GROPING IN THE DARK: THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO INTERPRET THE BUGUT BRĀHMĪ INSCRIPTION

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To the Great Master of all Central Asian Scripts,
Dieter Maue, who continues to inspire us all.

Abstract

This article is a sequel to the interpretation of the Khüis Tolgoi inscription published in the previous issue of the *Journal Asiatique*. The Bugut inscription is at least twenty years older than the Khüis Tolgoi inscription, being probably erected in 584 AD but no later than 587 AD. It is a quasi-builingual, with two inscriptions on the same stone: Sogdian that has been extensively studied before by Kliashtornyi, Livshits, and Yoshida, and the inscription in Brāhmī, that has not been properly studied before (only wild speculations regrding the identity of its language without any attempt to discuss the data have been published so far). Based on Dieter Maue's reading, which was greatly facilitated by 3D photography, I was able to interpret the inscription and to establish the identity of its language, which turned out to be essentially the same as the language of the Khüis Tolgoi inscription: an early Mongolic language, quite closely related to the Middle Mongolian of the thirteenth-fourteenth century in spite of 600 years that separate them. This discovery has many important consequences for linguistic history and history of Central Asia, among which the most important are: first, the fact that the oldest language on the steppe of the "Ataic" type is Mongolic, and not Turkic, and second that this Mongolic language was the official language of the first Turkic khaganate, which in its turn explains why we have no inscriptions in Old Turkic before the second khaganate.

Keywords: Mongolic, Inscriptions of Mongolia, Middle Mongolian, Bugut inscription, Khüis Tolgoi inscription, Ancient Mongolian, first Turkic khaganate

Résumé

Cet article fait suite à l'interprétation de l'inscription de Khüis Tolgoi publiée dans le numéro précédent du *Journal Asiatique*. L'inscription de Bugut est au moins vingt ans plus ancienne que l'inscription de Khüis Tolgoi, probablement érigée en 584 après J.-C., mais non plus tard qu'en 587 après J.-C. Il s'agit d'un ouvrage quasi-bilingue, avec deux inscriptions sur la même pierre : Sogdian qui a déjà été étudié en profondeur par Kliashtornyi, Livshits et Yoshida, et l'inscription dans Brāhmī, qui n'a pas été correctement étudiée auparavant (seules des spéculations sauvages régressant l'identité de sa langue sans aucune tentative de discuter les données ont été publiées à ce jour). À partir de la lecture de Dieter Maue, grandement facilitée par la photographie 3D, j'ai pu interpréter l'inscription et établir l'identité de sa langue, qui s'est avérée être essentiellement la même que celle de l'inscription Khüis Tolgoi : une langue mongole précoce, assez proche du mongol moyen du XIII^{e}-XIV^{e} siècles malgré 600 ans qui les séparaient. Cette découverte a de nombreuses conséquences importantes pour l'histoire linguistique et l'histoire de l'Asie centrale, parmi lesquelles les plus importantes sont : premièrement, le fait que la langue la plus ancienne de la steppe de type «ataïque» est le mongol, et non le turc, et deuxièmement que cette langue mongole était la langue officielle du premier khaganate turc, qui explique pourquoi, à son tour, on ne possède aucune inscription en vieux turc avant le deuxième khaganate.

Mots clé: les langues mongoliques, les inscriptions de Mongolie, la langue mongole moyenne, l'inscription de Bugut, l'inscription Khüis Tolgoi, la langue mongole ancienne, le premier khaganate Turc

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The following lines[1] represent the first and a very tentative attempt to interpret the Brāhmī part of the Bugut inscription, currently located in the courtyard of the provincial museum of Arkhangai aimag in the city of Tsetserleg, Mongolian republic.[2] If not for the pioneering efforts of Dieter Maue on deciphering the script, further aided by the team of two specialists in 3D photography, headed by Tobias Reich, the following lines would never see the light of the day and the Brāhmī Bugut inscription would remain as enigmatic as it was before until it would be completely destroyed by the elements. Slightly going ahead, it turned out that the Bugut Brāhmī inscription is in the same language as the Khüis Tolgoi inscription: a variety of Mongolic that is reasonably close although not completely identical to the Middle Mongolian of thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, which should be hardly surprising since with an approximate date of the Bugut inscription of 581 AD, it happens to be six hundred years earlier than the first known monument in Middle Mongolian, the Chinggis Stone (1224 or 1225 AD), currently exhibited in the basement of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

The other three sides of the stone are covered by the inscription in Sogdian, which started to receive its due attention much earlier (Кляшторный & Лившиц 1971, 1972, 1978), (Yoshida 1999, 2009, 2019 (this volume)). The presence of both Mongolic and Sogdian inscriptions on the same stone strongly suggested that we should be dealing with a bilingual inscription. As it turned out, this initial presumption was not only incorrect, it led me on a wild goose chase for about a year trying to find exact correlation between the Mongolic and Sogdian texts. As a matter of fact, we are dealing here with a quasi-bilingual text, with the contents being radically different. Therefore, it has to be interpreted on the same terms as the Khüis Tolgoi, namely as a monolingual inscription.

While the Sogdian inscription is largely a political manifesto, legitimizing the rule of the Ašına royal clan, with obvious Buddhist overtones, the Brāhmī inscription as it seems now represents a narrative of concrete historical events, mostly connected either with the rule of the fourth qaɣan of the first Turkic khaganate, Tadpar, or with the time when he was still a Crown Prince: as noted by Dieter Maue, he is mostly not accompanied with the title *qaɣan* in the text.

The interpretation of the Khüis Tolgoi and the Bugut inscriptions also brought different problems. All the initial parts of all columns[3] are lost in the Bugut inscription, and this makes the continuous interpretation of the text completely impossible. There are more lacunae in the Bugut text, but there are more unknown lexical entities in Khüis Tolgoi. The last phenomenon may be, of course, illusory, because many words in Bugut are reconstructed on the basis of only some preserved parts plus the context. Since reconstructing unknown words without knowing their full spelling is comparable to solving a mathematical equation with two unknowns, the Bugut text might have been more 'Mongolized' in my interpretation than it actually was. But whether it was so or not, will likely remain forever beyond our knowledge.

But two things remain clear. First, both inscriptions are written in the same language (although at this stage it seems that we have two slightly different dialects). Second, in both cases the best evidence for the Mongolic nature of the language that underlies them is not the vocabulary, but the morphology, which is mostly identical in both inscriptions and is very close to Middle Mongolian. It is much more distant from the Khitan morphology. See the comparative chart of the morphology at the end of the article.

