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A NOTE ON QAPQAN

BY GERARD CLAUSON

TURCOLOGISTS WILL ALL BE extremely grateful to Mr. Sinor for his paper on Qapqan in *JRAS.*, Pts. 3 and 4, 1954. It is most important that "delousing" operations of this kind should be performed before delusions get too firm a grip on the public mind. With his general thesis that the word is purely Turkish and not Iranian I wholeheartedly agree, but, with respect, I do not agree with his suggested etymology, and I should be grateful for an opportunity to make some supplementary observations.

The word QPĠN (not QPQN) occurs, so far as I am aware, only four times in actual Turkish texts, three times in the inscription of Toñukuk, and once in the Ongin inscription. These date from the early eighth century A.D. and so are the earliest recorded, with the doubtful exception of Professor Altheim's third-century ostrakon. There is not the least doubt what the word was in these inscriptions; it was the personal name of a Kağan of the Northern Türkü dynasty. The rulers of this dynasty had personal names and regnal titles. The personal name of QPĠN's predecessor was *Élteriş* (vocalization slightly uncertain) and his regnal title, which alone occurs in the Chinese Dynastic Histories, *Kutluğ Kağan*. QPĠN was a personal name, and the corresponding regnal title, given in the Chinese Dynastic Histories, was *Mo-ch'o Kağan*. This appears in an unpublished Tibetan text in the Pelliot collection as *mBug Chor*, no doubt a transcription of the Chinese rendering not the Turkish original. The Turkish original is in fact obscure, but there are two references in the inscription of Toñukuk to a *Bügü Kağan*, which seems to be an alternative name for QPĠN; the full title may have been *Bügü Çur Kağan*. His successor's regnal title was *Bilge Kağan*, the equivalent personal name in the Chinese authorities is *Mo-chi-lien*, for which no satisfactory Turkish explanation has yet been found.

The pronunciation of QPĠN is uncertain, it was no doubt disyllabic and the alternatives are *Kapġan* and *Kafġan* with the Byzantine evidence slightly in favour of the latter; both pronunciations may have existed simultaneously in different dialects. In view of known Turkish phonetic habits, a devoicing of the ġ, that is a pronunciation *Kapkan* is, *pace* Mr. Sinor, equally possible in a

dialect other than Türkü, even at a very early date. We do not know enough about the early Bulğar dialect to know whether it was a “devoicing” one, but it is not improbable.

The evidence collected by Mr. Sinor seems to show that the word, whatever its exact pronunciation, was originally a personal name in the Bulğar and Avar dialects as well as in Türkü. That it should also, and no doubt later, have been used as a title need not occasion any surprise, when one considers that such things often occurred in medieval Turkish and Slavonic countries; consider for example the evolution from *Carolus* (Charlemagne) to *kıral* “king” (Turkish) and *kral* (Slavonic) and from *Caesar* to *Kaysar* “emperor” (Turkish) and *Czar* (Slavonic).

So far then, and that is the part which really matters, Mr. Sinor and I are in complete agreement; where we part company is on the question whether the personal name *Kapğan* had a “meaning”. Many Turkish titles, e.g. *Kutluğ* and *Bilge* (Kağan), and some geographical names, e.g. *İki Ögüz* (“two rivers”) obviously had meanings, but in my view most Turkish personal, family, tribal, and geographical names had not, and were as much basic elements in the language as the basic nouns and verbs.

This has not, however, prevented enthusiastic etymologists from trying to find “meanings” for them; the process has been going on for over a thousand years, and would provide a rich, and almost untouched, harvest for connoisseurs of the preposterous.

The earliest essay in this field that I know of is the famous explanation of the name “*Türk*” itself in the Chinese (seventh century A.D.) Chou Shu, Chap. 50¹;—“the natural formation of the Altay mountains is like a helmet, so he (i.e. A-shih-na) took the (Turkish) word ‘helmet’ for the name of his House.” There is no Turkish word “*türk*” meaning “helmet”; the only word for “helmet” even vaguely resembling it is a very obscure one which appears in the Codex Cumanicus as *toulğa*, in the Abuşka as *dalğa/dawlğa/dawlğan* and in Redhouse as *tuğulğa*; probably a diligent search would disclose other forms. The only possible conclusion is that the author of the Chou Shu had no critical sense, and the same difficulty as many modern Chinese in distinguishing between *l* and *r*.

Even Mahmud al-Kaşğari, the father of Turkish lexicography,

¹ See N.Y. Bichurin's *Sobranie Svedeniy o Narodakh obitavshikh v Sredney Azii v drevnie vremena*, p. 221 of the 1951 reprint.

and probably its greatest exponent, writing in about A.D. 1074, records the theory, in his note on the name *Uyğur*,¹ that the name was originally *xūd̡xūr* and derived from a remark (in Persian!) by Dū'l Qarnayn (Alexander the Great) when he had seen some precision shooting by the Uyğur that “*inān xūd̡ xūrānd*”, “these chaps can feed themselves.” Kaşğari too seems to be the earliest exponent of the theory² that the name of the *Xalaç*, or *Kalaç*, tribe was derived from an incident when they wished to stay where they were and the other tribes wished to move on and, finding them obdurate, finally said “*kal āc*” “all right, stay and starve!”

