MONGOLICA

В НОМЕРЕ:

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The Role of Oaths in Seventeenth-Century Manchu-Mongolian Political Culture

Oaths were an important component of Mongolian political culture and their significance in indicating the binding character of an allegiance is already attested in the Secret History. In the early 17th century, when the Manchus were expanding their power base in Inner Asia, they frequently made use of oaths. Even after the Qing capital was moved to Beijing, oaths were important for binding the Mongolian nobility to the imperial house.

For the time before the 17th century, information on performative aspects of oath-taking is scarce. Archival records on Mongolian-Manchu relations in the 17th century, however, contain plenty of information on diplomatic preparations, the specific language of oaths and the staging of oath-taking ceremonies. There is evidence that the fundamental idea of a conditional self-curse, which called punishment on the swearing person if he or she broke a promise, was known to all participants, but details of implementation varied. The paper investigates the Mongolian terminology for oath-taking practices and draws inspiration from recent works on ritual theory. On the basis of 17th century archival material, it draws attention to the dynamic character of oath-taking and argues that it involved both individuals and groups. By exploring narratives which evolved around Manchu-Mongolian oaths as political landmarks, the paper sheds light on oath-taking as a cultural practice.

Key words: Manchus, Mongols, oath, Qing, ritual.

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Introduction

Oaths played a crucial role when the ancestors of the Qing imperial house (1636–1911) tried to enhance their position as a regional power and sought allies among their Mongolian neighbors. Oaths were implemented in order to establish and confirm bonds between leading personalities and often represented an important benchmark in the process of integrating both individuals and groups into larger political formations. During the period under study, Manchu and Mongolian chieftains could draw on well-established practices of oath-taking and diplomatic contact. To confirm mutual pledges of loyalty by sacrificial oaths had a long history in North East Asia. We know of oath-taking practices among steppe confederations already from the Xiongnu [Göckenjan, 1999/2000]. The continuing importance of sworn bonds of allegiance and trust for the coherence of steppe confederations is further confirmed in the Secret History and other sources on the formation of the Mongolian Empire [Kim, 2005; Zhanggeer, 2000].

For historians, oaths are an important object of study because they are part of the "glue" or the "social cement" holding groups and individuals together [Bayliss, 2013a. P. 9]. Sometimes a difference is made between assertive and promissory oaths, but both are understood as institutions to reduce violence. Because of their binding character, oaths of allegiance serve as indicators for the relative closeness of individuals to each other. Moreover, an investigation into the sanctions for breaking an oath promises insights into the legal framework of a given society.

The practice of oath-taking has received attention not only from historians and legal scholars but from researchers of various disciplines. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben entitled a book *The Sacrament of Language*: *An Archeology of the Oath,* in which he stresses that oaths are at the interface of the religious and the legal sphere which means that they are not an exclusively religious, nor an exclusively legal phenomenon [Agamben, 2015: P. 28]. He also emphasizes the aspect of language, because for him the oath is "the event of language in which words and things are indissolubly linked" [Agamben, 2011: P. 46]. The importance of the medium of the spoken word was also stressed by Sebastian Scharff, who reminds us that a solemn declaration is at the heart of every oath and without language there can be no oath [Scharff, 2016: P. 23].

While for Agamben oaths are "an event of language", scholars from the field of cultural studies concentrated

on the performative character of oaths, the wide range of possible interpretations and the combination of different media. The close relationship between oath-taking practices and wider systems of power made oaths — as a universal phenomenon — a welcome object of ritual studies.

In this paper, I argue that in order to understand the dynamics and the changes in Manchu-Mongolian oath-taking practices it is helpful to make use of theoretical considerations in the field of ritual studies. While for a long time research on ritual practices focused on the fixed and unvarying elements of rituals, in the recent decades, their processual character has been brought to the fore. Rituals are governed by rules, but they are not static and there is room for a certain degree of variation. Repetition of a ritual and compliance with ritual rules does not preclude that a ritual is transformed in its performance or in its meaning. Some elements could disappear and others be added and also the sequence of the ritual could be changed [Brosius, Michaels & Schrode, 2013. P. 15]. This insight enhances our understanding of Manchu-Mongolian oaths and their potential to express and reinforce novel constellations of power by well-established practices.

