

The Runic Inscription Found in Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain

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The Runic inscription found in Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain


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I . Preference

Arvis Mountain is a tall and beautiful mountain located within the village of Urandösh in the Üzüür Ruins of Otog Banner, Ordos City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China (Fig. 1). This majestic rocky mountain features thirteen canyons and valleys, including one known as “Kharankhui Valley” (Fig. 2). According to local people, the canyon earned its name due to the high cliffs on either side, tree-filled hollows, and a dark tunnel that was difficult to navigate. Kharankhui Valley had a dense forest until the 1970s, but deforestation left it treeless. Currently, coal is being mined from Arvis Mountain, so the Kharankhui Valley is now included in a state special protection zone.

The runic relic in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain is not the first such relic discovered in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China. Relatively few relics have been studied, including the Kari Çor inscription near *Xi'an* 西安, the capital of *Shanxi* 陕西 [Cengiz 2013a, 2015: 277-342; Battulga 2022: 48-50; Mörön & Ankhbayar 2015; 刘喆 2014; 张铁山 2013; 李宗俊 2014; 白玉冬 2013; 罗新 2013]; the Jimsar inscription 吉木萨尔县 found in the south of the

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ancient city Beshbalik [罗新 2009: 1-7]; the Śāriputri or Shaariibuu inscription discovered in a Chinese temple in Turfan [Cengiz 2013b, 2015: 363-372; Battulga 2022: 44-45]; the inscription of Princess Kutlug (Ölziit) [Battulga 2022: 45-46]; the Yargol cave inscriptions in Turfan [Cengiz 2015: 363-372; Battulga 2022: 47]; the Kumtura cave inscriptions [Cengiz 2015: 609-612; Zieme 2011; Battulga 2022: 47]; and Tsagaan ovoonii bichees, that is the inscriptions of White Ovoo in a place called Shiroon of Altantug Banner in Tsagaan Ovoo soum (present-day Darkhan soum) in the northeast of Batkhaalga ruins, which is the center of Darhan Muminggan United Banner in Inner Mongolia [Cengiz 2013c, 2015: 259-274; Battulga 2017, 2022: 49-50; Khasbaatar 2013; 白玉东 & 包文胜 2012].



Fig. 1 Location



Fig. 2 The Arvis Mountain, Kharankhui Valley

can be translated as “Cold Gate” or “Ice Gate”, following the original meaning. However, the text says 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋ, we believe that it actually means 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa – meaning leopard.

The natives of Altai, in Mongolia’s western region, call the leopard “arwās” or “arvis” and still use this term today.

It is unclear whether the writing of 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋ instead of 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa is a scribal error or a unique dialectal variation. Nevertheless, we believe that “Arvis” refers to “Irves” as a euphemism, and therefore it is correct to read 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa as “Irves – leopard”.

Apparently, even during the ancient Turkic and Uighur periods, Arvis Mountain was called 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa or “Leopard Mountain” in the Turkic language. If the name of Arvis Mountain had changed, it could have led to the misunderstanding of the term as “Cold Gate” (Khüiten Khaalga) or “Ice Gate” (Mösön Khaalga). This is a clear example of the historical significance and value of place names. Names given to mountains and rivers rarely change over long periods of history, and there are several instances where the original name is translated. On a side note, one of the classical relics of runic writing related to the early Uighur Khaganate, the Tariat Illuminated Monument inscription is rightfully considered a rare historical source that preserves the name of the place.

Dr. Azzaya Badam mentions five names of mountains and places and nine names of rivers in Tariat illuminated monument, but only the names of the rivers are listed: 𐰺𐰽𐰸 boruγu Boroo, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 küny Khünüi, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 orqun Orkhon, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 qaraya Kharaa, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 qanyuy Khanui, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 säläjä Selenge, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 täz Tes, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 Tuyla / Toyla Tuul. These rivers are all located in Arkhangai, Bulgan, and Töv aimag of Mongolia. Only the name of the 𐰺𐰽 Yar River has not been handed down [Azzaya 2009].

