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Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society / *FirstView* Article / November 2015, pp 1 - 9
DOI: 10.1017/S1356186314000558, Published online: 06 November 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1356186314000558

How to cite this article:
HATICE ŞIRIN Bombogor Inscription: Tombstone of a Turkic *Qunčuy* (“Princess”). Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Available on CJO 2015 doi:10.1017/S1356186314000558

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Bombogor Inscription: Tombstone of a Turkic Qunčuy *("Princess")*

HATICE ŞIRIN*[1]

Abstract

Turkic Runic inscriptions, discovered in Mongolia during the second half of the 20th century and especially in the last decade, are remarkable. The Bombogor, consisting of five-lines, is one of them. This article is an attempt to re-read the mentioned inscription which was first published by Ts. Battulga. According to my proposed reading, the text was written on a tombstone which was erected in honour of a Turkish qunčuy *("princess") who might have been married into the Karluk tribe.*

1.

Many inscriptions were found in Mongolia, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, through the field studies of Soviet, Mongolian, Japanese and German scholars. Some of them were listed by Alyılmaz 2003, Kempf 2004 and Sertkaya 2008; but a more current list, consisting of photographs and copies of the inscriptions is a web-publication, prepared under the directorate of Dr Napil Bazylkhan in Abai Kazak National Pedagogical University. This electronic database contains the transliterations, transcriptions, translations as well as the literature information of the inscriptions (http://irq.kaznpu.kz). Most of the new findings have recently been published by Mongolian scholars, like Bazilkhan, Bayar, Battulga, Bayarkhuu *et al*. Although some of those new texts consists of a single word/line only or just a few words/lines, each of them is precious in terms of Turkic language, culture and history. For example, the sentences *altm(ı)ş kul(a)n öl(ü)rtim yiti t(ä)bi öl(ü)rt(ü)m y(e)g(i)rmi bör[i] öl(ü)rt(ü)m* "I killed sixty wild asses I killed seven camels I killed twenty wolves" - documented on the inscription of Del Uul, which was found in Dund Govi Aimag in Mongolia in 1992–1997 - not only match up in style with Mongolian inscriptions (eg. Kül İč Čor) and Yenisei epitaphs (eg. Begre, Uybat IV), but also testify that the activities performed

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[1]**Abbrevations**
BK: Inscription of Bilge Kagan → Şirin User 2009
DLT: *Divanü Lâgat-it-Türk*
DTSl: Nadeljaev, V. M. *et al*.
ED: *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* → Clauson 1972.
KČ: Inscription of Kül İç Čor → Şirin User 2009
KT: Inscription of Kül Tigin → Şirin User 2009
TA: Inscription of Tariat → Şirin User 2009

doi:10.1017/S1356186314000558
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by the *alps/beg*s in order to achieve *er erdem* were directly connected with the number of wild animals they hunted. The phrase *tugçı borg(u)çı γ(a)g(ı)z çor tugr(a)gı*, documented on the inscription of Tevš, found by A. Okladnikov and N. Ser-Odzhav in 1949, and first published by V. M. Nadeljaev in 1974, proves that *tugčı* "the official title of an officer whose duties related to *tug*; standard-bearer" and *burgučı* "official bugler" were titles carried by elite individuals in the early medieval period and it verifies that these tasks were carried out by the officers whose titles were *čor* (perhaps together with the other presitigously-titled officers). This phrase, not only connotes that the definition of the word *tugrag* in DLT is inadequate ("Hakanın mührü, buyrultusu. Oğuzca. Bunu Türkler bilmez. Ben de aslını bilmiyorum."- DLT I: 462), but denotes that the word's meaning was semantically restricted in the ninth century. The inscription of Tevš was written three hundred years earlier than the *DLT*. *Tugrag* was likely to have been a powerful symbol or the royal emblem of the leaders of the Turkic sub-tribes (especially Oguz) just like the *belgü* of the second Turkic Kaganate's rulership.

2.

