Revival of the Djerid Game in Turkey

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The game of Djerid is an aspect of Arab equine history that had the potential to remain relevant in today's horse sports culture around the world. While various theories have been suggested about its origin, the generally accepted idea is that the game has been identified with Turkish culture. This is a justified belief, since the game has existed in the geographic areas occupied by the Turks through the centuries, and disappeared when the Turks withdrew from these lands. The belief remains valid today.

Much of the literature that has been written about the game of Djerid is linked to the Ottomon period. So far, any detailed research on the game that might have been preserved in Anatolian times, and up to the collapse of the Ottomon State, has not been unearthed. This study will analyse the rebirth of the game of Djerid after these historical periods and look at the activities and events that were carried out to try and revitalize the game within the cultural and sports policies established in the new Turkish State back in 1923.

Djerid Game: Material-Technical Analysis

The game has always been called the same thing despite the time or place in which it was played throughout its history. The word Djerid is of Arabic orgin, which means the palm branch with leaves peeled. While Djerid is the name of the game, it is also the name of a sharp-ended weapon, 75-80 cm long, largely made of iron and used by warring troops on horseback (Oppenheim, 1927). It's believed that the game originated from the exercises for use of that short lance for its optimal use in a war. In fact the game is based on hitting the Djerid with blunted end at the opponent while riding at full gallop, and avoiding from the thrown Djerid. The basic of the game has not changed for centuries.

According to the last Horse Djerid Competition Guidelines published by the Traditional Sports Branches Confederation, Djerid is played on a field that is 30-50m wide, 90-160m long (standard: 40x130m), with a raised soft stoneless soil, or a 5-6cm thick layer of sand. The game is played in two periods of 40 minutes each. Each side of the field has three special areas. The "team stand" is where each team's horses stand in line. 5m ahead of this line on each side is the "forbidden area", an area that team riders cannot enter. A further 7m ahead of the forbidden area on each side is the middle line where the Djerid can be thrown by the opposing team at the targeted rider. This area is called the "throwing area".

The game tool, Djerid, is an oval stick

made of wood, 100cm in length, with one end in 2.5cm, and diminishing towards the other end to a diameter of 1.5cm. The teams consist of seven riders each holding a Djerid in their hands. Each team has three substitute riders. A music that excites the horses and adapting to the game's tempo is played during the game. Usually braveness songs such as Köroğlu, Sivastopol, Cezayir, are preferred.

With the sign of the referee, a player of the team having the right to start goes up to the throwing area of the other team. Within the attack period (35s), while he throws his Djerid and run to his own game area, a rider from the other team begins to chase him. The attacked rider tries to hit the Djerid, and the other tries to avoid from the thrown Djerid, or catch the Djerid. Target in the Djerid game is the parts of the body over knees except the head of the opponent and his arm by which he tries to catch the Djerid. The actions such as throwing the Djerid from close distance, crashing his horse intentionally with the opponent rider, or throwing the Djerid to the horse intentionally are scored negatively. Gaining score in the game does not depend only on hitting the Djerid. Besides hitting, technical-tactical, ethic and esthetic actions defined as "catching" the opponent, and "forgiving" without throwing the Djerid from close distance, catching up the opponent rider and blocking him, and "catching the thrown Djerid in the air" are have high scores.

Djerid Game in the Ottoman Period: Advancement and Regression

It is known that the Djerid game has experienced its glorious days in the Ottoman period. The Djerid game was the most favorite war training means of the horsed troops in the Ottoman State whose army largely consisted of cavalries. The game has drawn the attention of foreign travelers and observers since it has been not only a military exercise, but also an important part of the public culture and an essential training, game and entertainment means of the Ottoman Palace life particularly since the early 16th century. Yıldıran (1996), in his bibliography on the travel books mentioning about the Djerid game, has revealed that the game has been used to be played between the 16th and 19th centuries on a broad geography where the Ottoman state has been dominant or ascendant. This geography expands to Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro in the Balkans; to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia in the Caucasus; to Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Egypt, Iran in the Middle East, and to Algeria, Sudan and Ethiopia in Africa.

