



**For references:**

Bakhrevskiy, Eugeny. (2019) "History and actual image of oil wrestling". *International Journal of Ethnosport and Traditional Games*, №2 (2), 12–36. DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.34685/HI.2020.75.15.002>

## HISTORY AND ACTUAL IMAGE OF OIL WRESTLING

**Eugeny Bakhrevskiy**

PhD in philology, ORCID: 0000-0003-1246-3398

Russian Heritage Institute,

Deputy Director;

E-mail: [kamlay@mail.ru](mailto:kamlay@mail.ru)

RUSSIA

**Abstract**

Turkish "oil wrestling" (yağlı güreş) has a great popularity in Turkey, spread in some neighboring countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania), in Western Europe and Japan there are amateur clubs of this wrestling. That is complex system of accompanying rituals and attributes, it is based on ancient folklore tradition, and in modern conditions it became an important symbol of Turkish national consciousness. An Oil wrestling long enough became a subject of scientific interest; there is a series of books on its history and a lot of papers. At the same time caring publicists note that still we don't have a satisfactory scientific description of oil wrestling, neither in Turkish nor in other languages. The article presents the results of a study of historical development of oil wrestling, listed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Symbolic and ritual elements of nowadays oil wrestling and Kırkpınar festival (ağa, cazgır, peşrev, kispet etc.) were analyzed. Kırkpınar festival came into being in the end of the 19th century, in the period of wrestlers' tekke system decay, when the well-known masters from Edirne and Constantinople began to participate to the local festival on Hıdırellez, after that it became very popular even on national level. Simultaneously many legends were attached to the festival, and historians of 1920-30th years linked to it the names of state figures and events, relating to conquest of Balkans by Ottomans. The place of oil wrestling among the other traditional wrestling styles in Turkey is shown, the version of its origin was proposed. At the same time, when, how and under what influence oil wrestling was formed, remains a mystery, because nobody but Turks preserved this tradition. A survey of legends and historical information about saint patrons of oil wrestling Sarı Saltık, Kızıl Deli Sultan, Mahmud Pir Yar-ı Veli is given. The translation from the Ottoman language of parts of "Travels book of Evliya Çelebi" concerning oil wrestling is given. Many cultural spheres in Muslim civilization (poetry, music, fine art, medicine, craft technologies etc.) frequently develop within Tasavvuf (Sufism) or use its infrastructure. One of its most important features is the developed tradition of knowledge and mastery transfer within a "teacher-student" system. It is the perfectly suitable feature of Tasavvuf for preservation and development of cultural traditions, including martial arts. Practically all Turkish authors writing about wrestlers' tekke insist that they were "sport clubs" of their time, that the religious terminology was used in them "according to habits of the time", and totally deny the religious component in the life of these institutions and in the system of wrestlers' (and also archers', mace fighters' etc.) education. I think that it is a typical misconception of researches, operating the concepts of secular-atheistic world of the 20th-21st centuries, and transferring these concepts to the traditional society field. A survey of oil wrestling at Ottoman sultans court is given. After the destruction of the Ottoman Empire oil wrestling became one of the symbols of a new, nationalistic Turkey. A survey of problems caused by sportization of oil wrestling during the last decades of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries is given.

**Key words:** ethnosport, oil wrestling, Ottoman empire, Sufi brotherhoods, traditional wrestling.



Turkish “oil wrestling” (*yağlı güreş*) is one of the eldest traditional combat in the world. It has a great popularity in Turkey, spread in some neighboring countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania), in Western Europe and Japan there are amateur clubs of this kind of wrestling.

Oil wrestling has a complex system of accompanying rituals and attributes; it is based on ancient folklore tradition. In modern conditions it became an important symbol of Turkish national consciousness.

Oil wrestling long enough became a subject of scientific interest; there is a series of books on its history, a lot of papers on particular aspects of this socio-cultural phenomenon. At the same time caring publicists note that still we don't have a satisfactory scientific description of oil wrestling, neither in Turkish nor in other languages.

### **Kırkpınar oil wrestling festival**

In 2010 Kırkpınar oil wrestling festival was listed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>1</sup>. The festival (*panayır*<sup>2</sup>) Kırkpınar from 1924 to present is annually organized in the city of Edirne (Adrianople) that was a capital of the Ottoman state from 1365 to 1453. It is commonly believed that this tradition was started approximately at 1356 or 1357, during the Ottoman conquest of Balkan Peninsula. There are no any exact dates; the hypothesis is based on the date of Ottoman conquest of Adrianople. According to the tradition, the second of Ottoman sultans Orhan Gazi (1324–1362) and his son Suleyman Pasha during one of the campaigns made a wrestling competition between warriors in the meadow between villages Samona (Simavina) and Sarı Hızır. The two strongest wrestlers (their names, Ali and Selim, are mentioned, and it is said that they were brothers) unwilling to give way to each other, were wrestling up to the moment when they both died. The heroes were buried at the same place, and after some time a lot of new springs were found there. So the name Kırkpınar, “Forty springs” appeared. The other version of the legend tells about forty warriors in the party, and interprets Kırkpınar name as “The spring of Forty”. Forty in Turkic and in other traditions may mean just “many”. But this number surely has a magic meaning, forty is a sacred number. Anyway right at this place, according to the version widespread in Turkey, beginning from 1356 or 1362 (after the conquest of Adrianople) during the whole history of the Ottoman state the major oil wrestling tournament was held.

In 1912 during the First Balkan war Samona village entered the state borders of Greece, and the festival was replaced to the village of Viran Tekke (now Kapitan Andreevo, Bulgaria). From 1914 to 1924, the period of the First World War, breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and formation of the Republic of Turkey, Kırkpınar was not held. In 1924 it was organized at the first time in republican Turkey in Edirne. From 1928 to 1946 the festival was organized by the Red Crescent, and from 1946 to present by Edirne municipality.

Historically Kırkpınar began 3 days before the *Hıdırellez* holyday (the day separating winter and summer, the 6<sup>th</sup> of May) and was accompanied by a fair. Starting from 1940<sup>th</sup> it was organized in the end of June – beginning of July. The fairs with

---

<sup>1</sup> Kırkpınar oil wrestling festival. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/krkpınar-oil-wrestling-festival-00386>

<sup>2</sup> *Panayır* is a word of Greek origin, originally it means a fair at the dedication day of a village church.



wrestling and other competitions took place in many villages and cities in Rumelia<sup>3</sup>, as well as in Anatolia, and some of them were held on *Hıdırellez*. Some festivals also have long traditions, and festival in Elmalı (Antalya region), held in the end of August – beginning of September, claims to have elder history than Kırkpınar, referring to 1352<sup>4</sup>.

It is interesting that the earliest available document speaking about Kırkpınar is dated 1893, and the second 1910. Numerous Ottoman historians and travelers, including Evliya Çelebi, who writes about wrestling in the Ottoman state in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in details, never mention Kırkpınar. At the same time there is a lot of information about many other Ottoman *panairs* in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, including estate, *vakuf* and administrative documents. There are no also any documents about *panairs* with other names, held in Kırkpınar region<sup>5</sup>.

Old traditions of oil wrestling undoubtedly existed in Trakia, especially in Edirne. Apparently in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of wrestlers' *tekke* system decay (see below), the well-known masters from Edirne and Constantinople began to participate to the local festival on *Hıdırellez*, after that it became very popular even on national level. Simultaneously many legends were attached to the festival, and historians of 1920–30<sup>th</sup> years linked to it the names of state figures and events, relating to conquest of Balkans by Ottomans.

Kırkpınar competitions traditionally continue three days. At the first day *yörük* (nomade) race is held. For participation in wrestlers' tournament it is necessary to pass the qualifiers that take place all over Turkey during some months. Entrance for spectators, except those who sit on VIP tribunes, is free. Along with municipality the competitions are financed by local entrepreneurs, but the main role in the festival organization traditionally plays *ağa*.

*Ağa* is responsible for invitation of wrestlers, reception, treat and accommodation of guests. He sends invitations to Kırkpınar in the shape of candles with red wax bottom. This candle was hanging in village coffee house, informing about the soon start of the festival<sup>6</sup>. *Ağa* controls observance of traditions and rituals, gives the awards. During the festival he wears traditional Rumelian costume and special amber prayer beads. In past years he was sitting in "ağa tent" (now at the special place on VIP tribune). He treats the guests to dinners for two days. The guests, coming from other villages and regions were bringing gifts to the *ağa* tent, binding animals here, the valuable gifts or money were put under the corner of goat skin, on which *ağa* was sitting. After these gifts were distributed among the *pehlivans* (heroes), the tournament winners<sup>7</sup>. *Ağa* of the following festival is elected after the end of competitions by auction. The bets for the right to sacrifice the auctioned lamb and distribute the meat

<sup>3</sup> Rumelia is the name of European territories of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Kırkpınar'ın rövanşı Elmalı'da. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/spor/1516392/kirkpınarin-rovanşı-elmalıda.html> The festival in Elmalı was related to the local tekke of Bektashiyya brotherhood, devoted to the name of Abdal Musa. There is a document dated 1419, telling that the local dweller Nuh Çelebi donated his land to the waqf for organization of wrestling there. See: Dünden Bugüne Antalya – Antalya Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2012, s. 280.

<sup>5</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Kırkpınar güreşleri'nin halkbilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. Yüksek lisans tezi. Trakya Üniversitesi. Edirne 2012, s. 209.

<sup>6</sup> Erdem, H. Doğuşundan günümüze Kırkpınar. Dahi Yayıncılık, 3. baskı 2013, s. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Ayağ, A. Türklerde Spor Geleneği ve Kırkpınar Güreşleri. İstanbul: Divan Yayınları, 1983, s. 77-78.



reach significant amounts. *Ağa* who three times organized *Kırkpınar*, like the wrestlers, three times winning the tournament, receives a golden girdle<sup>8</sup>. If after the end of the festival any funds from the donated remain, *ağa* spends it for charitable purposes. For example, the document dated 1910 informs that Mehmet Ağa donated the rest of the *Kırkpınar* money for the Ottoman Navy<sup>9</sup>.

The festival starts with solemn procession with traditional music along Edirne streets to Selimiye mosque, where the prayer is held. After preaching wrestlers pray before the tomb of legendary *pehlivan* Er Sultan, and the national anthem is played. After that *cazgır*<sup>10</sup>, who is responsible for prayers reading and announcements, reads the names of tournament participants, tells about the merits of the most famous of them. The *cazgır* speech is spoken in verse, has sublimely facetious manner, abounds traditional and new expressions, the most successful of which are reproduced for centuries. At the same time *cazgır* improvises, it is an exclusively creative role. The most successful improvisations of different epochs gain a foothold in tradition.

