



CAMEL

CAMEL, *šotor*.

i. *Etymology*.

ii. *In Persian history and economy*.

iii. *In modern Persia*.

iv. *Camel terminology*.

v. *Šotor-qorbānī*.

i. *Etymology*

The Indo-Iranian word **uštra-*, whence Vedic *uṣṭra-*, Avestan *uštra-* (fem. *uštrā-*), and Old Persian *uša°* (in *uša-bāri* “camel-borne”), is probably derived from the Indo-European root *ues* “to be wet” (Mayrhofer, *Dictionary* I, pp. 113f.), referring to the ejaculation of semen. For the semantic development we may compare Skt. *ukṣan-* “bull” (Av. *uxšan-*, Eng. *ox*, etc.) from **ukus-* (< **uegu-*) “to (be)sprinkle” and Skt. *vṛṣan-* “male human/animal” (Av. *varəšna-* “male,” *varšni-* “ram,” Pers. *gošn*, Lat. *verres* “boar”) from **uers-* “rain, dew” (see Mayrhofer, *Dictionary*, s. vv. *ukṣā'-*, *uṣṭraḥ*, *vṛṣā-*, and Pokorny, I, pp. 80-81 *aṣer-/uers-*, 1118 *uegu-/ukus-* “damp,” 1171 *ues-* “to dampen, wet”).



Akkadian *udru* and *uduru* “two-humped camel,” attested in the 11th century B.C., may be a loan from an Old Iranian form of the word similar to the form from which Khotanese *ula-* was derived (possibly **ušθra* > **u[θ]θra-* > **uδra-* and, with metathesis in proto-Khotanese, **urδa-*). Middle Persian has *uštar*, whence New Persian *šotor/oštor*, compare Sogdian *ʼxwštr* < **uxštra-*. For a survey of terminology related to the camel in Iranian dialects see G. Redard, “Camelina. Notes de dialectologie iranienne II,” in *Indo-Iranica. Mélanges présentés à Georg Morgenstierne à l’occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 155-62). See also Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 40.

The term *uštra* also occurs as a component in personal names, most notably *Zaraθuštra*, probably meaning “he who can manage camels” (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 182-83).

(D. N. Mackenzie)

ii. In Persian History and Economy

Camels belong to the Camelidae family of artiodactyl (even-toed) mammals, which evolved in North America, their closest extant relatives being South American llamas, vicuñas, guanacos, and alpacas. Prehistoric camel species reached Asia via the land bridge across the Bering Strait during the Ice Age and spread west as far as Rumania and into North Africa. Wild two-humped camels can still be found in the Mongolian desert, but no wild species of the single-humped camel has been attested in historical times (Bulliet, pp. 30, 48-49).

The word *šotor* is now applied to both the single-humped *Camelus dromedarius*, or dromedary, and the two-humped *Camelus bactrianus*, or Bactrian camel, the latter sometimes being further distinguished as *šotor dokūhānī* “two-humped camel” (for the medieval Arabic burrowing *dohānej*, see Jawālīqī, pp. 154-55). The camel’s humps are repositories of fat, upon which the body draws when food is scarce, and have no bony framework. There is thus no reliable way to identify the species by skeleton alone. Two-humped camels do not seem to have the adaptations for high temperatures that are characteristic of dromedaries (see below), but this conclusion has not been established scientifically. A hybrid, the *boḳt*, results from cross breeding the two species; it is characterized by a single hump longer than that of the dromedary, often with a depression several centimeters deep toward the front, a vestige of the division between the humps of the Bactrian camel. In



western Asia both the Bactrian camel and the dromedary were probably domesticated independently in the 4th millennium B.C., though there may have been some communication between camel users in southwestern Persia and Oman (Bulliet, chaps. 2, 6). The Iranians would thus have found camels already in use as domestic animals when they arrived in the 2nd millennium B.C.

Bactrian camels. Artifacts from ancient Iran indicate that only the Bactrian camel was part of the native fauna of greater Iran, though it was probably not numerous. Possibly the earliest evidence is a painted image on a ceramic shard from Tepe Sialk (Sialk), probably datable between 3000 and 2500 B.C., which may represent a two-humped camel (Ghirshman, I, pl. LXXIX, A2; Zeuner, 1963, p. 359). Another possible depiction is an animal figure cast as part of a bronze ax head found in a grave at Kōrāb in southeastern Iran and tentatively dated to 2600-2400 B.C. (Lamberg-Karlovsky; Maxwell-Hyslop; Zeuner, 1955; Bulliet, pp. 151-53). On a type of clay model from Turkmenistan, dating from the first half of the 3rd millennium B.C., a single camel's head and neck projects from the front of the wagon bed, thus strengthening the argument that the two-humped camel was in use as a draft animal in that area before the arrival of the Iranians (see, e.g., Masson and Sarianidi, p. 109 and pl. 36). The earliest material remains of domestic camels in Iran are a pot of camel dung and a bit of camel-hair fabric from the 3rd-millennium B.C. site of Shahr-i Sokhta (Šahr-e Sūkta) in Sīstān (personal communication from Maurizio Tosi).