Column 1

Transliteration (Maue)

...*pa-r̲ mu* g_1a-*n* kā g_1a-*n* sa *n*ā-m[?] čä-v du

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… [Tad]par Muɣan qaɣan sa-nām[?] čig-dü

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… Tadpar Muɣan qaɣan reside-PRES time-LOC

Translation (Vovin)

… when Tadpar and Muɣan qaɣans resided [together]

Notes (Vovin)

1. Maue suggested *sana-m* think-NML for *sanā-m*[?] (p.c.), but this is clearly anachronistic, because *sana-* means 'to count' in EMM (HYYY 20a.3) and 'to consider' in WMM (Mu 178). It is probably a loan from Old Turkic *sana-* 'to count'. But here we deal with a completely different word, namely *sa-* 'to reside'. MM *sa'u-* 'lo live,

[1] I express my gratitude to my colleagues Dieter Maue and András Róna-Tas, who read the first draft of this article and made many useful comments, which, I believe, led to the significant improvement of the original text. Needless to say, all mistakes and shortcomings remain my own responsibility.

[2] The discussion of the script as well as the history of discovery and research is not going to be done here, as the contributions of my colleagues, Dieter Maue and Mehmet Ölmez are dealing with these topics. Since Ïšbara qaɣan (ruled in 581-587 AD) is mentioned on column six of the inscription as a living person, we should take 587 AD as *non post quem* date for the Brāhmī Bugut inscription. I also want to add that like my contribution on the Khüis Tolgoi inscription (Vovin 2018), I do not discuss here the possible variants of readings of different akṣaras unless they all produce meaningful variants of the text interpretation.

[3] I follow here the lead of Maue and replace the term "line" that I previously used (Vovin 2018) with "column", because the latter better reflects the vertical direction of writing.

to dwell' is likely to be a complex formation, cf. Khitan 令 为 *s.a-* 'id.' (Kane 2009: 114). *-nAm*, a present tense marker, occurs in WMM (Godziński 1985: 125-126). Here it has the function of *praesens historicum*. The remaining problem is of a functional nature: in WMM *-nam* is clearly predicative, while here it appears to be adnominal. But we have seen the same problem in the Khüis Tolgoi inscription with the past tense in *-bA*, see also the commentary 2 to column four below.

2. *čig* < *čaɣ* 'time', cf. MM *čaɣ* 'time'[4] (MNT §31, §118, §149, etc.; KMQB 1.17a.3, Mu 120, 130, 352, etc.). As Maue has suggested (p. c.), the raising and fronting *a* > *i* could be explained by the influence of the initial palatal *č-*. For raising cf. also Eastern Yughur *čeg* 'time' (Bolučilaɣu et al. 1985: 135). There is also a somewhat similar phenomenon of *a* > *i* after *č-* in Daghur and Monguor, which, however, occurs only in the complex *čaɣa* > *čiɣa* (Poppe 1955: 27). *-dU* is a locative case marker, cf. MM *-dU* ~ *-dUr* (Godziński 1985: 85-86).

Column 2

Transliteration (Maue)

… + + bā̄ + + *tu* ... +-*d pa-r̲ k̄a* čo -$g_1^?$ $na^?$-$r̲^?$ + *ro* + *j*u + +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + + bī + +-tu [Ta]dpar qa čoɣ-nar [o]ro-[ɣa]-ǰu + +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + +-PAST + +-LOC Tadpar qaɣan noble-PLUR enter-[CAUS]-CI + +

Translation (Vovin)

… Tadpar qaɣan made the nobles enter, and …

Notes (Vovin)

1. *bī* could be: a) cognate of MM feminine past in *-bi*, b) cognate of MM negative *bü*, c) cognate of MM *büi* 'to be'.

2. *-tu* could be *-tU*, a phonetic variant of MM locative case marker *-dU*, or a comitative case marker *-tU*.

3. *qa* could be a cognate of MM *qa* 'qaɣan' (MNT §57, §126, §141, §144). Cf. also Khitan *qa* 'qaɣan'.

4. *čoɣ* 'noble (=splendid)' is possibly a cognate of the root of EMM *čoɣ-tai* (MNT §115), *čoɣ-tu* (PP 27.1) 'brilliant', 'splendid', 'magnificent' (not attested in isolation),[5] and *-nAr* is a plural suffix.

5. + *ro* could be *oro-* 'to go in, to enter', cf. MM *oro-* (MNT §145, §160, §188, etc.; HYYY 18b.2, KMQB 1.17b.3, Mu 131, 140, 167 etc.; IM 443, L 1259).

6. Then the following lacuna is probably some verbal suffix, possibly *-ɣa-*, a cognate of MM *-'a-*, WM *-ɣa-* ~ *-ge-*, causative. *-ǰU* is a converbum imperfecti, which we have already seen in the Khüis Tolgoi inscription on several occasions, and the rest of the column is unreadable.

Column 3

Transliteration (Maue)

... gä-n *k̄*a-n ha-r̲-$t^?$ *k*[] + + ×$u^?$ ×-*r̲* ndu-t^h *ju* kā *b*a *ba-r̲* ju *gla lu* ×-*r̲* *k*u

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

... [di]gi-n qa-n (h)ert[e] k[ü] + + [q]u[ri]-r ndü-t[i]-ǰü qapa bar-ǰu gle-lü[pe]-r kü

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… die-ADN qaɣan[6] earlier EP + + gather-NML create-EVS-CI surrounding take-CI talk-PRET-NML EP

Translation (Vovin)

… the qaɣan, who passed away, earlier … creating gathering with all their strength shut [themselves] in and talked

Notes (Vovin)

1. *gin* is probably the remainder of *[di]gi-n* 'deceased', with *[di]* possibly being the last eroded sign on column three before *gin*. *digi-* 'to die', cognate to Khitan *tege-* ~ *tige-* 'id.', but having no parallels in other Mongolic languages, occurs also in KhT 1-1. For details see Vovin (2018: 142). For the discussion of the adnominal *-n*, which has a cognate only in Khitan, but not in other Mongolic languages, see note six to column 1-6 of KhT (Vovin 2018: 147) and note four to column five of the Bugut inscription below. Alternatively, *digi-n* can be analyzed as *die-CM* 'died and'. The dying probably refers to the passing away of Muɣan qaɣan, the event also mentioned on the lines B-1:5 -- B-2:1 of the Bugut inscription in Sogdian (Yoshida 2006: 8).

2. *(h)erte* 'earlier, before', cf. MM *erte* 'id.'. Note that bare initial vowels in the Bugut inscription are rare: clear exceptions are on columns four, five, six, seven, and seventeen, however, the examples on columns six

[4] This is a famous Central and East Asian Wanderwort, cf. also OT *čaɣ*, Middle Korean *cèk*, Old Japanese *tökî* [təki] 'id.'

[5] This was suggested by Maue, as well as a parallel with OT *čoɣ* 'splendor', 'magnificence'.

[6] In EMM *qan* 'qaɣan', 'emperor' (MNT §123, §125, §126, §127, §152, §155, §160, §174, §177 etc.) can be a phonetic variant of *qa'an* ~ *qaqan*.

and seven might have a different interpretation. Consequently, initial *h-* and *v-*, alien to Mongolic phonology may have been used to indicate initial vowels.

3. Little remains of the word corresponding to akṣaras seven and eight, so *[q]u[ri]-r* is for the most part the lucky guess, cf. MM *quri-* 'to gather' (MNT §82, §164, §202, §245, etc.; Mu 312, 375, 384). Alternatively, it also could be a cognate of EMM *qura-* 'to gather' (MNT §57, §265), and WMM *qurā-* 'id.' (Mu 358).

