

Turkic Runes in Southern Part of Kazakhstan: Current State and Future

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Abstract: The article focuses on the ancient Turkic inscriptions found in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. It provides the brief review of the origins and deciphering of some inscriptions. Ancient Turkic runic monuments as a cradle of Turkic culture and common cultural assets are the most priceless heritage of our ancestors left to their descendants. There are so many inscriptions and images on stones on the Great Steppe, waiting for the history of the dwellers to be discovered and delivered to the next generation.

The article emphasizes the idea that the discovery and deciphering of runic inscriptions can refute the view on absence of ancient Turkic people's written culture.

Keywords: Turkic runic monuments, Turkic ancient letters, Orkhon-Yenisey and Talas inscriptions, Yenisey Writings, Alphabet of Proto-Turkic.

The Great Silk Road is the international land trade caravan route of Ancient times and the Middle Ages, which stretched across the whole Asia. The significant part of Eurasian continent was covered by the

number of road networks, which served as the platform for intensive exchange of tangible assets and spiritual values.

Tremendous trade artery which had functioned for one and half millennium put together history of many countries and nations, and was a trouble-free transponder of not only commodities and technologies, but ideas and religious and philosophical systems as well. Its overall length amounted to seven thousand kilometers, and it took merchants' caravan whole three year to cover this road from Mediterranean Sea to Great Wall of China.

The trade carried on variety of goods, however, the most important among them was silk, highly rated and valued commodity in the West. And the trade route became popular due to this product and named after it. People of Central Asia played a significant role in connection of two great civilizations, the Western and Far East Asia, who undoubtedly served as conductors for the both of parts. After some time, as the evidences of different nations show, there will be trade caravans and diplomatic embassies passing along the route.

Artifacts, which were found and will be found by scholars in the ruins of ancient settlements of the Great Silk Road demonstrate the culture of that time.

Between the 3rd and 1st centuries AD great nomadic confederations established in the vast territory of Great Steppe, composed of mountainous and hilly landscapes and breathtaking valleys with rivers and lakes stretched across the Eurasian continent. Huns, Sakas and Turkic Khanate who had inspired great fear and terror to Western Europe and China for centuries, founded empires along the Rivers Irtysh, Ili, Syrdariya, Zhaiyk and Edil. These empires while

fighting against external invaders for the unity of the empire could maintain political and social stability, develop their culture and literature, and deliver linguistic heritage and history to their descendants.

Today the study of Turkic runic monuments as an issue of high priority for Kazakh and other Turkic states challenge them to start searching for the historical roots of it from the period of Huns and Sakas, not only from the data and written monuments of ancient history. Therefore, in our article we have decided to dwell on ethnic and ethno linguistic characteristics of those Huns and Sakas considered as the ancestors of Turkic Khanate, who left these valuable ancient inscriptions.

The first nomadic empire in Central Asia founded at the end of 3rd century BC (Nazarbayev, 1999, p. 78). As the history states Great Huns inhabited the territory extended from Baikal to Tibet and from Central Asia to Huang He holding the reins of power and control for many years.

Although Huns are said to have belonged to the tribes of Altaic language group, there were other tribal unions speaking different languages as well. And among them were Turkic groups of people on whose history our article is based. Migration of Turkic and Mongolian group of people to the west started from the earliest time. This can be proved by the study of western researchers on resemblance in facial features of Mongolian and Sakas tribes, who occupied Ural region, thus facial characteristics of two similar, assimilated groups of people (Kliyastorny, Sultanov, 1992, p. 52).

In the 1st century AD the territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan served as the platform for cultural and linguistic relations between the tribes of Iranian, Ugor and Altaic language groups and small

ethnic groups. From this time forth, that is the beginning of our millennium, due to the migration of the Huns towards the West and weakening of other tribes, dwelt in the territory of Central Asia who spoke different languages had started Turkic ethnogenesis, the unification of Turkic tribal groups (Kliyashtorny, Sultanov, 1992, p. 80).