As the terms for camel in other branches of the Indo-European language family are derived from different roots (e.g., Gothic *ulbandus* and Old Norse *ulfalde* and Russian *verblyud* appear to be related; Greek *kāmēlos* and Latin *camēlus* are borrowed from Semitic) it seems that the domesticated Bactrian camel was first encountered by the Indo-Iranians after their separation from the other Indo-European tribes. In both the Avesta and the Rig Veda the camel is mentioned as a valuable domestic animal; in the latter (8.6.48; tr. Geldner, II, p. 299) the phrase “granting four pairs (yokes) of camels” occurs, an indication that the animal was used for labor, and in the Gathas (Y. 44.18) Zarathustra asks the Wise Lord how he can win a prize of ten horses and a camel (Insler, pp. 72-73). In the Achaemenid period images of Bactrian camels are both unequivocal and abundant. For example, they are included in the representations of several delegations from northeastern Iran in the carved frieze at Persepolis, whereas single-humped camels are represented only with



the Arab delegation (Bulliet, ill. 74-75). None of the Persepolis camels is depicted as a draft animal, but Sanskrit sources of the post-Achaemenid period refer explicitly to camel-drawn carts (*The Laws of Manu*, tr. Bühler, pp. 67, 472; Agrawala, pp. 148-49), as does a statement about India attributed to Nearchus, an officer in the army of Alexander the Great (Strabo, 15.1.43).

Although camels were harnessed to carts and possibly plows, there is little indication that they were used in pack caravans during the Achaemenid period. Such caravans became important in the Parthian period and doubtless played a crucial role in the opening of the Silk Route to China. Figurines of laden two-humped camels dating from the Parthian period are known from both Mesopotamia and northern China (Bulliet, figs. 76-78, 105-07). From the same period graffiti showing two-humped camels have been found in the Syrian desert, though the species was not native to the region. A relief from Dura Europos shows a caravan composed of such animals (Bulliet, fig. 79).

Dromedaries. The species of single-humped camels probably evolved in Arabia, as it differs from the two-humped species in its ability to withstand high temperatures. It is able to conserve body moisture in a variety of ways, for example, onset of perspiration only at very high blood temperatures and passing of very dry feces with concomitant high concentrations of waste in urine. The consolidation of fat in a single hump probably resulted from a similar adaptation, as less body surface is thus exposed to direct heat from the sun. The pattern of camel use in Arabia was quite different from that in Persia. In the former camels were abundant and an important source of meat, milk, and hair; although used for carrying burdens, they were never used for hauling. In order to find sufficient grazing in the desert, groups of specialized camel herders developed a migrant way of life (Bulliet, chaps. 2, 6).

The opening of the Silk Route provided the first opportunity for breeders of single-humped camels to extend their pattern of animal use into new territory; beginning in the Sasanian period there is evidence of the single-humped camel in Persia. In the famous relief of the royal hunt at Tāq-e Bostān dead game is carried by dromedaries; on silver objects scenes of Bahrām V Gōr hunting show him seated on a single-humped animal (Bulliet, figs. 82-83). The Arab conquest reinforced the trend toward breeding dromedaries in Persia. Tens of thousands of Arabs settled in Khorasan and other areas in the early Islamic period, undoubtedly bringing with them some of their livestock. Although the exact process by which the Bactrian camel was progressively supplanted by the dromedary is difficult to trace, the latter gradually became dominant in



Persia, and Bactrian camels became increasingly scarce. Tribal groups like the Baluch bred large numbers of single-humped camels, which hastened the spread of the species eastward through southern Afghanistan and the Indus valley, where Bactrian camels largely disappeared. Only in periods of large-scale population movements from Central Asia was the trend temporarily slowed, apparently with little net economic effect, however (Bulliet, chaps. 6, 7).

Hybrid camels (bokt). In the 1st century B.C. Diodorus Siculus (2.54.6) described three types of camel that were raised in one part of “Arabia,” probably southern Mesopotamia: “the hairless and the shaggy, and those which have two humps, one behind the other, along their spines and hence are called *dituloi* [double-knobbed].” *Dituloi* is evidently the Greek translation of the Persian *dokūhānī*; the Arabic word *fālej* connotes a single split hump, rather than two separate ones and would thus have been translated by a different Greek word. The “hairless” camel is the normal dromedary native to Arabia, with short hair adapted to the torrid desert; the “shaggy” camel is thus probably the *bokt*, which inherits its single hump from the dromedary and its shaggy hair, adapted to the cold of the Iranian and Central Asian winters, from its Bactrian parent. If this interpretation is correct, then this passage contains the first recorded reference to cross breeding of the dromedary and the Bactrian camel. Like many hybrids, *bokts* are larger and stronger than the parents, but, unlike mules, they are fertile when bred together. They can also be bred with the parent species, and the resulting offspring tends to resemble the latter, so that they have never been designated as a distinct species. Furthermore, after repeated crosses, they tend to become puny and hence of no economic value (Jāḥeẓ, I, p. 138, II, p. 240, III, pp. 145, 162, V, p. 459, VI, p. 216, VII, pp. 169, 242; *Āʾīn-e akbarī*, ed. Blochmann, I, pp. 146-47).

As the *bokt* is a stronger pack animal than either of its parents, it is no surprise that the breeding of hybrids to supply the caravan trade developed after the opening of the routes between Central Asia and Mesopotamia made economically significant combination of the two species possible, probably in the Parthian period. In A.D. 128 a Chinese traveler noted that the Yüeh-chi, an Iranian people living in Sogdia, possessed single-humped camels (Wylie, pp. 33, 40). These may have been either true dromedaries used for cross breeding or *bokts*. Bactrian camels are attested for the same period from the same region (e.g., Bulliet, fig. 81).

Though very little direct evidence of the large-scale breeding of *bokts* has been



preserved, it was surely an important factor in the replacement of two-humped camels with single-humped camels throughout most of Persia. Specialized camel-herding practices probably made it practical to mate a few two-humped males with large herds of single-humped females and, in Central Asia, the reverse. This industry probably declined along with the caravan routes themselves under pressure of intense competition from the European-dominated maritime trade after about A.D. 1600. Today *boḳts* are very rare.