4. *ndü-* should be a cognate of MM *nödü-* 'to build' (MNT §249, §265) that is often used cross-linguistically for 'to create, to make'. *-t[i]-* should be an expected version before the palatalization *ti* > *či* of MM and WM *-či-*, a verbal suffix indicating that an action is performed energetically or with strength (Poppe 1964: 66), (Godziński 1985: 56-57).

5. MM *qa'a-* 'to enclose' is normally a verbal stem in MM and other Mongolic languages, but one cannot exclude a case of conversion.

6. *gle-* 'to talk' should be cognate of MM *kele-* 'to talk', 'to speak' (MNT §85, KMQB 20a.4, Mu 100, 117, 154, 168, 178, 191, etc.). On the discrepancy between voiced and voiceless consonants see note three to column four. *-lü[pe]* must be a cognate of MM preterit *-lU'A* (Godziński 1985: 129-131). *-r* is a nominalizer.

7. *kü* is a cognate of EMM emphatic particle *kü* (MNT §7, §34, §84, etc.; KMQB 1.1a.4, 2.13a.1, PP 30.10, 30.11).

Column 4

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *cu-d pa-r̲ da-r̲* ptā$^{?}$ t^{h}a$^{?}$ g$_{1}$a *a* ×u + + *cu*

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… +-čU-d-pAr dar-p-ta taɣa a[y]u-?-?C$_{[-voice]}$-ču

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… X-SGS-PLUR-INSTR defeat-PAST-LOC enemy be.afraid-?-?-CI

Translation (Vovin)

… when the enemies were defeated by members [of a certain social group], [they] were afraid, and

Notes (Vovin)

1. *-čU-* is a cognate to the identical MM and WM derivational denominal suffix *-čU-* denoting social groups (Godziński 1985: 25), (Poppe 1964: 41). *-pAr* is certainly a cognate to MM instrumental *-'Ar* < *-pAr, *-i'Ar* ~ *-iyAr* < *-i-pAr, *-bAr* < *-pAr (voicing is clearly secondary, although some scholars confusingly reconstruct *-b-) (Godziński §154-§156). Unfortunately, the stem is eroded, so we cannot tell which social group is meant here. However, what is much more important is that the remaining paradigmatic morphology is strikingly Mongolic.

2. I believe that *darptā* can be analyzed as *dar-* 'to defeat'[7] a cognate of Mongolic *daru-* 'to win, to defeat', *-p-* < *-bA*, past tense suffix, and *-dA*, locative case suffix. In MM and WM *-bA* is strictly predicative, but in the Khüis Tolgoi inscription it is also used in the adnominal function. The remnant of the adnominal usage of *-bA* form in Mongolic is likely to be found in the conditional form *-bAsU*: e.g., *yabubasu* 'if he goes' < *yabu-ba a-'asu *go-PAST be-COND* 'if it be that he went' (Poppe 1955: 282). The vowel elision led to devoicing of [bd] to [pt].

3. I suspect that *taɣa* is a cognate of MM *dayyin* < *daɣïn 'enemy'. The context of column four also supports this analysis. Given indistinct nature of Mongolic vowels in non-first syllables due to the initial stress the assimilation *-ï* > *-a* is not something completely unexpected. The correspondence of MM voiced consonants to KhT and Bu voiceless and *vice versa* sometimes can be observed, like in KhT *jilo* 'stone' (MM *čila'un*), see also below. It is necessary to note that such a variation is attested within MM itself. Thus, for example, MM *teŋgeri ~ teŋgiri* 'heaven' appears in 'Phags-pa texts exclusively as *dėŋri* 'id.' (PP 1.8, 1.11, etc.). The same relationship can be observed between MM *toyid* 'monks, Buddhist clergy' and 'Phags-pa *doyid* 'id.) (PP 1.6, 2.8, 3.9, etc.). There is also internal 'Phags-pa variation between *dutum* (MM also *dutum*) 'each' (PP 39.3) and *tutum* 'id.' (40.1). Tömörtogoo posits a verbal stem *dayi-* as the primary underlying stem for MM *dayyin* 'enemy' (2014: 144), but *dayi- or *dayyi- is otherwise unattested in MM and Pre-Classical WM. Moreover, MM *dayi-ji-* 'to resist, to go against' (MNT §111, §174, §188, etc.), (Aruɣ 4) and Pre-Classical WM *dayi-la-* 'id.' (Arǰ 5.3) indicate, on the contrary, that this stem must have been originally nominal.

4. I interpret *a* ×u as *a[y]u-* 'to be afraid', cf. EMM *ayu-* (MNT §55, §79, §140, §145, §170, §244, §249, §260, etc.; HYYY 19a.2, KMQB 1.15b.2) and WMM *ai- ~ ayi- ~ ayu-* (Mu 96, 109, 401, Ist 17). The two following eroded akṣaras must be some pieces of morphology, the second of them ending in a voiceless consonant, which triggered the phonetic change of the converbum imperfecti *-ǰU* > *-čU*.

[7] Also occurring in Keregentas inscription one as *dar-pu(n)* 'defeated'.

Column 5

Transliteration (Maue)

... + + + g_1a *ca-r̲* ha-r̲ u $t^ha^?$-r̲ j*u* *ja-r̲* *n*[] + +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

... + + + ɣačar (h)aru tar-ǰu ǰar-n[] + +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + + + land back scatter-CI hurry-ADN + +

Translation (Vovin)

… hurried to scatter in the back of the land …

Notes (Vovin)

1. Bu *ɣačar* must be a cognate of MM *qaǰar* 'land, earth' (MNT §9, §98, §121, etc.; Mu 120, 288, IM 444), see the note three to column four above on alternation between voiced and voiceless consonants.

2. Bu *aru* 'back' is identical to EMM *aru* 'id.' (MNT §56, §194, HYYY 23b.4). The lack of case marking on *aru* is expected, since it is used here as a spatial word, cf. WMM *tū̃ni ǰük ǰāraba* 'hurried towards him (lit. hurried his side)' (Mu 204).

3. Bu *tar-* is a cognate of MM *tara-, tar-* 'to scatter', and *ǰar-* 'to hurry' is a cognate of MM *ǰāra- ~ yāra-* 'to hurry'.[8] *-ǰU* is converbum imperfecti, appearing many times in both KhT and Bu.

4. *-n[]* is an adnominal form, not attested in Mongolic, but appearing in Khitan. We have previously seen this form in KhT on column 7. It is likely to be used here in a predicative function.

Column 6

Transliteration (Maue)

… pu ta *lu* *ja-r̲* ha-*ś* *vā̃-r̲* *uñ* + + *da* + +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… [puru]pu tal-u-ǰa-r/ǰu Ašvar-un [ordu]-da + +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… [heavi]ly plunder-COOP-NML/-CI Ïšbara-GEN [camp]-LOC + +

[8] This word exhibits quite an unusual correspondence of an initial consonant within MM: it is *ǰāra-* in WMM (Mu 204), but *yāra-* in EMM (HYYY 18b.8).