Further inspiration can be found in the research of Vera Nünning and Jan Rupp, who establish a nexus between ritual and narrative and suggest us to take a closer look at the narratives, which evolve around rituals [Nünning & Rupp, 2013. P. 16]. As will be discussed below, in Manchu-Mongolian political discourse oath-taking was represented in narratives which had an important function for justifying military action.

At this point, a word on the definition of ritual is in place. The field of ritual studies was greatly influenced by Catherine Bell's book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* Bell stresses that ritual practices are social practices and can be strategically employed by individual actors in order to consolidate power and influence. She argues that "ritual practices are themselves the very production and negotiation of power relations" [Bell, 1992. P. 196] and summarizes the key features of ritual activities [Bell, 1992. P. 138f.]. Another definition of the characteristics of ritual has been put forward by Axel Michaels. He considers five elements as essential for ritual practices, namely their intentional performance (the fact that they are carefully planned), their formality (which makes them imitable), their framing (which sets them apart from day to day business), their indicating change and transformation and their evocation of a higher reality [Michaels, 2003. P. 4–5; Nünning & Rupp, 2013. P. 5–6]. Identifying these elements in Manchu-Mongolian oath-taking practices is important for better understanding their role in the course of ritual action.

This paper begins with defining the 17th century Mongolian terminology for practices which we today refer to as oath. In order to better understand the dynamics of oaths in inter-polity relations, I will then concentrate on individual and collective aspects of Manchu-Mongolian oaths and will argue that in addition to con-

firming agreement, oaths could mirror existing hierarchies and were also strategically used by various actors in order to negotiate power relations [Harth & Michaels, 2013. P. 125]. Moreover, in order to understand the relevance of oaths in political culture it is instructive to look at the way how oaths were used as an argument in political rhetoric. Different actors could place different meaning in the practices and oaths were surrounded by narratives which were important for political legitimation. As we will see below, to accuse somebody of having broken an oath was a very serious allegation and was a reason for war.

Terminology

According to the Qing-dynasty Pentaglot Dictionary, which was compiled between 1790 and 1794, the Manchu term *gashūmbi* corresponds to Mongolian *amaldamui* [Pentaglot Dictionary, 2013. P. 475], which is a contraction of *aman aldaqu* (to lose/give one's mouth/word). In the Pentaglot dictionary the entry is arranged within the category of "human being" and, more precisely, in the section of "ranting and curses". Interestingly, the term *amaldamui* is further explained as a synonym of *andayarlamui* [1]. The term *andayarlamui* includes the lexeme *anda*, which refers to a formally sealed allegiance of (usually) two males to assist each other in military and political affairs. The contentual overlap between *amaldamui* and *andayarlamui* is further confirmed by the *Qorin Nigetü Tayilburi Toli* (Twenty-one Volume Dictionary), a Mongolian-Mongolian explanatory dictionary compiled 1743 in Beijing, which also treats the two terms as synonyms [QNTT, 2013. P. 14].

Because of its relevance for the rise of Chinggis Khan, the nature of the *anda*-relationship has aroused many scholars' interest [2]. Igor de Rachewiltz argued that the *anda*-relationship was a kind of alliance and not a pseudo-kinship relation [Rachewiltz, 2004. P. 395/396; Birtalan, 2007/2008. P. 44]. Moreover, as Ágnes Birtalan has made plain in an article on *Rituals of Sworn Brotherhood*, there is a certain discrepancy between the information on the *anda*-relationship according to historical sources, namely the Secret History, and the way this bond is portrayed in the epic tradition. According to Mongolian epics, the most important way of sealing an *anda*-relationship involves the mingling of one another's blood, thereby entering a pseudo-kinship relation [Birtalan, 2007/2008. P. 52–53]. According to Birtalan, folk remembrance actually reinterpreted historical events, because according to the *Secret History* the *anda*-relationship was sealed by exchanging presents [Birtalan, 2007/2008. P. 45, 55–56]. Interestingly, Birtalan points out that the term *anda* is rarely used with reference to historical events after the end of the Mongolian Empire

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[1] *amaldamui, basa andayarlamui kememüi.* [Pentaglot Dictionary, 2013. P. 475].
[2] An overview of the literature can be found in [Birtalan, 2007/2008].

