

“İrk Bitig” and fragments of a Tibetan divination text revisited

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There is an evidence to suppose that an immediate source for the Turkic book could be rather Tibetan than some other one. Having published several fragments of a Tibetan divination text, A. H. Franke (1924: 11 — 12) ascertained similarity of three of them with “İrk Bitig” oracles. One of them is:

(1) *rnga mo chu thung du song ba dang nam sros [gyur dang]
zla ba shard 'de nas nam nang so (?)¹ de nas nyi ma shard [gyi 'o]
tang (ltang) phrad nas ('phral nas) snying dga' zhing song ngo myi
khyog kyang
[yid la] bsam ba bshin du ong ngo myi dgar ma byed [kyi 'o]* (Franke
1924: 10).

“Camels went to pond (to drink water), and it was getting dark, and rose the moon. Then the night was over and the sun rose. Being freed of (parting with) their load, there came joy. So it came out according to your [wish and] thought, o man! Nothing unpleasant will be done.”

However, this text does not seem to be a direct source of the Turkic oracle, with which it was first compared. More probably it is connected

¹ Interrogative sign — by Franke; probably it should be read here 'nangs'. Other brackets are ours (V. Y.).

with oracle XXIV. The latter is not quite clear and seems to be corrupted; we quote it for comparison:

(2) *t(ä)glük qulun irk(ä)k² jonda (ä)mig til(ä)jür/ kün ortu jütürük tün ortu qanta n(ä)güdä boly(a)î ol/ tir (a)nča bil(i)ñl(ä)r j(a)b(y)z ol.*

“A blind foal in a herd of horses seeks for a teat. During the day being loaded, during the night being in blood. Where to be [at rest]? Such a prediction is, you know, unfortunate.”

The Tibetan text suggests, that the resting place for a herd of horses hear is near a water-pond.

Therefore ‘qanta’ may stand here for ‘qañya’, and the sentence is to understand: “During the night how to get where the well is?” If so, then we should have a very important word ‘qañy’ twice in “Irk Bitig”, and the quoted oracle can be also compared with the oracle LVII. They are worth comparison indeed:

(3) *q(a)nyy ölm(i)ş köñäki toñmyş/ q(a)nyy n(ä)lük ölg(ä)î ol/ b(ä)glig ol/ köñäki n(ä)lük toñy(a)î ol/ kün(ä)şkă olurur ol/ (a)nča biliñl(ä)r bu yrq b(a)şynta az (ä)mg(ä)ki b(a)r/ kin j(a)na (ä)dgü bolur.*

“The spring has dried up, its pail got frozen. Why should the spring have dried up? It is a property of sovereign. Why should the pail get frozen? It is on the side where the sun shines. If so, know ye, [this must be fortunate]. There are slight difficulties in the beginning of this oracle, then there will be good fortune again.”

As to phrasing, there are parallel expressions in both oracles: *qanta n(ä)güdä boly(a)î ol* and *q(a)nyy n(ä)lük ölg(ä)î ol*. Semantically there is an opposition of day and night in one case and an implicit contradistinction of light side (*künäş*) and shade.

The *Qañy* oracle is the most significant example of extraneous influence upon “Irk Bitig”, and the major source for it was Chinese “Book of Changes”. Yet this topic we leave beyond the present scope.

² We think *qulun* is here definition to *irkäk*.

Apart from rare enigmas, such as *äsnägän bars* and *käkük* (DTS: ‘falcon’; *cp.* also tib. *bya rgod* [43H“ +/Ä’] ‘eagle’), there is *toquz araly syyun kijik* in oracle LX:

(4) *toquz (a)r(a)ly syyun kijik m(ä)n/ b(ä)diz tiz üzä önüp(ä)n müñräjür m(ä)n/ üzä t(ä)ñri: (ä)šidti/ (a)sra: kiši: bilti/ (a)nt(a)γ küčlüg m(ä)n/ tir (a)nča biliñl(ä)r (ä)dgü ol.*

“[This oracle] is a deer³ [grazing] upon nine islands. When he walks on his slender legs, he lows. So strong he is. Heaven above [heard what is said], humans below learned [it]. Such prediction, may you know, is fortunate.”

