

VARIA TURCICA  
XIX

**MÉLANGES**  
**OFFERTS À LOUIS BAZIN**

**par ses disciples, collègues et amis**

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## THE HUNNIC (HSIUNG-NU) COUPLET IN CHIN-SHU

As is known in the circles of Turkic and Altaic studies, in *Chin-shu*, the Chinese history of the Chin dynasty, there occurs a Hunnic (Hsiung-nu) couplet or sentence mentioned in connection with an event which took place in Lo-yang in 329 A.D. The passage at the end of which the Hunnic text is given with an accompanying word-for-word Chinese translation was first published by Shiratori<sup>1</sup>. It reads as follows:

Der König Shi Lo stammte aus einer Familie der Hiung-nu Hoh. Als er einst im Begriff war, mit dem feindlichen König Liu Yao Krieg zu führen, warnten ihn alle seine Vasallen, indem sie behaupteten, dass der Krieg für ihn unglücklich enden würde. Shi Lo fragte den Priester Fo-t'u-teng, welcher im Jahre 310 n. Chr. aus Indien nach der damaligen Hauptstadt Chinas Lo-yang gekommen war und bei Shi Lo in grosser Achtung stand, wie man es mit dem Krieg halten solle. Da schwang der Priester eine ringförmige Schelle und deutete ihren Klang:

秀支 替度岡 僕谷 勃壳雷

*siu-k'i t'i-li-kang puh-koh k'ü-t'u-tang*

Dieses *siu-k'i* bedeutet auf hohisch "Armee", *t'i-li-kang* "ausziehen", *puh-koh* ist der Rang des Liu Yao und *k'ü-t'u-tang* bedeutet "gefangen nehmen". Aus dem Ganzen ergibt sich also der folgende Sinn: Wenn man (in dem Krieg) auszieht, so kann man Liu Yao gefangen nehmen<sup>2</sup>.

Shiratori was the first scholar who attempted to interpret this short Hsiung-nu text in terms of Turkic. He identified *siu-k'i* as Old Turkic *sön-güš* "fight", *t'i-li-kang* as Chagatay *tolgan-* "to move around, circle", *puh-koh* as Old Turkic *bö-dig* "the throne (acc.)", *kü-* as Old Turkic *kop* "wholly, completely" and *t'u-tang* as Common Turkic *tut-* "to catch, seize".

It goes without saying that all these identifications with the exception of *t'u-tang* = *tut-* are wrong.

Ramstedt who became interested in this Hsiung-nu text interpreted the individual words in it as follows<sup>3</sup>:

1 *siu-k'i* = OT *sūkā* (*sū* "fighting army, fight", *-kā* dative suffix);

2 *t'i-li-kang* or *t'ai-li-kang* = *tal'iqāñ* or *tal't-qañ* (= OT *taštañ*) "go out!";

3 *puh-koh* = OT *bügü* "wise" used as the title of the rival leader) or *ügä* (an Old Turkic high rank);

4 *kü-* = OT *-g* (accusative suffix belonging to the previous word);

5 *t'u-tang* = the imperative form of Turkic *tut-* "to seize, capture".

Under the light of these identifications, Ramstedt's interpretation of the Hunnic couplet can be given as follows:

*sūkā tal'iqāñ* (or *tal't-qañ*) "zieh aus zum Krieg" und

*bügüg* (or *ügäg*) *tutañ* "fange den Bügü"

Ramstedt's interpretation of the second word of this Hunnic text as the imperative form

1) K. Shiratori, "Über die Sprache der Hiungnu und der Tunghu-Stämme", *Izvestija imperatorskoj akademii nauk*, T. XVII, N° 2 (1902), 01-032.

