Per Urales ad Orientem
Iter polyphonicum multilingue

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Seventy five years ago G. J. Ramstedt wrote on the origin of Kalmyk tsamtsv 'shirt' as follows: "viell. *samča zu ma. samsu 'hanfgewebe', kor. sam 'hanf'" (KW 421b).1 Approximately a decade later, in 1947, Leonardo Olschi suggested that the Written Mongolian word čamča 'shirt' possibly reflected a Greek etymon and was connected with French chemise and Italian camicia id. (cited after de Rachewiltz 2004: 309). Two years later, G. J. Ramstedt repeated his opinion that this word is a reflex of a proto-form *samča, being a derivative of a *sam in the proto-language, attested only in Korean. Thus, *sam (> Kor. sam 'hemp') > *samča > Mo. čamča 'shirt' (> Ma. samsu 'thin hempcloth') > Ma. Nan. čamči 'shirt' (SKE 222).

Neither Ramstedt nor Olschi explained the sound changes and morphological problems involved. In this situation, readers had at their disposal no precise arguments for or against Ramstedt and Olschi. It could thus be expected that some of them preferred the European etymology and others the Altaic. Indeed, this was the case.

Pavel Poucha (1956: 47sq.) devoted a discussion of some length to this Mongolic word. However, some of his formulations are not really clear and unequivocal or easily acceptable:

(1) "[…] nach Ramstedt vielleicht aus sam-ča zu mañ. samsu 'Hanfgewebe', kor. sam 'Hanf', dann könnte man das mong. čamča aus dem Chinesischen herleiten, wo *sam < šam 'Hemd' vorkommt." (Poucha l.c.)

There can be no question that Ramstedt's task when publishing his SKE was to show the Altaic genetic unity, rather than Chinese loanwords in Korean and Mongolic.

(2) "Obwohl Ramstedts Etymologie verführerisch aussieht, so ist doch zu erwägen, daß dieser gemeinsmgonolische1 Ausdruck dem europäischen 'Hemd' sehr nahe kommt: neugriech. (ίππο) κόμμας aus

1. Ramstedt used the sign (,) to indicate that the preceding part of a word is a nominal stem. Thus, his *samča is what we would today write *sam+ča, in contrast to the deverbal derivative *sam-ča. However, in the fragment cited after Poucha below, the word is traditionally transcribed *sam-ča.

2. Poucha (l. c.) adduces the following Mongolic forms: Dorbet-bejse sams(e), "udschumtsin" (= U3umucin) camc(i), "dschastu" (= Jasagtu) samzi, Ordos camca 'shirt' and Dagur chanchi 'overall, coat'. The modern Khalkha form came, Buryat samsa and Kalmuck čamča 'shirt' (mentioned as camča in Poucha l.c.) are to be added here.
dem Romanischen, spanisch camis(o)lla, franz. chemise aus vulgarlat. camisia [...] 'Männerhemd' < Gall. < Germ. *kamitja > ahd. hemidi > nhd. Hemd] [...]. Und so wäre es nichts Außerordentliches, wenn man annehmen wollte, was ich anzunehmen geneigt bin, nämlich, daß das mongolische Wort čamča letzten Endes mit deutschem 'Hemd' verwandt ist [...]' (Poucha i.c.).

Poucha, like Olschi, does not explain the sound differences observed here, nor does he settle the order of transitional languages. One cannot even determine what specific European word is to be regarded as the etymon of the Mongolic word.

In 1969, Martti Räsänen (VEWT 98a) continues, as was only to be expected, the "Altaic tradition" in that he repeats Ramstedt's suggestions, albeit in a somewhat more cautious way and without reconstructed forms: "mo. [...] čamča 'Hemd' > ma. čamči 'Weiberhemd') – ma. samsu 'Häntgewebe' – kor. [...] sam 'hemp'" (VEWT 98a). The real relationship between these forms remains unclear.

In the early 21st century Igor de Rachewiltz (2004: 309) derived the Mongolic word – with a question mark – from Chinese šan-tzu 'woman's dress, shirt', and this explanation was accepted by V. Rybatzki (2006: 307b). Thus, a third etymological suggestion emerged.

An element common to all these explanations is the fact that Turkic data are always reported to be loans from Mongolic. This does not of course mean that words like Oyr., Leb. čamča 'Hemd', Tel. čamča 'Rock', Brb. čamča 'Kleid', Eastern Tkc. čamča 'hemdartiges Kleidungsstück', Saryg-Uyg. čamja 'Ka^xan, BepxHflfl OAe>K£a', Cag. ċumča 'Hemd' (VEWT 98a); Sal. čamja 'surtout simple des femmes; chemise; pelerine' (Drimba 1976: 418) have not been borrowed from Mongolic. They certainly have. Nevertheless, the opposite borrowing direction seems possible as well, if one is ready to consider one further source of the Mongolic word, namely the word čamroš 'underwear', present in numerous Turkic languages, i.e. Turkic > Mongolic > Turkic.

