

Sheep in the Samoyed Tundras*

The Northern Samoyeds were never any great sheep breeders. They had no need to be, for their cultural heritage, composed of boreal and arctic elements, included a key to effective survival in the North by an economy primarily based on the reindeer. Although reindeer breeding was only developed into its most extensive forms under the influence of the expansive Izhma Komi beginning from the 16th century, the Samoyeds had for centuries before relied upon the reindeer for most of their dwelling and clothing material, as well as for a considerable portion of their food. This situation is illustrated by the Common Samoyedic or Common Northern Samoyedic distribution of many central items of reindeer terminology, and also by the general sophistication of this part of the lexicon in each of the Northern Samoyedic languages, particularly in Tundra Nenets.

Nenets has, however, appellations for the sheep, too. It is easy to imagine that, when the sheep was first introduced to the Samoyed tundras, it was referred to by various improvised appellations, as exemplified by *~aejãbta* /hE+yAbta/ 'Schaaf' actually 'Dünnfuß' (WSS 1). It is also not surprising that the most commonly used term for the animal in modern Tundra Nenets is б.-з. *ńавця* */hAwCa/ ~ *ńовця* /(h)owCa/ (NRS 372, 395, JWb. 36), an obvious borrowing from Russian *овца* /afcá/ ~ /ofcá/ (cf. Tereshchenko 1953. 69, 73). The situation suggests that the elements of sheep breeding may have been learnt by the Nenets from the Russian peasants not long before the October Revolution.

Another word denoting the sheep is recorded in Forest Nenets: Nj. *ńāsni* /ha:snɪ/, which can dialectally (Lj. S) also mean 'russischer Schafpelz' (Jwb. 20). The latter meaning is diagnostic, for the word derives from a Khanty term with the basic meaning 'Schafpelz': e.g. (OWb. 97) V a '*ťšńi*' /a:cNi/ (cf. also Tereshchenko 1959.102). The Khanty item is a compound

* All lexical material is transcribed according to the sources. Additionally, each item is phonemized (in phonemic brackets) using the simplified graphic principles presented by the author in JSFOu. (1987).

word from */a:c/ 'sheep' and */-Ni/ 'fur coat'. It is interesting to note that the manufacture of fur coats from sheep skins seems to have been understood by the Khanty as the unmarked case, for the reference to the sheep is preserved even when speaking of other kinds of fur coats, e.g. Trj. *nǫ^u γâs âtšni*' (NUges+a:cNi/ 'Zobelpelz' (OWb. 599). In fact, it can be conjectured that the skin was probably the main part of the sheep that was familiar to most Northern and Eastern Khanty, not to speak of the Forest Nenets who ultimately adopted the word for 'sheepskin furcoat' to denote the whole sheep.

There is, however, one more word in Nenets denoting the sheep, and it is the most interesting one, since its etymology is not immediately clear. The word is attested in all the main dialects of Tundra Nenets: O U-Ts. *χū* /xu/ (JWb. 200), ям. *и вост., реже б.-з.* *хү* /xu(a)/ (NRS 776, the transcription of the vowel as "overlong" in the Cyrillic source may be due to some misunderstanding). It remains unclear, whether this item can refer to a living sheep as such, for it is mainly, or perhaps even solely, used in the phrase Sj. *χūγ kōBγ* etc. /xuh-goba/ 'Schaffell', *χγ'xoba* /xu(a)ⁿ+xoba/(also:) 'одежда из овечьей шкуры', with *xobā* /xoba/ 'шкура' (NRS 766, JWb. 195). Thus, the item resembles the Forest Nenets word /ha:sni/ in that both tend to be used not so much of the sheep itself as of its skin. The problem is now: where did the word /xu/ come from?

Since /ha:sni/ is only recorded from Forest Nenets and */hAwCa/ ~ /(h)owCa/ is a recent borrowing from Russian, there is reason to assume that /xu/ is the oldest term referring to the sheep in Tundra Nenets. Supposing that the word was already present in early Tundra Nenets, it would have had the shape */ku/. Looking for similar appellations of the sheep in other languages, one sooner or later comes to think of the Turkic word for the animal, especially as it appears in the modern Turkic languages of Siberia, e.g. Khakas *xoŭ* /qOy/ (XRS 284), Tatar *күү* /kUy/ (KSTT 154). Indeed, the Turkic word has penetrated as a recent borrowing into some of the southern dialects of Mansi and Selkup: Mansi T *khoj* /koy/ (WWb. 94), Selkup Tsch. OO *qoi* /kOy/ (SSM 44). At first glance, it does not seem completely impossible that the Nenets item could somehow be connected with the Turkic word also (cf. Doerfer 1967. 563–565). The situation could be tentatively explained in two alternative ways: either it could be a question of relatively recent indirect diffusion from modern Siberian Turkic into Nenets, or the connection could date back to the period of the earliest contacts between Proto-Samoyedic and Proto-Bulgarian-Turkic.

