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TONYUKUK'S EPITAPH: AN OLD TURKISH MASTERPIECE

INTRODUCTION, TEXT, ANNOTATED SCIENTIFIC TRANSLATION, LITERARY TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

(Dedicated to MUSTAFA KEMAL GAZI ATATÜRK
BILGE ILTIRIS OF MODERN TURKEY)

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INTRODUCTION

Myriads of inscriptions have been cut in stone and bronze through the ages; thousands of them have come down to us in various stages of preservation. The writer of these lines has seen his fill of them in a baker's dozen of modern European languages; in Greek and Latin, in Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Hittite, Elamite, etc.; in Sinaite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, and Syriac; in South and North Arabic; in Old Persian, Pehlevi, and Modern Persian. Many of these have been overpraised, overadvertised, overpopularized, until the people of our Western world have come to believe that Egypt, Babylon, and the Hittite empires, Israel, Greece, and Rome constitute the history of mankind. Of recent years China, India, and Japan have thrust themselves forcibly into the consciousness of America and Europe.

Everywhere settled man—farmer or city-dweller—is treated as though he were all that is worth while of man; his casual and evanescent words and his constantly crumbling creations are described over

and over again, as though they were all of civilization. Even Turk and Persian and Arab, under the spell of a magically deluded and delusive West, are in danger of forgetting their nomadic origins, of closing their eyes to the proximity of nomadic life to their farms and cities, of overlooking and underrating the value of large tracts of nomadic land and of their fellow-countrymen, who are masters in the art of using such land effectively within their borders.

The perils that lurk in this westernizing attitude, which considers Western ignorance together with Western science magical wisdom, are illuminated in sharp relief by the recent course of natural events in one of the world's richest countries, the United States of America. On its great plains, where once bisons in hundreds of thousands roamed and found a living, not to speak of lesser game, America has allowed its cowboys to become dude-ranch tourist wranglers and its cattlemen to become absentee office men. Stretching civilization's great blessing, barbed wire, into this "uncivilized" area, it has dry-farmed and profit-grazed magnificent pasture lands into a dust bowl, whose dry clouds darken and endanger the lives of millions of men and, as perversely civilized rain, carry the useful topsoil of principalities in useless showers into the Atlantic Ocean.

The roaming saints and sages of ancient Asia were neither so ignorant nor so unwise, nor were they even unlettered. The credulous West will be prone to believe this in some little measure of the men of Arabia's deserts, whence they fondly believe what they call their religion to have sprung, and of the inhabitants of Persia's little-known wastes, whence the Magi bearing worshipful tribute to the newborn Christ king supposedly came. Of the Turk and the Tatar the half-educated West has of recent years heard a few half-heartedly pleasant things; in the main, it is still drunk with the slogans and epithets coined by its superstatesmen and superreporters. In the West the Tatar is still a "Tartar," to the Turk there still clings the qualification of the "unspeakable" and something of Gladstone's "sick man of Europe." Of the actual Turk, his deeds and his glory, the average "educated" Westerner knows next to nothing.

The archeological markets of Europe and America are glutted with the inscriptions of Egypt and Babylon. Men and matters that stood out in the narrow strip that is Palestine, in the little block that is

Greece, wrapped in neat little packages to fit little hands, stamped with trite slogans that fit little average minds, are peddled on every educational street corner. The Turk, from the wide wastes of Siberian steppes to the great plateaus of Asia Minor and the fertile plains of Hungary, is not so easily grasped and smugly appraised. Despite valiant efforts in these rapid times it is likely that it will be at least another century before his weighty impact on the history of humanity will impinge effectively on the Western mind.

With the work and finds of the last fifty years a promising beginning toward such understanding has been made. In sharp contrast with long-accepted, smugly superior European views we are now beginning to see the Turco-Tatar peoples from Lake Baikal to the Hungarian plains, from the horse-nomad to the motor and airplane stage, adopting and adapting to their use in various times and circumstances some six to ten different forms of Asiatic alphabetic writing. Through some fifteen centuries over this wide domain they learn to use, to work with, to influence, sometimes decisively, at least as many religious world-views, tenets, techniques. They construct empires no less extensive, no less important in the world's affairs, neither more nor less lasting or ephemeral than the "world-empires" of Europe and Hither Asia and, of course, destroy others in the process of building their own. As workmen and as patrons they play vital roles in the development of arts and sciences. To study properly that greater Western half of Asia, within which the cradle of mankind and its culture is still often posited, it is no longer sufficient to know the Semitic and Egyptian world alone; the Aryan-Iranian, and in no less measure the Turco-Tatar, area must be included in the picture, if one would see an intelligible whole.

