

The Camel and its Symbolism in the Daily Life of the Mongols with Particular Reference to their Folk Songs

Animals are an essential aspect for the survival of a society characterized by nomadic traditions. It is little known that for Mongolians the performance of music, and especially chanting, has been an indispensable factor in livestock-breeding itself. This article shows how the camel has its established place in legends, parables, metaphors, ritual songs and everyday folk songs, as well as in modern literature. All these art forms often also impart knowledge pertaining to the camel or its significance for Mongolians.

THE CAMEL IN THE DAILY LIFE OF THE MONGOLS OVER THE CENTURIES

In the Mongol non-sedentary breeding communities, a symbolism has evolved that directly relates to this feature of their existence. This symbolism already existed among pre-Mongolian ethnic groups, as can be concluded from numerous camel petroglyphs such as those at *Bičigtiin xad*, *Bayanlig* and *Čulūt*. Further indications of this are the still-preserved cave paintings of the “Northern Blue Cave” (*Xoit cenxeriin agui*) in western Mongolia, which, estimated to be 15,000–20,000 years old, date back to the Upper Paleolithic period and thus show the world’s earliest illustrations of a camel (see picture 23).¹

The importance of the Bactrian camel becomes apparent from a tradition that has been kept alive to this day: apart from horses, only camels have been identified by a *tamga* (um. *tamaγ-a*).² A *tamga* is a brand (see picture 24), a “clan emblem” or a seal (cf. Chuluunbaatar 2009:10). Moreover, the design of the nose-peg (*buil*), a utensil used in camel husbandry, was adopted as a brand in its own right (see picture 25).

In 1206, after the foundation of the Mongol empire, *Činggis Xān* issued the *Yasa*, a code of law for the entire empire. According to many scholars, the *Yasa*, which no longer exists in its original form, is not a uniform, systematically structured body of law, but merely a collection of regulations and instructions that *Činggis Xān* issued over the years if needed for concrete occasions (cf. Ratchnevsky 1974). It specified, among other things, that the theft of a camel had to be compensated by returning the camel plus nine similar animals (cf. Lane 2006:216). In the *Oirat* Mongol code of 1640, the punishment was increased to “15 nines of livestock” (i.e. 135 animals) and hence exceeded the value of a horse, even of a stallion (cf. Buyanöljei 2000:141).

Over the centuries, camels, particularly the rare white specimens, were of special importance to the then rulers, as they were in ritual folklore. In the second half of the 13th century, Marco Polo, for example, reports on a procession of white horses and camels at the New Year’s celebrations in front of the *Xubilai Xān* (cf. Knust 1983:156). In the 17th century, Mongol rulers had to pay an annual tribute of “Nine Whites” (um. *Yisün caγan-u alba*) to the Manchurian-Chinese emperor. This tribute consisted of one white camel and eight white horses (cf. Perdue 2005:139)

¹ The cave was added to the Unesco World Heritage Tentative List on August 1, 1996 in the cultural category, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/935/>, consulted 4 Nov., 2010.

² Mongolian is not a unified language. Unless stated otherwise, the *Xalx*-Mongolian dialect was transcribed. The following abbreviations are used: um. – Uigur-Mongolian, skr. – Sanskrit, tib. – Tibetan. With the exception of transliterations adopted from the authors cited, the transliteration schemes of Chuluunbaatar (2008) were applied both for the Uigur-Mongolian script and the Mongolian Cyrillic script. This is particularly important for the bibliography at the end of the article.

and was of a purely symbolic nature, as white was associated with highly valued qualities such as good fortune and health. These qualities were also important in traditional weddings. Thus the bride was taken to the yurt of the groom by a white horse and a camel of the same color. This custom with the same symbolism can also be found among some Turkic ethnic groups (cf. Blackwell 2001:151).

These animals, horses and camels, also played important roles in the life cycle. In “*Erdeniyin tobči*” (um.), which is translated as “Precious Summary: A Mongolian Chronicle of 1662”, written by *Sayang Sečen* in that year, the author reports that, for burials of persons of high standing, a horse or a camel was killed as animal sacrifice and then buried together with the deceased (Elverskog 2007:72). Even today, linguistic taboos regarding camels can be observed, especially associated with situations of death or pregnancy – and often gender-specific (Chuluunbaatar forthcoming). Joseph Kler (1938:59) reports of the *Ordos* Mongols: “Should a pregnant woman make fun of a camel or eat hare meat, her infant will be born with a hare lip, and other people will say that she has made fun of a camel or hare or of some person with a hare lip.”