Translation (Vovin)

… the fact that [they heavi]ly plundered together / [They heavi]ly plundered together, and at Ïšbara's [camp] …

Notes (Vovin)

1. I conjecture that the last two unreadable akṣaras preceding *pu* might be *[puru]*, a part of the adverb *[puru]pu* 'like a flood, heavily', but this is just a mere guess. Bu *purupu* 'like a flood, heavily' must be a cognate of EMM *huru'u* 'id.' (MNT §5, §24, §72, etc.; PP 30.11).

2. One of the most puzzling correspondences between the Bu-KhT and MM are the different reflexes of MM *-'-* as it can give in Bu-Kht three different ones: 1) *-ɣ-*, 2) zero, 3) *-p-* or *-b-*.

3. Bu *tal-* 'to plunder, to capture' is a cognate of MM *tala-* 'id.' (MNT §186, §198, §208, etc.; Mu 255, 338). Possibly EMM *tal-* 'to take off (clothing)' (MNT §126, §145) also etymologically belongs here.

4. The fourth akṣara is either *-ǰA-r* (COOP+NML) or converbum imperfecti *-ǰU* (much less likely plural *-nAr*, which also does not work morphosyntactically, as Mongolic does not mix verbal and nominal morphology), hence two possible interpretations. We have already seen cooperative *-ǰA-* in KhT column three, as well as multiple examples of the nominalizer *-r* and the converbum imperfecti *-ǰU* in both inscriptions.

5. Maue's guess that Ašvar corresponds to Ïšbara, the name of the sixth qaɣan is ingenious, as it allows us to identify the time frame of the events related in the Bugut Brāhmī inscription. Ïšbara qaɣan ruled in 581-587 AD, and is known in Chinese sources as 沙缽略可汗 ~ 沙鉢略可汗 EMC *ṣa pwât ljak $k^hâ^B$ ɣân^C* (Mand. *shābōlüè kèhán*). *-Un* is a Mongolic genitive case marker that we have also seen in both inscriptions.

6. The only remaining preserved akṣara is *da* that can be identified as Mongolic locative *-dA*. This calls for two previous missing akṣaras to be a noun. I tentatively propose *ordu* 'camp', but this is no more than a guess; with the same degree of probability it could be *orun* 'place', etc.

Column 7

Transliteration (Maue)

... + ×u + + -un/-run *j*[ar] va-r̲ j*a-n* + +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

... -tU + + -Un ǰ[ar]-va-r ǰan[ti-ǰu]

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

…-COM + + -GEN send-PAST-NML hi[t-CI]

Translation (Vovin)

… with … [he?] hit the messengers of X-GEN …

Notes (Vovin)

1. Column seven is badly eroded. Not much interpretation and translation can be done here except based on the mere guess-work.

2. If the only surviving akṣara in beginning of the column is *-tU*, it might be the cognate of the MM comitative case marker *-tU*, or of a variant *-tU* of the MM locative case marker *-dU*.

2. The only morphemes that can be identified with some degree of certainty in the middle of the column is either genitive *-Un* or converbum preparativum *-rUn*, followed by *ǰar-* 'to send', cf. MM *ǰaru-* 'id.' (MNT §16, §185, KMQB 1.18b.2, 1.28a.5, Mu 133, 202, 203, 283, 349, 376), with the elision of the final *-u*, which probably caused the lenition *-b-* > *-v-* before it disappeared, plus past *-bA* and a nominalizer *-r*. We have already seen *-bA* in the adnominal function in both KhT and Bugut, see the notes to column four above. Here *ǰar-va-r* is to be 'taken' as 'messenger', 'a person sent' (cf. the same function of *-r* in MM *nökü-r* 'companion, comrade' < WMM *nöke-* (Mu 217), EMM *nöke-* 'to add' (HYYY 20a8), EMM *nökü̈če-* 'to follow as a companion' (MNT §92, §150, §200, etc.).

3. *ǰan* in the last surviving akṣara could be potentially a remainder of *ǰanti-* 'to hit' (cf. MM *ǰančі-* 'id.' MNT §244, §245, Mu 166, 201, 341, L 1273), possibly followed by a converbum contemporale *-ǰU*, or another verbal inflectional suffix.

Column 8

Transliteration (Maue)

… ×-*d* Xa *b*[] *ca* Xa + *ma* + []*u*$^{?}$ + + + +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… [qa]-d [h]ab[V]-ča Xa + me[de-ǰ]ü + + + +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… [prince]-PLUR take-NML Xa + kn[ow-i]ng + + + +

Translation (Vovin)

…taking [prince]s… kn[owi]ng…

Notes (Vovin)

1. Column eight like column seven is badly eroded.

2. In the first akṣara we can only detect Mongolic plural in *-d*, but the noun itself is unreadable. Possibly *qa* 'prince'.

3. The next two akṣaras probably represent the verb *ab[V]-* 'to take' (cf. MM: MNT §13, §53, §188, etc.; HYYY 20a.4, KMQB 1.12a.1, Mu 100, 182, 210, etc.; IM 432, Ist 14) followed by the cognate of MM nominalizer *-čA* (Godziński 1985: 40-41), and WM *-čA* ~ *-ǰA* (Poppe 1964: 44, 47). Note that both MM *ab-* 'to take' and WM *ab-* 'id.' in contrast to Bu *ab[V]-* are consonantal verbs.

4. The word represented by *Xa* + is impossible to identify.

5. The next word looks like converbum imperfecti *me[de-ǰ]ü* 'knowing' of the verb *me[de]-* 'to know', cf. MM *mede-* (MNT §68, §94, §96, §132, etc.; HYYY 17a.5, KMQB 17b.1, Mu 235, 376, 386, etc.; IM 441, L 70), although there are equal possibilities that this form is *me[de-m]ü 'knows' or *me[de-k]ü 'will know'. Unfortunately, we do not know who is taking and knowing.

Column 9

Transliteration (Maue)

… *na-r*$^{?}$*-pu* + *ka-n* pu +$^{?}$ *na-r ta*-d *p*a-r *t*[] +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… -nAr pü[ne]ken pü[ker]-ner Tadpar t[ala]-

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… -PLUR fox ox-PLUR Tadpar capture-

Translation (Vovin)

… Tadpar will capture X-PLUR, foxes, and oxen

Notes (Vovin)

1. *-nAr* is a plural marker on some noun that corresponds to at least one eroded akṣara at the preceding part of column nine.

2. Bu *pü[ne]ken* is likely to be a cognate of EMM *hünegen* 'fox' (MNT §247), and *pü[ker]* of MM *hüker* 'ox' (MNT §100, §121, §177, etc.; L 76, Ist 35). *-ner* is, of course, [-back] variant of the plural suffix *-nAr*.

3. We have already met Tadpar before on columns one and two.

4. Only the first consonant survives from the following word, that is likely the disyllabic stem of a verb. On the basis of the context it appears that only two MM verbs seem to fit the bill: *tala-* 'to capture' (MNT §208, §208, Mu 255, 338), and *ta'ul-* 'to allot', 'to distribute' (MNT §229, HYYY 20b.3, KMQB 2.9a.1, Mu 343). Provisionally I chose the first one. Unfortunately, all following morphology is irretrievably lost in the eroded beginning of the next column.

