

O. I. SMIRNOVA ON TURKISH
NUMISMATICS OF THE
KÖK-TÜRK PERIOD IN WESTERN
TURKISTAN

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Mrs. O. I. Smirnova had dwelt, since at least 1951, on the question of the Kök-Türk period Turkish coinage, in western Turkistan. Her last book, published in 1981, in Moscow, entitled *Svodnyy Katalog Sogdiyskix monet, bronza*, is thus the outcome of long studies, pursued both in numismatic and historical fields, although restricted to the bronze coins. The coins bear both Soghdian and Turkish inscriptions in runiform alphabet. The Soghdian alphabet was also used for Turkish. The Turcologist Amanjolov has apparently helped Mrs. Smirnova, in what concerns the runiform scripts. As historian, O. I. Smirnova has tried to link the Turkish coins to dynasties reigning in Turkistan in the sixth to eighth centuries, taking equally in consideration the *tamğas* (dynastic, or tribal seals) and the heraldry. She noticed thereby that the coins with effigies of rulers appear, in western Turkistan, in the Kök-Türk period. This writer has long tried to keep up with Mrs. Smirnova's momentous contribution to Turkish history, particularly in subjects connected with culture and iconography. Mrs. Smirnova's work, books and articles, were my main source of information, in a paper on the Turkish dynasties of early mediaeval Turkistan, presented to a symposium convened in May 1985, by the Ankara University, on the theme of Turkish statecraft, throughout the centuries. The details which could not be here included may be found in that paper, which is now in print. However, some hesitation on the interpretation of runiform letters could not be dispelled and I am greatly in need of the support of philologists. The identification of runiform letters, proposed by Smirnova, do not always correspond to the list, in Prof. T. Tekin's *Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (The Hague, 1968).

Mrs. Smirnova has classified the Turkish coins, according to the *tamğas*, in an order which will be here approximately, followed.

I. The coins bearing a tamğa similar to the specimen with the inscription “tør’k γωβ”.

The inscription in Soghdian letters (pl. I, no. 26), on one coin, has been interpreted by Smirnova, as either, “The Turkish lord (or god)”, or as “the lord (or god) of the Tûrs (the legendary Tûr, ancestor of Turanians, was already in the Sasanian texts identified with the progenitor of the Turks). In Smirnova’s opinion, the *tamğa* on this and similar coins (pl. I, numbers 26-41) could be an imitation of the double *tao* (bifid blade) on a variety of Chinese coins, dating from 7-22 A.C. The existence of the concept of the bifid knife (*koş-biçek* : scissors), as well as of the bifid, or double sword (*koş-kılıç*), in Kâşğari’s Turkish-Arabic dictionary, in the Eleventh century, seems to confirm Smirnova’s supposition. The coins bearing the effigy of the “Turkish (or Turanian) lord” and those with the same *tamğa*, appear to have been issued by a dynasty under Kök-Türk sovereignty. This assumption is based on the existence of other *tamğas* of related form, observed on the mint of dynasties known to have been feudatories of the Kök-Türk Kağanate. The İhşîds of Soghdiana ¹ combined the same *tamğa*, with various other ones, on their coins (pl. I, no. 50). Another somewhat resemblant *tamğa* appears, again sometimes coupled with variants, on the mintage of the dynasty of Kara Buğra, ² reigning in Uşrûsana (pl. I, numbers 1419-32). A rectilinear variety of apparently the same *tamğa* can be seen on coins bearing a Turkish inscription in Soghdian alphabet, “γ’γ’n tωωγ” (the Kağan’s military governor of a province) (pl. II, no. 1445). The rectilinear variant of the *tamğa* has been interpreted, by Smirnova, as the runiform letter “ş” and read as uş. But in Professor T. Tekin’s list, the letter of this description has been indicated as I, ² to be pronounced *el* (land, state and other significations), as also kindly confirmed to me by Professor F. Akün. The rectilinear variety of the *tamğa* is equally shown on a medal from Fârâbi’s birthland, Kengü-tarban, ³ together with a lion depiction (pl. II, no. 1578). A series of coins, showing a ruler

¹ Kaynaklar (Sources): E. Esin *İslâmiyetten Önceki Türk Kültürü ve İslâma Giriş* (İstanbul 1978); idem, *A History of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Turkish culture*, indeks (index), s.v.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

with consort, sometimes with the inscription “γ’ttωn” (queen-regent), unite a triangle, with the rectilinear variant of the same *tamğa* (pl. II, numbers 1482-93). The triangle is interpreted, by Smirnova, as the runiform letter y.⁴

