

The nomadic ally of Heraclius

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS



The empire of the Western Turks gained back its international importance during the reign of T'ung shê-hu Khagan (618/619–630). The reconstruction of the name-element *shê-hu* remained in Chinese transcription is *d'ziäp yuo*, from which one can conclude to the form of title *Yabyu*, well-known from the name of Silzibulos. The only difference is that *jawu* or *jiwu* in the name of Silzibulos reconstructed by Ligeti has lost its intervocalic *-γ-*, while it remained in the Chinese transcription. This period left us the first Turkic coin mint to the name of T'ung *Yabyu* Khagan. On the obverse of the coin there is a European-shaped male figure with a bit of Iranian characteristic. The diadem on his head is conjuring the last period of Xusro II. The inscription on the right side of the face is Tokharian *sri iappu saho*. The obverse also shows the mintplace: the city of Abaršahr. Ghirsmān has already indicated that the coin might be assigned to T'ung shê-hu Khagan. Referring to the conclusion of Ghirsmān that the city of Abaršahr was not in the hand of the Turks in the T'ung shê-hu period, as it was temporary occupied only after 651, it can be ascertained that the Iranian mintplaces worked for the barbarians, especially for the Hephthalites. Another coin with the Pehlevi inscription "*yyp MLK"n MLK*" was attributed to Khagan T'ung *yabyu* by Harmatta. Also Tibetan sources mentioned him as *Ton yabyo Khagan*. T'ung shê-hu subjugated the T'ieh-lê tribes that soon after 600 rose against the collapsing Turk empire. Thus the empire ruled over the Sogdian cities as well as the Tarim Basin, the Fergana Valley, the upper part of the Indus, while in the west it was bordered by the western territories of the Kaspi, the northern steppes of the Black Sea and the Caucasus. According to Hsüan-tsang the Khagan's summer camp was in the hollow of the Talas river, at a place called 'thousand springs' (*Bing yul*, in Chinese: *Ch'ien-ch'üan*). The first great reorganization of the Western Turks was accomplished under his reign. At first it only affected the nations depending on the empire. The rulers of these tribes had been nominated for *eltübär*, which was the title of leaders of a wing of the T'ieh-lê (*toquz oγuz*) tribes, and parallel with them the power of the Khagans was represented by *tuduns*. The troops of T'ung *Yabyu* played an active role in the last great collision of the Byzantine and Sasanidan weapons, deciding the struggle for Byzantium. According to Teophanes, Ziebel,

the commander of the Khazars, "who owned the second place after the Khagan" was an ally of Heraclius (610–641), the Byzantine Emperor. The phonetic difficulties together with this fact were enough to erase scruple in the identification of Ziebel and T'ung Yabyu proposed by Markwart. A hundred years ago Chavannes identified him as the second in command of the Khazarian Khagan. But in the name of Ziebel the second syllable of the Istemi's Greek name, Silzibulos is clearly recognizable. Another argument is that T'ung Yabyu would have never graded himself after Hsieh-li, who was related to him though, but an enemy as well. This conclusion may be substantiated if it concerned relationship between persons, not titles. The Greek text is a commentary which only stated that "yabyu (in the present transcription: Ζιεβήλ/Ziebél is the second military title in reputation after the Khagan" (τῶ ... στρατηγῶ... Ζιεβήλ ... δευτέρῳ... τοῦ Χαγάνου τῆ ἀξία), which is a fact. The conception dated back to Artamonov but worked out in its complete form by Károly Ceglédý which claimed Ziebel as the brother of T'ung shê-hu, who would have ruled also as a Yabyu over the Khazars, and the nephew of his son, mentioned as the "King of the North" in Armenian sources, would have ruled the Turk army of 40,000 given to Heraclius, must be rejected.¹ The coalition of the Byzantine Emperor and the Turkic Khagan is clearly provable also in the Eastern and the Caucasian sources. These are more detailed but also richer in metaphorical expressions than those of Byzantium. According to the notes of Moses Kalankatvac'i in the tenth century Šat', the son of Yebu xak'an is the nephew² of

