

Treatise Dedicated to the Holy Warriors (Tuhfat al-ghuzāt)
939AH / 1533 CE

By: Matrakçı Nasuh (d. 958/1551 CE)

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The Second Section: Concerning Knowledge of the Use of the Sword—A Section that is Comprised of Ten Forms (Hūpāra)¹

(Turkish) This second section is a description of the Forms of the Sword (*kılıç*). Know that from the time of the Prophets, peace be upon them, God has decreed from His sublime infallibility and lordly wisdom that humans should work against the corruption of the earth that is caused by the misguidance of infidelity. Humans should endeavor to purify the world from the grave sin of ignorance. God has decreed that the religion and state of Muhammad and the pillars of the religious Law of Ahmad (i.e., Muhammad) are as a single sword (*shamshir*), with which social harmony and political order might be established (*nizam ve intizam bula*).

Quatrain:

It is the lowly dust of the earth that makes one corrupt.

This same dust of the earth, made into swords, can render one pure.

For within the sword is found: We sent down Iron (Qur'an 57:25)

About the sword God said: It has mighty power (Qur'an 57:25)

It is the sword that foils all enemies.

The sword upsets foes. Like a falcon, it rips apart ranks of troops.

Whatever I say of the sword, in sum: it is the Sultan of weapons.

Whatever is said about other weapons (like the spear) is vain boasting.

For the roses of the sword are the shield of Heaven's Garden.

The sword's hyacinths descend from Paradise's lilies.

Know as well that God, the Truth, most mighty and exalted, gave the first sword to the Prophet Seth, by means of the angel Gabriel. This is also found in the *Risāla-yi Tuhfat al-mujāhidīn* ("Treatise dedicated to the *Mujāhidīn*"):

(Arabic) "Indeed God, most mighty and exalted, made the sword descend from heaven by means of trustworthy Gabriel, to the Prophet Seth. God said to Seth 'Take this tool (*'idda*). Let it be for you a means of succor, and an aid in establishing religion.'"

(Turkish) At that time, swords were entirely straight [that is, double edged and straight]. Later, at the time of the Sassanian Shah Yazdegird I (r. 399-420 CE), sword makers began to make swords curved (*eyri*, i.e., single edged and curved). The reason that curved, single edged swords were produced was because of Zahhak, the paternal uncle of Yazdegird. The king entrusted a sword made of silver to Zahhak. However, a servant betrayed him. In the throws of a deep sleep, the servant found two opportunities for treachery: taking up the sword, he cut off the head of Zahhak, and then took the fine blade for himself. These affairs became known to the Shah Yazdegird. Thus, the king commanded in response, "From now on, let swords be stretched so that they are crooked. It does not befit swords to be straight if a servant can cut off the head of a master with the master's own blade." Some swords still remain straight even after this treacherous affair. Straight, double edged swords are nonetheless the most original form of the weapon.

¹ Matrakçı Nasûh *Tuhfetü'l-Guzât: bir silahşorluk risalesi*, Ümran Karadeniz ed. (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu, 2019), 61-62.

As for the Sword: *Dhū-l-Faqār (Zulfikar)*

They say that the famed sword of the Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 40AH /661 CE), the Prophet’s cousin and son in law, was double edged and fullered. The sword was not forked in its tip, as the heretical Shiite “Rejectors” of the Rightful Caliphs say. Ali’s sword was instead fullered for the purposes to make it lighter (*khafīf*). It is also said that at the Battle of Badr (2 AH/ 624 CE), Ali took it as a part of his share of the war spoils. It is also said that Prophet of God took it for himself. In one narration, the Sassanid Emperor’s vicegerent in Alexandria, Muqawqis, sent it as a gift to the Prophet. Now, it has been explained here the significance and history of swords. After this section several Forms (*hūpāra*) are mentioned, as well as their summaries (*mukhtaṣar*) culled from various Fighting Forms (*bunūd al-ḥarbīya*) and Essential Plays (*lu‘ūb aṣlīya*).

