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叶尔达

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The Sin and Merit of Killing a Tiger: Mentions about rituals connected to the tiger hunting in the oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais

[Brno]¹Ondřej SRBA

In the result of restrictions on hunting of protected wild animals both in Mongolia and China issued gradually during the 20th century, the ancient tradition of Mongolian hunters is coming on the verge of oblivion.² The living (former) hunters are currently still able to tell their own oral histories reflecting their hunting experiences and – what is particularly important for this paper – transmitted messages about remarkable hunting experiences of earlier generations of hunters. This oral tradition serving as a source of local history goes beyond simple narratives of usual hunting experiences and its stories testify sacral aspects of the traditional relationship between human society and landscape in the premodern Mongolia.

This paper intends to introduce newly recorded narratives from the oral tradition of the ethnic subgroup of Altai Uriankhais³ in Bayan-Ölgii aimag of Mongolia, which deal with a special approach to tigers as a – very exceptional – object of hunting with wider cultural and religious connotations, which are

¹ Acknowledgment: This publication was made possible with the support of the Czech Science Foundation within the project GA19-07619S: Mongolian ritual manuscripts in a Czech collection: their edition, history and Central Asian roots. The author expresses his gratitude to all information providers in Western Mongolia, namely the late R. Čadraabal (1945–2020) and S. Baldaa (1932–2015).

² This development is usually viewed by the former herders as a natural evolvement. Oirat nomads of the Altai Range believed that in times of need, the deified landscape (called variously as *Altai Xangai*, *altan delkei*, *baigal delkei* etc.) itself would ensure their livelihood, providing the hunters with wild animals. At a time of abundance, when the livestock breeding or possibly the secondary agricultural production manage to provide sufficient subsistence, the hunting beyond the need to survive would be considered a sign of ingratitude for the blessings given to man by the sacred landscape.

³ Note about transcriptions: For Classical Mongolian the paper uses N. Poppe's transcription. For the Modern Mongolian (transcribed from Cyrillic or dialectical forms) a simple Latin transcription (using *x* – for the Cyrillic *х*, *ǰ* – *ж*, *j* – *з*, *č* – *ч*, *š* – *ш*, *ö* – *о*, *ü* – *у*, *i* – *й*, *ii* – *и*) is applied, while the references are typed in Cyrillic. Frequent Mongolian terms (Uriankhai, Zakhchin, Khalkha, khan) are written according to the English orthography.

surprisingly shared in throughout the Mongolian cultural area despite the very rare occurrence of tigers themselves and narratives about their hunting.¹

Cases described in the extant literature

S. Dulam included a subchapter about the hunting of tigers in his book *Interpretation of Mongolian civilization*,² where he collected the following three quotations dealing with the issue of the historical tiger hunting in Mongolia.³

The first quotation comes from the *Survey of the Mongolian customs (Mongyol-un ʒang aʒali-yin oyilaburi)* composed and published in 1918 by Lubsangčoyidan (born 1875), an Inner Mongolian intellectual from Qarčın Left Banner.

*bars-un aba-yi yerü-yin kümün abalaʒu bolqu ügei yosutai. qaʒan noyad sayi bars-un aba-yi abalamui.*⁴

“An ordinary person is not allowed to hunt tigers. Tiger hunting may only be carried out by khan or lords.”

Lubsangčoyidan further described organization of an official hunt for a tiger. The

¹ This paper does not intend to investigate mentions about tigers in the Mongolian cultural area from the biological point of view, but exclusively for their cultural and religious connotations. Historic range of the Caspian Tiger (*Panthera tigris virgata*) included the Tianshan area in the present Xinjiang (till the 1960s) and records of its sporadic occurrence outside of normal range in the 19th–20th centuries include the wider area of the Mongolian Altai Range. Driscoll, C. A. et al.: Mitochondrial Phylogeography Illuminates the Origin of the Extinct Caspian Tiger and Its Relationship to the Amur Tiger. *PLOS One* 4/1 (2009): e4125, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2624500/> (accessed 25th September 2020), figure 1. It is unlikely that the Uriankhai narratives of the encounter with the tiger would confuse tiger with an irbis (snow leopard, Classical Mong. *irbis*, Khalkha *irves*, *Panthera uncia*), because despite its presently vulnerable conservation status it is still known to almost every herder and during the Qing dynasty irbis skins were in small amounts regularly submitted to the imperial court. (For example a list of sables, foxes, red squirrels, irbises, lynxes, corsac foxes and vulture feathers from individual Uriankhai groups in 1759 (in Manchu); 2 irbis skins (*yarha sukū*) were submitted by *meyiren-ü ʒanggi* Čilayun, 2 irbis skins by *bügüde-yin daruy-a* Čegen, 4 irbis skins by the chief ʒarnay; The First Historical Archives of China, sign. 03-0177-1752-013).