During his visit to the *Ordos* Mongols, the scholar Schuyler Cammann (1951:167) saw a ho-ly yearling camel with a necklace made of sheep’s shoulder blades (scapulae) and that men were therefore not allowed to ride. The significance of this animal, however, is not only apparent in folk belief. Starting with the second “Buddhisatation” of the Mongols at the close of the 16th century, Buddhism in its Tibetan form played a substantial role, which continued into the following centuries. Interestingly enough, the camel left several traces in the representation of some deities of the Mongolian Lamaistic pantheon, which distinguishes itself at times from the Tibetan form. An example of this is the camel-riding deity, the “Queen of the Winter” (um. *Ebül-ün okin tegri*, tib. *dGun-gyi rGyal-mo*, skr. *Hemantadevi*),³ one of the goddesses of the four seasons in the retinue of *Baldan lam/Oxin tenger* (um. *Okin tegri*, tib. *dPal-ldan lha-mo*, skr. *Śrīmatī Devī*). The popularity of the “Queen of the Winter” in Mongolia is apparent from the fact that they also like to depict her as an individual figure, whereas scroll paintings (tib. *thang-ka*) in Tibet only show her together with her three companions and just as one of the secondary figures surrounding the main figure *Baldan lam*.

Much of the color symbolism as well as the aureole-like radiance of the manes in certain paintings turns up again in the modern paintings of the former Mongolian People’s Republic. An example of such art is the painting “The Black Camel” by the artist A. Sengezoxio from 1962 (Museum of Modern Art, Ulaanbaatar). Camels, horses, cattle, sheep and goats are of such great importance for Mongolian animal husbandry that all together they were – and still are – called the “five snouts” (*tavan xošū mal*). In spite of the influence of the Soviet Union at that time, their significance for the Mongols was even visible in the corresponding state symbolism. This might also be due to semantic reasons because of the association with the five-pointed Soviet star (cf. Stolpe 2006). Despite having a social system that primarily depended on animal husbandry, the Mongolian People’s Republic considered itself a modern state. Illustrations with camel themes from that time are mostly connected with progressive achievements such as oil rigs or electricity pylons. Moreover, the camel was part of the Mongolian coat of arms and was hence shown on banknotes and other official emblems from 1940 until 1960. In the globalized age, however, camels are now used to transport satellite dishes to keep camel nomads up to date on news and to provide them with a kind of diversion unknown until recently (see picture 26).

³ An example of the “Queen of the Winter” of the 19th century is part of the collection of the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar. Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, <http://imageserver.himalayanart.org/fif=fp/50122.fpx&obj=uv,1.0&page=image.html&rect=0,0,1,1&hei=400>, consulted 5 Nov., 2010.

THE CAMEL IN MONGOLIAN EVERYDAY MUSIC

Apart from the herdsmen's calls, which are very important in human-camel interactions, the imitation of animal sounds is considered to be one of the earliest forms of musical expression. The camel as motif, however, is also used in all other later musical categories in Mongolia. The following gives examples of some of these categories, which can be regarded as part of everyday music or ritual music, since the distinction is not always clear.⁴ Only a comparatively small number of such songs are directly related to religion in Mongolian culture.

The herdsmen's calls are used as a herding technique to communicate with the livestock, to take them to the pastures, and another particular form is employed during animal births. There are numerous variations of camel signals used on the pastures, far exceeding those commonly used for other grazing animals. These include:

<i>dūr dūr</i>	–	come here
<i>xōs xōs</i>	–	an imitation of the sounds produced by camels used for soothing a motherless camel calf
<i>xā xā</i>	–	attention
<i>xā xōž</i>	–	go away
<i>sōg sōg</i>	–	lie down
<i>xōž xōž</i>	–	get up
<i>xai xeg</i>	–	everything is all right
<i>xoig xoig</i>	–	more slowly
<i>xii xoig</i>	–	forward/move on!

Caravanners in particular use such commands, but traditionally they do not sing any of the so-called “long song” (*urtyn dū*) genre during their journey (Ceren 2008:95), because they might create the impression that it lasts even longer.

The camel has its established place in legends, parables, metaphors, ritual songs and everyday folk songs, as well as in modern literature. All of these art forms often also convey knowledge of the camel or its significance for the Mongols. Performing music has several important functions in Mongol culture. It does not just constitute a mobilizing process at social gatherings, but is also a manifestation of established symbolism and a display of identities (Kuutma 2006:7, cf. Chuluunbaatar 2010:166). In rural areas, herders' songs related to everyday activities (e.g. milking) are an example of the social function of music. The following custom shows how closely the songs and related work activities are intertwined and how essential they are for the survival of nomadic cultures.

