The Runic inscription monuments and stamps in Bayankhongor province, Mongolia

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ABSTRACT

In last two decades, numbers of runic inscriptions have been found in the western part of Mongolia: mostly in Bayan-Ulgii, Khovd and Govi-Altai provinces, and comparatively less in Uvs and Zavkhan provinces, and also Bayankhongor province in which the following five inscriptions date back to the Ancient Turkic Period:

1. Inscription of Bömbögör monument (1986)
2. Inscription of the Three Mandalas: Adag mandala (the End Mandala) and Dund Mandala (The Middle Mandala) (1987)
3. Inscription of Olon Nuur (2008)
4. Inscription of Dalt (2012)
5. Inscription of Khirgisiin Ovoo Monument (2016).

Of them, the initial two inscriptions had been discovered by 1990, and the latter three since 2008, which have been followed by some alternative versions of deciphering due to some inadequate reviews. So they have given us a motivation to review the meanings of the words and expressions incorporated in them, as the following:

These two inscriptions – properly viewed to be the classical monuments of the runic inscription, have some special words and expressions as well as personal names those are not noted in the monuments found in other provinces. One of these words, tulton which occurs twice in the Bömbögör inscription, is a compound name which is derived from tul (widow) and ton (gown) and which means "a mourning gown".

These five inscriptions have 77 tamgas in them, 35 of which are in the inscription of Bömbögör, like ♂♀, ♂♂, ☼♂, and ☼♀, to require some urgent and careful studies.

Keywords: Runic inscription, stamps (tamgas), Western part of Mongolia, Bayankhongor province, Mongolia.
INTRODUCTION

Bayankhongor province of Mongolia is one of the places where runic inscription monuments date back to the Old Turkic Period, have been kept with them. So far, 5 monuments have been found in there: two of them (Inscription of Bömbögör monument (1986) and Inscription of the Three Mandalas: Adag mandala (the End Mandala) and Dund Mandala (The Middle Mandala) (1987) found in Bömbögör soum), before 1990 and three of them (Inscription of Dalt (2012) found in Bömbögör soum; Inscription of Olon Nuur (2008) found in Galuut soum; and Inscription of Khirgisiin Ovoo Monument (2016) found in Buutsagaan soum), since 2008. That means there is a gap of approximately two decades between the years with no any exploration.

Even though, it can be said that they have not studied in detail, particularly these newly found monuments have not been reviewed completely.

Previous studies

Here, we are introducing the previous studies on the aforementioned runic inscription monuments found in Bayankhongor province, listing as the chronological order they were first found.

In pursuit of the information1 in 1986 that an ancient runic inscription monument was found in Bömbögör soum, Bayankhongor province, Ts.Battulga reached the place where the monument has been kept, and launched the first study on it from his deciphering in 2005 (Battulga Ts, 2005B). In his studies, he noted that the inscription called “Inscription of Bömbögör monument” consisted of 5 lines of runic inscription and 35 tamgas, and included the transcription and translation of the runic inscription: 4 lines engraved on the upper of the monument and 1 line on the west side of the monument, along with some explanations on their special words and expressions (Battulga Ts, 2005A, pp. 122-128; Battulga Ts, 2016, pp. 70-79). This was followed by some other studies (Hatice Şirin, 2010; Suzuki Ko setu, 2010).

In 1987, S.Dashtsevel and R.Byamba, research workers of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, discovered the “Inscription of Three Mandala” in Buutsagaan soum, Bayankhongor province and informed them for their further studies (Bold L, and Byamba R, 1988). This comprises 2 ancient Turkic inscriptions placed separately on the rock of the mountain “Three Mandala”. They were first named “A inscription or Dund Mandala (or the Middle Mandala in English)” and “B inscription or Adag Mandala (or the End Mandala in English)” by L.Bold in his book which includes their transcription and translation (Bold L, 1990, pp. 25-27). And then some studies on the inscriptions, tamgas, and other rock paintings in the inscription of the Three Mandala have been done and published (Bayar D, and Erdenebaatar D, 1989; Bayar D, 1996; Mongol …, 1999, p. 207). Afterwards or in 2003, Ts.Battulga took some pressings and photos of the inscription personally, for his deciphering, translating and explaining (Battulga Ts, 2005A, pp. 132-140). He, as for the names of the inscription, agreed with the previous researchers’ proposals, but transcribed and deciphered in his alternative version.