Column 10

Transliteration (Maue)

… ×*u-y na bu-d bo* + *ña-ś kō-* ñ? ×*-y*? *r*[]

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… -[q]uy na bu-d bo[tuɣ]ńa-s qoń[i]y [i]r[e-y]

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… -NF nabu-PLUR camel.calf-PLUR sheep come-NP

Translation (Vovin)

… nabu (?), camel calves [and] sheep, which will…, came, and …

Notes (Vovin)

1. *-[q]uy* is likely to be a cognate of MM *-qu(i)* ~ *kü(i)*, nomen futuri (Godziński 1985: 133-135). The verb itself is eroded.

2. *nabu-d* looks like a plural form of *nabu*, which, judging from the context should be a name of some animal. It cannot be identified, though. Róna-Tas suggested Khitan *nabu* 'tent' (p. c., November 2018), but contextually it does not agree well with the names with the following two animals. In addition, the word for 'tent' in Khitan is written logographically as 艾 and read as *adʒa ~ adʒu* (Chinggeltei, Wu, & Jiruhe 2018.1: 186).

3. *bo[…]ńa-s* is probably plural in *-s* of *bo[tuɣ]ńa* 'camel calf', a likely cognate of EMM *botuqan* 'id.' (MNT §78) and WMM *botaɣa ~ botaɣan* 'id.' (Mu 25, 122, 270), if we admit metathesis here, which might have been caused by the structural pressure: normally plural in *-s* follows words ending in MM and WM in vowels or diphthongs, the only two known exceptions in Mongolic for words in *-n* are *kümü-s* 'people' from *kümün* 'person' and *ebüge-s* 'old men' from *ebügen* 'old man'. Neither MM *buqu* 'deer' or *buqa* 'ox' seem fit the bill here, because of the lack of final *-n* in these words (further aggravated by the *o ~u* discrepancy in the first syllable).

4. *qońiy* is likely to be a cognate of MM *qonin* 'sheep' (MNT §19, §100, §247, etc.; HYYY 5b.1, Mu 120, 150, 243, 302, etc.; Ist 45).[9] This word is usually believed to be a Turkic loanword in Mongolic, but with this directionality of borrowing it is difficult to explain an extra MM *-in* (or Bu *-iy*) in Mongolic: where does it come from? On the other hand, the loss of *-in* (or *-iy*) in Turkic is hardly surprising.

5. The last akṣara *r[]* is open only to a speculative analysis. As it is well known, no Mongolic root can have initial *r-*. A possible solution might be that we have here a case of initial vowel aphaeresis, possibly *r[]* stands for *[i]r[e-]* 'to come'. But the apparent difficulty with this proposal is that *ire* would be an imperative form, unlikely to be used towards sheep and *bo[…]na*. An alternative solution that *r[]* stands for *[i]r[e-y]* come-NP, with *-y* being a cognate to MM nomen praesentis *-(U)yi* in its predicative converbial function (Godziński 1985: 139), and Khitan converb *-i* found after various vowels (Kane 2009: 149-150). I tentatively follow this analysis in my interpretation of the Bugut inscription.

Column 11

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *gᵢa* nu + *-g thā̄ -r̲* ja-l + *ta-d pa-r̲* +?

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… [qa]ɣan-u +-g tīr ǰal[va-y] Tadpar +?

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… qaɣan-GEN +-g tīr conne[ct-NP] Tadpar +?

Translation (Vovin)

… connecting to qaɣan's X, Tadpar …

Notes (Vovin)

1. In the beginning of column eleven, we have *qaɣan* with an idiosyncratic Mongolic genitive *-u* after stems in *-n* that we have already seen on columns two and five of the Khüis Tolgoi inscription.

2. I am unable to suggest any parallels to *+-g tīr* at this time.

3. I believe that *ǰal* is a remainder of *ǰal[va-y]* 'connected and', consisting of *ǰalva-* 'to connect', a possible cognate of EMM *ǰalqa-* 'id.' (MNT §114) and WMM *ǰalqa- ~ ǰalɣa-* 'id.' (L 1272, Mu 200). On nomen praesentis *-y < -i* see the note six to column ten above and note six to column three of the Khüis Tolgoi inscription (Vovin 2018: 143). The sound shift *-ɣ- > -w-* (orthographic *-v-*) is unproblematic.

Column 12

Transliteration (Maue)

… c*ä* ×ä + *hā-t ka-n hä-r̲ g*[]*-c*? …

[9] An objection was raised by Maue to this interpretation, because *qońiy*, according to him should be spelled as *qo ńi-y* (p.c.). I believe that it is too early to establish any orthographic conventions at this stage of the decipherment. Alternatively, *-y* in *qońiy* could be a palatalization of MM plural *-n* (Godziński 1985: 78-79).

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… -či[l]i[A]-’Āt ken (h)irg[e]-č ...

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… -QV-CPF who people-ABL ...

Translation (Vovin)

… after making N into V, who from the people …

Notes (Vovin)

1. First four akṣaras should correspond to a verbal form, but only the converbum perfecti *-’At*, probably corresponding to EMM *-’At* (Godziński 1985: 143)[10] and WM *-ɣad ~ -ged* (Poppe 1964: 97) can be identified with a certain degree of reliability. The first two akṣaras on column twelve might be identified as *-čili-*, a possible cognate of MM and WM derivational suffix *-čilA-* (Godziński 1985: 57), (Poppe 1964; 64) that indicates that the noun “is rendered into, made into, or made like the thing designated by the primary word” (Poppe 1964: 64). I call this suffix a quality verbalizer (QV). The missing third akṣara is probably *-A-*.

2. *ken* ‘who’ seems to be a cognate of MM *ken* ‘id.’ (MNT §68, §147, §164, etc.; PP 29.42, 29.44, Mu 216, IM 440, L 67, Ist 50) and WM *ken* ‘id.’ (Sub 5.8b, Bur 10a, etc.).

3. I analyze *(h)irg[e]* as a cognate of MM and WM *irge ~ irgen* ‘people’ (MNT §5, §28, §137, §146, etc.; Mu 112, 119, L 1256, Aruɣ 4, 8; Bur 20b, Sub 6.8a).

4. Following Maue’s proposal, I identify final *-č* in *(h)irg[e]-č* as a reduction of the MM ablative marker *-čA* (Godziński 1985: 89-90), which is likely to be its original form (Poppe 1964: 75).

Column 13

Transliteration (Maue)

… p^ha + *k̄o ra* pā̄ ka *bä*-× *k̄a ja-r̲* +?

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… pa[ra-n] qora-pī kebi[r] qaǰar[-a]?

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… per[son-PLUR] poison-ACC steppe land[-LOC]?

