

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320614270>

History of Camel Wrestling in Turkey

Article in *International Journal of Livestock Research* · October 2017

DOI: 10.5455/ijlr.20171021041317

CITATION

1

READS

508

1 author:



Orhan Yilmaz

Ardahan University

274 PUBLICATIONS 1,085 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



No project [View project](#)



Kangal Dog spreads in the World [View project](#)

*Review Article***History of Camel Wrestling in Turkey****Orhan Yilmaz**

Ardahan University, Vocational High School of Posof, 75000, Ardahan, TURKEY

***Corresponding author:** zileliorhan@gmail.com

Rec. Date:	Sep 23, 2017 12:34
Accept Date:	Oct 21, 2017 04:13
Published Online:	October 24, 2017
DOI	10.5455/ijlr.20171021041317

Abstract

During thousands of years of Turkish history, camels were always important in their life. In the past camels were used as transport, pack, ride, war, food, and sport animal by Turks. After industrialization and modernization since 20th century, camel lost their importance and nowadays they are only a sport and tourism material in Turkey. Hence the camel population in Turkey decreased in number of about 1.000 recently. The camel population is mostly used for camel wrestling events in West Anatolia. The camel wrestling events are organized about in 60-70 places annually during winter season. Wrestling events are on Sundays and followed by not only men spectators but also women and children. Because of this side, camel wrestling events is a family sport. Although camel wrestling equipment, accessories, ornaments, wages of take carers, transport for wrestling from city to city, accommodation, catering are quite expensive, camel owners are not so rich people, but low or middle income people. Hence, those organizations and camel owners should be supported by the state more in order to survive this traditional event.

Key words: *Camelus dromedary*, *Camelus bactrianus*, Genetic Resource, Native Breed, Sport**How to cite:** Yilmaz, O. (2017). History of Camel Wrestling in Turkey. International Journal Of Livestock Research, 7(10), 235-240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5455/ijlr.20171021041317>**Introduction**

Because of geographical position Turkey is like a bridge between ages, nations, cultures and civilisations besides continental of Europe and Asia (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2011). In Turkey there are reared some native domesticated animals including bee, camel, cat, cattle, dog, donkey, duck, goat, goose, guinea fowl, hen, horse, mule, partridge, pheasant, pig, pigeon, rabbit, sheep, silkworm, turkey, and water buffalo (Wilson & Yilmaz 2013a,b, Yilmaz & Ertugrul 2011a, Yilmaz *et al.*, 2011c, Yilmaz 2012eF, Yilmaz & Ertugrul 2012a,b,c,d,e,f,g Yilmaz *et al.*, 2012a,b,c,d,e,f, Yilmaz *et al.*, 2013a,b). The origin of the word camel likely is derived from the Greek word 'Kremal' or from the Sanskrit word 'Kreluk' which means 'throw

away legs' (Khan *et al.*, 2003). The genus of *Camelus* was likely among one of the last domesticated animal species. It is believed that camels were domesticated in Saudi Arabia peninsula around 1.500 B.C. and spread to Anatolia (Asian part of Turkey) around 300 B.C. (Wilson 1998). Camel is not widely reared recently and the numbers critically decreased in 20th century continuously. Nowadays camels are used in small numbers as pack animal in provinces of Antalya, Mersin and Mugla. The majority of camel population is used for camel wrestling in 21st century in Turkey (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2011). The camel is also used as sacrificial animals for slaughtering (Cetin *et al.*, 2011). The aim of this review is to report camel wrestling from history to present with all aspects.

History

Even though camel was not reared recently, it was a crucial animal before industrialization and motorization in human life (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2011). In the history camel even used to be reared in Europe. Some camel bones were found in some archaeological sites from Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary and Switzerland. Camels were used in those countries for military and trade purposes during Roman Empire (Pigiore and Henrotay 2012). Camel used to be so important among Turks and a male camel was a cult and totemic animal in Middle Asian Turkish Culture (Ongel 2001). Dede KorkutOguzname was an important work for the history of Middle Asian Turkish culture. In the story of Bogac Khan of Dede KorkutOguzname, Bayindir Khan wrestled to a bull and bugra (a male camel) twice annually, once in summer and once in fall (Caliskan 2009). Even though origin of camel wrestling cannot be known definitely, it is believed that the origin goes back to ancient nomadic times of Turks in Middle Asia. The oldest evidence was a stone amulet dated in 2.000 B.C. found in Margiana, Sulekskaya, Khakassia, Russia on which there were two two-humped camels wrestling. The second oldest evidence was a bronze plaque dated 6th or 5th century found in Besoba kurgan, western Kazakhstan. The bronze plaque is now in Archaeological Museum of Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russia. On the bronze plaque two camels were at different heights, with one of them biting the hump of its adversary. Another bronze plaque dated 5th or 4th century was found in barrow burial at Filippovka Kurgan, Southern Urals. This bronze plaque is also now in Archaeological Museum of Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russia. On the bronze plaque two camels were biting the rear legs of them mutually. There are also some drawings, tinted drawings, and miniatures dated between 15th and 17th century made by Turkmen artists (Adamova 2004, Anon 2014^b).

