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Some notes on Old Turkic *ïrq*

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The article deals with the Hungarian verb *ír-*, which is a very old copy of the Old West Turkic verb *ïr-* 'to make a notch, to incise, to cut into wood'. The old verb had a semantic field pertaining to the runiform script cut into wood. It became obsolete and was replaced by *biti-* in the Buddhist East and *yaz-* in the Islamic West. The noun *ïrq* 'omen' is an old derivate from *ïr-* and denoted the signs carved into wood, dice, etc., with the help of which one could tell fortunes. Derivates such as *ïrïz*, *ïrïm* and the Mongolian *ira-* support these claims.[1]

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In a paper published in 2002, Árpád Berta and I announced the forthcoming publication of a monograph (Berta & Róna-Tas 2002). In this monograph we deal with those Hungarian words which are of Turkic origin and are not copies of Ottoman Turkish words. The great bulk of the words were copied before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarian tribal federation (895-900), but a smaller group of words came into Hungarian later, from the language of the Pechenegs and Cumanians who migrated to and settled down in Hungary after the conquest.

During the writing and compilation of the individual articles we encountered almost all problems of Turkic phonology and morphology. In all cases we set as our task not only to connect the Hungarian word with its possible Turkic original, but tried to clarify the background of the copied form, its morphological structure, its place in the Turkic lexical stock, its history and its geographical distribution. Of course, time, space and capacity set strong constraints on the ideal aims.

The monograph is addressed in the first place to Turkologists. We are convinced that the material will offer new insights into West Old Turkic and Middle Turkic. Hungarian is the most important source of West Old Turkic, and offers important material for the study of Middle Turkic as well.

[1] The work has been carried out in the Research Group for Turkic Linguistic History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at the University of Szeged and was sponsored by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (No. OTKA T-034955) and the R and D project (No. NKFP 5/021).

Last but not least, I would like to mention that we do not claim to have solved all problems. On the contrary, in working on the material we realized that many problems are and remain unsolved at the present moment. But we consider the exact formulation of the questions even more important than their solution. One of the items that raised more problems than it solved is the etymology of the Hungarian word *ír-* 'to write'. What I publish here is the present state of our work on this item. All comments will be highly appreciated.

On the abbreviations and the main bibliography see Berta & Róna-Tas (2002). Small technical changes in comparison with the samples given there are due to a broad discussion with our Hungarian and international colleagues, in Hungary and from abroad for which we offer our sincere thanks.

ír 'to write' p1372/c1448 *yr*tak-uala [īr-tak vala], irdal 'to cut, to slit in (e.g. fish)' 1600 *irdal*d [irdal-d], Dial: *ïr-* 'to cut, to carve' Chango of Moldava (Aydemir 2002: 205) | *īr* ← **ïr-* | OT *ir-* 'to make a notch, or breach, in (something)', *ïrq* 'dice, sticks, etc. for casting lots, divination, magical figure, hexagram, an omen, taking omens, divination', Turkic *ïrïm* 'belief in omens', *?yïrt-* 'to tear (something Acc), to pull to pieces'.

OT: *ïrk* 'omen' (RIrk), – (U), *ir-* <'I̲YR> 'to make a breach (in a wall)': *ol tām irdi* 'he made a breach in the wall (or other)' (AK Dankoff & Kelly read *ēr-*), *ïrök* <'IRUK> 'breach or crack in the wall, or other' (AK, AQB cf. Erdal 1991: 233), *yir-* 'to split the wood (or other), [The same] for anything moist that is split lengthwise but not cut with a sharp instrument ... The first [i.e. *yar-*] is a forceful splitting, this one is a gentle splitting: *tapuġ tāš yirär, tāš bašiġ yarār* 'Service splits a stone, but a stone splits the head' (AK Dankoff & Kelly read *yer-*), cf. also *yïrt-* 'to tear (garment)' (AK), *irü* 'Vorzeihen (BO:5).