2) K. Shiratori, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

3) G. J. Ramstedt, "Zur Frage nach der Stellung des tschuwassischen", *JSOu*, XXXVIII, 1 (1922), p. 31.

of *\*tal'tiq-*, i.e., the older form of OT *tašiq-* "to go out", is a very important discovery. According to him, the Ho language, i.e., the Hunnic dialect in which this couplet had been uttered was very close to Old Turkic, but obviously it was an /l/ language like present-day Chuvash. Ramstedt who was understandably happy to find an older form with /l/ of OT *tašiq-* in this text dating from the first half of the 4th century pointed out that the time gap between Hunnic *\*taliq-* and Old Turkic *tašiq-* was long enough for the occurrence of the sound change *\*l' > š* he assumed for Turkic.

The first attempt to interpret the Hunnic text after the appearance of Karlgren's dictionary was made by the well-known French Turkologist Louis Bazin<sup>4</sup>. Bazin first gave the ancient pronunciations of the 10 Chinese characters transcribing the Hunnic couplet. They read :

*siōg tšēg t'iei liād kāng b'uok kuk g'ju t'uk t'ang*

Bazin interpreted this text as follows:

*sūg tāgti idqañ "envoyez l'armée à l'attaque, boquyly tutqañ capturez le commandant !"*

As is seen, Bazin's interpretation is quite different from that of Ramstedt's. According to Bazin :

1 the first sign represents *\*sūg*, i.e., a word which is identical with the accusative form of Old Turkic *sū* "army" ;

2 the second and third signs stand for *\*tāgti* "attack", a hypothetical deverbal noun in *-ti* derived from OT *tāg-* "to attack" ;

3 the fourth and fifth signs should be read and understood as *\*idqañ*, an older (Proto-Turkic) 2. p. plural imperative form in *\*-qañ* of the verb *id-* "to send" ;

4 the sixth, seventh and eighth signs represent *\*boquyly*, the accusative form of the title *\*boquy* meaning "leader" ;

5 finally, the last two signs transcribe *\*tuqtañ* which is the metathetical form of an original *\*tutqañ*, i.e., the older imperative form in *-qañ* of the verb *tut-* "to capture".

Prof. Gabain who reviewed Bazin's interpretation criticised his views as follows<sup>5</sup> :

1 According to the Chinese translation, not only the first sign, but the first two signs mean

"army" ;

2 The suffix *-ti* forming nouns from verbs is a comparatively new suffix in Turkic ;

3 According to the Chinese translation, not only the fourth and fifth signs, but the third, fourth and fifth signs mean "to go out" ;

4 The older form of the Old Turkic 2. p. plural imperative suffix *-tā/-añ* could not be *\*-qañ* ;

5 Bazin's interpretation of the second line as *\*boquyly tutqañ* is based on the assumption that here we have two metathetical forms (i.e., *-ly* instead of *-ly*, and *\*tuqtañ* instead of *tutqañ*) which is unlikely.

After criticising Bazin in this way, Prof. Gabain herself made an attempt to interpret the Hunnic couplet. Gabain's interpretation is, "mit starkem Zweifel am letzten Wort", as follows :

*sārig illiqañ "Du wirst das Heer herausführen",*

*buquy kötürkän "du wirst den 'Hirsch' entführen".*

As is seen, Gabain reads the first two signs meaning "army" as *\*sārig*. She maintains that this could be a dialect form of Old Turkic *čārig*. In other words, she believes that a sound change *č- > s-* similar to the change in Sagay and Koibal might have taken place in this particular dialect of Hunnic. It goes without saying that such a view can hardly be accepted ; for the sound change *č- > s-* in Khakas (and Bashkir) is only a recent development in Turkic. To think that the same change might have occurred also in Proto-Turkic times would be anachronistic.

Gabain accepts Ramstedt's interpretation of the third, fourth and fifth signs with the only difference that she sees here a verbal stem *\*illi-*, i.e., the causative form of a hypothetical *\*ill-*, instead of Ramstedt's *\*taliq-* or *\*tliq-* (= OT *tašiq-*). She thinks that what we have here is not an intensive stem in *-q-* as in OT *tašiq-* (< *taš+I-q-*), but a causative stem in *-t-* as in *\*tašit-* (< *taš+I-* "herausgehen"). It should be said that this is not very convincing, because OT *tašiq-* is a direct derivative in *+iq-* derived from the noun *taš* "outside, exterior", but not an intensive stem in *-q-* derived from a hypothetical *\*taš+I-*.