Like the name of the mentioned river, the name of Arvis Mountain has been handed down unchanged. It seems that the Turks called it “Leopard Mountain” in their Turkic language, and the Mongolians called it “Irvesiin Uul – Mountain of Leopards” in mongolian language.

As for whether the Turks always called the leopard as 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa, it does not seem to be the case. In the runic inscription found in the Tekht River, surrounded by high snow-capped mountains in Altantsögts soum, Bayan-Öl-

gii aimag, Mongolia, a sentence 𐰺𐰽𐰸 𐰺𐰽𐰸 𐰺𐰽𐰸 irbič ärip sančinti(≈sančđi) – “The leopard was chased and speared” [Battulga Ts. *et al.* 2006; Battulga 2022: 84-85; Törbat *et al.* 2009a; Törbat *et al.* 2009b] was noted. From the valley of the Orkhon River, where the ancient Turkic and Uighur kingdoms were located, to the west of the main road to Beshbalik, its forks and branches, in a remote area, on the slopes of a snowy mountain, this inscription might have been written by a tribal person who lived there, not from afar. The word 𐰺𐰽𐰸 irbič – leopard clearly reflects the features of the dialect of the writer’s region and tribe.

When the same thing is called by two different names, one of the names is usually a loanword or a word of foreign origin. In this case, 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa could be a Turkic word, while 𐰺𐰽𐰸 irbič could be an ancient Mongolian word.

Based on the name of the leopard as 𐰺𐰽𐰸 toŋa by the Turkic people living in the Turfan depression, Beshbalik city, and beyond, it seems that the writers of the inscription were from tribes like Karluk and Basmyl who came from that region.

In general, this is what is mentioned in the Tekht inscription in connection with the word 𐰺𐰽𐰸 sančinti – speared (jadlaltsav), found only once in the runic inscriptions. The word 𐰺𐰽𐰸 sančđi - to jave, stab, which is formed from the ancient Turkic root sanč - jadla-, khatgaverb, is mentioned frequently in the illuminated monuments of Kul Tigin, Bilge Qaghan, and Kuli Chur from the classical monuments of the Turkic period, but it is not mentioned at all in the illuminated monuments of Ongi and Tonyukuk.

However, among the monuments of the Uighur period, only in the Mogoin Shine Usu inscription or the Monument of Moyunchur/Bayanchur can be found occasionally. It should be noted that the word 𐰺𐰽𐰸 sančđi - does not only mean spearing or stabbing an enemy; it refers to a battle where the enemy was speared, stabbed, crushed, or confronted. The root of the ancient Turkic language sanč- indicates the act of stabbing and cutting with a sharp point such as a spear or blade, while the root of the Mongolian language janči- indicates the act of hitting and crushing with a blunt-pointed weapon such as a club or ax. However, sanč-, šanč-, yanč-, and janči- have the

same root. It should be noted that the “hunting notes” of hunting leopards in remote areas and on the slopes of snowy mountains were left, which testifies to the fact that at that time there were many people who could read and write runes.

In addition to the leopard or Arvas, the people of Altai, for example, Bugat soum of Gobi-Altai province, many leopards of Altai soum are called “arwäs,” and the brown mountain on the east side of the gorge called Ongotsny Valley in Bugat soum is called Arvist (arwäst) Mountain.

The tradition of Mongolians to avoid names, especially animal names, still exists in rural areas. For example, there are more than twenty terms for “wolf,” such as the wooden tail and the wolf head. The natives of the Altai mountains, where leopards are found, avoid the name of the leopard and call it ‘arvis’. This may seem like a change in sound, but it actually relates to the ancient word “arvija - knowledge, wisdom” [Sükhbaatar 1999: 26; Tsevel Ya. 1966: 49], as well as skill and ability. The dictionary of Oirat dialects says “arwäs - brave, courageous; It is noted that arwästā kümñn means “a brave person with strength” [Tsoloo 1988: 46].

