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All White: The White Camel and Symbolism of the Color white in Mongolian Beliefs

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Abstract

The distinct significance of the color white for the Mongols has long been noted in the study of Mongol culture. The color white had multiple symbolisms, probably inherited from tradition and from contacts with other Asian peoples. The white camel is one of the "white" animals that were particularly revered, and in symbolic analysis it must be viewed from several aspects, as a sacrificial and as a mythological animal. In this paper, we have looked at the beliefs of the Mongols and the presence of the color white in their beliefs, traditions, and culture, revealing parallels with the peoples with whom they were in close or indirect contact. Due to its importance in the role of a cargo/transport animal on the Silk Road, the camel was particularly revered. In addition to this role, numerous supernatural properties were attributed to it, which are directly related to the appearance of this animal in white.

Keywords: White Camel, Color white, Symbolism, Beliefs, Mongols.

Introduction

The perception of the color white in the Mongolian world of belief shows us that everything was connected. Everything "White" was connected, first with the most important factors of their way of life, with food, clothes, home, symbols of rulership, cults, rites and ceremonies. The color white signifies purity, honor, wisdom, goodness, wellbeing, nobility, respect, experience, and a spiritual level achieved, even heaven, etc. Color white, was auspicious not only among Mongols but widely across Eurasia because things which are white on earth reflect in symmetry their counterparts among light-bearing stars in heaven (Baumann, 2019a: 405). For example, Turkic peoples often call the Milky Way "The Way of the White Camel-Mare" (Gyarmati, 1992: 226). For the Mongols and other peoples of the Eurasian steppe zone, where shamanistic religions prevailed in ancient times, even after the emergence of new religions, the color white retained the same or similar symbolism.

The Color white Symbolism and "Mongolian" White

In ancient India, white is a lunar color, that of the "silvery" moon (Sweta) mentioned by MacKenzie (1922). White as moon color is mention in several places in the Mahābhārata (Sambhava Parva, sec. LXXII; Rajasuyika Parva, Sec. XXXIII, etc), "...Stretching from east to west, are these six mountains that are equal and that extend from the eastern to the western ocean. They are Himavat, Hemakuta, that best of mountains called Nishadha, Nila abounding with stones of lapis lazuli, Sweta white as the moon, and the mountains called Sringavat composed of all kinds of metals... " (Bhishma Parva, sec.VI) (Rāya & Ganguli, 1893-1896). In India, caste (varna) literally means "color", and for Brahmans, the usual color is white (MacKenzie, 1922: 145). In ancient Egypt, white denoted cleanliness, and thus ritual purity and sacredness. White was almost invariably used to depict the clothing of most Egyptians and was especially symbolic in regard to the priesthood. Many sacred animals were also of this color, including the "Great White" (baboon), also, ox, cow, and hippopotamus. The word hedj "white" was used to denote

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the metal silver which was used with gold to symbolize the moon and sun respectively. The traditional crown of Upper Egypt was known as the White Crown, also became the heraldic color of southern Egypt (Wilkinson, 1999: 109). White rivers, white wells, white seas, etc., were "something more" than "white." They contained certain virtues. The "whiteness" of a river or well might be due to stellar or lunar influence. "Wells of milk" were names of some Irish holy wells; there was at least one "milk lake." The "milk" was not ordinary milk: the water was not ordinary water. Like the ancient Egyptians, the Hindus believed that the Ganges had its source in the sky, and they had a "Celestial Ganges" as the Egyptians had a "Celestial Nile" (MacKenzie, 1922: 159).

The dominant color impression of the ancient world was probably a monochrome light hue, from obvious reasons: white or off-white dominated on archaeological remains of sculptures and buildings mostly made of light-colored bare marble or other stone. However, in the ancient period there was a wide range of colors in use, which are mostly not preserved. As colorful monuments and artworks fell into disuse, the perishable painted or gilt decorations on their exteriors and relief sculptures simply wore away. In the domain of religion, the Greek and Latin color vocabulary's focus on luminance and brightness is often very convenient for expressing ancient ideas about the nature of the gods. When a Greek writer describes a goddess using the word leukē (leukos, white), or a Latin one with candida, these words communicate not just the color white but also shining and brilliance, an indispensable visual feature of divinities whose being is beyond human (Wharton, 2021: 2-13). In the literature on color symbolism and meaning, among the most frequently mentioned ancient philosophers is Empedocles, who, while building a cosmological theory in order to explain the structure of the sensible world, was also interested in explaining light and darkness. Thus, he associated the color white with the brightness of the element fire (Ierodiakonou, 2004: 94). For more about ancient color theories see also Bradley, (2009). The color white is generally associated with good, purity, and lack of blemish. White means normal, and often occurs in Caucasus hunting mythology. Basically, the white animal is special, belonging to the hunting goddess, or perhaps even being the goddess herself or a daughter of the hunting god (the very ancient hunting goddess was generally superseded by a male hunting god after the introduction of Christianity in the first millennium CE). For this reason it is considered very dangerous to hunt and kill a white animal, and there are many legends about hunters who did so and then died from apparently "natural" causes (Hunt & Chenciner, 2006: 460).

The Chinese Yang (male principle) is white. In Japan white is the female color (MacKenzie, 1922: 145). In Inner Asia, one of the key colors in the Turco-Mongolian world is tsagaan, chaghan, or aq (white). Investigating the sacral meaning of colors among Turko-Mongolian cultures, May concludes that each color had a sacral meaning related to the traditional cosmology of the Turkic and Mongolian tribes of the Mongolian plateau, since they shared culture, primal religions (e.g. shamanism), have related languages (Altaic language family), etc. In the context, white symbolizes air (May, 2016: 51-52). In addition, they share a mythological origin, legends about a hidden or secret place of origin, since they both descend from wolves, and according to some authors, they are also associated with a legend of Gog and Magog (Veselov, 2021).

