

On the Earliest Mention of the Ethnonym 'Oghuz' in Western Turkestan

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The appearance and earliest use of the ethnonym Oghuz occurs in the K k T rk realm; a group of tribes with that name was influential during the interregnum (630-682) and second periods of the T rk Empire (682-744). Later associated with the Uyghurs, they were merely neighbours of the T rk tribe in the Selenga basin. A great union of the Oghuz then appeared in Western Turkestan in the 9th century. Their ties with the synonymous eastern tribes are not clear, and no certain account of an east-west migration exists. On the other hand, sources describing the ethnic situation of Western Turkestan during the 8th and 9th centuries are very scanty. Early Islamic records speak of a great formation of the Oghuz to the east of Sir Darya and Aral. Given the lack of necessary data, their ethnogenesis is open to many speculations. It is customary to suppose that the T rghesh union, derived from the On Ok union of the Western T rk Kaghanate turned to be the core of the Oghuz. However, when and why the name Oghuz replaced T rghesh and when and why the latter disappeared needs explanation. Based on two unusual attestations of the name in the T rk inscriptions, this paper suggests that the name Oghuz was crucial among the western tribes of the T rks synchronically with, or even before, the name T rghesh.

Usage of the ethnonym Oghuz in the K k T rk inscriptions seems to have been reserved for the Oghuz in Mongolia. Another Oghuz formation appeared in the west after several generations, on the lower Sir Darya basin. The former union of tribes on the Selenga basin called the Tokuz (Nine) Oghuz was a reservoir of troubles for the Second T rk Kaghanate (682-744). Indeed, the two Oghuz are not contemporary to each other and the Western Oghuz appeared after the demise of the (Second) T rk Empire. The T rk and Uyghur inscriptions, Chinese sources or any other record do not imply anything concrete suggesting this union, often punished for their rebellions, replaced their habitation

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with another (westward) land in those days. The only statement, so vague as to be open to all kinds of comments, is given by Ibn al-Athir: "A certain historian of Khurasan told some of their history with greater clarity. According to his account these Oghuz were a people of the remotest Turks who migrated from the furthest regions into Transoxiana during the reign of al-Mahdī. They converted to Islam and al-Muqanna, the 'miracle-worker' and mountebank, called on them for help for the success of his mission."¹ This part about the late 8th century was inserted into the text, being not much relevantly to the pages telling about the story of the events around the year 1153.

The problem with the account is that no such migration during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) is known from other sources; the movement of the Sir Darya Oghuz towards Transoxiana was under the separatist Saljuk Beg, after more than two centuries, and this was not determinant and permanent. As for the coincidence of the Islamisation with this movement, it is entirely out of question. The first massive Islamisation of the Oghuz was in the horde of the same Saljuk Beg. Therefore, the account of Ibn al-Athir is very problematic, especially for the basic chronology. Hence, how can we check reliability of the news regarding 'remotest Turks' and 'furthest regions'? If it really happened, those regions might be equally the Selenga basin, the South Siberian belt and even the Semirechie.² Ibn al-Athir mentions only one migration, and that is the southwards march of the Oghuz, so a unique movement from the east and north of the Lake Aral should be understood. In that case, the 'remotest point' would be the known Oghuz habitation of the Aral-Sir Darya region.

Sümer believes that the Eastern/Tokuz Oghuz and those on the Sir Darya are separate peoples,³ and presents the following proofs: starting with the earliest ones (Ibn Khordadbeh, Khwarezmī), Islamic geographers record them as separate peoples. The Sir Darya Oghuz had dual tribal organisation, which was related to the separation of the On Ok federation into two. This is not visible in the east. The regent *yabghu*, the highest ruler among the Sir Darya Oghuz, was called *köl erkin*; it was the same as in the Nu-shih-pi, the west wing of the On Ok union, Oghuz Bilge Tamgachi attended to the funeral of Kül Tegin as representative of the Western Kök Türk region. This name includes the tribal name. Names of the Tongra and Kuni tribes of the Tokuz Oghuz are not attested in

¹ *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rīh*, Part 2, ed. D. S. Richards, Farnham-Burlington 2007, 57.

² Sümer pays attention to the fact that the Karluks destroyed the Türgesh in 766 and believes that the latter might have moved towards the Lower Sir Darya from the Chu and Talas valleys, and thus the account might be true. See: F. Sümer, *Oğuzlar (Türkmenler)*. İstanbul 1999⁵, 65.

³ Golden agrees that "bearing in mind, then, that Oghuz is originally a *terminus technicus politicus*, its appearance at various times and places in the Turkic world does not necessarily imply that the peoples bearing this designation belong to or are descendants of one and the same ethnos", see: P. B. Golden, "The Migrations of the Oghuz," *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 4 (1972), 45-84, 47, 54.

the west. Mahmud of Kashgar separates the language of (western) Oghuz from the so-called 'Khaqanī' language. Since the latter is the closest to the Kōk Türk language, the (western) Oghuz were different from the Eastern Turks.⁴

If we can find any early presence of the Oghuz in the west,⁵ while the Selenga Oghuz were still in their home (they are mentioned there even under the Uyghur kaghan Bögü (759–779), and they took the name of the ruling Uyghur tribe in the succeeding generations), then there would be no reason to suppose such a remote migration.⁶ We would at least suppose that the allegedly migrated group was of such a tiny one that they did not even enter into records. If so, then, the task of explaining the very great Western Oghuz mass will be a challenge.

