

Juha JANHUNEN (Helsinki)

ETYMOLOGICAL AND ETHNOHISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE YENISEI

Abstract. The paper discusses the background of the different terms used for the river Yenisei in the aboriginal language families of the region: Mongolic, Turkic, Yeniseic, Uralic, and Tungusic. The etymological material allows, in particular, important conclusions to be drawn of the areal interrelationships and chronologies of expansion of the Samoyedic branch of Uralic and the Ewenic branch of Tungusic. The presence of Uralic speakers on the Yenisei predates that of Tungusic speakers by a minimum of two millennia. Both Yeniseic and Turkic also reached the Yenisei earlier than Tungusic.

One of the great rivers of the world, the Yenisei (Russian *Енисей*) has a length of over 4,100 kms and a drainage area of over 2.5 million square kms, extending from the Sayan region and Northern Mongolia in the center of Asia to the Yenisei Gulf in the Kara Sea at the Arctic Siberian coast (SSÊ 1: 877-885, cf. also EÊS). The landscapes traversed by the river along its course vary from the alpine forests and forest steppes of the south to the boreal taiga belt in the middle and the treeless tundras and marshlands in the north. On its upper course, the Yenisei first runs in an east-to-west direction through the Tuvinian basin, from where it breaks its way northwest through the Western Sayans and enters the Minusinsk (Abakan) basin, running then mainly in a south-to-north direction. After leaving the highlands of Southern Siberia, it enters its principal section, which marks the physical boundary between the Western Siberian Lowland and the Eastern Siberian Plateau.

On the Mongolian side, some of the sources of the Yenisei are located on the southern slopes of Mt. Munku-Sardyg (Written Mongol **Muivggae Sara-diq**), the highest peak (3,491 m) of the Eastern Sayans at the Russo-Mongolian border. The drainage area of the Yenisei comprises, however, also the lakes Baikal and Khövsgöl (Written Mongol **Guibsugul**), two tectonic basins in Inner Asia, which are connected with each other via the Selenga river system. Baikal, in turn, is connected with the Yenisei main river via the Angara or Tunguska (*Тунгуска*), which forms the southernmost of the three right-hand tributaries to the Yenisei, the others being the Stony Tunguska (*Подкаменная Тунгуска*) and

the Lower Tunguska (*Нижняя Тунгуска*). The left-hand tributaries, running from the watershed between the Yenisei and Ob basins, are generally much smaller. In many places, the tributaries of the two rivers almost touch each other. At the Arctic coast, however, the area between the mouth regions of the Ob and the Yenisei contains several separate local rivers, including the Taz, the Pur, and the Nadym.

Due to its sheer size, the Yenisei drainage area has always served as the homeland for a variety of ethnic and linguistic groups. No single aboriginal population alone has apparently ever been able to cover the whole length of the river at any single synchronic point of time, although diachronically the Yenisei has served as an important channel for ethnic and linguistic movements in the south-to-north direction. Historically, excluding the colonial presence of Russian, the Yenisei basin contains languages belonging to five distinct language families: Uralic, Tungusic, Turkic, Mongolic, and Yeniseic. Of these, Yeniseic is a family attested only in the Yenisei basin, while the other families extend far beyond the Yenisei in different directions: Uralic to the west, Tungusic to the east, Turkic to the southwest and northeast, and Mongolic to the southeast. Of particular importance in recent ethnic history has been the role of the Yenisei main basin as a geographical marker of the linguistic boundary between the Samoyedic branch of Uralic (on the west) and the Ewenic (Ewenki-Ewen) branch of Tungusic (on the east).

Since the Yenisei has been too macroscopic a feature for any single aboriginal people to comprehend, the names used for it in the different local languages are also typically restricted to denoting certain parts of the main river, or of its sources and tributaries. There is no doubt that an etymological analysis of these names will yield information concerning the dates and routes of the ethnic movements and linguistic expansions that have brought the languages of the Yenisei region to their documented locations. The present paper is an attempt at creating a summary of the potentially important ethnohistorical implications that this toponymic material can offer.

Mongolic **sisig-tü*

The principal source of the Yenisei in Mongolia (not considering the Selenga-Baikal-Angara line) is known on Mongolian maps variously by the name *Шуухид гол* or *Шууигт гол* (Written Mongol **Sisigdu Qhuul** or **Sisikit Qhuul**), with *гол* (*гол*) ‘river’ (cf. e.g. MNT 2: 1146). This name is neither structurally nor materially Mongolic, though it may contain the Mongolic denominal formative for possessive adjectives in *-t < *-tU*, suggesting a derivational origin of the type **sisig-tü ~ *siski-tü*, in modern phonemic shape *shishegt ~ shishxet* (or also,

shishxed). Since the current aboriginal population of this region is composed of the Turkic-speaking Tsaatan < **caa-tan* ‘reindeer people’, who speak the so-called Tukha variety of the Tofa group of Sayan Turkic, it is possible that the item **sisig* also derives from local Turkic. In that case, the name could be tentatively compared with Tofa *shijjek* ‘small bird’, which may or may not be a borrowing from Mator Samoyedic †*shinjaku* ~ †*cinjaku* id. (cf. Helimski 1997: 341 no. 889).

