Dravidian and Altaic - implications of the established parallels

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1. Introduction

Dravidian and Altaic is an old theory, it was mentioned already by R. Caldwell in his comparative grammar of Dravidian languages (1856), where he listed a few possible lexical parallels with the Altaic and Uralian languages, which he called Scythian, cf. e.g.:

Ta. akka, akkacci, akkaicci etc. elder sister (DEDR 23)
Mo. ax-a elder brother (Caldwell 1913, pp. 611-12)

However, this Dravidian etymon is most probably related to:
Mo. egeci elder sister; older (referring to the age of women)\(^1\)
MT. EKÎN sister, aunt, eldest sister etc. (MTD II,443)
OT. EKÄ elder sister, aunt (OTD s.v.)\(^2\)

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1) This latter parallel was proposed in my first presentation (Vacek 1977) and repeated later also with the MT. and OT. parallels. The following lexemes were also mentioned in my papers several times.
Ta. kāl  leg, foot, base of a tree (DEDR 1479)
Mo. köl  a. foot, leg; b. something resembling or functioning as a leg or foot (of a natural or man-made object; foot, leg, base, stand, lower part of an object, etc. (Caldwell 1913, p. 617).

Ta. karu  black (DEDR 1278a)
Mo. xar-a  1. a. black, dark, obscure
OT. kara:  black (Cl. 643) (cf. Caldwell 1913, p. 616)3)

Though Caldwell’s parallels may have to be amended, subsequently this topic has attracted the attention of a few scholars, while it included not only Altaic in the narrow sense (Turkic, Mongolian, Manchu-Tungus), but also the Uralian languages which for some time were considered to be part of a broader family called Uralo-Altaic.4) Scholars from various specialisations mostly dealt with the possible lexical parallels, among them e.g. Andronov (first 1961, for a summary and further references cf. Andronov 2010), Bouda (1943), Burrow (1943), Menges (1964, 1977), Tyler (1968). Ramstedt and some other scholars

2) As for the basic meaning of this word, cf. also Clauson (p. 100): eke  originally ‘a close female relative older than oneself and younger than one’s father’, that is both ‘junior /paternal/ aunt’ and ‘elder sister’, later only ‘elder sister’. However, Clauson’s statement may have to be amended when compared with the other attested traditions.
3) Caldwell’s transliteration was updated in all the above quoted lexemes.
4) Altaic genetic relationship (which concerns also Uralo-Altaic) is viewed with scepticism and refusal by a number of linguists. We will not go into this question here, for a critical summary of the opinions cf. e.g. Choi 2004. That the similarities (lexical etc.) may reflect some other type of language relationship (e.g. early contact, borrowing etc.) is a possibility advocated in the work of many scholars. I feel that this possibility has to be considered very seriously, particularly if e.g. the lexical correspondences are not sufficiently systematic and if there are too many lacunae. Further cf. below.