[Birtalan, 2007/2008. P. 47]. Her observation is confirmed by the terminology for Manchu-Mongolian oaths in the early 17th century. In the archival material as well as in the chronicles [3], Manchu-Mongolian oaths are referred to with the term *aman aldaqu* or *amaldaqu*. There is no case, in which a Manchu-Mongolian oath agreement is conceptualized by the term *andaɣarlaqu/andaɣayilaqu* "to become like *anda*" or expressions including the word *anda*, such as *anda bolulčaqu* (to become *anda*). The findings in the sources thus contradict the equation of *amaldaqu* or *andaɣarlaqu* suggested in imperially sponsored compilations of the 18th century. The question of how the two terms — and the practices they denote — relate with each other deserves further research.

With its reference to the mouth and the spoken word, the use of the term *amaldaqu* / *aman aldaqu* confirms the observation of Agamben on the importance of language [4]. From an etymological perspective, oath-taking practices in the Manchu-Mongolian context were a matter of the spoken word. The entry in the *Qorin nigetü tayilburi toli* points in a similar direction when it explains *amaldaqu* as following: "After expressing one's resolution, one curses oneself with the words 'if I do not abide by my word, I shall meet with misfortune". It is noticeable that the 18th century compilers of the QNTT stressed the communicative aspects of the oath while giving no information on performative aspects [QNTT, 2013. P. 14] [5].

For the sake of completeness, I should also mention two other Mongolian terms also frequently translated into English as "oath-taking". One is *siqaqu* (to press), a principle of judicial proof, which is used in legal documents of the 17th and 18th centuries [Heuschert, 1996a]. The other is *tangɣariɣlaqu* which is used to refer to the taking of oaths in spoken Qalqa [6]. I did not encounter this term in the documents relating to Manchu-Mongolian oaths. However, *tangɣariɣlaqu* is mentioned in the *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*. In this work, it is put into the mouth of the Dalai Lama, who refers with this term to the initiation of the Hevajra-Abhiṣeka, which Qubilai Khan (reigned 1260–1294) received by 'Phags-pa (gest. 1280) [Kollmar-Paulenz, 2001. P. 190 & P. 306]. However, when emphasizing that the peace treaty between Altan Khan (1507–1582) and Ming-China (1368–1643) was confirmed by an oath, the author of the *Erdeni tunumal* does not use term *tangɣariɣlamui* but refers to this

action as *aman aldalduju bekilen* "they made an oath to each other and confirmed it". These findings may point to the conclusion that in the 17th century the term *tangɣariɣlaqu* was reserved for religious pledges but more research is needed to confirm this.

In conclusion, it is important to note that in the Mongolian language there is no generic term which applies to all these practices as for example the English word "oath" or the German word "Eid". For this reason, we must be aware that when we lump different practices together under the umbrella term of "oath-taking", we are using our own preconceived notions [Brosius, Michaels & Schrode, 2013. P. 11]. We cannot be sure that 17th century Mongolian speakers saw *aman aldaqu, andaɣayilaqu, siqaqu* and *tangɣariɣlaqu* as related practices.