Unfortunately, it is not known whether a name connected with **sisig-tü* is actually used by the Tsaatan, or by any other of the minor Turkic-speaking groups of the Eastern Sayan region, including the Tofa (in the north), the Todzha (in the west), and the Uighur Uriangkhai (in the east). A name of the type ‘bird river’ might also be semantically too trivial to represent the true origin of this hydronym, which may well have a deeper prehistory in unknown local languages. No actual names for the Yenisei or its source rivers seem to have been recorded from Mator, though it is possible that the Mator speakers simply identified the river as †*orgo bü[q]* ‘large water’ (Helimski 1997: 329-330 no. 816). In this connection, it is possibly relevant to note the name of the river *Egiin Gol* (Эгийн гол, Written Mongol **vG uv Qhuul**), which is the outlet of Lake Khövsgöl into the Selenga basin. The element *egiin* = *eg-iin* is formally a genitive from **eg* ~ **ege*, a nominal stem of unknown meaning and origin but reminiscent of Samoyedic **yəka* ‘river’, attested also in Mator as †*jaga* ~ †*caga* id. (Helimski 1997: 226 no. 169). It is not implausible to assume that the southern limits of the Mator language area once extended to all sides of Lake Khövsgöl. This would, however, have been prior to the historically documented Turkic (Uighur, Sayan Turkic) and Mongolic (Darkhat, Khalkha, Buryat) expansions into the area.

In this connection it may also be noted that, although the name of Lake Baikal (Russian *Байкал* ← Buryat *baigal*) has been the object of numerous popular explanations (cf. Gurulev 1982/1991), it goes back to earlier Mongolic (**baigul* (Janhunen 1996) and represents a borrowing from Turkic **bay-köl* (< **baay+kööl*) ‘rich lake’. Likewise, the name of Lake Khövsgöl (Russian *Козол* ~ *Хубсугул* ← Buryat **kubsugul*) is a transparent reflex of Turkic **kök-sub-köl* (< **köök+sub+kööl*) ‘blue-water lake’. These names obviously derive from the period of Turkic (Old Turkic and Uighur) linguistic dominance in Mongolia, that is, from a time immediately preceding the linguistic arrival of Mongolic under the historical Mongols. Altogether, it may be concluded that of all aboriginal ethnolinguistic groups in the Yenisei source region, the Mongols represent the most recent wave of expansion.

Turkic **kem*

The presence of Turkic speakers in the Upper Yenisei region is well documented by the Yenisei Turkic inscriptions (Malov 1952), which date roughly from the latter half of the first millennium AZ. The language of these inscriptions is Old Turkic, corresponding to the Proto-Common Turkic stage, though both the graphic and the linguistic background of the textual material seems to be more complicated than used to be thought (Kyzlasov 1990: 80-128). It is possible that some of the inscriptions are actually written in a language (or in languages) other than Turkic. On the other hand, it is well known that before the expansion of Common Turkic, the region was reached by a wave of Bulghar Turkic, as can be seen from several diagnostically Bulghar Turkic loanwords in Proto-Samoyedic, notably **yür* ‘hundred’ ← Bulghar Turkic **yür* (< Pre-Proto-Turkic **yüüi-s* > Common Turkic *yüüz* > *yüz*).

By the end of the first millennium, the Common Turkic language spoken on the Upper Yenisei had become divided into two varieties, corresponding to the later Yenisei Turkic (= Khakas) and Sayan Turkic (= Tuva) branches. Subsequent branching led to the separation of Lena Turkic (= Yakut) from Sayan Turkic. It is therefore not surprising that Yenisei Turkic and Sayan Turkic (but not Lena Turkic) share a common name for the Yenisei, also documented from Old Turkic in the form *kem* (*käm*) (DTS 297, VEWT 250). As is often the case with hydronyms, it is not immediately clear whether this is to be understood as a specific name of the Yenisei or as a general term for ‘river’. The assumption that it is a question of a general hydrographical appellative is supported by the fact that the word is present in modern Tuvian as *xem* ‘river’, attested in a large number of river names in the region (TRS 636-646). On the other hand, Khakas (**kem* > *kim* (XRS 1082) seems to be used only as the proper name of the Yenisei, also attested as *kim sug* ‘Yenisei River’, with *sug* (< **sub*) ‘river’ < ‘water’.

The Upper Yenisei is known in Tuvian as *ulug xem* ‘big river’. This section starts from the confluence of two source rivers, known in Tuvian as *bii-xem* (*Бий-Хем*) and *kaa-xem* (*Каа-Хем*), and in Russian as the ‘Greater Yenisei’ (*Большой Енисей*) and the ‘Lesser Yenisei’ (*Малый Енисей*), respectively. The ‘Greater Yenisei’, which is shorter but has more water, arrives from the north and drains the Todja (*Тоджа*) basin in eastern Tuva, while the ‘Lesser Yenisei’ is a continuation of the source river arriving from the Mongolian side. On the basis of the Russian names, it is often assumed that the Tuvian elements *bii-* vs. *kaa-* mean ‘big’ vs. ‘little’, but this is not so: these are, in fact, proper names of unknown meaning. Formally, the element *bii-* could be compared with the Tuvian noun *bii* ‘mare’ = Old Turkic *bi* (DTS 97), but a connection with Samoyedic **wit* > Sayan Samoyedic **bi[-q]* > †*bü[-q]* ‘water’ >

‘river’ would make more sense. A parallel to this type of naming would be present in *shet+xem* (*Шет-хем*), the name of a local river in the ‘Greater Yenisei’ system, which incorporates the Yeniseic (Kott) appellative *shet* ‘water, river’ (VWJS 3: 57-61).