Though we follow Malov’s translation of ‘araly’ here, with which neither G. Clauson nor M. Erdal agree, we are prone to think coincidentally with Talat Tekin’s translation, and this is his discovery, that horns of the animal are meant by this attribute. Such decision is also prompted by Tibetan fragment X, published by A. H. Franke. The text of this fragment (Franke 1924: 10) can be understood at present as:

(5) *mda’ rgyal (rgyang⁴) ni drum bu (drung du) zhig rgod kyi ni ’dab čhags kyang/ ma ’phangs ni ’phur myi (gyi⁵) ma mkhyen bas (pas) kyi ni⁶ bču ru la glad la ni rwa phan yang snyog (bsnyegs) čin ni nyug kyi ma mkyen||*

³ Literally: “I am a deer...” (or ‘a male maral deer’; see Talat Tekin. *Irk Bitig. The Book of Omens*, pp. 25, 62).

⁴ ‘rgyal’ in the text, but ‘Pfeilkönig’ (in Franke’s translation) hardly can be taken, even in the meaning of ‘excellent shot’.

⁵ This *gyi* here could possibly be pronounced or heard like ‘ŸM’, and then labialized under the influence by ‘-’ after it. We do not suggest this to be a rule. Anyhow, *myi* here is in a position of possessive particle. Somewhat similar may be the case with the last *myi* of the fragment. It is also possible, that the scribe, not altogether experienced, hesitated, while choosing a negative particle *mi* or *ma*, and having merged ‘gyi’ and *mi*, dwelt upon *ma. drum bu* or *grum bu* instead of *drung du* is probably also an example of labialization — between labial vowels this time.

⁶ Either *pas* or *kyi ni* is superfluous. This confirms, that the scribe was not sure about the form of the negative particle.

“The range of an arrow shot being short, game – birds of feather, unspared, are unable to fly; horns over the head of ten-horned [deer], though useful, will not be put forth, when [he]’s chased”.

We can not be sure, that the initial writing and meaning of the word preserved, so far as the number of the horns is not ten, but nine here, something else might be imagined. Yet the Tibetan ‘rwa’ could have been taken in the form ‘ara’ or even ‘aral’⁷ for branchy horns of deer or, more specially, sprouts there of. An adjective ‘aralyγ’ can also in such a case be supposed.

It is possible to add one more example of close similarity of the oracle LV of Irk Bitig and a part of a complete Tibetan divination text included in bsTan hgyur and introduced in 1859 to the Prussian Academy of Sciences in a paper by A. Schiefner. We read in Irk Bitig:

(6)(a)lp (ä)r oγly sükä b(a)rmyš/ sü jirintä (ä)r(i)klig s(a)bčy türmiš/
tir (ä)biη(ä)rü k(ä)ls(ä)r özi at(a)nmyš ögr(ü)nčülüg/ (a)ty jitiglig k(ä)lir/
tir (a)nča biliηl(ä)r (a)ñyγ (ä)dgü.

“Sons of valiant warriors took the field. A messenger was sent to the battle-place to say: ‘If you return to your homes, you will be glorified yourselves, and your horses, being well fed, will be brought by grooms’. Such oracle is very fortunate.”

The related Tibetan text runs:

(7)ya a da/ kye dri ba po gzhan gyi re ba ma byed/ lhas byin gyis
brlabs kyi mthus hbyung ba yin te/ de na khyod kyi sar hphrin yig dang
bde bahi gtam snyan skyel mkhan yong par dgah/ de na khyed phun sum
tshog pa hthob par hgyur ro// gsal zhing yid hphrag pa ong/ mthong na
ang dgah bor hgyur ro//

“ya a da. O, questioner! There is no hope for anything else. By Devadatta’s blessing will come strength. So a messenger bringing a letter and good news will come to your place. By that token yours will be glory, wealth and power. There will be light and magnificence. When you see [it, you] obtain blissful state.

⁷ [l] might appear as a compensation for [w], which was not in this case acceptable for the ear of a Turkic language speaker.

As for the present, we shall confine ourselves with a narrower conclusion:

Judging from coincidence of a number of positions of oracles of “Irk Bitig” and hexagrams of the “Book of Changes”, the order of the latter symbols was very important for the compiler of the old Turkic oracle book, and he remembered it well. Probably, “I ching ” was the principal source in his practice of divination. For that reason he adapted and supplemented some other source, which was at his disposal and in use in the region.