

**A terrifying etymology: on the origin of Old Uyghur
*bäliṅ täg***

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Abstract: Old Uyghur *bäliṅ tæg* behaves in a peculiar way. In the published Old Uyghur texts, it never appears without the postposition *tæg*, yet denominal verbs are formed by means of the usual suffixes. What is more, *bäliṅ* and *tæg* are often spelled as one word. They were clearly perceived as inseparable by some scribes. The divergent semantics of the adjective (‘terrifying, dreadful’) and the adverb (‘suddenly, all at once’) are remarkable as well. The article examines the uses of *bäliṅ tæg* in Old Uyghur and cites several examples. It becomes apparent that the adjective and the adverb are sometimes easy to confuse. Only by analyzing several examples in context is it possible to determine the exact meaning. Nearly all instances suggest the interpretation as an adverb. Cognates in modern Turkic languages are being adduced, too. Finally, a new etymology is being proposed.

Keywords: Old Uyghur, etymology, lexicography, Turkic languages, Sogdian.

Özet: *Korkunç bir etimoloji: Eski Uyğurca bälīṅ tæg sözcüğünün kökeni üzerine.*

Eski Uyğurca *bäliṅ* kendine özgü bir şekilde davranır. *bäliṅ*, bugüne kadar yayımlanmış Eski Uyğurca metinlerde hiçbir zaman yanında *tæg* edatı olmadan görülmez, buna karşılık bu sözcükten fiil yapımında bilindik türetme ekleri kullanılır. Ayrıca, *bäliṅ* ve *tæg*

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çoğunlukla bitişik yazılır. Bu iki sözcüğün bazı yazıcılar tarafından ayrılmaz olarak algılandıkları açıktır. Sıfat (‘dehşet verici, korkunç’) ve zarf (‘aniden, birdenbire’) kullanımları arasındaki anlam farkı da dikkat çekicidir. Makalede *bäliṅ tāg*’in Eski Uygurcadaki kullanımları incelenmiş ve bazı örneklerle yer verilmiştir. Sözcüğün cümlede sıfat mı zarf mı olarak kullanıldığının kolayca karıştırılabileceği görülüyor. Kesin anlamı belirlemek ancak çeşitli örnekleri bağlamı içinde analiz etmekle mümkündür. İncelediğimiz neredeyse tüm örnekler zarf olarak yorumlanması gerektiğini düşündürmektedir. Makalede Çağdaş Türk dillerindeki eş asıllı sözcükler de ele alınmıştır. Son olarak, yeni bir etimoloji önerilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Eski Uygurca, etimoloji, sözlük bilgisi, Türk dilleri, Soğudca.

Introduction: Old Uyghur *bäliṅ tāg* is rather unusual in its formation because the postposition *tāg* seems to be always obligatory. In the Old Uyghur corpus there is not a single occurrence without *tāg*. There is a structural and even semantic parallel in the projection participles¹ *-gU* and *-gUIUk*. These can likewise be combined with *tāg*, in which case the postposition takes on a purely grammatical function (Wilkens 2014). The semantics of *korkgu tāg* and *bäliṅ tāg* are more or less identical (‘dreadful, terrifying’). However, the latter has a different meaning when used as an adverb. It is also worth noting that *bäliṅ* and *tāg* are often spelled as one word, which goes to show that they were perceived as inseparable by some scribes. Just as with the projection participles *-gU* and *-gUIUk*, the literal meaning of the postposition is lost here, too. In this paper, I will examine the use of *bäliṅ tāg*, discuss briefly the denominal verbs, and propose an etymology for *bäliṅ*.

