

19th Century Ottoman Archery Records Among Leiden Miscellanea

Rik J. Janssen
S. Berk Metin

Authors:

Rik J. Janssen is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures

r.j.janssen@sms.ed.ac.uk, ORCID: [0009-0004-6686-399X](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6686-399X)

S. Berk Metin is a PhD student at Simon Fraser University, Department of History
sbm6@sfu.ca, ORCID: [0009-0004-2521-714X](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2521-714X)

Keywords:

Archery, Maḥmūd II, *Sünnet*, Legitimacy, *Ġāzī*, 19th Century

Cite this article:

Rik J. Janssen, S. Berk Metin. “19th Century Ottoman Archery Records Among Leiden Miscellanea” *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions* 3/1 (Winter 2025): 40-53. Available under <https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-25-01-05>.

Article DOI [10.25365/kshf-25-01-05](https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-25-01-05)

Published online 07, 2025

© 2025 Rik J. Janssen, S. Berk Metin, published by *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions*. This is an Open Access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0. International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Context

The following manuscript is part of a 19th-century notebook housed in Leiden University Library's Oriental Collections (Cod. Or. 12.418), and brought to the Netherlands by Franz Taeschner (1888-1967).¹ Below, we share the folios 16R and 27V containing Sultan Maḥmūd II's (r. 1808-1839) archery records shot on *Ekşi Menzili/Menzil-i Ekşi* (abbr. *Erkekli ve Dişili*, Tr. 'with male and female') in *Oğmeydānı* (Archery Field), bordering Istanbul.² The section on the sultan's archery records comprises nine pages of the more extensive notebook concerning various subjects.³ The archery section begins with *b[i-ʿsmi]h[u]*, (in His [God's] name),⁴ and presents the name and location of the range (*menzil*); wind directions (*hevā*); a list of the names of the (former) record holders; and their corresponding scores measured in *gez* 'aded (a cubit, approximately 60 cm).⁵ The word 'aded (amount) is shaped like an arrow flying through the sky: the two *dāls* (ﺩ) form the feathers of the arrow while the 'ayn (ع) is shaped like an arrowhead. The 'ayn and *dāls* are connected by a long line, representing the shaft (see the Facsimile).

Maḥmūd appears eighteen times in the notebook, of which seventeen are by name and once as *defʿa* (repeated). Most of his records are mentioned twice; some in the context of a sole record or only with one preceding archer (10 times), others in more extensive overviews of previous record-holders on a specific track (8 times).⁶ His most extensive title is *Ḥazret-i Sulṭān Maḥmūd Ḥan-i Ġāzī-i ʿAdlī-i ʿAdālet-kār Efendimiz* (His Majesty Sultan Mahmud Khan Gazi, the Just, the Righteous, our Master).⁷ The sultan's

¹ We thank Hans Theunissen for sharing this source with us and the discussions we had regarding its context. All errors belong to us. See Hans Theunissen, "Framing a Reformist Government," Leiden University Turkish Studies: Courses, accessed September 12, 2024, [https://rise.articulate.com/share/GM3dwzWXv8UPPgYhRAbXsRu_VJfsRLS#/.](https://rise.articulate.com/share/GM3dwzWXv8UPPgYhRAbXsRu_VJfsRLS#/)

² For the abbreviation, see Muṣṭafā Kānī, *Telḥīs-i Resāʾilātü ʿr-Rumāt*, İstanbul: Dārü ʿṭ-Ṭībāʿatü ʿl-ʿĀmire, 1263 [1847], 246.

³ For more information on the entire miscellany, see Jan Schmidt, *Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Leiden University Library, 2006), 252–57.

⁴ Cod. Or.12.418, fol 15V.

⁵ Şinasi Acar and Zafer Metin Ateş, "Gez Uzunluğu Ne Kadardı?" *Yapı* 330 (2009): 60–64.

⁶ This dual mention also occurs in Kānī. For the *Ekşi Menzili* example, see Kānī, *Telḥīs*, 124, 246–47.