Finally, Gabain's interpretation of the eighth, ninth and tenth signs as *\*kötürkän*, i.e., a metathetical form of an original *\*kötürkän* "du

<sup>4</sup> Louis Bazin, "Un texte proto-turc du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle : le distique Hiong-nou du 'Tsin-chou'", *Oriens*, 1 (1948), pp. 208-219.

<sup>5</sup> Annemarie von Gabain, *Besprechungen* (review of Bazin), *Der Islam*, 29 (1950), pp. 244-246.



wirst entführen" is indeed very doubtful, as she herself admits. In connection with this, it must be emphasized that OT *kōtār* means "to raise lift", not "to capture, seize".

Benzing who took the Hunnic text in hand after Gabain did not attempt to read and interpret it, but he contented himself with summarizing Ramstedt's, Bazin's and Gabain's readings and interpretations<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, Benzing could not himself take away from stating that the two words of the Hunnic text could be identified rather safely: *t'uk-tāng* clearly represents \**tuqta-* "festhalten" which is identical with Mo. *toqta-* "anhaltend" and OT *tut-* "halten" (for the sound correspondence, cf. Mo. *aqta* "Wallach" = OT *at* "Pferd"); *siōg* (*tieg*?) might belong to OT *sū* "army", but whether the text is in Turkic, or Mongolian, or Tungus could be understood only after an elegant interpretation of the remaining words<sup>7</sup>.

Benzing's reading of the signs *t'uk-tāng* as \**tuqta-* and his equating this verb with Mo. *toqta-* (better *toqta-*) and Turkic *tut-* is very interesting. This view of Benzing, however, has been criticised rather severely by Clauson<sup>8</sup>. According to Clauson, "Mo. *toqta-* means not 'to grasp' but 'to be immobile, fixed, still, permanent; to decide, settle a matter'. Furthermore, Clauson claimed that the equation Mo. *aqta* "gelding" = Trk. *at* "horse" could not be correct, since "Mo. *aqta* is not old Mongolian at all, it is a 13th century loan word, from Persian *axta*, the Past Passive Participle of *axtan* 'to geld'".

The Hunnic couplet in *Chin-shu* has recently been touched by Ligeti, Pulleyblank and Doerfer. As is known, Ligeti, the eminent Hungarian scholar, has always been sceptical about the Hsiung-nus being the ancestors of Turks. He rather believed that the Hsiung-nu were the ancestors of Kets or Yenisei Ostyaks. Consequently, he stated that the so-called Hunnic text in *Chin-shu* was not in Turkic or Altaic, but it was in the Ho language as understood clearly from the passage<sup>9</sup>.

Pulleyblank who has recently dealt with the problem of the identification of the Hsiung-nu and their language also touched the problem of the language of the so-called "Hsiung-nu couplet"<sup>10</sup>. On the several attempts made to interpret this couplet Pulleyblank commented as follows:

On the supposition that the Hsiung-nu spoke Turkish a number of attempts have been made to interpret the couplet in terms of Turkish (in recent times we may note the attempts of Ramstedt 1922, Bazin 1948, and Gabain 1949). None of these interpretations can be considered very successful since all do more or less violence to the phonetic values of the Chinese characters and to the explanation given in the accompanying Chinese text<sup>11</sup>.

He then gave the ancient pronunciations of the Chinese characters used in the transcription of the Hsiung-nu couplet. Pulleyblank's reconstruction of the Hsiung-nu text is as follows:

秀支	替皮岡
<i>sūx-kēh</i>	<i>ʁe(t)s-lɛ/le(t)s-kaŋ</i>
"army"	"go out"
僕谷	咄羌雷
<i>buk-kok/(g)δōk</i>	<i>gōh-thok/θok-taŋ</i>
"Liu Yao's rank"	"capture"

Pulleyblank did not attempt to add to the list of suggested reconstructions, at least for the present. But he nevertheless remarked that *-A* was a common verbal ending in Yenisscian, especially in Kottish, thus implying that the Hsiung-nu of the Chinese sources spoke a language of the Yenisei family, i.e., not early Turkic or any form of Altaic.