First it should be explained that, strangely enough, the female camel sometimes abandons her newborn. Mongolian camel herders assume that this is because camels often go through severe pain while giving birth (see picture 27). By playing the *morin xūr*, the horsehead fiddle (see picture 28), and by singing special rhythmic *bogino dū* (short songs), and in exceptional cases the not very rhythmic *urtyn dū* (long songs), they attempt to encourage the mother to accept her rejected calf or another camel's orphan. This custom – also used with other animals – is called *tōlō golox*. These practices are deeply rooted in an ancient time, as numerous early reports such as one by Peter Simon Pallas (1776:177–178) indicate. It shows an aspect of maternal care provided to their animals that is uniquely Mongolian and that only became known to the wider public through the Oscar-nominated film *The Story of the Weeping Camel*. Despite the fact that this kind of music is performed in everyday life,⁵ its actual performance in this case has a certain ritual character. For example, before playing the fiddle, the *morin xūr* is hung over one of the humps of the mother camel. This establishes a connection between the person playing the instrument, the camel and the “eternal blue sky”, which is considered sacred by the Mongols. Other instruments, such as the

⁴ While this is self-evident for Mongols, who are concerned with music, it at times contradicts the etic thought of some scientists, who have a certain tendency towards definitive categorization.

⁵ Mongolian herders use this kind of music in animal breeding almost on a daily basis for each of the five groups of animals: camels, horses, cattle, sheep and goats.

aman xūr (jew's harp) or the *limbe* (flute), are also used for this purpose. Just as important as the playing itself is the soft chanting of the words *xōs xōs* by the herdsman, as in the first stanza of the following song. In transcription and in literal translation the stanza reads:

Inge xōslōx učir:

*Angir šarga ūrgiig čin',
amltan šimex ūr n' bolson;
aldrāi byacxan botgō yūnd
andū sanan golson yūm be?
Ōglō bosōd ōmōlzōn zogsōno,
ōtgōn sūgē šimūlē č dē.
Xōs, xōs, xōs,
Xōs, xōs, xōs*

Song to soothe a mother camel:⁶

Your first milk, reddish-yellow like a Mandarin duck,
the young one was born to suck your milk.
Why are you abandoning your little baby?
In the mornings the newborn wakes up and trembles,
please, feed it with your creamy milk.
*Xōs, xōs, xōs,
Xōs, xōs, xōs*

In the context of nomadic life, the above stanza reveals a profound meaning. While the literal meaning of the word *xōs* in the title is any kind of foam, froth, lather and so on, in this case it acts as a metaphor for the froth produced when the camel calf is drinking milk. In the first line of the text, the “reddish-yellow” (*angir šar*) hints allegorically at the color of the first milk (*colostrum*) of a camel cow after giving birth (we find the same metaphor in the song *Ōčīn cagān botgo*). Both the color and the name of this particular milk are metaphorically connected to the Mandarin duck (*angir šuvū* in Mongolian). These migratory birds live in pairs on many lakes in Mongolia and their ducklings follow the alert Mandarin ducks everywhere.⁷ All this is conveyed by mentioning the color *angir šar* to the camel mother.⁸

Another song, “The orphaned white camel calf” (*Ōčīn cagān botgo*), conveys in a lachrymose form how a motherless camel misses its mother. The lyrics deal with the lament of the camel calf and the female singer imitates the agonized cries of longing in the song. Because of this imitation of the cries, the song cannot, musically speaking, be classified as one of the common Mongolian song genres. The result is an uncommon and therefore rare mixture of the musical forms of the *bogino dū* and *urtyn dū* genres, which I would call *boginovtor urtyn dū* (shortened long-song).⁹ A drawn-out but rhythmical melody (which is typical of *bogino dū*) is complemented by elongated vocal ornamentations of the lyrics typical of *urtyn dū* singing, which influence the rhythm accordingly. As far as its content is concerned, the song also assumes the character of an intense lament, which in this case rather takes on the nature of *urtyn dū* singing.¹⁰ In this song, the camel calf wants to cross the mountains to get to its mother. Thus it can be assumed that the mother camel is alive, but beyond the calf's reach. Although not explicitly stated, according to similar epic motifs the mother was probably sold by the herder. The same theme of the White Orphan Camel Colt is known from several Mongolian epics (*tūl*) as well as from various different fairytales. This may be the main reason for the unusual seriousness of the theme and

⁶ For an audio sample of this and other camel-related songs see <http://bit.ly/M6TUJn>.