As Klyashtorny proposes, it seems that the only support for Ibn al-Athir for the migration from the remote east can be found in the presence of the Igder tribe that was subdued by the Uyghur kaghan Moyen Ćur (c.749).⁷ It is one of

⁴ Sümer, *Oğuzlar*, 45–46. Chinese annals prove this linguistically known fact. According to both the early and late *T'ang Shu*, "(of the tribes constituting the Western Türks) traditions and lifestyles are usually the same as those of the T'u-chüeh (the Eastern, proper Türks), but their language is a little bit different." See É. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, St. Pétersbourg 1903, 21, 47; Liu Mau-tsai, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Doğu Türkleri*, trans. E. Kayaoğlu – D. Banoğlu, İstanbul 2006, 477–478. Although Korkmaz expresses the Kōk Türk > Karakhanid literary language line, she seems to have missed this fact by claiming that the dialect of the Oghuz was not yet separated from the Karakhanid (Khaqanī) in the 11th century in a true sense, see Z. Korkmaz, "Kaşgarlı Mahmut ve Oğuz Türkçesi," *Türk Dili Üzerine Araştırmalar I*, Ankara 1995, 241–253, (originally in *Türk Dili* 253, October 1972, 3–19), 243. Mahmud of Kashgar is the first author providing linguistic material on the Oghuz. An elaborated examination of the data of the Oghuz dialect given by him was made by A. Karahan, "Dīvānū Lügātī't-Türk'e Göre Oğuzca," In: *Oğuzlar: Dilleri, Tarihleri ve Kültürleri. 5. Uluslararası Türkiyat Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. T. Gündüz, M. Cengiz, Ankara 2015, 41–60.

⁵ The first reference to them is attributed to Baladhurī, according to whom 'Abd-Allah ibn Tāhir, governor of Khorasan (828–844) "sent his son Tāhir ibn 'Abd-Allah to the land of al-Ĝuziyye to wage wars. Tāhir conquered places where nobody had reached before him." (el-Belāzurī, *Fütūhu'l-Buldān*, trans. M. Fayda, 2nd ed., Ankara 2002, 628).

⁶ Klyashtorny is of the opinion that after eventually losing the conflict with the Uyghur Kaghanate in the third phase of their rebellion, the Tokuz Oghuz migrated westward from the year 759 on, and this is supported by Ibn al-Athīr's account, see S. G. Klyashtorny, "The Oguzs of the Central Asia and the Guzs of the Aral Region," *International Journal of Central Asian Studies*, II (1997), 1–4, 2. However, such a 'great' migration was not recorded by Chinese sources or Uyghur inscriptions. On the other hand, we know, for instance, about migration of some (likely very little) parts of them to China during the Second Türk Kaghanate.

⁷ It was recorded in the Terkhin inscription, see S. G. Klyashtorny, "The Terkhin Inscription," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 36/1–3 (1982), 335–366.). Tekin approves it, and makes another suggestion for the Oghuz tribes: The text transcribed as *baš* (?) *q^aybaš* (?) by Klyashtorny ("The Terkhin Inscription", 342) is transcribed as *baš*

the 24 or 25 Western Oghuz tribes that were recorded by later sources. Czeglédy makes another reconstruction of another case. According to an archaic account in the geographer Gardizī's work from the 11th century, the Yagma tribe of the Tokuz Oghuz union migrated to the Karluk, who were then subjects of the (Western) Türk kaghan. This story is reinforced by the Uyghur Shine Us inscription and Chinese annals. The Yaghma fled after they were eventually defeated by the Uyghurs in 749.⁸ Czeglédy does not relate this migration of a Tokuz Oghuz tribe to the account of Ibn al-Athīr. It is our idea that the latter, having read the same source(s) as Gardizī, might have reached to the conclusion that the Oghuz migrated then to Transoxiana. It is true that the Yaghma migrated to the vicinity of Transoxiana; however, they were included in the later Karakhanid realm, and had nothing to do with the Oghuz.

There is an earlier record in T'ang-shu of such a migration, according to which some –visibly insignificant – part of the Eastern Türks fled to the “western lands” in the aftermath of the collapse of the first empire in 630.⁹ This is, however, related to the Kök Türks, and not to the members of the Tokuz Oghuz union.

In the absence of accounts for movements of great populations from the east, the most logical approach might be to search for the ethnogenesis of the Sir Darya Oghuz within the On Ok > Türgesh realm. Our survey should start with the native records of the Kök Türks.

The scope of this paper does not permit a compilation of views regarding the etymology of the word Oghuz. However, for the sake of building this paper, we have to acknowledge that we are closer to the conventional ‘Németh theory’, according to which the word *oğuz* means ‘tribes’, since the translation of the Turkic word *ok* is ‘tribe’ in Chinese.¹⁰ In addition, we believe that the Kök Türks still meant ‘tribes’ by the word *oğuz*, perhaps with an unconscious usage of the archaic plural suffix *-Vz*. During the diplomatic phase of the anti-Türk coalition of China, the Kirghiz and the Türgesh in 709, kaghan of the Kirghiz said the following according to the Tonyukuk inscription: [*Türük bodunī yāmā*] *bulğanč ol temiš; oğuzi yāmā tarqinč ol temiš*. “[The Türk people] is in dis-

q(a)y (a)b(a) baš by Tekin. He notes that the Oghuz tribes Qay and Iva (Ava/Yava/Yawa) are mentioned here, see T. Tekin, “Kuzey Moğolistan’da Yeni Bir Uygur Anıtı: Taryat (Terhin) Kitabesi,” In: *Makaleler II. Tarihi Türk Yazı Dilleri*, ed. E. Yılmaz, N. Demir, Ankara 2004, 170–226, 181, 197. This reading, however, needs reconsideration.

