

BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Papers of BAS

Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 10, 2023, No. 1

Some historiographical notes on the correlation between *Huns* and *H[s]iung-nu*

Valery Stoyanow

Abstract. The first historian of the nomadic empires, Joseph de Guignes, identified in the 18th century the European Huns with the H[s]iung-nu from the Chinese sources and since then this issue has been an object of several analyses not only in the historical and archaeological but also in the linguistic field. One of them has tried to find the original form and etymology of the name Hun itself, another has linked the few preserved words from Hunnic with their possible correspondences from the Altaic and Uralic (especially Turkic and Mongolic) but also Iranian, Caucasian and even Paleo-Asiatic languages in an attempt to determine the language and ethnic origin of the Huns. The problem, however, still remains without a clear solution.

Keywords: Huns, Hsiung-nu, historiographical review

The problem of the ethnic and linguistic determination of the early human communities, their migrations and interactions, syntheses and decay is among the most complex ones in modern humanities. The shortage or even complete lack of written records, the possibilities for different interpretations and the need to use a multidisciplinary approach pose a difficulty for the narrow specialist and create prerequisites for a speculative attitude to the past. Including also the obtainment of results from DNA genealogy. In the absence of unambiguous data, the past can be “reconstructed” in any way according to the ideological conjuncture, the level of knowledge and the researcher’s personal bias. We have been observing this phenomenon for a long time in connection with the ancient Bulgarian theme. It is present, to a much greater extent, in determining the “ancestral homelands”, the directions of movement and interpenetrations between the ancient ethnolinguistic complexes.

The Neolithic peoples’ migrations resemble the splashing of waves in the trough called Eurasia, from one end (where some groups settle and later some of their descendants migrate) to the other end of the mainland and then back again, until more stable ethno-territorial formations are built and the waves gradually subside. In this case, mixing with the native population gives rise

to similar or intermediate cultures, ethnicities and languages, or the adjacent regions' inhabitants adopt the newcomers' cultural achievements to stimulate, in turn, their own development. This is probably how the *Proto-Elamo-Dravidians* brought to Central Asia and China some agricultural technologies, craft skills and cattle-breeding, and after them the ancient *Indo-Europeans* spread their horse-breeding skills, changing the ethnic map of a vast area of the old world, before they were themselves partially pushed out or assimilated by the waves of the *Altaic* peoples rushing in the opposite direction.

The appearance of the Alans in the 1st century AD represents the next stage of the Scythian-Sako-Sarmatian migrations. When, in 370, the Hunnic invasion reached the Alans, the Indo-European dominance in the steppe came to an end. The Huns' invasion not only unleashed the so-called *great migration of peoples* in Europe, but it also made it possible for *Altaic* ethnic elements to penetrate the Old Continent for the first time. It paved the way for a series of westward movements of new Asian groups that ended only after the establishment of the Golden Horde with its successors in the north and of the Ottoman Empire in the south.

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Before the Huns entered Europe, however, a people with a similar name had been making history for centuries at the opposite end of the steppe. The similarity between the names led the first historian of the nomadic empires Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800) to identify the *Huns* from the European sources with the *Xiongnu* (*Hun-nu* or *Siun-nu*, i.e. *Hiung-nu*, *H[s]iung-nu*)¹ from the Chinese annals (De Guignes 1756-1758). And although doubts about their identity arose as early as the 19th century, and later the discussion about the ethnic origin, language and relationship between the *Huns* and the *Hsiung-nu* became particularly acute, the terms *eastern* (or *Asian*) *Huns* and *Western* (or *European*) *Huns* continue to be traditionally used in historical science. They occur in studies that transcend the spatial and temporal boundaries of a particular region, era, ethnicity or culture.

