



## INTRODUCTION OF AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN TRADITIONAL EQUESTRIAN BRANCH OF SPORTS: EGYPTIAN WOOD GAME

**Mehmet Türkmen<sup>1</sup>,  
Kanat Dzhanzakov<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Professor Dr., Muş Alparslan University  
& Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University,  
Traditional Sports and Games Research & Application Center,  
Turkey and Kyrgyzstan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5926-7522>

<sup>2</sup>Professor Dr., Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University,  
Physical Education and Sports High School,  
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9138-4799>

### **Abstract:**

*Cop* is a slightly elliptical, knot-free stick made of flexible and dry wood, the length of which is 80 cm, and edges of which are blunted. The game played on horseback with this stick called *cop* is named particularly as 'Egyptian Wood Game'. It is a traditional equestrian game in which competitors on horseback try to make the sticks, by hitting them on the ground, bounce over a thick rope connecting two poles with heights of 5-6 m and a distance of approximately 6-7 m in between. The Egyptian Wood Game played frequently in Ottoman period and in the 1960s in Turkey was no more practiced in Turkey for the last fifty years except a few locations in the West Anatolia. **Significance:** Almost every day, a traditional cultural element disappears also in Turkey which is among the countries deeply affected by the globalization of the world. This study was conducted because the scope of studies on these issues diminished and there were even no theoretical resources as sometimes there were no practical sources. **Objective:** introduction of this traditional game, which does not exist in written records, to the Turkic sports literature by correctly underlining its rules and procedures. **Methodology:** Monograph was composed in the form a compilation, also observations were included by paying a visit to Karapurcek town of Susurluk district of Balıkesir province of Turkey and certain unique and distinctive images were used. **Result:** It was deduced that Egyptian wood game which was known to be played in the palace and its environs in the late period of Ottomans was especially an integral part of social ceremonies in the West Anatolia until the 1960s, and as of the 1960s, lost gradually its character making it the constituent part of festivals and at present, was practiced only in a limited format in a few small local festivals in combination with a performance of drum and clarion.

**Keywords:** Egyptian stick, cop (stick), equestrian sports, traditional game

## 1. Introduction

'*Egyptian wood game*' (Ulken, 1946) is introduced as '*stick game / stick dodging game*' in certain documents (Ant, 1959) and '*labud throwing game*' in some other resources (Delibas, 1947). In all three cases, style and rules of the game are identical. However, rituals of the game may vary and names attributed to the sticks thrown during the game may partially differ from region to region. The game is named after the wooden stick employed during the game. The main actors of the game are the horse, horse rider and wooden stick held by the horse rider.

"*Cop*" is a slightly elliptical, knot-free, smooth stick made of flexible and dry wood, the length of which is 80 cm, the diameter of which is 5-6 cm and edges of which are blunted. Proper wood is selected for *cop* production and *cop* is produced in conformity with certain specifications. The same applies to the stick called Egyptian wood. On the other hand, it is viewed that the stick length reaches 1 meter in Usak province of Turkey and its environs where Egyptian wood game is played. The length of wooden stick *cop* is limited as 80 cm in Susurluk district of Balikesir and in Karapurcek town of Susurluk where the game is mostly practiced (Türkmen, 1996). Slightly pear-shaped and with a particular aerodynamic structure, *labud* stick is thicker and shorter than *cop* stick and it is in the category of striker weaponry which was used in Ottoman period (Eralp, 1993).

Clear information as to when and by whom the game was devised was not yet discovered. It is known that a version of *cop* game (Egyptian wood game) which was named as '*labud*' in Ottoman period (Hafız Hızır İlyas Aga, 1987) was practiced with the name '*tayak*' by Egyptian Mameluke Kypchaks whereas the game was not played in Central Asia (Turkmen, 1996).

Emerging as a combination of entertainment and competition in relation to '*keskin cündilik*' (*elite horse rider*) games and especially the *jereed* (javelin) game among these games in Ottoman period, '*Egyptian wood game*' cannot be characterized in its current shape either as a formal branch of sports or as a game of sports. There are differences in its practice from region to region and its rules are not yet standardized. That being the case, it cannot be described as a branch of sports, however, there is an element of competition and achievement in *cop* game. In this sense of the argument, it seems closer to a branch of sports. Thus, it can be asserted that it exhibits a character in between sports and games.