Oaths and inter-polity relations

Long before the rise of the Manchus in the early 17th century, oaths were an important instrument of diplomatic practice in Central Asia. We know that the peace agreements between Altan Khan and the Chinese Governor-General of Shaanxi, Wang Chonggu were confirmed by oaths and — in addition to Altan Khan — many other Mongol and Manchu leaders, among them Nurhaci (died 1626), performed oaths to settle disputes with the Ming and define claims on territory and people [Heuschert, 1996b. P. 27/28, 29, 42]. Information on these oaths is mainly included in Chinese sources and it is rather brief. We learn that the taking of an oath included an animal sacrifice, (bull or horse or both) and a declaration, which included promises for the future and defined the prospect of punishment for those who broke the promise. We have much more information on the performance of oaths in the Manchu-Mongolian political context. Sources of particular importance for research on oath-taking practices are the *Jiu Manzhou Dang* (Old Manchu Archives) [JMZD, 1969] and the Mongolian language documents from the first half of the 17th century, which were published by Li Baowen in 1997 [MÜBD, 1997]. These primary sources include information on oaths between Manchus [7] and Southern Qalqa in 1619/20, between Manchus and Qorčin in 1924 and 1626, between Manchus and Naiman and Manchus and Aoqan in 1627, between Manchus and Qaračin in 1628 and between Manchus and Aru Qorčin in 1631. This — by no means exhaustive — overview shows that in the early period of Manchu state-building, oaths were a common means to confirm peace-treaties [Li, 2012. P. 60–61]. The amount of information we have on these oaths varies, but for several of them, the archival material includes a draft of the solemn declaration made during the oath and a kind of roadmap on the performance. The rich material has caused much scholarly attention and part of it has been translated into European languages, for example into German by Michael Weiers

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[3] For example [MÜBD, 1997. P. 32–33] and [AT, 1990. F. 176v].

[4] On *aman ne'e-,* «to open one's mouth» as an expression for the taking of a vow in the Secret History, see [Doerfer, 1963. P. 172].

[5] On the terminology for oaths in the 13th century see also [Honda, 1991].

[6] According to the [MÜIT, 1988. P. 1769], *tangɣariɣ* has two meanings: 1. "oath" and 2. "scholarly rank". The term *tangɣariɣlaqu* is not mentioned in the QNTT, but *tangɣariɣ* is given as a synonyme of Manchu *gashūn* «sworn allegiance» in the Pentaglot Dictionary [Pentaglot Dictionary, 2013. P. 475].

[7] At that time, the ancestors of the Qing imperial house referred to themselves as Jurchen.

[Weiers, 1983] and into English by Nicola Di Cosmo and Darijab Bao [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003].

According to the archival material, the taking of an oath began with the invocation of the presence of heaven (Mongolian *tngri* and Manchu *abka)* and earth (Mongolian *ɣajar* and Manchu *na*), both powers, whose support was crucial to increase the strength of humans and make them fortunate [Rachewiltz, 2015. P. 121–122]. In terms of ritual components, this invocation can be seen as what Michaels regards as "framing", i. e. an aspect which sets the taking of an oath apart from day to day business [8]. Moreover, among the elements frequently mentioned in the texts is the sacrifice of a white horse for heaven and a black bull for the earth. Weiers sees the mentioning of these animal sacrifices as an indication that an oath had taken place or was planned [Weiers, 1983. P. 425]. In this case, they were part of the framing process and can be understood as demarcations for the beginning of an oath-taking ceremony.

The solemn declarations, which both parties made, were preceded by bows and the burning of incense. These declarations were referred to as *itegeltü ügeben* "our trusting words". Interestingly, even though both parties' "trusting words" were similarly structured, they were not identical. The "trusting words" were spoken out loudly and, in written form, a text (*bičig*) was burnt.

Evidence for the dynamic relationship between script and performance can be based on a comparison between ritual instructions. There is a certain variation in the objects which were displayed to represent the hardship which those would suffer who broke the vow. According to records of the Manchu-Southern Qalqa oath from early 1620, five bowls, one with blood, one with earth, one with dry bones, one with liquor and one with meat were placed in order to let participants emotionally experience how — in case they broke the vow — their blood would be spilt, they would be pressed down by earth and their bones would dry out [Weiers, 1987. P. 137, 146]. The declaration goes on that, if they stuck to their words, they would drink the liquor and eat the meat. In the records on the Manchu-Qaračin oaths however, only four bowls get a mention, no bowl with earth [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 52/53, 64/65]. There seems to have been a set structure for the performance of an oath, but also a certain degree of variation. This confirms what above has been said about the processual character of rituals, which allows for a certain degree of variation.

