


Tibet in Old Turkic Texts

Erhan Aydın
(Inönü University, Turkey)

Introduction

ld Turkic inscriptions written with runic letters do not only provide information about the Turkish tribes, but also about the Turkish peoples and states that occupied the same and neighboring lands. Naturally, these peoples can learn about their own names or other information about themselves from texts written in other languages as well. The vast number of studies on samples of the names of tribe or people in old Turkic inscriptions such as *büikli* for Korea or a state or the people in that region, *buqaraq uluř* for the Bukhara state of people, *apar* (or *par*) for Avars or the Persians, and *purum* for the Roman Empire demonstrates that the debate on these names still continue. And perhaps, the debate will continue for a long time.

The name Tibet is concurrently the name of the people and the state in old Turkic inscriptions. In the present article, the name Tibet and the only Tibetan word witnessed in these Turkic texts, *böliin* are discussed, and the relationships between the Turkish tribes inhabiting the Yenisei region and Tibet are addressed.

1. Tibet in Old Turkic Texts

1-1. Tibet in Old Turkic Inscriptions

The name Tibet was witnessed as *töpöt* in old Turkic inscriptions written in Turkic runic letters. It is known that the word can be read as *töpüt* and *tüpiüt* due to the fact that the letter that depicts rounded vowels was flexible and could reflect both sounds. The word was witnessed in Köl Tegin and Bilge Kagan inscriptions and two Yenisei inscriptions. The locations where the word was witnessed in these inscriptions are as follows: KT S 3; KT E 4; KT N 12; BK N 3; BK E 5; Altın-Köl II (E 29), 7; Eerbek II (E 149), 6.

KT S 3: *bergärü toquz ärsinkä tägi sülädim töpötkä kiçig tägmädim* “I have traveled up to Tokuz Ersin in the south, little is left to reach Tibet” (Aydın, 2017: p. 47).

KT E 4: *tawyač töpöt par purum qırqız üç qurıqan* “China, Tibet, Iran, Byzantine, Kyrgyz, Three Kurikans” (Aydın, 2017: p. 52).

KT N 12: *töpöt qayanta bölün kälti* “Bölün came from Tibetan khan.” (Aydın, 2017: p. 68).

BK N 2-3: *bergäriü t[oaquz] (3) ärsinkä tägi sülädim töpötkä kiçig tägmädim* “I have traveled up to Dokuz Ersin (3) in the south, little is left to reach Tibet.” (Aydın, 2017: p. 75).

BK E 5: *[t]awyač töpöt par purum qırqız üç qurıqan* “China, Tibet, Iran, Byzantine, Kyrgyz, Three Kurikans” (Aydın, 2017: p. 81).

Altın-Köl II (E 29), 7: *är ärdäm üçün töpöt qanqa yalawač bardım kälmädim* “I went to Tibet as an ambassador for masculine heroism, but I did not return (back).” (Aydın, 2015: p. 85).

Eerbek II (E 149), 6.: *töpöt üpädä? birkä tükändim ä* “I died in Tibet? country?” (Aydın, 2015: p. 177).

As observed above, except for the sample in the sixth line of Eerbek II (E 149), all witnessed examples were written as TWPWT ($\text{Ḫ}^{\text{N}}\text{Ḫ}^{\text{N}}\text{Ḫ}^{\text{N}}$). In Eerbek II inscription, only the second W vowel was omitted ($\text{Ḫ}^{\text{N}}\text{Ḫ}^{\text{N}}$). In the last and 6th line of the Eerbek II inscription, the first word in the sentence *töpöt üpädä? birkä tükändim ä*, was read as *töp töpädä* by Kormushin. We considered that the first word could be *töpöt* (Tibet) and reflected the phrase as such in our study on Yenisey Inscriptions.¹ However, when compared to the spelling of other uses of the word *töpöt*, it can be observed that the vowel in the last syllable was omitted.

1-2. Tibet in Old Uyghur Texts

This ethnic name, which was also witnessed in the Old Uyghur texts, was read by researchers in two different forms as *töpüt* and *tüpüt*.²

1-3. Tibet in Karakhanid Texts

The written language that followed the Old Turkic language period was Karkhanid Turkish. In this period, it is necessary to list the works of Mahmud Kashgarî (*Divân Lugât-at-Türk*), Yusuf Has Hacib

¹ Aydın, 2015: p. 177.

