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Some Thoughts on Ötükän

Ötüken Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler

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The Ötükän Mountain was Mecca of the Turks from 552 to 840. The essay has collected 22 Turkic and 84 Chinese records about the Ötükän Mountain, and mainly examined the geographical location the Ötükän. The Turkic records clearly indicated the Ötükän was the whole Khangai Mountains. The Chinese official records agreed with the Khangai and some wanted to be more specific to the Khotont Mountain. Many Chinese records left for further examination. In addition to many historical events, the Chinese records provided some important description about the religious life of the Ötükän, and the Dujin, appeared in a couple of early records, in fact was the older form of the Ötükän.

Key Words: Ötükän, yış, the Turkic official records.



Introduction

Ötükän was Mecca of the Turks, revered Holly Ötükän where their Celestial God and the Earth God lived. They believed there was positively no better place to live than in the Ötükän. The Ötükän was the place to rule the nation. When Tunyuquq set up his camp in the Ötükän, the people from the south, the people from the west, north and east came and subjected. There is a sacred cave in this mountain; said Qaghan every year will bring his nobles to worship their ancestral cavern. Every year in May the Turks gather in this mountain to celebrate their biggest religious festival. Also, it is their Fengshui that when they set the tents doors will open to the east, also the Balbals are all facing to the east. These kinds of believes were continued down from old Hun period, maybe even before. Today, the Otogontenger and Suvraga Khairkhan are Mongol's sacred mountains in the Khangai. State ceremonies are held there.

Our study of the Ötükän records here is mainly to identify its geographic location. Three centuries of the Turkic history only covers ten percent of the Khangai's known civilization. And our discussion below only comprises the Turkic description about the Ötükän's geographic location. The Ötükän is the Khangai Mountain and disagreements had been not so great among the scholars about this. However some scholars are not yet fully convinced. The Khangai Mountain played very important role in the world history but the archaeological, historical and geographical studies about this area are not enough to uncover the whole treasure under the grassland. The Ötükän was not a particular peak. It covers the whole Khangai ranges. The name was so general that it left us many blurry parts about exact contextual location, etymology an others need to be cleared. We thought the Ötükän was a Turkic patent, it was born and gone with the Turks. But the Chinese records indicated its proto-Turkic or even older roots. The Kirgiz conquest of the Ordu Baliq in 840 had finally closed the Ötükän's geopolitical Turkic drama. Perhaps the storm and plague prevented them to remain in the Ötükän to continue its Turkic tradition.

Khangai is a Mongolian name derived from Khan "the King". Khangai Mountain is located in central Mongolia. Its east, south and western borders are clearly separated with plains. Its north is connected to the Sayan Mountains and



not easy to draw borderlines. The Khangai Mountain is basically even meadows and smooth slopes. Winter is warm and summer is green. Its abundant streams, springs and grasses offer an ideal condition for nomadic life. Domestication of horse in this region can be date back to the 9th century B. C. Besides its milk (Kumis) and meat, the horse turned out to be the best animal for transportation, hunting and fighting, called “wing of man”. Use of horse pushed the development of steppe society. It made the Khangai the cradle of Altaic nomadic civilization.

Orkhon Valley

The plains at the foot of the eastern Khangai host the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape - OVCL. It is the best part of the mountain with fresh water and grasses. For Altaic nation, the land of OVCL was always the house of gods, promise of victory and symbol of dominance. In the history, all Altaic nomadic powers fought to set their capitals there, such as the Hun (209 BC – 93 AD) capital Luut Khot, the Xianbei (93 AD -234 AD) capital Ordo, the Rouran (330-555) capital Mumo, the Turk (522 - 744) capital Ötükän, the Uyghur (744-840) capital Ordu-Baliq, and the Mongol (1206 - 1368) capital Kharkhorin are all in OVCL. Repeatedly they made OVCL Rome of the world; sometimes one would attack another turning the grassland a ground of brutal killing field leaving behind thousands of skulls for wolves and eagles. Today the OVCL is retired; ancient walls sunk to green mounds; some grassland now has corroded from salinization. Now everywhere looks so quiet as if nothing happen in the past. Only the ancient Deer Stones and Turkic Balbals are standing still and guarding this heroic steppe. Before our eyes, it is flaunting its all-Mongolian dress: green grass, sparkling water and smoking tents. Occasionally some tourists will come and wake up the valley, but they leave faster than they came, picking up some broken jars for souvenirs. In May 2006 the Mongolian government issued the resolution No. 123 and approved to register the OVCL as a World Heritage Property. In this 121,967 ha of grassland, there are 5 primary sites have been designated as Special Protected Area and 20 historical and archaeological sites as Protected Monuments. The

Gökhtürk Museum of Khushuu Tsaidam later built by the Orkhon River is displaying all kinds of important relics including the artifacts from the last excavation of the tombs of Bilge Qaghan.



