CHAPTER 2

An Evaluation on Game Tools in Traditional Equestrian Team Sports of Turks

Omer Tarkan TUZCUOGULLARI
Gaziantep University, Türkiye

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1. Equestrian Games in Turks

Traditional Turkish sports may vary from region to region depending on the period, geographical conditions and climate. It is also possible to see some diversity according to neighboring civilizations and the extent of the relationship between them. The introduction of ancestral games into traditional sports has led to the formation of a brand-new culture. “Scientists researching on Steppe Culture have sometimes called this type of culture equestrian culture or equestrian shepherd culture” (Onay, 2015). This created a new cultural environment. The fact that the horse was domesticated and put into the service of humanity in itself means the birth of an era. “The Turks, who tamed the horse for the first time in the world and used it as a riding animal and a means of warfare, crossed areas of thousands of kilometers at once thanks to this superiority and gained the opportunity to own many places” (Erdoğan, 2019). In other words, while the horse only had a place in nutrition culture, being able to dominate the horse made human life very easy for that period. Over time, the extraction and processing of some minerals led to the development of dominance over the horse. The harness materials applied to the horse enabled it to be used at the highest level. The horse, which has entered every stage of human life, has now been present in transportation, transportation, and every moment of social life in addition to the culture of nutrition. With the development of riding techniques, hunting and war strategy moved to a different dimension. It is unthinkable that the horse, which is involved in both economic and social life, does not have a ritual dimension. For Turks, strong and special beings have always existed in mythology. What makes them special is that they make the Turk strong and superior to others. The horse undoubtedly made the Turk superior to other civilizations. In that period, Turks were the

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ones who used the horse the best compared to the surrounding civilizations.

They knew very well how to utilize the horse's strength and agility. Turks were able to use this power in hunting and warfare with their skill. Perhaps this is why for many Turks the horse is considered sacred. Sacrificing the horse or burying it with the dead warrior may have been elements of this sanctity. In addition, "many Turkic tribes used the name of the horse because of this deep love. The most important branches of the Karakalpak tribes, such as the Ala Yuntluğ and the Tor stallions, bear the names of Kara Tay, Sarı Tay, Boz Tay" (Diyarbekirli, 1972). It is seen that the horse is the companion of the Turk. Both in this realm and in the other realm, the horse continues to be a companion. In the journey of the shaman to the cosmic realm, the horse has a different importance besides other taboo beings. In this sense, while describing the Turk, it is also necessary to describe his companion; the horse. If the physical culture of the Turks is to be explained, the horse and, of course, equestrian sports should be explained. The experiences gained in traditional games played on horseback were used in hunting and warfare. Perhaps the materials used in the games were imitations of those to be used in war, and the maneuvers to be performed in the game were rehearsals of the strategies to be used in war. In short, being ready for war under all conditions and at any moment depended on being able to show every skill and experiment on the horse under all conditions. The first condition in the steppe life of the ancient Turks was to survive and sustain themselves. It was essential to be able to skillfully use the weapons of the period and to be able to use these weapons on horseback. We see that this situation is valid for almost all Turkish states of 4000-5000 years. Horse culture and horsemanship were still the most important means of transportation and attack in wars until the last century of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, as long as the horse culture continues, it is natural that different games and therefore sports related to the horse have emerged in different centuries. When traditional games and sports are evaluated from this point of view, it is important to define the game tools used on the horse and their functions. Another characteristic of traditional games or sports is that they reflect social power and unity. In every game; it is possible to see this acting together, cooperation or collective intervention. In fact, these are behaviors that reveal the structure of society. The social structure is undoubtedly stronger in civilizations with an equestrian culture. Nomad culture will have an effect that no event can be thought individually. Within the framework of this culture, everything must be done in cooperation, whether it is natural events, preparation for winter or toy. This collective behavior has made the socio-cultural structure even stronger. Social strength manifests itself at every stage of Turkish life. Every event that a person experiences from birth to death; birth customs, naming, circumcision, military send-off, engagement, henna, wedding and everything related to death should be done collectively based on certain rituals and traditions. This loyalty between family members continues to grow and multiply between relatives, then between tribes, clans, etc. In fact, the concept of

nationhood is undoubtedly possible with strong family ties. Each individual sees another individual in another country or another province as a family member. Of course, this situation is reflected in the games played and then in the sports we call traditional. Behaviors such as cooperation, acting together and support are frequently seen in these games. In fact, in these games, it is seen that the effort to develop a strategy together and to score at the end of this strategy comes to the fore. To summarize; equestrian games-sports in Turks are sporting events in the nature of war rehearsals that protect the unity and solidarity of the nation with the same spirit and emotions in the society, react to the same events, rejoice, grieve, and from time to time show the power to fight in order not to break this unity.

