ON ČĠLGL (OR ČĠLGIL) IN THE KÜL TEGIN AND BİLGĂ KAGAN INSCRIPTIONS*

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This paper attempts to give new explanation for the ethnonyms bWkI and cWgl (or cWglI) occurring in the Türk inscriptions of Kül Tegin and Bilgä Kagan. After a thorough survey of former research the author comes to the conclusion that the two names must be treated separately, both indicating a separate country. Bökli or Bökküli (bWkI), as was correctly supposed formerly, is undoubtedly identical with Goguryeo, a Korean state of the period. ČĠlgl (or ČĠlgIl) must be read as Čulug el which may be a Turkic name for the Chinese state of Northern Zhou of Tuoba origin. On the other hand, a third ethnonym of the inscriptions, Tabgač, refers to the Northern Qi state of Tuoba origin. So it is certainly inaccurate to translate Tabgač, in a simplified manner, as ‘China’ or ‘the Chinese’ as most researchers have done until now. Čulug el and Tabgač were two separate Chinese states of the period.

Key words: Bökli, Bökküli, Čulug el, Tabgač, Türk inscriptions, Goguryeo, Northern Zhou, Northern Qi.

I. Introduction

Orkhon Turkic is the oldest Turkic dialect whose written records have come down to us (Tekin 1968, p. 7). Orkhon Turkic is known to us through the inscriptions found in present-day Mongolia, mainly in the basin of the Orkhon River, thus being conveniently called ‘the Orkhon inscriptions’. These are the Kül Tegin, Bilgä Kagan, Tunukuk, Išbara Tarkan (Ongi) and Küli Čor (Ikhe-Khüshötü) inscriptions (Tekin 1968, p. 9).

The Kül Tegin and Bilgä Kagan inscriptions are located in the vicinity of the old course of the Orkhon River and the inland lake named Košo Caydam (ca. 47°

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north latitude and 102° east longitude) (Tekin 1968, p. 9). They were at approximately one kilometre distance from each other. Severely damaged, these two inscriptions are now preserved in the museum (Alyılmaz 2005). The replicas of these inscriptions are in their original places.

Since the well-known Danish scholar Vilhelm Thomsen succeeded in deciphering the Old Turkic script used in the Orkhon and Yenisei inscriptions of the ancient Turks (Tekin 1968, p. 12), many researchers have tried to interpret the texts of the inscriptions. Most parts of the inscriptions are already correctly read and interpreted.

Many parts of the Kül Tegin and the Bilgä Kagan inscriptions are almost identical. Although most parts of these two inscriptions can be well understood, a thorough examination is still needed in the case of some words. One of them is the letter group of čẄlgl (or čẄlgIl) occurring in the list of countries that sent representatives to a Turkic Kagan’s funeral. This letter group has been usually treated together with its preceding letter group of bẄklI. However, none of the readings and translations so far of čẄlgl (or čẄlgIl) together with bẄklI are satisfactory. Moreover, the translations of the next word, TBGČ (tabgač), are also problematic. Therefore, in this paper we will try to solve the problem of reading and translating bẄklI : čẄlgl (or čẄlgIl) : TBGČ (tabgač).

The sentence containing these letter groups is in KT E 4 and BK E 5 as follows:

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II. Interpretations of the Letter Group ċẀlgl (or ċẀlgIl) together with the Adjacent Two Words, bẀklI and tabgač

As mentioned above, the letter group of čẀlgl or čẀlgIl has been usually treated together with its preceding letter group of bẀklI. The third letter group is certainly tabgač. Therefore, we can first divide the interpretations of čẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) into two groups: (1) čẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) without bẀklI, i.e. čẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) and bẀklI as separate nouns; (2) čẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) with bẀklI, i.e. čẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) and bẀklI as components of a noun.

