

THE SEAL WITH UNINTELLIGIBLE SCRIPT  
OF THE FOROUGHI COLLECTION

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In his excellent publication of the Sasanian seals in the Foroughi Collection,<sup>1</sup> Professor R. N. Frye described a remarkable specimen (Fig. 1) in the following way: "Writing only, in unintelligible script. Flat grey stone, 10 × 5, ht. 15."<sup>2</sup> Examining the published photo of the seal, one can state that its legend consists of two parts: to the right 3 lines written in cursive Pahlavi alphabet can be observed while to the left 2 lines written in a script of runic character may be suspected.

Numbered from above, line 1 of the Pahlavi legend represents without doubt the schematic, simplified, slightly deformed form of the word *GDH*, the logogram for MP *farr* 'royal splendour, glory'. The rudimentary remnants of *GD* in form of two short vertical strokes starting upwards from the horizontal body of the word can still be recognized. The *H* also appears in a rudimentary form as a circle filled up fully, joined to the right with *GD* while from its left part a horizontal stroke starts at the end of which a short stroke is protruding downwards.

The reading of line 2 does not cause any difficulty: it clearly consists of the 3 joined letters 'h'/hn. Line 3 can also easily be read: it contains 3 characters, one written separately and two joined. The separate letter can be read as *z* while the two joined ones may be identified as *yk*. Thus, the reading of the whole legend will be the following: line 1 *GDH* 2 *hhn* 3 *zyk*.

This inscription obviously consists of a personal name: *zyk* (\*Zīg), a title *hhn* (\*xazan) and the word *GDH* (*farr* 'royal splendour, glory'). This interpretation



Fig. 1. The inscriptions of the seal. Drawing after CH Part III. Vol. VI. Portfolio II. Plate XXXIII. Fig. 20

<sup>1</sup> Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum. Part III. Vol. VI. Portfolio II. Sasanian Seals in the Collection of Mohsen Foroughi. Edited by R. N. Frye. London 1971. Plate XXXIII. Fig. 20.

<sup>2</sup> R. N. Frye: op. cit. Description of Plates.

reveals several striking phenomena of the legend all at once. First of all, this word order is unusual in Middle Persian. The customary word order would be *Zig qaḡan GDH*. One could read, of course, the inscription upwards from below. Thus, we can arrive at the usual MP word order but in this case we have to assume a writing practice which is alien from Middle Persian.

The other striking phenomenon of the legend is the spelling *hḡn* representing apparently the Old Turkic title *qaḡan*. The usual Middle Persian form of Old Turkic *qaḡan* is, however, *ḡ'k'n*<sup>3</sup> to be interpreted as *qaḡan* or *qaḡan* being the most exact transcription possible of the Old Turkic word. The spelling *hḡn* reminds the Sogdian form of this title, viz. *γ'γ'n* to be interpreted as *qaḡan*, being similarly the most exact transcription possible of Old Turkic *qaḡan*. As Sogdian *γ* also had the phonetic value *χ* and the indication of the vowels in Sogdian orthography more frequently occurs than in Pahlavi, transcribing the Sogdian spelling into Pahlavi, a scribe not acquainted equally well with both Sogdian and Pahlavi orthography, could arrive at the Pahlavi transcription *hḡn* instead of the correct Pahlavi form *ḡ'k'n* inasmuch as he interpreted the Sogdian spelling *γ'γ'n* as *χ'χ'n*. Obviously, both phenomena, the inverse word order and the unusual transcription of the Old Turkic title *qaḡan*, require an explanation and at the same time they could throw light on the historical circumstances of the preparation of the seal.

A further peculiarity of the seal is the legend written in a script of runic character. At first sight, one can identify 3 runic letters, viz. <sup>1</sup>*b*, <sup>2</sup>*b* and *ük/kü*. The form of these signs clearly proves their belonging to the Orkhon-Yenisey runic alphabet. The other 3 characters have no parallels in the Orkhon-Yenisey alphabet. However, if one recognizes that these striking letter forms came into being by the clumsiness of the craftsman who engraved (perhaps on account of his ignorance of the runic script) the characters too near one to another on the surface of the seal (Fig. 2) and also reproduced the auxiliary ground lines of the draft, then these unintelligible letters can also be identified.

