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Felt and "Tent Carts" in The Secret History of the Mongols

MICHAEL GERVERS AND WAYNE A. SCHLEPP

In the final chapter of his novel, *The First Circle*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn extols the virtues of the felt boot: "A pair of felt boots are the two best friends a prisoner will ever have ... Woe then to anyone whose feet are not shod in felt boots! ... But the prisoner wearing his own felt boots has not a care in the world." Solzhenitsyn writes for those unfamiliar with the extremes faced by the society he is describing. Similarly, but far removed in time, we are accustomed to learning a great deal more about the uses of felt among nomadic peoples from travellers who have purportedly visited them than we do from such rare accounts as *The Secret History of the Mongols* (*SH*) which emanate from sources close to the nomads themselves.

There are numerous references in the *SH* to clothing and garments in general, and more occasionally, in particular, to boots, brocades, carpets, coats, collars, coverings, damasks, girdles, hats, satins, shifts, silks, skirts, sleeves, standards, and stomachers. Specific mention of felt is uncommon, however, undoubtedly because it is taken for granted in the course of nomadic existence. Yet felt is the fabric *par excellence* of the nomads and has almost certainly been available to pastoral groups since the domestication of sheep in the Neolithic period, if not before. Domestication freed the civilizations of the Neolithic from their dependence on wild animals for food and clothing and provided the foundation for both agricultural and nomadic societies. Felt, invariably made from matted wool or camel hair, like the pile carpet, is a man-made substitute for many of the objects which, among hunters and gatherers, would have been made from the skins of wild animals. Unlike the pile carpet, however, the manufacture of felt requires little technology and no tools or equipment other than a strong, supple stick and a reed mat or old covering felt.

It would probably be fair to say that all pastoralists in the plains regions of Asia use felt in varying degrees as protection against cold and the elements. In most areas felt-making is associated with loom cultures producing flat-woven rugs and pile carpets. This has not been the case in Mongolia; largely because the harsh winter climate has necessitated the continuous use of fur-lined garments, the geography has permitted regular access to furs and the successful pastoral economy has enabled the inhabitants of the grasslands to meet their textile needs through trade with sedentary populations predominantly to the south and to a lesser extent to the west. It is the availability of furs, wool for felt, and textiles through trade that has enabled the pastoralists of Mongolia not only to survive, but to prosper and endure without recourse to weaving and the loom. Given the abundance of fur, hides and felt,

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textiles are not even necessary; consequently, when textiles are referred to in the *SH*, the context, with few exceptions, describes them as luxury items.

The word for felt, *isgei* or *sisgei*, occurs only four times in the *SH*, twice in paragraph 124 [line 3314] and once each in paragraphs 202 [line 7706] and 203 [line 7823].[1] In the first instance, it is *nembe'e isgei* (felt which covereth), translated by Cleaves[2] as a horseblanket and by Pelliot[3] tentatively so. The word "horse" appears in the Chinese running translation only, not in the Mongolian text, nor in the Chinese gloss. According to a recent dictionary of terms in the *SH*, the *Menggu mishi cihui xuanshi*, *nembe'e*, which in the modern language is *nemnege*, means a cover or a horse blanket, and according to the *Monggol Kitad Toli*, a felt used to cover the backs of young animals.[4] The idea of a protective covering for animals is therefore implied, although in the context of what follows that protection clearly appears to apply equally to humans and might suggest a felt bed cover or blanket.[5] This sense of protection is compounded in the next sentence by the image of the "*gerisge isgei*" (felt which restraineth the wind). In the *Cihui*, *gerisge* is equated with *geresge*, which in modern terminology becomes *kereske*, a fence or barricade.[6] This is an explicit reference to the great felt screens set up to serve as wind breaks for the tents and for sections of the encampment as a whole. Such wind screens are not infrequently depicted in Chinese paintings of Mongol encampments; particularly good examples appear in scrolls depicting Liu Shang's late eighth-century text cycle of the *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*.[7] The *nembe'e isgei* and the *gerisge isgei* are related in this passage of the *SH* by the fact that they both offer protection; they are the metaphors which describe the ability of the loyal servant to protect his lord.

In paragraphs 202 and 203, we find *sisgei to'urqatu ulus* (people with felt tent walls) and *isgei tu'urqatan* (those with felt tent walls). The written Mongolian equivalent of the two forms *to'urqa-* and *tu'urqa-* is *tughurgh-a* (sides of a *ger*). The designation in this passage of "those who have felt tent walls" seems to imply a class distinction, perhaps comparable to Chinggis Khan's custom in official acts and proclamations of describing the Turko-Mongolian tribes of Asia as "the generations that live in felt tents".[8] This was to distinguish them from the subjugated, sedentary nations of East and West.

[1] The line numbers are those in Igor de Rachewiltz, *Index to the Secret History of the Mongols* (Bloomington, 1972).

[2] Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, i, (trans.) (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1982) (hereafter: Cleaves *SH*), p. 57.

[3] Paul Pelliot, *Histoire secrète des Mongols* (Paris, 1949) (hereafter: Pelliot *HS*), p. 157.

[4] *Menggu mishi cihui xuanshi*, E-er-deng-tai *et al.* eds. (Hohhot, 1980), (hereafter *Cihui*) p. 136; *Mongol Kitad Toli* [Mongol–Chinese Dictionary], ed. by Seminar of Mongolian Language, University of Inner Mongolia (Hohhot, 1977) (hereafter *MKT*), p. 367.

[5] Felt, much sought after for warmth and comfort, has been widely used as bedding. The white felts of Yarkand were highly prized for this purpose in the western Himalayas until trade was halted between China and India in 1950. Half a millennium earlier, in 1474, Barbaro commented on the felt carpets exported from Adena (Turkey) to Cairo, which were "light and soft to sleep on" (see Gaston Wiet, "Tapis égyptiens", *Arabica, Revue d'Études arabes*, VI (1959), p. 21; see also Michael Gervers, "Evidence for Ottoman influence on felt-making in Egypt", *Textile History*, XX (1989), pp. 3–12 (p. 6)).

[6] *Cihui* p. 203; *MKT* p. 621.

[7] *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Lady Wen-Chi, a Fourteenth-Century Handscroll in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. and trans. Robert A. Rorex and Wen Fong (New York, 1974), *passim*.

[8] Leonardo Olschki, *The Myth of Felt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949), p. 14. Olschki gives no reference to his source, but B. Ia. Vladimirtsov (*Le Régime social des Mongols: le Féodalisme nomade*, Paris, 1948, p. 40, n. 4) cites A. Pozdneev (*O drevnem kit.-mong. pamyatnikě Yuan-tchao-mi-si*, p. 18), who recalls an unidentified phrase in the *SH*

Other references to felt derive from terminology for specific articles. Related to the "felt tent walls" is the *irge* (para. 230), designated as the protective band of felt encompassing the outside bottom of the tent.[9] Culturally more significant is the "*caqan toloq*" of paragraph 189. *Toloq*, a word of Turkish origin designating a sheet of leather, is glossed as "big felt carpet", and the *Cihui* concurs that it is a white felt of ceremonial or funerary use.[10] Ceremonial use is indeed indicated by the context, wherein the head of Ong Khan is to be placed on the white *toloq* and sacrifices made to it. Another ritualistic function of the *toloq* is to be found elsewhere, in the election and enthronement of the khan. According to the Persian historian Wasafu (so designated in Chinese in the *Cihui*: presumably Waṣṣāf), "... the ... princes sat [the Chinese Emperor elect] Hai-shan on the white felt, two supported him under the arms and four lifted the felt and put him on the sacred throne ...."[11] A related ceremony is reported in the mid-thirteenth century for the coronation of a Mongol

which Vladimirtsov translates as "lignées habitant les charrettes de feutre", in which we have felt [covered] carts. Of the three occurrences in the *SH* of *isgei*, the third (para. 203 [Cleaves, pp. 143–4]) might be the reference in this case. Chinggis is talking to Šigi Qutuqu, requesting that he divide the entire people and give some to various members of the Chinggisids; he says: "Dividing those who have skirts of felt [which cover their tents as outward walls], making to separate themselves those who have doors of boards [on their tents]." This might suggest a designation for certain groups of subjects. However *isgei* in the *SH* does not occur modifying "cart" (*tergen*).

Pozdneev may be referring to the passage with "*qara'utai tergen*" in para. 24, which is significant to Vladimirtsov in his attempt to distinguish between forest tribes and nomads among the Mongols; he says: "Le texte qui décrit la transhumance du clan, séparé de la tribu forestière des Qori Tumat, observe que Qorilartaï-märgän possédait entre autres une 'charrette couverte', 'qara'utaï tärgän,' pareille à celles dont, à cette époque, se servaient les Mongols nomades ..." (p. 41; see also below, n. 43). This, of course, is a small cart. He goes on to explain in more detail later: "*L'Histoire Secrète* nous fait savoir que les Mongols connaissaient deux types de chariots, que Plan Carpin et Rubruck distinguent également; leurs classifications ne sont d'ailleurs pas concordante. [Here he notes Pelliot's review of Lefèbvre des Noëttes's "La force motrice animale à travers les âges" in *T'oung Pao*, XXIV (1926), pp. 263–4 which discusses some obscurities in Rubruck's description.] Les charrettes servaient non seulement au transport des charges, mais aussi à celui des yourtes, qui ne se démontaient plus. A cette époque, les chars représentaient un des aspects coutumiers de la vie mongole; on s'en servait même dans des régions aussi peu accessibles et difficiles que les pays d'amont de l'Onon et du Kärülän. Mais l'usage des énormes charrettes supportant de grandes yourtes [dont parle Rubruck] était réservé aux steppes et aux pays plats ..." (pp. 50–1). In view of what follows (below p. 98 ff.), it is worthy of note that Carpini and Rubruck are cited as the only sources for the legend of the "énormes charrettes supportant de grandes yourtes".

