An Old Turkic Epitaph in Runic Script from Xi'an (China)

The Epitaph of Qarï čor tegin*

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Summary: In the surroundings of Xi'an (Chang'an), China several Chinese epitaphs dedicated to the memory of Uigur officials of the Tang court have been discovered. The bilingual (Chinese, Old Turkic) epitaph under discussion here was discovered in the surroundings of Xi'an, too. It is a unique epitaph, as it is the only one discovered so far in the central parts of the Tang empire containing an Old Turkic inscription in Runic script. The Old Turkic part of the epitaph stands at the left end of a much longer epitaph in Chinese; both are engraved on a Chinese tombstone of the Tang dynasty. By content, the Old Turkic and Chinese parts of the epitaph are only loosely connected with each other. The Old Turkic part consists of seventeen lines, each line consisting of one to two words. It can be divided into three sections: Section one tells the name of the deceased as well as the names of some of his relatives; section two states that a funeral feast had been held by the Chinese emperor; section three gives the date when Qarï čor tegin was buried.

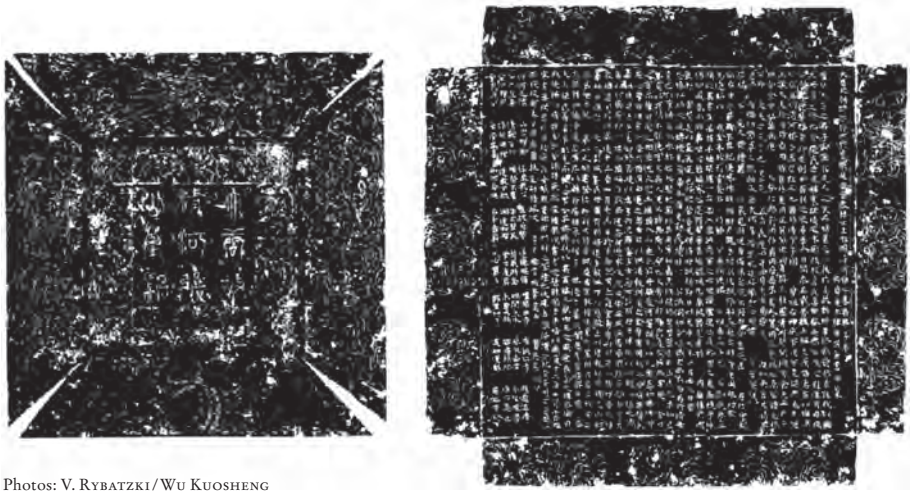
1 Introduction

The Runic epitaph under discussion here was discovered in recent years in Xi'an 西安 (*Chang'an* 長安 in Tang dynasty), one of the old capitals of China. The exact circumstances of the discovery of the tombstone are not known, thus the exact provenance as well as the grave itself, probably in or around Xi'an, is not known.[1]

The Runic epitaph stands at the left end of a much longer epitaph in Chinese. Both are engraved on a Chinese tombstone of the Tang dynasty; also the cover of the tombstone is preserved (Figs. 1 and 2). The epitaph is a

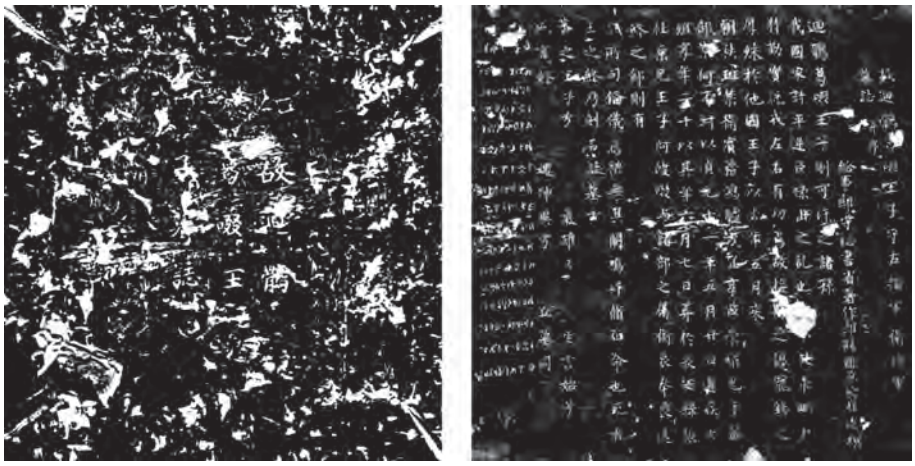
* This is a slightly revised version of our first interpretation of the Runic text, presented as "Preliminary decipherment of a recently discovered Runic epitaph from Xi'an (China)" on the 7th of April 2013 at the "International Workshop on an Uyghur Tegin's epigraph with Chinese and Old Turkic Inscriptions" at Peking University (PR China). This was the very first study of the inscription. After the workshop our handout has been used by several scholars without mentioning our contribution.