² Дулам, С.: *Монгол соёл иргэншлийн утга тайлал* [Interpretation of Mongolian civilization]. МУИС, Улаанбаатар 2013, pp. 166–167.

³ Further referred according the original publications.

⁴ Lubsangčoyidan: *Mongyol-un ʒang aʒali-yin oyilaburi* [Survey of the Mongolian customs]. Ed. Qa. Dambjalsan. Öbür mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, Kökeqota 1981, p. 263.

hunt in Lubsangčoyidan's version is carried out by a strictly military organized groups with a precisely determined even number of strong spearmen (*jidči* or *jidāči*). A special attention is attracted by the mention of ritual preparations for tiger hunting. The hunting of a tiger is admissible only if a particular tiger significantly harms people. The tiger is considered here an animal under a special protection of lords of the earth (*γaǰar-un eǰen*) – the local deities or spirits, here called “lord(s) of a mountain” (*aγulan eǰen*). The hunt is carried out on the basis of a decision of power holders in the human sphere, but the intention must first be ritually communicated to the representatives of the sphere of spirits or local deities to whose authority the tiger belongs. The lawsuit against the tiger is passed in the very similar way that in the human sphere the accusation of a non-resident criminal is passed to his own superiors.

eyimü kedün jüil-ün dürimtei bui. basa bars-i abalaqu üy-e ali qayan ali noyad-un ner-e-ber jakiy-a bayulyan abalaqu γaǰar-un aγulan eǰen-i ariki sačuǰu takiyad. bars-un yosu ügei yabuγsan-i keleǰü eǰedtügen tula abalamui kemen kedün üge silüg keleǰü aγulan eǰen-e yosu ügei bars-i qoriǰu aba-yin dotur-a oruyulǰu ögkü aban-u yosuγar abačimui kemen dayadqajū abalamui.¹

“[Tiger hunting] has these few rules. When hunting for a tiger, an official letter is issued on behalf of the khan or lords, the lord of the mountain in the hunting area is worshiped by an offering of alcohol, and a few words in verse are pronounced reporting that the tiger will be hunted because its improper conduct has harmed the people. They also pray to the spirit of the mountain to keep the tiger down and bring him into the round-up hunting siege.”

Another record about the ritual tiger-hunting is found in the large *Encyclopaedia of Mongolian customs*.² The encyclopaedical entry partially

¹ Lubsangčoyidan: *Mongyol-un ǰang aγali-yin oyilaburi* pp. 263.

² Bürintegüs (editor-in-chief): *Mongyol ǰang üile-yin nebterkei toli – aǰu aquiy-in boti* [Encyclopaedia of Mongolian customs: Economy volume]. Öbür mongyol-un sinǰilekü uqayan tegnig mergeǰil-ün keblel-ün qoriy-a, Kökeqota 1997.

paraphrases the report of Lubsangčoyidan (with an explicit reference to him) and adds interesting details unfortunately without specifying the source.

*čing ulus-un üy-e-dü bars olan qosiyu-du tusqai bars angnaqu qorin tabun jidačin-tai bayijai: jidačin jakiy-a yosu-bar bars samayuraysan ayulan-du yarču bars angnaday: jidačin ayula usun-u nibtay sabday-tu qaday barin mörgüjü čayan idege ergün takil talbiyad kümün amitan-i könügegsen bars-un yal-a gem-i toyačin-a: ali wang ali noyan-u jarliy-iyar qauli yosu-bar abačiqu-bar iregsen-iyen ayiladqan-a: naiman buyu arban qoyar jidačin toqum čoyulju tohuyai-ban bambayilayad qoyar yarlan sögüdčü jida-ban emün-e-ben bariju jalbarin dayadqaju bars-un irekü-yi küliyedeg: ...*¹

“During the Qing Dynasty, there were twenty-five special spearmen in several banners to hunt tigers. Based on an [official] order, the spearmen went to the mountains, where a tiger run wild, to catch the tiger. The spearmen holding *xadag* in their hands bowed to the spirits of the place, sacrificed dairy products and prayed, reported the crimes of the tiger that had killed people and domestic animals, and announced them, on the orders of which khan or lord they were coming. Eight or twelve spearmen make a hole in their *toxoms*² to shelter their heads, kneel in two groups [left and right] and, holding their spears in front of them, pray and wait for the tiger to arrive. ... [Then foot archers and mounted archers lie hidden at the tiger footpaths, others try to scare the tiger and direct him towards the armed men.]”

