

On the etymology of Hungarian *úr* ‘lord, gentleman’ and its possible cognates

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Several etymologies have been suggested for the Hungarian word *úr* (Acc *urat*) ‘lord, gentleman’. Many etymological dictionaries of Hungarian (such as Zaicz 883) consider a Turkic origin for the word the most probable. The Turkic etymology, which is supported by many current etymological works, connects the Hungarian word to the Proto-Turkic word **ur-* ‘megtermékenyít, nemz’ (> Turkish *urî* ‘young man’). While this etymology is phonologically plausible and does not include big semantical obstacles, also other, semantically more convincing explanations have been suggested for the word *úr*. In this paper, the earlier etymologies for the word *úr* and its possible cognates in other Finno-Ugric languages are critically commented, and a possible new etymology for the Hungarian word is suggested.

Numerous etymological sources, such as SSA (III: 356) also mention the etymological comparison of the Hungarian word to Finnish *uros* : *uroksen* ‘koiras; täysikasvuinen mies, sankari’ (within Finnic, cognates in Karelian, Vepsian and Ludic) and Saami (L) *årēs* ‘uros; porohärkä; male; reindeer bull’ (cognates in all Saami languages; see below), although SSA also mentions the possible Turkic origin of the Hungarian word. Same Finno-Ugric comparison is found also in UEW (No. 1094). In addition to these, various Indo-Iranian sources for the word have been suggested in earlier research (see below).

The old Finno-Ugric¹ explanation that can be found from SSA and UEW

¹ Fi *urho* ‘täysikasvuinen mies; sankari / erwachsener Mann; Held’, Karelian *urho(i)*, Ludic *urhak* are probably derived from *uros* (**uros* : **urozon* > *uros* : *urohon*; SSA III: 354–355). SSA considers also Fi *urakka* ‘toisella vuodella oleva urosporo / Rentierbulle im zweiten Lebensjahr’ a derivation of *uros*, but according to (Aikio 2009: 284) this is rather a loan from Saami **orēkkē*, which indeed is etymologically related to *årēs*.

is also mentioned by Zaicz as an alternative explanation to the Turkic etymology. It is also mentioned by MSzFE (654) as a possible explanation, and the etymology appears also in Sammallahti's (1988: 542) word-list of Proto-Finno-Ugric words. TESz (III: 1035) considers this Finno-Ugric etymology correct and rejects the Turkic origin for *úr*. UEW reconstructs the PFU form as **ur3*, but considers the comparison uncertain. Also SSA connects the Hungarian word to the Finnic and Saami words only with a question mark. UEW considers the Finno-Ugric explanation uncertain because of the possible other explanations for the Hungarian word, whereas SSA doubts it on the basis of another tentative Finno-Ugric comparison (see below). UEW, as well as MSzFE and Zaicz also doubt the etymology on the basis that its reflexes are found only in "distantly related languages", that is, in Hungarian, Finnic and Saami. As a methodological note we must state that this is not a very good argument, since there are many well-established Uralic etymologies which are found only in a couple of branches, such as **täktä* 'remina, bone' > HU *tetem*, Fi *tähde*, *tähteet* 'remains', SaN *dákti* 'bone' (Aikio 2015: 64; UEW: 515–516; Sammallahti 1988: 550) or **päjwä* 'day, warmth' > Fi *päivä*, SaN *beaivi* 'day, sun', Nganasan *hejbi* 'heat' (Aikio 2015: 63).

Semantically this Finno-Ugric comparison of *úr* to *uros* and *ârēs* is unproblematic, as all the possible cognates listed refer to some kind of 'male', either a person or an animal, and it could be assumed that the meanings 'lord' and 'hero' can developed from this meaning. However, this Proto-Finno-Ugric etymology needs closer investigation, and it turns out that there are better etymological explanations both for the Finnic and the Saami words as well as for the Hungarian word *úr*.

SSA's offers an alternative Finno-Ugric etymology for the Finnic word *uros* and its Saami cognate. SSA considers it a possibility that a "stem" (vartalo-osa) *u-* could underlie in the word *uros* and also in another word beginning with *u* and denoting a male person: *ukko* 'old man'; the derivational suffix *-ras* would have been added to the stem, thus producing **uras* > *uros* (the second-syllable vowel of the Finnic *uros* is in any case irregular, as the Saami forms point to a form **uras* with second-syllable **a*). Other examples of the same derivational suffix are found, according to SSA, in the words *koiras* 'male (of birds)' and *naaras* 'female (of animals)'. SSA even suggest that the stem *u-* might be cognate to the Mansi word *woj* 'animal' (the Mansi word has also a cognate in Khanty, although this is not mentioned by SSA, as well as in Komi and Mari; see Aikio 2015: 66).

