

## On The Reading, Meaning and Functions of the Title *Kül Tegin* \*

(An essay on the formation of the monarchy in Inner Asia, part 2)

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**Özet:** Makalemizde Göktürkçe *Kül Tegin* unvanını ele alacağız. Çince kaynaklarımıza göre, Bilge Kağan kardeşine *xianwang* unvanını takdim edip İmparatorluğun bütün ordularını onun emrine vermiştir. Buna göre *Kül tegin* unvanı herhalde tâ Asya Hunları dönemine dayanan eski *xianwang* rütbesinin paraleli olmalıdır

**Anahtar Sözcük:** *Kül Tegin, xianwang, Göktürkler*

**Abstract:** Our paper deals with the well-known Old Turkic title *Kül Tegin*. According to our Chinese sources, Bilgä Qayan gave the title *xianwang* to his younger brother and entitled him with the command of all the armies of the empire. So one can suppose that the Turkic title *Kül Tegin* must be a parallel of an original Inner Asian title that has already been preserved in Chinese loan translation.

**Keywords:** *Kül Tegin, xianwang, (Kök)Türks*

In our paper we shall examine the well-known Old Turkic title *Kül Tegin*. Our first point will consist in that the any attempt at the reconstruction of its original reading is in vain if one shall not consider the full political and historical background of this title. According to our Chinese sources, Bilgä Qayan gave the title *xianwang* to his younger brother and entitled him with the command of all the armies of the empire. *Xianwang* was however not a

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new title in Inner Asia. It was used already by the Xiongnu designating the left and right viceroys of the Empire. Although it has been traditionally translated as 'Wise King' its meaning is rather 'Virtuous or Worthy Prince/King'. So one can suppose that the Turkic title *Kül Tegin* must be a parallel of an original Inner Asian title that has already been preserved in Chinese loan translation.

In our paper that we read in our earlier conference, we tried to examine the political message of the Old Turkic runic inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> Then I have mentioned that *Kül Tegin* "got a title which correlates with that of the two viceroys of the Xiongnu Empire *xianwang* (illustrious prince)."

From the epoch-making work of de Groot,<sup>2</sup> the title *xianwang* (賢王) is translated as (left and right) 'wise king'.<sup>3</sup> As to the exact meaning of *xian* it can be translated not only as 'wise, talented, gifted' but also as 'good; virtuous; worthy; excelling others'.<sup>4</sup> As to *wang*, this title was used in China in the meaning of 'king' during the pre-imperial period, peculiarly in the Zhou epoch. During the imperial period it was used as a title for foreign sovereigns, or, in China it meant 'prince'. It was used sometimes as a title of the semi-autonomous military allies or vassals of the (founding) Emperors, conferred to the most eminent generals, and was usually awarded to all sons of Emperors.<sup>5</sup>

The title *Kül Tegin* has also various explanations. Its Chinese rendering is *que tele(i)* (闕特勒, EMC *k<sup>h</sup>uat dək lək* LMC *k<sup>h</sup>yat tʰəǎk ləǎk*) or on the Chinese text of his funerary inscription *que teqin* (闕特勤 EMC *k<sup>h</sup>uat dək*

<sup>1</sup> Dobrovits, M.: Textological Structure and Political Message of the Old Turkic Runic Inscriptions, in: *Rossijskaja Tjurkologija*, 2012/1 (in print).

<sup>2</sup> De Groot: *Die Hunnen vorchristliche Zeit*, Berlin 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Yü, Ying-Shih: The Hsiung-nu, in Sinor, D. (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, (Cambridge 1990), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Giles, Herbert A.: *A Chinese—English Dictionary*, (Shanghai—London 1912), 561 (No. 4513); 'умный, мудрый, талантливый, способный; мудрец; талант; (...) лучший, сильнейший, положительный; (...) достопочтенный, уважаемый, Ошанин, И. М.: *Большой китайско—русский словарь*, т. IV (Москва 1984), 712-713, (No. 13978)

<sup>5</sup> Hucker, Ch. O.: *Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Taiwan Edition, Taipei 1988), 62 (No. 7634).