After that the procession goes to the tournament place. The wrestlers are divided to categories (from 9 to 11) according to age and experience. They wrestle on a flat meadow, covered by grass (nowadays it is often a stadium lawn), where some matches take place at the same time. The wrestling field is called “the field of men” (*er meydanı*), earlier such expressions like “field of love” (*muhabbet meydanı*, see below) were used. Olive oil is taken from common pot. The wrestlers put it on the body and hands, and also to *kıspet*. They also oil the backs to each other. Any moment the wrestler can add the oil. Annually about two tons of oil are being used on *Kırkpınar*. The festival is accompanied by a series of rituals, conducted by *cazgır*.

All the festival is accompanied by traditional music, played on drums (*davul*) and flutes (*zurna*). The melodies, played during wrestling and rituals are called “*pehlivan melodies*”<sup>11</sup>.

### **Peşrev**

The most important of rituals is *peşrev*, a kind of theatrical introduction to wrestling, prayer and warm up at the same time. Rituals like *peşrev* also exist in the other kinds of Turkish traditional wrestling (*karakucak*, *aba güreş*), but they are much simpler and don't have a developed symbolism.

In the beginning of *peşrev* wrestlers line up in rows with the main *pehlivan* (*başpehlivan*, the winner of the previous competitions) at the right. Wrestlers are looking to the side of *Kıbla*<sup>12</sup>; they took with the right hand a right hand of competitor, by left hand his left hand, and listen to *cazgır* prayer. Holding hands of each other

---

<sup>8</sup> Uzgör, S. Ağa olmak// Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 10; Albayrak, E. Kırkpınar elemanları // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 222.

<sup>10</sup> The word *cazgır* is from Trakian dialect of the Turkish language. It became widespread only in the middle of the 20th century. See: *Cazgır Kelime Kökeni*. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.etimolojiturkce.com/kelime/cazg%C4%B1r> Earlier such terms as *duacı*, *duahan*, *salavatçı*, *okuyucu* (the prayers reader), *peşrevci* (*peşrev* steward) were used.

<sup>11</sup> Sağlam, A. Tarihi Kırkpınar Yağlı Güreş Musikisi. “Pehlivan havaları”. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: [https://www.academia.edu/37712355/Tarihi\\_K%C4%B1rkp%C4%B1nar\\_Ya%C4%9Fl%C4%B1\\_G%C3%BCre%C5%9F\\_Musikisi\\_Pehlivan\\_Havalar%C4%B1](https://www.academia.edu/37712355/Tarihi_K%C4%B1rkp%C4%B1nar_Ya%C4%9Fl%C4%B1_G%C3%BCre%C5%9F_Musikisi_Pehlivan_Havalar%C4%B1)

<sup>12</sup> *Kıbla* is the direction to Mecca, the direction where Muslims are looking during praying.



means: "You are more than a brother for me; you are my comrade in a holy war, in struggle on the way of martyrdom (*şehadet*). We are like heroes Ali and Selim, who became founders of Kirkpınar, we are their representatives now".

At the time of prayer *cazgır* gives to *pehlivans* different advises. He pays tribute to the saint<sup>13</sup> Hamza, companion of the Prophet Muhammed, the outstanding warrior that is considered to be a patron of all wrestlers. *Cazgır* says that *pehlivans* follow the way of Hamza, warns from underestimating the opponent. He calls to wrestle like a man, says that power, mind and skills are not the reason for pride; on the contrary, they should be reason to be modest. After that *cazgır* said: "Hail to Muhammed the Chosen!" and *pehlivans* put the right hand to hart and say a prayer.

After that *pehlivans* show the eagle opening wings, the wolf rushing to the prey, flying arrow, the rearing up horse. Everybody is looking to the main *pehlivan*. When he gives a signal, they make three steps back, then three steps forward and go down on the right knee. Three steps back mean that human neck is thinner than a hair before the Truth, justice and love. Three steps forward mean the aim: martyrdom and passion for the Truth. Then wrestlers by the right hand touch the ground, then a knee, lips and head. It means: "*Pehlivan*, don't be proud of your power and skills; you came from the ground, and you will become a ground again, you will give a report for the good you received. Power, skills, goods and honor are trusted to you, given to you as a gift, but they impose responsibility. You will answer, if you used all of that on the way of the Truth".

After that the pairs separate, and *pehlivans* are worming up all around the field. Meeting each other for the first time they shake hands, that means a promise of a fair wrestling. At the second meeting *pehlivans* take by left hand the belt, and by right hand touch the place under the right knee of rival, and then touch by hand lips and head. Meeting the third time, they take by right hand the belt, and by left hand touch the place under the left knee of rival. These motions symbolize thankfulness for those that the rival agreed to wrestle, that means honor. After that wrestlers meet and rubbing backs of each other. It means that they apologize in advance for everything that can happen during the wrestling. Finally, before wrestling begins wrestlers once more shake hands, wishing success to each other.

In time of wrestling in the presence of *padishah* (see below) during the *peşrev* it was prohibited to turn back to the sultan<sup>14</sup>.

The specialists mention that, unfortunately, often modern *pehlivans* are ignorant about the meaning of these movements, and sometimes *peşrev* is being performed carelessly<sup>15</sup>.

### **Kispet**

Garment of wrestler consists of one thing: leather pants below the knee long called *kispet*. *Kispet* is an Arabic word meaning the garment from the belt to the place below the knee, i.e. covering shameful places of the men. The word came to the Ottoman language through Persian. Nowadays *kispets* most often are sewn from calfskin. Up to the 1960<sup>th</sup> they were sewn from buffalo skin and their weight was

---

<sup>13</sup> The word "saint" hereinafter is a translation of *hazret* or *evliya* words. We understand the significant difference in sanctity concepts between Christian and Muslim traditions.

<sup>14</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 295.

<sup>15</sup> Delice, H. Peşrev // Destan-ı Kirkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 16.



minimum 12–13 kg. The modern *kıspet* weights about 1,8 kg, the oiled one 2,5 kg.

The importance of this garment is shown in a proverb: “*Kıspet* is a half of *pehlivan*”<sup>16</sup>. Really, properly tailored and sewn *kıspet* contributes to victory in wrestling in many ways, and any mistake in this process may become a reason for defeat of a wrestler<sup>17</sup>. Traditionally *kıspet* was made of 40-45 pieces of leather; the general length of the seam was about 55 meters. Art of *kıspet* making was passing by tradition among tanners. Before the development of modern technology it was a very labor-intensive art. Nowadays technology displaces the tradition, specialists ascertain erosion and the actual loss of old mastery<sup>18</sup>.

In literature there is a popular opinion that *kıspet* was borrowed by Ottomans from Persian wrestlers; even a supposed date of this borrowing is given: 1591<sup>19</sup>. No doubt that there were close cultural contacts between the Ottoman state and Persia with its tradition of *Zurkhaneh* (house of power), but the Ottoman *kıspet*, for sure is different from many kinds of wrestlers’ pants, widely spread along Middle East.

Young wrestlers, who are not yet eligible to wear *kıspet*, are wrestling in woolen or cotton pants named *pirpıt*.

According to the tradition, *pehlivan* had to meet certain requirements to gain the right to wear *kıspet*. This right was passed from teacher to student. Wearing of *kıspet* was accompanied by a special ceremony. On this ceremony experienced wrestlers and young *pehlivan*’s family members were present. Wrestler kissed the hand of a teacher and other elder wrestlers. After that the young wrestlers were wrestling. On the *kıspet* wearing ceremony rose oil was added to olive oil. Before *kıspet* wearing wrestler made *namaz* of two *rakats* and read *Fatiha* in honor of saint Hamza. After that he kissed *kıspet* and touched it by his forehead.

*Kıspet* always has to be worn and taken off beginning from the right leg. It is followed by rituals of three times rope tying under the knees and belt tying. The belt is tied for three knots; during the first knot tying Allah is commemorated, during the second Prophet Muhammed, and the third – Ali Veli. The right and left ends of the belt are symbolizing grandsons of the Prophet, Hasan and Huseyin<sup>20</sup>. After the end of wrestling the wrestler takes off the *kıspet* with the same rituals. It is to be cleaned from oil and put into the special straw basket *zembil*. The young wrestler may be permitted to carry the *kıspet* basket of his teacher, that means the wrestler is promising.

When *pehlivan* is ready to give up wrestling and retire, his *kıspet* may be put on the wall in the guest room or on some other place of honor. We know that some famed

---

<sup>16</sup> Kahraman, A. Cumhuriyete Kadar Türk Güreşi, C. I. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Türk güreşinde kıspet, kıspet ustalığı ve kıspet üzerine inanışlar // Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 8 Sayı: 16, Temmuz 2018, s. 204-222; Gül, M., Türkmen, M., Doğan, A., Soygüden, A. Lost Tradition in Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling: Importance of Kıspet and Ceremony of Kıspet Wearing // International Journal of Wrestling Science, 2015 5:1, 52-55;

<sup>18</sup> Başaran, F.N., Gürcüm, B.H. The Yağlı Güreş Tradition in Kırkpınar and the Last Master of Kıspet-Making // Folk life: journal of ethnological studies, Vol. 49 No. 2, 2011, s. 117; Dervişoğlu, M. Türk güreşinde kıspet, kıspet ustalığı ve kıspet üzerine inanışlar // Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 8 Sayı: 16, Temmuz 2018, s. 204-222

<sup>19</sup> Kirbaçoğlu, M., El-Fers, M. Kırkpınar: All About Turkish Oil Wrestling – Netherlands: Lulu.com, 2009, p. 97; Mandzyak, A.S.; Artemenko, O.L. YAğly gyuresh // Enciklopediya tradicionnyh vidov bor'by narodov mira. Minsk, 2010. S. 549.

<sup>20</sup> Özbil, A. Kıspet ve Kıspet Ustalığı // Acta Turcica Çevrimiçi Tematik Türkoloji Dergisi, 2(2), 2009, s. 86–87.



wrestlers put their *kıspets* on Kaaba. *Pehlivan* Kudretli Mehmet, who was at the war, sent his *kıspet* to Mecca with *pehlivan* Çoban Veli, and he put it on the corner of Kaaba. It happened during the reign of sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839)<sup>21</sup>. Modern wrestlers practically do not perform the described rituals, and some of them even know nothing about it<sup>22</sup>.

### The rules

According to the rules of oil wrestling the loser is considered: the wrestler, whose back comes to the ground as a result of the opponent's actions ("showing belly to the stars"); sitting with support on two hands behind; touching the ground by two elbows or elbow and hand. The winner is considered the wrestler who raised the opponent and carried him three steps or turned him around the axis. The wrestler with *kıspet* down, showing shameful parts also loses (such cases are extremely rare).

Before 1975 the time of wrestling was not limited, that was extremely inconvenient from competitions organization point of view. Any wrestling could drag out for hours. Nowadays wrestling in young categories is limited by 30 minutes, and 40 minutes for masters. The winner of a final tournament receives a title of "main *pehlivan*" (*başpehlivan*) and monetary award. *Pehlivan*, winning three years successively, is awarded by Golden belt. For the second and third places also awards are given, besides, to all participating *pehlivans* "trip money" are to be paid.