Almost all white animals had special symbolism. In the Fortune Book (Irq Bitig, 9-10th century), a source for Turkic religion, a White Mare, and White She-Camel are mentioned in one of the stories as a good omen during the childbirth (Baldick, 2000: 47-48). One of two twelfth-century sources present animals as guiding the Turks on their migrations from their Inner Eurasian mountain homeland. A Christian writer known as "Michael the Syrian", who was the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch from 1166 to 1199, wrote that the Turks' guide was a white dog (Baldick, 2000: 52).

In Mongolian thought, the color of West is white, colors vary depending on the system; the two independent parts of the Golden Horde are the White Horde, that is, the territory to the West; white denotes one of the basic element- metal, and among other five colors, white is also used in the sexagenary cycle calendar (Khabtagaeva, 2001: 90). The raising of the white

standard symbolically marked the birth of the Mongol Empire in the spring of 1206, the year of the Tiger, and the enthronement of Temujin as emperor of the nation of archers, supreme leader of the "people of the felt-walled tents" (Lane, 2006: 4). After the collapse of the Mongol Empire, in the mid-13th century, its successors were four great states and only the state of Jochi, the "Golden Horde", whose borders were formed as early as the 1240s in the steppe zone between the Irtysh and Danube rivers, could be considered a world power. The state headed by the inheritors of the house of Jochi was called the Ulus of Jochi in eastern sources; it consisted of two parts—the White Horde and the Blue Horde. The name "Golden Horde" which came from later Russian chronicles, applied to only the western part of the state—the White Horde (Gorelik & Kramarovskii, 1989: 78, 86; Vernadsky, 1953: 138-139; Grousset, 1970: 335).

The colors of Mongolian zurag (traditional painting) are also the colors of painted woodcuts and Lamaist iconography: red, blue, yellow, white, and green. There is an explicit symbolism of colors in Mongolian thought and art. White, the color of milk, signifies all that is auspicious. However, certain symbolic uses can have negative connotations for a color. It is likely that, as with many other peoples, the culture in earlier times recognized only three colors: red, black, and white. A close examination of the figurative uses of color terms in the Mongol language reveals another system, which is not explicit, and in which the connotations of each color may be quite different. For the ordinary herdsman, who did not have access to prepared paints, the available pigments were red ochre, which occurs naturally, possibly charcoal, and vegetable substances which were used in staining leather. The dyeing of fabrics or felt was not known in Mongolia, except by the Kazakhs in the far west of the country, and in some monasteries. Dyed goods were bought from Chinese merchants. However, the forms of ornamentation that are characteristic of nomadic pastoral life and have a long history in Mongolia, do not use color at all (Even, 1991: 223).

In Mongolian culture, the white had special significance. White, as a color, was meaningful in the case of basic human needs: yurt (tent), horse, mare, food, fabric, etc. White was the color of good omen with the Mongols: "White rock", "white felt", "white standard with nine feet [= scallops]", "white clothing", "white geldings", "white gyrfalcon", as mentioned in The Secret History of the Mongols (Cleaves, 1982: 15). White was an auspicious color on the steppes and the falcon was the symbol of the Borjigid Mongols (May, 2018: 23). Both, race and color were important in horses. White horses were considered sacred (Vernadsky, 1953: 112). In Vedic literature the horse is symbol of the sun and the Hayagrīva deity. This avatar of the deity Viṣṇu often appears depicted with a white horse's head or as a white horse (Sridhara Babu, 1990: 4). In China, the white horse is related to the legendary account of the arrival of Buddhism. In a dream of the Han Emperor Ming (r. 58-75 CE) a white horse is mentioned as the one that brought Buddhist scriptures and a portrait of Buddha Sakyamuni. Hangul Temple was remodeled for monks and renamed Baima (White Horse) Temple in memory of the white horse that "brought Buddhism to China" (Raz, 2012: 68). Analyzing the color symbolism (e.g., for the Irish concept of martyrdom) presented in the Celtic Homily (Collectio Canonum Hibernesis), Bulas (2009) finds numerous parallels in the ancient East, in China, India, Iran and Tibet. According to Chinese beliefs, both, the power and history rested on the system of Five Elements. The cardinal Five Elements were attributed to the Seasons, Virtues, Tastes, the Four Quarters of the globe, and the colors. The color white belongs to the basic colors for the Quarters of the globe, or the directions, in both, Chinese cosmic and calendar systems. The color white was attributed to certain ideas: to metal, the West and autumn (Bulas, 2009: 61-62). In the Avestan texts (the holy book of the Zoroastrians), "white" is always used to describe a positive being or object, and the term "positive" should be understood as "referring to the ahuric (= that of ahuras) part of the universe" (Gacek, 2009: 137). Many Avestan deities have zoomorphic incarnations, appearing as these animals in white or being depicted or described, also in white. Tištrya has three visual manifestations, one of them is of "a beautiful white horse with golden ears and golden "bridle"(Shenkar, 2014: 14-15). The goddess Čisti also appears in the Avesta, who is "white herself, she wears white garments" (Shenkar: 14-15). One of the basic features designating the status of a tent was the color of its felt cover, as well as the Mongolian so-called Golden Tent, which was made of white felt. White felt was used as a social marker mainly due, in

the first place, to economic factors. It was a rare and therefore expensive high-quality material (Dode, 2018: 138-139). As Hesse (1987) notes, around the deified Chinggis Khan and the insignia of his clan and the insignia of his sovereignty, was created a central cult of empire, and the center of this cult was the Chinggis Khan sanctuary, the eight white tents (nayiman čagan ordu) of the emperor. Hesse also examines how the great, and especially white shamanism, was transformed into the yellow shamanism that played a significant role in Mongolian folk religion. Goddess Dara ekhe (Mong. dara eke, Tib. sgrol-ma) particularly celebrated in Mongolia, sometimes is associated with white: the tsagan (white) Dara ekhe (Pozdneyev, 1978: 115, 648). The cult oboo (The custom of erecting and venerating an oboo is considerd an ancient custom, later adapted to the Buddhist cosmology), or in Mongolian obuγan-u takilγa, which is performed on a day in the three summer or three fall months, is purely shamanistic, and is dedicated to the worship of dragons, especially the white dragon. Namely, every summer and fall month luus-un qaγan tengri, i.e., the spirit or king of dragons descends from heaven to earth, because heaven is inhabited by an enormous number of such dragons (Pozdneyev, 1978: 521-523), of different characteristics and colors. They also descend, on different summer and autumn days. Their ruler, the white dragon king (čaγan luus-un qan tengri) always descends from heaven only on the second and sixteenth of every summer month. Dragon spirits are the cause of all misfortunes; sicknesses of people, cattle-plague and other natural disasters all depend on them; therefore Mongols honor these spirits and try to placate them with sacrifices. Dragon veneration is spread over all Mongolia, and nowadays consists in presenting offerings and reading prayers at an oboo constructed for just this purpose and consecrated to the dragon spirit (Pozdneyev, 1978: 522). The Mongols sacrifice to images, severely punish violations of taboos and respect the advice of powerful shamans (Baldick, 2000). These shamans consecrate all white mares, foretell the destinies of all new-born boys and are called in to diagnose the causes of all illnesses.