Oaths as mirrors of social hierarchy

In the "trusting words", the participants in Manchu-Mongolian oaths promise not to make common cause with the Čaqar or the Ming. For this reason, these oaths may be regarded as means to clearly distinguish between friend and foe. In addition, they address both individual and collective aspects. The "trusting words" of the Man-

chu-Qaračin oath of 1628, start with the affirmation that "our two polities (*ulus*), Manchus and Qaračin, live in harmony" [9]. They go on with the promise not to make common cause with the Čaqar, and then list the names of the individuals who had to face imminent death if they broke the promise. In the case of the Manchu oath, the list of chieftains begins with Hong Taiji, in the case of the Qaračin it includes five ruling princes starting with the name of a certain Laskiyab [10]. It is noteworthy that in the solemn declaration, both the names of the polities and of individuals were pronounced. This implies that the oaths were not only binding individuals, but rather polities. When individuals swore an oath as members of their group, this generated collective responsibility [Bayliss, 2013b. P. 323]. Involving multiple swearers was a way of integrating both polities and individuals into the agreement. Each of the persons mentioned in the oath became a sort of personal guarantor and provided security for the keeping of the "trusting words".

It may be concluded that over time the names of the ones who participated in the oath became a mirror of internal hierarchies. In the follow-up of the 1628 Manchu-Qaračin oath, a Qaračin nobleman who had not taken part in the oath wrote to Hong Taiji in order to reaffirm that he belonged to the leading circle of the Qaračin nobility and (even though he did not take part in the oath) should be involved in the consultations with the Manchu court [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 125–126]. With their participation in the oath and their name among the guarantors of the agreement, Mongolian nobles seem to have secured themselves (and their families) a place among the leading circle of their respective polity.

There is evidence that oath-taking was not only a means for individuals to enhance their prestige, but also for collectives. After the Manchu ruling house took residence in Beijing, it seems that oaths were like a remnant from a bygone era. Consequently, the question of whether or not Qing representatives should participate in the performance of oaths became a contested issue at the court. The conflict was sparked off in 1655, when a peace treaty with the Northern Qalqa came into reach. The Qing court was interested in establishing a stable situation in the North, but was irritated by the demands of the Mongolian side that the agreements should be confirmed by an oath. Judging from the archival material, for the Qalqa nobles, the prospect of a sacrificial oath to heaven and earth was a prerequisite for their consent to enter into peace negotiations. Some decades ago, oaths had been standard procedure to confirm Manchu-

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[8] On the framing of rituals [Ambos & Weinhold, 2013].

[9] *manju: qaračin: bide qoyar ulus: nigen ey-e-ber yabuquyin tulada*: [MÜBD, 1997. P. 32–33].

[10] *tngri ɣajar: qaračin-i buruɣusiyaju: jasaɣ bariɣsan: laskiyab, buyan, mangsur, sübüdi and genggel-eče ekilen kedün yeke baɣ-a tabun ong-ud-tu maɣu nigül kürčü : amin nasur oqur bolju:* «After heaven and earth have blamed the Qaračin, the five higher and lower officials Laskiyab, Buyan, Mangsur, Sübüdi and Genggel who took over the government will be guilty of grave wrong and their lives will be short» [MÜBD, 1997. P. 32–33].

Mongolian peace agreements and in some cases it had been the Manchu side who insisted on an oath. In 1655, however, the Qing court met the Mongolian oath-initiative with little sympathy and complied with it only reluctantly.

Lifanyuan officials tried to dissuade the Shunzhi-Emperor (1644–1661) to accept the demands of the Qalqa. The emperor, however, decided in favor of an oath. In January 1656, Prince Yolo (1625–1689), the fourth son of Hong Taiji (reigned 1626–1643), perfor-med the oath ceremony in the Imperial Clan Court to-gether with the Qalqa envoys [Song, 2011].