In ancient literature, the name of the Huns appears for the first time in Ptolemy's *Geography* (2nd century AD) in the form *Χοῦνοι*. Dionysius Periegetes (c. 160) probably knew the variant *Οὔννοι*. In Ammianus Marcellinus's accounts, the ethnonym occurs as *Huni* or *Hunni*, and in those of Ausonius, the form is *Chuni*, used as early as 378. Subsequently, the name was transmitted through Greek *Οὔννοι*, *Οὔννοι*; Latin *Hun(n)i*, *Chun(n)i*; Old Norse *hūn*, Old English *hun-*, Old High German *hiun-*, Middle High German *hiune* (< Gothic **χūnia*,

¹ The dialectal features of the Chinese language allow different pronunciations of the same words, for example with voiceless consonants in the south and with voiced ones in the north (cf. *Pekin* ~ *Beydzin*). Similarly, the southern Chinese guttural *h* usually corresponds to palatal-dental consonants (*s*, *ž*, *š*) or affricates (*č*) in the northern dialects. That is why the name of the legendary **Xia**, **Hsia** dynasty is often rendered differently, as *Hia* or *Sia*, and the name of the *Eastern Huns* *Xiongnu*, *Hiung-nu* (i.e. *Hun-nu*, *Hiun-nu*) is sometimes pronounced *Sung-nu* (*Siun-nu*), which is also the modern pronunciation. This inconvenience is avoided by transcribing the ethnonym as *H[s]iung-nu*.

pl. **χῦνίας*?), etc. It was also used to designate the Hephthalites, or the “white Huns” (*Οὔννοι οἱ λευκοί, λευκοὶ Οὔννοι*), who otherwise bear the name *ΟΙΟΝΟ* and *ΗΙΟΝΟ*, i.e. *Hyōn(o)*, -*χιονες*, -*χιωνες* (cf. *spēt hyōn, spiδ hayūn* “white Huns” vs. *Ἐρμιχιονες, Κερμιχιονες*, i.e. *karmīr hyōn, xarmāra hayūn* “red Huns”), as well as *Chionitae* (cf. also the name of the Avar *Οὐάρχωνῖται*, containing the ethnonyms *Οὐάρ καὶ Χουννί*). The forms *Χωναι* or *Χοναῖοι* from a 6th century geographical treatise (Moravcsik 1958, 236) should probably also be related to the Hephthalites, although some researchers associate them with the Western Huns (*Οὔννοι*), whereas others completely deny their Hunnic connection.

The Eastern sources have preserved a number of names that were used to refer to different representatives of this people, for example Armenian *Hon-*; Khwarezmian *Hūn (hwn)*, Sogdian *Xun (χ’ων)*; Avestan *Hyaona*, Pahlavi *Hyōn (xywn)* or *Xyōn, Xiyōn, Hayūn*; Syriac *Xyōn- (kywn, kywny’)* or *Hūn (hwny’)*; Khotanese Saka *Huna, Hūna*; Sanskrit *Hūṇa-* (cf. e.g. *śveta-hūṇa-, sita-hūṇa-* “white Huns” and *hāra-hūṇa-, hala-hūṇa-* “dark [i.e. black? red?] Huns”), Prakrit *Hūṇa*, Tibetan *Huna* (> Mongolic *hwyn’, kwyn’*). They all contain similar (if not the same) bases: *hun ~ hon ~ hiun, hion, hiyon, hyon*. In addition, the forms with a narrow labial (*hun-*) are reminiscent of the European equivalents of the ethnonym, despite the fact that they mainly refer to the so-called Iranian Huns. The Saka name *Huna* was generally used for the Central Asian nomads, and the Indian *Hūṇa* - for the Hephthalites, although it also occurs in the great epic poem *Mahabharata*, compiled before the year 250 BC (Shafer 1954, 154-166)².

