

PORTRAIT OF YOUTUN TESTING AN ARROW

Recently “rediscovered” in the hermitage collection, St. Petersburg

INTRODUCTION

One of the great sources for pictorial reference on Manchu archery equipment and dress are a series of officer portraits, commissioned by the Qianlong emperor, to be displayed in the Ziguangge or “Pavilion of Purple Splendor” (紫光阁). This was the hall where the highest of the Qing empire’s military examinations were held under supervision of no less than the emperor himself. It was also the place where foreign guests were sometimes received and where victories were celebrated with large banquets. There may have hardly been a higher honor for a Qing warrior than to be commemorated with a portrait hung in this hall for merits achieved on the battlefield. The hall was looted after the Boxer Uprising of 1900 and many portraits made it to markets abroad, quite a few of them made it to the Berlin art markets. Unfortunately many portraits have now gone lost or missing in the process, of the 280 such portraits commissioned between 1760 and 1792 only a fraction seems to have survived until today.¹ These turn up from time to time in forgotten museum or private collections, and when auctioned fetch prices from the hundred thousands up to the many millions. The research community behind www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn is constantly looking for new material and I am happy to announce that they have recently located three more portraits that had been assumed to be lost until then. Unfortunately the pictures we currently have access to are only black and white, and some of the portraits themselves seem to have some conservation problems. Nevertheless, they once again provide valuable insights in details of Manchu archery. Take for example the portrait of Erke Baturu (“Bold Hero”) Youtun.



The portrait of Youtun in the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg. He is standing upright, with his bow case and saber worn in the typical Manchu fashion with the bow pointing forwards and the saber hilt points backwards. This prevents both to become entangled. The saber is drawn pushing the hilt forward and drawing it with the edge up, just like in Japan. An alternative method described is to pull it from behind one’s back. Youtun is balancing an arrow on his left hand and watching it carefully.

¹ Bügener, Anette - The Qianlong Emperor and His Bannermen, accompanying Sotheby’s Auction New York 2005, Lot 280.



Victory banquet at the Pavilion of Purple Splendor in Beijing, celebrating the victory of the Jinchuan wars that lasted from 1771 to 1776. Painting probably by Giuseppe Castiglione, now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing.



The Pavilion of Purple Splendor in recent times. It is still used for government purposes, it therefore not accessible to the general audience.

ABOUT YOUTUN

Youtun was one of the officers that served in the East Turkestan campaign of 1755-1759 and was among the first 50 officers to be commemorated with a portrait in the Pavilion of Purple Splendor. This campaign was probably the most significant of 18th century campaigns as it led to the destruction of the rival Dzungar empire by the Qing forces, and secured the borders of present-day Xinjiang making the Qing empire about a third larger than China had ever been. Of the many thousands of soldiers involved in the campaign, Youtun was among the 50 most notable.

The eulogy above his portrait reads:

副都統克特爾克巴圖魯由屯
本射生手狼不暇走以之殺賊如探囊取奇功屢建亦因閱歷世職崇階酬其勞動²

Translation:

*“Manchu Brigade General, Bold Hero, Youtun:
Himself a skilled warrior in riding and shooting, he gave the wolves no time for leisure. Going out killing the thieves who intended to steal [our] goods, time and time again he proved his worth. Reviewing these events, he was granted a high hereditary rank to reward him for the toils he endured to gain merit.”*



The 1758 Victory of Khorgos, printed from a 1774 engraving by Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (1707-1783), after a drawing by Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-1768). This was one of the battles of the East Turkestan campaign in which Youtun gained his fame. It shows a body of Manchu cavalry charging into Dzungar spearmen and musketeers.

² From www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM YOUTUN

In the resurfaced portrait Youtun stands upright in typical Manchu garb. He is seemingly balancing an arrow on his left hand, watching it carefully. What is he doing? The 1771 *Mirror of the Five Languages of the Qing*, a Qing period dictionary listing terms in Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur and Chinese provides us with some insight.³ One entry of the work is: *niǎn jiàngǎn* meaning “to twirl an arrowshaft in the fingers”. The Manchu entry for the same concept is *foringgiyambi*, which, according to Jerry Norman, means: “to test an arrow shaft by turning it between the fingers”.⁴

The art of making bows and arrows, and their use, has been very well preserved in Korea and thus many of the old tricks of bowyers and fletchers are still used there up to today. On one of my visits to Korea I saw the famous arrow maker Yoo Young Ki take an arrow from a big bundle to his right, and spinning it on his fingernail. He then put it on either one of two heaps of arrows. Apparently the heap of arrows on the far left were considered ok. The arrows in the middle looked and felt fine, but the arrow maker told me they vibrated on his nail, which meant they were not perfectly straight. Therefore he put them in the middle for further straightening. With some arrows it was hardly possible to see they were not straight, but the arrow maker could *feel* it using this method.



Master arrow maker Yoo Young Ki giving a demonstration of fletching arrows at the World Traditional Archery Festival in South-Korea, 2007.

That is exactly what Youtun is doing here. A difference being that where the Korean arrow maker spins the arrow using a quick flick of his thumb and index finger of the feeling hand to spin it on his nail -a difficult trick to master- Youtun uses his opposite hand to give the arrow a spin. The reason may be that Manchu arrows are far longer and heavier than Korean arrows, which may make it even more difficult to spin them using only the left hand.

Checking the straightness of an arrow to his degree is really only relevant for shooting over longer distances because slight imperfections will not be of much, if any, consequence when shooting close ranges. The Koreans place much emphasis on arrow weight and straightness, up to the point of being nearly obsessive, exactly *because* their competition methods focus solely on long distance shooting. Their target is set up at 145 meters and the highest degree of proficiency can only be attained by hitting it with 6 out of six arrows in succession. This demands not only much of the archer, but also of the consistency of his arrows.