1. The adverb

After collecting the materials for this paper and looking afresh at all the instances of *bäliṅ tāg*, it became apparent that it is not at all easy

¹ On this term, see Erdal 2004: 301–307.

to find examples² that are clearly identified as adjectives. Several instances were formerly understood by the editors of Old Uyghur texts³ as being adjectives, but in many cases, an adverb makes much better sense in the translation. As it turned out, only one textual instance can be classified with some certainty as an adjective. Given the use as a noun in Kāšgarī's work and the evidence from modern Turkic languages, on which see below, this discovery was an unexpected result. A problematic passage from the *Daśakarma-pathāvadānamālā* may serve as an illustrative first example:

(1) ... *anıḡ arasınta bäliḡ tæg hilimbe yäk kızın koyınta kötürü alıp* ... (Wilkens 2016, 2: 702, lines 09113–09114)

At first glance one is tempted to translate this converb clause as follows:

“... instantly, [the hero Arjuna] lifted the daughter of the abominable demon Hiḍimba on his chest (?) ...”

A similar instance is found in the same text. Again, *anıḡ arasınta* and *bäliḡtæg* follow each other:

(2) ... *a[nıḡ] arasınta bäliḡtæg amrılmış äriḡin [dyanka] olurmuş ... h(a)ri[čandre tegin]ig kördi* (Wilkens 2016, 2: 512–514, lines 05523–05526).

Here it is obvious that *bäliḡtæg* cannot mean ‘terrifying, abominable,’ and it is by no means an adjective. In the edition, I assumed that the word would qualify *amrılmış* and opted for the translation “surprisingly”. But now we have identified it as a synonym of *anıḡ arasınta*, we arrive at the following translation:

“... he suddenly₂ saw the prince Hariścandra ... who had settled down in meditation with a calm gesture.”

On account of the context, I previously thought that in the next example, *bäliḡ tæg* would qualify *sin suburgan* (‘cemetery₂’) as an attribute and translated it in the edition of the *Daśakarma-pathāvadānamālā* accordingly as ‘terrible’. This analysis was

² In the translations, a subscript number 2 indicates a word pair or hendiadys. A subscript number 3 denotes a lexical combination of three members. Confusion of dentals is indicated in the transcriptions. A <ṭ> in the manuscript where one expects a <d> is rendered as ṭ.

³ This includes the authors of these lines.

apparently mistaken. In this example, we have to understand *bäliṅ täg* as an adverb.

(3) ... *tün yarımınta bäliṅ täg sin suburgan arakı sakınči köñülintä yügärü boltı* (Wilkens 2016, 2: 504, lines 05366–05368).⁴

“... at midnight the thought suddenly arose in his mind that he found [himself] placed in a cemetery₂.”

The following instance is difficult because of the following word *yavlak*. In the edition, I have treated *bäliṅtäg* as part of a hendiadys with *yavlak* as the second element. However, it is more likely that it is an adverb here:

(4) *bäliṅtäg yavlak ün yaṅku tæg äšiḍildi* (Wilkens 2016, 2: 692, lines 08914–08915)

“suddenly an ugly sound was heard like an echo.”

The same interpretation can also be postulated for the following sentence:

(5) [*anta*] *ötrü bäliṅtæg č(a)štane elig tägräsintä kolti sanınča yäklär katıg ünin kıkırıštılar alakırıštılar* (Wilkens 2016, 2: 696, lines 08972–08975)

“then suddenly demons, their number being like *koṭis*, shouted and screamed together around King Caṣṭana.”

As an interim result of the five examples just considered, we can conclude that by means of *bäliṅtäg* ~ *bäliṅ tæg*, the *Daśakarmapathāvadānamālā* introduces a new and action-packed scene in the narrative. The employment of this adverb is part of the narrative strategy of the text. It lends the description a touch of the dramatic. The *Daśakarmapathāvadānamālā* is a translation from Tocharian A, and for this reason we can assume that in each case *bäliṅtäg* ~ *bäliṅ tæg* renders a Tocharian A adverb. Perhaps this Tocharian A adverb was *ātukek*. So far only one example is known, but the context is quite similar to the Old Uyghur ones: *tmäṣ ātukek nirmitsinās risäṣ porām pākär mäskantrā* “then suddenly fires

⁴ A similar, slightly damaged example is found in the same text in line 05508 (Wilkens 2016, 2: 512). See also the equally damaged line 05515 (Wilkens 2016, 2: 512). Line 08654 (Wilkens 2016, 2: 682) is too heavily damaged to assess the context.

become visible from the illusory cities” (Carling & Pinault 2023: 33b).