[1] At the moment the epitaph is kept in the Tang West Market Museum in Xi'an. The burial place is called "張杜原" *(Zhang du yuan)* in the Chinese part of the epitaph. More research is needed to clarify the exact position of this location. Wu is presently dealing with the topic and will present his results in a forthcoming article.



Photos: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 1: A Chinese gravestone from the Tang dynasty.
Left: the cover; right: the body of the gravestone



Photos: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 2: Epitaph of Qarï čor tegin.
Left: the cover; right: the Sino-Runic epitaph

traditional Chinese one, placed horizontally in a crypt underground, and *not* erected above ground. The function of the cover was to protect the texts of the epitaph from being damaged. In this presentation, we only deal with the Runic part.

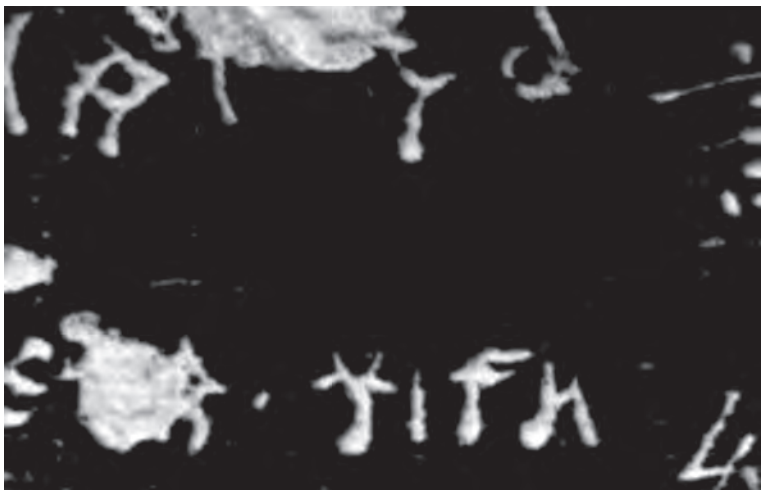


Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 3: Example of the epitaph (the contrast is enhanced)

In Turcology it is a common habit to name epitaphs or inscriptions according to the place of origin (inscription of Bugut, Şine usu, Tes, Ongi etc.) or according to the name of the deceased, who is honoured (inscription of Toñuquq, Kül tegin, Bilgä qaγan etc.). As we do not yet know the exact place of the origin of the tombstone, we would suggest to call this epitaph "Epitaph of Qarï čor tegin" for the moment.

The Turkic part of the epitaph stands, as already mentioned, at the end of a much longer Chinese epitaph. The Turkic part consists of seventeen lines, each line consisting of one to two words. The Turkic text can be divided into three sections: Section one tells the name of the deceased as well as the names of some of his relatives. Section two states that a funeral feast has been held by the Chinese emperor. Section three gives the date when Qarï čor tegin was buried.

As can be seen from the rubbings of the epitaph, the text is generally well preserved, only lines one and two, as well as ten and eleven are damaged. However, as can be judged from the following picture (see Fig. 3), where we have changed the contrast, it seems that the appearance of the engraved Runic signs is different from the damage of the surface of the tombstone (a superficial investigation of the original epitaph confirmed this view). The changing of the contrast did not have the expected results in all parts of the epitaph. An investigation of the original text on the 8th of April in Xi'an could not solve all the problems involved in the interpretation of the damaged lines but was of some help.

