

JÁNOS HARMATTA

## THE LETTER SENT BY THE TURK QAYAN TO THE EMPEROR MAURICIUS

**Summary:** The Byzantine historian Theophylactus Simocatta relates that the qayan of the Türks sent a letter to Emperor Mauricius in which he informed him about his victories. Since two and a half century historians reconstructed the history of Avar–Hephthalite–Turk–Chinese relations in the sixties of the VI. century A. D. on the basis of this letter. However, it can be proved that the events, described in the letter, took place between 580 A. D. and 599 A. D. and have nothing to do with the rise of the Turk Empire in the sixties of the VI. century A. D.

**Key words:** Theophylactus Simocatta, Mauricius, Avar, Hephthalite, Turk, Turk Empire, qayan.

In his *Oikumenike historia* written during the reign of the Emperor Heraclius (610–641 AD), the Byzantine historian Theophylactus Simocatta inserted an excursus on the Scythian peoples into the narration of the events happened in 596 AD, of the Avar–Byzantine war.<sup>1</sup> He relates that the qayan of the Turks sent envoys and a letter to Mauricius in which he informed the Byzantine emperor about his victories. Theophylactus quotes the introductory formula of the letter, summarizes its contents, describes the victories of the qayan and also expounds his ideas about the Pseudo-Avars, adding a wealth of information concerning Central Asia and China that was obviously based on the information given by the Turk envoys in the Byzantine imperial court.<sup>2</sup>

Theophylactus' information about the Turk qayan's letter arouse keen interest in historical research. Ever since almost two and a half centuries ago J. Deguignes noticed the similarities between the reports contained in Chinese historical sources (*Wei-shu* and *Pei-shi*) and events described in the Turk qayan's letter sent to Mauricius, on the strength of which he identified the *Juan-juan* with the European Avars,<sup>3</sup> no student of Avar history could abstain from examining this question.

According to the Chinese sources, mentioned above, *T'u-men* (= Bumīn) qayan won a decisive victory over the *Juan-juan*, a part of whom subsequently fled to the

<sup>1</sup> MORAVCSIK, GY.: *Byzantinoturcica*. I<sup>2</sup>. Berlin 1958, 544.

<sup>2</sup> HAUSSIG, H. W.: Theophylakts Exkurs über die skythischen Völker. *Byzantion* 23, 1953, 389.

<sup>3</sup> DEGUIGNES, J.: *Histoire générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols et des autres Tartares occidentaux*. I. 2. Paris 1756.

kingdom of the Chinese Western *Wei* dynasty.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, according to another Chinese source, the *Sui-shu*, *Mu-han* qayan, successor of Bumīn defeated the *I-ta* (= Hephthalites) during his rule (553–572).<sup>5</sup> In his narration of the contents of the letter Theophylactus again relates the victory of the qayan over the ruler of the Hephthalites and the subjugation of this people. He then proceeded to conclude an alliance with *Stembischagan* and overthrew the Avars. A part of the defeated Avars fled to the people of *Taugast*.

The form of the name *Taugast* appeared to be identifiable with the Turkic word *tabgač*, meaning ‘China’, ‘Chinese’, thus the events described in the Chinese sources and the ones related by Theophylactus seemed to be similar indeed, in as much as the Chinese and Byzantine sources agree that the Turks defeated the Hephthalites and the *Juan-juan*, as well as the Avars, and also that one part of the latter fled to China. The identification of these events also seemed to be confirmed by the mention of *Stembischagan* (= *Stembis* qayan), in whose name one deemed to discover *Istāmi* qayan (555–576), founder of the dynasty of the Western Turk qayans.<sup>6</sup>

Owing to the spectacular coincidence between the data contained in the Chinese and Byzantine sources, the theory of identity of the *Juan-juan* with the Avars was widely accepted – to the extent that the *Juan-juan* are usually called ‘Asiatic Avars’ up to now.<sup>7</sup> Only in the 20th century was serious doubt cast on Deguignes’ theory, primarily because Theophylactus called the European Avars Pseudo-Avars. Some scholars therefore rejected the identification of the *Juan-juan* with the European Avars and regarded the latter as a detachment of the Ogurs, i.e. Oguz that escaped from Asia.<sup>8</sup>

The question of origin of the European Avars was even more complicated by the fact that Theophylactus regarded them as a people consisting of two tribes and called the two ethnic groups *Uar* and *Chunni*. In the element *Uar* one believed to discover the name *Hua*, used for the Hephthalites in Chinese sources; one tried namely to interpret it as *Var* on the basis of the Hephthalite town of *Varvaliz*.<sup>9</sup> This led to the conclusion that the European Avars were properly Hephthalites.<sup>10</sup> The most extreme attempt to combine the linguistic and historical evidence – that can be interpreted variously – is, however, represented by the theory according to which the *Var* and the *Chunni* were the two ethnic components of the *Juan-juan* and thus the Hephthalites can be identified with the *Juan-juan*, the implication being that both the Avars and

<sup>4</sup> CSONGOR, B.: *Kínai források az ázsiai avarokról* [Chinese sources on the Asiatic Avars]. Budapest 1993, 46–47.