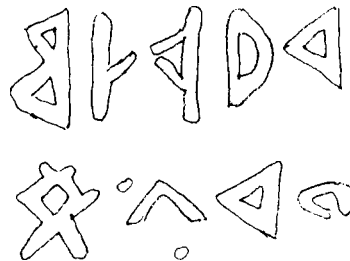


Fig. 2. Analytic drawing of the runic inscription of the seal

<sup>3</sup> Šahristānīhā i Ērān, ch. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. D. Vasil'ev: Корпус тюркских рунических памятников бассейна Енисея. Leningrad 1983, p. 12. Table of runic characters <sup>1</sup>b/20, *ük*/3, <sup>0</sup>η/2. As concerns <sup>2</sup>k, the same form of this letter occurs in runic inscriptions from Aymirliġ, from Burgenland (Austria) and Battonya (Hungary), the two latter being of Avar origin (cf. J. Harmatta: AntTan 30 (1983) 25 [Battonya], 31 (1984) 112 [Aymirliġ] 32 [1985–86] 25 [Burgenland]).

Numbering the lines from below upwards according to the practice of the Türk runic script, we can read in line 1 after <sup>1</sup>*b* the letters *iq/qi* and *š/s*, in line 2 (from right to left) *iq/qi* and <sup>1</sup>*y*, afterwards <sup>2</sup>*k* and <sup>0</sup>*η*. Thus, the reading of the whole text will run as follows:

line 1 <sup>1</sup>*b* *qī* *š/s*: <sup>2</sup>*b*  
2 *qī* <sup>1</sup>*y* <sup>2</sup>*k* <sup>0</sup>*η* *kū*

As concerns the form of the letters, <sup>1</sup>*b*, <sup>2</sup>*k*, <sup>0</sup>*η* and *kū* reveal characteristic features of the Yenisey runic script or of its variants (Fig. 3) used on the territory of the Western Türk Empire.<sup>4</sup> This fact clearly speaks for the Western Türk origin of the runic legend of the seal.

	Seal	O-Y	Avar
<sup>1</sup> <i>b</i>	∩	∩ Y	
<sup>2</sup> <i>b</i>	◇	◇ Y	
<sup>1</sup> <i>y</i>	∩	∩	∩ Bu
<sup>2</sup> <i>k</i>	∩	∩ A	∩B ∩Bu
<i>kū</i>	∩	∩ Y	
<sup>1</sup> <i>η</i>	∩	∩ Y	
<i>qi</i>	∩	∩	
<i>š</i>	∩	∩ Y	

Fig. 3. Comparative table of the runic characters. Abbreviations: O — Orkhon, Y — Yenisey, A — Aymırlıy, B — Battonya, Bu — Burgenland

The interpretation of the runic inscription does not encounter any serious difficulty. The text can be vocalized in the following way:

line 1 *b<sup>a</sup>qī<sup>e</sup>š<sup>e</sup>b*  
2 *qīy<sup>ü</sup>k<sup>0</sup>η<sup>0</sup>kū*

The first word may be the gerund of the Old Turkic verb *baq-* 'follow with attention'<sup>5</sup> formed with the suffix *-i*. The following three words *eš* 'companion', *eb* 'house, family', *qīy* 'village, suburb'<sup>6</sup> represent indefinite case having the function of an undetermined object. The next item *ük* can be taken for the imperative 2nd

<sup>5</sup> Древнетюркский словарь. (In the followings DTS.) Leningrad 1969. 81.