⁷ Cod. Or. 12.418, fol 15V.

recurring title is *Ḥazret-i Sulṭān Maḥmūd Ḥan*, often combined with other appellations.⁸ The names of the other competing archers are given rather humbly, only accompanied by their titles such as *Ağa*, *Bey*, or nicknames signifying their occupations, family ties, physical features, etc. Some preceding records are anonymous and are noted as “first stone” (*Anaṭaşı*), “second [stone]” (*İkinci*), and so on. Stone refers to the pillars erected to commemorate the record-holder’s success on the spot where the arrow fell. Maḥmūd II consistently broke records and erected numerous obelisks.⁹

The anonymous author of the Leiden manuscript most likely copied the entries from the *Telhīs-i Resā’ilātü ‘r-Rumāt* (1836, printed in 1847) of Muṣṭafa Kānī Bey (d. 1850). Almost all notebook records are identical; this includes the lines next to some numbers, representing 0.5 *gez* (see the Facsimile). Judging by copying errors and eraser marks, it is plausible that it is a later copy of tournament records.¹⁰ We present eraser marks with a strikethrough in the transliteration and translation.

Although we do not know the exact date and purpose of its authorship, the Leiden manuscript offers valuable information for those interested in the history of archery and sultanic legitimacy-building in the early 19th-century Ottoman court.

Maḥmūd II was initiated into the Archers’ *tekke* in Oḡmeydānı in 1818.¹¹ Around that time Ibrāhīm Pasha (d. 1848), the son of Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Egypt (d. 1849), quelled the Wahhābī revolt and ended the Ottoman-Wahhābī War (1811-1818). The unpopular sultan seized the opportunity to capitalise on the rare surge of favourable popular sentiment; adopting the “blessed” title of *Ġāzī* (holy warrior) and increasingly participating in archery tournaments to showcase his pious-chivalric virtues.¹² The

⁸ The only exception is the *Menzil-i Ekşi* where *Ḥan* is omitted. *Ibid.*, fol 27V.

⁹ See M. Şinasi Acar, *İstanbul’un Son Nişantaşları* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2006).

¹⁰ For a copying error, see Cod. Or. 12.418, fol 16R.

¹¹ For information on the sultan’s initiation, see Ünsal Yücel, “Sultan Mahmut II. Devrinde Okçuluk” *Türk Etnografya Dergisi* 10 (1967): 94-95.

¹² The sultan had adopted this appellation after the reconquest of Mecca and Medina from the Wahhābīs in 1813 and reiterated it in 1818 after the execution of ‘Abdullah ibn Sa‘ūd. See BOA, *HAT* 1522/32 S. (29 May 1813 CE); Tayyarzade Ata, *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi. Tarih-i Enderun*, ed. Mehmet Arslan, 5 vols. (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2010), III: 177-178 (originally published in 1874-77 CE), cited in Theunissen, “Framing.”

sultan's claim to holy victory, despite deploying Meḥmed 'Alī, was likely intended to downplay the latter's significance. Moreover, the Islamic symbolism innate in archery, as it was a *Sünnet* (Prophetic Tradition), played a significant role in this image-building campaign.¹³ The Leiden manuscript is useful in showcasing archery's role in this campaign: the sultan's appellations very often include *Ġāzī*, *'Adlī* (The Just), *'Adālet-kār* (The Righteous). The insistent invocations of *'Adlī* and *Adālet-kār* were likely responses to the widespread criticism among Muslims who accused the sultan of disregarding justice and the *şerī'at*.¹⁴ Frederick Anscombe writes that the sultan "stoked religious zeal to mobilize and motivate the Muslim soldiery during wars with Russia and in campaigns against Christian rebels."¹⁵ Therefore, archery as performative Islamic propaganda may have helped mitigate the opposition and consolidate sultanic legitimacy.

Transcription

F16R

<i>Menzil-i Emīn Lodos Hevāsıyla Atılmışdır</i>		
<i>Gez</i> <i>'Aded</i>		
<i>ḥ60</i>		

¹³ See Geyveli Hüseyin Efendi, *Kevserü'l-Hayat: Geyveli Hüseyin Efendi'nin Okçuluk Rehberi*, prep. Recep Selman Doğru, ed. Uğur Öztür (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2021). Originally published 1818.

