



SINO-UIGHURICA: REVISITING THE UIGHUR RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS AND THE T'ANG SOURCES

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The author is delighted to dedicate this study to outstanding Hungarian Orientalist scholar George Kara who made a remarkable contribution, among others, to the Uighur studies.

Runic inscriptions of the Uighur Empire in Inner Asia (744–840 AD) still contain many interesting accounts, which had not been fully utilised yet. A comparative analysis of these accounts with the information of parallel Chinese historical sources of the T'ang period enables us to address some significant problems of the political history of the Uighurs. A small number of autochthonous sources on the Uighur Khaganate produced by the Uighurs themselves and scantiness of their data makes sometime contingent the very use of these accounts. That is why the discussion of some historical episodes given below contains more questions than their solution.

Ozil Öñ-erkin and Wang Hu-ssu: Uighurs in East Turkestan

The Uighur Terkh runic inscription deciphered by S.G.Klyashtorny describes the military merits of El Etmish Bilgä qayan (749–759), the actual founder of the Uighur Empire. Enumerating victorious deeds of this qayan the inscription mentions his successful march to the Karashahr area in East Turkestan. The passage narrating this event has already been examined by S. G. Klyashtorny. It reads:

(14) ... *buri yaratıyma bilgä qutluγ tarqan säñün bunça boduniγ atyn jolın yaγma lum čiši eki joritdi qutluγ bilgä säñün uruşu qutluγ tarqan säñün ol eki yor (15) yarlıyqadi bayarqu tarduş biligä tarqan qutluγ yaγma tabγaç soydaq başı biligä säñün ozil-öñ erkin*¹

(14) „...He who made this (monument), Bilgä Qutluγ-tarqan-säñün, (has defeated) so many peoples with glory. He sent two (people against) the Yaγma and Lum-čiši. To Qutluγ Bilgä-säñün these two (persons) (15) he ordered: Go! The Tarduş Bilgä-tarqan and Qutluγ (both from the people) Bayarqu, the heads of the Yaγma, the Chinese, and the Sogdians, Bilgä-säñün, Ozil Öñ-erkin.”²

As S. G. Klyashtorny noticed, in this passage the author of the Terkh inscription enumerates the tribes and peoples subjugated by the Uighurs in the course of their military marches. These tribes and peoples included the Bayarqu, the Toquz-Tatars, the Yaγma, the Chinese

¹ Klyashtorny, S. G.: The Terkhin Inscription. In: *Acta Orientalia Hung.* XXXVI:1–3 (1982), p. 342; Klyashtorny, S. G.: East Turkestan and the Kaghans of Ordubalyq. In: *Acta Orientalia Hung.* XLII:3–3 (1988), p. 277.

² Klyashtorny, S. G.: *The Terkhin Inscription.* p. 345; Klyashtorny, S. G.: *East Turkestan and the Kaghans of Ordubalyq.* p. 277.

(Tabyač), and the Sogdians. Besides, here are mentioned some leaders of the subjugated peoples, namely certain Lum-čišī, whom S. G. Klyashtorny identified as a representative of the ruling Dynasty Lum (Chinese *Long* ‘dragon’) of Karashahr oasis in East Turkestan³, Qutluγ Bilgä-sāñün and Ozil Öñ-erkin.

While the name *Qutluγ Bilgä-sāñün* is a combination of widely spread titles among the Turks and Uighurs and *per se* does not provide ground for any concrete identification, the second name *Ozil Öñ-erkin* seems more productive for suggestions. The indication that this person was a head of the Chinese makes it possible to appeal to the Chinese sources in search for a person whose activity would be connected with the T’ang garrisons in the Western Region (Chin. *Hsi-yü*). Such search brings us to the T’ang historical work *T’ang Hui-yao* (Compendium of the most important events of the T’ang dynasty), compiled by Wang P’u. This work mentions a certain official by name *Wang Hu-ssu*, who served in the frontier military prefectures dealing with external ‘barbarians’. The second component of his name *Hu-ssu* makes it possible to assume that he might be of a non-Chinese origin. Yao Wei-yuan in his “Research on barbarian family names of the Northern Dynasties” gives *Hu-ssu* as a barbarian name deriving from the Toquz-Oγuz tribal name *Hu-hsieh* (another variant: *Hu-sa*)⁴. According to S. Yakhontov, the name of this tribe could sound in original Turkic language as *uksyr* or *uksar* with a possible sound ‘o’ instead of ‘u’ (*oksyr/oksar*), ‘l’ instead of ‘r’ (*uksyl/uksal* ≈ *oksyl/oksal*), while ‘g/h’ and ‘s’ in the beginning of the word might render to the Turkic ‘z’. S. Yakhontov believes that the Chinese *Hu-ssu* may be reconstructed as *Ogzil*, which is very close to *Ozil* of the Terkh inscription. The only confusion here is caused by the extra consonant ‘g’ before ‘z’.⁵