D.Bayar, R.Monkhtulga and S.Khurelsukh affiliated to the Institute of Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences discovered an ancient Turkic inscription on the sacrificing board, in the Olonnuur valley, Galuut soum, Bayankhongor province in June, 2008 and introduced for its further studies (Munkhtulga R, 2008, pp. 111-117; Munkhtulga R, 2018, pp. 15-18).

In 2012, in the sphere of the archaeological exploration around the place calles Dalt, Bömbögör soum, Bayankhongor province, a runic inscription with 5 characters was discovered. This is the inscription of Dalt, on which some studies have been conducted by Ts.Battulga and M.Erdene as well as B.Azzaya. In the initial study, the both researchers noted that this can be deciphered in three versions depending on its characters, and made the translation and explanation for some words and expressions (Erdene M, and Battulga Ts, 2012), with which the following researcher agreed in her study (Azzaya B, 2017).

In May, 2016, a research team whose members were T.Iderkhangai and Ts.Battulga first discovered a fragment of a monument with a runic inscription in a place, on the northwest bench of the Khukh Erig Garam (Khukh Erig Ford) of the Baidragin Gol (Baidrag River), in Buutsagaan soum, Bayankhongor province (Battulga Ts, and Iderkhangay T, 2016). They did some research on the fragment particularly its runic inscription, which has kept four wild goats (one small and three big).

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1 This was informed in 1986 by a local person, but had not studied yet before Professor Ts.Battulga studied in 2005.
Studies on the inscriptions and tamgas

1.1. The studies on the inscriptions

Through this study, we aim to review the Inscription of Bömbögör monument and the Inscription of Three Mandala which are considered to have been found in relatively early years, based on the previous researchers’ works.

1.1.1. Inscription of Bömbögör monument

This inscription was deciphered by Ts.Battulga and Hatice Şirin as the following:

The inscription on the upper part:

| Lines | by Ts.Battulga | by Hatice Şirin |
|-------|---------------|----------------|
|       | Runic origin  |               |
| I     | I  \[1\] \[2\] \[3\]    | wt' 1'…………… η |
| II    | II b' lb' kunçy'η    |               |
| III   | III \[1\] \[2\] \[3\] \[4\] | t’wln’I : 1’w(?) k’r’l’w’k |
| IV    | IV \[1\] \[2\] \[3\] \[4\] | kubr(a)p  tult(u)nl(a)ð |

Translation

| Lines | by Ts.Battulga | by Hatice Şirin |
|-------|---------------|----------------|
| I     | ...           | [k]utl(u)l[g  kunc(u)y(u)]η |
| II    | ilbis ilig qunčuyûŋ | il bilg[ä] kunc(u)y(u)η |
| III   | tultonî alu qarluq | tolt(u)ni : 1’w(?) k(a)rluk |
| IV    | qubarîp tulton aldû | kubr(a)p  tolt(u)nl(a)ð |

Translation

| Lines | by Ts.Battulga | by Hatice Şirin |
|-------|---------------|----------------|
| I     | ...           | kutlu  kunçuyûn(majeste leri Prensesin) |
| II    | Илбис Илиг гүнжийн | il bilge kunçuyûn |
| III   | гашуудалд (хойллогод) Карлук | kabri (?) Karlu(k)lar |
| IV    | хурж гашуудав (бэлэвэрэв) | toplanip toprağa verdi |

Judging from the studies by the both researchers, there have not been any alternative versions observed in the runic origins but some in their transcriptions and translations, due to the reversed engraving of the characters of the 2nd line on the “Upper inscription” and the incompatible deciphering the 4 characters as 2 different ones. And also, Ts.Battulga deciphered 7 characters in the 4th line as...
“tulton aldı”, while Hatice Şirin as “tolt(u)nl(a)di”. However there are some varied proposals for the deciphering, the general meaning of the inscription is the same.

Here below, we are deciphering and transcribing them in our version based on the runic origin of the Inscription of Bömbögör monument and explaining about some words and expressions which are different in their meanings from the previous researchers’ proposals.