¹ *Theophanis Chronographia*, rec. C. de Boor, vol. 1, Textum Graecum continens, Lipsiae 1883, 315–316; vol. 2, Theophanis Vitas, Anastasii Bibliothecarii Historiam tripartitam, dissertationem de codicibus operis Theophanei, indices continens, Lipsiae 1885, 196; *The Chronicle of Theophanes*. An English translation of anni mundi 6095–6305 (602–813 AD), with introduction and notes, by H. Turtledove, Philadelphia 1982, 22; J. Markwart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, Leipzig 1903, 394–401, 430, 498; Ghirshman, *Chionites-Hephtalites*, Le Caire 1948, 48–51; K. Czeglédý, "Herakleios török szövetségesei," *Magyar Nyelv* 49 (1953), 319–323; M. I. Artamonov, *Istorija hazar*, Leningrad 1962, 143–148; Artamonov also supposes, that the *jebyu qayan* called Ziebel was Mo-ho šad, the younger brother of T'ung shê-hu; on this person see E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*. Recueillis et commentés par ... St.-Petersbourg 1903, 55; W. Samolin, *East Turkistan to the Twelfth Century. A Brief Political Survey*, The Hague 1964, 57–58; S. Szádeczky-Kardoss, "Über die Wandlungen der Ostgrenze der awarischen Machtsphäre," in L. Ligeti, ed., *Researches in Altaic Languages*. Papers read at the 14th Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference, Budapest 1974, 267–274; J. Harmatta, "Egy nyugati türk uralkodó medaillonja Toxaristánból," *Antik Tanulmányok* 28 (1981), 21–29; P. Cannata, *Profilo storico del I° Imperio Turco (metà VI - metà VII secolo)* Roma 1981, 77–78; W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr.* München 1988, 273; D. Sinor, "The establishment and dissolution of the Türk Empire," in D. Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, Cambridge 1990, 308–309; P. B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, Wiesbaden 1992, 135.

² "... the king of the north sent the promised army, pointing his nephew, whom they call Šat' in honour of his princely rank among them, as its leader." *The History of the Cauca-*

the King of the North. In another part of the text the King of the North is titled as the *katsai* of the North.³ Czeglédý's opinion is that the "King of the North" cannot be anyone else just T'ung shê-hu Khagan. Hsieh-li, the eastern Turkic Khagan must be out of question because he was not T'ung shê-hu's brother, furthermore he spent the major part of his life with continuous fighting against him. Determining the "King of the North" as the Chinese Emperor is a palpable mistake. This is the reasoning of Artamonov and Czeglédý that was repeated by Ludwig as well.⁴

In my view this argument is assailable in more than one respect and instead we should turn back to the standpoint of the Russian Byzantologist, Kulakowski, whose opinion is that T'ung shê-hu, the Western Turk Khagan formed an alliance with Heraclius, while Hsieh-li, the eastern Turk Khagan might have been the "King of the North".⁵ On the other hand Czeglédý insists that Hsieh-li could not rule over the independent Western Turks any more, therefore Kulakowski was wrong here. The problem is that our sources show far less than this argument suggests.

1. In accordance with Nikephoros, Heraclius was looking for an alliance with "the Lord of the Turks" with his presents.⁶

2. The Armenian sources claimed Ĵebu xak'an as the procurator of the "King of the North", the second ruler of his empire, but on whom rested decisions to campaign.⁷

3. It is known from Chinese sources that Western Turk emperors kept the title of *Bayatur Yabyu* after they obtained the title of Khagan. In spite of the empire of the Eastern Turks where *Yabyu* remained an independent position, in the Western Turks' empire only Khagans could have this title, nobody else. Only a few exceptions are known, e.g. A-shih-na Hu-lu, who was invested with power as Tu-lu Yabyu – instead of A-shih-na Pu-chen, who escaped to China –, and thus ruled over the Ch'u-mi, Chu-yüe, Ku-su and the Qarluq tribes, a state of Tokharestan

sian Albanians by M. Dasxuranci. Tr. by C. F. J. Downsett, London 1961, 88; see also M. K. Patkanian, "Essai d'une histoire de la dynastie des Sassanides d'après leur renseignement fournis par les histoires Arméniens," traduit du Russe par M. Évariste Proud'homme, *Journal Asiatique*, ser 6, 7 (1866), 207.

