



The Tonyukuk Inscription: "Being a Translation of Professor Vilhelm Thomsen's Final Danish Rendering"
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THE TONYUKUK INSCRIPTION

Being a Translation of Professor VILHELM THOMSEN'S final Danish rendering

By E. DENISON ROSS

THIS monument is found somewhat farther to the East than the two foregoing ones, about 48° N. and a little more than 107° W. of Greenwich, near a place said to have the name of Bain Chokto, between the Nalaikha post-station and the right bank of the upper waters of the Tola. The inscription is graven on two pillars that are still standing upright; on the first and larger of these the inscription starts on one of the narrow sides, the one turned to the West, and is continued round towards South, East, and North. On the other one, the inscription, which is a direct continuation of that on the larger stone, likewise begins on the West side, but here this is one of the broad sides. The latter stone is more weathered than the first, and the inscription from the very beginning not being here so carefully incised as on the other. On both stones the inscriptions are written in vertical lines as in the Orkhon inscriptions; but with this difference that while the lines in the latter read from right to left here they read from left to right.

Near the two pillars there is a stone sarcophagus and the foundations of a building; furthermore, there stand around the stones eight figures, evidently made by Chinese stone-masons, whose heads have all been knocked off; lastly, there are signs of the whole having been surrounded by an earth mound, which was open towards the East; and here begins a row of upright flag-stones, running for a length of about 150 metres. It is thus an arrangement like that of the Orkhon stones, only on a somewhat smaller scale.

The whole is clearly a monument over the tomb of the great Turkish statesman and general, Tonyukuk, who was active under the first two kagans after the restoration, and was still alive (at a great age) at the beginning of Bilgä kagan's government. It may thus probably date from the years round about 720. The very long inscription is drawn up by himself, and he himself speaks all through in the first person.

Translation of the Tonyukuk Inscription

(T) (T I W)

I, the wise Tonyukuk, was myself born to belong to the Chinese 1
Empire, for the Turkish people at that time was under China; and 2
[thought I] "may I not live to see the Turkish people [but] getting for itself a khan (?)". But they broke away from China, and got themselves a khan. They nevertheless again deposed their khan, and again submitted to China. Then Heaven may well have spoken as follows: "I had given thee a khan; but thou hast forsaken thy 3
khan, and again submitted." As a punishment for this submission Heaven caused them to die; the Turkish people perished or languished and fell to ruin. In the [old] land itself of the united (?) Turkish 4
people there was no longer any ordered community left. But they that had remained independent [literally: in wood and stone] joined together, and they numbered 700. Two-thirds of them were mounted, a [third] part was on foot. He that as chief led the 700 5
men was the *shad*. "Join me," said he, and amongst those who joined him was I, the wise Tonyukuk. "Shall I make him [raise himself to be] kagan?" said I, and I thought: "If you want to distinguish afar off between lean bulls and fat bulls, you cannot say for certain 6
whether it [in each case] is a fat bull or a lean bull." Thus did I think. Afterwards when Heaven gave me insight I compelled him [to become] kagan. "Let me then be Elterish kagan, since I have the wise Tonyukuk *boyla baga tarkan* by my side." To the south 7
he defeated the Chinese, to the East the Kitays, to the North the Oguzes in great strength. His fellow in wisdom and his fellow in renown was I myself. We were dwelling then in Chugay-kuzi and Kara-Kum.

(T I S)

We lived there, nourishing ourselves on big game and hares, and 8
the people's mouth was filled. Our foes were all around like birds of prey (?) This was our situation. While we were dwelling there there 9
came a spy from the Oguzes. These were the words of the spy: "Over the Tokuz-["Nine"-] Oguzes people a kagan has set himself [as lord]," says he; "to the Chinese he is said to have sent Kuni sängün and to the Kitays Tongra Sämig [or Säm]; this is the message he is said to have sent: 'A few Turks would seem to have made 10
a rising; their khan is said to be brave, and his counsellor is said to be wise. If these two men are left alive, they will slay you, Chinese,