The Armenian form of the name (*hon-k’*) refers mainly to the Caucasian Huns, but also to the Hephthalites, while the names with an iotated vowel, probably reflecting a palatalized variety of the ethnonym (cf. *hūn ~ hōn* vs. *hun ~ hon*), are exclusively related to the Huns from Central Asia. All these names end in a *suffix pluralis*, a formative that was used in the formation of ethnic names (cf. in Sanskrit *-a*, Armenian *-k’*, Greek *-oi*, Latin *-i*). The fluctuations in the expression of the root vowel (*hūn, hun, hon, hiun, hyōn, hiyōn*) are perhaps suggestive of an original back vowel with a sound value between *o* and *u* (cf. Bulgarian *ѹ*) or of a diphthong, as in the Chinese variants of the ethnonym. In turn, the gemination of *n* in the Greek form *Οὔννοι* (resp. in Latin *Hunni*) could be a result of the name’s adoption through the medium of Caucasian languages (Georgian?) containing the plural formative *-ni* (i.e. Caucasian **Hun-ni, *Hon-ni*, comparable to Armenian *Hon-k’*) (Moór 1963, 71), without necessarily reflecting a name related to the Chinese *Hun-nu (H[s]iung-nu)*.

In fact, this name of the *Eastern Huns* appeared relatively late - only in the 3rd century BC. There are also older forms associated with the prehistory of the Xiongnu, which is dated back even to the time of the semi-legendary Chinese *Xia (Sia or Hia, Hsia)* dynasty. The oldest Chinese written sources, whose early parts reach the 3rd millennium BC, mention a people to the north of China, called *Hun-chu* or *Hun-chou*, and in the old pronunciation according to Bernhard Kalgren: *xiuən-tiuk* (Kalgren 1923, 1940). Around the beginning of the *Zhou*

² Cf. *Hūṇa* - situated between Kashmir and Shaka in the Himalayas, near the upper Indus River.

dynasty, the name was spelled *H[s]ien-yün* (*xiän-iüän*)³ or *H[s]iün-yuh* (*xiüän-iük*), and from the end of the “Warring States” period (*Chan-Kuo* or *Zhanguo*: 550-225, respectively 475-221 BC), approximately around the year 230 BC, *H[s]iung-nu* (*xi^wong-nuo*) became the dominant form (Shiratori 1902, 01; Gabain 1950-1955, 14-15; Shafer 1954, 154-155). In archaic Chinese, the etymon of this name (*H[s]iung*) sounded like *xióng*, *hiwong*, *hiung* (respectively *χbron*) (Pritsak 1959-1960, 29) or even *kiung* (Shiratori 1902, 01)⁴, whereas its second element (*no*, *nuo*, *nu*) carries the meaning of “slaves, servants”, so that *H[s]iung-nu* would be translated as “the H[s]iung slaves”.

All these names have already been noted and interpreted by the old authors. According to Joseph de Guignes, for example, during Emperor Yao’s reign (2000 BC), the Huns were called *Chan-yong* (*shan-yon*, i.e. *shan-jun*, *shan-iün*)⁵, which means “black barbarians” (De Guignes 1756-1758, vol. 1, part 2, p. 13). Later, under the *Shang*, they were called *Kuei-fang*, during the *Zhou* period, they were designated as *Hien-yun*, and under the *Han* dynasty, the form that appeared was *Hiong-nou* (*hun-nu*), meaning “wretched slaves”. According to Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, the Chinese names carried tendentiously selected derogatory meanings: *Hiün-io* - “sold slaves”, *Kouei-fang* - “devilish”, *Hian-yun* - “brigands”, *Hiong-nou* - “stupid slaves”, etc. (Abel-Rémusat 1820, 11). J. Klaproth, in turn, reconstructs the individual names as *Chiün-jü* during the *Shang* period (1766-1134 BC), *Chian-jün* under the *Zhou* dynasty (1134-256 BC) and *Chiün-nu* under the *Qing* and *Han* (256 BC - 263 AD), deriving the first name from the last emperor of the *Xia* (*Hsia*) dynasty’s son’s name - Chiün-jü, who fled with 500 followers to the nomads and became their ruler (*chen-yü* or *shan-yü*); the subsequent traditional designation of the Huns as *Hioung-nou* meant, according to him, “vile slaves” (vils esclaves) (Klaproth 1825, 257).