Impact on transportation. As the Bactrian camel was the original native species of Iran and seems to have been domesticated first as a draft animal, its history is inextricably bound up with the history of transportation. The Iranian migrants of the 2nd millennium B.C. had a well-attested tradition of using horses to draw their chariots. It is not certain whether or not they also used camels, but eventually camel carts of sophisticated design were developed in Central Asia, where they were still in use earlier in this century. The earliest recorded distinction between the two animals in Sanskrit occurs in a dictionary composed by the Jain scholar Hemacandra (British Library, ms. Add. 1088-1172), which suggests that the single-humped camels were probably introduced for this purpose in the Indus valley and northern India after A.D. 1000 (Gode, p. 137; unfortunately, Gode did not realize that *uṣṭra* specifically meant “two-humped camel”). Camel carts were explicitly mentioned around 999/1590, in the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar (*Ā'in-e akbarī*, ed. Blochmann, I, p. 285). There thus seems to be no intrinsic reason why the use of camel carts for heavy transport did not develop in Persia. Nevertheless, after the chariot went out of use wheeled vehicles were rarely used there, with the result that the improvement of roads corresponding to improved vehicle technology did not occur there as it did in Europe. Persia entered the modern era with a long history of construction of [bridges](#) and [caravansaries](#) but little in the way of developed roads. Furthermore, before modern times Persian cities were laid out primarily for the convenience of pedestrians, rather than for vehicles.

The main reason why wheeled vehicles were little used west of an imaginary line between Bukhara and Karachi seems, in fact, to have been the great success and prosperity of the caravan trade. Pack camels were cheap and efficient carriers over long distances where it would have been very costly to develop wagon roads. Furthermore, the growth of the trans-Asian caravan trade coincided with the rise to prominence in Arabia and Syria of caravan cities governed by Arab dynasts and tribes with direct interests in camel



breeding. These Arabs capitalized on the natural efficiency of camel transport to supplant wheeled transport throughout the lands from the Zagros to the Sahara, where they were the primary suppliers of animal energy. To the degree that Arab camel breeders in Mesopotamia also played a major role in the caravan trade across Persia, they undoubtedly carried their bias against wheeled vehicles with them. This bias could only have been intensified during the period of Arab political domination in Persia in the early Islamic centuries. Evidence can be found not only in the shift from two-humped to single-humped camels but also in the fact that all Persian camel-saddle designs can be traced to earlier Arab prototypes (Bulliet, chap. 6).

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(Richard W. Bulliet)

iii. In Modern Persia

Today the single-humped camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) is found in many regions of Persia, particularly around Mīnāb and Bandar-e 'Abbās and in Baluchistan, Sīstān, and the southwestern parts of Khorasan, whereas the two-humped camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) is common in northeastern Persia and Central Asia. The following discussion concentrates on the single-humped camel.

The camel's distinctive physical features include a long, curving neck and



large eyes set in protruding sockets, protected by long eyelashes. The nostrils, long slits in the sides of the muzzle, become dilated when the animal is running or chewing cud. The small, sensitive ears are continually twitching in response to the sounds of the environment; in one particular breed, known as *dabbā* and thought to be slower and less sturdy than other breeds, the ears are covered with hair. The tail is 70-80 cm long and about 5 cm thick at the root, tapering to about 2 cm at the tip. It is covered with strong bristles on both sides. The soles of the feet consist of circular pads of tough, resilient tissue, each equipped with two large nails covered with hair. The female has one udder with four teats about 4 cm long but located inside the body. The male camel urinates backward. The most characteristic features of the camel, however, are the hump and the *safna*. The hump, as high as 30 cm in a fattened camel, contains a reserve of fat (but no fluid as popular belief has it; see ii, above) on which the animal can draw when it is deprived of food and water for a number of days, as when crossing the desert. The *safna* is a triangle of extremely tough skin about 15 cm wide at the base and about 30 cm high, extending from under the belly to the base of the neck. As the camel kneels, it first folds its forelegs, then rests its entire weight on the *safna* while folding its hind legs.

Camel breeders believe that a well-built animal should have a wide chest and a graceful gait, with its head carried high enough to be visible above the hump from the rear. A narrow-chested camel will slump under heavy loads and damage the inner sides of its forelegs as a result of friction with the *safna*. Camels that are reddish-yellow (*sork-e šafrā*) are preferred to those of other colors (white, yellow, reddish brown [*sork-e ḥenāʾī*], black), for they are believed to be tame and good-tempered. White camels are found mostly in the southern and western parts of the country.

Life cycle. The mating season extends through most of the winter, though sometimes it continues well into spring. The signs of gestation appear about a week after mating. The female (*mejīl*) becomes spirited and, if approached by a male (*lūk*), stretches her neck and raises her tail in defiance. Mature males usually recognize the signs and move away, but a young and inexperienced male may pursue the female, who sometimes exhausts herself running away and brings on a miscarriage (*pūč kardan*). Miscarriage may also occur as a result of grazing on dusty and unclean dry shrubs. A female that has miscarried behaves dejectedly for several days and submits to mating only after she has recovered.



The normal duration of gestation is exactly twelve months, though in some breeds it is slightly more. If mating takes place in the first month of winter the period of gestation may be as long as thirteen months. If the camel is particularly well fattened delivery may also be retarded by a few days. Usually the birth is heralded about fifteen days in advance by the appearance of milk in the udders, but sometimes milk may not occur until as late as three days before delivery. Another sign of impending birth is the sagging of the belly and the visible spreading and moving of the lower vertebrae (*jağaz*) when the animal walks. Labor begins with the camel's rolling on the ground on both sides, whereas normally camels roll on only one side. Unless labor is particularly difficult, the camel gives birth silently.