⁷ As a migratory bird, the Mandarin duck is also often used as a metaphor for the seasons in Mongolian folklore (see e.g. the cited passage of the ritual text *Temēnii dallaga*).

⁸ A song with a different text, but with the same metaphor of the Mandarin duck, is also used in sheep husbandry (cf. Hasumi 1980:142–143).

⁹ *Bogino dū* (short songs) are strophic, syllabic in structure, highly melodic and have precise rhythms, whereas *urtyn dū* are performed by interpreters with an expansive range, plenty of characteristic ornamentation, vibrato and tremolos. In *urtyn dū* the vocal range spans up to three octaves and demands considerable artistic sentiments and skills from the singer. The internationally common use of the literal translation “long song” for the *urtyn dū* genre does not particularly correspond to what it actually means in Mongolian. These songs are not called *urtyn dū* in Mongolian because of their length, but because each sung syllable is stretched (vocally elongated). A translation of this song category closer to the Mongolian meaning would be “extended song”.

¹⁰ A different term for such songs is used by ethnomusicologist Carole Pegg (2001:49). She labels them “lengthened short-song” (*urtavtar bogino dū*). In my opinion, however, this term does not do justice to the song. The famous Mongolian *urtyn dū* singer N. Norovbanzad also places this song in the *urtyn dū* genre (cf. Norovbanzad 2004, liner notes).

the expression of a song that is actually regarded as belonging to the genre of songs of everyday life. In *Xalx*-Mongolian transcription and in literal translation the lyrics read:

Öñčin cagān botgo:

*Öñčin cagān botgo n
ölsöxiin erxēr builna
öl xalzan ēžiiḡē
sanaxyn učir builna*

*Xulsny möčriig
xūlan xūlan builna
xurūn činē mōmō
üḡüilexiin erxēr builna*

*Dersnii namiag
xemlen xemlen builna
delentei ēžiiḡē
sanaxyn ixed builna*

*Āvtaixan botgo n
āvygā dagād toglono
āv üḡüi botgo n
arār tenēd builna*

*Ēžteixen botgo n
ēžē dagād builna
ēžḡüixen botgo n
ergēr tenēd builna*

*Övdögnii min zogdor
urgasan č bolōsoi
Övör Xangaig davād
ēždē tavargād očixson*

*Šiliin min zogdor
urgasan č bolōsoi
šiliin xangaig davād
ēždē ḡüigēd xirex yumsan*

*Zōgōr dūren
zūn olon temēnēs
zūxan langiin ünetei
minii ēž xaičiv*

*Tašūgār dūren
tavin ulān temēnēs
tavxan langiin ünetei
minii ēž xaičiv*

*Talyn olon temēnēs
ta min yünd baixḡüi ve
engeriin olon temēnd
ēž min yaagād baixḡüi ve?*

*Žalga dund belčērtei
žaran šarga ingenēs*

The White Orphan Camel Colt:

The orphaned white camel colt
cries out for he is hungry.
He cries for he misses
his white-faced mother.¹¹

He cries nibbling and
nibbling the bamboo branches.
He cries for he is missing
the finger-sized nipples.

He cries nibbling and
nibbling the tufts of the feather grass.
He cries for he is missing
his mother with udders.

The calves that have fathers
follow their fathers and play.
The fatherless camel colt
wanders behind and cries.

The calves that have mothers
follow their mothers and bleat.
The motherless camel colt
wanders along the ravine and cries.

The hair on my knees,
I wish it had grown.
I would gallop to my mother
crossing over the southern *Xangai* Mountains.

The mane of my nape,
I wish it had grown.
I would run to my mother
crossing over the back of *Xangai* Mountains.

From among the hundreds of camels
filling the ridge.
My mother sold for a hundred pieces (lans) of silver,¹²
where did my mother go?

From among the fifty chestnut camels
filling the side of the hill.
My mother sold for fifty pieces (lans) of silver,
where did my mother go?

In the steppe there are several camels,
why are you not among them?
On the southern mountain slope there are camels,
why are you not among them?

From among the sixty female camels
grazing in the middle of the ravine.

¹¹ The Mongolian text refers to a “small white blaze” on the forehead of the camel mother, which is very rare.

