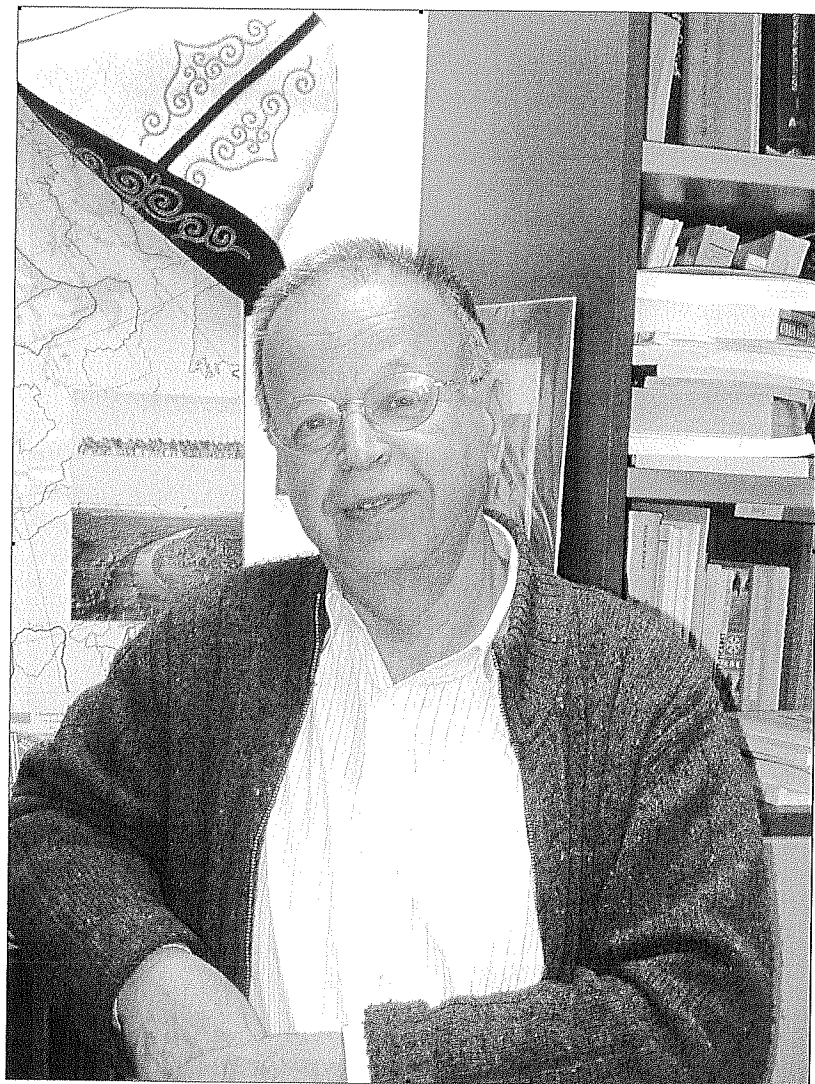


Yayımlayan: Mehmet Ölmez

Trans-Turkic Studies
Festschrift in Honour of Marcel Erdal

İstanbul 2010

X 128330



Prof. Dr. Marcel Erdal

Trans-Turkic Studies

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edited by
**Matthias Kappler,
Mark Kirchner and Peter Zieme**

with the editorial assistance of
Raihan Muhamedowa

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Türk Dilleri Araştırmaları Dizisi: 49
Yayımlayan: Mehmet Ölmez

SZTE Egyetemi Könyvtár



J000851781

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1. baskı

İstanbul, Temmuz 2010

ISBN 978-9944-761-35-2

Ürün Yayınları'nın katkısıyla
folkloredebiyat@superonline.com

TDAD İletişim adresi:

Mehmet Ölmez
Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi
Fen-Ed Fak. T.D.E. Bölümü
Davutpaşa Yerleşim Birimi
34210 Esenler-İSTANBUL

Tel. & faks: (90.212) 383 44 40

<http://www.mehmetolmez.org/>
molmez@yildiz.edu.tr
tda_dizisi@yahoo.com

Genel Dağıtım

Pandora Kitabevi
Perihan Sok. 68, Kat 2
Şişli-İSTANBUL

<http://www.pandora.com.tr>
Tel. (0212) 230 09 62
Faks: (0212) 219 42 92

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The Old Turkic *ıřq bitig* and Divination in Central Asia

Volker Rybatzki
(Helsinki)

The prediction of future events has always played an important part in the life of mankind. Among Turkic people we find several different methods, trying to give a glance into the future. The small Turkic tribes of the Altai, for example, know the following groups of soothsayers: *jaryučı* ‘Wahrsager aus dem Schulterblatt eines gebratenen Hammels’, *tölgöči* ‘Wahrsager mit Hilfe eines kleinen Bogens’, *qol-köröči* ‘Wahrsager aus den Handlinien’, *arbışçı* ‘Wahrsager, die flüsternd sprechen’, *jadaçı* ‘Wahrsager, die das Wetter beeinflussen’ (ALEKSEEV 1987: 278–279), among Tuvinians the most popular forms of divination are the *chuvaaŋak*-oracle, using 41 stones, and the *čarınnaar*-oracle, i.e. the shoulderblade-oracle (OELSCHLÄGEL 2005). Also in the life of the Old Turkic people fortune-telling has played a significant role, as ROUX pointed out in his article *Alttürkische Mythologie* in the *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* (1999: 232):

“Wahrsagen hat bei den Türken immer eine große Rolle gespielt. Es ist zwar Staatsangelegenheit, betrifft aber auch jeden einzelnen, den Fürsten wie den *bäg*, den Menschen aus dem Volk, wie die sozialen Gemeinschaften. Alle Mächte werden befragt, der Himmels-gott, die niedrigen Gottheiten, die Geister, die Pflanzen, die Tiere, alles, was möglicherweise eine Macht enthält. Sie ist gleichzeitig induktiv und intuitiv, erfordert manchmal eine psychische Anstrengung, manchmal komplizierte Riten und wichtige Geräte, sie ist aber auch darauf bedacht, jedes Zeichen zu nutzen, und alles, was geschieht ist ein solches Zeichen.”