The Djerid game was prohibited in 1826 under the military reforms of Sultan Mahmud II. Although the prohibition was initially effective in Istanbul, the game continued to be played in Anatolia and until withdrawal of the Turks on the other Ottoman geography until the early 20th century. What threatened the game was the loss of horses caused by the continuing wars rather than the prohibition.

Such association as Jockey Club Ottoman (1909) which was founded to encourage horse breeding by way of horse racing, Improvement of Horse Breed (1912) and Cavalrymen Organization (1913) were far way from comparing the losses of horses in Crimea, Ottoman-Russian, Balkan, 1st World and Turkish Independence wars. The Djerid horses were also extremely affected from the horse losses suffered, but the game could have been uninterruptedly conveyed to the Republic.

Djerid Game and Preservation Studies in the Republic Period

Advancement of the Djerid game in Turkey following the declaration of the Republic does

not show an integral pattern. Therefore, the advancement line of the game will be analyzed by being separated into the periods of Advancement under the Horse Breeding and Culture Policies (1923-1948), Regression associated with Urbanization Industrialization (1950-1970), and Re-popularization and Corporate Organization (1972 and onwards).

Advancement under Horsemanship and Culture Policies (1923-1948)

The Republic staffs, along with foundation, have places importance on horse breeding, and begun to regenerate horsemanship with studhorses brought from abroad at the new established stud farms (Tutel, 1998, 108-110). The first legal arrangement on the Djerid game had been made in the Law on Improvement of Animals as enacted in 1926. The law urged the province administrations to establish horsed Djerid fields, and allocate share from the budget for this purpose.

However, the serious attempts intended in regeneration of the Djerid Game in Anatolia were actually started along with foundation of the community centers (Halkevleri) in 1932. The fact that the community centers encouraged the traditional sports and offered practice possibilities within the scope of identifying, maintaining and improving Anatolian and Turkish culture values led to refreshing of the Djerid game which fell into oblivion particularly in urban areas in the minds. According to the reports for 1933, after just one year as of foundation, Adana, Afyon, Kayseri and Balıkesir branches had been engaged in the "Djerid" field (Anonymous, 1934). By 1940, horsed Djerid used to be conserved and encouraged by 30 community centers (Anonymous, 1940).

The Cavalrymen Organization (Sipahi Ocağı) regenerated in 1924 strived in coordination with the community centers to the advance the Djerid game, and to ensure it is played in line with rules. Carl Diem has been the first to have put emphasis on the rules, he has described the horsed Djerid he has watched in 1933 in Ankara as a game with no binding rules (Diem, 1941a, 87). It was reflected in the press also in Adana that the game is played "very primitively and subject to no rules" (Naip, 1934, 7). For this reason, Istanbul Cavalrymen Organization has prepared a "Djerid Guideline" in 1934 to ensure that the game is played with the same rules everywhere (Kırşan, 1937, 7); the guideline was sent by Turkish Sports Organization (Türk Spor Kurumu) to all Regional Directorates (BCA, 490.01.1097.10.1). The guideline which found great favor was presses in Ankara successively in 1934, 1936 and 1937. Adana Community Center has published a separate booklet, "Cirit Oyununun Kuralları" ("Rules of the Djerid Game"), in 1935.

Erzurum Cavalrymen House, together with the Community Center, has put the game which has been used to play "irregularly and without rules" all along in the region, and the Djerid teams established at Community Center Sports Branch in 1936 have started to play Djerid every Sunday in line with the rules (Küçükuğurlu, Okur, 2007, 129). State support assisted the Djerid teams acting locally to go to various regions and perform exhibition competitions. In 1935, the Djerid team coming from Bayburt to Istanbul had performed two exhibition competitions which attracted great interest of the people in the city where the game had experienced the most glories times once (Kavrak, 1935, 7).