⁸ K. Czeglédy, “Gardizi on the History of Central Asia (746–780 A.D.),” *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 27/3 (1973), 257–267, 263–267.

⁹ Liu, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Doğu Türkleri*, 277.

¹⁰ Golden revisited the *ok* (thus On Ok, Oguz, Ogur) question in P. B. Golden, “Plemena Zapadnogo Tyurkskogo kaganata Ok (Oq) i Ogur-Oguz (Oğur-Oğuz). K voprosu o vzaimosvyazi terminov,” In: *Zapadnyi Tyurkskii Kaganat, Atlas*, ed. A. Dosymbaeva, M. Žoldasbekov, Almaty 2013, 50–81.

order; the Oghuz, their subjects, are also displeased, he said".¹¹ Disregarding the reconstructed '*Türük boduni*', the possessive suffix in *oğuz-i* is very striking. It is unique in the inscriptions. It may refer to both 'their', as Tekin suggests, and 'his'. The previous sentences reference the Türk kaghan, and thus it is more plausible that the *oğuz* are 'his Oghuz', namely 'his subject tribes'.¹²

It is noteworthy that the ethnic name 'Oghuz' that is always used to describe the nine tribe union (Tokuz Oghuz) in the Türk inscriptions and early Medieval Islamic sources is not attested at all in the contemporary Chinese (early T'ang) records. Instead, the latter employ the meaning 'nine tribes' (or rather 'family') for them, too: *chiu-hsing*.¹³ Namely, for the Türks, *oğuz* was not a proper noun in those days, and the Chinese were aware of that fact, thus translating it as 'tribes'.¹⁴

The addressed mass in the inscriptions is clearly displayed by the words *türk oğuz*. In those usages, the two are not separated from each other, perhaps not in ethnic sense, but in referring to common language and styles: "Tokuz Oghuz lords and people! Hear these words of mine well, and listen hard."¹⁵ "Türk Oghuz lords and peoples, hear this!"¹⁶ The kaghan speaks with the Tokuz Oghuz folk, because "the Tokuz Oghuz people were my own people."¹⁷

The On Ok confederation,¹⁸ which constituted the western wing of the Kök Türk realm, was also expectedly among the collocutors: "See these writings

¹¹ T. Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, Bloomington 1968, 250, 286 (Tonyukuk, East 5).

¹² Prof. Zeki Kaymaz (personal communication) also advised us such a meaning.

¹³ For instance, see *Eski T'ang Tarihi (Chiu T'ang-shu)*, trans. İsenbike Togan et al., Ankara 2006, 384. E. Ekrem collected the concerning data in Chinese sources in "Çin Kaynaklarında Dokuz Oğuz Meselesi: Sayısal Yapısı," In: *Oğuzlar: Dilleri, Tarihleri ve Kültürleri. 5. Uluslararası Türkiyat Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. T. Gündüz, M. Cengiz, Ankara 2015, 189-220.

¹⁴ The view of Hamilton in this context that the common noun *toquz oğuş* 'nine tribes' underwent such a phonetical change as *toquz oğuz* under the influence of the last consonant of the first word is also very remarkable. Thus, in his view, the differentiated form *oğuz* then turned to be a proper noun. See J. Hamilton, "Tokuz-Oğuz ve On-Uygur", trans. Y. Koç - İ. Birkan, *Türk Dilleri Araştırmaları*, 7 (1997), 187-232, 189-190.

¹⁵ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 257 (Köl Tegin, South 2).

¹⁶ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 267 (Köl Tegin, East 22).

¹⁷ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 270 (Köl Tegin, North 4), 276 (Bilge Kaghan, East 29).

¹⁸ Formation of this entity does not date, surely, to the beginning of the Kök Türk domination in Central Asia (560's). The Byzantine sources report on eight divisions of the western wing of the Türk Empire. There seems to be no ethnic dimension in this division. Among others, Dobrovits believes that the On Ok were formed based on administrative divisions, see M. Dobrovits, "A nyugati türkök tíz törzsének kialakulása," [The genesis of the ten tribes of the Western Türks] *Antik Tanulmányok*, XLVIII (2004), 101-109, 108. We would reinforce two points here: The On Ok were clearly ethnic units; they were called *ok* 'tribe, surname' and each

and get a lesson (from them), all of you up to the descendants and subjects of the On Ok.”¹⁹ The subjects are ‘our others’, but the On Ok people, from which the Türgesh union was created, were ‘our own’, because “the Türgesh kaghan (and his people) were our Türks and our people.”²⁰ In an obverse way, the Türgesh kaghan says, by meaning the Eastern Türk lands that “my people are there.”²¹ Chinese sources support this case: “(After the death of Mo-ch’o in 716) Su-lu of the T’u-chüeh proclaimed himself kaghan and many of the T’u-chüeh officials ranged on his side.”²² Su-lu is the most famous Türgesh kaghan beginning his career in 716 and is depicted as a Türk by the sources, which have a strong knowledge regarding his Türgesh affiliation. The case of being politically suppressed does not alone present a reality that may explain these statements. The ‘Turkic’ peoples of the Central Eurasian steppes, at least the On Ok, are considered Türks by the kaghan.²³

member of it had its own tribal name. Secondly, lands of the Western Türk Empire included much wider regions from the shores of Azov to Jungaria; while the later On Ok lived in what is today Central and Eastern Kazakhstan. Thus, the two divisions do not suit each other in both ethnic and geographic senses. An intentional and traditional *decimal system* offered by Stark may not be true. He also believes that the On Ok organisation was created by Ishtemi, the ruler/conqueror of the western wing of the empire (552–576), see S. Stark, “On Oq Bodun. The Western Türk Qaghanate and the Ashina Clan”, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 15 (2006–2007), 159–172.

