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On the Use of the Title “Beg” among the Turks

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I. Beg can be considered as one of the basic words that reflects the layers of the historical process in the structure of Turkic culture. In one sense, it is one of the key words vital to understanding the heritage of the Steppe state tradition of the Turkic Steppe aristocracy. With its many forms, it holds a characteristic and interesting place in Common Turkic vocabulary. Beg has a wide scope of use ranging from that of a high level title, a modern term used among relatives to a simple call or a form of address.

This article will not enter into the discussions regarding the origins of beg. The focus of the stance we take on the word beg, which some researchers have tied to or based on Chinese or Persian roots, is that this word has been in the Turkic language for about 2000 years with its lively and widespread use and that it entered many languages via Turkic language.¹

The oldest possible occurrence of beg is documented in Chinese sources where it is used as the name of a ruler or his title. However, reading and correctly recognizing these words written in Chinese ideograms is an extremely difficult task. For this reason, the validity of some words that are thought to be beg has been debatable. For example, in Chinese sources, the II. Kopturk king, Kapgan is referred to as Mo-ç’o (Mochuo). Pritsak (1985: 207), Pelliot (1929: 152), and Bombachi (1971: 111, 117) explain the word mochuo () as bög çor. However,

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¹ TMEN II, 403; ED 322b ; E. Blochet, “Introduction a l’histoire des Mongols”, GMS, XII (1912), 93; W. Kotwicz “Contributions aux études altaïques”, A.B. Collectanea Orientalia, Vilno 1920, nr. 2, 38-54.

Beckwith (1987: 58, n. 23) indicates that Mo’ translated as “beg” is not correct, stating that in Chinese the syllable fu () is normally used for beg. The title of Uigur Bögü Khaghan is Mouyu kehan in Chinese, and occurs as ‘bug çhor in Tibetan. Here, the first form of both of these is bögü in Old Turkic and represents “wise”. Rybatzki thinks that Mo’ () in Chinese is the shortened variant of Mouyu’ (). (Rybatzki 2000: 223). Likewise in the T’ang dynasty yearbooks when the ideogram , pronounced as po and fu, is pronounced as Po, the T’ang dynasty reading is “b·k”, which is considered as the equivalent of the Old Turkic word ‘beg’ (Togan 2006: 208).

From the first written texts in the field of historical and modern Turkic language, we can recognize the widespread use of beg (b/p; e/ä/i, -g/-k/-y) with its basic phonetic changes.² This variation, demonstrated in its form, can generally be observed as having the semantic similarities of beg from region to region in different social structures.

Actually beg, used as a title to mean “the head of a group, clan or tribe, the second in command” was used in various Turkic sates in both the Islamic western and eastern Turkic areas in various languages in equivalent forms: beg = Ar. emir~ mir = Fa. mirza.

It is possible to explain the historical and modern process of beg and its derivatives, within the framework of its function and use in the Turkic political, military and social structure as follows:

1. The use of *beg* and its derivatives in the highest level of state hierarchy to mean “khan, ruler”³.

² Historical: Kok. Uig. *beg*; Qarakh. Kharezm. *beg*, CC. *beg* ~ *bey*, Kipc. *beg* ~ *bey*, *bi*, Ott. *beg* ~ *bey*; Modern: Turk. *bey*, Gag. *bey*, Az. *bäy*, Trkm. *beg*, Crm. Tat. Kar.(K), *beg*, *bey*, Kum. Nogh. KKlp. Kzk. *bek*, Tat. Bask. *bi*, Kirg. *bek*, Alt. *piy*, Alt.(dial.) *peg*, *pig*, *biy*, Uzb. Uyg. *bek*, Uyg. (dial.) *beg*, *bég*, Uzb. (dial.) *biy*, Khak. *pig*, Yak. *bi*., Çuv. *pi* (“manager, administrator”).