Because of the Chinese parallels, the examples from the *Altun Yaruk Sudur* to be discussed now are easier to analyze. All four instances in the tenth book are adverbial, a fact clearly apparent on account of the syntax. The meaning is in all instances ‘suddenly, all of a sudden.’ There are three different Chinese equivalents in Yijing’s (義淨; 635–713) version of the text, from which the Old Uyghur translation was made around the turn of the first millennium. In the tenth book, the word only occurs in the famous story of the hungry tigress, and it seems reasonable to assume that the translator had a kind of predilection for it.

(6) *tugdı bäliṅtäḡ seziki oglanıḡa yıčanu* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 632:22–23)

“Suddenly there arose a doubt [in her heart], worrying for her son.”

Theoretically, the syntax of the next example would allow for an interpretation of *bäliṅtäḡ* as an adjective, but the Chinese equivalent 忽 *hu* ‘suddenly, abruptly’ shows that this is not the case.

(7) ... *bäliṅtäḡ lačın kapdı kičigin* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 633:22)

“... suddenly the falcon grasped the smallest [of the three young pigeons].”

In the next example, the syntax only allows an adverbial reading:

(8) *ötrü hatun ämigi tañızıp eedip ärtiḡü turur ärkän bäliṅtäḡ ötrü akdı yürüḡ süüt* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 632:17–19)⁵

“Then the breasts of the queen swelled up₂ extremely, and while this was [so], suddenly white milk flowed.”

The Chinese equivalent is 忽然 *hu ran* ‘suddenly,’ as correctly indicated by Gulcalı (2021: 454) in her edition of the tenth book of the *Altun Yaruk Sudur*.

⁵ Nugteren and Roos (2018: 385) cite this sentence. In this study, we find the first etymological solution with respect to the verb *e(e)d-* in Old Uyghur.

The next sentence is similar, but the event is told from the perspective of the queen:

(9) *tolp ätözümtä tugyuk ol busuš kaḍgu alp ämgäk ämiglärüm
bäliṇtäg eedip taṇızıp süit akar* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917,
folio 633:7–10)⁶

“In my whole body there arose an affliction₂ and severe pain; my
breasts suddenly filled up [with milk] and swelled; [even now]
milk flows.”

As in example (7), the Chinese equivalent is 忽 *hu* ‘suddenly, abruptly.’ There are other texts showing the same correspondence of Old Uyghur *bäliṇtäg* (~ *bäliṇ täg*) and Chinese 忽 *hu* (e.g., Aydemir 2013, 1, 178, line 1334; Semet, Ölmez & Röhrborn 2022: 127, line 1187, Shōgaito 2003: 296, line 282), whereas the equivalent 忽然 *hu ran* in example (8) is also found in the following longer passage from the *Altun Yaruk Sudur*:

(10) *öñrä näčä bar ärsär ädgü körklä yemişliklär ögirgülük
sävingülük ilinčü kılguca yaraglıg t(ä)k ärsär yänä bäliṇtäg olar
barča kurıyur . bartaçıka körgäli busuš kaḍgu kaygu⁷ sakınč
kälür* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folios 557:21–558:3)

“The beautiful₂ orchards of old, pleasing₂ and suitable to cause
joy, they all instantly and suddenly wither; those who go [there]
to see them are overcome by dejection, grief and despondency.”

The next passage from the *Altun Yaruk Sudur* contains some additions by the Uyghur translator. It shows the same combination of *täk ärsär* and *bäliṇtäg*, which suggests that both are synonyms, and it confirms the hypothesis above that in examples (1) and (2) *anıṇ arasınta* and *bäliṇtäg* form a hendiadys. The whole phrase *anıṇ arasınta täk ärsär bäliṇtäg* renders Chinese 忽然 *hu ran*:

(11) ... *ötrü ol grdirakut tag töpösintäki yığılmış üstün t(ä)ñri
altın yalaṇok ulatı tolp kamag terin kuvrag anıṇ arasınta täk
ärsär bäliṇtäg bir ärtiñü ulug bädük y(a)rukluḡ tilgän içintä bir*

⁶ Nugteren and Roos (2018: 385) cite the second part of this example.