[9] Cleaves, p. 168 n. 2, quoting Antoine Mostaert, *Sur Quelques Passages de l'Histoire secrète des Mongols* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953). p. 137; and *Cihui*, p. 112. This is the *qayaghabci*, referred to as *xayaawch* in Krystyna Chabros, "Quilted ornamentation on Mongol felts", *Central Asiatic Journal*, XXXII (1988), pp, 34–60 (pp. 36, 48). *Irge* is defined in G. J. Ramstedt, *Kalmükisches Wörterbuch* (Helsinki, 1935) (hereafter Ramstedt, *KalmWb*), p. 209, and in J. Tsoloo, *BNMAU daxi Mongol xelnii nutgiin ayalguunî toli bicig* [Dictionary of the dialects in the M.P.R.], ii: *Oird ayalguu* [The Oirat dialect] (Ulan Bator, 1988), p. 494, as *geriin xayaa* [the lower edge of the round tent]; in Russian: *mesto styka resetcatoj steny i pola (jurty)* [the place where the lattice wall and the side felt cover (of the round tent) join]; *niznie koncy kosm jurty* [the lower ends of the felt covers of the yurt]; etc. Oirat *irgibc* (written *irgibtsi*, p. 493) is defined by the Khalka word *xayaawc* (but given in Ferdinand D. Lessing, *Mongolian English Dictionary* (Bloomington, 1982) (the corrected reprint), p. 915, as ХАЈАГАВСІ: "a narrow band of felt or squares of wooden boards joined to form a belt for covering the bottom of the yurt in winter"; in Russian, *niznij polog jurty*; see also Ramstedt, *KalmWb*, p. 161). We are indebted to Gy. Kara for the references to Ramstedt and Tsoloo.

[10] Pp. 261–2; on the Turkish origin of the word, see F. W. Radloff, *Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Turk-Dialecte*, iii, (St Petersburg, 1905) (hereafter *TD*), p. 1467. Berthold Laufer ("The early history of felt", *American Anthropologist*, XXXII (1930), p. 15), claims that "Among the Mongols, even of the present time, white felt is a material endowed with a sacred character ... The women therefore, in speaking of felt, carefully avoid the common word for it (*ishighei*), which is a term of respect, but substitute for it the words *dzulakhai* or *tolok*." A. Mostaert defines the Ordos *tolok* as "tapis de cérémonie en feutre blanc (p. ex. celui sur lequel on étale les cadeaux de mariage, ou celui sur lequel on fait descendre de leur cheval un prince ou la nouvelle bru d'un noble quand, le jour de mariage, elle arrive chez ses beaux-parents) ..." *Dictionnaire ordos*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1968), p. 666.

[11] *Cihui*, pp. 261–2, citing Constantin Mouradgea d'Ohsson, *Histoire des Mongols, depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour Beg ou Tamerlan*, 4 vols., The Hague and Amsterdam, 1834–35. This account stands in contrast to many others, from the sixth to the fourteenth century, in which the enthronement carpet in this Turko-Mongolian ritual is reported to have been black (Olschki, *Myth of Felt* pp. 22–34). Black felt was used in earlier times by the Topa

emperor. He was seated on a felt rug while an orator reminded him of the responsibility inherent in his new office:

> Look upwards and recognize God, and downward and see the felt on which you sit. If you reign well over your kingdom, if you make largesse, and rejoice in justice, and honour each of your Princes according to his rank, you shall reign in glory, all the world shall bow to your rule, and God will give you everything your heart can desire. But if you do otherwise, you shall be miserable, lowly, and so poor that this felt on which you sit shall not even be left you.[12]

Another object which we are encouraged to interpret as felt lies in the phrase in paragraph 205, "mantling him with his own mantle of felt" (*nemürge-ben nemürükse'er*), where *nemürge* is clearly a felt mantle in the Chinese gloss. This stands in contrast to the reference in the preceding poetic stanza to *boro örmege*, wherein *örmege* is glossed as "mantle" and *boro* as "grey woven material." There is probably a slight scribal error here which includes the word for "woven material" with the gloss for the colour; the gloss means more precisely "a great coat of woven material".[13] Cleaves has translated the expression both here and in paragraph 95 as "gray mantle of felt",[14] but the general weight of the evidence points to woven material,[15] and not necessarily even to a mantle. That notion comes entirely from the Chinese gloss; a Mongol word for coat, such as *daqu*, does not occur here. Finally, there is in paragraph 249 the phrase *örmege nekejü*, "weaving woollen fabric", in which the verb to weave is clearly associated with this material. This is the only instance in the *SH* in which specific mention is made of weaving. It refers, significantly, to part of the tribute offered to Chinggis Khan by the more sedentary Tanguts who live in "pounded city walls", and is recognized by the author of the *SH* as a distinction between the two peoples.

One of the most frequently mentioned objects in the *SH* is the *ger* or tent which, although rarely so described, is invariably considered to have been constructed of a circular, dome-shaped, willow-branch frame covered with layered sections of felt.[16] Other expressions are also used to denote a tent or shelter, however, and these are used sometimes on their own and sometimes to modify the word *ger*. Even the latter is used generically for "tent", and not specifically to designate a yurt. The interpretation of these other expressions leads one to suspect that they may, in fact, have indicated something other than a yurt. One such term is *alacuq*, which occurs twice in paragraph 118 and is on both occasions glossed as

Wei people and continued in modified form by the Khitans (Liao); see Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 275, n. 190.

[12] Simon of St. Quentin (Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, bk. xxxi, ch. xxxii, 452a), trans. W. W. Rockhill, *The Journey of Willliam of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55* (London, 1900), p. 21, n. 1; also cited in Olschki, *Myth of Felt*, p. 25. For the Latin text see Simon de Saint-Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, ed. J. Richard (Paris, 1965), pp. 90–1. Another translation (without citation) appears in Berthold Laufer, "The early history of felt", *American Anthropologist*, XXXII (1930), pp. 1–18 (pp. 14–15).

[13] The gloss uses the Chinese character for the word *mu*, referring to woven wool material which has a design woven into it (Tetsuji Morohashi, *Dai kanwa jiten*, 13 vols. (Tokyo, 1960), vi, pp. 830–1; hereafter Morohashi), and this refers to the *örmege*.

[14] Translated as "grauen Filzmantel" by Manfred Taube, *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* (Munich, 1989), p. 141.

[15] The *Cihui* (pp. 127–8) glosses *örmege* from para. 95 of the *SH*, *mao shan* ("fur or wool mantle"), but does not refer to para. 205 where the same term is glossed *mu shan* (see note 13 above). It cites the *TD* (Radloff, i, 1242), in which *örmök* refers to material woven of camel's hair. The *MKT* (p. 295) has *örmüg*, "a course material woven of sheep's wool". This suggests that *örmege* is woven material and not felt.

[16] Exceptions occur in para. 24 and 28 where mention is made of an impromptu shelter (*ger*) covered with grass, and in para. 103 of one made of elm twigs.

zhang fang or "tent dwelling". Another is *qosiliq*, appearing in paragraphs 80, 245 and 246, and similarly glossed as *zhang fang*. Finally, there is the word *terme*, sometimes modified by *altan* and sometimes itself used to modify *ger*. *Altan terme*, referring to a golden or imperial tent, occurs in paragraphs 184, 185 and 187, where *terme* is glossed as *sa zhang*, or spread tent.[17] Neither the Mongolian *ger* nor the Chinese *fang*, indicating dwelling, appears in this context.[18] In paragraphs 265 and 266 we find the expression *terme ger*, or "spread tent dwelling".[19] In the *MKT*, *terme* bears the meaning "woollen cloth which the Tibetans weave".[20] This consideration, together with the fact that *terme* in the preceding examples is used to modify *ger* to distinguish it from ordinary *ger*, confirms our belief that *terme*, like *alacuq* and *qosiliq*, refers to dwellings whose structure is unlike that of the *ger*.

Considerable attention is given to the anatomy of the tent, one element of which is the *e'üden* or door. In paragraph 203, a tent people are characterized as "those having board doors" (*qabdasun e'üdeten*),[21] but in several instances a soft door is indicated and translators have rightly or wrongly interpreted it to be felt. "... let them lift for you the wide door", says Chila'un Qayichi in verse to Chinggis in paragraph 137, to which de Rachewiltz adds the note: "The door of a yurt is often just a heavy felt curtain, hence the expression 'to lift the door.'"[22] Further light is thrown on the subject in paragraph 77, where we have "casting aside the door [curtain]" (*e'üten o'orcu*). There is no indication of the material from which this curtain is made, although Cleaves interpolates the word "felt". There is, however, pictorial evidence indicating that not all Mongol door "curtains" were made of such sturdy material, and it may well be that the term "door curtain" was never meant to designate felt. An example is to be found in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscript edition of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-tavārīkh* in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.[23] This MS, the illustrations for which were prepared under strong Chinese influence, contains a miniature depicting an episode in the funeral of Chaghatai, Chinggis's second son who died in 1242. In that miniature, Chaghatai's coffin lies on the ground, draped in a black fabric before the doorway of an imperial tent. In the doorway hangs a half-raised curtain which, judging from its folds, is of much finer material than felt.[24]

Other objects which may well have been made of felt include quivers (para. 105 *et al.*), and standards (para. 181, 193, 202, 232, 278), and very likely the covering blanket under which Temüjin and Jamuqa slept after declaring themselves to be sworn brothers (para.

