

Origins and Odyssey: A Comprehensive Study of Camel Fighting's Evolution and Expansion

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Abstract

The depiction of camel fighting in rock art to express certain rituals of human can be traced back to the late Paleolithic period and is believed to have originated in present-day northwestern Kazakhstan. After the domestication of Bactrian camels, depictions of camel fighting developed a relatively standardized format, primarily presenting paired camels engaged in aggressive biting matches. This motif of camel fighting may have originated in the Karate and Baikonur regions of Kazakhstan during the Bronze Age. Due to geographical proximity, the custom of camel fighting was introduced to the Sarmatians in the Ural steppes early on, and through the Sarmatians, it spread to the Huns (Xiongnu) in the north and the Qiemu people in Xinjiang, China, and later to Kangju. The camel fighting depicted in the Sulaek petroglyphs in the Minusinsk Basin should be attributed to the Kyrgyz, and its origin is likely the Huns. The fighting camels in the Loulan mural tombs may have been inherited from Qiemu or originated from the Huns. The camel fighting motif in Persian miniature paintings first emerged during the Timurid period in the latter half of the 15th century CE. The Timurid Empire was founded by Timur, a noble from the Barlas tribe historically affiliated with Mongol aristocratic lineages. This Central Asian polity maintained profound Mongol cultural influences. Notably, camel fighting had already been practiced as courtly entertainment in the Yuan Dynasty (established by the Mongols) as early as the first half of the 14th century CE. This chronology demonstrates that the Mongols long upheld camel fighting rituals, and the motif in Persian miniatures was transmitted westward through Mongol cultural and political influence.

Keywords: Camel Fighting, Sarmatians, Huns; Kyrgyz, Timurid Dynasty, Miniature Painting.

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Introduction

Camels are generally docile, but during the annual mating season, male camels engage in fierce fights to compete for mates, biting each other until one emerges victorious. This seasonal camel fighting, imbued with certain meanings by humans, spread throughout ancient Central Asia, Siberia, Xinjiang in China, Persia, India, and other regions, and remains prevalent in Turkey, Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere today.

Camels can be classified as single-humped or double-humped. Early camel fights involved double-humped camels, indicating that the custom originated with this species. As an instinctive behavior during the rutting season, humans observed camel fighting as early as the late Paleolithic period. In 1988, a mammoth bone with human and animal figures carved on it was discovered on the banks of the Tom River in Seversk, Tomsk Oblast, Russia. Yury N. Esin et al. used new technology to identify the images, concluding that the depicted animals were four double-humped camels, two of which were in a posture representing the beginning of a camel fight. The human figures were interpreted as hunters. Judging from the scene of double-humped camels being hunted, these camels were likely wild. Based on carbon-14 dating and the style of the images, they determined the carving to be from the late Paleolithic period. As hunting activities are seasonal, Yury N. Esin et al. speculated that hunters familiar with camel behavior carved the camel fight to express a certain ritual during their hunt (Esin, 2020: 1-13). If Yury N. Esin et al.'s interpretation of the bone carving is accurate, this would be the earliest known depiction of camel fighting.

Tomsk, located on the lower reaches of the Tom River, is not only devoid of late Pleistocene camel bone discoveries but also lies outside the native habitat of camels. Hence, Yury N. Esin et al. propose that the carving on the mammoth bone was likely done by hunters from south of Tomsk, who would have been well-acquainted with camel behavior. In the Barnaul region south of Tomsk, and in the Charis River basin, camel bones dating back 55,000-30,000 years have been found. In the late Pleistocene, camel bones were even more prevalent in northwestern Kazakhstan (Sarianidi, 1989: 152). Therefore, the custom of depicting camel fighting to express certain rituals may have originated in the upper reaches of the Ob and Irtysh Rivers, or even in northwestern Kazakhstan.

The Tomsk mammoth bone, measuring 74cm at its longest and 9.4cm at its thickest point, is portable, and the camel fighting depicted on it is a portrayal of a real scene. In contrast, later depictions of camel fighting in various portable artworks consistently show two camels locked in combat, possibly a result of the transmission of the same motif. The earliest example of this type of image can be traced back to the Togolok 21 temple ruins from the 2nd millennium BC, situated in the Murghab River delta basin in the eastern Karakum Desert of present-day Turkmenistan (Sarianidi, 1989: 152). Among the unearthed artifacts, there is a partially damaged stone amulet (Fig.1), the remaining portion of which clearly depicts two Bactrian camels engaged in a fight (Francfort,

2020: 32). Being a portable object, the Togolok amulet doesn't definitively prove that the motif of two camels fighting originated there, but it at least indicates that this type of camel fighting image had already taken shape as early as the 2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 1: Camel Fight Depicted on an Amulet Unearthed from the Togolok 21 Temple Ruins.

The scene of two camels biting each other also appears in Bronze Age petroglyphs. A.N. Mukhareva conducted a statistical analysis of the scenes of two camels biting each other in petroglyphs (Fig. 2) and found that, in addition to the Sulaek petroglyphs in the Minusinsk Basin dating to around the 1st millennium AD, it also appears in the Karatau petroglyphs in southern Kazakhstan and the Baikonur petroglyphs in the Karaganda region of Kazakhstan (Mukhareva, 2007: 257; Jacobson-Tepfer and Novozhenov, 2020: 486). Based on patina levels, techniques, and other factors, scholars generally believe that the Karatau and Baikonur petroglyphs date to the Bronze Age (Jacobson-Tepfer and Novozhenov, 2020: 17, 77). Unlike portable art, petroglyphs are immovable, so the camel fighting scenes in petroglyphs can more accurately reflect the origin of the camel fighting motif. Compared to the camel fighting image on the Togolok amulet, the camel fighting scenes in the petroglyphs appear more realistic and primitive in their expression. Besides the inherent characteristics of petroglyphs, this may also suggest that the camel fighting images in the petroglyphs are older. Therefore, Karatau, Baikonur, and other regions are likely the origin of the camel fighting motif in portable art.



Fig. 2: Camel Fighting in the Karatau (left) and Baikonur (right) Petroglyphs.

Sarmatian Camel Fighting Customs and Their Transmission Eastward

The Sarmatians emerged around the 7th century BC. in the steppe regions east of the Don River and south of the Ural Mountains. By the 3rd century BC, they crossed the Don River, encroaching upon vast swaths of Scythian territory, and thus becoming the dominant power in the western Eurasian steppes after the Scythians. A significant number of burial artifacts depicting camels have been unearthed from Sarmatian tombs south of the Ural Mountains, indicating that the Sarmatians were very familiar with Bactrian camels. In fact, the depiction of camels in the so-called “Animal Style” began with the Sarmatians (Korolkova, 2006: 196). Camel fighting was also one of the Sarmatians’ favorite themes. Archaeological excavations have revealed that bronze buckles used as horse harness decorations, featuring camel fighting motifs (Fig. 3.1-3), were found in tombs such as Pyatimary, Besoba, and Filippovka (Smirnov, 1964: 371; Kuznetsova & Kurmankulov, 1993: 47; Aruz, Et al, 2000: 85). Additionally, 29 gold plaques depicting camel fighting scenes were discovered in the Filippovka tomb. These plaques have small holes along their edges (Fig. 3.4), suggesting they were sewn onto clothing as ornaments (Aruz, Et al, 2000: 160). These tombs date from the 6th to 4th centuries BC., all located south of the Ural River, in proximity to Baikonur, Karatau, and other regions, suggesting that camel fighting likely originated from these areas.



1. Pyatimary

2. Besoba

3. Filippovka

4. Filippovka

Fig. 3: Metal buckle depicting camel combat, excavated from a Sarmatian tomb.

