Some Thoughts on Ötükân

Ötükên Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler

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The Ötükân Mountain was Mecca of the Turks from 552 to 840. The essay has collected 22 Turkic and 84 Chinese records about the Ötükân Mountain, and mainly examined the geographical location the Ötükân. The Turkic records clearly indicated the Ötükân 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 Ötükân, and the Dujin, appeared in a couple of early records, in fact was the older form of the Ötükân.

Key Words: Ötükân, yıš, 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 Khan-gai 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 dated 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 Ordubalıq, 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 1](image)

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. Of 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 täŋri tay*, but it was only attested in another Chinese-Mongol record said 腾格哩达哈 täŋri tay.

**Discussion about the Location of Ötükän**

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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 yïš ‘Ötükän slope’, ötükän yer ‘Ötükän Land’
and īduq ötükän ‘Sacred Ötükän’, ötükän quzī ‘north of the Ötükän’, ötükän (…) kādīn učī ‘western edge of the Ötükän’, ötükän ortusī ‘middle of the Ötükän’, Most representative calling is ötükän yīš. The name ötükän yīš appeared in different parts of the Khangai Mountain. The ötükän yīš in the Toňuquq inscription is in a south Khangai (Ovorkhangai) Ongi riverhead; Kül Tegin’s ötükän yīš is in the Orkhon Valley in the east. Bayančor’s ötükän is in the northwest corner of the Khan- gai, Tes riverhead. For the Turks every green slope around the Khangai is ötükän yīš.

Moreover, the yīš is not the Khangai specific. We saw altun yīš, čoγay yīš, kögmän yīš in the Turkic inscriptions. Kashgari said the yīš is a ‘downward slope’ (Dankoff-Kelly), also, RADLOFF ‘Schwarzwald, Bergwald, Waldgebrige’, THOM- SEN ‘montagne boisée’, GABAIN ‘Gebrigsweide’, 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 yīš, antonym (Gabain) to yazī’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), čoγay (Yinshan).

**Location of the Ötükän in the Orkhon Turkic Records**

**A. An Ötükän Yīş is at the Ongi Riverhead**

Toňuquq 15: “I led (my people) following the kök öŋ up to the Ötükän slope”. The kök öŋ 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 Toňuquq lead a rebellion. First they lived in Qara Qum (黑沙圖? 41.50 108.10) on the north of the Čoγay Mountain (陰山). Then they crossed the
Gobi, followed the Ongi River, and finally reached the ötükän yïš ‘the Khangai’. The Ongi River originates in 46.52 102.11 area in a foot of Khangai, or Ovorkhangai (Southern Khangai).

**B. An Ötükän Yïš Is in the OVCL**

In the Kül Tegin S4, S8, E23 and Bilge Qaγan N2, N3, N6, they call ötükän yïš, ‘Ötükän slope’, ötükän yer ‘Ötükän land’, and iduq 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 yïš ‘slope’, 25 km. is too big and we cannot tell where was their ötükän yïš. 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-etmiš Bilgä Qaγan 747-759) became Qaγan 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 učï ‘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.
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-etmiš Bilgä Qayan spent his summer in the middle of the Ötükän-Tariat Valley.

Terkhin W2-3: “In the year of the dragon I spent the summer in the middle of Ötükän, to the wet of Süňüz (As Öňüz) 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 贔屭, 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 wet of [S]ününüz (As Öŋüz) Baş[qan] holy summit, at the junction of Yabaş and Tuquş. 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 Süňüz (As Öŋüz) Başqan holy summit”.

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 ortuş “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.

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 yiš is a common noun. It means ‘a pastoral slope of the Ötükän Mountain’.
Turkic Sources

Toñuquq (716) 15: kök öjüg yuyurū ötükän yişyaru uduztum “I led (my people) reached the Ötükän slope by marching along the Ongi River”.

Toñuquq 17: türk qaγanīy Türk bodunyö ötükän yerkä bän özüm bilgä Toñuquq ötükän yerig qonmīš teyīn ašidip beryākī bodun, qurīaqī, yīrīaqī, qıryoqī bııqın káltı “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 qaγan ötükän yiş olursar eltā buŋ yoq “If Turk Qayan resides in the Ötükän slope, there will be no distress in the realm”.

Kül Tegin S4: ötükän yişda yeg idi yoq ärmis el tutsiq yer ötükän yiş ärmis “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 arqis tirkiş īsar nāŋ buŋ yoq ötükän yiş olursar bāngū el tuta olurtačı sān “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: iduq ötükän y[iş bodun bardıŋ] (...) “Sacred Ötükän slope [people, you left].”

Bilge Qayan N2: türk [qaγa]n ötükän [yiş]ş olursar [el]tā buŋ yoq “If a Turk Qayan resides in the Ötükän slope, there will be no distress in the realm”.

Bilge Qayan N3: [ötükän] [yiş]da yeg [idi yoq är]miş el [tutsiq yer ö]tük[än] yiş ärmis “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 [arqis] tirkiş īsar neŋ bu[ŋ yo]l [ötükän yiş] olursar bāngū [el tuta olurtač]ı sān “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”.

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: täjrídä bolmiš el etmiš bilgä qayan el bilgä qatun qayan atay qatun atay atanıp ötükän kedin uĉinta tätz başinta orgän (…) “I, the heavenly born El-etmish 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 yîlqa ötükän ortusinta süŋüz (as öŋüz?) başqan ĵduq baš kedin-intä yayladîm orgän bunta yaradîm čit bunta toqîtdîm bış yîllîq tümâ künlik bitigîmin bîlgûm in bunta (3) yasî taşqa yaradîm toluq taşqa toqîtdîm “In the year of the dragon (572) I spent the summer in the Middle Ötükän, to the wet of Süŋüz (As Öŋüz?) Bașqan 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: yaylayîm ötükän quzî kädin učî täz bašî öŋdüni qanuy kûnûy (…) čalγîm ötükän yeri onγî atla[nđî] “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 Onγî from Ötükän land went on campaign”.

Terkhin S6: ötükän ortusînta süŋüz başqan bûq baš kedinin orgän bunta eti(t)dim “I had my throne set up in the middle of the Ötükän, to the west of Süŋüz Başqan holy summit”.

Shine Usu N2: ötükän eli tegires eli ekin ara orlûmîs subî sâlângä ârmiš “They settled in between Ötükän realm and adjacent realms. Their river was Selenga”.

Shine Usu E7: ötükän yîrin qişladîm “I spent the winter in the north of Ötükän”.

Shine Usu E8: ol yîl [ötükän kedin uçinta tâ]z başinta qasar qodran orgän anta etîtdîm “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: ol yîlqa ötükän ortusînta [s]ûŋüz baş[qan]ta ĵduq baš kedin[tâ] yabaş toqûş bältîntä anta yayladîm orgän anta yaratiştîdim čit anta toqîtdîm “In the
[year of the dragon] I spent the summer in the middle of [Ötükän], to the wet of [S]üŋüz Baš[qan] 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 (?)] (...) lë[m] temiš “Let us (...) in the Ötükän (...).”

Shine Usu S4: üč içduq 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: tänridä qul(t?) bulmïš 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](image)

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