II. The Halaç/Kalaç coins

What seems to be a pictogram of a bifid sword is seen on coins, minted in various centres, but always bearing also the Halaç *tamğa* (pl. III, fig. 4 D). The Halaç *tamğa* could be ascertained through the Turkish inscription, in Soghdian letters, on one of the coins, deciphered as “Halaç ordu” (Halaç princely residence) (pl. III, fig A). Smirnova noting the Soghdian inscription “βγγ” (god, lord) beside the pictogram, sees in the bifid-sword, the early scissor like form of the thunderbolt weapon, attributed to Indra. Indra, as well as his thunderbolt weapon, were introduced to Turkish mythology,⁵ through Buddhism. Indra’s *vajra* was called *Hormuzta vacırı*, in an Uygur text.⁶ Lightning and thunderbolts could be represented as scissor-like weapons in Han period China as well.⁷ The ancient Eurasian pastoral riders to whose cultural tradition the early Turks belonged, had invoked an astralwar-god in the symbolism of the blade or sword in the rites of the oath of fidelity or allegiance.⁸ The Turks kept up a similar ceremony and the Turkish name for Mars was *Bakır-sokıım* (the Copper arrow-whistle). Some Turks, such as the Oğuz, believed that copper and iron ore were produced by lightning and had amulets, in the shape of swords and arrows.⁹ Thus, the term *Kök-temür*, cited by Kâşğarı,¹⁰ as he describes the ceremony of the oath (*and*)

⁴ O. I. Smirnova, *Katalog monet s gorodişçe Pencikent* (Moskva 1963, sikke (coin) 790. E. Esin, “Butân-i Halaç”, *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, XVII, (İstanbul 1971)

⁵ P. Zieme, *Buddhistische Stabreimdichtungen der Uiguren* (Berlin 1985), yazma (ms) 1, satır (line) 42.

⁶ J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu mythology* (London 1965), “Indra”.

⁷ E. Esin, “L’Arme à décor zoomorphe du guerrier turc”, *Protokollband der XII. Tagung der Permanent International Altaistic Conference*, (Berlin 1974), 196-200. M. Granet, *Danses et légendes de la Chine ancienne* (Paris 1959), index, “Ciseaux”.

⁸ Kaynaklar (Sources) : E. Esin, *Türk kozmolojisi, Erken devir* (*Early Turkish cosmology*), (İstanbul 1979), indeks (index), “And”.

⁹ Z. V. Togan, *Bîrûni’s picture of the World, supplement to the Memoirs of the archaeological survey of India* (Delhi 1937), 97.

¹⁰ Maḥmud Kâşğarı, *Ad-Dîvânü Lugât’it - Turk*, Atalay bask. (Ankara 1941-43 I, 361.

sworn on the sword, may be interpreted either as “azure coloured iron”, or as “celestial iron”. The Halaç bifid-blade may have been a combination of several parallel beliefs, such as the ancient Eurasian and Turkish cult of the heavenly weapon, as evocation of an astral martial god and the Indo-Chinese image of the scissorlike lightning and thunderbolt. The bifid form given in Ottoman Turkish art to Zu'l-fakâr, the sword of the Caliph Ali (originally an Arab double-edged blade) is probably a development similar to that of the Halaç insigne.¹¹

Smirnova has again, as in former works, underlined that the dynasty reigning in Pencikent were of Halaç stock, through the identity of the *tamğa* on Halaç coins. (pl. III), with those of the princes and *katuns* (queen-regents) of Pencikent (pl. IV, numbers 735-90). As a consequence of Smirnova's premises, an important cultural and artistic centre, such as Pencikent became available for the pursuit of researches on Turkish subjects.¹² Some Pencikent coins display the runiform letter, read as *ok* (arrow), a weapon of celestial origin and a symbol of the martial planet for the Turks. (pl. IV, 735, 738, 747, 752, 755).

III. The coins marked with the title Kağan.

The inscription “βγγ γ'γ'n”, on one coin (pl. V, no. 1365) correspond in Smirnova's opinion, to the title “Tenğri Kağan” (Heavenly Emperor) given to foremost Turkish monarchs. Another coin, with the inscription Kağan only, found in the province of Fargana, and showing in one case the additional name of the clan Alka/Alğa, displays also a bow-shaped *tamğa* (pl. V, numbers 1435, 1439). In a paper presented to the symposium on Turkish statecraft of the Ankara University, I had connected this *tamğa* with the western branch of the Kök-Türk dynasty. I later came across further evidence and propose to comment the subject in detail, at the XXXIInd International Congress of Asian and North African studies, in Hamburg (August 1986). Some of my arguments may be here summarized. The same *tamğa*, in single or double versions, appear on the mintage

¹¹ Arap şekli (Arap form): F.W. Schwarzlose, *Die Waffen der alten Araber* (Leipzig 1886), 152. Osmanlı şekli (In Ottoman art): Esin, “L'Arme à décor zoomorphe. . .”.