1. ċẀlgl (or čẀlgIl) and bẀklI as separate nouns

1.1. “Korea, Čülig realm, China”

(1) Clauson (1972, p. 420)²: Bükli: Čülig el³ Tavgač

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¹ The letter groups in parentheses are from the Bilgä Kagan Inscription. See Radloff (1893, Plates XVII, XVIII, XXII, XXIII) for the runic text.
² “PU čülig this word has been read in Türkü VIII I E 4, II E 5 in the list of countries which sent representatives to Ėştemi Xağan’s(?) funeral; it begins ‘from the east, where the sun rises’
1.2. “Korea, the čölig nation, China”

(1) Clark (1977, p. 135): bükli, čölig il, tabyač “Korea, the čölig nation, China”

1.3. “Bökli, Çölgi, Tabgač”


1.4. “Bükli, Çöllüg II, China”

(1) User (2009, pp. 48, 150, 154, 158, 159, 162, 164, 187, 223, 281, 282, 286, 333, 395): bükli çöllüg (el) t(a)bg(a)č “Bök Li, Çöllüg Il, Çin”

(2) User (2009, pp. 446, 455): bök (e)li : çöllüg (el) : t(a)bg(a)č

Bükli: (PU) Çöllüg el Tavğaç Tüpüt, etc. Henning in ‘The Date of the Early Sogdian Letters’, BSOAS XII 601 ff, showed that Bükli: meant ‘Korea’; Tavğaç is of course ‘China’ and Tüpüt ‘Tibet’; as the list is presumably in a strict geographical order, the entry between Korea and China must be some unidentified ‘realm’ (el) between Korea and China, perhaps one of the minor kingdoms in Korea. The word looks like a Chinese representation of some name like chá li (i). It has been read as čölig and explained as a P.N./A. fr. čöl meaning ‘belonging to the steppes’, but this is impossible since čöl is a Mong. word which is not traceable as a l.-w. in Turkish earlier than Çağ. XV ff. Vel. 252; San. 214v. 15. …… The suggested translations ‘distant’ and ‘strange’ are purely hypothetical, since they do not rest on any solid etymological basis” (Clauson 1972, p. 420). [The title of Henning’s article is not ‘The Date of the Early Sogdian Letters’, but ‘The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters’. However, there is no mention of Korea in that article.]

ćöl ‘desert’ (Mong.) see čülig (Clauson 1972, p. 417).

1 Correctly, el, i.e. el.
2 “KT E4 [= BX E5] čölig il in the list of countries that sent representatives to Ïstemi Xayar’s funeral: bükli, čölig il, tabyač, tögöt «Korea, the čölig nation, China, Tibet» (ED 420). Some editors of this passage have read the word as čöllüg, that is, as čöl «desert, steppe» + -lig (IOD 98,139; PDP 376; DTS 155; GOT 323); the same word has been read in Toñ 23 čölgı az eri butun «(I searched for a guide and) I found an Az man from čölgı(?)» (cf. ED 420; PDP 376; DTS 155; GOT 323). Because of this disputed occurrence in the inscriptions, both Räsänen (VEWT 117) and Doerfer (TMEN III 122–123; IV 458) consider čöl «desert, steppe» to be an originally Tü word which was borrowed into Mo (see TMEN for citations). For my part, I consider čöl a Mo word that first certainly appears in Çağ (cf. ED 420), and is found in Central Asian and Siberian Tü languages. As to the present passages, it should be pointed out: (1) the exact phonetic interpretation of the word is uncertain: KT čölg = čölig, čülig, čüleg, čüleg, čölig, čülig, čülig, etc.; Toñ čölgilg = čölgı, čülgı, čülegı, čülegı, čölegı, čüligı; (2) the meaning of neither word is known, nor is the connection between the two certain (čölig il comes between Korea and China, whereas čöligi is associated with the Az tribe, always mentioned in connection with the Çik and the Qryz of the Southern Sayan); (3) it might be possible to postulate čöllüg for čölig, but there is no suffix -gi in Tü or Mo for čöligi; (4) the formation čöl = čölgı is not otherwise known, nor does the construction čöl-lig il «(lit.) nation having or possessing the quality of a steppe» make very good sense; (5) both čölig and čölgı (as read) could be placenames or tribal appellatives drawn from a non-Turkic language. Because the two words are attended only by uncertainties (phonetic, morphological, contextual, semantic), it is rash both to seek the word čöl «desert, steppe» as their root, and to consider čöl as OTü on the basis of these words” (Clark 1977, pp. 135–136).