¹⁴ For popular Muslim opposition toward Maḥmūd II, see Frederick Anscombe, "Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform" *Past and Present* 208 (August 2010): 159-189.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

<i>Ekşi Menzili Yıldız Havâsıyla Atılmışdır: Tâcir-zâde Meḥmed Emîn Ağanıñdır</i>		
<i>Gez ‘Aded</i>		
1190,5	[erased]	
0006	<i>Ḥazret-i Sultân Maḥmūd Ḥan-i Ġâzîniñdir</i>	<i>der-sene 1248</i>
1196,5		
0023	<i>Ḥazret-i Sultân Maḥmūd Ḥan-i Ġâzîniñdir</i>	<i>der-sene 1251</i>
1219,5		<i>fî 14 C[emâzî’l-]â[hîr]</i>

F27V

<i>Menzil-i Ekşi Yıldız Poyrazıyladır</i>		
<i>Gez ‘Aded</i>		
884	<i>Anaṭaşı</i>	
019,5	<i>İkinci</i>	
903,5		
156,5	<i>Üçünci</i>	
1060		
0042,5	<i>Dördünci</i>	
1102,5		
0010	<i>Piṣgîrî Süleymân Ağa</i>	

1112,5		
0010	<i>Küçük Hasan Ağa</i>	
1122,5		
0006	<i>Cebehāneci Seyyid ‘Osmān Ağa</i>	
1128,5		
0027,5	<i>Sü‘edā Beg Tābi ‘-i Ḥadīce Sulṭān</i>	
1156		
0022	<i>Hasan Ağa Ser-Taht-i Revānī-i Hāşşa</i>	
1178		
0013,5	<i>Tācir-zāde Meḥmed Emīn Ağa</i>	
1191,5		
0006	<i>Ḥazret-i Sulṭān Maḥmūd-i Ġāzī-i ‘Adālet-kār</i>	<i>Sene 1248 fī C[emāzī 'l-]e[vvel] 14</i>
1197,5		
0022	<i>Def‘a</i>	<i>der-sene 1251</i>
1219,5		

Translation

F16R

Was shot at the Range of Emin with a Southwest Wind		
Distance in Gez		
1160		

Shot at the Male-Female Range with a North Wind: Son of the Merchant Mehmed Emin Agha's		
Distance in Gez		
1190,5	[erased]	
0006	His Majesty Sultan Mahmud Khan the Gazi's	In the year [1832/33 CE]
1196,5		
0023	His Majesty Sultan Mahmud Khan the Gazi's	In the year [1835 on October 7 CE]
1219,5		

F27V

Male-Female Range with a North-Northeast Wind		
Distance in <i>Gez</i>		
884	First stone	
019,5	Second	
903		
156,5	Third	
1060		
0042,5	Fourth	
1102,5		
0010	Süleyman Agha, the Napkin-Attendant	
1112,5		
0010	Hasan Agha, the Smaller/Younger	
1122,5		
0006	Seyyid Osman Agha, the Quartermaster	
1128,5		
0027,5	Sü'eda Bey, Servant of Khadija Sultan	
1156		

Male-Female Range with a North-Northeast Wind		
Distance in Gez		
884	First stone	
019,5	Second	
903		
0022	Hasan Agha, the Chief of the Privy Palanquin	
1178		
0013,5	Son of the Merchant Mehmed Emin Agha	
1191,5		
0006	His Majesty Sultan Mahmud the Gazi the Righteous	The year [1832 on October 9 CE]
1197,5		
0022	Repeated [Mahmud II]	In the year [1835/36 CE]
1219,5		

Discussion

Ekşi Menzili/Menzil-i Ekşi is the same track but the record contains Turkish and Persian grammatical constructions and this interchangeability is a recurring phenomenon.¹⁶ Wind directions feature in all records. Enes Azbay cites archery documents that use *hevā*

¹⁶ Cod. Or.12.418, folios 16R, 27V. Another range that experiences this phenomenon is the *Emîn Menzili/Menzil-i Emîn*. *Ibid.*, 15V, 32R. For another example, see footnote 18.

in reference to the literal blowing of the wind.¹⁷ As it affects the trajectory of an arrow, the wind needs to be recorded. The sultan shot in a north wind (*Yıldız*) on the *Ekşi Menzili* and in a north-northeast wind (*Yıldız Poyrazı*) on the *Menzil-i Ekşi*.¹⁸ These winds have minor differences yet are in the same general direction. This correlation between ranges and winds is emblematic of all of Maḥmūd's records: every shot on a specific track is shot in a designated general direction.

