THE FIRST LINE OF THE TONYUKUK MONUMENT

by
OSMAN F. SERTKAYA
Istanbul

I had been for some time studying the Tonyukuk inscription and had already in 1973 at the XVIth meeting of the PIAC in Ankara, tried to interpret the passage *ḫız ḫoduz* of that inscription.[1] In 1976 at the Second International Congress of Turcology in Istanbul, I had dwelt on the possibility that the passage read as *İnel Ḳağan* might be read as *İni İl Ḳağan* "the younger İl Kağan".[2] I will now tentatively add a few words on the first line of the Tonyukuk inscription.

It is wellknown that the Tonyukuk inscription has so far been read diversely by Radloff,[3] Thomsen,[4] Orkun,[5] Malov,[6] Aalto,[7] Giraud[8], Stebleva,[9] Tekin,[10] Ergin[11] and Aydarov,[12] altogether many times.

---

[1] "Some problems of Köktürk history: A note on the adjectival compound *ḫız ḫoduz* on the Toñyukuk Monument", *Turcica, Revue D'Études Turques*, XI, (1979), 180-186.

[2] "Göktürk tarihinin meseleleri: "İnel Kağan" mı – "İni İl Kağan" mı?", *Atsız Armağanı*, İstanbul 1976, 397–419.

[3] W. Radloff, *Die alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei, Die Inschrift des Tonjukuk*, Zweite Folge, S.-Peterburg, 1899.

[4] V. Thomsen, "Turcica", *MSFOu*, 37, Helsinki, 1916, 1–106.
V. Thomsen, "Alttürkische Inschriften der Mongolei", *ZDMG*, 78, Leipzig 1924–1925, 121–175.
V. Thomsen, "Moğolistandaki Türkçe kitabeler", *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, III, İstanbul 1935, 81–118.

[5] H. N. Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıları, I*. İstanbul 1936.

[6] S. E. Malov, *Pamjatniki Drevnetjurkskoj Pis'mennosti, teksty i issledovanija*, Moskova–Leningrad 1951.

[7] P. Aalto, G. J. Ramstedt and J. G. Granö, "Materialien zu den Alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei", *JSFOu*, LX, 7, Helsinki 1958, 3–91.

[8] R. Giraud, *L'Inscription de Baïn Tsokto*, Paris 1961.

[9] I. V. Stebleva, *Poezija Tjurkov VI–VIII. vekov*, Moskova 1965.

[10] T. Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, Indiana University, Bloomington 1968.

[11] M. Ergin, *Orhun Abideleri*, İstanbul 1970.

[12] G. Aydarov, *Yazyk Orhonskich Pamjatnikov Drevnetjurkskoj Pis'mennosti VIII veka*, Alma-Ata 1971.

Further more, Klyaštornyj,[13] Ščerbak[14], Mori[15], Zieme,[16] Hazai,[17] Clauson,[18] Tezcan[19] have, in their erudite researches dwelt on many problems of this inscription, bringing solutions to some of its aspects, making corrections and sometimes returning to older views.

While the first line of the Tonyukuk inscription was extensively studied in research works, the publications have always repeated the same text: *bilge tonyuḳuḳ ben özüm tabġaç iliŋge ḳılındım türk bodun tabġaçḳa körür erti* finding in this passage two sentences. The first sentence would be: *Bilge Tonyuḳuḳ, ben özüm, Tabġaç iliŋge ḳılındım* "I myself, Bilge Tonyukuk was born in China". The remainder of the line *Türk bodun Tabġaçḳa körür erti* was translated as a second sentence: "The Turkish people were subject to China (at that time)".[20]

The reason for reading *Bilge Tonyuḳuḳ, ben özüm, Tabġaç iliŋge ḳılındım* was that the term *ben özüm* "I, myself" occurs repeatedly in the same inscription. As an example one may cite the fourth and fifth lines of the Eastern face of the second stele: *İltiriş Ḳaġan ḳazġanmasar, udu, "ben özüm" ḳazġanmasar, il yime bodun yime yoḳ erteçi erti* "If İltiriş Kağan had not won and if I myself had not won, there would have been neither the State nor the people". As a second example we recall the first three lines of the Northern face of the second stele: *İltiriş Ḳaġan ḳazġanmasar, yoḳ erti erser, ben özüm Bilge Tonyuḳuḳ ḳazġanmasar, ben yoḳ ertim erser, Ḳapġan Ḳaġan! "Türk Sir Bodun" yirinte bod yime bodun yime kişi yime yoḳ erdeçi erti* "If İltiriş Kağan had not won, or if he had never existed,

---

[13] S. G. Kljaštornyj, "Tonjukuk Ašide juan'ǒjen", *Tjurkologičeskyj Sbornik*, 1966, 201–205.

[14] A. M. Ščerbak, "O Secetanii *odča: borča* v runičeskich nadpisyach", *Sovetskaja Tjurkologija*, 1975/6, 88–90.

[15] M. Mori, "A-shih-tê Yüan-Chên ve Tonyukuk", *İslâm Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi*, V/1–4, İstanbul 1973, 87–93.

