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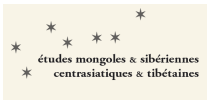
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Points of Transition. Ovoo and the Ritual Remaking of
Religious, Ecological, and Historical Politics in Inner
Asia, followed by Varia

Being skillful. Wisely navigating an intensely heterogeneous cosmos in Mongolia

*Être habile. Circuler avec sagesse dans un cosmos intensément hétérogène en
Mongolie*

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Being skillful. Wisely navigating an intensely heterogeneous cosmos in Mongolia

Être habile. Circuler avec sagesse dans un cosmos intensément hétérogène en Mongolie

Grégory Delaplace and Laurent Legrain

- 1 In the beginning of July 2008, just a few days after riots had been sparked by allegations of electoral fraud, an explosive atmosphere held sway in Ulaanbaatar. Military tanks took to the streets – not a whole lot of them, but it was said to be the first time this happened in Mongolia. When the yearly celebrations of the National festival of *naadam* started, newspapers emphasized the high standard of the manly games¹, they described at length the flight of the arrow that President Nambaryn Enkhbayar (2005-2009) had shot in the opening ceremony, and reported his wish: “may the state policies be *mergen*” (*töriin bodlogo mergen baih boltugai*), that is “wise” or “skillful” – as skillful indeed as an arrow that reaches its aim. Some journalists wrote that, judging from the quality of the manly games held all over the country, Mongol people could hope to experience auspicious conditions up until the next *naadam*. This kind of assertion could just be made out as an instrumental political reaction to the event and, of course, this is partly what it was. The key fact here is that even the political opposition, although ablaze after the recent events, stood still; they too seemed to endorse the same interpretation and bestow the same importance on the way *naadam* had been performed, and among other matters on the “skillfulness” with which the archers’ arrows had been shot. Compared to the previous days, the change of atmosphere was palpable. On each side, for a time, the claimed success of summerly celebrations seemed to lower the political temperature: the focus of public attention had partly shifted to the proper display of a particular virtue, “wisdom” or “skillfulness” (*mergen*), and to the “fortune” (*hishig*) it was supposed to bring to the entire community.
- 2 In this paper, we want to unpack this particular notion of wisdom-as-skillfulness, showing the implications in Mongolia of being *mergen*. We discuss how skillfulness, as a

virtue, may come to be relied on collectively, as the ability of some key characters to take action and make a difference at crucial points of transition like *naadam* festivals and *ovoo* rituals (the two main occasions when manly games are being held). Being skillful like an archer (*mergen*) or like a diviner (*mergech*, *mergen hün*) seems to be treated as a particular brand of prominence, which makes for a crucial resource when a local community beckons fortune in Mongolia².

Outlining the perimeter of a virtue

- 3 If being *mergen* is a virtue, it is not in the sense of a moral rectitude, but rather in that of the embodiment of a force or ability, the actualization of which generates benefits that reflect on the entire community. Before probing into our ethnographic data, we will delineate broadly the scope of what being *mergen* entails. An aphorism is used in Mongolia when a child throws a tantrum or an adult is overwhelmed by anger: “Knowledge comes from angering wise people, folly comes from angering foolish people” (*mergediig horsgovol erdem garah, mungiig horsgovol balag garah*). A lot of lessons could be drawn from such a saying. It plays on an opposition between “wise people” (*merged*) and “stupid” ones (*munag*). While wise people always strive to make the reason of their discontent understood, idiots turn into a rage that can only add to the confusion of an already muddled situation. Wise people depart themselves from the idiots not so much by their display of a measured attitude – although it is important too – but primarily by their understanding of the chain of consequences which might have led to the confusing situation at hand. Wise people know how to learn from the unsettling events they are faced with and eventually how to find their way out of it. In other words – those with which we will propose to interpret what “wisdom” is actually about in Mongolia – they are able to get a grip on the imbalance of operating forces that shape the world they inhabit alongside other, and potentially less wise, people.
- 4 Let us delve somehow deeper into this particular form of “wisdom” that is displayed by people who are said to be *mergen* in Mongolian, by considering the implications of yet another well-known expression: the “wise word” (*mergen üg*). Wise words are said to “hit” their addressee (*onozh helsen üg*). Everyone tries to keep these words in mind because listening to them means first and foremost “taking advice” (*zövlöögöö avah*). Wise words are telling people what to do and how to do it in a particular circumstance, i.e. the “correct” (*zöv*) procedure to follow and the “correct” behavior to display. In 1988, three years before the demise of the socialist state, a book called “Words of the wise People” (*Mergen ardyn üg*) was published. Many forms pertaining to the Mongolian oral literature were subsumed under this encompassing category of “wise words”: proverbs (*zuir tsetsen üg*), riddles (*on’sogo*), songs (*duu*), tales (*ülger*), legends (*domog*), mockery (*hoshin shog*). From the perspective of the author, Ch. Zhachin, the common ground for this disparate collection of oral pieces, dating back from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, lay in the fact that all these words shared the same basic function. All of them indicated to Mongol people how to behave in reaction to the oppressive rules of the Sino-Manchu Qing empire (1644-1911), how to make the attitude of the oppressors an object of ridicule, how to uncover their plots, how to use tricks to retrieve the wealth they extorted from people. As a first approximation, therefore, being *mergen* includes both an ability to see clearly the configuration of multifarious parameters shaping a given situation, and how to build on it to find potentialities for

action³. When people speak about the bearers of this virtue, they say that *mergen* people are “people who know and can” (*meddeg chaddag hün*). Skillfulness seems to point to an ability to absorb the variables of a particular context, to metabolize them and to seize the potential of this new assemblage to set a community on the tone of behavior adapted to a particular situation. It is the enactment of this virtue that turns skillful people into figures of prominence, primarily because everyone thinks that their actions will benefit to everybody.

- 5 The anthropologist Morten Pedersen introduced the notion of “figure of prominence” in the field of Mongolian ethnography in the course of his PhD research. It was in a certain way a continuation of Caroline Humphrey’s work on two contrastive figures: the shaman and the elder (Humphrey with Onon 1996). But Pedersen also drew on Marilyn Strathern’s argument on the personification of power in Melanesia (1991, p. 197), whereby to be prominent in a social group meant to appear to other people as “an epitome or a concentration of valued attributes that made visible what other people could be or could have been”. To put it another way, prominence is the attribute thanks to which a person (or an object) is perceived to stand out from the rest of the group (Pedersen 2002, p. 13). Yet to stand out is an action and therefore to distinguish oneself from others though skillfulness is a process. As for us, the elucidation of the mechanisms of this process and his impact in the life of a community set a kind of working area to put in dialogue our ethnographic data on two connected practices – archery and divination – with the aim of figuring out what skillfulness is about in Mongolia as well as how and why skillful people are important figures at turning points in the life of a community.

