

REVIEW ARTICLE



# Sports Lodges in the Ottoman Empire Depicted in the Travel Book (Seyahat-Name) of Evliya Çelebi

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Sport lodges are institutions that are responsible for providing athletes with accommodation, food and training. Sport lodges had the same tasks as today's sports clubs and played a vital role in the institutionalization and development of sports within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Evliya Çelebi is a prominent 17th century traveler. During his lifetime, he traveled throughout the Ottoman Empire and compiled in his 10-volume Seyahatname (Travelogue) what he saw, experienced and heard throughout his journeys. **Objectives.** The aim of this study was to trace in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname the sport lodges established in the Ottoman Empire. The general structure of sport lodges was addressed based on Evliya Çelebi's notes in Seyahatname. **Methods.** A literature review was conducted and the parts of Seyahatname describing sport lodges were screened and analyzed. Moreover, books on Turkish Sport History were examined and additional information was presented. **Results.** Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname mentions three sport lodges established in Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul but makes no reference to other sport lodges established especially in Anatolia. The analysis of Seyahatname shows that sport lodges can be regarded as the world's first sport museums. **Conclusion.** It is recommended that further studies be conducted to investigate sport lodges in more detail.

**KEY WORDS:** *Sports Lodge, Archery Court, Archery Lodge, Evliya Çelebi, Wrestling Lodge.*

## INTRODUCTION

Evliya Çelebi is one of the most prominent travelers of the Islamic World. He embarked on a 50-year-long journey across the Ottoman Empire and neighboring lands and compiled in his 10-volume Seyahatname (Travelogue) what he saw, experienced and heard throughout his journeys. The significance of the work is that it reveals the socio-cultural structure of the 17th century Ottoman Empire and contains information about medresses, bazaars, castles, baths, mosques, gardens and streets, as well as weddings, folk dances, clothing—styles of the era.

The work also contains information regarding the institutions referred to as *spor tekkesi* (sport lodges). Mostly depicting wrestling lodges and archery lodges established throughout the Ottoman Empire, Evliya Çelebi also highlights the most popular branches of sports of the era. One reason for the popularity of wrestling and archery was that they were used as training to kill the enemy and fostered as preparation for war. Archers inflicted heavy casualties before the enemy could even get close while wrestlers engaged in one-on-one fight and killed the enemy.

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**Evliya Çelebi.** What we now know about Evliya Çelebi's life is mostly based on the information provided by him in his 10-volume *Seyahatname* (1). Although there is a general consensus that he was born on March 25, 1611 in a house in Sağrıcılar Market in Unkapanı, Istanbul (2) (3), some conjecture that he was actually born in Zeryen District (Palace District) of Kütahya (4). Some also believe that his family migrated from Kütahya to Istanbul with the conquest of Istanbul (5).

Evliya Çelebi's father was Derviş Mehmet Zilli, a gold-worker, and his mother was the daughter of the aunt of Melek Ahmed Pasha, who was the vizier (minister) of Mehmed IV. Evliya Çelebi advanced through the ranks of the nobility basically because of his own family's status (6).

Although there is some skepticism over whether „Evliya Çelebi“ was his real name, Banarlı (5) states that it was actually „Evliya,“ which was given to him by his father as a gesture of respect for Evliya Mehmed Efendi, who was a prominent figure of the era. According to Köhler (6), Evliya Çelebi's real name was Mehmed but change to Evliya Mehmed Zillioğlu Derviş as he was named after his Quran teacher, Evliya Efendi, who died in 1635. We can see that there is an uncertainty about the full and real name of Evliya Çelebi.

Evliya Çelebi received a very good education thanks to his father's personal ties and prestige at the court. He graduated from *Sâdîzâde Dârülkurrâsı* and became a *hafîz* (7) at the age of 7 years. He, then, continued his education at the *Şeyhülislam Hamid Efendi* Madrasa and spent seven years in a room (4). He entered the Enderun School and improved his Arabic and Persian. Focusing on improving his skills as a *hafîz*, he attached great importance to music education. Listening to Evliya Çelebi reciting the Quran at the Hagia Sophia Mosque on Laylat al-Qadr (8), Murad IV was impressed by his performance and invited him to the palace (4).

Evliya Çelebi made his way to the palace at the age of 24 years and spent 5 years there before he left in 1640. During that time, he learned calligraphy, music, syntax and rhyme, and *tecvid* (9) from the prominent scholars of the era, and Greek from his father's apprentice (10).