In the first decades of the 17th century, in case of the Manchu-Qorčin and the Manchu-Qaračin oath, it had been the Manchu Khan who had taken the oath together with Mongolian representatives in the Manchu camp. Apparently, after the court had taken residence in Bei-jing, it was clear for all participants that the Qing em-peror would no longer participate in an oath-taking ce-remony. However, according to the demands of the Qal-qa nobles, the Qing representative in the oath-taking ce-remony had to have the rank of a Wang. Obviously, the meaning both parties placed on oath-taking had changed. While Manchu-Mongolian oaths in the first decades of the 17th century had reinforced agreements to fight toge-ther, after the Qing-emperors took residence in Beijing, the taking of an oath was a practice which would de-monstrate the Qalqa nobility's political weight in rela-tion with the emperor. There can be no doubt that during the reigns of Nurhaci and Hong Taiji, oath-taking was likewise not only regarded as a means for inspiring and confirming mutual trust, but was also implemented in order to make visible and sustain power relations. Howe-ver, as I would like to argue, in the Shunzhi-period the Qalqa nobility had turned the tables and used this prac-tice in order to renegotiate their political standing within the Qing realm. For them, to have their representatives enter an oath with Prince Yolo at the Imperial Clan Court was a way of gaining political recognition.

Later Qing historiography covered up the fact that it had been the Mongolian side, which insisted on the oath, but rather made up that it was the emperor who deman-ded the Mongolian side to take an oath of allegeance. This shows that within different frameworks oaths could acquire another meaning. The findings confirm Bell's argument that rituals should not be regarded as a func-tional mechanism, but rather as a practice which produ-ces nuanced relationships of power [Bell, 1992. P. 196–197].

Oaths in political discourse and narrative power of oath-taking

*O*aths can be regarded as a means to establish and maintain certain constellations of power. In this section, I will argue that they become effective not only through their implementation, but also through their representa-tion in political argument. The multiperspectivity of oaths and their operating on multiple levels makes them an important dimension of narrative [Nünning & Rupp, 2013. P. 18]. As communicative acts implying change and transformation, they can be remembered in different ways in different periods. There are several examples that Manchu Khans made use of oaths as an argument in political rhetoric. This is already indicated in the famous seven grievances of Nurhaci. In 1618, he accused the Ming of — among other things — having violated the border demarcation which had been confirmed by an oath ten years earlier, in 1608. This breach of promise for him was the reason to declare war on China [Li, 2012. P. 60].

Another example for the immense significance of oaths in political rhetoric is Hong Taiji's condemnation of the Tüsiyetü Khan Oba of the Qorčin in 1628. Two years earlier, the Qorčin chieftain had solemnly confir-med his loyalty to the Manchu Khan by an oath, but later failed to participate in a planned campaign against the Čaqar [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 55]. This seems to have been the final straw for Hong Taiji, who had been angry about Oba's unruliness for quite some time. He wrote a letter to him, which is published in facsimile by Li Baowen and in which he mentions the oath between Qorčin and Manchu three times and also at prominent places, i.e. in the beginning and the end [11]. In his letter of complaint, Hong Taiji distinguishes clearly between Qorčin acts of aggression which had happened before the Manchu-Qorčin oath and misbehavior and offences committed afterwards. So it seems that through the oath the quality of the relationship among the two leaders was transformed. The aspect of transformation as a key cha-racteristic of ritual practice was identified as a link in the nexus between ritual and narrative [Nünning & Rupp, 2013. P. 6]. It is noteworthy that Hong Taiji when refer-ring to the narrative quality of the oath gives prominence to the aspect of process and change.

Likewise, Hong Taiji makes use of the multidimen-sionality of the oath in order to strengthen his argument. Among Oba's alleged offences after the taking of an oath are issues which concern the terms of the sworn declaration for example the relationship with the Ming and campaigns against the Čaqar. It's fair to say that with these topics Hong Taiji addresses the legal aspect of the oath. However, he also complains about codes of conduct such as Oba's failure to give return presents and not showing enough respect for the Manchu Khan, his daughter and his orders [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 55–61]. These were issues not touched in the "trusting words" of the oath. By rhetorically mixing impolite be-havior and the violation of the terms of the agreement, Hong Taiji enhances the credibility of his accusations. The reader of the letter is left with the impression that Oba's lack of respect is part of the breach of the sworn statement.