[17] Golden tents of kings are mentioned by Tamīm ibn Baḥr in the early ninth century (V. Minorsky, "Tamīm ibn Baḥr's journey to the Uyghurs", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XII (1948), pp. 294–5). Minorsky notes they are also cited in the (Hsin) *Tang Shu* (*ibid*, p. 295, n. 2).

[18] For Mongol *altan* meaning "imperial", see Henry Serruys, *Monumenta Serica*, XXI (Nagoya, 1962), pp. 357–78. *Terme* is still used by the Oirats to mean "the lattice wall of the yurt". We are grateful to Gy. Kara for these references.

[19] Chinese *sa zhang fang*, with *sa zhang* modifying *fang*, rather than *sa* (spread) as a verb with the object *zhang fang* (tent dwelling). Note that in these two paragraphs the expression is part of the description of the Tanguts who were defeated by Chinggis at this time.

[20] *MKT*, p. 1037. [21] Translation by Cleaves, p. 144.

[22] Igor de Rachewiltz, "The Secret History of the Mongols", *Papers in Far Eastern History* (hereafter *PFEH*), X (1974), pp. 55–82 (pp. 62 and 76).

[23] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Supplement Persan, no. 1113, as cited in Olschki, *Myth of Felt*, p. 17 and 55 n. 46.

[24] Olschki (*Myth of Felt*, p. 17 and pl. I) himself argues that this curtain is felt, when it appears by its folds to be of woven material, even silk. Silk could be raised in folds, as here, while felt would in all likelihood have had to be rolled.

117). Pelliot translated *gölme* in paragraph 105 as *feutres de selle* or "saddle felts", but de Rachewiltz, who translates it as "shabrack", argues that what are intended are "the two pieces of leather – one on each side – hanging from the saddle, between the rider and the horse's ribs".[25]

"Tent Carts"

When describing the Scythians in 7 B.C., the Greek geographer, Strabo, wrote that: "As for the Nomads, their tents, made of felt, are fastened on the wagons in which they spend their lives ...".[26] This and other descriptions, perpetuated and enhanced by later observers and commentators, have led to a major misunderstanding of nomadic lifestyle. That misunderstanding concerns what has been interpreted as an uncollapsible, circular, felt tent, or yurt, transported on a cart. The notion is so frequently expressed in translations of the historical record that it has become a trademark of nomadism. The prime source of this misinterpretation may be traced to the thirteenth-century Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck, who includes in his account of "The Tartars and Their Dwellings" the following oft-cited description:

The dwelling in which they sleep is based on a hoop of interlaced branches,[27] and its supports are made of branches, converging at the top around a smaller hoop, from which projects a neck like a chimney. They cover it with white felt: quite often they also smear the felt with chalk or white clay and ground bones to make it gleam whiter, or sometimes they blacken it. And they decorate the felt around the neck at the top with various fine designs. Similarly they hang up in front of the entrance felt patchwork[28] in various patterns: they sew onto one piece others of different colours to make vines, trees, birds and animals. These dwellings are constructed of such a size as to be on occasions thirty feet across: I myself once measured a breadth of twenty feet between the wheel-tracks of a wagon, and when the dwelling was on the wagon it protruded beyond the wheels by at least five feet on either side. I have counted twenty-two oxen to one wagon, hauling along a dwelling, eleven in a row, corresponding to the width of the wagon, and another eleven in front of them. The wagon's axle was as large as a ship's mast, and one man stood at the entrance to the dwelling on top of the wagon, driving the oxen.[29]

[25] Pelliot, *HS*, p. 147; de Rachewiltz, ch. 3, *PFEH*, V (1972), pp. 151, 167. See also Gy. Kara's reconstruction of *gülimme* glossed as "*chabraque, housse*" in his "Un vocabulaire sino-mongol des Yuan le *Tche-yuan yi-yu*" in *Acta Orientalia* (Budapest), XLIV (1990), p. 266.

[26] *The Geography of Strabo*, ed. and trans. H. L. Jones, iii, The Loeb Classical Library (London, 1917), p. 223.

[27] *i.e.* willow poles; see Torvald Faegre, *Tents: Architecture of the Nomads* (London, 1979), pp. 79–94.

[28] Patchwork is common among Turkic peoples; Mongols would use quilting (see also note 54 below).

[29] Peter Jackson, trans and ed. (with David Morgan), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke* (London, 1990), pp. 72–3: ed. A. van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, i (Quaracchi-Florence, 1929), pp. 172–3. An account so similar that it can only have been borrowed from Rubruck was published nearly 400 years later, in 1630, by the English mercenary, Captain John Smith. In 1602, Smith was captured by the Turks and sent off as a slave to Tartary. He describes the homes of his captors as being "very artificially wrought, both the foundation, sides, and roofe of wickers, ascending round to the top like a dove-coat; this they cover with white felt, sometimes with blacke felt, curiously painted with vines, trees, birds and beasts; the breadth of the carts are eighteene or twenty foot, but the house stretcheth foure or five foot over each side, and is drawne with ten or twelve, or for more state, twenty camels and oxen" (John Smith, *The True Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captaine John Smith in Europe, Affrica and America from Anno Domini 1593 to 1629* (London, 1630, rpt. Amsterdam/New York, 1968), p. 26).

A contemporary, related account, including the description of a less grandiose mounted tent, is to be found in John of Plano Carpini's *History of the Mongols*:

Their dwelling-places are round like tents and are made of twigs and slender sticks. At the top in the middle there is a round opening which lets in the light, and is also to enable the smoke to escape, for they always make their fire in the middle. Both the sides and the roof are covered with felt, and the doors also are made of felt. Some of these dwellings are large, others small, according to the importance or significance of the people; some can be speedily taken down and put up again and are carried on baggage animals; others cannot be taken down but are moved on carts. To carry them on a cart, for the smaller ones one ox is sufficient, for the larger ones three, four or even more according to the size. Wherever they go, be it to war or anywhere else, they always take their dwellings with them.[30]

These two accounts by Europeans would appear to be corroborated by a nearly contemporary Chinese work: the *Heida Shilue* (Brief record of the Black Tatars), composed by the Sung dynasty official, Peng Daya, with a commentary by a Chinese envoy to the Mongol court, Xu Ting, in 1237. Therein, we read about the Mongols that:

Their dwellings are felt tents[31] which have no [solid] walls or beamed rooms. They migrate in the endless grasslands and the ruler of the Tartars[32] moves his tent to follow the hunt and he regularly takes his officers and retinue with him. On the day for travelling when the camp is broken up, cows, horses and camels are used to pull the cabins on carts[33] in which one can sit or lie down. These are called tent carts.[34]

[30] Christopher Dawson, ed., *Mission to Asia* (New York, 1966, rpt. Toronto,, 1980), p. 8: ed. Wyngaert, *op. cit.*, p. 35. We surmise that Carpini may well have seen examples of the felt-covered single ox-cart, but only heard of or speculated about the others.

[31] Chinese *qionglu* glossed in the text as *zhanzhang*, or "felt tent". [32] *i.e.* the *Dada.*

[33] Chinese: *che shang shi*; the term *shi*, "cabin", here suggests something smaller than *fang*, "dwelling".

[34] Chinese: *zhang-yu* (tent vehicle); *yu* can be a literary term with figurative senses, but its definition as "vehicle" tends to refer to ones that are covered. Erich Haenisch translates the expression as *Jurten-Wagen* (Erich Haenisch and Yao Ts'ung-wu, *Meng-Ta Pei-Lu und Hei-Ta Shih-Lüeh, Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237*, German trans. by Peter Olbricht and Elisabeth Pinks, with an introduction by Werner Banck (Wiesbaden, 1980), p. 104), and he equates it (see n. 4, *ibid.* p. 106) with *ger tergen* in the *SH.* His translation implies that the text refers to two kinds of cart, *Jurten-Wagen* and *Speisekarren.* But the Chinese passage seems clearly to say that these *zhang-yu*, which one can sit and lie in, may have poles at the four corners or sometimes boards connecting them and will have weather-proof covering, are called *yin-shi-che* (provisions-carts) and it is most likely that both terms refer to the same thing. It is unlikely that these would be used to transport removable yurts, whether folded up or not. The description of the *zhang-yu* given here is very much like the two-wheeled cart described by Marco Polo (see below and nn. 34, 41). As to the size of these covered carts, we have the brief remark by Zhou Hui of the Song dynasty: "On the road [between Handan and Xingzhou near the western boundary of modern day Hebei Province] we encountered a light cart (*qing che*) which was covered with black felt; it was a head family" (Zhou Hui, "Bei yuan lu" in *Shuofu*, ch. 54 (Shangwu, 1927), p. 838). This reference suggests that these covered carts were usually the lighter vehicles and, if one had them, were used for personal conveyance, as opposed to the larger wagons which were probably less frequently used and then mainly for heavy loads of goods or equipment during seasonal migrations.