Evliya Çelebi had always been extremely enthusiastic about traveling and exploring new places. He decided to embark on a journey after he had a dream, in which he saw Muhammad the

Prophet in a large group of prayers in the *Ahi Çelebi* Mosque. He came into Muhammad's presence, and instead of saying "God, have mercy!" he mistakenly said „God, have a journey!“ and Muhammad smiled at him and not only did he forgive him for his slip of the tongue but also gave him his blessing for the journey he was to embark on. Çelebi told his dream to Abdullah Dede, the Sheikh of the *Kasımpaşa Mevlevi* Lodge, and Abdullah Dede told him that he should definitely embark on a journey. Despite his father's objection, Çelebi went to Bursa in secret in 1640. His father, realizing that he cannot dissuade his son from his plan, gave him his blessing as well (4).

Evliya Çelebi started his journey from Istanbul, the city where he was born and raised, and then visited many places including Izmit, Trabzon, Erzurum, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Damascus, Sivas, Silistra, Sofia, Van, Baghdad, Uzi, Western Anatolia, Bozcaada, Wallachia, Hungary, Albania, Amsterdam, Vienna, Budapest, Krakow, Ochakow, Bahcesaray, Dagestan, Terek, Astrakhan, Kutahya, Manisa, Izmir, Chios, Rhodes, Adana, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina and Cairo (5).

He traveled for about 50 years and wrote a 10-volume *Seyahatname* (about 4 thousand pages). According to Robert Dankoff (11), Evliya Çelebi had two goals in his journeys. First one was drawing a general portrait of the Ottoman Empire and its inner regions. For this purpose, his notes included information regarding dates, administrative structures and names of towns, houses, mosques, madrasas, schools, inns and fountains, religious relations among locals, geographical conditions and climate, behaviors, customs, traditions, dialects and clothing styles, prominent figures, markets, shops, products and foodstuffs, parks, gardens and picnic areas etc. His second objective was the firsthand and detailed narration of his journeys.

*Seyahatname* is a very important work because not only does it contain vast information, but it also vividly portrays the socio-cultural and economic structure of the era.

Although it is believed that Çelebi died shortly after the Second Siege of Vienna in 1683, It is not yet known exactly when and where he died (5).

Records show that Evliya Çelebi was very fond of sports. Erkılıç (2) describes Çelebi's interest in sports as follows: „Çelebi engaged in almost all branches of sports. He saw wrestling as

an essential of Islam, however, he himself never wrestled. He was mainly interested in horse-riding and mostly travelled by horse. He expressed his appreciation of horse-riding by stating „every man needs a purebred Arabian horse. He was also very interested in archery, which he regarded as a *sunnah* (12) of Islam. Ağazade Nami even states in his work titled „Okçuname“ that there is a milestone erected in the name of Evliya Çelebi for shooting a target set 896 gez away. He was good at javelin, hunting and swimming as well.

**Sport lodges (Tekke).** The word *tekke* (lodge) is of Persian origin, meaning "a place to lean on" (13). It refers to a special place where the members of a religious order gather to worship and perform rituals together with their sheikh (14). The Turkish Dictionary (15) defines *tekke* as a place where the idle meet and take shelter. In contemporary Turkish, the word *tekke* mostly refers to a religious structure. However, the concept of sport lodges has the connotation of sports activities rather than of a religious affiliation.

Although it is not known exactly when sport lodges came into existence, the earliest sport lodges were opened during the Seljuk period. A sport lodge (wrestling lodge) was opened in Konya during that period. Its remains are still visible today (16). Considering that the Anatolian Seljuks established the first sport lodge, it would not be wrong to claim that sport lodges also existed around a thousand years ago in Turkish culture.

Since its foundation, the Ottoman Empire opened sport lodges in the conquered lands to encourage young people to engage in sports. Their objective was to train athletes as a whole by providing services in different branches of sports (17). In general, they were responsible for the institutionalization and development of sports within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

There were, at some point, 34 sport lodges within the borders of the Ottoman Empire (18). The most important sport lodges were in Mecca, Jeddah, Alexandria, Latakia, Damascus, Maras, Amasya, Tokat, Edirne, Ankara, Kutahya, Tire, Bergama, Manisa, Akhisar, Yenice, Skopje, Gallipoli, Ipsala, Strumica, Ablonia, Diyarbakir, Konya, Bursa, Balikesir, Urfa, Aleppo, Belgrade, Baghdad and Egypt (19). This is an indication of the importance attached by the Ottoman Empire to the development of sports.