MT – (UOg), – (UYAB), – (UHy), – (UHyS), – (UCiv), – (ABF), *yïrt-* 'to rend, tear to pieces' (AGul), – (AHMA), – (AHŠ), *yïrt-* 'razryvat′, carapat″ (AHŠF), *yïrt-* 'razorvat″ (AIM), *yïrt-* 'Kâğıt ve bez gibi nesneleri çekip paralamak [sic!], yarmak.' (AIMI), in: *yïrt* 'tear!' (AKD), – (AKor), *yïrt-* 'razorvat′, razodrat″ (AM), – (ANeh), *yïrt-* 'razryvat′, carapat″ (ANehF), – (ARbg), *yïrtïl-* 'rvat′sja, dyrjavit′sja' (ATef), – (AYC), – (AChag), – (AChagAb), – (AChagAbA), – (AChagAbV), – (AChagB), – (AChagBL), – (AChagBud), – (AChagG), – (AChagLN), In: *ïrq tuttï andïn* 'polučil ot nego durnoe znamenie', In: *yïrttï* 'razorval' (AChagMA), – (AChagML), – (AChagR), – (AChagS), – (AChagSC), *yïr-* 'spalten, reissen' (AChagSK), – (AChagZ), *yïrt-* 'zerreissen' (LCC), *ir-* 'sıkılmak, vasıl olmak, irişmek, ayırmak, götermek', *ïrmaq* '*arq* = *aruq*' (AAH), In: *yïrtmač* 'Eski kaftanların eteğindeki mahsus yapılan yırtık gibi dikilmemiş mahal' (AAHI), *yïrt-* 'drzeć, rozryvać', *ïrmaq* 'rivière, fleuve' (ABul), – (ADur), *yïrmaq* 'Fluss' (AHou), – (AKav), – (AMGh), *ïraq*, *ïrmaq*, *yïrmaq* 'reka', *yïrïn-* 'byt′ prodyrjlavlennym, provrannym', *yïrït-* 'delat′ dyru, rasčepljat′, razryvat′, rassekat, rvat′ na kuski' (ATuh), *yert-* ~ *yïrt-* ~

yïrtïr- 'déchirer' (AmTr), *ïrt-* ~ *yïrt-* 'rvat′, razorvat′' (AmD), – (AmCh), – (AmE), – (AOtT).

Ch: *ïr-*, *ïra-* 'vydabljat′, dolbit′ pazy (v dereve)', *ïra* 'paz (v doske, stolbe, bruse)' (Chuv).