<sup>5</sup> CHAVANNES, E.: Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux.<sup>2</sup> Paris n.d., 227. For the translation of the Chinese texts, ср. БИЧУРИН, Н. Я.: *Собрание сведений о народах обитавших в Средней Азии в древние времена* I. Moscow–Leningrad 1950, 229.

<sup>6</sup> Ср. for example, MARQUART, J.: *Erānšahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i*. Berlin 1901. Abh. KGWG Phil.-Hist. KI. N. F. III. 2, 216.

<sup>7</sup> CSONGOR, *op. cit.* (note 4), 8.

<sup>8</sup> MARKWART, J.: Kultur- und sprachgeschichtliche Analekten. *Ujb* 9, 1929, 90.

<sup>9</sup> MARKWART, J.: *Wehrot und Arang*. Leiden 1938, 45.

<sup>10</sup> GROUSSET, R.: *L'empire des steppes*. Paris 1939, 127; CZEGLÉDY, K.: Heftaliták, hunok, avarok, onogurok. IV–IX. századi népmozgalmak a steppén [Hephthalites, Huns, Avars and Onogurs. Migrations on the steppe between the 4th–9th centuries]. *MnyTK* 84, 10–11.

the Pseudo-Avars could equally be of *Juan-juan* and Hephthalite origin at the same time.<sup>11</sup>

In order to elucidate the real value of this mass of assumptions, first of all we have to examine whether the events described in the Turk qayan's letter and the Chinese sources are identical. Earlier research had already noted certain contradictions between Theophylactus' report and the Chinese sources: the sequence of events differed and the victories were won in an earlier period than the rule of the qayan who had sent the letter; and, also, that these victories occurred during the lives of at least three different qayans.<sup>12</sup> These statements necessarily resulted from the earlier assumption that the Turk qayan's letter described the same events as the ones contained in the Chinese sources. In this context, it must also be noted that the identification of events, persons and place names mentioned in the letter have proved unsuccessful to a great extent so far. Attempts have been made only to identify the victories won over the *Tieh-lê*, the *Juan-juan* and the *I-ta* with the wars against the Hephthalites, the Avars and the Ogurs, but even the chronological sequence of these events is reversed.

The state of the studies in this field were aptly characterized by E. Chavannes, well before the above bold theory was formulated: "Bien des points restent encore obscure dans le texte de Theophylact. Qui sont les Kolkh? Qui sont Sparzeugoun, Kounaxola et Tuldikh qui prêtèrent leur appui au kagan et qui est Touroum son ennemi? Où se trouvait la localité appelée Ikar, et la ville de Bakath élevée par les Ounougours, et celle de Taugast dont le nom devint chez les peuples turcs celui par lequel ils désignaient les Chinois? Autant des questions auxquelles nous ne pouvons pas répondre d'une manière scientifique et que nous préférons ne pas résoudre à grand renfort de fragiles hypothèses."<sup>13</sup>

Let us examine the letter itself and the data contained in it. The letter of the Turk qayan, described by Theophylactus as an ἐπιτίκτιον, a 'triumphal report', represents a well-known literary genre in the Ancient Near East. This is the *feth-nāme*, the 'triumphal letter', usually sent by a king to the rulers of other lands he has relations with.<sup>14</sup> Two famous examples can be mentioned in this respect: Dareios I's Bisitun inscription whose text was sent to all the countries of his empire and Šāhpur I's inscription on the Ka'be-yi Zardušt in which he announced his victories over the Romans to the kings of the neighbouring lands. The information in the *feth-nāme* was usually precise and timely. The mention of earlier events as contemporary ones and of victories won by other rulers was incompatible with its object to have a strong effect on the kings of his age. The boast of deeds, well-known long since or the expropriation of victories, won by ancestors, would have deprived the *feth-nāme* of its trustworthiness. It is therefore highly unlikely that the Turk qayan would have mentioned the exploits of other qayans as his own or that he would have described events that had occurred half a century earlier.