The Bombogor grave complex is situated in Shiveeny Kherem district northwest of Bombogor Sum, Bayankhongor Aimag, Mongolia at N 46° 07′- E 99° 31′. The memorial complex consists of a barrow (a circle of size 22–29 m), a stele and a stone fence. There are 4 horizontal lines of inscription at the top of the stele and there are 32–34 signs carved vertically on the side of the stele. Its height is 1.33 m., length is 0.20–0.47 m. and width is 0.16–0.20 m. The complex was discovered by an expedition held by Archeology Institute of Mongolian Academy of Sciences in Govi-Altai and Bayankhongor Aimags (http://irq.kaznpu.kz/?mod=1&tid=1&oid=82&lang=e). A picture of the stone and photographs of the 4 lines of inscription were published in 2004[2]. The Mongolian scholars Ts. Battulga examined the inscription of the stele firstly[3] and later the Japanese scholars K. Suzuki edited the inscription[4].

There are 32 *tamga*s on the inscription. These *tamga*s represent the sub-tribes and families who were living in dependence of the *Kaganate*. Moreover, as seen on the inscription of Bombogor, *tamga*s of sub-tribes and families were undergoing some small changes in accordance with the number of families who composed the clans[5]. It is likely that these *tamga*s belonged to the Qarluqs (or both Qarluqs and Basmils), since their ethnomyms were inscribed on the inscription of Bombogor, but on this issue further studies are required.

My re-reading and re-interpretation of the inscription is as follows:

2.1. Transliteration

Front

1. wtᴵlᴵ . . . . . .ŋ

[2]Tseveendorj *et al.*, 2004.
[3]Ts. Battulga 2005; Ts. Battulga 2006.
[4]Suzuki 2010.
[5]Mert 2008, pp. 7, 12.

2. Il² b²Ig² kunçy¹ŋ
3. t¹wltn¹I : l¹w (?) k¹r¹l¹ʷk
4. kʷb¹r¹p : t¹wltn¹l¹d¹I

Side

1. ẅzA <t²ŋr²k²>A s¹r¹A y²r²k²A : y²ẅk²n²<t>kʷ̈m b¹r¹ r²t²I y¹ŋltᵘkm y¹ʷk : b¹s¹ml²g¹ : b¹wd¹n¹g¹

Transcription
Front

1. [k]utl(u)[g kunç(u)y(u)]ŋ
2. il bilg[ä] kunç(u)y(u)ŋ
3. tult(u)nı : . . . (?) k(a)rluk
4. kubr(a)p tult(u)nl(a)dı

Side

1. üzä <t(ä)ŋr(ı)k>ä (a)sra y(ä)rkä : yük(ü)n<t>(ü)küm b(a)r (ä)rti y(a)ŋ(ı)ltuk(u)m yok : b(a)sm(ı)l(lı)g : bod(u)n(u)g

Translation
Front

1. Princess *Kutlug's*
2. Princess *İl Bilge*'s
3. grave! (?) Qarluq(s)
4. assembled and buried (her)

Side

1. I had worshipped the (heavenly) sky above, I had worshipped the (heavenly) ground below; I have never gone astray. The tribe with Basmils (Basmils were a sub-tribe within the leading tribe).

2.1.1. [k]utl(u)[g kunč(u)y(u)]ŋ

The character before wt¹l¹ is not clear and the ones after it are likewise. Suzuki's reading *utup artattıŋ* does not suit a tombstone text. Short texts of Turkic Runic inscriptions begin usually with the identity of the deceased. In consideration of this fact, I propose here a hypothetical phrase *kutlug kunčuyuŋ*. The word *kutlug* does not mean "blessed by the favour of heaven; fortunate, happy", but refers to a royal title/name in inscriptional Turkic. And in post-inscriptional Uighur it is normally used both as an anthroponym and an attributive adjective.[6] Since the royal title/name of Elteriš Kagan was mentioned as 阿史那骨篤祿 (*A-shi-na ku-tuo-lu*) in Chinese sources, and determined as *Ašina Kutlug*, one can conclude

[6]For more instances see Rybatzki 2000, pp. 262–266; Rybatzki 2006, pp. 470–472.

that the word *kutlug* has been in use as a royal title/proper name since at least the Early Middle Ages. The sentences *kutum bar üčün kagan olurtum* (KT G 9; BK K 7); *ögüm katun kutıŋa inim kül tigin är at buldı* quoted from the inscriptions are heavenly reflections of gender equity, since *teŋri kutı* ("sanctity") had been conferred upon both *kagan* and *katun*. The goddesslike beings of the queens (*umay täg katun*) and the godlike beings of the kings (*täŋri täg kagan*) prove that women were believed to be blessed and exalted by God in conformity with the beliefs and traditions of that age. Hence, it should not be surprising to observe *kutlug* as a proper name of women in the inscriptional and post-inscriptional Turkic texts: *yäŋgäm kutlug tegin* (Vatectexte: BT13.37) *anam tuglug kutlug aga* (Vatectexte: BT13.39); *ögi kaŋï kutluglar* (BT II)[7].