Altai Uriankhais called skilled hunters as ‘arvistai anchin’ and refers to a hunter who has mastered the art of hunting in addition to having hunting skills (hunting luck and hunting skills). As hunters like to say:

For those who are fortunate, the ibex descends on its own.

From the expression that “the thirteen ridges of Altai can be seen to hunters who are skilled [“arvist”]”, it is clear that a hunter with knowledge of the land, mountains, and water, who can see the position of the game, pastures, currents, and beds as if they were in the palm of his hand, is called a “hunter with arvis”. Hunters are distinguished by their own “arvis”, such as marmot arvis, ibex arvis, deer arvis, bear arvis, etc. In other words, the game is distinguished by the hunter’s skill and expertise.

A wolf is an animal that finds food by force, and a leopard by skill and cunning. Our ancestors aptly defined this with the expression, “*A wolf runs three nights and returns empty; a leopard rests three days and still finds its prey*”.

The reason for explaining all this is not just that the name of the leopard is changed to arvis, but to convey

the double meaning that emphasizes the leopard as a “hunting animal with arvis” possessing skill and cunning. the legend that a leopard was seen in Arvis Mountain in the early 1970s, and that the last leopard was hunted at that time, remains an old folk tale.

ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ – door, entrance.

Words such as qapïy in the Turkic language, khavkhag [shroud] (qabqay) in Mongolian, and khaalga [door] (qayalγ-a) belong to the group of Altaic language words derived from the root *qa.

In the inscriptions on the illuminated monuments of Kul Tigin, Bilge Qaghan, and Tonyukuk, runic classical monuments of the Second Turkic Khaganate, there appears the phrase ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ tāmīr qapïy – Tömör Khaalga (The Iron Gate), which refers to the gate of the main road between Balkh and Samarkand. Apart from this famous ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ tāmīr qapïy - the Iron Gate, the name ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ toṅa qapïy – Irves Khaalga (the Leopard Gate) occurs for the first time in a runic monument. Places named Khaalga are characterized by their location at important strategic points such as entrances to big cities, trade routes, travel routes, and official roads. By the way, I wanted to mention that we are going to publish an article about the Irves Khaalga (the Leopard Gate) and other related roads, historical events, and culture associated with it.

ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ qudïyï(qodïyï) – valley.

The word “ᠠᠷᠢᠰᠢ ᠵᠠᠫᠠᠯᠭ᠎ᠠ qudïyï” =qud+i+γ-i is formed by adding the suffix +i to the root word qud – khovd, khöndii, khui(meaning “hollow”) to create a verb, resulting in khovdol-, khuil-, khöndiil-(to dig). The noun qudïy is then formed by adding the suffix +γ to the verb root. For nomads, digging a well deep into the ground until water comes out is akin to creating a valley or canyon deep in the earth, so they often named things after natural formations, images, and patterns by analogy. Thus, the original meaning of qudïy was a canyon or valley. Over time, this primary meaning was forgotten, and the term came to refer specifically to an excavation dug for the purpose of extracting water from the ground.

The historical evolution of the word can be formulat-

ed as *quy, quδ > qud > qud̄y > quduy. The root of the word is preserved in the words hui (qui) and khovd (qobdu), which are common to Turkic and Mongolian languages.

The word “𐰏𐰣𐰆𐰇 qudī” in the Mongolian runic inscriptions is found on the 37th line on the left side of the Bilge Qaghan monument: “sälänjä qudī yorīpan qarañan qīsīlta äbin barqin anta bozdum – On my way down Selenge river, I invaded his home and relics in Khargan Khysaa”. In the 27th line of the Tonyukuk monument: “anī subqa bardīmīz ol sub qudī bardīmīz - We reached the water. We went down to that water (river).” On the 4th line on the left side of the illuminated statue of Moyun/Bayan Chur Stele of Shine Us: “üküşü sälänjä qudī bardī – Many (of them) went down the Selenge river” is recorded once.