It happens that the Old Turkic name of the Yenisei is also attested in mediaeval Chinese sources in the shape 劍 *jiàn* < **kiam* (Hambis 1956, LRP 148). It has been proposed that the Turkic item itself derives from Samoyedic (Vásáry 1975), but this proposal involves serious linguistic mistakes and need not be re-examined here (cf. Helimski 1995: 82). On the other hand, an internal Turkic connection between **kem* ‘river’ and **ke[:]mi* ~ **ke[:]me* ‘boat’ (ÊST 3: 37-38) would appear formally possible but is difficult to verify. There are, however, also several other possible points of comparison that call for attention:

- (1) First, there is the river Kemchik (*Кемчүк*), a southern (left-hand) tributary of the Upper Yenisei. This name would superficially look like a Russian deminutive in *-chik*, but it is also attested in the shape Khemchik (*Хемчүк*), confirming that it is of a local origin, borrowed into Russian from Tuvian. In fact, the combination **kem+kem-cik* (: Mongolic plural **kem+kem-cix/ü-d*) is also attested in mediaeval Arabic and Chinese sources (Hambis 1956: 287-296). Even so, the status and origin of the element *-cik* is not clear: although it may be a Turkic deminutive suffix, it could also be compared with Tuvian *cik* (*чүк*) ‘lowland, gully’. An almost identical name, but also structurally difficult to analyse, is Kemchug (*Кемчүг*), which denotes two rivers, the ‘Greater Kemchug’ (*Большой Кемчүг*) and the ‘Lesser Kemchug’ (*Малый Кемчүг*), originating only a few kilometres from the Yenisei basin but flowing into the Chulym (northwest of the Minusinsk basin) of the Ob drainage area.
- (2) Second, it is possibly not an accident that the southwesternmost Ewenki, who used to live on the Kemchug (Menges 1983), as well as on the Sym, a western (left-hand) tributary of the Middle Yenisei, are known by the tribal name *keemu* (< **kiamo*), which, in turn, is connected with the name *keemuka-gir*, denoting the Ewenki on the Stony Tunguska. Even so, the etymological (including derivational) relationship between *keemu* (also attested as *kima*, ÊRS³ 579, cf. also Futaky 1975: 18-19) and *Kemchug* (which Menges hypercorrectly writes “Kemčük”) is not clear. If there is a relationship, both items must, of course, be connected with the primary hydronym (**kem*).
- (3) Third, in Northern Eurasia, there are many other river names of the same general structure as **kem* (= K+M). A comparison of the Turkic name of the Yenisei with the Finnish river names *Kemi* and *Kymi* has been current in ethnohistorical literature since the mid 19th century (Castrén 1849: 19).

We now know that *Kemi* (the longest river in Finland) may have received its name (also Saami *Giepmá*) from a topographic appellative with the meaning ‘plain’ (SPNK 152, SSA 1: 342), while *Kymi* (Swedish *Kymmene*) is probably of a Germanic origin (cf. most recently Janhunen 2009: 209-210). Somewhat closer to the Yenisei is, however, the river Kama (*Кáма*) of the Volga drainage area, whose name derives from Udmurt *kam* ‘river’ (ÊSR 2: 172), which, on the other hand, has been compared with the Ob-Ugric hydronyms Mansi *kääm* and Khanty *kám* (DEWO 633). Unfortunately, although these similarities may well not be accidental, they involve unexplained geographical, chronological and phonological problems.

- (4) Fourth, it is perhaps also not an accident that there are conspicuously many other hydronyms in Northern Eurasia, but especially in Western and Southern Siberia, that end in the consonant *-m* (labial nasal). Many of these are bisyllabic, but there are also several “simple” monosyllabic names. A case in point is offered by the names of the rivers Sym (*Сѳм*) and Tym (*Тѳм*) (Werner 1978), which originate in a restricted area between the middle courses of the Yenisei and the Ob, with the Tym flowing into the Ob. The elements *-sīm* ~ *-sim* resp. *-tīm* ~ *-dīm* are commonly attested in the composition of bisyllabic river names in the region and may be of a Yeniseic, or also of a Pre-Yeniseic, origin (VWJS 3: 67-68). Possibly connected with these is the name of the Tom (*Томѳ*), which seems to be based on the Yeniseic (Pumpokol) appellative *to:m* ‘river’ (ibid. 55).
- (5) Fifth, it is possibly relevant to recall here the hydronym **yām*, which is the Samoyedic name of the Ob, but which also means generally ‘large river’, ‘water basin’, ‘sea’ (SW 40). Since this item is also attested from Sayan Samoyedic (Kamas) in the regular shape *nam* (with *n-* < **y-* before a following nasal), it must derive from Proto-Samoyedic and was apparently used by the Proto-Samoyedic speakers in the Upper Yenisei and/or Upper Ob regions. However, although it shares the final *-m* of **kem* (and others), **yām* (possibly < **lām*, with the Pre-Proto-Samoyedic development **l- > *y-*) has been connected with Tungusic **laamo* ‘sea’ (Joki 1952: 237-238, cf. also Anikin & Helimski 2007: 48-49). This connection should now be seen as uncertain, since **laamo* seems to be an old loanword form Amuric (Janhunen 2008: 97-99).

Obviously, it is difficult to take a definitive stand with regard to the origin of Turkic **kem* ‘river, Yenisei’. Most likely, this would seem to be a substratal hydronym or hydrographical term, which entered the lexicon of Turkic only in the Upper Yenisei basin, or in its vicinity. The structural type of the word has parallels both at a general (*-m*) and at a more specific (K+M) level throughout Eurasia, but the etymological relationships remain unclear, as always in top-

onyms. Although we know that Turkic entered the Yenisei basin only after Samoyedic and Yeniseic, the word does not seem to be of a Yeniseic or of a Samoyedic origin. Therefore, the possibility remains that it derives from some more ancient substratal language of the region.

