

Mongolia

THE TRADITION OF HUNTING WITH BIRD IN MONGOLIA

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Mongolians going out to hunt. Chinese picture from the Yuan dynasty.

There is evidence that hunting was a priority of people from the prehistoric period. At this time most food, clothing and almost all other unnecessary items have been obtained only from hunting and since that time people have accumulated knowledge about the biology of wild animals and details of their natural environment through their hunting activity.

We can read in historical books how those first ancestors of human being and birds of prey originated from the Asian continent. Scientists argue that

wide steppes and vast sand deserts are the most suitable environment to develop the art of bird hunting. Mongolian people since ancient times



Kublai Khan hunts together with his guards. Chinese picture from Yuan dynasty Kwanten 1979 p179

have had historical traditions to worship, feed, and train to hunt and catch wild animals with splendid and powerful birds of use in the essentials of their lifestyle and there is a substantial probability to conclude that this art had originated in Central Asian.

By the written works of scientists and travelers we can see that Mongolian ordinary people have obtained a major part of food through hunting and "... males haven't trouble for anything, they have only made war and hunted with their falcons". Researchers have classified the concept of hunting with birds of prey as "shuvuulakhui" and there are many records, demonstrating that Mongolians are people with substantial systematic knowledge of falconry.

By the materials in our hand, ancient Mongolians, apparently, have been feed, train to hunt, keep under hungry regime and catch wild animals with birds included in the class of eagle, falcon and hawk. Forthwith, have been

used their natural specific characteristics and strength. Records show they used the eagles to hunt mammals such as wolf, fox, steppe fox, hare and other mammals, but falcons and hawks to hunt grouse, duck, goose and other birds.

In the medieval era, the falcon named "aksognkur" in Turkey, "sonkar" in Mongolian, "hai-ch'ing" or "hai-tungch-ing" and as referred in historical sources, the fastest hunting birds are big falcons of few species such as white falcon (*Falco rusticolus*), ordinary falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), which have capability to catch big water birds such as crane, goose, duck etc. These

falcons have nature hunting skills, don't fear from whoever and whatever, courageous and might win bird and animals, which often catch animals bigger than themselves. It is common that a good trained saker falcon might catch the black tailed gazelle.

Also in this book it records that the white falcon is biggest in the falcon species, very beautiful, most courageous and respected. Therefore, the white falcon was the worship of the ancient Mongolian "golden origin" or Khiad Borjigin tribe, which was written in the



Parts of the illustration drawings of world history book, written by Rashid-ad-din Faddulakh, a Persian scientist from XIY century an now storing in the Tokapi-carai library. Hassig, 1992, p. 278-279.





Hunting Mongolians.
Now storing in the Tokapi-carai library/ EW, 1968, p. 25, 52.

history of Butanchar – ancestor of the great Chinggis Khaan.

In the "Mongolian sacred history", article 63 referred: "...When Esukhey Baatar in company of his son Temuugin had met Dai Setsen from the Khongirad, Dai Setsen said "Esukhey Khud! I've seen a prophet dream last night: A white falcon flew in with the sun and moon in its hands and stepped down on my hand! We are seeing sun and moon with our eyes. This is wonderful! I've told people of this amazing event. Esukhey Khud! You are come with your son! This is explanation of my dream. What is dream? There was worship of your Khiad Borjigin who came in my dream!"

The great kings have been brought such good falcons mostly from the Baigal Lake, Manchuria, Far East, Korea and Bokhai. There is no doubt that white falcons were native in Mongolia. An Italian traveler, Marko Polo, had written in his book "The various bizarres of the world", article 74 "... If you make a journey of four days you would reach a sea /North Ocean/... On the islands of the sea ... much more white falcons, so the king can have more of them than he wants..." As referred in the "Lu. Golden History", lords from Uigur and Khirgis, captured by Zuchi – old son of Chinggis Khan, delivered to Chinggis Khan White falcons and hawks.