The word “𐰏𐰣𐰆𐰇 qudī” generally means going down a river basin or valley, or going through a valley, indicating the direction of down, downwards, or descent.

This meaning is related to the Mongolian words gudarğan (γuduryan), khudaran (quduryan), gudruu (γuduryu), khudruu (quduryu), gudrah (γuduraqu), etc. The words udury-a(tail) and qudary-a (saddle) are also related in meaning.

In a book of divination (TTI₁₂₈) discovered in the city of Yar in Turfan, it is written: “üyinki altinqi tapladı örüki qodiqi sêvinti – Bot nobles and commoners welcomed. All were delighted” [Bang & von Gabain 1929; Nadyelyayev V. M. *et al.* 1969: 452]. This demonstrates the wide use of opposite words to express space and direction, and in the written text qodiyi örüki, the q~γ consonants are switched and the word position is changed.

However, if it had gone down the Kharankhui Valley, it would likely have been written as 𐰏𐰣𐰆𐰇 qudī (qudī), as recorded in the runic monuments. So, we believe that the word 𐰏𐰣𐰆𐰇 qudīyī - valley, which indicates the topography of the land, is mentioned in the inscription.

𐰏𐰣𐰆 őrük(~örüg) – room, lodge, temporary modular flat.

The root meaning of the ancient proverb “Even if the winter is mild, do not spend it in a örüg”. has been preserved. “Örüg” refers to a place to rest, camp, or stop during a migration or journey. Even the meaning of Mon-

golian chess match game is called “örüg”. On the right and left side of the inscription, the mineral water gushing out from the three to four meters high rock wall is truly indescribably beautiful and awe-inspiring. Travelers must have camped at such a holy and clear mineral water place.

𐰏𐰣𐰆 Ƴäl+qa – envoys, leading messengers, leading representatives (alginch).

In Mongolian runic writings, “yälü bar-” refers to a drum, uter drum, or fast drum, formed from the root *yä-. There are words such as “yälü kör-” meaning “see immediately,” “uter see,” “quick see-,” “yältür-” meaning “attack-,” “attack-.” From this root, “yäl- +mä” is the leader of the army, alginch, leader, head unit, guard unit, military, “yél+k+n” meaning “red,” “attacker.” “Algin” refers to those who move quickly, travelers, brave individuals, visitors. A name was created to designate these people.

Based on the historical facts of the language, it is likely that the word “yälikkä” was shortened to “𐰏𐰣𐰆 Ƴälqa”. Therefore, we assume that this word means “to Alginch,” “to the chief representative” or “to the guest”.

Finally, the first inscription in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain is a type of inscription that belongs to the category of “Notes of a Journey” and has the common characteristics of small monuments of runic writing.

III . The Second Inscription of the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain

It was written in a small sunlit shelter on the rock walls, at a height of more than 2 meters, a few steps to the right of the first inscription in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain (Fig. 4). Over time, the writing has taken on the color of the rock due to the influence of the sun and wind, making it barely noticeable. However, the letters and symbols are clearly visible when viewed up close.

The length of the writing line is approximately ~28 cm, the height of the letters is 4-5 cm, and each letter is very clear.

Transcription of the original text: 𐰇𐰏𐰍𐰆𐰇𐰏

Transliteration: QŋmzQŋa

Transcription: qanjimz qaŋa

Translation: Our Father. To dear Father (Our dad. To dear Dad)

It is possible that this inscription was written in gratitude to the writer’s father, who brought him from the lands of Turkic and Uighur nobles and princes to this wonderful land called Irves Khaalga (the Leopard Gate).



Fig. 4 Second inscription

IV . The Third Inscription of the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain

The third inscription is written by dotting the rock, at a distance of 38-40 cm below and to the right of the letter “𐰇” at the end of the word “𐰇𐰏𐰍 qaŋa” in the second inscription (Fig. 5). The writing appears to be made using the dot engraving method and looks like it was just done recently.