SSA's argumentation for this alternative etymology is not very convincing. First of all, there are only a very few examples of this postulated deriva-

tional suffix **-ras*; although it is, of course, possible that this suffix has been more productive in the past and the other instances have simply disappeared in the linguistic prehistory of Finnic, it does seem far-fetched to trust this explanation because of such a scanty evidence. Also the connection of the stem **u-* and the Ob-Ugric words for ‘animal’ is not semantically convincing, although phonologically it would not be impossible to consider Mansi *woj* and Finnic *u-*, since examples of this kind of vowel relation are found in inherited Finno-Ugric vocabulary² (Sammallahti 1988: 504–506). And what is the derivational process that lies behind the form *ukko*? It is even more obscure than the one postulated for *uros*. TESz claims that Finnic **s* is a denominal (?) suffix, and while there indeed exists a derivational suffix *-s* in Finnic (which is deverbal and not denominal), it is unlikely that in the word *uros* a reflex of that derivational suffix could be found.

However, there is another and better explanation for the Fi-Sa words, which makes their connection to Hungarian *úr* unlikely. Tette Hofstra (1985: 254–256) has suggested a rather convincing Germanic etymology for the Finnic and Saami words: PG **ūruz* > Old Norse *úrr* ‘Auerchse’, Old English *úr* etc., Middle Low German *ur-osse* id. This etymology is mentioned in the SSA entry only in the bibliography, but not commented in the text itself; it is hard to understand why, since it is clearly a much better etymology than the other Finno-Ugric explanation offered by SSA. Most, or not all, of the words ending in **-as* in Finnic or Saami are early loans from various Indo-European languages, and a Germanic etymology explains the ending of the Fi-Sa words in a much more solid way than any of the other etymologies. There are also forms in Finnic without *-s*, such as Fi *uro* and Ludic *uroi*, but these can be derived from **uras* (Ludic *-oj* clearly points to a derivational suffix). LÄGLOS (III: 339–340) supports Hofstra’s etymology and states that “Diese Etymologie ist lautlich und semantisch problemlos”. Also Jorma Koivulehto, arguably the best specialist of the Germanic-Finnic loanword research has supported Hofstra’s etymology in his review of Hofstra’s doctoral dissertation (Koivulehto 1989: 99).

There is yet another loan explanation for Finnic and Saami words. This etymology is originally invented by Hermann Jakobsohn in 1922 and has

² As is well known, many researchers of Uralic historical phonology and etymology do not distinguish between the reconstructed Proto-Finno-Ugric and Proto-Uralic stages. This article keeps agnostic position in this matter and uses PFU for words with classical Finno-Ugric distribution and PU for words with Samoyed cognates without implying a difference in the Finno-Ugric and Uralic proto-languages.

since been defended by Hartmut Katz in (Katz 1983) and also in his posthumously published *Habilitationschrift* (Katz 2003: 17). This etymology connects the Fi-Sa word to the Indo-European word for ‘man’, **wiHros*, or more precisely to its PII reflex **wiHras* > Sanskrit *vīrá-* ‘man’ (which is reconstructed by Katz as **uīrɔs* – a highly non-standard PII reconstruction and notation used by no other researcher). The Indo-Iranian etymologies of Katz have been widely criticized by Uralic scholars on methodological grounds (see especially Aikio – Kallio 2005: 213–216, 220; Anttila 2006),³ and his etymology for *uros* is likewise problematic. Semantically the equation would make sense, but the phonological obstacles make the etymology unlikely. **wiHras* could hardly give **uras* or the like; one way to save Katz’s etymology would be to consider that the *jr* cluster of PU ***ujros* impossible and thus postulate a development to **uras* through a loss of **j*,⁴ but this makes the etymology rather complicated, and Katz himself certainly did not suppose this kind of development, as he reconstructs (?) the Finnic word to a Proto-Finno-Permic form **wīrās* (needless to say, there is no way to derive *uros* from such a form). This etymology is also criticized by Rédei (1991).

Shortly one could state that there are numerous problems in Katz’s etymology and it pales in comparison with Hofstra’s more solid Germanic loan etymology. Katz (1983) has also connected Komi *veres* ‘man’ to this word, but it is likely that the Komi word is a separate loan from some Indo-Iranian language, and in Katz (2003) it is considered that *veres* is derived from another Komi word, *ver* ‘slave’, which Katz considers a later loan from the same Indo-Iranian source (whether this source of the Komi word is correct or not cannot be decided here).