One of the diplomatic traditions to present gifts between tribes and countries was the falcon since the time of Hunn and Dunkhu nomadic tribes. Therefore, Mongolians have honored hunting falcons and hawks as gifts and

not just when asked for. However, they were also known to take gifts and oblige as a tax such precious hunting birds from defeated or captured tribes. For example, the "The Mongolian Sacred History" said in chapter 29 "... While they request for Bodonchar's hawk, he hadn't gave..." In the chapter of 239 "In the year of hare /1207/ "... When Zuchi had started war against a oin ard /forest people/ , Bukha had gone as quide...and Zuchi's cavalry had reached Shigdhis / Shishgid river/ through the territory of Tumen Oirad, the khirgis noyod /lords/ and oirad noyod have met the Zuchi's cavalry giving presents to Chinggis Khan with white falcons, white horses and black sables..." The Korea dynasty, existed from 918 to 1392, had paid huge taxes, including Shon Koi Mae or falcon in very large numbers. During the great Mongolian imperial time they had been paid taxes with falcon birds to Mongolian imperials from Russia. Later, famous Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin in his book about India had referred to "... The carriages with white falcons, sent by the great tsar have waited tatarian envoy Shirvanshin Asanbek for two weeks and in the carriages 90 white falcons...". Also, in 1491 Russian tsar Ivan III had



Chinggis Khan hunts with falcon.
Chinese picture from Yuan dynasty.

signed an agreement with Tatarian Khan Mengli-Girtei to add white falcons to his tax payment. The latest evidence of such practices is in 1491 where six best white falcons were among gifts to Mongolian Bogd Khan by Spafary. Mongolians have used hawks and eagles in hunting. As referred to in the "Mongolian Sacred History", Bodonchar – Munkhag, referred in the history as Mon Khan - one of the leaders of an original Mongolian tribe from Three (Onon, Kherlen and Tuul) Rivers had lived in a grass hut on the Baljun island of the Onon River because he was expelled by his brothers. Once, he had been seen with a grey hawk he had caught that was fed with black khur bird - he had caught this with a snare made with long hairs from his horse to keep and feed it. This was written in the "Mongolian Sacred History", chapter 25. An Italian traveler Marko Polo had written in his book "The Bizarre Variety of the World", article 92 "... The great Khan also has many eagles having caught wolf, fox, gazelle, and deer. Those have sufficiently many numbers of varieties of wild animals. Eagles, which catch wolves, are the biggest and most powerful. There were no wolves, which could be saved from their talons..."

During the great Mongolian empire, the hunting with birds of prey ended as one of main forms of livelihood and was changed to the specific form of hunting activity, having a character of entertainment for Mongolian great khans and warriors. Great Chinggis Khan has an extraordinary knowledge of hunting with birds (falconry) and he brought hunt activity to the high level of state activities. In his period hunting with bird of prey was closely connected to war and military structure and white falcon was portrayed on the imperial army flag as the coat of arms.

It is mentioned in various historical sources, the khevtuul or inner guard of khishigten or the imperial guard had direct responsibility for operation of hunting with bird (falconry) during the emperor's hunt. As written about it in the "Mongolian Sacred History", chapter 232 "... When we will hunt with bird, the khevtuul are allowed to follow us! Some



Mongolians going to hunt.
Chinese picture from Yuan dynasty.



"The steppe's queen" by D. Erdembileg



Falconers.
Picture from Kidan dynasty.



Picture of the Mongolian great khans, inherited from warriors of Timur khans. Esin, 1977, p. 18.



Two works by B. Monkhsul.

birds let place in carriers!..’ and in chapter 278 was referred as Chinggis Khaan and Ogodei Khan have issued a decree “... When we are going to hunt and hunt with bird, some khishigtens let the palace guard and others follow us!... Ogodei and Tsagaadai, sons of great Chinggis Khaan have had hunt with bird too. As referred in historical source, every week have sent caravan of 50 camels, carrying hunted cranes. Hubilai Khaan of the great Mongolian Yuan dynasty had continued the hunting tradition with bird for his mental and spiritual pleasure. Above mentioned Marko Polo had note in “The Bizarre Variety of the World” Khubilai khan “... goes to hunt followed by ten thousand bird keepers with five hundred falcons and simple eagles and brown head eagles. Also, goes to hunt water birds along the river basin with eagles. Khan doesn’t keep too many people and birds in the same place. He deploys them in different places and hunters present the greater part of hunted birds to khan....”. Further, “Khan goes with twenty best falcons and several lords and warriors of higher range for pleasure. Khan ascends in the Ger residence, harnessed several elephants and lords and warriors follow him. If they shout: “Great khan! Flock of cranes is coming” the khan will look at flock of great many cranes and free one of his birds of prey. Freed falcon or eagle undoubtedly intends to catch a crane. So the great khan pleasures...”. After death of Chinggis khan and disunion of his great empire the tradition of hunting with birds of prey had continued as heritage for a long time.

