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Author(s): TALÂT TEKIN

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ON KÖK TURKIC BÜNTÄGI

by

TALÂT TEKIN

Los Angeles

Tony. 56-57: nâh yirdäki qayanlıy budunqa büntägi bar ärsär nä buñi bar ärtäçi ärmis̄ (G. J. Ramstedt, J. G. Granö, Pentti Aalto, "Materialien zu den alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei", *JSFOu.* 60, Helsinki 1958, 7, pp. 47-48).

Turcologists have had difficulty in interpreting the above sentence. It is generally thought that the main difficulty comes from the word represented by the group of letters *b²ün²t²gi*. Radloff, *Zweite Folge*, p. 25, transcribed this group of letters as *äbin tägi*. This transcription of Radloff, as Thomsen remarked (*Turcica*, pp. 59-60), is not acceptable, since the letter which follows *b²* is the rounded front-vowel sign and not *i*. (See the photograph in *JSFOu.* 60, 7, p. 26; cf. also Sprengling, "Tonyukuk's Epitaph", *AJSL*, LVI, No. 1, p. 18).

Thomsen transcribed the word as *bünt(ü)gi* and made an assumption about its structure and meaning. According to him, this group of letters should have represented a word like *bünt(ü)g* or *bönt(ü)g* having the third person singular possessive ending *-i*, and this word should have implied a meaning similar to "incapable, idler, lazybones, good-for-nothing". Thomsen's translation of the whole sentence is as follows: "Si un peuple habitant n'importe quel pays et soumis à un kagan a (à sa tête) un fainéant (?), quel chagrin (ou misère, malheur) il en résulterait pour lui!" (*Turcica*, p. 58).

This interpretation of Thomsen was generally accepted by the turcologists who later published the Tonyuquq inscription (cf. H. N. Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları I*, Istanbul 1936, p. 188, and S. E. Malov, *Pamiatniki drevnetiurkskoi pis'mennosti*, Moskva - Leningrad 1951, p. 64 and 70). The most recent publication of the inscription is that of Pentti Aalto. In this work, the sentence in question is translated as follows: "Einem in irgendeinem Lande befindlichen, einen Qayan habenden Volk, wenn Taugenichtse (?) vorhanden gewesen wären, was für eine Not wäre

(daraus) geworden!” (G. J. Ramstedt, J. G. Granö, Pentti Aalto, “Materialien zu den alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei”, *JSFOu.* 60, Helsinki 1958, 7, pp. 47-48).

This interpretation of the word *büntägi* and that of the whole sentence do not seem accurate. In the first place, a sentence with this meaning does not conform with the context. In the preceding sentences, as is known, Tonyuquq enumerates his achievements and rightfully praises himself as well as Ilteriš Qayan: “By Heaven’s grace I have not let any armored enemy ride among this Turkic people, or any branded (?) horse run around. If Ilteriš Qayan had not won, and I myself had not won, there would have been neither the state nor the people. Since he won, and since I myself won, both the state has become a state, and the people a people. Now I myself am grown old, and am far advanced in years.” (*Tony.* 53-56). In the passage inscribed on the north side of the inscription, which is the continuation of the above-quoted passage, Tonyuquq continues praising Ilteriš Qayan and himself: “If Ilteriš Qayan had not won, or if he had never been, and if I myself, Bilgä Tonyuquq, had not won or I had never been, in the land of Qapyan Qayan’s Turkic Sir people, there would have been neither tribes, nor people and human beings. Since Ilteriš Qayan and Bilgä Tonyuquq have won, Qapyan Qayan’s Turkic Sir people has flourished so much.” (*Tony.* 59-61). In such a context, a sentence having the above-mentioned meaning seems out of place.

