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“SLON” IN THE LANGUAGE OF MAMMOTH HUNTERS

Povzetek

“SLON” V JEZIKU LOVCEV NA MAMUTE

Na svojem nedavnem potovanju skozi Mongolijo in Kitajsko sem bil presenečen nad dejstvom, da kitajska in mongolska beseda za slona nista zelo različni od slovanske besede slon. Kitajska beseda za slona je **Si-Ang**, Mongolska beseda za slona pa je **Zaan** - (v cirilici **ЗaaH**). V obeh besedah, mongolski in kitajski, manjka glas »L« za besedo slon. Zato me je zanimalo, kako imenujejo slona Japonci. Hiter pogled na Google je pokazal, da je japonska beseda za slona **Zosan** ali **Zo**. Kot umetnik sem pogosto označen, da imam pretirano domišljijo, toda z dodatkom zvoka »L*« v **Z*OsAN** ali v **Z*O** pridemo do besede, ki je podobna besedi **SLON** - слон. Ta kratek prispevek navaja, da so lovci na mamute imenovali svoj plen slon ali nekaj podobnega. Ta beseda se je začela z zobnikom **S** ali **Z** in končala z nosnikom **N**, med njima je bil odprti samoglasnik **A** ali **O** in pogojno zvočnik **L**.

Zamyšlení – úvaha

SLOVO „SLON“ V JAZYCE LOVCŮ MAMUTŮ.

Nedávno jsem při své cestě navštívil Mongolsko a Čínu a byl jsem překvapen tím, že čínské a mongolské slovo pro název **SLONA**, se příliš neliší od slovanského slova **SLON**. V Číně se pro název **SLONA** používá slovo **Si-Ang**. V Mongolsku se pro **SLONA** používá slovo **Zaan** – (v azbuce **ЗaaH**). V rodných jazycích Mongolů a Číňanů v názvu pro slona chybí písmeno „L“. Proto jsem se zajímal, jak **SLONA** nazývají Japonci. Rychlý pohled v prohlížeči Google ukázal, že Japonci nazývají slona **ZOSAN** nebo **ZO**. Jako umělec jsem často označován jako člověk, který má velkou představivost, ale přidáním zvuku (hlásky) „L*“ v **Z*OsAN**, nebo **Z*O**, lze přijít ke slovu, které se podobá slovu **SLON** - С ЛОН. Tento krátký příspěvek naznačuje, že lovci mamutů nazývali svůj úlovek **SLON** nebo nějak podobně. Toto slovo **SLON** začínáme vyslovovat sykavkou **S** nebo **Z** a je ukončeno nosovkou **N**. Mezi nimi se vyskytuje samohláska **A** nebo **O** a hláska **L**.

LEXICONS re: ELEPHANTS

The Slavic word **SLON** is now found between the geographical points of Ljubljana - Vladivostok as well as Prague - Vladivostok, and extends to remnants of Slavic populations in Eastern Germany (Wends) and Slovenian dialects in Italy, Austria and Hungary, Table 1. **ZILONUS** (or **ZILONis**) is the Latvian word for Elephant. **GLAN** is the Tibetan word for Elephant. (G & Z or S are often interchangeable as in Zrno/Grain or Zlato/Gold.) Tocharian

A word for Elephant is **ONKALAM**. Tocharian B word for Elephant is **ONKOLMO**. We may consider here **OKEL** or **KEL** = elephant's tusk. It may be prudent to consider both **SLON** and "the animal having **OKEL**". "Creative" rearranging of phonemes can yield words resembling "**KLON**" = (**SLON**). (As in the English word "**CARP**" can result in Slovenian **KRAP** or Czech **KAPR**.)