On this line of the Bombogor inscription, I suppose that the proper name of the princess for whom the tombstone was erected is *kutlug*.

2.1.2. il bilg[ä] kunç(u)ɣ(u)ŋ tult(u)nı

This phrase is explained as *ilbis ilig qunčuyïŋ tultonï* "*İlbis İlig* günciyn belevsreliyn=widow's coat of the princess *İl Bilge*" in the edition of Battulga[8]. Suzuki's reading and interpreting is as follows: *el beš älig qučuyïŋ utu altunï alu* "(Consequently, Qarluq/Qarluqs), acquiring the forty five girls of the country and seizing the golds (of Basmils)"[9]. Suzuki's reading is not appropriate to the Turkish syntax because of the obscure morphological connection between the words/phrases *el*, *beš älig qučuyïŋ* and *utu* respectively.

The first word is clearly seen as Il² (*il*) on the inscription. The line is horizontally arranged from left to right. Although it is regarded as Il²b²s²l²g² wkwnçyŋ by Battulga, if one attentively examines the original writing one will see that the snick of the upper right-hand corner of the fourth letter (I=i) is merged with the snick of the upper left-hand corner of the following letter. Battulga has overlooked this merger. This sign is not (s²), as Battulga suggests, but is (I). In other words, these two signs are not s²l, but Il². Thus, the word (Il²b²ilg²) *il bil(i)g* becomes apparent; but the style and the glossary of Old Turkic inscriptions require that the attribute of the noun *kunçuy* cannot be *bilig*, but *bilgä* due to semantical reasons. In my opinion, this word should be *bilg[ä]*. Then the first three words of the phrase appear as *il bilg[ä] kunčuy*. It is known that *il bilgä* was the title of the *khatun*s and was prominently used in the Second Turkish and Uighur Kaganate in seventh and ninth centuries (See KT E 11; BK E 10; TA S 6; TA W 1)

Giving examples from Nadeljaev 1969 and ED, Battulga has read the word t¹w¹tnI in the second line as *tul ton*. In the dictionaries, one of the instances is quoted from a Manichaean story and others are cited from the *Kutadgu Bilig*. Therefore, all of the *tul ton* samples from Kutadgu Bilig (84, 5029, 5824) are really used in the sense of "widow's coat" whereas the spelling t¹w¹tnI on the inscription of Bombogor can be read differently in the context of this tombstone[10].

[7] Erdal 2004, p. 490.
[8] Battulga 2005, p. 123.
[9] Suzuki 2010, p. 7.
[10] While I thought for a long time about the spelling and the meaning of the word t¹w¹tnI on this inscription, Professor Semih Tezcan announced, in the Symposium of III[rd] International Turkology Researches held on

Peter Zieme discusses a word that has been read as *tulton* so far. This word is documented in a Manichaean story in which a drunken man had necrophilic intercourse with the corpse of a woman in a tomb. The story has aroused a great interest ever since it was first published by Le Coq; and the meaning of the word *tulton* was regarded as "widow's coat" until van Tongerloo [11] and Z. Özertural attributed a new meaning "shroud" to the word[12]. The phrase *t(ä)rkin tultunta tasıkıp täzdi* (M I, S. 6–7, ZZ. 8–11) is quoted in ED from the mentioned dreadful Manichaean story under the entry *tul* "widow" and translated as "He immediately stripped off his mourning garments and ran away." (ED: 490a). It is also misinterpreted as "Trauerkleid" by Klimkeit[13].

Zieme not only noticed that neither of the meanings "widow's coat" and "shroud" fit into the context of this story, but he also perceived that the lexemes which compose a hendiadyoin as *tultunka inkä*[14] of another Manichaean story, should have the same or a similar meaning. On the basis of this observation, he corrected the dubious word as *tultun/toltun* "grab" and translated the full sentence *ötrü b(ä)liŋlädi anıg korktı ulug ünün m(a)ŋradı t(ä)rkin tultunta tasıkıp täzdi* as "Dann erschrak er und fürchtete sich sehr, mit lauter Stimme schrie er. Sogleich ging er aus dem Grab hinaus und floh." Thus, the spellings *twltwn /twltn* in two Uigur stories become understandable through Zieme's suggestion.