Secondly, the interpretation of the word *büntägi* is far from satisfactory. Thomsen assumed that the word *büntüg* or *böntüg* might be related to Chagatay *bön-* “to grow old, to reach one’s dotage” and to Turkish *bön ~ böñ* “imbecile, fool, idiot” (*Turcica*, p. 59, note 1). But, neither he nor other scholars were able to explain the suffix element of the word. Is the stem verbal or nominal? What is the suffix element in each of the two possible cases? This interpretation of the word *büntägi* is unacceptable unless these questions are satisfactorily answered. In addition to this, such a word does not seem to have existed in any of the Turkic languages.

Finally, the consequence clause of the sentence, namely the clause *nä buñi bar ärtäçi ärmiš*, is translated as if it were a positive statement made through exclamation. But, we may very well consider it as a negative statement made through interrogation. In this case, it indicates nonexistence of any kind of trouble under the condition expressed in the hypothetical clause. Such an interpretation of the consequence clause, in my opinion, conforms more with the use of interrogative pronouns

in the Turkic languages, cf. *Özä täñri basma[sar, asra] yer tälinmäsär, Türük budun, iliğin törügün kem artatı udaçı [ärt]i?* “If the sky above did not collapse, and if the earth below did not give way, o Turkic people, who would be able to destroy your state and institutions?” (*Bilgä Qayan* 24-23).

Taking the above-mentioned contextual and grammatical data into consideration, I interpret the word *büntägi* as a phonetically developed form of **buntägi*, namely as the word **buntäg* (<**bunī tæg*) having the third person singular possessive suffix *-i*.

1. The old Turkic compounds **bunī tæg* ~ *munī tæg* “like this, such, of this kind” and *anī tæg* “like that, so, of that kind” have developed at an early date into the forms *muntay* and *antay* with the assimilation of the vowel *ä*. In the Orkhon inscriptions, the compound *anī tæg* usually occurs as *antay*. However, the undeveloped form *antäg* occurs once in the Tonyuquq inscription (line 29). On the other hand, side by side with the forms *antay* ~ *anday* and *muntay* ~ *munday*, the forms *anī tæg* and *munī tæg* occur in Uigur. These examples illustrate the fact that the development of the compounds *munī tæg* and *anī tæg* into *muntay* and *antay* had not yet been completed in Orkhon Turkic of the eight century. We may, therefore, assume that the word **buntäg* had, in certain dialects of Old Turkic, phonetically developed in the reverse direction, namely the vowel *u* had become *ü* under the regressive influence of the front vowel in the second element. Regressive assimilation is a common phenomenon in the Turkic languages: Kirg. *müntüp* ~ *mintip* (< *munī etip*) “like this, such, in this way”, *üşüntip* ~ *üşüntip* (< *ušunī etip*) “like that, in that way”, *bügün* (< *bu kün*) “today”, *büyüz* (< *bu yüz*) “this side”, *ögünü* (< *ol küni*) “that day, the day before yesterday”, *ököz* (< *ol kez*) “that time, at that moment; a little while ago”, *öyüz* ~ *üyüz* (< *ol yüz*) “that side, the other shore”, Turk. *öbürü* (< *o biri*) “that one, the other one”, etc.

2. Adding the possessive suffix to the compound **buntäg* (< **bunī tæg*) and obtaining a pronoun is normal, cf. *antay-ıñ-ın üčün* “for your being so” (*Bilgä Qayan* N9, *Kül Tegin* S8). Cf. also Turk. *onun gibi-si*, *bunun gibi-si*, *böyle-si*, *öyle-si*).

3. Also expressing of the idea of possession through the dative-locative case was also normal in Old Turkic, cf. *Täñri elim-kä elči-si ärtim* (*Uyuy-Tarlıq* 2).

To sum up: *Näñ yerdäki qayanlıy budunqa büntägi bar ärsär, nä buñi bar ärtäçi ärmis?* “If a people living anywhere and having a *qayan* (i.e., having a state, an independent state) had such a man (i.e., a man like me as its prime minister), what kind of trouble would it have?”