¹² Esin, “Butân-i Halaç”. *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, XVII (İstanbul 1972).

of the western branches of the Kök-Türk dynasty, those of the lineage of Kara Çurin Türk (perhaps Tardu Kağan¹³), reigning in Buḥârâ (pl. V, no. 1377); those of the Yabġu — titled rulers of Toḥâristân and those of the Hâkânids,¹⁴ whose link to the western branch of the Kök-Türk dynasty will be discussed below. A mural of the Kök-Türk period, showing a monarch who hoists the wolf-headed standard the totemic insigne and privilege of the Kök-Türk dynasty, depicts a variant of the *tamġa*, on the figure's shield.¹⁵

Smirnova has mentioned, but not reproduced a coin on which she tentatively reads the inscription "Bilge Kağan" (no. 1659). The *tamġa* on this coin resembles the chinese ideogram denoting the mastery of the four cardinal directions, in a crucial pictogram.¹⁶ The eastern connection of this symbolism and the expression of the same concept and related terminology (*tört bulung*) on the stale of the eastern Kök-Türk monarch Bilge Kağan (died 734) suggests a possible link.

Smirnova notes some particulars of the Buḥârâ coins, attributed to the lineage of Kara Çurin Türk (possibly Tardu Kağan of the western branch of the Kök-Türk dynasty). These show a duplicative variety (pl. V, numbers 1377, 1392) of the bow-like *tamġa* on a coin marked with the Kağan title (pl. V, no. 1435, 1439). Other Buḥârâ coins bear the Turkish inscription *bay* (wealthy, wealth) in Soghdian letters, together with a camel figure (pl. V, figs. f, g, h). The *Bugra* (wild camel stallion) title could only be ascertained, in Turkish history, in the Hâkânid dynasty, although its older origin was surmised. Prof. Czeglédy¹⁷ has however show that the title was also borne by some Yabġus of Toḥâristân, a branch of the Kök-Türk dynasty, pointing also thereby to the confirmation of a theory, linking the Hâkânids to the western branch of the Kök-Türk dynasty. The ascription of the camel heraldry to the western branch of the Kök-

¹³ Kaynaklar (Sources): Esin, *İslâmiyetten önceki...*, id., *A History...*, indeks (index), "Kara Çurin Türk".

¹⁴ E. Esin, "Kün-ay", *VII. Türk Târth Kongresi bildirileri* (Ankara 1972), levha VIIB/2, VIIIA/3/a, b, c, d.

¹⁵ E. Esin, "Kotuz", *Erdem*, I/1 (Ankara I 1986), levha VIII/c.

¹⁶ E. Chavannes, *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-Ma-Is'ien* (Paris 1967), III, 309.

¹⁷ K. Czeglédy, "Zur Geschichte der Hephtaliten", J. Harmatta, *From Hecataeus to al-Huwârizmî* (Budapest 1984), not (note) 8.

Türk dynasty may lead to new interpretations of the art works which depict this emblem.

Smirnova remarks further that even after the conversion to Islam, some Buĥârâ coins, with Arabic inscriptions, presented *tamġas* which look like runiform letters (pl. IV, numbers 1671, 1674).

IV. The Türgiř and Toĥsı coins

The Türgiř mintage, some with Kaġan inscription (“βγγ Τωρ-kyř γ’γ’n”) (pl. IV. no. 1597) have already been extensively studied. In this last book Smirnova introduces also the coins of a Toĥsı prince, who, as marked on the coins, was a Türgiř vassal. The Toĥsı attribution is justified with inscriptions, such as “τγωσ’n’k γωβω” (pl. IV, numbers 1625, 1652). The *tamġas* on both categories of coins are likened, by Smirnova, to Chinese characters, although other explanations could occur. The Türgiř *tamġa* could be an ideogram of brilliancy, traced as far back as Chou period Chica, called *Kün-ay* in Turkish, which represented an auspicious solar-lunar conjunction and royal rank.¹⁸ The *trisula* shape, on the Toĥsı coins is often mentioned as “the flaming trisula” (yalın-teg drzl) in Uygur texts and depicted in art.¹⁹

V. The mintage of the Tuduns of Tařkent

The coins of the dynasty with Tudun²⁰ rank, reigning in Tařkent (pl. VI) are recognizable through the inscription “tδωn” on no. 1561, as well as with a leonine emblem and a *tamġa* which recalls both the Türgiř and the Toĥsı seals (pl. IV, no. 1597, 1625, 1652). The lion, not native to Inner-Asia and introduced with Buddhist influences, appears to have been propagated among Turkish princes, as a heroic emblem and substitute for the older *tonga* (tiger).²¹ Some of the leonine coins have been attributed to the Türgiř clans.

Smirnova’s book is rich in other themes which could throw light to the history of Turkish culture, but each of these would necessitate a special monograph.

¹⁸ Kaynaklar (Sources): Esin, “Kün-ay”.

¹⁹ Ibid., 335.

²⁰ Kaynaklar (Sources): Esin, *İslâmiyetten önceki . . .*; id., *A History . . .*, indeks (index), “Tařkent”.

²¹ Kaynaklar (Sources): Esin, *İslâmiyetten önceki . . .*; id. *A History . . .*, indeks (index), “Arslan”.