³ From the oldest periods to the periods before and after Islam, the Turks used a variety of titles for ‘ruler’. According to Chinese records, the oldest known titles for the Asian Hun Emperor Khan were *tanhu* and *şanyü*. Moreover, during the same periods *yabgu* was used. The Old Turkic era employed *kagan*, *kan*, *idi-kut*, *ilteber*, *erkin* (*kül erkin*, *ulug erkin*). Post-Islamic Turkic states used forms such as *hakan*, *han* and *ilig*, *ilçi beg* (during the Kharakhanid era), Arabic forms were *sultan*, *melik* and the Persian forms were *şah*, *padişah*. In addition to these titles, the highest level of administrators in certain periods

2. The use of *beg* in state hierarchy, as the independent leaders beneath the ruler to mean “a tribe or clan leader”⁴.
3. The use of *beg* as a noble title to mean prince, crown prince and princess.
4. The use of *beg* as a form of address to mean “respect, reverence, honor, elevation, glorification”⁵.

and certain areas were called *beg*, which was equal to “ruler”. Like such large dynasties as the Kharakhanids and the Seljuks whose rulers went by such titles as khan, sultan and emperor, there were some rulers and princes of small Turkic dynasties that appeared to use the title of *beg*. The first Ottoman rulers, the Qara Quyunlu ve Aq Quyunlu, used the title *beg*. For example, the people that founded the Seljuk Empire held the title of *beg* (*Tugrul Beg*, *Çagri Beg*). The title of *beg* was used in place of “sultan, ruler” in the Ottoman State up to the time of Sultan Mehmed the Conquerer, Murad II called himself *beg*. It is possible to say that it was the preferred title especially during the periods after Islam just as the transition from the principality to state and to the empire was in process. In fact, Tamerlane was one of the rulers who used the title of *beg* instead of khan. On the other hand, in *Kutadgu Bilig*, the word *beg* (300) was the second most frequently used word for “ruler”, besides *padişah*, *hakan*, *han*, *melik*, *ilçi*, after the word *ilig* (800). (Tekin 2001: 111).

⁴ In the Old Turkic period, *beg*, was the title of people who headed small tribes or large communities comprising various tribes and was a lesser title than the title of khan. In Kafeso lu’s formulation of *uğuş-urug-boy-bodun-il* as the structure of Turkic life in the steppes, at the head of the clans made of both families and urugs, there were *boy beg*’s assigned to protect the internal solidarity of the clan, to improve justice and rights and to protect the interests of the clan, with guns, if necessary a nation comprised of the union of clans was led by leaders who had titles such as *yabgu*, *şad*, *ilteber* (Kafeso lu 1997: 230-231). In administration, *begs* were the greatest assistants of the khan. In the Old Turkic period, we can witness *boy beg* in the phrases in the Kokturk inscriptions.

⁵ Likewise, we can cautiously interpret *beg* as ‘God’s emissary’ in a Manichaean text, meaning the one who represents God, *tāngri*, with the word, “to extoll, to honor”, and with the word “venerable” as a form of address. It could be considered as: *Ölügüg tırgüriğli beg ay teñriçe* “the moon god, the lord who brings the dead to life” (M. I, 24, 27-8) and *bilge beg teñri Mar Nev Manı* (M. I, 12, 19). Furthermore, *begrek* “a form of address denoting respectability” < *beg+rek* “superior, more than an (ordinary) beg” (ED 328b). The word *beg* is a derivation of a comparative suffix. The suffix *+rAk* is usually only added to adjectives and adverbs, which is wh-3nk .03 a

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As is exemplified above, there are a large number of derivatives of beg. In its rich area of use, determining and recording the use of beg in historical texts will without a doubt provide important and remarkable results, both for the history of language and the history of culture. In this article, while this topic requires a wider scope of examination, within a general framework, we have attempted to dwell on the philological aspect of some terms that are beg's derivatives and that are also from the Old and Middle Turkic areas. Here, out of the approximately 50 terms we found in our scanning of texts, we selected a few examples that were remarkable, that were represented in the text and that needed explanation. Without a doubt, it is possible to do a study of a wider scope of all the terms that would encompass all the characteristics of beg that is effective in all levels of Turkic aristocracy.

II. 1. ilig beg

compared with *ilig han* (U.I 6) found in Uigur documents, meaning “ruler”.