³ In Downsett's translation "the cauldron of the north."

⁴ D. Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft des Chazaren-Reiches im Licht der schriftlichen Quellen*, Münster 1982, 348–354.

⁵ Ju. Kulakovskij, *Istorija Vizantii III*, Kiev 1915, 57–91.

⁶ *Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula historica*, ed. C. de Boor, Lipsiae 1880, 15; A. Bombaci, "Qui était Ĵebu xak'an," *Turcica* 2 (1970), 12.

⁷ When the viceroy of the king of the north (*yaord ark'ayin hiwsisoy*) who was second to him in kingship (*erkrord t'aganworut'ean nora*) and was called Ĵebu Xak'an heard this and considered the promise of the loot to be had by attacking all the countries subject to the king of Persia he replied with great eagerness ..." Czeglédý, *Herakleios*, 319; Artamonov, *Istorija hazar*, 145; the expression of the Armenian chronicle "second to him in kingship" is merely a translation of the Greek δευτέρω ὄντι τοῦ Χαγάνου τῆ ἀξία, cf. Downsett, *The History*, 87 (in the notes) and Bombaci, *Qui était*, 7.

and over a Western Turkic alliance of tribes called Nu-shi-pi. His dwelling was in the hollow of the river Talas.⁸ But this *yabyu* appeared only after the reign of T'ung shê-hu, and under his rule no Chinese sources – or any other source – mentioned two *yabyus* wielding power simultaneously. With regard to the Khazars, Dunlop rightly called the attention to the fact that there is no sign of any *yabyu* amongst them at all.⁹

4. Moses Kalankatvac'i states that the son of Ziebel, Šat' is the nephew of the King of the North. He was the lord of the Khazars (Šat' Xazr)¹⁰ according to the sources. It is however known that title *šad* hiding behind this name could be given to the aristocratic male line of the khagan's clan, especially to those who owned a private *ordu*. After 635 among the Western Turks the title was given to the officials from the khagan's clan, who were superior to the tribal aristocracy invested with the rank *čor* or *erkin*.

5. According to the T'ang-su Chapter of CCXXI it was T'ung shê-hu himself, who devastated Persia, killed its king named K'u-sa-ho (Xusrō), and enthroned his son, Si-li (Kavad Siroe II).¹¹

6. Before describing Heraclius' journey to Jerusalem, Nikephoros mentioned that the emperor recalled his daughter already promised to the Turkic leader, because the Khagan was killed. Concerning T'ung shê-hu it is known that his Qarluq subjects revolted against his rule in 630, and finally he was murdered by his own uncle.¹² Moses Kalankatvac'i also brings up that in 629, at the time of the

⁸ Chavannes, *Documents*, 32–33, 34–38; Bombaci, *Qui était*, 17–18.

⁹ D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton 1954, 31.

¹⁰ "... Jebu Xak'an arrived with his son ..."; "... the king of the north sent the promised army, appointing his nephew, whom they call Šat' in honour of his princely rank among them, as its leader." "he returned home, leaving his warlike forces in the hands of his son, Šat' with brave men as his advisers..."; "... the king's son Šat'"; "I [i. e. Šat'] shall swear on oath on the life of my father Jebu Xak'an..."; He [*Viro katholicos*] liberated the prisoners of Armenia, Georgia, and Albania from Šat' Xazr." Downsett, *The History*, 83, 88, 95, 98, 100, 229.