Picture I

The Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape – OVCL

Materials and Researches

Historical records about the Ötükän Mountain were written in different languages and times. They belong to the following four groups:

1. The Orkhon Turkic records. They are basically the first hand witness reports from the mouth of native Turks and written during the Ötükän's "active" period up to 840 the Kirgiz conquest.

2. Turkic Legends. Along with the great Turkic migration, the Ötükän name had gone with them. But the memory remained for another five hundred years among the Turkic people as we can see from the Turfan texts (Le Coq 1911 S. 12, 1922 S. 16 - 17), DLT (Dankoff, R & Kelly, J. 1982), QB (Dankoff 1983), Rashid al-Din (Blair 1995), Juvayni (Boyle 1958) and others. In comparison to the Orkhon Turkic records, they are second hand materials.

3. The Chinese records are third person reports mostly from their annals. We cannot divide the Chinese records as original and legendary, all are the stories written in thousand miles away.

4. Mongolian sources. Unlike legendary stories told by Turkic descendants, the Mongols physically moved into the Khangai. In spite of four-century gap in between, many Old Turkic local names survived in Mongolian contemporary place names. Off course, taking some Mongolian shape and folk etymology is inevitable. Mongolian sources are from four directions: local Mongolian names, Chinese Mongol records, Mongolian books and Chagatai books. Here is an example, in the Tang Chinese records, the Ötükän had another name called 天山 *Tianshan*, its Turkic origin supposed to be *täjri tay**, but it was only attested in another Chinese-Mongol record said 騰格哩達哈 *täjri tay*.

Discussion about the Location of Ötükän

Author	Location
齐召南 1761	East range of the Khangai
俞浩 1847 : 7, 9	Today's Altai. Today's Khangai
Thomsen 1896	Tamir and Orkhon riverhead area of Khangai
Melioranskiy 1899: 84	Kharkhorin Mountain in Yuan period
Hirth 1899	Tamir and Orkhon riverhead area of Khangai
Chavannes 1903	Kharkhorin Mountain in Yuan period
Shiratori 1907	Kharkhorin Mountain in Yuan period
Marquart 1914: 63-64	Also entire Khangai
Ding 1915	Dulan Khaala mountain in between Tula and Orkhon
Wang 1923: 997.	Khangai Mountains
Pelliot 1929: 212, 217.	The whole of Khangai
Cen 1939	A peak in the Khangai
Gabain 1950: 34 - 36.	In between southwest, southeast Khangai and Tannu-Ola
Ögel 1957: 119.	Khangai Mountains
Potapov 1957.	a vast mountain-taiga region in Khangai and partly in the Sayan highland
Giraud 1960: 207.	co-ordinates to 101 47
Jisl 1963: 388	A part of Khangai alongside the Orkhon river
Schubert, 1964: 215.	in the southeastern part of the present Zavkhansky aimak
Feng & Lu 1982: 72.	Tamir and Orkhon riverhead area of Khangai

Tan 1982: 5	Khangai ranges
Klyashtorny 1982	The whole of Khangai
Tekin 1983: 834.	Northwest Khangai, in between Orkhon and Tes rivers
Lin 1988 : 72.	In between Orkhon and Selenga, or Orkhon valley
Xue 1992: 132.	Bayan Ula mountain, Kherlen riverhead
Sümer 1994: 3, note 9.	The eastern part of the Khangai, Orkhon and Tamir riverheads, little south of the Ordu Baliq
Tekin 1994: 64.	Eastern slopes of the Khangai mountains
Tevanenko 1994: 37.	Today's Otgon Tenger
Bosworth 1995.	Orkhon and Tamir riverheads
Czeglédy 1995: 62, note 5.	The eastern foothills of the Khangai mountains near the Orkhon river. Also used to denote the whole of the Khangai mountains
Rybatzki 1997: 51, 97 and note 255.	The Khangai or a part of it
Konovalov, 1999, p. 179	Northern Xiongnu or Yinshan
Gömeç 2000: 428.	Entire Selenga river outreaches extended to the Altai mountains
Golden 2002: 107, note 879.	Could be the mountains and elevated area by the Orkhon
Aminev 2006	Similar place names "Utegen", "Etukan" in Bashkortostan
Aydin 2007	Today's Mt. Otgon Tenger area in Zavkhan aimak.
Bao 2010: 57, 58.	The highest peak of Khangai. The west of the Khangai range
Drobyshev 2012.	Khangai mountains.