This method and this matter have, during about ten years just past, been introduced by the writer at the University of Chicago. For Turkish, letting easily attainable Osmanli take care of itself, the writer believes the best introduction for the Western student to be the Old Turkish of the runic inscriptions. Of the considerably more than two score inscriptions which have hitherto been found and in some measure published, the more important for introductory purposes are probably also the earliest in time. Leaving aside for a later time more intensive work on the records of the Uighur kingdom,

roughly A.D. 750–850, and the numerous Yenissei tomb inscriptions, as well as other minor inscriptions, we have at Chicago concentrated our attention on those five major inscriptions which date from, and deal with, the affairs of the later phase of the earliest empire for which the name "Turkish" appears to be used.

This is the empire whose great founders Tumen Il-Kaghan, Istemi, and Mokan, alluded to in the great inscriptions, made contacts with the Persian and Byzantine empires, on the one hand, and with China, on the other. Rising to historical significance about A.D. 550, a unified empire, including Soghdia in the West and reaching to the borders of Manchuria on the East, is maintained for upward of thirty years. Thereafter, divided into an eastern and western empire, the East maintains its independence for another fifty, the West for upward of seventy-five years. Fifty years of subjection to China are followed about 680 by the re-establishment in the East of an independent empire, which lasted, greater or less in extent, until about 750, when its place is taken by the empire of their close relatives, the Uighurs, for about another one hundred years.

The five major inscriptions of which we have some knowledge cover a period of forty to fifty-five of the seventy years of this last pre-Uighur empire. Of only one of these—the least significant and most fragmentary—is an adequate, at least photographic, publication of the runic text itself easily attainable in the Polish journal *Rocznik Orjentalistyczny*, Tome IV (1926), published at Lwów in 1928, pages 60–107 (Kotwicz and Samoïlovitch, *Le Monument turc d'Ikhe-khuchotu*). Of the others, the so-called Ongin monument is intriguing but so inadequately published that little that is safe can be said about it. The most extensive and, on the whole, the best publication in transcription and translation has been given to the two greater inscriptions, to a large extent repeating each other, in honor of the Emperor Bilge Kaghan and his younger brother Kültegin. The best and most completely preserved, and in every way the most extraordinary, of the five is the autobiographical epitaph of the great prime minister Tonyukuk.

It is this *pièce de résistance* of the collection with which this monographic essay deals. In many ways the most important, certainly the most attractive, not only of these five but of all the older Turkish in-

scriptions so far known, it has up to the present received the least effective attention. Of the runic text, the writer had at hand only Radloff's publication in *Die alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei* (Zweite Folge, 1899), not the *Atlas*. Corrections offered by G. J. Ramstedt in his notes on the Sine-Usu inscription, *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, XXX, No. 3, 10–63, and, from Ramstedt's readings and photographs, by Vilhelm Thomsen in his *Turcica, Samlede Afhandlinger*, III, 92–198 (cf. p. 346), have been of great help. Radloff's transcriptions and translation and Thomsen's notes and translations in the original Danish, rendered into German by Schaeder, *ZDMG*, LXXVIII (N.F. = Vol. III), 121–75, and into English by E. Denison Ross, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, London Institution*, VI, 37–43, have not been overlooked. A few textual notes published by Samoïlovitch (*Rocznik Orjentalistyczny*, IV, 99–102) have been duly registered. The greatest help in reading the idiomatic phrases and the subtle shades of meaning, with which the old vizier's style teems, was derived, as the notes to the scientific translation will show, from intensive use of al-Kāshgharī's excellent work, *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, published at Constantinople-Istanbul, A.H. 1333–35.

With these means, and an intensive effort in repeated readings to feel his way into the rich mind and experience of a truly great old man, the writer feels confident that he has carried the work of his great predecessors forward by a sufficient number of steps to warrant calling his own work here offered to the public a new reading. This great inscription is worth a new reading and a new publication. In going over it with a number of fine advanced students, he was asked time and again, "Do you know any other inscription that contains this feature, such artistic finesse, that clarity or beauty of statement?" And again and again he had to reply, "No, I do not!"

With each renewed study the conviction kept growing in the mind of the writer that in the old vizier, Tonyukuk, he was dealing with one of the world's very finest masterminds. One must range far and wide and search deep and fine to find the equal of the racy style, the subtle thought, the fine art of story-telling, displayed by the aged raconteur in this *apologia pro vita sua*. To find his superior anywhere, more especially in writing engraved in stone, would be a rare find indeed.