NW: *ïrmau* 'vyem, vyemka, paz, fal′c (na brevne, doske, bruse i.t.p.), špunt (da doske), zakroj (na rebrax ili krajax dosok)', *ïrïm* 'zaklinanie, zaklinanija, koldovstvo', *ïrïm-yerim* 'nerovnyj, izrezannyj (o rel′efe)', *ïrïskal* 'sčast′e', [?cf *yĕr-* 'proryvat′, ryt′'] (Tat), *ïruga* 'nalog, vzimaemyj za venčanie' (TatDI-Kaz.ar-krš), – (TatD2), *ïrï-* 'delat′ pazy, utorit′', *ïrïw* 'paz', *ïrïm* 'primeta, sredstvo (lečebnoe)'; *ïrïm*, *ïrmau* 'paz, fal′c, utor', *ïrmaq* 'instrument kotorym delajut utori ili paz', *iriś* 'sčast′e', *ïrïškal* 'bogatstvo' (Bashk), *ïr-* 'rubit′ sruby v paz', *ïrïs* 'sčast′e, blagososotojanie', *ïrïm* 'predskazanie, gadanie, sueverie, dobryj ili xudoj znak', *ar-* 'delat′ pazu na stolbax (dlja zabora)' (SibT), *ïr-* 'rubit′ srubi v paz; in Fugen arbeiten'; (SibTBR), *ïrk* 'blagodenstvie, žizn′ v soglasii, mirnoe sosuščestvovanie', *ïrïm* 'vera v primeti, v predznamenovanie, dlja počina, zaklinanie' (Kirg), *ïrïs* 'fate, lot, happiness, good fortune', *ïrïm* 'belief in omens, superstition' (Kaz), *ïrïm* 'sueverie, vera v primety, v predznamenovanija, v zaklinanija', *ïrïs* 'sčast′e, dolja' (Kklp), *ïrga-* 'rezat′, razrezat′ tupym nožom', *ïrk* 'nastroenie, želanie, volja', *ïrïz* 'čest′, sovest′', *ïrïs* 'sčast′e, dolja', *ïrïm* 'sueverie, vera v primety, v predznemenovanija' (Nog), *ïrïz* 'čest′, sovest′, skromnostě', *ïrïm* 'koldovstvo, zaklinanie' (CrTat), – (KarT), *ïrïz* 'dostoinstvo, čest', sovest', nravstvennost', skromnost', vozderžanie' (KarC), – (KarH), *ïrïs* 'udače, sčast′e' (Kum), *ïrïz* 'sovest′, čest′', *ïrïs* '[ploxaja] primeta, predrassudok, sueverie' (Krch-Blk). **SW:** *ïrïm* 'predznamenovanie, primeta', [cf. *yïrt-* 'rvat′, razryvat′, rascaraplat′, pocarapat′'] (Tkm), *irmäk* 'melkie otrubi', (Az), [cf. *yïrt-* 'iznosit′, trepat′, rvat′, razryvat′, razdyrat′']; *ïrk* 'sčast′e; das Glück' (TtR-Zenker), ?*ïr-* prov. = *ayir-* 'to part, to separate, sever, to divide' (Tt) [cf. *yïr-* 'to tear, rend, split, burst'], *ir-* 'razryvat′, razrezat′, razmyvat′ (berega)' [cf. *yïrt-* 'rvat′, razryvat′, otryvat′'], *irik* 'razorvannyj, rupt' (Gag), – (Khor), – (SOg). **Kh:** – (Kh). **T:** *irim* 'vera v primety, sueverie' (Uzb), – (TurkiJ) – (TurkiSh), *irim* 'proverie, sueverie, vera v primety, primeta, predznamenovanie' (MUyg) – (Sal), *ïrk* 'sčast′e, buduščee, xorošee predskazanie', *ïrk kara-* 'gadat′' (YUyg). **S:** – (Alt), – (AltR) – (AltLR), *ïrïs* 'sčast′e, blagososotojanie, uspex' (AltQK), *ïrïs* 'sčast′e' (AltL), *ïrïs* 'sčast′e' (AltTK), *ïr-*'rubit′ srubi v paz; in Fugen arbeiten' (AltTelR), *ïrïl-* 'razryvat′sja, razdyrat′sja (o materii), rastreskivat′sja (o zemlje)', *ïrïs* 'sčast′e, uspex', *ïrïχ* 'anat. promežnost′' (Khak), *ar-* II 'vydablivat′ v brevnevyemku ili paz' (HakSag), *ïrïm* 'predskazanie, proročestvo, sčast′e' (KhakB), – (FY), *ïrï-* (dial.) 'potrošit′ (napr. rybu)', *ïrïm* 'ploxoe fizičeskoe sostojanie, ploxoe samočustvie' (Tuv), *ïr-* 'kolot′, raskalyvat′ (napr. drova), ščapat′ (lučinu), rvat′, razryvat′, potrošit′, torit′ (dorogu)' (Tof), **Y:** *sïr-* 'proryvat′, razryvat′, *sirit* only as the gerund *siritä* (examples in Pekarskij 1917: 2247), *siritin-*, *sirittär-* 'razorvat′sja', *ï:r-* 'raskalyvat′, vilovatoe; raz"edinjat′; razryvat′'; *ïrït-* 'razbirat′ po častami, razedinat′, raznimat′, otdelat′' (Y), *hïrïk* 'Schlucht, Erdspalte' (Dlg).

Mong: *ira-* 'to expose, to open wide, thrust or draw open, cut open, to draw back (as covering)', *iraga* 'ripples on the surface of water', *iralga* 'ripples on the surface of water, wrinkles on the forehead', cf. Kalm. *ir-* ~ *yar-* 'schneiden, mit dem Messer ritzen; (die Erde) aufritzen, pflügen'.