<sup>11</sup> This theory has been discussed in detail by CZEGLÉDY, K.: *Nomád népek vándorlása Napkelettől Napnyugtáig* [Migration of nomadic peoples from East to West]. Budapest 1969, 84–89, 152.

<sup>12</sup> CZEGLÉDY, *op.cit.* (note 11), 103.

<sup>13</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 251.

<sup>14</sup> For the *feth-nāme* cp. FEKETE, L.: A feth-nāmeról [The feth-nāme]. *MTA I OK* 19, 1969, 65–117.

Another important feature of the Turk qayan's letter is that it was written in Sogdian using the Sogdian script. At the time of the emergence of the Turk Empire, the Turks were still allied with Persians with whom they overthrew the Hephthalites. At that time, the Persian scribes sent by the Sāsānian king were still active in the Turk qayan's court and it was they who managed his correspondence. Later, around 570 the relations between the Turks and the Persians deteriorated and a war broke out between them. The Western Turk qayan replaced the Persian scribes who were deemed unreliable with Sogdian ones and maintained diplomatic relations even with Byzantium with their help.<sup>15</sup> This change is reflected by the replacement of Σιλζί-βουλος, the Persian form of the Western Turk qayan's name with Σιζάβουλος, its Sogdian equivalent in the reports of the Turk missions to the Byzantine imperial court. This is an important recognition since this Sogdian 'mediation' must be borne in mind when identifying Turkic and Chinese forms of words, arrived at the Byzantine imperial court and to Theophylactus. This helps us to solve the problem of the ethnic name Οὐαρχωνῖται as well.

The third important task in relation to Theophylactus' report is the separation of the layers of different origins. Most important in historical terms is the information contained in the Turk qayan's letter, such as the wars waged by him. Other informations were obviously supplied by members of the Turkic delegation who had delivered the letter. These include information on the history of China, Chinese life and Chinese customs. We must also distinguish Theophylactus' own additions, such as his expositions concerning the Pseudo-Avars. Let us begin with this latter.

E. Norden has already noted that Theophylactus' narrative about the Pseudo-Avars – that they only used the fearful name *Avar* to terrify in the peoples they attacked – is a classical ethnographic *topos* of antiquity that was fairly common in Graeco-Roman historical works.<sup>16</sup> By using this literary *topos* Theophylactus hoped to reduce the prestige of the Avars as enemies of Byzantium.

Accordingly Pseudo-Avars had never existed in reality. However, even if Οὐάρ and Χουβνί, the ancestors of the Ogurs are simply inventions by Theophylactus, the fact remains that the ethnic name Οὐαρχωνῖται did already exist in earlier Byzantine historical sources since this it became known in Byzantium at the imperial court at the time of Valentinus' second mission to the Turks, in 576.<sup>17</sup>

Since by that time the Turks already employed Sogdian scribes and interpreters in their diplomatic relations, the ethnic name Οὐαρχωνῖται is obviously a Sogdian form of name for denoting the Avars. It is again clear from Theophylactus' text that Οὐαρχωνῖται (Οὐάρ + Χουβνί) was the general name of the Ogur tribes and that its meaning may well have been 'Turk'. Since the Persians called the Turks *Kirmīrxyūn*, 'Red Hun', and since the form, corresponding to Middle Persian *xyūn*, was *xūn* in Sogdian, obviously we may regard the Sogdian ethnic name *Vārxūn* 'Turk' as the

<sup>15</sup> HARMATTA, J.: Byzantinoturcica. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 10, 1962, 148 ff.

<sup>16</sup> NORDEN, E.: *Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus' Germania*. Leipzig–Berlin 1920, 422–434; ALFÖLDI, A.: Zur historischen Bestimmung der Awarenfunde. *ESA* 9, 1934, 289–291; VÁSÁRY, I.: *A régi Belső-Ázsia története* [The history of ancient Inner Asia]. Szeged 1993, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Menander 205 (Exc. de leg. De Boor).

equivalent of Middle Persian *Kirmirxyūn* and interpret it as ‘Red Hun’. As a matter of fact, the Yidgha, one of the Eastern Iranian languages preserved the word *vūr*, ‘light red’,<sup>18</sup> that can go back to Old Iranian *\*barva-*. This Old Iranian form may have survived in the form *\*vār* in Early Medieval Sogdian in the 6th century.