Oil wrestling technique is unique and very complicated. It is known that the oil wrestling *pehlivans* easily master other styles, including Japanese Sumo. At the same time, it is quite problematic to master oil wrestling if you have skills of other kinds. Practically the only possible reliable grip is the grip of folds of leather pants, that can be successful in certain situations. Often the wrestlers insert his hand deep under *kıspet* belt and clench a fist, that permits at least somehow "catch" the rival<sup>23</sup>. It is the technique that often causes unsuccessful jokes of outsiders. It should be noted that oil wrestling is quite a dangerous kind of martial arts with high level of traumatism.

### The traditional wrestling styles in Turkey and oil wrestling origin

Do doubt that to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Turks had rich wrestling traditions. At the same time, it is obvious that plenty of olive oil, that is a required attribute for oil wrestling, could not be characteristic of Ottoman Turks material culture of this period. We have a series of evidence about wrestling with use of oil in Ancient Egypt and Babylon sources of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. Apparently interlacement of Turkic, Balkan and Middle East wrestling traditions began long before creation of the Ottoman state. At the same time, when, how and under what influence oil wrestling was formed, remains a mystery, because nobody but Turks preserved this tradition. In *karakucak* wrestling (see below), using of oil is prohibited. There are no evidences about using of oil for wrestling in Greeks and other Balkan peoples of the Ottoman conquest period. Oil wrestling existing now in Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia and other Balkan regions, no doubt is the Ottoman tradition.

Turkey is quite jealous of the theory of borrowing of oil wrestling by Turks from

---

<sup>21</sup> Sevuk, İ. H. Türk Güreşi ve Elli Yıl Önce Garp Âlemindeki On Yıllık Türk Kasırgası. İstanbul: İnkılap ve Aka, 1948, цит. по: Dervişoğlu, M. Türk güreşinde kıspet, kıspet ustalığı ve kıspet üzerine inanışlar // Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 8 Sayı: 16, Temmuz 2018, s. 204-222.

<sup>22</sup> Gül, M., Türkmen, M., Doğan, A., Soyguden, A. Ibid, s. 52-55.

<sup>23</sup> Mandzyak, A.S.; Artemenko, O.L. Ibid. S. 550.



anywhere. Many authors persistently prove its “purely Turkish” or “exclusively Muslim” character<sup>24</sup>. However, many researchers recognize oil wrestling a result of synthesis of Turkic and local (Middle Eastern, Hellenistic) cultures<sup>25</sup>. A.V. Kylasov thinks that in game culture of Turkey, end especially in oil wrestling, “lineaments of Hellenes’ Olympic past can be definitely traced”, and “Antic agons, like a mirage, soar over Kırkpınar”<sup>26</sup>.

In Turkey, besides oil wrestling, four more traditional wrestling styles are popular. The nearest one to oil wrestling is *karakucak* (black embrace). Its geography is interesting: the regions of Amasya, Tokat, Samsun, Çorun, Sivas, Erzincan, Erzurum and Yızgat, i.e. the Eastern part of Central Anatolia. The original wrestling terminology used actually in *karakucak* can be find in Oguz epos of the 13<sup>th</sup> century “Dede Korkut”<sup>27</sup>. Its technique in general resembles freestyle wrestling. Most likely that *karakucak* became the basis of oil wrestling development.

The other kind of Turkish wrestling is *aba güreşi* (wrestling in *aba*, wool jacket) that is spread mostly in the regions of Gaziantep, Hatay (the Sothern part of Anatolia bordering Syria), but also in the Central (Tokat) and North-Eastern (Artvin) Anatolia. One more kind of wrestling is *şalvar güreşi* (wrestling in *şalvar* trousers) with an original technique, nowadays practiced only in Kahramanmaraş region (Central Anatolia) by populating this region Turkmens. Tatars of Turkey, migrants from the Crimea and Dobrudja, practice *kuşak güreşi* (belt wrestling), that is sometimes called “Tatar wrestling”. There are also some other kinds of wrestling, for example, “wrestling for water” game called *sinsin*.

There is an opinion that oil wrestling was formed and developed in Rumelia, in European lands of Ottoman state, on the territory of modern Turkish Trakia, in Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. It came to Anatolia with the Turk refugees, escaped from Balkans as a result of loss of several provinces during Russian-Ottoman war of 1877–1878<sup>28</sup>. This version even published on the official site of Turkish wrestling federation<sup>29</sup>. But the widespread wrestler schools in different regions of Anatolia in 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries contradict it. There is one research proving that Rumelian *pehlivans* took the lead in Constantinople only in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the majority of wrestlers participating to palace competitions originated from Anatolia: Amasya, Sivas, Kastamonu, Samsun etc., and just 10% of wrestlers were from Rumelia<sup>30</sup>. It should be noted that exactly these regions now are the territory of *karakucak*. This circumstance shows that there is no clear boundary between these two wrestling stiles.

Nowadays oil wrestling is widespread all over the Turkish Aegean and

---

<sup>24</sup> Erdem, H. Doğuşundan günümüze Kırkpınar. Dahi Yayıncılık, 3. baskı 2013, s. 25-27.

<sup>25</sup> Türkmen, M., Kaynar, Ö., Abdybekova, N.A. General perspective Ottoman pehlivan / wrestling lodges and Greek gymnasium / palaistra’s a glance // Vestnik fizicheskoj kul'tury i sporta. Bishkek, 2017, № 1(2), s. 122-126.

<sup>26</sup> Kylasov, A.V.; Nesterov, P.V. Olimpizm i kul'turnaya preemstvennost': peresmotr klyuchevogo momenta v sporte // Vestnik slavyanskih kul'tur, 2016, №2. S. 117–118.

<sup>27</sup> Kahraman, A. Ibid, s. 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> Yazoğlu, A. Yağlı güreş sporunun Kırkpınar adı altında tanımı ve tarihi gelişmesi // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 8, 2014, s. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Tarihçe. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.tgf.gov.tr/tr/index.php/tarihce-2/>

<sup>30</sup> Laqueur, H.P. Zur Kulturgeschichtlichen Stellung Des Türkischen Ringkampfes Einst End Jetzt. Taken from: Ahmet Acar. Türk Güreş Tarihinde Pehlivan Tekkeleri (2. Bölüm) // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 22, s. 28-30.



Mediterranean coasts, and in less degree in many other regions.

### **Saint patrons of oil wrestling**

As it was noted above, the main patron (*pir*) of wrestling for Muslims is Hamza, one of the first Muslims, relative and close associate of Prophet Muhammed. But the mention of his name in prayers before wrestling became compulsory just after 1826, when janissary corps was abolished, Bektashiyya brotherhood and everything associated with it was prohibited. Before this even during wrestling in palace in presence of sultan the prayers in honor of Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mahmut Pir Yar-ı Veli (see below) were said<sup>31</sup>.

The most important person in the legendary history of oil wrestling is sheikh Sarı Saltık (or Saltuk) Baba<sup>32</sup>, who lived in the second part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According one of the versions, it was he who organized the first wrestling in Kırkpınar<sup>33</sup>. In the epic biography of the hero named "*Saltukname*" it is told that his real name was Şerif Hızır<sup>34</sup>, and he was a mighty hero, that's why he was called *Saltuh*, that, as it called in the poem, in Persian (variant: in Greek) means "the strongest man"<sup>35</sup>. The Ottoman traveler of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Evliyâ Çelebi insists that the real name of the sheikh was Muhammed Buhari, and the name Sarı Saltık he received after he killed the Christian priest (or patriarch) with this name. Subsequently the local Christian population, converted by him to Islam, mixed their names<sup>36</sup>. He was one of the students of the great Turkic sheikh Ahmad Yasevi, that sent him for spreading Muslim teaching to Rum. Sarı Saltık preached Islam in the Crimea and Balkans, many miracles are attributed to him. He organized wrestling with Christians, demanding from the defeated wrestlers to accept Islam. *Saltukname* tells that the Christian wrestler Elion Rumi was defeated by Sarı Saltık, after that he became Muslim and changed his name to İlyas Rumi. This wrestler became the nearest companion of the sheikh. There are tombs of Sarı Saltık in Babadağ (Romania), Varna and Kaligra (Bulgaria), Blagay (Bosnia), Prizren (Kosovo), Babaeski (Kırklareli), İznik, Constantinople (Rumeli Fener), Niğde, Bor and Tokat (Sarı Saltuk village)<sup>37</sup>.

Popular cult of Sarı Saltık on the Balkans, as among Muslims, as Christians, even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused some concern of the Ottoman power. Sultan Suleyman I Kanuni (1520–1566) after visiting the tomb of the sheikh in Babadağ (Dobrudja) in 1538 even asked to give a fetwa about his sanctity from sheikh-ul-Islam. The answer of Ebu-s-Suud Efendi was: "Sarı Saltık... is a monk, as a result of whose asceticism relics remained"<sup>38</sup>. Evliyâ Çelebi several times mentions the name of Sarı Saltık writing

---

<sup>31</sup> Erdem, H. Ibid, s. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Possibly he belonged to Babaiyya brotherhood. One of the most important persons in the holy history of Bektashis and Alevits.

<sup>33</sup> Kahraman, A. Ibid, s. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Şerif Hızır, "the Noble Hızır". Hızır is a mystic Koranic personage, the most important person for Sufi teaching. It is he, with whom the spring holyday of Hıdırellez is associated (days of traditional organization of Kırkpınar).

<sup>35</sup> Aneshofer, H. Seyahatname'deki Sarı Saltık Menkıbeleri ve Bektaşî Sözlü Rivayeti // Evliya Çelebi. Editörler: Tezcan N., Tezcan S. Ankara: Kültür ve Tuzrizm Bakanlığı, 2011, s. 458.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example: Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriyya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1998, ss. 25, 73.

<sup>37</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 57-59.

<sup>38</sup> Aneshofer, H. Ibid, s. 456.



about the Christians' prayers, and in his Greek language vocabulary he translates "İsvet (Saint) Nikola" as "Sarı Saltık"<sup>39</sup>. Identification of St. Nikolas with Sarı Saltık apparently can be explained by Christian worship of Sarı Saltık tomb in Babadağ: "The Greek infidels also visit it. They say: "Our İsvet Nikola is this Sarı Saltık Sultan". They pay for care to *türbe* (mausoleum) keepers and visit it. Government, for sure, doesn't prohibit it"<sup>40</sup>. Also Sarı Saltık is mentioned as a patron of *buza* (millet drink) makers' corporation in Constantinople<sup>41</sup>. It should be noted that this corporation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century consisted mainly of Tatars of the Crimea and Dobrudja.