5 Bök Li should be an error for Bükli.
6 čöl ’čöl, bozkır’ (User 2009, p. 522).
7 bök (e)li should be an error for bükli.
2. čVelg (or čVelgI) and bVklI as components of a noun

2.1. “mighty people(s) of the steppe”
(1) Radloff (1894, pp. 5, 45): бӧкli чӧlгі āл Taƅҕач “die (rundherum bis nach Osten hin wohnenden) mächtigen Steppenvölker, die berühmten (Chinesen)”, Radloff (1894, p. 140): бӧкli чӧlгі āл Taƅҕач “mächtige Steppenvölker”

2.2. “mighty peoples of the desert (i.e. foreign?)”
(1) Thomsen (1896, p. 98): бӧкli чӧlгі āл tabγač “les puissants peuples du désert (c’est-à-dire étrangers?)”, les Chinois”,
² čöl<–l>g?

2.3. “mighty Āls of the steppe”
(1) Bang (1896, pp. 333, 349–350): бӧкli чӧlig āл, Taƅγač “die mächtigen Āle der Steppe, die Chinesen”

2.4. “people of Bökli-Äčü”
(1) Radloff (1895, p. 216): Bӧkli-ӓчӳліг āл “das Volk des Bӧkli-Ätschü”

2.5. “tribes of Bӧkli-ӓčü?”
(1) Radloff (1897, p. 131): Bӧkli-ӓчӳlіг āл, Taƅγač “die Stämme der Bökli-Steppe, die Chinesen”,
² die Stämme der Bӧkli-etschü?

8 “…… So viel ich weiss, kann āл jedoch nicht in der Bedeutung budun zur Bezeichnung eines nicht türkischen Volkes gebraucht werden, weswegen auch THOMSENs „peuples étrangers” zu verwerfen ist. Grammatisch richtig kann āл nur durch „nach vorn, zum Aufgang der Sonne (zogen) die mächtigen Āle der Steppe” übersetzt werden. Da in I S 7–8 = K a. 7–8 jazy „Ebene” im Gegensatz zu Ütükän jyš (Bergwald) steht, so verstehe ich unter чӧlгі āл die die Steppen bewohnenden Stämme der Türk. „Nach Osten” kann sich nur auf die Richtung des Zuges bei den Trauerleiterlichkeiten beziehen; Osten ist ja auch die Seite, nach welcher unsere Inschriften schauen” (Bang 1896, pp. 333–334).

9 “IlkÚb (ḅöḳḷi). Dieses Wort habe ich im Glossar pag. 140 aus бӧк+lі erklärkt und durch «mächtig» übersetzt. Jetzt bin ich der Ansicht, dass es besser sei, das Wort als Titel oder Eigennam aufzufassen. Ein Mal (K 8,8, X 8,6) steht голи каҕан, und einmal (K 8,8 YYYYsic ⇒ ṬΤΤΤΤ bӧkli [sic] чӧlig) голи āвӦйăл «das von einem Bӧkli ātschü regierte Volk». Es sind zwei Gründe, die mich veranlassen голи nicht als «stark» aufzufassen: 1) er scheint «stark» wo es auftritt, stets in der Form мӧкӧ oder бӧкӧ und wird überall als Adjectivum angewendet; 2) ist das Adjective bildende Affix il=г molto unwahrscheinlich und wo es auftritt, anders zu erklären. Ist голи auf türkischem Boden entstanden, so müsste es als гол+или oder гол+yli von einem mir unbekannten Verbalstamm голо, голо+yli von einem mir unbekannten Verbalstamm голо, голо+yli hergeleitet werden” (Radloff 1895, pp. 230–231).


10 “Bӧkli Eigennam 140 b; Bӧkli вӧллир āл, Bӧkli вӧлри āл (oder Bӧkli āвӦйр āл) und Bӧkli каҕан (Berg?) 231, 46” (Radloff 1897, p. 180).
(2) Radlov – Melioranskij (1897, p. 17): Бӧкlij-чӧллиğ [Bökli-öyylüş ?] äl, Табγач “племени степи Бӧкли”, (затъмь) Китайцы”,
7 Или «племена Бӧкли ёчӱ»?