say I ; to the East they will slay the Kitays, say I, and us the Oguzes they will slay, say I. So ye attack them, Chinese, from the South, 11 and ye, Kitays, attack ye them from the East ; I shall attack them from the North. In the united (?) Turks' land no lord must prosper. Let us, if so may be, destroy [such] a lord, say I.' " When I had heard 12 these words sleep came not to me by night, nor rest by day. Then I made representation to my kagan ; thus did I represent it to him : " If these three—the Chinese, the Oguzes, and the Kitays—combine, all will be over with us ; we are, as it were, fastened to a stone by the Will (?) of Fate. To bend a thing is easy while it is slender ; 13 to tear asunder what is still tender is an easy thing ; but if the slender thing becomes thick, it requires a feat of strength to bend it, and if 14 the tender thing coarsens, a feat of strength is required in order to tear it asunder. We must ourselves come to the Kitays in the East, to the Chinese in the South, to the Western [Turks] in the West, and to the Oguzes in the North with our own army of two or three thousand 15 men. How may that be done ? " Thus did I put it before him. My kagan deigned to listen to the representation which I myself, the wise Tonyukuk, did make unto him. " Take thou them as you may see fit," said he. We waded up Kök-Öng-[üg ?], and I led them to the Ötükän forest. With cows and beasts of burden the Oguzes came 16 along the Togla. Their army was (three thousand strong ?), we were 2,000 ; we fought and Heaven favoured us ; we cut them up, and they fell into the river or were slain in flight. Then came all the Oguzes [and submitted]. When they heard that I [had led] the Turkish 17 kagan and the Turkish people to the Ötükän land, and that I myself, the wise Tonyukuk, had settled in the Ötükän land, the peoples dwelling in the South, the West, the North, and the East came [to join on to us].

(T I E)

We were 2,000 ; we had two armies. The Turkish people—to 18 make conquests—and the Turkish kagan—to rule—had come unto the towns of Shantung and unto the sea, but had found destruction. I laid this before my kagan, and got him to take the field and to come 19 unto the Shantung plain and unto the sea. Twenty-three towns did he lay waste, and made his camp in Usin Bundatu (?). The Chinese Emperor was our foe, the kagan of the " Ten Arrows " [that is to say, of the Western Turks] was our foe ; further(more) (the Kirghizes' ?) 20 might(y kagan) became (our foe). These three kagans took counsel

together and said: "Let us meet in the mountain-forest of Altun," thus did they take counsel: "Let us move against the kagan of the 21
Eastern Turks," said they; "unless we move against him, he will unfailingly (?)—for (the kagan is brave and) his counsellor is wise—he will unfailingly (?) slay us. Let us all three united go off and destroy him," quoth they. The Türgish kagan spoke thus: "My people shall be there," said he, "(the Turkish people) is in disorder," (said 22
he), "the Oguzes, their vassals, are stirred up," said he. When I heard this, no sleep came to me by night, and no rest came to me [by day]. Then thought I: if first we march against (the Kirghizes ? . . .), 23
said I. When I heard there is but one road over Kogman, and that is was shut [by snow], I said: "It is no good our going that way." I then sought a guide and found a man from the far-away Az people. (. . .) "My land is Az," (. . .) there was a resting-place; 24
one can advance along by Ani (?). If you keep to it, you can go on with one horse at a time. When I heard this, I said and thought: "If we go this way, [the thing] is possible."

(T I N)

This laid I before my kagan. I made the army ready for the march, 25
and ordered it to mount on horseback. Beyond Ak-Tärmäl I bade them gather together. Ordering them to mount their horses, I made a way for us through the snow. Then I bade them ascend on foot, pulling the horses after them, and holding fast by the trees [? or wooden staves ?]. So soon as the foremost men had trampled [the snow] down, I bade [the army] move forward and we crossed 26
[the pass] Ibar (?). So with difficulty we climbed down. For ten nights [i.e. days and nights] we went on through the [snow] barriers on the mountain-side. As the guide had led us astray, he was cut down. While we were suffering want, the kagan said: "Try to ride on. This is the river Ani; [let us] ride [along by it]." We rode thus 27
down along this river. To take our numbers we bade them dismount and [meanwhile] tied the horses to trees. Both day and night we rode on at a gallop and fell on the Kirghizes while they were asleep, 28
and opened [ourselves a way ?] with the lances. The khan and his army gathered together; we fought and won. We slew their khan, and the Kirghiz people submitted to the kagan and gave in, and we went back again. We came over at this side of the Kögän mountain-forest, and turned back from the Kirghizes. From the Turkish kagan there came a spy; these were his words: "'Let us go forth with the

army against the Eastern kagan,' he [i.e. the Türgish kagan] is
reported to have said. ' If we do not go forth, he will—for the kagan 29
is brave, and his counsellor is wise—he will surely (?) slay us ", [thus]
he said. The Türgish kagan has now gone forth," said he [i.e. the
spy]; " the men of the Ten Arrows have marched out to a man,"
says he, " and the Chinese too, have an army [ready]." Having
heard these words, said my kagan: " I will go home in peace," said 31
he; now the katun was dead; " and I will hold her funeral," said
he. " Do ye go on with the army," said he; " Stay in the Altun
mountain-forest," said he. " Let Inäl kagan and Tardush shad go 32
forth at the head of the army," said he. But me, the wise Tonyukuk,
he commanded as follows: " Do thou lead this army," said he;
" inflict on them [i.e. the Western Turks] such punishment as thou
thyself findest good. What [else] shall I entrust to thee ? " said he;
" when they are on their way coming, then send [the spy ?] [to me];
if they do not come, then stay quietly and collect information and
tidings," said he. So we lay in the Altun mountain-forest. There 33
came in haste (?) three spies; their tidings were all alike: " Their
kagan has set out with the army, and the army of the Ten Arrows
has set out, all to a man," they say; they said, it would seem:
" Let us gather together on the Yarish plain." Having heard these
words I sent the kagan a message about them. From the khan there
came back a message: " Stay there quietly," he had said; " do 34
not ride away, keep a good watch (?), do not let yourselves be taken
by surprise." Such was the order Bögü kagan sent me. But to
Apa tarkan [i.e. the head-commander] he sent a secret message.
" The wise Tonyukuk is fickle and self-willed. He will say: ' Let 35
us march off with the army,' but do not do his will." Having heard
these tidings, I ordered the army to march, and I climbed over the
Altun mountain-forest where there was no road, and we crossed the
River Irtish where there was no ford. We continued [our march]
by night, and reached Bolchu well on in the morning.