Yeniseic **quk*

Considering the fact that the Yeniseic languages are historically spoken along almost the entire length of the Yenisei from the Minusinsk basin to the Arctic zone it is curious that no Common Yeniseic name for the river seems to have been preserved in the linguistic material. Obviously, at least some of the Yeniseic-speaking populations have known the Yenisei only by descriptive names, such as Kott *paca+ul* 'large water' > 'sea' = 'Yenisei' (VWJS 2: 51, cf. also Dulzón 1961). Similar names are well-known from Sayan Samoyedic (as mentioned above), though it is unclear how specific their reference was. A hydronym that possibly belongs to this context is *Kezes*, which has been derived from Ket (*)*qā-ses* 'large water' (Dulzón 1959: 99). However, although occasionally quoted as denoting the Yenisei (Maloletko 2002: 102), *Kezes* (*Kežéc*) today refers to a minor river in the Mras-Tom-Ob system, and the connection with the Yenisei remains unconfirmed. Moreover, the name itself may actually be based on ¹*kes* (*ke-ś*) 'burbot' [fish] (VWJS 3: 46).

A true proper name for the Yenisei would seem to be present in Ket ¹*quk* (*qu-k*) = Yugh ¹*xuk* (VWJS 3: 40). This is a stem belonging to the phonological class of first-tone monosyllables (Werner 1996: 96-97), which seems to imply that it is a question of an original monosyllabic stem that may be reconstructed as Northern Yeniseic (Proto-Ket-Yugh) **quk*. Since, however, the item is not attested in the Southern Yeniseic languages (Kott, Arin), it is impossible to say much of its history and origin. The possibility that **quk* is originally a proper name would seem to be confirmed by the fact that it is not used as a general hydrographical term in other river names. In fact, an overwhelming majority of all Yeniseic river names is based on the word **ses* 'river', which is reflected as Ket-Yugh ¹*ses* (*śe-ś*), Pumpokol *tet*, Arin *set*, and Kott *shet* (VWJS 3: 34-61, cf. also Maloletko 2002: 155-158).

In the absence of relevant comparative information, the ultimate origin of the hydronym **quk* remains unknown. Even so, it has to be mentioned that this hydronym is homonymous with two regular nominals also attested in Northern Yeniseic:

- (1) Ket ¹*quk* (*qu-k*) = Yugh ¹*xuk* 'windstill' = 'calm' (weather) (VWJS 2: 129).
In this case, at least, the homonymy appears accidental, for the semantic

transition from ‘calm’ to the name of a large river is unlikely for the simple reason that water basins are rarely calm. One would rather expect a hydronym to derive from the meaning ‘wind, windy’ (as in the case of the Liao, cf. Janhunen 2008).

- (2) Ket ¹*quk* (*qu-k*) ‘Loch (im Boden, Schnee)’ = ‘hole’ (VWJS 3: 239). This stem is also attested in a number of derived items, including *quk-sentus* (*qúkšéntuš*) ‘löcherig’ = ‘holey’, and it is possibly connected with Kott *huunanga* (*hūnaŋa*) ‘löcherig’ (VWJS 2: 130), suggesting that it may derive from Proto-Yeniseic. In principle, it is thinkable that a river could get its name from the appellative meaning ‘hole’ = ‘cavity’, perhaps in reference to either a deep valley or to an uneven bottom. In the case of the Yenisei, the name could be explained by the conspicuously high right-hand (eastern) bank of the river, a circumstance that also underlies the Khanty name *kökkəng+äs* ‘stony Ob’ = ‘Yenisei’ (with a variety of dialectal forms) (DEWO 601, ÊSR 2: 20).

It cannot, consequently, be ruled out that the Northern Yeniseic name of the Yenisei is actually based on the appellative meaning ‘hole’. This possibility is neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by the existence of the compound name (*)*quk+ses* ‘Quk River’, which can refer to either the Yenisei (Yugh *xukses*) or also to the minor local river *Kukses* (*Куксéc*), a tributary of the Yelogui (*Елогуй*), which itself flows into the Yenisei (VWJS 3: 38, 44). However, the fact that **quk* is normally used alone (without *-*ses* ‘river’) as the name of the Yenisei would seem to suggest that it is a question of an old hydronym which, like the names of many other great rivers, might have an ancient local origin.

Another river name that may be mentioned in this context is Ket ²*qol* (*qɔʔl*) = Yugh ²*xol* (*xɔʔl*) ‘Stony Tunguska’ (VWJS 3: 40, 44). This is likewise normally used independently (without *-*ses* ‘river’), though the compound (*)*qä-qol* ‘Great Tunguska’ is also attested. In this case, a comparison with the homonymous appellative ²*qol* (*qɔʔl*) = Yugh ²*xol* (*xɔʔl*) ‘Stillwasser, kleine Bucht’ is formally possible but semantically unconfirmed (VWJS 2: 122). On the other hand, a comparison may also be made with Selkup (*)*qoltu* ‘(large) river’ > ‘Ob, Yenisei’ (SkW 340 no. 2372), a general hydrographical term that has no known connections within Samoyedic. Of course, the details of the phonological relationship between the Yeniseic and Selkup data remain to be explained. At least theoretically, it could be a question of an ancient substratal hydronym or hydrographical term of the Middle Yenisei region.