2.6. “tribes of the Bökli steppe”
(1) Radloff (1897, p. 131): Бӧкlij-чӧллиğ [Bӧklî-öyylüş?] äl, Табγач “die Stämme der Böklî-Steppe”, die Chinesen”,
5 die Stämme der Böklî-etschü?
(2) Radlov – Melioranskij (1897, p. 17): Бӧкlij-чӧллиğ [Bӧklî-öyylüş?] äl, Табγач “племена степи Бӧкли”, (затъмь) Китайцы”,
7 Или «племена Бӧкли ёчӱ»?
(3) Radloff (1905, col. 2044): Бӧкlij11 чӧллиğ äl “племена степи Беклю – die Stämme der Бӧкля12 Steppe”
(4) Radloff (1911, col. 1694): bӧkli чӧлли çл “племена степи Бекли – die Stämme der Бӧklî-Ebene”13

2.7. “people of the Bökli steppe”
(1) Malov (1951, pp. 29, 36): Бӧкlij чӧл(l)ig il, табγач “народ степи Бёклийской, (а также) табγач14”
(2) Malov (1951, p. 373): Bӧklî чӧл(l)ig äl “народ Бёклийской стеpи”

2.8. “people inhabiting the Bökli steppe”
(1) Nadeljaev et al. (1969, p. 155): bӧkli чӧл[l]ig еl “народ, обитающий в Беклийской стеpи”

2.9. “tribal union of the Bökli steppe”
(2) Amanžolov (2003, p. 159): bӧklî чӧllig äl ч’ээчэ “(на востоке) племенной союз Бёклийской стеpи (чжурчжени?)15, табгачи (китайцы)”

2.10. “people of the Bökli desert”

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11 Correctly Бӧкli.
12 Correctly Böklî.
13 Bӧklî-Ebene is an error for Bӧklî-Steppe.
14 Tabγач ‘Китай’, … (Malov 1951, p. 425).
15 Interpreting it as Jurchen is impossible, because the name Jurchen was used after ca. the 10th century.

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2.11. “people of the Bükli desert”

(1) Tekin (1988, pp. 8, 9, 38, 39): bükli : çöllüg (e)l : t(a)bg(a)ç; bükli : çöllüg il : t(a)bg(a)ç “Bükli Çöl halkı, Çinliler”\(^{16}\)

(2) Tekin (1995, pp. 38, 39, 62, 63): Bükli Çöllüg el, Tabgaç; Bükli Çöllüg il, Tabgaç “Bükli Çöl halkı, Çinliler”\(^{17}\)

2.12. “people of the Bükli plain”

(1) Tekin (1968, pp. 232, 264): bükli čöl(l)üg el, tavgac “the people of the Bükli plain, the Chinese”\(^{18}\)

(2) Tekin (2000, p. 201): bükli čöl(l)üg / el “Bükli ovası halkı”\(^{19}\)

(3) Tekin (2000, p. 221): Bükli čöl(l)üg il, Tabgaç

2.13. “people of the Bökküli steppe”

(1) Ölmez (2012, pp. 80, 93): bökküli : çöllüg e\(^{20}\) : tavgac “Bükli bozkır halkı, Çin”\(^{22}\)

2.14. “people of the country of the Bökküli (= Korea) steppe”

(1) Aydın (2012a, p. 45): bök<k>üli çöl<l>üg el\(^{20}\) : tavgaç “Bökküli (Kore) bozkır yurdundan, Çin”

2.15. “people of the country of the Bökküli steppe (= Korea)”

(1) Aydın (2012a, p. 79): bök<k>üli çöl<l>üg el [t]avgaç “Bökküli bozkırı yurdu (Kore) halkı, Çin”\(^{23}\)

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\(^{16}\) “KT D 4: bükli çöllüg (e)l = BK D 5: bükli çöllüg il. …… Buradaki Bükli (veya Bökküli?) kelimesinin bük (e)li “orman halkı” diye anlaşıltması gerektiği ileri sürülmüştür (bkz. Sertkaya 1979, p. 292). Bence bu görüş doğru değildir. Çünkü zıtlarda bir coğrafi terimden önce daima bir özel ad gelmektedir: Altun yı, Kadıran yı, Çuğay yı, Yarıuş yı, vb. vb. Ayrıca ve bundan daha önemli olarak dört satır aşağıda Bükli k(a)g(a)n ibaresi geçmektedir: …Bükli k(a)g(a)na t(e)gi sül(e)yü birm(i)ş (KT D 8 = BK D 8). Buradaki ibareyi bük eli kagan şeklinde anlamak ve açıklamak gramere ve kullanışa aykırı olur. Tek başına bük el-i gibi bir isim tamaması normal ise de (krş. Tabgaç ili, vb.), böyle 3. kişi iyelik eki ile kurulmuş bir isim tamamasının 3. kişi iyelik eki alınmasını başka bir isimle yemek bir tampama kurabileceği şüphelidir” (Tekin 1988, p. 72).