While the preparatory steps to the hunt are essentially the same as in Lubsangčoyidan’s report, the encyclopaedical entry adds a special note, how to deal with hunters after the successful completion of the hunt. First, the hunters are considered ritually as transgressors because they killed the “master of animals” (*ariyatan-u qan*), sometimes terminologically equated with the “lord of mountains”

¹ Bürintegüs: *Mongyol jaŋg üile-yin nebterkei toli* p. 940.

² *Toxom*: a saddle-cloth or cushion usually of felt, which protects the horse under the saddle (actually under the *gölöm* saddle-cloth).

(*ayulan-u ejen*). Therefore, they need to be punished. But the punishment has only a symbolic value. Twenty-five lashes are performed painlessly on buttocks covered with *toxom*. Second, hunters are rewarded with symbolic numbers of livestock and other valuables, possibly with the award of titles and the remission of taxes and forced labour obligations.

*bars-i alamaγča aba tegüsün-e: aba-yin aqalaγči-ača jidačin-i daγudajū bars-un emün-e sögüdkejü ayula-yin ejen-i könügegsen nigülten gejü bögsen deger-e ni toqum toqujū qorin tabun tasiyu γuyadan-a: daray-a ni bars-i daruγsan nayir kijü bars alaγsan kümün-dü emegel qaγayartu mori türügütei yisü tabu (mori tabu. temege tabu. üker tabu. qoni tabu. imay-a tabu. torγ-a tabun büküli. alta tabun lang. mönggü tabun lang. yuwambuu tabu)-bar šangnan-a: tabun qosiyu mal-i tabu yisü-ber šangnaqu ču bui: jarim-duni otuγ jingse jegülgejü noyan jerge debsigülüged nasun tursi qaγan-u alba. wang-un alba-ača keltüriγüldeg:*¹

“Once the tiger is killed, the hunt is over. The hunting commander summons the spearmen, letting them kneel in front of the tiger and whip them with twenty-five lashes on their buttocks covered with saddle-pads, because they committed a sin of perishing the lord of the mountains. Then a banquet is held to celebrate the victory over the tiger. The man who killed the tiger is rewarded with a fully harnessed horse and nine other quintuple [gifts] (five horses, five camels, five cows, five sheep, five goats, five pieces of silk, five taels of gold, five taels of silver and five [silver] ingots). Sometimes the reward consisted of five nine-membered [gifts] [nine of each of the five species of livestock – *note by the author*]. Some were awarded a badge of an official rank, their aristocratic ranks were promoted, and their duties to the khan or prince (*wang*) were remitted for their whole life.”

The hunt organized in the military way described in the two previous texts is likely to apply rather than to common hunters in the service of Mongolian banners to

¹ Būrintegūs: *Mongγol jaγg üile-yin nebterkei toli* p. 940.

the official imperial military unit called in Chinese “Tiger-hunting Brigade” *Hu qiang ying* 虎槍營, which was established by Kangxi emperor in 1684 with 360 men and reorganized under Yongzheng emperor, who increased the number of its soldiers to 600 men. It was an elite group of Manchu bannermen organized to attend the emperor on hunts and, logically, it was not only engaged in tiger hunting.¹

Various forms of the symbolic ritual punishment of a person which has killed a tiger was recorded also from the oral history of Ööled Oirats in Mongyolküriy-e in Ili (Xinjiang) as mentioned by K. Mende and B. Bayankesig in their book about the local folk customs. Both cases they recorded were about hunters who killed a tiger they came across unintentionally while hunting. The first hunter who had encountered and killed a tiger, Törübtöbsin, was brought to the temple and whipped fifty times with a woollen lash (*nousun milay-a*) as to “dispirit him” (*sür-i ni daruday*). The second hunter (Nur-a-yin Ayurjan-a) underwent a different ritual punishment. One of his eyes, with which he aimed his rifle when firing, was symbolically “plucked out” by seven golden pack-needles, which in fact seven times only slightly touched his

¹ Hucker, Charles O.: A dictionary of official titles in imperial China. Stanford University Press, Stanford 1985, p. 257. *Qing shi gao* (Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽: *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 [Draft History of Qing]. First published between 1928–1930. Quoted according the online edition at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=98755&remap=gb>, accessed 25th September 2020) mentions that in 1684 the General of Heilongjiang (*Qar-a mören-ü jangjun / Sahaliyan ula i jianggiyün / Heilongjiang jiangjun* 黑龍江將軍) sent 40 skilled Manchu hunters to Kangxi emperor, who formed from them the “Tiger-hunting Brigade” (*Qing shi gao*, chapter *Zhi* 92 志九十二). Confirmed by another record in chapter *Zhi* 105 (志一百五) “In the year 23 [= 1684], the Tiger-hunting brigade was formed from good equestrian archers sent by the General of Heilongjiang, who could kill tigers well.” (二十三年，以黑龍江所進精騎射、善殺虎者編虎槍營。) Chapter *Zhi* 65 (志六十五) dealing with the Muran imperial hunting grounds mentions the year 1694 as the year of establishment of the Tiger-hunting Brigade. For example in *Qing shi lu*, records about the tiger hunting in reference to the Tiger-hunting Brigade are extremely scarce (for example a record of 19th October 1816 (清仁宗嘉慶 21 年 8 月 29 日); *Qing shi lu* 清實錄 / 仁宗睿皇帝實錄 / 卷之三百二十一, online edition of the Academia Sinica <http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/mq1c/hanjishilu?@2^894828662^807^^^702110110009032500010027^1@@@1086717895#top> (accessed 27th September 2020).

