

Research Article/ Araştırma Makalesi

Reinterpretation of Hunnic Title *Ku-t'u* 孤涂

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Abstract

We don't have much information about the language of Asian Huns who played one of the most important roles in both Turkic and world history and occupy a remarkable place in Asian history. On the other hand, we have been familiar with all existing data pertaining to their language thanks to Chinese annals. Chinese annals mention some words which belong to their language. One part of those words constitutes the captions belonging to Hunnic ruling class. One of those captions is *Ku-t'u* meaning "son" which is given by the Huns for their rulers. The mentioned caption has been tried to be explained with different meanings. Some researchers evaluate the true meaning of this caption as "son" and link this with the words which match up with it semantically and phonetically while others aim at clarifying it with the namings which are evocative of the meaning of majesty. In this paper it will be shown that the mentioned caption is related to a belief system belonging to Turks and

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Mongols. The main topic of this paper revolves around explanation of the mentioned caption on the base of a belief in Turks and Mongols.

Keywords: Hunnic, Turkic, Mongolian, Ku-t'u.

Hun Ünvanı Ku-t'u'nun Yeniden Yorumlanması

Öz

Gerek Türk gerekse dünya tarihinde en önemli rollerden birini oynayan ve Asya tarihinde önemli bir yer tutan Asya Hunlarının diline dair çok fazla malumata sahip değiliz. Öte yandan, onların dili hususunda elimizde mevcut olan tüm verilere Çin yıllıkları sayesinde aşınayız. Çin yıllıklarının onların diline ait kimi sözcükleri kayıt altına aldıklarını bilmekteyiz. Bu sözcüklerin bir kısmını ise Hun yönetici sınıfına ait ünvanlar teşkil etmektedir. Bu ünvanlardan biri Hunların kendi hükümdarları için verdikleri ve oğul anlamına gelen Ku-t'u'dur. Bahsolunan unvan bugüne değin farklı anlamlarla izah edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Kimi araştırmacılar bu ünvanın asıl anlamı olarak Çin yıllıklarının kaydettiği "oğul" sözcüğü olarak değerlendirip Altay dillerinde ona uygun düşen kelimeler ile eşleştirme yolunu seçerlerken kimi dilbilimciler ise Türkçe'de hükümdar anlamını çağrıştıran adlandırmalar ile ona bir izahat getirme çabası içerisinde olmuşlardır. Bu çalışmanın ana konusu zikri geçen ünvanın Türk ve Moğollardaki bir inanç temelinde izahı üzerindedir. Bu makalede zikri geçen sözcüğün esasen Türk ve Moğol dillerine ait bir inanç sistemi ile bağlantılı olduğu gösterilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hunca, Türkçe, Moğolca, Ku-t'u.

Introduction

撑梨孤涂单于 Ch'engli Ku-t'u Ch'anyu: This is the exact form of the nomenclature used for rulers in the language of the Asian Huns. While the Chanyu element at the end of this designation is a title given to the Hunnic rulers, the first two words are adjectives complementing this title and have the meaning of "son of heaven".¹

It is accepted by the scientific world that the word Ch'engli, which constitutes the first part of this denomination, is the Chinese spelling of the word *Tengri*, the name given to God by the Turks. However, Doerfer,

¹ Ssu-ma Ch'ien., *The Grand Scribe's Records, The Volume IX, The Memoirs of Han China, Part II.*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2011, s.256.

as usual, objected to the view that this word is of Turkic origin.² We will not dwell on Doerfer's claims since Tekin has made reasonable criticisms and explanations to German scholar's objections.³

On the other hand, Hunnic word is related to the verb *tenġ* "rise into the air, disappear from sight"⁴ recorded by Kaşgarlı Mahmut in his dictionary, and the word *tenġek* "air."⁵ Is derived from this root. The word *teŋeri* in Altaic dialect carries the meaning of "sky".⁶ Hunnic *tengri* is obviously related to also the word Teŋeri. Tekin connects the root of the word Tengri to the verb *täŋir*, older form of the verb *tägi* "to turn, to encircle" in Turkic.⁷

Chinese 天 (tiān) meaning "sky" is really a Turkic borrowing but the most striking similarity with Turkic Tengri is Lithuanian *dangùs* "sky, heaven". Its etymology and root are discussed and is evaluated with another word *deŋgti* "cover, thatch, clothe, shelter, conceal".⁸ Again Lithuanian *dangà* "cover" is related to *dangùs* and *deŋgti*. Fraenkel presents a list of words related to *deŋgti* and shows *dingti* "disappear" as one of those words and adds *daŋgé* "river" to this list.⁹ Lithuanian words are obviously related to Turkic ones.