2. İlçi beg

One can discover the use of *ilçi beg* in the area of historical Turkic language in *Kutadgu Bilig* to mean “administrator, manager, ruler”: KB (2020) *aya ilçi begler ilig kolsa sak, bu saklık bile sen tözü ilge bak* “Hey, ruler of the kingdom, if you want to your country to be protected, take precautionary measures all over your land.”; (KB 5250) *negü tir eşitgil bügü ilçi beg, bu beglik işini bilir yolçı beg* “Listen to what the magistrate ruler running the country and the administrator giving advice in these managerial affairs, have to say”.

On the other hand, we see *İlçi beg*, as a managerial office in the 13th-14th century Turfan-Uigur civil documents: [*Iduk*] *kut t(e)ngrikeni[m(i)zke] ülcey tümen ilçi beg[lerke] m(e)n yıgmuş [bitig birür m(e)n.]* “Felicitations to the venerable Iduk-Kut, to all the Tümen ilçi rulers, I am Y gm (I am presenting the deed)” [T. (140a/055) = U. 5947]

In this document about the census, it starts with a salutation to *dikut*, meaning the Uigur rulers, after which the addressee, an employee, of the given document, is mentioned as *tümen ilçi beg*. O. Fikri Sertkaya translated this phrase as ‘regional tax officials’¹⁰. If we think that the this document is an individual declaration and that the document’s addressee is the person responsible for the census and tax collection, we see that in the Turk-Mongol administration system, this job was done by *darugas*. As a result, it is possible that the use of *ilçi beg* is an equivalent of *daruga*. The Golden Horde *yarliq*’s use of *daruga begi* is interesting. The word *daruga* is usually used with the title of *beg*¹¹. The *darughas* in the Golden Horde, as the representatives of the great central khan, are the

¹⁰ Osman Fikri Sertkaya, “Eski Uygur Türklerinden Hukuk Belgeleri Örnekleri”, *Türklerde İnsani Değerler ve İnsan Hakları (Başlangıcından Osmanlı Dönemine Kadar)*, Türk Kültürüne Hizmet Vakfı Yay., İstanbul 1992, 134.

¹¹ A. Melek Özyetgin, *Altın Ordu, Kırım ve Kazan Sahasına Ait Yarlık ve Bitiklerin Dil ve Üslup İncelemesi*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1996, 112, 115.

most important civil chiefs, ‘governors’ of the provinces, responsible for the census procedures¹². The basic meaning of the word *İlçi* (< *elçi*)¹³ was ‘the ruler’s representative in a foreign area’. The word *ilçi* is part of all of these terms and points to the direct representative power of the ruler. According to this, the term *ilçi beg*, which is in our text, possibly shows that this person is an appointee of the central ruler to represent and to be the regional, divisional administrator and governor.

3. beg i i

This expression comprises *Beg+işi*. R.R. Arat explains that although the meaning of this combination, which he believes belongs to the Turkic clans organization, is clear, it’s roots are obscure (1991: 358). He also states that it is remarkable that the word is used only by administrators, and only with *beg* and has the same meaning. The word *işi* must mean “the leader’s spouse”. Likewise, in DLT, the word *işiler* means “woman, upper level women” (I, 117). It was natural for the spouses to accompany the rulers in the Turkic state organization. However, it is not very clear how much say the spouse had in the administration (ED 256a, TMEN II 645). R.R. Arat considers the term *beg işi* to be used more in clan organization than in state organization (1991: 358).

The term *beg işi* occurs in Buddhist Uigur religious texts and here it is always used with compounds about state and public management. In *Sekiz Yükmek* it is seen in this form: *İnçip yana yirke tengrike burkanka ilke kanka **begke işike** yirinür övkileyür kut birmez igidmez tip* “thus again he will get angry with the earth, the sky, the

¹² As military governors and tax collectors, Darughas held an important place in the Turk-Mongol administrative tradition. Among the duties of the Darughas, were general census taking organization, recruiting solidiers for the local military, establishing postal stations and collecting taxes and sending them to the ruler. For more detailed information see: Beatrice Forbes Manz ‘The Office of Darughas Under Tamerlane’, *Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları (Journal of Turkish Studies)*, Vol. 9, 1985, 59-69; István Vásáry, ‘The Golden Horde Term Darughas and Its Survival in Russia’, *Acta Orientalia*, XXX (2), 1976, 187-197.