The Sarmatians were not only the creators of the camel imagery in the Animal Style, but also its disseminators. The appearance of camel imagery in objects unearthed from tombs in the northern Black Sea region is a result of the Sarmatians’ westward migration (Korolkova, 2006: 196). Since no images of camel fighting have been found in

archaeological excavations in the northern Black Sea region, it is unknown whether the custom of camel fighting also spread westward with the Sarmatian migration. However, there is evidence that this custom spread along the prehistoric Silk Road to the Huns (匈奴 Xiongnu) and Xinjiang, China.

The Huns were the dominant power in the northern grasslands of China during the Qin and Han dynasties. A very obvious feature of their archaeological culture is the rectangular belt plaques decorated with animal patterns, and the Bactrian camel is one of the decorative animals. Although the images of two camels standing or lying opposite each other and biting each other are rare on Huns belt plaques (Yueying & Yan, 2008: 156-158), a rectangular belt plaque (Fig. 4) believed to belong to the Huns depicts a scene of camel fighting (Korolkova, 2006: 205).

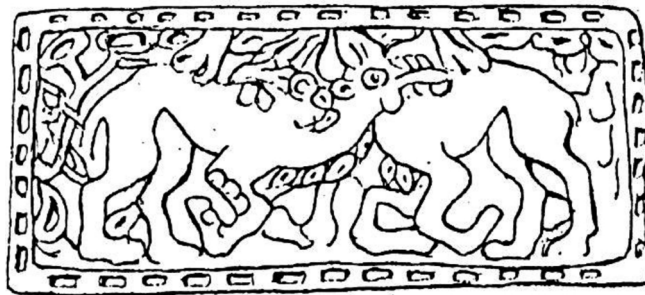


Fig. 4: Huns belt plaque depicting camel combat.

Regarding the Huns's camel fighting custom, the Dongguan Hanji (东观汉记) states, The Chanyu (南单于 The Southern Chanyu) annually conducted rituals at the Three Dragons Shrine (三龙祠 Sanlong Ci), where horse racing and camel fighting were held as ceremonial entertainments (Shuping, 2008: 886). The record of the Southern Chanyu's annual sacrifice to the Three Dragon Shrine is also found in the Hou Han Shu (后汉书), but it states that the Southern Chanyu "horse and camel racing were held as ceremonial entertainments (Ye, 1965: 2944)". Although the Dongguan Hanji was valued by people after its completion, Hou Han Shu became widely circulated after its completion, and the Dongguan Hanji gradually declined and became scattered. This raises doubts about the accuracy of the Dongguan Hanji's statement that the Huns had camel fighting as entertainments. However, the Huns belt plaques shown above indicate that the Huns did indeed make the camel fighting. In addition, the Chuxueji (初学记) and Taiping Yulan (太平御览) both quote the Dongguan Hanji as saying camel fighting (Shuping, 2008: 888), so it can be concluded that the difference between the two texts should be based on the Dongguan Hanji.

The Huns belt buckles originated from the early Eurasian nomadic cultural tradition. Around the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD, due to the influence of Han cultural tradition, rectangular belt buckles began to become popular (Yueying and Yan, 2008: 156-158). The image of the Bactrian camel is often found on this type of rectangular belt. The Bactrian camel was introduced to the Huns very early, as Sima Qian's Shiji (

司马迁《史记》) states that the Huns had rare animals like the Bactrian camel (Qian, 1959: 2879). However, the image of the Bactrian camel is rarely seen on early Huns belt buckles, and only appeared after the emergence of rectangular belt buckles. The Han and Huns competed for supremacy for a long time, and Han records contain many detailed accounts of the Huns, but neither the *Shiji* nor the *Hanshu* (汉书) mentions the Huns fighting camels, while both the *Dongguan Hanji* and *Hou Han Shu* attribute this custom to the Southern Chanyu. This suggests that the custom of camel fighting may not have been introduced to the Huns before the 2nd century BC. Before this, the frequent depiction of Bactrian camels on metal plaques began with the Sarmatians, and metal belt buckles are evidence of cultural exchange between the Sarmatians and the Huns (Brosseder, & Miller, 2011: 355-384). Therefore, the Huns's camel fighting custom must have come from the Sarmatians.

In addition to the Huns, the custom of camel fighting was also introduced to Xinjiang, China, very early. The Zagunluk cemetery is located in Qiemo (且末), Xinjiang, China. A wooden bucket was unearthed from tomb M17, and the upper edge of the wooden bucket is carved with a pair of Bactrian camels (Bo, et al, 2003: 110). The head of the right camel extends towards the front leg of the left camel, and the mouth of the left camel is depicted as overlapping with the front hump of the right camel (Fig.5). The arrangement of the two camels is very similar to the camel fighting scenes on the rock paintings and Sarmatian plaques shown earlier, and it should represent the theme of camel fighting.

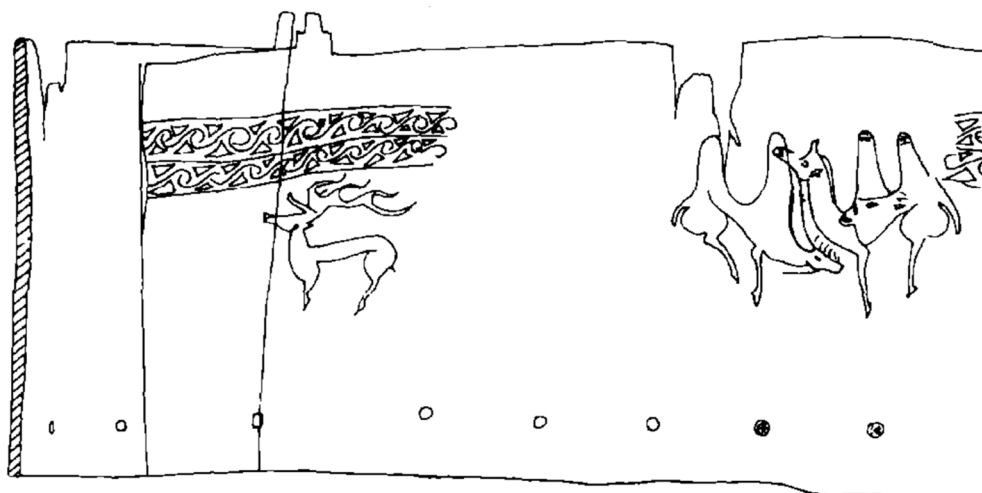


Fig. 5: Plan view of a wooden bucket excavated from tomb M17 at the Zagunluk cemetery.

The Zagunluk cemetery dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period to the Western Han Dynasty (Bo, et al, 2003: 132). Tomb M17 is a single-tomb-passage vertical pit shed tomb with a knife-handle shape, and this type of tomb dates back to the Warring States Period to the Western Han Dynasty (Huiqiu, 2008: 174). Based on the type of bone comb unearthed from tomb M17, the date of the tomb can be further determined

to the early to middle Warring States Period (Lipeng and Jie, 2007: 159). Therefore, the custom of camel fighting was introduced to Qiemo no later than the early to middle Warring States Period.

According to research, the early Zagunluk culture reflects the Bronze Age culture of Central Asia, especially the Chust culture. In the process of development, it integrated a large amount of culture from the Subeixi culture (苏贝希文化), the Barkol type remains of the Chawuhu cultural (察吾乎文化) group, and the Pazyryk culture of the Altai region (Huiqiu, 2008: 181). This shows that the Zagunluk culture itself is a product of cultural exchange between the East and the West. The deer and camels carved on the M17 wooden bucket are realistic animals, and many such realistic animals have been found in the Subeixi culture, so they are considered to have come from the Subeixi culture (Huiqiu, 2008: 181). The Subeixi culture is also a product of the blending of Eastern and Western cultures. Judging from the artifacts and animal patterns, it has close cultural exchanges with the Sauromatian-Sarmatian, Pazyryk, and Scythian cultures (Huiqiu, 2021: 211-213). Considering all these factors, the camel fighting depicted on the wooden bucket unearthed from tomb M17 of the Zagunluk No. 1 cemetery is likely to have originated from the Sarmatians.