Like the Community Centers, Turkish Sports Organization (Türk Spor Kurumu) which was founded in 1936 directly subordinate to the political party governing the country also considered regeneration and popularization of the Djerid games among its most important

missions. In that regard, the units to assume priority missions were deemed as the Horse Sports Clubs founded and being founded (Kırşan, 1937, 6). Also, Turkish Armed Forces (Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri) used to support the initiatives of the government for advancing the Djerid game through Community Centers and Turkish Sports Organization, and communicate that Djerid teams be established at the province and county centers breeding horses, and Djerid games be played at horse race organizations to awake the interest of the people (BCA, 490.01.1097.10.1). Thereupon, the government has demanded that the existing Horse Sports Clubs be federated, and clubs be founded where they do not exist and be prepared for Djerid game (BCA, 490.01.1097.10.1). Several training institutions contributed to popularization of the game, as well. It was clearly indicated in the Education Guide that village instructors make the villagers play the Djerid game besides various events within the framework of the Republic Day celebrations (Erdem, 2008, 196).

The efforts of reawakening interest on, and creating practice fields of, the Djerid game carried on with the support of various organizations in the first years of the Republic used to be supported also with publishing activities. The extensive studies oriented in the Djerid game since the first years of the Republic were written up by the Germans. Max Freiherrn von Oppenheim (1927) who has conducted researches on the Bedouins, Carl Diem (1941a; 1941b; 1960) who was invited to Turkey in 1933 in respect of organization of youth and sports, and Herbert Riedel (1942), director of the "Physical Training Institute" which was established within the High Institute of Agriculture founded in 1933, published studies addressing the game in all dimensions.

The Djerid game and variant richness had drawn the attention particularly in the research trips performed for the purpose of identifying and recording the cultural assets of Anatolia, which was included in the mission descriptions of the relevant branches of the community centers, primarily "Villagism" and "Sport". In this process, particularly in the compilations made from the Middle Anatolia cities and villages, it was tried to reveal the social, cultural, sports, military and economical aspects of the game; the technique-tactic, terminology, clothing used in the game, Djerid horse breeding techniques, harnesses, time, place, equipment details concerning the game, game types, religious/mystical items, were recoded and published. Such ethnographic studies initiated by Dehri (1934) were continued by Kırşan (1937), Atabeyoğlu (1938), Şapolyo (1938), Türker (1946) and Yener (1947).

The government's support to the game was continued under the circumstances of the World War II although the horses with 140, even 135 cm height at withers, were collected by the army, and they didn't return for use as stud (Güleç, 1998a,10). The government, following the war, had instructed that the games organized by Çubuk Community Center in the neighborhood of Ankara on 1 May 1947 are communicated to public via radio that their photos and films are shot, and it had awarded the ranking teams. However, Çubuk Community Center that demanded to repeat the same activity in 1948 received the reply that no assistance could be given due to budget insufficiency (BCA, 490.01.1097.10.1). That reply was going to be the beginning of the long lasting silence of the game at the same time.

Regression associated with Urbanization and Industrialization (1950–1970)

The horse begun to rapidly loose the important role it has been playing in Turkish social and economic life due to the

urbanization that gained speed in 1950 and the industrialization that increased since the 1960s. The dependence of the Anatolian villages whose saddle horses were taken from their hand during war on the horses fairly decreased along with introduction of modern vehicles in agriculture, carriage and transport, and horse breeding lost its importance. Urbanization constricted the Djerid fields. Djerid was not played at the modern sports facilities established on broad fields where previously Djerid used to be played. The game rapidly regressed from the regions it had been popularized during the Early Republic period, and retracted again to Erzurum and its neighborhood, where it had been uninterruptedly continued during the history. Additionally, the Turkmen of Karakeçili had continued in silence the Djerid they played in the memory of Ertuğrul Gazi, whose tomb in Söğüt they had been visiting, and in the name of whom they had been organizing feast, every year since an unknown date. On 24 September 1961, the Djerid game which Franz Täschner who had participated in the 680th death anniversary of Ertuğrul Gazi in Söğüt was waiting for in a great excitement was ceased since a player dropped off his horse and was badly injured (Täschner, 1962, 9).