- ¹⁹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 263 (Köl Tegin, South 12), 281 (Bilge Kaghan, North 15). Tekin translates the word *tat* as ‘subject’, but in his Turkish edition of the inscriptions he prefers the meaning ‘stranger’, getting closer to other Turkish editions: T. Tekin, *Orhon Yazıtları*⁵, Ankara 2014, 23. The word clearly designates ‘subjected other (people)’, see Sir G. Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish*, Oxford 1972, 449. The only significant subject people of Western Turkestan were then the Sogdians; thus, in our opinion, the kaghan addresses them, too.
- ²⁰ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 266 (Köl Tegin, East 18). Bilge Kaghan, East 16, repeats the same sentence.
- ²¹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 286 (Tonyukuk, East 4), following H. N. Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları*³, Ankara 1994, 107, translates the sentence as “my people will be there”. So thinks Stark, too: Stark, *On Oq Bodun*, 166. The original sentence is *meniñ bodunum anta erür*. The copula verb *er-* is not used for future tense. The context, in the course of shaping an alliance, truly needs such a sentence, but in that case the Türgesh kaghan would say “my army will be there,” instead of expressing a part of folk in present tense. Thus, we preferred other editions, see M. Ergin, *Orhun Abideleri*⁷, İstanbul 1980, 55; E. Aydın, *Orhon Yazıtları*, Konya 2012, 112. We are grateful to Prof. Gürer Gülsevin for debating and clarifying this sentence.
- ²² Liu, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Doğu Türkleri*, 310.
- ²³ Although he does not consider the case in this sense, Dobrovits sums up the number of the Türk tribes as 30, as given by sources: 11 Eastern Türks, 9 Oğuz and 10 Western Türks, namely On Ok, see M. Dobrovits, “The Thirty Tribes of the Türks,” *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 57/3 (2004), 257–262, 260.

Narrating the times of Bumin and Ishtemi, the first generation of the K k T rk state, Bilge Kaghan, owner of the inscriptions, says that “they settled [the T rk people] eastwards up to the Khingan mountains and westward as far as the Iron Gate. They ruled (organising) the K k T rks between the two (boundaries).”²⁴ We would object to this translation. It is by no means clear who were settled. Before the first sentence above, Bilge Kaghan comments on the conquest of the peoples in the ‘four directions’. Garrisons were surely sent to certain points, as well as some civilian groups. However, it is hard to believe that all of the vast area from Manchuria to Afghanistan was then populated by the T rks proper. It is crucial for the tribesmen of the On Ok confederation living in what is today Kazakhstan, too. The second cited sentence is originally *İkin ara idi oqsız K k T rk anca olurur ermiř*, which should best be translated as “The highly disorganized K k T rks used to live so between the two (Manchuria and Afghanistan).”²⁵ What we understand from this sentence is that the T rks, even the K k T rks, used to live in olden times in the greater home (not merely in the Altay region or in the legendary ‘Ergenekon’) without any great polity; Bumin Kaghan, founder of the K k T rk state, changed the situation by organising the Turkic mass under the state administration. The ‘dynastical’ T rks in the Altay ranges otherwise had an organised structure even well before Bumin Kaghan (d.552), under the suzerainty of the Juan-Juan.

In Minorsky’s terms, “the ethnical unity of the Turks, the Ten Arrows, the Tokuz Oghuz and the Oghuz living to the north of the Turks was felt and claimed, but that politically the groups were disunited or separate”.²⁶ Such a consciousness of a wider Turkic ethnic entity and identity would not be without any reason and reality. Additionally, if this consciousness is based on the knowledge of common origins, then the T rks were on the boundaries of Transoxiana a significant time before that of al-Mahdi. Even a converse situation might be real. The T rks proper, who once reached as far as the Altay Mountains moving eastwards, continued their march and conquered Central Mongolia in the time of Bumin. It should be noted that the word *ilg r * ‘forward’ also means ‘east’ in Old Turkic language.

However, interests of one’s own tribe are always essential: “In order to nourish the people, I, with great armies, went on campaigns twelve times northwards against the Oghuz, eastwards against the Khitan and Tatabi peo-

²⁴ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 263 (K l Tegin, East 2-3).

²⁵ Golden is of the idea that the term *oqsız* (lit. ‘tribeless’) refers here to the On Ok, see P. B. Golden, “Oq and Oġur~Oġuz,” *Turkic Languages*, 16/2 (2012), 183-188, 184. However, in his opinion, it does not “provide definite evidence for the existence of an *On Oq* organization in the latter half of the 6th century.”