E / T: In the Karahanid language we find a verb *ir-* with front vocalic *-i-* with the meaning 'to make a breach, a crack, a slot'. The front vocalic verb is the base for a deverbal noun: *irök* with the meaning 'a breach or crack', and this is present in both the Dīvān of Kashgari and in the Qutadgu Bilig; further, it also occurs in a few Uyghur texts (see Erdal 1991: 233). From the Turkic data one has the impression that either this word was formerly back vocalic or it had a back vocalic pair. This is corroborated by the Mongolian data.

The verb *ir-* can hardly be separated from *yir-* 'to split (gently) [see above]' (read as *yer-* by Dankoff & Kelly as they also read *er-* instead of *ir-*, and *erük* instead of *irök*). The verb *yir-* is, further, most probably the base for *yïrt-* 'to tear', which preserved its back vocalism. The result, i.e. a cleft, a mountain gorge, may be behind the noun denoting 'channel, river' as in the at-Tuḥfat: *ïraq*, *ïrmaq*, *yïrmaq* 'river', *yïrïn-* 'to become splitted', *yïrït-* 'to make a hole, to cleave, split, tear etc.' (ATuh) which suppose a verb *ïr-* ~ *yïr-* (see Yakut). As for the modern languages, the back vocalic form *ïr-* 'to make a breach' is present in Volga Turkic, where Chuvash is a loan from Tatar, and it occurs in some Siberian languages. Some clear derivates appear elsewhere as, for example, in Noghay (*ïrga-* 'rezat', razrezat' tupym nožom'). The verb *yïr-* is present in most languages with *y-* or its developments, but in Yakut we find both with *s-* (< **y-*) and, without the initial consonant, simply *ï:r-*.

If *ir-* had an OT form with back vowel, this word could be connected with the word *ïrk* 'omen, sign'.

We have the following possiblities:

(1) Morphologically *ïrk* may be *ïr-(O)k*. But Erdal (1991: 224) pointed to the fact that the vowel *(O)* is syncopated only after rounded vowels in monosyllabic verbs ending in *-r*, (as *kör-k*, *ör-k*, *tur-k*), and just *irök* 'a crack, a slot' is one of the cases in favour of this hypothesis, the other is *arok* 'exhaustion'. Here a possible solution may be that *ïrk* is an earlier derivation, when *-(O)-* was already syncopated, and later this syncopation was restricted to monosyllabic verbs with rounded vowels and final *-r*. In other words: *irök* is a later derivation than *ïrk*. To this earlier layer would pertain *ärk* 'authority, power, free will, independence' and *bark* 'movable property'. *ärk* has to be a derivation of *är-* 'to be, etc.' and *bark* has to be connected either to *bar-* 'to go' (see Erdal 1991: 292-293 on *barïm*), or to *bar* < *bar-* 'to exist' on which see *barom* in our forthcoming book. Turkic *terk* 'quickly, very soon' can hardly be separated from *tez-* 'to run' (**tez-ök* > *tezĕk* > **tezk* > *terk*), a clear example for secondary rhotacism, and an earlier derivation than *irök*.

(2) We may postulate that *-rk* is a development of *-r-(X)g* > *-rg* > *-rk*. However, there are morphophonological difficulties, because in this case there is no syncopation of *(X)* as we can see in the binom *ärig-barïg* 'the manner of being' (see the data

in Erdal 1991: 186–187). We can depart from an **ïr-ïg* only if we have other data which corroborate this. Of course, *ärk*, *barq* and *terk* may also pertain to this group, and thus they would promote the derivation of *ïrk* from **ïrïg*. Do we have a key which would help to solve this dilemma?