**Transcription:**

1. ...
2. ilbislig (ilbis ilig?) qunčuyŋ
3. tultonı alu? Qarluq
4. qubarıq tultonladi

**Translation:**

1. ...
2. Илбислиг (Илбис Илиг) гүнжийн
3. бэлэвсэний хувцас нь ...? Карлук
4. цуглаж бэлэвсрэв(гашуудав)

**Our explanation for some words and expressions in the inscription**

*ilbislig (ilbis ilig?) qunčuyŋ* – This collocation which is placed in the 2nd line in reversed form, was translated by Ts.Battulga as “of Ilbis Ilig Gunju (princess/daughter of Emperor)” and noted that the 4th character in the relevant line is inevitably obvious that is “s”. Since the clear photos, this cannot be deciphered as “il bilge qunčuyŋ” which comprises 2 single words, but as “ilbislig” which is a compound word.

*tulton* – This is a compound word which comprises tul (or widowed (Nadelyaev V.M, 1969, p. 585)) and ton (or gown (Nadelyaev V,M, 1969, p. 574)). In its context, it occurs twice: 1. “qunčuyŋ tultonı”; 2. “tultonladi”. The compound word “qunčuyŋ tultonı” which means “a mourning gown”. Nevertheless, a verb “tultonladi” means “to be widowed; to mourn”.

The inscription on the west side:

| by Ts.Battulga | by Hatice Şirin |
|----------------|----------------|
| **Runic origin** | **Translation** |
| üző[t’ŋr’k’]A s’r[Ay’r’k’A y’ük’n’[t k’mh’r’ r’l’I y’nl’t’km y’š’k b’s’m]’g’ b’wd’n’(g’h’?) | Дээд тэнгэрт, доод газарт залбирил асан болгоо, Буруутсан минь үгүй, Басмылыг ард түмэн (Battulga Ts, 2005A, pp. 122-128; Battulga Tsend, 2016, pp. 70-79) |
| üző [teŋrikä] asra yerkä yükünüküüm bar erti yanjitluqım yoq basmilyγ bodunuy | yukarıda göre (Gök Tanrı’ya), aşağıda topgra (Yer Tanrısı’na) tanımlanmış var idi sapmılmış yok (idi) Basmılı (tebası içinde Basmıl olan) halk (Hatice Şirin, 2010, pp. 62-70) |

**Transcription**

| Üzä [teŋrikä] asra yerkä yükünüküüm bar erti yanjitluqım yoq basmilyγ bodunuy | Üzä <(t)(ı)ŋr(ı)k(ı)ä (a)sra y(ä)rkä yük(ı)ñ <(t)>üm b(a)r (ä)rti y(a)ŋ(ı)ltuk(ı)ñ yok b(a)sm(ı)l(ı)g bod(u)n(u)g (?) |
As the previous researchers deciphered the west side inscription of Bömbögör monument in the same meanings, we are here including the transcription as the following:

**Transcription:** üzä tenrijkä asra ýükün[t]üküm bar erti ýañiltuqum yoq basmilȳ bodunuy

**Literal translation:** Дээд тэнгэрт, доод газарт мөргөсөн минь буй болгоо, буруудсан минь үгүй, Басмилыг тумнийг ...

**Translation into English:** Prayed for the Heaven and Earth, but did not betray to them, the Basmil and the people ...

**The explanation for some words and expressions**

\[\text{yükünüküm} \] – This word has been understood as the same meaning in the previous 2 studies above mentioned, however, Hatice Şirin has deciphered adding 1 character, on the basis of the grammatical meaning. We agree with his deciphering because of its grammatical structure as \(\text{yükün}-\text{(to bow)} + \text{tük} \) (a suffix for gerund) + \(m\) (the 1st personal possessive inflection). Though, it is governed by the same word together with “yaŋıl + tuq + um”(буруудсан минь) and taken the same morphemes in the context.

1.1.2. **Inscription of Three Mandala**

There are some alternative versions in L.Bold and Ts.Battulga’s deciphering and translating the Inscription of Three Mandala as the following:

**The Dünd Mandal (Middle Mandalala):**

| Lines | by L.Bold | by Ts. Battulga |
|-------|-----------|----------------|
|       | Runic origin |                |
| I     | Xśř       |                |
| II    | Ḳñ         |                |
| III   | Ḳñ Ḳñ       |                |

**Transcription**

I...ата быз...
II...акыз
III...е́р а́тым Улунгчик (Олуунчык)

**Translation into Mongolian**

I...энцэг бид...
II...Акыс
III...Эр нэр минь Улунчык

Even though, as there is a little difference in deciphering, transcribing and translating the aforementioned inscription by Ts.Battulga, we are trying to include our version here.

