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A NOTE ON THE TURKMEN NAME FOR DRAGON / MONSTER / SNAKE

Among words illustrating his theses, S. A. Starostin (1997: 332) gives also the following entry:
The very formulation raises doubts about the correctness of the reconstruction: if the question mark is justified, the Turkmens word does not belong here – are there then any other reflexes of the word in Turcik languages? (if there are not, the Tunguz *ʒəbdar is not enough to postulate the existence of a Proto-Altaic etymon); what is the historical status of *-r(-) ? (it is absent from the Proto-Altaic and the Japanese etymon, but it turns up in Tunguz and Turkmen); what is the -(r)xā suffix in Turkic?; are there any other derivatives in -(r)xā ?

However, the main goal of our study is not to evaluate the correctness of the Proto-Altaic etymon *ʒabda (cf. esp. Miller 2000:71) but, instead, to discuss the etymology of the Turkmens word.
First of all, we should complete the word material. It is not especially weighty that the Turkmens juvdarxā has also an adjectival meaning of ‘never surfeited, ravenous, greedy’ since it can be derived from the sense of ‘dragon’ (however, as the etymology presented below shows, the semantic connection between ‘dragon’ and ‘ravenous’ may have also played a role in the development of the Turkmens word).

It appears more important that the word juvdarxā has also another phonetic variant: aždarxā ~ aždar ‘1. snake; 2. dragon’. This not only shows that the word-final -xā probably is an independent segment but also makes it possible (or even inevitable) to equate the Turkmens words juvdarxā ~ aždar(xā) with Ottoman-Turkish 1603 aştarha, 1680 aždar(hā), 1730 ažlār,
1790 aždär ~ ažlär ‘dragon’ (Stachowski 1974: No 134) = Karaim aždaya
id. = New Uygur ačtär id. and to etymologize them from the Persian word
aždar (Pl. aždarhâ) ‘dragon’.

Now, the question arises, how the word-initial juv- came into being. The
fact that juv-, as it seems, does not occur in the equivalents of the Turkmen
word in other Turkic languages suggests the idea of an individual and spor-
radic change in Turkmen alone. We would like to explain it as a result of
two psychic processes: association and folk-etymology.

First, the word-initial až- of the Turkmen aždar(xä) has probably been
associated with Turkmen aš ‘food, meal’, so that the entire word could
have been interpreted as a designation of a being which is, this way or
another, connected with eating or devouring. All the more as the rest of the
word could then have been understood as a suffix composition: -dar
(< Persian dār ‘having; habend’, cf. Turkmen mādār [-ll-] ‘cattle-breeder’
< māl ‘cattle’, dūkāndār [-nn-] ‘shop-keeper’ < dūkān ‘shop’ (Clark 1998:
521); Ottoman-Turkish veznedar ‘cashier’ < vezne ‘cash desk’, defterdar
‘minister of finance’ < defter ‘register, tax list/register, booklet, copy book’) and
-hā, Persian plural suffix.

This folk-etymology (partially correct, because the Turkmen segment
-xä actually is a reflex of the Persian plural suffix) made then possible a
contamination of the segment až(d)-, misunderstood as a variant of aš ‘food,
meal’, with juv(d)-, being a part of the Turkmen juvut- (~juvdV-) ‘to swal-
low, to gulp’, juvd-ul- ‘to be swallowed’, juvd-un- ‘to swallow the spit
(e.g. in fear)’, juvd-um ‘a gulp’. The result was a new word juvdarxä whose
word-initial syllable suggested a creature that swallows (its victims).

In the light of what has been said above there exists no possibility of
reconstructing a Proto-Altaic etymon of the Turkmen word juvdarxä.

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