Samoyedic **yentäsi(-)*

Samoyedic forms another coherent group of languages historically spoken along the entire length of the Yenisei. The documented distribution of the Samoyedic-speaking ethnic groups on the map (Dolgix 1960) suggests that Proto-Samoyedic was once spoken on the Upper Yenisei, or also in the region between the upper courses of the Yenisei and the Ob, from where the principal direction of expansion was towards the north. The general areal and typological situation suggests further that Samoyedic preceded Yeniseic as the principal language of the Upper Yenisei. It is, then, not surprising that the Samoyedic languages share an old appellation for the Yenisei. This has been reconstructed as **yentäsä* (SW 43), but is today more correctly written **yentäsi(-)*. The word is attested in three possibly distinct derivational shapes:

- (1) The Nenets and Enets data presuppose the original shape **yentäsing*. This is regularly represented as Nenets $\sqrt{yenäs\bar{y}äng} >$ Tundra Nenets $(*)yenäs\bar{y}^{\circ}h$ (MDTN 263) : (genitive) $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}-h$: (dative) $yen^{\circ}syän-t^{\circ}h$, Forest Nenets $*yen^{\circ}syäng$: (genitive) $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}- >$ $jen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}-$ (JSW 112), and Enets $jedäshi(h)$: (genitive) $jedäshiä-h$ (JSEW 51). From modern Forest Enets, distorted shapes like *jeci* (abbreviated from the nominative form) $\sim jecu$ (generalized from the oblique stem), and others, have also been recorded (Siegl 2011: 191, note 298). In Nenets, the basic form of the word (nominative) is rarely used, since the river is normally referred to by the compound phrase $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}-h+yam >$ $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}-yam$ ‘Yenisei River’ (with *yam* ‘river’). Somewhat unexpectedly, the word is also attested in the settlement names $(*)ngarka\ yenäs\bar{y}^{\circ}h$ ‘Big Yenisei’ (with *ngarka* ‘big’), $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}-h+mär^{\circ}q$ ‘Yenisei Town’ (with *mär^{\circ}q* ‘town’), and Western Forest Nenets $yen^{\circ}syä^{\circ}+karwät^{\circ}$ id. (with *karwät^{\circ}* ‘town’), all referring to the settlement of Kondinsk or Kondinskoe (Конди́нское) on the Konda (Кóнда), a tributary to the Irtysh. The background of this usage is unclear, though it is possible that the name of the Yenisei has simply been transferred to other large rivers, including the Konda and/or the Irtysh (Anikin & Helimski 2007: 21). Kondinsk is located some 1,000 km west of the Yenisei main basin.
- (2) The Nganasan cognate of the hydronym is historically recorded (by M. A. Castrén) as *jentajea* (WS 52), suggesting the modern phonological shape $(*)jentëjië$. Although the phonological development would seem to be unique, this might simply represent the vowel stem of **yentäsing* : $*yentäsing-ä-$, as present in Nenets and Enets. It might, however, also be a question of a different derivative formation, in which case the reconstruction would be **yentäsi-yä* (with the common suffix *-yä* for denominal relational nouns, and with a regular loss of the intervocalic **y* before an unstressed syllable).

If this is so, the basic stem of the word may be abstracted as **yentāsi(-)*, from which **yentāsi-ng* resp. **yentāsi-yə* would represent two parallel derivatives.

- (3) In Selkup the item is attested only in the southern dialects, from which it may be abstracted as *nyantāsi* ~ *nyandāse* > *nyanzə-* (SkW 238 no. 1652), also used in the compound phrase *nyantāsi+kī* ‘Yenisei River’ (with *kī* ‘river’). In the absence of further data it is impossible to determine whether this corresponds to the basic stem of the word or to the derivative **yentāsi-yə*, as suggested by Nganasan. It also appears futile to speculate on the original quality of the vowel of the initial syllable (along the lines of Helimski 2005). What has, however, long been obvious is that the Selkup data must represent a borrowing from Sayan Samoyedic, since the initial glide **y-* shows the typically Sayan-area regressive assimilation into the nasal **ny-* (Menges 1956: 175). This removes Selkup from the list of languages that have an inherited reflex of **yentāsi(-)*, while it adds to the list Sayan Samoyedic, meaning either Mator or Kamas (cf. Anikin & Helimski 2007: 20), two otherwise rather different languages from which the hydronym is not directly attested.

It may be concluded that **yentāsi(-)* was the name used by the early Samoyedic speakers of the Yenisei. The reference must originally have been to the Upper Yenisei, but with the expansion of the Samoyedic languages the name came to be used along the entire course of the river. From the Samoyeds the word was adopted by the Russians, from whom it has further spread to international usage in a variety of spellings (*Yenisei*, *Yenisey*, *Yénissei*, *Enisei*, *Jenissei*, *Īénissei*, etc.). It was once thought that the Russians borrowed the name from the Southern Samoyeds (Paasonen 1917: 90 note 3, ÊSR 2: 20), but it is now clear that the word must have entered Russian from Tundra Nenets, either directly from the plain stem (**)yənəsy^oh* : *yən^osyə^o-*, or also from the compound phrase *yən^osyə^o-yam* (Vladimirov 1938). This is understandable against the general background of the Russian conquest of Siberia, which started in the northwest and proceeded towards the southeast (Janhunen 1985). Most probably, the Russians first reached the Yenisei in the 16th century from their bases in the Mangazeya (*Мангазѣя*) region on the Taz (Belov & Ovsianikov & Starkov 1980-1981, cf. also Helimski 1996).

The phonological representations of **yentāsi(-)* in the modern Samoyedic languages correspond fully to the Proto-Samoyedic level of reconstruction, which implies a time depth of some 2,000-2,500 years. In all the languages concerned it is basically a question of a hydronym with no known appellative connection. Theoretically, a comparison with Proto-Samoyedic **yentā* ‘sinew, bow string’ (SW 43) could be made, but there is no independent confirmation of this,

and the elements *-si(-)* ~ *-si(-)ng* would remain unexplained. In fact, we do not know how the word should be segmented if it is of a Samoyedic origin (possibilities include: **yentə-si-* ~ **yen-təsi-* ~ **ye-n-təsi-*, etc.). As a whole, **yentəsi(-)* looks like a compound word or a derivative, but it could also be a borrowing from a non-Samoyedic substratal language.