Kangju (康居), referred to as a “traveling state” in Han Chinese texts, primarily controlled the region between the Amu Darya and Syr-Darya rivers in Central Asia. Orlat, located about 50 kilometers northwest of Samarkand, Uzbekistan, is a large Kangju cemetery dating back to the 1st-2nd century AD (Ilyasov & Rusanov, 1997/98: 123-130). In tomb No. 2 at Orlat, a set of six bone belt buckles were found, all with line engravings. One of the smaller bone plaques depicts a camel fighting scene (Fig.6). The style of the camel fight, with the two camels biting each other’s hind legs, is very similar to the camel fighting scene on the bronze plaque from the Sarmatian Filippovka tomb mentioned earlier. Based on the structure of the Kangju tombs and the artifacts unearthed, there was close cultural exchange between Kangju and Sarmatia (Yun, 2018: 77-78). Therefore, the camel fighting depicted on the Orlat tomb bone plaque can be traced back to Sarmatia.

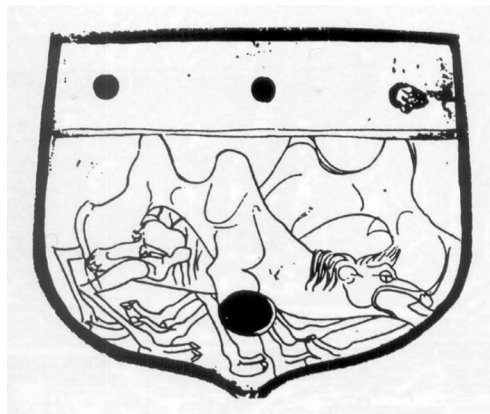


Fig. 6: Camel combat depicted on a belt plaque excavated from tomb No. 2 at Orlat, Kangju.

Ethnic Affiliation of the Camel Fighting Depictions in the Sulek Rock Art of the Minusinsk Basin

The Minusinsk Basin in Siberia is one of the northernmost habitats of the Bactrian camel, and there are many images of Bactrian camels in the rock art there. Sulek is located in the Minusinsk Basin, and different forms of camel fighting themes have been found in the Sulek rock art. There are images of two camels baring their fangs and confronting each other before a battle (Fig.7), two camels biting each other's front legs, and the more classic image of two camels biting each other's hind legs (Mukhareva, 2007: 255).

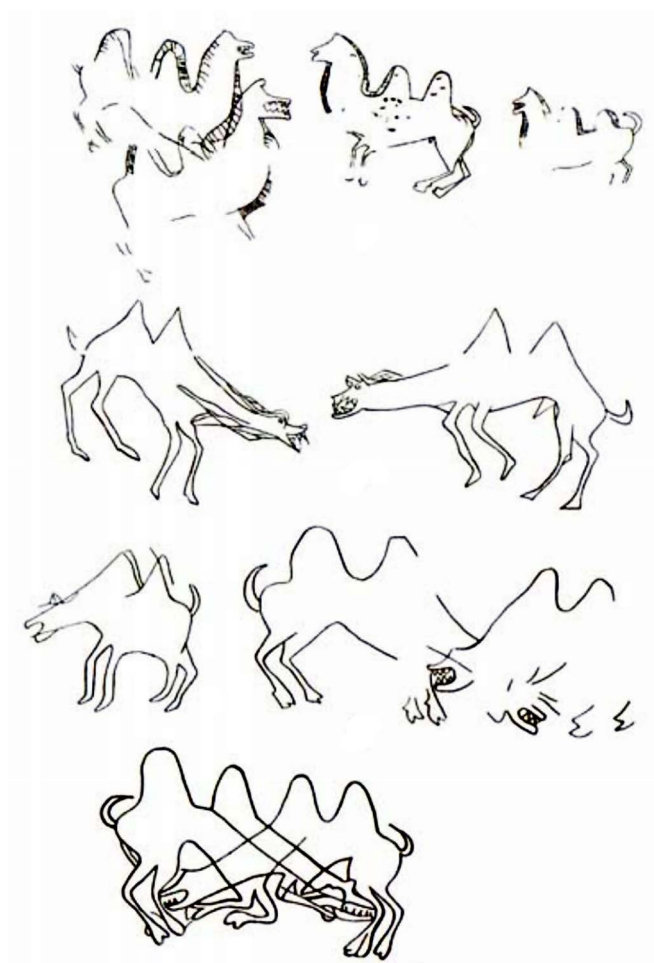


Fig. 7: Scenes of camel fighting in the Sulek rock art.

Due to the discovery of inscriptions believed to be in Turkic script near the two camels, some scholars have attributed the camel fighting and other rock paintings to the Kyrgyz (黠戛斯) of the 7th-9th centuries AD. (Yevtyukhova, 1948: 102-103). However, Klyashtorny, after more careful observation, found that the inscription had damaged the image, so he believed that the image of the two camels was earlier than the inscription (Kyzlasov, 1994: 294). Mukhareva studied the camel images in the Minusinsk Basin and believed that their age could only be roughly determined to the 1st. millennium AD. Combined with the camel fighting images in various plaques and rock paintings,

he also believed that the camel fighting in the Sulek rock paintings was introduced by the Tagar people from the Iranian-speaking tribes of the Eurasian steppe (Mukhareva, 2007: 256-259).

Since both the images and the inscriptions have been severely damaged by modern people, their original state is difficult to restore. In addition, the content of the rock paintings is likely to be an accumulation of different eras, so the age of the Sulek rock paintings cannot be generalized. However, regarding the origin and ethnic affiliation of the camel fighting in the Sulek rock paintings, the author believes that it was likely introduced from the Huns, and its ethnic affiliation should be the Kyrgyz.

The Kyrgyz were an ancient nomadic people who roamed the Minusinsk Basin during the Sui(隋) and Tang(唐) dynasties. Their origins can be traced back to the “Jiankun (坚昆)” of the Qin(秦) and Han(汉) dynasties (Jie, 2013: 78). According to research, the Jiankun originally lived on the edge of the Mongolian Plateau and Siberia. After being conquered by Modu Chanyu(冒顿单于) of the Huns (209-174 BC), they migrated north to the Minusinsk Basin (Ronghui, 2020: 48-49). This indicates that the Jiankun (i.e., the Kyrgyz) had migrated to the Minusinsk Basin by the first half of the 2nd century BC at the latest. The Sulek rock paintings date to after the Common Era, later than the time when the Kyrgyz settled in the Minusinsk Basin. Therefore, it is reasonable to attribute the Sulek rock paintings to the Kyrgyz based on the timeline. Furthermore, the Kyrgyz also had the custom of camel fighting. The earliest record of Kyrgyz camel fighting in existing historical materials is found in the Taiping Huanyu Ji(太平寰宇记), which states that the Kyrgyz “at large gatherings, there are camel and lion performances, as well as horse and rope tricks (Shi, 2007: 3822)”. The New Book of Tang(新唐书) also mentions that the Kyrgyz “have camel and lion performances, as well as horse and rope tricks (Xiu & Qi, 1975: 6148)”. The “camel performance” likely refers to camel fighting. Therefore, considering these two points, the camel fighting depictions in the Sulek rock paintings should belong to the Kyrgyz.

The Jiankun had a close relationship with the Huns. Not only were they conquered by the Huns during the reign of MoD Chanyu (Qian, 1963: 2893), but they were also absorbed by Zhizhi Chanyu (郅支单于) of the Huns in the middle of the 1st century BC. (Gu, 1964: 3800). As mentioned earlier, the Huns already had the custom of camel fighting around the Common Era. Therefore, based on the relationship between the two, it is entirely possible that the Kyrgyz’s camel fighting custom was introduced from the Huns. In addition, the camel fighting games of the Kyrgyz and the Huns were very similar. According to the previous quotes about Huns camel fighting, the Huns considered camel fighting as entertainment, while the Kyrgyz also used camel fighting as a game. The Huns fought camels when they gathered all the tribes and discussed state affairs during their sacrifices to the gods, and the Kyrgyz also fought camels during their large gatherings. Therefore, judging from these two points, the Kyrgyz’s camel fighting game likely originated from the Huns.