The Turkic era in the Mongolian steppe lasted for 3 centuries and left us some records about the Ötükän in the Turkic inscriptions. Almost all of these inscriptions were carved on the granite stones, the numbers are limited. Among them we have only five of them consist more than 30 lines. Even though, the name of Ötükän had been seen from beginning to the end for more than 20 times. It was called: *ötükän* 'Ötükän', *ötükän yış* 'Ötükän slope', *ötükän yer* 'Ötükän Land'

and *ıduq ötükän* ‘Sacred Ötükän’, *ötükän quzi* ‘north of the Ötükän’, *ötükän* (...) *kädin uči* ‘western edge of the Ötükän’, *ötükän ortusi* ‘middle of the Ötükän’, Most representative calling is *ötükän yiš*. The name *ötükän yiš* appeared in different parts of the Khangai Mountain. The *ötükän yiš* in the Toñuquq inscription is in a south Khangai (Ovorkhangai) Ongi riverhead; Kül Tegin’s *ötükän yiš* is in the Orkhon Valley in the east. Bayančor’s *ötükän* is in the northwest corner of the Khangai, Tes riverhead. For the Turks every green slope around the Khangai is *ötükän yiš*.

Moreover, the *yiš* is not the Khangai specific. We saw *altun yiš*, *čoyay yiš*, *kögmän yiš* in the Turkic inscriptions. Kashgari said the *yiš* is a ‘downward slope’ (Dankoff-Kelly), also, RADLOFF ‘Schwarzwald, Bergwald, Waldgebrige’, THOMSEN ‘montagne boisée’, GABAIN ‘Gebirgsweide’, ORKUN and SERTKAYA ‘orman’, and CLAUSON said 2mountain forest, the upper part of a mountain covered with forest, but also containing treeless grass valleys’ and KLYASHTORNY ‘slope’. I think we better go back to the Kashgari. The *yiš*, antonym (Gabain) to *yazi* ‘plane’, is really a green sloppy grassland side of a mountain where the Turks would live and herd their animals. In a contrast, *tay* ‘mountain’ is a dry, high, uninhabitable peak that nothing useful besides hunting. It is rare to see *ötükän* was called a *tay* ‘mountain’ although the conception of ‘mountain’ had been always attached. In any of these Turkic texts, the *ötükän* is indicating the Khangai Mountain as a whole, but not necessarily calling it ‘mountain’.

In all Turkic inscriptions the standard answer of the *ötükän* is the Khangai Mountain, no matter it is in full, abbreviated or respected name. The Turks were at least should not be obscure about the mountains in their homeland like *ötükän* (Khangai), *altay* (Alati), *kögmän* (Sayan), *čoyay* (Yinshan).

Location of the Ötükän in the Orkhon Turkic Records

A. An Ötükän Yiš is at the Ongi Riverhead

Toñuquq 15: “I led (my people) following the *kök öj* up to the Ötükän slope”. The *kök öj* is the Ongi River (Czegledy 1962). It is an endorheic river starts from a southern side of the Khangai Mountain and dies in the Gobi desert in the south. In 682 Toñuquq lead a rebellion. First they lived in Qara Qum (黑沙圖? 41.50 108.10) on the north of the Čoyay Mountain (陰山). Then they crossed the



Gobi, followed the Ongi River, and finally reached the *ötükän yış* ‘the Khangai’. The Ongi River originates in 46.52 102.11 area in a foot of Khangai, or Ovorkhangai (Southern Khangai).