2. Horse and Horsemanship in Turks

Turks, like many other civilizations, had a hunting culture when they emerged on the stage of history. Over time, they succeeded in taming the animals they ran after for the hunt and this led to the birth of a whole new era. Thus, with the taming of animals, the development of nomadism to meet the need for nutrition in all seasons of the year emerged. “Both the steppe conditions and the semi-nomadic lifestyle they lived made the horse indispensable for the Turks. The horse has been the greatest supporter of the Turks both in migration, hunting and daily life” (Durmuş, 1993) Nomad culture and shepherding led to the birth of this process. “This culture was developed in Inner Asia not by the Turks, but by the Prototurks or Preturks” (Rasonyi, 1993), Pre-Turkic advocates such as Koppers, who defines nomadic culture as “the domestication of the horse and the introduction of the horse into the service of mankind”, definitely point to the Turks. “The domestication of the horse and the introduction of the horse herding culture can be attributed to the first Turks. This achievement in the history of mankind has led to remarkable developments in the development of tribes and other cultures” (Koppers, 1983). Naturally, shepherding culture requires relocation. Within this culture, the horse grows in its own free environment. At certain times of the year, this free environment allows horses to be better fed and strengthened. “The horse, which embodies speed and endurance in the same body, can only be raised in large meadows. Such meadows can only be owned by nomadic societies. Because settled societies have used these fertile and large areas as agricultural land” (Öztürk, 2014). The biggest example of this is Chinese society. A society that uses large meadows for agricultural land will probably use stables and farms for horse breeding. However, the most valuable horses for the Turks are the horses that remain in the yearling herd. Because, “in steppe culture, feeding animals with external elements such as “feed” is not seen” (Onay, 2015).

It is expected that there would naturally be a difference between horses that run-in meadows and wide plains and spend the night in nature instead of in the barn and horses that spend the night under protection. This difference can always be observed for the

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horses of the communities living in the north of China; Turks and Mongols. Most sources in the literature focus on these two societies when talking about good horses. It is also possible to find eulogies about the horse and the Turk in history. It would be useful to mention a few of them. "The horse is the wing of the Turk" and "bird with its wing and man with his horse", this is how Kashgarli Mahmut mentions the importance of the horse for the Turk in his works. The Turk cannot be imagined without a horse. Therefore, Dede Korkut thinks that a soldier without a horse will be useless. Dede Korkut says "a man on foot has no hope" when talking about the horse. "The Turk gives importance to his horse rather than himself. He raises his horse himself. If you add up the days of a Turk's life, the time spent on horseback is more than other days" (Gömeç, 2016). Because Turks try to see even their daily work on horseback. Since they are used to sitting on the horse since childhood, perhaps their bone structure develops accordingly and therefore sitting on the horse does not tire them. According to Öngel, "Ammianus states that the Huns would not get off their horses even to fulfill their natural needs... They would shop, eat and drink on their horses, and even manage to sleep sweetly on the thin necks of their horses" (Öngel, 2001). Again, Grousset, speaking about the Huns' dependence on the horse, says: "The Huns were as if they were glued to their horses, which were tireless and went like lightning. They spent their whole lives on their horses, sometimes with their legs apart, sometimes sitting on their sides like women" (Grousset, 1999). Grousset clearly mentioned the Turks' agility as well as their skill on horses. The horses raised by the Turks in this Central Asian geography became a center of interest for the surrounding civilizations. Especially the horses raised in the Fergana region attracted the attention of the Chinese rulers and they risked war for these horses. "The horses raised by the Turks are warlike and fierce like themselves. In the games of preparation for war, the rider and his horse are so integrated that the rider's ambition, anger, determination and this mood are reflected on the horse. The horse and the rider become almost one. The Turk has to act according to his comrade even when planning his life" (Tuzcuoğulları, 2019). It is possible to see this situation in equestrian traditional sports, which we see as a kind of rehearsal for war. In the game of Kökbörü, the ambition of a rider trying to take the goat from the opponent could also be reflected on his horse. In these games, you can witness horses engaged in a fierce struggle with another rival horse and even horses biting the ear of the rival horse. It can be seen that the horse is not just a creature for Turks. The horse is a part of the family for Turks, a companion for the Turk, a wing for the Turk. For centuries, the horse has won the Turks battles, run from raid to raid and even shared the same kurgans at the end of their lives. Because the horse is sacred for the Turk. The horse, which was the power of the Turk in war, could not be considered away from holiness. Accompanying the shaman on his cosmic journey, the horse is an important symbol in the ascent to the celestial realm. The sanctity of the horse has taken its place in that cosmic environment to serve in the other world as it served in the world, in shamanic rituals, at the grave of the kings, around the homeland of the deceased Alps, next to