\(^{17}\) çöl ‘bozkır, step’ (Telin 1995, p. 101).

\(^{18}\) čöl steppe, plain, desert; č.-l(l)üg KT E4, BK E5; (bükli č.) KT E4, BK E5 (Telin 1988, pp. 323–324).

\(^{19}\) čöl ‘step, bozkır’ (Telin 2000, p. 242).

\(^{20}\) Correctly el.

\(^{21}\) Correctly Bökküli.

\(^{22}\) čöl ‘bozkır, çöl’ (Ölmez 2012, p. 311).

\(^{23}\) bökküli? çöllüg el Kore; b. KT D 4, BK D 5 (Aydın 2012a, p. 159).
2.16. “Bökli-Çöläk people”

(1) Vambéry (1898, p. 29): Bükli²⁴ Çölök-il, Tapgač “das Volk Bökli-Çülek, Chinesen”

2.17. “distant Bökli (?) people”

(1) Thomsen (1924, p. 145): “das ferne Bökli(?)volk, die Chinesen”

2.18. “foreign (?) Bökli people”

(1) Gabain (1941, p. 249): Bökli çölg(u)gil²⁵ il, Tabğaç

2.19. “Bökli people of the desert”

(1) Çagatay (1950, p. 5): Bökli çölg(u)gil, Tabğaç

2.20. “(from the) tribes inhabiting forests and steppes”

(1) Orkun (1936, pp. 24, 31): bükli çölg il, tabgaç; bükli çöl il, tabgaç “ormanlarda (10), çöllerde oturan kavmelerden Çinliler”²⁷

2.21. “Korean (?) country”


²⁴ Correctly Bökli.
²⁵ çölg(u)gil (ü? Runenschr.) fremd(?) || yabancı (?)’ (Gabain 1941, p. 308).
²⁶ çölg çöl, yaban (?) (Çagatay 1950, p. 54).
2.22. “Korean people”


2.23. “bökli çölgil [= Korea]”

(1) Sertkaya (2015, p. 44): bökli : çölgil : t(a)bg(a)ç “bökli çölgil [Korea], tabgaç [China]”

III. Conclusion

As was seen above, all researchers except four persons treated the letter group çŴlGl (or çŴlGlI) together with its preceding letter group of bŴklI. The readings and translations of çŴlGl (or çŴlGlI) with or without bŴklI differ a great deal according to the researchers, but the following word tabgaç, has been mostly translated as ‘China’ ‘the Chinese’, or in a few cases as ‘Tabgaç’.

These readings and translations are unsatisfactory and problematic, because most researchers overlooked the following three points:

1. The mark resembling a colon (:) is used to separate words and word groups from each other. Since the letter group of çŴlGl or çŴlGlI is in a list enumerating the

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29 Its Turkish original has the title of ‘Kore’nin Göktürk Yazıtlarındaki Adı’ and amounts to 12 pages. This Turkish original is attached to pp. 123–134 of the proceedings named The 7th (2nd International) Goguryeo Conference to Commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Restoration of Independence (the 5913th Anniversary of the National Foundation Day) [of Korea] – the Relationship between Goguryeo and the Turkic Kaganate (Korea and Turkey Are Brother Nations), Guri, pp. 33 – 48. “돌궐비문들에있는한국의이름”,광복70주년(개천5913년)기념제7회고구려학술대회(국제2회)−고구려와돌궐의관계(터키와한국은형제국)−,구리. This conference was held in Guri / Korea on November 7, 2015. It was not a scholarly conference. It is officially recognised in Korea that the first Korean state was established in 2333 BC. Therefore, 5913 should be corrected as 4348.