We have in this inscription not merely a historical inscription of the

highest rank and of the first importance; we have here that rarest of treasures, unique, indeed, of its kind, a masterpiece of Old Turkish literature. It is not a poem, not a drama, not a history, not a short story! Everything to its own kind! A masterpiece is that which with unerring precision makes the most effective use of its medium. *Pari passu* Tonyukuk's production will not suffer by comparison with Caesar's *Commentaries*. In lapidary writing the writer of this study and such of his colleagues as he was able to consult know for the epitaph of Tonyukuk the Turk no equal, let alone a superior—few, indeed, of the world's great inscriptions which approach its terse excellence.

In simple, homely language, rambling easily along with apparently innocent aimlessness, repeating a few phrases without fear and without straining after needless originality, the old upbuilder of kings and kingdoms tells his clever tale. Of its own accord, without apparent effort, point after point rises clearly into view as it is needed. Essential situations out of which action arises are rapidly and clearly sketched. The great episodes and accomplishments which constitute the milestones of a great life in stirring times slip naturally into their place. The whole is summed up in a brief statement of essential accomplishments. An ironic note, pungent, but not embittered, leads to an end which is not an end but a hopeful outlook and a new beginning.

How clearly we see him in his youth during the darkest days of the Turkish empire before 680: a Chinese subject, not badly off, perhaps even prosperous and in fairly high position, but sharing and feeling keenly the subjection of his people! He weighs and rejects the chances of a successful move for independence under his own initiating leadership. He sees at least one unsuccessful attempt. But, if he cannot be first, perhaps through lack of family and tribal connections, he can at least be second.

A little movement arises, led by a scion of the old royal house, not completely gone to seed. Here is a new energy, power, and persistence. He is invited and joins. His keen mind sets to work; questions of policy are his to solve. Shall they remain obscure and unnoticed; shall they play high and assume imperial status? He decides with the wisdom conferred by the gods on the dangerous life, and his leader becomes to the Chinese Kutlug (the Fortunate), to his people Iltiris Nation-assembler, Empire-founder) Kagan.

The poor but hardy little empire is surrounded by scheming enemies. It cannot sit still or it will be taken, held by its own hobble ropes, and crushed. It must expand. There are many campaigns, north and east and south. Tonyukuk does not lose himself in details. He lifts out the one significant success, which wins not merely a victory over the closely related Oguz but their and other tribes' allegiance. The new empire is firmly settled in the empire-breeding river country of the Orkhon and the Selenga south of Lake Baikal. Mongolia and its tribes are incorporated and consolidated.

Subtly the scene shifts. It was Thomsen who first sensed that at this point Kutlug Iltiris Kagan disappears from the scene. Not a single Kagan's demise, among his own lords, is mentioned; yet two certainly, probably three of them, disappear to make room for another to carry on under Tonyukuk's clever guidance, as the drama of empire unfolds. The death of Iltiris was untimely. He must have been still young after ten years of rule, in 690 or 691. One scents disaster. The Chinese annals seem to have little or no definite information; perhaps they confuse him with Tonyukuk, whose death in battle under a Chinese name and title they seem to announce at this point (Thomsen, *Afh.*, p. 190), though under his Turkish name they know him living thirty years later (Thomsen, *Inscriptions de l'Orkhon*, pp. 75 f.). However uncertain the Chinese might be, Tonyukuk knew. Unless the writer is greatly mistaken, line 18 tells the end of Iltiris. The old seven hundred had become two thousand; the two thousand had become two armies. Overreaching himself, against Tonyukuk's advice, the lust for conquest and rule in settled China and its cities overtook Iltiris, and he perished in the attempt to establish himself thus and there.

His tremendously energetic and forceful younger brother, Chinese Metchoue, Turkish Kapagan, is seated on the Kaganal throne. Under Tonyukuk's tutelage he maintains nomadic headquarters, a nomadic Kagan's establishment, while his armies ravage the rich lands and cities of northeastern China and, securing ample revenge with rich booty for the Turkish hosts, stop short any move China might have wanted to make toward aggressive domination over her northern frontier.

This done, the aggressively expansive border-watch constantly

necessary for a nomad nation now leads the merry dance onward northwest of Lake Baikal, over the Kögmen, i.e., the Tangnu or the Sayan mountains, into the homelands of the Kirghizes along the upper reaches of the Yenissei. This feat, accomplished in midwinter, is described in greater detail than any other in all three of the greater inscriptions. It must have left a lasting impression not only on Tonyukuk's Turks but probably also on the surprised Kirghizes, helping to deter them for a hundred years or more from any effective thrust southeastward.