(T 2 W)

A spy was brought in; his words were as follows: " On Yarish 36
plain there has now gathered an army of 100,000 men," he says.
When they heard these words all the begs said: " Let us turn back; 37
for the pure, humility is best." But I say as follows, I the
wise Tonyukuk: " We have now come hither after having crossed 38
the Altun mountain-forests, we have come hither after having crossed

the river Irtish. The [foes] who have advanced hither are brave, I have been told ; but they have not noticed us. Heaven and Umay and the holy Yer-sub must out of regard for us have struck them [with blindness]. Why should we flee ? Why should we be afraid at their being many ? Why should we be overwhelmed through being 39
few ? Let us attack ! " said I. We attacked and plundered [the camp]. The next day they came rushing hotly forward like a steppe 40
fire, and we fought. Their two wings were about half as many again as ourselves. By the favour of Heaven we had no dread at their being many. We fought, and following Tardush shad, we scattered 41
them and took the kagan a prisoner ; their yabgu and shad they slew 42
there ; we took half a hundred men prisoners. The same night we sent round a message to their peoples. After having heard these tidings the begs and the people of the Ten Arrows came and submitted. 43
Having gathered together and marshalled those of the begs and the people that had come [to join with us], and as a few of the people had fled, I bade the army of the Ten Arrows to march out, and we ourselves 44
marched out, and we followed them up. After crossing Yenchü-ügüz [" the Pearl River "] (—) the mountain Tinäsi-ogli-yatigma-bängligäk (—?).

(T 2 S)

As far as Tämir-kapig [" The Iron Gate "] we followed them up ; 45
there we made them turn back. To Inäl kagan (. . .) there came the whole Sogd people with Suk (?) as leader and submitted. Our 46
forefathers and the Turkish people had [in their time] reached Tämir-kapig and the Tinäsi-ogli-yatigma mountain, where [at that time] 47
there was no lord. As I now had brought [our army] to this land, 48
it carried home the yellow gold, and the white silver, maidens, and girls, -(?) and precious things in profusion. Because of his wisdom and his bravery Eletrish kagan fought seven times with the Chinese, 49
seven times with the Kitays, and five times with the Oguzes. I it 50
was who was there his counsellor, I that was his war-leader. To Elterish kagan, the Turkish Bögü kagan, the Turkish Bilgä kagan (—).

(T 2 E)

Kapagan kagan (. . .). Without getting sleep by night or 51
rest by day, and shedding my red blood, and sweating my " black " 52
sweat, I have give up to them by toil and my strength, and so, too, I have sent them forth on far expeditions. The Arkuy-Karagu 53

[? guard ?] I have made great ; a withdrawing foe I have (. . .) ;
I have caused my kagan to take the field. By Heaven's grace I have 54
not let any armour-clad foe ride among this Turkish people, or any
horse with bearing rein (?) gallop around. If Elterish kagan had not
toiled, and if I myself, following him, had not toiled, there would 55
not have been any kingdom or any people. Since he toiled, and since
I myself, following him, have toiled, both the kingdom has become
a kingdom, and the people a people. Now I myself am grown old, 56
and am far advanced in years. But should a people, ruled by a kagan
in any land whatever, have only worthless men [at its head] what a 57
misfortune would it not be for it. For the Turkish Bilgä kagan's 58
people I have had this written. I the wise Tonyukuk.

(T 2 N)

If Elterish kagan had not toiled, or if he had never been, and if 59
I myself the wise Tonyukuk, had not toiled or had never been, in
Kapagan kagan's and the united (?) Turkish people's land both 60
community and people and men would have been without a lord.
Since Elterish kagan and the wise Tonyukuk have toiled, Kapagan 61
kagan and the united (?) Turkish people have flourished, and this 62
[present] Turkish Bilgä kagan rules for the good of the united (?)
Turkish people, and Oguz people.