(3) In cases of OT *-rk-* Mongolian has sometimes *-k*, sometimes *-g*, pointing to the original Turkic velar stop. In the case of *irk* 'ram' we have Mongolian *irge*; in the case of Turkic *börk* 'a cap' we find Mongolian *bürge* 'shack, hut', but also *bürkü* 'summer hat' (a later loanword), while in the case of *ärk* 'power' Mongolian has only *erke*, that is Mongolian preserved the *-g-* in the case of **irgĕ* and **börgĕ* and Turkic lost voiceness, while Mongolian preserved Turkic *-k* in *bürkü* and *erke*. We may suppose that Mongolian *iru-a* 'foreboding, bad omen, premonition' (see further *iruči*, *iruači*, *iruġači* 'fortuneteller', Written Mongolian forms in: MongL, Kow) has to be connected with Turkic *ïrq*. According to Doerfer (1963-1975 TMENI, 1965: 55-60), the Mongolian orthographic *-ua* denotes a short final *-o* as in *činua* 'wolf'. In the Muqaddimat al-Adab we find *ira* in *mū ira bariba tünese* = Chaghatay *yaman ïrq tuttï andïn* 'polučil ot nego durnoe znamenie' (Poppe 1938-1939, 1: 242). This clearly points to a West Middle Mongolian *-a*, to which East Mongolian *-o* corresponds, and in fact all Mongolian data (with the exception of Dahur *irō*) show a short *-o* in this word or its development (Ordos *yoro*, Khalkha *yor*, Buryat *yoro*, Kalmyk *yoro*). The final short *-o* in Mongolian is very rare. According to Poppe (1955: 71), it goes back to **βa*. Mongolian *iruġa* would give **irō*, as *ǰiruġa* is *džorō*; hence we have to suppose either following Poppe an **irβa* or an **iroga* from which an *iro* developed through **irō*. The easiest way would be **iroġa* > **ïroγa* > *irva* > *irua* > *iro*. In fact the last forms are attested. In this case an early Mongolian **iroġa* has to be equated with Turkic *ïrq*. The Turkic form would be **ïrogă* from which **ïrog* > **ïrŏg* > **ïrg* > *ïrk*. This means that Mongolian would support the solution under No 2. See further Yakut *ïra* and *ïrā* 'predčustvie, predrekanie, zagadivanie' (← Mongolian **ira*, **irā* < **iroġa*). Mongolian **ïroġa* has been copied by some Turkic languages. Beside Yakut *ïra* ~ *ïrā*, we find Kirghiz *ǰoro* ~ *ǰorō* 'predznamenovanie, priznak, primeta', Noghay *yoru* 'preugadyvanie, predskazanie, tolkovanie snov'.

(4) Finally we have to mention that in OT we find *irü* and / or *ïru* 'omen, sign'. Clauson (1972: 197) supposed this form to be the origin of Mongolian *iru-a*. It is very difficult to separate *ïrk* from *ïru* / *irü*, see the sentence *:ïraq-taqï kiši asan yanmaz, nägüg yorap irü ïrqlasar büdmäz* 'Der in der Ferne befindliche Mensch wird nicht gesund zurückkommen. Mit was für einem (geheimen) Wunsch man auch das Orakel befragen mag wird er nicht erfüllt' (UTTVII: 38:28:6). Here *irü irklasar* is 'if one seeks by divination for an omen to explain something' (Clauson 1972: 197). But the Turkic form *ïru* cannot be the original form of Mongolian *irua*. Is Turkic *irü* / *iru* a loanword from Mongolian?

From the verb *ïr-* we find the derivate with *-(X)m-*. In Bashkir in the forms *ïrïm*, *ïrmau* (< *ïrmag*) 'paz, fal'c, utor' meaning 'notch'. In Tatar only *ïrmau* 'vyem,

vyemka, paz, fal'c (na brevne, doske, bruse i.t.p.)' is recorded. In the same languages the same word *ïrïm* also has the meaning 'zaklinanie, koldovstvo, primeta, sredstva (lečebnoe)'. The word *ïrïm* has this or similar meanings ('sueverie, predznamenovanie, vera v primety', etc.) in Kirg, Kaz, Kklp, CrTat, Tkm, Uzb, MUyg, Khak, i.e. 'belief in omens, superstition'. The Tuvan *ïrïm* 'ploxoe fizičeskoe sostojanie, ploxoe samočustvie' is especially interesting; it may have been connected with the shamans and their fortune-telling during their trance. The shaman relates that he was "cut into pieces" during his journey to the other world. The words *ïrïm*, *ïrïmla-*, *ïrïmči* occurring in Alt, Tel, Kirg have already been connected by Thomsen (1912: 193 [see now the reprint 1922: 230]) with *ïrq* 'omen'. Here Thomsen dismissed with reason connecting *ïrq* with *yïr*, *ïr* 'a song'.