Recently, Mongolian archeologists (U. Erdenebat and others) have found a head bone of hawk (Assipiter nisus) during excavation of a grave from XVI century is the guarantee of the tradition that Mongolians have buried their khans and honored people together with their precious possessions and important domestic animals. There is a tradition of Mongolians, which inherited to comparative late period such as selecting, catching, keeping, training and feeding of falcons,

eagles and hawks. There were people with special duties to perform these activities, named as “Falconer”, “eagler” and “hawker” and method and operation of hunting with birds have detailed order and have correspond to particular season and characters of particular bird and special “language”. For example, the linguistic work of several Mongolian science authors in 1746 “Dictionary of thirty six” has a special chapter named “Hunting falcon and dog’s for entertainment”. This chapter contains many Mongolian terms, connected to the custom of hunting with birds of prey. Therefore, we have an opportunity to analyze these terms in comparison to historical knowledge and etymology sources of ancient Mongolians to find some information on hunting with falcon and hawk .

There were different methods of catching of birds of prey such as to take chicks from a nest, catch adult birds with bird bait, use a snare, catch while such birds could not fly because their feathers were wet with rain water or hard to fly caused by extra eating. The best method is to catch with a snare because the body of the bird would not be injured and will catch only bird of prey, not another bird. A bird snare for trapping is called in Mongolian “toor urkhi”.

There are some main terms in Mongolian terminology:

Barimui/keeping: This term means keep bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui on the hand. In the “Mongolian Sacred History”, chapter 266 it is noted “let birds be kept by outstanding boys! Allow them to follow the hunt!”. Wilhelm de Rubruk, messenger of king Ludovick of France, had written in his travel book “... Khan ordered to bring hunting-birds and stand them on his hand to stare at...”, when the French messenger had paid a visit to Mongolian khan.

Suulgamui/standing: This term means bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui standing on the “togor”. In other words, stand feeding and training birds to make them calm in the specially made setting.

Duluulmui/be awaking: This term means training of bird of prey such as idleg falcon and hawk by keeping it awake in night time. To adapt to domestic condition could keep hungry and awake, because wild birds are very ferocious.

Ogimui or uriadmui/calling: This term means to call, showing any bait to a bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui. This is one of the important parts of the training of birds of prey and birds trained with such methods in future don’t fly away and give hunted bird or animal to the trainer in full.

Uriaduulmui/coming by call: This term means that birds of prey come by call of the trainer or passive voice of call. In other words, be called with bait and this method used after taming of the bird of prey.

Buulimui/training to hunt: This term means bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui or hunter-dogs trained to hunt wild animals such as hare or birds. As referred in the “Mongolian Sacred History”, chapter 27 “...Qabur boluba. Noyod ireüi cay-tur garcyai-bayan teilegüüzü oyurba. Noyod yalayud qoziyulas tutun qunsiyud küenzüigles tutun qunsiyud hünistele talbiba...” or (Spring season arrives. Then come the ducks, he has kept the hawk hungry and freed it to hunt. He has jerked ducks and geese on every stump and every stub everywhere). If analyze this phrase, above mentioned Bodonchar-Munkhag had kept his female hawk hungry and when comes spring season, he had freed it to hunt ducks and geese. This is the buulimui or training to hunt. Many researchers have agreed that referred here word “teilegüüzü” is a special term, meaning “keep hungry and free to hunt”, basing on the translation of the “Mongolian Sacred History” into Chinese. Some researchers have explained content of word “oyorba” as free or fly birds of prey for hunting wild animals and birds and have note as referred in 249th chapter of “Mongolian Sacred History”. This information is evidence, arguing



that Mongols from the steppe have been trained and hunted with birds of prey and when researchers have explain content of word "gunsiyud" as "jerked fowl" and unanimously agreed that translation of Ts. Damdsinsuren as "has hung two or three of fowls on every stump" is just right translation.