⁷ It is noteworthy that the manuscript has the usual Old Uyghur form *kaḍgu* and the progressive form *kaygu* following each other.

aḡsız ulug t(ä)ḡri burhan nom nomlayu oluru y(a)rlikamişin körtilär (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 188:9–16)

“... then all of a sudden₃, the entire₂ community₂ [consisting of] gods above and humans below, etc., being assembled on Mount Gr̥dhraḡūṭa, saw that an exceptionally huge, godlike buddha was preaching⁸ the *dharma* in an extremely large₂ wheel of light.”

In the *Uigurisches Wörterbuch*, we find for the same instance the transcription *täg ärsär* instead of *täk ärsär*. The phrase *anıḡ arasınta täg ärsär* is rendered with a question mark tentatively as “als ob es zur selben Zeit sein würde ...” (Röhrborn 2010: 158). The longer quote—also with the transcription *täg ärsär*—... *tolp kamag terin kuvrag anıḡ arasınta täg ärsär bäliḡtäg ... körtilär* of the same sentence is translated differently by Röhrborn (2015: 219), again with a question mark: “die ganze² Gemeinde², sie sahen plötzlich, als ob es in ihrer Mitte wäre, ...”. In the same year, *anıḡ arasınta* was identified as a calque on Tocharian A *taṃ ywārckam* ‘in the meantime’ (Wilkens 2015: 325). In light of the quoted examples, we can now add the meaning ‘suddenly, all at once’ and suggest the same translation for *täk ärsär*. One instance in the *Altun Yaruk Sudur* features *täk ärsär* without combining it with *anıḡ arasınta* or *bäliḡtäg*:

(12) ... *tınl(ı)g tetmä atıḡ yeläyü tözlügin ukup täk ärsär öḡ tözlügin köḡülnüḡ barı üzä ötrü tınl(ı)g tetm(ä)z at bolurın bilmäk ukmak ärür* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 264:15–19)

Unfortunately, a Chinese parallel is lacking here. Thus, we are not in the position to countercheck the semantics of *täk ärsär* by comparing the Chinese version. The parallel in the manuscript Mainz 263 v. 1 lacks *ärsär*, which makes it likely that the translation “sadece” by Tokyürek (2015: 484) could be right. We can infer that this instance of *täk ärsär* is different from the ones just discussed. The following tentative translation can be proposed:

“... by understanding the deceptive nature of the name called ‘living being,’ the realization₂ [follows] that a ‘living being’ does not exist but is [only] a name through the mere [perception of] the

⁸ One could argue that *olur-* should be translated literally as “to sit,” but as an equivalent in Chinese is absent, I agree with E. Çetin’s proposal (2018: 229) that an auxiliary is more likely here.

nature of color and the fact that consciousness (Skt. *viññāna*) is [indeed] present.”

In combination with *bäliṇ*, the postposition *täg* occasionally confused some editors of Old Uyghur texts, and they translated it literally.

(13) *öz 心 (= köñül) küčindä bäliṇtäg tuyunup ...* (Tekin 1980a: 47, line 251)

This was mistranslated by Şinasi Tekin as “durch die Kraft ihres eigenen Herzens wie erschrocken erkennend” (Tekin 1980a: 63), which does not make sense at all. Instead, the translation “by virtue of (their) own consciousness suddenly realizing ...” can be proposed. The next passage caused Tekin problems as well:

(14) *... bäliṇtäg kök kalık yüzündä 化佛 (= bālgürtmä burhan) köziñüp ...* (Tekin 1980a, 189, lines 61–62)

Again, Tekin (1980a: 239) chose the wrong translation, “wie erschrocken,” but apparently noticed that this would sound odd in this context. He therefore opted mistakenly to relate the word to the preceding phrase. Instead, the converb clause should be translated as follows:

“... suddenly a transformation Buddha appeared in the sky ...”