The nobility in Mongolia were known as the white-boned or the chaghan yasun, the idea referring to the nobility that predates the Mongol empire, even though the concept underwent a drastic change with the rise of Chinggis Khan (May, 2016: 62). Like white, black also carried other sacral meanings. Just as the black tuq signaled war, a white tuq signaled peace, auspicious occasions, and good fortune. When Temüjin ascended the throne as Chinggis Khan in 1206, a white tuq (white and black spirits known as sülde - protector spirits - dwelt within the tuq, which were also thought to be the genius of their particular clan) was present, signifying not only the peace that now reigned in Mongolia with the defeat of all opponents, but also the auspicious occasion of Temüjins rule (May, 2016: 58). The Borjigin clan (the clan of Chinggis Khan) were the Ancestor and Guardian-Spirits of the Mongqol ulus the Mongol state or empire. The white bone (čagan yasun) of the oboq Borjigin, with Chinggis Khan as its leader, became the white bone of all the white bones of all Mongolian clans, i. e., the white bone of the Borjigid, the altan uruq, became the overarching noble descent line of the empire (Hesse, 1987: 408).

In Turkish, the word ak describes the color white (with metaphorical meanings in folk tales). The word is derived from Old Turkish and is found in the form of ürüng. The word ürüng only survived in Yakut and Kyrgyz after the 11th century, and encompasses meanings such as whiteness, purity, greatness, blessedness, strength, equality, clarity, experience, and maturity in both the matriarchal moon goddess belief and the Sky God belief. The word ak is a term introduced by the Oghuz Turks. While ak [white] represents a literal color, it also carries metaphorical meanings such as cleanliness, honor, wisdom, goodness, and wellbeing. The color white signifies purity, cleanliness, nobility, respect, old age, experience, and a spiritual level achieved. In battles, the leader’s clothing and the color of their horse was white and in Altay Turkic, the word ak denotes "heaven", etc (Kaplan & Peker, 2023: 600-601).

As a thirteenth-century Chinese source states (Allsen, 2023: 453), the Mongols "take white to be the cause of good fortune (fu)." For this reason, the Mongolian elite made extensive use of white things – clothing, pearls, "mares white as snow," and koumiss – in political–religious rituals. As Marco Polo well understood, Qubilai made regular libations of koumiss to the air and the earth to bring fertility and productivity to his realm (Allsen, 2023: 453). The possession of supra-human qualities, charisma, understood as genius or good fortune, was a natural

accompaniment of sacral kingship. It was so for the Mongols, who saw in their qa'an a direct mediator between Heaven and Earth whose charisma assured the success of the imperial venture and the prosperity of his people. In Mongolian this was termed su/suu, which was further strengthened by the addition of jali, "flame" or "spirit", a clear allusion to the solar-like brilliance of the ruler, his nimbus or aureole. For the steppe peoples, Eternal Heaven was the ultimate source of good fortune (Turkic qut) (Allsen, 2023: 451-452). So, the key terms qut and su reveal a number of affinities: both have a similar semantic range – individual soul, life force, protective spirit, and royal glory; both inhere in lands as well as people; both are associated with the idea of radiance or flame (Turkic yalin and Mongolian jali), the aureole of the ruler; and both are used in forms of address reserved for divinities and royal persons (Allsen, 2023: 453). In the Tibetan versions of Mongolian imperial edicts, the term su, "good fortune", is rendered by bsod-nams, "accumulated merit" (puṇya) which, following earlier Turkic precedent, gave the formula meaning within the Buddhist worldview (Allsen, 2023: 446).

The White Camel

Wild camel (Camelus ferus) is the species whose habitat was distributed between Mongolia and Central Kazakhstan at 1500–2000 m asl altitude. Bactrian camel, or two-humped (Camelus bactrianus, Asian camel) habitat is the same as Camelus Ferus, that is, the mountainous regions of Mongolia, West China and Central KZ, but from here it diffused to the west in the Pre-Caspian region and to the southwest until Bactria, Kopet-dag, Khorasan and Anatolia. Dromedary (Camelus dromedarius, Arabian dromedary or Indian dromedary), one-humped, is well adapted to hot dry climate and widespread in North Africa, Arabia, and the Middle East (Sala, 2023: 118-119). According to the most widespread hypothesis, the homeland of the domestic two-humped camel are Bactria, the classical name for the valley of the Oxus River in northern Afghanistan, and Mongolia or northwestern China. The Greeks called the animal the Bactrian, although they came into contact with it many centuries after it was domesticated (Bulliet, 1975: 143). The domestication of the Arabian and Bactrian camels happened more or less synchronously at the turn of the III millennium BCE (Sala, 2017: 205). More precisely, the hunting of Bactrian camel is evidenced by findings from archaeological excavations of the Neolithic site of Ayakagytma (Kyzylkum desert, UZ), from early Neolithic period, between 5500-3500 BCE, while its domestication is documented by archaeological finds on the southern borders of West Central Asia, in Turkmenistan and Bactria, and attributed to the IV-III millennium (Sala, 2017: 206). For archaeological evidence from Central Asia that confirms the period of domestication of the Bactrian camel, as well as other features associated with this species (see Kuzmina, 2008: 66-70). The camel represented in the Altai Scythians and in the works of Turkestan during the Ak Hun (White Hun) period, for example in Varakhsha (Varahṣa), was probably the totemistic prototype of the Ak Huns, according to Prof. Şişkin. In the Karakhanid (Karahanlılar) dynasty, the name Buğra, meaning male camel, was widely used (Esin, 1962: 167).