Re-popularization and Corporate Organization (1972 and onwards)

The Djerid game's onto the agenda after a 20-year silence period again and strongly took place thanks to leading persons and entities. Konya Tourism Association headed by Fevzi Halıcı aimed at advancement of traditional sports in 1972 within the scope of culture, art and folklore studies. First, a Djerid game screening was performed across the country, and it was determined that a Djerid game existed in Bayburt besides Erzurum (Halıcı, 1985, 12). In the same year, Turkish Equestrian Federation headed by cavalry general Rıfkı Alkan made interviews with the International Equestrian Federation to incorporate the horse Djerid in its body, the authorities who came to Ankara were made watch a Djerid exhibition, and the horse Djerid which was admired by the delegates was incorporated in the body of the Equestrian Federation (Güleç, 1998b, 26). The Equestrian Federation soon prepared a "Horse Djerid Competition Guideline". Soon after that, Konya Tourism Association initiated the horse Djerid games on 9-10 September 1972 in Konya with the competitions where Erzurum and Bayburt teams played in accordance with the guideline. Thirty thousand audiences watched the Djerid game that was held in Konya stud farm. As expressed by its founder; the horse Djerid competitions "which survived in difficulty with own limited possibilities as a local sport away from any kind of interest" were continuing by the end of 1985 (Halıcı, 1985, 12). Exhibition competitions were being organized in various provinces in order to introduce the game across the country (Güleç, 1998b, 26). Thus, by 1980, about 100-150 Djerid players and Djerid horses existed in Turkey (Halıcı, 1980, 75). The foundations of the first Djerid stadium planned to be built in Erzurum were laid in 1979, and the facility with horse shelters, social facilities and a capacity of 10 thousand audiences was put into service on 3 June 1986 with the Djerid games exhibited before the President.

In the meantime, the attempts of creating awareness on the Djerid game were being initiated through publications and scientific environments. Erzurum Horse Sports Club began to publish an annual magazine "Cirit" in 1974; although just one issue was published, the almanac served an important role for having recorded the status of the game in Erzurum and its neighborhood. Konya Tourism Association tried to draw the attention onto Djerid at the

"Seminar on Traditional Turkish Sports", which it held in 1986, and where a live Djerid show was performed for the invited scientist, bureaucrat and politician participants.

The attempts were yielding results. In 1990, Soil Products Office (Toprak Mahsulleri Ofisi) subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs established a strong Horse Sports Club in Ankara with 10 Djerid players it had transferred from Erzurum against an employee staff. For the traditional sports which passed over in the previous Development Plans with a phrase as "focus will be placed on and will be supported", the "Specialty Commission for Advancement of Traditional Sports Branches" was founded while the VI. Five-Year Development Plan (1990-1994) was being prepared, and the established "Horse Djerid Sub Commission" prepared an extensive report. Horse Djerid which could not show the expected advancement within the body of the Equestrian Federation begun to be represented at the level of Inferior Presidency under the roof of Traditional Sports Branches Federation in 1996. The federation prepared the new "Horse Djerid Competition Guideline" in 1997, and held Turkey Horse Djerid Championship in the same year. Club formation was encouraged, and numbers of clubs were increased. For the Turkey championships where the clubs succeeding in local or regional level competitions participate, the cities where Djerid was not played were preferred, and the introduction area was expanded. By 2006, number of registered of Horse Djerid Clubs had reached 50, and number of horses had reached 600.