While the winds and grammatical constructions of names show minor differences, a closer look at the distances and the years of records provide more insights into the track. On the *Ekşi Menzili* Maḥmūd shot two records, beating Tācir-zāde Meḥmed Emīn Ağa's 1190,5 gez by 6 gez, bringing the new record to 1196,5 in 1248 [1832-3 C.E.]. About three years later, on 14 C[emāzī 'l-]ā[ḥir] 1251 [October 7 1835 C.E.],¹⁹ the range was again visited by the *Ġāzī*, where he broke his previous record by 23 gez, bringing it to 1219,5. This folio solely contains the records of Maḥmūd and the previous record holder.²⁰

Similar observations can be made when scrutinising the folio containing the full list of range records on the *Menzil-i Ekşi*. Another notable variance is distance. According to the *Menzil-i Ekşi* entry, Tācir-zāde's record was 1191,5 (1 gez more than in his *Ekşi Menzili* mention). Again, Maḥmūd increased the record by 6 gez, bringing the total to 1197,5 on October 9, 1832 (C[emāzī 'l-]e[vvel] 14, 1248).²¹ The year aligns with the record in the previous case, however, this time it is dated, although possibly incorrectly

¹⁷ Enes Azbay, "Osmanlı Türkçesi Okçuluk Terimlerine Bir Bakış: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Yorumlar," *Türkbilig* 45 (2023): 63, 66, 70.

¹⁸ Cod. Or.12.418, folios 16R, 27V. Another case is the *'Abdullāh Efendi Menzili* where Maḥmūd shot with a southwest wind (*Lodos*). On the *Menzil-i 'Abdullāh Efendi* he shot with a west-southwest wind (*Baṭı Lodos*). *Ibid.*, 16V, 31V.

¹⁹ Although the lines next to the month *Cā* reads as *ā[ḥir]*, this is either a copying mistake, a wrong addition, or a reference that Maḥmūd held the last record on this range. Generally, the month *Cemāzī 'l-āḥir* is abbreviated as C. In contrast, Kānī dates the record to the month *Cemāzī 'l-evvel*. In that case, the date would be September 7, 1835. See Kānī, *Telḥīs*, 124, 247.

²⁰ Cod. Or.12.418, fol 16R.

²¹ This date is likely incorrectly copied, as it is the same date as Maḥmūd's 1251 shot, if we consider it to be dated in the month *Cemāzī 'l-evvel*, see footnote 23. In addition, Kānī does not include a date for this record shot, only the year 1248. See Kānī, *Telḥīs*, 124, 247. This corresponds with the other sources consulted, see footnote 24.

(see footnotes 23, 25). His improved record is not dated; only the year is given (1251/1834-35). This record was enhanced by 22 *gez* (1 less), bringing the total to 1219,5.²²

Considering the (almost) identical distances and directions on the same range, the folios refer to the same records. But why are there minor variances in *gez*? The author likely copied from Kānī's *Telḥīs*, where the records are given as 1190,5, improved by 6 to 1196,5 and again enhanced by 23, bringing the final score to 1219,5, both in the shortened record holder section and the more complete overview.²³ The same records from the printed version of the *Telḥīs* are recounted in Ünsal Yücel's book *Türk Okçuluğu* (*Turkish Archery*).²⁴ It is possible that the notebook's author wrongly copied the full-list overview from his singular record list, as Tācir-zāde's 1190,5 record could be hard to decipher. The o in this record dangles between the Arabic numerals o and 1 and thus could have been interpreted as 1191,5 (see the Fascimile). To get the correct outcome (1219,5), the copyist may have changed Maḥmūd's improved shot from 23 *gez* to 22. Another possibility is that the writer copied from one of Kānī's writings where the ink was blurred, resulting in the 23 resembling 22 and the o a 1. None of the sources consulted confirms the latter theory, however. Some dual recordings can still complement each other when critically interpreted, as shown by the specified dates and wind directions accompanying the *Ekşi Menzili/Menzil-i Ekşi* records, even though the scribbler may have incorrectly added a specified date to the sultan's 1248 A.H./1832-3 C.E. shot.