The Paris Oğuz Nama, probably written somewhere near the Aral Sea in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, gives quite a different explanation of *Kalaç*; according to it³ Oğuz Kağan, while on a journey, found a house with golden walls, iron windows, and a locked door, and said to one of his retainers “*kal aç*”, “stay behind and open it.”

Perhaps the most prolific source of such etymologies is the Jāmi‘u'l-Tawārīx of Raşīdu'l-Dīn Faḍlu'llah written in the early years of the fourteenth century (the author was executed in A.D. 1318); these include *Uyğur* (from *uy-* “to follow”), *Kalaç* (“stay and starve”) and a number of others. They are most conveniently available on pp. 83–90 of Vol. I of the new Russian translation of this work.⁴ Some of them are discussed at length in the Introduction to Radloff's “Das Kudatku Bilik des Jusuf Chass Hadschib aus Bālasagun” (St. Petersburg, 1891), with a summary of the views of various nineteenth-century European scholars on the subject. The views expressed are extremely uncritical and show a complete lack of historical sense; for example no difficulty is felt in deriving *Uyğur* from *uy-* “to follow”, although the sound change *ḏ > y* did not take place for some centuries after the first record of the name *Uyğur*, in whose dialect the verb was always pronounced *uḏ*.⁵ Similarly no attempt whatever is made to explain the second syllable.

¹ I, 102, of the printed text, I, 111, of Atalay's translation.

² III, 306, of the printed text, III, 416, of Atalay's translation.

³ Bang and Rachmati, Die Legende von Oghuz Qaghan, p. 19.

⁴ Rashid-ad-Din, Sbornik Letopisey; Moscow-Leningrad, 1952.

⁵ It is doubtful whether *uḏ*, as an ordinary verb, was current in the Uyğur dialect; the only certain occurrences are of the Gerund *uḏu*, used as a conjunction meaning “thereafter, thereupon”.

More recent scholars have been less wild, but not much happier, in their etymologies. For example, F. W. K. Müller's derivation of the name *Türk* from "a Turkish word *türk* meaning 'strength'" is open to at least three objections:—(1) the original form of the name was not *Türk*, but *Türkü*, as is shown by the inscriptions of the *Türkü* dynasty and contemporary Chinese, Tibetan, Khotanese and other records; (2) the Turkish noun *türk* did not mean "strength" but "ripeness" (of fruit), "maturity" (of man); (3) Kaşgari in his *Dīwān*¹ records the name and the noun side by side without suggesting any connection between the two, which in view of his obvious addiction to etymologizing proper names he would hardly have failed to do if he thought that the name was derived from the noun. His many friends and admirers greatly regret the late Professor Pelliot's essays in this field. It must always be remembered that of the many languages in which he did such brilliant work Turkish was the one in which he was least at home; and though Pelliot's worst was better than most other scholars' best, there is no doubt that in this field he has left one or two legacies of error which, in face of his enormous prestige, it will be difficult to bury in decent oblivion. In particular, in his posthumous work "Quelques Noms Turcs d'Hommes et de Peuples finissant en *-ar*" vast erudition in collecting material for the study is unfortunately combined with serious critical deficiencies in interpreting it.

It follows that, with all deference, I am quite unable to accept Pelliot's and Sinor's views on the etymological possibilities and functions of the reduplicating intensive prefix. I cannot dogmatize about Mongol, though remaining completely sceptical of the theory that *Teb-tengri* is an example of the reduplicating suffix (it seems to me likelier that *Teb* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *deva*), but there is no doubt that in Turkish the reduplicating prefix was used only with adjectives of colour, e.g. *apak* "dead white", and of size and the like, e.g. *up uzun* "very long", *bom boş* "quite empty". It seems to me no more possible to explain *Kapqan/Kafqan* as *qap qan* "very khany" than to explain it as an Iranian phrase *kav kavan*. I cling to the belief that it was just a personal name, and no more susceptible of etymologizing than other personal names

¹ I, 292-4, of the printed text, I, 350-3, of Atalay's translation.

like *Iştemi* and *Toñukuk*, which even the most enthusiastic etymologizers have found too hard nuts to crack.

Postscript.—Perhaps I might take this opportunity to apologize for the intrusion of two ghost words (misprints) in my paper on “Turkish Ghost Words” (*JRAS.*, 1955, Parts 3 and 4). The old Turkish word referred to on p. 136, line 21, was **ulus** “country” (not **ulus**) and the form in Mongolian, subsequently reborrowed by Turkish was **ulus** (not **ulur**).