There were two types of lodges within the borders of the Ottoman Empire; dervish lodges and sport lodges. Dervish lodges were institutions that provided accommodation and training for orders' members who gathered and observed certain rites and ceremonies on certain days. Sport lodges were, on the other hand, institutions that provided shelter and training for athletes, who were then referred to as dervishes. The managers of sport lodges were referred to as "sheikhs. Despite the structural resemblance between dervish lodges and sport lodges, the latter have nothing to do with the former. The reason why athletes for whom sport lodges provided shelter and training were referred to as "dervishes" was because they were likened to dervishes sheltered and fed in dervish lodges (20).

Athletes in sport lodges followed a strict diet, exercise and sleep regulated by experts and master trainers (21).

In this context, we can reach the following conclusion: Sport lodges in the Ottoman Empire were what sports clubs are today (19). Sport lodges had a greater function than do sport clubs today because, at that time, athletes of sport lodges were accommodated, fed, trained and allowed to participate in competitions. Sport lodges were managed by *waqfs* (foundation) that provided funding for the promotion of sports (13).

Like today's sport clubs, sport lodges had presidents referred to as "sheikhs" selected among the smartest and wisest of master archers, and highly respected by archers. A sheikh was like the president of a sport club commissioned by the state and was sometimes referred to as "binyüzcü sheikh," which was a title given to those who set a record in archery (19). A sheikh's duties were to meet the needs of his sport lodge in line with its revenue, to train athletes and protect their rights, and to pray when a wrestling match is held before a Sultan (22). There were three aldermen alongside the sheikh. One of them was *rikabı hümayun atıcı başı* (regent head archer). The second one was responsible for milestones and the third one was trustee who was responsible for *waqf*-related affairs. These people had a voting power regarding almost all affairs in the square and lodge (23).

There were two types of sport lodges depending on the way they were established. If a Sultan had a sport lodge established, then the expenses of that lodge were covered by a *waqf* also established by that sultan, and its accounts

were audited by *Haremeyn Nezareti* (Ministry of Foundations) under the supervision of *Dariüssaade Ağası* (Chief Harem Eunuch) (20). If a private *waqf* had a sport lodge established, then the expenses of that lodge were covered by that *waqf* and its accounts were audited by *kadıs* (Muslim Judges) (13). In other words, sport lodges were established either through endowment by the state or through funding by private *waqs*.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A literature review was conducted. First, books on Turkish Sport History were examined to collect information on sport lodges. Second, the book titled “Seyahatname” was examined. *Seyahatname* was written by Evliya Çelebi, translated by S. A. Kahraman and Y. Dağlı and published by Yapı Kredi Yayınları between 2003 and 2010. The parts of *Seyahatname* describing sport lodges were analyzed. Third, Turkish Sport History books were screened to see whether they make any reference to the sport lodges described in *Seyahatname* for a more accurate description of sport lodges.

The study is limited to sport lodges depicted in the 10-volume *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi.

## RESULTS

**Sport Lodges Depicted in Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatname*.** Evliya Çelebi, the Great Turkish traveler, provided limited coverage to sport lodges in his *Seyahatname*. Although there were many sport lodges that were up and running during his lifetime, he mentioned only three sport lodges in Bursa, Edirne and İstanbul.

More systematic and detailed information on these sport lodges was provided below based on Evliya Çelebi’s accounts and on some other sources.

The first sport lodge opened within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire was a wrestling lodge in Bursa. Its name is only mentioned in the first volume of the second book of *Seyahatname*. In the book, the lodge is referred to as *Küşte-giran Tekkesi* (Wrestling Lodge). Evliya Çelebi left ten lines blank below the paragraph about the lodge to describe it in more detail later (24). However, he provided no further information.

After the conquest of Bursa, Nilüfer Hatun, Orhan Bey’s wife, endowed wrestlers with an open space on which the first wrestling lodge was built (25) on the border of the city walls (22).

It is believed that there was also an archery lodge established in Bursa. During the construction of Yıldırım Bayezid *Küllüye* (social complex), large areas of the lower sections of the mosque were reserved for archery drills. It is known that there was an *Okmeydanı* (Archery Court) in Bursa until the 16th century (26) (19). After Orhan Bey conquered Bursa in 1325, the first thing he did was to endow the area that lay between the *Balıkli* village and *Okmeydanı* for races and running events (22).

The second sport lodge was opened in Edirne after it was conquered and became the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It was established directly by the state during the reign of Murad I. Having donated all his property to the lodge before his death, *Cemaleddin Efendi* was buried in its garden after his death (22) the lodge was, therefore, also referred to as *Cemaleddin Tekkesi* (19).