“-gil ek Türkiye Türkçesi’nde sadece ince şekli olan ve kelimeleri eklenliğinde aidiyet bildiren bir partikül (clitic, clitic) eki.розmalı Baklagiller teriminde, Bu geçen oto-
mobil dayanımlı döngü çemelinde -gil eki aitlik-mensubiyet bildirir. Dolayısıyla çöl[li], izgil, çigil kavim adlarındaki -gil eki kavim adı yapan bir ek fonksiyonu olarak gözükmedektir” (Sertkaya 2015, p. 131). [The Korean translation of this passage is on p. 42.]
countries that sent representatives to the Turkic Kagan’s funeral, it is problematic to read b₇a`kla (or c₇a`kla) as one composite name.31

2. There were two Tabgač states in northern China in the early years of the Turkic Kaganate. The period of the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians (五胡十六國 Wù-hú-shí-liù-guó; 304–439) ended with the unification of northern China by the Northern Wei (北魏 Běi Wèi; 386–535), a dynasty founded by the Tabgač (拓跋 ~ 拓拔 Tuò-bā) clan of the Xianbei (鮮卑). In 534–535, the Northern Wei was divided into the Eastern Wei (東魏 Dōng Wèi; 534–550) and the Western Wei (西魏 Xī Wèi; 535–556). The Eastern Wei and the Western Wei were succeeded by the Northern Qi (北齊 Běi Qí; 550–577) and the Northern Zhou (北周 Běi Zhōu; 557–581) respectively. The Northern Zhou destroyed the Northern Qi in 577. It was overthrown by the Sui (隋 Suí; 581–618). The Sui unified the Northern and Southern dynasties in 589.

The Turkic Kaganate (552–744) was established by the Ashina (阿史那 Ā-shì-nà) clan of the Turks under the leadership of Bumïn (土門 Tǔ-mén) Kagan (d. 552). His younger brother Ištämi (室點密 Shì-diǎn-mì) was the de facto ruler (yabgu) of the western part of the empire, the Western Turkic Kaganate (552–576).

In the passage in question, there is a list of countries that sent representatives to a Turkic kagan’s funeral. As seen above, in the early years of the Turkic Kaganate in 552–577, there were two Tabgač states when we count the Western Wei and its successor state the Northern Zhou as one country: (1) the Northern Qi and the Western Wei in 552–556; (2) the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou in 557–577. These two Tabgač states must have sent their representatives to the Turkic Kagan’s funeral separately, not jointly. Moreover, it is unthinkable that only one Tabgač state sent its representatives to this funeral. Therefore, c₇a`kla (or c₇a`kla) and Tabgač must correspond to the Northern Qi and the Western Wei / the Northern Zhou. It is certainly inaccurate

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31 See Tekin (1968, p. 48).
32 The pronunciation of 拓跋 ~ 拓拔 is Tä-kbat ~ Tä-kbōt/beh-t in Early Middle Chinese and Tä-kphuat ~ Tä-kphuu in Late Middle Chinese. “… Early Middle Chinese is the language of the Qiyeon rhyme dictionary of A.D. 601, which codified the standard literary language of both North and South China, the preceding period of division. … Late Middle Chinese is the standard language of the High Tang Dynasty, based on the dialect of the capital, Chang’an” (Pulleyblank 1991, p. 1).
33 The name of this country was simply 齊 Qí. However, it is called 北齊 Běi Qí in order to distinguish it from the Qi 齊 (ca. 1046–221 BC) of the Spring and Autumn period (春秋時代 Chōu-qīn Shì-dài; 770–476 (or 403) BC) and the Warring States period (戰國時代 Zhàn-guó Shì-dài; 476 (or 403)–221 BC) and from the Southern Qi (南齊 Nán Qí; 479–502 AD), the second of the Southern dynasties. The name of the Southern Qi was also simply 南齊 Nán Qí. The pronunciation of 齊 is nîhwiy (i.e. nîhuy) in Early Middle Chinese and dej (i.e. déy) in Late Middle Chinese.
34 The name of this country was simply 周 Zhōu. However, it is called 北周 Běi Zhōu in order to distinguish it from the Zhou 周 (ca. 1046–256 BC) in ancient times. The pronunciation of 周 is kû in Early Middle Chinese and tûw in Late Middle Chinese.
35 The pronunciation of 阿史那 is ʔaʔ-ṣiʔ-’na in Early Middle Chinese and ʔaʔ-ṣiʔ-’na in Late Middle Chinese.
36 The pronunciation of 土門 is tʰoʔ-’mon in Early Middle Chinese and tʰuʔ-’mun in Late Middle Chinese.
37 The pronunciation of 室點密 is cît-tem-’mit in Early Middle Chinese and cît-tiam-’mit in Late Middle Chinese.

