



## Foreign Studies of the Mansi Language in the XIX–XX Centuries

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January 10, 2023

# Foreign studies of the Mansi language in the XIX–XX centuries<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The article presents an overview of the main milestones in the study of the Mansi language and its dialects by foreign researchers; in historical retrospect, information is presented, starting from the first expeditions of Finnish linguists in the XIX century to Hungarian studies in the XX century.

**Keywords.** the Mansi language, Mansi dialects, the first scientific expeditions, the first studies, Munkacsi, Kannisto, Kálmán, Honti.

## 1 STUDIES OF THE MANSI LANGUAGE IN THE XIX CENTURY

An important stage in the study of Mansi and the Mansi language was the expedition of Bernat Munkachi in 1888-1889 to Western Siberia to the Ob Ugrians, in order to study the Mansi people, their language and culture [Munkacsi 1943]. The main purpose of the trip was to decipher and verify the linguistic materials of the Antal Reguli expe-

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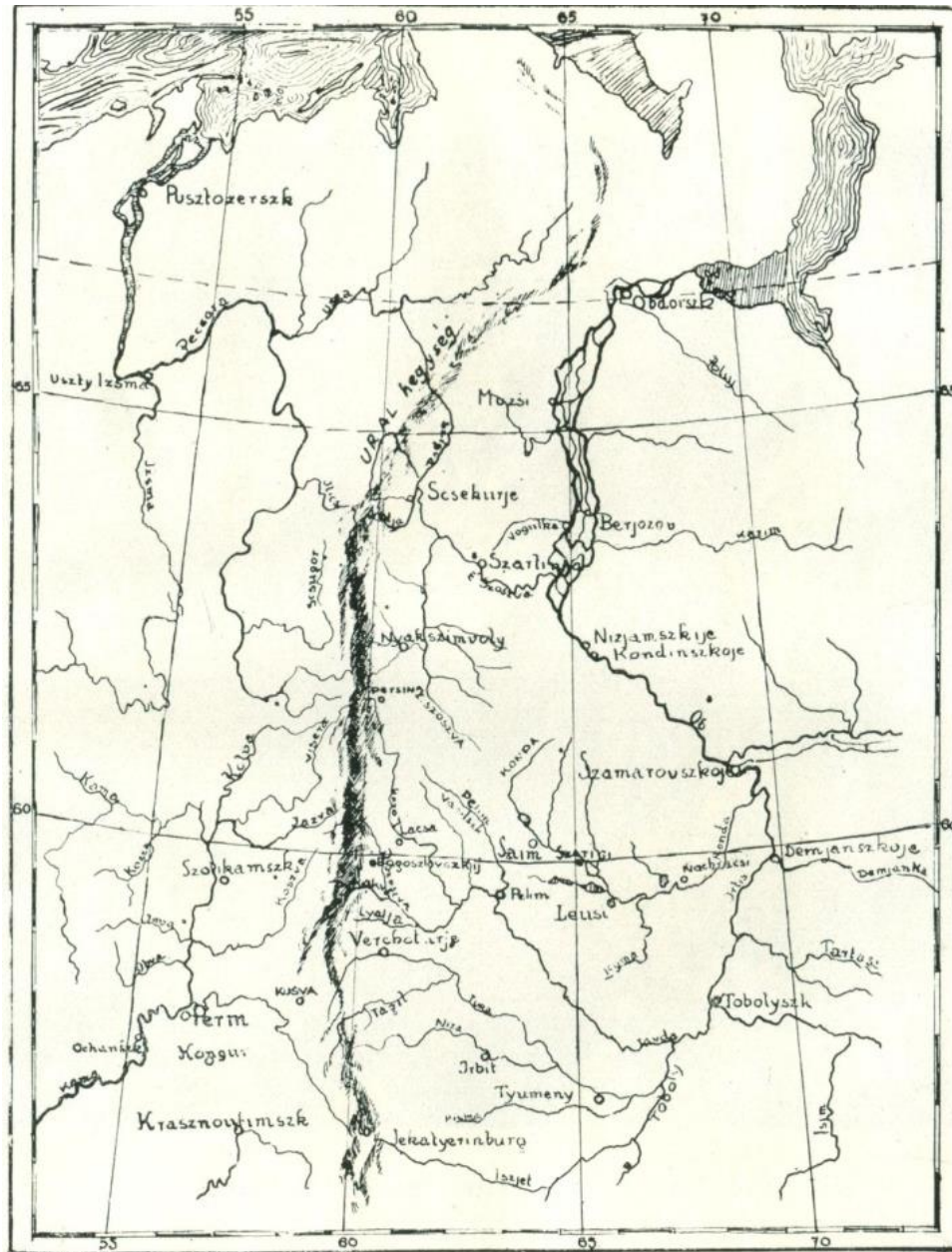
<sup>1</sup> Supported by Russian Science Foundation, project no. 20-18-00403 ‘Digital Description of Uralic Languages on the Basis of Big Data’.