eye.¹

Mentions about tigers in the oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais

All the significant moments of the tiger killing described above appear in the oral tradition of another ethnic subgroup of the Oirat cultural circle – Altai Uriankhais of Mongolia. Altai Uriankhais accepted the Qing rule around 1754 and have inhabited their present day areas on both northern and southern slopes of the Mongolian Altai Range since the early 1760s.² Together with other peripheral groups of the Qing-ruled Mongolia (Uriankhais of the Golden Lake/Altan nuuriin Urianxai, Tagnu Urianxai, Xöwsgöl Urianxai and others), Altai Uriankhais were allowed to make a living from hunting and were obliged to pay taxes to the imperial court in the skins of hunted animals.

In the 19th century at the latest, the occurrence of tigers in the area of Altai Uriankhais was already quite exceptional, as evidenced by the very unique reports in the oral tradition documenting a similar approach to tiger hunting as recorded in the literature on the more central Mongolian areas.

The main narrative to be analysed here comes from the former Banner of the Right Governor (Baruun Amban Banner, *Baruun ambanii xošuu*, in the Autonomous period renamed *Darqan güng-ün qosiyu*), which included the present sums Bulgan and a part of Delüün in Bayan-Ölgii aimag, Mönxxairxan, Duut and a part of Bulgan sums in Xowd aimag, as well as Čingel *siyan* (Qinghe xian) in the present-day Xinjiang. I have recorded the narrative from Rawjaan Čadraabal (1945–2020) in June 2018 on his summer encampment next to the lake Sönköl in Bulgan sum.

¹ *Nidü-yi ni tebekelekü gedeg ni doluyan altan tebene-ber bars alaysan kümün-ü buu šayayiju qarbuysan tere nidü-yi gönjijü tebekelekü düri yaryaju nidün-düni doluyan uday-a kürgejü daruly-a kikü-yi kelejü bayin-a: Mende – Bayankesig: Ögeled-ün jang ayali – ili-yin mongyolküriy-e siyan-u ögeled-ün yosun yabudal* [Folk customs of Ööleds – traditions of the Ööleds of the Mongyolküriy-e siyan in Ili]. *Ündüsüten-ü keblel-ün qoriy-a*, Begejing 2006, p. 221.

² Their ancestors very probably inhabiting the wider area of the Altai Range even before the Qing conquest, but at least a part of them underwent a short move to the vicinity of Ulaangom in 1750s.

Čadraabal mentioned, that in the former banner monastery (Daščoinxorlin),¹ a skin of a tiger used to be hung in a temple yurt (in the sanctuary of a protective deity called commonly *kiidiin sakuusan*²). He explained its origins with a concrete account of the story of the hunter named Marg, including the genealogy of his descendants.³ Similarly to the abovementioned Ööled hunters in Ili, Marg shot the tiger to protect his own life, when he stumbled upon it while hunting wild boar in the reeds along the lower reaches of the river Bulgan.

(The narrative presented here is transcribed literally from a live interview with Čadraabal. One of the significant characteristics of a live narrative of Mongolian nomads is that the narrator repeatedly returns to the already described events when telling the story, trying to express it in more detail, explaining its circumstances and so on. For example, here the narrator returns two to three times to the key moment of shooting the tiger. If a listener unfamiliar to such a story listens to it for the first time, he may find it difficult to correctly perceive these scenic jumps in the story. However, the narration of the oral tradition usually presupposes at least a partial knowledge of

¹ In the oral tradition called usually *Ix xüree*. The banner monastery was mostly nomadizing along the Čingel river till 1913, when the centre of the banner moved to the river Bulgan. *Ix xüree* changed many temporal seats along the Bulgan river including a locality next to the mouth of Dund Ĵargalant confluent, where several brick temples and houses were built. Probably in 1920s another monastery called popularly *Baga xüree* separated from the *Ix xüree*. In 1930–1931 the monastery moved with the majority of the banner population to Čingel under the Republic of China’s rule, but between 1932–1934 eventually returned to Bulgan and functioned in a limited extent until persecution in 1938. (According my research of the local oral tradition. A short entry about the monastery with photos of the present view of the ruins in Dund Ĵargalant: <http://www.mongoliantemples.org/en/component/domm/226?view=oldtemplemn>, accessed 26th September 2020.)