In one of legends it is told that at *Hidirellez* day soon after Edirne conquest, sultan Murad I went to Kırkpınar. He personally came to the field and said: "There are no khans or khakans here... This is a field of men. Let everyone show their skills. If you will not wrestle with me properly because I am padishah, I will witness against you here and in afterlife!" At the moment some hero with covered face came before the sultan. Padishah said him to remove the cover. The hero said: "Try to do it on the field!" Murad jumped and removed the cover. It turned out that under it was a handsome blond man with blue eyes. When sultan asked his name he answered: "My name is Mehmet Buhari, but I'm known as Sarı Saltık. The reward for those that you tore off my cover you will get in Kosovo"<sup>42</sup>.

Sarı Saltık is mentioned in traditional prayer red by *cazgır* before the beginning of wrestling. The earliest variant of this prayer twice gives in his "Travels book" Evliyâ Çelebi. He himself often was a *duacı* (prayers reader). This is the text of a prayer red in the palace in Constantinople before wrestling of sultan Murad IV with three Pashas and one *pehlivan*: "Allah, Allah! Lord of the world, Master of being and Miracle of existence, full of perfect beauty! (Our) prayers (are addressed) to Muhammed the Chosen. In Engürü (Ankara) rests Er, in Rum Mehmet Buhari Sarı Saltık puts on pants, pulls up legs. For the glory of our patron saint Mahmud Pir Yar-ı Veli. Hand to hand, hed to hed, brest to brest. For the love of Ali-Şir Yezdan Veli. May Allah accept it!"<sup>43</sup>.

The text of the prayer red by Evliya before the wrestling of Seydi Ahmed Pasha and Baki Pasha is a little bit different: "Allah, Allah! Lord of the world, Master of being and Miracle of existence, full of perfect beauty! (Our) prayers (are addressed) to Muhammed the Chosen. In Engürü (Ankara) rests Er, in Rum Mehmet Buhari Sarı Saltık puts on pants, pulls up legs. Two viziers (met) for the glory of our patron saint Mahmud Pir Yar-ı Veli. May Allah greet and support both of them! With religion and

---

<sup>39</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. VIII. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı., Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 2003, s. 122.

<sup>40</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. VIII. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı., Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 2003, s. 130.

<sup>41</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 2006, s. 347.

<sup>42</sup> Delice, H. Ibid, s. 20-21. During the battle on Kosovo field on June 15, 1389 sultan Murad was killed by Serb Milosh Obilich.

<sup>43</sup> Allâh Allâh hâce-i azîm seyyid-i kâ'inât ve mefhar-i mevcûdât ber-kemâl-i cemâl Muhammed Mustafâ-râ salavât. Engürü'de er yatır, Rûm'da Muhammed Buhârî Sarı Saltık tan geyer ve tummân çeker. Pîrimiz Hazret-i Mahmûd Pîr-yâr-ı Velî aşkına dest-ber-dest kafâ-ber-kafâ sîne-ber-sîne. Ma-habbet-i Alî, şîr-i Yezdân-ı Velî aşkına Allâh onara - Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2006, s. 117.



faith (start)”<sup>44</sup>.

We can compare these with the prayer, read in 1905 in Çardak by *cazgır* Ali Rıza Çubukçu: “Allah, Allah, İnsh-Allah. May we be blessed, we will bless. May Allah bless *seyyids*<sup>45</sup> of Muhammed. Welcome, *pehlivan*! Did you bring nobility to the field of men? Did you put on black last night in the dream? You fled like a wind. If your rival is an ant, do you think that you are manful? On the other side of this world there is devastation and returning bloody dust. From Kaf (mountain) to Kaf (mountain) Parmaksız Arab was ruling. And he is gone, and the field didn’t remain for him. And it will not remain for you, *pehlivans*. Where is Ali, where is Veli? Where is son of Zal *pehlivan* Rustem? Where is our patron saint Hamza? This field didn’t remain even to these heroes. And it will not remain for you, *pehlivan*. In Engürü rests Er, in Rum Sarı Saltuk. He knows the friend, puts on pants. Two brave came to the field. Manful son of manful. Don’t look at the Moon, look at the Sun. Your hart awaked, look at sultan Suleyman. Even if your rival is an ant, look at him like at a man, son of a man...”<sup>46</sup>.

One more patron of wrestling is considered to be a famous sheikh of Bektashiyya brotherhood Seyyid Ali Sultan, also called Deli Kızıl Sultan (“Red Madman”). He took active part in the Ottoman conquest of Trakia, and about 1397 founded a monastery of Bektashiyya brotherhood in Dimetoka<sup>47</sup>, and later he was buried there. One of the eldest oil wrestling festivals in Çardak village is associated with his name. According to statements of its organizers, this tournament known as “day of sand”<sup>48</sup> is elder then 280 years<sup>49</sup>.

### **Wrestlers’ tekkes**

The development of oil wrestling in the Ottoman state is closely related to the direct state support that sultans and senior officials were giving to the military training of the population and development of martial arts (wrestling, archery, fight with maces etc.). The centers of these activities became *tekke*: monasteries of Sufis, followers of mystic-ascetic teaching in Islam that received for this purpose special donations (*wakufs*).

It should be noted that wrestling, horsemanship, archery, swimming and running are considered to be pious pursuits in Islam. There is a series of hadithes in which the Prophet Muhammed tells about their advantages. For example: “Teach your children to ride, bow and swim”<sup>50</sup>. In the trustworthy hadith collections there are some variants of a story about wrestling of the Prophet with Meccan hero Rukanna ben Abdueyid,

---

<sup>44</sup> Allah, Allah! Hâce-i âlem, seyyid-i kâ’inât ve mefhar-i mevcûdât ber-cemâl-i kemâl Muhammed Mustafâ-râ salavât. Engürü’de er yatır, Rûm’da, Sarı Saltık, tan giyer ve tumman çeker. Pîrimiz Hazret-i Mahmûd, pîr-i yâr-ı velî aşkına iki vezîrdir. İkisinin dahi dutduğun Allah öğer, dîn [u] imân ile gide - Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 1998, s. 182.

<sup>45</sup> Seyyids – descendants of the Prophet Muhammad

<sup>46</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 58-59.

<sup>47</sup> The monastery was ruined in 1826.

<sup>48</sup> The name is associated with one of the miracles of the sheikh.

<sup>49</sup> Erdem, H. Ibid, s. 38; Hatipler, M. Rumeli Türklüğünün (yağlı) güreş sporunun gelişmesine etkileri // V. Uluslararası tarihi Kırkpınar sempozyumu bildirileri kitabı. Edirne, 2010, s. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Musnad al Tayalisi, Sünen, 2096. From: Kuşçuzade, M. Sünnette spor // International Journal of Science Culture and Sport, August 2015: Special Issue 4, s. 402.



who was thrice won by Muhammed, and after that converted to Islam<sup>51</sup>. There is one more hadith related to wrestling: once the Prophet said that a real *pehlivan* and strongman is not the one who wins in wrestling, but the one who can win his own anger<sup>52</sup>.

Many cultural spheres in Muslim civilization (poetry, music, fine art, medicine, craft technologies etc.) frequently develop within Tasavvuf (Sufism) or use its infrastructure. It can be explained by inherently creative nature of Tasavvuf as a socio-cultural phenomenon. One of its most important features is the developed tradition of knowledge and mastery transfer within a “teacher-student” system. It is the perfectly suitable feature of Tasavvuf for preservation and development of cultural traditions, including martial arts.

Spread of Sufi monasteries *tekke* (other names of these monasteries, according to their size and importance: *asitane*, *zaviye*, *hangah* or *hanaka*, *ribat*) caused by structural formation of mystic-ascetic brotherhoods, happened in the 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, i.e. at the period of Seljuks of Rum and emergence of the Ottoman state. There are some evidences that the earliest wrestlers’ *tekke* in Asia Minor could be founded in Seljuk period. In their capital of Konya, it definitely existed at the Ottoman period, fragments of this building have survived to the present day. In 1939 “*pehlivan* stone” was discovered here, that is obviously related to Seljuk period<sup>53</sup>. There is a fragment of inscription on the stone, in which *pehlivan* word can be read. Probably, the stone was used as sports equipment<sup>54</sup>. There are also some books of Seljuk period, in which martial arts are mentioned. For example, in the first medicine tractate written in the Turkic language in Asia Minor, there is a chapter about the benefits of military exercises, including wrestling<sup>55</sup>. At the same time it should be noted that wrestling teaching was practiced in religious schools of Central Asia<sup>56</sup>.

Ottoman wrestlers’ *tekkes* were closely related to janissary corps and belonged to Bektashiyya brotherhood that performed a pastoral care of janissary. *Pehlivans* from these *tekkes* could go to the capital, for the tournament in presence of sultan (*huzur güreşleri*), and wrestle with palace *pehlivans*. This kind of tournaments was usually organized on special days, like sultan’s accession to the throne, days of the circumcision of padishah sons, weddings, religious holidays. During 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries wrestlers’ *tekke* spread all over the Ottoman Empire (apparently, following janissary garrisons). Besides Constantinople, where there were two of them, the most important *tekke* existed in Mecca, Jeddah, Alexandria, Cairo, Algiers, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdad, Maraş, Amasya, Tokat, Edirne, Ankara, Kütahya, Tire, Bergama, Manisa, Akhisar, Yenice, Konya, Karaman, Bursa, Balıkesir, Diyarbakır, Urfa, Skopje, Gelibolu, Ipsala, Strumica, Belgrad, Dimetoka (Didimotihon), Deliorman (near

---

<sup>51</sup> In some variants of the traditin he never accepted Islam. See: Akyüz, V. Asr-ı Saadette Spor. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.sonpeygamber.info/asr-i-saadette-spor>

<sup>52</sup> Özcan, A. Güreş // TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 14. cilt, s. 318.

<sup>53</sup> The artefact now is stored in the ethnographic museum of Ankara.

<sup>54</sup> Acar, A. Türk güreş tarihinde pehlivan tekkeleri (2. Bölüm) // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 22, 2015, s. 28-30.

<sup>55</sup> *Tuhfe-i mübarizi*, written in the end of 13<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Kahraman, A. Osmanlı Devletinde Spor. – Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1995, s. 105-111.

<sup>56</sup> Snesarev, G.P. Horezmskie legendy kak istochnik po istorii religioznyh kul'tov Srednej Azii. M.: «Nauka», 1983. S. 176.



Razgrad)<sup>57</sup>. More or less detailed information we have just about several of these *tekke*. There are some witnesses that oil wrestling was practiced in remote provinces of the Empire up to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, in Algiers<sup>58</sup>.