The newborn calf is immediately fed a spoonful of sheep ghee, which breeders believe will ensure its health and strength. About two hours after birth it finds its mother's teats and drinks the beestings (*falla*, *āğūz*), which it needs during the first day of life. The calf of a young and healthy camel stands up and starts sucking more quickly than other calves; the suckling period is normally six to eight months. Weaning (*rogā*) takes place in early autumn, when the calf is separated from its mother and taken to pasture to graze. It is forcibly separated from its mother by means of sticks, to the anguished cries (*gorra*) of both. Some mothers forget their calves after a day or so, but others continue to cry for several days. A female and her calf can still recognize each other after three to four months of separation. Once separated from the calf the mother is put on an enriched diet to prepare her for the next mating season. A healthy well-fed camel can be mated every year; otherwise every other year is the rule.

The calf is referred to by different terms, depending on the stage of development. Until it is one year old the calf is called *ḥāṣī*; the yearling is called bent *labūn* (plur. *labān*). A two-year-old is *ḥaqq* (right) and is ready to be put to work. The three-year-old is *ja'd* (curly) and a four-year-old *kall*. At the age of five the camel loses its baby incisors and larger ones appear; it is called *do-dandān* (two teeth) and in the next year *čār-dandān* (four teeth). A male of this age may also be called *ka'ūd*. In its eighth year the camel is referred to as *gerd* (round), for at that age it develops a pair of round molars. In the ninth, with the appearance of the canine teeth (*nīš*), the camel's physical growth is complete, and it is called *nīšakī* or simply *šotor-e kār* (work camel). *Ja'd-e lūkī* is a three-year-old male, *ja'd-e mejjī* a three-year-old female, and so on.

In the first days of winter the mature *lūk* is in a state of sexual agitation



described as *mastī* (lit. “intoxication”). He frequently roars and blows out the soft palate like a pink balloon, by which the females appear to judge the manliness of the stallion. The camel copulates with the female in a reclining rather than a standing position; the male mounts the crouching female with most of its weight resting on its hind legs. The sexually active male (*lūk-e mast*) attempts to assemble a large “harem” of females (*kālfā*) for the purpose of mating. If permitted by the breeders, he may claim as many as fifty females and guard them jealously. At any attempt to remove one of his females he will attack. Occasionally, however, he will reject a particular female (*radda*) for no apparent reason and refuse to mate with her. In these instances the camel breeder will sometimes smear her body with the urine of another female and blindfold the male for mating. In a subsequent season the *radda* may be accepted by the same male without further ado. As the pastures begin to warm up in the spring sun, the male (*lūk-e kālf*) detaches himself from the rest of the herd and grazes on his own, with a haughty air, as if not deigning to mix with lesser members of the herd.

Feeding and behavior. A healthy full-grown camel needs from 6-9 kg of fodder, cotton seed, and beet tops daily. On this diet a lean camel can be fattened in about fifty days. In the desert camels graze on various shrubs. The most important in spring and summer are *ašm* (*Sisymbrium scorpiuroïdes*, Schlimmer, p. 510), *taratīzak* (*Lepidium sativum*, garden cress, Schlimmer, p. 343); *šalgām-barg* (lit. “turnip leaf”), *gol-e zard* (lit. “yellow flower”), *lāla ‘abbasī* (four-o’clock, *Mirabilis jalapa/Nictago splendens jalapa*, Schlimmer, pp. 402-03), *halander* (?), and *mārčūba* (wild asparagus, Schlimmer, p. 61). Camels usually do not need water in the spring, especially if the annual rainfall has produced sufficient moist grass. In the Kūr (K^vor) area autumn and winter forage include *ošnān* (common soda, *Salsola tragus*, Schlimmer, p. 497), *jafna* (?), *arta* or *eskambīl* (Pers. *eskambar*, calligonum; *Pterococcus persicus*, Schlimmer, p. 475), and *rams* (?). During the winter mating season the male camel feeds less, and its stomach shrinks (Pers. *mīān var čīdan*) considerably. The breeder therefore feeds him balls of oatmeal and pitted dates called *navāla*. A certain plant known as *ganda-bū* (lit. “foul smelling”) has a deranging effect; even a small amount causes the camel to run wild, froth at the mouth, and then collapse. When it regains consciousness after three or four hours, it is extremely thirsty. Normally camels drink water once a week in wintertime, up to 40 liters, usually after nightfall. On hot summer days they may seek water every day, or at least every other day. The interval between waterings is called *henār*. Although camels are well known for their



endurance of thirst, they cannot survive hunger for any length of time. Deprived of food, they will collapse (*kafya kardan*) in less than forty-eight hours. Mature camels never sleep, though until the age of three they do need some sleep. In sunshine the animals invariably rest facing the sun. Camel drivers believe that they are trying to protect their humps (*kūhān*) from the direct heat of the sun by keeping them in the shadows cast by their heads.

Camels are highly social animals and observe degrees of command and leadership. Young camels graze in flocks of six to fifteen, usually led by more mature animals. It is not uncommon to see a female “work camel” (*arvāna-ye kār*) at the head of a flock of five-year old *herras* (young camels), guarding them against the hazards of the field and guiding them to the watering pond early, for young camels have not yet developed the ability to withstand thirst. The lead camel is known as *jālakaš*. As a rule camels are attached to their native place (*falāgāh*), but in search of forage and water they may follow a *jālakaš* for distances up to 300 km from home.