the rider in the kurgans. If we talk about horsemanship in Turks, it should be analyzed in two ways: primitive horsemanship and systematic horsemanship. Turks went from primitive horsemanship, which was used to lead and manage herds in steppe life, to systematic horsemanship with the ability and means to shoot arrows in all directions on horseback and became invincible on horseback. Being able to shoot arrows in all directions on horseback must have been the highest point in cavalry. This is because the Turks demonstrated their superiority in primitive horsemanship by being able to shoot arrows by turning back on horseback even during artificial retreats during defeat; naked on horseback. Being able to shoot arrows even while running away from their enemies was related to the skill of the horses as much as the training of the rider. Primitive horsemanship was used for herding and herd management. Actions such as holding the horse by the mane or keeping it under control with reins made of lasso, directing the horse with pressure with the knees indicate primitive horsemanship. “For the ancient Turks, riding forty kinds of horses without stirrups, getting on and off the horse while the horse was running fast, were movements of no value” (Radlof, 1994; Çavuşoğlu, 2007). Movements such as avoiding an enemy attack while on the horse or reaching forward and rising on the horse for more effective strikes were vital for riders. Because these skills would be used in battles where survival was a struggle for survival. In fact, it was the skills they displayed on the horse that gave the Turks this title of invincibility. Undoubtedly, these skills were valued thanks to the characteristics of horses. While primitive horsemanship did not go beyond riding while the horse was naked, the biggest factor in the emergence of systematic horsemanship was the application of stirrups.

3. Traditional Equestrian Sports in Turks

“The horse has influenced the formation of the social structure in Turkic culture, and with its mobility, it has provided the chance of contact with distant regions in a short time. When the resistance and endurance it gave to the human body with its freedom of movement was integrated with two weapons such as the arrow in later periods, followed by the spear (cıda), it created a system that was impossible to defeat among its contemporaries” (Kalkan, 1997). The success of this system depended on games imitating warfare with and without tools, that is, equestrian sports. It was thought that games played on horseback would make riders good warriors. Indeed, Turks did not refrain from practicing these traditional sports in every social event. Even on the anniversary of the death of some commanders or important people, or during the ceremonies for the raising of yoghurt, they showed these struggles. In short, every moment on the steppe was an excuse to repeat these trainings, irregularly but continuously. Another sport whose game tool is called stick, stave or javelin is the mounted javelin game. “Javelin, which was developed with the skills of valor, warrior and sportsmanship in Turks, has been a sport played or traces of it have been seen everywhere where Turks spread their traditions and