¹² In earlier times, people frequently paid with silver coins or bullion from which different sized pieces were cut off as needed. *Lan* (*liang, tael*) is a Chinese weight unit that was also used in Mongolian settlement areas during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

*žaran langiin ünetei
minii ēž xā yavā bol?*

My mother sold for sixty pieces (lans) of silver,
whereto did my mother go?

*Xailāstyn davāg n
davsan č bolōsoi xō
xalūn xōrxōn mēmē
xōxsōn č bolōsoi*

I wish I could cross
the *Xailāstyn* pass.
I could suckle at
warm lovely udders.

*Burgastain davāgar n
davsan č bolōsoi xō
bulag bolson mēmē
xōxsōn č bolōsoi xō*

I wish I could cross
the *Burgastai* pass.
I could suckle at udders
like from a spring.

*Ar šandyn usnās n
amssan č bolōsoi xō
angir šar ūrgā
amtalsan č bolōsoi*

If I had tried
the water of the river on the southern side.
If I had tasted
the milk colored like a Mandarin duck.

*Dalan cagān tēmē n
talā dagan belčixed
dalai bolson sūgē
sanan sanan builna xō*

Seventy white camels
are grazing on the steppe.
How I miss and cry for the
the ocean-like milk.

Several stylistic characteristics typical of traditional Mongolian music can be observed in the above lyrics. The song is composed of four-line stanzas and shows an alliteration of the initial sounds of the lines. In addition, the words at the end of each verse are often repeated.

The significance of the rich world of sounds in Mongolia, with its basic forces of nature and its ever-present fauna, is represented through the wide range of song genres. Very frequently these songs give accounts of the various gaits of a camel, which are imitated in a rhythmic way both vocally and with stringed instruments, particularly among the western Mongolian *Oirats*.¹³ An example of such a (dance) song is *Žūrā geldene* (The Prancing Camel) (cf. Chuluunbaatar 2007, Track 15)¹⁴. The numerous references to animal gaits in Mongolian folklore are also reflected in different proverbs, as for example in “A three-year old male camel comes prancing along / The grass of the plain is falling”, which stands for “cutting the hair” (Taylor 1954:327).

In an *Oirat*-Mongol song called “The Rendezvous” (*Bolzō*), which can be classified as part of rare genre of the dialog song (*xarilcā dū*), a herdsman uses the camels’ behavior as an explanation or excuse to his lover for not showing up at several rendezvous. In this example, we also encounter the color symbolism that is so important in everyday Mongolian culture (cf. Shukowskaja 1996). With each missed rendezvous, a male camel of another color is brought up, while color adjectives are even attributed to geographical names. Despite all obstacles for the people involved, the song has a positive finale, which is characteristic of *Oirat* chants and by which they can often be distinguished from songs of other Mongolian ethnic groups. As in *Ōnčin cagān botgo* described above, *Bolzō* also shows alliteration of the initial sounds of the lines. In *Oirat*-Mongolian transcription and in literal translation the lyrics read:

Bolzō

*Ulān būrtai temēgē
xurāna gesen čin yalā dā*

The Rendezvous

Female lover:
You wanted to round up your red male camel and his herd,
that is what you told me, what happened?

¹³ Numerous Mongolian melodies imitate camel paces: walking (*alxax*), gentle trotting (*vergōx*), trotting (*šogšix*), fast trotting (*xatirax*), slow galloping (*tsogix*), galloping (*davxix*), fast-paced galloping (*tavrax*), prancing (*devxrex*) and so on. Some *bii* dances also imitate camel paces, such as the *bii* dance of the *Zaxchin Oirats* called *Bulgan šaryn yavdal*.

¹⁴ For an audio sample of this and other camel-related songs see <http://bit.ly/M6TUJn>.

ulān xürengiin zax dēr
ülzana gesen čin yalā dā

At this red-brown edge of the valley,
we would meet, you said to me, what happened?

Ulān būrtai temēnūd
usand orōd sātālā dā
ulān xürengiin zaxār
üyerlež ursād očsongui

Male lover:
The red male camel and his camels
went into the water to drink, that is what held me up.
At this red-brown edge of the valley,
there was high water, that is why I could not come.

Xar būrtai temēgē
xurāna gesen čin yalā dā
xatū zōlōngiin zax dēr
xargaldana gesen čin yalā dā

Female lover:
You wanted to round up your black male camel and his herd,
that is what you told me, what happened?
At this smooth-hard edge of the valley,
we would meet, you said to me, what happened?

