

The Evolvement of Pasture Use in an Altai Valley (Dund Tömört): Reconstructing the Chronology Based on Oral History

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This paper attempts to show the chronological development of pastoral use strategies, pasture division and changes in ownership relations within the Dund Tömört valley (Ulaanhus bag, Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii province, Mongolia), one of two sub-areas within the Ulaanhus bag and containing the highest concentration of spring and summer herding positions of the Altai Uriankhai ethnic group. Reconstructed through oral history, the chronology provides a detailed description of pastoral development from the time of cooperatives (negdel) through the period of privatisation to the recent period of rapid decrease in the number of pastoral households. This microhistorical case study aims to explore the informative potential of oral historical sources in studying the local chronology of pasture use.

Key words: mobile pastoralism, movement patterns, adaptive strategies, oral sources, interethnic relations, pasture management

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1. Introduction

This paper was written within the framework of a five-year research project, which has aimed, among other goals, at conceptualizing the relationship of selected sample groups of Mongolian rural pastoral communities to the landscape they inhabit (landscape identity), as manifested in their oral-historical memory.¹ This research operates with the assumption that in Inner Asian societies based economically on mobile pastoralism,² there has been a shift from the historical emphasis on belonging to administrative units with a weak relationship to the inhabited territory toward a significantly strengthened relationship of territorially bound identity. In this article, I will present the preliminary results of my documentation of oral memory of pastoral mobility in one sub-valley in the Mongolian Altai Mountains (Dund Tömört³).

I conducted research on the oral memory of pastoral mobility systematically from 2022 to 2025 in two administrative units belonging to the lowest-level (*bag*: Ulaanhus bag and Sömköl bag) of the district (*sum*) Bulgan of Bayan-Ölgii Province in Western Mongolia.⁴ This area belongs to the most remote regions of Mongolia, and due to its mountainous terrain and high altitude, is still difficult to access. My research followed up on several previous annual 1-2-month field research terms in the same area, which focused on the general community historical memory of the Altai Uriankhai ethnic group (in 2012–2014 as preliminary acquaintance, in 2015–2020 as local-family-based participant observation and participant listening). Consequently, this research into the oral memory of pastoral mobility was initiated in the context

of a high degree of mutual familiarisation between the present author as a researcher and the entire local community, and the establishment of full trust by the community in the ethical integrity of the researcher, after acquiring basic orientation in the local conditions and no less with the mutual realisation that the results of my research would be interesting and welcome (if not “useful” in the strictly utilitarian sense) for the local community.

2. Oral Memory and Memory of Landscape

Western academic discourse usually draws a strict demarcation between oral history and oral tradition (oral tradition as source of history). Oral history is limited to the personal memories of individuals concerning a period in their lives as well as their lived experience (Vaněk – Mücke 2015: 14). Oral tradition, by contrast, is defined as having been passed down through at least one generation; nor does it necessarily have to concern the past (Vansina 1985: 28). If we want to distinguish between “oral history” and “oral tradition” in the Mongolian narratives, we find that the first category corresponds to eyewitness testimonies – “what I saw with my own eyes” (*nüdeeree üzsen yum*), while the second category corresponds to “what was heard” (*sonsvor*) or “what people or elders told each other” (*amitan küündej baisan yum*, *kokščuud küündej baisan yum*). Usually, the narrator refuses to confirm the reliability of information from the second category (“I don’t know if it’s true or false” *ünen hudal’ii medehgüi*). However, when old people confront various hearsay accounts about the past (*tüühiin sonsvor*), the ones they usually consider as true are those received from their parents or other elders, whom they fully trusted and “who could not lie” (*hudal keldeggüi*). From the point of view of the narrators, the main criterion for the admitted truthfulness of “history” is the declared relationship to one’s own community and to the landscape that this community inhabits. The relationship to the community is usually expressed by a genealogical connection to a person who is currently living, while the relationship to the landscape is expressed by a reference to a specific and locally generally known place with its individual name.

According to Pierre Nora (1989), memory is, unlike history, characterised by the preservation of this emotional, subjective connection with the past. Anthropologist Manduhai Buyandelger (Buyandelger 2013: 17) relates

the technical term “memory” in the thinking of Mongolian nomads to the verb *sanah* (“to remember, to recall”) and emphasises that memory is not “a static object, but an activity undertaken by an emotionally and cognitively engaged individual.”

From a practical point of view and influenced by the nature of the research process,⁵ each piece of information in this article is referred back to its specific bearer. However, it should be noted that such information is equally part of a collective memory in the sense formulated by Maurice Halbwachs (1950) – the awareness of the pastures’ use established an unwritten claim to its continuity. Collective memory is highly dynamic, changeable, enlivened, supplemented and developed by continuous, intensive social communication, which provides not only new information (about the present), but also about the past.

During the research interviews, the need to talk about this part of memory is artificially induced by myself as a researcher. Although the shared knowledge under consideration (memory of the past use of pastures) is still a living part of active social relationships, it may not appear in everyday communication as frequently as I would need for research findings. However, the memories are closely related to the social frameworks (here the local ethnic and administrative community), thus providing the tools and contexts for remembering – once a considerable part of the community (entire family units) leave the area, their memory fades and eventually ruptures. This situation of memory-destruction itself evokes the need for both tangible and intangible means to help to re-establish the memory relationship with places, persons and events (the concept of “realms/places of memory” *lieux de mémoire* as conceived by Pierre Nora 1984–1992). This is the case of the Būūvei family, and the ritual reappropriation of their winter encampment site described below.

The memory of pastoral sites belongs basically to the type of “communicative memory” (*das kommunikative Gedächtnis*) as defined by Jan Assmann (1988: 10): informal, retrieved and revived by everyday social interaction, and usually spanning no more than three generations back. However, once the community is linked to the area, there begins to appear a longer cultural memory, linked mostly to fixed points (significant stones, building relics, graves), which can solidify the memory and allow it to be passed down for a somewhat lengthier period of time.

Key ideas in memory studies related to the landscape were developed by Christopher Tilley (e.g., Tilley 1994, Tilley – Camero-Daum 2017) and Tim Ingold (1993). Although the present research of the oral memory of Altai Uriankhai shares and further develops many of their theoretical emphases, we do not have the opportunity to elaborate on them in this limited space. One vital insight has been Tilley's focus on how the subjective experience of moving through the landscape influences the memory – although dwelling in the same landscape, not all herders will fully experience the highly rugged alpine landscapes. Herders engaged in hunting will have perfect knowledge of even the difficult-to-access mountain crevices, while the experience of purely pastoral individuals is limited to the pasture zones. In turn, women's experience is often limited to the immediate vicinity of their household encampments. While men perceive the landscape for most of the day from the mountain ridges, women have predominantly the opposite perspective from the depths of the valleys, a difference in views corresponding to Ingold's concept of the "taskscape." The researchers' even more limited subjective experience of the landscape further distorts the transmitted fragments of memory. Further, both personal and collective memory of the landscape change with the number of personal engagements with individual places, not to mention the cumulative narratives linked to them which are often derived from others.

Simon Schama (1995) argued that landscapes are not merely formed by their visible geographical features, but are also products of the human mind, created through the accumulation of cultural memory. To no lesser a degree do the people of Altai Uriankhai construct their own landscape through collective myths, traditions, and historical tales. At the beginning of their settlement in the Altai Mountains, the Altai Uriankhai people themselves were said to have established the boundaries of their territory (Srba 2019: 69), further demarcating it with sacred boundary cairns, the *ovoo*-stones (Srba 2019: 57). In turn, the boundary territories are commemorated through legitimizing narratives about heroes who stood up for the property rights of their people against the allegedly illegitimate demands of their neighbours (Srba 2019: 97). The construction of landscapes through ties of individual users and ownership reaches less far back

in time, but it shapes the perception of the landscape perhaps even more strongly than founding stories. The memory of land use and pasture use allows us to approach variations in stability and mobility from which more general definitions and ideas about the nature of nomadic or mobile pastoralism can be derived.