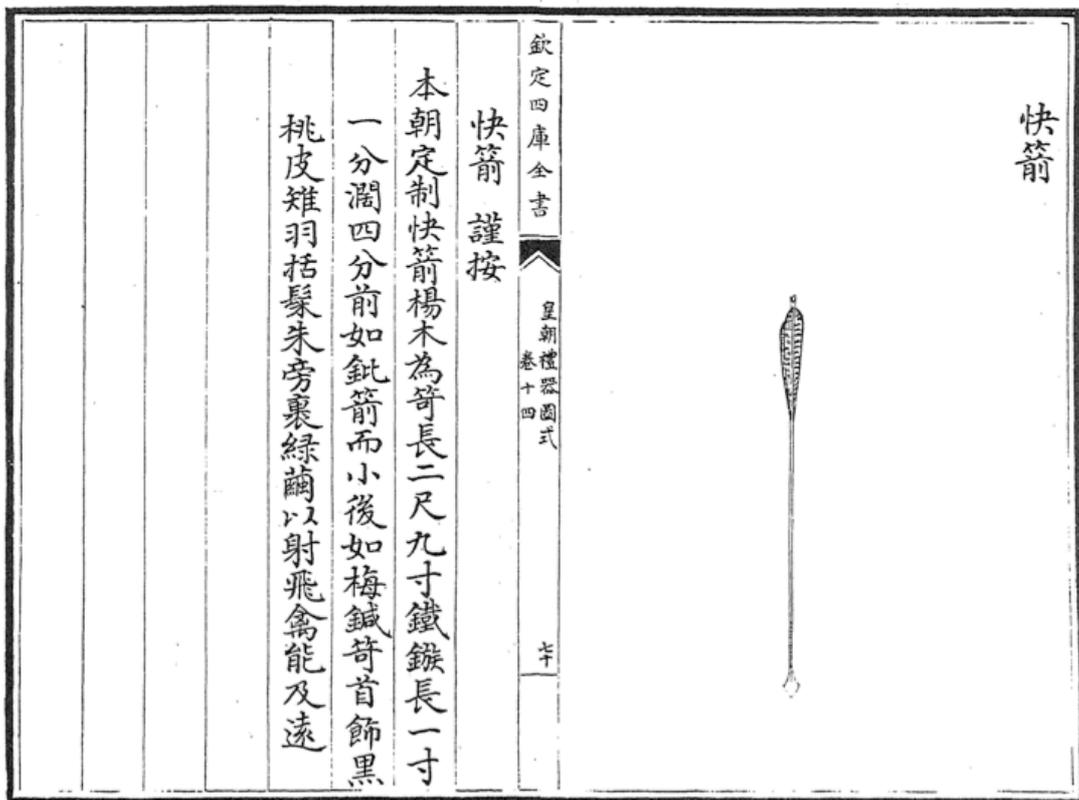
When looking at Youtun's arrow we can see that it has unusually short fletchings for a Manchu arrow and also a rather small tip. It seems to me that we are looking at a rare depiction of a Manchu long distance arrow. These arrows are described in the *Huangchao Liqi Tushi* as *kuàijìàn* or “fast arrow”.⁵ In the Manchu language is described an arrow called *kalbikū*, an arrow with a small head and a slender shaft used for shooting at distant targets. It might be a reference to Youtun's skill where he could already hit an opponent that was still relatively far.

There is another interesting bit of info in this painting. The point where one feels the shaft for vibrations using this method is typically the point of balance of the arrow. This portrait gives us a good idea of where the balance of this particular shaft is, which is slightly less forward than what is the case on most Manchu military arrows. Perhaps this point of balance was more typical for longer range arrows.

³ Wu-ti Ching-Wen-Chien. (五體清文鑑) Reprint of 1771 edition held in the Palace Museum, Routledge, 1999.

⁴ Norman, Jerry. *A Concise Manchu–English Lexicon*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1978.

⁵ *Huangchao Liqi Tushi*, Illustrated Book of Chinese Imperial Ceremony of Qing Dynasty, Yun Lu et al. Reprint, Yangzhou, 2005. Scroll 14.



A page of the 1766 Palace Edition of the Huangchao Liqi Tushi. Translation:

Fast arrow

According to the regulations of the dynasty; Fast Arrow:

Alder wood serves as the shaft, which is 2 chi 9 cun long. The steel arrowhead is 1 cun 1 fen long and 4 fen wide. The front is like a [regular] broadhead arrow but smaller. The back is like a plum needle [arrowhead].

The shaft's front end is decorated with black peach bark. [Fletched with] pheasant feathers. The nock's hollow is lacquered vermillion, its side is wrapped with green cocoon.

Used to shoot flying fowl. Can also be used to shoot over long distances.

CONCLUSION

A portrait, some old texts, a dictionary and a master Korean arrow maker shed some light on a trick the Manchus used to test the straightness of their long distance arrows. This is one of the things that makes Manchu archery studies so interesting; new material keeps emerging and combining information from artwork, texts, eye-witness accounts, archery knowledge in living traditions, and even dictionaries old and new, there is much we can learn about their methods. Now go practice *foringgiyambi*!

VOCABULARY

Chinese	Pinyin	English
捻箭桿	<i>niǎn jiàngǎn</i>	To twirl an arrowshaft in the fingers.
捻著直	<i>niǎn zhāo zhí</i>	It spins straight.
快箭	<i>kuàijiàn</i>	"Fast arrow".

Manchu	Romanization	English
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<i>foringgiyambi</i>	To test an arrow shaft by turning it between the fingers.
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<i>foron sain</i>	The arrow shaft spins straight.
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<i>kalbikū</i>	An arrow with a small head and a slender shaft used for shooting at distant targets.
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