Consequently, the Uarchonites = pseudo-Avars did not exist as a separate people, but then neither did the ethnic element *Var*. This was simply assumed on the basis of Chinese *Hua*, the name of the Hephthalites in Chinese historical sources, since its original prototype was restored as the form *\*Var*.<sup>19</sup> However, the Hephthalite form of Chinese *Hua*, Ancient Chinese *γwat*, Northwestern T’ang *γ<sup>w</sup>aI > χ<sup>w</sup>aI* can be restored variously. The form *\*Var* represents but one of several possibilities – this form was preferred because it seemed to correspond to the ethnic name of the alleged *Var* people. The existence of this people still needs to be proven, even more so, since there is no reliable evidence for their actual existence. On the basis of the above, Northwestern T’ang *χ<sup>w</sup>aI* can be interpreted as *χval* and identified with the ethnic name *Qalač*,<sup>20</sup> the name of the Turkicized Hephthalites that still sounded *Xvalič* (Χοαλιτται)<sup>21</sup> in the 6th century according to the report of Zemarchus, the Byzantine envoy to the Turks. The final *-č* in the form *Xvalič* is an adjectival suffix, while the word *χval-* is of Eastern Iranian origin and means ‘lord’.

The alleged existence of the ethnic group *Var* cannot be proven by the name of the Hephthalite town of *Varvaliz* either. This phonetic form indicates its Bactrian origin and contains the Bactrian word *liz*, ‘fortress’,<sup>22</sup> the equivalent of Old Persian *daiza-* and Middle Persian *dēz*, both meaning ‘fortress’. *Varva-*, the first element of the place-name represents the Bactrian outcome *varlva > varva-* of Old Iranian *\*rδva-*, ‘up, upper, straight, high’ that survives in Munji *valyo < Old Iranian \*rδva-ka*, ‘up, upper’.<sup>23</sup> The meaning of the place-name *Varvaliz* was ‘Upper Fortress, Citadel’ and has nothing to do with the alleged ethnic name *Var* or with the word *vār*, ‘red’, occurring in the ethnic name *Vārxūn*, ‘red Hun’.

The source of the information on China contained in Theophylactus’ narrative can obviously be traced to the Sogdian members of the mission sent by the Turk qayan. Being merchants, the Sogdians were no doubt familiar with the Chinese history of the period; we know from the Sogdian “Ancient letters” that many communities of Sogdian merchants flourished in the Chinese cities. The Sogdian members of the Turk mission no doubt provided an accurate and detailed description of Chinese society and culture, as well as of contemporary events. The two Northern Chinese kingdoms, separated by the river Huang-ho, and ruled by the Pei-Ts’i and the Pei-Chou dynasties, were united under the Pei-Chou dynasty some time before, in 577. The Chinese sources verify that the soldiers of the latter wore black uniforms indeed,

<sup>18</sup> MORGENTHAUER, G.: *Indo-Iranian Frontier Languages II*. Oslo 1938, 259.

<sup>19</sup> MARKWART, *op. cit.* (note 9), 45.

<sup>20</sup> MARQUART, *op. cit.* (note 6), 251–254; HUDŪD AL-‘ĀLAM: ‘*The regions of the World*’. *A Persian Geography 372 A.H. – 982 A.D.* London 1937, 347, 362.

<sup>21</sup> Menander 195 (Exc. de leg. De Boor).

<sup>22</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS, N.: *Bactrian*. *Compendium Linguarum Orientalium*. Wiesbaden 1989, 234.

<sup>23</sup> MORGENTHAUER, *op. cit.* (note 18), 258.

while the clothing of the population living in the kingdom of the Pei-Ts'i was red in colour.<sup>24</sup>

Other informations from the Sogdian envoys can be traced back to the Sogdian Alexander novel, according to which the two Chinese capitals, Χουβδάν and Ταυγύστ had been founded by Alexander the Great. Χουβδάν (= Xumdān) had already been identified with the Chinese capital *Ch'ang-an* earlier.<sup>25</sup> According to another passage in the Alexander novel preserved in an Arabic source, Alexander had founded two cities, *Xumdān* and *Saray* in China. The identity of *Saray* with *Lo-yang*, the other Chinese capital can be proven with the aid of a Sanskrit-Chinese vocabulary. Consequently, the equivalences *Xumdān* : *Taugast* = *Xumdān* : *Saray* and the identity of *Saray* with *Lo-yang* demonstrates that *Taugast* was the name of the Chinese capital *Lo-yang*.<sup>26</sup>