SaN form *varris* (*vārres* in Nielsen’s orthography) is problematic, since SaN *va-* is an irregular reflex of Proto-Saami **o* (< PFU/PU **u*). Because of this, Rédei (1991: 95–96) has separated the SaN form from the rest of the Saami forms and offers a Baltic etymology for it. According to Rédei the SaN form, which can go back to Pre-Saami **wirās* (~ **wiras* ~ **werās*), is a loan from Proto-Baltic **vīras* ‘man’ > Lithuanian *vīras* id. Rédei’s etymology is actually a modified version of Katz’s idea, which Rédei legitimately

³ Aikio & Kallio criticize Katz’s work in detail and point out that the sound substitutions that he uses are so arbitrary that most of his conclusions cannot be taken seriously.

⁴ There are various examples of Baltic and Germanic loanwords in Finnic where diphthongs that do not suit Finnic phonotactics are substituted in various ways, such as PG **flauja-* ‘ship’ > Fi *laiva* ‘id.’ (Koivulehto 1970).

criticizes. Rédei states that the Saami word could be a loan from PII **wiHras* as well, but because of distribution it is more likely to derive it from a Baltic source. Here one could point out that according to Aikio’s (2012b: 71–76) recent view the Baltic loans in Saami have all diffused through Finnic, so here a Baltic etymology for a word not found in Finnic but only in SaN is also suspicious. And while Rédei’s etymology is in itself good, it becomes more problematic when SaT form is taken into account; SSA states that SaN *varris* and SaT *viâres* forms are ”uncommon variants (poikkeuksellisia variantteja)” of the Proto-Saami word; although this is not a perfect explanation, the fact that irregular forms are found in geographically and genetically distant Northern Saami and Ter Saami makes it unlikely that the irregular forms are loans from Baltic, but it rather seems that in different parts of the Saami language continuum the irregular sound change has taken place, so probably the SaN word is not a separate loan. As a side-note, it is interesting that same kind of irregular development is found also in the SaN *varit*, reflex of the PSa word **orëkkë* ‘two year-old reindeer bull’ (origin of Fi *urakka*), derived from the same source as *ârës*; here also Inari Saami *vaareeh* shows the same kind of irregularity (Aikio 2009: 284), but the SaIn *ores*, cognate of *ârës*, does not.

So for now it can be said that the different origin for Hungarian *úr* and Finnic *uros* and its Saami cognates seems probable. However, there is yet one Finno-Ugric etymology that has been suggested for the Hungarian word, this time not involving a Finnic (or Saami) cognate. The etymology was first presented by Munkácsi (1901: 614–617) and later supported by Elemer Moór (1965). Munkácsi explained *úr* as a reflex of the Proto-Finno-Ugric word **asVra* (**asora* in Ante Aikio’s [2015] reconstruction⁵). Reflexes of this PFU word are found in Permic and Mansi, eg. Udmurt *uzjŕ* ‘rich’ and Mansi *õtər* ‘lord’ (UEW No. 29; Sammallahti 1988: 523). This explanation is also mentioned in UEW, who considers it *irrtümlich*. This explanation has recently been rehabilitated, albeit with caution, by Ante Aikio in his recent (2015) work on the development of Uralic vocalism. Aikio (2015: 57) sees this as a possible example of vowel contraction, not infrequent in Hungarian words of Uralic origin. Aikio mentions such parallels as PU **nomala* ‘rabbit’ > Hu *nyúl*. The vowel contraction is a possible explanation, but it would be

⁵ In Aikio (2013:8), the word was reconstructed as **asira*, but in Aikio 2015 it is argued that this is one of the PU/PFU words featuring second-syllable **o*, a novel idea of Aikio’s. For a detailed discussion of Aikio’s arguments see Holopainen – Kuokkala – Junttila [submitted].

more reassuring to find exact parallels for the development postulated for **asora* > **úr*. Aikio does offer another example, Hu *húz* ‘to pull’, which Aikio derives from a proto-form *?*kapotV-*; the exact development is postulated by Aikio as such: “< *?*kautV-* < *?*kavotV-* < *?*kapotV-*”. The word has cognates in Ob-Ugric languages: Khanty (Irtysh dialect) *χǎpət-* ‘tear or shake loose, knock over’ < Proto-Khanty **kipət-* and Mansi (Tavda dialect) *kat-*, (Sosva dialect) *χat-* ‘tear’ < Proto-Mansi **kat-*). Maybe in both **asora* and *?*kapotV* the second-syllable labial element **-o* has caused the vowel to develop into **u* and then **ú* in Hungarian – but it would be more convincing if there were more examples of this kind of development. UEW (no. 29) and MSzFE (III: 655) (and apparently also TESz, see below) reject the comparison of Hungarian *úr* to **asora* because of the Hungarian vocalism, but because it is difficult to say what kind of vowel would result from this kind of contraction, and as there are anyway unclear points in the development of Hungarian vocalism, one cannot rule the connection of *úr* to **asora* impossible. So Aikio’s argumentation is promising but not totally convincing. But it is maybe the best of the options that have been suggested so far.