The possibility of an ancient Turkic loanword in Nenets is particularly tempting. Certainly, this possibility involves a difficulty from the point of view of cultural history, for while the speakers of Proto-Samoyedic may

well have been familiar with the sheep, it is rather natural to assume that the speakers of Proto-Nenets, in their essentially arctic environment, were completely ignorant of any such animal. The situation is, however, more complicated, for all of the Northern Samoyeds have preserved a Common Samoyedic term for another domestic animal, the horse, which is also completely strange to their immediate environment. Moreover, the Common Samoyedic appellation of the horse, */yUntA/ ~ */yUnta/ (SW 49), is a borrowing from Turkic, most probably deriving from the very period of the earliest contacts between Proto-Samoyedic and Proto-Bulgarian-Turkic (cf. e.g. Róna-Tas 1980. 380). It remains an enigma, how the word was able to survive during its migration, together with some Samoyedic-speaking proto-population, from the neighbourhood of the steppe zone up to the arctic tundras, where absolutely no horses were present before the recent expansion of the Russians and the Komi. Whatever the explanation, if the word for the horse was able to survive, a word for the sheep could have survived equally well.

Unfortunately, there is also a phonological problem connected with the comparison of Nenets /xu/ with the Turkic appellation of the sheep. Thus, although most of the modern Turkic idioms suggest an earlier shape */kOy/ scattered data such as Ancient Turkic *qoĵ* /kON/ ~ *qoĵun* /kOyUn/ (DTS 453) require the reconstruction of the original shape of the word as something like */kONIn/. In fact, this reconstruction is confirmed by Mongolic *xoni(n)* (*qonin*) /kOnin/ 'sheep' (MED 965-966), a loanword from early Turkic, possibly Proto-Bulgarian-Turkic. What is more interesting here is that the word was also borrowed from early Turkic into Proto-Selkup to yield *(kONAr), as attested in several southern and central dialects of language (cf. again Doerfer 1967 loc. cit. as well as Filippova 1983. 81). However, neither the original Turkic shape nor its adaptation in Selkup can have been the source of Nenets /xu/.

The possibility of recent diffusion from modern Siberian Turkic into Nenets must also be dismissed, for between Siberian Turkic and Nenets there is a broad belt of Ob-Ugric and Selkup dialects in which the sheep is called either */a:c/ (both in Khanty and in Mansi, GOUV 123) or */kONAr| (in Selkup). Obviously, the word /xu/ in Nenets cannot have come from this direction.

Indeed, the etymological problem can be solved through rather simple reasoning, the clue to the correct solution being the fact that it was not the sheep but its skin that was first introduced to the Nenets. Consequently, we should not look for words with the meaning 'sheep', but, rather, for words with the meaning 'skin'. Now, the normal word for 'skin' in Komi is *ku* /ku/ 'Fell, Haut, Leder' (SWb. 494), and this is the answer to the whole

problem: the Komi word was borrowed by the Nenets with the specialized meaning 'sheepskin', for sheepskins represented the only commercially important type of skin that the Komi had and the Nenets did not have. It can be concluded that the first information about sheep breeding reached the Samoyed tundras not through the Russians but through the Komi. This is, of course, completely congruous with what is otherwise known of the cultural history of the region.

As to the chronology of the borrowing, the wide distribution of the word in the Tundra Nenets dialects as well as the semantic change from 'sheepskin' to 'sheep' suggest that /xu/ may well be one of the earliest items of Komi vocabulary to have penetrated into Nenets. In fact, the borrowing most probably took place during the initial stages of the Izhma Komi expansion. It may be added that the Komi word /ku/ was once much later, in the 19th century, recorded from a bilingual Tundra Nenets speaker as a direct citation loan in the meaning 'leather' (Schrenk/Swv. 72, cf. Turkin 1985: 195). By that time, the relationship between Komi /ku/ and Nenets /xu/ had probably become quite obscure even in the minds of bilingual speakers of both languages.

From the point of view of absolute chronology, it is relevant to note that the Nenets stem /xu/ was already recorded in its modern meaning in the 17th and 18th centuries. The early sources know the word only as a diminutive derivative: *Goewoetza* 'Schaep' ~ *Choewoetza* 'een Pels' (Witsen/SWv. 6-7), в пустоэерском окр. хуыць 'баран' (LTOVC 2.62), /xu(a)Ca/ (it seems futile to speculate about the vocalism of the stem, as reflected in the inadequate transcription used in the old sources). Incidentally, the same derivative is still dialectally preserved today, although it may have lost its specific reference to the sheep or sheepskins: зап. хуця /хuCa/ 'одеяло из шкур' (NRS 787). There is also one early occurrence of the phrase /xuh-goba/, written down in the 18th century, but this was allegedly recorded in the Enets language: Мангазейскаго округа хуихоба 'баран'. It remains an archaeological task to investigate whether the information really comes from Enets, in which case the Nenets phrase would have been present in Enets as a loanword, or whether it is just a question of misplacement of the lexical material (the phrase is also certainly misspelled in the source).

As a diachronic curiosity, it may be mentioned that the Komi word /ku/ is of Common Uralic origin and ultimately identical with Nenets /xoba/ (KESK 143, UKS 252). Thus, the Nenets phrase /xuh-goba/ represents a very special kind of *figura etymologica*, with the two components united after several millenia of separation.

The cultural conclusion of the etymological result presented above is that the Tundra Nenets originally became familiar with the sheep as the

source of a new type of skin. Although the Nenets had a rich supply of skins of various other animals, both domestic and wild, sheepskins may well have been an article of barter trade between the Komi and the Nenets. As an item of material technology introduced to the Nenets by the Komi, sheepskins can be seen as a parallel to, for instance, broadcloth. Incidentally, the appellation of the latter in the Nenets language, *ной* /noy/, is also known to derive from Komi (cf. e.g. Wichmann 1902. 183 and Turkin 1985. 197).

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