The Greek spelling Ταυγύστ reflects the transliteration of a Sogdian form: *Taβgač*. In the Greek transliteration the letter τζ would be more suitable for the phoneme č, but exciting barbarian impression it became to be replaced with στ that was more acceptable to the erudite Greek reader. The Sogdian name *Taβgač* was also borrowed by the Turks in the form *Taβγac̣* ~ *Tawγac̣* ~ *Tawqač*, meaning 'China, Chinese'.<sup>27</sup> It has since long been known that this expression comes from the name of the Chinese *T'o-pa* dynasty that was of Turkic origin,<sup>28</sup> but its formation and etymology remained unclear. The Ancient Chinese phonemic form of the dynastic name *T'o-pa* was *T'âk-b'uât*, while its Northwestern T'ang form can be restored as *T'ây-b'uaj* that might have been the Chinese transliteration of a foreign form *\*Tāγβar*. The latter was obviously a loanword from Iranian *tāγβar* < Old Iranian *\*tāga-bara-*, 'wearing the crown' > 'king', similarly to the Armenian borrowing *t'agavor*, 'king'. According to the Chinese, the meaning of the name *T'o-pa* was 'Prince of the Earth' and this harmonizes neatly with the meaning of Iranian *\*tāγβar*, 'king'.

In Sogdian, the form *\*tāβγar* developed from *\*tāγβar* by metathesis<sup>29</sup> and the form *tāγβarč* meaning 'Chinese' was formed by adding the adjectival suffix -č. Thus, the Sogdian name of *Lo-yang* may have been *\*Tāγβarč kanθ* or – since the phoneme *r* often disappeared in Sogdian in this position<sup>30</sup> – *\*Tāγβac̣ kanθ*, 'Chinese town'. *Xumdānč kanθ*, 'Ch'ang-an', and *Činānč kanθ*, 'Turfan' can be quoted as parallels to the place-name *\*Tāγβarč kanθ*. The Sogdian name for *Lo-yang* could have appeared in this form in the Turk qayan's letter, written in Sogdian.

As regards the actual essence of the Turk qayan's letter, what must first be noted is that scholarship has since long succeeded in determining the identity of the qayan from Chinese sources. The letter was sent by the qayan *Ta-t'ou*, who is identi-

<sup>24</sup> GROUSSET, R.: *L'histoire de l'Extrême Orient*. I. Paris 1929, 265; HAUSSIG, *op. cit.* (note 2), 395–396.

<sup>25</sup> SCHAEDEER, H. H.: *Iranica*. Abh. GWG Phil.-hist. Kl. III. F. Nr. 10. Berlin 1934, 45.

<sup>26</sup> SCHAEDEER, *op. cit.* (note 25) 46–49.

<sup>27</sup> SCHAEDEER, *op. cit.* (note 25) 44, with earlier literature.

<sup>28</sup> PELLISOT, P.: L'origine du nom de 'Chine'. *T'oung Pao* 13, 1916, 727 ff.

<sup>29</sup> For the metathesis, cp. HENNING, W. B.: *Sogdica*. London 1940, 22; GERSHEVITCH, I.: *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian*. Oxford 1954, 64 (§ 417).

<sup>30</sup> GERSHEVITCH, *op. cit.* (note 29). 69 (§§ 459–460).

cal with Menander's Τάρδου and who ruled from 576 to 603.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the union of the two Northern Chinese kingdoms occurred during his reign. The most recent event related in the letter was the war against Turum (Τουρούμ), a relative of the qayan and the death of Turum respectively. Only one single attempt has been made to identify Turum – according to this attempt he is identical with the Hephthalite king Toramana.<sup>32</sup> Still, even neglecting the difference between the two names that cannot be explained by this assumption, this identification must be rejected on the grounds that Toramana was active in Western Iran and Western India in the years around 512,<sup>33</sup> implying that he could hardly have met Tardu qayan, nor could he have been his relative.

Notwithstanding, the name and the person of Turum and the events associated with him can be reassuringly identified by the help of the Chinese sources. Tardu qayan had a second cousin called *Tu-lan*, the Northern Turk Qayan who ruled between 587 and 599. Tardu waged a war against *Tu-lan* who was killed by his soldiers in 599.<sup>34</sup> This allowed Tardu qayan to consider himself the monarch of both the Western and the Northern Turk Empire when he sent the letter and to assume the boastful title κύριος κλιμάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐπτά used in it. The name *Tu-lan* derives from Ancient Chinese *Tuo-lâm* in which the velar *â* can also represent a foreign *u* vowel (cp. the Chinese [= Northwestern T'ang] transliteration *sâ-t'uo* of Saka *Suhadatti*<sup>35</sup>). Consequently, the foreign prototype of *Tuo-lâm* can be restored in the form *Turum* without any difficulty.