² *Tüpüt* (EUTS, p. 169); *Tüpütçä* (Kara-Zieme, 1977: p. 58); *tüpüt tilintin uyyur tilingä ävirtim*: Altun Yaruq 30 / 8-9: (Kaya, 1994: p. 72 and p. 749); *töpüt til-intin uyyur tilingä ävirtim* (Kasai, 2008: p. 87 and p. 207). Furthermore, compare Zieme, 2012: p. 462.

(*Kutadgu Bilig*) and Edib Ahmed (*Atebetü'l-Hakâyık*). In the following section, information about Tibet, which was mentioned in these works, will be provided.

Dīvān Lūḡāt at-Turk: tübüüt: A large tribe (*jül... kaḡır*) in the lands of the Turks. Among them is found the musk-deer whose navel or musk-bag is cut out. They are the descendants of Tābit. He was a man from Yemen who committed a crime, then took fright and fled by sea to Şīn. He found those regions to his liking and settled there. His children multiplied to such an extent that they took over 1500 parasangs from the lands (*arādī*) of the Turks. They are bordered on the East by Şīn, on the West by Qişmīr, on the North by Uighur, and on the South by the Indian Sea. In their language, one still finds some Arabic words, such as: 'UMA' uma "Mother" (umm) and; 'ABA' aba "Father (ab)".³ In *Kutadgu Bilig* and *Atebetü'l-Hakâyık*, there was no mention or information about Tibet.

2. The Name Tibet and Tibetan Words in Old Turkic Inscriptions

It is generally accepted that the name Tibet is derived from the word *bod* in Tibetan written resources;⁴ however this view is not supported by many scholars. The word *bod* was written as *Fan* (蕃) in Tang dynasty period Chinese. Furthermore, the name Tibet was observed in the form of *Tubo* (吐蕃) during the Tang Dynasty. L. Bazin and J. Hamilton⁵ read Tibet as **Töpät*, which can be explained in Turkish and this form was also witnessed in tri-lingual Karabalgasun inscription. The name *töpöt* was not witnessed in the recent publications of Karabalgasun I inscription.⁶ In Clauson, this name does not appear as a header; however it was understood that it was read as *tüpiüt*.⁷ Ramstedt⁸ quotes it as *tüü-d* in Kalmyks language and designs its old form as *tübiüd* or *tübed*.⁹

H. W. Bailey¹⁰ stated that the name of Tibet was in the forms of *twp'wt* in Sogdian, *twpyt* in Middle Persian, *tubbat* in Arabic and

³ Dankoff-Kelly, 1982: p. 179. Furthermore, compare Ercilasun-Akkoyunlu 2015: 152.

⁴ Scharlipp, 1995: p. 48.

⁵ 1991: pp. 11-17.

⁶ Compare to Aydın, 2018: pp. 66-70.

⁷ ED, p. 420a-b and p. 611a.

⁸ 1935: p. 417.

⁹ See also Radloff, 1895: p. 131; VEWT, p. 506; DTS, p. 598.

¹⁰ 1940: pp. 604-605.

Persian, *twpty-* in Syriac, *bhoṭa* in Skr., and *ttāgutta* in Khotan texts was taken from a foreign language form such as **toyut* or **togut*. However, it could not be **tagut*. Bailey attempts to combine it with *taṇut*, i.e., the name Tangut, which is also witnessed in the old Turkic inscriptions. He stated that the *tāha'tta* and *tāha'tta* forms in Khotan can be compared to Skr. *bhoṭa* and proposed that **toyat* or **toχat* forms could be **töböt* in Turkic while the abovementioned **toyut* form could have developed such as **towut* < **tobot*.

J. Hamilton¹¹ was not convinced that the origin of the name *tibät* was the *töpät* form with a Turkic or Altaic origin and indicated that he certainly did not share the Bailey's proposal of the *töböt* form. He suggested that the word *Ttāgutta* should be *toṅra* (Chinese: Tang hiang = Tangxiang 黨項, or T'ang-kou = Tanggu 唐古), not *töböt* / *töpöt*. An interesting etymological proposal for the name Tibetan is *töpü+t*: *töpü* 'mountain peak' + *+t*: plural suffix in Turkic. Such a name could have been used to indicate that Tibet is a mountainous region.¹² However, the fact that the word *töpö* / *töpü* means "hill" rather than "mountain" would cast a shadow on the said assumption.¹³

On the other hand, R. Dor¹⁴ attempted to derive the name Tibet from the **töpä+n* / *töpä+t* form, indicating that the name was transferred to Persian and Arabic languages through Sogdian. The word *töpät* meant "all the summits that form Tibet" owing to the plural suffix *+t* included in the word according to the author.