With this strenuous campaign the tremendous energy of Metchoue-Kapagan seems to have been sapped. Going home to bewail his queen's death, he does not reappear in Tonyukuk's account on the scene of action. Chinese sources seem to indicate that in his latter years he conferred the title of Kagan on two of his sons, the elder, Bögü, the successor designate, and the younger İnel, perhaps to follow him in turn, an example followed a number of times with no better results by early Abbassid caliphs at Baghdad a little later. In the same Chinese sources Kapagan-Metchoue is overtaken by disaster a year or more after this, in 716, whereupon Bögü and his whole line are almost immediately put away to be succeeded in the very same year by Iltiris' elder son Bilge Kagan. However this may be, in Tonyukuk's account, which certainly rests on more intimate information, Kapagan disappears at this point, and Bögü Kagan assumes a larger and more active role than Chinese annals seem to allow.

The character and events of what may be called Bögü's reign are summed up in two contrasting episodes. Bögü appears as an intriguing weakling who attempts to clip Tonyukuk's wings and probably satisfy his own unwise desires by ordering a state of inactive defense to be maintained by a volatile, nomadic host in the face of the gravest danger that up to this point had ever threatened the young empire. Tonyukuk escapes the intrigue and averts the danger threatening the state by a successful coup involving an act of unveiled insubordination. However ephemeral against the advancing Arab-Moslem pressure Tonyukuk's conquest of Western Turkey and, especially, Soghdia, may have been, this last active feat of Tonyukuk's life seems to the writer to have accomplished for the old vizier two things. It put an effective stop to all danger of invasion of the Eastern Turks' em-

pire by their Western brothers and it gave to Tonyukuk both the favor of the sons of Iltiris and a loyal army, with which, on their return, Bögü and İnel and all their line could conveniently and summarily be put out of the way.

With the accession of Bilge Kagan and a plea for continuance of affairs under the guidance of the aged raconteur, the inscription comes to an end. Chinese annals, as presented in Thomsen's *Inscriptions de l'Orkhon* some years before Tonyukuk's own inscription became known, indicate that this pithy plea was not made in vain.

With this brief summary, with the publication of the best text attainable with the means at hand, with a fully annotated scientific translation, and with an attempt at a more literary rendering in English unencumbered by notes, it is hoped that the importance, the beauty, and dignity of this queen of inscriptions may be brought nearer home to English and other Western readers. For Turks, too, the writer hopes to have illumed more brightly the fact that they have here a true masterpiece of Old Turkish literature; each paragraph and trenchant episode falls fittingly and with crystal clarity into its facet, until the whole appears a gem of the first water. If the modern Turks in their new capital Ankara must a little incongruously live in the shadow of a glorifying apology of the Roman Augustus, they in turn may point with pride to one of their ancestors, whose deeds are at least as great as those of the Roman, and whose telling of them is better. It is a pity that this purely Turkish monument should remain to weather away in Mongol steppes, now being turned into a Russian apanage in the Russian *Drang nach Osten.*

THE TEXT

Turkish runes have been treated in America, and indeed in some parts of Europe, as though they were an occult mystery, inside knowledge of whose hocus-pocus was reserved for an initiated priesthood or circle of adepts, who alone by heaven's special saving grace held the keys to true and innocuous knowledge of their hellishly difficult and dangerous values. The difficulty of their reading is, indeed, in some spots and features considerable, but not a bit greater than that of the Old Persian cuneiform alphabet, whose invention is now being assigned properly again to the organizatory genius of that greatest Achaemenian, Darius I. The runic Turkish alphabet has thirty-eight sym-

bols and a colon to separate words from one another; cuneiform Old Persian has thirty-six rather more complicated symbols and a word-divider. Variation in the form of symbols in different inscriptions is considerably greater in runic Turkish than in cuneiform Persian; but the identity of the symbols once established, as it is for the most part, this offers no great obstacle to the intelligent reader. The mass of material in runic Turkish, including its use on paper, as now known, is probably somewhat, though not very much, less than that of the Old Persian inscriptions, even with the appreciable additions to the latter made by new finds in recent years. For knowledge and understanding of men and peoples, situations and events dealt with in the runic Turkish inscriptions, parallels in other languages, chiefly Chinese, are probably at least as copious and rather better in accuracy and fulness than are the Assyro-Babylonian, Greek, and Hebrew parallels for Old Persian.