One may note that 1) the Chinese term for yurt, *qionglu* (Haenisch's *Kuppelzelt*), at the opening of this passage is different from that used for tent-cart, *zhang-yu* (Haenisch's *Jurten-Wagen*), 2) *zhang-yu* is never used in the *SH* to translate *ger tergen*, and 3) *zhang* is most often used to designate a structure different from a felt yurt (*SH* 80, 118, 184, 185, 187, 245, 246), and only seldom used to translate *ger* (*SH* 256, 266). The term *ger* has a wide range of meanings; it can refer to dwellings in general, and is then usually glossed in Chinese as *fang* or *fanzi.* It very often signifies something less concrete, like household or home, when it is glossed as *jia, jia nei, jia li.* Almost as frequently its meaning remains open and then may be glossed interchangeably by *fang* or *jia.* When it refers to a dwelling in the *ordo* (camp), it is often glossed with *shi* (room, house). Specific reference to the physical structure yields *wu* (house, room) as the gloss. It is also used to refer to an impromptu shelter (see note 16 above). While there is no reason why Peng Daya should have used the same terms as did the scribes for the *SH*, this comparison allows a better notion of what the words can mean.

Further information, is to be gathered from the commentary by Xu Ting:

The yurt [*qionglu*] is of two kinds. The Yenjing style uses willow sticks as a structure which is like lattice work of the south and is collapsible. The door is in front and the top is like the spines of an umbrella, the very top of which has an opening called a "sky window". All use felt as a covering. They are carried on horses. The grassland style uses willow sticks to weave a rigid enclosure and across its diameter felt is used to pull it taut; these are not collapsible and are carried on carts.[35]

Such consistent reports by travellers about nomadic accommodation, both from the classical period and from the period of the Mongol Empire alike, suggest either that there is some truth behind the concept of the cart-mounted tent, or that this image of nomadic lifestyle was at an early period inculcated into the perception of sedentary populations and became so stereotyped that no description was considered credible without it. A third possibility, if not a probability, is that it was a bit of both. The result, combined with the preconceptions of interpreters and translators, and the medieval tendency to accept established authority, led to general conformity in the exegesis of the image.

While Rubruck implies that all tents were carried on carts, Carpini and the *Heida Shilue* make a clear distinction between those which were collapsible and transported by baggage animals, and another type apparently transported erect on a cart. Further explanation and interpretation of the latter cart-mounted tent may be derived from three additional sources: the fourth-century Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus, the thirteenth-century merchant Marco Polo, and the fourteenth-century Arab traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. Describing the Halani, who "inhabit the measureless wastes of Scythia" and whose nations "stretch all the way to the river Ganges", Ammianus wrote that they

dwell in wagons, which they cover with rounded canopies of bark and drive over the boundless wastes. And when they come to a place rich in grass, they place their carts in a circle and feed .... As soon as the fodder is used up, they place their cities, as we might call them, on the wagons and so convey them ...; wagons form their permanent dwellings, and wherever they come, that place they look upon as their natural home.[36]

Marco Polo says of the Tartars:

And they have their small houses like tents of rods of wood and cover them with felt; and they are round; and they always carry them with them on four-wheeled waggons wherever they go. For they have the wooden rods tied so well and orderly that they can fit them together like a pack and spread them, take them up, put them down, and carry them very easily where they please. And every time that they stretch and set up their house they set it so that the door is always looking towards midday.

[35] Peng Daya, *Heida Shilue* (ChangSha, 1937, p. 3). Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer (*Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Boulder, Colorado and Folkestone, 1979), p. 63, with bibliographical information on p. 391) have conflated text and commentary from Peng Daya (5ab) to read as follows: "The Mongols live in a felt yurt which has no heavy or permanent walls, ceilings or rooms ... They use a tented cart on which they may sit and sleep ... There are two types of yurts – in the type common in the area of Yenching [Beijing] willows are used to form a frame or lattice work for the yurt ... This framework forms a wall and may be expanded or collapsed. There is a door in the front and the ceiling is also formed of a framework like an umbrella; in the center is a hole spoken of as *t'ien ch'uang* [sky-window]. The whole framework of the yurt is covered with felt. It is possible to transport the yurts on horseback. In the steppe grazing areas, yurts are formed of willow stakes which are not collapsible and the whole yurt is transported on a cart".

[36] Ammianus Marcellinus, book XXXI, chapters 13, 16, 18, trans. John C. Rolfe, Loeb edition, iii (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1939), pp. 388–91.

They have beside this very beautiful carts with only two wheels covered with black felt which is so good and so well prepared that if it rained all day on the cart water would soak nothing that was in the cart under that cover of felt. And they have them brought and drawn by horses and by oxen and sometimes by good camels. And on these carts they carry their wives and their children and all the things and food which they need.[37]

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa records that when he travelled to Sarai, north of the Caspian Sea, he travelled in a four-wheeled wagon which had on it

a kind of cupola[38] made of wooden laths tied together with thin strips of hide; this is light to carry, and covered with felt or blanket-cloth, and in it there are grilled windows. The person who is inside the tent can see [other] persons without their seeing him, and he can employ himself in it as he likes, sleeping or eating or reading or writing, while he is still journeying.[39]

There emerges from these accounts a composite picture of three distinct objects: first the circular, felt-covered yurt which stood on the ground; second the felt-covered wagon in which people lived, according to Ammianus all the time, and according to Marco Polo and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, during transhumance; and third, the cart in which the dismantled yurt was carried during transhumance. The light, lattice-work frame of the yurt was so constructed that it could both support a covering of felts and easily be collapsed for transport. The frame for the two-wheeled covered wagon was of an entirely different construction. Rather than being of lattice-work, it was "woven" into a sturdy, non-collapsible superstructure, over which felts were pulled to keep it taut (the comment by Ammianus about bark notwithstanding). It is likely that this superstructure could be removed from the wagon once the nomads had reached their new feeding grounds and had moved back into their yurts. There is no evidence that the cart used for transporting a dismantled yurt was anything but an open vehicle, such as the four-wheeled version described by Marco Polo or the two-wheeled example which still plied the Central Gobi in the 1950s (fig. 15).

For the most part, the historical descriptions of the yurt, the cart which conveyed the dismantled yurt, and the covered wagon are unambiguous. Yet, the capacity for some observers, and more often their interpreters, to conflate the three objects in an attempt to verify the extraordinary fabrication of William of Rubruck, has led to centuries of confusion and misrepresentation.

More recently, the situation has caused numerous scholars to continue such a fiction by

[37] Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. and trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, i (London, 1938), pp. 168–9. This edition is based on 120 MSS, "of which ... no two are exactly alike" and no single copy is known "to be either complete or correct" (p. 40). The reference to "four-wheeled waggons" derives from the 'R' text, a printed Italian version of 1559 prepared by Giovan Battista Ramusio for which no MS survives (p. 43). No mention is made of these wagons in the edition of Henry Yule and Henri Cordier (*The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 3rd ed., i (London, 1903, rpt. London, 1975), p. 252). John Masefield's edition (*The Travels of Marco Polo the Venetian* (London, Toronto and New York, 1908, rpt. 1929), pp. 123–4) reproduces word for word the text of Thomas Wright (1810–77), who revises the translation and notes of William Marsden (1754–1836). See also the re-edition of Ramusio's work by Renato Giani: Marco Polo, *Il Milione* (Rome, 1954), p. 60.

[38] This phrase is translated as "*une espèce de pavillon*" in Ibn Batoutah, *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, ed. and trans. by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, ii (Paris, 1877), p. 361.

[39] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, A.D. 1325–1354*, trans. with revisions and notes from the Arabic text edited by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, by H. A. R. Gibb, ii (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 472–3. An English translation is cited in Laufer, "The early history of felt", p. 14, and Yule, i, p. 221 n. 2.

reading it into the lines of the *SH* itself. The passage in question lies in paragraph 121 where, in the first place, a tan cow butts a *ger tergen*. The expression *ger tergen* bears some explanation. It occurs seven times in the *SH* (paragraphs 121, 124, 232, 233, 234 and 278 [bis]). In para. 233, the Chinese gloss is *fangzi che* (dwelling cart), which could be read as adjective-noun; all other instances are glossed as *fangzi chezi* (dwellings and carts), which suggests a pair of terms in coordination, rather than the first being subordinate to the second. Thus, in paragraphs 232, 234 and 278, we find *ordo ger tergen*, meaning "palace yurts and carts" and not necessarily "palace tent-carts" This interpretation is possible as well in the Chinese running translation in para. 234: *zhangfang cheliang* or "tents and carts".