Translation (Vovin)

… people … poison at the steppe lands …

Notes (Vovin)

1. The end of column thirteen is preserved rather well.

2. I think that the first missing akṣara could be [ra-n], the second syllable *-ra* of *para* ‘person’ plus diachronically singular *-n*, that can also function as a plural on the synchronic level (cf. EMM *hara* (PP 22.7), MM *haran* ‘person, every person, population’ (MNT §39, §91, §100, etc.; Mu 198, IM 437, Ist 31), EMM *harad* ‘people’ (MNT §123, KMQB 1.27a.4, PP 29.31).[11]

3. Bu *qora* is likely to be a cognate of WMM *qora* ‘poison’ (Mu 302) and EMM *qoro* ‘id.’ (MNT §67).

4. Bu *-pī* in all probability is a cognate of MM *-[y]i*, accusative suffix (Godziński 1985: 88) and WM *-[y]i*, id. (Poppe 1964: 75). Note that the accusative in the Khüis Tolgoi inscription is *-ı ~ -i* like in Mongolic, without any traces of *-p-*.

5. Bu *kebir* is likely to be a cognate of EMM *ke’er ~ keher* ‘field’ (MNT §56, §195, HYYY 2b.2), WMM *keyēr* ‘steppe’ (Mu 94), *kehēr* ‘desert’ (IM 439).

6. On *qaǰar* ‘land, earth, place’ see note two to column five.

Column 14

Transliteration (Maue)

... v[]? + + *k*u c^ha? *kā-r̲-d* + *χša*? +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… o[l-ɣa-ba] kü čekēr-d [a]-qsa +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… recei[ve-CAUS-PAST] EP empty-PLUR [be-]NPF +

Translation (Vovin)

… were made to receive … and were empty …

Notes (Vovin)

1. It is very close to a wild guess to reconstruct a word form on the basis of a single initial *v-*, but initial *v-* most likely was used to indicate an initial rounded vowel, since /v-/ is alien to the Mongolic phonological system. Given the context on the previous column thirteen, the first akṣara most likely represents the root of the verb *ol-* ‘to find, to obtain, to receive’. The following two unreadable akṣaras represent some verbal morphology. It is, of course, difficult to say what morphology exactly is lost here. Potentially it could be *-ɣa-*, causative and past

[10] Historically this form represents plural in *-d*, the singular being *-’An* (Godziński 1985: 143).

[11] Historically MM *hara-n* includes singular *-n*, and *hara-d* plural *-d*, but MM *haran* has both meanings.

-bA: *ol-ɣa-ba* ‘were made to receive’, or preterit suffix *-lUpA* (MM *-lU’A*): *ol-lupa* ‘received’.

2. On emphatic particle *kü* see note seven to column three.

3. Bu *čekēr* ‘empty’ is likely to be a cognate of EMM *čekēre ~ čekērei* ‘id.’ (MNT §96, §104). It is not an adjective, but a noun, hence it can take plural marker *-d*.

4. We have seen nomen perfecti *-qs[a] ~ -ks[e]* in the Khüis Tolgoi inscription, but this is the first time it appears in the Bugut inscription. The preceding lost akṣara must be a verbal root, and the context would dictate the reconstruction of *[bol-]* ‘to become’, which Maue excludes on the palaeographic grounds. I tentatively reconstruct *a-* ‘to be’, which is not excluded on palaeographic grounds.

Column 15

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *t*[] + ku ju *tu* ka-× + g_1[]-r̲ []-r̲?

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + -t[U] + küǰü-tü ke[n-ü] ɣ[a]r-[pa]r

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + -COM + strength-COM wh[o-GEN] hand-INSTR

Translation (Vovin)

… by… by whose strong hands

Notes (Vovin)

1. The first partially preserved akṣara, *t[]* is likely to be either a masculine comitative *-tU* or locative *-tU*, a phonetic variant of *-dU*, cf. MM *-tU* and *-dU* respectively (Godziński 1985: 39, 85-86). The parallelism with the following *küǰü-tü* ‘strong (lit. with strength)’ points to the first rather than to the second solution.

2. Bu *küǰü* ‘strength’ in contrast to MM and WM *küčü* ‘id.’ has voiced *-ǰ-*, but see the note three to column four on alternation between voiced and voiceless in Bu and KhT vis-à-vis MM. *-tü* is a comitative case marker. Theoretically, *küǰü-tü* can be also ‘with a neck’, cf. EMM *küǰü’ün*, WMM *küǰūn* ‘neck’, but it does not fit well into the context.

3. I reconstruct *ka-*× with the following eroded akṣara + as *ke[n-ü]*, an interrogative pronoun *ken* ‘who’ and Mongolic idiosyncratic genitive *-ü* after stems in *-n* (with front vocalism) on the basis of the context.

4. I believe that the following akṣara *g_1[]-r̲* with a missing vocalization is likely to be a cognate of MM and WM *ɣar* ‘hand’ (MNT §63, §104, §166, §189, etc.; HYYY 23b.6, KMQB 1.10b.1, Mu 111, 112, 136, 175, etc.; IM 444, L 61, Arǰ 2.6, Bur 4b, Sub 8.24a).

5. On Bu instrumental case suffix *-pAr* see the note one to column four.

6. Presumably this column is saying something about the spiritually poisoned people who were saved by the strong hands of Tadpar (?).

Column 16

Transliteration (Maue)

… + + la ko + + -l -×-r̲ ×-*n da* + ×*ä*-g_1 +

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + + -lA kö[be’ü-d] [ge]l[e]-r[ü]n dA + ×ıɣ +

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + + -VBL(IMP) son-PLUR say-CP dA + ×ıɣ +

Translation (Vovin)

... do X! As sons said …

Notes (Vovin)

1. Column sixteen is preserved very poorly. Only mere guess work can be done here.

2. The third akṣara could be a verbalizer *-la*. Since, as far as I can tell, there is no verbal morpheme *kö* in Mongolic, the verbalized form in *-la* must function as an imperative form.

3. It is most likely then that *kö* represents the first syllable of a noun. Moreover, *kö* must be an open syllable. Ultimately, there are three possibilities in MM: EMM *kö’ün* (plural *kö’üd*) (MNT §2, §3, §10, etc.; HYYY 15a2, KMQB 1.3b.1, 1.5a.3, etc.) ~ WMM *köbe’ün* (L 66) ‘son’,[12] *köser* ‘earth, land’, and *köken* ‘milk’. It is unlikely that any milk will be mentioned in the context of this inscription, and if my next speculation is correct, it is probably *köbe’üd* ‘children’.

4. The two akṣaras *-r̲ ×-n* could be either a noun ending in *-r* + genitive in *-Un*, or a converbum praeparativum *-rUn*. The surviving *-l* in the previous akṣara could be a remainder of *gele-* (MM *kele-*) ‘to say, to talk’. Consequently, only sons, but not lands could do some talking.

5. The rest of column sixteen is resistant to any analysis.

[12] WMM form must be more archaic than EMM, cf. also WM *köbegün* ‘son’.