There will be those who say that empires and affairs dealt with in these inscriptions are too remote to be of great interest to the American student. To meet this objection, two or three things need only to be clearly stated for the average, impartial, intelligent, non-hyphenated American to see through its fallacy. If it be a question of time, these inscriptions date from 700 to 750 of the Christian Era, the time of Boniface and Karl Martell. They are far nearer to us in time than any stones inscribed in classical Latin or Greek—from one to four thousand years more recent than matters of moment in Egypt and Babylon. If it be a matter of space, we must not be deceived by the "ancient Near East." That is a deceptive term. It was coined in England and for England is correct. From our American mainland the distance to the "Near East," on the one hand, to Manchuria, Mongolia, and Lake Baikal, on the other, is just about 120 degrees of longitude, and to some of our island and peninsular holdings the latter are much nearer. And that in nearness of actual significance and interest to us means much, especially today. The antiquated delusion that our culture, our religion, our science, and our art comes to us in a straight line of progress from Palestine and Attica, from Egypt and Babylon, is still widely propagandized. There is no such line of continuity. We are what we make of ourselves today. And if today no great movements to alter the fate of the world bid fair to issue from Turk or Tatar lands any more than from Arabia, Baghdad,

or Cairo, yet over these lands the fate of Asia, the question of who is to be our next-door neighbor, is being decided. Beyond its already vast and rich lands in Siberia, unobserved by our press and not publicized by our government, Russia is silently clamping heavy hands on Turkestan, Sinkiang, and Outer Mongolia, territory nearly or quite as large as the United States, while we are diligently taught to fix horror-stricken eyes on slender Japan fighting westward over Chiang Kai-shek's China for its growing young life. That is of far more vital interest to us in the United States than is the revolt in Palestine, however sympathetic we may be to the Arab who owns it and wants to keep it, or to the Jew who wants it and feels he needs it, or to England who must hold it as one of the most indispensable keys to her empire.

The difficulty in the path of the American student who seeks knowledge of these regions, such as every clear and unbiased American should have, lies elsewhere. The chief difficulty is that readable and reasonably reliable texts are almost unobtainable. This is especially true of the Tonyukuk epitaph. It was first published by Radloff in his well-known difficult and unreliable manner in 1899 (*Die alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei*, Zweite Folge). His text was reprinted practically unchanged in a fair modern Turkish edition (*Eski Türk Yazitlari* [Istanbul, 1936]). The Danes, who through Vilhelm Thomsen have a claim and a duty to these inscriptions, will not publish for five or six years to come. They will be glad to have any work upon them published in the meantime.

Therefore this writer here sets forth for the use of students a new text and reading of Tonyukuk. It is constructed from as close a study as the writer's eyes and mind could give to the poor photographs and squeezes published in Radloff's *Atlas*. The copy in the Munich state library was used, since Chicago has none. The *Atlas* was checked by Radloff's text and notes and by Thomsen's and Ramstedt's notes, based in part on later photographs taken by Ramstedt. The writer had hoped to see these later photographs in Copenhagen. He learned there that, through some chemical defect, they are irretrievably lost. Since Russian Mongolia is hermetically sealed to all foreigners, even to men like John D. Littlepage, what is here given is the best that can be done at present.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Tonyukuk Ia. West.

(1) [illegible]

(2) [illegible]

(3) [illegible]

(4) [illegible]

(5) [illegible]

(6) [illegible]

Radloff I, 18 non cat.

(1) [illegible] Thomsen

(2) [illegible] Radloff

(3) [illegible]

(4) [illegible]

(5) [illegible]

(6) [illegible]

(7) [illegible]

(8) [illegible]

(9) [illegible]

(10) [illegible]

(11) [illegible]

Tonyukuk I b. Süd.

Tonyukuk I c. Ost.

Tongukuk Id. Nord.

Photo complète, effectif en stone, Radloff: ᐊᓐᓄᓕᓐᓂᓕᓐᓂᓕᓐᓂ

Tonyukuk IIa. West.

Tongukuk II 6. Süd.

II 8. Süd. Photo illeg.

Tornjukuk IIc. Ost.

(51) ᐊᓂᓕᓐᓂᐊᓐ ᑲᓇᐃᓐᓂᐊᓐ ..... ᑲᓇᐃᓐᓂᐊᓐ ..... ᐊᓯᐊᓂᐊᓐ

(52) ᐊᓯᐊᓂᐊᓐ ᐃᓄᐃᑦ

(57) ᐊᓂᓕᓐᓂᐊᓕᓐᓂᐊᓕᓐᓂᐊ