Table 1. Slavic and similar words for Elelphant

Slavic (general)	SLON
Polish	S"u"ON
Saami/Lapp	SLONN
Roma (in Slovenia)	SLONO
Kalderash	woroSLANo, SLONo, ilifanto
Latvian	ZiLONus
Mongol	ZaAN
Chinese	SeeAHNg
Hakka (south China)	SiONg
Japanese	ZOsAN
Tibetan	GLAN
Laotian	SANg
Thai	CHANg
Tocharian A	onKaLAM
Tocharian B	onKoLMo

The "L" sound in many languages is problematic. When we were in China we had a guide who spoke very good English. A very important word in the tourist industry is "Hotel". Our Chinese tourist guide could only pronounce the word as "Hoter". In America a very popular comical utterance is "Rots of ruck!". Most Americans had lost the context of this phrase. A Japanese reporter wished Richard Nixon: "Rots of ruck on your next erection!" ... He meant to say: "Lots of luck on your next election!".

Keep in mind that the word **VENETI** arose because **Sloveneti** was too arduous for non-Slavic people to utter. In a similar way the **SLOWends** (Slavic) peoples in Germany are called **Wendisch** or **Wends**. Often times Germans would pronounce the phonemic combination **SL** as in **SLleep** >> "**SCHL**" = **SCHLafen**. "Slo" on the other hand is a very common and endearing combination of sounds in **SLOvanic** languages. National states in modern Europe as well as smaller ethnic groups use the "slo" or "sla" element in their identity. Among them are Slovenes, Slovaks, Slavonians, and (in northern Poland) the **Slovincians**, and other Slavs.

There are many significant and poignant Slavic words with the **SL** prefix. Among them are the Czech words: **slast** = bliss, **sláva** = glory, **sluj** = cave or cavern, **sládek** = brewer, **sladký** = sweet, **slaný** = salty, **slza** = tear, **slunce** = sun ... Even more poignant is the fact

that SLAVONIC Languages obtain their name from the lexeme: “SLOVO” which means “Word” or “Word of Honor”. Thus, SLAVS by definition are the “Users of Words”.

It is very unlikely that “SLON” was a loan-word from Germanic or Italic languages. It *could* be a loan from Asia or *vice versa*.

Hakka language is a variant of Chinese spoken in the south of China and as the native dialect on Formosa. The Hakka word for Elephant is **SI**ONG. In Polish the “L” sound in SLON is palatalized and approaches the sound of the English “W” and thus it is a semi-vowel. In Polish the word is pronounced **Su**ON. Thus it may be expected that the “L” sound became fugitive/silent in SLON as languages evolved from the original Eurasian language. The Japanese have two forms of the word for Elephant. The basic word is “ZO”. The optional “SAN” is an address of respect as in: “He, the Master - Elephant” and in that way it functions somewhat like the gender ending “ON” in Slavic languages exemplified in zvON, barON, bizON, slON, etc. The Saami/Lapp word for Elephant is **SLONN** [1], in contrast to Finnish NORSU.

Semitic Languages have a totally different form for their word for Elephant. The Arabic word for Elephant is **FEL**. The Hebrew word for Elephant is **FEEL** or **PEEL**. With the Diaspora as well as with the spread of Islam there are variants of **Peel** or **Feel** or **Fel** in many parts of Central Asia and among peoples who had an extensive maritime tradition such as the Vikings and the Greeks, Table 2.

Table 2. Names for Elephant derived from Semitic.

Language	Elephant
Farsi	FEEL
Azerbaijani	FIL
Kazakh	PIL
Pushtu	PIL
Uzbek	PHEEL
Armenian	PLUGH
Chechen	PIYL
Tatar	FIL
Tajik	FIL
Turkish	FIL
Icelandic*	FILL
Faroese (Viking)	FILUR
Greek	FEEL or ELEPHANTAS: ελέφαντας
Latin**	ELEPHANTUS

*ostensibly from their Viking travels

** The Romans used the grapheme “V” to write the “U” sound

The West Caucasian languages use the Arabic or Greek forms. Most European languages subsequently had adopted some form of the Greco-Latin “ELEPHANT derivative”, Table 3.

Table 3. European names for Elephant.