The first wrestlers' *tekke* in the Ottoman state emerged in Bursa soon after the conquest of the city in 1324. The wife of sultan Orhan Nilüfer Hatun presented to wrestlers a site inside the citadel, where in a short time *tekke* was built. Simultaneously the *wakuf* for its support was established, and also a field for wrestling tournaments was given. Later sultan Bayazıt I (1389–1402) generously donated this *wakuf*. We have an archive document, informing that the building in which *pehlivans* lived has long been in disrepair, and two neighbors tried to make use of it, by adding this site to their possessions. On the complaint of one of *pehlivans* justice was restored, and some resources from sultan's *wakuf* were given for the building reconstruction<sup>59</sup>. Evliyâ Çelebi who visited Bursa in 1640, saw this *tekke* and mentions it. Unfortunately, the description of the *tekke* is missing in the text<sup>60</sup>.

The most important event became the foundation of wrestlers' *tekke* in Edirne soon after its conquest in 1361 by sultan Murad I (1359–1389). The first mentor of the *tekke* became Cemaleddin Efendi. Before his death he left his entire estate for *tekke*, and subsequently it became known under his name.

In 1648 Evliyâ Çelebi visited wrestlers' *tekke* in Edirne. He writes: "Wrestlers' *tekke*. *Asitane*<sup>61</sup> of Seyyid Cemaleddin Sultan. After conquest (of Edirne) Gazi Hudavendigar<sup>62</sup> for brilliance of army of Islam built this monastery for powerful, strong and mighty, fearless braves, experienced and young wrestlers. They really did the army of Islam brilliant. Till now braves from Rumelia are gathering here once a week on Fridays. Seventy-eighty pares of mighty *pehlivans*, oiled and smeared with mud, like conquerors of the past, brave like Rustem<sup>63</sup>, shake hands, kiss the hand, and like rams rest head to head, tell Muhammedan *gülbâng*<sup>64</sup> and when they are wrestling on the field of love (*meydân-ı muhabbet*), a man will marvel and wonder, his breath will be stopped and he will feel dizzy. Really, they pray to the noble spirit of their patron, saint Mahmûd Pîr Yâr-ı Velî, encourage all Muslim *gazîs* to the way of holy war. The ground of this *tekke* is like a black stone covered by oil, it is the place of competition. If some inexperienced person will step on the ground of this monastery, he will (slip) and find himself over the oil, and will lose by himself. But two braves coming to the field of courage, barefoot and without shirts, during two-three hours are wrestling over this oil. If they cannot easily win each other, they use three hundred and sixty *pehlivan* tricks. Surely, they (try to win) the rival by some maneuver: it is *kesebend hanesi* ("short

---

<sup>57</sup> Dever, A. Sports Lodges in the Ottoman Empire Depicted in the Travel Book (Seyahat-Name) of Evliyâ Çelebi // Annals of Applied Sport Science 2019, 7(1), s. 49-55.

<sup>58</sup> Svinth, J.R. Turkish Oil Wrestling in Algiers. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: [https://ejmas.com/jalt/2007jalt/jcsart\\_Svinth\\_0710.html](https://ejmas.com/jalt/2007jalt/jcsart_Svinth_0710.html)

<sup>59</sup> Acar, A. Ibid, s. 28-30.

<sup>60</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi didn't finish the edition of his book, that's why there are a lot of lacunas in it. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1998, s. 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Asitane* is the central monastery of the brotherhood.

<sup>62</sup> Gazi Hudavendigar means "devoted to God warrior", the title of sultan Murad I (1362-1389).

<sup>63</sup> Rustem is a hero of Firdowsi "Shahnameh".

<sup>64</sup> The word *gülbâng* here means a secret Bektashi prayer.



ties” – ?)<sup>65</sup> or *künde* throw (“with the girth of the body” – ?), or *şirazi* (“pant leg”), or *asmanişin* (“sitting on the sky” – ?), or *sarma* (“girth”), or *kesme* (“break”), or *ters kepçe* (“back bailer”)<sup>66</sup>, or *kavak dikme* (“poplar planting”), or *taşlama* (“stone throw”), or *Cezayir sarması* (“Algerian girth”), or *karakuş* (“black bird”, “eagle”), or *hevalama* (“lowering” – ?), or *kiret* (“dirty” – ?), or *boğma* (“strangulation”), or *şaki* (“grasp”), or *kapan* (“trap”)... (lacuna 1,5 lines). In general, using the abovementioned wrestlers’ tricks they take the rival by surprise and punish him, making a throw.

Because for *pehlivans* power is a manliness. But the gate of trickery is a manliness of manliness. The fathers told: “If manliness is ten, the nine is trickery”. Many also tell: “Nine of ten troubles is trickery”. Really, the braves, who go to campaigns, weapon and wrestling skills, are extremely needed. *Sunnah* of our Prophet says that the Proud of Existence<sup>67</sup> wrestled with damned Abu Lahab and Abu Jahil<sup>68</sup>, and won without stoning, so that their dirty mugs turned to dog muzzles bloodstained in slaughterhouse. It is a great and famous art.

In this *tekke* in Edirne on summer and on winter there are one hundred pairs of dervish wrestlers, who are training by rite of Pir Yar-Veli. Really, this *tekke* is not a stone building with domes, but it is arranged well. There are numerous cells, kitchen and a small garden. Around the field of love there are hanged iron bows, beech arrows, maces, different selected arrows and advises of archers, cudgels and clubs, oiled *kispets* of buffalo skin with weight of forty-fifty *okka*<sup>69</sup> and a lot of different weapons, belonged to *pehlivans* of a past. This wrestlers’ *tekke* is near the market of Ali Pasha, on inner side from *Balık bazarı kapusu* gate<sup>70</sup>.

In the other place of Edirne description there is one more fragment devoted to the same monastery. “Description of wrestlers’ *tekke*. In it there live poor men<sup>71</sup>, who went out on the way of wrestlers after Pir Mahmud Yar-ı Veli, close to the way of the Truth, bird of happiness of the highest sphere of Paradise, sheikh Seyyid Cemaleddin. In this *tekke* (stays) the teacher of *pehlivan* Demir, lion of the lions, source of wrestlers, “twelve beloved braves”<sup>72</sup>, saint Er Sultan. Once he in presence of Father of Victory Mehmed Khan<sup>73</sup> won seventy of the best *pehlivans* of Azerbaijan shah Uzun Hasan. It is the Er Sultan, teacher of *pehlivan* Demir, who in presence of Selim Khan the First<sup>74</sup> tore four lions in two”<sup>75</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> The majority of the listed maneuver names is not used nowadays.

<sup>66</sup> Now manuevre *kepçe* is called putting hand through legs of a rival from back side. The discription of some of the manuevres see: Güreş oyunları. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.edirnekirkpinar.com/tr/yazi/2-ritueller/12-gures-oyunlari>; Dervişoğlu, M. Kirkpınar güreşleri’nin halkbilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. Yüksek lisans tezi. Trakya Üniversitesi. Edirne 2012, s. 134-147.

<sup>67</sup> Epithet of Prophet Muhammed.

<sup>68</sup> Meccans, the lidere of pagans, opponents of Muslims.

<sup>69</sup> *Okka* is a measure of waight, approximately equal to 1300 gr.

<sup>70</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. III. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 1999, cc.245-246.

<sup>71</sup> Poor men – Sufis.

<sup>72</sup> It is about twelve Shia imams: obvious citation of Bektashi spiritual verse.

<sup>73</sup> Sultan Mehmed II Fatih (1451-1481).

<sup>74</sup> Sultan Selim I (1512-1520).

<sup>75</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. III. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. - İstanbul, 1999, s. 258.



Evliyâ Çelebi tells an interesting story about Er Sultan that happened to the traveler during his trip to Ankara: “The real dream I saw. Poor Evliyâ that day was in Engürü fortress. Firstly I was honored to visit the place of Hacı Bayram Veli, started their reading Quran, and came home. After sunset I read necessary prayers and fell asleep with divination prayer. And I see in a dream a man of average height, with yellow beard, in a wool *hirka* from *aseli* cloth<sup>76</sup>. On his head there was a student cap<sup>77</sup> of *aseli* cloth, on which twelve turns of Muhammedan turban was wrapped. He said: “Look, son! Is it good that you go to my student Köseç Bayram Veli, passing me? You could visit me and start reading Quran. You pass by and even don’t read *Fatiha* for me, would that do?” This poor said: “My noble sultan, who are you? I don’t know you, and where are you”. He said: “When you among braves, in wrestlers’ *tekke* and in presence of sultan Murad were reading prayers for *pehlivans*, didn’t you say “in Engürü rests Er, in Rum Sarı Saltık”? So, this Er Sultan in Engürü is me. I am under the dark dome, near the bottom wooden fortress close to Odun-bazar. Come there, visit me and read *Fatiha*. In this world and in the other you will live in joy and achieve your desires. After morning *namaz* I will send to you one man, he looks a lot like me. Follow him, he will take you around the city, and you will visit me. Peace for you”, said he and disappeared<sup>78</sup>.

In 1826 *pehlivan* Cemaleddin *tekke* in Edirne was given to Nakshbandiyya brotherhood, it is mentioned in many documents of the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. After 1900 the citadel of Edirne was demolished, and *tekke* together with it. In republican period tomb stones were brought to the other *tekke* of Nakshbandiyya brotherhood. Tomb of *pehlivan* Adalı Halil was also brought here from Kasım Paşa mosque<sup>79</sup>.

Wrestlers’ *tekke* in Manisa was built in time of sultan Murad II (1421–1444). There is a court decision concerning this *tekke*, dated 1551<sup>80</sup>.

Two wrestlers’ *tekke* were built in Constantinople recently conquered by Ottomans in time of sultan Mehmet II Fatih (1444–1446, 1451–1481). Evliyâ Çelebi informs that “between Suleymaniye (mosque) and a wall of the Old Palace there is a place known as square of Pehlivan Demir, the source of wrestlers. In the afternoon all *pehlivans* of *tekke* wrestle in this beautiful place. But in real *Türki* language the word (*güreş*) sounds like “*güraş*”<sup>81</sup>.

Evliyâ Çelebi also describes a procession of wrestlers during guilds parade of the Ottoman capital. “Guild of *pehlivans*-wrestlers. Their *tekkes* are in two places. One of them is near Küçük-bazar, on the Unkapanı road, not far from Sevri bakery. It is the *tekke* of Pehlivan Şüca, (built in time of) Father of Victory Gazi. The other is near the bottom of Zeyrek descent, it is the *tekke* of Pehlivan Demir. This *tekke* is arranged well, sheikh Baba Hasan, a well-known good old man lives there.

In this *tekke* there are three hundred *pehlivans*, like Zupin<sup>82</sup>, these are men who

---

<sup>76</sup> *Hirka* is a Sufi garment, a sackcloth.

<sup>77</sup> *külâh-ı veledî* - ?

<sup>78</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1998, s. 223.

<sup>79</sup> Yazoğlu, A. Kırkpınar, yüce Türk ulusunun Anadolu ve Rumeli’yi yurt edinişin soylu bir destandır // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Kahraman, A. Ibid, s. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2006, s. 71.