Interestingly, Munkácsi also derived Fi *urho* and *uros* from the same PFU word, supposing a metathesis. This can hardly be corrected, as the explanation would require unexplained metathesis of both consonant and vowels (from **asura* to **urasa?*), and it is highly unlikely that such a complicated and totally irregular process would have happened in the predecessor of the Finnic word.

Since PII **s* regularly becomes *h* in Iranian, and the Old Iranian vowels went through numerous changes towards the Middle and Modern Iranian periods, it would be tentative to search for a later Iranian origin (a later reflex of **asura*) for the Hungarian word. It seems that in later Iranian languages the word is only attested in the reflex of the Old Iranian compound **asura-mazda-* (OP *a^huramazda-*), such as Middle Persian *‘whrmzd* ‘Gottesname’ and Khotan Saka *uhrmaysde* ‘Sonne’ (EWAia I: 147), and these kind of formations are not suitable origins for the Hungarian word. Of course the simple reflex of **asura* could have been retained in some unattested Iranian language of the East European steppe, but it would be methodologically unsound to postulate an unattested Middle Iranian origin for the Hungarian word.

As a new alternative explanation I would like to offer a new loan etymology for the Hungarian word. In the Indo-Iranian languages a suitable original for this word can be found: Sanskrit *sūri-* ‘Opferherr, Herr, Schimherr’

(EWAia II: 741–742), which suits the Hungarian word semantically, and, one can argue, also phonologically: the Sanskrit form is reconstructed as PII **(H)su-Hri-* by EWAia, and a borrowing from this form to Pre-Hungarian would give a form like **suri* or **sura*, which would regularly develop to **ura* and then *úr* in Hungarian. A minor point or uncertainty here is that exact cognates for the Sanskrit word are not found in other Indo-European languages, but it can be nevertheless be regularly derived from Proto-Indo-Iranian compound **(H)su-Hri-*, which consists of well-attested Indo-European element **h₁su-* ‘good’ (> Greek *εὖ-*, Avestan *hu-* id.) and *Hri-*, which goes back to at least Proto-Indo-Iranian (from the full-grade *Hreh₁i-* > Sanskrit *rayí-* ‘Besitz, Reichtum, Eigentum, Gut’, Old Av *rāiiō-* [genSg] ‘des Reichtums’; EWAia II: 438). The Sanskrit word *sūri-* is attested already in the Rig Veda, so supposing a Proto-Indo-Iranian etymology for the word is plausible despite a lack of cognates (it is well-known that the earliest phases of the Iranian branch are significantly less-well attested than the Old Indo-Aryan, and this can explain the lack of this formation from the Old Iranian sources). This etymology naturally supposes a very old age for the borrowing, as it much have been absorbed into the linguistic ancestor of modern Hungarian before the Proto-Ugric/Proto-East-Uralic sound change **s > *θ* or **Λ*, from where Hungarian **ø* (see Häkkinen 2009: 13 for details of this sound change and its distribution in Ugric and Samoyedic).

One could, of course, criticize the early Indo-Iranian origin of the Hungarian word by stating the lack of its cognates in other Uralic languages. However, there are numerous other examples of early Indo-Iranian (and Proto-Indo-European) loanwords that are found in only one or two branches of the Uralic language family, such as *sammas* ‘pillar’ from PII **stambhas* (only in Finnic; SSA III: 125) or *guohtut* ‘eat (of animals)’ from PII **kHād-* (only in Saami; Koivulehto 2007: 254, Holopainen 2017). So even if a word is present only in Hungarian, it is not impossible to consider it an early loan from Proto-Indo-Iranian.