*Küşte-giran Tekkesi* in Edirne was „a lodge with a wooden roof established by the wrestler, *Pehlivân Cemâleddîn*, who is a member of *Nakşibendiye*. The lodge is on *Kulekapısı* street of *Kadîmen Mevlânâ Veliyyüddîn* district, known today as *Metropolid* district, No 33. This lodge is registered under *Evkâf-ı Hümâyûn Hazîne-i Celîlesin*. The building, which was in ruins, was rebuilt in 1890“ (27).

Evliya Çelebi described the Edirne wrestling lodge as follows:

After the conquest, Murad had the *Küşte-giran* (wrestling) lodge established so that the young, strong and brave soldiers of Islam could rejuvenate and refresh themselves. The brave men of Rumelia still meet in the lodge and wrestle every Friday. The ground floor of the lodge was a square covered in a black stone-like oil so that the incompetent trying to enter the lodge would slip and fall but two competent men could wrestle on that square for hours without falling. The wrestling lodge was kept very clean and had many rooms, kitchens and gardens. In the square of the lodge hung various articles (arrows, bows, maces, tights etc.) belonging to the wrestlers of the time (28). From Evliya Çelebi’s description, we understand that the floor of the lodge was mostly oily or that the ground was slippery due to wrestlers constantly training. Another point worth noting is that the wrestling lodge in question also functions as a museum because it is a place where articles belonging to the wrestlers of earlier periods are displayed. This indicates that the first sport museums were

established (albeit without conscious intent) during the Ottoman Empire.

The Edirne wrestling lodge was built by *Pehlivan Cemaleddin* inside the *Balikpazarı* (Fish market) gate near *Ali Paşa Bazaar* (29) and funded by a *waqf* named Well-Wishers for Wrestlers. It was mainly made of wood and had a *matbah* (kitchen). Wrestlers exercised all year round and learned archery, horse-riding and javelin there (30). It also had 50 shops selling cotton, barley and tents. Half of the total income of the shops was reserved for the beylic. The monthly income of the 50 shops was 350 akçe (4200 akçe per year) (Arabacı, 2000:154). According to Evliya Çelebi's description, inside this lodge were the grave of Şeyh Seyyid Cemaleddin, who was the pupil of Pir Mahmud-ı Yar-ı Veli, the father of wrestlers, and the grave of Er Sultan, the champion of the champions (28). From this perspective, sport lodges bear a similarity to religious lodges because both types of lodges contain the graves of prominent figures.

The third sport lodge, *Tir-endazan Tekkesi*, described by Evliya Çelebi in the first volume of the first book of *Seyahatname*, was in Istanbul. It was established by Mehmed II for archers to meet and socialize. Afterwards, Bayezid I, who was very interested in archery, expanded it. However, it began to fall apart over time and Murad IV had it restored by Musahip Silahdar Mustafa Paşa (24).

Evliya Çelebi also described *Hasan Karlıği Mesire Alanı Tekkesi* (Picnic Area Lodge) and stated that it was built especially for archery drills. Evliya Çelebi also talked about the *Putayeri* Picnic Area Lodge, which had some green space. Thousands of archers gathered there and recited al-fatiha for the soul of Pir Vakkas, the father of archers, and then shot arrow at the *puta sepeti* (31)(24).

Evliya Çelebi mentioned *Okmeydanı* in the second volume of the first book of *Seyahatname*. *Okmeydanı* had a marble pulpit built by Murad IV for rain prayers. There was an archery lodge was located *Okmeydanı* where all artisans spent their time. The officer of this area and the archery lodge was the chief archery instructor of the janissary. Some edicts by Mehmed II and Bayezid I even decree that in the event a person steals an arrow from the archery lodge, he be killed with a bow string. The bows and arrows of earlier wrestlers are kept in the treasury room of the lodge. There were also milestones in the area. Some sultans even used

to have their tents built in front of this area and watched wrestling tournaments (24).

The archery lodge was the administrative building of the sport lodge built on the *Hasköy* ridges of the district called *Okmeydanı*, which borders the town of *Kasımpaşa* starting from the coast of the Golden Horn (32).

Halim Baki Kunter (18), a prominent figure in Turkish sports history, states that the archery lodge in *Okmeydanı*, Istanbul, had existed for five centuries and that it is today referred to as *Okmeydanı* because archers back then shot arrows, and milestones were erected there for those who broke records.