There are other hypotheses about the essence of the ethnonym itself. Carl Friedrich Neumann’s assumption is that the name *Hun-io*, known during the *Xia* (*Hsia*) dynasty, probably meant “**people**” or “**a nation**”. Subsequently, the Chinese began to give the Huns similar-sounding derogatory nicknames, for example, *Hiong-nu* “noise-making slaves” (lärmende Slaven), etc., which

³ The Czech sinologist Gustav Haloun reads the name *H[s]ien-yün* as *guan-jun* and reconstructs it through **kam-miər*, thus establishing a connection with the *Cimmerians* (Haloun 1937, 317-318).

⁴ According to Kurakichi Shiratori, this is evident from the fact that the usurper Wang Mang referred to the *H[s]iung-nu* as “the Kungnu tribe”, and *Kung* could also be pronounced as *Hiung* (Shiratori 1902, 01).

⁵ In fact, *Chan-yong* (*shan-jun*) can also be translated as „mountain *Jun(g)*“ - this is the name of the easternmost branch of the ancient *Jun(g)* tribes, who, together with the *Di/Ti* people, were China’s northern and western neighbours. Undoubtedly, some of the *Jun(g)* took part in the genesis of the “Eastern Huns”, but the two ethnic groups are not identical despite attempts to present them as such. Following De Guignes, a number of authors in the 19th century identified the early Huns with *Chan-yong* (*shan-jun*). In the Chinese historical tradition, however, foreigners in the west are called *Kiang*, in the south - *Man*, in the east - *I*; *Jung* and *Ti* stand for northern (or western) barbarians, *Yün* also means northern (respectively western) barbarians, and *Hu* is a general, unspecified name for barbarians as a whole (Gabain 1950-1955, 18; Pritsak 1959-1960, 28).

gradually replaced their native name (Neumann 1847, 25-26). According to a similar interpretation by Vivien de Saint-Martin, the name *Hun* originated from the Finnish word *hum* “human being” (Saint-Martin 1848), whereas Sigismund Zaborowski’s hypothesis is that the *Hiong-nou* received their name from *Houn* - one of the names of the Orkhon River, which is located in the centre of their territory (Zaborowski 1898, 171).

Kurakichi Shiratori’s opinion is that the actual name of the Huns, in the pre-*Han* era, was *Hou* (*hu*) and only later did it start to be used as a term to designate other peoples as well, including the *Tong-hou* (*tong-hu*, *dunhu*), who lived to the east of the Huns and were related to them; their name actually means “eastern *Hu*” and had nothing to do with the name of the Tungus (Shiratori 1923, 80-81)⁶. Gyula Németh seeks to identify in the ethnonym *Hun* a possible *kun*, *qun* - a variant of Turkic *kün* “a people”, coinciding with the Mongolic *kūmun* “human being” (Németh 1930, 140-148). Louis Bazin relates it to the word *cun*, *kun* (i.e. *qun*), used in the *Codex Cumanicus* and denoting “forcia, force” (Bazin 1950, 255 ff.), whereas Franz Altheim, after offering further arguments in favour of this etymology (the parallel use of *χ* and *q* in Old Turkic *χayan/qayan*, *χan/qan*, *χatun/qatun*, etc. and the similar interpretation of the ethnonym *türk* < **törük* as “strong, power”), describes the forms *Hu* (**γew*, **qu*) and *Xwn* (**qun*) as a name in -*°n* (*qu-n* “strength”), derived from the verb **qu-* “be strong” (Altheim 1959-1962, I, 8, 29).