In this connection it is necessary to consider also another item, known only from Selkup. This is the word represented in Southern Selkup (Ket) as *(*)cangəsə* ~ *cagəs(ə)* > *caas(ə)* and in Northern Selkup (Taz) as *(*)cangəntəsə* ~ *(*)cagəntəsə* > *(*)caantəs(ə)* and normally glossed as ‘sea’, but denoting, more abstractly, ‘die mythologische Gegend wohin die Gewässer fließen’ (SkW 223 no. 1558b). The word, or its derivative in **-yə* (> *-lyə* > *-l*), is also present in actual hydronyms, notably *püül+caantəs+qoltə* ~ *püül+caas+qoltə* ‘stony sea river’, which can refer either to the Yenisei or to the Taz. The dialectal variation in the stem structure is not regular, but it is reasonable to assume that the longest and/or most complex attested shape is the most original, which would yield the Proto-Selkup reconstruction **cangəntəsə*. At the Proto-Samoyedic level this could mean a shape like **yəngəntəsə* ~ **yəngəntəsə* (with a regular development of initial **y* to the palatal stop *c-*), suggesting a conspicuous similarity with **yentəsi(-)*. Also, since the latter is not otherwise attested as an inherited item in Selkup, it cannot be ruled out that its true Selkup cognate is actually **yəngəntəsə*.

An etymological connection between Proto-Samoyedic **yentəsi(-)* ‘Yenisei’ and Selkup **cangəntəsə* < **yəngəntəsə* (?) ‘sea’ should, consequently, be accepted as a possibility (as also maintained by Anikin & Helimski 2007: 21). The forms are not directly compatible, however, as the extra syllable *(*)-ngə-* in Selkup remains unexplained. The possibility that this syllable was lost in all the Samoyedic languages except Selkup appears unlikely, while it is equally unlikely that it could represent a secondary “infixal” addition in Selkup. If, however, the Selkup data were assumed to be more “original”, the Proto-Samoyedic reconstruction would have to be amended to **yəngəntəsi(-)*, which, again, would allow several different segmentations (**yəngəntəsi-* ~ **yəngən-təsi-* ~ **yəngə-n-təsi-*, etc.). There are, of course, many problems in this analysis. For one thing, the status of medial **ng* in Selkup is unstable, as this segment is often confused with **k*, both being represented as *g* [ɣ]. One could therefore also think of a possible connection with Proto-Samoyedic **yəka* ‘river’, an item that is otherwise only marginally present in Selkup (SW 35). At the same time, it is possible that the Selkup data represents simply an etymon different from Proto-Samoyedic **yentəsi(-)*.

However the origin of Selkup *(*)cangəntəsə* ‘sea’ is to be explained, the Proto-Samoyedic status of **yentəsi(-)* ‘Yenisei’ is a fact beyond doubt. Moreover, since this is a true hydronym with a specific reference, the word confirms

that the Proto-Samoyedic speakers lived either right in the Yenisei main basin or in its immediate vicinity, a circumstance also suggested by other ethnohistorical considerations. This gives a basis to link Samoyedic ethnicity to a concrete geographical and chronological framework. As a hydronym, **yentasi(-)* may be dated back to a time at least several hundred years earlier than the most ancient historically documented or linguistically reconstructable traces of the Turkic name **kem* of the river.

Tungusic **yense-gii*

The only Tungusic speakers who live close enough to the Yenisei to have a name for the river are the Western Ewenki. This is not surprising, since the sphere of geographical knowledge of the other Ewenki (and Ewen), not to mention the Amur Tungus and Manchu, has, at least in historical times, not extended as far west as the Yenisei basin. The Western Ewenki name of the Yenisei is represented in the dialectal forms *yendregii* (Sym) ~ *yendegii* (Ilimpiya) (ÊRS³ 153), which, on the other hand, may be derived from the older shape **yensegii*, corresponding, in principle, to the Proto-Ewenki (Proto-Ewenic) level of reconstruction. It is important to realize that the stem contains the cluster **ns*, regularly represented as *nr* > *ndr* (phonemically still *nr*) > *nd* > *nn* depending on the dialect (Benzing 1955: 39). Against this background, the “Proto-Tungusic” reconstruction **yendesii*, which has been proposed as an alternative (Anikin & Helimski 2007: 20, 47-48) is simply not correct.

It is immediately obvious that Ewenki **yensegii* closely resembles Samoyedic **yentasi(-)*, which means that we are probably dealing with a single hydronym. The question is whether this hydronym was transmitted from Tungusic to Samoyedic (as suggested in Anikin & Helimski 2007, and already in Helimski 1983, 1985) or vice versa. Of course, there also remains the possibility that both Samoyedic and Tungusic borrowed the name from some third (substratal) language of the region. We should, therefore, have a closer look at how the Samoyedic and Tungusic data correspond to each other semantically and phonologically. From the semantic point of view it has been noted that Ewenki **yensegii* is lexicographically registered in three meanings: (i) ‘Yenisei’, (ii) ‘large river in general’, and (iii) ‘the source of a large river’ (ÊRS³ l.c.). These meanings are basically congruent with those of Samoyedic **yentasi(-)* and do not rule out the likelihood that it is ultimately a question of the proper name of the Yenisei, which, probably secondarily, has also come to refer generically to other large basins of water.