All those feeling confident about his horse-riding skills, performance of his horse and his muscle power are eligible to participate in the game. This game which is practiced in general for entertainment on the occasion of festivals and marriage ceremonies creates an ambience of exuberance and cheerfulness. Two poles, the length of which is by 9-10 meters, are erected in an open space and poles are tied together with *knitted* or *hempen* rope. The affluent people of the region or village attach items with

varying material value such as money, gold, prayer rugs, towels, shirts. Horsemen with a wooden stick reaching 1 meter in its length (Egyptian wood) ride their horses and approaches poles, hit Egyptian woods in their hands to the ground from a proper distance and try to bounce them over the rope. It is claimed in environs of Usak that the best stick for Egyptian wood game is made of apple and celtis woods. This type of wood can be bounced over a rope stretched 5-6 meters above the ground between two poles. It is alleged in environs of Balıkesir that cornel wood is the best for *cop* game. Bouncing the wooden stick from ground above the rope stretched tightly between poles is called as '*galgıtma*' in environs of Usak and '*asırma*' in environs of Balıkesir. In environs of Usak, 'Egyptian jereed' is another name attributed to this equestrian game which is named as '*Egyptian wood game*' <https://www.usaksevdalisi.com/usak-genel/kuluplerimiz/133-usakcirit>

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to correctly introduce this traditional game, which does not exist in written records, together with its rules and procedures and add it to the Turkic and world sports literature. Moreover, enhancing the attractiveness of *cop* game, popularity of which declined, which is almost forgotten and practiced only in two provinces in the Aegean region of Turkey, at least ensuring its expansion to other regions of Turkey and avoiding the dangerous probability of its being forgotten.

### 2. Method

There is no object used as research material. However, discussion and conclusions, three original documents from of the Premiership Ottoman Archives (POA) were used in the study. While writing these documents for reference; First, the Premiership Ottoman Archive (POA) abbreviation, then the fund code abbreviation, file number / archive number (POA, DH.MTV: 44/16) was written. That is, it is classified according to the International Council on Archives (ICA) format. Monograph was composed in the form a compilation, also observations were included by paying a visit to Karapurcek town of Susurluk district of Balıkesir province of Turkey and certain unique and distinctive images were used. In the study, descriptive identification and comparison method was used.

### 3. Findings

This game was promoted by the horse-riders (*kapı cündileri*) of Ottoman generals (*pashas*) who were appointed to Egypt after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Sultan Selim the Resolute according to historical records. It is known that Egyptian wood game was practiced in Ottoman period prior to the introduction of jereed competitions. Particularly in late periods of Ottomans, it is documented that the game was played in Galatasaray High School (1868-1923). Hafız Hızır İlyas Aga notes that:

*“while horse-riding, hitting the labud (wooden stick) to the ground and bouncing it high above the rope stretched between trees, this was a game played sensually and magnificently by sharp horse-riders...” (1987: p. 442).*

M. Z. Pakalın refers to *Mihrab*, 839, the source of which we failed to ascertain, in the First Volume of Ottoman History Idioms and Terms Dictionary and remarks the following:

*“While the horse was galloping, cutting with a sword blow into two the iron wire twisted 5-10 to 30 times covered with wet snow mat, stopping the horse suddenly, going around in circles in a narrow and fictional location on horseback, hitting the iron labut (stick), the length of which was one Ottoman yard, the thickness of which was four fingers, on the ground while on horseback, bouncing labut above the rope stretched a hundred meters above his hand, they were all the skills of horsemen.” (1983: p.16)*

With reference to the History of Galatasaray High School by Ziya Bey, the proponent of entente, M.Z. Pakalın furthermore notes the following about throwing *labut* stick:

*“All students of Galatasaray High School were busy with studying, playing tomak and cop games in accordance with their procedures, and those interested in learning archery were first paying respects to a master, practicing with a bow called kepaze which had a loose grip and was easily handled, pulling the bow string 5-10 to 200 times to strengthen their arm muscles and afterwards shooting arrows towards two bags full of weeds in order to develop their martial abilities. Students responsible for studying here were acting in a formal, well-disciplined and regulated manner... Following the afternoon prayer, royal master used to allow them to perform excursions through certain games, and on this occasion, they had entertainment with cop game exercises as a preamble to the practice of jereed, tomak and javelin throwing and were wandering around the palace square for a while.” (1983: p.17).*

#### **4. Discussion and Results**

It is obvious that all three aforementioned games either named as ‘*throwing labut*’ or ‘*cop game*’ or ‘*Egyptian wood game*’ refer to the same game in these sources. However, it was a highly exaggerated and incredible statement by M. Z. Pakalın noting that *“...hitting the iron labut (stick), the length of which was one Ottoman yard, the thickness of which was four fingers, on the ground while on horseback, bouncing labut above the rope stretched a hundred meters above his hand, they were all the skills of horsemen.” (1983-I, p.124).* Here it is alleged that iron cop was used instead of wooden one, this iron stick hitting the ground was bouncing a hundred meters and dodging above the stretched rope and the length of this iron stick was one Ottoman yard. The weight of an iron stick at this length and thickness is supposed to be minimum 30-40 kilograms (Ant, 1962). It is

evident that, irrespective of the weight of the iron stick, iron stick does not have the property to bounce back upon hitting on the ground, and it is not possible to stretch a rope between trees 100 meters above the ground as a target for the iron stick. When the stick for *labud*, *cop* or Egyptian wood game is made of any type of wood, the reason for paying attention to their flexibility besides their robustness is that they need to have the ability to bounce back.

In general, '*labud*' and '*cop*' are terms written in printed documents about this game in Ottoman Turkish (POA, AE.SABH.I.: 60/4205). There exist also village and family names as Labut. For instance, a document stating that "*It will be more proper for the Ministry of Internal Affairs to pay the amount demanded as a quid pro quo for the people of Labut village connected to downtown Uskub (Skopje)...*" (POA, DH.MTV: 44/16). Moreover, it is observed that words *labud* and *labüd* as Arabic adjective and adverb meant 'to be essential, necessary, indispensable' and additionally meant 'no separation' (Devellioğlu, 1996). For instance, "...*Although increasing the monthly wage of the employees of the Department of Inheritance is deemed necessary by the Treasury of Foundations,...*" (POA, BEO: 1694/126980).

Nevertheless, according to Ottoman archives, use of words *labud/labut*, Egyptian wood and *cop* do not pertain to the game under consideration. In other words, a document titled Egyptian wood, *cop* or *labud* game do not exist in archives. Documents where the latter word was stated had a different context as noted above. As mentioned before, issues relevant to the game were addressed in printed documents only as of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5. Result

Egyptian wood, *labut* or *cop*, all these three names represent the same game. Except for a version practiced in Mameluke State established by Kypchak Turks, Egyptian wood game did not exist in any Turkic state other than Ottoman Empire. Especially after the ban on *jereed* game by Mahmud II in Ottoman period, the popularity of Egyptian wood game rose. It was ascertained that information on the game did not exist in Ottoman archives but in printed books written for the last 150 years. Although there appeared to be certain exaggerated remarks about the game in these resources, it was highlighted that the game was among the physical activities performed by students of prominent schools like Galatasaray High School particularly in the late period of Ottomans and practiced just as other traditional sports branches especially the *jereed* in social ceremonies organized by the people besides the Ottoman palace and its entourage.

It is seen that, in terms of the name, materials used and rituals applied, there are slight differences between regions where the game is played. However, rules and procedures of the game are identical and ideological and formal aspects of the game overlap. *Alp* attributes such as Bravery, manliness, gallantry rest with the character of the game, and on the occasion of the game, playing of Koroglu and welcoming folk song together with the performance of drum and clarion just as in the case of traditional

wrestling and the equestrian sports branch of jereed offers the challenging ingredient of wrestler spirit to the participants.