The Bactrian camel of Mongolia is used as a draft animal, for its fine hair, for milk, and for its hides and meat. The two-humped camel is primarily an animal of the Gobi Desert. The endangered wild two-humped camel (khawtgai) is found in southwestern Mongolia. The Alashan breed, is a typical breed of the Mongols riding camels, with a soft felt saddle with attached stirrups placed between the humps (Atwood, 2004: 75).

The importance of the camel was on different levels: in arid areas devoid of road infrastructure, it determined the superiority of the loaded camel over all other types of wheel and draft transport, thus expanding its use as a pack animal throughout the Middle East and the continental networks of caravan routes. The camel increased the mobility of camel-breeding communities, by transporting tents, and as a military animal it was very useful in controlling the desert expanses (Sala, 2017: 205).

References to camels appear in the Rig Veda and the Avesta, the word ushtra being used in both sources. This word for camel is the source for most later words for camel in Iran and India (modern Persian: shotor; Hindi: ūṭ; etc), but it is completely unrelated to any Indo-European words for camel north and west of the area of the Indo-Iranian linguistic influence (Gothic:

ulbandus; Old Norse: ulfalde; Old High German: olbento, etc). So, it is presumably, when the Indo-Iranians entered camel-breeding country, and before the Indian language group and the Iranian diverged, they adopted a word for camel that implies a pattern of domestication characterized by the animal being used for hauling. The word "camel" itself, of course, is a borrowing through Greek from the Semitic languages (Bulliet, 1975: 153-154). In Kazakh words related to camel - Инген - is common name of two-humped camels. Originally it is the name of the place in Kokshetau region, primarily meaning two-humped white female camels. It derives from Mongolian word "mother camel" (Imamura, Amanzholova & Salmurzauli, 2016,: 66).

Because of its color white, which has diverse symbolism in Eastern cultures, the white camel has a special place and significance, and because of its importance as a hardy and indispensable beast of burden, in general, the camel became popular throughout the East. The camel earned a place of honor among the Iranian tribes of Zoroastrianism, as indicated by the name "Zarathushtra", that is, the second part of the name - ushtra - which means "camel". A camel in mythology is related to the highest sphere of being. In the hierarchy of figurative and symbolic representations of the archaic consciousness, which perceived all phenomena and elements of the surrounding world as the personification of various animals and deities, the camel is in the middle, between man and heaven (Khazbulatov & Shaigozova, 2020: 232-233).

Since the devil also appears in the form of a camel (Russell, 1985: 16), or, according to legend, the camel is a creation of the devil (Khazbulatov & Shaigozova, 2020: 234), the camel, in addition to its "heavenly" quality, also possesses demonic properties and can be viewed from a different angle. In Mongolian tradition, we can find stories about the white camel associated with mysterious loci, restless places. The motif, a man stuck in a supernatural locus, who loses the ability to move (or as a related motif, loses his way), is widespread. It appears in Slavic, Finno-Ugric and Altaic traditions and among the Buryats and Kalmyks, whose traditions are connected to Mongolian culture. Local beliefs contain a rich array of details describing additional forms of supernatural phenomena (güidel) in such places. In Mongolian traditions, such additional forms often include acoustic manifestations. Among the most popular demonic sounds we can find those (more likely associated with certain regional motifs or beliefs) such as the scream of a camel. According to some narratives, there may also be visual manifestations of a supernatural presence. Among the most popular images are a white camel (alone or with a rider), which the witness sees either while awake or in a dream (Solovyeva, 2022: 363-364).

The cosmopolitan character of northern China from the Han (206 BC-BCE 220) through Tang (618-907) dynasties was frequently captured in funerary art. It was customary to bury the deceased in tombs with an array of ceramic representations of the people, animals, and objects of daily life believed to be necessary for comfort in the afterlife. The camels (Bactrian; one is white colored), which are kept at the Harvard Art Museum (No. 2003.193), come from a tomb dating back to 559 AD and belong to the Northern Qi period (Wolohojian, 2008: 32). The camel's association with funeral rituals is well-known throughout Asia; a male white camel, for example, was exempt from the prohibition associated with carrying away the deceased, while other camels were subject to the rule that they could not be used in household work for 49 days (Khazbulatov & Shaigozova, 2020: 234). The Camel was important in the funeral rite, which is the usual belief among different groups of Mongolian people. It is of particular importance to choose an animal that will not only carry the deceased to the burial place, but also accompany the deceased to another world. The Mongols use a camel or an ox to deliver the body of the deceased to the burial place and rarely a horse. In the worldview of the Mongolian peoples, the camel belongs to animals with a "cold" breath and is considered a gift from an earth deity (Khazbulatov & Shaigozova, 2020: 234).

The white camel is often mentioned as a sacrificial animal, even in other cultures. In the Byzantine hagiographical works known as the Narrations of Nilus, which shed light on pre-Islamic religion, a white camel is mentioned. Beside the historical validity of this text we are obliged to mention the detailed description of camel sacrifices. Nilus relates that the Arabs used a spotless white camel in accordance with their common practice of using white animals for

sacrifice. The author of the Narrations (probably a monk in Sinai) did not specify whether a "female" camel was used, also common in Arab tradition (Christides, 1973: 39-48).