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[11] The letter is translated into English [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 55–61].

Hong Taiji mentions the oath in the beginning of his letter and then makes a whole list of legal and quasi-legal offences and, in the end, at the culminating point of his message, makes reference to the oath again. His style of referring to the oath in the crucial passages of his argument makes his letter a rhetorical masterpiece [12]. Significantly, at the end of the letter, he does not refer to the oath with the term *amaldaqu* or by making reference to the sacrifice of a white horse for heaven and a black bull for earth. Rather, he blames Oba for "violating the libation-offerings made while exchanging our trusting words before heaven and earth" [13]

This is remarkable for several reasons. In the archival records, when oath-taking practices are mentioned, the offering of libation usually is not mentioned. This, of course, does not mean that it had not taken place. As a rhetorical device, reference to the oath under the catch-word "libation" is made in order to increase the effect of the accusation and make it sound more emotional and convincing.

At this point I would like to come back to the poly-valent character of the oath, and the fact that it touches both the legal and the religious sphere. It made sense for Hong Taiji to mention the libation and the oath in the final and crucial passage of his letter because this was a way to add to his arguments and leave the readers or listeners of his letter with the impression that Oba acted against higher and super-human powers. Is has been argued that, when it comes to the policing of an oath, the obligations of human and super-human powers can sometimes be blurred [Bayliss, 2013b. P. 171]. The fact that Oba disregarded and counteracted the libation offerings put Hong Taiji in a position, in which he was almost obligated to arrange for the punishment of this offence.

It is also instructive to look at the instances in which Manchu chieftains make use of the narrative quality of oaths. Interestingly, in both cases (Nurhacis seven grievances and Hong Taiji's letter to Oba) the Manchu Khans had a clear goal. The same goes for a reprimand of the Tümed leader Jobiltu Hong Taiji, who failed to join an expedition against the Čaqar in 1629 [Di Cosmo, 2002. P. 337] and was likewise accused of having broken an oath. It is conspicuous that the ancestors of the Qing imperial house made reference to oaths not in instances of peace-building. Their goal in story-telling

about oaths was not to pacify a tense situation and bring the parties back together to seek a solution. Rather, they referred to oaths in order to justify a declaration of war or to mark a shift in diplomatic tone. These findings confirm the polyvalent character of oaths also in the context of their narrativity. Oaths were not only a means of peace-making, but also an instrument to exert pressure on political partners [Scharff, 2016. P. 297f].

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, reference was made to characteristics of ritual actions as defined by Michaels, namely their intentional performance, their formality, their framing, their indicating change and transformation and their evocation of a higher reality [Michaels, 2003. P. 4–5]. The identification of these elements in the context of Manchu-Mongolian oaths was helpful for defining the polyvalent character of this practice and its various areas of implementation. Oaths were among the practices which could be strategically employed both by individual actors and by groups in order to consolidate power and influence.

On a political level, involving multiple swearers was a way of integrating both polities and individuals into an agreement. When in the "trusting words" leading personalities of the participating polities are mentioned, this underlines their function as guarantors. Their naming also reflects their position within the internal hierarchy of a certain political formation.

This paper also suggests that Manchu-Mongolian oaths should not only be investigated on the grounds of historical records as ritual roadmaps. It is also most instructive to look at the way how historical actors referred to oaths in order to strengthen a certain argument and thus invented oaths as a particular narrative. An analysis of the rhetoric strategies of Manchu Khans in the early 17th century arguable reflects that in political discourse, oaths were used as a valid justification to adopt a harder line. Reference to both, the legal and the religious dimensions of an oath could make an argument more emotional and convincing. The multidimensional nature of the oath and its entrenchment in different spheres of human existence made it an attractive diplomatic tool in Manchu-Mongolian relations in the 17th century.

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[12] On this rhetorical device see [Scharff, 2016. P. 225f].

[13] *tngri ɣajar-tu itegel-tü ügeben kelelčejü sačul-i sačuɣsan-i ebdejü* [Di Cosmo & Bao, 2003. P. 61].

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