2 Preliminary decipherment of the Runic epitaph

2.1 Lines 1–2: unclear

According to our original understanding of the epitaph, these two lines might have contained the name or title of the eldest of the relatives of Qarï čor tegin. According to this understanding, we tried to interpret the first two lines as [i]*bolmïš* (??) [ii]*XXXX* · *bügü* at the Peking-workshop. The investigation of the original showed that this interpretation was wrong. Following this misinterpretation we are not sure if lines one and two belong to that part of the epitaph enumerating some of the relatives of the deceased, or if they form an independent fourth section. The first two lines can be transliterated as [i]b[1]Ws[2]mŋ [ii]t[2]Is[2]l[2] · b[2]zg[2]k[2]. There is a gap in the first line between W and s[2], this is part of the original text and not a later damage as it can be seen clearly from the picture of line one (Fig. 4). If the third character of line one is not s[2], but I, the first line might read *bu imiŋ* 'This is your sign', for *im* cf. CLAUSON (1972, p. 155). The last letter of the first word of line two might also be interpreted as r[2], but at the moment we prefer the reading l[2]; the last word of this line might be *bäzgäk*, dev. n. fr. *bäz-*; 'ague, malaria' (CLAUSON 1972, p. 391; ERDAL 1991, pp. 391–396, esp. 394 [cold fever]; TMEN §825). However, it should be stressed that being unsure about the exact function of the first two lines, we refrain for the moment from giving further fantastic interpretations.

2.2 Lines 3–12: Name and title of the deceased, names and titles of some of his relatives

Line 3

Two clear words, divided by the punctuation sign "·", typical for this inscription (RYBATZKI 1999). The first one is y[1]g[1]l[1]k[1]r[1], i. e. *yaγlaqar*, designation of the most important royal clan of the Uigurs (RYBATZKI 2000, pp. 230–244); the second word is k[1]An[1], *qan* 'ruler, qan' (C 72.630). Generally *qan* indicates a position in the political hierarchy lower than *qaγan* (id. 611), in this case, however, it seems to be a colloquial or affectionated(?) variant of the later word (RYBATZKI 2006, pp. 484–489, 500–507).

Line 4

Two words divided by the punctuation signs "*:*", after the last word "·". The interpretation of the first word is problematic. It consists of the letters At[1]I. This should be interpreted as *atï* ← *at* 'name, title' (C 72.32–33) + *-I* 3 p. poss. s.



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 4: Line 1



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 5: Line 2



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 6: Line 3



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 7: Line 4

The occurrence of *at* in this position is strange as in all other cases the name/title is followed by a term of relationship (*atïsï* 'his grandson or nephew', *oγlï* 'his son', *inisi* 'his younger brother') in this part of the inscription. Perhaps *atï* is a mistake for *atïsï*? On the photograph of line 4 (Fig. 7) the first letter looks much like l[1], but the investigation of the original has confirmed our reading A. The orthography is not according to the rules of Runic orthography where initial *A-* is generally not written, but also in line 7 *atïsï* and line 16 *ayqa* are written in the very same way with initial *A-*. The second word is čb[1]s[1] (= š/s), i.e. *čabuš* (~ *čavuš*) 'principal military officer of the *qaγan*' (C72.399). This is a title not very common in Old Turkic (OT), but nevertheless attested already in the Toñuquq inscription where Toñuquq calls himself *bilgäsi čavuši* 'Councilor and Army Commander of (Elteriš qaγan)'. The orthography of the word is identical in the Toñuquq and Qarï čor tegin inscriptions. Following the interpretations of Clauson (C72.399) and Doerfer (TMEN §1055) we read the title as *čabuš ~ čavuš*.

Line 5

Two words divided by the punctuation sign "·". The first word is t[2]Ig[2]n, *tegin* 'prince, i.e. son or grandson of the *qaγan*', a very old title in OT, perhaps of non-Tu. origin as it forms the plural in *-t* (C72.483; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 378–382; TMEN §922). The second word is Wg[1]l[1]I, *oγlï* 'his son, the son of' ← *oγul* 'offspring, child', originally of either sex, but with a strong implication of 'male child'; also this word has a non-Tu. pl. in *-n* (C72.83–84; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 56–61; TMEN §498, 502) + *-I* 3 p. poss. s. (= gen.).