During the mating season confrontation of two males usually results in a fierce fight. The two begin with intimidating tactics: roaring, frothing at the mouth, and lashing their tails. Butting with the shoulders and head blows mark the next stage, and the fight culminates with the *lūks* biting each other savagely. Sometimes one male tries to suffocate the other by wrestling it to the ground and leaning on it with full weight. It is also at this time that the proverbial “camel’s grudge” (*kīna-ye šotorī*) manifests itself. For instance, the *lūk* may chase a man who had hit him a long time before; in a sufficiently maddened state he may even attack for no apparent reason. If he catches his victim, he will knock him down and crush him under the *safna*. Or he may kill him with a blow of the head or bite him. An experienced camel breeder in this situation will escape by dropping his clothes, which the camel will take as surrogate. The female camel, on the other hand, does not display vengeful behavior of this kind.

Economic uses. The camel was formerly a means of transport over the long distances that separate the population centers of Persia (see ii, above). It has now largely been replaced by motor vehicles, and in the few localities where camels are still to be seen they are reared mostly for meat. There are, however, still many difficult mountain passes and desert tracks where only camels can carry the loads of the migrating tribes that are almost always on the move across Persia’s vast plateaus and rugged mountains. The *bārgīr* (lit. “load bearer”) is the lead camel of the caravan. It may be either a male or a



female. The *bārgīr* can find the desert routes, even on moonless nights and when the trails have been covered by shifting sand. Camel drivers believe that the *bārgīr* follows the stars. The animals have very good eyesight and can see great distances even in the dark; their hearing is also extremely acute, and they will take fright at any unfamiliar sound. The camel's sense of smell is also extremely strong, and camel drivers believe that it finds its way on cloudy nights by following the aroma of the '*alaf-e šab-bū* (herb bennet, *Geum urbanum*), which it can recognize from a distance of 200 km. Caravans habitually travel in the cool of the night, and the camels rest at dawn for only a few minutes after being unloaded. They lay their long necks on the ground and close their eyes for a few seconds, after which they are rested and refreshed. They spend the daylight hours foraging for food.

A *jammāz*, or *zalū* (from Arabic *zalūk*), is a nimble camel, with slim legs and a small belly, suitable for fast riding across deserts; it is trained for this purpose from its earliest years and fed very nourishing food but in small amounts so that it will not become too heavy to move quickly.

The trappings of the working camel include the back cloth (*jol*), which is made of camel or goat hair, lined with felt, and usually embroidered. It has one or two holes for the camel's hump(s); a pair of wool or hair cords (*tang*) pass between the front and back legs and are fastened to each end of the *jol*. The trappings for a *jammāz* also include *šakar-tang*, a pair of embroidered bands, each about 5 cm wide and 50 to 60 cm long, which are wrapped around the *tang* in front and in back to pull them tighter so that the *jol* will not slip as the camel runs. The pack (*jahāz*) consists of two sacks woven of camel or goat hair held together by two small iron rods across the camel's back. The rein (*afsār* or *mahār*) consists of a wooden rod passed through a hole made in the camel's nose with a rope fastened to its ends; this device ensures the animal's docility. It is used mainly in Sīstān, Baluchistan, and the Persian Gulf area. Different kinds of bells are suspended from the neck or head of the animal. The most common are *korkorī*, *pīāla-zang*, and *gaborga*. The *nīmčā* is a bell consisting of two or three nested iron cups. The *gāv-zang* (*gow-zang*) and *kolakčā* are relatively large bells suspended from the *jahāz*; they tell the camel driver, who walks ahead of the caravan, whether or not all the camels are in the line. Sometimes five or six strings of graduated bells, called *šānarīz*, are suspended from the animal's shoulder. *Bal-gūšī* or *bar-gūšī* are pairs of small bells flat on one side, which are attached to the rein beside the camel's ear.

Camels are raised for meat, as well as for work. The weight of a *hāšī* is 35-40



kg; a well-fattened fifteen-year old camel supplies more than 300 kg of meat, of which the tenderest cut, the *māza*, is from the fleshy area directly under the hump. The camel is slaughtered by means of a long knife thrust into the heart through a soft spot in the chest (*naḥr*), whereas the preferred method for slaughtering other livestock is cutting the throat (*debḥ*).

Camels are sheared once a year between Ordībehešt/April and Tīr/June, when a new coat of hair is growing to replace the old one. The hair (*lork*) of a calf less than two years old is particularly soft and is used for weaving the flowing clerical garments known as *ʿabās*. Camel hair is also used in weaving some tribal carpets (See [carpets: tribal carpets](#)).

Camel's milk is slightly salty, which means that it cannot be cultured, but it can be made into a tasty *dūḡ* (and see [cheese](#)) by the admixture of a small amount of yogurt. In drought years, when milk is in short supply, the beestings from all four teats may be entirely consumed by the newborn; if there is a surplus, however, it is usually boiled and made into a kind of curd (*jak* or *jaklar*), which is considered to be an excellent relaxant for the nervous system.