Amtshuulmui, eremshuulmui/ training with bait: This term means bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui or hunter-dogs train to hunt. In other words, to give a possibility to taste the fowl of the hunt, to become encouraged and stimulated and inspired with own might. Generally, a Mongolian word "bolovsrokh" or train has content to strength and repeat learning by any human or animal. Word "amtsikh" means any live subject adapts to own actions, returns permanently and word "eremshikh" means further advancing on the basis of previous events and actions.

While birds with hunting experience have

no need to train, newly caught chick or bird of prey, with no experience, need to train. For this purpose, first time trains by the way to give live birds to catch. Only well trained bird of prey must be free to hunt.

Amtashjukhui, eremshjukhui/ trained with bait: This term means bird of prey such as falcon and khyargui or hunter-dogs were trained to hunt. To hunt with bird of prey, a hunting man could go by hillside or high place and before freeing bird to hunt could discover head and untie the bind of legs. Generally, during hunting with bird of prey there is a need to involve two or more men and after catching of bird men must come on fast. About it referred in one of source "... When the great khan goes to hunt with all eagles and other birds, followed by ten thousand warriors. They divided to many small groups by pairs. The pairs named as toascaor, means guard. They

deployed wherever in pairs and this is covers a wide territory. Each man has a small pointed hat and woodwind instrument. With this instrument they call eagles and other birds. Once great khan ordered they shall free birds and shouldn't follow them. But deploy here and there to watch after birds, if the birds need help then immediately go to them". Because, birds of hunt might be tired caused by long fighting with animal to hunt or wild animals might injure them. Also, hunting birds kill animal and eat fresh meat or might be damage skin and hair. A good trained bird awaits their trainer, guarding hunted animal and does not let approach other animals and birds.

Hogshiluulmui /feeding: This term means feeding hawk and other hunting birds. The "Mongolian Sacred History", chapter 26 referred "When there wasn't food, Bodonchar had killed with an archer gazelles, which was stolen by wolves to eat and had been He took the remains of wolves eating to feed his hawk to overcome winter season".

Tuulgamui/feeding: This term is mean feeding any animals to feed in purpose of overcome the winter season. Feeding methods of hunting birds are different and depend from particular season of the year caused by keeping hungry, growing in weight and cause to molt. Generally, gives meat without fat of marmot, gopher, fox and hare after washing with water, but does not give meat of livestock. Wilhelm de Rubruck had noted in his travel book "Mongols don't use meat of long - tailed mouse /gopher/ but gives to keeping birds".

Togor/seat: This term is means the seat for hawk, khyargui and falcon. Newly caught bird of prey let wear hat, sets on the right side of ger /felt tent/ on the seat with three poles, specially made with wood or fests with long rope outer of ger. Some ferocious birds are set on the moving bar to let them be calmed: bird tires attempting to find body's balance and strengths its skill to keep. When going to hunting place, some big birds such as eagle uses the

fork-wood with leather string on one side to bind to saddle for purpose of supporting the hunter's hand.

Malgai/hat: This term means the leather hat (hood) to cover birds such as eagle. The hat used to hide bird's eyes to let bird be calm.

Devsger or yasun: This item used to contact with khonkh /bell/. Apparently, this is aims to bind the small bell to tail of hawk and falcon - also used on one hand to make fly water birds from lake and river, or on another hand to prevent from attack of other bird of prey such as eagle.

Khonkh /bell: This term means bell, which is made in the way of few miniature iron or brass balls as a spherical small container.

Orvolgo /wrapper: This term is means the wrappers of white and black color, which tie wing and tail of hawk and khyargui. During training of birds of prey it ties their wing and tail in parts with leather and cloth strap named utugan. This is aimed to limit height of flight of bird. French traveler Wilhelm de Rubruck had referred about it "They /Mongols/ tie a leather halter from head to middle part of chest and setting on right hand. After freeing of birds, directly they pull the rope with left hand in the purpose of limiting flight height".

Khorobkhi: This term means bind between wrapper and devsgger, made with silver or brass strips.

Tushaa/lace: This term is means cord or lace with felt cover, binding legs of birds of prey such as hawk and others. To this cord ties leather leash of 30-40 cm and the trainer keeps in his hand the other end of the leash.

Erguul/whirl: This term is means a whirl, made with copper or brass and binds to one end of the leash. It is used to tie the bird.