As for another component in the name under consideration – *Öñ* – it seems to be pretty transparent. This word can be found in the Turkic runic texts in the form *Oñ* as a transcription of the Chinese family name *Wang*. We have evidences, when the T’ang prince Li Tan (future emperor Jui-tsung, ruled in 685–689 and 710–712) is called *Oñ-tutuq* in the inscriptions in honour of Kül Tegin⁶ and Bilgä-qayan⁷. Thus, there are no serious linguistic arguments against the identification of *Ozil Öñ-erkin* of the Terkh inscription with Wang Hu-ssu of the T’ang sources. The third component in the name, which is the title *erkin* (Chinese *ssu-chin*), also cannot be a serious obstacle for such assumption: the above-mentioned case of a Turkic version of Li Tan’s name (*Oñ-tutuk*) shows that the Turkic title *tutuq* (though of Chinese origin) was used as a part of his name.⁸ However, appearance of the title *erkin* in the name *Ozil Öñ-erkin* raises some questions. We know from *T’ang shu* that the Uighur qayan appointed eleven *tutuqs* as chiefs of the nine *Oγuz* (Uighur) tribes and two adopted tribes of *Basmils* and *Qarluqs*. This account may be an indication on the nomenclature reform undertaken by El Etmish Bilgä qayan at least before 754 (the year of

³ Klyashtorny, S. G.: *East Turkestan and the Kaghans of Ordubalyq*. pp. 277–280.

⁴ Yao Wei-yuan: *Pei chao hu-hsing k’ao*. Peking 1958, pp. 306–308 [Research on barbarian names of the Northern Dynasties].

⁵ Written consultation of S. Yakhontov from October 3, 1988.

⁶ The Kül Tegin inscription, line 31; Malov, S. E.: *Pamjatniki drevnetjurkskoj pis’mennosti*, Moskva – Leningrad 1951, pp. 31, 41.

⁷ The Bilgä-qayan inscription, line 25; Malov, S. E.: *Pamjatniki drevnetjurkskoj pis’mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*. Moskva – Leningrad 1959, pp. 16, 20.

⁸ On the Turkic title *tutuk/totoq* see Ecsedy, H.: Old Turkic titles of Chinese origin. In: *Acta Orientalia Hung.* XVIII (1965), pp. 83–81, 84.

subjugation of the Qarluqs in the Beshbaliq area, East Turkestan).⁹ In this connection, the usage of the title *erkin* in the name of the Chinese chief may relate to the pre-reform time.

As for historical records on Wang Hu-ssu, the T'ang standard histories do not contain his Biography. Fragmentary accounts available in different sources only inform about some facts of his biography. *T'ang Hui-yao* tells that in 733 Wang Hu-ssu was appointed military governor of four garrisons in Western region, which, as it is known, included Karashahr.¹⁰ However, in 740 Wang Hu-ssu is mentioned in the T'ang military activities against the Kidans and Tatabis in the Northeast. The same year he became an immediate superior of An Lu-shan in the army of P'ing-lu. In 741 Wang Hu-ssu replaced Li Shih-chi, a military governor of You-chou.¹¹ These are practically all accounts on Wang Hu-ssu we know from records.

A. Maljavkin assumed that Wang Hu-ssu could be identified with another T'ang high rank commander Wang Chung-ssu, who many times came to contact with the Turks and Uighurs in the northern frontier regions.¹² However, it is obvious that these are different persons. As S. Yakhontov notices correctly, Wang Chung-ssu could not have non-Chinese name, since his name *Chung-ssu* ('faithful heir') was bestowed to him by the emperor meaning that he was faithful to his father, who had been killed by the Tibetans and the son took revenge on him.¹³

Coming back to *Ozil Öŋ-erkin* of the Terkh inscription, one should admit that the identification of him with Wang Hu-ssu reveals some factual contradictions. Knowing that Wang Hu-ssu took an appointment to An-hsi in 733 and then, in 740, appeared in Northern China, nevertheless we do not know what happened to him in the early 750s, when the Terkh inscription dates and if he has been sent to Western garrisons again. Unfortunately, Chinese sources keep silence on his further career.