Mehmet II attached great importance to the areas where he had the ships move over the land and had his *Otağ-ı Hümayun* (Imperial Tent) erected during the conquest of Istanbul. He, therefore, endowed that land to archers after the conquest (19). Akşemseddin, the teacher of Mehmet II, had an important role in this as he was the one who recommended Mehmet II that that he buy the area. Mehmet II did as his teacher told him and paid double the price and bought it (33).

During the reign of Bayezid II, Mehmed II's son and successor, the area in *Okmeydanı* was extended further, and a dervish lodge was built there by Grand Vizier Iskender Pasha for archers. According to historical documents and sources, the archery lodge in *Okmeydanı* was composed of 14 parts; *Hünkâr Köşkü* (Sultan's House), *meydan odası* (yard room), mosque, shrine, sheik's office, *mathabs* (first examination places, kitchens), service rooms, toilets, qasr door, main door, guard door, pulpit sofa, muezzin sofa and archers' sofa (34).

According to Süleyman Kani İrtem (35), the main lodge consisted of two parts; the yard hearth and coffee room. There were bows and arrows hanging on the walls of the yard room. Three sides of the room were furnished with cushions and there were lockers at the fourth side. When archers came to the lodge, they put their bows and arrows in those lockers and then abluted and performed prayer. The lodge also had a pasha room and an imperial pavilion.

*Okmeydanı* was preserved by the edicts of both Mehmed II and Bayezid II. Those edicts prohibited all kinds of encroachment, construction of vineyards and orchards, and digging of water trenches. The area of *Okmeydanı* was measured as 8100 gez, that is, 5346 meters (35).

The archery lodge in *Okmeydanı* belonged to the Sultan, and therefore, its costs were covered by the state. The funding of the lodge was as follows: 2000 kuruş from the *Haremeyn Nezareti* (Ministry of Foundations); 900 kuruş from the *Hüseyin Paşa Waqf*; 220 kuruş from the *Muhzır Hacı Ebubekir Ağa Waqf*; 120 kuruş from the *Sultan Mustafa Atik Waqf* and *Cedid Valide Sultanlar Waqfs*; 60 kuruş from the *Hacı Beşir Ağa Waqf*; 60 kuruş from the *Laleli Waqf*; 250 kuruş pursuant to the contract of the Jewish

cemetery on the border of *Okmeydanı*; 2250 kuruş pursuant to the contract of the Poolside cafe; 1750 kuruş pursuant to the contract of the *Ayazma* cafe; 500 kuruş pursuant to the contract of the *Solak* fountain cafe; 900 kuruş as revenue from *merga*; 500 kuruş pursuant to the contract of *Ayazma*; 100 kg of rice; 4000 loaves of bread from the shipyard; 240 *kıyye* (36) of plain butter; 750 *kıyye* of mutton. This data indicates that the archery lodge in *Okmeydanı* had three sources of revenue; the state, the waqf and leasing.

**Table 1. Information Regarding Sport Lodges Described in *Seyahatname***

Sport Lodge Name	City/Province	Sport Lodge Manager	Funded by
Küşte-Giran	Bursa/Kaleiçi	?	A waqf established by Sultan
Küşti – giran (Cemaleddin Tekkesi)	Edirne/Metropolid	Pehlivan Cemaleddin	A waqf established by Sultan
Okçular Tekkesi	İstanbul/Okmeydanı	Şeyh Hamdullah (first manager)	A waqf established by Sultan

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Sport lodges in the Ottoman Empire played a vital role in social life. They provided not only physical training but also accommodation and food for athletes. There was a constant increase in the number of sport lodges and people engaged in sports within the borders of the Empire.

Albeit limited, *Evliya Çelebi* described in his *Seyahatname* three sport lodges established in Bursa, Edirne and İstanbul. Although the work has no further information on the sport lodge in Bursa than merely its name, it contains some more information on the other two sport lodges, especially on the archery lodge in İstanbul. This is probably due to the fact that back than *Evliya Çelebi* lived in İstanbul, which was the capital city with a denser population and a livelier social life resulting in more participation in sports.

*Çelebi's* descriptions show that sport lodges had different functions. Apart from encouraging and facilitating sports within the borders of the Empire, they also served as museums and cemeteries.

In conclusion, the fact that sport lodges dating back to 700 years ago are similar to sport museums of today manifests the pioneering spirit of the Ottoman Empire in this field. We believe that future studies on sport lodges will provide further information on our sport history and sport museums.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Sport lodges in the Ottoman Empire were what sports clubs are today, and therefore, research on sports management history should also look into sport lodges as well.
- Sport lodges are the most primitive form of today's sport museums. Data show that the first sport museums in the world were established in the Ottoman Empire.

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