The phrase *ger tergen* in para. 121 should, therefore, probably be read as "yurts and carts", which, in a broad sense can be understood as "households",[40] or it might well be the circle of alternating yurts and carts which forms a compound for enclosing a flock of sheep.[41] Certainly, the expression does not refer exclusively to the idea of a "tent cart" (*ger-tergen*), although that is how it has been translated in this passage by Cleaves, Haenisch, Pelliot, de Rachewiltz and Taube alike,[42] with the implication that it refers to a cart bearing an erected yurt. In cases where a cart with a dwelling upon it might be indicated, that cart may be interpreted as either the two-wheeled vehicle covered with black-felt[43] described by Marco Polo, or the four-wheeled travelling wagon mentioned by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, bearing a felt-covered frame, in which the nomads lived as they moved from one pasture to another.[44] The scene in paragraph 121 is a fitting context for the appearance of the covered wagon.

To introduce here, as the Chinese did in 1986 in their cinema rendition of the life of Chinggis Khan,[45] the image of an enormous circular felt tent mounted on a wagon modelled after that described by William of Rubruck and pulled by his two rows of eleven oxen, is tantamount to an avowal of sedentary peoples' ignorance of nomadic ways. The sources may well speak frequently of tents on wagons, but it is rather their translators and interpreters who infer that these tents are circular in shape and thus like the yurt. In fact, this oft-cited covered wagon, which has been known for millennia, is probably no less than a

[40] This interpretation of *ger tergen* is suggested by F. W. Cleaves in "The *Bodistw-a Čari-a Awatar-un Tayilbur* of 1312", *HJAS*, XVII (1954), pp. 1–129 (pp. 78, 102 n. 129), although in "An early Mongolian loan contract from Qara Qoto", *HJAS*, XVIII (1955), pp. 1–49 (pp. 37–8 n. 26, 102 n. 129) he feels it should be translated "tent-cart". See also the modern dictionary, *MKT*, in which the meaning "household" or "home" is given as well (p. 757).

[41] This suggestion was proposed in a personal communication from Gy. Kara to W. Schlepp, dated 24 March 1992. See also fig. 14 below.

[42] Cleaves *SH*, p. 53; Erich Haenisch, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* (Leipzig, 1948, hereafter: Haenisch *GG*), p. 32; Pelliot *HS*, p. 155; de Rachewiltz, ch. 3, *PFEH*, V (1972), p. 162; Taube, *Geheime Geschichte*, p. 53.

[43] This is probably also the explanation of "black cart" in *SH* para. 6. Vladimirtsov reckons the word *qara'utai* does not mean "black", but rather is from the word *qaraghu*, which refers to guarding or protecting (see also above, n. 7). This is one of the meanings given in *MKT* (p. 585), but it has a specialized sense of guarding one's own flock or herd and may not be used as generally as Vladimirtsov thought. From this he translates "charrette couverte" (p. 41 and n. 4). Following the Chinese gloss, Cleaves translates the expression "black cart" (*SH*, p. 2). The *Cihui* (p. 170), takes the term *qara'u* to be *qara* "black" combined with *'u*, "the ribs of a yurt over which the felt is drawn", citing Radloff, i, 1591 (no. 4 under the second entry for 'ȳ'). They add that *qara'u* is a *peng che* (canopied or covered cart) that has black staves.

[44] Although the terms for the four references in the *SH* to "black carts" (*qara'u*, *qara'utai terge*; para. 6, 55, 100, 244) are somewhat ambiguous, it seems clear that these are the type of cart used for personal transport and are probably the ones referred to by Marco Polo and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.

[45] Directed by Zhan Xiangchi and produced by the Inner Mongolia Film Studio in cooperation with the Youth Film Studio.

forerunner of the "caravan tent" mentioned by the Swedish ethnographer Gösta Montell, who accompanied the Sven Hedin expedition to Mongolia in the early 1930s.[46]

In conclusion, none of the contexts for *ger tergen* in the *SH* supports explicitly the notion of a circular yurt on a large cart. In fact, it is highly dubious that such a contraption ever existed on the plains of Central and Inner Asia. Nor is it as though the term had no other viable meaning in an environment where tents and carts represented an inseparable unit in the nomad's material environment. In every case, the expression justifies the translation "tents and carts" or "household" rather than "tent-cart" or "*Jurten-Wagen*". Furthermore, from a practical viewpoint alone it is inconceivable that twenty-two oxen should be hitched in two ranks of eleven abreast, instead of in eleven pairs, and it is next to inconceivable that large, round, felt tents ("*ger*" or "yurt"), still erect, should ever have been transported on a cart.

Illustrated record

The illustrated record for the nomadic tent mounted on a cart can be traced to at least the late fifteenth century, when it appears in several miniatures from the Radziwiłł Chronicle (figs. 1–3).[47] The source for that work was the Laurentian Chronicle of 1377, which in turn was based on a manuscript originally written in the twelfth century.[48] The miniatures depict a series of episodes in which Russian princes skirmish with marauding nomadic Polovtsians during the period 1061–1093.[49] While the text refers in each instance to the Polovtsians and their tents, there is no allusion whatsoever to tents on carts.[50] Rather, the miniatures are remarkably close in their rendition to an interpolation of the descriptions of nomadic tents provided by William of Rubruck and Marco Polo. Figs. 1 and 2 show four-wheeled carts which, according to Marco Polo, were used for transporting the dismantled round tent, and fig. 3 the two-wheeled felt-covered cart in which wives, children and household goods were carried during transhumance (cf. figs. 13 and 14). The tents borne on the four-wheeled vehicles appear to be the artist's interpretation of Rubruck's circular

[46] Gösta Montell, "As ethnographer in China and Mongolia, 1929–1932", in Sven [Anders] Hedin, *History of the Expedition in Asia, 1927–1935*, pt. IV (Stockholm, 1945), pp. 327–448 (p. 396).

[47] The MS, no. 34.5.30 in the Library of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, has been published in facsimile: *Radzivilovskaia ili Kenigsbergskaia Letopis*, 2 vols. (St Petersburg, 1902) (reproduced on microfilm in 1977 by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan and London, England). The figs. appearing here are derived from vol. 1, fos. 232v, 237v, and 242v. We are indebted to Professor Richard Pope of York University (Toronto) for confirming the location and shelf no. of the Chronicle. The miniatures in question are also reproduced in S. A. Pletneva, "Pechenegi, Torki i Polovtsy v Yuzhnorusskikh Stepiakh", in M. I. Artamonov, ed., *Trudy Volgo-Donskoi Arkheologicheskoi Ekspeditsii*, i, *Materialy i Issledovaniia po Arkheologii SSSR* (Institut Istorii Materialnoi Kultury, Akademia Nauk SSSR), 62 (1958) (Moscow–Leningrad), pp. 202–3 (figs. 25–7).

[48] *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*, trans. & ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, Mass., n.d. [1953], hereafter *RPC*), pp. 4, 18–21.

[49] The dates correspond to the period between the first attack by the Polovtsians (*RPC*, p. 143) and the death of Prince Vsevolod (*RPC*, p. 174), who is mentioned in the text associated with fig. 3 (see also note 50 below).

[50] Fig. 1, fo. 232v: "The Polovtsians were defeated and [the Russians] beat them back as far as the tents; and they took many prisoners, women and children, and they stayed in the tents for three days making merry."

Fig. 2, fo. 237v: "Prince Roman went against the Polovtsians and he captured the tents of the Polovtsians and he brought home many prisoners."

Fig. 3, fo. 242v: "Prince Vsevolod son of Georgii and grandson of Vladimir Monomakh went against the Polovtsians with his son, Constantine. The Polovtsians heard of his approach and they fled along with their tents."

The authors are grateful to Professor David J. Huntley of the University of Toronto for providing the foregoing translations.



1 "The Polovtsians were defeated and [the Russians] beat them back as far as the tents". Fifteenth-century artist's conception of an eleventh-century, four-wheeled Polovtsian nomad "tent-cart" (Radziwiłł Chronicle, fo. 232v).



2 "Prince Roman . . . captured the tents of the Polovtsians". Fifteenth-century artist's conception of an eleventh-century, four-wheeled Polovtsian nomad "tent-cart" (Radziwiłł Chronicle, fo. 237v).

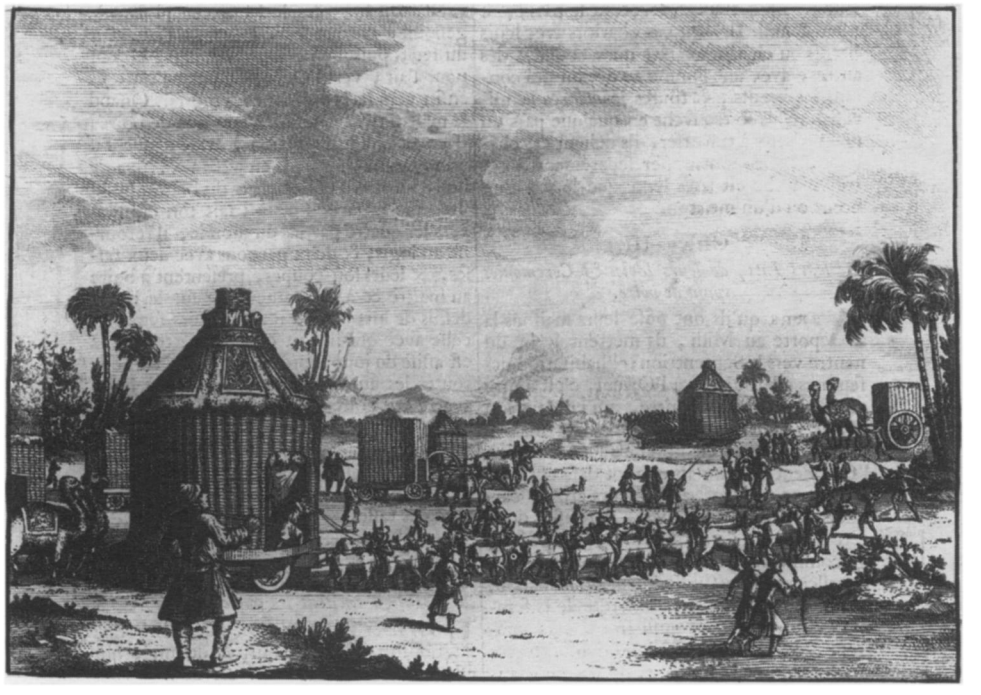


3 "The Polovtsians ... fled along with their tents". Fifteenth-century artist's conception of an eleventh-century, two-wheeled Polovtsian nomad "tent-cart" (Radziwiłł Chronicle, fo.242v).