I think, the word *tultun/toltun* "grab" identified by Zieme, occurs as $t^{I}w^{I}\underline{t}$wnI in the inscription of Bombogor. The word *tul ton* which means "widow's coat" does not suit the story's context. I surmise that Battulga established a connection between the meaning "widow's coat" and the death concept since the text is an inscription on a tombstone. Whereas, this line should be read as *il bilg[ä] kunč(u)γ(u)ŋ tult(u)nı/tolt(u)nı* and translated as "grave of the princess *İl Bilge*". Thus, the sentence in this line becomes apparent as an explanation that expresses the identity of the deceased.

2.1.3. k(a)rluk kubr(a)p tult(u)nl(a)dı

Battulga has read and translated this sentence as *qarluq kub arïp tulton aldï* "Karluk hurj belevsreliyn huvtsas avav"[15]. Suzuki explained it as *kuvrap utu altun aldï* "Assembling (and) acquiring (them), (Qarluqs) captured the golds"[16]. The likeliness that the inscription has been written as *utu altun aldï* instead of *altun uttı* and that the former sentence has been

26–29 May 2010 in Ankara, that Professor Peter Zieme has determined this word as *tultun/toltun* "grave" in one of his articles. I decided to suggest a re-reading of the Bombogor inscription in accordance with this information.

[11] van Tongerloo and Z. Özertural 2008.

[12] Zieme 2008, p. 359.

[13] Klimkeit 2000, p. 370.

[14] *01 öltükintä kišig tašgaru 02 [kı]lmıšt[a] it böri azu ad(ı)n 03 [a]z(ı)gl(ı)g [tı]nl(ı)glar ye(y)ür yok 04 yodun buzar azu tultunka 05 inkä kizläsär k(ä)ntü ät'özi 06 -ntä kurt koŋuz üzä 07 [yoka]d/u[r] [alk]ayur yok [buzar] 08 ymä in[čä kaltı tugmaduk 09 kılınmadın // : inčip 10 kamagda yeg ol ol kim 11 bo yertinčü ät'öz birlä 12 mäŋülüg kazganč üküš 13 yirün kazgansar : ädgü 14 [kılınč kıl]ıp yaruk 15 [ ]* "Wenn ein Mensch gestorben ist, bringt man ihn nach draußen: Hunde, Wölfe oder andere Hauer habende Tiere fressen (ihn), vernichten (ihn oder) zerreißen (ihn), oder man verbirgt ihn in einer Höhle (tultun, in), wo sein Körper durch Würmer und Getier vernichtet wird. Aber es ist besser als daß man nicht geboren wird, denn derjenige, der mit diesem weltlichen Körper ewigen Besitz und viel Frucht 13 erwirbt, [tut gute] Taten und [sammelt] Licht [an]." (Zieme 2008, 361)

[15] Battulga 2005, p.123.

[16] Suzuki 2010, p. 7.

repeated is small. Besides, Suzuki's proposals contain obscure morphological relations and syntactic defects, so they are quite unacceptable for semantic and morphological reasons.

It would be more appropriate to read the second word as *kubrap* (*kubra-+(X)p*) for semantical reasons. This adverb occurs in the inscription of KČ in the context of the funeral ceremony of the Kül İč Čor, ruler of the Tarduš tribe: *[. . .]ın : üçün : bunça : bod(u)n : kubr(a)p : yogl(a)dı :* "Owing to (his heroism) so many tribes assembled and attended (his) funeral ceremony" (KČ 27).

kubra- was used in the sense of "to assemble, to congregate (for performing a particular task)" in Bombogor and KČ. The verb *kubran-*, augmented by the suffix *-(X)n-*, occurs in the sentence *ıda t(a)şda : k(a)lm(ı)şı : kubr(a)n(ı)p : y(e)ti yüz boltı* in the Toñuquq inscription. It is clear that the verb does not signify a disorganised agglomeration, but an assemblage in an organised manner in this instance as well. In addition to these usages, Uigur *kuvrag*, derived from the same verb (*kubra-*), means "a monastic community" (ED: 585a).