The most common disease among camels is mange (*garī*), which becomes widespread during the frequent droughts, when there is little fresh grass. To prevent it *rowḡan-e mandāb* (wild rocket oil, *Nasturtii sylvestris oleum*, Schlimmer, p. 396) is applied to the camel's hide every fortnight for about two months after shearing. Another ailment, *del-zang* or *del-čāh*, is believed to result from exposure to excessive heat and cold in quick succession. The afflicted animal insists on facing the sun; the usual cure is to cauterize the chest with a red-hot iron bar. Cautery is also used as a cure for other infirmities, like softening of the sides of the *safna*; the ailment *zūr dīdan* affects the animal's ability to get up after lying down; and *bāš-lab*, a loosening of the lower lip, which makes grazing and drinking difficult. *Naḥāz* is characterized by coughing and also causes miscarriage (*her andāktan*) in females; it is treated with soft-boiled eggs and baked turnips. Blistered lips (*ābela*) usually last only three days, but at times they can become a lethal epidemic. It is commonly believed that baking bread or cooking with ghee in a camp where cases of *ābela* have been detected will cause an immediate epidemic. *ʿAqrabak* is a mangy spot in the shape of a scorpion that appears under the camel's chin; it is treated with applications of *rowḡan-e mandāb* and is ordinarily cured in a short time. *Pāsow* (abrasion of the sole) caused by walking on rough ground, is cured by a few days' rest in the pen.



The camel has few natural enemies. It is defenseless against leopards but seldom encounters them. Wolves can kill a camel only by attacking its hump, though a young and nimble camel can usually throw the predator off its back and trample it to death.

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The material presented in this article is based upon personal observations and records. For the botanical names see Schlimmer, *Terminologie*.

(Moḥammad-Nāṣer ḡolāmrezā'ī)

iv. Camel Terminology

In this article a number of terms used in connection with camels and cameleering in the Kūr and Bīābānak area are listed and explained.

Arvāna, a mature breeding female camel with good conformation. An *arvāna-ye bārgīr* (lit., a camel who can carry [heavy] loads) or *šotor-e pīš-āhang* (lit., a leading/avant-garde camel) is a calm and experienced leader of a string of camels. It can remember even very difficult roads for several years. At approximately every *farsak* (about 6 km) it stops and urinates to mark the spot for following camels.

Ballabān, for *bent labān*, yearling calf (see iii, above).

Būmī, lit, “native” [camel]. Camels rarely get accustomed to foreign places. When they are sold and moved they sometimes return to where they were born and raised, even after a long time has passed and braving even vast deserts. By relying on this habit camel buyers can easily find runaways.

Dāḡ nehādan, branding. After being separated from their mothers camels are branded on their cheeks. Different kinds of brands are used, and small camel owners usually use the brand of big owners. The most common kinds of



brands (of nuclear origin are *jalak-dāg*, *dāg-e pella-qeyčī*, *anbor-dāg*, *dāg-e yā Ḥosayn*).

Dalīl-band, the knot of a fine string connecting a camel's harness to a rope tied to the saddle of another camel.

Ga'ūd, a male camel at least four years old.

Gora, the period a suckling calf depends on its mother; also the wail of the mother and calf when they are separated from each other.

Gūr-band, a kind of camel poitrel.

Hamāb (lit. "sharing the same water"), camels that gather at the same watering place (cf. *henār*).

Henār, the period from when the camel leaves the watering place to graze until it turns back. In spring the period has been reported to last for as long as seventy days. The cameleers gather at the watering place a couple of days before the expected return of the camels for shearing and branding (usually about seventy days after Nowrūz). If camels become wild after a long absence the cameleers usually use tame camels to recapture the wild ones by driving them into an enclosure together. In the open, young and skillful cameleers may attempt to grab the tail of a wild camel by hiding behind a tame camel walking next to the wild one, and then jump onto a wild camel and ride it until it is exhausted and kneels down. The cameleer then fastens its forelegs with a rope called *egāl* (Ar. *'eqāl*) and harnesses it.

Jālakaš, a camel that carries water, clothes, and other supplies for camel drivers.

Ja'bīa, a small stony pond for watering camels that is usually filled from a well.

Jol, a felt saddle covered with a woolen cloth (*šālakī*) with a hole for the hump.

Lang kardan, a stop of one or two days after crossing a difficult path in the desert.

Lūk (cf. iii, above), a distinguished camel usually selected for breeding. It has pointed, tough ears and a hairy crest on the head. The *lūk* is extremely jealous and does not permit any other *lūk* to come near its *kālfas*, the females it has chosen for mating with. During the mating season, which begins in



Ābān/November, the *lūk* is fed cotton seeds or a dough made of barley to compensate for his loss of weight (*mīān bar čīdan*) resulting from frequent matings.

Mejjī, a female camel at least four years old.

Qaṭab, a piece of wood in front of the *jahāz* (saddle) for fastening the rope connected to *sīna-band*.

Remsī, a loss of appetite that is believed to be caused by a herb of the same name if eaten in the morning before anything else.

Regā, the weaning period of the calf.

Sīna-band, a broad wool band, tied into two loops by a string in the middle. One loop is passed around the neck and chest of the camel and the other is tied to the *qaṭab*.

Šarī'a (Ar. lit. "water hole"), a water source for camels outside of the village.

Zang, bell, hung from the neck or cheek of the camel but usually reserved for the leading camel. There are different kinds of bells, for instance, *par-gūšī*, *bokārāī*, *dogma-dār*, *pīāla-zang*, *gāv-zang*, *gaborga*.