The question concerning the phonological correspondences is more complicated. The assumption of a borrowing from Tungusic to Samoyedic (as origi-

nally formulated by Helimski) would only be possible at the level of the corresponding protolanguages, since the Samoyedic data, in any case, presuppose the protolanguage level of reconstruction. This would take the Tungusic item also back to Proto-Tungusic, an ancient language more or less contemporaneous with Proto-Samoyedic. Moreover, this assumption would only be possible in a framework in which the Tungusic shape of the hydronym is, indeed, reconstructed as **yendesii* (which could easily yield **yentasi-* in Proto-Samoyedic). Apart from the incorrect reconstruction of the Tungusic internal cluster as **nd* (instead of **ns*), this assumption requires that the medial *g* of the actually attested Tungusic data is derived from **s*. Although the desibilization of **s* into *x* [h] is a process widely attested in Tungusic with dialectally varying contextual conditions (Benzing 1955: 43-44), there is no regular phonological development from *x* [h] to *g* [ɣ].

In fact, the only argument in favour of reconstructing the Ewenki data as **yendesii* is provided by the 18th century information, according to which the river Angara used to be known to the “Tungus” by the name *Joandesii* (Fischer 1768: 791 note 33). Quite plausibly, this could correspond to an Ewenki shape of the type †*yendesii*. Unfortunately, there is no further confirmation of this information, which means that we are left with several possible explanations, all of which remain hypothetical, but none of which requires the assumption that the segment †*s* is original in this word. Assuming that it is not a question of a mistake made in the process of transcription or copying (similar mistakes are quite widespread in 18th century linguistic materials), we might, for instance, postulate an interdialectal replacement of medial *g* by *s* (**yendegii* > *yendesii*), a process which would certainly be irregular, but which would not be any more irregular than the opposite development (**yendesii* > *yendegii*, as postulated by Helimski). Another problem with the “Proto-Tungusic” reconstruction **yendesii* is that it does not explain the actually attested dialectal form *yendregii*, for the process (**ns* > (**nr* > *ndr* > *nd* (> *nn*)) is unidirectional and cannot be reversed.

It is, then, inevitable to come to the conclusion that the element *-gii* in the Ewenki data does not correspond to the Samoyedic sequence **-si(-)*. Rather, *-gii* is a secondary element added to the bisyllabic root **yense-*, which as such is the Ewenki counterpart of the entire Samoyedic trisyllabic hydronym **yentasi-*. In fact, (**)-gii* is a common denominal suffix in Ewenki with many functions, also used without an obvious function, as in *anda* : *anda-gii* ‘friend’ (ÊRS³ 750-751). Since this is so, Ewenki **yense-* must be a borrowing from Samoyedic, rather than vice versa. Moreover, the Samoyedic original of **yense-* may well have been of the Nenets type (**)yenasy^oh* : *yen^osyə^o*-, implying that the borrowing may have taken place after the completion of the specifically Nenets developments exhibited by this item (**nt* > **nn* > *n*, **ə* > ^o). This would place the lexical contact in the Lower Yenisei region, where Nenets and Ewenki speakers

must have been interacting since, at least, the time of the arrival of the Russians in Northwestern Siberia.

Apart from the Samoyedic connection, there are three additional lexical items with which the hydronym **yense-gii* may be, or has been, etymologically compared:

- (1) Ewenki **yensi* : **yense-gii* ‘coal, graphite, black pigment made of coal’. This item is recorded mainly from the western dialects of Ewenki in forms such as *yendi* (Ilimpiya) ~ *yendri* (Sym) : *yendegii* > *yennegii* (Yerbogachen), but there are also a few more distant attestations such as *nyendegii* (Ayan, on the Okhotan coast) and *nyindingi* (Western Ewen) (SSTM 1: 354). In view of the western dialectal distribution and the specialized meaning, it is very probably a question of a secondary usage of the hydronym ‘Yenisei’. Although we do not know the material background, it must be so that a certain type of black pigment (possibly graphite) was obtained from the Yenisei region (with well-known graphite deposits) and traded eastwards within the network of Ewenki-speaking communities, which extended from the Yenisei to the Pacific coast. Importantly, the short form **yensi* seems to preserve a direct trace of the Samoyedic original of the hydronym, which once more confirms that the element *-gii* is a secondary suffix.
- (2) Ewenki *jandri* ~ *jandi* ‘neighbouring peoples, i.e., the Ket, the Selkup, and the Khanty’ (ÊRS³ 149, SSTM 1: 249, cf. also Futaky 1975: 25-26). This item (already in ÊRS¹ 48, ÊRS² 50) is recorded only from the westernmost groups of the Ewenki (on the Sym). The reference is to the three linguistically distinct populations traditionally classified as “Ostyak” (Yeniseic, Samoyedic, and Ugric). It is obviously a question of a generic ethnonym which the westernmost Ewenki used for the populations living in and beyond the Middle Yenisei basin. An earlier shape of the item must have been **jansi*, which very probably represents the same etymon as **yensi* : **yense-* ‘Yenisei’. The variation between the vowels *a* vs. *e* (in Ewenki [a] resp. [ə]) is hardly of any consequence, but the development of **y* (palatal glide) to **j* (palatal affricate) suggests that **jansi* was borrowed from a different source, and possibly at a different time, than **yensi* : **yense-*. This development, which is not typical of Ewenki itself, is well known from several Samoyedic languages, any one of which (but perhaps most probably Forest Nenets) can have been the donor language of the ethnonym **jansi*.
- (3) Ewenki *yenee* ~ *yengee* ~ *engnye* ~ *engne* ‘river, river valley, gully’ (SSTM 355). This is a general hydrographical term with a considerable amount of irregular dialectal variation, suggesting that the word may be of