The variants of the ethnonym that have reached us suggest that there may be hidden in it a possible original form **hun*, **hün*, i.e. **h°n* ~ **χ°n*, **g°n* ~ **γ°n*, **k°n* ~ **q°n* (phonetically comparable to **q°l*, etc., **q°r*, etc.); also with a final vowel: **h°n*[°], etc., as it is in some Central Asian examples. There have been debates, however, concerning the nature of the Chinese transcriptions - whether they reflect foreign two-syllable names, or combinations of the national name itself plus an appositionally added component meaning “barbarians” (*Küan-i*, *Küan-jung*), and being also an epithet of the respective people. According to Omeljan Pritsak, who analyzes the second possibility, the Huns’ actual name was recorded in 119 BC (nearly a century after the appearance of the form *H[s]iung-nu*) as *Hün-yü* or *Hün-yün*, but its etymon *Hün* (**χiwən* ~ **χun*) also occurs in earlier designations: *Hün-yu* (**χiwən*), *Küan-i* (**kiwən*), *K’un-i* (**kwən*) and *Hun-i* (**g’wən* ~ **gun*) (Pritsak 1959-1960, 30-33). This is implied by the protoform **kwan*, **g’wən* ~ **gun* (around 1000 BC) > **kwən* ~ **kun* (before the 5th century BC) > **kwən* ~ **kun* and *χiwən* ~ **χun* (in the 4th-3rd centuries

⁶ In Shiratori’s view, the “Eastern *Hu*” (*Tong-hu*) were an offshoot of the *Hiong-nu* and the two peoples, who spoke a language composed of Mongolic and Tungusic elements, are the probable ancestors of the modern *Solons* and *Dahurs*. This should rather be understood in the sense that the *Hsiung-nu* and *Tung-hu* spoke some dialect of the Altaic proto-language containing Proto-Mongolic and Proto-Tungusic elements, i.e. an idiom from the time when Turkic and Mongolic on the one hand, and Mongolic and Tungusic on the other hand, were not yet differentiated. Among the *Tong-hu*’s descendants, he mentions the *Sian-pi*, who, according to him, spoke Tungusic (other authors consider the language of the *Hsien-pi* to be Proto-Mongolic), and also *to-pa*, *zhuan-zhuan* (*ruan-ruan*), *ki-tan* (*ki-dan*) etc. tribes with a predominant [proto]Mongolic vocabulary (cf. also Shiratori 1902, 08 ff.).

BC) > *kwən, kiwən, k'iwən* ~ **kun* and *χiwən* ~ **χun* (in the 2nd century BC - the 1st century AD), i.e. with development of the initial consonant: **gun* > **kun* > **χun*. The form is also attested in the Sogdian letters (*Xwən*), in Ptolemy's *Geography* (*Xoḏvov*), in the accounts of some Latin-speaking authors of the 5th and 6th centuries (*Chuni*), as well as in the 7th century *History* by Theophylact Simocatta (*Xoovvī*). The latter gave rise to the development of the variant **hun* in the 5th century AD due to the loss of the guttural *χ*-, i.e. as a result of its tendency to change to *h*- (cf. *Oḏvov*, *Huni*, *Hon-*, *Hūn*, *Hūna-*) or to disappear (*Oḏvov*, *'Un*) (Pritsak 1959-1960, 33-34)⁷.

There is undoubtedly a certain continuity in the names of the *Eastern* and *Western* Huns, but whether they should be related to the same ethnic element, and to what extent it is possible to trace the hypothetical continuity from the Xiongnu to Attila's clan are issues that are still being debated. It is not only the ethnonym's etymology that is contested, but also its connection with the name *H[s]iung-nu*. It is often assumed that the *name* of the European *Hun[n]i* is cognate with Sogdian *Xwən* (= Chinese *hun* or *hūn*), but not with the Chinese form *Hsiung-nu*. There have been doubts concerning the identity of Ptolemy's *Xoḏvov* and the later *Oḏvov*, *Hunni*. The question about the nature of the Hunnic language is also debatable and it is closely related to the issue of the Huns' ethnic origin. And if we exclude some Russian authors' endeavour to identify Huns with Slavs, as well as the attempts to explain individual Hunnic words with the Caucasian languages, the prevailing opinions are that the *Eastern* and *Western* Huns belong to the great Ural-Altai ethnolinguistic community.