The other Indo-Iranian, more precisely Iranian loan etymology for the Hungarian word by Harmatta (1955) has been criticized by Moór (1965). Harmatta supposed that *úr* is a borrowing from Proto-Iranian **sura-*,⁶ which

⁶ Harmatta’s PI reconstruction is outdated, as Avestan *s-* cannot reflect PII **s* (which always gives *h* in Avestan), but PII **ć*, which’s PI reflex was probably **ts* (or **ś*, but hardly a plain **s*; see Mayrhofer 1989). This is not an obstacle for the etymology itself, since there are other Iranian loans in Ugric languages that were acquired early but seem to postdate the reconstructed Proto-Iranian, pointing to Old Iranian phonology instead.

is reflected by Av *sura-* ‘stark, gewaltig; gebietend Herr über...’. Moór finds it unlikely that this kind of meaning would have developed to a meaning ‘lord, ruler’, and criticizes the fact that Harmatta supposes this kind of unattested semantic change in Proto-Iranian. Moór opts for Munkácsi’s older etymology instead.

Harmatta (1955) criticized Munkácsi’s etymology (*úr* < **asora*)⁷ on the basis of the vowel-length: according to Harmatta, the development from **asora* (or the like) to *úr* would have led to a long *ū*, and Harmatta does not find it possible that *úr*, in which even synchronically the original short *u* is visible in some forms (eg. Acc. *urat*), could result from a Pre-Hungarian long *ū*. Moór’s criticism concerns more the semantic side of Harmatta’s new etymology and he does not in fact offer an explanation for the issue of vowel-length raised by Harmatta. From the point of view of modern Finno-Ugric studies, the issue of the original length of **u* in the Pre-Hungarian form can be considered less significant, as there probably were not long vowels in Proto-Finno-Ugric (see Aikio 2012a who explains the Finnic long vowels as secondary), and thus one can consider the emergence of long vowels in Hungarian a relatively late phenomenon in general. So in time when the supposed diphthong **au-* (?) from **asora* developed to a single vowel, there probably was not an opposition of short and long vowels in Pre-Hungarian.

Also TESz (III: 1035) criticizes Harmatta’s etymology, at least apparently, as it simply states that both the Turkic and Iranian etymologies are wrong (without specifying what these etymologies actually are!). TESz also appears to reject the comparison to **asora* (again, it is simply stated that the “other Finno-Ugric explanation” is wrong without going into detail).

Despite Harmatta’s futile criticism of Munkácsi’s etymology, his own

For instance, Proto-Ugric **saraña-* ‘gold’ is universally considered a borrowing from Old Iranian **zaranya-* (cf. Av *zaranya-* id.); theoretically this could also be a loan from PI form **dzaranya-* already, with PI affricate **dz* being substituted by **s*; similar kind of substitution is found in Proto-Iranian loans of Western Uralic languages (Koivulehto 2001).

⁷ Moór cites the PI source of the word as **osura-*, but this kind of a reconstruction is anachronistic: it is well-known that PIE **o* had merged with **a* already in PII and thus **o* did not exist as a phoneme in Proto-Iranian or its Old Iranian daughter languages (only exception being second syllable-long *ō* in Avestan, but this is a late development). In the word **asura-* the **a* in fact reflects PIE syllabic **n*? (EWAia I: 148), so there is absolutely no reason to suppose a form like **osura-* in any phase of any Iranian language.

etymology is also plausible, especially in terms of phonological development. The semantic issues raised by Moór could be overcome, as the meaning ‘stark, gewaltig; gebietend Herr über...’ could develop to a meaning ‘ruler, lord’ without bigger problems, but since there are competing etymologies with more sound semantics, Harmatta’s etymology is clearly not the best one.

As a conclusion one can state that there is no reason to consider Hungarian word a cognate of the Finnic and Saami words; the Germanic etymology is clearly better for the latter ones, and for Hungarian, there is more than one possible explanation. Connection to Finnic and Saami words can be rejected with certainty; the Turkic etymology is possible but not the most convincing one; the classic connection to PFU **asora* is promising but lacks certain parallels; and lastly, our new Proto-Indo-Iranian explanation have to be taken into account as serious alternatives for the origin of this Hungarian word. This shows that there is still a lot of work to do in Uralic etymology and even well-attested words with relatively long research history can have competing etymologies and a complicated background.

Abbreviations

Av	= Avestan	PII	= Proto-Indo-Iranian
Fi	= Finnish	PU	= Proto-Uralic
Hu	= Hungarian	PUg	= Proto-Ugric
OP	= Old Persian	Sa	= Saami
PFU	= Proto-Finno-Ugric	SaIn	= Inari Saami
PG	= Proto-Germanic	SaL	= Lule Saami
PI	= Proto-Iranian	SaN	= North Saami
PIE	= Proto-Indo-European	SaT	= Ter Saami

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