We can compare the sudden appearance mentioned here with the Tocharian sentence quoted above.

2. The adjective

The only remaining example that might be an adjective is the following, slightly damaged, instance:

(15) *ötrü ol [kadır] tumlug yüzlüg atavake yäk bäliṇ[täg] tülükün t(ä)ñri burhanka yakın se[kriyü] barıp ...* (Wilkens 2016, 2: 574, lines 06796–06799)

“Then that grim- and icy-faced demon Ātavaka leaped towards the god Buddha with tremendous force ...”

Only the position of *bäliṇtäg* suggests its being used adnominally. Thus, a caveat is in order concerning the translation. Here *bäliṇ[täg]* could also be understood as an adverb, which would mean that no sure example of an adjectival use would remain.

3. The verbs

So far I have not been able to verify the existence of *bäliṅ* in the corpus without the postposition *täg*. It may never have existed—at least not in written Old Uyghur⁹—but it surfaces in the verbal domain in denominal derivations. The denominal verb *bäliṅlä-* occurs quite often and in most cases means ‘to fear’ or ‘to be afraid.’ One of the earliest occurrences is found with defective spelling in the first syllable in Manichaean script (Le Coq 1912: 6 v. 9). In the oldest stratum of the Buddhist texts, the *Maitrisimit nom bitig* has some examples, both in the Sengim MS and in the Tömürti MS. In two instances *bäliṅlä-* follows *kork-* (Geng, Klimkeit & Laut 1998: 22 ch. 20, folio 1 v. 17; Tekin 1980b: 150, pl. 165 r. 23), in another occurrence *ürk-* precedes *bäliṅlä-* (Tekin 1980b: 246, pl. 196 v. 15). In classical Old Uyghur, the verb *bäliṅlä-* is quite common. The *Biography of Xuanzang* has several examples, e.g., *kork- bäliṅlä-* (Mirsultan 2010: 87, line 160). Rather unusual is the slightly damaged biverb *bäliṅlä- busan-* (Mirsultan 2010: 110, lines 404–405).¹⁰ The biverb *kork- bäliṅlä-* is also common in the *Altun Yaruk Sudur* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folios 5:10, 141:7, 608:18–19)¹¹ as is *ürk- bäliṅlä-* (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folios 615:11, 621:22, 622:12).¹² The biverb *bäliṅlä- odun-* ‘to start from one’s sleep₂’ is rare (Radlov & Malov 1913–1917, folio 621:1). There is only one slightly damaged instance of the biverb *äṅ- bäliṅlä-* (Dietz, Ölmez & Röhrborn 2015: 66 lines 0340–0341), which renders Chinese 驚 *jing*.

A slightly different nuance presents the following example:

(16) *lačın açı üzä bäliṅläp öz ätin bıçturdı* (Hazai & Zieme 1971: 33 lines 61–62)

“Being concerned about the falcon’s hunger [the king] let his own flesh cut off.”

The reference in this sentence is to the well-known Jātaka story of King Śibi, who offered his own flesh to a falcon in order to ransom

⁹ But see chapter 4 below.

¹⁰ See also the damaged line 274 in Mirsultan 2010: 97.

¹¹ For late instances of *kork- bäliṅlä-*, see Zieme & Kara 1978: 60, line 77 and 180, line 1277.

¹² Late examples of this biverb are found in Tekin 1980a: 210, line 306 and Zieme 2005: 140, line G190.

a pigeon that had taken refuge with the king. In this particular instance, the king does not experience anything like fear at all, but to the contrary, does a heroic deed.

There is yet another meaning of *bäliṅlä-* in the *Biography of Xuanzang*. There, it does not only mean ‘to fear’ but also ‘to be astonished’, which is, from a semantic point of view, closer to the adverb:

(17) *bo savka bäliṅläp han özi bardı* (Semet, Ölmez & Röhrborn 2022: 83, lines 0695–0696)

“The ruler was astonished by this and went himself.”