² According to another information provider, Banjariin Xandĵaw (1926–2017), this protective deity was Gombo *burxan* (Mahākāla).

³ Magsariin Erencen (1942–2019), herder in bag Ulaanxus, sum Bulgan. His mother was named Dūūdei and was a daughter of Marg. She was one of three children of Marg together with her sister Diidl and one brother, who died at age of 24. Marg belonged to the Ax *sumun* administrative unit within the Baruun Amban Banner and to the clan (*elkin/elken*) Oriyas. Erencen himself knew only the simple information, that his grandfather killed a tiger, the skin of which was later kept in the monastery, but he could not tell the story of his hunt in detail. Interview with Erencen on 17th June 2018, Number of recording: 180617_006.

the story and its context. At the end of the story, the narrator often returns to the beginning and recapitulates the circumstances that led him to tell the story. For a better orientation, I have added some notes into my translation of the narrative.¹⁾

Notes: Č.: Čadraabal – narrator, OS: Ondřej Srba – interviewer.

Č.: *küreend barsiin arisan baisan. örkees ölgečixsen süülii gajart möškisen kebtdeg bilee. sümiin dugand. tüünii čini marg geĵ xümn alsan bilee.*

OS.: *xaana alsan?*

Č.: *šar xulsand alsan yaasiim.*

OS.: *yag xaana baisan bilee?*

Č.: *xowdiin bulganaas uruu. erencenii eeĵiinii aaw gesen baixaa. ter anguuč xüm baiĵ. ter üyed buu jewseg muutai. xawal šaamal gedeg buutai l baiĵ. ter xüm ter šar xulsan dotor gaxai agnadiim baina l daa. geteĵ. xulsan ix öndör. gaxain jam baidag. tüügeer geteed anir čimeegüi yawaad. tegeed xajugaasii bosood güüngüüt buuddiim yaadiim. xewddeg. tegeed yawĵ baisan. yag uridii ter xulsan dotor xewtsen gelüü. ter bar. ter bas jorigtoi mundag xüm baiĵee. yag küm irĵ yawxiig ter bar medelgüi yaaxuu. ter ünerii anirii. nögöö xümün ... buu belen baisan, gaxai buuddag, yamar bar buudna gesen biš. yamar č baisan buudčxaad üxeye geĵ bodson bailgüi. yag odoo tolxaaguur magnaiguur nüdnii jaagaar oruulad buudsan. nüdnii ömөөр таарсиим yaasiim. buudčxaad xajuum ni xulsuur unaad odson nögөөк čini. tegsen čini xuls sar bargaad. tegeed anir čimeegüi bolson.*

OS.: *yaasiim gelee?*

Č.: *buudčxaad nögöö xulsruu unaj odoĵ nögöö küm. tegeed xuls šar šur geed*

¹ This narrative pattern was described by A. Oberfalzerová: “For instance, a Mongol returns to one question several times, considers the topic from many angles, and in specific examples repeats his or her opinion several times, by which he or she also emphasizes the important information. The informant can unexpectedly return to the beginning and then go back again to the last point of the speech act. The way of communicating is like circling freely around the heart of the matter” Oberfalzerová, Alena: *Metaphors and Nomads*. Charles University – Triton, Prague 2006, p. 25.

anir garaad, tegeed anir čimeegüi bolson čini neg kebteel. tegeed bosoj awaad gedergee irsen jamaar güisen čini gedergee güitel ardii unsan baisan kii garaad nögöö bar.

buudaad ter küm beyeen xulsuur unaj odson. tegsen ter bar ix xol xaraidiim. arwan metr üsrediim. bar üsreed ter kümees öngörööd caar unsan.

tegeed noyond ireed medegdsiim baina. bar allaa enee teree. öwčsön bainldaa. tegsen noyon ireed işkee mayaag kiigeed. işkee mayaagaar juu cokdiim gene. či buruu yum kilee. neg yosondaan buruudxaj. tawan küštnii negiig allaa. či buruu yum kiilee baigalii. yosiig güicetgej. jemlel xüleelgej baigaa bolj bainldaa. ter işkee mayaa law öwdxölgüi. tegtiim tüixtei yum bilee. ter arga xemjee üjüülseñ yanjtai. tegeed albagüi xar galjan bolgoston. odaagaar boljim tatwar matwar töldöggüi.