Fig. 5 Third inscription

The inscription is located at the end of the hollow, or metaphorically, in a place resembling the hollow of a palm. In addition to this inscription, the first inscription, as well as the related rock paintings from the Bronze Age nearby, are likely connected to the structure of the rock. It is impossible for later imitators to rewrite “𐰇𐰏𐰍 qanjima” instead of simply copying the two words “𐰇𐰏𐰍 qaŋa” and “𐰆𐰇𐰏𐰍 qanjimz.” Because of this, it was concluded that the third inscription was not a fake written later in imitation.

Transcription of the original text: 𐰇𐰏𐰍

Transliteration: Qŋm a

Transcription: qanjima

Translation: Dear Father (My Father)

According to the content of the inscription, it seems possible that the third inscription is the beginning of the second inscription. When viewed together and combined, the inscriptions read: “𐰇𐰏𐰍𐰆𐰇𐰏𐰍 qanjima qanjimz qaŋa – Dear Father (My Dad). Our Father (Dad). To our Father (Dad)” It is unique as it appears to be the first monument dedicated to an unknown father, referred to as

Father.

This inscription starts with the words “𐰇𐰏𐰍 qanjima – Dear Father(My Dad),” followed by “𐰆𐰇𐰏𐰍 qanjimz – [You are] Our Father (Dad),” and concludes with “𐰇𐰏𐰍 qaŋa – To my Father”, which was deliberately mentioned that it was dedicated to his father.

Examining the letters 𐰇 and 𐰆, along with other characters in the Kharankhui Valley inscription of Arvis Mountain, it is evident that the inscription dates back to the Uighur period.

V . A Rock Seal in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain

There are no directly or indirectly related seals in the three Kharankhui Valley inscriptions of Arvis Mountain. It should be noted that Mongolian runic monuments are often accompanied by more than one seal. In recent years, researchers have conducted and published exten-

sive research on seals directly and indirectly related to runic writing, and on seals from the Turkic and Uighur periods in general [Azzaya B. *et al.* 2021, 2022; Fatma & Azzaya 2021; Azzaya B. 2020, 2022; Batbold 2017, 2022; Gerelmaa & Azzaya 2019; Mönkhtulga 2018; Mönkhtulga *et al.* 2019; Mönkhtulga & Osawa 2013, 2015].

If one observes the rocks near the long wall rock inscriptions in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain, you can see seals related to many tribes of the ancient state, such as the Huns, Turks, and Uighurs, although they are scattered and few in number.

To the left of the first inscription in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain, not far away, there is a seal (Fig. 6), which belongs to the clan of Tonyukuk, the adviser and wise minister of Ilterish, Qaphagan, and Bilge Qaghans. Tonyukuk played a crucial role in the establishment of the Second Turkic Khaganate. The seal is on two illuminated statues celebrating his achievements. Tracing the seal, it is certain that the wise minister Tonyukuk, or the nobles of his tribe, must have passed through this area. In other words, the wise minister Tonyukuk, who honored the runic script as the state script of the Turkic Khaganate, and the princes and rulers from the noble tribes related to him, may have been motivated and involved in writing inscriptions on this majestic steep rock in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain.

VI . Conclusion

Runic inscriptions. Three runic inscriptions found on Arvis Mountain near the village of Urandösh, located among the Üzüür ruins of Otog Banner, Ordos, in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. The initial and most conspicuous inscription was documented in 2012, however it has only recently garnered the interest of scholars. The initial inscription is a journey chronicle, and the latter two inscriptions are devoted to the author's father. Regardless of their content, these inscriptions are classified as carved inscriptions based on their writing technique.

Rock-Paintings. There are quite a few petroglyphs in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain, as seen from the nearby pictures of the runic monuments. Although



a detailed study and recording of the rock paintings is not our aim, we present our brief observations of them.