The editors have already pointed out that the phrase *bo savka bäliṅläp* is an addition by the translator (Semet, Ölmez & Röhrborn 2022: 204). Very similar from a semantic point of view are the slightly damaged occurrences of *bäliṅlä- taṅla-* ‘to wonder₂’ in chapters four and ten of the same text (Semet, Ölmez & Röhrborn 2022: 58, lines 0415–0416; Mirsultan 2010: 139, line 717). The first instance is a translation of Chinese 驚嗟 *jīng jiē*; the second one renders 怪 *guai*.

The causative *bäliṅlä-* ‘to frighten, scare’ is not as customary as the simple verb. It appears already in the *Maitrisimit nom bitig* in the biverb *ürkit- bäliṅlä-* (Tekin 1980b: 226, pl. 101 r. 17–18). The same combination occurs in the ninth chapter of the *Biography of Xuanzang* (Aydemir 2013, 1: 244, line 2155) where it translates the Chinese character 驚 *jīng*. A damaged line in the third chapter of the same text was restored to *[korkıt-] bäliṅlä- kov-* ‘to scare₂ and pursue’ by the editors (Ölmez & Röhrborn 2001: 96, lines 612–613).

4. Evidence from other Turkic languages

While *bäliṅ* is never used without the postposition *täg* in the published Old Uyghur materials, Kāšgārī’s *Dīwān luḡāt at-Turk* (“Compendium of the Turkic Languages”) has an entry on *bäliṅ*: “The panic (*hazāhiz*) that befalls a people at the approach of an enemy’ and ‘a man who is frightened away (*naḡūr*) from something’ is called *bäliṅ kiši*” (translation by Dankoff & Kelly 1982–1985, 2: 338). A later hand corrected the latter to *bäliṅči* (*ibid.*), for which see the cognates from modern Turkic languages discussed below. Evidence for Early Middle Turkic of the adjective/adverb or derived verbs is scarce. Entries are, for instance, lacking in Boeschoten

(2023). Old Anatolian Turkish—and accordingly Ottoman—has *belin* ‘fear, fright’ and the verb *belinle-* ‘to flinch, be startled with fear’ (Kanar 2018: 105 b). Some modern dialects of Turkish have preserved the velar nasal (DS pp. 612b, 618a–b).

The lexeme and its derivatives are relatively well represented in modern Turkic languages. The adverbial use and meaning ‘suddenly’ does not seem to have survived in any modern language, although verbs and verbal phrases are known that denote the sudden experience of fear. Derived verbal and nominal forms are quite widespread. South Siberian Turkic languages in particular provide modern cognates. In Tuvan, for instance, we only find the derivatives *beliṅči* ‘frightful, shy,’¹³ *beliṅne-* ‘to be afraid, to shun,’ and *beliṅnet-* ‘to scare, to frighten,’ while the base is lacking (Ölmez 2007: 91a). Clauson (1972: 343a) mentions Altai Turkic and Teleut *päliṅ* ‘a simulated disease’ as well as the verb *päliṅlä-* ‘to suffer from an imaginary disease’ (Clauson 1972: 344b). Baskakov and Toščakova (1947: 30a) have two relevant entries for Altai Turkic: *belinde-* ‘to repeat someone else’s words and actions unwittingly’ and *belinči* ‘a person who repeats unconsciously someone else’s words and actions.’ Tofa features the verbs *beliṅnä-* ‘to flinch on account of surprise or fright, to jump on account of surprise or fright’ and *beliṅnät-* ‘to frighten, intimidate, coerce’ as well as the derived noun *beliṅši* ‘timid, fearful, flinching on account of a certain sound (person or animal)’ (Rassadin 2016: 68).

