

EXPLORATION OF CAMELS IN ARCHIVES AND HERITAGE IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES BY R. TREVOR WILSON

R. Trevor Wilson's maiden contribution to the world of camels was a minor paper published in 1978 in the journal *Tropical Animal Health and Production* as part of a series on the domestic livestock of Southern Darfur in Sudan where he worked and lived with his family in 1972-1974 and 1976-1978. His reference book "The Camel" was published in the year 1984. The book proved a plethora of scientific information about camels in a classified manner. The book received a big opening with great appreciations because at that time there was a big void of camel related books. In the International Year of Camelids 2024, it is important to recall the outstanding research done by R Trevor Wilson on camel archives and heritage in different countries through several monuments, pictures, statues, stamps, archives, old literature and other relevant evidences. He reviewed the presence and performance of the one-humped camel - exotic to Tanzania¹. Accordingly, camels appeared in annual veterinary reports in 1926-1934: numbers varied from 26 (1926) to 67 (1930) and 5 (1934). In this pre-independence period they occurred mostly in the coastal provinces and since independence some 340 camels have been imported privately and by NGOs.

Later, Dr Wilson and his co-researchers explored camels in Turkey⁴ and found that camels were first known to have been in Turkey some 2600 years ago when they were used as animals of war. There has been continued presence ever since and the country is unusual as it is home to both one-humped and bactrian types. During the nineteenth and as late as the early twentieth century there was an important exchange of breeding animals between Turkey and Syria. Numbers declined rapidly after the 1930s and at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the country's camel population was little more than 1000 animals. These are now mainly used for sport and as a tourist attraction with meat being a minor product.

He gave first comprehensive account of the presence of camels and of camel production in Uganda. The dromedary camel started to appear in the arid northeast of the country during the 1960s/1970s. In 2008 the national camel population was about 31 000 but in 2017 could go as high as or more than 40 000. Traditional pastoral tribes have become camel keepers for the production of milk, some meat, some transport and for medical uses. It was inferred that these camels contribute to food security and to the livelihoods of pastoralists in some of the remote parts of Uganda².

His further research focused on Somaliland which is a self-proclaimed republic and had about 1.7 million camels and the camel has always been an icon in the culture and customs of the ethnic Somali. The British administration organised a Camel Corps to help in the maintenance of law and order in the then Protectorate but it also distinguished itself against the troops of Italian Somaliland in the World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 before it was disbanded in 1946³.

His further research revolved around Eritrea and Ethiopia, among the poorest in the world⁵ Ethiopia has the greatest number of livestock in Africa at an estimated 120 million ruminant animals of which 1.1 million are camels. In contrast Eritrea's livestock population is under 10 million in which camels may number 320 000. The one-humped camel possibly arrived in the area of study about 1900 years ago. In Eritrea camels were owned by Beja tribes near the border with Sudan, by Tigre clans in the north and by Afar and some Somali in the east along the Red Sea littoral. Ownership in Ethiopia was mainly by the Somali people and by the Afar in their respective Regional States in eastern Ethiopia and by the Boran in the south.

His most recent publication unfolds the use of camels in the British military and in transport of trade goods for British trading companies from their areas of origin and have been recognised as

making considerable economic contributions to Britain in these roles. In recognition of this there are several monuments and memorials to the animal around the country. Camel is also a word used in British geography for some British towns and villages and as names for geographic features such as rivers and hills. This paper provides a repertoire of such monuments, memorials and place names⁶.

This editorial is specially dedicated to R. Trevor Wilson with a big salute because he chose the Journal of Camel Practice and Research as a platform for publication of his research on this aspect.



(Dr. Tarun Kumar Gahlot)
Editor

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