A Newly Discovered Turkic Inscription in the Tian Shan Region: The *CHIYIN TASH* Rock Inscription

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This paper presents a study of a newly found Turkic runic inscription nearby Ak-Ölöng village, Yssykköl Province of Kyrgyzstan. The inscription carved on the rock is the 35th inscription of Early Medieval Turks discovered in the Tian Shan Region. The authors give a description of the monument and supply it with transliteration, transcription and translation What makes this inscription important is that it is closer to the inscriptions of the Yenisey region rather than the other inscriptions of the region both with regards to its palaeographical and contextual features. This is particularly prominent in the orthographical characteristics of the signs for G^1, T^2 ve Ẅ. The parallel usage of *teŋride(ki) yerde(ki)* in the Yenisey Inscriptions also support this view. Due to its palaeographical features it can be said that this inscription belongs to the earlier period of Turkic runic writing than any other found in the Tian Shan region.

Keywords: Turkic runic inscription, Tian Shan, Chiyin-Tash, Kyrgyzstan

1. Introduction

In 2009 a new Old Turkic inscription, written in the runic script,

was discovered in Ak-Ölöng village of Ton District of Yssykköl Province in Kyrgyzstan. It is located at the western edge of the Teskey Ala-Too mountain range. Ak-Ölöng is also on the way to Köksay Region, where the runic inscriptions known as the Kochkor Inscriptions were discovered in 1998 and 2002. The location, where the new inscription is discovered, is named as *Chiyin-Tash* "the pictorial stone" by the local residents.

The massive rock, the surface of which is burnt by solar beams, is covered with many petroglyphs. The archaeologist K. Tabaldiev, who has studied the drawing techniques of the images, states that it is possible to date some of them to the Bronze and Early Iron Ages and the rest to relatively later dates.

The figures depicting a hunting scene including a hunter, a hound and chamois stand out among the images (Figure 1).

Two *tamghas*, *written* with line technique, are noteworthy (Figure 2).[1] Similar to these tamghas, which bear a resemblance to the classic Greek musical instrument lyre, can be noted on Türgish coins and the Talas and Kochkor Inscriptions (see Alimov 2008).

2. Description of the Inscription

Two inscriptions are discovered on the south part and at the centre of a massive rock. The first one of these is an inscription made up of 26 (twenty six) signs engraved irregularly (Figure 3). Tabaldiev reckons that the signs in the first inscription are engraved by inscriber, exercising to write the second inscription. Although the signs, which range from 1 cm to 5 cm, appear to be in groups they cannot be read convincingly. The recent Cyrillic letters engraved at beginning part of the inscription covered up some of the runic signs and created difficulty to read and interpret the runic signs.

The second inscription can be found at top section of the southern

1) *Tamgha* is an abstract seal used by Eurasian nomadic peoples and by cultures influenced by them. The *tamgha* was normally the emblem of a particular tribe, clan or family.

edge of the rock. It consists of a single line made up of 32 (thirty two) runic signs (Figure 4). This section of the rock surface is full of cracks. However, the inscription is engraved carefully on the smooth part of the rock avoiding the cracks. There are cracks between the 6th and 7th, 12th and 13th, 19th and 20th, 22nd and 23rd, and finally between the 29th and 30th signs of the inscription. Some of these cracks have damaged the signs demonstrating that they had appeared after the inscription was engraved. The beginning section of the rock where the signs begin is broken. We assume that the beginning of the inscription was on this broken part. The signs of the inscription are small ranging from 3 to 5 cm.

3. Palaeographical Features of the Inscription

Despite the fact that the inscription is found in the Tian Shan Region, the palaeographical characteristics of some of the signs bear a resemblance to the signs of the Yenisey Inscriptions rather than to the signs of geographically close Talas and Kochkor Inscriptions.[2)]

The most prominent difference is in the appearance of the sign for G^1. This sign (𐰍) looks like the signs present in the 10th, 13th, 20th, 40th, 42nd and other inscriptions of the Yenisey region. However, the allograph used for G^1 in the Talas and Kochkor inscriptions are the signs 𐰋 and 𐰌 (see Vasil'ev, 1983:108-109).

The Ẅ (𐰺) sign, the additional part of which is adjoined to the main part from the middle, is also present in the Yenisey Inscriptions (e.g. 5th, 7th, 17th, 20th inscriptions). The allograph used for the Ẅ in the Tian Shan inscriptions is 𐰾, the additional part of which is adjoined to the main part at its top edge (see Vasil'ev, 1983:99).

The same thing can be said for the T^2 (𐰓) sign as well. The sign used in the Chiyin-Tash Inscription is same with the classical sign of the Yenisey Inscriptions, whereas the sign (𐰔) used for the same

2) A variety of the Turkic runic writing fixed in the inscriptions found in Yenisey basin.

consonant in the Tian Shan Inscriptions (Talas-5, Talas-6) is rather different (see Vasil'ev,1983:138).