3. Historical context

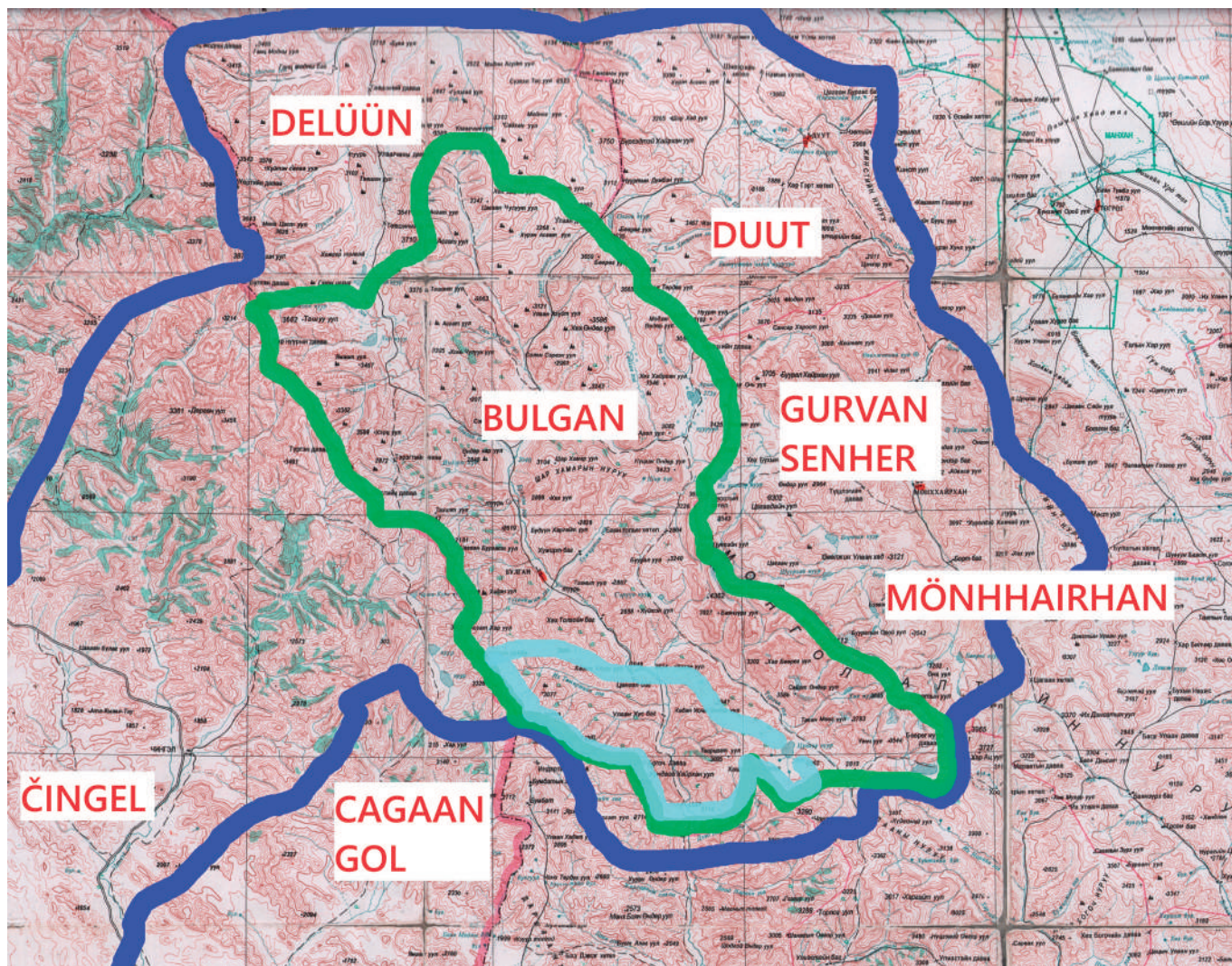
Currently, the investigated area is populated with the intermingling of two mutually separate ethnic groups – the Altai Uriankhai (nationally self-identifying as an ethnic subgroup of the Mongols)⁶ and Kazakhs⁷ (representing a separate nationality within Mongolia). The continuous presence of the Altai Uriankhai in this region has lasted for approximately 270 years, while the presence of Kazakhs in this locality has only been reported since the 1930s. Another Oirat Mongolian subgroup – the Torguud, living in the neighbourhood of the Altai Uriankhai since 1771, currently as the majority subgroup in the neighbouring sum Bulgan, Hovd province (on the lower part of the Bulgan River basin) – has been using the peripheral sections of the summer areas in the southern part of the Bayan-Ölgii Bulgan sum.

According to the official Qing historiography and archival documents in the First Historical Archives of China, the Altai Uriankhai banners,⁸ which were formally organised by the Qing military leadership following the submission of several Uriankhai chiefs (with the title of *zaisan*) in 1754 and 1755 (Oyuunjargal 2009: 169; Srba 2018: 10–11), were assigned territories matching the later Altai Uriankhai Seven Banners on both sides of the Mongolian Altai Mountains around 1760 (Oyuunjargal 2009: 172–173; Srba 2018: 12). In 1762, the division into the Seven Banners was officially confirmed by the emperor Qialong. It is likely that especially the borders of the easternmost of the seven banners, administered by the hereditary nobleman Töbsin and his descendants with the title *Ma./Mo. sula amban* ("wing governor")⁹ stabilised only at the beginning of the 1760s.

The ancestors of the residents of the present-day Bayan-Ölgii province Bulgan sum belonged to the banner of the wing governor Töbsin and his descendants, popularly using the simplified name Right Chief Banner (*baruun ambanii hošuu*). The banner territory included the basin of the Čingel River, the Bulgan River and part

of the present-day Delüün sum. After two banners of the Torguud came to the Bulgan River in 1771 (supplemented by one banner of the Khoshuud in 1792), the Altai Uriankhai, according to tradition, voluntarily ceded the basin of the Cagaan Gol river and the lower reaches of the Bulgan River. In exchange for this loss, the Altai Uriankhai asked for additional territory and in 1772 were offered the basin of the Three Senhers (Gurvan Senher,

now the sums of Duut and Mönhhairhan as well as the border of the Manhan sum; Srba 2018: 13, 44–46). An archival document concerning the search for fugitive subjects, dated 1774, indicates that the pastoral households of the Right Chief Banner spent the summer in the Čingel and probably also the Delüün river basins, while in the autumn (late September, early October) they concentrated on the Bulgan River.¹⁰ Throughout



Map No. 1: Within dark black line: Former area of the Right Chief Banner (Baruun ambanii hoşuu) in the Qing period. Medium gray line: Current extent of Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii province. Light gray line: Administrative area of the Ulaanhus bag, in which the Dund Tömört valley is located

4. Geographical situation

In Ulaanhus bag, Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii province, Mongolia, the current population of mobile pastoralists belonging to the ethnic subgroup of the Altai Uriankhai concentrate their summer grazing activities in two separate sub-areas with significantly different natural conditions – one in the vast plain in the vicinity of Lake Sönköl to the east of the Bulgan River and the other in the steep mountain valleys of the so-called Western Ridges (*Hoid nurgan*) to the west of the Bulgan River (and adjacent to the national border). This division creates two informal – and continuously overlapping – groups in the closely interconnected local community, each with slightly differing strategies of seasonal pastoral mobility. This paper attempts to show the chronological development of pastoral use strategies, pasture division and changes in ownership relations within the Dund Tömört valley. On the theoretical level, this research intends to complement the already numerous studies of spatial ethnography of Mongolian nomadic pastoralism (alternatively denoted as mobile pastoralism due to its high level of territory-bound seasonally repeated rotation of positions and pastures; see e.g., Marchina 2021), with research investigating the longer chronological perspective to demonstrate the internal dynamics and historical contexts of the motivations for changes in habitual movement patterns.

In the present situation, proceeding from its mouth, the Dund Tömört valley includes a moderate narrow strip of willow thicket, once very dense and now moderately thinned, mixed with caragana bushes around the calm but regularly flooding watercourse of the Dund Tömört River. The surrounding area has arid slopes, steeper on the left side of the stream, gentler on the right, containing relatively short and shallow gulleys. If we proceed upstream, solitary larches, only rarely mixed with poplars, appear with increasing frequency around the stream. The larch forest eventually thickens and forms a small, more continuous stands of trees around the confluence of the main watercourse of the Dund Tömört and the right tributary Hargait – this is the so-called Dund Tömörtiin belčir (“Dund Tömört Confluence”). If we proceed along the stream, after only half a kilometre we come to the confluence with the tributary valley Horj. After another kilometre and a half, we reach the upper limit of larch occurring on the bank, and the highest spring

site below the mouth of the shallow swale (Jigjiin dav). From here, the main valley turns south and rises steeply into a steep ravine-like narrow valley called Derveedeg, which is the actual source of the Dund Tömört River. Between the highest spring encampments and summer sites, sites can be found for extensive wintering for small livestock (sheep and goats).

5. Development of the distribution of pastoral households

5.1 The pre-collectivisation period

Dund Tömört valley, a parallel valley to lh Tömört but almost half as short, underwent a different development than lh Tömört, which was a natural link between the Bulgan River valley and the Čingel River basin on opposite sides of the Altai Mountains. Dund Tömört, by contrast, is almost devoid of references to the old banner society. Only at the very confluence of the Dund Tömört River and the Bulgan River, one oral memory noted the presence of a willow tree to which the former representative of the banner, Čültem *da lama* (“monastery administrator”), tied his horses, and was therefore probably the place of his temporary residence, i.e., between 1916–1930, when Čültem held this function, in 1927 renamed the banner chairmen (Mo. *qosiγun-u daruy-a*). In late 1929 or 1930, he moved to Čingel followed by the majority of the local population.