The names and persons of the other Turk rulers who helped Tardu can also be identified. Τουλδίχ was Tardu's son; his name appears as *Tu-liu* in the Chinese sources.<sup>36</sup> The Ancient Chinese form of *Tu-liu* was *Tuo-liuk*, while its Northwestern T'ang variant can be restored as *T'uo-l'uy*, this latter perhaps being the Chinese transliteration of a Turk name, *Tolïq*, a phonetic variant of *Toluq* that occurs in Old Turkic (in the name *Toluq Tükä*<sup>37</sup>). The letters λδ in the Greek transliteration can be attributed to the Sogdian mediation since Sogdian *l* had two phonetic values: *l* and *δ*. Thus the interpretation of the Sogdian spelling of the name became uncertain.

Σπαρζεβοῦν was a great-grandson of Tardu qayan; his full name was *I-p'i* [*sha-po-lo szü yeh-hu* according to the Chinese sources.<sup>38</sup> Σπαρζεβοῦν, the Byzantine transliteration contains the two most important elements, *sha-po-lo* (Ancient Chinese *sâ-puât-lâ*, Northwestern T'ang *sâ-p'â-lâ*) and *yeh-hu* (Ancient Chinese *iäp-γuo*, Northwestern T'ang *iäβ-γ'uo*), in other words, the titles *išpara* and *yäβγü*, the latter in its Western Turkic form *jeβγü*. The third Turk ruler, Κονναξολάν can be identified with *Kia-na shê*,<sup>39</sup> another great-grandson of Tardu, if we assume a confusion of *a* with *ou* in Theophylactus' codices and take the form *Κονναξολάν* as a starting point.

<sup>31</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 50.

<sup>32</sup> HAUSSIG, *op. cit.* (note 2), 379 ff.

<sup>33</sup> For Toramana, cp. HARMATTA, J.: Late Bactrian Inscriptions. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 17, 1969, 399 ff.

<sup>34</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 50.

<sup>35</sup> G. HALOUN in: BAILEY, H. W.: *Khotanese Texts IV*. Cambridge 1961, 178.

<sup>36</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Древнетюркский словарь*. Leningrad 1961, 574.

<sup>38</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

The Ancient Chinese form of the name *Kia-na shê* was *Ka-nâ śiat*, while its North-western T'ang development can be restored as *Ka-nâ ś'ä*, the latter form being the transliteration of *Qanaq*, a Turk name, and the title *śad*. The use of o instead of a and of λ instead of τ in the Greek transliteration can be explained by the oft-occurring confusion of these characters with one another in the Theophylactus codices.<sup>40</sup>

On the basis of the above we may conclude that Tardu qayan informed the Emperor Mauricius of his strife against his second cousin, Turum/*Tu-lan*, the Northern Turk qayan between 595 and 599 and that members of the Western Turk qayan's dynasty, namely Tuliq, Īšpara *jeβγü* and Qanaq *śad* helped him in this war.

The events, identified so far, took place in the years before the letter was written. In the first place, however, the letter mentioned the victory won by Tardu qayan over the Abdels. The Greek text has an accompanying note, according to which the Abdels are the Hephthalites. This note was probably added by Theophylactus to explain the meaning of the ethnic name Ἀβδηλοί. This name remained an unsolved problem in historical research,<sup>41</sup> although it can be easily explained if we bear in mind that the letter was written in Sogdian. In Sogdian the Old Iranian consonant clusters *-ft-* and *-χt-* became voiced *-βd-* and *-γd-*, moreover the Old Iranian initial *h-* disappeared (as in Old Iranian *hafta-*, 'seven' > Sogdian *'βt*, read *aβd*).<sup>42</sup> In accordance with this phonetic law, the form *haftal* developed into *abdal* ~ *abdel* regularly. The greater part of the Hephthalites – the Hephthalite kingdoms surviving in Eastern Iran and Western India – came under Persian rule around 560, but after 571 they became subjects of the Turks.<sup>43</sup> When Tardu qayan came into power, the Hephthalite kingdoms that had earlier been subjected by the Sāsānian rulers had come under Turk supremacy only shortly before and had, according to Chinese sources, revolted against their new overlords in 582.<sup>44</sup> It was this revolt that had been suppressed by Tardu qayan. The letter therefore mentioned not the Hephthalite principalities on Sogdian territory that had been subjected to the Turks long since, but a Hephthalite kingdom that had survived on the territory of Toxaristān that had only come under Turkic rule shortly before.