The Uygur language with its y > i palatalization and loss of word-final r (čamšyr > čamaši), as well as vowel raising (Čamši > Čamši) seems to best fit into the because the sub-a three-syllable Čamši > Čamši frequent alternation by side quite possible actually be four forms like čam, čam, Kleid') and čam to support our čamasy(r) > Čam

Provided we may go a step further: Is a loan from čamasyr 'launtic change has (2002: 471) even correction occ alengiri (argy

3. For the semantics cf. Fr. chemise and its English reflex chemise.
4. In Turkic words, the letter y stands for the velar counterpart of i (i.e., < Tksh. i, Russ. и), often rendered also by ы in other Turkological works. In non-Turkic examples, ы = i.
5. A degree symbol (°) is used to signal that a form is a modern and perfectly possible, although unrecorded variant, rather than a protolinguistic reconstruction (see Anikin 1997).
6. Both phenomena can easily be observed in the Uygur name of the desert in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China: Taklamakan < *Taklamakan < *Taklarmakan, lit. 'place of arches' (< taka 'arches' [pl. < tak 'arch archit.'] + makan 'place') because winds occasionally blow the sands away and expose some remnants of old buildings, namely arches jutting out of walls (Jarring 1997: 447). The modern pronunciation Taka... (instead of Takl...) results from a secondary vocalic harmonization. It cannot possibly be interpreted as the result of the so-called "Uygur umlauting" because this process does not work "before an r that is the result of raising" (Hahn 1991: 51). Even if one assumes that r in Takl... was, at some stage, no longer perceived as secondary (easily imaginable in an old compound), was no longer etymologically transparent and used only as a geographical name, the umlauting would yield an e – i sequence (as in *bad 'head' + im 'my' > Uyg. beim 'my head'), rather than a – i (Hahn i.e.).
best fit into the imaginable borrowing channel and the train of sound changes, because the subsequent syncope of a narrow vowel in the second syllable of a three-syllable word, usually called Mittelsilbenschwund in Turkic linguistics (°camisi > °camisi) is quite a regular tendency on the brink of being a rule. The frequent alternation -a -v (°-ı) makes the occurrence of °camisi and °camısa side by side quite possible. The only problem is that neither °camisi nor °camısı could actually be found in Uygur. On the other hand, Eastern Turkic (“türk oriental”) forms like jumýar (Zenker 375a: giýgär ‘chemise, vêtement / Hemd, Kleid’) and jumýah (Zenker 365b: giýgah ‘chemise / Hemd’) seem to support our conjecture about the existence of a former Persian-Turkic form °cama$y(r) - °camsı or the like.

Provided that we accept this etymological possibility for the time being, we may go a step further back because the Turkic word caması́ - ‘underwear’ is a loan from Persian. Interestingly enough, most sources adduce only Pers. zama$ur ‘laundress’ as the source of the Turkic word (the non-trivial semantic change has probably never been explained or at least discussed’). A. Tietze (2002: 471) even resorts to an inorganic (i.e. non-etymological) r that as hypercorrection occurs after a vowel and refers to the Turkish word pair alengili - alengirli (argot) ‘distinguished, noble’. Some mistakes have to be corrected here:

(3) In his Turkish formulation (“inorganik bir /r/” = ‘an inorganic /r/’), Tietze, for unknown reasons, uses a phonological notation /r/ which certainly is incorrect in this context. As a matter of fact, an etymologist does not care whether an inserted unetymological consonant is a phoneme or an allophone in the given linguistic system.

(4) In case of alengili - alengirli one should invoke a dissimilation (H > rH) or assimilation (rH > H), i.e. focus on the consonant cluster, rather than the postvocalic position of the r. Besides, there is no “inorganic r” in alengirli, even if this variant really goes back to alengili.

(5) Since the etymology of alengili - alengirli remains unknown, one cannot decide whether -r- actually is secondary here (cf. Tietze 2002: 149ab).³

Additionally, the assumption of a hypercorrect insertion of r is, in point of fact, totally unnecessary. The Persian word consists of jima ‘clothes, dress; clothing, apparel’ and sty, the present tense stem of sostan (~ sostan) ‘to wash’. But this stem has, in reality, three forms: su, sty and sur (PRS 2: 101), so that one can expect zima$uv to have two other variants as well. Indeed, Pers. zima$ur ‘laun-

³ However, this is not the only case of such a change. An interesting parallel is Turkish k$ar ‘wheel of fat sheep milk cheese’ < Romanian că$ar ‘a shepherd who produces cheese’ (< rov ‘fresh, i.e. unsalted sheep milk cheese; single wheel of cheese’). I would like to sincerely thank Cornelia Leschber (Berlin) for her help with the Romanian word material.

⁸ The explanation of r (written again as a phoneme) given by Tietze sub alengili requires further critical commentary (for one, Turkish camıse is the only example where r is not followed by a consonant). This would, however, lead us too far astray.
dress’ is attested too (PRS 1: 425; this form is also given in PLOT). The only
form I could not find is the variant °jdmasu but this seems to be nothing more
than a phonetic variant of °jamašu.