Another oral mention¹² referring to the early periods of the Altai Uriankhai presence in Dund Tömört is that of the grave of the deceased Torguud bride of the Uriankhai banner governor, Jamiyanjav (1908–1969), supposedly slain by a curse transmitted by a rejected suitor; the alleged gravestone is located on the upper edge of the mouth of Jigjiin dav. The event, which is a key narrative in the local oral tradition (see Srba 2015 and Srba 2019: 228–248), is nonetheless mostly considered to refer to another place on the Bulgan River (the burial place of the bride: Gombiin dav) and most tradition-bearers reject this marginal variant which declares that it took place in Dund Tömört.

Another old place name in Dund Tömört is the “Chinese yard” (*Kitadiin hašaa*), which, according to prevailing opinion was supposed to serve Chinese iron-ore miners. According to some local residents, the presence

of Chinese miners has reportedly been confirmed by recent archaeological surveys.¹³ The name “Chinese yard” refers to the left river shore, its bank now largely sodden, on the other side of the present-day spring shelter of Aguul.¹⁴ However, another version of the narrative shared by several information-providers claims that no real Chinese ever came to this valley. Instead, the “Chinese yard” was a site looted by Kazakh robbers, and because the Kazakhs came from Xinjiang, i.e. China, this place received its name from them.¹⁵

It is likely that the oral memory of the Kazakh raid in Dund Tömört, during which a group of yurt households on the opposite bank of the mouth of the Horj Valley were looted, dates to the 1940s. Perhaps chronologically related is the oral tradition about hiding from Kazakh plundering in the Deed Bulag valley, downstream of the Bulgan River.¹⁶ The main wave of Kazakh bandit raids during the Osman Batur uprising (after breaking his alliance with the Mongolian People’s Republic to ally with the Guomindang and to subsequently attack the Mongolian borderlands in 1946–1948) avoided the upper Bulgan River basin, but even the marginal reverberations of the fighting strongly marked life in this region which, at that moment in time, had received a large wave of Kazakh immigrants.

Another place bearing a memory from the pre-collectivisation period is the site of an alleged suicide of an elderly woman who hanged herself from the branch of a larch tree; named Šürt, she was said to have worn a number of precious beads (the name Šürt itself means “with corals”, but current information providers prefer to consider it her personal name as opposed to a nickname). The site is called Olon Bulag (“Many Springs”) and stands out for its lush grass within a sparse larch forest. Due to this ritual pollution of the site, the location of this abundant spring, after the woman’s suicide, was never more used as pastoral grounds (except in the 1990s briefly by Čimediin Dorjpalam). Given that Šürt does not appear in the oral genealogies of any current residents, it is possible that this event dates from a yet more distant past.

In the present-day area of the spring encampments area within the Dund Tömört valley, the most frequently mentioned location is the grassy area on the banks of the Dund Tömört River, the usual wintering grounds for Olconii Būūvei (1884–1967), who was famous for his

high number of 12 children, all of whom survived to adulthood and through whom almost all Uriankhai families in the Ulaanus bag have kinship ties to Būūvei (Otgonbayar – Mandah 2011: 17). Among the currently living herders, Č. Dorjpalam (*1960) mentions this site as a regular wintering place in his preschool age until 1967,¹⁷ when the family started to winter in the main valley of the Bulgan River, i.e. also closer to the school in Šüvter bag centre. During the period of collective farming, this location was used by families who were not core herders of the negdel and only took care of their own private livestock. In the 1970s, this place was used in autumn by the herding unit of Čimediin Onkok together with Ligdenii Bödlöö. He was later twice awarded the title of state champion herder (*ulsiin hošoi avraga malčin*), even though he was still only an assistant herder – although, of course, the herds must have been in the mountains throughout the late autumn.

A few years ago, Būūvei’s descendants founded an “Ancestral Fund NGO” (*Buurliin san TBB*) which supports commemorative events and provides mutual aid between relatives. A symbolic tie to the ancestral region is represented by the claim of permanent belonging to this previously transient encampment site (used regularly by Būūvei between the 1920s and 1960s as wintering grounds), ensuring its current ownership in the hands of a family member (Būūvei’s grandson M. Očirbat is now using the land as a hay meadow) and building commemorative monuments in its vicinity: this includes the commemorative stone busts of Būūvei and his wife B. Norov (1899–1973), their son Būūvein Perenlei (1927–2004) and his wife J. Horloo (1932–2019), stelae bearing the names of persons born in this locality, facilities for community celebrations and a stupa (*suvraga*) on a nearby mountain spur, surrounded by a fenced area with bushes planted in the shape of a bow, an Uriankhai cultural symbol. This series of memory-recalling building projects culminated in a ceremonial gathering of relatives in August 2024.

In the 1940s, the upper part of Dund Tömört – similarly to the other valleys on the right bank of the Bulgan River flowing from the Chinese border and especially the Indert Valley – was temporarily forbidden to most of the herders as a larger frontier belt. The Dund Tömört Valley was perhaps less strict in this regard, as its upper tributaries do not reach the border directly. In the 1950s, with the temporary harmonisation of Mongolia’s relations

with the People's Republic of China, the border zone for herders was partially reopened. Around the year 1950, one natural death reportedly occurred below the mouth of the Horj ravine (Kokaan Jambal), indicating the presence of this family during that time.

5.2 The collectivisation period – the spring encampments in Dund Tömört

The 1950s were the period of the most sweeping administrative shifts and changes in the history of the Mongolian People's Republic, often associated with the emergence of the first collective agricultural units of the new generation, called *negdel* ("cooperatives").¹⁸ For the Bulgan River basin specifically, the Hujirt sum unit established in 1938 (and continuously transferred from the subordination of the Hovd Province to the newly created Bayan-Ölgii Province in 1940) was in 1952 divided into two units: Hujirt (the upper part of Bulgan River till the confluence of Hujirt and Bulgan Rivers) and Bulgan (from Höh tolgoi/Kök tolhaa to the confluence of Dood narin and Bulgan Rivers, i.e. the middle part of the Bulgan River basin; Taqyrhan – Zeinel 2008: 234). While Hujirt sum consisted mostly of Kazakhs, Bulgan sum was half-Kazakh and half-Mongolian (Uriankhai). Hujirt sum used the old administrative centre by the Yolt River, where the headquarters of the banner office was documented in the late 1920s (Srba 2018: 134); Bulgan sum chose as its centre a location called Šüvter, approximately in the geographical centre of the entire region. According to the surviving scheme of the emergency winter grazing plan for small livestock from about 1954, the sum contained 7 bags (the smallest administrative units) marked with numbers:¹⁹ the 1st bag was located on the Baga Narin River (now Deed Narin), the 2nd bag on the right bank of the Sönköl (Cönhöl) River, the 3rd bag under the Höh Tolgoi Mountain on the left bank of the Bulgan River, the 4th bag on the Dund Tömört River, the 5th bag on the left bank of the Sönköl (Cönhöl) River, the 6th bag on the lh Narin River (now Dood Narin) River and the 7th bag on the lh Tömört River.²⁰ However, it is unclear as to how permanent this division was, because in August 1956 it was decided to redistribute bags nos. 1, 2 and 6 to the sum of the same name Bulgan of the Hovd Province (in the lowest part of the Bulgan River Basin). Given that this switch involved the transfer of

the territory of the Dood Narin and Deed Narin rivers on the left side of the Bulgan River, and part of the territory of the Indert River and the entire Tošint River on the right side of the Bulgan River, the above-mentioned map indicated bags nos. 1 and 6, while bag no. 2 was marked in the very geographical core of the sum (unless the move was a transfer of the Kazakh population, but this has not yet been documented).²¹ Similarly, two bags were taken from the Hujirt sum in August 1956 and attached to the neighbouring Delüün sum in the north (the border became the Ulaagčïn Davaa pass). The two sums, territorially reduced, were united into one entity – Bulgan sum (alternatively still called Hujirt), with a new administrative centre between the mouths of the Narin Jargalant and Tuulait rivers. However, in the spring of 1959, the situation was temporarily reversed: Bulgan sum within the reduced borders was again divided into Hujirt and Bulgan sums, with their respective centres in Yolt and Šüvter. The last historical merging to survive to this day occurred in 1963, when the construction of a new sum-centre began, while larger bag-centres with separate elementary schools remained in the localities of Yolt and Šüvter.

The first collective herding cooperative *negdel* (including its own agricultural section) established in Bulgan sum was called *Uria* ("Appeal"). The Province Archives of Bayan-Ölgii have preserved relatively detailed documentation of the first years of its existence since its foundation in 1954, including a list of members, numbers of livestock, the handwritten applications of new members etc. However, almost no records were made on the distribution of pastures, which was evidently considered an internal matter of the herding unit, and not subject to notification to higher levels of administration.

An exception is the schematic map of the territory of the *Uria negdel* from October 1954, which includes the entire basin of the lh Tömört River. The river's individual tributaries are divided into winter pastures (meaning winter grazing of small livestock on the left-hand slopes of the upper course), spring pastures (on the left-hand slopes of the lower course), summer pastures (on the right-hand slopes of the upper course) and autumn pastures (on the right-hand slopes of the upper course).²² Revealing the slight conflict of this layout with the traditional use of pastures is the original name of the valley Havarjaanii Salaa (Spring Encampment Valley), which

according to the map fell into the area of autumn pastures. The centre of the *negdel* is indicated in the vicinity of the wider confluence of the Ih Tömört and the Bulgan River, where the winter positions were then logically located and where the centre of the brigade (*bag*) Ulaanhus was later created.