A Tibetan word was witnessed in old Turkic inscriptions written with Turkic runic alphabet: *böliin*. The word included in KT N 12 was written as (𐰽𐰺𐰏𐰍). The omission of the vowel in the second syllable makes the word to be read as *böliin* / *bölön* or *bölän*. It is known that most researchers read the word as *böliin*. Scharlipp¹⁵ preferred to read it as *bölän*. It is known that the Tibetan origin of the word is *blon*. This is a high title and can be interpreted as 'senior official representing Tibet'. In fact, it is understood that the visitor in the text was representing the Tibetan Khan: *töpöt kayanta böliin kälti* "the *böliin* of Tibetan Khan arrived".¹⁶

¹¹ 1977: pp. 519-520.

¹² Scharlipp, 1995: p. 48.

¹³ Aydın, 2016: pp. 149-151. On the name Tibet, also see Eren, 2005: pp. 182-183; Chirkova, 2007: p. 410; Aydın, 2015: p. 86 and p. 177.

¹⁴ 2014: pp. 32-33.

¹⁵ 1995: p. 50.

¹⁶ Aydın, 2017: p. 68. About the word *blon*, see Aydın, 2008: p. 101.

The word was given in the form of *blon* and as a verb in H. A. Jäschke's dictionary:¹⁷ "to give advice, to counsel", "to make arrangements", "v. to follow". The *blón-po* structure was defined as "officer, minister". In Sarat Chandra Das Tibetan-English dictionary,¹⁸ it was mentioned as *blon* and was explained as "advice, counsel". In *blon-hdebs-pa* and *hbebs-pa* examples, it was explained as "to give advice, to counsel; to give religious instructions" and it was stated that it could also mean "to make arrangements". Thus, it can be concluded that the person who was present at Kōl Tegin's funeral was a counselor of the Tibetan Khan.

3. *The Relations between Ancient Turks and Tibet*

Apart from the fact that the word *böliin* used in old Turkic inscriptions was a Tibetan word, the main issue of interest here is the relations between ancient Turkic people and Tibet. The Arab invasion of the inner regions of Central Asia and their victory over the Chinese in the war of Talas in 751 also increased their impact on the Silk Road as well. Thus, it can be argued that Arab and Tibetan traders were more prominent when compared to their Chinese opponents in trade. It can be stated that Arab and Tibetan merchants were superior to their Chinese counterparts. It was stated that caravans that included 20-24 camels brought imprinted fabric from the lands of the caliphate to Minusinsk basin three times a year.¹⁹

It is obvious that the relationships between Tibet (with the mention of the dispatching of an ambassador in Yenisei inscriptions) and the Turkic tribes in the Yenisei region are more important than the location of Tibet mentioned in the inscriptions erected by the Second Turkic Khanate in Mongolia and the two Yenisei inscriptions. L. Bazin,²⁰ based on the phrase *är ärdäm üčün töpöt qanqa yalawač bardım kälmädim* "I went to Tibet as an ambassador for masculine heroism, but I did not return (back)" on the 7th line of Altın-Köl II (E 29) inscription, mentioned that the inscription could have been erected between 840 and 848 with respect to the relations between Kyrgyz and Tibetan states. Thus, it is possible to argue that the Yenisei, that is, the Turkic tribes in the southern Siberia, had both political and economic relations with Tibet based on the fact that the protagonist of the inscription went to the Tibetan Khan as an

¹⁷ 1985: p. 385.

¹⁸ 1902: p. 905.

¹⁹ Gumilëv, 2002: p. 464.

²⁰ 1991: pp. 95-96.

ambassador. However, he did not come back and probably died in Tibet.

4. Conclusion

One of the topics discussed in the present article was the name *Tibät* in the old Turkic inscriptions written with Turkic runic alphabet and the the only Tibetan word witnessed in these inscriptions, namely *bölün*. It was concluded that the individual who arrived with the title of *bölün* was the adviser or counselor of the Tibetan ruler. Another issue addressed in this article is the fact that the Tibetan word can be explained by Turkish rules. Apart from the name *Tibät* and the only Tibetan word, *bölün*, another important issue that the present article addressed was the framework of the relations between old Turkic tribes and Tibet. In particular, concerning the Yenisei region inscriptions, this can be considered as an evidence for the fact that the most important reason for the visit of the ambassador to Tibet was the strong relations between the Turkic tribe inhabiting the Yenisei region and the Tibetan state.

Abbreviations and References

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