¹³ See *elçi* ED129a, TMEN II 656.

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again.” [SJ M/6, Inv.1952g. 4176, Clark 57; Yamada Sa29, Sayit-Yusup 29 (1-29)]

4. Begeç < beg+eç “prince”

It is well-known that in the vocabulary of Common Turkic, the words *tigin*, *oglan* are common and used for “prince, crown prince”. With the examples of the derivatives made with *beg* that are used as names directly for the concept of “prince, crown prince”, the examples thought to be used as noble titles for princes are actually quite limited in number as determined by the document. For this reason, this meaning of the term has to be interpreted with caution. On the other hand, the derivatives of *beg* that are titles used for noble women (such as *begim* ~ *begüm*) are more distinctive functionally.

The word *begeç*, *beg* is a(beg)Tj /F -1.etea5.43uffixuch as

5. Begüm

Among *beg*'s derivatives, there is the notable word *begim* ~ *begüm* used as a noble title and having one of the most widespread uses for women of noble heritage. The word *beg* has also taken the first person singular possessive suffix meaning “my beg”. This form was later used as a form of address and after that was used as a title. Actually while being used primarily for men as a title, this term began to be used for women too. This word can also be compared to the Old Turkic's *Tengrim* < *Tengri+m* which adopted the first person singular suffix “used as a title for the daughters and spouses of the ruler; princess.” (ED 524a).

In Old Turkic texts, *beg* was determined to be used for “spouse, woman”. P. Zieme gave the meaning of the word *begim* in the text to mean “my spouse” used for women. (1987: 307): ...*qızım bağag xatun-qa begim qutadmış ...bört-ke oglum bağag-ga begim ödüş-ke qızım liçük-ke...* “...for my daughter bağag xatun, for my wife Qutadm Bört.. for my son bağag, for my wife Ödü , for my daughter liçük...” (A.T. III M (144) (Mainz 858, T III Mtq 144).

The word *begim* ~ *begüm*, which takes the first person singular suffix, was later used especially in the Turkic-Indian Empire. In the *Baburname*, Babur's father used *begim* for women relatives of the Timür family. In the *Baburname*, besides *begim* as among the titles used for women, there were again derivatives of *beg* such as the words *bî*, *begi* ~ *bigi*, *bike* (Arat 1987: 587-589).

On the other hand, A. Bican Ercilasun corrected the name of the girl, Fakim, who married the famous ruler of the Sassani's of the Kokturk Khan Istemi Khan, Nu irevan, as *Begim*. If this is accepted, then it appears that the use of the name, *Begim* ~ *Begüm*, as a personal name can be traced much further back in time (Ercilasun 2004: 808).

This word, which is found in Eastern Turkic area, meaning “a title given to women of noble heritage”, was taken from Turkistan to India during Babur's time there. Moreover, especially in Pakistan today the word *begüm* is a variant of *begam*, used as an equivalent of “lady”. In Indo-Persian sources, this title was *begam*, and was only used during

KP: Kalyanamkara Papamkara, see Hamilton (1998)
 Kum.:Kumyk
 Kzk.: Kazakh
 M: Manichaika, see Le Coq (19129)
 Man.: Manichaeen
 Nogh.: Noghay
 Ott.: Ottoman
 Pe.: Persian
 Qarakh.: Qarakhanid
 Tar.: Taranchi
 Tat.: Tatar
 TMEN: see Doerfer (1963-75)
 Trkm.: Turkmen
 TT: Türkische Turfan Texte, see bibliography
 Turk: Turkish
 U: Uigurica, see Müller (1908, 1920)
 Uig.: Uigur (Old Turkic).
 Urd.: Urdu
 Uyg.: Modern Uygur
 Uzb.: Uzbek
 Wind.: see Bang (1928).
 Yak.: Yakut

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