Line 6

Two words divided by the punctuation sign "·". The first word is k[1]An[1], *qan* (see above line 3). The second word is t[1]Wt[1W]k[1], *totuq (tutuq ~ totoq)* 'military governor (of a district, region)'. By origin this might be a Tu. title borrowed into Chinese, in this case its reading should be *tutuq* [dev. n. fr. *tut-*], or (one of the few titles) borrowed into OT from Chinese, in this case the reading should be *totuq ~ totoq* (C72.453; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 340–343; TMEN §874).

Line 7

Line 7 consists of one word, followed by the punctuation sign *":"*. The word is At[1]Is[1]I, *atïsï* ← *atï* 'the son of one's younger brother or of one's own son', that is '(junior) nephew' or 'grandson' > Middle Mongγol (MMo.) *aci (köbegün) ~ haci (kö·ün)* 'grandson, nephew' > Uigur (Uig.) *ačï* 'son of the brother

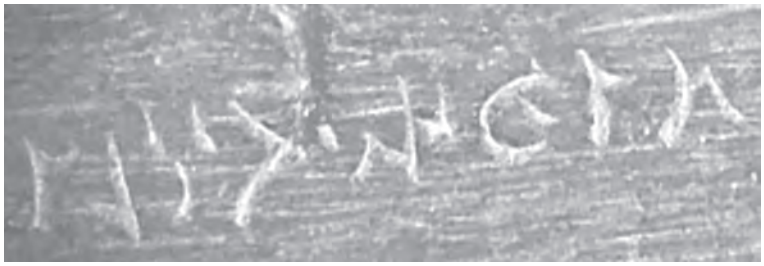


Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 8: Line 5



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 9: Line 6



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Fig. 10: Line 7

or son' (C72.40; Röhrborn, p. 40; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 18–19; TMEN § 432) + *-sI* 3 p. poss. s. (= gen.) (see above line 4). Note the irregular orthography with initial *A-* as in line 4 *(atï)* and line 16 *(ayqa)*.

Lines 8–9

Lines 8–9 consist of 3 words, divided by the punctuation sign *":"*, after the last word "·". The first word is b^2Ẅg^2Ẅ, *bügü (bögü ~ bögö)* 'sage, wizard' > MMo. *böge ~ bö·e ~ bō* shaman, (!) shamaness (this is usually *iduqan ~ iduγan*) (C72.324–25; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 234–235; TMEN § 112); the second word is b^2Il^2-g^2A, *bilgä* 'wise (man)' (C72.340; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 245–250; TMEN §§ 835–836); and the last one t^2ŋr^2I, *täŋri* 'heaven, heavenly', a very old word, prob. pre-Tu., which can be traced back to the language of the Xiongnu if not earlier ≈ MMo. *tenggeri ~ tenggiri ~ tngri ~ dėngri ~ dingri ~ tengri ~ tangri* 'heaven; gods; Heaven, God' (C72.523–24; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 401–410; TMEN § 944).

Line 10

This line is very damaged, but an inspection of the original confirmed our first interpretation that the two words written here are k^1An^1, *qan* (see above line 3), and In^2Is^2I, *inisi* ← *ini* 'younger brother' (C72.170; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 374–375 [sub *degü*]; TMEN § 674) + *-sI* (see above). For *bügü bilgä täŋri qan* cf. Rybatzki 2000, pp. 235–239.

Line 11

Also this line is damaged, although less severe than line 10. The line contains the first part of the appellation of the deceased, k^1r^1IčWr^1, *qarï čor.* The first word *qarï*, attested several times in Manichaean Turkic texts, could mean 'old' (C72.644). The second word is *čor*, a title fairly well attested in Old Turkic, Manichean and early Uigur texts. Probably *čor* is not of Tu. origin, but f. ex. in Tocharian texts it occurs only as a title connected with ethnically Turkic people (id. 427–428; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 320, 321–322 [sub *corogi*]). The interpretation of the first word as *qarï* is according to Runic orthography, where initial as well as first syllable A is generally not written. The reading of this line, first suggested at the Peking-symposium, has been confirmed by our investigation of the original in Xi'an.