²⁶ V. Minorsky, “Tamim ibn Baħr’s Journey to the Uyghurs,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 12/2 (1948), 275-305, 286. However, his comment that the T rghesh kaghan says “We Oghuz”, referring to the Tonyukuk South 3, is not true. The speaker there is clearly the chief of the Tokuz Oghuz, sending emissaries to China and Khitan.

ples, southwards against the Chinese.”²⁷ There were no expeditions for plundering towards Central Asia, perhaps for the distance was great. However, besides the efforts to realise political unity of the Türks living in that vast area in an *oqsız* ‘disorganised’ way, the very provocative cooperation of the On Ok with the Chinese and Kirghiz against the Kök Türks resulted in the march of the armies of the latter departing from Ötüken, the centre of the Kök Türks, down to Central Asia, beginning in the winter of 709-710. Western expeditions of the Second Kök Türk Empire were well studied; in particular, Giraud’s book references the story of those days.²⁸ Thus, we will not technically analyse the case, but strive to see ethno-political significances and perceptions in the sources.

In view of the great men in Ötüken, the On Ok/Türgesh region was a hereditary and natural part of the once great Kök Türk Empire, and was now ‘mistakenly’ outside the Second Empire. Lion’s share in this mistake was of the Türgesh rulers: “The Türgesh kaghan (and his people) were our Türks and our people. On account of their foolishness and their being traitorous to us, their kaghan was killed; his commanders and lords, too, were killed. The On Ok people suffered (a great deal).”²⁹

It is hard not to see the sadness of Bilge Kaghan regarding the developments. In some other cases, the *bodun* ‘people’ is ‘killed’, but there are no such expressions. It seems he (they) did not want to harm the civil (On Ok) people. He wanted rulers of the Türgesh only to obey the kaghan and to cease cooperation with China. This did not materialise, however, and the people were ultimately harmed. The continuing texts show that the common people were treated well as long as they maintained obedience. Although this behaviour is not rare in steppe polities for both ‘our’ and ‘other’ peoples, some ethnic sentiments are visible in this case. It would be useful to have a glance at the texts in question.

After the Kök Türk army had defeated the Kirghiz in 710, when Köl Tegin was 26 years old, Kapgan Kaghan sent the army onto the Türgesh, the western participant of the tri-partite alliance: “In that year we marched (against the Türgesh) climbing over (the Altay Mountains) and crossing over the Irtish

²⁷ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 266 (Köl Tegin, East 28), Bilge Kaghan, East 16, repeats the same sentence.

²⁸ The story is scattered through the parts dedicated to political history of the Second Empire, and readers would hardly find a thorough analysis of the mentioned expedition: R. Giraud, *Gök Türk İmparatorluğu. İleriş, Kapgan ve Bilge’nin Hükümdarlıkları (680–734)*, trans. İ. Mangaltepe, İstanbul 1999, different pages. Gömeç draws a better picture: S. Gömeç, *Kök Türk Tarihi*⁴, Ankara 2011, 145–156. Dobrovits has a paper on this expedition, dating between the years 711 and 714. However, he does not make a deep analysis of the events: M. Dobrovits, “The Great Western Campaign of the Eastern Turks (711–714),” *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 58/2 (2005), 179–185.

²⁹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 268 (Köl Tegin, East 18–19), Bilge Kaghan, East 23, repeats the same sentence.

River. We fell upon the Türgesh people while they were asleep. The army of the Türgesh kaghan came (upon us) like fire and storm at Bolchu. We fought... There we killed their kaghan and took their realm. The common Türgesh people all submitted to us. We settled those people at Tabar.”³⁰ The same case is narrated in the Bilge Kaghan inscription as such: “In that year I marched against the Türgesh, climbing over the Altay Mountains and crossing over the Irtish River, and fell upon (the Türgesh people while they were asleep). The army of the Türgesh kaghan came (upon us) like fire and storm. We fought at Bolchu. There I killed their kaghan, their yabgu and their šad; there I took their realm.”³¹

Tonyukuk, the chief counsellor of the state, relates this expedition in more detail: “The Chinese emperor was our enemy; the On Ok kaghan was our enemy; (furthermore) the populous (Kirghiz and their) mighty (kaghan) became (our enemy). These three kaghans apparently consulted together and said: ‘Let us come together at the Altay Mountains. They apparently consulted together as follows... The Türgesh kaghan reportedly said as follows: ‘My people are there’ he said. ‘(the Türk people) is in disorder; their Oghuz are also displeased (with them)’.”³² After defeating the Kirghiz, as said, they turned to the Türgesh: “Meanwhile a scout came from the Türgesh kaghan... (the scout) said: ‘The Türgesh kaghan has reportedly marched off’. He says, ‘the On Ok people all have marched off’ he says.”³³

They waited in the Altay Mountains and reviewed the situation. Kapgan Kaghan, who had commanded the army until then, returned to his ‘capital’ Ötüken for the funeral of his wife, who had died shortly before; consequently, Tonyukuk, together with the outstanding princes of the time, continued the campaign. They received new reports: “There came three scouts. Their messages were all alike: ‘The kaghan has marched off with the army. The army of the On Ok has marched off, all to a man’ they say. They apparently said: ‘Let us gather together on the Yarish plain’.”³⁴ Despite the order of Kapgan to remain there until new orders came, Tonyukuk recognized an ongoing intrigue within the army against him, and he ordered to march: “We climbed over the Altay Mountains without any roads, and we crossed over the Irtish River without any fords. We made (the army) to march (even) by night, and arrived in Bolchu while the dawn was breaking.”³⁵

In contrary to the Köl Tegin and Bilge Kaghan inscriptions, the Tonyukuk inscription contains details of the battle in Bolchu. Having heard that one hundred thousand troops (ten divisions ‘tümen’ in the text) gathered in the Yarish

³⁰ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 269 (Köl Tegin, East 36–38).