[16] P. Zieme, "Neue Funde zur Geschichte der Türken in der Mongolei", *Das Altertum*, 18 (1972), 255–258.

[17] G. Hazai, "Sur un passage de L'Inscription de Tonyukuk", *Turcica, Révue D'Études Turques*, II, Paris 1970, 24–31; G. Hazai, "Zu einer Stelle der Tonyukuk Inschrift", *Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Altaischen Völker*, Protokollband der XII. Tagung der PIAC 1969 in Berlin, Berlin 1974, 265–269.

[18] Sir G. Clauson, "Some notes on the Inscription of Toñuquq", *Studia Turcica*, Budapest 1971, 125–132.

[19] S. Tezcan, "Tonyukuk yazıtında bir kaç düzeltme", *TDAY Belleten 1975–1976*, Ankara 1976, 173–181.

[20] T. Tekin, 283; Louis Bazin, *Les Calendriers Turcs Anciens et Medievaux*, Lille 1974, 208–209.

and if I myself, Bilge Tonyukuk, had nor won, or if I had never existed "O Kapgan Kağan"! there would have been neither the Turkish Sir people nor tribes, nor people, nor human beings at all". As third example may be cited in the tenth line of the Southern face of first stele: *Türk bodunuġ Ötüken yirke, ben özüm, "Bilge Tonyuķuķ Ötüken yirig ḳonmış" tiyin eşidip biriyeki bodun, ḳurıyaḳı, yırıyaḳı, ōŋgreki bodun kelti* "It was I myself, Bilge Tonyukuk, who (had led) the Turkish kagan and the Turkish people to the Ötüken land. Having heard the news that (the Turks) settled themselves in the Ötüken land, all the peoples who lived in the south, in the west, in the north and in the east came (and submitted to us)".

It appears clearly from these three examples that the word *ben* stands here as a personal pronoun. The word *özüm* "myself" follows in order to strengthen the significance, as if it were a superlative.

The word *ben* alone occurs in three instances on the Tonyukuk inscription. The first two instances take place on the eighth line of the Eastern face and on the second line of the Western face of the second stele: *Ben Bilge Tonyuķuķ.*.

The third instance is on the third line on the Southern face of the second stele: . . . *ol yirte, ben, Bilge Tonyuķuķ tegürtük üçün* . . .

As to the term *Bilge Tonyuķuķ* it occurs four times, once in the first line and thrice again, in three cases as nominative and once, in dative form.

The nominative cases are as follows:

1. *Ayıġmaın ben ertim: Bilge Tonyuķuķ* (I, W, 5)
2. *Bilge Tonyuķuķ a͡nıŋ͡ġ ol* (I, N, 10)
3. *Bilge Tonyuķuķ Boyla Baġa Tarḳan birle İltiriş Ḳağan* . . . (I, W, 6)

The dative is this:

Bilge Tonyuķuķ(ḳ)a ba͡nga aydı (I, N, 7)

After these observations one may wonder if the *ben* of the first line is really a personal pronoun. I doubt it. Because in Turkish the personal pronoun always precedes names and titles: It is a personal pronoun used copulatively. I will give an example of this: *Ben Köl Tigin ben* means "I am Köl Tigin".

The first *ben* is a personal pronoun, while the second *ben* is used copulatively. Therefore, the first sentence of the first line may be seen as *(Ben) Bilge Tonyuķuķ ben* that is "I am Bilge Tonyukuk".

This form is frequent in inscriptions and texts with Kök-Türk script, such as the first line of "*IRK BİTİG*" *Tensi men* "I am the son of heaven". Again the first line of the *ŞİNE-USU* inscription: *Teŋride bolmış, il etmiş, Bilge Ḳaġan (ben)*. Further the initial three lines of the *SUCİ* stele: *Ḳırġız oġlı men* "I am the son of the Kirgiz" then comes *Boyla Ḳutluġ Yarġan men* "I am Boyla Kutlug Yargan" *Ḳutluġ Baġa Tarḳan Öge Buyruḳı men* "I am the Öge Buyruk of the fortunate and great Tarkan". One may add to these more than twenty other similar passages in minor steles.

We now come to the second sentence of the first line of the Tonyukuk inscription: *Özüm Tabġaç iliŋge ḳılındım* "I myself was born in China". The word *özüm* is the subject of this second sentence. Another example, with the word *özüm* comes on the sixth line of the Eastern face of the second stele: *Özüm ḳarıġ boldum, uluġ boldum* "I myself became old, and aged".

In conclusion, the first line of the Tonyukuk inscription is composed not of two, but of three sentences.

The first sentence is: *Bilge Tonyuḳuḳ ben* "I am Bilge Tonyukuk". This first sentence defines the owner of the stele.

The second sentence *Özüm Tabġaç iliŋge ḳılındım* "I myself was born in China" defines the locality of birth of the stele's owner.

The third sentence *Türk bodun Tabġaçḳa körür erti* "The Turkish people were subject to China" expresses the fact that when the stele's owner was born, the Turkish people were under Chinese dependency.