The letter then went on to describe the alliance concluded by Tardu qayan with the *Stembischagan*. The name *Stembis* reminds of *Istāmi*, qayan of the Western Turk tribes with whom it is usually identified.<sup>45</sup> This identification encounters, however, unsurmountable difficulties. *Istāmi* qayan was Tardu's father and, together with his brother Bumīn qayan, the founder of the Turk Empire. On the testimony of the Orkhon inscriptions, his memory lively survived in the historical consciousness of the Turks as late as the 8th century. It is most unlikely that Tardu would have attributed his

<sup>40</sup> Cp. e.g. a ~ o: Ἀκβας ~ Ὀκβας 150/21, Λαγο- ~ Λογγο- 240/16, 117/3, Ἀδορ- ~ Ἀδααρ 130/24; τ ~ λ: ξενηλατούντες ~ ξενηλαλούντες 107/1.

<sup>41</sup> Cp. HAUSSIG, *op. cit.* (note 2), 325.

<sup>42</sup> GERSHEVITCH, *op. cit.* (note 29) 197 (§ 1316).

<sup>43</sup> HARMATTA, J.: Nyugati türk uralom Kelet-Iránban (Kr.u. 650–750) [Western Turkic rule in Eastern Iran, 650–750 AD]. *Ant. Tan.* 38, 1994, 150.

<sup>44</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5) 49.

<sup>45</sup> This identification was first proposed by MARQUART, J.: Historische Glossen zu den alttürkischen Inschriften. *WKZM* 12, 1898, 185 ff.



father's deeds to himself. Moreover, there are some phonetic difficulties in identifying the name *Istāmi* with Στεμβίς. The spelling -μβ- in the name Στεμβίς cannot represent the -m- of *Istāmi*, because its phonetic value was -mb- or -m-. As shown by the Byzantine transliteration of the ethnic name обри as Ὀμβροί,<sup>46</sup> we have to reckon with the phonetic value of -b- in the case of the consonant cluster -μβ- already at the time (6th century) that the letter was sent by the Turk qaĀan. Consequently, the spelling Στεμβίς should be interpreted as *Stebi-*. Still, in view of the transliteration of *Tabgač* as Ταυγάστ, we must also consider the possibility that the letters -στ replaced the spelling -τζ also in Στεμβί-. The phonetic form of this name could thus equally well have been *Čebi* or *Ĵebi*. In this case the form Στεμβί- can be identified with the name of *Sê-pi* qaĀan of the Chinese sources since the Ancient Chinese phonetic form of the latter, *Dz'i-b'ji*, corresponds exactly to *Ĵebi*, the presumable phonetic value of the spelling Στεμβί-.

This, in turn, fully changes the historical perspective of the events in question. *Ĵebi* (= *Sê-pi*) qaĀan was the son of Tardu qaĀan and brother of Tuldich, who is also mentioned in the letter. His participation in the events at his father's side is thus entirely understandable.

One task still remains, namely the identification of the peoples who, according to the letter, had been defeated by Tardu qaĀan. These peoples were the Avars (Ἀβαροί), the Ogurs (Ὀγῶρ) and the Kolch (Κόλχ). The problem of the Ogurs can be resolved fairly easily. According to the letter, they lived in the region of the river Τίλ, called Μέλας, *i.e.* 'Black'. In this we can easily recognize the name *Qara Itil* 'Black Itil' of the Volga river, that has remained in use up to the present time.<sup>47</sup> These Ogur tribes, living in a loose tribal organization in the Volga region, came under the rule of the Western Turks around 580. They are not identical with the *Tieh-lê* (Oguz) tribes of Inner Asia who had been defeated by Bumīn qaĀan before he turned against the *Juan-juan*. Thus, after the disappearance of *Istāmi* qaĀan, we can eliminate the last element from Tardu qaĀan's letter through which the events reported in the letter can be linked to the Turks' victory over the *Juan-juan*.