The Origin of Camel Fighting Depictions in the Loulan Mural Tombs

The Loulan (楼兰) mural tombs are located about 4 kilometers northeast of the ancient city of Loulan LE and date to the mid-3rd century to the first half of the 4th century AD (Xiaolu, 2014: 106-109). The tombs are divided into front and back chambers, with murals painted on all four walls and the central pillar. On the west wall of the front chamber, there is a scene of two camels, one red and one white, biting each other's hind legs (Fig. 8). Next to the camels, there are two human figures, each holding a long stick, trying to pry open the camels' mouths (Xiaolu, 2017: 261). Based on the camel fighting scene, this is a complete representation of a real-life scene.



Fig. 8: Camel fighting scene in the Loulan mural tombs.

In 2005, a tomb was discovered at the Salt Spring Racehorse Mountain in Yuli County (尉犁县咸水泉赛马山). Four painted wooden box coffins were found in the tomb. One of the painted coffins was relatively well-preserved, with clear paintings. The middle of the coffin lid also depicts a scene of two camels (Fig. 9), one red and one white, biting each other (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Cultural Relics Bureau, 2011: 159). Based on the shape and paintings of the coffin, it dates to a similar period as the Loulan mural tombs (Xiaolu, 2014: 106-109).



Fig. 9: Camel fighting depicted on a painted coffin from the Salt Spring tomb.

Since the Salt Spring tomb was looted and only painted coffins and some remains were left, the ethnicity of the tomb owner is difficult to determine. Although the Loulan mural tombs were also looted, the murals were not completely destroyed, and scholars have discussed the ethnicity of the tomb owner based on them. Because some of the themes in the tomb murals are closely related to the Kushan Empire, and a person's name in Kharoṣṭhi script was also found, most scholars believe that the tomb owner was a Kushan immigrant (Meicun, 2006: 175-177; Xiaolu, 2012: 79-88). However, no evidence of camel fighting has been found in the Yuezhi or Kushan Empire, indicating that this custom was not popular among them. Therefore, the camel fighting depicted in the Loulan mural tombs should not have been introduced by the Kushan. The main culture of Zagunluk belongs to the Qiemo Kingdom recorded in Han Chinese texts. As mentioned earlier, camel fighting existed in the Zagunluk culture and also among the Huns. Considering the relationship between the Loulan Kingdom and Qiemo and the Huns, there are two possibilities for the origin of camel fighting in Loulan: one is that it was inherited from Qiemo, and the other is that it came from the Huns.

Qiemo was originally a small kingdom in the Western Regions, bordering Loulan to the east. Loulan was located at a strategic point on the Silk Road. After the Han Dynasty opened up the Western Regions, Loulan repeatedly attacked Han envoys and obstructed traffic. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (汉武帝), Wang Hui (王恢) led troops to defeat Loulan, and Loulan became a vassal state. Qiemo was likely the same. In the fourth year of Yuanfeng during the reign of Emperor Zhao of Han (汉昭帝元凤四年), Fu Jiezi (傅介子) killed the king of Loulan and established Yutuqi (尉屠耆) as the new king, renaming Loulan to Shanshan (鄯善). After Wang Mang (王莽) usurped the throne, he demoted and replaced the marquises and kings, causing resentment and rebellion in the Western Regions, and the Han Dynasty's influence declined. The Huns then regained control of the Western Regions. In the early Eastern Han Dynasty, the Han Dynasty was preoccupied with other matters, and the Huns's power weakened. The kingdoms in the Western Regions attacked each other, and Qiemo and other kingdoms were annexed by Shanshan. Although there were periods when Qiemo was independent of Shanshan afterward, it was mostly a vassal state of Shanshan. Therefore, based on their geographical and political relationship, it is possible that Loulan's camel fighting came from Qiemo.

There are two reasons why the Loulan camel fighting custom may have originated from the Huns:

The Huns had a very close relationship with Loulan. Loulan was originally a vassal state of the Yuezhi, but after Modu Chanyu defeated the Yuezhi, Loulan came under the control of the Huns. After the Han Dynasty opened up the Western Regions, the Han and Huns competed for influence in the region. Loulan acted as a spy for the Huns and was defeated by Wang Hui. Although Loulan surrendered to the Han, it still played both

sides, sending one son as a hostage to the Huns and another son as a hostage to the Han. During the Zhenghe period (征和年间) of Emperor Wu of Han, the king of Loulan died, and the Huns hostage returned as the new king, again acting as a double agent for the Huns and repeatedly killing Han envoys. During the reign of Emperor Zhao of Han, Fu Jiezi killed the king of Loulan, changed the country's name to Shanshan, and established Yutuqi, who was in the Han Dynasty, as the new king. Shanshan then distanced itself from the Huns. During the reign of Wang Mang, the Western Regions rebelled, and the Huns regained control of Shanshan. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the reason why the relationship between the Han and the Western Regions was "three times open and three times closed" was also due to the influence of the Huns in the Western Regions. The camel fighting customs of the Huns and Loulan have similarities. As mentioned earlier, the Southern Chanyu sacrificed to the gods and the Han emperor, gathered all the tribes, discussed state affairs, and enjoyed racing horses and fighting camels. This was actually a game where the Chanyu and other nobles gathered and enjoyed watching camels fight each other. Looking at the camel fighting in the Loulan mural tombs, in addition to the camels biting each other, there are also two people holding long sticks trying to pry open the camels' mouths, which is very similar to the camel fighting scenes in Persian miniature paintings after the 15th century. It is worth noting that opposite the camel fighting scene, there is a banquet scene on the east wall of the front chamber of the Loulan tomb, with six human figures, three men and three women (Fig.10). Researchers generally agree that they should be the tomb owners, as they are dressed luxuriously and are either rich or noble (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Cultural Relics Bureau, 2011: 167). The east wall depicts the tomb owner's banquet scene, and the west wall depicts the tomb owner's favorite camel fighting scene. The corresponding layout of the east and west walls indicates that camel fighting was also a game held during banquets and gatherings.



Fig. 10: Banquet scene on the east wall of the Loulan mural tomb.

The Origin of Camel Fighting Themes in Persian Miniature Paintings

Camel fighting is a frequently depicted theme in Persian and Mughal miniature paintings. In these images, the camels are mainly dromedaries (single-humped camels), and they

are shown both biting each other (Fig.11) and pushing each other with their long necks (Fig.12 and 13). There are both individual camel fighting scenes and camel fighting games where the owners control the camels (Adamova, 2004: 1-4).

In modern-day camel wrestling competitions in Turkey, the camels' mouths are tied shut to prevent them from biting each other, and they are also controlled by reins. The camels mainly use their necks and other body parts to push each other, so it is generally called camel wrestling. Similar scenes can be seen in miniature paintings, so camel wrestling in Turkey is likely derived from this tradition.