In the same year, Doerfer, after reproducing Ramstedt's, Bazin's and Gabain's interpretations which differ greatly from one another, ironically claimed that the so-called Hunnic text could even be read and interpreted in terms of Akkadian (and he actually did this)<sup>12</sup>. Most re-

6) Johannes Benzing, "Das Hunnische, Donaubolgarische und Wolgabulgarische", *Fundamenta* I (1959), pp. 685-695.

7) J. Benzing, *op. cit.*, p. 687.

8) Gerard Clauson, "Turk, Mongol, Tungus", *Asia Major*, VIII (1962), p. 107, note 2.

9) L. Ligeti, "À propos des éléments 'altaïques' de la langue hongroise", *Acta Linguistica*, XI (1960), p. 23.

10) E. G. Pulleyblank, "The consonantal system of Old Chinese: Part II, Appendix: The Hsiung-nu Language", *Asia Major*, IX (1963), pp. 239-265.

11) Pulleyblank, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

12) Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, I (1963), p. 96.

cently, in his long article dealing with the language of the Huns, Doerfer has maintained the same negative and ironic attitude and claimed that the so-called Hunnic text might even be read in the Eskimo language!<sup>13</sup>

After this rather long introduction, I now would like to offer my interpretation of the Hunnic couplet in *Chin-shu* dating from the 4th century. As will be seen, my interpretation is mostly identical with that of Ramstedt (the first line and the last word of the second line). I also partly agree with Bazin on his interpretation of the rival Hsiung-nu leader's title. Here is my interpretation:

1 秀 交 Karlgren *siðg tteğ*, Pulleyblank *sūx kzh* "army". The first sign is in all probability nothing but the Old Turkic word for "army", i.e., *sū* as Ramstedt, Bazin and Benzing rightfully assumed. The diphthong *ið* in Karlgren's reconstruction and the long *ū* in Pulleyblank's transcription suggest that OT *sū* had a long *ū*. As a matter of fact, OT *sū* is spelt *sūū* in some Uighur texts. Therefore it is very probable that this word had a long *ū*.

As for the second sign, Karlgren's and Pulleyblank's reconstructions of this sign are quite different from one another. If Pulleyblank's reconstruction is correct we may then assume that the first two signs meaning "army" stand for an original *\*sūkā*, i.e., the dative form of OT *sū*. The reconstruction of the first two signs as *\*sū-kā* "to the army (on campaign)" fits the reconstruction of the following three signs (see below).

2 替 交 岡 Karlgren *t'iei liəd käng*, Pulleyblank *θe(t)s-let/le(t)s-kañ* "go out". As I have already mentioned, Ramstedt reconstructed these three signs as *\*tal'iqāñ* or *\*tal'iqāñ* and regarded this as the older form in /l/ of OT *tašiqāñ* "go out!" (2nd person plural imperative of OT *tašiq-* "to go out"). I completely agree with Ramstedt on this very interesting and rightly assumption of his. Only, I am of the opinion that the second form suggested by Ramstedt, i.e., *tal'iqāñ* fits better the ancient phonetic value of the fifth sign: *käng* = *-qañ*. It is also very probable that the Hunnic or Proto-Turkic word underlying these three signs is not *\*tal'iqāñ*, but *\*taliqāñ*. Thus, the first line reads as follows: *sūkā taliqāñ*

(or *\*taliqāñ*) "Go out against the army (on campaign)!"

Here it should be reminded that OT *sū* "army" was also used with the meaning "an army (on a campaign)", or directly "fight, battle, war". Observe the following example: *q(a)n sūkā b(a)rmīš y(a)γlγ s(a)nēmīš* "A khan went to the army (i.e., in war) and routed the enemy" (*Irak Bitig*, XXXIV).

3 僕 谷 Karlgren *b'uok kuk*, Pulleyblank *buk-kok/(g)ððk* "Liu Yao's rank".

