

CAMEL WRESTLING ECONOMY IN MODERN TURKEYOrhan YILMAZ^{1*}, Yakup Erdal ERTÜRK², Füsün COŞKUN³, Mehmet ERTUĞRUL⁴¹Canakkale University, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Animal Science, Canakkale, Turkey²Iğdir University, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Economics, Iğdir, Turkey³Ahi Evran University, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Animal Science, Kirsehir, Turkey⁴Ankara University, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Animal Science, Ankara, Turkey.

*Corresponding autor: zileliorhan@gmail.com

Abstract

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

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

Introduction

Because of geographical position Turkey is like a bridge between ages, nations, cultures and civilisations besides continental of Europe and Asia (Yilmaz et al., 2011). In Turkey there are reared some native domesticated animals including bee, camel, cat, cattle, dog, donkey, duck, goat, goose, guinea fowl, hen, horse, mule, partridge, pheasant, pig, pigeon, rabbit, sheep, silkworm, turkey, and water buffalo (Wilson and Yilmaz 2013^{a,b}; Wilson et al., 2011, Yilmaz and Wilson 2012; Yilmaz and Wilson 2013; Yilmaz et al., 2011; Yilmaz et al., 2012^{a,b,c,d,e,f}, Yilmaz et al., 2013^{a,b}).

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

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

*N/A: Not available)

The origin of the word camel likely is derived from the Greek word ‘Kremal’ or from the Sanskrit word ‘Kreluk’ which means ‘throw away legs’ (Khan et al., 2003). The genus of

Camelus was likely among one of the last domesticated animal species. It is believed that camels were domesticated in Saudi Arabia peninsula around 1.500 B.C. and spread to Anatolia (Asian part of Turkey) around 300 B.C. (Wilson, 1998). Camel is not widely reared recently and the numbers critically decreased in 20th century continuously (Table 1). Nowadays camels are used in small numbers as pack animal in provinces of Antalya, Mersin and Mugla (Figure 1). The majority of camel population is used for camel wrestling in 21st century in Turkey (Yilmaz et al., 2011). The camel is also used as a sacrificial animal for slaughtering (Cetin et al., 2011).

The aim of this review is to report camel wrestling from history to present with all aspects.



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

Camel

All wrestling camels are illegally imported when they are 8-9 years old age from Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to Turkey. They illegally pass the border between county of Maku (Iran) and county of Dogubeyazit (Turkey) (Anon 2011; Bagcil, 2013). A wrestler camel is called as ‘tulu’ which is crossbred of a single-hump Arabian female camel (*Camelus dromedary*) and double-hump Asian male camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) (Kilickiran 1987).

Although other large ruminants have horns, camel does not any horn which is good for camel wrestling (Gulsoken, 2010). Temporary teeth fall around 7 years old age and permanent teeth come out around 8 years old age. Between 5-8 years old age, the camel is begun to wrestle but he should not be mauled until 10 years old age. After 12 years old age, a wrestler camel is accepted as adult (Bagcil, 2013). They wrestle effectively from the age around 10 to 20 (Anon 2011; Anon, 2014^e). Although some of them can live up to 40 years old age, after 25-30 years old age, they can have front leg disorders which cause walking difficultly and limping (Bagcil, 2013).

Weight of wrestling camels is normally 400-500 kg, but under good feeding and care this amount increase up to 1000-1200 kg around fall season (Anon, 2012). In fall season camel should be exercised and must lose weight up to around 900 kg (Bagcil, 2013). In this season they started to rut and ‘havut’ (camel packsaddle) is put on the camel (Culha, 2008). Havut is put on the camel on the day of Republic Day, 29 October which is called as ‘Havut Giydirme

Toreni' (Kilickiran, 1987). All wrestling camels put on packsaddles are adorned and taken for a walk in that settlement (Caliskan, 2009). After putting havut, camel begins to be exercised (Caliskan, 2010^b). Also havut helps to exercise, so lose weight to around 900 kg. Heat signs can obviously be seen. For example a kind of oily liquid called as 'mislik' is secreted from his neck. (Bagcil, 2013).

Camel wrestling fans agree that, a champion is born and not made (Kilickiran, 1987). According to Muhsin, a saddler from Burhaniye, a perfect camel is lower in front part, but higher in rear part of body. The camel has long neck, small head, symmetric hump, thin tail, balanced testicles, and bigger penis (Gulsoken, 2010). Wrestling camels can be trained, but no amount of training can make up for a weak or overly peaceful character (Kinzer, 2000). A wrestler camel morphologically should have in shorter front legs, but longer rear legs. Hump of wrestling camel should be in almond shape and it is so called as 'badem horguc' (almond hump) (Kilickiran, 1987).

Normally camels do not attack to human. If somebody hit or kick to the camel, the camel never forget the attacker and want to hurt him and attack to him. Camels can know people by smelling, hearing or seeing. (Bagcil, 2013).