a secondary areal origin. Uncertain cognates have been quoted from Neghidal and Udeghe, but basically the item is restricted to Ewenki (proper), from which it has been adopted into Russian and international usage as the name of the river *Yana* (Яна) in Northeastern Siberia, far from the Yenisei. In spite of opinions to the contrary (Anikin & Helimski 2007: 47) it is impossible to see any etymological connection between this variable item and the Ewenki name of the Yenisei. More credible distant comparisons could perhaps be made with Yukaghir **ön-* : *enu-ng* ~ *onu-ng* ~ *unu-ng* ‘river’ (HDY 329-330) and Kamchukotic **inung* ‘sea’ (CCKD 102), though, of course, these comparisons also remain uncertain and unclear in the details.

An independent piece of evidence showing that the element (*)-*gii* in Ewenki **yense-gii* is a suffix is provided by the 18th century hydronym *Iendes* = †*yende-ses*, which was recorded (by G. F. Miller) as denoting an unspecified river in the Stony Tunguska system (Maloletko 2002: 103). This hydronym is clearly composed of Ewenki *yende* ‘Yenisei’ (without the suffix *-gii*) and the Ket hydrographic term **ses* ‘river’. In fact, in view of the vagueness of the source, it is even possible that the reference was actually meant to be to the Yenisei main river. This does not necessarily mean that Yeniseic (Ket-Yugh) speakers at any time used the Ewenki hydronym as an actual borrowing. More probably, the Russian surveyors, approaching the region from the west, simply relied upon Yeniseic-speaking informants, who provided hydronyms of various origins, all complemented by the appellative **ses* ‘river’.

The conclusion from the above is that the name of the Yenisei was, indeed, transmitted from Samoyedic to Tungusic, and not vice versa. The borrowing took place fairly late, which means that Samoyedic has been spoken in the Yenisei region much longer than Tungusic. Clearly, the Yenisei has been one of the central geographical points of reference for Samoyedic speakers of all times, while for Tungusic speakers it represents a marginal feature, only known to a few specific (western) sections of one of the Northern Tungusic groups, the Ewenki. All of this should, of course, also be evident from the overall dialectological situation, for Ewenki (Ewenic) is a remarkably uniform language with little dialectal variation all over Siberia and Manchuria. This can only mean that it has spread to its historically known area of distribution very rapidly and very late. Without going into the details, it has to be added that other “evidence” quoted in favour of an early Tungusic presence on the Yenisei, including the alleged Tungusic “loanwords” in Khanty (Futaky 1975), also involves serious problems.

This brings us to the question concerning the Tungusic linguistic homeland. Tungusic speakers became first known to the Russians via the Western Ewenki in the very Yenisei region, as can also be seen from the history of the

ethnonym *Tungus* (Helimski & Janhunen 1990). Perhaps this western contact zone is the original reason why Russian scholars, especially archaeologists and ethnographers, have tended to place the Tungusic homeland in the west, that is, in the region between the Yenisei and Lake Baikal (cf. Jettmar 1952), though alternative opinions have also been presented (Zalkind 1950). Today, however, we know that the Tungusic homeland must have been located in Southern Manchuria and Northern Korea (cf. e.g. Janhunen 2008: 89-91). The technical proof of this Far Eastern homeland comes from the distribution of external lexical elements, especially Mongolic loanwords, in the Tungusic languages (Doerfer 1985: 270-273 et passim).

General conclusions

The hydronyms used for the Yenisei serve as an important source of information on the ethnic history of Western, Southern, and Eastern Siberia. Among the names used in the modern precolonial languages of the region, Samoyedic **yentäsi-* has undisputably the oldest traceable history, followed by Turkic **kem*. Yeniseic **quk* is ambiguous but need not be particularly old as a hydronym. The youngest layer is represented by Ewenki (**)yende-gii*, which is a borrowing dating back to the time when ethnic contacts were initiated between the Samoyeds and the Northern Tungus, which must have happened only shortly before the arrival of the Russians. Before that time, the eastern neighbours of the Samoyeds must have spoken some other, non-Tungusic, languages, of whose identity we, unfortunately, know nothing. Of course, it is possible and even necessary to assume that the Samoyeds were also preceded by other ethnolinguistic groups on the Yenisei. Some of these must have been connected with the archaeologically well-documented cultural succession of the Minusinsk basin, while others may have represented more minor local cultures and communities.

An important topic for future research would be a comprehensive analysis of all hydronyms in the Yenisei drainage area, including also the Selenga-Baikal-Angara system. Work in this direction has been begun (especially Maloletko 2002), but much remains to be done. As always in toponymic research, reliable results can only be reached if the diachronic apparatus (notation, reconstruction) is up to date, and if the interpretations (datings and directions of borrowing) are correctly made.

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nately, can no longer present his always insightful comments. The main difference of opinion concerns the identification of the hydronym *Yenisei* as either Samoyedic (by the present author) or Tungusic (by Helimski). This, in turn, gives rise to different scenarios concerning the ethnic and linguistic history of the Yenisei basin, and concerning the expansion of the Samoyedic and Tungusic languages. Till the end, Helimski seems to have been firmly in favour of his Tungusic identification, which required him to date the presence of Tungusic in the Yenisei basin to a time much earlier than is suggested by the present author. It is up to the reader to decide whether the arguments presented above are sufficient to provide an unambiguous answer to the question.

Juha Janhunen

Institute for Asian and African Studies

Box 59

FIN – 00014 University of Helsinki

[asiemajure@yahoo.com]

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