Although we have no, or to be more optimistic, only scarce direct evidence for the use of fortune-telling among the Türks and Uigurs of the Steppe from the 6th to 9th century, the existing texts dealing with fortune-telling belonging to the later Uigur empire of the oasis in Gansu and Eastern Turkestan, we can be sure on the basis of later Mongolian practices that all kinds of divination were used among them.

BAWDEN, in an article published over 50 years ago (1958), divided different types of divination in use among the Mongols into two main groups, one being dependent from astrology, the other one being only little or not at all influenced by it. According to BAWDEN (1958: 321), the second group can be divided further into practices styled by him involuntary divination (unwillkürliche Divination), this means the examination of signs that originate from themselves, and intentional divination (absichtliche Divination). In this last group certain actions are taken, for example the throwing of dices, or coins, or scapularmancy to predetermine the future.

The first group, depending on astrology (BAWDEN 1958: 323–329, MOSTAERT 1969), is fairly common among Mongolian manuscripts found in European collections. This group is already attested among Old Uigur manuscripts published by RACHMATI (1936) as *Türkische Turfantexte* VII, in RADLOFF's *Uigurische Sprachdenkmäler* (1928, Nr. 32–33, 38–39), HALÉN (1991: 161–163, Nr. 1) and ZIEME (2005), as well as in Middle Mongolian manuscripts of about the same time (CERENSODNOM & TAUBE 1993, LIGETI 1972, KARA 1979, TUMURTOGOO 2006). The aim of this kind of divination is to sort out lucky and unlucky days, hours and events, for example for cutting nails or wood, building houses, digging ditches etc., this means for every kind of event connected with daily life. However, it has to be remarked that these months, days, and hours are arranged in such a complex way and in so many categories that one has the feeling to “swim, if not even to sink in a sea of inconsistencies” (BAWDEN 1958: 323). This system goes even so far to define days that are not good for divination, as it is stated in one Uigur text that *küskü küntä körüm körsär yaramaz* ‘If one asks the lot on a day of the mouse, it is not fortunate’ (RACHMATI 1937: 47, Nr. 39/1). For the importance of this kind of divination among common people speaks also the fact that Buddhist sutras, although criticising this kind of “pagan” divination, give similar prescription for the directions to build a house as well as cosmological speculations as for example in the *Säkiz Yükmäk Yarıq* (ZIEME 1985: 174, Nr. 49/10–12; 1992: 38–39, 55; GABAIN 1964: 226; ELVERSKOG 1996: 95–100). Another, tantric text, the *Yitikän sudur ärdini*, a very popular text of the Mongol period, contains fortune-telling and magic directed towards the deities of the constellations (ZIEME 1985: 161, Nr. 43/2–3; 1992: 59–60; 2005; GABAIN 1964: 226; ELVERSKOG 1996: 93–95).

This form of divination is also well attested in Indic, and depending from the later, in the Khotanese culture. An example belonging to the Christian Sogdian cultural sphere was published by SIMS-WILLIAMS (1995: 292–297), together with references to Syriac omen texts (id. 294–297). In a more general article the same author has treated astrological formulae from Babylon to China, pointing out the striking similarities between them. These similarities are most probably not due to chance, because the Mesopotamian notion of the planetary week together with the names of the seven days were introduced in the 8th century by Sogdian Manicheans into China (SIMS-WILLIAMS 1996). An extract from the Khotanese example, first published by BAILEY (1935–37), and republished with several corrections by SKJÆRVØ (2002: 82–85) may illustrate this kind of divination. The corresponding Sanskrit text, published by LÜDERS (1933), contains very different predictions as pointed out by SKJÆRVØ (2002: 82).

OR 11252 (16) *pa auysa mula mulä salya hve ysaiyi muysga-jsīnī hime u rrau i u* (17) *[///] barji ni širi hi himāre u hve yaulajsi hime u sahautti* (18) *[ni himi] kh[u] jvīdi ba-jsīnya himāre u nāvi pharāka himāre ...*

‘First the rat. A man born in the Year of the Rat. He will be short-lived and ... and ... the harvests will not be good. And he will be a quarrelsome man. And [he will not be] blessed (with health). If they life, they will be short-lived. And he will have many rivers (to cross?). ...’ (SKJÆRVØ 2002: 83).

Involuntary divination (BAWDEN 1958: 329–331) is commonly attested in (Middle) Mongolian and Old Uigur sources. Old Uigur examples were published by RADLOFF (1928: 59–61, Nr. 42), RACHMATI (1936: 44–46, 96–97, Nr. 34–38) and ZIEME (2002). For the Middle Mongolian period, the first example stems from the *Secret History of the Mongols* (§189) and occurs in an episod where the Naiman Kōkse-ü Sabraq is rebuking Tayang Qan of whom his father had said, interestingly, (6527) *ene tayang-i elbesü-er töre-ülüle-e* ‘This (son of mine) Tayang, I begot (only) through magic (*elbesü-er*)’ (DE RACHEWILTZ 1972: 97; 2004: 111, 629, 681). The relevant passage of the *Secret History* reads:

(6529–6530) *edö-e noqan-u dawun idürekiü qucal qucamui* ‘Now the dogs are barking and this barking sounds as if (a calamity) is approaching’.