B. An Ötükän Yış is in the OVCL

In the Kül Tegin S4, S8, E23 and Bilge Qayan N2, N3, N6, they call *ötükän yış*, ‘Ötükän slope’, *ötükän yer* ‘Ötükän land’, and *ıduq ötükän* ‘Holly Ötükän’. Their tombstones were found on the bank of old Orkhon River, one kilometer apart from each other. The Khangai is on the west of the Orkhon river about 25 km. from their resting place. For a *yış* ‘slope’, 25 km. is too big and we cannot tell where was their *ötükän yış*. At least in Xintangshu 43 said “reach the Ordu Baliq. Its east is a plain, west leans to the Ötükän” which is pointing the Khotont Mountain 102.60, on its west side in the OVCL.

C. Northwestern Ötükän is in the East of the Tes Riverhead

Among the Uighur inscriptions, the following three passages are telling a same story. Bayan Čor (El-etmiş Bilgä Qayan 747-759) became Qayan and had set up his camp twice in the Tes river valley. Tes riverhead is in 49.21 97.97 area. Shine Usu E7 “I spent the winter in the north of the Ötükän” must be a valley in a north of 49.21. Based on the following stories we can come up to the point that the Tes river valley 49.21 97.97 is the Ötükän’s northwest corner.

Terkhin 1: “I had (my) throne set up at the western border of the Ötükän, on the Tes riverhead.” Here said *kädin uçı* ‘western point’ means ‘western border’ located at the east or further east of the Tes riverhead.

Terkhin 5: “My summer residence is on the western border of the northern Ötükän, to the east of the Tes riverhead”. Furthermore here he added a ‘northern’. This ‘north’ could go beyond 49.21.

Shine Usu E8: “That year I ordered the setting up of the Qasar Qordan throne [on the western border of the Ötükän] in the riverhead of Tes.”

In sum, the northwestern Ötükän should be the Tes Valley riverhead 49.21 97.97 area where the Tes inscription was also erected.



Picture II

The Tes River

D. Middle of Ötükän is the Tariat Valley

The Terkhin inscription, also called Tariat inscription, was discovered in the Tariat Valley. According to KLYASHTORNY's report, It was located in 12 km. west from the Terkhin River mouth from Lake Terkhin Tsagan nur, 1 km. north side of the river and 2 km. south from the mountain slope, coordinates to 48.09 99.45 area. Following three passages are also telling another same story that in the year of dragon in 572, El-etmiş Bilgä Qayan spent his summer in the middle of the Ötükän-Tariat Valley.



Picture III

T The Tariat Valley

Terkhin W2-3: "In the year of the dragon I spent the summer in the middle of Ötükän, to the wet of Süñüz (As Öñüz) Başqan holy summit. Here I had my

throne set up; here I had walls erected; here I had my thousand years - ten thousand days scripts and signs (3) carved on a flat stone, and I had it mounted on the huge stone.” Here the *tolqu taš* “huge stone” means the turtle-like dragon base stone. A proper tombstone must be mounted on a *Bixi* 夔夔, one of dragon’s nine sons, number six. He was out of control and became very wild. The dragon then exiled him to the earth to carry heavy tombstones.

Shine Usu E9: “In the [year of the dragon] I spent the summer in the middle of [Ötükän], to the west of [S]ünjüz (As Önjüz) Baš[qa]n holy summit, at the junction of Yabaš and Tuquš. There I had my throne set up and had the walls erected.”

Terkhin S6: “I had my throne set up in the middle of Ötükän, to the west of Sünjüz (As Önjüz) Bašqa]n holy summit”.



Picture IV

The Terkhin Inscription in the Archaeology Institute

The Terkhin and Shine Usu are sister inscriptions. In addition, some stories are repeated. The Shine Usu inscription was created a few years later (Kamalov 2003) and located at about 200 km east. When they describe the construction of the adobe, wall and inscription, the Terkhin indicated *bunta* ‘here’ and the Shine Usu indicated *anta* ‘there’. The Terkhin valley is the *ötükän ortusi* “middle of Ötükän” where the inscription is located *bunta* ‘here’. It coordinates to 48.11 99.60 area, just the centre of the Khangai.