dition. The letter of recommendation received with the assistance of Academician Radlov guaranteed him full support from the local authorities. The scientist met the first Mansi in the east of the Urals in the Nikita-Ivdel village (in 1924, renamed to S. Ivdel) [Egorov, Zagrebin 2018: 69-70].

The route of Munkachi's movements was laid along the Lozva, Konde, Tavde, and Pelym rivers (Fig. 1). Munkachi's intensive research work began in d. Torek-Paul, where for several weeks, with the assistance of native speakers, he deciphered the folklore texts of A. Reguli [Kalmán 1961: 384]. Moving from one locality to another in the direction of the Lozva River, Munkachi managed to collect rich linguistic, ethnographic and folklore data of the Tavdinsky, Kondinsky and Pelym Mansi. In a village near the Sygva River, the scientist discovered a unique material on oral folk art: many new plots of the heroic epic and songs of the bear rite [Hoppal 2015: 122-123].

In January 1889, Bernat Munkachi arrived in Berezovo, where he spent several months systematizing and processing the collected materials. In April, the researcher returned to Kazan via Tobolsk and Perm and continued his work.

Fig. 1. Map of the Mansi expedition of Bernat Munkachi  
in 1888-1889.



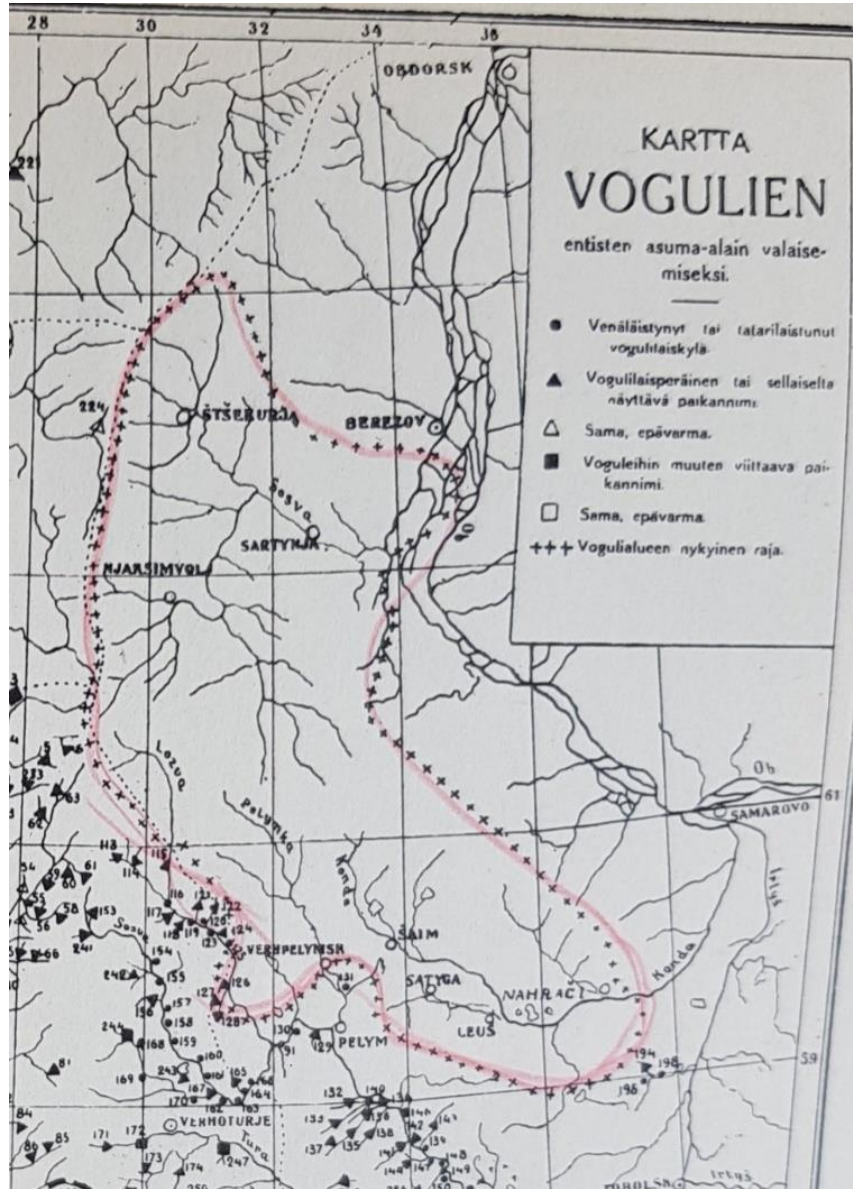
The result of Bernat Munkachi's trip along Antal Reguli's route was the deciphering and translation of most of his folklore texts and the recording of new material [Kálmán 1981]. All the data obtained by Munkaci during the expedition were presented in a 4-volume edition (with author's comments of linguistic and ethnographic nature, there were seven such volumes) of Mansi folklore texts [Munkacsi 1894]. These publications contain several maps specifying the territory of Mansi residence, 131 Mansi villages are mentioned. To the last two volumes, after the death of the researcher, comments were added by another Hungarian scientist, Bela Kalman [Kálmán 1961; 1963]. An important achievement was the compilation and publication of the Mansi dictionary [Munkacsi, Kálmán 1986].