In the Holy Kuran, camel was mentioned about in good way (Gulsoken, 2010). Camel was also a pack and ride animal for Mohammed, thus Turks respected the camel. After Turks began to become Muslim around 10th century, camel seemed as the second holy animal apart from horse (Akar, 1996). During Ottoman Empire camels were one of the crucial animals for different purposes such as food, military,

sport, trade purposes. Camels dubbed 'Military Heavy Transport Vehicle' were used up to 60.000 camels by the Ottoman Army (Yarkin 1965). Although the existence of camels dating back to very early times in Turkey, there were not enough information about where, when and how camel wrestles originated. Evliya Celebi (1611-1682), the very famous traveller in Ottoman Empire lands in 17th century, wrote his experiences in the book of Seyahatname. The Seyahatname mentioned about places, people, cases, traditions etc. extremely detailed, but there is not information about camel wrestles (Caliskan 2009). He mentioned about 'devekirikici' (camel shearer) in Edirne region. EvliyaCelebi also reported that camel feces were burned for cooking or getting hot in camel caravans (Gulsoken, 2010).

Armagan reported that during Ottoman King of Mahmud II. (Reigned 1808-1839) there were camel wrestles organizations in city of Tire, Izmir and it's near. A camel wrestling competition was reported that it took place in the village of Hidirbeyli, county of Incirliova, province of Izmir, about 200 years ago (Kilickiran, 1987). During the early years of the Turkish Republic, the camel wrestling events were discouraged since it did not suit with the modern, European image to which the state aspired. But after a military coup dated 12 September 1980 it was revived as a tourist attraction and promoted Turkey's pre-Islamic heritage. Hence the number of camel owners has risen from 200 to more than 2,000 today (Torchia, 1971).

Present

The camel wrestling events are real folk festivals. Those events are definitely not organized for self-interest of people and there are no cheating, match-fixing or gambling (Kilickiran, 1987). The events cover commercial activities, special rituals, traditions, costumes, music and dance. Common people organize those camel wrestles and there are very good opportunities for cultural exchanges. One day before wrestling a parade organized by playing drum (Davul) and 'zurna' to 'Zeybek' tunes. The Zeybeks were a bandit community in Aegean region who are regarded as Robin Hood type heroes. Aegean region has a special music and culture associated with Zeybeks (Aydin 2011). In the evening of the same day a special meeting is organized to enable the camel's owners to meet. In this meeting a carpet is sold to provide financing the organization therefore this meeting is called as 'Carpet night' (Hali gecesi). In carpet night belly dancers also show their performance (Caliskan, 2009). During wrestling events drum and zurna are continuously played (Anon, 2014^c). At the end of the wrestling events there are no financial reward. The prize of champion camel is usually a cheap machine-made rug (Christie-Miller, 2011). Roughly between 100-150 wrestling camels take part in these events, with each camel competing in only one match (Anon 2014^c). Specific locations and popularity of the events are the main factors which affect which camels may participate in which areas. Another factor is transportation costs (Aydin, 2011).

Conclusions

In Turkish history which has been continuing thousands of years, camels have always been an important livestock in their life besides horses and sheep. According archaeological evidences, camel wrestling had at least 4.000 years of history in Turks. In the past, communication was a horrible problem for camel owners, but nowadays mobile phones and internet solved this problem. Another benefit is about following weather forecasts easily, because wrestles were cancelled in cases of unfavourable weather conditions in the past. In spite of economic, social and cultural advantages of camel wrestling events, there have been no institutions or organizations, which are interested in and plan camel wrestles at regional or national scale in Turkey. All events are organized by local instrument excluding Seljuk events. The most common problem is to overcome the financial problems of the continuing these wrestling events. At the present situation local municipalities help those events but it is not enough but in fact that many settlements are organized wrestles with financial difficulties. The state should support those events.