White camels were in special esteem and cherished by Kazakhs. A Kazakh would say about a happy day: "Ak tuyenin karny zharylgan kün", that is "the day when the white camel's stomach blew out". The Aruana (one-humped white she-camel of the best breed) was highly protected from the evil eye by putting around the neck a pendant made of shoe or insole leather. It was also believed that the newly born white camel colt is subject to the evil eye, and a spoke bone (protective amulet) or a red cloth was to be put on its neck as amulet (Sala & Kartaeva, 2018, 39). The Kirghiz acknowledged a spirit in the form of a young white camel that was the "master" of sacred springs and trees. The Kazak baksy's kobyz (the shaman's fiddle/instrument) was also known as nar-qobïz (where nar means "camel") and according to a Kazak legend, the first baksy made the first kobyz from the hide of a camel (Basilov, 1989; Lymer, 2000: 312). For example, the ashes of Khubilgans who are not buried in Mongolia but were taken to Tibet or Wu-t'ai-shan, were gathered in a special box which is then put in a suburgan, and thus sent to their destination on a white camel. It is said that in Tibet such suburgans are placed in the idol-temples, and in Wu-t'ai-shan in special cemeteries for which the Mongols are said to have a certain plot solicited from the Bogdokhan. It is remarkable that burial in Wu-t'ai-shan is considered more sacred by the Mongols even than that in Tibet. It is quite possible that this belief has arisen just on account of the difficulty of being buried in Wu-t'ai-shan (Pozdneyev, 1978: 365).

As "a ferocious beast—Tengri's white camel Khavshil...", which "igniting a fire" (Khavshil: specifically, a male camel when he ferociously gnashes his teeth to assert dominance) is mentioned in Jangar (Bougdaeva, 2022: 184-185), (Jangghar, Atwood, 2004). Nomads of the Great Eurasian Steppe, Kalmyks (Kalmyk means "the remained"; the remaining Mongols of Chinggis Khan's empire in Europe), transmitted some of the greatest epics, such as Jangar which belongs to a genre of oral literature about heroic age. In medieval and early modern times, Kalmyks were known as Oirads, as stated in Jangar, the center of their culture was Altai. According to archaeological discoveries in the Altai Mountains, it is assumed that the heroic epic tradition of the region first arose in the third to first century BCE, evolving from generation to generation for more than two thousand years and coming down to the present as a modified oral transmission (Bougdaeva, 2022: 1-5, 10). On the other hand, Atwood (2004) states that the time of origin of the Jangghar epic is uncertain, and that it probably originated in the 17th century among the Kalmyks. Jangghar's relatively realistic themes parallel the epics of the neighboring Turkic Muslim peoples, Nogay, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz etc. (Atwood, 2004: 260).

The camel is mentioned in the funeral rituals of Kazakh, the idea of the camel as a guide to another world is found among the Uzbeks, and this connection between the camel and death, or rather the camel as a sacred ritual sacrifice, is also preserved in ancient legends and written sources of the Turks (the Oguz epic "Kitabi dede Korkyt"/"The Book of Grandfather Korkyt"), because in the funeral rite of the ancient Turks it was mandatory to have a camel (Khazbulatov & Shaigozova, 2020: 234-235).

The White Horde, The White Tatars

The Golden Horde, the domains of the heirs of Jochi were not known by that name. The term "Golden Horde" does not enter the sources until the sixteenth century, when Russian chroniclers referred to the domains as Zolotaia Orda, the Golden Camp or Palace. During the Mongol era, they were known as the Kypchak Ulus or Khanate or the Jochid Ulus or Khanate. Divided between the many sons of Jochi, the Jochids still followed a traditional bifurcation between left (east) and right (west) wings, with a southern orientation and with the Ural River serving as the dividing line. These halves were known as the Blue (koke or koko) and White (aq or chaghaan) ordas or Hordes respectively, following a color identification that had existed since the Xiongnu period (c. 209 BCE–91 CE) (May, 2018: 280-282).

The Khanate of Kypchak, traditionally known, as we mentioned, the Golden Horde, was only part of a larger political body known as Juchi's Ulus, or the western khanate. Even Marco Polo spoke of the Juchids as "the Tartars of the West." It is assumed that the Ulus of Juchi as a whole

was known as the White Horde (Vernadsky, 1953: 138-139), although there are different interpretations in the literature. The German traveler Johann Schiltberger, who visited the Khanate of Kypchak in the early 15th century, called it the Great Tartary (which corresponds to the Great Horde of the Russian chronicles) or the White Tartary (which corresponds to the White Horde) (Schiltberger, 1381(?)/1879, as quoted in Vernadsky, 1953). According to the description in Chinese sources: "Those called the White Tatars have a slightly more delicate appearance, and in character they are respectful". Their country is referred to as Tenduc by Marco Polo; according to medieval pronunciation (Atwood, 2021: 72). "White Tatars was the name of nomads, who lived south of the Gobi desert and kept Boarder Guard Service in the empire Kin (Jurchen). Most of them were Turkic-speaking Ongud and Mongol-speaking Khitan. They were dressed in silk clothes, ate from porcelain and silverware, had hereditary chiefs, who studied Chinese literacy and Confucian philosophy..." (Molchanova, 2015). In the Khitan religion, heavily Altaic in its internal logic, the heaven is dominant, represented by a white horse (Baldick, 2000: 36). The Khitans, a Mongol or Tunguz people who ruled China from 907 to 1125, sacrificed animals to "the earl of the wind", "the Divine Lady", "the spirit of the deer" and "the spirit of the white horse" in shamanistic rituals. They sacrificed white animals: horse, sheep and goose, and dogs (Baldick, 2000: 31-32). The Khitans (like Homer's Trojans) would sacrifice a white sheep to Heaven and a black one to Earth. Also, more frequently, they would immolate a grey bovine and a white horse (in memory of the original pair of ancestors) (Baldick, 2000: 31-32).

