A Mongolian word in Hungarian
Hungarian bóda [bôda] ‘handle of different arms’

There does exist a long discussion on possible Mongolian loanwords in Hungarian. In the 19th century, scholars as G. Bálint (1877), B. Munkácsi (1901) and others tried to find out that words with similar forms and meaning in Hungarian and in Mongolian are related or are borrowed, and if borrowed, are they directly copied from Mongolian or borrowed through intermediary languages. The discussion was closed by a very detailed and well argued paper by Ligeti (1935), which unfortunately did not appear in a language other than Hungarian. Ligeti made clear that we cannot suppose direct Mongolian loanwords in Hungarian, but the word could be hitherto not detected in Turkic, only in Mongolic. To the other group pertain words which are clearly of Mongolic origin and were transmitted to Hungarian through Cuman (nyögér ‘name of a group of military people in Medieval Hungary’, daku ‘a short fur coat’). In the last decades a few new words enriched both groups. One of them is the words cited in the title.

I am dealing with the word in Róna-Tas – Berta – Károly (2011/1, 136–138) in details; here I give only a brief summary with a few new and additional data. The word first occurs in the Hungarian sources in 1395 in the Wordlist of Königsberg, which excludes the possibility that it would be of immediate Ottoman origin. The Hungarian word is well known in the 15th–17th centuries. It is noted in 1430 in the Wordlist of Schlâgli, we find it the Transylvanian historical dictionary of A.T. Szabó (1976/1, 978) cited from the year 1584: bolda ‘Griff, handle’. It lives in several Hungarian dialects in East and South Transdanubia (B. Lörinczy 1, 504). The word is not present in Old Turkic and appears only in some late Middle Turkic sources: baldaq ‘anneau auquel le ceinturon du sabre est attaché’ (AChag), balçaq ‘konec rukojatki (éfesa) meča’ (AChagB), baldaq ‘der Säbelgriff’ (AChagR), balçaq/g ‘hand-guard, hilt (of a sword)’ (AChagŠ 126v: 29), baldaq ‘Säbelgriff, Stiel’ (AChagŠSK), balçaq ‘guard (of a sword)’ (AMGh), balçaq ‘kılıç sapı’ (AOtT).

In the modern Turkic languages we find the word in the Northwestern (Kipchak) languages as: baldaq ‘koľčo, kolečko’ (Tat), baldaq ‘koľčo, kolečko (bez kamnja)’ (Bashk), baldak ‘éfes, kostyl’, podstavka pod ruku u ohotnikov s
lovčej pticej’ (Kirg), baldaq ‘crutch; (finger)ring’ (Kaz), baldaq ‘kostyl’, podstavka’ (Kkap), baldaq ‘rukojakata kinžala’ (Nog); in the Southwestern (Oguz) Turkic languages baldaq ‘stebel’, baljak ‘čes sabli’ (Tkm), baldaq ‘suspensory ring of a sword scabbard or belt’ (Tt); and in the Southeastern Turkic languages as: baldaq ‘gladko kolʹco (bez kamnja)’ (Uzb), baldaq ‘bar, cross-piece, ladder-peg, step of a ladder’ (TurkJ), baldaq ‘a mace or truncheon with a wrist-strap’ (TurkSh), baldaq ‘matiča-žendir pod potolkom, gde ženščiny sohranjajut moločnye produkty; verhnja polkaperekladina u ljuł’ki; podstavka dlja lovčej pticy’ (TurkL), baldaq ‘zadvižka, zasov; stupenka’ (MUyg). I did not find it in the Northeastern or Siberian languages, but it is present in Yakut where it is an immediate Mongolian loanword: bartaχ~battaχ ‘poduške u stolbov v domah, na kotorou kladetsja matica ili perekladina; kostyl’, veselka’.

The word occurring in the Turkic sources can be reconstructed as *baldag or *baldak. This cannot be a genuine Turkic word, because there does not exist a Turkic suffix *±dag or ±*dak.

The word does exist in Mongolic: baldag ~ bardag ‘knob, hilt of a sword’ (Lessing). baldag (Khalkha), baljag (Kalmuck), baldag (Buryat), baldak (Ordos), bardag (Monguor), bardag (Ordos), bardag (Monguor), etc. everywhere with the special meaning ‘hilt of the sword, knob’. It can be morphologically analyzed. In Mongolian we find a deverbal suffix -dAg (Poppe 1964: 94), forming in most cases the nomen usus (see yabudag ‘someone who usually goes’ < yabu- ‘to go’). The suffix also has another function, however: it forms nouns and adjectives denoting something which is like the action as in mokudag ‘blunt, dull’ from moku- ‘to be blunt etc.’, burgildag ‘stormy’ < burgila- ‘to frequently rise in clouds’. Since Mongolian has both bardag and balzag with the very specific meaning ‘hilt of a sword, knob’, we may suppose that the Mongolian word is an inner Mongolian development baldag ~ bardag < *baridag < bari- ‘to hold’. It entered the Turkic languages as a term for military weapon.

Also, the distribution of the word in the Turkic languages points to its Mo origin, as was already supposed by Räsänen (1969: 60). The final -k in the present north-western and other T languages may be due to two different Mongolian transmissions (Cuman *baldag ← Mongolian baldag → Turkic baldak). The irregular T -k shows that the word was transmitted through a West Mongolian dialect (see Kalmuck baldāq ‘Griff, Stiel (des Schwertes)’ or by a Mongolian language like Ordis (baldaq).

The Turkic forms with /č/ were originally different words. The Mongolian word *bolčagu is present in several Mongolian languages, as Khalkha bolcũ, bulcũ, Buryat bulsũ, Ordis bolčan, bolčogor, all with the meaning ‘blunt, blunt end of an arrow’ from the Mongol verb *bolčoyi-, see Ordis. This Mongolian word has nothing to do with the Turkic forms like balčak (in contrary to Starostin – Dybo – Mudrak 2001 134). The Turkic word forms may go back Mongolian baričaga **grasp’ which very early changed its meaning to ‘pledge, assurance, guarantee, security’ but originally has meant the object ‘held by the lender or loaner back as pawn’, i.e. what has been seized, grasped (*bari-čaga). Another
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possibility is that *balčak is a secondary Turkic form, where the Mongolian suffix –dag was replaced by the Turkic diminutive suffix +čak, perhaps because the balčak was smaller than the baldag/baldak.

The semantics of the Mongolian and Hungarian words is also a clear argument of the ultimately Mongolian origin. It was used for several types of handles, used for arms and weapons. It pertained to the vocabulary of the warriors of the 13th–14th centuries.

The labialisation of the first vowel before /l/ and the disappearance of the /l/ are Hungarian developments, well documented in other cases. Though it is not noted in the Codex Cumanicus, the Hungarian word was most probably copied from Cuman. As the copied form we can suppose a form like *baldaw, or *baldau.

The rare occasion that this word escaped Ligeti’s attention can be perhaps due to the fact, that Gombocz (1912, 213) did not accept the Turkic origin of the word. The origin of the Hungarian word was also obscure for the authors of the newest Hungarian Etymological dictionary (see Benkő 1993–1997/1, 114). Though they cited some Turkic parallels, according to them the word is of unknown origin.

Bibliography