Similarly the G^2 (𐰍) sign reminds the Yenisey Inscriptions rather than the Tian Shan Inscriptions.

The remaining signs are shared by both the Yenisey and Tian Shan Inscriptions. The N^2 (𐰋) sign looks like that of both the Talas-9 and Yenisey (24th, 41st, 46th, 51th, 108th) Inscriptions. Also the Z (𐰏) sign bears a resemblance to the allograph used both in the Yenisey and Tian Shan Inscriptions.

The A (𐰀) sign is used as a separating sign. It is the same case in the Yenisey and Talas-2nd Inscriptions. The sign (𐰃) for D^1 is also presented in the Talas-3rd and Talas-11th and the Yenisey Inscriptions Ye-2nd, Ye-11th, Ye-18th, Ye-24th, Ye-46th and etc.

One of the interesting characteristics of the inscription is the existence of two signs, which have not been come across in the other Tian Shan Inscriptions so far. One of these is the sign $K^{ẅ}$ (𐰇). This sign is also present in the Yenisey Inscriptions Ye-24th and Ye-49th. The other interesting sign is the "bow tie" (𐰴), which also appears in the Ye-2nd, Ye-49th, Ye-94th and the Tonyukuk Inscription. The phonetic value of this sign is still a matter of debate.

4. The Transliteration and the Transcription of the Inscription

4.1 The transliteration of the Inscription

[K^2ẄK^2 (?)] T^2Ð$R^2D^2K^2$I $T^2G^2L^{2ẅ}$K $T^2G^2N^2$ A $Y^2R^2D^2K^2$I $Y^2G^2R^2N^2$ D^1G^1lïq ẄN^2I ẄZI B^2R^2 A

4.2 The transcription of the Inscription

[Kök (?)] teŋrideki teglük tigin : yerdeki yegren adïglïk üni özi bir:

4.3 The translation of the Inscription

The Blind Prince on the Heaven, his voice of the brown (chestnut)

bear on the Earth and he himself and are one (and the same).

5. Some Explanations on the Orthography of the Inscription

Signs 1-6: T^2Ɒ$R^2D^2K^2$I. We have deciphered this sign group as *teŋrideki*. A similar expression is present in the inscriptions Ye-7th (3rd line) and Ye-149th (3rd line) from Southern Siberia. The final vowel of the word *teŋri* is written in both nominative and suffixed forms in this inscription and in the others. We think it is possible that it is not written here because of the pronominal suffix as it has become an internal sound.

Signs 7-10: $T^2G^2L^{2\breve{w}}$K. We consider that these four signs give us the name of the owner of the inscription. *Teglük* means "blind" in Old Turkic and passes in Irk Bitig (omen No. 24) and Uigurica (III: 76-13) (see VATEX and Müller 1922: 2).

Signs 11-13: $T^2G^2N^2$. We have read these signs as *tėgin* "prince" being the title of the name denoted by the previous four signs. This word is also seen with the same spelling on the 8th line of north side of the Kül Tigin inscription (see Tekin, 1998: 38). However, there is another and more common orthographic variant of the word in Turkic runic inscriptions (e.g. Kül Tigin, Bilge Kagan, Tonyukuk and Shine-Usu), which transliteration is $T^2IG^2IN^2$ with the reading as *tigin* (see Tekin 1998; Aydın 2007). The same situation can be observed in Old Uigur texts as well. There are two orthographic variants of the word in them, one's transliteration is TIKIN and it is read as *tigin*, and another's are T'KIN and *tėgin* respectively. Here we deal with the last phonetic doublet of the word.

Sign 14: A. It is obvious that this sign together with the last character of the inscription is a separating sign.

Signs 15-19: $Y^2R^2D^2K^2$I. We have deciphered this sign group as *y(e)rd(e)ki*. One can see the same word with the same orthography on the 3rd line of the Ye-7th inscription. A similar form is seen in the Yenisey inscriptions Ye-7th, Ye-147th ve Ye-149th in the parallel usage *teŋride(ki) yerde(ki)* (see Kormushin 1997)

Signs 24-26: D^1G^1lïq. The character that needs emphasizing in this group of signs is the last one. The phonetic value of the last sign is still a matter of debate. However, like Ramstedt (see Aalto 1958:55), Rybatzki (1997:33-34) and Kormushin (1997:170) we consider it as ligature *lïq*.[3)]

Signs 33-34: B^2R^2. We have read this two runic signs as *bir* "one". The first syllabic /i/ is, normally expressed in Turkic runic writing system and the situation here can be explained if we consider this spelling as a local orthographical variant of the word.

6. Conclusion

The Chiyin-Tash Inscription is the 35th (thirty fifth) inscription discovered in the Tian Shan Region. However, it is closer to the inscriptions of the Yenisey region rather than the Kochkor and Talas Inscriptions both with regards to its palaeographical and contextual features. This is particularly prominent in the orthographical characteristics of the signs for G^1, T^2 ve Ẅ. The parallel usage of *teŋride(ki) yerde(ki)* in the Yenisey Inscriptions also support this view. We conclude that the inscription from Ak-Ölöng is an "outer" inscription and engraved by someone from the Yenisey region. Due to its palaeographical features it also can be said that this inscription belongs to the earlier period of Turkic runic writing than any other found in the same region.