Language	Elephant
Greek	FEEL or ELEPHANTAS: ελέφαντας
Latin	ELEPHANTUS
Basque	ELEFANTE
Finnish	ELEFANTTI or NORSU
Estonian	ELEVANT
Hungarian	ELEFÁNT
Afrikaans	OLIFANT
Irish Gaelic	EILIFINT
Scottish Gaelic	AILBHEAN
Welsh Gaelic	ELFFANT
Yiddish	HELFOND
Kiribati*	EREBANTI

* The Kiribati word demonstrates aversion which some languages have to “L” and “F-V-PH” phonemes.

Suffice it to say that all the Germanic and Italic languages also derive their words for Elephant from the Latin model [2].

Some African words for the cognate of “Elephant” are presented in Table 4. They categorically contain dental and/or alveolar sounds which (Together with “O” and optional “L”) superficially resemble the “SLO” part in SLON. Often, however, the lexicography of the words below is deficient. There is usually a “plosive” or a “click” element to the sound which is quite impossible for native speakers of Indo-European languages to replicate. Thus, it may be a vestige of the earlier Khoisan [3] rather than the latter Bantoid.

Table 4. Some African words for the cognate of “Elephant”

Language	Lexeme
Setswana	<u>T</u> LOU
Ndebele	IND <u>L</u> OVU
Baherero	ND <u>I</u> QU(ND <u>Ž</u> OU)
Kalanga	<u>Z</u> HOU(<u>Ž</u> OU)
Karansa	<u>Z</u> HOU(<u>Ž</u> OU)
Harero	OT <u>I</u> QU(OT <u>Ž</u> OU)
Ngoni	N <u>J</u> OVU
Nyanja	N <u>J</u> OMVU
Kaonde	N <u>Z</u> OVU
Subiya	U <u>Z</u> OVU
Tonga	N <u>Z</u> OVU; MNU <u>Z</u> OVU
Shona	N <u>Z</u> OU
Bemba	INS <u>O</u> FU
Mbukushu	ND <u>T</u> H <u>Q</u> VU

All of the Bantoid Languages in Table 4 contain a Dental Z,T,Ž,S,TH plus an open vowel **O** much as the Eurasian languages. Alternately, the tongue is placed on the an alveolar ridge (upper gum) instead of the upper teeth [4,5] to produce the **N,D,L** sounds accompanied by the open vowel - very much like in Europe and Asia.

In some instances the word for ELEPHANT in a Native Language is a bit longer and the phonemic elements identified above are sandwiched in a bigger word. Here I underline the elements identified above, Table 5.

Table 5. Some longer African words for the cognate of “Elephant”

Language	Lexeme
Tsonga	ING <u>I</u> /rOFU
Mbukushu	NDTH <u>O</u> VU
Bayeyi	INGLO <u>U</u> FU
HambuKushi	NDH <u>O</u> VUO
Zulu	INGLO <u>F</u> U

Thus, in Europe there are Three Linguistic (Phonemic) Sources for the cognate of “Elephant”:

- #1. The Phonemic source from the Greek ELEPHANTAS ...
- #2. The Phonemic source from the Semitic or FEEL, PEEL, FEL ...
- #3. The Phonemic Slavic SLON.

The Bantoid languages in Africa, on the other hand, share the similarity of TLOU/ DLOU/JOU/ZOU to SLON in the Slavic languages.

The Semitic source is imported from the Arabian peninsula and the Levant. The Hellenic Word Source has most likely origins which are Hamitic from the Sudan. (The author had played with the concept that the Slavic prefix “VELE” {VERY BIG} as in Velehrad, Velegrad, велеград, velemesto, velemoc, velesila ... *may* play a role in the word: “Elephant”). The Slavic-optional ininitial “V” sound would follow the same rule as the Slavic word for Eight = Osem or Vosem. (The author had eliminated the Slavic “VELE” option and cautions others against such dead-end scholarly pursuits.)