When camels are brought to wrestling arena, camels generally open their back legs and wave their tail, or cock their head back and moan (Figure 2). This is the kind of posing "I am looking for my opponent". Organizers arrange a female camel just outside the fighting ring to provoke the male wrestlers (Parkinson, 2011). When the camel is brought to the arena, he should erect his ears. If he droops his ears, this means the camel does not want to wrestle. If a camel is crushed and screamed by his adversary, that camel does not want to wrestle again at least 2-3 weeks. During wrestle a camel sometimes droops his ears, erect his tail and look for the gate which means he will flee (Bagcil, 2013). On the other hand the camel owners tries to find a good spot in the fields outside, where their camels can size each other up for the contests (Aydin, 2011).



Figure 2. Legs opened and waving tail. The 'pes' is also seen on 'havut'

Preparations

Wrestling organizing committee (WOC) which consist from several persons invites camel owners and negotiates about cost of truckage. The cost of truckage is not fixed and it depends on according to the camel's reputation. The WOC should pay a fair price for truckage of camels. If they agreed about the truckage, they prepare a contract and sign it for each side. The contract includes a fine against to the possibility of camel's absence. If owner of camel does not bring his camel, he must pay the fine which mentioned into the contract (Anon, 2012). The fine is about 3.000 TL¹ (1.500 USD) (Bagcil, 2013). WOC also promise to pay about 300-500 TL (about 150-200 USD) to the owners to provide their attendance (Kinzer, 2000). WOC also should find accommodation for camel, owner and 'savran' (caretaker of camel). If there is any cost for accommodation, WOC should pay the cost (Bagcil, 2013).

The day before wrestling, WOC assign a board of referees which consist of about three to five people. The one of them board of referees is field referee who manages the matches. And then they decide two 'urganci' groups. The urganci attendants carry a piece of rope to split up the locked and still camels. Each group consist of 10 to 20 attendants. Thirdly WOC determine 2-4 of 'agiz bagci' (muzzle guy) who fitted the camels with tight halters to prevent them biting each (Christie-Miller 2011). Besides them WOC also determine 2 of 'agiz bagi kontrolcusu' (controller of muzzle) who check muzzle whether it is securely muzzled or not. The camel has to securely muzzled before the match (Anon, 2010). WOC also assign a 'cazgir' (announcer) (Anon 2012). Cazgir is a very important because he is not only announce the camels, but also he give some details about camels, tells mania poems and makes jokes. The most colourful person of wrestling is the cazgir. WOC finally chooses enough ticket sellers and security personnel. Those attendants are announced by WOC the day before wrestling (Culha, 2008). WOC also organize 'Hali gecesi' (Carpet night) and a carpet is sold by auction to supply to pay some expenses (Kilickiran, 1987).

The wrestling day the board of referees is gathered in early morning and prepares a list to wrestle for a pair of camel (Anon, 2012). While deciding the pairs of camels, age of camel is ignored, but wrestling style and applying certain tricks are definitely considered. A weight difference of 150-200 kg can be tolerated (Bagcil, 2013). This list cannot be changed except by the board of referees (Anon 2012). Sometimes the board of referees is gathered the day before wrestling to prepare the list to (Culha, 2008). All attendants should carry armbands in order to be known (Anon, 2012).

Economy

Camel wrestling events contribute to economy via camel raising, feeding, equipments, accessories, ornaments, clothes and finery, eating, drinking, wages etc. A camel consumes approximately five tons of feed in a year. Depending on the feed type, the annual feeding costs of camels vary between 2,000 and 5,000 TL. Savrans receive a salary varying between 500 and 1,000 TL. Hence only the caring cost of a camel varies between 8,000 and 17,000 TL yearly excluding its accessories (Caliskan 2009). These rich elements and relationships create an almost special wrestling economy and cultural fabric that supports each other's existence. Some camel wrestling organizations or association use income of wrestling events for establishing for school, bridge, village hall or holy places. In additional, beyond being traditional events, camel wrestling events are a rich attraction for international tourism. Tourism economy in Turkey, the policy of combining festivals and tourism began to become evident after 1980s (Caliskan, 2010^a).

The quality of wrestling has increased recently with the contribution of very well-bred camels. This has meant an increase in the cost of buying and caring for these camels (Aydin, 2011). Camel wrestling is no longer a sport for low income people. The beginning price for a wrestling camel is between 20,000 and 50,000 TL (10.000 and 25.000 USD) (Parkinson,

¹ TL – Turkish Lira is Turkish currency.

2011). Superstars like 19 years old Cilgin Hasan, in Burhaniye county of Balikesir province, can fetch up to 300,000 TL (150.000 USD). On the other hand, if a camel is badly injured or retired because of age, he is generally sent to be slaughtered (Caliskan, 2010^b). Carcass yield is about 50% (Bagcil, 2013).

Conclusions

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

In the past, communication was a horrible problem for camel owners, but nowadays mobile phones and internet solved this problem. Another benefit is about following weather forecasts easily, because wrestles were cancelled in cases of unfavourable weather conditions in the past. In spite of economic, social and cultural advantages of camel wrestling events, there have been no institutions or organizations, which are interested in and plan camel wrestles at regional or national scale in Turkey. All events are organized by local instrument excluding Selcuk events. The most common problem is to overcome the financial problems of the continuing these wrestling events. At the present situation local municipalities help those events but it is not enough but in fact that many settlements are organized wrestles with financial difficulties. The state should support those events.

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