dwelling "from which projects a neck like a chimney". In view of the relatively late date of the Radziwiłł Chronicle and the absence of any reference to tents on carts in the texts accompanying the miniatures, there is good reason to suspect that the artist was familiar with the descriptions found in Rubruck and Marco Polo and fashioned his renditions as he imagined nomadic tents might have been. By so doing he, or perhaps an even earlier source, set the stage for subsequent misrepresentation.

Equally imaginative, while showing itself to be far more precise in its attempt to visualize Rubruck's description of the large tent drawn by twenty-two oxen, is the engraving (fig. 4) used to illustrate this scene in the 1735 edition of Pierre de Bergeron's *Voyages faits principalement en Asie dans les XII, XIII, XIV, et XV siècles*.[51] The round tents, drawn on four-wheeled floats, are depicted as enormous wicker basket-like forms capped with fringed fabrics representing felts. The example in the forefront is drawn by eleven pairs of oxen; that in the distance is preceded by a set of oxen in two ranks eleven abreast, one rank appearing at the front left and the other at the front right of the vehicle. There was obviously some uncertainty about how to interpret the passage "Ego numeravi in una biga

[51] i, (The Hague, hereafter De Bergeron, *Voyages*), pt. IV: *Voyage remarquable de Guillaume de Rubruquis ... en Tartarie et à la Chine, l'an de nôtre Seigneur M.CC.LIII* (hereafter, *Rubruquis*), cols. 7–8. De Bergeron's work was first published in Paris in 1634 under the title *Relation des voyages en Tartarie de Fr. Gvillavme de Rvbrvqvis, Fr. Iean dv Plan Carpin, Fr. Ascelin, & autres religieux de S. François & S. Dominique, qui y furent enuoyez par le pape Innocent IV. & le roy S. Louys* ... Incredibly, this engraving has been attributed to the hand of Rubruck himself in two more recent publications: Tamara Talbot Rice, *The Seljuks in Asia Minor* (London, 1961), p. 263 (*re* pl. 33); Mary E. Burkett, *The Art of the Felt Maker* (Kendall, 1979), p. 15.



4 Eighteenth-century engraving illustrating William of Rubruck's thirteenth-century description of Tartar "tent-carts", hauled by twenty-two oxen (De Bergeron, *Rubruquis*, cols. 7–8).

xxii boves trahentes unam domum, undecim in uno ordine secundum latitudinem bige, et alios xi ante illos",[52] here mistranslated as "j'ai compté jusqu'à vingt deux boeufs pour traîner une de ces maisons, onze d'un côté, & onze de l'autre."[53] Translators have generally opted for the meaning of two rows of eleven oxen abreast, one in front of the other. Two- and four-wheeled carts in the background are surmounted by large wicker squares, clearly oversized renditions of what Rubruck goes on to describe as storage chests:

In addition, they make thinly cut twigs into squares large enough to form a large box, and then they place on top of it from end to end a carapace fashioned of similar twigs, and make a small entrance at the front end. Next, this chest or miniature house is covered with black felt smeared with fat or ewe's milk, to render it rain-proof, and is again decorated with patchwork or embroidery [*polimitario vel plumario*].[54] In these chests they put all their bedding and their valuables, lashing them tightly onto high wagons which are drawn by camels, to enable them to ford rivers. These chests are never removed from the wagons. When they unload their dwelling-houses, they always turn the doorway towards the south, and following that draw up the wagons with the chests half a stone's throw away from the dwelling on either side, so that the dwelling stands between two rows of wagons as if they were two walls.[55]

[52] ed. Wyngaert, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

[53] De Bergeron, *Voyages*, pt. IV: *Rubruquis*, col. 6.

[54] The embroidering of felt is common among Turkic peoples; the Mongols use quilting techniques instead (see also note 28 above).

[55] Jackson, *Rubruck*, pp. 73–4. The reference to "two rows of wagons" ("duos ordines bigarum" (Wyngaert, *op. cit.*, p. 173)) makes little sense in a context where "two wagons" would seem far more appropriate for a circle



5 The camp of Baatu Khan. Eighteenth-century engraving illustrating William of Rubruck's description of the Khan's pavilion (De Bergeron, *Rubruquis*, cols. 41–2).

Fig. 5 illustrates Rubruck's reception at the court of Baatu Khan:

On sighting Baatu's camp, I was struck with awe. His own dwellings had the appearance of a large city stretching far out lengthways and with inhabitants scattered around in every direction for a distance of three or four leagues ... Baatu had had a large pavilion set up ... He was seated on a throne which was deep and broad like a couch, completely overlaid with gold, and with three steps leading up to it ...[56]

The wicker-work tents, which in fig. 4 were being transported erect on floats, are here positioned solidly on the ground. Two storage wagons are visible on the left.

De Bergeron's *Voyages* also contain the account of John of Plano Carpini (1245–7). whence figs. 6 and 7 are taken. Fig 6[57] reflects Carpini's more modest description of Mongol dwellings on carts (above pp. 14–15), in which far fewer draught animals are cited than by Rubruck. Surprisingly accurate in contrast to the previous descriptions of tents is the river crossing scene (fig. 7) in which dismantled tents are represented on the backs of three horses. Clearly visible are the circular crowns strapped next to bundled sections of the

consisting of alternating carts and tents (see also above p. 22 and n. 41). This interpretation would make the reference to a camp as "tents and carts" (*ger tergen*) even more plausible and give further evidence of Rubruck's poor observation encumbered by an obscure style. For a contemporary layout of "the wagons with the chests half a stone's throw away from the dwelling on either side", see fig. 14, below.

[56] Jackson, *Rubruck*, pp. 131–2. The engraving is from De Bergeron, *Voyages*, pt. IV: *Rubruquis*, cols. 41–2.

[57] De Bergeron, *Voyages*, pt. III: *Voyages très curieux faits et écrits par les RR. PP. Jean du Plan Carpin, Cordelier, et N. Ascelin, Jacobin ... vers les Tartares et autres peuples orientaux* (hereafter, *Carpin*), cols. 27–8.



6 Eighteenth-century engraving illustrating John of Plano Carpini's thirteenth-century description of "tent-carts". To draw the smaller ones "one ox is sufficient" (De Bergeron, *Carpin*, cols. 27–8).



7 Eighteenth-century engraving of a river crossing described by John of Plano Carpini, showing the artist's conception of dismantled yurt frames and crowns (with roof poles attached) carried on horseback (De Bergeron, *Carpin*, cols. 53–4).



8 Yurt frame and crown transported on camelback during transhumance: Zerbg Sum, Hovd Aimag, Mongolia, 28 August 1990 (M. Gervers photo: Mongolia, XI-11).

frame. The text does not provide the detail reproduced here,[58] although this arrangement for transporting the *ger* is still current today (fig. 8).[59]

The concept of the large, erect circular tent transported on a four-wheeled cart drawn by two rows of oxen eleven abreast, as described by Rubruck, was unfortunately pursued by Henry Yule who, in his edition of Marco Polo (1871), published a drawing (fig. 9) of how he supposed the ensemble to have looked.[60] That and subsequent editions were widely distributed and the illustration has, over the course of the twentieth century, entrenched itself in the popular imagination. Yule himself found it "a curious fact that the practice of carrying these *yurts* or felt tents upon waggons appears to be entirely obsolete in Mongolia."[61] If at the time Mongols, Chinese and Russians who were shown the drawing had understandably never seen anything of the kind, their descendants now familiar with that sketch might claim that although such a dwelling was unknown to them it certainly existed in ancient times. A clay model based on the Yule drawing is conspicuously displayed in the National Museum in Ulan Bator. Similarly inspired is the reproduction (fig. 10) on the end paper of a Mongolian edition of the *SH*, published in Ulan Bator in 1975.[62] Fig. 10