*šar xulsan manai urianxain gajar.*¹

“(Č.): There used to be a tiger skin in the monastery. It was hanging from the roof and its tail was lying curled on the ground. It was in the monastery temple (*dugan*). It was allegedly killed by a man named Marg.

(OS:) Where did he kill it?

(Č.): He killed it in Šar Xuls (a place called Yellow Reed – *note by the author*).

(OS:) Where exactly was it?

(Č.): From [the centre] of Bulgan [sum] down [along the river]. He was probably the father of Erencen's mother.² He was a good hunter. At that time, people had bad rifles and weapons. He had only the so-called handgun (*xawal šaamal*). [*Introductory description of situation:*] He was hunting wild boars in the Yellow Reed. He was lurking for them. The reeds were very tall. There were

¹ Recorded by the author from R. Čadraabal on 15th June 2018, number of recording 180615_021.

² References in the historical oral narrative to the facts of the present (genealogical links to living people, links to specific places known to the listeners) are an important feature of the oral tradition of local history.

boar trails in it. He crept through them without any sound. And then as soon as the boar ran out next to him, he shot it. [*Description of the particular event:*] So he was lying there. That is how he went there. The tiger must have been lying in the reeds just in front of him. And he was a really brave man. The tiger, of course, knew from the smell and sounds that a man was approaching. The man ... had a rifle ready to shoot boars. It never occurred to him that he should shoot a tiger. [When he noticed a tiger,] he must have thought: “Anyway, before I die, I will shoot.” And he shot him to its head, [precisely] in the forehead between its eyes. He hit right in front of its eyes. He shot and fell [himself] into the reeds. It rattled in the reeds and there was silence.

(OS:) What happened exactly?

(Č.:) The man fired and fell into the reeds. Then the reeds rustled *šar šur* and [then] there was silence. He lay for a moment, then got up and ran back the way he had come. And the tiger was lying behind him, rolled over and dead. [*Spontaneous retelling of the event:*] He [Marg] shot and tumbled into the reeds. The tiger is said to be able to jump very far. It jumps about ten meters. So the tiger jumped up, flew over the man and fell [dead] behind him.

Then he came to the lord and told him that he had killed a tiger and so on. He must have gutted [the tiger in the meantime], too. The lord then allegedly had made a felt whip and beat him [Marg] hundred lashes with a felt whip. “You did a bad thing.” In a sense, he accused him: You killed one of the five “strong” animals (*tawan küčten*).¹ He let him receive the punishment only formally. It certainly did not hurt with that felt whip. That is what happened. Formally, [lord] took an action. [But] then he was freed from [serf] duties, today we would say [that] he does not have to pay taxes and similar levies. Šar

¹ Probably a variant or mistake instead of “the four strong” (*dörwön xüčten*): dragon, garuda, lion and tiger, a popular quaternion in the Mongolian iconography symbolizing strength, bravery, fortitude and protection (*Монгол хэлний дэлгэрэнгүй тайлбар толь*. Боть II (Д-Л). Ботийн редактор Э.Пүрэвжав, С.Бат-Эрдэнэ. ШУА Хэл зохиолын хүрээлэн, Улаанбаатар 2008, p. 732, https://mongoltoli.mn/search.php?opt=1&ug_id=34884, 05.11.2020).

Xuls was our Uriankhai territory.”

The narrative surprisingly corresponds with information from the *Encyclopedia of Mongolian Customs* that a hunter of a dangerous tiger must first be formally punished by a representative of the official authority, but at the same time he is subsequently rewarded by the dismissal from servitude.

Another Altai Uriankhai narrator from the Bulgan sum, hunter S. Baldaa (1932–2015), told me the same history in an abbreviated, but no less dramatic version:

manai küreed arsii baisan tiim gexaar bars gedeg kümñ odoo ene ard kitdiin nutagt odoo ene altai čingel biš, tüünee caad öröngö tüünees caaduud yamar gajar yawsan tend baij baigaad angnaad xulsan dotraaguur, xulsan gej öndör öwsön baiš. tüin dotor yuunee jim baina, jam, gaxain jam baina, ter gaxain jamaar buu bariad iigeed očiј baital, ömnii ter bar kebteј baij gene. tun xoyor nüdii gal asaј baisan. tun ömnei dawirax geј, degterdeg arga baixgüi. yag ene dundii xaan, kewteed odtol deegüirii garaad, caadnuidii odaad unaxdaan, ter öwseegii süüleer iigeј ergüüleed tegeed üxew gene. tegeed ükxeer tegeed oдаa yag enüügeer orowš.

tegeed ireed noyond irј medüülј. amia julaad alaw bar dairј irxeer alaw. ter bariig küm yawuulaad awxuulaad. ter jaluug juun tawi, gurwan juu cokaad, gurwan juu cokixdaan iškee tiim jöölen tiim mayaa kiiged. čamaig šiitgew. tüüniig ter küreed ter arsiig ögeed daatgaad, teexd yag enüügeer orson sumne orond köwün kiičixsen baisan ...¹

“There was a tiger skin in our monastery. A man called Bars² was going somewhere to the west, to the Chinese land, behind the mountains, not in Altai

¹ Recorded from S. Baldaa on 13th May 2014, number of recording: videotape No. 19, minutes 05:23–06:50.

