DAVID L. GOLD
New York
dovedleyzer@yahoo.com

TWO COMMENTS ON MAREK STACHOWSKI’S
“HOW TO COMBINE BARK, FIBULA, AND CHASM
(IF ONE SPEAKS PROTO-TURKIC)?”

Keywords: Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, Proto-Turkic

Abstract

This note reacts to an article by Marek Stachowski in Studia Linguistica UIC (no. 127, 2010, pp. 179–186) by suggesting that a phonemic opposition between /b/ and /v/ may be a relatively late development in the world’s known languages and by suggesting that dialectal Turkish goğuz ‘nutshell’ may in some way be etymologically related to certain words in Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Persian meaning ‘nut’.

M.S.’s “How to combine bark, fibula, and chasm (if one speaks Proto-Turkic)?” (Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis, no. 127, 2010, pp. 179–186) prompts two comments.

M.S. writes:

The sound value of the respective rune in the Old Turkic alphabet might have positionally varied between a fricative ß ~ ν and a stop b (Erdal 1998: 139). Nevertheless, we usually do not accept simultaneous existence of both b and ν at the phonological level. (p. 180).

M.S.’s reluctance to accept Erdal’s assumption of a phonemic contrast between /b/ and /ν/ is based on Turkological considerations. It is also justified by the fact that that opposition is, probably more often than not, a relatively late development in the world’s known languages.

For instance, whereas most latter-day varieties of Hebrew have a phonemic opposition between /b/ and /ν/, it is not believed to have existed in Earliest Hebrew.
Rather, Earliest Hebrew is presumed to have had */u/, */b/, and */bb/ but not */v/.
In certain later varieties of the language, these changes occurred (in the order shown):
1) */u/ split into /u/ and /v/.
2) */b/ became */v/ (thus merging with /v/ reflecting */u/).
3) */bb/ became /b/ (which, of course, is historically not the */b/ mentioned in the
   previous paragraph).

Or, to take another example, Classical Latin is assumed to have had */b/ and */u/ but
not */v/. Only in post-Classical Latin did the language acquire */v/ (when */u/ split
into */u/ and */v/).

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M.S. writes:

There exists only one variant pointing to *-g, i.e. Tksh.dial. goğuz ‘nutshell’ […] (p. 180).

Not only is it easy to agree that the word should be considered an innovation (thus,
a word that does not go back, at least not entirely, to Proto-Turkic) but it is also pos-
sible that the word is either a borrowing of an Arabic, Aramaic, or Persian word or
a blend of a native Turkish word and an Arabic, Aramaic, or Persian word (in both
cases, I have in mind Arabic, Aramaic, and Persian words that are cognate with
Hebrew egoz ‘nut’).