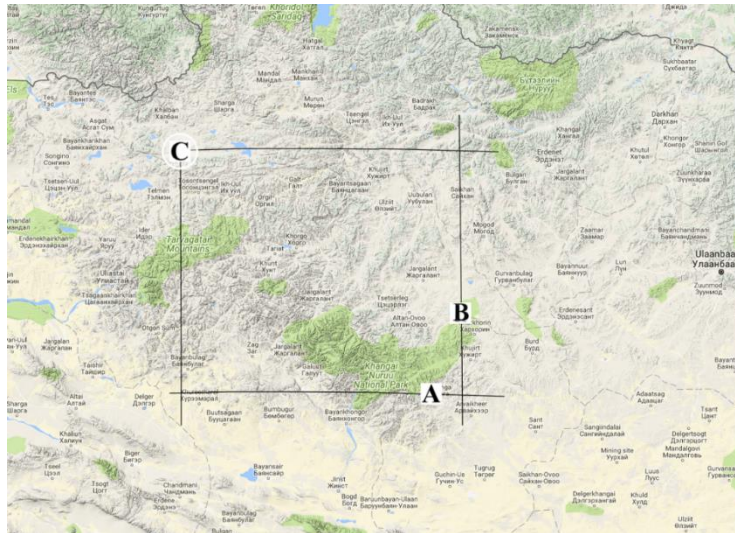
In spite of very limited resources, the inscriptions generously provided us clear geographical descriptions. They are sufficient enough for us to outline an Ötükän regional map. Based on above A, B, C three locations, we can determine:

(C) Latitude 97.97 is the western border of the Ötükän.

(A) longitude 46.52 is the southern border of the Ötükän.

(B) Latitude 102.60 is the eastern border of the Ötükän in between OVCL and Khotont.

(C) Longitude 49.21 is a northern border of the Ötükän. From (C) northwest 49.21 97.97 corner we take the northern line.



Picture V

Map of Ötükän

As we can see, the Turkic Ötükän is the whole Khangai Mountain. The middle of Ötükän is the Tariat Valley which is located in the centre of the Khangai. Based on this map and above descriptions we can come up with following two conclusions:

1. The Ötükän is the Khangai Mountain including the Arkhangai (Northern Khangai) and Ovorkhangai (Southern Khangai).

2. The *ötükän* *yış* is a common noun. It means ‘a pastoral slope of the Ötükän Mountain’.

Turkic Sources

Toñuquq (716) 15: *kök önjüg yuyuru ötükän yişyarı uduztum* “I led (my people) reached the Ötükän slope by marching along the Ongi River”.

Toñuquq 17: *tü[rk qayanıy] türk bodunuy ötükän yerkä bän özüm bilgä Toñuquq ötükän yerig qonmıř teyin äřidip beryäki bodun, qurıyaqı, yıryaqı, öñräki bodun kälti* “I, Bilgä Toñuquq, myself brought the Turk Qayan and Turk people to the Ötükän. Having heard about we had settled down in the Ötükän land, the people from the south, from west, from north and from east have come”.

Kül Tegin (732) S3: *türk qayan ötükän yiř olursar eltä buñ yoq* “If Turk Qayan resides in the Ötükän slope, there will be no distress in the realm”.

Kül Tegin S4: *ötükän yiřda yeg idi yoq ärmiř el tutsıq yer ötükän yiř ärmiř* “There was positively no better (place to live) than the Ötükän slope. The Ötükän slope was the place to rule the realm”.

Kül Tegin S8: *ötükän yer olurup arqıř tirkıř ısar näñ buñ yoq ötükän yiř olursar bängü el tuta olurtaçı sän* “Whoever resides in the Ötükän land and send off caravans, there will never be a trouble. If you reside in the Ötükän slope, you will rule the realm forever”.

Kül Tegin E23: *ıduq ötükän y[iř bodun bardıñ] (...)* “Sacred Ötükän slope [people, you left].”

Bilge Qayan N2: *türk [qaya]n ötükän [yiř] olursar [el]tä buñ yoq* “If a Turk Qayan resides in the Ötükän slope, there will be no distress in the realm”.

Bilge Qayan N3: *[ötü]kän [yiř]da yeg [idi yoq är]miř el [tutsıq yer ö]tük[än] yiř ärmiř* “There was positively [no] better (place to live) than the Ötükän [slope]. The Ötükän slope was the place to [rule] the realm”.

Bilge Qayan N6: *ötükän yer olurup [arqıř] tirkıř ısar neñ bu[ñ yo]q [ötükän yiř] olursar bängü [el tuta olurtaçı] sän* “Whoever resides in the Ötükän land and send off caravans, there will never be a trouble. If you reside in the Ötükän slope, you will [rule the realm] forever”.

Bilge Qayan E19-20: *ıduq ö[tükän] yiř bodun bardıñ* “Sacred [Ötükän] slope people, you left”.