In the literature, the name Öngüt is often associated with the name "White Tatars", whose ethnonym appears very late in written sources (at the time of Chinggis Khan). Among others, Öngüt are also defined as "White Tatars" (bai Dada), as Paolillo (2013) notes in his analysis. Furthermore, by exploring their mention in the literature, he discusses their ethnicity. Bese (1988), refers to several sources and states that the ethnic name Önggüd-Önggüt occurs in the Secret History of the Mongols (SHM), and that the Önggüts played a significant role in the age of Chinggis Khan. They were mentioned by the Chinese sources as White Tatars. According to Rashid-ad-Din, the Önggüts belonged to the non-Mongol peoples or tribes, and lived independently from the Mongols. Čaγan Tatar (Čaγan means: white; pure, good; noble), the name of the group of the Tatar people, as an ethnic label occurs both in the SHM and Rashid-ad-Din, which means that the Čaγan Tatars of the SH and Rashid-ad-Din, were the same people as the White Tatars (meaning "Southern Tatars" or "Western Tatars") of the Chinese sources, i.e., the Önggüts (Bese, 1988: 31-37). The names—Kereyit, Naiman, Merkit, or even Mongol—appear rarely if at all in the earliest accounts of the early Mongol Empire translated by Atwood (2021). In these accounts, the people of the Mongolian plateau are all Tatars, with at most further divisions into "Black" and "White" and "Raw" and "Cooked". The terms "Black" and "White" evidently meant "North of the Gobi" and "South of the Gobi", respectively. The "White Tatars", designated the people known in Mongolian accounts as the Öng'üt: descendants of the Shatuo who had founded regimes in North China during the Five Dynasties. Archaeological remains and short inscriptions show they were Turkic speaking and in the middle of the eleventh century had converted to Christianity of the Church of the East—something mentioned in none of the early Chinese sources (Atwood, 2021: 11, 12). The Naiman (Altai people) of 12th-13th centuries had ethnopolitical connections with the Ongut and together with the latter fitted the concept of White Tatars, also according to Chinese chronicles (Akerov, 2016: 2078).

The White Month

The Mongolian calendar of worship has long been divided into two basic seasons: the winter of meat (red food), the White Month, hunting, and Epics, and the summer of dairy products ("white food") milk aspersions, the three manly games, and the oboo offering (Atwood, 2004: 468). During the great assemblies (Quriltai) the khans bestowed on their courtiers' clothing of set colors. Such court clothes were called jisün, "color", from the designation of a special color for each day. During the White Month all present wore white silk (Atwood, 2004: 113). The name White Month—chagha'an sara in Middle Mongolian, tsagaan sar in modern

Mongolian—derives from the auspicious character of the color white among the Mongols. The Buriat Mongolian name, sagaalgan, means "whitening" (Atwood, 2004: 584).

In spring, from the first to the sixteenth inclusive of the first month called Tsagan sara is celebrated by the Mongols (Tib. zla-ba dang-po), i.e., "the white month", or, in other words, during the first sixteen days beginning with New Year's Day. Tsagan sara is considered to be the New Year, and is the most important annual holidays in the social life of Mongols (Pozdneyev, 1978: 370-371). According to Marco Polo, the beginning of their New Year was celebrated in February, and was marked by a great feast, called the White Feast. On this occasion, the Great Khan and all his subjects dressed in all-white clothes to ensure prosperity throughout the year, as they believed that white clothing was good luck (Polo, Cordier & Yule, 1903: 390- 411).

The shamans were the bekis, and they wore white clothes, rode a white horse, etc. Before Chinggis Khan the bekis in some tribes, such as the Merkid, Oirats, and Dörben, were, in fact, the real chiefs (Atwood, 2004: 495). Chinggis had no intention of letting the shamans interfere with state affairs, but he deemed it useful to emphasize his loyalty to the traditional clan cult, and appointed old Usun of the Baarin clan—a senior branch of the descendants of Alan-Qoa—chief beki. Usun was given a white fur coat and a white horse. His function was "to appoint and illuminate the years and the months". Presumably he was in charge of the Mongol calendar. He also became what may be called the national augur (Vernadsky, 1953: 31). Many shamans among the Mongols operated, however, with an almost completely Buddhist cosmology. They are sometimes distinguished from the less Buddhist influenced shaman as yellow opposed to black (from the Buddhist "Yellow Faith") or as white opposed to black. Among the Khori Buriats white-side and black-side shamans coexist as two different traditions often practiced by a single shaman (Atwood, 2004: 496). According to the Buriat Mongols, ancestral white spirits originated in the west, while black spirits came from the east and were usually associated with plagues and illness or chthonic spirits, who were always dangerous (May, 2016: 56-58). While the black-side shamans use a drum and have an antlered cap, the white-side shamans hold a dragon-headed staff (like that of the White Old Man), ring a bell, and use the Buddhist om mani padme hum chant (Atwood, 2004: 496). In the world of spirits, the dual nature of spirits led to the rise of chaghan boge (white shamans) and kara böge (black shamans). White shamans dealt with good spirits and were more effective at gaining the spirits assistance in matters of importance. It is interesting to mention that the white shamans primarily wore blue, and black shamans, white robes (May, 2016: 56-57). Mongolian shamanism had 99 tngri /tengri (deities): 55 white or benevolent and 44 black or terrifying, which were common to all Mongol clans and they were only called upon by the leaders, great nobles, and great shamans on special occasions. In the Mongolian belief system, in addition to the white and black tngri there was a large number of minor genii, the spirits of the ancestors who were also divided into white and black and in separate, hierarchically differentiated groups or classes of spirits, correlating with the souls of the respective ancestors these spirits were representing (Hesse, 1987: 405). Ancestral spirits, divided into black and white, are further delineated based on greater or lesser status, usually based on their status in the mundane world. The sacral color attributes that designated them as black or white indicated the origin of the spirits that they engaged, so the type of shaman one became was also determined by ones ancestral spirits. If one's ancestral spirits were predominantly white, one became a white shaman, and black spiritual ancestors made one a black shaman (May, 2016: 56-58).