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to translate Tabgač simply as ‘China’ or ‘the Chinese’ as most researchers have done until now.

3. Although it was already pointed out by Clauson (1972, p. 420) and Clark (1977, pp. 135–136) that cWlg in cWlgI (or cWlgII) cannot mean ‘desert’, most of the researchers wanted to relate it to the Mongolic word čöl ‘desert’ and translated it as ‘(of the) desert’ or ‘(of the) steppe’. However, there is a plain rather than a steppe or desert in the Liao River basin of Manchuria, to the east of the Turkic Kaganate. It is the Liaohe Plain (遼河平原 Liáo-hé Píng-yuán). The Liaohe Plain, the Songnen Plain (松嫩平原 Sōng-nèn Píng-yuán), and the Sanjiang Plain (三江平原 Sānjiāng Píng-yuán) make up the Northeast Plain (東北平原 Dōng-běi Píng-yuán) or the Manchurian Plain which is China’s largest plain at present. Therefore, it is almost impossible to relate cWlgI (or cWlgII) to čöl ‘desert’ or ‘steppe’. The word for ‘plain’ is yazï in the Orkhon inscriptions, e.g. Ṣantun yazï ‘the Shantung Plain’ (KT S 3, E 17; BK [N 2], E 15), Töglütün yazï ‘the Töglütün Plain’ (KT S 6–7; BK N 5), and Yarïš yazï ‘the Yarïš Plain’ (T 33, 36).

To solve the problem of reading and translation of bWklI : cWlgI (or cWlgII) : tabgač, we should first of all consider bWklI and cWlgI (or cWlgII) as separate nouns. The countries that sent representatives to a Turkic kagan’s funeral are mentioned clockwise beginning from the east. Although Kïtañ and Tatabï were also the eastern neighbours of the Turks, their names are given at the end of the list. Therefore, bWklI should be a more important and powerful country than Kïtañ and Tatabï. The only candidate for such a country is Goguryeo. Goguryeo (고구려 Gō-gōu-li, 37 BC–668 AD) was an ancient Korean kingdom located in Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. It was one of the Three Kingdoms of ancient Korea. The other two kingdoms were Baekje (백제 Bāì-jì, 18 BC–660 AD) and Silla (신라/新羅 Xīn-luó, 57 BC–935 AD). The name Goguryeo was inherited by the Goryeo dynasty (고려/高麗 Gō-li, 918–1392), from which the English word “Korea” stemmed.38 The name bWklI (= Goguryeo) is not in the list of the countries that sent representatives to Kül Tegin’s funeral in 731 because Goguryeo was no longer in existence at that time, but neither its successor state Balhae (발해 Bāihài, 698–926) was mentioned in the list.

The Japanese scholar Iwasa Seiichirō (巖佐精一郎, 1911–1935) had already read bWklI as bökči 挹句麗 ‘句麗 of the挹 māk people’.39 It is also possible to read bWklI as bökküli or bökköli. The name bökküli or bökköli can be analysed as bökküli (< *bökčüli 挹句麗) or bökköli (< *bökköli 挹高麗).40 挹句麗/挹高麗 Gōu-li/Gōo-li is another name of Goguryeo (挹句麗 Gōo-gōu-li). 挹 Maek

38 See Song (2001, p. 27) and Lee (2005, pp. 82–86). By the way, Goguryeo must be read as Goguri (고구려), because the pronunciation of the character 鵲 is ri, not ryeo [ryэ] when it is used as part of the name of a country. Thus, 高麗 must be read as Gori (고리), not Goryeo (고려). Unfortunately, this fact has been largely ignored.