In Indic languages, e.g. in Sanskrit “gaja” [6], Hindi “hāthī; haathi” [7], Tamil “yāṅai yāṅai” [8], there is observed no match with European and Bantoid expressions for Elephant. This is reminiscent of the lexicons concerning herding and animal husbandry and the vocabulary regarding cereal crops. In Sanskrit the words for animal husbandry are similar to the Slavic, while the Sanskrit words for grain cultivation are dissimilar from the Slavic [9,10]. This indicates that the Aryans, who arrived India about 3500 years ago, accepted the aboriginal Indic terminology regarding the elephant.

In southeast Asia, the Thai word is “Chang” [11]. In the Khmer language of Cambodia the word(s) for “Elephant” is “Thum-rey” [12] or “Domrey” [13]. In Laos the word for “Elephant” is “Sang” [14]. The words “Chang” and “Sang” resemble “SLON”. The word “Thum-rey” or “Domrey” resembles the Slavic “SLON” much less.

There are very few outliers to the general uniformity of words for elephant across Eurasia. Tantalizing is the similarity of two such outliers. In Lithuanian the word for "Elephant" is "Dramblys". In Cambodian language (Khmer) the word for "Elephant" is "Damrey".

The survey of slon-like words for Elephant is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The names for Elephant in Eurasia.



Figure 2. The names for Elephant in southern Africa.

Discussion

The word SLON as used in all Slavic languages is the only one which is evidently indigenous and autochthonous in Europe. The use of the word SLON (and variations) may extend in some modified form to the Himalayas and to China and Japan (and other parts of Asia) and into the time of the Eurasian Ice Age ... and by same logic, to the Mammoths.

The Last of the Mammoths survived on Wrangel Island to about 4,000 years ago [15]. By 4,000 humankind entered the Historical period and Elephants from India and Africa were known to caravans and locals through tales, sagas, byliny and legends. Thus for the Slavs and others there was no need to remove the word "SLON" from their lexicon. Most mammoths were extinct by 10,000 years ago. But recent evidence places mammoths on St. Paul Island, Alaska till 3750 BC and on Wrangel Island till 1650 BC [16,17].

When Thomas Jefferson sent out the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery (1804 - 1806), he (Jefferson) hoped that the explorers would still find living samples of mammoths [18].

Palaeoloxodons of Northern China (only 3000 years ago) were more closely related to African Elephants (LOXODONT) rather than to the Asian (ELEPHAS). It is meaningful that Northern Chinese had Experiential Knowledge about Elephants till very recently [19,20].

The extension of the SLON-like words for Elephant from the Slavic part of Europe across Central to East Asia observed here, parallels the extension of some of the ceramics and figurines in several cultures in Eastern Europe and China as well as the R1a haplotypes observed by Klyosov & Mironova [21]. This parallelism may indicate that the R1a people, the Aryans, extended the word SLON to the east and possibly they were those who exterminated the Palaeoloxodons of Northern China about 3000 years ago.

Etymology

The word "mammoth" comes from the Russian мамонт *mamont*, probably in turn from the Vogul (Mansi) language, *mang ont*, meaning "earth horn". The word first appeared in English in Richard James's *Dictionariolum Russico-Anglicum* of 1618 [15]. In English, the noun "mammoth" also has become an adjective meaning "large" or "massive" [22].

The Word ELEPHANT also is of rather modern coinage from Latin elephantus, from Greek elephas (genitive elephantos) "elephant, ivory," ... Hamitic elu "elephant," source of the *word* for it in many Semitic languages, ... [23].

The word FEL-FEEL-PEEL is a recently imported word from Abrahamic lands.

The word SLON and related words: GLAN, SIONg, See-AHng, SLONN, ZAAAN, ZILONUS etc seem to have been used throughout Eurasia for thousands of years.

Unless we can pinpoint an individual who indulged in neologisms and coined the word "SLON" in the last couple of thousand years we must always assume that the word comes to us from great antiquity. We can safely say that the Slavic Languages began serious "branching" after Cyril and Methodius -- since a single Glagolitic language served all Slavic people well at that time - a thousand years ago. Since all Slavic peoples use the one and only term "SLON" we are prone to assume that the term goes back to

a time when all speakers of the language had *experiential knowledge* about Proboscidea in their own Homeland. Even after the extinction of Proboscidea from their immediate environment oral and written traditions continued to live on and on ... perpetuated by trade from India and the Orient.