² The name Bars (“Tiger”) might have been mistakenly said by Baldaa as a slip of the tongue.

Čingel, but even further west, Öröngö [river/lake]¹ or even further, I do not know, what places are there, and he was hunting in the reeds. Reeds are such a tall grass. There are paths in it, boar paths. While he was going through the boar paths, carrying a rifle, he suddenly came across a tiger lying directly in front of him. Fire burned in its [tiger's] eyes. The tiger was just about to jump on him. It was not possible to escape. He shot right between its eyes. As he fell to the ground, the tiger flew over him, fell behind him, turned its tail around the grass, and died. When [the tiger] died, he found that the bullet had passed exactly here [between its eyes].

When he came home, he told the lord, “I killed it to save my life. It wanted to attack, so I killed it.” [The lord] sent someone to bring the tiger and had the young man flogged with a hundred and fifty lashes, three hundred lashes. To whip him three hundred lashes, they made such a soft whip of felt, saying “We have punished you in this way.” They gave the skin to the monastery, to pray [for protection]. Exactly to the place where the bullet had penetrated, cotton wool was inserted.²”

A relevant context for the rewarding of the tiger defeater in the local oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais and their neighbouring Zakhchins are frequent narratives about hunters, who came across an extraordinary animal – usually a nice stag with a special sign as a nose-rope (*dör*) or an earmark (*im*), which indicated that the animal belonged directly to the local spirit. The encounter with such an animal may either lead to a closer contact with the local spirit or it can be interpreted as a special blessing of the local deity for the successful hunter. In the second case, the hunter

¹ The original area of the Baruun Amban Banner was reaching the river Öröngö by its southern edge. According to the oral tradition, people from the banner were serving in the vicinity of the Öröngö lake (today called Ulungur Lake / Wulungu Hu 乌伦古湖, Fuhai County, Xinjiang, China) probably in border crews.

² Apparently, the skin was given to the monastery for the lamas to perform protective rituals against the negative influence of the tiger.

usually got rich and stopped hunting.¹

The above-mentioned hunter Baldaa noticed that after dissolution of the monastery in the late 1930s, the tiger skin was appropriated by a school director in the *aimag* centre in Xowd. Within only two years, his two (subsequently married) wives died one after another. His stoker was a Uriankhai man named Ĵimbe. Ĵimbe recognized the tiger skin from the monastery in Bulgan and understood that the misfortune which had affected the director was caused by the tiger skin illegally appropriated from the sacred property of the monastery. However, due to strict bans on religious interpretation in that time, he could not allow himself to warn the director.²

Baldaa contextualized the theoretical appearance of a tiger into a larger discourse of “animals with black traces” (*xar mörtei amitan*), which means that an encounter of such an animal brings a negative impact on the person and people in his neighbourhood. A more common example of an “animal with black traces” is the snow leopard (*irbis*). According to Baldaa, hunting of the snow leopard had negative consequences for most hunters – unexpected deaths in their families or at least deaths of their cattle. However, other clans – Baldaa’s own clan being an example of them – were immune from such consequences and could hunt snow leopards without any negative impact.³ Baldaa mentioned that the tiger – which he has never encountered in person – has the most serious “black trace” from all wild animals. Even when the tiger only passes through the mountains, it is a sufficient cause, that the area in the vicinity suffers some misfortune. Baldaa added an interesting sentence about the (rather theoretical) occurrence of a tiger in the mountains: “If a tiger appears in the

¹ Cases from the oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais and Zakhchins in author’s Ph.D. dissertation. Srba, Ondřej: *Historie a orální tradice Altajských Urianchajců* [History and oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais] (Ph.D. diss., Charles University, 2019), accessible online <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/147127/>, p. 167.

² Recorded from S. Baldaa on 13th May 2014, number of recording: videotape No. 19, from minutes 06:51.

³ According to Baasanxüü and Batmönx (2011: 188) animals with the black trace are *irbis*, lynx, fox and wolverine.

mountains, the local governor will put on his official clothing and his hat with the button-of-rank (*jinstei malgai*) and will go to the mountains, burn an juniper-offering, bow and ask the tiger not to harm his people.”¹ This mention corresponds unanimously with the tradition recorded by Lubsangčoyidan.