Xar būrtai temēnūd
xargana rū orōd sātālā dā
xatū zōlōngiin zax čin
xaraxui bolōd očsongui

Male lover:
The black male camel and his camels,
they went into the pea shrub to eat, that is what held me up.
At this smooth-hard edge of the valley,
it suddenly got dark, that is why I could not come.

Xüren būrtai temēgē
xurāna gesen čin yalā dā
xüren xürengiin zax dēr
xürnē gesen čin yalā dā

Female lover:
You wanted to round up your brown male camel and his herd,
that is what you told me, what happened?
To this brownest edge of the valley,
you would come, you said to me, what happened?

Xüren būrtai temēnūd
xövögör garād sātālā dā
xüren xürengiin zaxār
xüiten bolōd očsongui

Male lover:
The brown male camel and his camels,
crossed the steppe, that is what held me up.
At this brownest edge of the valley,
it got cold, that is why I could not come.

Tormon šartai temēnūd
toglon cuvād baina dā xō
tanxil xongor bid xoyor
tārād sūx n damžigui

Together:
The two-year-old yellow male camel and his camels,
they play and walk one after the other.
My spoilt darling, we both,
belong to each other and will no doubt be together.

THE CAMEL IN MONGOLIAN RITUALS

In spring, special rituals for camels are performed that can be traced back to the fire cult.¹⁵ Mongols worship fire in the form of a nature deity, which belongs to one of their oldest religious beliefs. This ritual is performed with varying intensity, in various ways and on different occasions. It is also celebrated in spring, when it is necessary to bless the weakened camels when they have overcome the hardest season. Such good fortune rituals are part of the *dallaga* (um. *dalaly-a*) rituals. *Dalaly-a* (to beckon) is the term applied to any ritual beckoning good fortune. In it, the participants move their stretched out arms horizontally in a clockwise direction and try to propitiate the spirits by shouting “*xurai, xurai, xurai*”. There are some slightly different text versions of varying length for this camel blessing ritual (um. *Temegen-ü dalaly-a*).¹⁶ The titles of two of the

¹⁵ Even the fireplace, which is traditionally located in the center of the yurt, is considered sacred by Mongols and is protected by various taboos. It is not allowed to pollute the fire or bring it into contact with pointed objects. The sacrifice of first fruits that are offered to the fire before each meal is an indication of a very intense fire cult. The belief that the fire has to be worshipped is among the oldest religious beliefs of the Mongols and was later adopted as by Buddhism. For a more detailed discussion of the fire cult see Poppe (1925).

¹⁶ A manuscript from the 19th century in Uigur-Mongolian script entitled *Temegen-ü yalun taily-a orosibai* ([Here] is the Fire Offering for Camels) is kept at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (The Mongol-Manchu Collection, MS 215). Another document written in the *Oirat* “Clear Script” (*todo bičig*) entitled *Temēnī*

manuscripts contain the Mongolian word *sudur*, a polysemous word that means “collection of texts”, but also “*Sūtra*” (skr., teachings on or commentaries of individual rules in Buddhism) in the Buddhist context. Clearly originating from folk religion, this ritual was integrated into the Buddhist belief system as a local particularity, or they tried at least to influence its original character. This is especially demonstrated by the version of the manuscript in which both the country of Tibet and the holy residence of the Dalai Lama are called upon for a blessing (Rintchen 1959:52). Thus the two titles can be literally translated as “*Sūtra* of the Virtue and Fortune of the Camels”. In addition to the above-mentioned alliteration of the individual initial sounds of the lines, the poetic analysis of the following example shows a vertical alliteration of different syllables that are repeated in various lines.

In *Xalx*-Mongolian transcription and in literal translation the lyrics of the first four stanzas read:

Temēnii dallaga:

Cagān cen šuvū irexüid
cast ül gesxüid
cagān šaraḡ inge botgoloxuid
caglašgüi ix buyant dallaga avnam
xurai, xurai, xurai

Xun šuvū irexüid
xur casan gesxüid
xuaḡčün inge botgoloxuid
xutagṭ ix dallaga avnam
xurai, xurai, xurai

Angir šuvū irexgüi dor
atar gazryn nogō urgaxui dor
atigar xaraḡ inge botgoloxui dor
aldal ügüi ašdyn ix dallaga avnam
xurai, xurai, xurai

Nugasan šuvūn irexüi dor
nūryn us gesexgüi dor
nomxon zant temē botgoloxui dor
nomyn ix dallaga avnam
xurai, xurai, xurai