The root of Turkic word *dengiz/tengiz* "sea" is the word *teng* meaning "marsh".¹⁰ Tana(is) was a denomination given to Don river in antiquity. Ottomans called Tanais *Ten* or *Tân*. Chuvash word for Tanais is still *tan*

² Gerhard Doerfer, "Zur Sprache der Hunnen", *Central Asiatic Journal*, XVII(1), 1973, s.5; Doerfer, G., "O Yazyke Gunnov", *Zarubezhnaya Tyurkologiya*, Vyp. 1, 1986, s.74.

³ Talat Tekin, *Hunların Dili*. Ankara: Doruk yayınları, 1993, s.10-12.

⁴ Kaşgarlı Mahmut, *Divanü Lügati't-Türk*. Türk Dili Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, C.III, 1999, s.390.

⁵ Kaşgarlı Mahmut, a.g.e, s.396.

⁶ Emine Gürsoy Naskali & Muvaffak Duranlı, *Altayca-Türkçe Sözlük*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1999, s.174.

⁷ Tekin, a.g.e., s.11.

⁸ Rick Derksen, *Etymological Dictionary of the Baltic Inherited Lexicon*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2015, s.115.

⁹ Ernst Fraenkel, *Litauisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1962, s.88.

¹⁰ Hasan Eren, *Türk Dilinin Etimolojisi*, Bizim Büro Basımevi, Ankara, 1999, s.108; Stachowski, M., *Kurzgefaßtes Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Türkischen Sprache*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków, 2019, s.123.

while Kalmuks call the same river Tenj. According to Simon Kézai's *Gesta Hungarorum*, the Hungarians migrated westward after they had lived in *Maeotis Marshes*. It was claimed what was meant with Maeotis Marches in Kézai's work was Tanais river.¹¹ Greek sources in antiquity relate that Tanais is also name of today's Syrdarya river in Central Asia. It has been shown what is meant with the phrase *Sakā tayai paradraya* ("the Scythians beyond the sea"), which occurs in the inscription of Darius, is the Scythians dwelling in the eastern part of Syrdarya not the Scythians living in what is today Ukraine and what is meant with sea in the same inscription is Syrdarya, that is to say, Tana(is).¹² Tanais is really a Scythian word and Iranians took this word from the Scythians with the meaning of sea.

Georg tried to connect Turkic Tengri to a Yenisei origin.¹³ We never take Yenisei theory seriously. Lithuanian words listed above (especially *dañgė*) seem to be of Scythian origin and allow us to suggest the fact that Turkic *tengri* "god" and *tengiz* "sea" are related to each other and Turkic/Hunnic *tengri* seems to be of Scythian origin.

The word *Ku-t'u*, which represents the second element of this title, means son, according to the information given by the Chinese source. Shiratori correlates *ku-t'u* with the Tunguz word *guto*, meaning "son".¹⁴

Pulleyblank reconstructs this title as Ku-t'u < Kou-dou < Kwañ-ḍañ.¹⁵ It is worth noting that the same word overlaps with *kotoy*, one of the names used for boys in Bashkir.¹⁶

¹¹ Fatih Şengül, *Sabir, Sekel, Avar ve Bulgar Etnik Meselelerinin Çözümü*, Hikmetevi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2013, s.67-68.

¹² Fatih Şengül, *Sakaların ve Sarmatların Kökeni*, Eğitim Yayınevi, Konya, 2023, s.86-93.

¹³ Stefan Georg, "Türkisch/Mongolisch Tengri "Himmel, Gott" und Seine Herkunft", *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia*, 6, 2021, ss.83-96.

¹⁴ Shiratori Kurakichi, Sur l'Origine des Hiong-nu. *Journal Asiatique*, CCl(1), 1923, s.71-81

¹⁵ Edwin George Pulleyblank, "The Consonantal System of Old Chinese:Part II", *Asia Major*(16), 1962, s.244; Edwin George Pulleyblank, (1986). "Yazyk Syunnu", *Zarubezhnaya Tyurkologiya*, 1, 1986, s.35.

¹⁶ Murat Özşahin, *Başkurt Türkçesi Sözlüğü*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 2017, s.377.