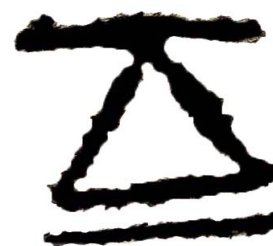


Fig. 6 Seal

Looking at the rock paintings of the Kharankhui Valley, there are relatively few paintings using the punch carving technique, which is one of the common techniques used to carve the rocks of the Central Asian Plateau. However, there are relatively more paintings using the dot engraving technique. Due to the nature and characteristics of the rock structure and formations of Arvis Mountain, it seems that the paintings were created using a dot engraving method. Chronologically, images related to the Bronze Age predominate. Among them, we can mention the classic representations of Bronze Age rock-paintings, including animals such as ibex, deer, wolves, foxes, and domesticated animals like horses and cows. There are also warrior figures wearing helmets and carrying bows and arrows, as well as common male figures. Additionally, there are many unique rock paintings from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, depicting items like bags, coils, rings, and various abstract images.

Seals. It has been observed that there are many seals belonging to various periods on the rocks of the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain. When counting the seals, which were visible in different ways, bright and dim, due to the reflection of the sun, the number reached ten. It is very likely that travelers who passed through this area since ancient times have left many of their tribal

seals here and there. Therefore, if the seals are studied and recorded individually, they will undoubtedly become important materials and sources for archaeological and ethnographic research.

Other inscriptions. Chronologically, there are Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan inscriptions. If we read and study these Chinese inscriptions, it cannot be denied that they are important writings related to early times, such as recording historical events or confirming information from sources. Mongolian and Tibetan writings are mostly observed to contain mantras. Further detailed study may reveal interesting relics of Uighur and Mongolian writing related to early times.

For this reason, there is no doubt that if the rock paintings, seals, inscriptions, and tombs of Arvis Mountain are recorded and comprehensively analyzed and studied, it will be a valuable and important historical research effort in ancient history and culture.

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< Mongolian, Russian, Turkic >

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Urandösh Mountain
(Otog Banner, Ordos)

of Uighur prince Qarī Ćor Tigin, *The western regions studies, vo. 4.*]

Abbreviation:

- МУИС — Монгол Улсын Их Сургууль,
- МХСС — Монгол хэл соёлын сургууль
- УБ — Улаанбаатар.



Author in study
(with the first inscription of Arvis Mountain)

**The Runic inscription found in Kharankhui
Valley of Arvis Mountain**

**阿爾巴斯山の黒龍貴溝で発見された
ルーニック碑文**

Abstract

概要

This article presents a report on the study of runic relics discovered on Arvis Mountain in the village of Urandösh, the Üzür of Otog Banner, Ordos, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China. Three pieces of runic inscriptions were found in the Kharankhui Valley of Arvis Mountain. The first inscription, the most clearly visible, was reported in 2012, but only recently attracted the attention of researchers. The first inscription is a travel record, while the second and third inscriptions are dedicated to the author’s father. Despite their content, these inscriptions are categorized as carved runic inscriptions in terms of writing method.

本稿は中国内モンゴル自治区鄂爾多斯市鄂托克旗棋盤井鎮烏仁都西嘎查に所在するアルバス山で発見されたルーニック碑文を報告する。3つの碑文はハランホイ谷（黒龍貴溝）で見つかった。最もはっきりと見える第1碑文は2012年に報告されていたが、研究者の関心を集めたのは最近のことである。第1碑文は旅行記録であるのに対して、第2と第3碑文は筆記者の父に捧げられたものである。内容にかかわらず、3つの碑文は記述方法の点では刻記ルーニック碑文に分類されるものである。

Key words: Ordos, Arvis mountain, Kharankhui Valley, runic inscriptions

キーワード：鄂爾多ス、アルバス山、ハランホイ谷、ルーニック碑文