Shooting arrows to beckon fortune

- 6 There is an intricate web of relations connecting manly games, rituals of “fortune beckoning” (*dallaga*), rituals performed around *ovoos*, arrows, and the spirits “master of the land” (*gazryn ezed*): listing them may be a good starting point to explore the terms of the archer’s *prominence* as a “skillful” person.
- 7 a) According to Caroline Humphrey, *dallaga* denotes “the gesture of beckoning, a circular waving of the arms which draws in the blessing” (Humphrey with Onon 1996, p. 149). It is performed during *ovoo* rituals, at least those led by Buddhist monks – that is, mostly, rituals involving the population of an administrative unit like a district or a sub-district (Lindskog 2019, p. 9). In the anthropological literature, one also finds descriptions of individual *dallaga* performances at *ovoos* in crucial periods of the year, such as the first day (*shinii negen ödör*) of the new-year celebrations (*Tsagaan sar*) (see for example Ruhlmann 2019, p. 201 *et seq.*). As reported by Krystyna Chabros (1992), *dallaga* are performed on a wide variety of private occasions – there are spring bird and camel *dallaga*, *dallaga* for hunting, slaughtering, *dallaga* for healing, etc. As Bulcsu Siklós mentioned in his review of Chabros’ book, the feature that stands out in *dallaga* rituals is their pervasiveness and their simplicity. A *dallaga* consists of performing a circular gesture with or without an arrow or an arrow substitute, uttering the word *hurai* and thereby beckoning for oneself the benefits desired (Siklós 1994, p. 411)⁴.
- 8 b) It is commonly observed that *ovoo* rituals tend to be coupled with the “three manly games” (*eriin gurvan naadam*) (Hamayon 2016, pp. 132-142), which include wrestling (most of the time), horse racing (often) and archery (occasionally, but the practice of

archery seems to be given less importance and attention now than right after the Revolution, cf. Otgonbayar 2008).

- 9 c) These “manly games” (called thus despite the participation of women to archery contests since the 1960s, cf. Lacaze 2000) seem to be associated with the coming into being of fortune (*hishig*) for the year to come. Describing the manly games held during the summer *naadam* festival, the Polish ethnographer Iwona Kabzinska-Stawarz wrote in her 1991 book *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*:

The shepherds believed that the evil spirits frightened by the loud shout *uuhai*⁵ would not come back till the next *naadam*, when the repetition of all the magical procedure would be necessary [...]. The cheerful shout was heard not only by people but it also reached the *ovoo*, Heaven and all the good spirits to please them and make them rejoice that so many excellent shooters gathered at *naadam* and that they displayed weapon and archery skill. *Lus sabdag* [*lus savdag*], the lord of the nature was also happy. The shepherds believed that the shout *uuhai* could wake him up, if he happened to be asleep. (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991, p. 104)

- 10 Kabzinska-Stawarz concluded with a quotation from one of her informants, stating that “when *Lus* wakes up, it will be rain and all abundance but there is nothing when he is asleep” (1991, p. 104). Despite what Kabzinska-Stawarz seems to imply when she claims that the cry of *uuhai* reached the *ovoo*, we do not think that *ovoos* are always and necessarily considered in Mongolia as the abode of land masters. Rather, following Benedikte Lindskog (2016), we think it is more accurate to see them as “a physical construction in the land where to the *gazryn ezen* can be summoned”. We have never heard the kind of exegesis that Kabzinska-Stawarz mentions concerning the “cheerful shout” of the archer, *uuhai*, and the awakening of the land master but, as mentioned in the introduction of this article, it is still usual for people today to regard the successful and smooth delivery of the manly games as an auspicious sign for the year to come.
- 11 d) It is well-known also that the *dallaga* circular gesture at the *ovoo* ritual, or in other occasions, was sometimes performed with an arrow (*dallagany sum*) in one’s hand⁶. In addition, Humphrey remarked that a *dallaga* “denotes not only the gesture of beckoning but also the sacralized meat in the pot to be shared by all those present” (Humphrey with Onon 1996, p. 149). A *dallaga* therefore involves, Humphrey continued, “the transfer of blessings, usually through an arrow, into the content of sacred container”⁷ (Humphrey with Onon 1996, p. 149).
- 12 e) A praise to the *naadam*’s archer, transcribed by Mongolian ethnographer Sampildendev at the end of the socialist period, went like this:

Harvahad mergen
Hanilahad eyeldeg
Daïnd baatar
Dallagand hishigtei
Barildhad baatar
Iim saihan eriig
Mahiitel tatai bai gemeezh n'
Daraagar shar numny colyg olson amui.
 When you give [the bow] to draw,
 To a virile man,
 Heroic in wrestling
 Full of grace in his beckoning gesture
 Heroic in the battle
 Affectionate with his friend

Skillful when he shoots [his arrow]
This bow then receives the title of yellow bow⁸.

- 13 The praise is not performed anymore. The verse that is related to our topic is the one which links up a good archer and a person who is “full of grace in his beckoning gesture” (*dallagand hishigtei*).