In the Altan tobci nova this part is missing, because the example belongs to a long section of the *Secret History* (§§176–208), which was not included into it (DE RACHEWILTZ 1972: 97–98; 2004: 111, 681–682).

Another example, a prediction based on the place of the birthmark, Mo. *mengge* < Uig. *meng*, which is some centuries later than our first example, has been discovered among the manuscript remains from Olon sūme:

(6) *tolayai orcin mengge bolbas[ɯ//]* (7) *sayin bui · nidiin-dür mengge* (8) *barimidadu sayin bolqu · ta[//]* (9) *mengge bolbasu ebe[ci]n-dür [//]* (10) *[j]irüken-dür mengge bolbasu*

‘Wenn ein Muttermal nahe des Kopfes ist ... ist es gut. Ein Muttermal auf dem Auge ist für die Weisheit gut. (Wenn es fünf) Muttermale sind im Fall von Krankheit ... Wenn ein Muttermal auf dem Herzen ist ...’ (HEISSIG 1976:508–509:6–10).

A prediction based on the behaviour of horses is found in the *Altan tobci anonymus* (BAWDEN 1955), and in the *Altan tobci nova* (VIETZE & GENDENG LUBSANG 1992).

(Altan tobci anonymus) *qulaqan qarqan nere-tü qoyar mori inu jönglejü sanaya aldan yajar cabcilaju bayiba · morin-ıyan sanaya aldayısan-i medejü mendü örlüg ügüleriin qoor-tan yabuquı-dur eyimü belge geji*

‘His two horses called Qulaqan and Qaraqan, prophesying and groaning, were beating the ground with their hooves. Noticing that his horses were groaning, Mendü Örlög said: ‘There are such signs when evil people are on the march’ (BAWDEN 1955:76–77, 166)

= (Altan tobci nova, folio 147recto, ll. 4493–4496) *qulayana-i qarayana-i neretü qoyar morin jönglejü yajar cabcilan sanayan aldan bayiba : morin-ıyan sanayan aldayısan-tur mendü örlüg ügüleriin : qoor-tan-i yabuquı-tur eyimü geji* (VIETZE & GENDENG LUBSANG 1992: 102).

Involuntary divination examines the future according to natural signs, so itching, the twitching of limbs, sneezing, marks on the body, but also mouse-bites, or the shouting of magpies can be used to forecast the future. However, these are only some of the possible examples and it has to be remembered that “nearly every phenomenon might count as an omen” (BAWDEN 1958: 330). For omia based on the behaviour of birds compare also the large article of LAUFER dealing with bird divination among the Tibetans (1914). Additionally, a Khotanese fragment connected with twitching (cf. ZIEME 2002 dealing with the same matter in Turkic texts) is kept in the India Office Library (SKJÆRVØ 2002: 260–261), and lastly there exists also an illustrated Manichean Middle Persian omen-text from Turfan dealing with involuntary divination (RECK & SUNDERMANN 1997 [1998]). Similar examples are known in modern times from all over the world, thus one says in German: “Wenn die Schwalben tief fliegen wird es Regen geben, wenn die Schwalben hoch

fliegen wird es Sonnenschein geben”. In the same way certain signs and occurrences are considered to be omia in Gilgit:

“If an unusually heavy rain falls at any season in Gilgit, it is supposed that the chief of Yasin will advance towards Gilgit. If innumerable kites are seen hovering over Gilgit, it is generally accepted that Gilgit will be invaded by the Nagar people. If packs of wolves make frequent night visits into Gilgit, and inflict heavy losses among the flocks, it is affirmed that the chief of Hunza is certainly going to invade and plunder Gilgit. If harvest is unusually abundant, it is believed that Gilgit will be attacked by the Punyal Chefs” (MUHAMMAD 1905: 107).

Intentional divination is the last group sorted out by BAWDEN (1958: 331–337). The means of this kind of divination among the Mongols are among others scapularmancy (*dalu-yin tölge*), the throwing of dices (*şoo-yin tölge*) or coins (*joyos-un tölge*, or: *Kitad-un tabun joyos-un üjel*), as well as counting of stones (*qumalay-un tölge*) (BIRTALAN 2001a: 1058–1059, KARA 1973: 94, SÁRKÖZI 1971). To this may be added, for example, divination with the help of cards used among Tibetans (STEIN 1939: 297–373), divination by throwing small arrows or little sticks made of willow used already among the early Turks in the West, but going back to a much older tradition, as this kind of divination is known to have been used by Scythians and Huns (ROUX 1999: 233–234), and lastly divination using the entrails of a sheep, testified in the *Secret History of the Mongols* (§272/11234, 11301, 11305). The relevant term here is *abitla* ‘to divine by expecting the entrails of an animal’ < *abit* ‘entrails’ (DE RACHEWILTZ 2004: 995); MoL *abid* ‘intestiness (obs.)’, Ord. *awik* ~ *awilak* ‘id.’. In connection with the Cinggis Khan cult in the Ordos region, a detailed description of this divination practice, using the liver of a sheep, was presented by SOLONGGOD (1999). A written description of the ritual from the same area can be found in a manuscript, transcribed, translated and explained by SERRUYS (1984).