Egyptian Wood (*Cop / Labut*) Game is practiced in a limited scope only during wedding ceremonies only in Balıkesir, Usak and a few locations in Aegean region of Turkey. At present, it almost began to be forgotten. This game practiced with horse which is the main actor of Turkish national culture is not supposed to be played only in wedding ceremonies in villages and small-scale organizations but also should be part of large-scale activities arranged recently such as Malazgirt Victory Celebrations, Migrant Games, Altai Hand Games etc.

### Note

This study was performed in the context of the project titled as “KTMU-BAB-2018. GOSAUM.01 No - Analysis of the Traditional Equestrian Sports in Kyrgyzstan and Turkey”.

### References

- Ahmet Cevat Pasha (1299/1882). *Târîh-i askerî-i Osmânî. Kitâb-ı evvel- cild-i evvel [ek], Mecmû'a-i eşkâl*, İstanbul: La Turquie Matbaası; Paris: Ernest Loro [Leroux]. Turkish and Ottoman edition.
- Ant, M. (1959). *Kırk Gün Kırk Gece [Forty Days Forty Nights]*, İstanbul: Taç Yay. / Tach Publications. Turkish edition.
- Ant, M. (1962). *Gönlü Yüce Türk [Heart sublime Turkish]*, Ankara: Dost Pub. Turkish edition.
- Delibası, A. S. (1947). *Tarihte Halk Temaşası [Folk Entertainment in History]*, Ankara: CHP Halkevleri Representation Publications. Turkish Edition.
- Devellioglu, F. (1993). *Osmanlıca – Türkçe Ansiklopedik Sözlük [Ottoman- Turkish Encyclopedic Dictionary]*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, prep. by A. Sami, Ankara: Aydın Kitapevi.
- Eralp, T. N. (1993). *Tarih boyunca Türk toplumunda silah kavramı ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda kullanılan silahlar [The concept of weapons in Turkish societies throughout history and the weapons used in the Ottoman Empire]*, Ankara: Atatürk Culture Center Publications. Turkish edition.
- Gokalp, M. (1964). “Kars ve Dolaylarında Cirit Oyunu / Javelin in and around Kars game”, *TFA [TJFS]*, Vol 9, No 181, 41-43 pp. Turkish edition.
- Hafız Hızır İlyas Aga, (1987). *History-i Enderun-Letaif-i Enderun (1812-1830)*, Trans. C. Kayra, İstanbul: Gunes Publishing. Turkish edition.
- Pakalın, M. Z. (1983). *Osmanlı tarih deyimleri ve terimleri sözlüğü [Ottoman Idioms and Terms Dictionary]*, V.I, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, İstanbul: National Education Publishing. Turkish edition.
- Premiership Ottoman Archives, Babîâli Document Room (POA, BEO: 1694/ 126980); Hijri (Month) Calendar: H-07-04-1319 / July 24, 1901.

- Premiership Ottoman Archives, Interior Ministry Document Item (POA, DH.MTV: 44/16); Historical: Hijri (Month): H-23-04-1329 / April 23, 1911.
- Premiership Ottoman Archives, Supreme Order of Abdulmecid I (POA, AE. SABH.I): 60/4205; Hijri (Month): H-22-08-1200 / June 20, 1786.
- Türkmen, M. (1996). *Türklerde Geleneksel Atlı Sporların Yapılışı, Kaynağı ve Bilinmeyen Yeni Boyutları [Construction of traditional equestrian sports in Turks, source and unknown new dimensions]*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Istanbul: Marmara University - Institute of Health Sciences. Turkish edition.
- Ülken, Mustafa (1946). "Eski Samsun'da Spor Oyunları / Old Turkish sports games in Samsun", 19 Mayıs Dergisi [*Journal of 19 May*], Volume 7, Issue 28, 9-11 pp.  
<https://www.usaksevdalisi.com/usak-genel/kuluplerimiz/133-usakcirit>; Date of access: May 27, 2019.

Mehmet Türkmen, Kanat Dzhanuzakov  
INTRODUCTION OF AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN TRADITIONAL EQUESTRIAN BRANCH OF SPORTS:  
EGYPTIAN WOOD GAME

---

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).