References

1. Adamova AT 2004. The Iconography of a Camel Fight (Translated by J. M. Rogers), Muqarnas, 21:1-14. Leiden Brill.
2. Akar M 1996. Gocebe Turkmenlerde Deve Guresi ve Sosyo-Kulturel Boyutu - Turk Halk Kulturu Arastirma Sonuclari Sempozyumu [1.: 1994: Ankara]. 41-46.ss; Ankara: Kultur Bakanligi.
3. Anonymous 2014a. Livestock Statistics, Statistics by Theme. Turkish Statistical Institute, Prime Ministry, Ankara. [updated 30.1.2014] Available from: <http://tuikapp.tuik.gov.tr/hayvancilikapp/hayvancilik.zul>
4. Anonymous 2012. A Camel Fight.[updated 04.02.2012] Available from: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/a-camel-fight-signed-abdullah-bukhara-mid-5668147-details.aspx>
5. Anonymous 2012. Camel Wrestling.[updated 04.02.2012] Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camel_wrestling
6. Aydin G 2003 Deve Yetistiriciligi. Yayimlanmamis Doktora Semineri, Selcuk Universitesi, Fen Bilimleri Enstitusu, Konya, 12
7. Aydin AF.2011. A Brief Introduction to the Camel Wrestling Events. Camel Conference of SOAS, University of London, 23-25 May 2011;
8. Christie-Miller A 2011. Turkey: Tradition of Camel Wrestling Making a Comeback. 2011. [updated 30.01.2014] Available from: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62784>
9. Caliskan V 2009. Geography Of a Hidden Cultural Heritage: Camel Wrestles in Western Anatolia. The Journal of International Social Research.; 2(8): 123-137.
10. Cetin O, Dumen E, Kahraman T, Bingol EB and Buyukunal SK 2011. Kurbanlik Hayvan Secimi ve Kesimi. Istanbul Universitesi Veteriner Fakultesi Dergisi. 37(1): 63-67.
11. Gulsoken S 2010. Ayirin Develeri. Ege Yayinlari, Istanbul.
12. Khan BB, Iqbal A and Riaz M 2003. Production and Management of Camels, Pak TM Printers, Faisalabad, Pakistan.
13. Kilickiran MN 1987. Ege'de Kis Turizminin Kurtaricisi "Deve Guresleri". III. Milletlerarasi Turk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri. 125-146. Basbakanlik Basimevi, Ankara.
14. Ongel HB 2001. Turk Kultur Tarihinde Spor. Kultur Bakanligi Yayinlari, Yayin No: 2564, Ankara.
15. Pigiere F and Henrotay D 2012. Camels in the Northern Provinces of the Roman Empire. Journal of Archaeological Science. 39: 1531-1539.

