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ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF POLISH *JARMUŁKA*[1]

Polish *jarmułka* is from Latin and not from Turkic or Turkish. This Polish word appears as early as the fifteenth century: a deed of purchase of 1443 mentions 'two dozen little headdresses' (*jalmurky*); a document issued in Warsaw in 1458 mentions a red *yelmvncha* (*Słownik staropolski*, vol. III, Wrocław, 1960–1962, s.v. (*jarmułka*)).

The Polish word comes from Medieval Latin *almunicum* 'church canon's cap' (this Latin word is known in a fifteenth-century document from Germany). Hence Polish **jałmunka*, *jełmunka*, *jałmonka*, with a number of changes known in Polish dialects: prothetic *j-*, as in Latin *angelus* > Polish *jamioł* 'angel'; *ja-* > *je-*, as in Pol. *jabłko* > *jepko* 'apple'; and *un* > *on*, as in Pol. *funt* > *font* 'pound'. The suffix *-ka* was added because it is typical of Polish headdress names (*czapka*, *mycka*, *krymka*, *piuska* etc). The form *jałmurka* comes from another variant of the same Latin word, *armutia* 'long cap worn by clergy', known in this form from the acts of the Council of Ravenna, 1314 (Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, vol. I, Paris 1840, s.v. *almucium*, which is the basic variant). The expected Polish reflex of *armutia* should be **jarmucka*, but it may have changed by progressive assimilation into *jarmurka* (cf. Ukrainian *jarmurka*, from Polish) and then by dissimilation into *jałmurka* or *jarmułka*. For that dissimilation cf. *haraburda* > *hałaburda* 'troublemaker'. The confusion of *jałmonka* and *jarmułka* yielded *jarmołka*. The loss of /r/ resulted in *jamułka* and *jamołka*.

Until the eighteenth century, the Polish word *jałmonka* and variants referred to a skullcap used by priests (zucchetto), physicians, old men, and sick men, as well as

1 Przedruk za zgodą / Reprinted by permission from "Jewish Language Review" vol. 7, 1987, s. 200–201. Redakcja „LingVariów" serdecznie dziękuje Panu Profesorowi Davidovi L. Goldowi za zgodę na przedruk artykułu B.A. Struminskiego i komentarza, dzięki czemu stał się możliwy trójgłos o *jarmułce*.

to a sleeping cap or a protection for the head under a soldier's helmet (*Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. IX, Wrocław 1975, s.v. *jałmonka*, *jamułka*, *jamołka*, *jarmołka*; S.B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. II, Lwów l855, s.v. *jamułka*). It was only during the first half of the nineteenth century that *jarmułka* began to be associated especially with Jews, as in this quotation (given here in English translation) from Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (1834: "With his left hand he [Jankiel, a Jew] adjusted his skullcap, which had moved" (*Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, vol. III, Wrocław 1968, s.v. *jarmułka*).

The Polish word began entering East Slavic languages in the early sixteenth century. However, in his *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* (vol. I, Cracow, 1952–1956, s.v. *jarmułka*), F. Sławski wrongly assumed that Polish borrowed the word from Eastern Slavs. This assumption was based on another false assumption, namely that the word was of Turkic origin (allegedly from *yagmurluk* 'raincoat'); see, for example, A. Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Cracow, 1927, s.v.; M. Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Russian edition, vol. II, Moscow, 1967, s.v. *ermólka* (D.L.G. has cited from the German original above); and M.I. Herzog (cited by D.L.G.).

But *jarmułka*, etc. never designated any raincoat or hood for protection from the rain, hence Turkish is irrelevant.

The prevailing form in Polish until the eighteenth century was *jamułka* (but it was already considered obsolete by I. Włodek in 1780; see *Ludzie Oświecenia o języku i stylu*, vol. III, Warsaw 1957. P. 243), whereas the form *jarmułka* started to prevail only in the nineteenth century. It seems that Jews borrowed the Polish form *jarmurka* > *jałmurka*, *jarmułka* by the early sixteenth century and contributed to the reactivation of specifically the latter form in the nineteenth century, but only in the new, Jewish-related meaning (as one would expect).