The verb which constructs the predicate of the sentence should be *tult(u)nla-* "to bury" (*tultun* "grave" *+lA-*). There are other examples of words which are used in the sense of "to bury", deriving from nouns meaning "ground" and/or "grave" with the formative *–lA*:

A. *yer* "place; ground" "**+***lA* **>** *yerle-* → Kzk. *jerle-*, Tat. *cirle-*, *Bşk. yirle-*, Tkm. *yerle-* Uyg. *yerli-* "to bury" etc.

B. *sin* "grave"(*+lAg* > *sinleg*) **+***lA* **>** *sinlele->sinnele->* Turkish dialects *sinnile-* "ölüyü sine gömmek"; krş. *sinnik* "ölü gömülen yer, kabir" (DS X: 3643)[17].

The sentence below quoted from the KČ shows affinities with the inscription of Bombogor in many respects. Both, the construction and the meaning of these sentences perfectly correspond with each other: *bunça* ***bod(u)n*** *kubr(a)p yogl(a)dı* (KČ 27) // ***k(a)rluk*** *kubr(a)p tult(u)nl(a)dı* (B 3–4). *A single tribe*, that's Qarluq, in KČ, supersedes the *many tribes* (*bunça bodun*) of the Bombogor. The semantic nuance of the verbs *yogla-* and *tultunla-* is as remarkable as the construction of the sentences. While there is an elaborate and magnificent funeral ceremony in the associative field of the verb *yogla-*, there is only a simple and silent funeral in the semantic field of the verb *tultunla-* [18]. The last phrase of the inscription (*basmıllıg bodun*) could be a supplementary text in order to remove this simplicity/loneliness.

The sentence *k(a)rluk kubr(a)p tult(u)nl(a)dı* "Qarluq(s) assembled and buried (her)" proves, by itself, that the Bombogor inscription is an epitaph of a princess who was a member of the Turkic royal family. Name and title of the princess are registered as *il bilge kunçuy* in the first line of the inscription. The princess *il bilge kunçuy* could be the wife or the daughter-in-law of a Qarluq *yabgu*, since she was buried by Qarluks.

The title *il bilge* was the part of the name of İl Teriš's wife as well as the consort of Moyun Čor, so the princess for whom the Bombogor inscription was erected, could have been

[17] I sought this word as *sinle-* in Turkish dialects. Professor Semih Tezcan (personal communication), however, calls my attention to the fact that this word is used as *sinnile-*. So I would like to thank him.

[18] It is significant that Qarluq was the single nation who had attended the funeral of the princess, for whom the Bombogor inscription has been erected. Whereas, funerals of the powerful rulers, such as Kül İč Čor, Bilge Kagan, Kül Tigin, Tonyukuk etc., were held magnificently by the participants who had come from different states. These attendants are being expounded in the inscriptions from their nationalities to their appellations. One wonders whether the simplicity of the İl Bilge Kunčuy's funeral derives from her gender or her status. This question can be answered by discovering similar inscriptions.

born into the Turkic royal family and she may have married into the Qarluq ruling family. It is known that Turkic *kagan*s can give in marriage their sons/daughters to family members of the sub-tribes' leaders in order to protect their political status and to provide an inner economic balance. The following lines from the Bilge Kagan inscription present concrete evidences of this kind of marriage: m(ä)n : *[t]ürg(i)ş : k(a)g(a)nka : kız(ı)m [kunç(u)y(u)]g (ä)rt(i)ŋü : ul(u)g : törün : (a)lı birt(i)m* "I married my princess daughter to the king of the Turgiš with an elaborate ceremony". (BK K 9); *tür[g(i)ş k(a)g(a)n] kızın : (ä)rt(i)ŋü : ul(u)g : törün ogl(u)ma : (a)lı birt(i)m* "I married my son to the daughter of the king of the Turgiš tribe with an elaborate ceremony". (BK K 9–10).