Terkhin E3: *ötükä eli tägiräs eli ekin ara orqun ügüzdä (...)* “At the Orkhon river in between the Ötükän realm and the adjacent realms (...)”

Terkhin W1: *täñridä bolmiš el etmiš bilgä qayan el bilgä qatun qayan atay qatun atay atanip ötükan kedin učinta tüz bašinta örgin (...)* “I, the heavenly born El-etmiş Bilge Qayan (together with) El-bilge Qatun, having taken the title of Qayan and Qatun, (...) I had (my) throne set up at the western border of the Ötükän, on the Tes river-head”.

Terkhin W2-3: *ulu yilqa ötükan ortusinta süñüz (as öñüz?) bašqan iduq baš kedin-intä yayladim örgin bunta yaratdim čit bunta toqitdim biñ yilliq tümä künlük bitigimin bälgümin bunta (3) yası tašqa yaratdim tolqu tašqa toqitdim* “In the year of the dragon (572) I spent the summer in the Middle Ötükän, to the west of Süñüz (As Öñüz?) Bašqan holy summit. Here I had my throne set up and here I had walls erected. Here I had my thousand years - ten thousand days scripts and signs (3) carved on a flat stone, and I had it mounted on the huge stone”.

Terkhin W5: *yaylayim ötükan quzi kadin uči tüz baši öñdüni qanuy küniy (...)* *čalyim ötükan yeri onyi atla[ndi]* “My summer residence is on the western edges of the northern Ötükän, to the east of the Tes river-head where I settle-move. Upon my wish Onyi from Ötükän land went on campaign”.

Terkhin S6: *ötükän ortusinta süñüz bašqan iduq baš kedinin örgin bunta eti(t)dim* “I had my throne set up in the middle of the Ötükän, to the west of Süñüz Bašqan holy summit”.

Shine Usu N2: *ö[tükän eli tegires] eli ekin ara olurmiš subı sälänjä ärmiš* “They settled in between Ö[tükän realm and adjacent] realms. Their river was Selenga”.

Shine Usu E7: *ötükän yirin qışladim* “I spent the winter in the north of Ötükän”.

Shine Usu E8: *ol yıl [ötükän kedin učinta tä]z bašinta qasar qodran örgin anta etitdim* “That year I ordered the setting up of the Qasar Qordan throne [on the western edge of the Ötükän] in the river-head of Tes”.

Shine Usu E9: *[olo yıl]qa ö[tükän ortus]inta [s]üñüz baš[qan]ta iduq baš kedin[tä] yabaš toquš bältirintä anta yayladim örgin anta yaratitdim čit anta toqitdim* “In the

[year of the dragon] I spent the summer in the middle of [Ötükän], to the wet of [S]ünjüz Baš[qa]n holy summit, at the junction of Yabaš and Tuquš. There I had my throne set up and had the walls erected.”

Shine Usu E11: *ötü[kän ?] (...) li[m] temiš* “Let us (...) in the Ötükän (...)”.

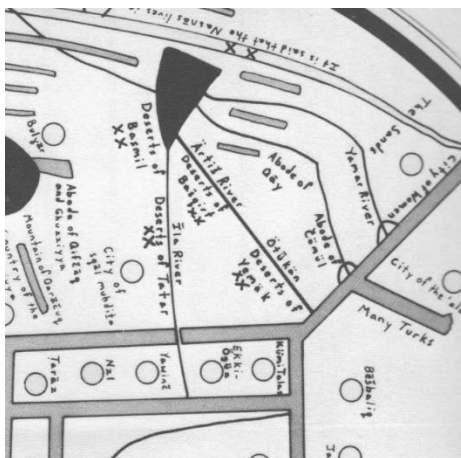
Shine Usu S4: *üč iduq tay ötükän (...) [ö]tükäntä bän* “Three sacred mountains Ötükän (...) In the Ötükän, I (...)”.

HT I, 3: *ötükän öz yerim* “Ötükän is my own land”.

HT VII, 2: *täñridä qul(t?) bulmiš ötükän elintä* “in god blessed Ötükän realm” (Sertkaya-Harcavbay 2001: 319, 327).

Let us take one, DLT as an example from later Turkic legendary stories. Kashgari’s DLT was completed in 1077 in Baghdad (Dankoff & Kelly 234. III, 4).

DLT 8 N: “Name of a place in the deserts of Tatar near Uighur.”



DLT (1077) Map and B. I, 138

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