(Eqbāl Yağmā'ī)

v. Šotor-Qorbānī

Šotor-qorbānī (camel sacrifice) refers to the customary slaughter of camels or other animals on the 'Īd-e Qorbān ('Īd al-Aẓḥā), literally "sacrificial feast," also known as 'Īd-e Gūspand-košān in classical Persian (Bīrūnī, pp. 252-53) and 'Eyd-e Čarbū in Kermān (Bāstānī Pārīzī, p. 730 n 2), which is celebrated on the 10th of Du'l-ḥejja throughout Muslim countries. On this day, sacrificial animals, sheep, cattle, or camels, are slaughtered by the pilgrims in the valley of Menā. In Persia, too, 'Īd-e Qorbān is generally observed. The slaughter of camels is a pre-Islamic custom that was adopted into Islam (Koran 22:28-38; Westermarck, pp. 157-58; Jorjānī, VI, p. 203; Nöldeke, p. 665b). Although evidence from *ḥadīṭ* and *tafsīr* texts demonstrates that it was not unusual for individuals who could afford the sacrifice to use camels for this purpose (Mālek b. Anas, I, p. 394; Termedī, III, pp. 267-68; Meybodī, VI, p. 368), by the



time Sir Richard Burton undertook his famous pilgrimage, the camel sacrifice was practiced only by “the Sharif and the principle dignitaries” in Arabia (Burton, II, p. 217 n. 2).

Animal sacrifice was widely practiced by the pre-Islamic Persians, though Zoroastrian texts do not mention camels among sacrificial animals, which were typically horses, cows, or sheep (e.g., Yt. 5.21, 25, 33, etc.). Jackson reports that the Muslim rite of sacrifice on ʿĪd-e Qorbān had been adopted by the Zoroastrians of Persia and was practiced by them during his visit to Persia (Jackson, p. 162 n. 1; 371 n. 3; see also Marquart, pp. 132-36).

There is no evidence in Muslim religious sources that the sacrificial camel among the Arabs was in any way elaborately decorated. It was marked, however. The marks on the camel ranged from branding on a conspicuous part of the body by red hot iron (*wasṣm*), hanging a collar formed of two sandals hung on a grass rope around its neck (*qelāda*), or wounding it on the hump to make its blood flow (*ešʿār*; *Mālek b. Anas*, I, p. 394; *Jorjānī*, VI, p. 199; *Majd-al-Dīn Ebn al-Aṭīr*, II, p. 479).

The Persian form of camel sacrifice, called *šotor-qorbānī*, or *šotorkošān*, however, is far more elaborate. References to the sacrifice of camels during the ʿĪd-e Qorbān are not uncommon in classical Persian sources (Anwarī, I, p. 190; Saʿdī, p. 814). For the Mongol period there is evidence that camels and other beasts of burden were decorated during Nowrūz and other festivals (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīk*, Baku, pp. 568-69; idem, *Tārīk-eḡāzānī*, pp. 362-63), but there is no indication that it was part of a sacrifice. Not until the Safavid period do we find detailed descriptions of *šotor-qorbānī*, primarily reported by Western travelers. These descriptions essentially indicate that a camel was elaborately decorated with flowers, mirrors, henna, and fine fabrics several days prior to the day of sacrifice. It was then paraded through the streets of the city accompanied by minstrels, dancers, and acrobats. On the day of the festival it was led to the sacrificial place, called *qorbāngāh*. The *qorbāngāh* was usually located several miles outside the city, although in later periods it could also be a certain square within the city limits. There, the religious leader of the city or one of the nobles acting on behalf of the king, would slay the animal by thrusting a spear into its chest (*naḥr*). It is possible that originally it was the king himself who thrust the spear (cf. Nilus’s description of camel sacrifice among the ancient Arabs in Nöldeke, p. 665), but I have seen no other evidence for this. The corpse would be cut in pieces and divided among the representatives of the different guilds and city quarters.



Often fights would break out among the people who were energetically trying to secure a piece of the magically potent flesh of the sacrificial animal for themselves, and many would lose their lives in these fights (Della Valle, II, pp. 157, 475; Thevenot, pt. 2, pp. 107-08; Franklin, pp. 137-41; Kaempfer, pp. 234-37; cf. Conybear, pp. 432-35, for the similar sacrifice of a cow by Armenians). The flesh of the slaughtered camel was consumed by the faithful for its *baraka* (blessings) or was administered to the sick, who were then thought to be cured by its magical powers (Massé, *Croyances*, p. 143). Blood from the sacrificed camel was brushed on door jambs and lintels to ward off evil spirits (Fryer, III, p. 140; cf. Jorjānī, VI, p. 203). As the animal was paraded through the streets people would also try to tear off tufts of hair, which was also considered sacred and blessed (cf. Termeḏī, V, p. 21, Monḏerī, II, p. 154). A great celebration, involving such entertainment as acrobatic feats, ram fights, and singing and dancing girls, followed the *šotor-qorbānī* (Franklin, p. 140; Kaempfer, p. 234).

In the early Qajar period, it was customary to bring the sacrificial camel accompanied by musicians to the houses of the nobility. The master of the house was expected to send money or gifts to the attendants of the camel (Lesān, p. 68).

During the Qajar and even in the early Pahlavi period it was customary for a person called *šāh-e šotor-qorbānī*, “king of the camel sacrifice,” to ride the camel. The office of the *šāh-e šotor-qorbānī* was hereditary. This individual, dressed in fine clothes, and wearing a fake crown and bearing a sword, would ride the camel accompanied by musicians, horsemen, footmen, and guards, who would surround his mount. In this manner he would ride the victim from ‘Alā’-al-Dawla avenue (southern part of modern Ferdowsī avenue) down to the Tūp-kāna square. Along the way he would put on a show of mock rulership, asking his attendants about the state of the country and his subjects. The attendants would most respectfully inform him that his realm was safe and sound and his subjects were grateful for his kind rule. Once the party arrived at the square, however, one of the attendants would suddenly run up to the camel and kill it by thrusting a spear into its heart. The camel would fall, and the attendants and the lookers-on would rush upon the fallen animal, drag the mock king off of its back, and proceed to pillage the trappings of both the camel and the king. They would then cut the animal to pieces, often even before it was completely dead (Šahrī, I, pp. 201-03).