³¹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 276 (Bilge Kaghan, East 27–28).

³² Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 285–286 (Tonyukuk, East 2–5). We slightly changed the translation.

³³ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 287 (Tonyukuk, East 5–6).

³⁴ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 287 (Tonyukuk, East 9).

³⁵ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 288 (Tonyukuk, East 11).

plain, the Kök Türk commanders were afraid of the situation, but Tonyukuk encouraged them. Consequently, the On Ok were heavily defeated at the battlefield. Their kaghan was captivated; their yabghu and shad were killed. "After having heard those tidings, the lords and people of the On Ok all came and submitted. Having organised and gathered together, the lords and the people who had come (and joined us), since a few of the people had fled, I ordered the On Ok troops to march off. We, too, marched off, and followed them up. Having crossed over the Yenchü River and passed by the sacred Ak Tag, which is (also) called Tenshi Oghli, we came as far as the Temir Kapig (Iron Gate)." ³⁶

Küli Chor, a prince of the Kök Türk dynasty ruling over the subject Tardush union, was chief of the troops reaching as far as Temir Kapig in the north of Afghanistan. An inscription was erected for this brave prince, but, in addition to the damages on the stone, the account on the expedition is very short: "He mounted his saddle-horse and (suddenly attacked) and killed three men. After organising the Tür(giś people), Küli Chor mounted his private reddish-brown horse and... ..Afterwards he went (forward), crossed over the Yenchü River and (led) the army as far as Temir Kapig and the (land of the) Tezik and conquered (all these lands)." ³⁷ Additionally, the Hoytu Tamir inscription, written in the time of Bilge Kaghan, briefly refers to the campaign. ³⁸

While the Kök Türk army was organising the Sogdian regions and partly conquering south of the Sir Darya River, the Türgesh remnants restarted the trouble: "After that the common Türgesh people rose in revolt, and went toward Kengeresh. Our army horses were lean (and exhausted), and our army had no provisions... We sent Köl Tegin forward together with a few men. He fought a great battle, we were told... There he killed and subjugated the common Türgesh people." ³⁹

The Chinese sources (*Early T'ang Shu*) briefly narrate about this event, but with the background: "(In 709) Che-nu, younger brother of So-ko (the Türgesh kaghan) revolted against his brother, being angry of the number of tribes given him, and went to the T'u-chüeh. He offered to guide them in his country to punish So-ko. Then Mo-ch'ö (Kaghan Kaghan) retained Che-nu; mobilized 20.000 troops and came to attack So-ko together with his companions. He captured him and returned back. On the other hand, he said Che-nu: 'You cannot get along with your brothers. How could you be faithful to me?' Thus, he killed him together with So-ko." ⁴⁰

³⁶ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 288–289 (Tonyukuk, West 7–8).

³⁷ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 294 (Küli Çor, East 3–4). Tekin translated the words *tür... etdökde* as "at war against the (Tümät?)." No such a people is known, and the historical context displays that the enemy were the Türgesh. Besides, the verb *et-* means "to organize, put in order" (Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 36), which complies with the context supported by the other inscriptions. Thus, we followed the translation of Aydın (*Orhon Yazıtları*, 146).

³⁸ Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları*, 110–111.

³⁹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 269–270 (Köl Tegin, East 39–40).

⁴⁰ Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, 44, 80–81.

We aim at surveying the word ‘Oghuz’ in the west, and some details in usage of that word may be helpful. Thus, we should pay attention to the battle in Bolchu: “The Tokuz Oghuz people were my own people. Since heaven and earth were in disorder, they revolted (against us). We fought five times in a year. First, we fought at Toghu Balik... Secondly, we fought against the Ediz at Kush-Alghak... thirdly, we fought against the Oghuz at Bolchu...⁴¹ We killed their army and conquered their realm. Fourthly, we fought at the headwaters of Chush... Fifthly, we fought against the Oghuz at Ezginti-Kadiz... The army was killed there. After we spent the winter at Amgha Korghan, in spring we marched off with an army against the Oghuz.”⁴²

The sixth war, the latest, was very dramatic for the Kök Türks, and they avoided being annihilated due to the very brave resistance of Köl Tegin. There is some doubt regarding the second and third wars. The Ediz tribe is not counted among the Tokuz Oghuz, but were (likely one of the easternmost) members of the South Siberian T’ieh-lê union. They were associated with the A-tie, although the Tokuz Oghuz were also members of the T’ieh-lê,⁴³ and despite the Bilge Kaghan inscription mentioning them at the beginning of the text, among the addressed: “Oh, nomadic lords and peoples of the... Sir, Tokuz Oghuz and Eki (Two) Ediz.”⁴⁴ The third war is even more interesting. The victory is definite according to the text, but such a case contradicts with the following great wars, the latest of which was fatal for the Kök Türks. If the reading *bolču* is true, and if it is the Bolchu to the south of Irtish, we would either suppose that the Kök Türk and Tokuz Oghuz troops travelled together to a distant west plain to start a war, and returned back within the same year. This seems improbable. Or, more plausibly, the Oghuz referred to here were a different people. The fourth and fifth wars with the Tokuz Oghuz were fought in the east.