Due to absences in the archive holdings, it is unknown if any other collective herding unit was established within Bulgan sum in the 1950s. However, as in all of Mongolia, between 1959 and 1960 large herds were nationalised on a large scale using both incentives and indirect coercive means. After the unification of Bulgan and Hujirt sums in 1963, the collective farms of the *negdels* were also united into a single unit – *negdel* with the Kazakh name Saltanat (Tačarčan 2018: 7). The cooperative management divided the predominant herds of goats and sheep into individual herding units (*suuri*, one unit with 400–500 goats), which usually consisted of one leading experienced herdsman and two assistant herdsman. From spring to autumn, the herding unit was also accompanied by the households of the respective entrusted herdsman. The exception was the winter period, when Mongolian cows and horses need to be wintered in warmer, lower-lying locations, typically around the Bulgan River (and in the monitored period, relatively close to schools); sheep and goats, on the other hand, must graze in higher altitudes, typically on the southern, sunny slopes of the mountains, which usually remain snow-free.²³ During the collectivisation period, the maximum number of private livestock per household in Bulgan sum was limited to 75 heads (regardless of species). This was for less active households consisting of older members or with heads of the family devoting themselves to other tasks, from local administration to agriculture to hunting – in both latter cases, these activities were also ordered by and performed within the framework of the cooperative organisation. During the livestock birthing period and the period of intensive milking, individual herding units accepted individuals from the families not directly involved in the *negdel* structure to help with birthing and milking. In addition to these temporary tasks, families with a minimum number of livestock in personal ownership had considerable freedom in terms of choosing the locations for use, and very often they also put their own small quantity of livestock together with the livestock cooperative for grazing.

5.2.1 The Dund Tömört Confluence herding unit

Dund Tömört was not included into the lands of the first Uria cooperative, probably because it was smaller than the Ih Tömört valley and was therefore left to families with small private livestock herds. The situation changed with the full-scale collectivisation around 1960.

The first documented herding unit in Dund Tömört was based in Dund Tömörtiin belčir (Dund Tömörtiin Confluence), where suitable bases for yurts and herds extend for half a kilometre from the mouth of the Horj ravine to the very confluence of the Dund Tömört and the Hargait stream at an altitude of around 2030–2060 m. above sea level. In 1974, a stone enclosure on the left bank was collectively built here as a spring base for the birthing of small livestock. In the 1970s, the core herders of this unit were Čimediin Onkok (1944–2017) and Ayuušiin Jigmed (1929–2001). In their case, it was not an ancestral location, because Jigmed's father Ayuuš in the 1940s used the location in the mountains on the opposite side of the Bulgan River (Čáčirtiin Huurai salaanii Hadaan oroin ötög) in the winter and Lake Sönköl in the summer. However, they possibly had a connection to the place through Jigmed's wife (Jambaliin Orlogor), whose father had died in this place, as mentioned above. In the spring of 1982, Čimediin Onkok led the construction of a second stone enclosure on the other bank of the Dund Tömört River to divide the livestock more effectively. At the same time, however, his wife passed away and, due to worries about their children, he decided to leave his position as head of the herding unit. With only private livestock left, he then alternated between various pastoral grounds, until in 1985 he became employed as an assistant herdsman in the neighbouring unit of the Kazakh leader Husayan (Husain). Onkok was followed by his unmarried sister with her son Batsüh, and in 1986 the young couple of his younger brother Dorjpalam (*1960) (who had returned from central Mongolia, where he had studied and trained as a tractor operator, driver and car mechanic) and his wife joined them. In the spring, they alternated between staying at the “Chinese yard” and the second enclosure of the unit in Hargana tohoi (“Caragana bay”), further downstream on the Dund Tömört River. Onkok used the Horj ravine for a summer camp, while Husayan and his brother Kokson used the summer camp in the more distant Derveedeg ravine.

Meanwhile, in the Dund Tömört Confluence Unit there appears a new assistant herder, Cagaanhüügiin Cendee (?–2014). In 1985, Ayuušiin Batnasan (1942–2002) took over the position of head of the herding unit in Dund Tömört Confluence, where his brother Ayuušiin Jigmed had previously worked, but who had by then moved to the unit in the Bulgan Gorge (Bulganii havcal). Ayuušiin Batnasan started to use the location at the water spring below the upper forest in the Hargait valley (Hargaitiin Havtgai hargain adag) as his summer grounds.

5.2.2 Husayan's herding unit

Since the mid-20th century, Dund Tömört seems to have been already inhabited by several Kazakh families. In the 1970s and 1980s, the current spring sites in Hargana tohoi ("Caragana Bay") and the "Chinese yard" were inhabited by a Kazakh family, Husayan and his brothers Qamai and Koksun, constituting a separate herding unit within the cooperative. This family used the Derveedeg ravine as its summer emplacement and the winter emplacements for small livestock under the sunny rock below the confluence of the Derveedeg and the Kok dav (in the 1990s, then used by Janbolat up till the early 2020s).

5.2.3 The "Buck shelter" (Tekiin hašaa)

During the cooperative era, bucks and rams were grazed separately from the herds and were allowed into individual herds only at during set times. The reason was to ensure relatively short intervals between births in the spring, helping to organise this difficult part of the livestock breeder's working year and assisted by their children who were, at that time, granted special school holidays during the kidding and lambing period. As a result, the bucks and rams formed a separate herding unit (*suuri*) with specially allocated pastures. The spring shelter for the bucks (Ulaanhus bag/brigad specialised in breeding goats rather than sheep in the 1970s and 1980s, while the sheep were concentrated in the neighbouring bag/brigad Sönköl) was established at the mouth of the Dund Tömört valley not far above the place where the river leaves the surrounding mountains and flows into the valley of the Bulgan River; hence the place gained the name Tekiin hašaa ("Buck shelter").

The first herder made responsible for grazing bucks, still remembered by present-day herders, was a Kazakh

named Sayildaа (who worked in this capacity from 1982 to 1984?). Later he was succeeded by an Uriankhai herder Būūvein Lör (whose ancestral grounds were located only 800 m. upstream) who had already a previous experience in grazing bucks and his son Hašhūū (1985–1986). Because the task was very difficult, requiring intense concentration and involving separation from most of the local community for a longer part of the year, the assigned herders rotated much more frequently than members of other herding units. Two years later, the responsibility was assigned to Čuhaan Mendbayar (in this function 1987–1992) and his son Mendbayariin Baldas (from 1992 till the dissolution of the buck herd).

In the cooperative period (1980s), the winter external grazing site and the temporary pasture for bucks was located in Šavaan havarzan, a minor ravine on the little-used right bank of the Bulgan River between the Muhar Tömört and Dund Tömört valleys. The summer pasture for the buck herd in the 1980s was mostly located in the Hargait ravine of Dund Tömört, which was therefore set aside for this purpose and made inaccessible to other herds. One exception was made for the herds of the Torguud from neighbouring Bulgan sum (Hovd province), grazing in the highest localities of the Hargait ravine with the prevailing cattle herds; they grazed their sheep and goats under careful supervision and at a sufficient distance to avoid accidental mixing with the herd of bucks. After 1991 and the unofficial claiming of the Hargait ravine by A. Batnasan, the buck herd was grazed at alternative remote grasslands, such as Köšeen Kök salaa, located in the mountains on the opposite side of the Bulgan River.

5.3 The privatisation period and spring encampments

The democratisation process in Mongolia in 1990 brought about a process of privatisation in two phases, which in the environment of Western Mongolia manifested itself as a locally organised dissolution of the cooperatives. In the autumn of 1991, the so-called "small stocks" (*Baga huvicaa*) were implemented, during which the livestock owned by the cooperative was redistributed on the basis of a lease system (*tūrees*). However, in the spring of 1992, another redistribution of livestock into full private ownership took place according to the number of household members and the working capacity of

the household (as part of a redistribution program known as “big stocks” (*Ih huvicaa*). Oral history narrators in Bulgan sum agree that the distribution of livestock was approached carefully and responsibly and did not cause any significant dissatisfaction. On the contrary, the herders found significant motivation in taking significant numbers of livestock into their own personal responsibility. Although the regular salary income of cooperative employees was now replaced by the necessity of private efforts to sell livestock products on the newly emerging free market, livestock breeding was considered a sure and secure source of livelihood at this time. The 1990s brought a temporary increase in Mongolian herding households in Bulgan sum, matched by the start of a wave of Kazakh migration to Kazakhstan.