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civilizations, especially in Anatolia" (Köstem, 2000; Ay, 2018). Mounted javelin is one of the most vicious and warlike games of traditional sports. "In the Ottoman Empire, the javelin game was played very hard and there would be injuries in every game. But the brave men would not pay attention to these wounds, they would continue the game by throwing nagra" (Karcıoğlu, 2017). If we remember that it was banned in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Mahmut II because of injuries, it is not difficult to manifest the degree of hardness of the game in ancient Turks. It is even known that anyone who dies during this game is considered a martyr. We can say that the mounted javelin game is a complete war game in this respect. Gökbörü is a goat-grabbing game known as Kökbörü and Buzkaşi. It is an equestrian fighting game, meaning Gökkurt, which is claimed to have been born in imitation of the wolves that raided the stables in one of the villages of Kyrgyzstan and wiped out the goats. Traditionally, the game is played individually. Hundreds of horsemen, at the signal of the referee, try to grab the dead goat, which is placed at a certain distance, and carry it to the starting point. It is a game where arm strength and the coordination of horse and rider are at the forefront. Again, very large areas are not needed for the popular jop game played on horseback. Therefore, it is a game that can be easily played anywhere, where targeted shooting and timing skills are displayed at a high level. Moreover, it is necessary to perform these skills on horseback and while riding fast, which makes it even more difficult. "The stick used in the baton game should be made of a dry tree without knots. Two poles of three to four meters in length were erected on a flat square and a rope was passed across them. When the rider coming fast on a horse from the opposite side comes in front of the rope, he hits the ground with the baton in his hand so that it bounces" (Köstem, 2000; Ay, 2018). The jop is made to bounce with the force it receives from the ground. If the warrior can make a good, balanced shot, the jop will rise and pass over the rope, which is an expected result. Equestrian hockey, known by names such as Çöğen, çevgen, çevgan, tubuk, tüy, bandel, is another equestrian sport that has reached Anatolia. This is a game in which the teams, divided into two equal numbers, score points when they pass the ball between two poles erected by riding or passing the ball on horseback. It is a sport in which hard hits are made with a curved stick called a girdle and the horses are used to it. The aim is to ensure that the horse is not startled during all these actions, that it is accustomed to shouting, shouting, noises and that it can obey its rider in that atmosphere.

4. Functions of Game Tools

Traditional sports are one of the elements of national culture where people who experience the same emotions exhibit their common reactions and behaviors. "Sportive activities are a part of the culture of societies. All nations that have lived in history have combined their own cultures and the characteristics of the geography they live in with their sports and created a unique sports culture" (Karcıoğlu, 2017). Turks reveal their

unique characteristics in equestrian sports. This should not be considered only in terms of respect, reverence and forgiveness. It is definitely possible to see these values in the application phase of traditional sports. However, as important as these behaviors are the purposes of the games and the functions of the game tools. Being able to swing the stick in the game of agile quickly while on horseback, even lying down if necessary, and being in this practice for hours undoubtedly provides a great development of strength. In particular, "riding Turks, who also possessed the striking power of iron, became the fearful dream of other societies" (Onay, 2015). Being able to use a sword well on horseback can be possible with constant repetition in such games. Moreover, in the system of "high stirrups" called Kazak stirrups, these strikes could be made even more powerful, and they could shatter the metal and leather armor of that period. It would be fair to say that they acquired different skills in the game of Horse Javelin. It required a lot of repetition to be able to quickly throw a javelin (spear) at the enemy on horseback and hit them. This was possible through traditional sports practiced at every opportunity. "After the end of the game, the one who hit his opponent with a javelin, the one who caught a javelin in the air, the one who made skillful movements on the horse, the one who bent down and picked up the javelin was given gold or gold coins" (Kahraman 1995; Evliya Çelebi, 2001; Karcıoğlu, 2017). These skills were frequently encountered during war. Being able to catch a jirid in mid-air or to pick up a jirid on the ground during a battle by reaching from a horse and fighting again was essential for survival. We can see that the game was invaluable for developing these skills. "Capricorn", the game tool used in Kökbörü, the game of capricorn snatching, weighs approximately 30-35 kg. It requires great strength to pick up a material of this weight from the ground and carry it on the horse. Tugging naturally takes place during the game. Each player tries to take the goat away from the opponent in order to possess it. All this requires skillful movement on the horse. Because the rider tries to pull the goat by using both hands to have the goat. In this situation, the rider and the horse have to act in harmony. In addition, in all this chaos, horses learn to listen to their rider and act in harmony with him. These behaviors (horses not being frightened by the noise, not avoiding the struggle) are the most needed characteristics in war. Joping on horseback also builds skills in balance and timing. Riding the horse fast, bouncing it off the ground and over the rope with good timing also requires excellent target shooting. It can be seen that the game materials used in equestrian sports are in fact a good preparation for the tools of war to be used in war. These traditional sports, which are played at every opportunity outside of war, bring great experience to both horses and riders. These experiences gained in civilian life, skills involving horse handling, tool use, throwing, lifting and pushing are developed for use in hunting and warfare.

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About the Author

O. Tarkan TUZCUOGULLARI is a lecturer at Gaziantep University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Department of Sports Management. He has a master's degree from Gaziantep University, Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports. His research area is psychosocial. Main areas of interest; traditional sports and hockey.

E-mail: tarkanfolk@hotmail.com , ORCID: 0000-0003-2283-6207

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