An Old Uigur manuscript found in Yar Khoto and written in late cursive script belongs also to the group of intentional divination. This booklet, published by BANG & GABAIN (1929) as *Türkische Turfantexte I*, belongs, however, to the civilisation of Eastern Asia as it is a kind of adoption of the Chinese *Yijing*. The same cultural background might be attributed to the scene following the murder of Sundarī, described in the *Insadi-Sūtra* (ll. 238–244). Here the word *ırq* occurs as a compound together with the word *sun* (< Chin. *sun* ‘humble, submissive; the fifth of the eight trigrams of the Yijing; south-east’; MChinY, L *sun* (MATHEWS 5550, PULLEYBLANK 1991: 297)

pīrsančī xan ymā qayū-ta käl bar qīlur ärsär tīdīy-süz-in tīlāgū-kä boşuy yarlıy berü yarlıqadī boşuy bolmīš-ta oq braman-lar köküž-lärin bögsäk-lärin būrīnu köriim bitig-lärin ača īr-q-lärin sunlarīn sača ayaz-ta yulduz körü yayız-ta yer idīšqayū

‘als der König Prasenajit wie immer (?) “komm-und-gehe” (*käl bar* ‘Zauberbewegungen’) machte, geruhte er für eine ungehinderte Nachforschung die Erlaubnis zu geben. Sobald er das erlaubt hatte, zerkratzten die Brahmanen sich Brust und Bauch, öffneten die Traumbücher (Wahrsagebücher?), streuten ihre Orakel (Wahrsagezeichen?) aus, am klaren Himmel beobachteten sie die Sterne und rochen auf dem Boden die Erde’ (TEZCAN 1974: 38).

A reference to divination using sticks is found, according to some interpretations, in connection with the sickness of Ögedei Khagan and the death of his brother Tolui in the *Secret History of the Mongols* (§272/11231). After Ögedei falls ill it is stated *bö-es bö-es tölgecin-e tölgele-ülī-esü* ‘als man alle möglichen Schamanen und Weissager die Losstäbchen werfen ließ’ (HAENISCH 1962: 150–151). According to HEISSIG (1989: 166, note 2) scapularmancy is meant in this case, DE RACHEWILTZ (2004: 203) translates “various shamans and soothsayers were ordered to divine (the cause of the illness)”. As rightly remarked by DE RACHEWILTZ (2004: 994–995), *bö-e* (= MoL *böge*) is the standard designation of the Mongolian shaman, whereas *tölgeci* seems to have been a general term for diviners practicing different forms of prognostication involving ‘signs’, such as the flight of birds (augury), dreams (oniromancy), etc. However, scapulimancy, mentioned by DE RACHEWILTZ as belonging to the practice involving the *tölgeci* ‘diviner’, is, at least in modern times, performed by the shaman. For this reason it remains uncertain what sort of divination is meant here. MoL *tölge*, KhalL *tölög* has the meaning ‘fortune-telling, divination; also a device used for divination; omen, portent’ > MoL *tölgeci/n*, KhalL *tölögč* ‘diviner, fortuneteller’, Ord. *tölgö* ‘art divinatoire, opération par laquelle le devin découvre quelque chose de caché; instrument qui sert à la divination’ > *tölgöči* (*kün*) ‘devin’, Kal. *tölge* ‘(veraltet) Wahrsagerei, das Wahrsagen mit Knochen, Würfeln, Pfeilen, oder anderem’ > *tölgčī* ‘(selten) Zeichendeuter, Wahrsager’. As a loan-word from Mongolian the word entered the Turkic languages of South Siberia with the meaning ‘kleiner Bogen zum Wahrsagen; Wahrsagerei; Schicksal, Los, Bestimmung; Vorzeichen, Omen’ (VEWT 493); for Tuvinian the following meanings are attested: *tölge* ‘Schicksal, Glück; Orakel, Wahrsagung’, *tölgeči* ‘Wahrsager’, and lastly *tölgele-* ‘Karten legen, wahrsagen’ (ÖLMEZ 2007: 276).

A very short and unclear, fragmentary Nestorian divination text published by LE COQ (1909) differs considerable from other Old Uigur divination texts dealt with until now, but it has some parallels in Tibetan divination texts analysed by FRANCKE (1924) and URAY (1987: 202–203). Its closest correspondence is, however, with a Sogdian fragment, also of Nestorian provenance (SIMS-WILLIAMS 1976: 63–64). Among old divinatory texts, the Uigur Nestorian and the Sogdian Nestorian texts are among those that are, in a certain way, closest in style and structure to the Old Turkic *īr-q bitig*, the main subject of this article.

Scapularmancy as a mean to forecast the future reaches far back into prehistory, and is attested over a wide area in Eurasia stretching from China to England (ANDREE 1906: 143–165). In connection with the Old Turks, scapularmancy is not mentioned in the sources, if not a bull-skull, found in a big kurgan 30 km south-east of Ėlista, and published by KLJAŠTONRYJ & VÁSÁRY (1987), was used with this intention. KLJAŠTONRYJ & VÁSÁRY deal, however, only with the Runic signs found on the skull, and don’t touch upon the actual use of it. In the light of the widespread use of scapularmancy among the Mongols, it seems, even if there is only negative evidence for the moment, highly improbably that this mean of divination was not used by the early Turks.

There are several reports about scapularmancy left by early visitors to the Mongols. The oldest, based on observations made during his stay in the camp of Muqali in 1221, is the report by Zhao Hong preserved in the *Mengda beilu*; another one, by Pang Daya, in the *Heida shilüe* dates back to the year 1237.