Outside South Siberia, we find further modern cognates. In Turkmen, *beliṅ* is used only with verbs: *beliṅ bermek* ‘to fuel the fire’ and *beliṅ almak* ‘to feel disgust; to fear, dread’ (Baskakov, Karryev & Xamzaev 1968: 86). Similar to Turkmen, *bilen* is found in Bashkir only as a complement in the verbal phrase *bilen al-* ‘to become suddenly violently frightened, suddenly feel fear’ (Uraksin 1996: 90a). Derived verbs are *bilenlä-* ‘to experience sudden fear’ and *bilenlät-* ‘to suddenly scare (someone)’ (Uraksin 1996: 90a). Other Kipchak languages have preserved the lexeme, such as Kazakh *beleṅ* ‘temper, timidity’ (Bektaev 1999: 100a) and Noghay *beleṅ* ‘fearful, timid; moody, stubborn’ (Baskakov 1963: 77a). In standard Kyrgyz, the lexeme is retained with a suffix: *belimči* ‘neuropath’, ‘hysteric’ (Judaxin 1965: 127b). The Batken dialect of Kyrgyz preserves *beliṅ* ‘fear, timidity’ and *belinči* ‘a person who

¹³ See the already mentioned correction *bäliṅči* in Kāšġarī’s work.

constantly repeats words' (Mukambaev 2009: 227b), which recalls the Altai Turkic meaning.

5. The etymology

Turkic **bāliŋ* does not have a convincing native Turkic etymology. Neither Räsänen (1969–1971, 1: 69b) nor Clauson (1972: 343a) provide insights into the possible etymological origin of the word. After failing to segment the lexeme, a foreign loanword presented itself as a possible solution. Ölmez (1991: 70) assumed a loanword, too, and cited Sanskrit *paryāṅka* '(sitting) in cross-legged position' as the etymon in his translation of example (11) above and rendered *täg* as "gibi." Çetin (2018: 229) accepted this suggestion and, following Ölmez, transcribed *bāliŋ* as *paling*. However, in light of the other examples presented above, this etymological proposal is not convincing. Starostin, Dybo & Mudrak (2003: 338–339) assumed an Altaic word **belV* 'hysterics, panic, mourning'. They reconstructed **beli(n)* for Proto-Tungusic, **belbe-* for Proto-Mongolic, and **bEliŋ* for Proto-Turkic. The Mongolic words quoted by these authors are not related to the Turkic lexeme.

The search for the etymon has to take other languages into account. In Manichaean Sogdian, *pδ'nk* 'calamity, misfortune' is recorded in Sogdian script (Sims-Williams & Durkin-Meisterernst 2022: 162b). The lexeme is also attested in Buddhist Sogdian texts. In Gharib's dictionary we find the meanings 'misfortune, difficulty' (Gharib 1995: 271a no. 6756). The correct meaning, 'calamity, trouble, misfortune,' was first established by MacKenzie (1970: 40 note to line 402), who also compared the etymologically related Buddhist Sogdian verb *pδ'ync-*.¹⁴ He also suggested that the Middle Persian and Parthian word *pdngyn* ~ *pdyngyn* 'soiled, dirty' might be etymologically related, but not all scholars have accepted MacKenzie's proposal (Durkin-Meisterernst 2004: 270 b).

From a phonetic point of view, the Sogdian etymology does not present a problem. The close relationship between the interdental /ð/ and /l/ can be inferred from the Manichaean script as well. The "new" letter <ð> devised to represent the interdental letter in texts in Middle Iranian is related to <l> from a paleographic point of view (Durkin-Meisterernst 2005). As far as the phonetic aspect is

¹⁴ *rtykδ 'w mrtym'k 'z'wn βyrt rty 'pδ'ty ZKw ynt'kk pδ'nkw pcwzt* "and when he acquires the existence of a man he meets, unjustly, evil misfortune" (MacKenzie's translation; lines 401–402).

concerned, Lurje and Yakubovich (2017: 319) have demonstrated that the lateral phoneme is often secondary in Iranian languages. They pointed at Yidgha and Munji where /l/ is a development in initial and intervocalic position of */d/ > */δ/, while in Sogdian “/l/ remained a marginal phoneme” (*ibid.*), mainly in loanwords. Highly relevant to our topic is the following observation of Lurje and Yakubovich (2017: 321) concerning Aramaic *lamedh*: “But if a Sogdian word is spelled phonetically, *lamedh* is normally used there for the reflexes of Iranian interdental fricatives.” In the Sogdian national script *lamedh* represents the phonemes /δ/, /θ/ and /l/ (Yoshida 2009: 283). And what is more, Early New Persian has /l/ for East Iranian */δ/ (*ibid.*) in East Iranian loanwords,¹⁵ a phenomenon formerly perceived as a dialectal feature of Sogdian in Iranian studies but demonstrated by Lurje and Yakubovich as being of Bactrian origin. In the Sogdian national script there was originally no letter representing /l/. Sanskrit loans with initial *l*—and also in other positions—can be either represented by the letter <r> or <δ>, the latter “is always likely to reflect its adaptation in the spoken language” (Lurje & Yakubovich 2017: 335).