Already in the 18th and 19th centuries, they began to be considered Mongols, Turks or Finns, or a mixture of Turks and Mongols, Turks and Finns, Mongols and Tungus, Turks, Mongols, Tungus and Finns, etc. The idea that has gradually become prevalent is that of the "Turkic" (i.e. pre-Turkic) Altaic origin of the *Xiongnu*, but with possible mixing with Iranian elements for the so-called *Central Asian* Huns, with possible Alanic components for the *Caucasian* Huns and Ural-Altai interpenetrations in the genesis of the *European* Huns. Friedrich Hirth, who revives the thesis of the continuity between the Huns and the Xiongnu, connects the name of the founder of the Hunnic power *Mao-tun* (*Mak-tut*, *Mak-tuk* < **mâg-tuên*) with *Baktur* - a transcription from Turkic *bağatur* "hero" (Hirth 1900). Around the same time, Shiratori investigates 90 examples in the Chinese sources and 15 glosses from the Xiongnu's language, which he explains through Turkic: *ch'ang-li* (*č'ang-li* "sky" = *tängri*), *yen-chi* (*yen-č'i* "wife" = Uyghur *abeči*, *evči* "wife"), *eu-ta* ("hole" = Chuvash *odar* "sheep shelter", Chagatai *otak* "living room", Ottoman *oda* "room"), *king-lo* ("sword" ≈ Turkic *kilic* "sword" < *kil-* "cut, chop"; Korean *khal* "sword", Japanese *kiru*

⁷ Pritsak's theses have been criticized by Otto Maenchen-Helfen, who points out that the designation *Hün-yü* exists only in elevated language, in speeches and decrees. It was an archaic term identifying the *H[s]iung-nu* with the earlier *Hün-yü*, just as Byzantine historians often identified the Huns with the Cimmerians, Scythians and other ancient tribes not only to show their knowledge but also because they were convinced that there were no peoples that the sages of previous generations did not know.

“cut”), *kü-ts’z’* (“girl, daughter” ≈ Turkic *kız* “daughter”), *k’i-lien* or *hoh-lien* (“sky” = Turkic *kükler* “heavens”), etc. (Shiratori 1902, 02-07). Later, however, he regards the title *tch’eng-li kou-t’ou* (*čej-li ku-t’u*) as an imitation of the Chinese imperial title “Son of Heaven” (from Turkic *tängri* “sky” and Tungusic *gutó* “son”), assumes that *chan-yu* (*shan-yu, šan-yü*) is also an honorific title of Chinese origin (from *chan* “big, great” and *yu* “vast”) and interprets *kiu-ts’eu* (*küčü* “princess”) not through Turkic *kiz* (cf. *kü-ts’z’* “girl”), but through Chinese *kong-tchou* (*gundju*) > Mongolic *güng-žü* “princess”. Pointing out that out of 23 other words from the Xiongnu’s language, 14 can be explained through Mongolic, 4 - through Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, 2 - through Mongolic and Tungusic, but only one (*king-lou* “knife”) - through Turkic, which, however, despite being compared with Turkic *qingraq* “knife” by Hirth, has more correspondences in the Iranian languages (for example, with Wakhi *khingar* and Persian *khinğar* “knife, dagger”), the scholar sees in the language of the *H[s]iung-nu* a mixture of Mongolic and Tungusic elements in a small number of Turkic lexemes (Shiratori 1923, 72-77, 79). These include *ou-t’o* < *êu-t’uât* (Turkic *ordu* “military camp, army”), *kuo-lo* < *kwâk-lâk* (“belt” ≈ Turkic *qur-* “to stretch, to place”), *fu-lu* < *b’ju-lj’e* (Turkic *börü* “wolf”), *tu* < *d’uok* (Turkic “flag”), *küe-t’i* < *kiwet-d’iei* (Turkic *qatir* “mule”) (Gabain 1950-1955, 21-23)⁸, etc., as well as a short oracular text (*siôg t’iëg t’iei liäd kâng b’uok kuk g’iu t’uk tâng*), interpreted differently by individual researchers⁹.