(1221): “beim Wahrsagen über Glück und Unglück, Vorgehen und Zurückweichen, Töten und Angreifen bedienen sie sich immer des Schulterblattes eines Schafes, das sie mit einer glühenden Eisenstange bearbeiten. Man beschaut dann die Sprünge und Risse darin und entscheidet (danach sogar) die wichtigsten Staatsangelegenheiten” (Mengda 77).

(1237): “Was ihre Wahrsagerei anlangt, so brennen sie Schulterblätter von Schafen an, prüfen, ob die Linien widrig oder günstig verlaufen und schließen daraus auf Glück oder Unglück (bei ihren Vorhaben). Allein hiernach entscheiden sie, ob der Himmel (ihr Vorhaben) verwirft oder ihm zustimmt. Sie glauben ganz fest daran. Sie nennen es ‘die Laute anbrennen’. Von ihren Angelegenheiten, selbst den geringfügigsten, erledigen sie keine ohne das Orakel zu befragen, und erst, wenn sie es mehrere Male befragt haben, hören sie damit auf” (Heida 140).

The practice is further described by Wilhelm von Rubruk, who also pointed out the great importance given by the Mongols to scapularmancy (RISCH 1934: 213–214):

“Bei unserem Hineingehen kam gerade ein Diener heraus, der Schulterblätter von Schafen heraustrug, die ganz kohlschwarz gebrannt waren. (...) Mangu (= Möngke) unternahm um alles in der Welt nichts, ohne vorher jene Knochen zu befragen, weshalb er auch niemandem erlaubt in seine Jurte einzutreten, bevor er diese Knochen befragt”.

Möngke Khagan seemed to have been even more superstitious than the Mongolian average, as at the end of the chapter on Möngke Khagan in the Yuanzhi, in a somewhat critical tune it is stated that, beside all the good deeds he did,

“vertraute er aber sehr auf die Künste von Wahrsagern und Schamanen und vor jeder Handlung wandte er sich unbedingt (zuerst) an sie. Es gab kaum einen Tag, an dem er sie nicht befragte und niemals wurde er ihrer überdrüssig” (ABRAMOWSKI 1979: 33).

On special occasions scapularmancy was carried out by the ruler himself, or by one of his most confident officials, so for example by Chinggis Qan and Yelu Chuzai, as well as Ögedei and Güyük. It seems that this was done to influence the result of divination, as this seems to have been possible to a certain degree, as was shown by ERKES (1940) in connection with Chinese oracle-bones. Under the influence of Lamaism the character of scapularmancy was later refined and became more sophisticated. In the 18th century, a handbook on scapularmancy was compiled by Sumpa mkhan-po. This handbook is the foundation of all modern Mongolian copies on scapularmancy (BAWDEN 1989: 227). Early modern and modern observations concerning scapularmancy have been recorded among others by PALLAS in his *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften* (St. Petersburg 1801, Bd. 2, S. 350–354), BIRTALAN (1993, 2001a: 1035–1036) and OELSCHLÄGEL (2005). BAWDEN published two manuscripts (1959) obtained by GRØNBECH, which describe how the bone has to be prepared and burnt, and explain the mystical topographical terminology.

The throwing of coins as a mean of divination (BAWDEN 1958: 334–336) is commonly attested in Mongolian manuscripts preserved in European collections. Coin divination is a rather modern form of divination, based on Chinese traditions. This sort of divination is neither attested among Old Uigur nor Middle Mongolian texts. It is used only in a restricted amount of cases and stands under the protection of Guanyin, that is Avalokiteśvara.

The counting of stones can be conditioned by complex astrological calculations on one side, on the other hand it might be used in a very simple way (BAWDEN 1958: 336–337; OELSCHLÄGEL 2005). This kind of

divination is neither attested in Old Turkic nor Middle Mongolian texts. There are, however, some references in Old Central Asian sources to the use of stones as magical tools. A Runic fragmentary manuscript from Toyoq (ORKUN 1938: 57–59) describes the astrological origin of various precious and semi-precious stones, similar texts are known from Pahlavi and Sogdian literature (WEBER 2003: 228–230, 235–237). The Sogdian text consists of two parts: In the first part (ll. 1–122) nine stones with magical effects are introduced, in the second one (ll. 123–304) rain magic is described in a very detailed way (BENVENISTE 1940: 59–73, 193–200). Weather magic was/is widely used in Central Asia to influence weather conditions, in literary form its use is exemplified only by the second part of the Sogd. text just mentioned (WEBER id. 229–235), and some Old Turkic texts (MOLNÁR 1994, with Old Turkic text examples by P. ZIEME). A modern Mongolian weather magic ritual, most probably of Tibetan origin, was described by BIRTALAN (2001b).

A significant difference between Sogdian and otherwise known Central Asian rain magic lies in the fact that Sogdian rain magic uses nine stones, namely those described in the first part of the manuscript mentioned, “Jene Steine mit den neun Arten sind notwendig, die hier oben beschrieben sind.” (WEBER id.: 229), whereas all other descriptions of this practice in Central Asia mention only one stone, Middle Turkic, Uigur *yad*, Middle Mongol *jada* ‘rain stone; rain magic’ (CLAUSON 1972: 883), usually a bezoar (BIRTALAN 2001a: 998, 1065–1066). Concluding it might be assumed that the Runic text from Toyoq, resembling the first part of the Sogdian text, might stem from a text dealing with rain magic.