¹¹ Chavannes, *Documents*, 24, 52; J. Harmatta, "Late Bactrian inscriptions," *Acta Antiqua Hungarica* 17 (1969), 404; according to Canatta the subsidiary troops could be led only by a Khazar chief, while T'ung shê-hu was fighting on the eastern ends of the empire, and vehemently attacked the Persians; Cannata, *Profilo storico*, 78.

¹² *Nicephori ... Opuscula historica*, 22; The news of his death was sent to China by his uncle, cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, 25 (KTS), 53–54 (HTS), 256; the information of the *Chiu T'ang-shu* and the *Hsin T'ang-shu* about the *hsüe-yen-t'ò* people declare that the Khagan was killed in the second year of the Chêng-kuan period (2 February 628–29 January 629) LMT, 354; but as Chavannes pointed out (*Documents*, 95, 194), the biography of Hsüan-chang by Hu-li mentions a meeting between him or at least a khagan titled as Yeh-hu – and Hsüan-chang in the end of 629 or in the beginning of 630. The biography also tells that at the end of his life he must have been faced with the rebellion of his son, cf. *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*. (trans. S. Beal) vol. I, London 1884, 27–28, 45; *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*. London 1911, 42–44, 45; Franke sets the date of the Khagan according to the dynastic chronicles to 628; O. Franke, *Geschichte des Chinesischen Reiches. Eine Darstellung seiner Entstehung, seines*

Khazar *šad*'s campaign, "the King of the North started to avenge the sins thousandfold". This led Czeglédy to the conclusion that in 629 the rebellion was aimed at Ziebel, which was followed by an uprising against T'ung shê-hu and the collapse of the Western Turkic empire.¹³ In 630 it was the Eastern and not the Western Khaganate which collapsed. Another fact is that the ceremonious enter of Heraclius in Jerusalem could not have happened in 629, as Czeglédy claimed, for at that time he only carried on negotiations about the return of the city, but his visit took place only in March, 630 during the Easter holidays, when the crucifix of Christ was restored. Eudokia, his daughter could not leave the city much earlier either.¹⁴

7. In connection with the *katsai* of the north it is worth mentioning China here. Czeglédy declares that according to the report of Sebeos the head of the troops helping to Heraclius was *Jepetux* (*Čepetux*), a general of the Western Turkic khagan, and his state is named Cenastan. In the exact description one can read that the Armenian aristocracy (*naxarar*) had arisen against the Persians after the death of Smbat Bagratuni, and for the intervention of the *Tčepetux* of China they were taken into the service of Xak'an, the King of the North. Under his control they were migrating from the east to the west in order to join the military force of Tčepetux, then they marched in large numbers to the assistance of the Greek Emperor.¹⁵ Tabari's opinion is similar, he claimed that Fayfūra was the brother of Šāba, the ruler of the Turks, who was supposed to be an opponent of Bahrām Čōbin. This name is obviously a variant of the Arabic "*fayfūr*", a derivation of the Parthic "*βaypūr*", and as a calque from the Chinese T'ien-tzu (the Son of the Heaven) it is the name of the Chinese emperor. It is quite true, that two decades

Wesens und seiner Entwicklung bis zur neuesten Zeit, Bd. II: *Der konfuzianische Staat I*, *Der Aufstieg zur Weltmacht*, Berlin 1961, 353.