Two expeditions to Western Siberia by the Finnish researcher Uuno Taavi Sirelius belong to the end of the XIX century. During the second trip (1899-1900), the scientist visited the northern Mansi. Based on his own field research and already available information, he studied the material and spiritual culture of Mansi [Professor Sirelius 2000].

## 2 STUDIES OF THE MANSI LANGUAGE IN THE XX CENTURY

The great breakthrough in the study of the Mansi language in general and, in particular, in the XX century was the research activity of the Finnish linguist Artturi Kannisto (1874-1943). A large-scale expedition carried out by him in 1901-1906 made it possible to significantly expand the existing knowledge about the people, culture and life of Mansi, grammar and phonetics of Mansi dialects, as well as toponymy [Kannisto 1914; 1919] (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. A. Kannisto's expedition to the Mansi localization territory in 1901-1906



The expedition of the scientist took place on September 1 , 1901 . The first Mansi village visited by Kannisto was Pelym, where work was carried out to collect lexical material. By the end of the year, the researcher moved to the village of Verh-Pelymsk, where he spent two months studying written sources of the Mansi language of the XVII–XIX centuries, extracted by him from the church archive. From March to June 1902, Kannisto moved inside the Pelymsky district, recording the dialects of the villages of Massava, Votpa, Zarechnaya. The next point of the expedition of the scientist were more western areas: Vagilsk and the surrounding villages of Sotnikovo (here he noted the strong influence of the neighboring Russian-speaking population), Zaozernoje, Kama, Ushpina, Osye. In his diaries, Kannisto noted that the work on recording the Mansi dialects of this area was progressing quite difficult. At the end of August 1902, the scientist went to Mansi, localized on the territory of the Lower Lozva. Here he explored the villages of Tanshina, Kuzino, staying for several months and writing down lexical material [Liimola 1965: 299-300].