5.3.1 The Dund Tömört Confluence herding unit

The older shelter in the Dund Tömört Confluence herding unit was first privatised by the assistant herders of the unit, Cagaanhüügiin Cendee and his brother-in-law Günčini Bataa, who in the 1990s almost always used Horj for their summer grounds. After Cendee's death, his widow and her teenage children began to use the summer grounds of her husband's brother-in-law, R. Čadraabal, at Lake Sönköl. After the eldest son Önöbat started his own family, in 2024 they decided to stay in Dund Tömört again in the summer (2024 first in Derveedeg, in 2025 in Hargaitiin Havtgai hargain adag in the neighbourhood of Batbold). The year 2001 brought the arrival of Batočir, son of the herding unit's former chief Č. Onkok, who in the 1980s resigned from his leadership position for family reasons and later became assistant herdsman in Husayan's neighbouring herding unit. In the 1990s, he built a new independent springtime position in the Muhar Tömört valley, where he also regularly summered in one of the upper branches of the valley (Muhar Tömörtiin Tarlan). Batočir joined Cendee on his spring grounds, thus claiming his father's inheritance for this locality. Cendee and Batočir grazed their flocks together in the spring, just as Cendee's son Önöbat and Batočir later continued to do so.

The second spring livestock shelter in Dund Tömört Confluence (constructed in 1982/4) was privatised by the active chief of the herding unit, A. Batnasan. In 1991, Batnasan's son Batbold took over this location from his father.

5.3.2 Husayan's herding unit

After the final dissolution of the cooperative, Husayan's shelter (the “Chinese yard”) was taken by Husayan's descendants (currently Aguul). The second shelter (“Caragan Bay”) after Koksun was used by Jalal and finally sold to their one-time fellow worker Onkok in 2008. The shelter was inherited and is actively used by Onkok's nephew U. Batsüh and Onkok's daughter-in-law (widow after his son Tulgaa) T. Uuganbilig.

5.3.3 The “Buck shelter” (Tekiin hašaa)

The “Buck shelter” itself was privatised as early as 1991 by Būüvein Minjūür and remade into a fixed, combined winter-and-spring position. In 1994, 1996 and 2003 this place was also shared by Minjūür's adoptive son (son of Minjūür's eldest sister Šarkövüün's daughter Mideg/Myadag (1938–2018) Očirbat (*1975), commonly known under his nickname Maamuška. Following the relocation of Minjūür and his other children to Ulaanbaatar in 2004, Maamuška became owner of the position. On the opposite side of the Dund Tömört River, a new combined winter-and-spring position of Mendbayariin Baldas (*1980), son of the previous herder of bucks Mendbayar, was established as a separate homestead. Briefly after 1991, Mendbayar and his son Baldas continued to take care of bucks and rams, no longer within the cooperative organisation, but solely through agreement with local shepherds, yet by 1997, the buck herd was dissolved. In this period, Mendbayar and Baldas used their own spring position in Muhar Tömörtiin Eknee usan (until 1997, together with Š. Torguud) and later changed it for a slightly lower locale known as Muhar Tömörtiin Adagiin usan, which they have been habitually using up till today.

In 2023 Maamuška purchased a new spring position in Dund Tömört from a Kazakh herder Janbolat (a position called Cagaan davaan aman) and has used it since 2024 as a separate spring position to increase pasture rotation as well as providing an area for hay-making. Although the opposite process of abandoning spring positions can be observed in many households of Bulgan sum, in the case of Maamuška, this positive shift in terms of grassland protection was possibly due to the overall decrease in households farming within the Dund Tömört valley.

5.3.4 New spring herding locations

The new spring herding locations in Dund Tömört reflect the increasing number of livestock during the 1990s and 2000s. One of the newly established springtime locations was the previously mentioned farmstead of Janbolat (his brother Qamalbai moved away already in the 1990s), now owned by Očirbat. Two new farmsteads were built in the lower part of Hargana tohoi by Tüvšeen Mönkbat in the 2000s (after his relocation out of Bulgan sum was abandoned) and his brother-in-law Č. Dorjpalam (established in 2018) in the vicinity of the old lower Husayan's herding unit shelter now possessed by U. Batsüh, where Č. Dorjpalam joined the cooperating households.

The spring pastures around the Dund Tömört Confluence became overcrowded in the 1990s, so in 1995, one of Cendee's brothers, Kököö (after he had left his original profession as a driver and became a herder), began to use the grasslands above Olon bulag below the mouth of the Jigjidiin dav as a springtime base. Gradually, several cooperating households came here, of which finally (after Kököö's departure to Ulaanbaatar in 2010) only his successor remained, his nephew Jamišiin Tömörbat (*1975). This location also allowed a very easy transition from the external winter grazing of goats and sheep, centred around the former Kököö's winter dung position (*ötög*), now used by Tömörbat.

5.4 The collectivisation period – summer pastures

As mentioned above, the Dund Tömört valley in its upper reaches includes three separate smaller valleys or ravines appropriate for summer grazing of livestock: Hargait, Horj and Derveedeg. Each of the ravines includes several patches of larch woodland (forest islands) with established names that serve to define specific parts of the valley.

- Hargait: Hargaitiin havtgai hargai (the upper larch forest of Hargait), Hargaitiin dund hargai (the middle larch forest of Hargait), Hargaitiin adgiin hargai (the lowest larch forest of Hargait)
- Horj: only one large forest island;
- Derveedeg: Derveedgiin eknee hargai *or* havtgai hargai (the upper larch forest of Derveedeg), Derveedgiin dund hargai (the middle larch forest of Derveedeg), Derveedgiin adgiin hargai (the lowest larch forest of Derveedeg).

In case of Hargaitiin havtgai hargai (the uppermost larch forest of Hargait) expressions as:

- *hargain eken* – “the upper edge of the forest”;
- *hargain eem* – “the upper lateral edge of the forest”;
- *hargain adag* – “the lower edge of the forest” are applied for a detailed definition of the location.

The following section will attempt to describe the chronology of summer pasture use according to the current state of oral memory.

5.4.1 The summer pastures in Hargait: 1980s

The summer pastures in Hargait in 1982 still belonged to the areas claimed by the Onkok's goat-unit. Households caring for kids and lambs were located near the water spring under the lower edge of the Havtgai hargai, while households with adult goats and sheep were at the upper edge of the Havtgai hargai and Hargaitiin eken (two parts: Uvš, Onkok + Cendee). Since 1983, Buural Bataa and Cendee started to prefer Sönköl Lake for their summer pastures. After Batnasan became employed as the new unit leader, he started to use the upper part of the Hargait valley from the upper edge of the forest upwards, while the area around Havtgai hargain adgiin bulag (spring at the lower edge of the uppermost forest) served for bucks, cared for by Kazakh Sayildaa (1982–1984?), later by B. Lör and his son Hašhüü (in 1985–1986) and then Mendbayar (1987–1991). The uppermost part of the Hargait valley was used by Torguud households with numerous cows and yaks.

5.4.2 The summer pastures in Horj

Horj is referred to as a former summer pasture in the early 20th century of the famous Uriankhai wrestler Jumag (for the legends about Jumag see e.g., Srba 2019: 165). A couple, Samyaan Damdin and his wife TÜRÜÜ-nii Togtoh, sister of Jumag, regularly stayed in Horj during the summers in the 1950s. Togtoh is known for her knowledge of the clear script, having taken the lay ordination of *upāsikā* (Oir. *usanz*) before the religious repressions and regularly reciting the Diamond Sutra in the clear script. During the summer of 1962 in Horj, she fell ill, and in the fall had to be taken on a sled to Hargaitiin Belčir, where she subsequently died that autumn. They summered in Horj together with their daughter D. Muuja and son-in-law Cagaadain Buyandelger.²⁴

In the 1970s, the Horj ravine became the summer position for Onkok's herding unit. After 1979, Buyandelger returned to his father's summer pastures in Horj together with his grandson (and adoptive son) Čuluun-očir (previously they used to summer in lh Tömört valley).

5.4.3 The summer pastures in Derveedeg

In the 1970s and 1980s, Derveedeg (supposedly alongside the upper forest lateral line) was used exclusively by Kazakh herders belonging to Husayan's unit. The uppermost parts of the ravine have been used by Torguud herders from Bulgan sum in Hovd province.

5.5 The privatisation period and the summer pastures

In 1991, the three most experienced Uriankhai herders in Dund Tömört theoretically divided their spheres of influence among the three upper ravines. The chief of the Dund Tömört Confluence herding unit, A. Batnasan, declared himself the main authority over the Hargait Valley. The Horj ravine was officially claimed by Č. Onkok and his son O. Batočir, but was left unused by them at that time, as they found, for themselves, larger summer pastures in the Muhar Tömört (Tarlan) valley, then still sufficiently supplied by a natural spring and moreover connected to their new spring in the same valley.