From the beginning of our millennium ethnical changes gradually took place in Eurasian steppe. As an example for this, can serve the process of unification of Turkic tribes, resided in those areas, into a political union which was considered as a new stage of development. As the history states the second half of the first millennium was the time when improvement of populations' social conditions, political and territorial stability and integrity, and establishment of several great empires was seen. If to be precisely, in the vast territory of South Siberia, Central Asia, Lower Volga region and North Caucasian there were founded the First Turkic Khanate, East Turkic Khanate, Western Turkic Khanate, Turgesh Khanate, Uyghur Khanate and Aral Oghuz Khanate. This period in the history was scientifically determined as the Ancient Turkic Period. The fact that, in the course of history, our Proto-Turkic language preserved its trace through the long-term development and expansion is the result of fruitful interrelation of present day Turkic people. Kazakh language appeared as the result of such continuous and dynamic developments, is one of the main branches of Turkic language.

Arguments and research findings on emergence of Turkic language given above by stages are considered to be the beginning and continuation of the formation of Turkic peoples' own writings. Basically, Turkic tribes' monuments and round stones left to their present day

descendants as a heritage reflect the history today. What makes us believe in that is the direct connection of appearance of our writings with well-known Sakas tribes.

It is known from the pages of history that Turkic tribes dwelling in the territory of Kazakhstan, Central Asia and Southern Siberia unified and established an independent political entity which was called Turkic Khanate in the mid VI century. In the course of their formation tribal groups, composed the Khanate, experienced series of fierce conflicts and devastating wars to maintain their freedom and liberty. Their success in defending themselves from the besieged invasions of enemies was seen from the military prowess and heroic behaviors of warlords and unified support of the population. Well-known paragons such as Kül-Tegin, Tonyukuk, Bilge and Bumin kagans had become the main heroes of not only historical but poetry works as well. In order to write down their names in the pages of history wise connoisseurs of that time carved their biography, achievements and advices on the stones which were maintained as Turkic runic monuments, attributes of civilization.

These artifacts of Turkic tribes which provide important clue to understanding social and cultural aspects of their lives, of their literature and domestic rites is the common heritage of all present day Turkic people. Carved stones bearing the history of Great Steppe, grief and sorrow, and lifestyle of that time, like warrior's heroic deed passed through the centuries and reached us in the original form.

Ancient Turkic written monuments left as a heritage for the next generation found in every corner of the vast territory of Kazakhstan advance the number of monuments year by year. However, it is noticed that the study on these ancient relics to understand the meaning

of their content and the idea they deliver, and their significance to Kazakh people has remarkably slowed down in recent years. Turkology divides ancient Turkic written monuments into three main groups, Orhon, Yenisei and Talas, in terms of geography, content and timing aspect. Talas writing monuments were found in southern regions of Kazakhstan and the Middle Age heritage and historical places to be considered as the continuation of the monuments given above are located here, within the mountainous, hilly and fluvial landscapes. Therefore, this indicates that essential facts linked to the history, ancient culture, civilization and national identity, language and mindset of Kazakh and other Turkic speaking states should be traced in these areas.

In order to get insights into Turkic runes which reflect the history of whole political entity, in terms of linguistic, literary, historical and political and ethnical aspects we should possess deep knowledge of geographic content of ancient heritage. Moreover, the study of the ancient cultural centers and historical places of Kazakh people, their meaning and content, and peculiarities for the favor of future generation should be the concern of not only certain groups of scholars but the government's as well. Spiritual wealth of Kazakh people bounded with its history. Therefore, it is appropriate to start the study of these ancient written monuments from the historically rich southern region of the country. Nowadays, it is hardly possible to find historical written monuments discovered in the regions of Kazakhstan in local museums and special institutions for maintaining historical monuments. In addition, the organization of expeditions to the coastlines of Talas River and mountainous, hilly areas of that region has been left out of sight in recent years. For the favor of next generation it is advisable to organize

expeditions of small-sized groups to the territories of present day Taraz city and its southern part, outskirts of Alatau and Karatau mountain ranges, Ulytau and Bolattau mountains in Central Kazakhstan to carry out research on the ancient written monuments of our ancestors left to their descendants, successful finding of which is highly expected. As a sound proof we can mention about written monuments found during the research had been carried out from the second half of the 19th century to 70-ies of the 20th century. At the period of that time there were found a set of round stones, petroglyphs and runic writings in the territory of Talas River and southern regions of Kazakhstan.