<sup>82</sup> Züpîn is the name of grandson of tsar Gushtasp, a hero of Firdowsi “Shahname “. Here, possibly, the name of some well known *pehlivan*.



can manage a plough, like a pair of buffaloes. One hundred – one hundred and fifty pairs of *pehlivans*, put on *kispets*, smeared with yellow butter oil<sup>83</sup>, split into pairs, shifting from one foot to another, like men-dragons, pounce on each other like furious lions. Being amongst many spectators they cast jealous glances at each other, bottom-up and up-bottom, and do the mighty men business. They pass the Alay-köşkü palace, making (...) <sup>84</sup> maneuvers named *kesme*, and *şirazi*, and *kesebend*, and *ters kepçe*, and *piş-kabza* (“front handle”), and *yanbaşı* (“side” – ?), and *sergelle* (“head-head” – ?, or name of herb), and *asumanış* (“sky”), and *Cezayir sarması*, and *boğma*, and *karakuş*, and receive from padishah mercies and honor. Their patron is saint Mahmud Pir Yar-ı Veli, the belt of whom was tied saint Hamza. His tomb is in (...)»<sup>85</sup>.

This fragment clarifies the question about, who was for Evliyâ Çelebi one of the main saint patrons of wrestlers. Below we give another fragment in which the belt of Mahmud ties the Prophet himself. Ottoman author Sadeddin Efendi (died 1788) in the book “*Tuhfe-i Hattatin*” (The gift of scribes”) calls Pir Yar-ı Veli Mahmud a “patron of *duacı* (prayer readers)”. *Pehlivan* Adalı Halil<sup>86</sup> in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in interview to “*Resmi Gazete*” told that “patron of *pehlivans* is saint Hamza Veli, and of heralds, i.e. jury is Haydar Mahmud”<sup>87</sup>.

Some Turkish researchers of oil wrestling, one of the most important sources for whom is being Evliyâ Çelebi, constantly mentioning the name of this saint, question about the person of Mahmud, and cannot find enough information in Ottoman documents. Halis Erdem makes an interesting assumption that this could be well-known rebellion leader sheikh Bedreddin Mahmud Simavna (executed in 1416 or 1418). But he said at the same time that to his mind, it's more likely that it is Pahlavan Mahmud, buried in Khiva<sup>88</sup>.

Pahlavan Mahmud, Pahlavan-ata, Pehlevan Purya Veli, Mahmud Periyar is the most important person related to wrestling in Iran and Central Asia. In Iran the name of Pehlevan Purya Veli is mentioned before wrestling in *zurkhana* (“houses of might”)<sup>89</sup>. In Central Asia a huge number of legends are associated with his name, and for Khiva Pahlavan Mahmud is the main saint patron of the city, where his mausoleum is situated. Pahlavan Mahmud, born in Urgench, presumably in 40<sup>th</sup> years of 13<sup>th</sup> century, died in Khiva in 1322 or 1325, and was the great sheikh of Kubraviyya brotherhood, furrier by profession, an invincible wrestler and well-known poet. Inscription on his mausoleum said: “The blessed tomb of the world pole and the greatest leader Pahlavan Mahmud, son of Pir-i Mar-vali, hallowed be the mystery of them both!”<sup>90</sup>. Iranian authors also mention about the father of Mahmud Purya Veli, who was even greater sheikh and wrestler. In the city of Khoy there is a revered tomb of Purya Veli,

---

<sup>83</sup> Interesting information, telling that the wrestlers could use not only the olive oil.

<sup>84</sup> Lacuna.

<sup>85</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2006, s. 311.

<sup>86</sup> Adalı Halil (1871-1927) was a well-known pehlivan of his time.

<sup>87</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Kırkpınar güreşleri'nin halkbilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. Yüksek lisans tezi. Trakya Üniversitesi. Edirne 2012, s. 235.

<sup>88</sup> Erdem, H. Ibid, s. 76-79.

<sup>89</sup> Ahmedov, SH.P.o. O Pehklevane, svyatom i poete Pur'yaveli // Uchenye zapiski Orlovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, № 1 (82), 2019. S. 93.

<sup>90</sup> Snesarev, G.P. Ibid, S. 176.



son of Mahmud<sup>91</sup>. So, it's possible that in the image of the saint patron of wrestlers merged two sheikhs, father and son.

It is interesting that one of the most popular legends about Pahlavan Mahmud, related to wrestling, links Khiva and Anatolia. The legend tells about invitation by “padishah of Rum” sent to khan of Khiva, who came accompanied by musicians, buffoons and wrestlers. Here Mahmud accidentally learns that tomorrow against him will wrestle a weaker opponent, but he extremely needs to win (the motives of the rival in different versions of the legend differ). The hero deliberately loses the wrestling, after that being disgraced, has to live in Rum for forty years, and returns to Khiva only in old age. The similar story is known in Khoy<sup>92</sup>.

It should be noted that the First International World ethnosport games, held in Khiva in 2019 were dedicated to the memory of Pahlavan Mahmud<sup>93</sup>.

Wrestlers' *tekke* in Amasya was founded by the future sultan Bayazit II (1481–1512), when he during 27 years before enthronization was a governor in this city. It is known that during his governance he invited to Amasya *pehlivans* from other cities. After 1481 many of them went to Constantinople<sup>94</sup>.

In the document dated September 1573 there is a call for *pehlivans* from *tekkes* in Manisa, Tokat and Amasya. In October 1585 a letter was sent to Karaman and Sivas, in which it was told that in wrestlers' *tekkes* of the capital remained no *pehlivans*, and if in these regions there are people fit for this, if they want, they should be sent to Constantinople<sup>95</sup>.

Tekke in Deliorman on Danube, in 35 kilometers from Razgrad, in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as is believed, was founded by *pehlivan* Demir Hasan Baba. His name was also given to one of wrestlers' *tekke* in Constantinople. He was a famous warrior, glorified himself during conquest by Ottomans of fortress Budin in time of sultan Suleyman I Kanuni (1520–1566). After a lot of legends were told about Demir Hasan. In his *tekke* many generations of wrestlers were brought up, including Kel Aliço who became famous in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Türbe* (mausoleum) of Demir Hasan is in a Mumcular village, not far from Razgrad<sup>96</sup>. Evliyâ Çelebi described in detail this *tekke*, but it is interesting that he doesn't mention about wrestlers in it<sup>97</sup>. In 1925 in Bulgaria an assumption was made, that *türbe* of Demir Hasan actually is an ancient tomb of khan Asparuh. On the insistence of Muslims the grave was opened and ascertained that the entombment is Muslim<sup>98</sup>.

It should be noted that practically all Turkish authors writing about wrestlers' *tekke* insist that they were “sport clubs” of their time, that the religious terminology was used in them “according to habits of the time”, and totally deny the religious component

---

<sup>91</sup> Ahmedov, SH.P.o. Ibid, S. 93.

<sup>92</sup> Snesarev, G.P. Ibid, s. 170-172; Ahmedov, SH.P.o. Ibid, S. 94.

<sup>93</sup> The first competition was held in the discipline of ethnosport-strongman in the program of the first International Strongman Games. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:  
<http://ethnosport.org/news/112.htm>

<sup>94</sup> Acar, A. Türk güreş tarihinde pehlivan tekkeleri (2. Bölüm) // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 22, 2015, s. 28-30.

<sup>95</sup> Acar, A. Pehlivan Tekkeleri // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 21, 2015, s. 16-17.

<sup>96</sup> Günaydın, G. Dünyayı titreten Türk Koca Yusuf // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 4, 2013, s. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. V. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2001, s. 304-305.

<sup>98</sup> Erdem, H. Ibid, s. 120.



in the life of these institutions and in the system of wrestlers' (and also archers', mace fighters' etc.) education<sup>99</sup>. I think that it is a typical misconception of researches, operating the concepts of secular-atheistic world of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and transferring these concepts to the traditional society field.

### **Oil wrestling at the Ottoman court**

The first documents of the Ottoman epoch telling about sultans as *pehlivans*, date the time of Murat I (1359–1389). The poet Ahmedi in his “History of sovereigns of Ottoman Dome” calls the sultan “young brave *pehlivan*”. The majority of Ottoman *şahzade* (princes) loved wrestling and were personally wrestling. The son of Bayazit I (1389–1402) Mehmet Çelebi had a nickname *Güreşçi Çelebi*, i.e. “the Wrestler”<sup>100</sup>.

Quite early Ottoman period gives information about “wrestling in the sultan presence” (*huzur güreşleri*), which were organized on the occasion with different celebrations. There is a document telling that after wrestling in presence of sultan Bayazit II in 1504 the *pehlivan* by name Beşir Ahmed was awarded with 3000 *kuruş*, and *pehlivan* Süleyman – 1500 *kuruş*<sup>101</sup>.

The documents related to reign of the sultan Selim I (1512–1520) inform about “the wrestlers’ community” (*cemaat-ı küştigiran*) at court, the *pehlivans*’ names are given: Ali Küçük, Hacı, Kemal Acem, Şahkulu, Mehmet Divane, Ali Rum and Ali Zorbaz. We know also that Ali Küçük received a salary of 1000 *kuruş* for training of other wrestlers. The document of the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century informs that not every padishah was a wrestling fan. One of the wrestlers wrote to sultan a plea to return former attention to *pehlivans*<sup>102</sup>.

Honor and respect to the wrestling at Ottoman court fully returned at the time of Murad IV (1623–1640). “The wrestlers’ community” was taken by him from outer to inner palace, that meant the importance of this institution. Great attention of padishah to the wrestling affected, in particular, in the order prohibiting Tokatlı Halil and Hamza Pehlivan to wrestle without special permission of the monarch. Violation of this decree led to the death penalty of two wrestlers and temporary ban for wrestling in the palace<sup>103</sup>.

Evliyâ Çelebi who was taken to the court in 1635, left priceless evidence about culture and tempers of the epoch, and in particular, described in detail a heroic strength and passion to wrestling of Murad IV.

“Once (padishah) grabbed by belts our patron Melek Ahmed Ağa<sup>104</sup> and Silihdar Musa Ağa, and both of them were people like dragons, and with one hand raised each of them over his blessed head. After that he released from his left hand Musa Pasha, and seven-eight times by the right hand rotated Melek Ahmed Ağa like a mace.

The other case. Melek Ahmed, Deli Hüseyin, Hattat Hasan, Pehlivan Dişlen Süleyman – all of them were master wrestlers who wore oiled trousers. (The sultan) himself would strip naked in the meadow at Çemen Soffa, put on oiled *kıspet*, and engaged in wrestling, and this poor man was their prayer reader (*duacı*)”. There follows the text of prayer we cited above. “After this prayer the happy padishah, like universe,

<sup>99</sup> See, for example: Erdem, H. Doğuşundan günümüze Kırkpınar. Dahi Yayıncılık, 3. baskı 2013, s. 91.

<sup>100</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 28.