Being *mergen* as an archer

- 14 What can we draw from this web of connections if we approach the question of what is at stake in an *ovoo* ritual from the standpoint of prominence? What kind of attributes or what kind of enactment is required from whom, in order to get the attention of spirits and maintain the more or less fragile relationship with land masters? In a recent article, Benedikte Lindskog (2019) highlighted the general requirements needed to put hope in the potential efficacy of *ovoo* rituals: the knowledge of the person – generally a lama – who conducts the ritual, the reading of the right sutra, the respect of a particular order for ritual sequences, and a proper behavior. The question we want to ask in this article is a bit different. Indeed, what the praise to the archer translated above seems to indicate is that all men are not equal in their ability to perform a *dallaga* efficiently. Some of them do it better, and because of this, they become prominent in the sense that Marilyn Strathern, and Morten Pedersen after her, gave to the notion. Why, then, are archers regarded as the primary bearers of this particular prominence? What is it they do better than others, which makes them more suited to the efficacious performance of a *dallaga*? How is it, in other words, that their particular virtue is more closely associated to “fortune” than any other within the manly games performed around *ovoos* in Mongolia?
- 15 To try and answer this, we will draw on data collected by Laurent Legrain in Ulaanbaatar, in the course of two periods of fieldwork amounting to six months of observation and instruction in archery in the springs and summers of 2013 and 2014, during the preparation of the yearly *naadam*. These years, a crucial matter of concern among male archers, and perhaps especially among the members of the executive bureau of the Mongolian Archery Association, was what they conceived of as a general loss of strength in Mongolian archery. A scripture engraved on a famous stele found in the valley of Harhiraa, dating back to the 13th century, stated that an archer had hit his target from a distance of more than 500 m⁹. Obviously, this feat seemed impossible to achieve nowadays with a Mongolian bow, and archers saw two options to account for what was therefore considered a decline in the practice of their discipline: it was either bows or men that were not as strong as they used to be at the time of the Mongol great empire. One can understand how worrisome this latter alternative might be for a Mongol man.
- 16 However, when Laurent Legrain reported this to a very famous female archer, and when he alluded to the usual conception that archery was on the wane because of the increasing feminization of the practice, she scolded him for giving an idiot’s words too much importance. Archery, she argued, was not a matter of strength but rather a matter of fitting things together, or even of piecing things together. She used the Mongolian verb *evlüüleh* to express this: this term, according to Charles R. Bawden (1997), could be translated as “to put together”, “to fit together”, “to assemble”, “to get together”, or “to piece together”. From his past research on music, Laurent Legrain

knew very well the stem used for the formation of this verb: *ev* means “peace”, “concord”, “amity”¹⁰. In the course of his past research, he had learned the high value given to concord in the moral life of the Mongols. Another saying he had often heard people refer to when they spoke about Mongol pre-revolutionary outstanding singers was that they could master the “nine manly skills” (*er хүнийг үсөн ердэм* also translated as the nine manly “abilities” or “arts”), the highest of which was precisely “concord” (*ev*).

Erdmiin dee - ev
Eldev uilend uran
Dalai deer üsch
Dain deer baatar
Nom deer gün
Noyond zusargüi
Ügend (shalamgai) setsen
Har'd hatuu
Harvaldval mergen
 The higher ability – concord
 Elegant in many actions
 In the ocean, he swims
 In the war, he is a hero
 Deep in [the knowledge] of book
 Without obsequiousness in front of the prince
 Wise in the use of language
 Harsh with the stranger
 If he shoots, he hits¹¹.

- 17 Each piece of this puzzle seems to converge in pointing to a deeper connection between “skillfulness” and “concord”. As we started seeing in the introductory discussion of the term, being *mergen* implies the ability to assemble “things” (*yum*) harmoniously, that is in an *ev* manner. Conversely, fitting “things” together accurately tends to make you a *mergen* person. As Laurent Legrain’s conversation with the female archer was interrupted by the resumption of the tournament, he was left wondering what these “things” were, that needed be fitted together in order to be *mergen* – and therefore to receive this official title as a victor in the tournament.
- 18 The specificity of Mongolian bows is a source of pride among archers. All the materials used in the making of a bow are described as having a “natural origin” (*baigaliin garaltai*) or as “being in strong connection with nature” (*baigal'taigaa бүх yum уялдazh baina*). We will not expand further on the fabrication process of a multilayered composite bow, which is in itself an assemblage between two different species of tree, horn, horse tendons immersed in water for days, glue that is ideally made from animal leather and hooves, animal bones, and today, fishing wire to strengthen the solidity of the assemblage and to maximize the strength of the bow. There are two crucial remarks that can be drawn from the evocation of this long and difficult process of assemblage. First, this crafting process is regarded by archers and Mongolian intellectuals who wrote about archery as an achievement of the human wisdom and intelligence (*sod mergen uhaan*) that has enabled Mongolians as a population to “write an important page of the world history” (*mongolchuud bid negen tsagt eh delhiin түүхийг бичийлтсэж*) (Otgonbayar 2008, p. 3). So, a *mergen* kind of wisdom enables people to piece together some elements of the environment and find the potentialities of this new assemblage to open new prospects for their community. There is a second point that is stressed in every discussion Laurent Legrain could have with archers. They insisted on

the sensitivity of the bow to any variation in temperature, humidity, and air pressure. Even the amount of sunlight might increase the draw weight and therefore the way the bow should be handled. This strong insistence on making the sensitivity of the bow central in their discussion can also contribute to understanding what being *mergen* means.

- 19 In our view, such emphasis points to the fact that the trick of the trade for archers is their faculty to feel the influence of these fluctuating forces and adjust their aim accordingly. Archers usually draw a line with a pen on their left hand and use it as a sight. If the draw weight rises, they must release the arrow a bit lower. Other forces must be taken into account: the force of the wind, as well as the coming of the rain, or even hail, etc. – the list composing this assemblage of technical and environmental conditions is actually endless. In an archery tournament lasting for hours on end, each archer has to shoot forty arrows successively, from a distance of 75 m for men and 65 m for women. In each round of the tournament, archers enter the game facing three other opponents: after they shoot their first arrow, they have to wait for the other three to shoot their own, which means there is always a delay in-between their shooting of one arrow and the next. After four arrows have been shot, the round ends and the outgoing archers make room for the next incoming group. Between each round, the waiting period may last from a few minutes to a few hours, depending on the number of competing archers. These two kinds of hold periods, when archers wait for their opponents to shoot and when they wait for another round to start, are actually rather difficult to deal with. Archers have to keep calm, to temper their enthusiasm, and to moderate their appetite for victory. Moreover, during these hold periods, they have to rely on a kind of nerve and muscle memory in order to keep track of the right gesture. If their last arrow flew over the target or missed it, they will take some time to ponder about what should be corrected. As the contest goes along, archers strive against pressure and combat fatigue. Referees also have a role to play in what could become a successful shot. From time to time archers become referees: they stand near the target and through a set of codified and elegant gestures, they indicate to the shooting archers where exactly their arrows have just landed. At a distance of 75 m, it is indeed difficult to see clearly the flight course of one's arrow, so this code is meant to facilitate the adjusting of one's aim in-between successive attempts.
- 20 Although many other aspects in the complex practice of archery could be mentioned, this short description should suffice to emphasize what kind of forces, energies, inner state, or coded signs must be fitted together in order for archers to hit their target each time at each attempt (and not only once in a while). All these heterogeneous components of the environment must be felt, assembled, and on the basis of this delicate assemblage, the right, beautiful and efficient gesture needs to be performed.
- 21 In a conference in 1934, Marcel Mauss has famously proposed the notion of “techniques of the body” to grasp in a comparative manner “the way in which from society to society men know how to use their body” in an “effective” and “traditional” manner – which means it has both to be transmitted and to achieve something (Mauss 1936). As a technique of the body, archery surely meets these two criteria of “tradition” and “efficacy”. First, archery is indeed undoubtedly oriented toward the completion of a particular purpose – the arrow has to hit the target. This is a visible, tangible, perceptible result of the archer mastery and, as Sandrine Ruhlmann (2019) stressed in her book on the production, consumption and sharing of food in Mongolia, every single