**Transcription:**
1. tebiz
2. qış
3. er ton aňų el a? oq

**Translation:**
1. тэбиз
2. эвөл
3. баатар хувцас авагтун улс ... сум
The explanation for some words and expressions

er ton alıŋ – This is the version of the initial 6 characters in the 3rd line that our research team proposed. Due to masculine and feminine consonants in the Runic grammar, the initial character can be deciphered as “r” used in feminine words but rest of them as the consonants used in masculine words. And the 7th character is the consonant “l” in feminine words, so it can no longer be deciphered as one single word in a way of compounding with the previous word. In addition, “al(take) and ıŋ ((imperative form of III person) or “take…”) occur several times in this form in other classical inscriptions.

The Adag Mandala (End Mandala):

| Lines | by L.Bold | by Ts.Battulga |
|-------|-----------|---------------|
|       | Runic origin |               |
| I     | ...атым др... | qut altun арүт | |
| II    | ...утумлыг түрк егелтке | inälik qız qarayaz ačqa iki | |
| III   | ... еничык Акыз кыргыз еленте | tunyaluγ törgi iltä tür qan | |
|       | Translation into Mongolian |               |
| I     | ...нэр минь др... | хатуу чанга хууль ёс мэт улстай Төр хан | |
| II    | ...еничык Акыз киргиз улсад | Итгэлт охин Карагаз Ачха Хоёр | |
| III   | ...Утумлыг түргийн эгэл түмэнд... (Bold L, 1990, pp. 25-27) | Өлзийт алт, эд агуурс хүргүүлэв (Battulga Ts., 2005A, pp. 132-140) | |

We have a proposal for the transcription of this inscription as the following:

| Transcription | Translation |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. tunyaluγ törgi iltä tür qan | 1. чанга(хүчирхэг) төр ёс мэт улсад Төр хан |
| 2. inel ök qız qarayaz açq iki | 2. мэшид итгэлт охин Карагаз хоёр...? |
| 3. qat altun ed er erti? | 3. хатуу? алт, эд агуурс, батар эр байв...? |

The explanation for some words and expressions

inel ök qız – the “inel ök” in this collocation is an adjective that modifies the “qız (or girl)”. However, the “ök” is a particle of which function is to intensify the meaning of the adjective. As a result, we are translating this as “машид итгэлт охин (a very faithful girl)”.

qat altun – the “altun (golden)” in this collocation initially placed in the 3rd line, is modified by an adjective “qat”, that is the same as just the previous one. In addition, as there is no any vowel between the both consonants, it is more definite that it can be deciphered in inserting a vowel “a” but not “u”.

1.2. The studies on the tamgas

It is very wonderful that most inscription monuments found in Mongolia are almost complex with one single or more tamgas engraved on their bodies. This means the engravers or writers would engrave the names of their own or their tribes as their familiar practice. So it is no longer possible to study them in separate objects.
These *tamgas* can be classified into 2 parts: 1. The *tamgas* which were engraved in the same the periods of the inscriptions are the *tamgas* which directly involved or followed the inscriptions; and 2. The *tamgas* which were engraved very close to the inscriptions are the *tamgas* which indirectly involved the inscriptions.

Regarding the fact that why the *tamgas* were engraved on or near the inscriptions, the people who travelled for military campaigns or state affairs, and their leaders would make some travel notes and their followers would engrave their notes along with their *tamgas* in different forms depending on the status of their tribes and titles.

Totally, there have been 5 inscription monuments found in the territory of Bayankhongor province as mentioned in the initial part of the paper. And these monuments have around 70 *tamgas*, 35 of which have been engraved on the Inscription of Bömböögör monument².

As the core object of this research, we have found out that these 35 *tamgas* consist of 14 basic types which include 2 or more similar *tamgas* with each other in their forms as viewed to potentially be their versions, in the instance, a *tamga* `>` with `<<` and `<<`; a *tamga* `Y` with `Y` and `Y`; and a *tamga* `Y` with `Y`, `Y`, `Y`, `Y`. Here below, all the *tamgas* are numbered and listed according to the orders occur in the monument, as the following:

№1 `>`; №2 `Y`; №3 `<<`; №4 `<<`; №5 `<<`; №6 `<<`; №7 `<<`; №8 `<<`; №9 `<<`; №10 `<<`; №11 `<<`; №12 `<<`; №13 `<<`; №14 `<<`; №15 `<<`; №16 `<<`; №17 `<<`; №18 `<<`; №19 `<<`; №20 `<<`; №21 `<<`; №22 `<<`; №23 `<<`; №24 `<<`; №25 `<<`; №26 `Y`; №27 `Y`; №28 `Y`; №29 `<<`; №30 `Y`; №31 `Y`; №32 `Y`; №33 `Y`; №34 `Y`; №35 `<<`.