<sup>101</sup> Özcan, A. Güreş // TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, s. 319.

<sup>102</sup> Özcan, A. Ibid, s. 318.

<sup>103</sup> Özcan, A. Ibid, s. 318.

<sup>104</sup> Melek Ahmed was a visier and cousin of Evliyâ Çelebi.



would lumber up to the arena like a dragon and shake hands in friendly rivalry with Melek Ahmed or Deli Hüseyin. Following the rule of the wrestlers they would clap each other on the head three times, hold hands, kiss and embrace, then begin grappling like dragons. The sultan, enraged, would place one knee on the ground so that his opponent could not budge him no matter how hard he tried. Using some maneuver, the sultan invariably toppled his opponent and emerged victorious.

From the *pehlivans'* maneuvers (should be mentioned) *ters kabza* ("back handle"), and *iç kabza* ("inner handle"), and *tış kabza* ("outer handle"), and *kesme*, and *kesme-bend* ("connection break" – ?), and *şirazi*, and *hevayi* ("lowering" – ?), and *karakuş*, and *sade sarma* ("simple girth"), and *Ceazyir sarması*, and *kündeden atma*, and *kabak dikme* ("pumpkin planting"), and *kabak atma* («pumpkin throw»), and *girdiman dikme* (?), and *boğma*, and *ters kepçe*, and *şirazi bulma* ("finding pant leg"), and *göğüs şaki* ("chest grabbing"), and *yanbaşı*, and *sergele*, and *Talut bendi* ("Talut binding" – the proper name), and *Ali bendi* ("Ali binding"). In presence of saint Prophet all *pehlivans* with the fastened belts and sashes, saint Maadi Kereb, and saint Ukail ibn Abu Talib, and Suheil Rumi, and Saad, and Said, and saint Halid ibn Valid, and Asvad ibn Mikdad, and (...) Haddad, and saint Umar, and saint Ali, and saint Hamza, and saint Malik Ajder, all of these excellent *sahabs*<sup>105</sup> wrestled in presence of the saint Prophet.

The saint Prophet himself also was a *pehlivan*. He wrestled many times with damned Abu Lahab and Abu Djahil, and won them. For the gross of veneration and fortitude according to customs of Islam, he paid attention to all *pehlivans*, tied the belt to Mahmud Pir Yar-ı Veli, and made him a source of *pehlivans*. Strong, fearless, brave and skilled (wrestlers) learn these knowledge, master the abovementioned forty kinds of maneuvers (*fen*), seventy bindings (*bend*) and one hundred and forty avoidances (? – *hevâ*), and in time of holy war they take revenge on enemies. But among *pehlivans* such maneuvers like *karakuş*, strangulation and *girt* ("embrace" – ?) are forbidden. Because these maneuvers to be made in oil, and the rival is not your enemy. If you're going hand to hand with enemy in struggle, you can use *karakuş* and strangulation and even cutting off the head.

The late Murad Khan was mighty; he mastered the majority of above-mentioned maneuvers, and surely, using one of them, put the rival to his back. This kind of strong man he was"<sup>106</sup>.

Evliyâ Çelebi gives one more interesting episode about wrestling of two pashas. "After returning from Gönnye campaign<sup>107</sup> all viziers, *mir-i mirans*<sup>108</sup> and *emirs*, were sitting on Muhammedan feast and eating. Seydi Ahmet Pasha and Baki Pasha began to wrangle and, being in public, left the food and grabbed each other by the collar. They said: "Get up, Evliyâ! We, two pashas, will wrestle. Bless us. We will wrestle properly on empty stomach, and eat after". This unworthy said: "I'm ready, like a ring near bowstring, like an arrow on a stretched bow", and got up from the table". There follows the text of prayer we cited above. "These two strong men, brave, fearless and skilled

---

<sup>105</sup> Sahab means companion of the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>106</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2006, s. 117.

<sup>107</sup> Gonio Fortress is near the city of Batum.

<sup>108</sup> Mir-i miran – the governor of the province.



vizier, great *vali*<sup>109</sup>, grappled like two ram, and ripping off collars, fell with faces to the dust in the middle of the tent, wrestling like *pehlivans*. Baki Pasha was a brave, fearless, mighty and skilled (wrestler), with a body of elephant. He grabbed Seydi Pasha so that he was about to win. But between two attacks he made a mistake, and Seydi Pasha, with equal effort flexed his muscles, and by a *yanbaşı* maneuver, threw Baki Pasha right to the table with Muhammedan feast, like a mountain wreck<sup>110</sup>.

In this case it is interesting that, although the wrestling of two generals happened as a result of a quarrel and had been made clearly not by the rules of oil wrestling, the “*pehlivans’ prayer*”, however was red.

In the “epoch of tulips”, as a reign of sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730) is called, for wrestling in Constantinople *pehlivans* were coming from all parts of empire and even from abroad. In the capital Sadabad palace was built, in which there was a special part where wrestlers lived. One of them was appointed a “chief of *pehlivans*” (*Pehlivan Kahyası*), who was in charge of all activities, concerning wrestling at court<sup>111</sup>. The commander of the Ottoman Navy Küçük Hüseyin Pasha, who was a skilled wrestler himself, once organized a tournament between six of “his own” athletes and palace *pehlivans*, but the palace wrestlers won in all the matches<sup>112</sup>.

### **Oil wrestling in Ottoman state and republican Turkey after 1826**

After the abolition janissary corps and prohibition of Bektashiyya brotherhood (1826) wrestlers’ *tekke* were closed or given to the other Sufi orders, and some of them took on the support of wrestlers. For example, the oil wrestling festival in Çardak *tekke* of Mevleviyya brotherhood started to organize<sup>113</sup>.

The sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) who abolished janissaries loved wrestling, patronized many *pehlivans* and organized tournaments in his own presence. But at the same time there was a significant reduction of court servants, and the “wrestlers’ community” was closed<sup>114</sup>. At the time of sultan Abdul-Aziz (1861–1876), who was the last padishah, personally participated in wrestling, from Anatolia to Constantinople came a lot of *pehlivans*, some of which were taken to court again to different positions. At time of European travelling of sultan in his retinue there were some *pehlivans*; after that the interest Ottoman wrestlers emerged in Europe. The most well-known *pehlivans* of this epoch were Tokatlı Kasım, Arnavutlu Ali, Lotçalı Kara İbo, Kvasoğlu İbrahim, Makarnacı Hüseyin and Kel Aliço. These wrestlers were placed to Ihlamur palace in the capital, where tournaments were organized<sup>115</sup>. Kel Aliço entered the history as a *pehlivan* who won Kırkpınar the largest number of times – 26<sup>116</sup>.

Abdul-Hamid II (1876–1909) in the beginning of his reign treated badly the wrestlers, because they participated to intrigues in time of Abdul-Aziz. The professional wrestlers, having lost state support, started going to provinces to participate in local

<sup>109</sup> The title of high rank Ottoman official.

<sup>110</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1998, s. 182.

<sup>111</sup> Şener, O.A., İmamoğlu, G. Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Güreş Faaliyetleri ve Yansımaları // Turkish Studies. Social Sciences. Volume 13/26, Fall 2018, s. 1096.

<sup>112</sup> Özcan, A. Ibid, s. 319.

<sup>113</sup> Acar, A. Tarihi Çardak güreşleri // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 28.

<sup>114</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 29.

<sup>115</sup> Özcan, A. Ibid, s. 318.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, s. 320.



tournaments on holidays, and also to wrestle abroad. Thanks to performances in circus of such wrestlers as Koca Yusuf (who received a nickname “the terrible Turk”), Kara Ahmed, Adali Halil and Kurtdereli Mehmed after 1890 in Europe and in America the expression “strong like Turk” spread. After it in Constantinople wrestler tournaments were allowed again, and Abdul-Hamid II held the reception in honor of “champion of the universe” Kara Ahmed and awarded him the order. In 1897 in Constantinople wrestling tournaments on Ramadan holiday started to be organized, which became traditional since that time, circus wrestling also became popular. In 1901 in the Ottoman Empire began the organization of championships in Greek-Roman wrestling<sup>117</sup>. At the same time the Ottomans borrowed the European tradition to award the champions with golden belt<sup>118</sup>. But the Ottoman Empire faced with the growth of revolutionary movements, whereupon in the capital and its neighborhood from 1900 to 1908 meetings were forbidden. That’s why wrestling could be organized just by special permission.

After the destruction of the Ottoman Empire oil wrestling became one of the symbols of a new, nationalistic Turkey. The founder of republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was interested in wrestling, organized competitions and met with well-known *pehlivans*. During his conversation in 1931 with Kurtdereli Mehmet, who was the chief arbiter on tournament in Ankara, Atatürk asked the elderly wrestler about the secret of his numerous victories abroad. The answer of Kurtdereli Mehmet fully reflects the new meanings imputed to oil wrestling in republican period: “When I was wrestling, I felt behind my back all the Turkish people, and I made everything to protect its honor. And I felt that I base on the might of all the Turkish people behind my back”<sup>119</sup>.

It is interesting that Turkish wrestling federation was founded in 1922, 1 year before official creation of Republic of Turkey. Starting from 1925 this federation organized oil wrestling and *karakuçak* competitions. In 1998 Federation of traditional kinds of sports of Turkey was founded, it is engaged in such kinds of wrestling as *aba güreş*, *şalvar güreş* and *kuşak güreş*.

### **The actual problems**

Despite the attention given to oil wrestling from state and society of Turkey, nowadays it going through a difficult period of development. It has been repeatedly mentioned that the processes of modernization and sportization of oil wrestling are perceived with anxiety by the supporters of the preservation of the original cultural tradition. Specialists notice that traditions are emasculated; modern *pehlivans* do not know a symbolic meaning of wrestling and accompanying rituals, there is no interest to this knowledge; transformation of oil wrestling to usual sport competition, although not devoid of national pathos.

Introduction of new rules is subjected to rather harsh criticism, equating the oil wrestling to modern sport wrestling. It is a time limit of wrestling and points system, introduced from 1983. For example, the owner of golden belt Hüseyin Çokal thinks that “the points system excludes oil wrestling from the status of our fathers’ sport”. On his mind, now a wrestler can “get one point and lie up to the victory”. Because of that

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, s. 319.

<sup>118</sup> Dervişoğlu, M. Ibid, s. 153.

<sup>119</sup> Hatipler, M. Rumeli Türklüğünün (yağlı) güreş sporunun gelişmesine etkileri // V. Uluslararası tarihi Kırkpınar sempozyumu bildirileri kitabı. Edirne, 2010, s. 21.



wrestling totally loses its originality. The wrestler advocates a return to the old system<sup>120</sup>.