*gin* LMC *kʰyat thəðk̄ kʰin*).<sup>6</sup> Although many scholars have maintained the traditional reading as *Kül Tegin*, lot of them tried to read it as *Köl Tegin*, as it was an analogue of the well-known Mongolian title of the *Dalai Lama*. The new reconstructions of Pulleyblank made the reading *köl* impossible.<sup>7</sup> As to the reading *kül* Ölmez gives no explanation. İsenbike Togan, based on Doerfer's ideas, according to which the title *kül-Tegin* was that of the "little (*i.e.* second in rank) *qayan*",<sup>8</sup> tried to make an explanation of this title on the analogy of the Mongolian *odčigin*. According to her *kül tegin* meant the 'Prince of Ashes', so the holder of the family's fire-place as the youngest member of the dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Orkhon Inscriptions *Kül Tegin* really died defending the *ordu* (I. N 9-10):

"(...) Prince Kül stabbed nine men together and did not surrender the camp. (...) My younger brother Prince Kül passed away."<sup>10</sup> So semantically it would fit totally, had not there been four problems:

(1) We have not seen this title earlier.

(2) We should take it into consideration, that *Kül Tegin* himself never wanted to become the supreme ruler of the empire. He satisfied with the position of the commander-in-chief of the army.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> All Chinese reconstructions are given according to Pulleyblank, E. G.: *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese and Early Mandarin*, Vancouver 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Togan, İ.: *Çin kaynaklarında Türkler. Eski T'ang tarihi (Chiu T'ang-shu) 194a: "Türkler" Bölümü. (Açıklamalı Metin Neşri)*, (Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları: XXVIII, 6, Ankara 2006), 286-287; Ölmez, M.: Eski Uygur ve Çin kaynakları ışığında Orhon Yazıtlarında geçen yer ve kişi adları, *Orhon Yazıtlarının Bulunuşundan 120 Yıl Sonra Türklük Bilimi ve 21. Yüzyıl konulu 3. Uluslararası Türkiyalar Araştırmaları Sempozyumu, 2010* (Ankara 2011), 632-633 (with further literature).

<sup>8</sup> "der Klein-xayan [d.h. der kül-tegin]", Doerfer TMEN III, 323 (*Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, III, Wiesbaden 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Togan: *Çin kaynaklarında Türkler*, 287.

<sup>10</sup> (...) *toquz ärän sančdi orduy bermedi (...) inim kül tegin käreğäk bolti*, with some slight changes we made use the following edition: Tekin, T.: *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series 69) Bloomington—The Hague 1968.

(3) The first element *kül* is to be found in many other titles, and is consequently transcribed by the Chinese as *que* (闕). So we can not suppose, that all the leaders having the element *kül* or *kül(i)* in their titles should be a kind of "officers in home service". So we can see the titles *kül erkin* (*que sijn* 闕俟斤) and *kül(i) čor* (*que chuo* 闕啜) in both Old Turkic and Chinese variants. It is also worth mentioning, that this element is to be found three times amongst titles of the Western Turkic chieftains. We can see one *Huluwu que chuo* (胡祿屋闕啜), one *Axijie que sijn* (悉結闕俟斤), and finally a *Geshu que sijn* (哥舒闕俟斤). These later two titles has parallels like *Axijie nishu sijn* (阿悉結泥孰俟斤), and *Geshu chuban sijn* (哥舒處半俟斤). So we can suppose that this element appears when a new tribal formation came to exist during the reorganization of the Western Türks into Ten Tribes.