Pulleyblank, who defended the Yenisei thesis against Turkic thesis, the prevailing view on the origin and language of the Huns, by suggesting that the letter -d in the middle of the word kou-dou < kwañ-ḍaḥ was actually used for the foreign letter -l in the Old Han period, reconstructed the Hunnic kou-dou < kwañ-ḍaḥ as **kwala* and linked it with the Ket word *qalek*, which means "grandson, son".¹⁷ The word *qalek* is related to Turkic *kalak* "male and man"¹⁸, *kalık/kaluk* "spinster"¹⁹ (Özder, 1981:67) and *kallax* "man, who prefers to spend time with women"²⁰ and etc.

A linguistic evidence reveals how inconsistent such a forced explanation made by Pulleyblank to link the Huns to a Yenisei origin is and also relates that such a vocal transition cannot occur. Chinese sources mention another title Guduhou [Kütühóu], which is phonetically very close to the above-mentioned *kou-dou*. Ku-t'u and Guduhou [Kütühóu] are dated to the Old Han Period and the 3rd century BC.

A title used by the Asian Huns is referred to as 骨都侯 Guduhou [Kütühóu] in Chinese sources.²¹ This title, which represents a high rank in the Huns, could not be explained by anyone from the linguistic point of view. It was the Hungarian Sinologue Katalin Csornai who revealed the true meaning of this title in Huns' language. Csornai, noting that the ruling layer of the Huns State has made internal marriages with Guduhou, and that whenever an internal marriage occurred, the bride was from Huns ruling class and the groom was from the Guduhou, tried to relate the word Guduhou with the word

¹⁷ Pulleyblank, a.g.e., s.245.

¹⁸ Mustafa Adil Özder, *Türk Halkbiliminde Düğün-Evlilik-Akrabalık Terimleri Sözlüğü*, Ziya Gökalp Derneği Yayınları, Ankara, 1981, s.66.

¹⁹ Özder, a.g.e, s.67.

²⁰ Ahmet Dinç, *Türkçenin Kayıp Kelimeleri*, Litera Yayıncılık, C.II, 2023, s.276

²¹ Anna Dybo, *Lingvističeskiye Kontakty Rannikh Tyurkov. Leksicheskiy fond., Pratyurkskiy Period*, Vostochnaya Literatura, Moskva, 2007, s.109; Axel Schuessler, "Phonological Notes on Hàn Period Transcriptions of Foreign Names and Words", *Studies in Chinese and Sino-Tibetan Linguistics: Dialect, Phonology, Transcription and Text. Language and Linguistics Monograph Series 53*, Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 2014, s.273.

"kuda", which means kindredship in Mongolian, moving from the point that it means "groom".²²

Csornai achieved an excellent result but could not see the Turkic word "kütekü" which means "groom" and was first found in Uyük Turan inscription. The word which means groom in the Huns' language was clearly Turkic *kütekü*.²³

If Pulleyblank's claim of /d/ >/l/ transition were really true Hunnic word should have survived in Turkic dialects today as Gülekü/Külekü. However, the word has never taken this form. Therefore, Pulleyblank's argument has no validity and the claim of /d/ >/l/ transition has no scientific basis. We regret to specify that the Yenisei argument, which seeks to link the origin of the Huns to the Ket community, is the most incoherent and baseless argument. It is astonishing that such an argument, which has no foundation whatsoever, can still gather adherents in the scientific field today, even if only a few.

Let us now turn to the explanation of Ku-t'u, which is the main topic of this article. Our explanation here is inspired by Pulleyblank's reconstruction of the same word in the form kwañ-ḍañ. And we think that the form kwañ-ḍañ is the closest to the original form of Hunnic word.

Contrary to Shiratori's interpretation of the Hunnic word as directly meaning "son", Tekin suggests that *ku-t'u'* may have been translated into Chinese as "son" under the influence of title T'ien-tzū meaning "son of Heaven, son of God" which Chinese used for their emperors.²⁴ Müller correlated *ku-t'u'* with the Uighur word *kut* 'majesty' and translated *tängri kut* as *idikut* [<"iduk kut" 'holy majesty'].²⁵ We agree with Tekin

²² Katalin Csornai, "Where Huns' Blood Drew". *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1(3), 2009, s.37.

²³ Şengül, a.g.e. s.303.

²⁴ Tekin, a.g.e., s.13.

²⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Müller, "Uigurica (I). 1. Die Anbetung der Magier, ein christliches Bruchstück. 2. Die Reste des buddhistischen Goldglanz-Sūtra. Ein vorläufiger Bericht," *AKPAW*(*Abhandlungen der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*), Philosophisch-historische Klasse 2, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1908, s.56; Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Müller, "Uigurische Glossen", *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, 8, 1919-1920, s.316.

and Müller and the views of both authors reflect the truth but are incomplete in meaning.