Ramstedt assumed that the underlying word here could be OT *būgū* "wise". Gabain thought that OT *buyu* "male deer, stag" plus the accusative suffix *-γ* i.e., *buyuγ* would make a better reconstruction for the signs *b'uok-kuk*.

Bazin who read this title *\*boquγ* put forward an entirely different theory. According to him, this title which occurs together with the OT title *tutuq* "military governor" in the Bilgā Kagan inscription (southern side, line 10) could be the prototype of the Old Ottoman title *boγ* "commander": *\*boquγ > \*boγuγ > \*bo'uγ > \*bðγ > boγ*<sup>14</sup>.

Putting aside the discussion of the possibility of such a phonetic development for the time being, it should be noted that the signs *b'uok-kuk* in the Hsiung-nu couplet might have been underlying an old title like *\*hoquq* or *bðquq*, a form which actually occurs in the sources related to Old Turkic: *بووقوق خان*, *boquq xan* in Juwainī, *bu-yuγ* in the phrase *tāñrikāñ uyγur bu-yuγ xan* in *Thomsensfestchrift*, *Borur Qan* in *Chav.-Pell.*, *JA* 1913, 197 (*Türkische Turfan-Texte II*, p. 413).

Under the light of the discussion above, I read the first two signs of the second line as *\*boquq* or *\*bðquq*, thinking that only a form like *\*bðq* could be the prototype of Old Ottoman *boγ* (cf. OT *āq > Old Ottoman aγ*, *Az. aγ*, etc.). The element *-uq* in *\*bðquq* can best be explained as a diminutive or endearment suffix (cf. *Uig. ðgñk* "Mütterchen").

4 咄 亮 雷 Karlgren *gtu t'uk tāng*, Pulleyblank *gðh-thok/θok-tañ* "capture".

The first sign can be reconstructed as *\*.γl*, i.e., the Hunnic (Proto-Turkic) accusative suffix corresponding to the Old Turkic accusative suffix *-(t)γ*. As is known, the Old Turkic accusative

13) Gerhard Doerfer, "Zur Sprache der Hunnen", *CAJ*, XVII (1973), pp. 1-50 (his remarks on the Hunnic couplet: p. 4).

14) L. Bazin, *op. cit.*, p. 211. For the pronunciation of Old Ottoman *boγ* with *bo'* see Redhouse and Ş. Sami, and for its use synonymously with *baş* "head, leader, chief" see *Tarima Sözlüğü*.

suffix  $-(i)\gamma$  goes back to an older  $*-\gamma\bar{i}$  which corresponds to Written Mongolian accusative suffix  $-yi$  going back to an older  $*-\gamma\bar{i}/-gi$ . The suffix  $*-\gamma\bar{i}/-g\bar{i}$  with a short narrow vowel in final position could easily develop into a form like  $-\gamma\bar{i}/-g$  (i.e., a form which is identical with the Old Turkic accusative suffix  $-\gamma\bar{i}/-g$ ): *ballq-γā* / *ballq-γ* "the city".

The last two signs of the second line, i.e., *t'uk-tāng* in Karlgren's reconstruction, obviously stand for an original  $*tuqtañ$  corresponding to Old Turkic *tutañ*. As is generally known, OT *tut-* has a dissyllabic variant *tuta-* (cf. MK *tut-* "to seize, capture", but *tutam* "a handful" / *tuta-m*, *tutañ* "continuously" / *tuta-ṣ-t*, etc.). It is obvious

that Common Turkic *tut-* goes back to an older  $*tuta-$ , and this, in its turn, probably to a still older  $*tuqta-$  (cf. Turkic *bat-* "to go down, sink" = Mo. *baγta-* id.).

Thus, the second line of the Hunnic couplet in *Chin-shu* reads, in my opinion, as follows:

*bōquq-γā tuqtañ* "capture the Bokuk!"

My reconstruction of the whole couplet could then be given as follows:

*sūkā taltqañ* (or *iltqañ*), "Go out to the army (on campaign)

*bōquqγā tuqtañ* ! (and) capture the Bokuk !"

T. T.