Bibliography

Acar, M. Şinasi. *İstanbul'un Son Nişantaşları*. İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2006.

²² Cod. Or.12.418, fol 27V.

²³ Kānī, *Telḥīs*, 124, 246-47.

²⁴ For other ranges Yücel also consults an anonymous manuscript (İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY2694) but for *Ekşi Menzili* he solely consults the printed version of *Telḥīs*. See Ünsal Yücel, *Türk Okçuluğu* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı, 1999), 133-34, 203, 205. We compared TY 2694 with *Telḥīs* and the records are identical. We did the same for Kānī's recently-published *menzil-nāme*, resulting in the same finding. See Mustafa Kānî Efendi, *Risāle-i Menzilân-ı Meydân: Okmeydanı Menzilleri*, prep. Şükrü Seçkin Anık, ed. Uğur Öztürk (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2023), 116-19, 166-69.

- Acar, Şinasi, and Zafer Metin Ateş. "Gez Uzunluğu Ne Kadardı?" *Yapı*, no. 330 (2009): 60-64.
- Anscombe, Frederick. "Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform." *Past & Present* 208 (August 2010): 159-189.
- Azbay, Enes. "Osmanlı Türkçesi Okçuluk Terimlerine Bir Bakış: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Yorumlar." *Türkbilig* 45 (2023): 61-73.
- Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), *HAT* 1522/32 S. (28 Cemâziyelevvel 1228/ 29 May 1813 CE).
- Geyveli Hüseyin Efendi. *Kevserü'l-Hayat: Geyveli Hüseyin Efendi'nin Okçuluk Rehberi*. Prepared by Recep Selman Doğru. Edited by Uğur Öztürk. İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2021.
- Kānī, Muştafa. *Telhīs-i Resā'ilātü'r-Rumāt*. İstanbul: Dārü't-Tıbbā'atü'l-Āmire, 1263 [1847].
- Kānī Efendi, Mustafa. *Risāle-i Menzılân-ı Meydân: Okmeydanı Menzilleri*. Prepared by Şükrü Seçkin Anık. Edited by Uğur Öztürk. İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2023.
- Leiden Cod. Or. 12. 418. Taeschner Collection. Special Collections, Leiden University. İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 2694.
- Schmidt, Jan. *Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and Other Collections in the Netherlands*. Vol. 3. Leiden: Leiden University Library, 2006.
- Tayyarzade Ata. *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi. Tarih-i Enderun*. Edited by Mehmet Arslan. Vol. 3. İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2010.
- Theunissen, Hans. "Framing a Reformist Government." Leiden University Turkish Studies: Courses. Accessed September 12, 2024.
https://rise.articulate.com/share/GM3dwzWXv8UPPgvhRABXsRu1_VJfsRLS#/.
- Yücel, Ünsal. "Sultan Mahmut II. Devrinde Okçuluk." *Türk Etnografya Dergisi* 10 (1967): 89-102.
- Yücel, Ünsal. *Türk Okçuluğu*. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı, 1999.

Fol. 27v

مزد اکشی بیدر پورازیه در	
کرن	۸۸۴
ایناطاشی	۹۰۶
اوجی	۱۵۶
در دنجی	۱۱۰۲
پیشکیری سلیمان. اغا	۱۱۰۲
کوبک حسن. اغا	۱۱۰۲
جبه خانه جی سید عثمان. اغا	۱۱۰۲
سعدا بک تاج خدیجه سلطان	۱۱۰۲
حسن اغا سر تحریرانی: خاصه	۱۱۰۲
تاجر زاده محمد امیر. اغا	۱۱۰۲
حزق سلطان محمود غازی عدا قنکار	۱۱۰۲
دفعه	۱۱۰۲
در	۱۴۵۱