Another derivate of *ïr-* with the deverbal suffix *-(X)z* (Erdal 1991: 323-327) is *ïrïz*, *ïrïs*, 'sčast'e, luck, fortune'. This word or its further derivates are also common, cf. Tat, Bashk, Kirg, Nog, KarC, Krch-Blk, AltQk, AltL, Khak.

In an interesting paper on *ïr-* published in 2001, L. Károly suggested that OT *ï:z*, *īz* 'trace, furrow, notch' was an old derivate from **ï:r-ïz*. If this can be corroborated, then we have an early derivation with the syncopation of *-ï-* and a later one with its preservation. The earlier form preserved its original meaning: 'furrow, notch', hence 'trace'; the later went through a semantic change 'notch' > 'sign' > 'omen' > 'luck predicted by the omen'. I would, however, put this aside, because of the large word family *izde-*, *iste-*, *irde-* 'to seek, to trace, etc.', which would demand a longer treatment here.

Thus we have a word family with the meanings 'belief in omens, superstition, fortune, luck', and this has to be connected with *ïrq* 'divination, fortunetelling, omen'. Morphologically the words *ïrq*, *ïrïm* and *ïrïz* can be connected only if they have as a common stem a verb *ïr-*.

Fortunetelling is done from 'signs'; an omen is nothing else than a sign from which you can tell the future. Thus my claim is that *ïr-* 'to make a notch' also had the meaning 'to make a sign', and hence 'to make an omen', 'to tell a fortune (from signs)'.

As is known, the famous Irk Bitig was found in the Dunhuang Cave in 1907 by Sir Aurel Stein, and was first published by V. Thomsen in 1912 (see now the 1922 reprint). The text has been republished with a Turkish translation by Orkun (1936-1941, 2: 71-93), and with a Russian translation by Malov (1951). Important papers were brought to light by Clauson (1961) and Erdal (1978), the text was edited with an English translation by Tekin (1993), and recently it has been dealt with by Erdal in 1997. There are, of course, many remarks on the text or on some of its problems in many other papers. A good survey on the earlier literature is Erdal (1997).

In a paper published in 1956 (Róna-Tas 1956: 171) on tally stick and divination-dice in the iconography of Lha-mo, I have called attention to the parallels between the Tibetan dice used in divination and the Turkic Irq Bitig. The dice with dots can be found in the iconography of Lha-mo, the godess of divination. The famous *mo*

divination, i.e. the divination with the dotted dice, the *Lha-mo mo*, has been described in many sources and is present in the iconography of Lha-mo. I came to the conclusion in my paper that the *mo* divination was first a pre-Buddhist practice (Róna-Tas 1956: 173), and I claimed "that Lha-mo, the fortuneteller – medicine woman – enchantress, is undoubtedly a pre-Buddhist deity" (1956: 176-177). It can also not be doubted that the Irq Bitig comes from a layer of folk-religion independent from and earlier than the massive intrusion of the great religions in the area, Manicheism and Buddhism. This is true even if we have a clear hint in the colophon that it was written or copied by and for people having close contacts with the Manicheans.

On the Turkic terminology of writing we can refer to the paper of Bodrogligeti (1965). There existed two basic verbs for 'writing', *biti-* 'to write' and *ur-* 'to hit, to strike, to cut in (a stone an inscription)'. The verb *yaz-* was in the time of Kashgari a dialectal word in the Oghuz languages. There we read *ol bitig yazdï* 'he wrote the book'. One has the impression that with the meaning 'to write' *biti-* spread with Buddhism, and *yaz-* with Islam.