The White Old Man

The "White Old Man" is known in Mongolia as Tsaghan Ebügen; Čaγan Ebügen (Heissig, 1980: 76-77), "Tsagaan Övgön", (also Tserendug, and the Tibetan, sGam po dkar po) (Annan, 2019: 1; Birtalan, 2020: 272). In the western aimags of Hovd and Uvs, however, he is called "Tsagaan Aav", or the "White Father", because the word "Ovgon" means "old", in the Mongolian language and this is considered disrespectful by the Torgut and Durbet people (Annan, 2019: 1). An image of Tsaghan Ebügen is found at the very doors of some Mongolian idol-temples. His cult is widespread all over north-east Asia. Tsaghan Ebügen is worshipped by Mongolian Buddhists,

by Chinese Confucianists and Taoists, and finally, by Buriat shamanists (Pozdneyev, 1978: 135). The key to understanding the originality of the image phenomenon of Tsaghan Ebügen (The White Elder, Sagaan Ubgen: Imikhelova & Mongush, 2020) is concealed in his name: the philosophy of the name, as we know, shows that the name, denomination in ancient consciousness has always had a sacral character, directly communicating with the hidden essence of what is shown (Imikhelova & Mongush, 2020: 1998). The word "ubgen" is equated with the notion of world wisdom, the definition of "perfectly wise", and B. Vladimirtsov pointed out that the Mongolian word "ebugen" or "uvug dedes" can also mean "progenitor" (Vladimirtsov, 1934, as quoted in Imikhelova & Mongush, 2020).

Dede Korkut (Oghuz epic), within epic, combines the roles of wise old man, religious leader, and bard — strongly suggestive of the Central Asian shaman. His role is universal, indispensable to all spheres and phases of nomadic life. As a shepherd he maintains an economic pastoral life-cycle, as a keeper of the secrets of Nature, he maintains the vital link between the Sky and the Earth (Babayeva, 2007: 137, 142). The Kyzyr/Kydyr Baba that we meet among the Kazakhs is a legendary archaic image, which is often found in the myths, folklore and religious legends of many eastern peoples. Its genesis and personality are very complex, according to different interpretations, sometimes it is linked to ancient archaic concepts, sometimes it arose under the influence of Islam, because every nation has had the concept of Kyzyr, for centuries. In the Kazakh folklore, Kyzyr Baba [Kydyr] is the saint in the form of an old man in a white robe, who cares for people, gives them happiness and wealth, and protects them from various difficulties (Sahitzhanova, et al., 2023: 38).

Almost everywhere, besides his name, he is also recognizable by his white clothing or other white features, as he is most often depicted. The clothing of the White Old Man is significant in the iconography. In all the sutras, Tsaghan Ebügen is dressed in a white Delhi (Mongolian national robe), and occasionally a cloak is thrown over his shoulders. The origin of this garment can be linked to Mongolian household clothing, where shoulder pads with a uulen hee ornament are symbols of goodwill and longevity. This piece of clothing (shoulders) is characteristic of warriors and cultural heroes. The belt is also shown, which is a symbolically significant detail of the clothing of the White Old Man, mentioned also, in the sutras, and it represents a kind of thread that connects different worlds in the structure of the universe, "ours" and that of the "aliens", "the other" space, the source of vitality. In addition to the belt, one of the most important details of Mongolian men's clothing is the hat (Batchuluun, 2021: 27-29).

The Buriats interpret the White Old Man as a rain deity (Hummel, 1997: 60), but he acted more as a stern deity who punished wrongdoing. His main role was that of a protector who granted longevity and fertility (Sodnompilova & Nemanova, 2019: 470-471). In Tibet he is the lord of the mountains, the wide plains and the water, progenitor of the tribes who grants welfare and protects herds and animals (Hummel, 1997: 60). On the connection of the White Old Man with the cult of ancestors, among Buryats and Kalmyks, as well as his role as a tribal protector (see: Galdanova et al., 1983). In Mongolia he is considered a protector of pastures and the one who bestows the fruits of human labor (Hummel, 1997: 60). Hummel also states that he is known with these attributes throughout Central and North Asia, from Europe to East Asia, but the core areas where he is venerated are the Tungus and Siberian populated regions, and that a deer that generally accompanies him reinforces his Siberian origin (Hummel, 1997: 60). This view seems to be supported by Birtalan, who states that in its current form, The White Old Man is probably known since the eighteenth century, but the appearance of the deity (visual morphology) has certain ancient characteristics that predate Chinese Taoist and Tibetan Buddhist influence. He is universal nature deity, inherited from the Mongolian pre-Buddhist belief system (Birtalan, 2020: 271-272).

A major problem in researching the earliest appearances of this mythological character is the lack of scientific evidence. Semantically, it is easily recognizable, but in the iconographic sense (before the 12th/13th century, which is assumed to be the time of its first evident appearance), this connection is absent. There are not enough clear traces for the period, as well as the cultural area, for which it is assumed that they originally appeared, neither in literature

nor in material culture. So, pictorial iconography of Tsagaan Ebugen is associated with lack of data. Batchuluun (2021) states that he was unable to find pre-Buddhist and Buddhist written iconographic or iconometric sources, which would contain information about the system of rules for depicting the White Old Man and the time of appearance of his first canonical images, and the works presented by the author also do not provide sufficient scholarly grounds for an accurate determination of the time of the first iconographic samples.

The characteristics of The White Old Man have been observed in many pre-Buddhist mythological characters, and one of the postulates of the research can be set in relation to the color associated with its characteristics, the color white.

The origin of this mysterious old man, "the long-lived" is not to be sought in Lamaism, or Tibetan Buddhism, but in much older traditions. His cult is not confined to Tibet and its Lamaist peripheral regions, because he was accepted in the Lamaist pantheon only as a side figure, a fact which is supported by the apocryphal character of a text dedicated to him, and by the Mongolian-Lamaist view of the White Old Man as a former follower of the so-called Black Faith, a non-Buddhist, heretical religion (Hummel, 1997: 59). Many deities and spirits from Buddhist and pre-Buddhist mythology that appear in his narrative and offering texts: the god Indra (Written Mong. Qormusda), the mother Earth Ötügen, another hypostasis of the sky named Degedü tngri, the Lord Yama (Written Mong. Erlig qan), and the multitude of various spirits, indicating the White Old Man's original role and Buddhicized duties. Lower-ranking spirits, usually the malevolent adas, demonic beings, such as māras (Written Mong. simnus), the inconsistent, but frequently violent and furious chthonic nāgas (Written Mong. luus), departed human souls (Written Mong. sünesün), highlight the crucial role of the White Old Man, as seen in ritual texts, as he averts the dangerous spirits and eliminates their ill effects in return for the veneration and offerings presented to him (Birtalan, 2020: 273).