The last group of intentional divination to be dealt with here, is divination with the help of dices. This kind of divination, not notified among the Mongols of the Middle Mongolian period, is known from the Old Turkic culture in the form of the famous *irq bitig*, a small booklet, consisting of 29 folded sheets (= 58 leaves about 13.6 cm high and 8 cm wide), the folded sheets being glued together at the end one by one. The booklet was discovered by SIR AUREL STEIN in 1907 in Dunhuang. The text of the booklet consists of 65 chapters, each headed by three groups of small circles, followed by the text of each *irq* (omen), depicting in a lively way different scenes of common life (KLJAŠTORNYJ 1992). Every *irq* ends with the general statement if it is good or bad, some *irqs*, however, have no statement at all (see below).

The text of the *ırq bitig* was first published by THOMSEN (1912); the publications of ORKUN (1938: 71–93) and MALOV (1951: 80–92) are mainly translations of THOMSEN into Turkish and Russian. A new transcription and translation, together with the facsimile, was published by TEKIN (1993), however, as has been pointed out by ERDAL (1997) in his review article, this new publication is not without faults, merely because it did not take into consideration the quite extensive literature on the *ırq bitig* (cf. bibliography, and CLARK 1997: 109, 139–140, Nr. 198).

Most probably the *ırq bitig* is the work of a Turkic author and not a translation. This last statement is important, as dicing is a way of divination not only typical for the culture of the Old Turks, but also for cultures to the south and southwest of the Turks. However, dicing is a form of divination *not* typical for the Chinese culture.

Dice divination as it occurs in the *ırq bitig*, Tibetan texts of *mo*-divination (FRANCKE 1924, 1928; TAUBE 1980; THOMAS 1957), as well as divination texts in Sanskrit (LÜDERS 1940, FALK 1986), uses 1 or 3 oblong dices with 4 long and 2 short sides, thrown 3 or 1 time. Examples of these dices have been discovered in excavations in Khotan, Turfan and Termez, in the last one in connection with sites of the Kušan period from the 3rd century A.D. (RÓNA-TAS 1956: 179, CLAUSON 1961: 218).

Several articles have pointed out various problems of the *ırq bitig*, for example the role of the animals, the meaning of the different colours, or the importance of the identification of the gods. Thus it was for example stated by ERDAL (1997: 64–65) that “Altaic astragalomancy practices and knuckle-bone games (*aşiq oyunu*) feature animal names for sides of the dice, perhaps connected in some way with the many animals appearing in the *ırq bitig*. This and colour symbolism are among the topics which might help in trying to solve its enigmas. Research into Altaic anthropological context should be deepened and detailed comparisons carried out with Tibetan divination books, of which there is quite an abundance”. Although all of the specific questions mentioned before are important for the understanding and evaluation of the *ırq bitig*, it seems to me that here problems have been brought up before answering two basic questions: What was the purpose of the book? What was its religious background? TEKIN (1993), following VON GABAIN, calls it a “handbook for interpreting the significance of the various combinations of three throws of a dice”; similarly, ERDAL (1997) thinks that it “served the divinatory interpretation of the casts”.

Although these statements are more or less right, it seems that the *ırq bitig* was *not* a handbook used in connection with the throwing of the dices as the sequences of the throws occur in a way, very difficult to be referred to. However, for an understanding of the sequences it might be important to state that in the first dice-oracle of the Bower Manuscript the sequences 4-4-4, 3-3-3, 2-2-2, 1-1-1 and the permutations of each group (this means for example 4-4-3, 4-3-4, 3-4-4) are considered as belonging together and are thus called by the same name (LÜDERS 1940: 134–139).

There are several *ırqs* without a statement if they are good or bad (Nr. 4, 13, 14, 21, 48, 51), other occur 2 or 3 times (1-1-4: 32, 47; 2-4-2: 5, 10; 3-1-3: 24, 25; 3-4-1: 49, 61, 64), some are missing (1-1-3, 1-2-4, 3-1-1) [see: Appendix].

In the light of these facts the *ırq bitig* has, perhaps, to be considered a “report” of a séance of throwing dices. It might be that the owner of the book threw the dices 65 times (but why not 64 times, the correct number of all possible combinations?), and the results, in the succession as the dices were thrown, were written down in the book. This interpretation is strengthened by the sentence *bu ırq bitig ädgü ol : ančip alqu kântü ülügi ärklig ol* “this book of divination is good. Thus, everyone is the master of his own fate” (TEKIN 1993: 26, 27). In addition the colophon is of some relevance for answering the two questions put before, and for this reason it is quoted here:

bars yıl ekinti ay biş yigirmikâ taygüntan manıstantağı kiçig dintar burua yuru ešidip ičimiz isig sajun itačuq bitidim

‘In the Year of the Tiger, on the fifteenth (day of) the second month, (I) the humble monk of the Taygüntan monastery, after listening to the omen-master, wrote (this down) for our elder brother, the affectionate General Itačuq (or: *isig* is an attribute of *sajun*; in this case the end of the colophon should be translated ‘for our elder brother General Itačuq’).