Abbreviations

Ye-2nd The Uyuk-Arzhan Inscription of Tuva
Ye-5th The Baryk I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-7th The Baryk III Inscription of Tuva
Ye-10th The Elegest I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-11th The Berge Inscription of Tuva

3) A character consisting of two or more letters combined into one.

Ye-13th The Chaa-Khöl I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-17th The Chaa-Khöl V Inscription of Tuva
Ye-18th The Chaa-Khöl VI Inscription of Tuva
Ye-20th The Chaa-Khöl VIII Inscription of Tuva
Ye-24th The Kemchik Kaya Bashy Inscription of Tuva
Ye-40th The Tasheba Inscription of Khakassia
Ye-41st The Khemchik-Chirgak Inscription of Tuva
Ye-42nd The Bay-Bulung I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-46th The Telee Inscription Tuva
Ye-49th The Bay-Bulung II Inscription of Tuva
Ye-51st A Turkic runic Inscription from Minusinsk Museum, exposition No. 36
Ye-94th The Yur-Sayir Inscription of Tuve
Ye-108th The Uyuk-Oorzak I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-147th The Eerbek I Inscription of Tuva
Ye-149th The Eerbek II Inscription of Tuva

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http://vatec2.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/vatecasp/Irk_Bitig.htm (= VATEX)

APPENDIX:

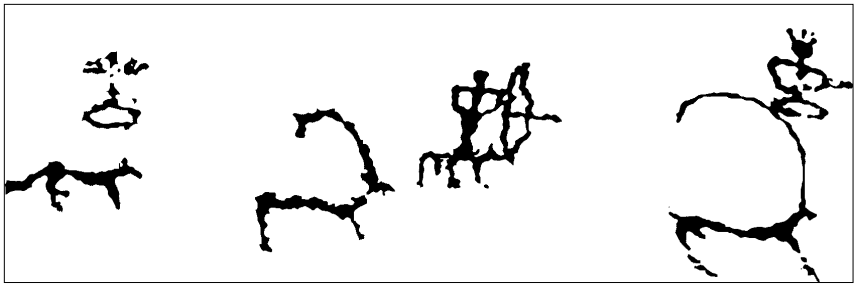


Figure 1: A hunting scene

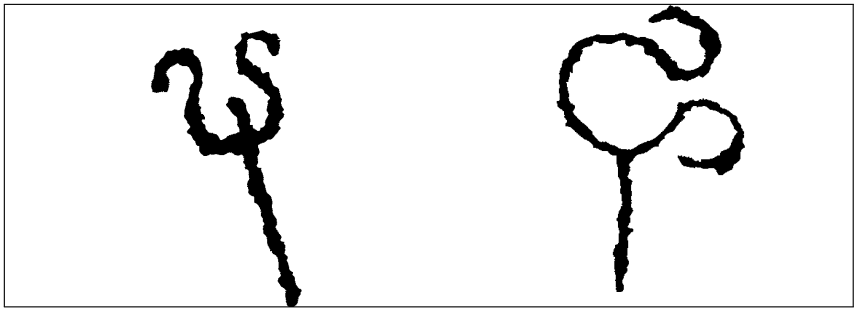


Figure 2: Lyre-like tamghas

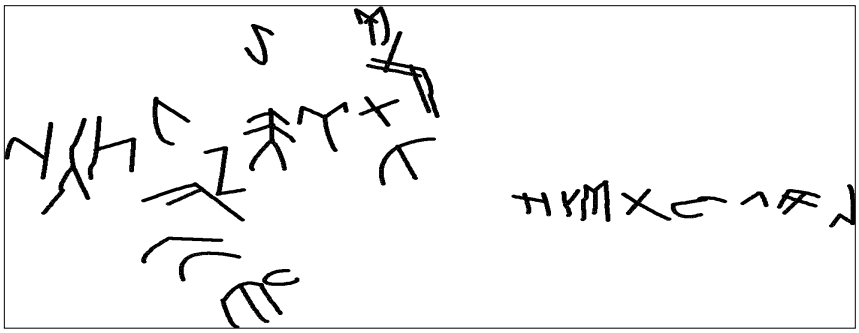


Figure 3: A copy of the first inscription

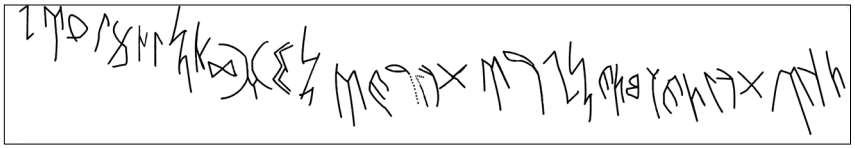


Figure 4: A copy of the second inscription

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