He is also convinced that the Russian Orthodox Church honors Tsaghan Ebügen too, for they connect the personality of the latter with that of St. Nicholas. Tsaghan Ebügen is shown as a venerable old man, grey with age, dressed in a white caftan and holding a staff in his hand with the image of a dragon's head (sometimes even two heads) (Pozdneyev, 1978: 135).

A deity of the herds and of fertility, always appears in the Mongolian prayers and invocations in the form of a white-clothed, white-haired old man who leans on a dragon-headed staff. With many East Asian parallels such as Japanese Jurojin, etc. The figure of the White Old Man, character of personified creative power, lord of all the earth and all waters, originated in pre-Buddhist times. The Dragon-headed staff of the White Old Man, corresponds to the horse-headed staff once held by the shaman and used by him as a mount for riding when he ascended and also as a magical staff. The dragon-headed staff of the White Old Man, like the shaman's magic staff, is called tayaγ in Mongolian. The white clothing of the White Old Man also belongs to his shamanic character, and the reference may be made here to the white clothing of Mongolian shamans at the time of Chinggis Khan. In connection with the White Old Man, many things are white, as we mentioned, clothing, the offerings, gifts consist of preferably milk, his mythical residence are "snow-white mountains", which may indicate the Himalayas (Heissig, 1980: 76-80).

Using the philological approach, Futaki classified texts related to the White Old Man. The White Old Man plays a unique role in the mystical religious dance cham. The cham itself originated in Tibet and was introduced into Mongolia with the influx of Buddhism and Buddhist culture (Futaki, 2005: 35). The ceremony, 'chams "dance" (Géluk masquerade), comprises at once sacred tantric ritual and a profane public spectacle. As tantric ritual, the dance enacts cosmic allegory and is set upon a field of concentric circles representing spheres of heaven. Dancers transform themselves into cosmic beings through the donning of large masks and elaborate costumes. The purpose of the dance is to exorcise the world of sin and error through the annihilation of their effigy in consuming fire (Baumann, 2019: 35). Hummel believes that the White Old Man figure (in the 'cham) is older than Ho Shang (whom he states as one of role models), who dates back to the early history of Lamaism in Tibet. Ho Shang also took over some

peculiarities of his namesake, the big-bellied Buddha (Chin. Pu Tai Ho Shang), who has a similar function to that of the White Old Man. Pu Tai Ho Shang is a form of Maitreya, popular in China as a god of fertility and of the offspring, and as an archetypal innocent fool. Pu Tai (Jap. Hotei), along with the Japanese variants of the White Old Man, is one of the seven gods of good fortune in Japan. Thus, it was probably the character of the White Old Man which allowed for the acceptance of Pu Tai in the Tibetan 'cham, possibly dating back to Chinese stimuli in 7th century Tibet. Nevertheless, the relationship between Ho Shang and the White Old Man remains hypothetical (Hummel, 1997: 59-60).

The White Old Man is described as the ruler of the world in the famous Western Mongolian Epic Jangar (Jangγar). The deity also appears in Eastern Mongolian epics such as Ere-yin degedU AriyakUU and Tusibaltu BaGatur. These texts should be regarded as typically oral. The deity appears not only in Buddhistic narratives, but in folk-religious prayers. In Ordos, the White Old Man was popular especially as a protector-deity of cattle (Futaki, 2005: 35-36), but he was also venerated in other ways as well among Tibetans, peoples of Amdo and Inner Mongolia, Khalkha, Oirats, and Buriats (Baumann, 2019: 35). Birtalan points out that the connection of the Oirats with this deity looks closer than that of other ethnic groups, since he is customarily labeled in their texts with terms of kinship, such as "father" (Spoken Oirat āw) among the Altai Oirats and "uncle" among the Kalmyks (descendants of Oirats) (Birtalan, 2020: 276). Baumann stipulates that the White Old Man represents an allegory of Canopus, the Antarctic star (known as Shouxing 壽星 – Star of Longevity – in Chinese), and turning to heaven for an analogue to the Mongols' White Old Man. Throughout their history, the Mongols' heaven has been their own, even though their sovereigns have appropriated much from the heavens of their neighbors and predecessors. Of these, Mongol "heaven" bears affinity, even sharing the name tenggeri, with that of Turkic peoples. For this affinity Mongol sovereigns knew the allegories of Iranians, Indians, and other western peoples. Their greatest reliance, however, was on the allegories of Chinese tian 天. Under the vault of Chinese tian one finds a star, the allegory which corresponds to that of the White Old Man. Known in the West as Canopus (α Carinae), in Chinese allegory he is called Laoren 老人 "The Old Man". Shining with a brilliant white hue, after Sirius (α Canis Majoris) Canopus is the second brightest "fixed" star (Baumann, 2019: 46).

Conclusion

The color white among the Mongols, as well as among many other cultures of the East, had a specific significance. Everything in white was considered special, animals, food, clothes, shelters/tents, everything that formed the backbone of nomadic life. The color white was also a symbol of the ruler's dignity, ruler's marks and gifts. White camels, horses and mares were given as gifts, and certain white animals and their products were used for sacrificial purposes. The white camel was most often depicted in art and in color white in order to emphasize its liminal nature. In general, in Eastern cultures (in our research mainly Central Asia, but also beyond), the camel, as an animal with specific natural characteristics, deserved a place in both the heavens and in the underworld. The white camel did not differ much from other white animals that also had special symbolism, and in the first place that which connects them with the purity and whiteness of a positive spirit. White was an attribute of many deities, the color of priestly clothing, the color of everyday, but also sublime things, raw materials from which nomads survived, such as camel hair, milk and their processed products.

Ethics Statement

During the writing process of the study titled "All White: The White Camel and Symbolism of the Color White in Mongolian Beliefs," scientific rules, ethical and citation rules have been followed; no alterations have been made to the collected data, and this study has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication medium. As this research is based on document review, an ethics committee decision is not required.

Researchers' Contribution Statement

The authors' contributions to the work are equal.

Statement of Conflict

There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.

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