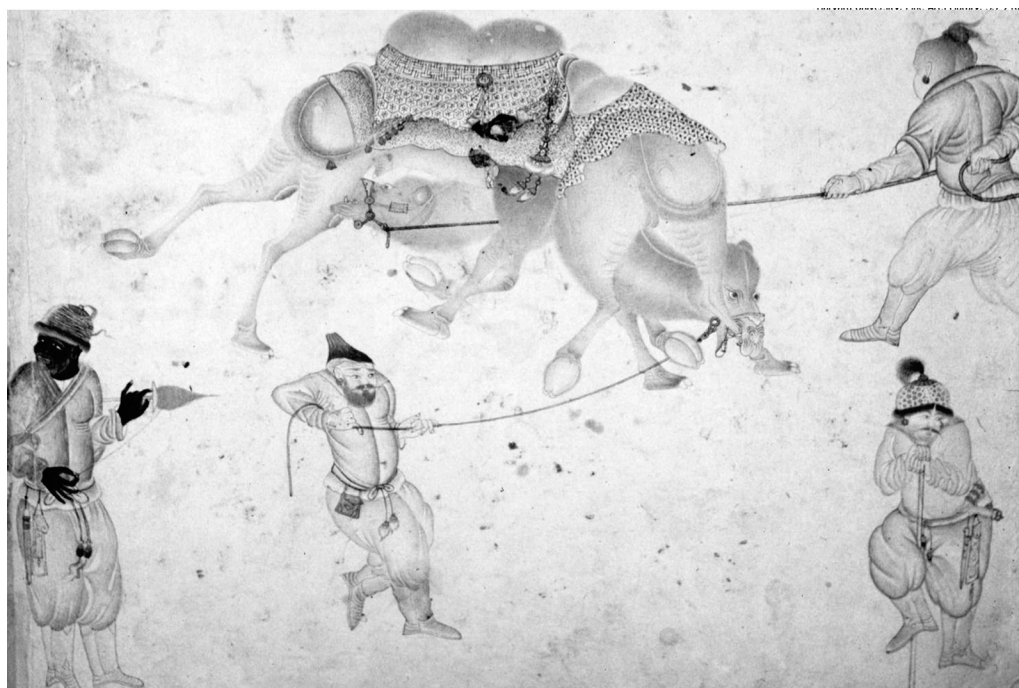


Fig. 11: Camel fighting scene, Topkapı Palace Library, İstanbul, Turkey.

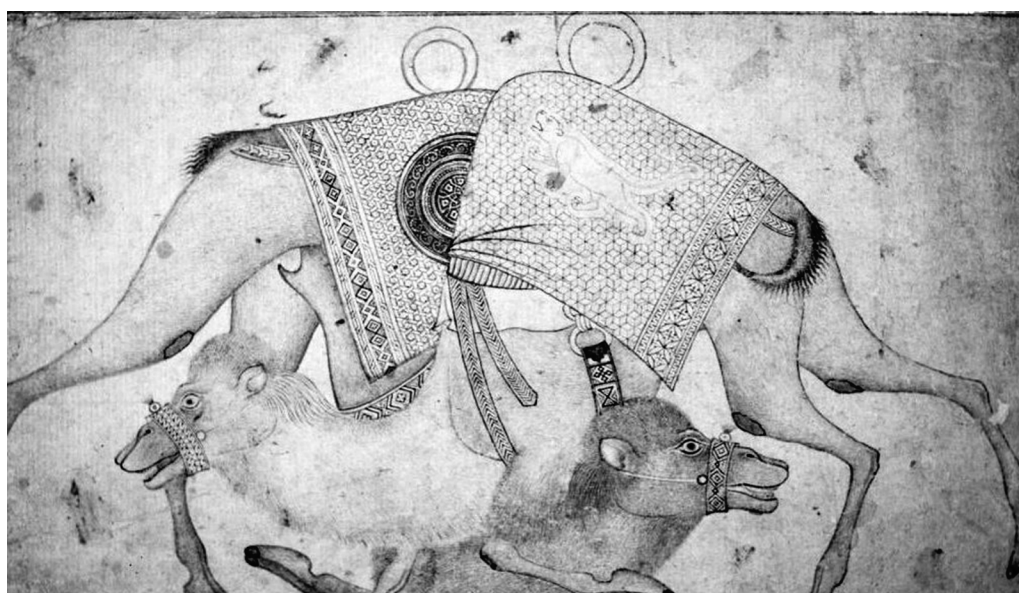


Fig. 12: Camel fighting scene, Topkapı Palace Library, İstanbul, Turkey.

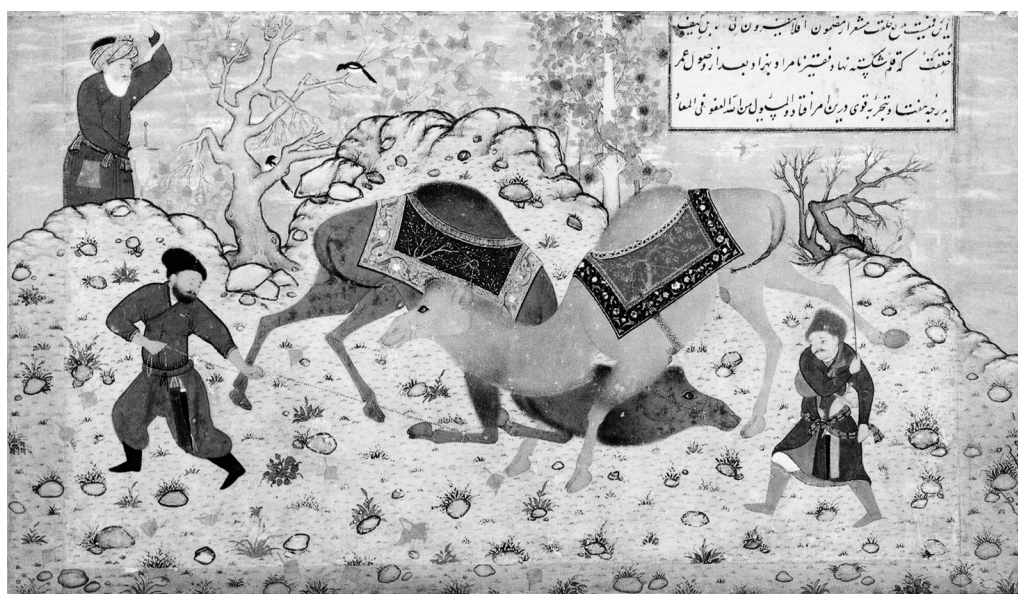


Fig. 13: Camel fighting scene miniature painting, Gulistan Library, Tehran, Iran.

Since there is no tradition of camel fighting in West Asia, the camel fighting in miniature paintings must have come from outside. Richard W. Bulliet, based on his research on camels in ancient Central and West Asia, believes that camel fighting in Turkey and miniature art was brought after the Seljuk Turks ruled Anatolia. However, the author did not present any evidence, only making inferences based on the absence of camel fighting traditions in Syria and Arabia (Bulliet, 1990: 231, 315; Bulliet, 2009: 126). So, was camel fighting in miniature paintings really brought by the Seljuk Turks?

The Seljuks originally nomadized in the grasslands north of the Syr-Darya River. From the second half of the 10th century, they gradually migrated to the Transoxiana region, and in the middle of the 11th century, they entered the Khorasan region and established the Seljuk dynasty. They continued to expand their territory and established a Seljuk Empire that stretched from Central Asia in the east to the Bosphorus Strait in the west. The Seljuks should not have been unfamiliar with the fighting between male camels during the mating season because they were very familiar with camels. They were even famous “camel breeders,” crossbreeding dromedaries and Bactrian camels to produce stronger hybrid camels that were more adaptable to cold climates. The hybrid camels in Anatolia were introduced by the Seljuk Turks (Bulliet, 2009: 126). It is worth noting that the camels in modern Turkish camel wrestling competitions are hybrids of Bactrian and dromedary camels, called Tulu (Yilmaz& Ertugrul, 2014: 2000). There are also hybrid camels in miniature paintings, such as in Figure 11, where the camel has two humps, but one of them is shorter and has almost disappeared. This type of camel is considered to be a hybrid of a male Bactrian camel and a female dromedary camel (Grube & Sims, 1985: 117-118). The use of hybrid camels in fighting may be because they are more aggressive and their fights are more spectacular. However, early camel fighting games all used Bactrian camels. The hybrid camels bred by the Seljuks only

added new types of camels to the existing camel fighting games and do not indicate that the Seljuks had camel fighting games.