The semantic side, i.e. Sogdian ‘calamity’ vs. Turkic ‘*fear’, which must be the primary meaning despite the adverbial usage in Old Uyghur,¹⁶ does not pose a serious problem. We may cite Sanskrit *bhaya*, which means ‘danger’ and ‘fear’, or Sanskrit *āṃhas-* ‘fear, anxiety’ vs. Avestan *qzah-* ‘constriction; distress, peril’ (Bernard 2025: 15). Modern English *fear* can be compared with Old English *fær* ‘calamity, sudden danger.’¹⁷

Conclusion: The wide attestation of modern cognates of Turkic **bäliṅ* in South Siberian Turkic, Oghuz, and Kipchak points to a relatively early Sogdian loan in Turkic. It is surprising that in Old Uyghur, *bäliṅ täg* is perhaps exclusively limited to adverbial use. The denominal verbs in Old Uyghur preserve the primary meaning of the base **bäliṅ*.

To conclude this investigation, materials from Mongolic can also be mentioned. Classical Mongolian *beleng* ‘obscene or indecent words; jumping disease, lata’ and its derivatives *belengči* ‘A person

¹⁵ For Bactrian in Manichaean script from Turfan, where Proto-Iranian */d/ is represented as /l/, see Lurje & Yakubovich 2017: 323.

¹⁶ The derived verbs in Old Uyghur corroborate this primary meaning.

¹⁷ I thank Hans Nugteren for pointing this out to me.

who is affected by jumping disease; a person who shouts obscenities’ and *belengde-* ‘To shout obscenities; to behave as if affected by jumping disease’ (Lessing 1960: 98a) are very likely etymologically related as well. To put it differently, they are probably loans from Turkic. The Pentaglot *Wuti* also has *belengči* and the verb *belengčile-* (Corff et al. 2013 no. 1726). The corresponding Manju words in this entry are *belci* and *belcidembi*—in all probability loans from Mongolian.¹⁸ In Khalkha Mongolian we find *belen* ‘involuntary act or utterance (*a neurological condition*),’ *belendex* ‘to utter obscene expressions involuntarily,’ and *belenč* ‘one who utters obscenities involuntarily’ (Hangin 1986: 97a). The vowel of the second syllable in Mongolic is difficult to explain. It could be due to assimilation or a reflex of the original vowel in Sogdian borrowed via a Turkic language preserving this feature. In Tungusic *bēlin* is recorded as ‘hysteric’ for Evenki and ‘nervous disorder’ for Negidal (Cincius 1975, 1: 124a). Both lexemes are loans from Buryat *belin* ‘impropriety, obscenity, indecent, obscene’ (Čeremisov 1973: 131 a).¹⁹ Thus the “Altaic” word postulated by Starostin, Dybo and Mudrak (see section 6 above) turns out to be a loanword with a very complex word history.

If the Sogdian etymology proposed in this paper is accepted, the complex borrowings across different language families permit us to trace the trajectory of the Sogdian word, several semantic shifts notwithstanding.

Abbreviations

ch.: chapter

DS: Derleme Sözlüğü (see *Türkiye’de Halk Ağzından Derleme Sözlüğü*)

MS: manuscript

pl.: plate

r.: recto

v.: verso

¹⁸ The first word is recorded for Nanai (Cincius 1975, 1: 124a). This is in all probability a loan from Manju.

¹⁹ Cf. also the verb *belinde-* ‘to utter indecent words’ in Buryat (Čeremisov 1973: 131 a).

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