The Safavid kings were present during the rite of the sacrifice (Kaempfer, loc.



cit.), but by the Qajar period the monarchs did not like to take part in the ceremony. Instead, they would assign the task to a prince as their agent. The nobility of the Qajar period sometimes competed with one another for this honor (E'temād-al-Saltāna, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, p. 821). A prince called Jahānsūzī carried a chunk of the flesh of the slaughtered camel on the tip of his spear to the general audience given by the shah on 10 Dū'l-ḥejja (Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek, p. 95; E'temād-al-Saltāna, p. 320, however, says he was the *šāter-bāšī*, i.e., chief of those who cleared the road before the procession). It has been suggested that it was this royal agent who later evolved into the character of the *šāh-e šotor-qorbānī* (Lesān, p. 69). In Tehran two squares were used for the sacrifice: Meydān-e Negārestān/Bahārestān (Hedāyat, p. 90; Najmī, p. 348) and Meydān-e Tūp-kāna (Šahrī, I, p. 202).

During the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, the once elaborate carnival following the *šotor-qorbānī*, of the Safavid and Zand periods was changed into a festivity involving fire works, blowing of horns, and firing of guns and cannons (E'temād-al-Saltāna, pp. 385, 456, 586, and see index). Three days before the day of the sacrifice a band of twelve horsemen led by Prince Jahānsūzī clad in full medieval armor would ride through the streets of Tehran, announcing the upcoming ceremony. They would finally make their way into the palace precinct, preceded by the fully adorned sacrificial camel and accompanied by musicians, dancers, and clowns for the royal review. At times they would be taken to the royal harem for the entertainment of the king's wives and children (ibid., p. 384; Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek, pp. 94-95). The practice of *šotor-qorbānī* was forbidden during the reign of Reżā Shah (Šahrī, I, p. 202; Donaldson, p. 85), but it was some time before it died out completely.

For the early Islamic period there is some evidence that the practice of the camel sacrifice with its associated festivities was not limited only to the occasion of the 'Īd-e Qorbān. Ebn al-Jawzī reports that on the night of the 'Īd-e ġadīr in 399/999, the Shi'ites lit great fires, played trumpets and drums, and on the following morning sacrificed a camel (Faḡīhī, p. 121; Ebn al-Jawzī, VII, pp. 16, 206).

The *šotor-qorbānī* assumed different forms in different cities, sometimes contrary to what was prescribed in the canonical scriptures. One of the most interesting varieties of *šotor-qorbānī* was the one celebrated in Kāšān: The camel was adorned ten days prior to the sacrificial festival and, accompanied by drums and a singer performing religious songs, was walked around town, stopping at some houses (presumably houses of the wealthy). The master of



the house would then, according to his ability, send out a gift or money to the camel's attendants. On the day of the festival thousands of citizens would leave Kāšān to attend the ceremony, which was held outside the gate of Fīn, at a place called Moṣallā. There, the camel was stripped of its trappings, laid on the ground, and slain, in direct contradiction to *sonna*, which required the camel to be slaughtered standing (Koran 22:36; Meybodī, VI, p. 368; Jorjānī, VI, p. 202). Each quarter of the city, as well as selected families, were assigned a predetermined portion of the sacrificial animal, which had been marked before the slaughter of the camel. Once the animal was slaughtered those who had received their pre-assigned portions would proudly hold up their share. The animal's head was carried amid great merrymaking toward the governor's house. However, on the way to his house, at the gate to the city, sometimes fights would break out among those who insisted that the head should be taken from the right side of the town (presumably to pass by their quarters), and those who insisted that it should be carried to its destination from the left side of town, thus attempting to ensure its passage through their own quarter. It was not uncommon for lives to be lost in these fights. One man was in charge of cutting off the sacrificial camel's tail. According to local custom he had to cut off the tail with one clean blow, pick it up, and run as fast as he could to a certain tree inside the city, called *derakt-e košga*, where, he was expected to throw the tail far up into the branches at the top of the tree.

In Kāšān it was not only every piece of the flesh of the sacrificial camel that was coveted; the local farmers would even carry away the dirt bloodied by the sacrifice. Dirt bloodied from a sacrifice (not necessarily that of a camel, however) was said to possess magical power and was used to bless the farms to increase their yield (cf. *Tafsīr-e Gāzor* VI, p. 203; Termeḍī, V, p. 203; Monḍerī, II, p. 153). During the slaughter those in charge were supposed to imitate at the top of their voices the sound of the camel screaming *bollo bollo bollo* (Lesān, pp. 69-70).

Although camel sacrifice is celebrated in Persia no longer, references to it have remained in Persian popular expressions. Thus, *folān čīz(folān-ī) šotor-e qorbūnīšod* "such and such a thing (or person) became a sacrificial camel," means that it was totally and quickly devoured, used up, or oppressed (Jamālzāda, pp. 243-44). Furthermore, *šotor-qorbānī*, as an image of chaos and carnivalesque atmosphere has been used in satirical poetry critical of the rule of Reżā Shah (Kūhī Kermānī, pp. 65-74).



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Figure 1. Camels grazing on a ridge south of Kabul, Afghanistan (1974).

Figure 2. Camels at rest, Mazār-e Šarīf, Afghanistan (1974).



Figure 3. Camel train on the road, Balk, Afghanistan (1974).