A local historian and archivist Č. Damčaa recorded an oral tradition from the Left Governor Banner of Altai Uriankhais (Jüün ambanii xošuu),² that in the monastery of Sagsai River³ (Sagsain xüree) there was also a tiger skin being kept. According to the oral tradition the skin was brought by one of earlier banner governors called Dorgi amban (Manchu “inner minister”, Mong. *dotuyadu sayid*, Chinese *nei da chen* 内大臣).⁴ Around Höhhot once appeared a tiger which was threatening travellers. Advisors of the Manchu emperor announced that there was a governor among the Altai Uriankhais who was able to catch and kill the tiger. The governor Dorgi amban was called by the imperial court, caught the tiger and was rewarded with a gold seal. However, later he struck a Manchu messenger in a dispute and the injured man bled to death on the spot. For this, Dorgi amban’s golden seal was confiscated.⁵ This tradition might also have some correspondence with the famous narrative about Dugar *jaisan*, who should have tamed a wild tiger sent against him by Tibetan lamas of the “red religion” (non-Gelugpa sects) and who became a popular and widely worshipped iconographic motive in the whole Buddhist Inner

¹ *Ter nutgiin noyon jinstei malxaan ömseed, jinxen noynii xuwcsaa ömseed tendeер odaad sang tawiad, mürgeed, oдаa mand muu yum bitkee kiiten geed, xamgiin yawsan jam ni xar baidag.* Ibidem, from minutes 04:37.

² *Itegemjitü güng-ün qosiyu* of the Autonomous period. The banner included the area of the present-day sums Buyant, Altai, Bugat and Sagsai in Bayan-Ölgii aimag.

³ Since 1887 settled on the northern bank of Sagsai river within the current Sagsai sum (Bayan-Ölgii aimag). Mongolian Temples project: <https://www.mongoliantemples.org/index.php/en/component/domm/228?view=oldtemplemn> (accessed 20th September 2020).

⁴ This governor of the oral tradition cannot be identified with any of known governors of the banner (who were bearing parallelly the function of *sula amban* supervising four banners of the Left wing of Altai Uriankhais).

⁵ Дамчаа, Чолоогийн: *Алтайн Урианхайн судлалын бүтээл туурвил* [Works about Altai Uriankhai Studies]. Bibliotheca Oiratca XLIII. Тод номын гэрэл төв, Улаанбаатар 2015, р. 22.

Asia.¹ However, in the Dugar *jaisan* legend the symbolism of the tiger is rather pushed into background, while the tiger represents the malicious intents of the unorthodox “wrong” form of religion, and Dugar’s killing of the tiger is aimed at protecting the true religious faith.²

Conclusion

The oral tradition of Altai Uriankhais preserved an old stratum of the Mongolian notion of killing tigers as a ritually precarious type of hunting. This notion might have a connection with the Manchu approach to tiger hunting codified in the Qing imperial period in rules for military units entrusted with organizations and assistance in imperial hunts. This concept is similar in various parts of the Mongolian cultural environment despite an entirely marginal occurrence of this animal which shifts him rather to a position of a semi-mythical being. As far as we know, Altai Uriankhai governors were frequently obliged to participate in the imperial hunts and some of the notions might have been transferred to their dependants.³ However, legal or archive records which would explain the diffusion of this ritual understanding of tiger hunting from the imperial centre to the peripheries are not yet known. A role of epic motives (particularly in Geser epics) in the diffusion of this notion are also worth considering but stay behind the scope of this paper.

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¹ Dugar jaisan is considered the founder and first incarnation of the *tulku* lineage of the Amarbuyant monastery, presently in Bayan-Öndör sum, Bayanхongor aimag. Monography about the oral tradition on Dugar jaisan Аззаяа, Загдаагийн: Дугар зайсан Госор бандида [Dugar jaisan Gosor bandida]. Мөнхийн үсэг, Улаанбаатар 2016.

² Humphrey, Caroline: Vital force: the story of Dugar Jaisang and popular views of Mongolian-Tibetan Relations from Mongolian perspectives. In: *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface. Opening New Research Terrains in Inner Asia*. Ed. by U. Bulag & H. Dienberger, Brill, Leiden 2007, p. 160.

³ For example the first governor of the Baruun Amban Banner participated in the imperial hunt already in 1758, Срба, Ондрей: Алтайн Урианхайн Баруун амбаны хошууны он цагийн товчоон [Chronology of Baruun amban banner of Altai Uriankhais]. Соёмбо, Улаанбаатар 2018, p. 11.

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