From the end of December 1902 to August 1903, the Kannisto path ran through the territory of Verkhnyaya Lozva to the middle one, in the town of Nikolo-Ivdel, the village of Pershino. Then he moved up the Lozva River, exploring local dialects and dialects. Here he managed to collect extensive lexical and folklore material and make significant progress in his research. In August, Kannisto went to the southern Mansi, in the Tavda. Here he discovered that the local population had become very russified. In March 1904, the linguist reached the territory of the western Mansi, where for some time he studied the eastern dialects

of the village of Konda (the preservation and diversity of the Mansi language here was significantly higher than in Pelymka, Vagilsk, Nizhnyaya Lozva and Tavda) [Liimola 1965: 300-302].

From September 1904 to January 1905, to study the dialect of the middle Konda, he stayed in the village of Leushi, after which the researcher spent about a month in the village of Satyga, located west of the village of Leushi, where he collected statistics on the number and vocabulary of Mansi. After that, he made another big trip to the Mansi people living along the tributaries of the Konda River to collect ethnographic material. Then, after a short stay in Hungary, at the end of July 1905, Artturi Kannisto continued his expedition through Siberia, heading for the Berezovsky Mansi. Here, in addition to recording dialects, he managed to record 113 Mansi melodies and enrich data on mythology and ritual culture. From January to February 1906, Kannisto studied the Sosva Mansi, where he also collected data on their dialect, ethnographic information and statistics [Liimola 1965: 302]. After studying all the Mansi dialects, the researcher moved to the Turin district to check his materials collected at the beginning of the expedition (1901-1902). Here he managed to collect new material and record 20 more melodies. With this, the study of Mansi dialects was completed.

As a result of the Kannisto expedition, linguistic material was collected on eleven Mansi dialects, more or less different from each other. In addition to the lexical form, the researcher gave declension forms, usage examples, and word meanings. In addition, information about the spiritual and material life of the Mansi (their customs, customs, clothing, housing, economic and social relations, cult practice,



and so on) was expanded; lists of their numbers and their ratio relative to native speakers to Russified Mansi were created; More than 200 photographs were taken and about 650 ethnographic objects were purchased [Liimola 1965: 305-306].

During his lifetime, Kannisto did not have time to complete the processing and publication of the expedition materials. The work on his field recordings was continued by Matti Liimola (with the assistance of a number of other foreign researchers). Subsequently, the processed data were translated into German and published in 6 volumes [Kannisto, Liimola 1951; 1955; 1956; 1958; 1959; 1963]. The linguist also created a work on the historical morphology of the Mansi language [Liimola 1963] and a number of articles on the etymology of individual words.

Based on his own research and recordings of folklore texts by B. Munkachi and A. Kannisto, as well as other scientific works, for example [Hazay 1907], Wolfgang Steinitz (1905-1967) did a lot of work on the study of the phonetics of the Mansi language. Of particular value in this area of research is his work on the history of Mansi vocalism [Steinitz 1955].

In the middle of the XX century, the Hungarian scientist D. Lako, after several scientific trips to the USSR, published an essay on the grammar of the North Mansi dialect [Lako 1956], where he described its phonetic features. In the 1960s, the Hungarian researcher Janos Guya was actively engaged in the study of the Mansi manuscript monuments of the XVII century. The result of his scientific research

was a number of articles and a defended dissertation [Gulya 1958; 1964].

At the same time, Professor Bela Kalman of the University of Debrecen published several Mansi monographs and a number of other significant works [Kálmán 1961; 1963; 1981].

Hungarian scientist Laszlo Honti, based on folklore texts collected by Munkacsi and Kannisto, and his own research, studied in detail the phonetics of the Mansi language and compiled a grammar of the extinct Tavda dialect [Honti 1975; 1982; 1993].

According to E. I. Rombandeeva, "already in the works of the first researchers of the Mansi language (Steinitz, Lako, Kalman, Honti), the phonemic composition of the Mansi language is presented in synchronic and diachronic aspects, Mansi texts are written very accurately, read and perceived easily" [Rombandeeva 2017: 12-13].

Contributions to the study of the Mansi language and its dialects in various years of the XX century were also made by [Beke 1905; Fokos 1936; Szilasi 1962; Kispál 1966; Veenker 1969; 1971; Pirotti 1972; Bakró-Nagy 1979; Rédei 1988] and others.

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