Fig. 1. All present-day summer encampments in Hargait (2025). Photo by Ondřej Srba

In the early 1990s, Derveedeg was still used by Husayan's brothers and their children, but without the encouragements for interethnic cooperation common during the cooperative era, Kazakh families now preferred to spend their summers in purely Kazakh surroundings, increasingly moving to Ih Tömört for the summer. Derveedeg thus remained unused and gradually began to attract the attention of Mongolian families. For the first time, in 1993 a group of Mongolian families spent the summer here, still close by the Kazakh settlers (Bayancagaan, C. Kōkōō, Nyamdeleg, Mišigdorj). Dejidiin Hašhūū's household began to summer regularly in Derveedeg in 2001, although between 2000 and 2015, only the younger generation spent the summer in the mountains, while their parents took care of the travellers' canteen next to the bridge over the Bulgan River. Dorjpalam and his family came to Derveedeg again in 2012 and stayed ever since (except 2018 and 2019). Since 2022, J. Tömörbat has also become a permanent summer user of the pastures in Derveedeg, thus contributing to the creation of a stable Mongolian seasonal settlement.

5.5.1 Summer pastures in Hargait: 1990s–2025

Havtgai hargain bulag (Spring below the Upper Forest): The site was always considered to be the territory over which decisive authority was held by the former unit-leader A. Batnasan and, after his death, his son Batbold. However, the site was used by a large number of cooperating households in the 1990s, as their livestock numbers in the 1990s were not large. Batbold lists up to 11 parallel summering households. After 2000, many of these households left Bulgan, while the livestock numbers of the remaining households gradually increased. The established summering patterns were disrupted by the devastating winter of 2009, but Batbold and his brother Erdei kept the site in permanent use. Batbold decided to guard the summering area against spring grazing of livestock from the spring pasture zone by erecting a fence under Hargaitiin adgiin hargai (the lower forest), but the fence was soon damaged and no longer fulfils its function.

Havtgai hargain eken: Č. Onkok together with his younger brother Dorjpalam, son Batočir and sister Uvš and her son Batsüh summered in Muhartiin Tarlan most summers between 1992 and 2006 (only exceptionally preferring Havtgai Hargaitiin adag). When the water source in

Tarlan dried up, in 2007 they moved over the ridge above the upper boundary of the Havtgai hargai forest, where a water spring was available at the time. After the 2009 severe winter storm (*zud*) calamity, in 2010 and 2011 further households with decimated livestock numbers joined them (Mendbayariin Bayaraa, Jargalsaihan) to take advantage of the good alpine grass. After this water source dried up, they moved to another spring at the uppermost part of the Hargait ravine (Hargaitiin eken, in 2012 and 2013). Since 2014, Batočir and his closest relatives have exclusively used a slightly lower location at the upper lateral edge of the Havtgai hargai forest, and in 2021/2022, they built a simple wooden house here, following the earlier example of their neighbour Batbold. This freed up the lower part of the upper end of the Hargait valley, which the Torguud, who had previously been restricted to the highest part of the valley, began to use.

5.5.2 The summer area in Horj after 1990

As indicated above, Onkok and his son Batsüh initially claimed their historical authority over the Horj ravine but have never used its summer pastures since the 1990s (except summer 1991). The only completely regular summer household in Horj was the household of Čuluun-očir, sometimes accompanied by the households of his sons.

Between 1994 and 2001, the one constant co-user of pastures in Horj was Č. Dorjpalam (the last time having occurred in 2018). Other pastoral households without fixed habitual summering grounds chose Horj as an alternative in some years: Maamuška Očirbat (2012, 2019, and 2021), J. Tömörbat (2019, 2021), U. Batsüh (2022, 2023). In this way after 2015, Horj mostly remained used only by the household of Čuluun-očir, occasionally accompanied by another household without traditionally fixed summer pasture lands. Most of these families gradually gave preference to the more spacious Derveedeg ravine with its more constant neighbourly relationships.

5.5.3 The summer area in Derveedeg

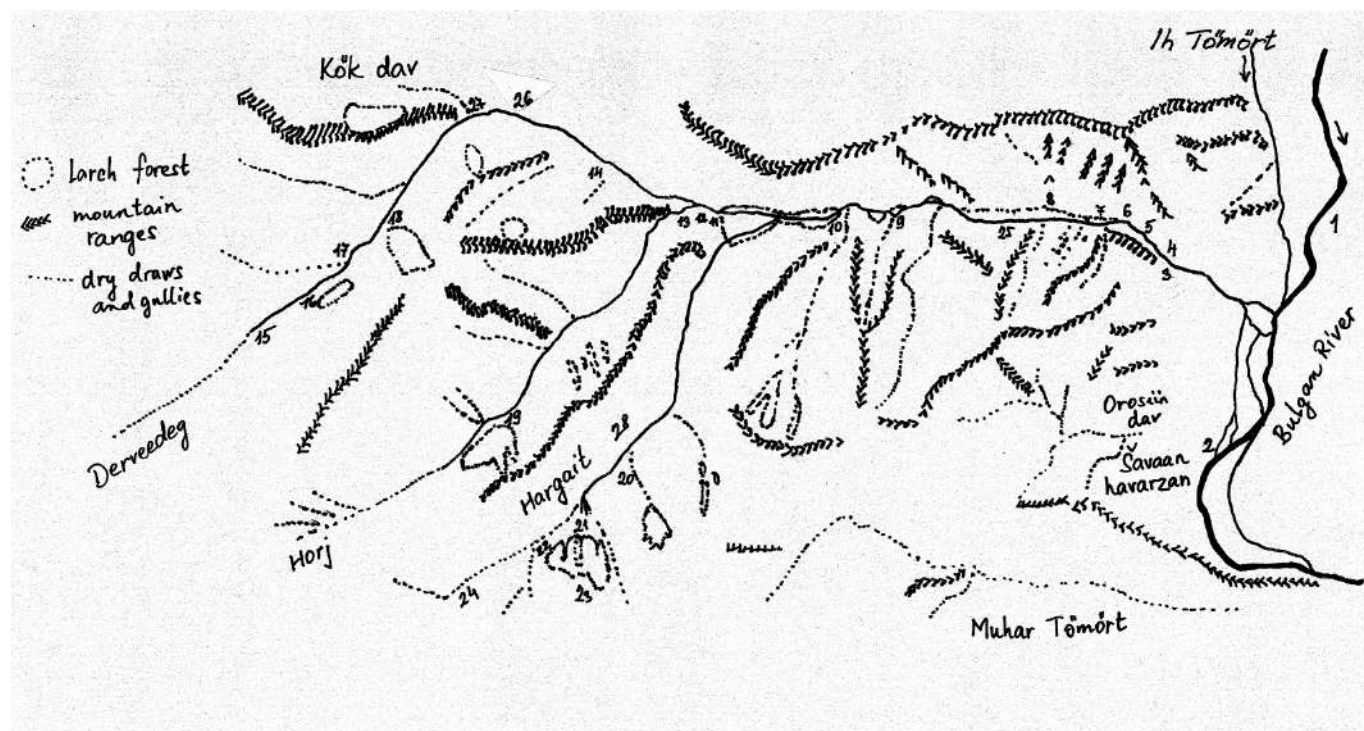
Uriankhai households tried to settle in Derveedeg in summer for the first time in 1993, on a site below the Dund hargai forest (Dorjpalam, Kōkōō, Bayancagaan, Nyamdeleg, Mišigdorj – families then usually summering at Hargaitiin Havtgain hargain adgiin bulag (Spring at the Lower Edge of the Hargait Upper Forest), yet by

the 1990s, this locale was already frequently overcrowded, leading several households to attempt to find alternatives.

The Uriankhai families who gradually established almost constant neighbourly ties were Č. Dorjpalam (since 2012), Dejidiin Hašhüü (since 2001, though rather irregularly due to the summer operation of the restaurant by the bridge), and J. Tömörbat (since 2020 and 2022). Hašhüü, who in his youth served in the herding unit under Onkok's leadership and who had historically strong ties to both Hargait and Horj, opened a restaurant and shop at the new bridge over the Bulgan River, which served traders traveling from Bayan-Ölgii to the newly opened

border crossing and markets in Taikeshkent. His sons took care of the family livestock on the summer pastures; up until 2015 they typically joined other herders in Hargait, and ever since 2015, in Derveedeg. After 2019, the restaurant was closed due to the decrease in travellers passing through and the elderly parents also began to spend their summers in Derveedeg.

In 2024, due to the strong spring flood of the Bulgan River, which destroyed the only bridge in the Ulaanhus bag that allowed vehicles and livestock to cross from the right to the left bank of the river during the migration from the spring encampments to the summer pastures, many families who usually spent the summer at Lake



Map No. 3

Winter encampments (winter encampments alongside the Bulgan river are only recorded when the family uses Dund Tömört for other seasons):

1. Hašhüü; 2. Čuluun-očir; 3. Baldas; 4. Maamuška (Tekiin hašaa); 5. former Būüvei's encampment.

Spring encampments: 6. former Mönhbat encampment; 7. Dorjpalam; 8. Batsüh, Uuganbilig; 9. Janbolat (Maamuška's new spring encamp.);

10. Husayan's encampment (now Aguul); 11. Batbold; 12. Batočir; 13. Önöbold; 14. Tömörbat.

Summer encampments (by place names): 15. Derveedgiin eken; 16. Derveedgin deed hargain eem; 17. Derveedgiin sairiin aman; 18. Derveedgiin dund hargain adag; 19. Horjiin hargain zah; 20. Hargaitiin Dund hargain aman; 21. Hargaitiin Havtgai hargain adag; 22. Hargaitiin Havtgai hargain eem; 23. Hargaitiin Havtgai hargain eken; 24. Hargaitiin eken.