For thousands of years the people of the Alps had not seen any elephants. Yet, when Hannibal was crossing the Alps it is a safe bet that the locals knew what those critters were and had a lexicon dealing with the huge beasts and their valuable ivory.

The *Proboscidea* (from the Latin *proboscis*) are a taxonomic order containing one living family, Elephantidae, and several extinct families [24]. Thus we can rather safely assume that Mammoth Hunters used (some form of) the word “SLON” to call their prey.

Apologia

I must confess that I had trepidations even suggesting that the word “SLON” was used by the Mammoth Hunters of the Gravettien-Pavlovian-Kostienkian cultures of the Paleolithic. Yet there are only two ways to account for the word “SLON”.

#1. 19th Century scholars promulgated that millions Slavs emerged from the small area of Pripyat River Marshes in the 6th Century AD and populated over half of Europe. As these people obtained knowledge about elephants some authoritative individual or group of individuals then would send messengers to all the Slavic villages from the Elbe River to the Ural Mountains and compel all the Slavic people to abandon the use of words like FEL or ELEPHANT and adopt the word “SLON”. Alas, there were no elephants emerging from the Pripyat River Marshes 1500 years ago. There would have been no room for the SLONs next to the tightly packed SLAVs.

#2. The other scenario suggested is that in the Stone Age people of the Gravettien-Pavlovian- Kostienkian (Y-haplogroup I people) [25] and other related cultures hunted Proboscidea in Eurasia. Only thousands (or perhaps few hundreds of thousands) of hunters and gatherers would have used the word “SLON” and passed the word on to their more numerous descendants. Mammoths became extinct, but southern Eurasians domesticated elephants and perpetuated the knowledge of such animals among their trading partners who continued to use the word “SLON”. Thus, there is a linguistic connection between GLAN, ZAAN, SIONg, SeeAHNg, ZOAN, KLON, and SLON all over Eurasia and some parts of Africa.

PS. There is one more fascinating feature about Elephants ... The two forms of Elephants (Asian and African) are not merely 2 different species ... But they belong to TWO different GENERA! *Lexodonta* & *Elephas*. Yet, there is at least one case where the mating (in a zoo) between the two genera produced a live birth! This could suggest that MAMMOTHS could be fertile with both *Elephas* and *Lexodonta*.

PSS. The Czech word for Hippopotamus is onomatopoeic = “HROCH” (the first “H” is pronounced like in **H**andel and the **CH** at the end is pronounced as in Ba**CH**). Perhaps the Mongol word “ZAAN!” is the best onomatopoeic representation of the trumpeting

sound of the elephant. Europeans, on the other hand, had more generations to forget how the Chinese palaeoloxodons or woolly mammoths sounded. Thus in Mongolia there may be a sound of more fidelity of the “voice” of elephants than in the Slavic tongues.

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Summary

In my recent travels through Mongolia and China I was struck by the fact that in Chinese and in Mongol the words for “ELEPHANT” were not very dissimilar from the Slavic word “**SLON**” “слон”. The Chinese word for “Elephant” is **See-AHng**. The Mongol word for “Elephant” is Zaan - (in Cyrillic written = 3aa**H**). In both Mongol and Chinese there is the omission of the “L” sound in their indigenous words for “Elephant”. I was motivated to find out what the Japanese called an “Elephant”. A quick look on Google revealed that the Japanese word for “Elephant” is **Zosan** or **Zo**. As an artist I am often accused of “overactive imagination” ... but by adding an “L*” sound to Z*OsAN or to Z*O we come up with a word not very dissimilar to SLON - слон. This short paper suggests that the hunters of mammoths called their prey “**SLON**” or *some such lexeme* which starts with a dental **S** or **Z** and ends with an alveolar/nasal **N** with an open vowel **A** or **O** in the middle with an *optional* liquid/alveolar **L**.