Let us now turn to the role of the Avars and the Kolch. The *Sui-shu* mentions a tribe called *A-pa* among the *Tieh-lê* tribes whose revolt led to the fall of Tardu qaĀan in 603. The Ancient Chinese phonetic form of this tribal name was *·â-b<sup>mw</sup>at*, while its Northwestern T'ang development may have been *·â-b<sup>mw</sup>a.l*. Therefore, it can be plausibly regarded as the Chinese transliteration of the tribal name *Apar* ~ *Abar* ~ *Avar*.<sup>48</sup> The *Tieh-lê* (= Oguz) tribes represented an important, but constantly turbulent ethnic element in the Turk Empire and the qaĀans had to repeatedly compel them to recognize their overlordship. Examining this brief period of a few decades that is documented in the historical sources, we find the following. In 603, the revolt of the *Tieh-lê* overthrew Tardu qaĀan. *Ch'u-lo* qaĀan, ruling between 604 and 611, was often defeated by the *Tieh-lê* and finally escaped to China in 611. *Shih-kuei* qaĀan

<sup>46</sup> MORAVCSIK, GY.: *Byzantinoturcica* II<sup>2</sup>. Berlin 1958, 217.

<sup>47</sup> MARKWART, J.: Ein arabischer Bericht über die arktischen (uralischen) Länder aus dem 10. Jahrhundert. *Ujb* 4, 1924, 285.

<sup>48</sup> HARMATTA, J.: Az onogur vándorlás [The migration of the Onogurs]. *MNy* 88, 1992, 260 ff.

who assumed power after him was compelled to withdraw his army advancing victoriously in Iran owing to the revolt of the *Tieh-lê*. This results from the fact that his successor, Ton Yabyu qayan had to defeat the *Tieh-lê* tribes in order to consolidate his power. In 627, towards the end of his rule, the *Tieh-lê* again revolted against him and they similarly revolted against *Sê-pi* qayan who came to power after him between 628 and 630. The qayan who came to power after *Sê-pi* was again forced to quell the restless *Tieh-lê* tribes. When the *Tieh-lê* suffered a defeat, they usually fled to the Chinese. But when the *Tieh-lê* defeated the Turk qayan, the latter also fled to the Chinese.<sup>49</sup> Thus the *Tieh-lê*, i.e. the Oguz tribes revolted repeatedly under the Western Turk qayans and the defeated party usually fled to the Chinese. The events described in Tardu qayan's 'triumphal letter' were oft-recurring typical events in Central Asia and had nothing to do with Bumïn qayan's victory over the *Juan-juan* in 552.

As regards the identification of the Kolch (Κόλχ) it must first be noted that their name cannot be identified with the ethnic name *Qalač* or with the Mongolian tribal name *Halha*.<sup>50</sup> It cannot be identified with the former since the contemporary Byzantine transliteration was Χοαλίται and in any case, the final -χ of Κόλχ cannot be interpreted as a -č either. Neither is the identification of the Κόλχ with the Mongolian tribe of *Halha* possible since this tribe – even if it had existed in the 6th century – lived on the territory of the Northern Turk Empire and Tardu could hardly have led a military campaign against them. We should rather consider the possibility that the spelling Κόλχ, reflecting Sogdian mediation, conceals the ethnonym *Qarluq*. In Sogdian the Turk *q* phoneme was represented by χ and thus the Sogdian form of the ethnonym *Qarluq* may have been *Xalluχ* since the consonant cluster -rl- did not exist in Sogdian. This form was then also adopted and used by Arab and Persian geographers.<sup>51</sup> Aside from *Xalluχ* a form *Xulχ* could also have existed in Sogdian, as shown by the form *sumdr-* that developed from the Sanskrit *samudra-* in Sogdian.<sup>52</sup> The Byzantine spelling, Κόλχ could well be the transliteration of such a Sogdian form in which the dissimilation χ -χ > κ -χ occurred according to Greek phonetic law. The *Qarluq* were under Western Turk rule, but they often revolted against it and played an important role in the fall of the Turk Empire. Their historical role is typical even from the perspective of the Turk qayan's letter to the Emperor Mauricius.

In the light of the above arguments, it is fairly clear that the events described in the Turk qayan's letter that took place between 580 and 599 have nothing to do with the historical events that occurred almost fifty years earlier and can be associated with the rise of the Turk Empire. This conclusion can also be helpful in clarifying the origins of the European Avars.

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<sup>49</sup> CHAVANNES, *op. cit.* (note 5), 14, 15, 24, 26, 52, 88, 89, 116, 175.

<sup>50</sup> HAUSSIG, *op. cit.* (note 2) 372 (Kolch = Halha); CZEGLÉDY, *op. cit.* (note 11) 40 (Kolch = Qalač).

<sup>51</sup> HUDŪD AL-‘ĀLAM, *op. cit.* (note 20), 286.

<sup>52</sup> GERSHEVITCH, *op. cit.* (note 29) 38 (§ 180).