Special autumn encampment: 25. Bayanjargal.

Winter encampments for sheep and goats: 26. Kokiin har ötög (Tömörbat); 27. Kok davaan aman (Janbolat); 28. Hargaitiin ötög..

Sönköl chose instead Dund Tömört – in most cases, the Derveedeg ravine, where the largest accumulation of households occurred. The households were divided into several cooperating neighbourhoods (*hot*, from the lowest to the highest altitude):

- a) Batčuluun, Erencenbyamba, Jargal, Baasta,
- b) Hašhüü, Pürevhüü, Palagvar,
- c) Tömörbat, Dorjpalam, Önöbat,
- d) Hugraa (from Bulgan sum, Hovd province).

In the summer of 2025, Erencenbyamba, from the first group, again chose his habitual summering locale in Bimbiin salaa; Önöbat decided to summer together with B. Batbold in Hargait, while Batčuluun stayed again on his habitual summering locale on the bank of Lake Sönköl.

6. Conclusion

This article was based exclusively on documentation of the currently preserved oral memory of the present-day active herders in the Dund Tömört valley. It shows that the oral memory of pastoral use of the area goes back in exceptional cases to the 1950s (only fragmentarily to 1940s or earlier) but a comprehensive image can only be compiled for the period of time beginning in the 1970s. Even so, this documentation cannot be supported by local archival sources, because, at least for the socialist period and the 1990s, they do not contain this type of information. Here, orally reported memory testimonies about earlier ties to specific locations play a significant role in the appropriation and legalisation of claims to individual territories and the creation of cooperating pastoralist neighbourhoods.

The pastoral use of the Dund Tömört valley corresponds to the situation when the valleys close to the state border were strictly guarded in the 1940s (and less strictly so in the 1960s and 1970s) against the free movement of herders unless directly authorised to work in this area. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Dund Tömör valley had a relatively balanced ratio of Mongolian and Kazakh households, among which the most stable were two goat herding units (1 Kazakh, 1 Uriankhai) and an ethnically alternately managed buck unit.

The privatisation of livestock in 1991 and 1992 brought a rapid increase of herding households, along with relatively large fluctuation and mobility caused by the search for suitable locales and the formation of

neighbourly relations in a society no longer organised from above by collective management. After 2000, many households completely left Bulgan, reducing the number of households, but the total increase of livestock led to lower numbers of collaborating households in one *hot* conglomeration. The Great Zud (snowstorm catastrophe) of the winter of 2009 – 2010 again stimulated the search for new habitual locales. In the long term, however, the remaining herding families tend to use stable seasonal locations and lower variability in their movement patterns, partially caused by the increasing average age of household members and the absence of the younger generation. However, the sudden vacating of a suitable location after a family moves out may also motivate a change in seasonal movement strategy.

In the period between 2010 and 2025, it is possible to define two groups: herders who adhere rather strictly to decades-old movement patterns (B. Čuluun-öčir, B. Batbold), and active herders of middle age with a smaller quantity of livestock who continuously try new locations and various inhabited areas (e.g.: Maamuška, U. Batsüh, C. Önöbat), sometimes for personal, family or even random reasons such as organizing festivals, anniversaries, convenience of transport, and so on.

In the summer period, the local situation presents the less-settled herders with the dilemma of choosing a summer residence in Dund Tömört, or instead on the plateau on the other side of the Bulgan River, at Lake Sönköl. The first option (Dund Tömört) has the advantage of easy and close transportation from the spring to the summer position, along with relatively good high-altitude pastures. The disadvantage is the need for constant daily supervision of the grazing herds of goats and sheep, due to the ruggedness of the mountain terrain, in contrast to the broad, visually open pastures on the plateau. In some cases, the surrounding settled areas are small, which increases the need for frequent shifts of herding work and decreases the opportunities for rest and entertainment, while the large community of the Altai Uriankhai around Lake Sönköl organises various communal and family festivities during the summer. For other herders, another motivation for choosing the plateau may be the suitability of the surroundings for hunting or for training fast horses for summer races, whereas conditions for both of these activities are limited in Dund Tömört.

Overall, since the 1990s, the Dund Tömört valley has become ethnically more unified (becoming fully Altai Uriankhai), similarly to the neighbouring Ih Tömört valley, which, in contrast, has become almost entirely inhabited by Kazakh families.

This short overview is marked by its restriction to a single valley, though it by no means functions in isolation from the rest of the local area. In view of this circumstance, I have almost completely avoided the issue of winter herding positions located mostly outside Dund Tömört, both in the case of fixed households and in the case of most of the extensive winter positions (*ötög*, “dung position”) for goat and sheep grazing by men taking turns high in the mountains. Apart from the stand of B. Batbold in Hargait and J. Tömörbat in Kok davaan am, these are all located outside Dund Tömört. Moreover, many households in Ulaanus bag have been abandoning personal grazing of livestock over the winter during the last decade and are taking advantage of the opportunity to place their livestock (sheep and goats) in large herds for the winter in the neighbouring sum Mönhhairhan, which has more suitable natural conditions for winter grazing. These issues will require further elaboration.

For a more relevant understanding of how the static construct of landscape memory created by myself as a researcher differs from the memory of the landscape seen by local residents, it would be necessary to follow the references to territorial relationships that appear in unstructured interviews. This experience would probably provide a much stronger perception of the flexibility of memory, its dynamics and plasticity, and moreover not limited and simplified by the individual marginal information that leads me, as an external observer, to a rather simplified positivist description. Living memory undergoes constant reshaping to serve current individual and collective needs and the currently felt identity of the community. However, similar research based on everyday communication would yield a methodologically fundamentally different study than this one, which operates within the bounds of oral history.

Monitoring the changes in ownership of homesteads and use of pastures in the Dund Tömört valley has revealed the relatively late arrival and gradual retreat of the Kazakh population. For the surrounding landscape, Kazakh herders created their own toponyms or used

the Kazakh pronunciation of Mongolian toponyms, which now tend to be forgotten – in parallel with the originally Mongolian toponyms in areas inhabited now entirely by Kazakhs. Hence the landscape is thus coded in two languages in parallel. It should be noted that even the Altai Uriankhai did not inhabit the given area continuously for very long and originally would move seasonally across greater distances than today. It is likely that the relatively high density of place names (almost every small creek and gully) was achieved somewhat recently. The dynamics of oral memory also include the probably high variability of place names, which in the Mongolian Altai may not be much more stable than the reference between the names of herders and the places they inhabit(ed). These two “name landscapes” (for the term *Namenlandschaft* see Nitschke 2006) – the landscape of personal names and the landscape of toponyms – actively intertwine and leave traces upon each other.

Focusing on ownership and user relations to the landscape, this study has not sufficiently emphasised the differences in the perception of the landscape on a gender basis. In parallel, the landscape is perceived differently by pastoralists due to the different species composition of their herds, which requires a different way of moving in the landscape and conditions greater or lesser use of certain zones. Many scholars emphasize that Inner Asian pastoralists perceive their surroundings as “sentient landscapes” filled with a more-than-human sociality (Peemot 2024), where the relationships of humans, domesticated and wild animals, and other living entities represented by material components of the landscape interact. Although I do not have enough material representing this aspect directly in the Dund Tömört valley, there are enough recorded narratives from among the Altai Uriankhai about encounters with local spirits – lords of places – and establishing interactions of mutual communication, granting good fortune, sharing wisdom, and intimate relationships.

The historical oral tradition of the Altai Uriankhai is not a static archival source preserved unchanged since the moment of its creation (old Mongolian archives were aptly called *hevtmel dans* “lying-down records”). It is a conscious interpretation of the most personal historical experience, which its bearers unconsciously pass on as a message to future generations. History in

the understanding of the Mongolian nomads is based on the awareness, with the overall Buddhist context, of causal connections (*üiliin ür*). Such connections can be positive – e.g. good fortune resulting from the merits of parents or more distant ancestors, or negative – a typical example is the noted ritual pollution of the Olon Bulag site, due to a suicide that took place there. The shared oral memory goes beyond present-day society: it runs within its individual and inevitable order; hence it would be unreasonable for all community members to ignore it and not relate to it.