action that implies a technique is linked to “fortune” (*hishig*) – not only that of people who actually performs this action but also, and by extension, that of their family and their community. Everything that has to be done, must be done “well”, that is correctly (*zöv*), and the result of the archer’s action enables anyone to assess its efficiency. Second, of course, archery is transmitted. Archers are acutely aware of being the bearers of age-old know-how. In the process of learning how to handle a bow, they slowly come to embody a virtue, in other words, they have to learn to be skillful and wise¹². The particular forms of wisdom that may qualify one as *mergen* are not considered as innate senses, rather they entail an apprenticeship, which leads to a form of “cleverness or wisdom rooted in experience” (*turshлагаар үндэслэн их ухаан билэгтэй*) as the Mongolian linguist Tsevel defined the notion in his comprehensive dictionary (1966, p. 356).

- 22 In his introduction to the book that compiles some of the most famous articles of Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss had this comment to make on the notion of a technique of the body: “Every technique, every mode of behavior, learned and transmitted by tradition, is founded on certain nervous and muscular synergies which constitute veritable systems bound up with a whole sociological context” (Lévi-Strauss 1987, p. 7). What is it exactly that makes the sociological context of archery, when understood as a “technique of the body”? More broadly, what components of the world do archers have to harness in order to accurately bend their bow and hit their target? These include the competing archers, the people that have gathered to watch the event, the more or less strong relations of archers to their masters, or to their bow makers. These elements concern the social dimension of the archers’ world. But their matters of concern are also the wind, the rain, the sun, the variations in temperature, humidity and air pressure, and, last but not least, perhaps somewhere in the background, a fortune that is hoped for and a fortune-providing agency that can be called “land master” or other comparable names. What Lévi-Strauss called the “sociological context” indeed needs to be enlarged to really encompass what world do archers deploy their bodily technique into. Hitting a target means being attuned with other people and other forces or energies that compose a heterogeneous cosmos, in order to go along with it in a “right” or “correct” manner. Hitting a target each and every time one shoots (or at least a satisfying number of successive times) is clear evidence of one’s mastery of a kind of agency that is called *mergen* and that has something to do with the ability to harmonize heterogeneous forces and influences, which gives its bearer prominence while he or she bestows fortune on everyone else.

Astrological and divinatory skills

- 23 Obtaining “fortune” (*hishig*) at an *ovoo*, most of all during seasonal rituals where archers have to showcase their skill, relies on the talent of yet another prominent character, whom we could call the master of ceremony in these celebrations. This character makes sure everything goes right in the unfolding of events, but also, he ensures (he usually is a “he”, in contrast with archers who may often be women nowadays) that the astrological configuration of the situation remains propitious all along. For instance: which “prayers” (*nom*) should be recited, who should or should not attend, to whom the offerings should be addressed, how, and most crucially when exactly should the ceremony take place? Establishing this also supposes an ability to

assemble heterogeneous conditions and to wrap them up, as it were, into a single efficient gesture. The person who is relied upon to show this kind of talent is the diviner; he is the specialist in charge of operations involving the handling of astrological calculations commonly referred to in Mongolian as *mereg tölög*¹³.

- 24 This specialist might be a Buddhist monk of any given rank (all religious specialists affiliated to a monastery tend to be called indiscriminately *lam* in Mongolian), but he can also be a layman, either an “elder”, what the Daur call a *bagchi* (Humphrey with Onon 1996, p. 30), or just a person renowned for his handling of astrological manuals. Whatever his credentials, this character is expected to be “skillful” – or rather, being a “skillful person” (*mergen hün*) is the fundamental quality that distinguishes someone qualified for conducting astrological operations. These operations range from the choosing of the appropriate time for any given daily activity to the most crucial steps of certain life-cycle rituals, and the more or less delicate operations of “reparation” (*zasal*) meant to fix small and big unbalances and mismatches in an ailing person’s environment. As Charles R. Bawden (1994a) has shown in his review of manuscripts devoted to astrological practices surrounding “sickness” and “death”, most problems anyone might face, up until one’s own demise, tend to be attributed to the breaking of what he calls an “astrological taboo”, yet what could be considered more broadly as a lack of judgment as to the proper usage of the world.
- 25 Treatises of divination such as those referred to by Bawden, but also more or less any ritual of “reparation” carried out in the daily life of contemporary Mongolians, wherever they live or whatever activity they are engaged in, tend to represent the cosmos as a vast set of components, each imbued with a more or less stable quality. One needs to know, therefore, the possible and impossible associations between these components of the world in order to navigate it safely. This may translate into the impossibility of making use of a particular category of artefacts that are associated with a certain “element”, due to the “seat” (*suudal*) one is “sitting on” in this particular year (the list of possibilities and impossibilities one is faced with can be requested from astrologers each year around Tsagaan Sar nowadays). More generally speaking, any place, person or item is imbued with a fluctuating quality that will make associations between them more or less suitable – and therefore a potential source of personal misfortune (see Delaplace 2019)¹⁴. The presence or dispositions of “demons” (*chötgör*), or “land masters” (*gazryn ezed*) is but one of the variables that have to be considered in order to make the right decision and perform the right action at any particular time. Being “skillful”, in this context, is precisely being able to answer with a “correct” (*zöv*) gesture to any particular situation, that is to see through the qualities of all the components of the world, at any given moment, in order to combine them wisely.
- 26 One only has to browse through a 19th century manual of astrology and divination to realize how complicated this can get. The one collected in 1919 in the Ordos region by Antoine Mostaert (1969), and translated into English by Brian Baumann in 2008, is a case in point. Astrology appears in this manual as a vast enterprise of extensive denomination and classification of the cosmos, and one of mapping out of patterns of its propitious and unpropitious combinations – astrology, in Mongolia and elsewhere, is indeed first and foremost an exercise in qualification. Here the categories, distinctions and lists tend to proliferate however, and the point of such a manual as the one translated and commented by Mostaert and Baumann is probably not only to figure out the possible matches between elements of the world but also to check how lists and

categories might overlap with each other. There is indeed rarely one way only in which the quality of a particular component of the cosmos is determined; manuals such as this one offer a succession of tables and lists, which operate distinctions in various aspects and dimensions of the cosmos.