The Camel *dallaga* Ritual

While the white tundra swans are arriving,
 while the snow-covered mountains are melting,
 while the yellow-white camel is having its young,
 we ask for timeless great prosperity.
xurai, xurai, xurai

While the swans are arriving,
 while the snow is melting,
 while the old camel is having its young,
 we ask for prosperity rich in blessing.
xurai, xurai, xurai

While the Mandarin ducks are arriving,
 while the virgin land is thawing,
 while the small black camel is having its young,
 we ask for flawless prosperity.
xurai, xurai, xurai

While the ducks are arriving,
 while the ice on the lake is thawing,
 while the gentle camel is having its young,
 we ask for great educational prosperity.
xurai, xurai, xurai

Camel rituals are also performed for other purposes. The written text (Rintchen 1975:58–59) of such a ritual (*Temegēni jaṣal kekü sudur ene bui*) contains Buddhist elements such as corresponding mantras (invocation formulas for meditation).

THE CAMEL IN MONGOLIAN RITUAL MUSIC

The camel also has its place in ritual music. Here, above all, the musical genres of the *yerōl* (wish-praying), the *magtāl* (praise-song) and the *tūl* (epic) should be mentioned. *Temēnii yerōl* are sung to support camel herders in camel breeding, especially in the number of births and against the loss of young animals, against harsh weather, against the loss of animals to wolves, against animal diseases etc. *Temēnii magtāl* are performed less often and primarily as thanksgiving rituals, for example if a motherless camel calf was accepted by another mother camel or

buyan xišgīn sudur can be found in the Institute of Language and Literature of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences (*Oirat* Manuscript No. 70). Two other versions entitled *Temegen-ü dalaly-a sudur orosibai* and *Temegen-ü yalun takily-a orosibai* were published by B. Rintchen (1959:49–50, 1975:20–21). The photograph of another manuscript (um. *Temege[n]-ü buyan kesig-un sudur orusibai*) shows a very abbreviated version with mistakes in the handwriting (http://www.flickr.com/photos/erdeni-yin_sang/461941122/in/photostream#/, consulted 25 Sept., 2010).

if no or only few animals were lost in winter. As far as the content of these two musical genres is concerned, the special qualities of the camels are described and represented in the performance.

As in everyday music, the great significance of white camels among the Mongols is also evident in ritual music (cf. Fedotoff 1997). The following example shows that this has its origins in very early times. In the epic *Sarig cagān ingenii önčin cagān botgo* (The orphaned white camel calf of the snow-white female camel), the blind camel herder dazzled the female camel and cut her tendons so that she could not escape (Katu 2005:182). While stamping around on the newborn camel, he already feared its eventual revenge. The camel calf wept for his mother and subsequently watched over her. Because of his intelligence, she finally recovered. At three years of age, the white male camel was indeed thirsting for revenge. So the scared camel herder asked the hero *Bičin Mičin Gerel Xān* for help. Endowed with magical powers, he transformed the herder into a rat so that he could hide more easily in a pile of ashes. But when the male camel caught sight of him, he crushed the rat by trampling on the ashes and could then live his life in peace.

Elements of this story can also be found among the *Oirat Zaxčīn* of western Mongolia in a *tatlaga* entitled *Sarig cagān inge* (The snow-white female camel), which the Mongolian musicologist Ž. Enebiš recorded in 1971 (Cerensodnom 1982:68–69).¹⁷ Examples mentioned are the attempt of the camel mother to get up without her Achilles tendon and the camel calf's grief for his mother expressed in a special form. This particular grief is also reflected in the song *Önčin cagān botgo* (see above). For a *boginovtor urtyn dū* or an *urtavtar bogino dū*, a genre that is concerned with everyday music, this has to be considered very rare.

In consequence, it can be assumed that the epic described here and the *tatlaga* cannot just be traced back to the same origin, but that they probably stem from an early form of handed down Mongolian epic. The Mongolist D. Cerensodnom (1982:66) assumes that the epic and the *tatlaga* are somehow connected, since the *tatlaga* as a musical form preserved characteristics of a uniform art. These art forms (dance, music and poetry) – separate today – originally had a uniform character and only later started to diverge (Cerensodnom 1982:64–65). Here the *Oirats* of western Mongolia should be mentioned, since they are the only group who dance the *bii-dance* (also *bīyelgē* dance) to the *tatlaga* melody, while other Mongolian ethnic groups do not know this art form.¹⁸ In this early version of a folkloric text, the color white in connection with the camel is already apparent as a formative element of the Mongols.