Shijim/rope: This term is means the long rope to tie to lace. It's used to

fasten with rope.

Suljee/wooden tie: This term is means the wooden tie connected with rope.

Beelii/glove: This term is means a leather glove for hunters hand to keep bird. Hunter wears a long glove of about 50 cm, made with cow skin with felt inner layer to protect his hand from bird's talons. By the illustration drawings of world history book, written by Rashid -ad-din Faddulakh, a Persian scientist from XIY century an now storing in the Tokapi-carai library, was shown Mongolian hunters, wearing such glove.

Taartsag/bait container: This term is meant the small container or sack to contain baits for birds of prey.

Goyo/stomach clearer: This term is means items, used for cleaning up stomach of birds of prey. Such clearers (castings) may be made with different materials: paper, bone, felt etc. using such clearer. Hunter clears stomach of birds from remains of eating such as meat, bone, hair and others in the way of belching.

Uria/call: This term means method and items for calling of bird. Mongolian

hunters have specific calling sounds and some musical instruments. To call birds of prey he shall show bait from sack and blow musical instrument.

Thus, the hunting experiences of ancient Mongolians with birds of prey such as falcon, hawk and eagle proved by historical sources and the traditional terminology in the Mongolian language, connecting to feeding, keeping and training of birds of prey. Also, in the comparison of names of birds of prey and terms, used in training and using of birds of prey in some Asian countries of Turkish origin and in Russia are almost same. Therefore, "shuvuulakhui" or hunting with birds of prey, obviously, has an ancient common origin. For example, seat for setting of bird hunting bird is called by Mongolians as "toor", Kazakhs "tugyr" and this word had entered into Korean language in old time, because in the Korean-Chinese dictionary, published in XYIII century saved as "toor". Name of peregrine falcon /falco peregrinus/ in Russian language "sapsan" had originated from kalmyk language and Russian name of male hunting bird is "chelig" and originated from turkey's "Chayulyu".

Some names of birds of prey, containing same forms and contents are shown in following table:

Mongolian Name	Middle Asian Name	Korean Name	Russian Name	Latin Name
Idleg shonkhor	Itelgi, itelgu, itolgi	Igdoogui	Baloban	Falco cherrug
Turamtai shonkhor	Turumtai	Toruntai	Kobchik	Falco vespertinus
Egel shonkhor	Lashin, lhachin	Col	Sapsan	Falco peregrinus
Jadan shonkhor	Shumkar, sunkar		Krechet	Falco rusticolus
Khartsaga	Kharchiga, kharshyga	Khaljyge	Yastreb	Assipter gentius
Burged	Burgut, byrkyt		Berkut	Aquila chrysaetos
Sar	Saryja		Sarych	Buteo buteo
Tarlan sar	Tarlan			Buteo rufinus



Present day hunting party in Mongolia.

So, hunting with birds of prey was changed to entertainment in the custom of khans and elite warriors - ruling minorities of the Mongolian society then in the period at the end of the Mongolian empire brave Mongolians have terminated traditional shamanism and have lost the political right to outer powers, the hunting practice of wild animals and birds changed to shooting of target or ball. Therefore, later among the all Mongolian nations was forgotten tradition of hunting with birds of prey and custom of keeping, feeding and hunting birds. Evidence of worship of power of birds of prey were saved on the symbols of police organization and strictly protected areas. Also existing, many other examples such as title "hawk" given to national wrestlers, successfully participated in the national wrestling competition and title "Falcon" young wrestlers, who won the national wrestling competition. Mongolians haven't killed wild animals in massive numbers, but have followed

rational norms for protecting of wild animals and have made law not to kill any wild animals and birds in their reproduction period or from to March to November. Furthermore, as referred in some historical sources, "... have circled the silver ring on the legs of birds of the great khan and high level aristocrats with written name of proprietor and keeper. Therefore, any men, who catch such bird shall know its proprietor and deliver it to proprietor and keeper...". So, Mongolians not only feed and train birds of prey to use in hunting practice or their daily life needs, fun and entertainment, but have also protected them. There is high probability that Mongolians have found the scientific method of research for bird's movements using ringing techniques. On the other hand, methods of hunting with birds of prey has an advantage not to massacre wild animals and birds and leave some injured or maimed; hunts are more reliable with an awareness to protect nature. ✈