In the 20th century, there emerged a new possibility of determining the linguistic affiliation of the early *H[s]iung-nu*. Once Paul Pelliot notes that Hunnic, being in essence an Altaic language, probably also includes elements of a far more ancient layer (Pelliot 1929), and after him Otto Maenchen-Helfen admits that it is possible for certain words in the *H[s]iung-nu*’s language to have been borrowed from Paleo-Siberian Proto-Ket (Maenchen-Helfen 1945, 224). Later, Louis Ligeti demonstrates that the gloss *so-to* < *sak-dak, saydaq* (< **sak-dak, *sâkd’âk*) “boots” has no analogical forms in Turkic and Mongolic, but is comparable with Ket *sâgdi* or *šâgdi* “boots” (Ligeti 1950-1951). L. N. Gumilev links this lexeme with the late Turko-Mongolic loanword in the Russian language *cazâügak* “a quiver with a bow and arrows”, assuming that the Huns stuck into their boots the arrows that did not fit into the quiver, just as the Russians later kept their spare knife there (Gumilev 1960, 49), and E. G. Pulleyblank makes reference to the Iranian etymology from **sâxtak, *sâyday* “outfit” (< *sak-*, *sâk-* “to prepare”), suggested by Harold Bailey. E. G. Pulleyblank, however, cites other glosses that show a connection with the Yeniseian languages such as *ku-t’u* (*kou-dou* < **kwafi-dan*) “son” [as opposed to linking *ku-t’u* with Turkic *qut* “majesty”, which is proposed by F. K. Müller and accepted by A. von Gabain];

⁸ The author draws other Hunno-Turkic parallels, including *king-lu* < *kieng-lug* (“sword” ≈ Teleut *qingîraq* “double-edged knife”) and interprets the expression *ch’êng-li ku-t’u* < *t’ang-lji kuo-d’uo* as Turkic *tängri qut* “heavenly majesty”.

⁹ The text is a reconstruction of an answer to a query concerning the siege of Lo-yang in 329 AD, and its general meaning is that if the defenders’ army left the fortress, the enemy leader Liu Yao would be captured.

chüeh-t'i (*kwet-dei* < **kwet-defi*) “horse”; **chieh** (*kiat* < **kāt*) “stone”; some names of certain dairy products and titles (Pulleyblank 1962, 243-244). His ideas have been adopted by Andrej Dul'zon, who, after analyzing the 15 glosses discussed by Pulleyblank in relation to the Yeniseian languages, constructs his own system of linguistic kinship: *Hsiung-nu* - *Yenisei-Ostyak* - *North Caucasian* - *Basque* - *Sino-Tibetan* languages (Dul'zon 1968). Omeljan Pritsak, however, was resistant to these ideas. Denying the possibility that a primitive Paleo-Asiatic people may once have played such an important role in Eurasia and may have been able to identify themselves with the historical *Hsiung-nu*, Pritsak attempted to establish the Turkic (“Hunno-Bulgarian”) etymology of the two Chinese transcriptions of the word for “stone” - **chieh** < *kiat* (**kat*) and **che-chieh**, **che-cheh**, **che-shih** < *cià-cie*, *cià-ciet*, *cià-jia* (**čač*), which again brought the issue of the nature of the Hunnic language back to Altaic studies (Pritsak 1976).

All this led Gerhard Doerfer, half a century ago, to criticize the results from the linguistic analyses, which have served as a basis for the separate hypotheses about the nature of the *H[s]iung-nu* and the European *Huns*. Doerfer's final conclusion, however, is that the languages of the two peoples do not belong to any of the linguistic families known today (even less so to the known living linguistic families). Rather, they are dead isolated languages (like Sumerian and Ugaritic), which, in his words, should come as no surprise because the dead languages in the world are far more than the living ones (Doerfer 1973, 7, 43-44, 46)¹⁰. Well before him, Otto Maenchen-Helfen also expresses his skepticism about the possibility of relating the *H[s]iung-nu*'s idiom to any of the major linguistic families of Eurasia (Maenchen-Helfen 1945, 224 ff.). Although he accepts that the predominant components characterizing the Huns are Turkic, he also pays attention to the Iranian origin of the names they used. Maenchen-