2.1.4. üzä <t(ä)ŋr(i)k>ä (a)sra y(ä)rkä yük(ü)n<t>(ü)küm b(a)r (ä)rti

The illegible second word is corrrectly identified by Battulga. Suzuki and Battulga read the 5th word as *yükünüküm*[19] This reading implies that *yükünüküm* is a noun derived from the verb *yükün-* by adding the suffix –(o)k. But, the phrase *y(a)ŋ(ı)ltuk(u)m yok* which follows the first sentence shows the parallelism in style; and "the perfect participle suffixes are *-mIš*, *-dOk* and *-yOk*; positive *–dOk* is used mainly in runiform and Manichaen sources while *-yOk* is never used in those sources." (Erdal 2004: 294). In this case, we can conclude that *bitigči* ("clerk") might have forgotten to write the sign t2, not y2 and that *bitigči* should have written *yüküntüküm* (y²ükn²t²ük̲m), not (y²ükn²y²ük̲m). Style parallelism corroborates my thesis: yükün<*t*>*üküm bar* ärti ya*ŋ*ı*ltukum yok*.

2.1.5. b(a)sm(ı)l(lı)g bod(u)n

Battulga read this phrase as *basmïlïg bodun* and Suzuki read it as *basmïlïg bodunug*. The letter g¹ which was proposed by Suzuki, is not clear. It can be explained as *basmıllıg bodun* "people with Basmıl/members. Words and phrases *Çaruklug* "a part of the 22 *Oguz*s" (Index: 836) and *tatsız türk olmaz/başsız börk olmaz*". There are no Persians except those mixed up with Turks/There are no *börk*s (a kind of hat) without a head in it" (II: 281) quoted from DLT show the possibility of the construction *ethnonym* + *+lXg(//+sXg)*.

2.2.

The ethnonyms Qarluq and Basmıl might be important to date the inscription, but historical sources of the Turkic Kaganate give limited information about these two tribes -in particular of Basmıls- that are being framed with wars. Data about marriages between princesses who were members of the Turkic royal family and leaders of sub-tribes are almost non existing in the sources. Possibilities concerning the date of the inscription that is presented below must be understood as interpretations only:

A. The ethnonyms Qarluq and Basmıl were mentioned in the historical records of the second Turkic Kaganate in conjunction with the Uighurs during the period of decline of the Kaganate (741–742). Thus the collapse of the second Turkic Kaganate was strongly

[19] 2005: 124; 2010: 7

related to this triple alliance[20]. The inscription of Bombogor might have been erected before the collapse while Qarluqs were only a sub-tribe of the Kaganate. If the princess for whom the inscription was erected is an *A-shih-na*, her epitaph could be arranged during the glorious era of the second Turkic Kaganate, as a symbol of Qarluq tribe's loyalty to the Kaganate.

B. There is another possibility of interpreting the identity of the princess for whom the Bombogor inscription was erected: Since the title *il bilge* is also evident in the name of the second Uighur Kagan's wife (*elbilgä katun*), she was probably a member of the *Yaglakar* dynasty. It is possible that a marriage took place between a princess of Uighur Kaganate and the leader of the Qarluq, who was assigned as *Sol Yabgu* (administrator of the *Eastern Kaganate*) by Kutlug Bilge Kül Kagan (745–747)[21], during the triple alliance. The phrase *basmıllıg bodun* "the tribe in which the Basmıls are members as a sub-tribe" emphasizes the early years (741–742) of the Qarluq-Basmıl alliance[22]. In the same years Qarluqs were exiled by the Uighurs from their homeland in Inner Asia to the western regions where the On Oq tribe settled[23]. A group of Qarluqs who did not migrate and continued to dwell in Ötüken were allied with the tribes Kirgiz, Čik, Türgiš and Basmıl, and then rebelled (753) against the Second Uighur Kagan Moyun Čor (747–759). Qarluqs and Basmıls were defeated utterly by the Uighur royal army and survivors of Qarluqs took refuge in the land of Türgiš (ŠU B 1–2). On the basis of this fact, the date of the inscription provides a *terminus post quem* of 754 A.D, since there is no mention of a prepotent Qarluq presence in Ötüken after this date.

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[20] Taşağıl 2004, pp. 54–62.

[21] Kafesoğlu 1995, p. 138.

[22] In 742 AD, Chie-tie-i-shih, descended from the *A-shih-na* dynasty, ruler of the Basmils, ascended the throne as *khan*. Chie-tie-i-shih, however, did not last long on the throne. Just after the triple alliance dispersed he was killed and then the Uighur leader Kutlug Bilge Kül was elected as khan (745) (Taşağıl 2004: 57, 59). Was it possible to call the names of these two tribes amicably in the same text of the inscription despite of the social disturbances? Although it seems difficult to answer this question, one can come to a solution by further studies.

[23] Golden 2002, p. 114.

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