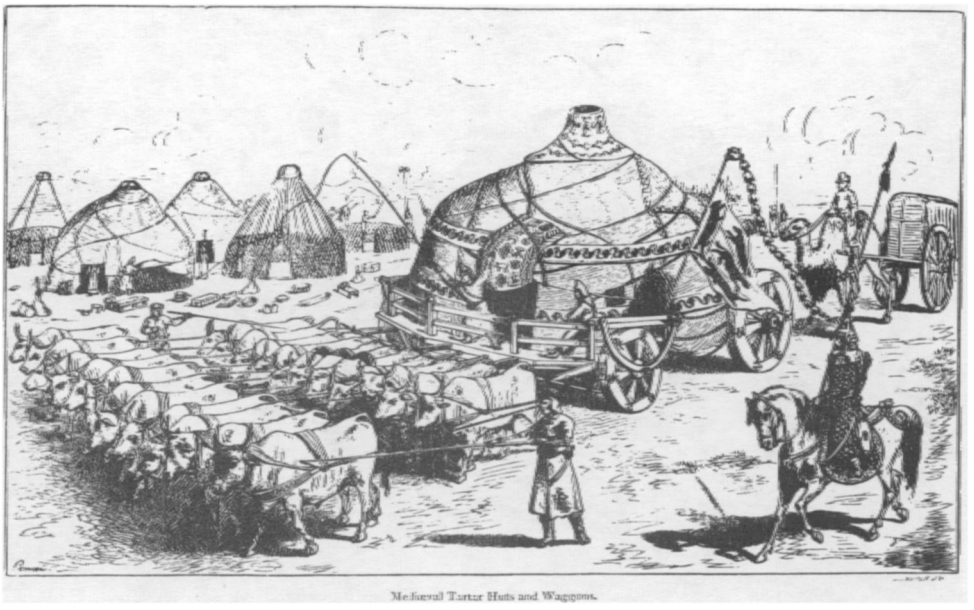
[58] De Bergeron, *Voyages*, pt. III: *Carpin*, cols. 53–4; *cf.* Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, pp. 35–6.

[59] Another excellent photograph of the contemporary transport of the circular tent is to be found in the exhibition catalogue *The Turcoman of Iran* (Kendal, 1971), pl. 3.

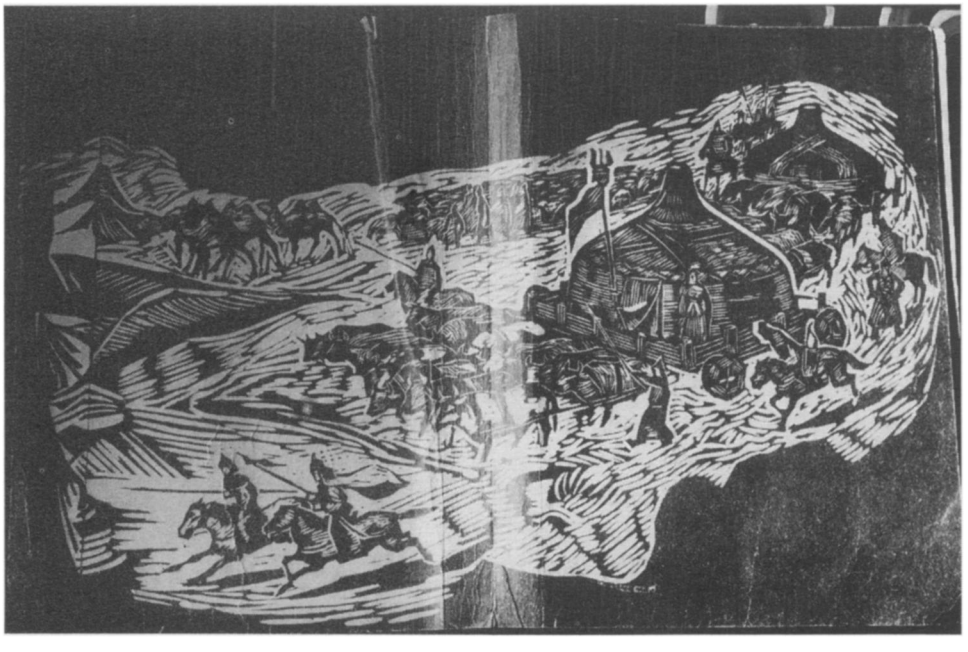
[60] *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, i (London), 1871, p. 223; also in Yule and Cordier, i, p. 255.

[61] Yule and Cordier, i, p. 254, n. 2.

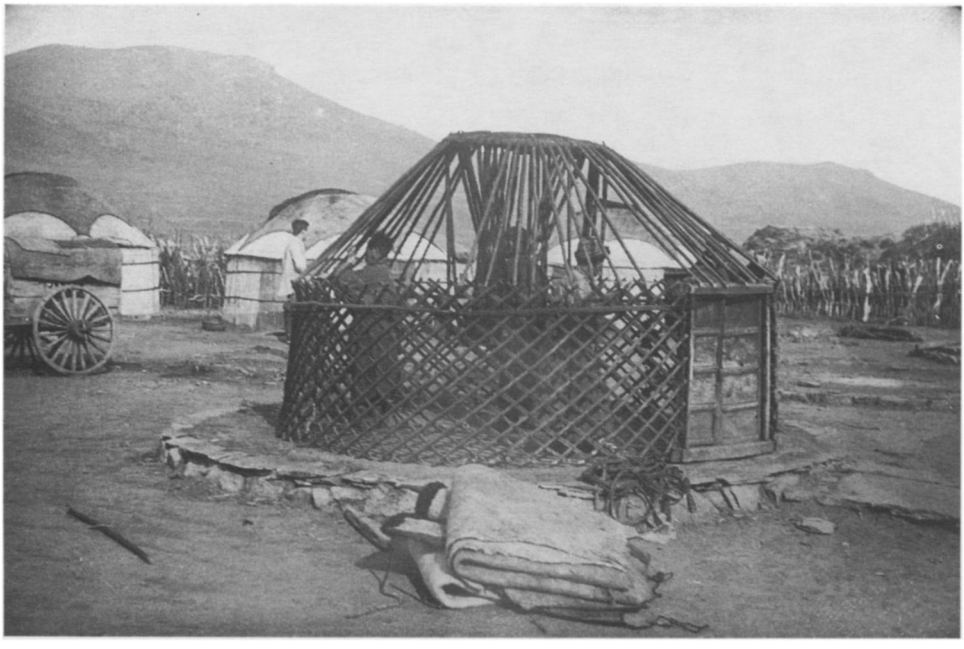
[62] *Mongoliin Nuuts Tovchoo* (Secret History of the Mongols), ed. Sh. Gadamba (Ulaanbaatar, 1975).



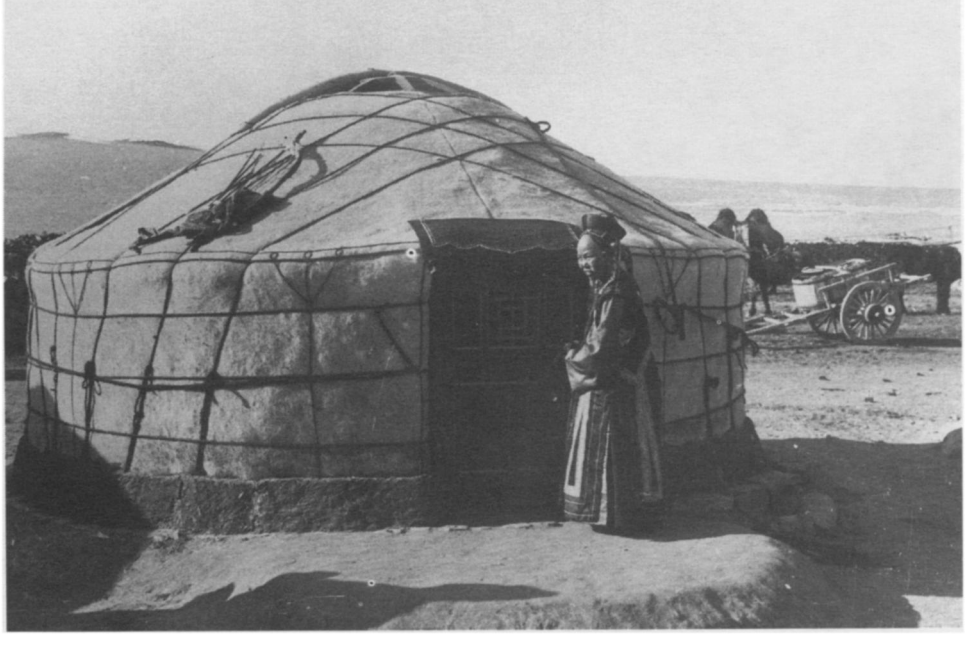
9 Henry Yule's imaginary reconstruction (1871) of the twenty-two-ox "tent-cart" described by William of Rubruck (Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo . . .*, 3rd ed., I, p. 255).



10 End paper of a Mongolian edition (1975) of the *Secret History*, showing a wood cut of the twenty-two-ox "tent-cart" derived from Henry Yule's engraving of 1871 (fig. 9) (*Mongoliin Nuuts Tovchoo*, ed. Sh. Gadamba).



11 Arriving at an established camp-site, Mongols erect the frame of their circular *ger*, or yurt. Haslund-Christensen expedition, eastern Mongolia, 1936–37 (Courtesy of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen: Mongoliet I, B2).



12 The Mongolian *ger* enveloped in its winter felts. K. Grønbech expedition, eastern Mongolia, 1938–39 (Courtesy of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen: Mongoliet VII, film XXIX, no. 13).