The *tamga* №1 and its 14 versions will be emphasised later as a special object of the further study. As for the *tamga* №2, there are some versions: a form `Y`, as the directly involved one, but another form `Y`, as the indirectly involved one in the Inscription of Biger, Biger soum, Govi-Altai province and 2 forms `Y` and `Y` as the indirectly involved ones in the Inscription Shaakhar in Chandmani soum, Govi-Altai province (Azzaya B., 2019).

The forms of *tamgas* №24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 34 occur in mostly runic inscriptions including the Inscription of Shaakhar in two forms: `Y` and `Y` as the directly and indirectly involved ones, respectively, and the Inscription of Baga-Oigur, Ulaankhus soum, Bayan-Olgii province, in the forms `Y`, `Y`, and `Y`.

A form `<<`, similar with the *tamgas* №27, 28, 31 was found in the Inscription of Altankhad, Govi-Altai province, as the directly involved one.

The form `Y` of the *tamga* №32 is directly involved in the Inscription of Shaakhar, Chandmani soum, Govi-Altai province and the Moyunchur monument or Shine Us monument.

And there are the *tamgas* `<<`, `<<`, `<<`, `<<` and `<<` engraved in the Inscription of Gurvaljin Uul, Gurban bulag soum, Bulgan province.

² Apart from this Inscription of Bömböögör monument, the Shiveet Ulaan monument with *tamgas* which is located in the confluence of the Khanui and Khunui rivers in Bayan-Art soum, Bulgan province is properly viewed to be the monument which has numbers of *tamgas*. In addition to them both, the Rashaan khad monument in Binder soum Khentii province, the Bichigtii buuts in Buren soum (Perlee Kh, 1975), Töv province and Tsgaa golin *tamga* in Govi-Altai province (Rintchen, 1966) have been agreed to be the complex monuments with *tamgas* and have attracted many researchers’ attentions.
Conclusion

In Bayankhongor province, there are 5 runic inscriptions those can be classified into 2 parts: the monuments found before 1990 (the Inscription of Bömbögör monument and the Inscription of Three Mandala) and monuments found since 2008 (the Inscription of Olon Nuur, Inscription of Dalt and Inscription of Khigisiin Ovoo Monument). For the first class of monuments, the researchers have made some different versions of their deciphering, transcribing and translating, while the second class of monuments, they have not reviewed in detail, just like the basic study. As a result, we are trying to compare all the versions which the previous researchers made before 1990, to review and then to draw a conclusion on this first class of monuments among the runic inscription monuments found in Bayankhongor province as the following:

- There are some unusual words and expressions as well as personal names which occur in these two inscription monuments but not in classical runic inscriptions and other inscription monuments found in other places. For example: tulton, er ton, tunyaluγ tör, etc.
- Of these two inscription monuments, one is the monument, the rest of it is a rock painting, but both of them have numbers of tamgas, involved in the relevant inscription monuments. So all the tamgas we have found, should be studied for the further research and researchers.
- The fact that there is a fixed expression like “üzä teŋri asra yer” or “The Heaven. The Earth” noted on the west side of the Inscription of Bömbögör monument which occur in other classical monuments several times, reveals that the writers of the inscriptions must be a well-educated person in the ancient Turkic language.
- In the 5 runic inscription monuments found in Bayankhongor province, there are around 70 tamgas engraved so far today. Of them, the tamga and its versions have been displayed in the Inscription of Bömbögör monument and the Inscription of Three Mandala (especially the Adag Mandala). Some of the tamgas are engraved quite clear, but few of them are not because they are engraved on any other rock paintings. Consequently, the tamgas, as the main object of this introductory study, can be a significant source to describe which tribe people went to the west for which affairs, where and how many tamgas they engraved and which kinds of relations they had.

The runic inscriptions have been found in almost monuments, rocks and the sacrificing board. Even though their purposes to be engraved must be different and contents should be special. Consequently, they are waiting for more detailed studies.

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