The Seljuks belonged to a branch of the Oghuz Turkic tribal alliance. The Turkic group with clear records of camel fighting games is the Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz had close relations with the Turks, Uyghurs, and others, but there is no record of whether the Kyrgyz camel fighting games spread to the Turks, Uyghurs, etc. According to Duan Chengshi's *Youyang Zazu* (段成式《酉阳杂俎》) from the Tang Dynasty, the Kingdom of Kucha had camel fighting games. The text states: "(The Kingdom of Kucha) on New Year's Day, they fight bulls, horses, and camels for seven days, observing the wins and losses to predict the increase or decrease of sheep and horses for the year (Chengshi, 1981: 46)". It is unknown when camel fighting games started in Kucha, but the first part of *Youyang Zazu* was compiled between the end of the Huichang (会昌) period and the first year of Dazhong (847 AD.), and the record of Kucha's camel fighting games belongs to the first part (Minjing, 2002: 7). This indicates that camel fighting games in the Kingdom of Kucha existed no later than 847 AD. Kucha was originally a vassal state of the Western Turks, and was recovered by the Tang Dynasty in the mid-7th century. After the An Lushan (安禄山) Rebellion, the Tibetans occupied Kucha. By 821 AD., Kucha fell into the hands of the Uyghurs. In 840 AD., the Uyghur Khaganate in Mobei (漠北) was destroyed by the Kyrgyz, and a group of Uyghurs fled west to the Western Regions. The Kyrgyz pursued them, and Kucha was occupied by the Kyrgyz. Three or four years later, the Kyrgyz returned north, and the Uyghurs established themselves in Kucha, and Kucha gradually became Uyghurized (Xiaoxue and Fuxue, 2014: 107-116). If camel fighting games had already existed in Kucha, then the Turks, Uyghurs, and others should have been aware of this custom during their occupation of Kucha. If camel fighting games were introduced to Kucha during the Kyrgyz occupation, then the subsequent Uyghur rulers should have also witnessed this custom in Kucha. However, due to the lack of documented evidence so far, it is unknown whether the Turks, Uyghurs, etc. had this custom.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the Karakhan Khanate, established by a branch of the westward migrating Uyghurs, had a khan named Arslan Khan, and the second highest-ranking khan was named Boghra Khan (Pritsak, 1950: 227-228). Camels are generally docile, but male camels become extremely aggressive during mating season, and the name Boghra Khan may be related to this. However, it is unknown whether camel fighting was practiced in the Karakhan Khanate. The *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* also contains records of camel fighting, such as the proverb: "When two male camels fight, the gadfly in the middle suffers," meaning that when two Begs fight, it is the weak and helpless who are trampled (Kashgari, 2002: 203). However, this seems to be a description of the natural state of male camels fighting, not a record of camel fighting as a spectacle. The *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* is an encyclopedia of the Turkic peoples, and it contains vocabulary for horse racing, polo, archery, wrestling, and other competitions,

but not camel fighting (Xiaolin, 2014: 13-20; Yinshan, Can, Liuhong, 2016: 165-167). This suggests that camel fighting was not popular in the Karakhan Khanate.

Since the literature does not provide a clear answer, we now turn to the perspective of images to see if we can provide some useful insights into the introduction of camel fighting in West Asia.

Regarding the earliest depiction of camel fighting in miniature paintings, scholars initially believed it to be a painting from the 1640s, currently housed in the Gulistan Library in Tehran, Iran. This painting was either considered to be an original work by the Timurid master Bihzad or a replica. However, Adel T. Adamova, after careful research, discovered two earlier camel fighting paintings, both dating from the second half of the 15th century (Figs.11 and 12). These are famous paintings from the Timurid period and, like the camel fighting painting in the Gulistan Library in Tehran, were imitated or modified by later generations (Adamova, 2004: 9). Therefore, from a chronological perspective, the depiction of camel fighting scenes in miniature paintings should have begun in the Timurid dynasty.

The Timurid dynasty was founded by Timur, a nobleman from the Barlas tribe of Mongolia. Since he was not a descendant of Genghis Khan, after seizing power, Timur established the legitimacy of his rule by respecting the descendants of Genghis Khan as khans and marrying into the Chagatai family (Qi, 2018: 127-134). Therefore, the royal family members and military leaders of the Timurid dynasty were mainly of Mongol descent. Although the Mongol rulers came from humble origins, after occupying Iran and other places, they introduced the Chinese court painting academy system to this region, hiring first-class painters to illustrate classical literary works or historical records according to the monarch's will and aesthetic taste, thus greatly promoting the development of Persian miniature painting (Hongyan, 2015: 59-63). The camel fighting in miniature paintings must have been created or copied by court painters according to the ruler's intentions, which indicates that camel fighting was a court spectacle of the Timurid Mongol rulers.

It is worth noting that Mongolia already had camel fighting as a court spectacle. In the year of Jiayu (1334 CE) during the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Yuan Dynasty (元惠宗甲戌年), Xu Youren(许有壬) had an audience with the emperor, who happened to be watching camel fighting in the imperial garden. Xu was granted permission to watch, and later wrote "Ode to Camel Fighting(斗驼赋)," in which the camel fighting process is described as follows (Geping, 2016: 73):

虎贲执缰，两两相睨。腾蹙倾奔，砉歔徙倚。待怒气之既盈，俄侵袭之渐迹。脱羁发纵，势迈角抵。始啣颈而踟躅，复摩肩如委靡。乍分立以伺隙，遽挑衅于駉駉。飘忽若风燕，盘旋如磨蚁。划然踊跃，人立对起。波瀾土坟，雷轰电駃。持久跼跼，胜负未决。貂璠声援，陛楯毗裂。余勇虽鼓，处骄已竭。嗟两雄之相戾，卒不遑乎一蹶。胜者植立，扬扬自谦。主矜调扰，望拜蹙足。薛。天为噤嘘，赐杏缿帛。

The tiger guards held the reins, the camels glared at each other. They pranced and leaped, suddenly shifting and leaning. As their anger filled, they gradually approached each other. Released from their restraints, their momentum surpassed that of wrestlers. They began by biting each other's necks and stumbling, then rubbing shoulders as if exhausted. They stood apart for a moment, watching for an opening, then suddenly provoked each other with a snort. They moved swiftly like wind and swallows, circling like ants on a millstone. With a sudden leap, they rose up, facing each other. The ground shook like a wave, thunder roared and lightning flashed. They persisted, the outcome undecided. The spectators cheered, the railings cracked. Their remaining courage swelled, but their arrogance was exhausted. Alas, the two heroes fought each other, and in the end, neither could escape a fall. The victor stood tall, proud and content. The master praised their ferocity and rewarded them with silk and cloth.

The Chinese literature record of Mongolian camel fighting is not limited to this one example. According to the Qingbai Leicha (清稗类钞), compiled by Xu Ke (徐珂), Mongolians also had camel fighting as a spectacle. The text reads: "Mongolians have the spectacle of bullfighting and camel fighting, but they do not judge the winner by speed or agility, but rather by kicking and biting. The winner receives a prize. In their fights, only two calves or two male camels fight each other, not a chaotic fight with many animals"(Ke, 1986: 2990). This shows that Mongolian camel fighting continued to be practiced until the end of the Qing Dynasty(清).

From the text of "Ode to Camel Fighting," the process of camel fighting is very similar to that depicted in miniature paintings, but its time period is more than a century earlier than the camel fighting in miniature paintings. This suggests the origin of the camel fighting theme in Timurid miniature paintings. Both the Mongol Yuan rulers and the Timurid Mongol rulers had camel fighting as a court spectacle. It can be confirmed that camel fighting was a court spectacle of the Mongol rulers and spread westward with the Mongol expeditions.