13 Two-wheeled, camel-drawn carts from Hailar district, eastern Mongolia, with fixed, felt-covered, windowed superstructures. Haslund expedition, 1936–37 (Courtesy of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen: Mongoliet X, H35).



14 Two-wheeled, felt-covered carts placed between tents in Hailar district, eastern Mongolia, reflecting the storage wagons set up "half a stone's throw away from the dwelling on either side" described by William of Rubruck, and the *ger tergen*, or "yurts and carts", of the *Secret History*. Haslund expedition, 1936–37 (Courtesy of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen: Mongoliet X, H27).

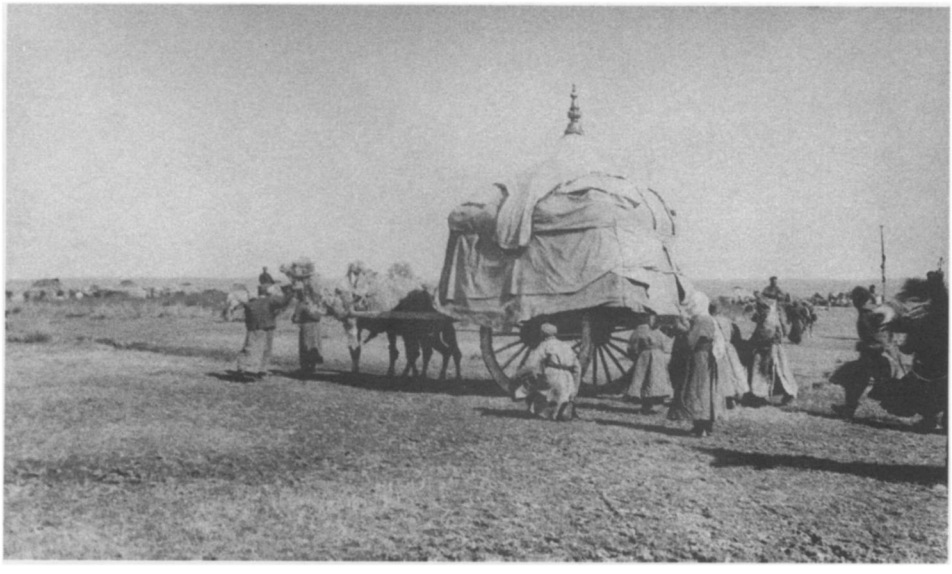


15 Two-wheeled open carts, or *tergen*, transporting a dismantled *ger* across the central Gobi in 1957/58. The tent-crown is clearly visible in the third cart. Marco Polo describes four-wheeled examples which were used for the same purpose. (From L. Jisl, *Mongolian Journey*, pl. 119).

was photographed in 1990 from a copy of that book owned by a nomad living high in the Altai mountains of Hovd province.

Whatever the historical truth, the Mongolian landscape continues in many respects to speak for itself. Photographs appearing in figs. 11–14 were taken during the course of several Danish expeditions to Mongolia in the latter half of the 1930s. Fig. 11 shows the mounting of the wooden frame of the *ger*, and fig. 12, the *ger* enveloped in its winter felts. Figs. 13 and 14 depict two-wheeled, felt-covered carts with windows which could well represent the storage carts described by Rubruck, the "one ox" carts of Carpini, the "cabins on carts" of Peng Daya, the rigid willow-woven enclosure mentioned by Xu Ting, the "superior" vehicle covered with black felt which Marco Polo said was used to convey women and children, and the felt-covered vehicle with grilled windows cited by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in which one could sleep, eat, read or write while travelling. They could also be what inspired the drawings in the Radziwiłł Chronicle of felt-covered carts carrying women and children. Fig. 14 reflects Rubruck's somewhat obscure reference to the storage wagons set up "half a stone's throw away from the dwelling on either side, so that the dwelling stands between two rows of wagons as if they were two walls."[63] Finally, a photograph (fig. 15) made during a Czechoslovak expedition to the central Gobi in 1957–

[63] See note 54 above.



16 Ceremonial return of the tent (*comcogh*) of Chinggis Khan to its walled enclosure at Ejen Horo, Inner Mongolia, 26 April 1935 (O. Lattimore photo).

58 depicts a train of one-horse, two-wheeled open carts. In the third of these *tergen* the crown of the dismantled *ger* can clearly be seen.[64]

In contrast to the foregoing is the ceremonial tent (*comcogh*) used in the annual festival celebrating the Sacrifice of Chinggis Khan at Ejen Horo ("the Enclosure of the Lord, or Emperor") in the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia. The photograph (fig. 16) was taken by Owen Lattimore on 26 April 1935. He notes in his description of the event that the tent is different from the Mongol *ger* with a smoke hole at the top, for here "a 'cap' fits over the top, rising to a little 'spire' of wood."[65] Furthermore, it is evident from the illustration that this tent has a square base. It is interesting in the present context that when the tent, which contains the ceremonial coffin of Chinggis, is brought out from its walled sanctuary for the festival it is transported on "a high, bare, two-wheeled cart" pulled by two white camels.[66] Lattimore concludes "That this appears to be the last relic, preserved thus only in ritual, of the old Mongol usage of keeping tents permanently on carts, as described by the medieval travellers like William of Rubruck."[67] Once again, Rubruck is cited with reference to a tradition for which he may himself be the inspiration.

[64] Lumír Jisl, *Mongolian Journey*, trans. Till Gottheiner (London, 1960), pl. 119. The caption to this plate reads: "A family on the move to fresh pastures. The wagons, *tergen*, hold all their worldly possessions, among them the *yurt* which can be taken down and folded up."

[65] Owen Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys* (London, 1942: hereafter: Lattimore), p. 45 (see also pp. 43–4). The volume is without illustrations. Fig. 15 is reproduced with the kind permission of Dr David Lattimore. The negative is in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. We are grateful to Paul Kahn for drawing our attention to the existence of this photograph.

[66] Lattimore, p. 49. [67] Lattimore, p. 56.

Glossary of terms

alacuq: tent dwelling (帳房).
altan terme: golden spread tent (cf. terme).
caqan toloq: a white felt rug, often for ceremonial use.
cheshang shi 車上室: covered cart, i.e. cart with a cabin on it.
comcogh: a tent with a pointed top and no smoke hole; ceremonial tent.
Dada 韃靼: Chinese term for Tartar, referring to the Khitans at first and later to a clan of the Mongols.
fangzi chezi 房子車子: cf. ger tergen.
e'üden/eüten (egüden): door.
e'üten o'orcu: to cast aside the door.
ger tergen: taken as a single term by some to mean "tent cart", i.e. a vehicle with a yurt, undismantled, set atop it for transportation; otherwise seen as a compound term meaning "household", i.e. tents and carts (房子車子).
ger: yurt, dwelling(房, 房子); home (家, 家內, 家裡).
gerisge isgei: a barricade of felt, a felt windbreak (cp. kereske).
gölme: shabrack.
gülimme: shabrack (cp. gölme).
irge: the lower edge of the round tent (cp. xayaawch).
isgei, sisgei: felt (氈).
kereske: a barricade, fence; cp. gerisge isgei.
mao shan 毛衫: coat of fur or wool.
mu shan 褁衫: coat of woven material; (cf. örmege).
mu: see örmege.
nekejü: to weave (in reference to örmege).
nembe'e isgei: felt cover, horse blanket (cp. nemnege).
nemnege: a cover, blanket for young or weak animals (see nembe'e isgei above).
nemürge: felt mantle (氈衫).
ordu 宮: often translated "palace", though strictly refers to the camp in which the khan has his dwelling; occurs frequently modifying "ger" (usually glossed as 宮室 or 宮室房子) or "ger tergen" (glossed as 宮室車子, 宮室車, 宮的房子車子).
örmege: woven material (褁).
örmök, örmüg: see örmege, above.
qabdasun e'üdeten: those who have board doors (cf. e'üden).
qara'u: black staves of a covered cart? (cf. qara'utai terge).
qara'utai tergen: glossed in the *SH* as "black cart" (黑車) most likely referring to a covered cart.
qayaghabci: see xayaawch.
qionglu 穹廬: Chinese term for felt tent.
qosiliq: tent dwelling (帳房).
sa zhang 撒帳: see terme.
sa zhang fang 撒帳房: see terme ger.
sisgei: see isgei.

sisgei to'urgatu ulus: people with tents of felt walls (cp. tughurgh-a).
t'ien-ch'uang: cf. tianchuang.
tergen: cart, carriage (cf. ger tergen).
terme: spread tent (**撒帳**).
terme ger: spread tent dwelling (**撒帳房** cf. terme, ger).
tianchuang 天窗: "sky-window", i.e. the smoke hole in the roof of a yurt (ger).
toloq: a rug of felt, often for ceremonial use (cf. caqan toloq).
tughurgh-a: sides of a yurt (ger).
ХАЈАГАВСІ: see xayaawch.
xayaawch (qayaghabci): a band of felt, or other covering, around the very bottom of the yurt (ger).
yinshi che 飲食車: provisions cart.
zhang 帳: term often used for tents that were not yurts (ger).
zhangfang cheliang 帳房 車輛: tent-dwellings and vehicles (carts).
zhangyu 帳輿: tent vehicle; covered wagon; may or may not be the same as (**黑車**) in the *SH*.
zhanzhang 氈帳: felt tent; Chinese gloss for qionglu, q.v.