



Camel Wrestling Culture in Turkey

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Abstract

In Turkish History which lasted several thousand years, 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 equipments, accessories, ornaments, wages of takecarers, transport for wrestling from city to city, accommadation, 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 stata more in order to survive this tradational event.

Key Words: *Camelus dromedary, Camelus bactrianus*, genetic resource, native breed, sport.

1. 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 and Yilmaz 2013^{a,b}, Wilson et al. 2011, Yilmaz and Wilson 2012, Yilmaz and Wilson 2013, Yilmaz et al. 2011, Yilmaz et al. 2012^{a,b,c,d,e,f}, Yilmaz et al. 2013^{a,b}).

Table 1. Camel numbers and camel meat production in Turkey 1999-2012 (Yarkin 1965, Aydin 2003, Anon 2014).

Item	Year											Change 1960- 2012 (%)
	1928	1937	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2003	2010	2012	
Number	74.437	118.211	110.000	65.390	39.000	12.000	2.000	1.350	808	1041	1315	-98,0
Animals slaughtered	N/A*	N/A	N/A	1.600	3.140	400	320	29	N/A	N/A	55	-96,6
Tonnes meat	N/A	232	160	208	531	60	75	8	24	N/A	18	-91,3

* N/A: Not available)

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 (Table 1). Nowadays camels are used in small numbers as pack animal in provinces of Antalya, Mersin and Mugla (Figure 1). 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 a 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.



Figure 1. Nomadic Yoruk Turks migrating from plain to highland (Photo by M. Karakoyun)

2. Terms

The camel wrestling is a very rich term vocabulary (Akar 1996, Aydin 2003, Caliskan 2009, Caliskan 2010^a, Anon 2012, Bagcil 2013).

Agiz bagci: Attendant who bind the muzzle of the camels.

Agiz bagi kontrolcusu: Attendant who check the muzzle binding of the camels.

Atan: Castrated male camel.

Bagci: Camel which take the head of adversary camel under their chest and then try to sit on them.

Besrek: Another saying of 'tulu' camel especially in nomadic people.

Bodur: Birth-1 year old camel.

Buhur: Double-hump camel.

Cal: Baby camel.

Cazgir: Speaker who announces the names and gives extra information of the wrestling camels.

Cengelci: Camel which trip the adversary camel by using foot tricks.

Daylak: 7-12 years old camel (Figure 2).

Doru: 1-6 years old camel.

Dorum: Baby camel.

Havut: Packsaddle of camel.

Havut giydirmesi: Day of 29 October when packsaddles are put on camels.

Kosek: Baby camel.

Kukurd: Male very short haired light coloured wrestling camel.

Lok: Male hairless wrestling camel.

Maya: Female single-hump camel (Figure 3).

Mislik: Greasy liquid which secreted from neck of camel by beginning to rutting season (Figure 4).

Nacir: Male short curly haired wrestling camel.

Ogur: Mating time of camels.

Pes: Embroidered piece of cloth which put on packsaddle of camel where name and place of camel written on.

Potuk: Baby camel.

Sagci: Camel which attack from the right side.

Savran: Trainer and takecarer of camel.

Solcu: Camel which attack from the left side.

Tavinda: Female camel which erects her tail when she sees the male because of being in heat season and ready to mate.

Tekci: Camel which push their rivals to make them beat a retreat

Topak: Lump of dough which is mixture of grains with water. Camel does not eat anything in heating season in winter. Hence topak is tucked in to the throat of camel forcibly by owner or savran.

Torok: Baby camel.

Tulu: Male long haired wrestling camel by crossbreed of single-hump and double-hump camels. Wrestling camels are called as 'tulu' after 12 years old age. The term 'besrek' may also be used instead of tulu where the camel is reared by nomadic people.

Urganci: Attendant who handle the ropes used to guide and split up the camels (Figure 5).

Yelek: Offspring \leq 1 year old of a camel

Yoz: Single-hump camel.



Figure 2. Two daylaks with 'badem horguc' (almond hump).



Figure 3. Maya the Female single-hump camel.



Figure 4. Mislik the greasy liquid which secreted from neck of camel by beginning to rutting season



Figure 5. Two 'urganci' teams on duty in different colours of jackets

3. Equipment and Ornaments

The main equipment is 'havut' (packsaddle) (Seyirci 1987) and it weighs about 150-200 kg. The second important equipment is halter to lead and the control the camel. A number of accessories such as neck bead, haircloth, under stomach felts and etc. required for the wrestling camels. Ropes for tying the mouth are supplied from Tire (Izmir), haircloth and felt from Bozdogan (Aydin), Balikesir and Tire (Izmir), reed from Civril (Denizli) and woven clothes to be embroidered from Buldan (Denizli). The number of masters dealing with packsaddle and adornments for wrestling camels are rather few today (Caliskan 2009). Ornaments and accessories are grouped into two categories as clothing and bells (Gulsoken 2010).