THE CAMEL IN MONGOLIAN FOLKLORE

While the motif of the enmity of the camel and the rat known from the epic *Sarig cagān ingenii önčin cagān botgo*, it also appears in a popular Mongolian legend (*domog*) called *Temē yagād ünsen dēr xörvödög ve*, where the camel has another reason for rolling in the ashes. This legend explains why the camel is not part of the twelve-year Buddhist calendar and why it looks the way it does today. This story is told in numerous similar versions and is also depicted in the visual arts (cf. Zhambaldorzh 1997:86):

How it came about that the camel rolled in the ashes

A long time ago the Buddha created the Mongolian twelve-year calendar whose cycle is based on the names of 12 animals. Many animals offered their names. The camel and the mouse fought over the

¹⁷ The term *tatlaga* commonly designates the instrumental rendition (mostly with the *morin xūr* or the *Oirat ikil*) of a dancing song. Thus recorded versions of performances of the lyrical texts of legends or epics set to the tunes of a *tatlaga* are very rare. The melody of the *tatlaga* (without text) as recorded on CD by Altai-Hangai (1999, Track 13) serves as a sound document.

¹⁸ Today there are 27 ethnic groups (*yastan*) of Mongol or Turkic origin in Mongolia (Dashbadrax 2006:135). Nine of these groups belong to the *Oirats*, who represent a minority.

last empty place, the one at the beginning of the cycle. As the Buddha left it up to them to decide, they made a bet. The first to see the rising morning sun would win. The camel waited for the sun in the east. The mouse that had climbed up on the camel's hump, however, looked at the snow-covered mountaintops in the west and was the first to see the reflected rays of the sun. So the mouse won the bet and at the same time the place in the Mongolian calendar. The camel, confident of victory, was so furious to have lost the bet that it wanted to trample the mouse to death. The mouse ran for cover and quickly hid in a pile of ashes, whereupon the camel tried to crush the mouse by rolling on the ashes. And even though the camel was not accepted into the calendar, its body has the special features of those animals that belong to the calendric cycle. These features are: the ears of the mouse, the stomach of the cow, the paws of the tiger, the lips of the hare, the body of the dragon, the eyes of the snake, the mane of the horse, the wool of the sheep, the hump of the monkey, the comb of the rooster, the legs of the dog and the tail of the pig.

Since camels like to roll in ashes to protect themselves against insects and parasites, herders always relate this to that legend, which they then pass on to their children.

While the frequent subject of rolling in the ashes supports the conclusion that it is of an earlier origin, the appearance of the camel with the features of the twelve other animals also found its way into other art forms, such as the rhythmic hymn (*col*), as the title *Temē collox üg* (Song of praise for the camel) shows (cf. Zhambaldorzh 1997:216–217). A story that is similarly popular among the Mongols and that also has many variations is the story of the camel that was cheated of its antlers by a deer:

One day, when the camel went to the river to drink, a deer came by. The deer admired the beautiful antlers the camel had at that time in contrast to the deer, who had none. So he asked the camel to lend him the antlers for a wedding he had been invited to. Since the camel was friendly and ready to help, he agreed, on condition that the deer would return the antlers the next day at sunset. The deer was very happy and proud to present his antlers at the wedding celebration. When the camel came back to the river the next day, he looked for the deer, but he did not show up. That is why today camels still lift their heads after each drink of water and look around in the hope that the deer might keep his promise after all.

Mongolia's nomadic herders have developed social and economic values that are different from those of settled agricultural communities (Campi 1996:94). Although the effects of migration to urban areas can now be seen, Mongolian pastoralists' relationship with the camel can be seen as one of the oldest, most diverse and endearing relations in human history.¹⁹ One day the camel will be completely replaced as a means of transport, but it will probably always be an integral part of Mongol culture. This can also be concluded from the examples of symbolism provided in this paper and from the music that Mongolian nomads love. In the catalog of motifs comprising love of the family, the homeland, nature and the horse, the camel can be said to be one of the essential motifs of Mongolian folklore.

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¹⁹ While in 1989, a year before the political transition from a communist state to a democratic government, the livestock population comprised 558,000 camels (Source: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Sheehy 1996:46), this fell to 260,600 by 2007 (NSO 2007:198). As Mongolian herders mostly breed several different kinds of animals, the number of herders living exclusively on camel husbandry is not known.

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