For the question of the purpose of the book, the most important words of the colophon are *burua yuru ešidip ... bitidim* ‘after listening (to) the omen-master, ... I wrote down’. The first word to be analysed, *burua*, has been interpreted differently. According to THOMSEN (1912.214) these two words are of Sanskrit origin, namely *pūrva* ‘former’ and *guru* ‘teacher’ (= ‘a former guru’), a similar interpretation was given by TEKIN (1993: 27), who translates ‘*burua guru* (i.e. the spiritual master of presage)’, and HAMILTON (1975: 13, 16–17) ‘le guru «Présage»’. I don’t think that this interpretation is correct. The booklet, as its name *ırq bitig*

says, has as its content the interpretation of different *irq* i.e. 'omina'. The colophon contains a number of Manichean words, *manistan* 'monastery' and *dintar* 'monk', and for this reason another interpretation of the word should be looked up in the Manichean environment. The word for omen in Pahlavi is *murwāg*, in Manichean Middle Persian the form is *murwā* (MACKENZIE 1971: 57). The alternation of initial *m* and *b* in Old Turkic is a well-known fact, and if the second vowel *u* is further interpreted as *w*, the resulting form of the word in the *irq bitig* is *burwa* ~ **murwa*, corresponding perfectly to the Manichean Middle Persian form. The second word is of no problem, it is Sanskrit *guru* 'teacher, master; etc.'. Most important for the interpretation of the *irq bitig* are, however, the next two verbs *ešidip* ... *bitidim* 'after listening ... I wrote down'. In my opinion these verbs can only be understood as meaning that the scribe was first listening to interpretation of the dices given by the omen-master, after that he wrote down what he had heard. Here also the use of the verb *biti*- 'to write down' [vs. *yarat*- 'to compose'] (CLAUSON 1972: 299–300, 959–960) should be stressed.¹ Still it is not clear if the omen-master taught the different omina in the "correct" order to the monk, who later mixed them up (in this case the original meaning of the booklet could have been that of a handbook), or if the monk wrote down a séance of throwing dices. It is also unclear if the monk wrote down what he had heard after each interpretation of the dices or only after he had heard all of them. In consideration of the high esteem for any written (religious) text, especially among Manicheans, the first alternative does not seem very realistic to me, and I would consider the text of the booklet to be a report of a séance of throwing dices. The last two points can not be clarified.

Mainly from the Tibetan, but also from the Turkic side, similarities have been pointed out between the *irq bitig* and Tibetan texts dealing with *mo*-divination. Tibetan dice divination, as well as Turkic, used oblong dices. This, however, is the only similarity between them, and the statement of TAKEUCHI (1995: 4) that "Old Tibetan divination texts using a dice resemble the ... *irq bitig* to a degree beyond coincidence" is not

1 According to Zieme (2001: 378) the sequence : *Burua : yuru (ä)š(i)d[ip]* :, usually translated as 'after listening to the guru Burua', should be interpreted as the personal name of the scribe: *Burua urušd* ('Omen-Sunshine') and the last part of the colophone should be translated as 'I, the humble monk Burua Hurušd wrote (this book) for our elder brother (or: brothers), the affectionate Sayun İtačuq (or: Isig Sayun [and] İtačuq)'.

quite right. The differences lie not only in the results for the different throws [see: Appendix], but also in the structure of the texts itself.

Each chapter of the *irq bitig* begins with a general description of a scene, followed by the results of the throws. For Tibetan occurrences these kind of texts are attested only in a very small number of fragments stemming from Turfan (FRANCKE 1924, TAUBE 1980: 86–90). The structure and content of these texts is very close to the Uigur and Sogdian Nestorian texts mentioned before (FRANCKE 1928, URAY 1987). Among different texts dealing with dice divinations, these three groups, the Tibetan dice-oracle texts from Turfan, the Uigur and Sogdian oracle texts and the Old Turkic *irq bitig* seem to form a clear group of their own.

The last group of Tibetan *mo*-texts, from Gansu and Northeastern Tibet (THOMAS 1957), differs again from the two groups mentioned before. The "chapters" of these texts start with a general introduction, resembling the introduction of each Turkic *irq*. After this, however, follows a section giving forecasts for different aspects of the daily life, for example trading, petitions, marriage etc., followed by a sentence giving the general result of the throw. The structure of these texts resembles the divination text published in the *Türkische Turfantexte I* (BANG & GABAIN 1929), or the Chinese oracle texts published by BANCK.

The colophon of the *irq bitig* points to the fact that the background of the booklet is Manichean. In the first instant this seems to be quite surprising as contrary f. ex. to Buddhism in 17th and 18th century Mongolia, incorporating a lot of popular believes in its religious framework, Manicheism is mainly known for adapting elements from Buddhism, Early Christianity and Zoroastrism in its ideology. However, the fact that Manicheism was not completely disinclined to popular aspects of religion is in addition to our text proven by an illustrated Middle Persian omen-text (RECK & SUNDERMANN 1997 [1998]), as well as Middle Persian spells and a Parthian amulett (HENNING 1947). Also the similarities between the *irq bitig*, the Nestorian texts and the Tibetan texts from Turfan mentioned before, are most probably due to Manichean influence (or the common background of Nestorianism and Manicheism, both influencing the Old Turkic as well as early Tibetan cultures).

This article is a largely revised version of a paper presented at the P.I.A.C. in Lanakan/Belgium in 2000. Due to organisational problems, the papers of the conference were never published. In the 2000 version of

this article also etymological remarks concerning *ırq*, *İRİM*, *İRÜ* and *İRÜK* were presented. As in the time following two important articles dealing with the verb *İR-* 'to make a notch, or breach' and its derivatives, among other *ırq*, originally perhaps specifically 'divination in the form of scapularmancy', and only later 'divination in general, omen; luck, etc.' were published (KÁROLY 2001, RÓNA-TAS 2004), the reader is referred to these two articles for more detailed informations concerning the etymology of *İR-* and *ırq*.