Column 17

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *d*[]-n *ta* + iṅä na-r̲ | + *c*^{h}[] | *śa-r̲ ju*

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + -d-[U]n te[mē] iŋi-ner [a]č[i]-sar-ǰu

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + -PLUR-GEN male.camel female.camel-PLUR load-?-CI

Translation (Vovin)

... loading male and female camels of X-PLUR, and

Notes (Vovin)

1. Unlike column sixteen, the end of column seventeen is preserved much better. Most of it can be deciphered and interpreted.

2. The first readable akṣara is likely to be plural *-d* followed by genitive in *-Un*, although it could also be a noun ending in *-d* and followed by the same genitive, or just a noun ending in *-dUn*, like, e. g., *nidün* ‘eye’ or *ildun* ‘sword’.

3. Bu *iŋi-* is likely to be a cognate of WMM *ingen* ‘female camel’ (Mu 120, 122, 182, 200, etc.). *-ner* is a [+front] variant of the plural suffix *-nAr*. Therefore, logically the preceding *tA* should be the remainder of the word for ‘male camel’: EMM *teme’en*, EMM and WM *temegen* (MNT §244, §265, HYYY 6a.1, 21b.1, YY 72a, Qaz 195[13]). At the first glance it might seem that an extra akṣara is needed for this word, but cf. EMM *temē* (ZYYY 377), WM *temē* (IM 448), WMM *temēn* ‘male camel’ (Mu 116, 120, 124, 136, etc.).

4. Bu *[a]č[i]-* is likely to be a cognate of MM *ači-* ‘to load, to put a load on’ (MNT §14, §90, §234, §248, §255, §272, §281, Mu 95, 385). Bu *-sar-* is a piece of unknown morphology, and *-ǰu* is a converbum imperfecti that we met many times in both Bu and KhT.

Column 18

Transliteration (Maue)

… + + + *bu l[] k*[] *pa-r̲* ×*-d* + g$_1$*a*-n

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + + + bül[e]-k[ü]-per [qa]-d [qa]ɣan

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

… + + + churn-NF-INSTR prince-PLUR qaɣan

[13] Cited according to Poppe 1925.

Translation (Vovin)

... by the churning, princes [and] qaɣan

Notes (Vovin)

1. Bu *bül[e]-* ‘to churn’ is likely to be a cognate of EMM *büle-* ‘id.’, and *-kü* is a nomen futuri. For the combination of both see MNT §85.

2. Bu *-per* is an instrumental case marker, see note one to column four.

3. It is, of course, a speculative guess that the last three akṣaras ×*-d* + *g$_1$a-ñ* reflect *[qa]-d [qa]ɣań* ‘princes and qaɣan’, but it is the only one I can offer here.

Unfortunately, columns nineteen to twenty-four, exactly one quarter of the inscription are undecipherable, since columns nineteen, twenty, and twenty-four are completely eroded, and columns twenty-one to twenty-three preserve only few readable akṣaras, most of which tell us nothing about the decipherment or possible content of these columns. There is only one exception, where one word might be readable on column twenty-three that I am going to discuss below.

Column 19

Completely eroded.

Column 20

Completely eroded.

Column 21

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *thä-r̲* + +...

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + tir + +...

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

Not possible.

Translation (Vovin)

Not possible.

Column 22

Transliteration (Maue)

… + *va kro*

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… + ba kro

Morphemic analysis (Vovin)

Not possible.

Translation (Vovin)

Not possible.

Column 23

Transliteration (Maue)

… *ra* pa-*r̲-ś*

Tentative transcription (Vovin)

… ra pars

Morphemic analysis (Vovin) ? tiger?/Persia?

Translation (Vovin)

… tiger? Or Persia?

Notes (Vovin)

1. If the devoicing *b-* > *p-* took place, *pars* could stand for *bars* 'tiger', a loan from OT. If not, it could be Pars, the name of Sassanian Persia, which was not yet conquered by Arabs at the time of the Bugut inscription.

Column 24

Completely eroded.

Tentative Translation of the Brāhmī Bugut Inscription

1. …when Tadpar and Muɣan qaɣans resided [together] 2. … Tadpar qaɣan made the nobles enter, and 3. …the qaɣan, who passed away, earlier … creating gathering with all [their] strength shut [themselves] in and talked. 4. … when the enemies were defeated by members [of a certain social group], [they] were afraid, and 5. … hurried to scatter in the back of the land … 6-7. … the fact that [they heavi]ly plundered together / [They heavi]ly plundered together, and at Ĭšbara's [camp] with … [he?] hit the messengers of X-GEN. 8. … taking princes … knowing… 9-10. … Tadpar will capture X-PLUR, foxes, and oxen … nabu (?), camel calves [and] sheep, which …, came and 11. … connecting to qaɣan's X, Tadpar … 12. … after making N into V, who from the people … 13. … people … poison at the steppe lands 14. … were made to receive … and were empty … 15. ... by … by whose strong hands 16. ... do X! As sons said … 17. ... loading male and female camels of X-PLUR, and 18. ... by the churning, princes [and] qaɣan 19-22. [Completely or almost completely eroded, no interpretation is possible] 23. … tiger? / Persia? … 24. [Completely eroded, no interpretation is possible].

Comparative Chart of Bugut, Khüis Tolgoi and Mongolic/Khitan Morphology

marker	Bugut	Khüis Tolgoi	MM	Pre-Classical WM	Khitan
genitive after *-n* stems	-U	-U ~ -Un	-U ~ -nU	-U	-en
genitive after consonantal stems	-Un	-Un ~ -iń	-Un	-Un	-un, -en,
genitive after vowel stems	--	-n	-yin, WMM -īn, -n[14]	-yin	-n, -on, -un
dative-locative	[-A]	--	-A	-A	--
locative	-da	-dA	-dA	--	-de, -do
locative	-dU	--	-dU	-dUr	-du
accusative	-pī	-ı ~ -i	-i ~ -yi	-i ~ -yi	-Ø
instrumental	-pAr	--	-iyAr, -i'Ar, -Ār	-bAr, -iyAr	--
ablative	-č	--	-[A]čA	-AčA	--
comitative	-tU	--	-tU	-tU	--
plural suffix	-nAr	-ńAr	-nAr	-nAr	-ńer ~ -ńeń
plural suffix	-d	-d	-d	-d	-d

[14] After stems ending in *-ai*.