The following is a counterpart to this Hunnic name, which in fact contains both the son and holiness meanings of the Hunnic word.

In Turkic, the word Kut means "sacred, spirit, happiness, etc."²⁶ Sanscrit *huta*, Gothic *guths*, German *got*, English *god* etc. which mean "god" is related to Turkic word.²⁷

Turkic kut is in the form of *kutug* in Mongolian. However, the word also has a belief connection with the son, which has been overlooked until today.

The word was taken by the Mongols in the same sense and in the form *hutog* and it has been used by the Mongolians in the form of *hutogto* "the holy, holy person who leads to salvation and the title of the newborn in northern Buddhism". The same meaning is kept alive among the Yakut Turks in the form of "*kut-ogo*" "baby spirit".²⁸ Hunnic *Kou-dou* < kwañ-ḍañ is also identical with the word *kutuka*, which is also present in the forms of *kotuku*, *kutuku*, *kutukağ*, *kıtıkağ* and etc. and means "sweet child, lambkin, baby, brave man"²⁹ in the language of the Yakuts.

The academics who prepared the Etymological Dictionary of Altaic Languages reconstruct proto-Mongolian form of *kutug* as *kutug* "good fortune and majesty".³⁰ Such a reconstruction corresponds to the forms we propose for Hunnic naming above.

²⁶ Abdulkadir Donuk, *Eski Türk Devletlerinde İdari-Askeri Ünvan ve Terimler, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı*, Ankara, 1988, s.78-79.

²⁷ İsmail Hakkı Danişment, *Türklerle Hind-Avrupalıların Menşe Birliği*, Devlet Basımevi, İstanbul, C.II, 1936, s.229-230.

²⁸ Gavriil Vasilyevich Ksenefonov, *Yakut Şamanlığı*, Kömen Yayınları, Konya, 2011, s.118.

²⁹ Eduard Karloviç Pekarskiy, *Yakut Dili Sözlüğü*, Ebuzyiya Matbaası, İstanbul, C.I, 1945, s.572

³⁰ Sergey Anatolyevich Starostin, Anna Vladimirovna Dybo, & Oleg Mudrak, *An Etymological Dictionary of Altaic Languages (Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 8 Uralic & Central Asia Studies (Book 8), Brill, V.II, 2003, s.749.*

Conclusion

Identification of Hunnic rulers with the meaning of "son" is essentially related to this belief mentioned by Ksenefentov above. On the basis of this belief, the Chinese combined Turkic and Mongolian word, that is used in connection with the child, with the word "son" they use for their own rulers. The belief "Son of Heaven" in Chinese community seems to have been passed down from the Huns to the Chinese.

It should be noted that Pulleyblank's reconstruction *Kou-dou* < kwañ-ðañ is identical with the forms in Mongolian and Yakut dialect.

The words *gödäk* "child" in Uzbek³¹, *hatı* "small child" in Yellow Uyghur³², *goduk* "child" in Derleme Dictionary³³, *hodak* "small children riding on oxen while plowing"³⁴, *kodak* "child"³⁵ and etc. are the remnants of Hunnic word today. Other remnants of Hunnic title are animal names used in Turkic dialects even today. If necessary to give several examples, *godek* "buffalo calf"³⁶, *godak* "piglet, kid(goat)"³⁷, *kodak* "donkey-foal"³⁸.

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³¹ Derleme Sözlüğü, *Türkiye'de Halk Ağzından Derleme Sözlüğü*, Türk Dil Kurumu, Ankara, C.III, 2019, s.2093.

³² Mehmet Ziya Binler, *Türk Dünyası Aile ve Akrabalık Terimleri Sözlüğü*, Selenge, 2007, s.150.

³³ Ahmet Caferoğlu, *Doğu İllerimiz Ağızlarından Toplamalar (Kars, Erzurum, Çoruh İlbaylıkları Ağızları)*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1995, s.260.

³⁴ Derleme Sözlüğü, a.g.e., s.2897.

³⁵ Gyula Nemeth, *Kumuk ve Balkar Lehçeleri Sözlüğü*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1990, s.22.

³⁶ Ahmet Dinç, *Türkçenin Kayıp Kelimeleri*, Litera Yayıncılık, Ankara, C.II, 2023, s.217.

³⁷ Derleme Sözlüğü, a.g.e., s.2897.

³⁸ Derleme Sözlüğü, a.g.e., Türk Dil Kurumu, Ankara, C.IV, 2019, s.2093.

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