The name of the competing camel is written on a piece of embroidered cloth called as 'pes' which is hung behind the packsaddle (havut). Pes gives some information about name, and place of the camel. Beneath the camel's name is also written the word of Masaallah (May God protect him). Some carpet or rug is put on havut and some body parts of the camel. Nomadic Yoruk Turkmen are very good at weaving rug (kilim), sack, saddlebag and haircloth besides carpet weaving. Production of some metal materials like rings and bells called as 'dizgor' are also hung on the camel. The rings and bells can be in different sizes from small size called as 'zilgur' (Figure 6) to big size called as 'havan' (Figure 7) (Kilickiran 1987). Glass beads made by prisoners are also largely used for camel embellish. Some neck

collar, embroidered cloth and bags are also used (Culha 2008). Mirrored blankets covering their backs and colourful pompoms woven into their tails are also used for ornament (Kinzer 2000). They are

provided from the settlements in the region of wrestles. All those equipments, ornaments and accessories are so expensive and can cost up 1.500 (700 USD) to 15.000 TL (7.000 USD) (Culha 2008).



Figure 6. Small bells called as Zilgur



Figure 7. Bell of 'havan'

4. Arena

The wrestling areas are mostly on flat soil football fields or mini football stadiums which are usually amphitheatre-shaped (Anon 2010). If there is not available football field for the venue, any field can be used for wrestling unless there is a cliff near to field. A asphalt, concrete, gravel, hard core, or lawn wrestling areas are never preferred just in case camels are injured or hurt (Anon 2012). Basically two factors are determinative on the choice of location of the venue. The space should bear the characteristics to enable camels to wrestle and spectators to watch wrestles. They are generally areas with soil ground and where a broad plain is surrounded by slopes. The slopes surrounding the area function as a stand for spectators. The wrestling places are rather unkept since they are used once annually (Caliskan 2009). In Turkey, Selcuk has the largest wrestling area where is about 25.000 spectators of capacity (Culha 2008). In spite of in small amounts, rain makes the ground slippery

and may cause camels to be hurt or injured. Therefore, rainy weather has a negative effect on wrestles and in such cases, wrestles are cancelled (Caliskan 2010^b).

5. Culture

Lots of traditions, dances, songs, poems, proverbs, idioms, sagas, tales, and riddles can often be seen in Turkish culture related with camel wrestling, because Turks deal with camels wrestling for thousands years (Seyirci 1987). Bridal dowry used to be carried on a camel in wedding ceremony until 21st century (Gulsoken 2010). There are plenty of folk dances related with camels. The Deve Oyunu (Camel Dance) is performed in province of Elazig, Erzurum, Isparta, Izmir, Kars, Siirt, and Sinop. There are also different dance types in some provinces by including Kor Deve (Blind Camel) in Adiyaman, Yedideve (Seven Camels) in Gaziantep, and Camala in Kirlareli (Cakir 1987). In a quatrain male likened as a drake:

Deve sunadir (Camel is drake)
Koyun berber (Sheep is barber)
Keci cercidir (Keci is huckster)

At server (Horse is leader) (Akar 1996)

In nomadic Yoruk culture, another function of wrestling events is finding a mate for boys. The boys and girls generally cannot communicate in villages because of strict traditions and wrestling arenas is a good place to find a mate for boys. Sometimes parents come to wrestling events to find a 'hayirli bir kismet' (A nice girl) for their son (Kilickiran 1987).

6. Cultural Tourism

The tourism is to travel for knowing, seeing and learning for new things. Unlike 3S (sea, sun, sand) tourism, people travel for cultural tourism for knowing, seeing and learning for new historical, ancient, cultural, traditional or national items (Culha 2008). In this frame, the camel wrestling events can be evaluated in cultural tourism. Touristic places are generally close to big cities. The organizers of this kind of events try to draw domestic and even some foreign tourists, so that they can become professionally organized festivals. Small organizations like camel wrestling events in small settlements arrange those events for social reasons. Those camel wrestling events are largely held in villages and small towns and far away from commercial concerns. The small organizations try to preserve their traditional identity and struggle to survive if they only have a rural audience (Kilickiran 1987). For example Selcuk Camel Wrestling Festival is attend by about 20.000 domestic and foreign tourists, because Ephesus ruins are in Selcuk and very close to wrestling arena which is on the main road of Aydin-Izmir (Caliskan 2010^a).

7. Beauty Contest

The camel beauty contests are organized in some countries such as Saudi Arabia and Gulf States. In those countries, camel fans are typically held alongside competitive camel racing which are big business rather than wrestling. A camel was sold for 2.7 million USD in United Arab Emirates in 2010. In a beauty contest one entrant of 10,000 camels was awarded for 10 million USD (Parkinson 2011). The camel beauty contests are a new event in Turkey. The 1st camel beauty contests was organized in Selcuk the day before camel wrestling event in 2011. The 'Savas Arabasi' (Chariot) won the first place in the competition (Christie-Miller 2011).

8. Conclusions

In an organization, cost of transport the camels, accommodation and catering of owners and savrans, arranging a 'Hali Gecesi' (Carpet Night) Party, embellishing of camels, wages of 'hakem

heyeti' (board of referees), 'urganci's, 'agiz bagci's, 'agiz bagi contolcusu's and 'cazgir' are important expenses factors. Even though all cost are expensive about wrestling camels, the most of the camel owners are low or middle income people. Another problem is import of the camels from Iran, Afghanistan etc., because those camels are not native domestic animals of Turkey. The imported camels which are mostly 7-8 years old are very expensive, in additional owners have to spend too much money, until they reach to wrestling age of 12-13 years old. In some provinces, the governorship usurped 40-50% of ticket income gained by camel wrestling organizations or association.

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 Selcuk 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.

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