marker	Bugut	Khüis Tolgoi	MM	Pre-Classical WM	Khitan
plural suffix	-s	--	-s	-s	-se
singular suffix	-n	-n	-n	-n	--
social group suffix	-čU-	--	-čU-	-čU-	--
nomen actoris	--	-či	-či	-či	--
nomen praesentis (with converbial function)	[-y]	-yi > -Ø (after -yi)	-(U)yi	-(U)yi	-Vi
nomen futuri	-[q]uy ~ -k[ü]	--	-qu(i/n) ~ kü(i/n)	-qu(i) ~ kü(i)	-ho ~ -hu
nomen perfecti	-qsa	-qs ~ -ks	-qsa[-n/-d] ~ -kse[-n/-d]	-ɣsan ~ -gsen	--
converbum modale	--	-n	-n	-n	--
converbum imperfecti	-ǰU	-ǰU	-ǰU	-ǰU	-ǰ ~ -č
converbum perfecti	-'Āt	--	-'At	-ɣad ~-ged	--
converbum finale	--	-rA	-rA	-rA	--
converbum praeparativum	-rUn	-rUn	-rUn	-rUn	--
adnominal	-n[]	-n[]	--	--	-n
past	-bA, -va-, -bi	-bA	-bA(i), -bi	-bA(i)	-beń
distant past	--	-ǰ	*-ǰi	-ǰuqui ~ -ǰüküi	--
preterit	-lU[pA]	--	-lU'A, -lA'A(i)	-lUɣA	-lun
present	-nam	--	WMM -nam	-nam	--
deductive present	--	-yU	-yU	-yU	--
nominalizer	--	-ɣuń ~ -ɣun	-'Un	-ɣun ~ -gün	--
nominalizer	-r	-r	-r	-r	--
nominalizer	-čA	--	-čA	-čA ~ -ǰA	--
nominalizer	--	-ɣol	-'Ul	-ɣul ~ -gül	--
verbalizer	-lA	--	-lA	-lA	--
cooperative	-ǰA-	-ǰA-	-(U)lčA-	-lčA-	--
energetic verbal suffix	-ti-	--	-či-	-či-	--
quality verbalizer	-čiliA-	--	-čilA-	-čilA-	--
functionally unclear verbal suffix	-sar-	--	--	--	--
functionally unclear verbal suffix	--	-n[V]yA-	--	--	--

We can see on the basis of the table above that there are some differences between the languages of the Brāhmī Bugut and Khüis Tolgoi inscriptions. Some of them are certainly due to the fact that both inscriptions are relatively short, with Bugut being the longer one of the two. Thus, we cannot expect a complete overlap in the morphology, and we should not count any cases of the lack of attestation as differences between the two languages, because the lack of an attestation never implies the attestation of a lack. But other discrepancies are most likely due to the slight dialectal differences. Thus, for example, Bugut has the clear preference for the locative case marker *-dU*, unattested in Khüis Tolgoi, which uses *-dA* instead, attested in Bugut only twice. Nomen perfecti does not have any final vowel in Khüis Tolgoi, which depending on the vowel harmony appears as either *-qs* or *-ks*, but the single attestation in Bugut has the final vowel: *-qsa*. Plural suffix *-ńAr* has a palatal /ń/ in Khüis Tolgoi, but in Bugut it appears as *-nAr* without any palatalization as in the rest of Mongolic.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the language of the Brāhmī Bugut inscription as Mongolic has many important consequences for the early history and linguistic history of Central Asia. First, it demonstrates that the Mongolic language of the Khüis Tolgoi inscription is not an anomaly. Since the Brāhmī Bugut inscription turned out to be another one written in the Mongolic language, we should expect that we are dealing here with a regular phenomenon, and hopefully we will witness soon enough the discovery of other monuments in the same language, especially that the Mongolian archeology is still in its infancy. Second, this discovery clearly shows that, as suggested previously by Étienne de la Vaissière, in addition to the Sogdian language that served as a *lingua franca* in the First Turkic khaganate, this was the imperial language. Incidentally, this explains the great puzzle why there are no inscriptions in Old Turkic from the time of the First Turkic khaganate: we can now see that the Mongolic language was used as a written imperial language instead of Old Turkic at this period.[15] Historically this makes sense, since both Xianbei and Toba-Wei empires were Mongolic speaking, although unlike the language of Bugut and Khüis Tolgoi inscriptions, both Xianbei and Tabɣač languages are closer to Khitan than to the mainstream Mongolic languages.

Third, this discovery pushes back in time the linguistic history of Mongolic by more than 600 years. However, it is quite possible that the Ruan-ruan language was also Mongolic, as suggested many times by various scholars. It is therefore quite likely that both Brāhmī Bugut and Khüis Tolgoi are written in the Ruan-ruan language, the language of the steppe Empire that immediately preceded the First Turkic khaganate, as suggested by Étienne de la Vaissière (2018).[16] From now on I am going to adopt tentatively Étienne de la Vaissière's hypothesis and call the language of the Brāhmī Bugut and Khüis Tolgoi inscriptions 'Ruan-ruan'. Fourth, the chronological precedence of Mongolic over Turkic suggests that initially the former was likely to have higher cultural status than the latter. Consequently, many common words that are usually believed to be Turkic loanwords in Mongolic might have completely reverse directionality of borrowing, namely from Mongolic into Turkic.

I have a distinct predilection that we are standing on a threshold of many changes yet to come rather soon in our traditional understanding of various historical and ethnolinguistic processes in Central Asia in the antiquity and early Middle Ages. The discovery of the Mongolic nature of the language of the Brāhmī Bugut and Khüis Tolgoi inscriptions is just a first step in this direction.

Abbreviations of Languages and Linguistic Terms

ADN	Adnominal
CAUS	Causative
CI	Converbum imperfecti
COM	Comitative
COND	Conditional
COOP	Cooperative
CP	Converbum preparativum
CPF	Converbum perfecti
EMM	Eastern Middle Mongolian
EP	Emphatic particle
EVS	Energetic verbal suffix
INSTR	Instrumental
LOC	Locative
MM	Middle Mongolian (both Eastern and Western)
NF	Nomen futuri
NP	Nomen praesentis
NPF	Nomen perfecti
NML	Nominalizer
OT	Old Turkic
PAST	Past tense
PRES	Present tense
PRET	Preterit
QV	Quality verbalizer
SGS	Social group denominal suffix
SING	Singular
VBL	Verbalizer
WMM	Western Middle Mongolian

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Arǰ	Wall Inscriptions from Arǰai Grotto
Aruɣ	Inscription of Prince Aruɣ, 1340 AD.
Bur	Ɣayiqamsiɣ burqan-u arban qoyar ǰokiyangɣui, 14th c.
IM	Ibn Muhannā vocabulary, 14th c. AD.
Ist	Istanbul vocabulary, 14th or 15th c. AD.
KMQB	Kitad Mongɣol Qarilčaɣan-u Bičig (Sino-Mongolian Documents), 14th c. AD.
HYYY	Hua-yi yi-yu, 1389 AD.
L	Leiden vocabulary, 1343 AD.
MNT	Monggol niuča tobca'an, ca. 1240 AD
PP	'Phags-pa texts, 13th - 15th c. AD.
Qaz	Hamdullāh al-Qazwini, 14th c. AD.
Sub	Subhāṣitaratnanidhi, 14th c. AD.
YY	Yi-yu, 16th c. AD.
ZYYY	Zi yuan yi-yu, 13th c. (?) AD.

[15] One possible but not very reliable exception is a very brief inscription in Runic alphabet rkllI $II^2l^2k^2r^2$ (probably representing a proper noun) on a single tile from the Ider archeological site (Жолдасбеков & Сарткожаулы 2006: 63).

[16] This certainly reopens the problem of identification of the traces of an unknown Central Asian language found as loanwords in Old Turkic that I have previously christened as 'Ruan-ruan' (Vovin 2004, 2010).

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