Timur was a Turkicized Mongol nobleman, and the subjects of his dynasty included Mongols, Turks, Persians, and Arabs. In order to build the legitimacy of his royal power, in addition to aligning himself with the descendants of Genghis Khan, Timur also actively utilized Islam, especially the traditions of Turkic monarchs in the Islamic world, calling himself "Sultan" and making himself the ruler of the Islamic world(Wende & Weiwei, 2021: 37-39). Therefore, the Timurid Mongol rulers had a wide influence in the Turkic and Islamic worlds, and it is very likely that the Mongol court spectacle of camel fighting spread throughout the Iranian region during this period and was adopted by other ethnic groups. At the same time, this camel fighting also spread to India with the Mongols, as camel fighting is also one of the themes depicted in the miniature paintings of the Mughal dynasty in India, founded by descendants of the Timurid dynasty (Adamova, 2004: 4-7).

Conclusion

The earliest depiction of camel fighting as a ritual is found on a mammoth bone from the late Paleolithic period, discovered in the Tomsk region of Russia. To date, no late Pleistocene camel bones have been found in Tomsk, and the area is not a native habitat for camels. Therefore, scholars speculate that the carving on the mammoth bone came from hunters south of Tomsk. Late Pleistocene and even earlier camel bones have been found south of Tomsk in the Barnaul and Charesh river basins, as well as in northwestern Kazakhstan. Therefore, the custom of camel fighting likely originated in these areas. Later portable artworks depicting camel fighting all show two camels biting each other, which should be the result of the spread of the same motif. Although this type of image appeared on an amulet from the Togolok temple site in the 2nd millennium BCE, the scenes of two camels biting each other are already present in the petroglyphs of Karatau and Baikonur, which are earlier than the Togolok site. Therefore, the camel fighting motif likely originated in these areas.

The Sarmatians liked to depict camel fighting on metal plaques, which have been found in tombs such as Pyatigorsk, Besoba, and Filippovka. These tombs date from the 6th to 4th centuries BCE and are all located south of the Ural steppe. This area is close to Baikonur, Karatau, and other places, so the Sarmatian custom of camel fighting likely originated in these areas. Sarmatian camel fighting was introduced to Qiemo in Xinjiang, China, no later than the early to mid-Warring States period, and to the Huns after the 2nd century BCE. Camel fighting also appears on a bone belt buckle unearthed from a 1st. century CE Kangju Orlat tomb. The scene depicted is very similar to Sarmatian camel fighting images, so it may have come from the Sarmatians.

There are many depictions of camel fighting scenes in the Sulek petroglyphs of the Minusinsk Basin, dating from the 1st. millennium CE. Considering that the Kyrgyz entered the Minusinsk Basin in the first half of the 2nd century BCE and that the Kyrgyz also have records of camel fighting, the camel fighting in the Sulek petroglyphs should belong to the Kyrgyz. The Huns and the Kyrgyz had a close relationship, and their camel fighting spectacles were quite similar, so the Kyrgyz camel fighting likely came from the Huns. Although the Loulan mural tomb may be a tomb of the Kushans, the camel fighting scene on the south wall did not come from the Kushans, but may have come from Qiemo or the Huns.

The view that camel fighting in West Asia was brought by the Seljuk Turks is not credible due to lack of evidence. The camel fighting in Persian and Mughal miniature paintings can be traced back to the second half of the 15th century CE at the earliest, emerging during the Timurid dynasty. The Timurid dynasty was founded by Mongols, and as early as the Mongol Yuan period, the rulers had a court spectacle of camel fighting, as evidenced by Xu Youren's "Ode to Camel Fighting" after watching camel fighting with Emperor Huizong of Yuan in 1334 CE. This shows that the Mongols had camel fighting long ago, and it spread to Persia, India, and other places with the westward expeditions of the Mongols.

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پیشینه و سرچشمه: تکامل و گسترش جنگ شتر

شیائوشینگ می^I

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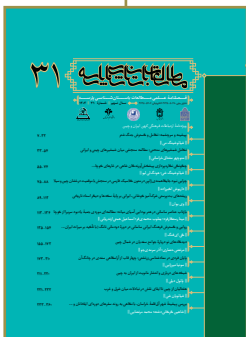
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چکیده

نگاره‌های «جنگ شتر» در هنر صخره‌ای بازتابی از مراسم آئینی بوده است که می‌توان آن را به اواخر دوره پارینه‌سنگی تاریخ‌گذاری کرد؛ اعتقاد بر این است که سرچشمه آن به شمال غربی قزاقستان امروزی بازمی‌گردد. با وجود این و به گمانی، نگاره‌های رایج جنگ شتر در آثار هنری منقول می‌تواند ریشه از نواحی «کاراتائو و بایکونور» قزاقستان از دوران مفرغ سرچشمه گرفته باشد. به دلیل نزدیکی و موقعیت جغرافیایی، آئین جنگ شتر در اوایل به «سرماتی‌ها» در استپ‌های اورال معرفی شد؛ سپس از طریق سرماتی‌ها به «شیونگنو» در شمال و قوم «شی ایمو» در «سین‌کیانگ» چین و سپس به «کانگجو» گسترش یافت. جنگ شتر که در سنگ‌نگاره‌های «سولائک» در حوضه «مینوسینسک» نگاریده شده، باید ملهم از سبک هنری قرقیزها و سرچشمه آن نیز می‌تواند شیونگنو باشد. نگاره‌های جنگ شتران در گورگه‌های «لولان» به گمانی از شی ایمو یا از شیونگنو سرچشمه گرفته باشند. با وجود این، نگاره‌های جنگ شتر در مینیاتورهای ایرانی از زمان تیموریان آغاز شد و نوعی سرگرمی برای درباریان سلطنتی بود. با آمدن تیمور، به اوایل دودمان «یوان»، با پیدایی نوعی جنگ شتر، به عنوان سرگرمی درباری، روبه‌رو می‌شویم. این موضوع نشان می‌دهد که نه تنها آئین جنگ شتر با آمدن مغولان گسترش یافت که نگاره‌های جنگ شتر در مینیاتور ایرانی نیز با آمدن مغولان به ایران درهم‌تنیده است.

کلیدواژگان: نبرد شترها، سرمات‌ها، هون‌ها، قرقیزها، دودمان تیموری، نگارگری.



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مقدمه

هرچند شترها عموماً چهارپایانی رام هستند، اما هر سال و در طول فصل جفت‌گیری، شترهای نر برای جفت‌گیری با شترهای ماده، با رقبای نر خود به شدت می‌جنگند؛ در این رقابت، کار آن‌ها با گاز گرفتن هم‌دیگر و درگیری به جنگ‌های شدیدی کشیده می‌شود تا زمانی که یکی بر دیگری پیروز شود. این جنگ فصلی اشتراک آن‌ها به مفهومی خاص تفسیر شد در سراسر آسیای میانه به روزگار باستان، تا به سیبری، سین-کیانگ در چین، ایران، هند و سایر مناطق گسترش یافت و هم‌اکنون نیز در ترکیه، عربستان، افغانستان، پاکستان و جاهای دیگر رایج است.

شترها را می‌توان به دو دسته تک‌کوهانه یا دوکوهانه طبقه‌بندی کرد. جنگ اشتراک در صورت اولیه بیشتر به شترهای دو کوهانه محدود بود که به عبارتی گواه آغازین این آئین از این‌گونه از اشتراک بوده است. به‌عنوان یک رفتار غریزی فحل‌شدگی، انسان با جنگ شتر به اواخر دوره پارینه‌سنگی آشنا شد. در سال ۱۹۸۸ م.، یک استخوان ماموت دربردارنده نگاره انسان و حیوان در سواحل رودخانه تام در «سورسک»، استان تومسک، روسیه کشف شد. «یوری» و همکارانش با استفاده از فناوری جدید به شناسایی نگاره همت‌گماردند؛ آن‌ها بدین نتیجه رسیدند که حیوانات نگاریده شده دربردارنده نقش چهار شتر دوکوهانه هستند که دو تای آن‌ها در حالت آغاز جنگ اشتراک است. بررسی انجام شده درباره این نگاره گواه گمانند جنگ اشتراک دو کوهانه وحشی است؛ آن‌ها برپایه آزمایش کربن ۱۴ و سبک نگارش نقش‌ها، این حکاکی را مربوط به اواخر دوره پارینه‌سنگی تشخیص دادند. آن پژوهشگران، با توجه به فصلی بودن این نوع جنگ، انجام آن را بر پایه این سند به مراسمی آئینی ارزیابی کردند. دقت بالا در حکاکی این نگاره، یکی دیگر از دلایلی بود که این دانشمندان آن را در شمار نخستین سند برای چنین موضوعی بر رسیدند.