Appendix: Dicing in Old Turkic, Old Tibetan and Sanskrit Literature A Comparative Table

	Old Turkic (<i>ırq</i> bitig)	Tibetan (mo)	(Addendum A)	(Addendum B)	Sanskrit
	TEKIN 1903	THOMAS 1957	THOMAS 1957	THOMAS 1957	FRANCKE 1928.115
4)	anča bünlär				gut
22)	anča muplay ol anıq yablag ol				schlimm
00)		good (28)			medium
31)	anča bünlär anıq bar adıgı ol				gut
47)	anča bünlär adıgı ol	very bad (27)			
63)	anča bünlär adıgı ol	good (26)			gut
6)	anča bünlär yablag ol	very good (24)			gut
8)	anča bünlär yablag ol	No clear augury (25)	no augury	4-1-4 (2) very bad	gut
00)					gut
34)	anča bünlär adıgı ol	inauspicious (23)			gut
45)	anča bünlär yablag ol	good (22)			gut
46)	anča bünlär yablag ol	good (21)			gut
37)	anča bünlär yablag ol	good (20)			schlimm
15)	anča bünlär adıgı ol				gut
44)	anča bünlär yablag ol				gut
50)	anča bünlär yablag ol				gut
31)	anča bünlär adıgı ol				gut
28)	anča bünlär adıgı ol	No clear augury (31)			gut
7)	anča bünlär adıgı ol	good (15)			gut
		bad (14)	bad	2-1-4 (9) medium	
62)	anča bünlär adıgı ol		2-3-3 bad	very bad (8)	gut
16)	anča bünlär yablag ol	good (13)	2-1-2 (bad)	medium (9)	gut

Old Turkic (İrğ bitig)		Tibetan (mo)		(Addendum A)		(Addendum B)		Sanskrit	
TEKIN 1993		THOMAS 1957		THOMAS 1957		THOMAS 1957		FRANCKE 1928.115	
57)	2-3-1	anča būlγlār bu ārg bačūnta an	good (12)	good		2-4-4 (6) no clear augury	medium		
		āngūnti bar kın yama ādgū ol				very good (5)	schilum		
1)	2-3-2	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					schilum		
20)	2-2-3	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					medium		
39)	2-2-4	anča būlγlār yablag ol	bad (11)				gut		
56)	2-3-1	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					schilum		
53)	2-3-2	anča būlγlār ādgū ol	gut (10) bad (3)	good		2-3-3 (7) very good	schilum		
17)	2-3-3	anča būlγlār ādgū ol	bad (8)	bad		2-1-3 (8) very bad	schilum		
						very good (7)	medium		
14)	2-3-4	anča būlγlār					gut		
18)	2-4-1	anča būlγlār anīg ādgū ol					gut		
5)	2-4-2	anīg ādgū ol					gut		
10)	2-4-3	anča būlγlār					gut		
34)	2-4-4	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					gut		
90)	3-1-1		No clear augury (30)	1-2-1 good		no clear augury (6)	gut		
52)	3-1-2	anča būlγlār ādgū ol	good (3)	good		4-4-2 (1) good	gut		
						very good	gut		
24)	3-1-3	anča būlγlār yablag ol				2-2-2 (5) very good	medium		
25)	3-1-3	anča būlγ yablag ol					gut		
38)	3-1-4	anča būlγlār ādgū ol							

This mo, being bad,
is for a future day (19)

Old Turkic (İrğ bitig)		Tibetan (mo)		(Addendum A)		(Addendum B)		Sanskrit	
TEKIN 1993		THOMAS 1957		THOMAS 1957		THOMAS 1957		FRANCKE 1928.115	
9)	3-2-1	anča būlγlār yablag ol					schilum		
58)	3-2-2	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					medium		
59)	3-2-3	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					gut		
41)	3-2-4	anča būlγ ādgū ol					medium		
21)	3-3-1	anča būlγ	very good (18)				gut		
65)	3-3-2	anča būlγlār yablag ol					schilum		
3)	3-3-3	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					gut		
43)	3-3-4	anča būlγlār yablag ol					gut		
49)	3-4-1	anča būlγ ādgū ol					gut		
61)	3-4-1	anča būlγlār yablag ol					gut		
64)	3-4-1	anča būlγlār anīg ādgū ol					gut		
13)	3-4-2	anča būlγlār					schilum		
12)	3-4-3	anča būlγlār yablag ol	bad (17)	4-1-4 good		very good (4)	schilum		
48)	3-4-4	anča būlγlār	bad (4) not good (16)				gut		
36)	4-1-1	anča būlγlār anīg yablag ol					medium		
55)	4-1-2	anča būlγlār anīg ādgū ol					medium		
19)	4-1-3	anča būlγ ādgū ol					gut		
42)	4-1-4	anča būlγlār ādgū ol	good (7)	good		3-4-3 (4) very good	gut		
						very bad (2)	gut		
26)	4-2-1	anča būlγ ādgū ol	good (6)				gut		
27)	4-2-2	anča būlγlār ādgū ol	good (5)				medium		
30)	4-2-3	anča būlγlār ādgū ol					gut		

	Old Turkic (İrğ bitig)	Tibetan (mo)	(Addendum A)	(Addendum B)	Sanskrit
	TEKIN 1993	THOMAS 1957	THOMAS 1957	THOMAS 1957	FRANCÉE 1938.115
33)	4-2-4	anča būnylar yablaq ol			gut
60)	4-3-1	anča būnylar adğū ol			gut
29)	4-3-2	anča būnylar adğū ol			gut
51)	4-3-3	anča būnylar			medium
35)	4-3-4	anča būnylar adğū ol	very good	4-1-1 (3) very good	gut
40)	4-4-1	anča būnylar adğū ol			schlimum
23)	4-4-2	anča būnylar adğū ol	3-1-2 good	good (1)	schlimum
11)	4-4-3	anča būnylar añy adğū ol			medium
2)	4-4-4	anča būny adğū ol			gut

210.6. 9.3.48

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