The earliest evidence for the word in Yiddish is indirect: the accusative singular form *jermylku* is found in a register of gifts to the Crimean Khan and his men by the Lithuanian envoy, Prince Siemion Bielski, written in southwestern White Ruthenian in 1541–1543 (*Akty, otnosjaščiesja k istorii Zapadnoj Rossii*, vol. II, St. Petersburg 1848, p. 382). *E* instead of *ja* in unstressed position was a normal feature of that White Ruthenian lect, but the *y* can be explained only as a borrowing of the presumed Southern Yiddish form at the time, i.e., I assume that the /u/ (which may still have been the stressed syllable of the Yiddish word) had been fronted and unrounded by then in Southern Yiddish (see p. 165 ff. of Herzog's book, cited by D.L.G.). It is not likely that the form in the White Ruthenian document comes from Ukrainian *jarmolka* / *jarmulka* > **jarmylka*, *jarmilka*, because such a change was still quite rare in sixteenth-century Ukrainian. One can conclude that in the early sixteenth century the custom of wearing this type of skullcap was already widespread among Jews in Poland and the Ukraine (throughout most of which Southern Yiddish was spoken), but not necessarily in Lithuania. Bielski may have bought his *jermylka* from a Jew in Kyjiv or another place in Lithuanian Ukraine while on his way to the Crimea. Noble (see

Plaut's article, cited by D.L.G.) said that the Yiddish word was directly attestable for the eighteenth century, but he did not indicate the spelling(s?) he had found.

Modern Eastern Yiddish shows stress retraction (see R1982/1, in JLR 5: 422–423) and syncope in a posttonic syllable, thus initially stressed *yarmlke* (cf. M. Mieses, *Die jiddische Sprache*, Berlin and Vienna, 1924, p. 57, on syncope), but in the nineteenth century a vowel before *l* in this word was still pronounced: /o/ in Northeastern Yiddish (Alexander Harkavy, *Complete English-Yiddish dictionary*, New York 1891, s.v. cap) and /I/ in Central Yiddish (I. Drejzin, *Polnyj russko-jevrejskij slovar'*, Warsaw 1892, s.v. *ermolka*), the latter of which goes back to an older **yarmulka*. Northeastern Yiddish *yarmolka* has its model in the Lithuanian Polish form *jarmołka* (attested for 1582 in M. Stryjkowski, who lived in Lithuania); this Lithuanian Polish form is also the etymon of White Ruthenian *jarmołka*.

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COMMENT BY D.L.G.[2]

I do not think that B.A.S. (in his last paragraph) is justified in reading so much into Harkavy's and Drejzin's dictionaries. The Yiddish spelling of "educated" people at the end of the nineteenth century was notoriously etymological. The fact that Harkavy wrote a komets-alef after the mem in his 1891 dictionary does not necessarily mean that Yiddish-speakers were pronouncing /o/ here (this spelling is repeated in his 1898 dictionary, where the English gloss is 'cap, skull-cap'). I am certain (but have no direct evidence) that there was no vowel between the /m/ and the /l/ in this word at the time (the /l/ being syllabic). As for Drejzin's spelling, it was long common in Yiddish to indicate the syllabicity of a consonant by writing a yud before it, e.g., *tepl* 'cup' with a yud between the pey and the lamed (later, under New High German spelling influence, the convention was to write an ayen, thus "tepel"). My guess is that by the mid nineteenth century at the latest Yiddish *yarmlke* already had a syllabic /l/ (in those varieties where the /l/ was present; where it was not, there was a vowel between the /m/ and the /k/). Incidentally, Harkavy's 1898 dictionary (English-Yiddish and

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