- 27 Classically, and as any Mongolian person just a little versed in astrology would know, twelve animals are used to mark cycles of twelve years, as well as the twelve months of the year, cycles of twelve days in a month and of twelve hours in a day. Each of these animals (and each combination of them at any particular time of the year, month and day) correspond to good or bad “influences”, and thus to things that can be done or should be avoided). More technically, each one of the twenty-eight “lunar mansions” (called *naṣadar* after Sanskrit) corresponds to a particular “constellation” and is named after it: one can do things and must avoid others when “under” any given constellation. There are also twelve “zodiac signs”, called “houses” (*ger*) – it is not clear how they are used – as well as thirty-eight symbols, some more auspicious than others, which might be applied to the thirty days of a month. Also, when each of the seven “planets” (the sun, the moon, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn) are “ascending”, some things are advisable to do while others are “bad”. And of course, the four elements (fire, water, earth and air) might determine some of these components, some essentially, other more punctually: celestial bodies have at their essence one of these elements, while periods of time are alternatively weighted by each of them, thus creating yet broader cycles of time.
- 28 This could be the end of it, but each lunar month also has a distinctive color, although the way this comes into play is not really specified in the manual. Each month is yet again associated with a lunar mansion, and each day is associated with one of twelve “lords” (called by a Chinese name) on the top of being paired with one of thirty-eight symbols. To complicate the matter even further, there are “special days” each month (like the 6th, the 16th and the 26th, or the 9th, the 19th and the 29th) as well as particular hours each day, that are marked as more or less “black”, i.e. inauspicious, or when gods or demons are supposed to congregate or battle amongst each other. A few synoptic tables are provided in the manual to help readers figure out how the matching of some of these elements might work out (for example, how propitious the association between planets and lunar mansions might be) but for the most part, the job of computing these series of variables – and of choosing among them – is left to the person perusing it.
- 29 Therefore, “divination” (*mereg tölög*), as the concrete application of astrological principles to a particular problem, speaks to a distinctive ability to navigate through the changing qualities of the cosmos: to perform the right calculations with the relevant variables in order to respond correctly to the particular assemblage that characterizes each particular situation. In other words, making the “right” (*zöv*) decision or “repairing” (*zasah*) the “wrong” (*buruu*) ones. Of course, this is very complicated, and not everybody is able to do this. Not everyone, in other words, is equally “skillful” or “wise” in this respect. Throughout Mongolia’s recent history, as we already suggested earlier, there has been a wide range of specialists, some with a more encompassing skill than others, who were available for consultation. Roughly, and based on what Grégory Delaplace could see during his fieldwork with people identifying as Dörvöd in Northwestern Mongolia (Uvs Province) throughout the 2000s, the most “skillful” astrologists in Mongolia were the ordained “lamas” (*lam*), as their knowledge of the Buddhist scripture was supposed to give them access to more esoteric “books”

(*nom*), and therefore to a higher domain of astrology¹⁵. The term *lam hün*, however, tended to lump together a variety of specialists more or less officially associated with the Gelugpa clergy, when they were not downright exterior to it – as were common astrologers (*zurhaich*), for example, or members of one of the Buddhist schools “of the Red” (*ulaany shashin*). Beside these, an even more composite set of people were relied upon locally in Mongolia for the less complicated matters. They could be heirs to a lineage of prominent lay diviners, but they could also well be trusted elders with no other pedigree than their own reputation, as virtually anybody could try themselves at the basics of divination through astrological calendars (*tsag toony bichig*) or even, more expertly, through techniques of stone or coin sorting¹⁶ that run through some family lines or which can be learnt from peer to peer. Typically, the holder of the *Manual* collected by Antoine Mostaert was a local administrator who was really an amateur astrologist, whom people used to consult when they needed to figure out a wedding day, what the cause was to some of their ailments or even how to deal with their dead (Mostaert 1969, p. 1).

Divinatory skills in practice

30 Being skillful, therefore, is first and foremost being able to calculate, and divination is indeed, as Baumann has stressed in his commentary to the *Manual*, a matter of mathematics. As such, being *mergen*, skillful, means also being judicious. Divination indeed requires not a small amount of interpretation and transposition; the generic recommendations provided in astrology manuals or calendars need to be applied to the particular problem one is confronted with. This is especially true in the context of card, stone or rosary divination where, as Katherine Swancutt (2006) has convincingly showed, interpretations sometimes need to take the form of “conjectures” akin to the “intervallic” leaps that Morten Pedersen (2007, p. 323) has put at the center of interspecific perspectival traffic in Mongolia. But it is also true for seemingly more straightforward applications of astrological apparatuses, like when a “lama” or a “skillful person” needs to direct the appropriate performance of a ritual using an astrology manual or applying apparently an apparently univocal set of association rules. As already suggested earlier, astrology only provides people with a general framework for the action to be achieved, or with hints to be interpreted in order to become relevant to a specific situation. This is probably never clearer than in the organization of funerals. One crucial part of any given funeral is the choosing of how and where the body will be “placed” (*orshuulah*). In Uvs Province in the 2000s, this was actually done in two main stages, by two different specialists. First a “lama”, preferably a professional one from within a monastery (but failing that at least an established *zurhaich*) would have to “open the golden vessel” (*altan sav neeh*), that is to settle the general conditions of the funerals according to the general situation of the person’s death¹⁷. Reading from a particular book (the “Golden Vessel”, precisely), and computing the time of birth, the time of death, planets and the rest, the specialist would establish the cause of the death – or more exactly the “problem” (*gai*), that precipitated it, usually an astrological incompatibility. Considering this “cause” and the rest of the variables, he would prescribe the exact form the ritual had to take: how the dead person’s body should be treated (buried in the ground or laid over it, incinerated or else), when the “placing” should be performed, who should “carry the bones” (*yas barih*), what color should the shroud be, what item should be designated as the “refuge

thing” (*horgodoson yum*, that is the thing in which the soul of the deceased might take refuge and which should be discarded or “placed” with him or her), what prayers should be read thereafter, and possibly, who the dead person shall be reborn as.