16. Torchia J 2011. Camel Fighting. The Palm Beach Post, 16 February 2011. [updated 30.01.2014] Available from: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=UaM1AAAAIIBAJ&sjid=KbcFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1478,2821155&dq=camel-fighting&hl=en>
17. Wilson RT 1998 Camels. MacMillan Education Limited, Hong Kong.
18. Wilson RT and Yilmaz O 2013a. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Notes on Rabbits and a Review of the Literature. *Archiv Tierzucht*. 56 (3): 1-14.
19. Wilson RT, Yilmaz O, Ertugrul M 2011. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Pig. *Pig Veterinary Journal*. 66: 26-30.
20. Wilson RT & Yilmaz O 2013. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Notes on Rabbits and a Review of the Literature. *Archiv Tierzucht*. 56 (3): 1-14.
21. Wilson RT & Yilmaz O 2013b. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Populations, Production and Pathology of Ducks and Geese. *International Journal of Poultry Science*, 12 (9): 553-560.
22. Yarkin I 1965. Goat-Camel-Pig Husbandry (Keci-Deve-Domuz Yetistirciligi). Ankara University Publishing, Number: 243, Ankara University Print House, Ankara.
23. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2011. Domestication of Donkey (*Equus asinus*) Journal of Iğdir University, Institute of Science and Technology (Egegin Evcilleştirilmesi. *Iğdir Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Dergisi*. 1(3): 111-115.
24. Yilmaz O, Boztepe S & Ertugrul M 2011a. Some Morphological Traits of Turkish Mules Raised in East Region of Turkey. *Journal of Iğdir University, Institute of Science and Technology* 1 (4), 113-118.
25. Yilmaz O, Ertugrul M and Wilson RT 2011b. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Camel. *Journal of Camel Practice and Research*. 18 (2): 21-24.
26. Yilmaz O 2012. Turkish Native Horse Breeds and A Conservation Policy. *Yuzuncu Yil University Journal of Agricultural Sciences*. (Turkiye Yerli At Irklari ve Bir Koruma Calismasi. *Yuzuncu Yil Üniversitesi Ziraat Fakültesi Dergisi*.) 22(2): 117-133.
27. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012a. Determination of the Rize Koyun (Sheep) Dog in Turkey. *Canadian Journal of Applied Sciences*, 2(1): 216-221.
28. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012b. Determination of Kars Shepherd Dog Raised in Turkey. *Canadian Journal of Pure and Applied Science*. 6(3): 2127-2130.
29. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012c. Some Phenotypic Traits of Turkish Kangal (Karabash) Dogs Raised in Europe. Vth International Symposium of Livestock Production of University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Institute of Animal Science, 5-7 September 2012, Skopje, Macedonia.
30. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012d. Native Dog Breeds and Types of Turkey (Turkiye Yerli Kopek Irk ve Tipleri) *Iğdir University, Journal of Institute of Science and Technology* 2 (1), 99-106.
31. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012e. The Morphologic Traits of Donkeys Raised in East and Southeast of Turkey. *Hayvansal Üretim*. 53 (1), 10-13.
32. Yilmaz O & Ertugrul M 2012f. Coat colour in horses (Atlarda Don). *Journal of the Agricultural Faculty of Gaziosmanpaşa University* 28 (2), 145-152.
33. Yilmaz O and Wilson RT 2012. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Economic and Social Role, Species and Breeds, Conservation Measures and Policy Issues. *Livestock Research for Rural Development*. 24 (9): 157.
34. Yilmaz O and Wilson RT 2013. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Notes on Donkeys. *Journal of Animal and Plant Sciences*. 23 (2): 651-656.
35. Yilmaz O, Ertugrul M and Wilson RT 2011. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Camel. *Journal of Camel Practice and Research*. 18 (2): 21-24.
36. Yilmaz O, Boztepe S and Ertugrul M 2012a. Phenotypic Characteristics of Turkish Mules. *International Journal of Agriculture and Biology*. 14: 450-452.
37. Yilmaz O, Ertugrul M and Wilson RT 2012b. Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Water

- Buffalo. *Tropic Animal Health and Production Journal*, 44 (4): 707-714.
38. Yilmaz O, Akin O, Yener SM, Ertugrul M 2012c. Wilson RT, The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey - Cattle: Local Breeds and Types and Their Conservation Status. *Animal Genetic Resources*, 50: 65-74.
39. Yilmaz O, Kor A, Ertugrul M, Wilson RT 2012d. The domestic livestock resources of Turkey - Goat breeds and types and their conservation status. *Animal Genetic Resources*. 51: 105-116.
40. Yilmaz O, Ertugrul M and Wilson RT 2012e. The domestic livestock resources of Turkey: breed descriptions and status of guard and hunting dogs. 2012e, 63rd Annual Meeting of the EAAP, 27-31 August 2012, Bratislava, Slovakia.
41. Yilmaz O, Boztepe S, Ertugrul M and Wilson RT 2012f. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Breed Descriptions and Status of Ungulates (Horses, Donkeys, and Mules). 63rd Annual Meeting of the EAAP, 27-31 August 2012, Bratislava, Slovakia.
42. Yilmaz O, Boztepe S & Ertugrul M 2012a. Domesticated Donkeys – Part II: Types and Breeds. *Canadian Journal of Applied Science*. 2(2): 260-266.
43. Yilmaz O, Boztepe S, Ertugrul M & Wilson RT 2012b. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: National Horse History, Breed Descriptions and Conservation Status. 63rd Annual Meeting of the EAAP, 27-31 August 2012, Bratislava, Slovakia.
44. Yilmaz O, Cengiz F, Ertugrul M, Wilson RT 2013a. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Sheep Breeds and Cross-Breeds and Their Conservation Status. *Animal Genetic Resources*, 52: 147-163.
45. Yilmaz O, Savaş T, Ertugrul M & RT Wilson 2013a. The Domestic Livestock Resources of Turkey: Inventory of Pigeon Groups and Breeds with Notes on Breeder Organizations. *World's Poultry Science Journal*. 69 (2): 265-278.
46. Yilmaz O, Erturk YE & Ertugrul M 2013b. Some Phenotypical Characteristics of Camels Raised in Provinces of Balikesir and Canakkale of Turkey. *Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Journal of Agriculture Faculty*. 1 (1), 51-56.