The term for making incisions, notches, to carve into wood was *ïr-* in OT, in contrast to *ur-*, which had the meaning 'to hit, to cut into stone', hence, 'make stone inscriptions'. The dots were also carved as were the runiform letters, or the hexagrams. The signs carved and used for divination were called *ïrq*. The carving of signs and script into wood slowly disappeared with the introduction of the great religions and the writing systems brought to and adapted by the Turks. The terminology became blurred. But some terms preserved the reminiscence of the old practice. What was written was the fate, the luck, the fortune or the means for divination. A parallel case is the word *pětü* 'amulet' (Chuvash), *beteü* 'amulet, obereg, talisman' (Bashkir), a semantic change from *bitig* 'writing'.

On a possible borrowing of OT *ïr-* into Ostyak see Rédei (1988-1991: 850), who correctly states that the Ostyak word *jeri-* 'zeichnen' and Hungarian *ír-* are independent borrowings from Turkic; however, he supposes a Turkic *yaz-*, Chuv *śïr-* as Turkic protoforms (on which see below).

E / H: The Hungarian word *ír-* 'to write' has been connected until now with Turkic *yaz-*. Gombocz (1912: 87-88, 179-180) supposed a Chuvash **ïr-* as an irregular Chuvash equivalent of Turkic *yaz-*. But Chuvash has *śïr-* 'to write', which is a regular correspondence to Turkic *yaz-*. Some scholars tried to explain the loss of the consonantal initial of *yaz-* as a Hungarian development (Sinor 1977: 332, Doerfer 1976: 28), but Ligeti (1986: 24) refuted their suggestions with reason. According to Ligeti (1986: 25), the *y-* disappeared before back vocalic *ï* earlier than *y-* became *ǰ-* in Old Chuvash, and Hungarian borrowed this dialectal form. But this would involve great chronological difficulties, and has no parallel in the Hungarian material. The Hungarian word was first connected to Turkic *ïr-* by Róna-Tas (1992) with the discussion of earlier opinions. Benkő (1993-1997, 1: 621) correctly remarked that the etymology connected with Turkic *yaz-* has serious phonological difficulties. The se-

mantic history of the Hungarian word is also of importance. In the Hungarian derivate *irdal* 'to slit in, to mark out, to make cuts into (mostly into the skin of the fish before roasting)' even the notion of making a notch, a cut in, is preserved, see also Tuvan *ïrï* 'potrošit' (napr. ribu)'. According to Benkő (1967-1984, 2: 231) the verb *irdal* is a derivation from *irt* 'to extirpate', and less likely from *ír* 'to write'. In Benkő (1993-1997, 1: 622) he added that the change *t* > *d* occurred on the analogy of *vagdal*, *furdal*, and the semantics "... beim Abholzen eines Waldes die Bäume (mit Einschnitten) vorgezeichnet werden". This is unlikely. The verb *irdal* has the meaning in the Hungarian dialects 'to cut in meat, fat, fish before roasting, to clear one line of seed from maize' a derivate *irdas* has the meaning 'grooved, furrowed'. The suffix *-dal* is a Hungarian frequentative suffix, as in *vág* 'to cut', *vagdal* 'to cut frequently'. In this case Hungarian preserved a very old meaning of Turkic *ïr-*. This was due to the fact that the Hungarians used a Runiform script carved in wood. This script pertained to the East European Runiform script (on which see Göbl & Róna-Tas 1995 and Róna-Tas 1999: 437-444).

To sum up: Hungarian *ír-* is a very old copy of the Old West Turkic word *ïr-* 'to make a notch, to incise, to cut into wood (furrows, letters, etc.)'. The word later became front vocalic in some Turkic languages. The old verb had a semantic field pertaining to the runiform script cut into wood. This became obsolete and was superseded by *biti-* in the Buddhist East and *yaz-* in the Islamic West. The noun *ïrq* 'omen, etc.' is an old derivate from *ïr-* and denoted the signs carved into wood, dice, etc. with the help of which one could tell fortunes. Derivates such as *ïrïz*, *ïrïm* and the Mongolian *ira-* support our claim.

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