⁴¹ Tekin leaves blank the place name in the English edition, but in his later Turkish edition of the inscription, he writes *bol[ču]da* (Tekin, *Orhon Yazıtları*, 37). According to Ergin (Ergin, *Orhun Abideleri*, 29), it is directly *Bulču*. Orkun writes it as *bu[...]* (Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları*, 50). Aydın reads it as *bur[gu]da* (Aydın, *Orhon Yazıtları*, 61). In an earlier paper, he explains why it can be read as *Burgu*, and associates it with the river name *Burgu* occurring in the Šine Us and Terkhin inscriptions, see E. Aydın, “Köl Tegin Yazıtının Kuzey Yüzünün 6. Satırında Bir Düzeltme Denemesi ve Bir Öneri,” *Bilig* 43 (2007), 55–62, 57, 58. It seems plausible, because the Uyghur kaghans in the succeeding generation lived there, between the Qarga and Burgu rivers (Klyashtorny, *The Terkhin Inscription*, 344).

⁴² Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 270–271 (Köl Tegin, North 4–9).

⁴³ P. B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, Wiesbaden 1992, 156. As the precise paper of Ekrem shows, the Ediz are not counted among the nine – Oghuz – tribes, but are historically just next to them to share their fate, see Ekrem, *Çin Kaynaklarında Dokuz Oğuz*, esp. 200–201. Giraud, *Gök Türk İmparatorluğu*, 265–266, rejects associating the Ediz with the A-tie.

⁴⁴ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 275 (Bilge Kaghan, East 1).

ON THE EARLIEST MENTION OF ...

A comparison of the text of the Köl Tegin inscription with that of the Bilge Kaghan would help enlighten the case. The latter, speaking of four battles in a year, unifies the first, fourth and fifth wars in an uninterrupted story: "(The Tokuz Oghuz) were my own people. Since Heaven and Earth were in disorder, and since they were green with envy, they started hostilities (against us). I fought four times in a year. First I fought at Toghu-Balik. After I had crossed the Toghla River ordering (our men) to swim... their army. Secondly, I fought at Antirghu and put their army to the lance... (Thirdly) I fought (at the headwaters of Chush). The Türk people tottered and was about to be routed. I put their army, which had come assaulting and spreading, to flight... Fourthly, I fought at Ezginti-Kadiz. There I put their army to the lance and destroyed it. At the age of forty (?) famine prevailed while we were spending the winter at Amgha-Qorgha. In the spring I went on a campaign against the Oghuz."⁴⁵

That spring was difficult for the Kök Türks, as the story progresses to state the same as in the Köl Tegin inscription; Bilge Kaghan's brother Köl Tegin saved the dynasty and the state. Ultimately, the Tokuz Oghuz were routed and a significant part of them took refuge in China in 717. We can make such a table to compare the two inscriptions:

Battles in the Köl Tegin inscription

1. with Oghuz at Toghu Balik
2. with Ediz at Kush-Alghak
3. with Oghuz at Bolchu
4. (with Oghuz) at Chush
5. with Oghuz at Ezginti-Kadiz

Battles in the Bilge Kaghan inscription

1. with Oghuz at Toghu Balik
2. with Oghuz at Antirghu
3. (with Oghuz) at Chush
4. (with Oghuz) at Ezginti-Kadiz

The second and third wars in the Köl Tegin drop in the Bilge Kaghan inscription, and the second one at Antirghu is introduced. Thus, it seems that two battles in the Köl Tegin text are doubtful. The Kush-Alghak battle was mentioned because the Ediz were likely allies of the Tokuz Oghuz, but was removed in the refined Bilge Kaghan inscription that was written a few years later. Thus, we would either equate the war at Bolchu of the Köl Tegin with the Antirghu of the Bilge Kaghan, or presume that the Türgesh war in 710 was mistakenly introduced in the text for the year 716. On the other hand, we have a record of a war with the Karluks at Tamagh.⁴⁶ The Karluks used to live just in the vicinity of Bolchu, possibly between the rivers Urungu and Kara Irtish.⁴⁷ If it happened in 715 as Giraud believes,⁴⁸ then Kök Türk troops campaigning in the west might have touched on the Türgesh, allies of the Karluks, for a second

⁴⁵ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 276–277 (Bilge Kaghan, East 29–32).

⁴⁶ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 270 (Köl Tegin, North 1).

⁴⁷ Dobrovits, *A nyugati türkök tíz törzsének kialakulása*, 108.

⁴⁸ Giraud, *Gök Türk İmparatorluğu*, 278.

time at Bolchu. Additionally, if the Türgesh were also called Oghuz, as we suggest, then the author of the Köl Tegin inscription would not hesitate to include it among the (Tokuz) Oghuz wars of the next year. In any case, the chronology of the inscriptions contains some ambiguities at this point.

The relationship between Kök Türk and Tokuz Oghuz has a complicated history, beginning with the first days of the Second Kaghanate. Bilge Kaghan exhausted most of his energy to subdue them. The shorter Ongin inscription erected for the name of Ishbara Tamgan Tarkan also mentions this last phase of the conflict,⁴⁹ as well as the Tonyukuk inscription, giving further details.⁵⁰