- 31 It is important to understand that the “Golden Vessel” gives more or less specific indications which translate into hints given by the specialist to the family. Most often too, the prescriptions provided by the “Golden Vessel” have to be adapted to the particular situation at hand. Thus, for example, the bone-carrier will be chosen among the men of a particular year, that has been established as compatible with that of the deceased and the general situation. But if such a person is not available, then the astrologer has to figure out a solution, and most often, he will come up with a “fix” that will enable someone from another year to do it anyway. That is what being “skillful” actually means: not only calculating wisely but also coming up with the appropriate practical solution to the odd astrological dead end. Very much like in archery, all the variables are not set in advance, and possessing skill means being able to compose not only with what is already expected, but also with what comes up unexpectedly.
- 32 Being skillful is also a matter of adapting the array of possible options to the political situation one is faced with, and this is also particularly striking in relation to modes of burial. There has been throughout Mongolian recent history a staggering variety of ways to treat the dead – and this has created moral panics at certain periods of history. Nowadays, dead people might be buried in the ground within the limits of a cemetery (legally) or outside of them (illegally), laid on the ground within designated areas (legally) or outside of them (illegally), and finally incinerated, the ashes being kept in a stupa or dealt with differently. Up until 1992, burial in designated cemeteries was the only legal option, as the Socialist regime wanted to end what it held to be an undue distinction between commoners (laid on the ground), aristocrats (buried), and high-ranking lamas (incinerated). The situation was much more complex than that however, given that at the turn of the century, it was apparently possible, according to Alexei Pozdneyev (1978), to deal with the dead in five different ways, each of them corresponding to a particular “element”. According to him, therefore, a dead body could be delivered to earth, by being buried, to fire by being cremated, to wood by being put “in the hollow of a tree trunk”, to air by being put in a sort of swing, or to water by being thrown into a river – “such prescriptions were always most strictly followed in the days of yore”, and “all that is observed formally at present too” (Pozdneyev [1887] 1978: 606).
- 33 Father Huc, however, who travelled through Mongol lands in the middle of the 19th century, found Mongol funerals to be less systematic than what Pozdneyev described a few decades later. He simply states that “the way of burying the dead among Tartars is not uniform” (1850, p. 59), and proceeds to give a glimpse of the variety of ways in which dead people may be treated, even reporting that in the vicinity of the Great Wall, “where Mongols have mingled with Chinese people”, the Chinese way of burying the dead generally applies. More surprisingly though, and as Isabelle Charleux (2015, pp. 245-255) has ascertained in her own work, some families went to great pains around that time to take the remains of their dead parents (sometimes on their own back) to the holy mountain of Wutaishan, in the Shanxi province. The variety of Mongol funerary options was indeed so rich in the 19th century, that it even included the possibility to perform second funerals.

34 One could regard this flexibility in ways of dealing with the dead as mere indifference for the funerary treatment of the dead. Such is not the case of course. Different political and religious situations, on the contrary, saw the expansion or the shrinking of practical solutions to treat the dead in an astrologically relevant way. Indeed, each new funerary option seemed to offer a fresh possibility to answer with an appropriate action to a particular – and particularly complex – astrological situation. Pozdneyev gives a telling example of how this required a great amount of skill, as there was always a reason why the most obviously fitting option was actually not an option.

One can ask what the use of so many instructions is, and why the deceased should not always be buried in the most fortunate direction, if one believes in any kind of misfortune. The fact of the matter is that the calculations about carrying the corpse out and burying it are influenced not only by these rules but by numerous other circumstances. When I was living in the Chahar nomadic lands in the winter of 1877, a nephew of my tenant Dabaan jalang died at eleven years of age. He had been born in 1866, the Male Fire Tiger year, and died at the Hare hour in the morning. According to the rules, he had to be carried out of the yurt at the Hen hour, and the best way to bury him would have been to the east, since he was born in the Tiger year. But the Hen hour, which corresponds to 6 or 7 p.m. happened to be one when the deceased's unlucky star, Venus, was shining and moving westward. Had the deceased been carried out to the east at that time, he would have had to move towards his unlucky star. Thus the lamas had to choose the middling direction to the north. As regards the mode of burying the deceased, the best would have been to cast his body into water, and the middling way, to put it in wood; but we saw the fire element was part of that boy's birth year, and the fire element is completely opposed to the water and wood elements; hence, only the worst burial could be chosen for the poor lad, i.e., his body was delivered up to fire, and he was in fact burned. (Pozdneyev 1978, p. 609)

35 The multiplication of funerary options therefore amounts to the possibility of an increased accuracy in the matching of particular funerals with particular problems: *in fine*, it almost offers the promise of a tailor-made solution for each and every one of them (which in the particular situation described by Pozdneyev could have avoided the choice of the worst astrological option for the poor boy).

36 Such a narrow fine-tuning appears in another stage of the preparation of the funeral: the choice of a particular location to lay or bury the dead, which is subject to a protocol known as “taking the place” (*gazar avah*) or “requesting the place” (*gazar guih*). Rather than a “lama” associated with a particular monastery, it is usually a local “skillful person” who is in charge of this part. People say that the reason why it is so is that it is cheaper, but we would tend to think it is not the only one. It is very important indeed for the successful completion of this part of the procedure that the specialist would know both the place and the person very well. The diviner's skill, in this context, is to figure out what place can be associated with the particular person, and what ritual actions should be performed in order for the process to be auspicious. Or rather, for it not to be inauspicious, as the risk associated with any funeral is to completely ruin the family's fortune, to the point of causing other people's deaths as a follow up to this one.