¹⁰ The author objects to the thesis that the preserved glosses from the *H[s]iung-nu*'s language were of Turkic nature (eg: *ch'eng-li* = *täŋri* ‘sky’, *hiep-ho*, *xiəp-γəu* = *yabgu* ‘kind of title’, *ao-t'ot* = *ordu* ‘military camp’, etc.), assuming rather that they were Hunnic loanwords in Turkic, just as the Turkic *ordu* later penetrated the European languages (cf. German *Horde*). Due to the lack of vocal harmony in the original form for “sky” (**taŋri*) and the presence of the non-Turkic sound combination **-ŋr-**, this word, as well, cannot be of Turkic origin. The availability of glosses beginning with **l-**, which is characteristic of the Ket language, and the almost complete absence of such an initial consonant in the Turkic and Mongolic languages is yet another piece of evidence against the Turkic thesis. And although he rejects the idea of the Yenisei-Ostyak origin of the *Eastern Huns* (the dozen or so comparable forms could be Hunnic loanwords in the Ket language), Doerfer considers even the faint possibility that the unknown language of the *H[s]iung-nu* may have survived as an adstrate in modern Yenisei-Ostyak (cf. pp. 4-7). Concerning the language of the *European Huns*, the author accepts the Slavic origin of the three preserved common nouns (*strava* “funeral feast”, *medos* “mead”, *kamon* “kind of drink”), emphasizing the mixed nature of the Hunnic anthroponymy, which includes Germanic and Iranian forms, as well as some forms of unclear origin (cf. pp. 14-43). This also sheds light on the ethnic composition of the Hunnic state, which comprises, in descending order: a) *Huns* (with an unknown language), b) *Germani* and *Alans* (names from their languages are also found in the first stratum), c) subordinate *Slavs* (they did not exert influence on the anthroponymy of the ruling stratum and only separate words from their language have been preserved) and subordinate *nomadic tribes* and other *nationalities* (belonging rather to the second, partly to the third category).

Helfen's hesitations and Doerfer's negative result urged, in turn, the great American-Ukrainian orientalist Omeljan Pritsak, who labelled Doerfer's study as "very disappointing and unproductive", to analyze the Hunnic onomastic material (Pritsak 1982). As a result, the Altaic etymologies of a number of proper names have been outlined and individual characteristics of the language itself (phonology, phonetic changes, grammar) have been revealed. Pritsak identifies it not as generally Turkic, but as a language between Turkic and Mongolic, "probably closer to the first one than to the second", having strong connections with Ancient Bulgarian and Modern Chuvash, but also showing lexico-morphological features that link it to Yakut and even Ottoman.

* * *

Thus, researchers continue to seek the origin of the ancient Huns within the Altaic ethnolinguistic community, taking into account possible mixtures with Paleo-Asiatic, Iranian, Uralic and Caucasian elements, but isolating the Hunnic language in an independent (R-) group that occupies a position between the Proto-Turkic (Z-) and Proto-Mongolic (R-) languages. The Huns are discussed in a similar way in the latest publications¹¹, which, however, drawing on the results so far, have a markedly generalizing character and do not offer anything significantly new to the solution of the problem. Thus, the question of the correlation between the *Huns* and the *H[s]iung-nu*, as well as their ethnic origin and composition, still remains open to the future researcher.

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¹¹ See, for example, the relevant articles in the third volume of *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta* (History 2000, 52-75, 256-281) and in the first volume of the ambitious edition on the Turks' place in world history *The Turks* (Turks 2002, 197-216, 217-227, 290-305).

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Prof. Valery Stoyanow, DSc, PhD
Institute for Historical Studies
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
52 Shipchenski prohod Blvd., Bl. 17
1113 Sofia, Bulgaria
Email: valeryst1@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.valeristica.ihist.bas.bg/>