- ¹³ "Then the cauldron of the north turned his contenance against his sons and fought against his own kin, visiting the fulness of his wrath upon his young and punishing one (crime) a thousandfold and two, ten thousandfold (...) terrible news arrived from the destructive lion of the north, Jebu Xak'an himself, to his ravenous whelp Sat: 'Brigands have fallen upon me' he said 'and you shall never see my face again, for I did not consolidate my position but imprudently dissipated myself over kingdoms unsuited to me. My pride has thus caused me to fall from my exalted position.'" Downsett, *The History*, 106; According to Czeglédy (Herakleios, 323) the ruin of Jebu Xak'an is that he wanted to dominate the kingdom was unsuited to him, and therefore the hand of T'ung shê-hu had crushed him. But Bombaci (Qui était, 22) demonstrates that the *katsai* of the north and the lion of the north are the same person in this text.
- ¹⁴ *Nicephori ... Opuscula Historica*, 22; Kulakovskij, *Istorija Vizantii III*, 115-117, 269-275; A. Frolov, "La Vraie Croix et les expéditions d'Heraclius en Perse," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 11 (1953), 93; A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century I*: 612-334, transl. M. Ogilvie-Grant, Amsterdam 1968, 245-255; Bombaci, *Qui était*, 23-24; M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 600-1025, London 1996, 80.
- ¹⁵ *Istorija episkopa Sebeosa*, per. St. Malhasjanc, Erevan 1939, 61; Czeglédy, Herakleios, 323; Bombaci, *Qui était*, 7; Patkianian's opinion (Histoire, 196) was that after Smat Bagratuni's death the "Khagans of the the northern countries" detailed the Armenian troops under the Chinese general *jepetux* of China (*Djepetoukh de Chine*).

after the events mentioned above, the territories of the Western Turkic Khaganate were annexed by the T'ang China that reached its zenith of power at this time. In connection with this Marquart's opinion should be mentioned, who argues that the *katsai* is in fact nothing else than a false transcription of the title of the Chinese emperor that was written by Theophylaktos Simokattes as "Ταῖσάβ". Comparing to the conciseness of his work, Czeglédy discussed in detail that the "Katsai of the North" is an expression of scriptural origin, the "cauldron of the north" references a nomadic menace, and by saying this he paid no more attention to a possible Chinese connection;¹⁶ understandably so, for the Bugut inscription ascribed for 670–680, was discovered two decades after his paper was published.¹⁷ According to the first line of the text (B1,1) the inscription was made by the Turks, under the reign *Kwts'tt*, the Chinese Emperor. Following Yakhontov, the publishers of the inscription only said that the identification of this title with the temple names of the Chinese Emperors Kao-tsu or Kao-tsung of the T'ang period is not possible.¹⁸ But the evidential similarity of the two names leads us to the idea that in the Armenian "*katsai* of the north", – with a scriptural contamination – a reference to the Chinese emperor has been kept.

There were not two *yabyu* khagans, from which one would have been Ziebel, the *yabyu* of the Khazars, and the other the legendary "King of the North" ruling the Northern Empire. From our sources it turns out that it was T'ung shê-hu Khagan himself, who made an alliance with Heraclius, and according to his coin, he himself bore the title of *yabyu*. It is also quite possible that the historians who lived in the tenth century, in the last century of the Khazar reign, were simply confused by the memory of the almost five-hundred years earlier unified Turkic realm and by the changes that happened in the life of Western Turkic leaders. The formulas related to the second man after the king in his empire are an attempt to explain the original state of the rank *yabyu*, and are partly extrapolations of an earlier situation, relating to the relations of power of the unified Turkic khaganate. According to these, Eudokia returned to her father because of the death of the T'ung shê-hu khagan, and not because of a non-existing Khazar *yabyu*. Her unsuccessful attempt cut the line between the Greek-Roman and the Inner Asian civilizations, that had been united since the Hellenic period. At her return, the Arabs professing Islam were already lurking behind the desert borders, to rush out shortly from the obscurity to overthrow both Byzantium and his ancient enemy.

¹⁶ The name *Taiōáv* was elucidated from the name of T'ai-tsung who accepted a Byzantine embassy in 643 by N. Pigulewskaja, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien. Aus der Geschichte des byzantinischen Handels mit dem Orient vom 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert*, Berlin–Amsterdam 1969, 171; Czeglédy, *Herakleios*, 321–322.

¹⁷ S. G. Kljaštornyj, and V. A. Livšic, "The Sogdian Inscription of Bugut Revised," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 26 (1972), 69–102.

¹⁸ Kljaštornyj-Livšic, *Bugut*, 72.