37 The way “skillful people” are able to do that is unclear, just as how archers are able to reach their target several times in a row is difficult to put into words. They just do, and that is why they can be trusted. It is very much embodied knowledge: knowing from the “Golden Vessel” in which general direction the body should be taken from the house, the “skilled person” will ride with a few other men until he finds what he holds to be a suitable place, that is, one that does not clash with any of the dead person's

qualities, and one that will be well situated within the particular configuration of the cosmos on this particular spot at that particular time. One could even add to this that the embodiment of “skill” in this context is not confined to the body of the specialist but extended to that of his horse. It is indeed a well-known story (cf. Bawden 1994b, p. 260) that when a broad area has been picked by the man in charge of “taking the place”, everybody will step down from their horses and wait for one of these to urinate. The exact spot where a horse has urinated will be circled with an antelope horn and “taken” by the skilled person with appropriate offerings to the land masters. Astrology and divination thus rely as much on a calculating power, on the specialist’s knowledge of the rules, as on a practical ability; a sense of navigating the complexity of the cosmos and an embodied knowledge as to the proper way of assembling its heterogeneous components. Astrological knowledge is indeed a practical one. As we mentioned in our introduction “skillful people” are often described as “people who know and can” (*meddeg chaddag hün*) – as if knowledge had to go hand in hand with practical ability for a person to be genuinely qualified as a diviner.

Conclusion

- 38 We may seem to have drifted a bit far away from the main theme of this special issue. Yet we feel that this detour we have proposed to take through “skillfulness”, as a virtue embodied both by archers and diviners, is useful to understand better what is at stake in *ovoo* worship – as actually in most Mongolian rituals, to a varying degree. The association of archery contests to *ovoo* festivals might be felt to make better sense now as the display of a skillfulness that is indexical of “fortune” for the community, just as the odd fact that arrows often come to be featured in rituals of “beckoning fortune” (*dallaga*) might be easier to account for. In a nutshell, in the summer celebrations of *naadam* in Mongolia archers give the public a way of perceiving the world as it is constituted, i.e. a compound of fluctuating forces and moving energies. And at the exact same time, as everyone is made to attest that the archer’s arrows hit their target, the world comes to be shown as a reality within which key characters are able to harmonize these forces. In other words, archers exemplify in reality the theoretical possibility of circulating auspiciously within the intense heterogeneity of the cosmos. What we mean is that what archers do during the yearly *naadam* is not simply a metaphor of what diviners have to do all year long in order to guarantee the community’s prosperity, day in and day out. What we are saying instead is that archers achieve the same thing with their bow and arrows as the diviners with their astrology manuals and their divinatory techniques. Both of them ensure the success of the ceremony, and therefore of the year to come, through the exhibition of their way of being *mergen*.
- 39 Both of them offer a contribution to the obtaining of fortune, yet each does it through a different path: while diviners prevent any misfortune by monitoring the general conduct of the ritual (and the “harmony” of the associations it relies on), archers effectuate it by having their arrows reach their target. Both activities indeed contribute to position a community rightly within the complexity of the cosmos, skillfully avoiding any mismatch and skillfully wrapping up contradictory variables into a “correct” (*zöv*), that is “harmonious” (*ev*), resolution.

- 40 Of course, the archer and the diviner are not the only depositaries of “skillfulness” within an *ovoö* celebration, or in any other ritual circumstance in Mongolia. *Mergen* also is the one who will respond to any complicated situation with appropriate words, either “wise” (*tsetsen üg*) or propitiatory (*yeröööl*) ones. Saying the “right” words (in the right order) at the “right” time, to put it rather mundanely, is also the sign of a virtue that is encouraged in everybody, but prominently embodied by certain people: respected elders, sometimes official “wish-sayers” (*yerööölch*), or more or less professional singers. During the Manchu period, quite a lot of renowned singers were also recognized to be *mergen* people; some, but not all, were even archers as well. One could venture to say that if they too could pride themselves on being *mergen*, it is also because singing at a ceremony contributes to turn the gathering of people – each one with their own origin, agenda, social trajectory, emotional tonality or something else – into a harmonious whole for a while.
- 41 It is perhaps not by chance that all these skillful people are made to converge and collaborate around *ovoös*, precisely. In the same way that *ovoös* tend to become more than just heaps of stones as a result of their proper consecration, the collective that gathers around it with (or perhaps behind) archers, diviners and singers tend to become more than a collection of ill-assorted elements by virtue of their intervention. The fact that a collective comes to constitute a community around the *ovoö* that marks the core of a given “homeland” (*nutag*) – and most of all the fact that it will continue to do so for the year to come, in harmony with the *nutag* itself – is not something that is granted *a priori*; it is the result of some harmonizing work, and as hinted in the opening vignette to this paper, it is one of the expected outcomes of the yearly *naadam* celebrations. *Ovoö* festivals indeed appear as “points of transition”, points in both a geographical and temporal sense, whereby the community’s fortune comes to depend on its proper and harmonious composition and positioning within the intense and intensely changing complexity of the cosmos.

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NOTES

1. Yearly celebrations of *naadam* are held at the beginning of the month of July in Mongolia, at all the administrative levels of the country (*uls*, *aimag*, *sum*, i.e. nation, province, district), over a total period of ten days or so. The national *naadam* festival is always held on three days, starting on the anniversary of Mongolia's 1921 revolution on the 11th of July, and features most prominently the "three manly games" (*eriin gurvan naadam*): horse races, wrestling and sometimes archery. Anklebone shooting is also performed during national-level and provincial-level festivals, but it is less highly regarded as the other three, and not customarily included within the manly games of Mongolian *naadam*.
2. This paper is based on the episodic fieldwork that both Grégory Delaplace and Laurent Legrain have carried out in Mongolia since the end of the 1990s, in the far northwestern province of Uvs (G. Delaplace), in the northern province of Hövsgöl (L. Legrain) and in the capital city Ulaanbatar (both G. Delaplace and L. Legrain).
3. Perhaps it is in this sense, therefore, that during the socialist period, Lenin was officially called the "wise teacher" (*mergen bagsh*) and his followers were said to "lead the party wisely" (*namyg mergen zholoodoh*).
4. Bulcsu Siklós' review is quite harsh. He criticizes Chabros for her attempt to "disentangle Lamaism from native Mongol religion" (1994, p. 413). "The question of early Mongol cultural or religious contacts is often an obscure one, but this does not mean that an assumption of unadulterated Mongolianness can be made for any unlamaized Mongol ritual or text. In any case there is much natural overlap between a) Indian tantric conceptions, b) Tibetan folk or Bon conceptions and c) Mongol folk or Shamanist ones" (Siklós 1994, p. 411). The discussions about

dallaga that Laurent Legrain has had with Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, who carried out extensive fieldwork in Tibet in the beginning of the 2000, tend to confirm that the ritual was vivid among Tibetans in rural central Tibet at the time of her fieldwork.

5. Some archers Laurent met saw a direct connection between the shout *hurai* uttered during the *dallaga* and their own shout *uuhai*, the latter being a kind of derivation from the former.