First mentioning of the study on ancient Turkic monuments in the territory of Talas River, which maintained its value and significance, and became the issue of high priority after the collapse of Soviet Government, found in the work of academician V.V. Bartold. In 1893-1894 the academician made a great contribution to Turkology by conducting researches in Zhetisu areas. At the same time the works of Turkistan society of young archeologists, founded in Tashkent city, on collecting data about ancient Turkic written monuments in the southern regions of Kazakhstan and northern areas of Kyrgyzstan earned high appraisal from turkologists. In 1896-1897 Auliye-Ata county governor V.A. Kallaur and Finn archeologist G. Geikel working collaboratively found five written monuments inscribed in Turkic runes in the territory of present day Taraz city (former Auliye-Ata). Moreover, several written monuments and images inscribed on the surface of stones had been discovered in recent years (in 1897 Tereksai Pass next to Dmitrievsk village, in 1898 Aiyrtau and in 1925-1926 in Kaysar Pass nearby Lake Issyk). During the Soviet period archeological excavations and

study on ancient written monuments were continuously carried out. In 30-ies of 20th century in the territory of Central Asia there was found a stick with Turkic runes on it. This system of writing inspired scholars engaged in graphical linguistics arousing their interest in ancient writings. The reason why that writing evoked the interest lies in presence of some unknown symbols except those previously used ones. Some scholars had got involved in identification of those symbols thereby introduced their version of pronunciation: S.E. Malov (1936), Kh.N. Orkun (1940), A.M. Sherbak (1959) and so on.

In 1948 turkologist and archeologist A.N. Bernshtam found an item (mirror) made of bronze with runic writings on its surface nearby Kazakhstan coastlines of Irtysh River. Shortly after that, it was known that there was discovered one more ancient written monument in Shemonaikha region of East Kazakhstan.

F.Kh. Arslanova explored a bone made amulet with writings on it while carrying out archaeological excavations in the stream ways of Irtysh River in 1960. Prominent turkologist, professor A.S. Amanzholov notes that those and other explored historical artifacts were Turkic people's belongings and tools used in their everyday lives and the inscriptions on them represent the alphabet applied by our ancestors (Amanzholova, 1996, p. 42).

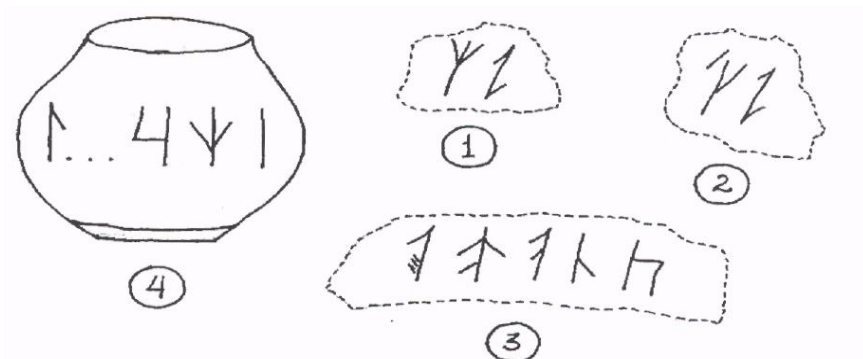
In the year of 1970 it was revealed that in Issyk fortress located on the coastline of the Ili River there were found some artifacts such as everyday life belongings of that time regarded as historical evidence of ancient Sakas culture. As a result of such archaeological excavation there was explored a silver cup with inscriptions of 26 runes on it in two rows. Scientists experienced strong arguments and disputes while

deciphering the runic writing to discover its meaning and value. Historical significance of the writing found in Sakas fortress advanced day by day. First of all, some inscribed letters are different from those well-known symbols applied in ancient Turkic writings of 6th and 8th centuries. Second of all, according to the findings of archaeologists, explored script is progress of Sakas period. Therefore the writing system is 5-6 centuries older than the previously discovered ancient Turkic alphabet. Thus, it again proves the fact that our culture of writing takes its origin from ancient period of Sakas and Huns.