40 See Li Yong-Sŏng (2003, especially p. 256).
(= Mük) or 淺貊 Yemaek is the name of an ethnic group which became the basis of modern Koreans. Goguryeo was also founded by this ethnic group. The denasalisation of initial m- is found in the name of bünkii.41

As mentioned above, there were two Tabgač states in northern China in 552–577, i.e. in the first twenty five years of the Turkic Kaganate. Therefore, we should suppose that the Türks distinguished these two Tabgač states by calling one state Čwlg (or ČwlgII) and the other state Tabgač. In all probability, Čwlg (or ČwlgII) and Tabgač are the Northern Zhou and the Northern Qi, respectively. If so, Čwlg (or ČwlgII) can be analysed as Çüliç el ‘realm/country of the Ču people’ (< Ču (< 周 Zhōn) + -liç ‘suffix forming possessive noun/adjective’ + el ‘realm/country’). The Turkic kagan’s funeral should have been held during the period between 557 and 577. The kagan in question may be Mukan Kagan (木杆可汗 Mù-gān-kē-hàn; r. 553–572), the second son of Bümın Kagan and the third kagan of the Turkic Kaganate, or his younger brother Tatpar Kagan (他鉢可汗 Tà-bō-kē-hàn; r. 572–581). However, the question remains: Why is the Northern Zhou mentioned in the list immediately after Goguryeo instead of the Northern Qi? Probably because this funeral was mentioned 154–174 years after the event by later descendants. They could not certainly enumerate the countries that sent representatives to the funeral exactly from the east, because they confused the geographical order.

-ılxg is a suffix forming possessive noun/adjective. It can be added to the proper names of places. Erdal (1991, p. 144) writes about it as follows:

“This +ılxg is added also to the proper names of places, as it is to this day; in Ht IV 1736, the translator describes himself as Beş Balıklıg, i.e. from the well-known town of Beş Balık; the Byzantines are Vromluglar (Ht IV 966), the elite of Benares (Maitr 7 v2) Bar(a)nas(t)g bāy bādīk kīslār. PrièreMan mentions a Solmuli(t)g Alp Totok Öğrängü y(e)gān and a certain Küsänlig iç buyruk, and somebody refers to his (or one of his) son(s)-in-law as Kam(iłl)g kūdāğümüz. These designations could identify either where one lived or where one was born.”

Thus, Çüliç el is the first example of the +ılxg added to the proper names of places. Now, the letter groups bünkii : Čwlg (or ČwlgII) : TBGč in this passage should be

41 I witnessed an example of the denasalisation of initial m when I took part in the International Workshop: “Descriptive and Contrastive Analysis on Languages of Northeast Eurasia” at Niigata University in Japan in July 8–9, 2016. One day a Tuvan participant named Arzhaana Syur-yun from the Institute for Language Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences) asked me to pronounce ‘to eat’ in Korean. I pronounced meokta [mokta]. However, she wrote not meok but bok as the verb stem on her cell phone. Perhaps the western neighbours of Goguryeo, the Kūais or the Tatahīs or the Türks, also heard māk as bāk or bōk.

42 Cf. čub ‘region, zone’ in all čub sogdak tapa ‘in the direction of Six-zhōu Sogdian colonies (= 六胡州 Liu-hú-zhōu)’ (KT E 31; BK E 24; < 州 zhōu). 六胡州 Liu-hú-zhōu was in the northern portion of Shaanxi (陝西 Shān-xī) province. It was comprised of 鄒州 Lú-zhōu, 青州 Qīng-zhōu, 落州 Lào-zhōu, 興州 Xīng-zhōu, 徐州 Xú-zhōu, and 兗州 Ōu-zhōu. 州 Zhōu was an administrative division in former times. The pronunciation of 州 zhōu is also kaw in Early Middle Chinese and čiu in Late Middle Chinese like that of 陽 zhōu.
read as Bökküli⁴³, Čüülüg el, Tabgač “Bökküli (= Goguryeo), Čüülüg el (= the Northern Zhou), Tabgač (= the Northern Qi)”.

Abbreviations

BK Bilgä Kagan Inscription
BX Bilgä Kagan Inscription
IOD Thomsen, Vilhelm (1896): Inscriptions de l’Orkhon déchiffées. Helsingfors (MSFOu 5).
KT Kül Tegin Inscription
T Tuńukuk Inscription

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⁴³ Bökküli is also possible.


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Thomsen, Vilhelm (1896): *Inscriptions de l’Orkhon déchiffrées*. Helsingfors (MSFOu 5).


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