It is of no great importance whether we take Pers. jamašur, jamašuy or
°jdmasu as our starting point. The Uygur reflex would have probably always
been °jamašu, and this would in its turn change, according to rules of the Turkic
vowel harmony, into °čamašy. The further phonetic evolution of the word is sug-
gested above.

In view of these data, Germ. Hemd ‘shirt’ cannot be considered a European
cognate of Mo. čamča id. This does not, however, mean that no correspondence
of čamča is known in Europe. Another Persian derivative of jama ‘clothing’
is jamašur ‘1. wardrobe; 2. portmanteau, suitcase’. This word was borrowed
into Russian as chemodan ‘portmanteau, suitcase’, probably via some Turkic
language(s). Thus, chem- in the Russian word chemodan is the European etymo-
logical counterpart of čam- in the Written Mongolian word čamča.

On the other hand, Pers. jamašur was also borrowed into Manchu as
chemda ‘portmanteau, suitcase’ (Anikin 1997, 2000 s.v. chemodan), so that this
language has reflexes of two derivatives of Pers. jama ‘clothing’:

Russ. chemodan = Ma. čamda ‘suitcase’ < Pers. jamašur id. < jama
‘dress’ > jamašur(y) > jamašur ‘laundress’ > various Turkic lan-
guages čamasyr ‘underwear’ > Uyg. čamšu – (*čamšuy >) čamasi
°čamaša > čamši > čamša > čamša > čamša > čamša > čamša > čamša (> Ma. samsu ‘hemp
fabric’) as čamši – (Üzümüčin čam(t), 3asagtu šamži, etc.) > čamša
 (> Written Mo. čamča ‘shirt’ > Khamnigan Evenki čamča id. [Jan-
hunen 1991: 104]).

Yet another trace of Pers. jama is hidden in English pyjamas – pajamas, a word
borrowed – via Urdu – from Pers. pājamā (PRS 258a) – pājamā (PRS 271a) –
pājamā (PRS 321a) < Pers. pājā – pay ‘foot; leg’ + jama ‘clothing’. Since this
English word was afterwards borrowed into numerous languages, an etymo-
lolgical counterpart of Mongolic čamča can easily be found virtually all over Europe.

An additional problem to be solved in the future is whether the Siberian
Turkic forms like Oyr. čamča ‘shirt’ should be better derived directly from Uyg. 
čamša or via Mongolic čamča. At least the ch – č sequence in Oyrot etc. seems
to point towards Mongolic mediation.

Yet another problem is whether both the phonetic form and the meaning of
Ma. samsu ‘hemp fabric’ actually were influenced by Kor. sam ‘hemp’ – a ques-
tion that I do not feel competent to answer.

9. I would like to warmly thank Andrzej Pisowicz (Krakow) for directing my attention to this reflex of
the Persian word.

10. The fact that Pers. pājā + jama originally was a piece of clothing that covered legs, i.e. a sort of trousers
is also reflected in the structure of Engl. pyjama+s like trouser+s, drawer+s, breech+es.

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In any case, if these words are cognates in an Altaistic spirit, the word-initial s- is original, and the c- of all other variants must be explained. If they are not, the origin of the Manchu s- is to be explained because Manchu does tolerate a word-initial c-, and this appears to be a case more complicated than the former one.

Furthermore, there exists a homonym čamča (~ čomča) 'spoon, ladle' in Turkic, attested also in Persian (čumča id.). The etymology and the conduits of transmission (TMEN 3: 95 Nr. 1121; Doerfer 1968–69 Nr. 68: Ar. čímča) are not ultimately settled, and two aspects are possibly of special importance to čamča 'shirt'. One is the phonetic shape of the word: Can our understanding of one čamča word be effectively used in order to explain the origins and evolution of the other čamča word? The other aspect is of contactological nature: Is it possible that these words affected each other, e.g. in phonetic terms?

All in all, I do not actually think that the Persian-Turkic word čamaš(y) is the only source of the Mongolic word čamča. Rather, čamaš(y) was one of the forms involved, and the whole word family of Siberian čamča ~ samsa ~ čamži and so on, is arguably to be viewed as the result of blending of different words whose more detailed analysis requires further research (although it is not certain that this etymological knot can ever be ultimately untied).

Even if Mongolic čamča and its counterparts in other languages are no Oriental reflexes of German Hemd and French chemise, they build a set of phonetic and semantic variants that certainly merit our attention.
Abbreviations

Ar. = Arabic  
Brb. = Baraba  
Čag. = Chagatay  
Engl. = English  
Fr. = French  
Germ. = German  
Leb. = Lebed  
Kor. = Korean  
Ma. = Manchurian  
Mo. = Mongolic  
Nan. = Nanay  
Oyr. = Oyrot  
Pers. = Persian  
Russ. = Russian  
Sal. = Salar  
Tel. = Teleut  
Tkic. = Turkish  
Tksh. = Turkish  
Uyg. = Uygur

References


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*Written Mongolian čumča 'shirt' and its etymological counterparts in Europe*