نگاره گاز گرفتن دو شتر به عصر مفرغ در سنگ‌نگاره‌ها به ما رسیده است. «موخاروا» با بررسی این سنگ‌نگارها دریافت که نگاره‌های «سولائک» در کران «مینوسینسک» به هزاره اول پس از میلاد مربوط است؛ همین نگاره‌ها (همانند) در «کاراتا» در جنوب قزاقستان نیز دیده می‌شود. «سرمیتیان»، به‌عنوان یکی از گروه‌های نیرومند اوراسیایی، به خوبی با شترهای (مرغوب) بلخی آشنا بودند. سرمیتیان نیز به جنگ شتر بسیار علاقمند بودند. از گورگاه‌های این دوره میراث جنگ شتر به دست آمده است؛ صحنه‌های جنگ شتر بر روی ۲۹ پلاک زرین به دست آمده از یکی از گورگاه‌ها، به خوبی قابل فهم است. نگاره‌های جنگ شتر به دست آمده از کرانه‌های دریای سیاه نیز می‌تواند ناشی از جابه‌جایی سرمیتیان و مهاجرت بدین کران جغرافیایی بوده باشد.

این سنت، یعنی جنگ شتر، در دوران پیش‌تاریخی از «راه ابریشم» به کرانه‌های شیونگنو و شین‌جیان چین نیز کشیده شد. شیونگنو به دوره دودمانی شین و هان، قدرت برتر در کران مراتع شمالی چین بود. از میراث شناخته شده باستان‌شناختی آنان باید به کمر بند مستطیلی شکل با پلاک‌های دارای آرایه‌های جانوری اشاره کرد. از شمار این آرایه باید به نگاره شتر بلخی ارجاع داد؛ از آن جمله به نگاره دو شتر که در حالت درازکش، روبه‌روی هم قرار گرفته و در حال گاز گرفتن هم‌دیگر هستند. در موضوع جنگ شتر، برخی منابع چینی به نثار این رخداد به «معبد سه اژدها» در شیونگنو برای سرگرمی اشاره کرده‌اند. این چنین، سنت جنگ شتر از این مسیر (شیونگنو) به شین‌جیانگ نیز گسترش یافت.

از پس این دوره، و به گورگاه‌های دوره «هان» شاهد میراث سنتی جنگ شتر هستیم. اندک‌اندک در دوران سپسین‌تر بر تابوت‌های مقابر نیز این نگاره، یعنی جنگ شتر پدیدار

شد؛ این نگاره به سده چهارم میلادی در لولان دیده می‌شود؛ هم‌چنین، در منابعی چون منابع ترکی، از نوشتاری و تا به نقاشی، با صحنه جنگ شتر روبه‌رو می‌شویم؛ این منابع به سده‌های هفتم تا نهم میلادی وابسته‌اند.

مینیاتورهای ایرانی و نگاره جنگ شتر

نگاره جنگ شتر به فراوانی در مینیاتورهای ایرانی و البته به دوره مغولان به یک دوره زمانی ۴۰۰ سال روایی داشته است. در این مینیاتورها، شترها بیشتر از نوع شتر تک‌کوهانه‌اند و در حال گاز گرفتن و هل دادن هم‌دیگر به یاری گردن بلند خود هستند؛ این نگاره‌ها هم به جنگ شتران در مفهوم اخص و هم به نوعی جنگ شتران در مسابقه شتران که در آن صاحبان افسار به دست نیز دیده می‌شود، می‌پردازد.

در مسابقات امروزی جنگ شتر در کشور ترکیه، دهان شتران را می‌بندند تا از گاز گرفتن هم‌دیگر جلوگیری کنند؛ افزون‌تر، افسار شتران در دست صاحبان برای مراقبت و کنترل قرار دارد؛ در چنین صحنه‌هایی، شتران با هل دادن یک‌دیگر در مبارزه از گردن و دیگر اعضای بدن خود استفاده می‌کنند. بدین صحنه‌ها نیز جنگ شتران گفته می‌شود. به گمانی این سنت جنگ شتران در ترکیه از آن سنت ایرانی (مینیاتور) برگرفته شده است.

با وجود این، از نبود پیشینه تاریخی جنگ شتر در غرب آسیا (ایران)، این تصور پیش می‌آید که نگاره‌های جنگ شتر در مینیاتورهای ایرانی، عنصری وارداتی است. بر پایه پژوهش‌های «ریچارد دیبلو بولیت» باور دارد که رخداد جنگ شتران در ترکیه و نیز نگاره‌های آن در مینیاتورها پس از سلجوقیان در ترکیه رخ داده است؛ اکنون این پرسش کلیدی پیش می‌آید که آیا ترکان سلجوقی در وارد شدن نگاره جنگ شتران در مینیاتورها اثرگذارترین بوده‌اند؟

سلجوقیان به نیمه دوم سده ۱۱ م. به سوی خراسان و ایران آمدند و دودمان سلجوقی را برپا کردند. سلجوقیان به عنوان آشناترین قوم به بهره‌گیری از شتر، نباید با جنگ شتران به هنگام فصل جفت‌گیری ناآشنا بوده باشند. افزون‌تر، آنان در پرورش شتر بسیار فعال بودند و در پرورش شتران «دو گونه‌ای» (جفت‌گیری بر پایه دو ژن/نوع متفاوت) به منظور تربیت شتران قوی‌تر شهره هستند. نگاره شتر دو گونه‌ای (ترکیب دو نوع متفاوت) از مینیاتورها (تصویر ۱۱) آنجا که دو شتر دوکوهانه کوچک و دیگری کم‌رنگ شده، به خوبی قابل فهم است.

با به قدرت رسیدن «تیمور»، احترام به بازماندگان «چنگیز» یکی از سیاست‌ها بود. مغولان در دستگاه سیاسی به مناصب مهمی دست یافتند. مغولان سبک نقاشی چینی را با خود به ایران بردند؛ این سبک پردازش بر مینیاتورهای ایرانی اثرگذارترین افتاد. یکی از این نفوذهای، باید به گسترش و ارتقا نگاره جنگ شتران در مینیاتورهای ایرانی بیاری سبک چینی اشاره کرد.

نتیجه‌گیری

نخستین نگاره معروف به جنگ شتر، که از آن به عنوان صحنه‌ای آئینی نام رفته است، به دوره پارینه‌سنگی و برروی استخوان یک ماموت برمی‌گردد. این اثر از کران تومسک روسیه کشف شد. از این‌روی، پژوهشگران باور دارند که موضوع جنگ شتر از این کران جغرافیایی و شمال غرب قزاقستان برای نخستین بار ریشه گرفته است. سرمتیان نخستین گروه در گسترش صحنه‌های جنگ شتر برروی نوعی فلز بودند؛ این آثار، یعنی پلاک‌های فلزی بیشتر از معابدی از بیابان‌های جنوب اورال کشف شده‌اند. سرمتیان در گسترش این هنر نقشی کلیدی داشتند و این هنر از راه سرمتیان به چین رسید.

چنین به نظر می‌رسد که به دلیل نبود مدارک کافی، ترکان سلجوقی این هنر به غرب آسیا منتقل کردند. با ورود مغولان، هنر جنگ شتر به ویژه با دوره تیموری در مینیاتورهای ایرانی پدیدار شد. از مسیر مغولان، برخی ویژگی هنری «یوان» چین نیز به مینیاتورهای ایرانی راه یافت.