However, irrespective of the relationship of Wang Hu-ssu to *Ozil Öŋ-erkin*, it is clear that the Chinese garrisons in East Turkestan have fallen under Uighur control before the garrisons were withdrawn to China with the break-up of the rebellion of An Lu-shan in 755.

Coup d'état in Ordubaliq of 779

Domestic and external policy of Bögü-qayan who accepted Manichaeism as a state religion in 762 and relied on Sogdians resulted in the extreme strengthening of the latter's position in the Uighur state. This inevitably evoked strong resistance of the Uighur aristocracy. Political opposition finally succeeded in overthrowing Bögü-qayan in 779 and replacing him with his cousin Ton Baya-tarqan. The coup *d'état* was reported to the T'ang court by Liang Wen-hsiu, the Chinese envoy to the Uighur capital, who eye witnessed that event. In the course of the coup *d'état* Bögü-qayan and about 2000 of his relatives and followers were murdered.

⁹ Kamalov, A.: The Moghon Shine Usu Inscription as the Earliest Uighur Historical Annals. In: *Central Asiatic Journal* 47:1 (2003), pp. 77–90.

¹⁰ *Tang Hui-yao*. Peking 1955, ch. 78, p.1429.

¹¹ Pulleyblank, E. G.: *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*. Cambridge University Press, London – New York – Toronto 1955, p. 161, n. 83.

¹² Maljavkin, A.: *Istoričeskaja geografija Centralnoj Azii*. Nauka, Novosibirsk 1981, pp. 126–127.

¹³ Written consultation of S. Yakhontov, cf. note 3; on the biography of Wang Chung-ssu see Liu Mau-tsai: *Chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte des Ost-Turken (T'u-kue)*. Wiesbaden 1958, pp. 337–338.

Among those killed were two sons of Bögü-qayan, born of the marriage with the T'ang Princess Hsiao Ning-Kuo (Younger Ning-Kuo).

The coup *d'état* in question is interpreted in academic literature differently. The most reasonable explanation is that given by Tadzaka Kōdō, who characterised it as anti-Sogdian and anti-Manichean.¹⁴ To our view, Ton Baġa-tarqan's disagreement with Bögü-qayan's policy may also be explained by personal relations between them. Such conclusion comes to mind if we look at records relating to his career. Let us look at these records:

- According to the T'ang historical annals, at the moment of the coup *d'état* Ton Baġa-tarqan held a rank of minister (Chin. *tsai-hsiang*; Uig. *Uluġ Buyuruq*).¹⁵
- S. G. Klyashtorny considers that a head of the inner buyuruqs of El Etmish Bilgä qayan named İnanču Baġa-tarqan in the list of Great Buyuruqs in the Terkh inscription can be identified with Ton Baġa-tarqan.¹⁶ This means that at the time of compilation of the inscription that is in 753–756 Ton Baġa-tarqan held a high position of a head of nine ministers/uluġ buyuruqs.
- Another important record relating to his career can be found in *Tzu-chih T'ung-chien*. This work cites the speech of the T'ang minister Li Pi, who recalls that Ton Baġa-tarqan accompanied the Uighur prince Yabyu when he came to China at the head of the cavalry in 757 and that at that time he had a title of Uluġ Tutuq.¹⁷ The T'ang histories also relate that the Uighur prince Yabyu, elder son of El Etmish Bilgä qayan, was executed for committing some crime after he had returned from China to Ordubaliq, approximately in 758.
- During the rebellion of P'u-ku Huai-en, a T'ang General of Uighur origin, in 765 Bögü-qayan sent a military assistance to this rebel general, who was his father-in-law. The Uighur cavalry was led by six outer Uighur ministers (buyuruqs), the list of which is preserved in *Chiu T'ang-shu* and *Ts'e-fu Yuan-kuei*. The Head of these ministers and commander of the Uighur cavalry was Alp Uluġ Tutuq Yaylaqar, Bögü-qayan's younger brother. The latter was the third son of El Etmish Bilgä qayan, who in 758 led Uighurs in the march to China under the title Qutluġ Ćor-tegin. Ton Baġa-tarqan is also named among six outer ministers.