(4) In the Western Khaganate we can see *Küli čor* as the commander of the armies of the *Tarduš*.<sup>12</sup>

So, for a valid etymology of this title we should look for an other solution. On the Tariat (Terkhi) Inscription we can read the name of a *külüg oñi öz inanču* (W6) and a *tölis bäglär oylı bñ başı tölis külüg ärän* and a *tarduš bäglär oylı bñ başı tarduš külüg ärän* (W7). So we have some basis to suppose, that the forms *kül* and *küli* are shortened forms of an original *külüg* (*čor*, *erkin*, *tegin*).<sup>13</sup> Such abbreviations are not unusual in Turkic languages. One can mention

<sup>11</sup> *Xin Tangshu* 215b, Zhonghua shuju, p. 6051; P'i-kia Khagan (mit den Namen) Mo-ki-lien, der ursprünglich Klein-Schad genannt wurde, war von Naturgütig und freundlich. Er war sich darüber klar, daß er nicht durch seine eigenen Verdiensten Khagan geworden war, und wollte (die Würde) dem K'üe T'ê-lê (=Tegin) abtreten, aber der T'ê-lê (=Tegin) wagte nicht, um zu abzunehmen. So trat dann (P'i-kia) die Thronfolge an. Dies geschah im 4. Jahr K'ai-yüan (716). Er ernannte der T'ê-lê (=Tegin) zum linken Hien-wang (weisen König) und betraute ihn mit der alleinigen Leitung seiner Armee. (LMT 223).

<sup>12</sup> Clauson: ED, 715 (Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, Oxford 1972).

<sup>13</sup> On *külüg* see ESTJA V., 140 (*Ėtimologičeskij slovar' tjurkskix jazykov, Obščetjurkskie i mežturkskie osnovy na bukvy "V", "G" i "D"*, Moskva 1980).

Каца *ala* 'глупый, запутанный (Radloff WB I. 350)<sup>14</sup>; Kondak *alu* 'слабоумный' Altay *elā* 'глупый, пустой', (Radloff WB I. 810; Teleut *alu* (Radloff WB, I. 387); Turkish *ala (ala bakmak)* 'смотреть глупо, придурковато' (DS I. 171) = < *aliq/aluq*, ESTJA I. 145; Turkish; dialectal: *ayl(da)* 'впереди', ESTJA I, 146 (DS I. 320); kkalp. ujj. *äkel-, äket-* (< *alip kel-*; *alip kit-*) ESTJA, I. 128; and cf. also the well-known expressions: *abi* < *ağabey* 'elder brother'; *peki* < *pek iyi* 'very well'; *aslan* < *arslan* 'lion'.<sup>15</sup>

Based on the etymology *kül(i)* < *külüg*, we can find a direct link between the titles *kül tegin* and its Chinese translation as (link) *xianwang*. Both titles meant 'virtuous prince'. While the Chinese original could refer mostly to an eminent scholar, its Inner Asian parallel refers to a military commander, second in rank to the ruler. As to *Kül Tegin*, the Chinese referred to him as the Left *xianwang*, for during the epoch of Xiongnu this was the elder in rank of the then two (left and right) *xianwang*. By this title was mentioned his elder brother also in the *Jiu Tangshu*. As to his role, he was military commander of the armies, a kind of "Generalissimo" in the Late Roman meaning of this term. As a military commander, he succeeded to overthrow the rival branches of the *Ashina* and make an end to the political role of the *Aside*, but also succeeded to establish a real monarchy, instead of the rule of a charismatic clan. *Bilgä Qayan* and his two sons ruled officially already alone. Judging from the throne names of the last Turkic rulers as *Tengli (Tängri) Qayan* we can suppose that the development of the sacral kingship also has begun.

This process, however could not be completely successful. The young age of the successors of *Bilgä Qayan* and the unsuccessful politics of *Bofu*, the widow of him led to the collapse of the Empire. The process, however continued amongst the Uighurs and the Khazars, reaching its hit in the form of the Khazar sacral kingship.

<sup>14</sup> Radloff WB I: Wilhelm Radloff, *Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Türk-Dialecte*, I-IV, SanktPeterburg 1893.

<sup>15</sup> ESTJA V: *Ëtimologičeskij slovar' tjurkskix jazykove*, Moskva 1974; DS: *Türkiye'de halk ağzından derleme sözlüğü*, I, Ankara 1963.