Sportization of wrestling and erosion of its traditional content led to growth of unlawful, dishonest and cruel maneuvers in wrestling, so that specialists called this process “a transformation of *pehlivans* to gladiators”. In 1986 for the first time a mandatory oath on Qurane do not use illegal tricks was introduced for wrestlers<sup>121</sup>. In 2013 all Turkey was shocked by the news that doping was detected in *başpehlivan* Ali Gürbüz on Kırkpınar<sup>122</sup>. The public discussion around these issues ended with a demand of many specialists to found the separate oil wrestling federation. In the address to the President Erdoğan it was told that with the introduction of the points system, the quality of wrestling drops, hustle is growing. Turks love the wrestling, but few people come to the tribunes on Greek-Roman and freestyle wrestling competitions, even on European and world level. On ethnic kinds of wrestling there are always a lot of people. Popularity of oil wrestling in Turkey can be comparable with football, and in some positions exceeds football, and we have to preserve this heritage<sup>123</sup>.

The special worry of Turkish public cause attempts to “arrogate” the oil wrestling made by Greece and Bulgaria. In 2003 Greece asked the Wrestling federation of Turkey to send oil wrestling masters to participate in demonstrational competitions on Olympiad-2004 in Athens. This proposal was perceived as an attempt “to bind oil wrestling to the Greek culture”, and the chief of the federation gave tough enough response. The attempts of Greece to organize the demonstrational oil wrestling with help of Bulgaria and Macedonia caused the special displeasure in Turkey<sup>124</sup>. In the circles of oil wrestling adherents the alleged claims of Bulgaria that cradle of oil wrestling is Deliorman, and the famous natives of this region – Koca Yusuf, Kel Aliço, Hergelici İbrahim, Kara Ahmet and others – are really osmanized Bulgarians are discussed.

In general, we can say that despite significant modern problems, oil wrestling retains its value for Turkey. It has a wide circle of adherents of traditions conservation and support from the state. The scientific research of oil wrestling is going on, and we hope, soon it can reach a new level of understanding of this outstanding phenomenon of the world ethnosport.

## Bibliography

1. Acar, A. Türk güreş tarihinde pehlivan tekkeleri (2. Bölüm) // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 22, 2015, s. 28-30.
2. Acar, A. Pehlivan Tekkeleri // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 21, 2015, s. 16-17.
3. Ahmedov, SH.P.o. O Pekhlevane, svyatom i poete Pur'yaveli // Uchenye zapiski Orlovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, № 1 (82), 2019. S. 93.
4. Akyüz, V. Asr-ı Saadette Spor. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:

<sup>120</sup> Başgöl, Ö. Altın kemer sahibi Çokal: Puanlama, yağlı güreşi ata sporu olmaktan çıkarıyor // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 1, 2013, s. 15.

<sup>121</sup> Delice, H. Ermeydanı arena oldu // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 7, 2014, s. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Yazoğlu, A. Ata sporumuz yağlı güreşte neler oluyor? // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 3, 2013, s. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Bucak, E. Yağlı güreş federasyonu lazım! // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 2, 2013, s. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Yunanistan, yağlı güreşe sahiplenmeye çalışıyor. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:

<https://www.tgrthaber.com.tr/gundem/-115541.html>



<http://www.sonpeygamber.info/asr-i-saadette-spor>

5. Albayrak, E. Kırkpınar elemanları // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 26-27.
6. Aneshofer, H. Seyahatname'deki Sarı Saltık Menkıbeleri ve Bektaşî Sözlü Rivayeti // Evliya Çelebi. Editörler: Tezcan N., Tezcan S. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2011.
7. Ayağ, A. Türklerde Spor Geleneği ve Kırkpınar Güreşleri. İstanbul: Divan Yayınları, 1983.
8. Başaran, F.N.; Gürcüm, B.H. The Yağlı Güreş Tradition in Kırkpınar and the Last Master of Kispet-Making // Folk life: journal of ethnological studies, Vol. 49 No. 2, 2011, s. 117.
9. Başgül, Ö. Altın kemer sahibi Çokal: Puanlama, yağlı güreşi ata sporu olmaktan çıkarıyor // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 1, 2013, s. 15.
10. Bucak, E. Yağlı güreş federasyonu lazım! // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 2, 2013, s. 5.
11. Cazgır Kelime Kökeni. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.etimolojiturkce.com/kelime/cazg%C4%B1r>
12. Delice, H. Ermevdanı arena oldu // Destan-ı Kırkpınar, No 7, 2014, s. 8.
13. Delice, H. Kırkpınar. Türklerde Spor Anlayışı ve Kırkpınar Ruhu – Babıali kültür yayıncılığı, 2011.
14. Delice, H. Peşrev // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 16.
15. Dervişoğlu, M. Kırkpınar güreşleri'nin halkbilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. Yüksek lisans tezi. Trakya Üniversitesi. Edirne, 2012.
16. Dervişoğlu, M. Türk güreşinde kispet, kispet ustalığı ve kispet üzerine inanışlar // Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 8 Sayı: 16, Temmuz 2018, s. 204-222.
17. Dever, A. Sports Lodges in the Ottoman Empire Depicted in the Travel Book (Seyahat-Name) of Evliya Çelebi // Annals of Applied Sport Science 2019, 7(1), s. 49-55.
18. Dünden Bugüne Antalya – Antalya Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2012, s. 280.
19. Erdem, H. Doğuşundan günümüze Kırkpınar. Dahi Yayıncılık, 3. baskı 2013.
20. Özbil, A. Kispet ve Kispet Ustalığı // Acta Turcica Çevrimiçi Tematik Türkoloji Dergisi, 2(2), 2009, s. 86–87.
21. Özcan, A. Güreş // TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 14. Cilt.
22. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. I. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2006.
23. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. II. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1998.
24. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. III. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 1999.
25. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. V. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı. 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2001.
26. Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. VIII. Kitap. Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman, Dr. Yücel Dağlı., Prof. Dr. Robert Dankoff, 1. Baskı. İstanbul, 2003.
27. Gül, M.; Türkmen, M.; Doğan, A.; Soygüden, A. Lost Tradition in Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling: Importance of Kispet and Ceremony of Kispet Wearing // International Journal of Wrestling Science, 2015, 5:1, 52-55.
28. Güreş oyunları. December 15th 2019, retrieved from:



- <http://www.edirnekirkpinar.com/tr/yazi/2-ritueller/12-gures-oyunlari>
29. Hatipler, M. Rumeli Türklüğünün (yağlı) güreş sporunun gelişmesine etkileri // V. Uluslararası tarihi Kırkpınar sempozyumu bildirileri kitabı. Edirne, 2010, s. 19.
  30. Kahraman, A. Cumhuriyete Kadar Türk Güreşi, C. I, II. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989.
  31. Kirbaçoğlu, M.; El-Fers, M. Kırkpınar: All About Turkish Oil Wrestling – Netherlands: Lulu.com, 2009, p. 97.
  32. Kırkpınar'ın rövanşları Elmalı'da. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/spor/1516392/kirkpinarin-rovans-elmalida.html>
  33. Kırkpınar oil wrestling festival. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/krkpnar-oil-wrestling-festival-00386>
  34. Kuşçuzade, M. Sünnette spor // International Journal of Science Culture and Sport, August 2015: Special Issue 4, s. 402.
  35. Klyasov, A.V.; Nesterov, P.V. Olimpizm i kul'turnaya preemstvennost': peresmotr klyuchevogo momenta v sporte // Vestnik slavyanskikh kul'tur, 2016, №2. S. 117–118.
  36. Laqueur, H.P. Zur Kulturgeschichtlichen Stellung Des Türkischen Ringkampfes Einst End Jetzt. Цит. по: Ahmet, Acar. Türk Güreş Tarihinde Pehlivan Tekkeleri (2. Bölüm) // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 22, s. 28-30.
  37. Mandzyak, A.S.; Artemenko, O.L. YAgly gyuresh // Enciklopediya tradicionnyh vidov bor'by narodov mira. Minsk, 2010. S. 549.
  38. Özbil, A. Kispet ve Kispet Ustalığı // Acta Turcica Çevrimiçi Tematik Türkoloji Dergisi, 2(2), 2009, s. 86–87.
  39. Özcan, A. Güreş // TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 14. cilt, s. 318.
  40. Sağlam, A. Tarihi Kırkpınar Yağlı Güreş Musikisi. “Pehlivan havaları”. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: [https://www.academia.edu/37712355/Tarihi\\_K%C4%B1rpk%C4%B1nar\\_Ya%C4%9FI%C4%B1\\_G%C3%BCre%C5%9F\\_Musikisi\\_Pehlivan\\_Havalar%C4%B1](https://www.academia.edu/37712355/Tarihi_K%C4%B1rpk%C4%B1nar_Ya%C4%9FI%C4%B1_G%C3%BCre%C5%9F_Musikisi_Pehlivan_Havalar%C4%B1)
  41. Şener, O.A., İmamoğlu G. Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Güreş Faaliyetleri ve Yansımaları // Turkish Studies. Social Sciences. Volume 13/26, Fall 2018, s. 1096.
  42. Sevuk, İ.H. Türk Güreşi ve Elli Yıl Önce Garp Âlemindeki On Yıllık Türk Kasırgası. İstanbul: İnkilap ve Aka, 1948, цит. по: Dervişoğlu M. Türk güreşinde kispet, kispet ustalığı ve kispet üzerine inanışlar // Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 8 Sayı: 16, Temmuz 2018, s. 204-222.
  43. Snasarev, G.P. Horezmskie legendy kak istochnik po istorii religioznyh kul'tov Srednej Azii. M.: «Nauka», 1983. S. 176.
  44. Svinth, J.R. Turkish Oil Wrestling in Algiers. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: [https://ejmas.com/jalt/2007jalt/jcsart\\_Svinth\\_0710.html](https://ejmas.com/jalt/2007jalt/jcsart_Svinth_0710.html)
  45. Tarihçe. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.tgf.gov.tr/tr/index.php/tarihce-2/>
  46. The first competition was held in the discipline of ethnosport-strongman in the program of the first International Strongman Games. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <http://ethnosport.org/news/112.htm>
  47. Türkmen, M.; Kaynar, Ö.; Abdybekova, N.A. General perspective Ottoman



- pehlivan / wrestling lodges and Greek gymnasium / palaistra's a glance // Vestnik fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta. Bishkek, 2017, № 1(2), s. 122-126.
48. Uzgör, S. Ağa olmak // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 10; Albayrak E. Kırkpınar elemanları // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 26-27.
49. Yazoğlu, A. Kırkpınar, yüce Türk ulusunun Anadolu ve Rumeli'yi yurt edinişin soylu bir destandır // Destan-i Kırkpınar No 1, 2013, s. 3.
50. Yazoğlu, A. Yağlı güreş sporunun Kırkpınar adı altında tanımı ve tarihi gelişmesi // Destan-ı Kırkpınar No 8, 2014, s. 3.
51. Yunanistan, yağlı güreşe sahiplenmeye çalışıyor. December 15th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.tgrthaber.com.tr/gundem/-115541.html>