Summarizing all these accounts, we can enumerate in chronological order all positions held by Ton Baġa-tarqan as follows:

- 753–756: Head of Inner Buyuruqs (ministers)
- 757: Uluġ Tutuq
- 765: Outer Buyuruq (minister)
- 779: Buyuruq (minister)

As the study of these nomenclatures shows, the highest of them was that of Uluġ-tutuq, which Baġa-tarqan held in 757. The next position in the hierarchy is that of the head of inner

¹⁴ Tadzaka Kōdō: Kaikotsu ni okeru Manikyo hakugai undo. In: *Toho gakuho* 11 (1940), pp.223–232. Recent studies on this episode include Hayashi Toshio: Uigur Policies toward Tang China. In: *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 60 (2002), pp. 87–116.

¹⁵ On Buyuruqs in the Uighur Kaghanate see Kamalov, A.: Drevnije Ujgury. VIII-IX vv. In: *Naš Mir* 2001, pp. 129–135; Kamalov, A.: *Tarihi Umumi Ujgurstan*. Center for Documents and Diplomatic History, Tehran 2002, pp. 123–133 [General History of Uighurstan].

¹⁶ Kljaštornyj, S. G.: Nadpis' ujugurskogo Bögü-kagana v Severo-Zapadnoj Mongolii. In: *Centralnaja Azija. Novyye pamjatniki pis'mennosti i iskusstva*. Nauka, Moskva 1987, p. 29.

¹⁷ Tzu-chih T'ung-chien, by Ssu-ma Kuang, Peking, 1956, ch. 223.

Buyuruqs (753–756). The positions of *outer buyuruq* and *buyuruq* (may be also *outer ministers*) are the lowest ones here. Having ascertained correlation between these positions, we can see the rise of Ton Baya-tarqan's career in the period 753 to 757. Then, in 765 he held much lower position and by 779 still occupied such a regular rank of the minister. Surprisingly, when he held the highest position, he accompanied Yabyu. After the execution of Yabyu in 758, Ton Baya-tarqan's career also went down. This enables to link the reduction of his rank with his relations with Yabyu, who in 758 has been executed apparently for participation in the conspiracy against El Etmish Bilgä qayan. Though Ton Baya-tarqan was not executed, however he was punished and removed from the position of Uluy-tutuq. During the reign of Bögü-qayan Ton Baya-tarqan improved his position in the court, but in all likelihood he did not support the new qayan. This old rivalry between relatives might play its part in the events of 779, when Ton Baya-tarqan replaced Bögü-qayan on the throne.

Princess Yabyu: a role of the Buyu tribe

Of the two T'ang standard histories – *Chiu T'ang-shu* and *Hsin T'ang-shu* – the first is considered as more reliable in accuracy of records. However, some of additions made by the authors of the new version of the T'ang history are of great value. One of such records relating to the Uighurs is the information saying that a granddaughter of the T'ang general P'u-ku Huai-en participated in the coup *d'etat* in Ordubaliq in 790. According to the T'ang histories, during the coup *d'etat* the Uighur kayan *To-lo-ssu* (Talas, Chin. Title: Chung-ch'en k'o-han) was killed and the throne was usurped by his younger brother. The usurper did not find support in the highest echelon of power and soon was himself killed by ministers-buyuruqs, who enthroned *A-cho*, a young son of the late qayan. The T'ang sources differ in the matter of a person who killed *To-lo-ssu* kayan. *Chiu T'ang shu* relates that he was killed by his younger brother, but *Hsin T'ang-shu* claims that he was poisoned by his wife (*qatun*), a 'princess Yeh':

“That year (790), the qayan was poisoned by the younger qatun, Princess Yeh. The princess was the granddaughter of P'uku Huai-en, so the latter's daughter was called Princess Yeh. The qayan's younger brother then set himself on the throne.”¹⁸

Colin Mackerras who studied the T'ang materials on the Uighurs doubted the accuracy of this record, since there is no mention in the sources that Huai-en had a son who left China for the Uighur Empire:

„The parallel text in HTS...claims that the kaghan was poisoned by the younger khatun, who was a granddaughter of P'u-ku Huai-en, through his son. However, no other text mentions that Huai-en had a son who went among the Uighurs, although two of his daughters married the Uighur kaghan. The HTS text is certainly corrupt, despite the fact that PIT (*Pian-i Tien – A.K.*) 126.8ab quotes it with ought criticism,

¹⁸ Mackerras, C.: *The Uighur Empire (744–840). According to the T'ang dynastic histories*. Australian National University, Canberra 1968, p. 88.

and all other early parallel texts support CTS's version that it was the kaghan's younger brother who murdered him."¹⁹

However, *Chiu T'ang-shu* contains the record confirming indirectly the accuracy of the above cited record. Describing the meeting of the Uighur leaders with the T'ang General Kuo Tsu-i just after the death of P'u-ku Huai-en in 765, *Chiu T'ang-shu* says that the commander of the Uighur cavalry Alp Uluy Tutuq Yaylaqar said: „As for Huai-en, Heaven killed him. Now we beg permission to expel and kill the Tibetans and seize their sheep and horses, thereby repaying the state's mercy. However, Huai-en's sons are the brothers of our *qatun*, so we beg permission not to kill them” (*Hsin T'ang-shu*'s version: „However, Huai-en's sons are the younger brothers of our *qatun* and we wish to spare them from death.”²⁰) Though these accounts do not openly indicate that sons of P'u-ku Huai-en were taken by Uighurs to the steppe, it is obvious that they were taken to their sister, who was a Uighur *qatun*. P'u-ku Huai-en, who was originally from the Uighur (Toquz Oγuz) tribe Buγu, maintained close relationship with the Uighurs.²¹ Two of his daughters were successively married to the Uighur Bögü-qayan. His kinship and close relations with Uighurs finally became a ground for the T'ang court eunuchs in accusing him of treason. This forced P'u-ku Huai-en to rise in rebellion against the T'ang dynasty in 764. He could unite various tribes and threaten the T'ang dynasty for about two years. His son-in-law Bögü-qayan sent him a military help. Only the sudden death of P'u-ku Huai-en allowed the T'ang forces to cope with insurgents. The T'ang general managed to conclude agreement with the Uighurs and use them in fighting Tibetans. After the death of P'u-ku Huai-en the Uighurs asked the Chinese not to kill his sons. It is natural to assume that they were not only spared, but also allowed to leave the country with the Uighurs. Being brothers of the Uighur *qatun*, they might hold high positions in the Uighur court. One of them apparently was granted a title 'Yabyu'. It was his daughter who later married the qayan To-lo-ssu and became his younger *qatun*.

Hsin T'ang-shu's record is important in a way it allows to link the assassination of the qayan To-lo-ssu (790) with the examined above coup *d'etat* of 779. Bögü-qayan who has been killed and replaced by Ton Bagha tarqan had conjugal ties with the tribe Buγu/P'u-ku. However, after the coup *d'etat* the Buγu clan was pushed aside and lost its privileges, though it still remained its pretty strong position in the hierarchy of the Uighur tribes. As a result of these changes, P'u-ku Huai-en's granddaughter through his son became a younger *qatun* of the qayan To-lo-ssu, a Ton baya tarqan's successor. In this context, participation of the Princess Yabyu in the coup *d'etat* in 790 can be considered as a tribal internecine struggle for the supreme power in the Uighur *el*. This might be an attempt of the Buγu tribe to restore its weakened position in the Uighur court.

The episodes examined above show that the comparative study of the Turkic runic inscriptions of the Uighur Empire with the T'ang historical works was not accomplished yet.

¹⁹ Mackerras, C.: *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang dynastic histories: A Study in Sino-Uighur relations, 744–840*. Canberra 1972, p.161, note 184.

²⁰ *Chiu T'ang shu*, ch. 195, 7a; *Hsin T'ang shu*, ch. 217A, 6a; Mackerras, C.: *The Uighur Empire (744–840)...* pp. 45, 46.

²¹ On the Buγu/P'u-ku tribe see Hamilton, J. R.: Toquz Oghuz et On-Uighur. In: *Journal Asiatique* CCL (1962), pp. 26–27.

At the same time not only comparative research promises to be productive but also the study of the Chinese accounts *per se*.

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