International Introduction and Popularization Attempts

The continual interest of foreigners to the Djerid game directed the Federation to international introduction and popularization activities. In the interviews made in 2006, it was decided to teach Djerid to a team coming from Iran. In 2009, three Djerid teams whose all equipment was met by Turkey were established in two cities of Hungary, which showed a special interest on the Djerid game. A 15-day practical training was given to the players, trainers and referees of the Hungarian teams. Moreover, the German, English, Hungarian, South Korean and Polish horse archers who participated in the "International Horse Archery Competitions" organized by Sivas Horse Sports and Djerid Club in 2009 personally participated in the second period of the Djerid exhibition they had been watching, and became the first foreign sportsmen of the Republic period to have played Djerid. The Federation aims to take Djerid teams to the countries including Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in order for the horse Djerid to be played outside Turkey as well, and to be introduced at international level; and then to organize inter-countries competitions.

An Actual Problem: Insufficiency of Djerid Horses

When the Traditional Sports Branches Federation was founded in 1996, it was understood that the most important obstacle in front of popularization of the game was insufficiency of Djerid horses, whereas the continuity of the game depended on presence of Djerid horses. Until the 1950's during which the horse had an important role in the economic life, it was common to breed Djerid horses in Anatolia along with the game (Güleç, 1998a, 23). In the East, the Hınıs horse derived from mating of native Anatolian horses with Arab and native horses used to be preferred and bred as Djerid horse. In parallel with rapid urbanization and industrialization, it was became hard to breed the horse of which functions particularly in

agriculture and transport fields have diminished since the early 1960s. Gradually increasing costs caused the breeding activities to fairly slow down in short time at the regions where Djerid horse used to be bred in the past. Even in Erzurum where the game and Djerid horse breeding had been continued uninterruptedly for centuries, the existence of Djerid horse and Djerid game reached the danger limit in the early 1970s. As a matter of fact, Erzurum Horse Sports Club had to buy 8 saddle horses from Karacabey stud farm in 1973, and debited the horses on its players (Anonymous, 1974, 37). While the popularization move reinitiated in 1972 was successful, the insufficiency of Djerid horses persisted. In 1982, Erzurum clubs were supported again, this time, 25 Arab horses were given from Karacabey stud farm as saddle and stud horses (Güleç, 1998b, 27).

During the process, the newly founded Horse Sports Clubs and private Djerid teams increased the horse requirement. The intent of the Federation to import high-condition and resistant Turkmen horses which were determined to be suitable for Djerid from Turkmenistan in 1998 could not be realized. The Horse Sports Clubs, as a last resort, tended towards low priced race horses which were not run at the hippodromes due to performance decrease associated with age. Today many thoroughbred Arab horses which cannot run in races due to various reasons in Erzurum, Uşak and several regions of Middle Anatolia are used as Djerid horses. However, when compared with the Djerid horses undergone special training for years; the fact that the race horses trained just for moving forward could not perform the maneuvers required by the game as desired, and in general the fact that they could not adapt the game, reduced the enjoyment the riders from the game as well as of the pleasure of the audiences from watching. Of course the appropriateness of the Arab horse to Djerid incontestable when it is bred for the purpose. As a matter of fact, the skilled Djerid players watched by Theobald Schlegel at İstanbul Atmeydanı about 40 years later then the prohibition exhibited their skills over the "Arab horses swift like an arrow" (Schlegel, 1865, 28).

As a result, the Djerid game which is an old national sport of the Turks was tried to be advanced under the horsemanship and culture policies of the government in the beginning of the republic period, but regressed again due to the negative effects of the urbanization and industrialization that have the economical and social life since the 1950s. The Djerid game carries on its advancement and popularization thanks to the attempts initiated in 1972 and continued up to present. As in the past ages, it is possible today as well for a traveler visiting Turkey to come across a Djerid game anywhere in the country and enrich his memories.

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