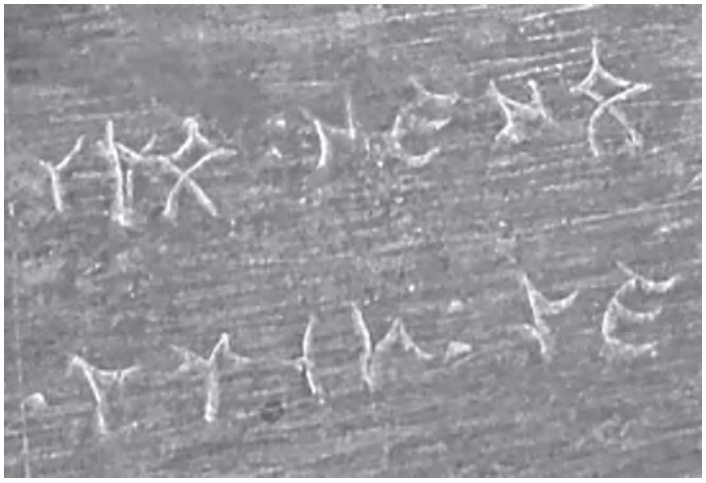


Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 11: Line 8–9



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 12: Line 10



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 13: Line 11

Line 12

Two words, easily read and interpreted, divided by the punctuation sign "·". The first word is $t^2Ig^2n^2$, *tegin* 'prince' (see above line 5); the second one s^1In^1I, *sïnï* ← ^{2}*sïn* 'tomb', a rare word in modern Turkic, but not a Ch. loan-word as suggested by Räsänen (C72.832; Räsänen 1969, p. 422b) + *-I* (see above) = 'his tomb, the tomb of'.

Line 13, first word

Two easily read words, divided by the punctuation sign "*:*", after the last word "·". The first word is y^1Wg^1I, *yoγï* ← *yoγ* 'funeral feast, wake', a word not attested in modern Tu. languages (C72.895; Räsänen 1969, p. 204b) + *-I* (see above) = 'his wake, the wake of'. With this word the first part of the epitaph ends.

Transcription and translation of the first part:

[i]*XX XXX* [ii]*XXXX · XXXX* [iii]*yaγlaqar · qan* [iv]*atï[sï?] : čavuš* · [v]*tegin · oγlï* [vi]*qan · totuq* [vii]*atïsï :* [viii]*bügü : bil*[ix]*gä : täŋri* · [x]*qan · inisi* [xi]*qarï čor* [xii]*tegin · sïnï* [xiii]*yoγï :*

'XX XXX XXXX XXXX. The tomb (and) wake of Qarï čor tegin, the younger brother of Bügü bilgä tŋri qan, the grandson of Qan totuq, the son of Čavuš tegin, the (???) grandson of Yaγlaqar qan.'

2.3 Lines 13–14: Statement concerning the Chinese emperor

Line 13, second word

The second word of line 13, starting the second part of the epitaph, is $t^1b^1g^1č$, *tabγač (tavγač)* 'China, Chinese' (C72.438 Räsänen 1969, p. 452a).

Line 14

Two easily read words, divided by the punctuation sign "·", after the last word "·". The first word is k^1n^1, *qan* 'ruler, emperor' (see above ll. 3, 6, 10); note that in ll. 3, 6, 10 the orthography (k^1An^1) of the word is different than in this line. The second one is $y^1Wg^1l^1d^1I$, *yoγladï* 'He celebrated/has celebrated the funeral feast' ← *yoγ* (see above l. 13) + *-lA-* den. v. s. = *yoγla-*; contrary to *yoγ*, the word *yoγla-* survives in some NC and NW Turkic languages (C72.902, Räsänen 1969, p. 204b) + *-dI* 3 p. sg. perf. s. This is the end of the second part of the epitaph.

Transcription and translation of the second part:

[xiii]*tabγač* · [xiv]*qan · yoγladï* ·

'The Chinese emperor celebrated the funeral feast.'