6. See Jagchid & Hyer (1983, pp. 89-90), Hamayon (1990, p. 315), Heissig (1980, p. 47) and Lham & Yeröolt (2010, p. 12) for mentions of this in rituals dating back from the Qing period or from the beginning of the 20th century and Humphrey with Onon (1996) for a contemporary ritual.

7. To the best of our knowledge, the liveliest description of a *dallaga* ritual involving the transfer of blessings can be found in the biography of the Kanjurwa Kutughtu (1914-1980) edited by Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer (1983, pp. 89-90).

8. First translated in French by Gaëlle Lacaze (1999-2000, p. 119). We have slightly modified Lacaze's translation on the verse *Dallagand hishigtei*.

9. The documentary film "Wisdom of Mongolian bow makers" (Norov 2017) starts with a speech of the general secretary of Mongolian Archery Association standing near the replica of the stele that sits just in front of the National History Museum. "This stele should be revered by all Mongols. The stone inscription of Chinggis Khan was engraved in 1226. The inscription says that Esungge, a grandson of Chinggis Khan hit a target at 335 *alds* (536 m) when Mongolian gathered at a place of Bukh Sochikai. There is no archer today, in the entire world, who can hit a target at this distance" (see also Lhagvasüren http://www.atarn.org/mongolian/mongol_1.htm, accessed 16 June 2020). The story is reproduced in every publication on archery (see for example Otgonbayar 2008).

10. The Mongolian linguist Tsevel (1966, p. 865) defined the word *ev* as "the agreement / concord between people" (*hün amtny hoorondyn nair niilemzh*).

11. There is an interesting sequence in the Mongolian movie *Tsogt Taizh* (from the name of a noble man living at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century). One can see Tsogt Taizh participate in an archery contest. One of his opponents calls him out and asks "Tsogt Taizh, aren't you trusting your luck (*az*) a bit too much?". Tsogt Taizh's answer is worth noting: "Luck is blind. Only idiots trust it. Whereas *mergen* people... [then Tsogt Taizh releases his arrow that hit the target and people utter the *uuhai*] praise their own ability" (*mergen hün bol...chadal erdemdee shütdeg yum*). The person who uploaded the sequence on YouTube wrote the following sentence on the screen "let us live like true human" (*hün shig am'dar'ya*).

12. Another and very different argument has been proposed by Katherine Swancutt (2007), in the context of game playing among the Deed Mongols of Qinghai, that envisages learning as a matter of perspective-taking between "novice" players and "virtuosi". Although the notion of virtuosity lends itself to an analysis of some people's prominence in their display of a particular talent, we have preferred to stick to a vocabulary that does not so much evoke the exceptional and rare ability of some outstanding individuals, as the prominence of some *kinds of people* that are relied upon for their distinctive cultivation of a particular virtue. Similar reasons led us to steer away from a conception of prominent bearers of skillfulness as "exemplars" (*sensu* Humphrey 1997): what we are trying to get at is less the emulation of charismatic individuals than the delegation of particular concerns to a category of persons deemed more able than the rest to tackle them. In this sense, skillful people are envisaged here less as "exemplars" than "examples" of "skillfulness" (Højer & Bandak 2015).

13. Etymology is always a perilous exercise for people who lack the distinctive talent that makes philologists prominent within the field of humanities and within that of Mongolian studies in particular. One can go so far, however, as to risk saying on the basis of contemporary classical script that *mereg*, within the lexical pair *mereg tölög*, "divination", shares the same root as *mergen*, "skillful", and that the latter indeed looks like the adjectival derivation of the former (to be skillful is to have *mereg*). As *tölög* may be more easily translated as a "count" (*tölö-*, "to count" + *-g*,

a suffix denoting the material result of the action described by the verb), “divination”, in Mongolian, seems to be conceived of as the overlap between counting as a finite process and skillfulness as a quality.

14. Of course, this kind of problem comes up retrospectively rather than prospectively. Classically, people who feel unable to “finish a job” (*azhil бүтэжгүй*) or who feel surrounded with more serious trouble (a series of deaths in their close family for example) will consult a diviner who will try and figure out with them what kind of astrological mismatch might have caused this misfortune for them.

15. Thus, each monastery of importance in prerevolutionary Mongolia included a faculty (*datsan*) of astrology (Charleux 2006). A prominent faculty of astrology is found today at the monastery of Gandan in Ulaanbaatar.

16. Bernard Charlier (2018) gives a description of a divination séance performed with an astrological calendar in the process of a wolf hunt in the mountain in Uvs province. He also reported the way one of his informant “reads” the stones on that occasion. See also Katherine Swancutt (2006) for a comprehensive analysis of several divinatory techniques employed by Buryat people in Dornod to figure out the origin of possible “curses” (*haraal*).

17. The “opening of the golden vessel” is widely mentioned by authors studying rituals of death in Mongolia (e.g. Humphrey 2002). In Uvs Province, it was alternatively called “to open the inquiry” (*shinzhee neeh*).

ABSTRACTS

This paper proposes to explore how being “skillful” (*mergen*) plays out and is relied upon in Mongolia within two different contexts, archery and divination, both linked to “cairns” (*ovoo*) in more than one way. In these contexts, skillful people are expected to embody a virtue that any Mongolian man or woman is supposed to exhibit daily in a less spectacular and consequential manner. As prominent bearers of skillfulness, archers and diviners are indeed relied upon to respond with accuracy to a complex set of potentially clashing variables, and thus to ensure each in their own way the proper and fortunate positioning of people within an intensely heterogeneous cosmos.

Cet article examine les voies par lesquelles l’habileté se donne à voir et joue un rôle majeur dans deux pratiques – l’archerie et la divination – qui entretiennent des liens étroits avec les cérémonies aux « cairns » (*ovoo*). Dans ces contextes, une grande importance est accordée au fait d’être « habile » (*mergen*). On attend de personnes habiles qu’elles incarnent une vertu dont tout homme ou femme est supposé faire montre quotidiennement. Si lors de certains moments clés on sollicite tant les archers que les devins, c’est pour harmoniser un ensemble complexe de variables potentiellement contradictoires ; on espère ainsi qu’ils pourront, chacun selon sa manière propre, permettre à tous de se positionner avec justesse et bonheur dans un cosmos hétérogène.

INDEX

Keywords: Mongolia, archery, divination, funerary rituals, prominence

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