<sup>6</sup> DTS 184, 162, 440.

person of the verb *ük-* 'accumulate, gather'<sup>7</sup>, *kü* is the well-known Old Turkic word meaning 'reputation, renown, fame'<sup>8</sup>, *oŋ* 'true, veritable'<sup>9</sup> is the attribute of *kü*, and the whole phrase *oŋ kü* can again be regarded as an undetermined object in indefinite case. Thus the whole text can be interpreted as follows: "Being attentive to companion, to house, to settlement, acquire veritable renown!"

Obviously, this text represents the principles in short form of correct royal behaviour by which the ruler can acquire true reputation among his subjects. Both the title *qayan* and the Western Türk character of the runic script and the Old Turkic text speak in favour of the assumption that we have to do with the seal of a Western Türk *qayan* whose name is given by the Middle Persian legend of the seal in the form *zyk* (\**Zig*). There can be hardly any doubt that *Zig qayan* should be identified with *Shih-kuei qayan* of the Chinese sources (Sui-shu, T'ang-shu). The Chinese transcription *Shih-kuei* 射匱. Ancient Chinese *dž'äk-g'jwi*, points to an Old Turkic prototype \**Jig*. The difference between the two forms *Zig* and *Jig* can also be ascribed to the intermediary role of Sogdian in which Western Türk initial *ǰ-*, being absent from Sogdian phonemic system, was replaced by Sogdian *z-*.

According to the Chiu T'ang-shu *Shih-kuei qayan* "was the first who enlarged the territory (of the Western Türk Empire). Eastwards, he advanced up to the *Chin-shan* (Altai), westwards, he advanced up to the sea. To the west of *Yü-mên* (-*kuan*) all the diverse kingdoms were his subjects".<sup>10</sup> During his reign lasting from 611 A.D. to 619 A.D., *Jig qayan* sent an army to the aid of the Hephthalites who were his vassals and waged war against Sasanian Iran in 616-617 A.D. The Türk army won a great victory over the Persians and advanced up to Rey and Isfahan.

Very likely, the preparation of the bilingual seal of *Jig qayan* can be brought into connection with his temporary occupation of Persian territories. The administration of Iranian territories required the use of written documents and their authentication by seal. Thus, the seal of *Jig qayan* was probably prepared in order to certify the orders issued by the Türk officials in the name of the *qayan*, i.e. the Western Türks adopted the Persian administrative system on the occupied Iranian territories. It follows that this specimen was not the personal seal of *Jig qayan* himself—in this case it should have been of much greater size and of better quality and also provided with the *qayan*'s portrait—but it may have been an "administrative" seal used by his officers. In any case, the seal gives clear evidence for the intention of the Western Türks to make arrangements for a lasting occupation of Persian territories. Thus, it permits an interesting insight into the obscure history of Western Türk—Persian relations in the first decades of the VIIth century A.D. Scholarly research may be really grateful to Professor Frye for the inclusion of this seal into his publication.

<sup>7</sup> DTS 623.

<sup>8</sup> DTS 322.

<sup>9</sup> DTS 367.

<sup>10</sup> E. Chavannes: Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Tures) occidentaux.<sup>2</sup> Paris 23-24.

## APPENDIX

There exists one evidence more for the military success of the Western Türk army in Iran in 616–617 A.D. This is the silver medal in the Collection of P. Quaroni<sup>11</sup> the obverse of which shows a king to right, bearing a winged mural crown. The legend to the left of the bust of the king runs as follows: *GDH 'pzwv zyky*,<sup>12</sup> while the legend to the right is the following: *MLK''n MLK'*. The whole text can be interpreted in the following way: "Glory, growth! Zig King of Kings". The medal portrays Zig *qayan* as a Sasanian *šāhān šāh* and was obviously minted to commemorate his victory over the Persians.

Budapest

<sup>11</sup> Published by R. Göbl: *Medaillen des islamischen Mittelalters und ihr Formenkreis*. *Litterae Numismaticae Vindobonensis* 3 (1987) 276 foll. Plate 39, Fig. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Göbl l. c. could not read the name of the king and erroneously dated the medal, anonymous in his opinion, from Islamic times.