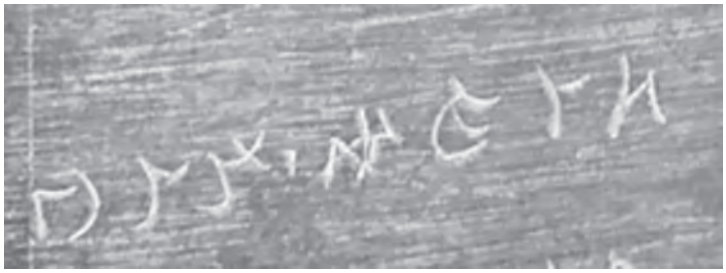


Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 14: Line 12

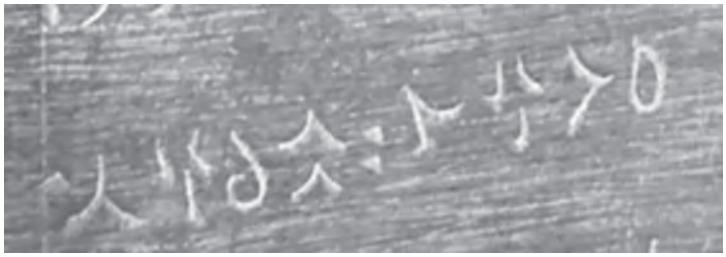


Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 15: Line 13



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 16: Line 14

2.4 Lines 15–17: Colophon

Line 15

With this line of the last part of the epitaph, the colophon begins. Line 15 has two words, divided by the punctuation sign "·", after the last word there is also "·". The first word is l¹g¹zIn¹, *laγzïn* 'pig, swine' (豬、亥); the earliest name of this animal in the twelve-year cycle, later replaced by *toŋuz*; because of the initial *l-*, this word is not of Tu. origin (C72.764). The second word is y¹Il¹, *yïl* 'year', originally only 'a year of the 12-animal cycle', later 'year' generally > (second period loanword) MMo. *jil* 'id.' (id. 917). The year indicated here is 795.

Line 16

Two, clearly readable words, divided by the punctuation sign "·", after the last word there is another "·". The first word is *l¹t¹ŋč*, *altïnč* 'sixth'← *altï* 'six' + *-nč* s. forming ordinal numerals (C72.130, 131; RÄSÄNEN 1969, p. 18a); the word is written according to Runic orthography without initial *A-*, this is contrary to the orthography of all other words of this text beginning with *A-* (l. 4 *atï*, l. 7 *atïsï*, l. 16 *ayqa*). The second word is Ay¹k¹A, *ayqa* 'in the month' ← *ay* originally 'moon'; hence from the earliest period 'a (lunar) month' (C72.265; RÄSÄNEN 1969, p. 10a; RÖHRBORN, pp. 281–285; TMEN §627) + *-KA* dat. s.

Line 17

The last two words of the epitaph, divided by the punctuation sign "*:*". The first word is y¹It1¹, *yeti* 'seven' (C72.886, RÄSÄNEN 1969, p. 199a); the second one y¹ŋIk¹A, *yaŋïqa* 'of the first ten days of the month' ← *yaŋï* 'new; (in connection with time) one of the first ten days of a month' + *-kA* (see l. 16).

Transcription and translation of the third part:

xv*laγzïn · yïl* · xvi*altïnč · ayqa* · xvii*yeti : yaŋïqa*

'(In) the Year of the Pig, in the sixth month on the seven[th day] of the first ten days of the month / of the beginning of the month.' [(28th of June 795)]

At the end of the epitaph is a *tamγa*, probably the one of the deceased prince. Its basic shape resembles the *tamγa* of Bügü qaγan found on his funeral inscription at Şine usu.

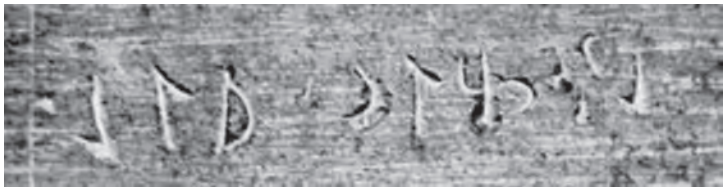


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Fig. 17: Line 15



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 18: Line 16



Photo: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Fig. 19: Line 17





Photos: V. Rybatzki/Wu Kuosheng

Şine usu Qarï čor tegin

Fig. 20: The two *tamγas* from Şine usu and Xi'an

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