After the collapse of totalitarian confederation of unified Turkic empires each of them proclaimed itself as a sovereign political entity gaining its independence. It is obvious that our spiritual wealth, traditions and customs, language and mindset are reviving, thus, are given a new lease of life. As a result, attitudes towards Turkology Studies have changed finally brining new achievements to the Study. Thereby, the study of research targets, the history and culture of the nation originated from ancient periods has been intensified and has already gained much of success in the process. In order to provide sound evidence to the abovementioned information we intend to discover the idea of the writing given below and introduce its meaning to the society. Nowadays in the territories dwelt by ancient Turkic tribes everyday life belongings and round stones with inscribed runes on them are found. They preserve the unveiled historic pieces for the generation to come. For instance, in Namangan, Fergana and Kashkadarya provinces of Uzbekistan there has been found stuff of some ancient tribes in recent years. We have already started exploring the

aforementioned ancient Turkic writings in the framework of our study (Saurykov, 2000, p. 17-22)

It is with considerable regret that the correct pronunciations of some of them still have not been learnt. Have a look at the following:



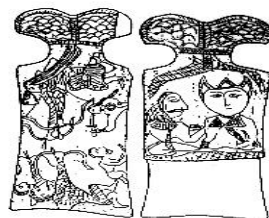
First three of these displayed pictures were discovered by professor E.V. Rtveladze, member of Institute for History and Archaeology of Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, in April, 1993 while carrying out archaeological excavations in ancient fortresses in Kashkadarya province. Symbols described in the 1st picture can be read as “Atj” in ancient Turkic language. Both inscribed symbols can be found in the runic alphabet. As for the second picture, the first symbol “a” is easy to understand whereas the identification of the second symbol seems to cause some difficulties. It is not clear what sound it is. The first symbol of the third picture is pronounced as “t”, the second as “i”, and the third should be pronounced as “p”. Thus, it means *min* “**said (told), saying**”. The meaning of the forth symbol stays unknown, it might lost its form throughout the centuries. The last character describes the sound

“*p*”. Taken all round, these inscribed on stone symbols are difficult to understand as they were not written on everyday life belongings or other types of items used that time.

The writing given in the forth picture found in 1993 from Namangan province of Uzbekistan. Here symbols were inscribed on a jug. As the jug was left under the ground for many years, some of its symbols faded out. And the remained symbols mean [сыңар] or [сокур]. Hence, the given word stands for the volume of the jug (that is, a 0,5 liter jug) or the name of the person who made the jug.

In 1998 in Kuksai, Tikbugan, Kyzyl Bulak and Alkym mountainous, hilly and fluvial areas nearby the Karasu village of Koshkar region of Kyrgyzstan, there were discovered some unknown ancient Turkic runes inscribed on the surface of stones (Soltobayev, Tabaldyev, 1998, p. 36-37).

All 8 runic inscriptions found in this region can be classified into well-known Talas written monuments. In the article we are dwelling on three of them maintained their appearance on the stones and the forms as well. It is incomprehensible why these inscriptions have still not been deciphered by turkologists. Please, have a look at the set of symbols:



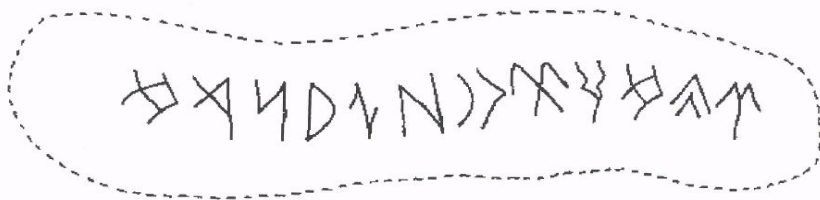
The system of symbols in the first picture is repeated by the symbols of the second picture. The given ancient Turkic writings belong to the period of Talas monuments. Therefore, they are older than Orhon runes.

The meaning of the writing on the third picture was mentioned in our article called "Ancient Turkic runic monuments as the legacy of next generation " (Saurykov, 2001, p. 4).



Er atym sagunqa ayrsym → I have lost my stallion Sagun

It is obvious that there could be found numbers of these priceless historical artifacts in the territory of Kazakhstan. As our ancestors dwelt



in the vast territory of Kazakhstan stretched in the east to Altai and Tarbagatai mountain ranges, in the west to Ural mountain ranges, in the north and central part to Ulytau, Bolattau mountain ranges and in the south to Alatau and Karatau mountain ranges and to other fluvial territories there must be left the trace of their lifestyle. Out of reach artifacts can be discovered in every corner of sovereign Kazakhstan.

The discovery of these artifacts is believed to be the starting point of great progress to the scientific study of the development of history and culture of Turkic people, the origin of their civilization and national identity. I would like to conclude the article by the words of the President, N. Nazarbayev “If we like to build a political entity, maintain our national identity, then we should understand the origin of spiritual wealth of the nation. It can be achieved through the conventional wisdom” (Nazarbayev, 1999, p. 273).

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