The Oghuz living just to the northeast of the Kök Türk capital county on the Orkhon valley are mentioned both as Oghuz and Tokuz Oghuz (we additionally have the 30 Oghuz). However, it seems the same word was used for the On Ok/Türgesh, too, if the statement on the war in Bolchu with the Oghuz is true. This place name occurs in the Shine Us inscription erected by the Uyghur kaghan Moyen Ćur in 759 or 760: "I defeated the Three Karluk at the Bolchu River."⁵¹ Considering the route of the Kök Türk army in 710 down to the western skirts of the Altays, Bolchu was one day distant to the southwest after crossing the Irtish River. It was both the name of a place (Kök Türk ins.) and a river (Shine Us ins.). It is to be the Ulungur (Urungu) River now; as a place, it may be the plain where is now the town Buluntoghoy.⁵² The name of the Yarish plain, mentioned in the Tonyukuk inscription as the gathering point of the On Ok troops, also occurs in the Shine Us writings. It was possibly the name of the overall plain, and Bolchu was within it. Gömeç locates this plain between Tarbaghatay and the T'ien-shan ranges in Jungaria.⁵³

Consequently, the inscriptions likely mention a war of the Kök Türks with the Oghuz at Bolchu, where the former had waged a war against the Türgesh. Thus, the referenced Oghuz are to be the Türgesh. Even if the record is doubtful, it is expectable, since the western Oghuz union emerged chronologically after the disappearance of the Türgesh within the same ethnic basin in the same region. One should once more remember that there is no reliable and clear account regarding the Oghuz migration from the remote east to the west of Central Asia. We do have an informed understanding concerning the usage of the word *oq* 'tribe' for the Western Türks: On Ok "Ten Tribes". The aforementioned sentence in the Köl Tegin inscription consolidates our idea: "From my On Ok descendants, from the Türgesh kaghan, seal-keepers Makarach and Oghuz Bilge came."⁵⁴ Oghuz Bilge was surely an eminent personality to represent his horde in the funeral of Köl Tegin. The problem is that we do not know

⁴⁹ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 291 (Ongin, Front 5-6).

⁵⁰ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 270 (Tonyukuk, South 2-9).

⁵¹ E. Aydın, *Şine Usu Yazıtı*, Çorum 2007, 60.

⁵² Giraud, *Gök Türk İmparatorluğu*, 258; E. Aydın, "Bulçu Yer Adı Üzerine Notlar," *Turkish Studies*, V/1 (Winter 2010), 178-186. S. Gömeç, "Kök Türkçe Yazıtlarda Geçen Yer Adları," *Türk Kültürü*, XXXIX/453 (January 2001), 25-36, 28.

⁵³ Gömeç, *Kök Türkçe Yazıtlarda Geçen Yer Adları*, 36.

⁵⁴ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 272 (Köl Tegin, North 13).

about using the word 'Oghuz' as a personal name, until the emergence of the genesis legend of the Oghuz, the earliest version of which was written in the 13th century. Should we not translate the name of the representative as "the wise of the Oghuz", as offered by Sümer?⁵⁵ Moreover, it would not be too much exaggeration to identify him with the legendary Dede Korkut, who is said in a few instances to have organised the Oghuz ethnic structure ("boy boyladı, soy soyladı"), according to the *Book of Dedem Korkut*?

Thus, we should reconsider the account of Ibn al-Athir. We offer the following reconstruction: The Türgesh were called (also) Oghuz (lit. 'tribes'), referring to the name of the wider On Ok union. This does not mean that the later Oghuz people descended directly from the Türgesh. In the aftermath of the 710 quarrel, (parts of) the Türgesh moved further west due to the Kök Türk pressure: "(They) went toward Kengeresh",⁵⁶ i.e. the Proto-Pechenegs. This is where the Sir Darya Oghuz appeared in the succeeding generations. It was surely the case that some other ethnic processes occurred too. They absorbed some local tribes; furthermore, some others coming from the South Siberian belt joined them.⁵⁷ Thus, the union grew up and the well populous Oghuz people of the 9th and 10th centuries were created. The difficulty in matching the names of the 24 or 25 or even more Oghuz tribes given by sources written from the late 11th century on by Mahmud of Kashgar and others, with those of the members of the On Ok union given by Chinese sources may be due to the fact that the original Türgesh components perhaps only constituted a small part of the Oghuz; and the majority were of those coming from "remote countries" of Ibn al-Athir. Since the Türgesh identity almost died out in the time of Al-Mahdi, and the making of the Oghuz simultaneously started, a bulk of the participants might have migrated in the last decades of the 8th century.

⁵⁵ Sümer, *Oğuzlar*, 46.

⁵⁶ Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 269 (Köl Tegin, East 39).

⁵⁷ In relation to some later-coming elements of the Oguz union, see: O. Karatay, "The Making of the Oğuz: Why Their Eponymous Ancestors are Western Peoples?" In: *Meždunarodnaja naučno-teoretičeskaja konferencija Nasledie Zapadnogo Tyurkkogo Kaganata v Kontekste Razvitija Mirovoj Civilizacii*, 11 December 2013, Astana (not yet published. Its Turkish version was included in my varia *İlk Oğuzlar. Köken, Türeyiş ve Erken Tarihleri Üzerine Çalışmalar*, İstanbul 2017, 82–89; ibid. "Salur-Peçenek Savaşları: Oğuz Kimliğinin Oluşum Aşamalarını Tespit İçin Bir Deneme," In: *17. Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 15–17 Eylül 2014, Ankara (not yet published; included in Karatay, *İlk Oğuzlar*, 93–112). In contrary to Gumilyëv, who asserts that, being ethnic successors of the ancient Sarmathians and Alans, the Oghuz were an old ethnos in the 10th century (L. N. Gumilyëv, *Hazar Çevresinde Bin Yıl*², trans. D. A. Batur, İstanbul 2002, 286), we believe that they were being formed around the year 800, and were ready to become widespread in the 10th century, after completing their ethnogenesis.