NOTES:

1. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all tradition-bearers and consultants from Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii province, as well as their family members. Additional thanks go to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and guidance. Sincere thanks to Dr. Rachel Mikos for her insightful English proofreading.
2. This study prefers the term mobile pastoralism over the usual term nomadism. Even in the Mongolian Altai Range, degrees and forms of pastoralist mobility differ widely according to local conditions, along with the impact of earlier and recent migrations and sedentarisation. The concept of nomadism is currently frequently discussed as an external conceptualisation and (secondarily) accepted self-fiction (Myadar 2021). Contemporary scholarship, following and reinterpreting the notion of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983), tends to avoid or rethink Euro-American imaginaries about “nomadic societies” in terms of both “exoticism”, “romanticism” and the conception of “difference”. The movement patterns of pastoralists in the present day Bulgan sum partially resemble transhumance, as they are frequently limited to the seasonal movement of livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures.
3. Note concerning the transcription of Mongolian: Modern Mongolian (basing on the Cyrillic orthography) is transcribed in the author’s own simple transcription using simple substitutions of letters (otherwise requiring hyphenation in standard English transcription) $u = c$, $ж = j$, $ч = č$, $ш = š$ and $x = h$. The form “Altai Uriankhai” and other names of Mongolian ethnic subgroups are preserved in the customary English spelling. In references, Cyrillic is preserved for accuracy. Toponyms and some personal names reflect the dialectal peculiarities of the local variety of (Oirat) Mongolian. For Classical Mongolian, I use Poppe’s transcription (apart from j instead of $ᠵ$). Abbreviations: Ma. Manchu, Mong. Modern Mongolian, Mo. Classical Mongolian (Poppe’s transcription). For transcribing Kazakh names, the New Kazakh Latin alphabet of 2021 is used. However, personal names of local Kazakhs from Bulgan sum are rendered in forms commonly used by the local bilingual Mongolo-Kazakh community.
4. Note regarding the use of personal data: All stages of the research (including fieldwork, preservation of the recordings and other related materials, and their analysis and presentation) have been carried out in full accordance with the personal data processing plan

This article has attempted to organise shared narratives about past land use in the Dund Tömört valley into a structured and organised description. I am fully aware that this is primarily my own understanding and vision of the temporal dimension of the landscape shaped by the stories and information provided. It is an imperfect reconstruction based, moreover, on the partially formulated memory of the narrators, which is no less partial, determined by individual interests, the selective nature of memory, and the subjectively conditioned reinterpretation of the transmitted narratives.

approved by the Ethics Committee of Masaryk University for this project. Given that the core materials used within the project are oral history materials (or materials of the transmitted oral tradition) applied to the framework of historical research, the aim has been to transmit the obtained information in as accurate and undistorted way as possible. At the same time, the environment of the Mongolian countryside is highly culturally specific in terms of requirements for working with personal data. In most cases, it is preferable not to anonymise the authorship of oral history statements, because correct attribution of authorship in the outputs is considered as expected and welcome feedback from the perspective of the information providers. The same applies to the immediate focus of this article – direct information about people herding livestock in specific places. Here, anonymisation or even changing the names would completely oppose the interests of information providers. However, I have not in this article provided specific references to the recording numbers, as this would expand the length of the text excessively. The exact source, in the form of recording numbers, will be traceable for the given information in the database of pastoral landscape use, currently being created within the framework of the research project and eventually to be published on its website. The relationship to the territory in use is officially registered by Mongolian authorities in the case of winter and spring settlements, but the general living awareness (whether in relation to the past or the present) is crucial for legitimizing an authentic relationship to the given place or territory. As such, the information provider perceives the inclusion of this information in the research as a part of this legitimisation process (although of course it is not the research’s actual goal). The names of people and places and, for better chronological orientation when relevant, the years of birth (and death) are therefore given in the forms known in the monitored community (not necessarily in a form identical to official documents and official maps), due to the common use of nicknames and abbreviated names. When making recordings and interviews (including unrecorded records in the form of a research diary), informed consent forms were signed in all cases by the information providers, explicitly agreeing to use the relevant information without anonymization. As stated in the text of the article, from the perspective of cultural specifics, the mutual trust built between the researcher and his/

- her local collaborators is significantly more important than written documents.– Note regarding personal names: Current Mongolian names consist of the father's name with the genitive suffix (mostly transcribed as *-iin*) and the personal name, which is considered the person's main name identifier, while the father's name has only secondary importance. Therefore, every person is first mentioned by their full name and in repeated occurrences, either by their personal name only (if unique in the given community) or with the father's name abbreviated, e.g. Ayuushiin Batnasan > A. Batnasan > Batnasan. Abbreviated personal names and nicknames are given preference according to the common use in the current local community.
5. While most interviews are conducted in a pair involving the narrator and researcher, from the viewpoint of Mongolian cultural norms, it would be much more natural to conduct interviews in larger, ideally unorganised groups. It must be said, however that interviews conducted in pairs are more for the convenience of the researcher, who may find it difficult to navigate a spontaneous conversation involving several people, as the natural performance of oral collective memory will occur in a setting of several people conversing among themselves.
 6. The Altai Uriankhai are speakers of an Oirat Mongol variety. Together with the Dörvöd, Zakhchin, Bayad, Ööld and Khoton, they constitute the Oirat community of Western Mongolia and its neighbouring part of the Uyghur AR Xinjiang in the PRC. Additionally, a group of speakers of a Tuvan (Turkic) variety, living in Cengel sum of Hovd province, formed part of the Altai Uriankhai as an administrative unit from 1762 to 1929.
 7. The Kazakhs in Bulgan sum belong to various clans (*ru*) within the larger group of Abaq Kerei Kazakhs, particularly the Jäntekei clan with the branches Botoqara, Bazarqül, Qankeldi, Sekel; and other of the 12 Abaq Kerei clans: Şybaraıǵyr, Iteli, Merkit, Şeruşı, Molqy, Sarybas, Qaraqas. Further, the Naiman tribe and the minor clans Köbek and Tailaq are included (Taqaqan 2018).
 8. Banners (*Ma. gūsa*, *Mo. qosıyū*) were originally administrative and military divisions organizing the whole of Manchu society as well as the first Mongolian and Chinese allies of the Manchus. After the individual Mongol groups of southern Mongolia and later northern Mongolia entered into an alliance with the Qing dynasty, the communities of the subjects of individual hereditary Mongol rulers also adopted the designation "banner," indicating the general obligation of the Mongol rulers to provide military forces for the defensive and expansionist interests of the Qing Empire. After the western Mongolian regions were also annexed, the same administrative model was applied there, although the military character of the banners was diminished, with the banners functioning more as economic units organised by their predominantly hereditary lords as protectors and coordinators of economic operations, including tax collection.
 9. *Mo.* also *sula sayid*, *Chin. sanzhi dachen* 散秩大臣, lit. "great minister without rank" or "great minister with various functions" (Hucker 1985: 396). Here translated as Wing Governor, as this position was held by the director general (*Mo. bügüde-yin daruy-a*) of the largest banner in each of two wings of Altai Uriankhai.
 10. National Archives of Mongolia, Fund M-9, Д-3, ХН-284. Edited by Srba 2018: 93–95.
 11. The most detailed analysis of these events is provided by Ganbold 2022 and Kamimura 2015.
 12. Told to me by Jamišiin Tömörbat (*1975), current owner of the spring encampment near this location. Recording 24.05.2024, No. ZOOM003 51:15-54:49. Mr. Tömörbat kindly accompanied me and showed me the locale in question. Tömörbat heard this information from a local eyewitness, Čogtaan Šaraldaq (1911–1997).
 13. I was unable to find any references to this archaeological survey in published sources.
 14. Told by Uvšiin Batsüh (*1974). Recording 18.08.2025, No. 250818_001.
 15. Information provided by Čimediin Dorjpalam (*1960).
 16. Told by Jigmediin Badrah (*1969). Recording 19.05.2025, No. 250519_005. Badrah heard memories of the Kazakh invasion of Dund Tömört from his father Jigmed (1929–2001), who was about ten years old at the time and lived with his parents above the Dund Tömört Confluence.
 17. The information concerning the dates of the stay of individual households in given places is provided here without references to the source, because detailed databases are being created for individual places and individual households within the project, for which each piece of information will be provided with a reference to the source (the relevant recording).
 18. The first generation of collective farming was introduced in the early 1930s, when herds of livestock were nationalised from the estates of monasteries and the former aristocracy and transferred to the care of the poorest households of the population, part of the so-called process of the nationalisation of feudal property. However, the created communes soon proved their unsustainability due to irresponsible treatment of the acquired livestock and incompetent, unprofessional management, and thus were dissolved after 1932. This first phase did not affect the territory of the Altai Uriankhai.
 19. This number of bags is confirmed by the Decree of the Conference of the Presiding Officers of the National Assembly from 25th July 1952 (Mönh-Očir – Azzaya 2014: 37).
 20. Bayan-Ölgii Province Archives, Ф-20, Д-1, ХН-9, between 1954 and 1956.
 21. According to Mönh-Očir – Azzaya (2014: 39–40; cited also in Srba 2018: 26), two bags from Hujirt sum were transferred to Hovd province Bulgan sum only in 1957.
 22. Bayan-Ölgii Province Archives, Ф-36, ХН-2, Н-1, 1954. *Bulgan sumiin Uria negdeliin gazariin zurag*.
 23. Yaks also stay higher in the mountains during the winter, but most of the time, until the spring birth of their young, they move completely independently without any need for human supervision.
 24. For more details concerning D. Muuja and her mother T. Togtoh, see Srba 2015.

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