Poem:

*Of all manner of armament (yarāq) that exists, the greatest is the sword.
 With a sword, one cannot be overcome, even if one’s state seems beyond salvation (dirigh)!
 When a sword is drawn for combat, it is an act of glory.
 It is the sword that wafts the fine perfume of blood to Heaven.*

The First Form – Winding In²

This Form is that of Winding In, the way it is employed is as follows: The riders should wind in from the right and from the left [ranks in which they stand in the *maydān*]. When they arrive at the entrance of the *maydān*, they should turn and attack [with the sword], and then retreat by circling around, ending up back where they were in the *maydān*. At the end, they should shoot a bodkin arrow (*ḥarbīya*) then attack [with swords].

The Second Form – The Baldric

This Form is that of the Baldric, the way it is employed is as follows: One rider should shoot at the opponent's shield [*kalkan*] twice with bodkin arrows. After this, the opponent should shift his own shield behind his back, at which point the rider should seek to cut under the opponent's armpits three times, ending with a Mangonel Strike [to the head – a *molinello* from the shoulder] followed by shooting a bodkin arrow. He should end in the *maydān* without further attacks.

The Third Form – The Bodkin Arrow

This Form is that of the Bodkin Arrow, the way it is employed is as follows: Shoot a bodkin arrow at the opponent's knee. After this, stay in place, and prepare to hit with a shield strike [to defend against an incoming blow after shooting], turning the shield to the left and the sword to the right [to maximize defensive cover], then fire five bodkin arrows [as you circle the opponent]. Wheel back to the same location and shoot a bodkin arrow, followed by a sword strike.

The Fourth Form – Intercepting from the Right

This Form is that of Intercepting from the Right, the way it is employed is as follows: The rider should stay in one place and fire a bodkin arrow. After this, he should turn and attack from the right. Then he should follow wind in further and seek to strike the opponent. The opponent will keep his sword behind him and over his knees [in defense]. Thus locking up any openings as the rider approaches the opponent's legs, the two riders disperse from the *maydān*.

The Fifth Form – Interception from the Left

This Form is that of Intercepting from the Left, the way it is employed is as follows: The rider should shoot a bodkin arrow and then strike the opponent while initiating an attack from the right. At that moment, the opponent will seek to parry by putting the sword at the head then riposting with a turn toward the rider. When this occurs, the rider should parry the incoming blow with the metal boss of his shield (*ḥaddād*), and then enter into striking distance of the leg. The opponent should parry this, and right after, shift the shield behind him against any blows from behind. Placing their swords over their knees, the riders disperse from the *maydān*.

The Sixth Form – The Oblique

This Form is that of the Oblique, the way it is employed is as follows: The riders should turn toward each other and circle one another, with one seeking to attack with a turn out of the circle (*hov dōne*). During the second circling, one rider should enter in and bind the opponent's blade [who is trying to attack and turn out of the circle]. After this, the rider should have his horse stamp its foot, and seek to enter in the aforementioned way in the *maydān*. The opponent will take up the shield [in surprise], in which case the rider can strike under it. The rider should take up his own shield over the right shoulder, because a riposte from the opponent will come. After this, the riders should disperse and fire bodkin arrows.

² Ibid., 62-64.

The Seventh Form – Pursuing

This Form is that of the Pursuit, the way it is employed is as follows: riders in the *maydān* should circle around each other. They will then open up the *maydān* and seek to attack each other one on one. After that, the riders should wheel around, and get within the distance of their respective opponents' heads. The opponent will lean away from the incoming threat of the sword, at which point the rider should hit the head of the opponent with his own Baldric [strap? Scabbard?]. After this strike, the opponents should disperse and fire a bodkin arrow.

The Eighth Form – The Eternal

The way it is employed is as follows: When one encounters a blow from the Baldric [strap? Scabbard?], they should turn their shield behind them. Then, they should take up their shield and strike the opponent's leg with the sword. The opponent should lift their own leg and return to the *maydān*. After that, the opponent should reach at the head of the rider, but then they will disperse and fire a bodkin arrow. Or, the rider will place his sword behind him, and seek to reach the head of the opponent from the side, and then reach the *maydān* as the opponent parries the blow.

The Ninth Form – The New

This Form is that of The New, the way it is employed is as follows: the riders should circle around each other and fire bodkin arrows. After this, one rider takes up entering in by coming in from the side. This rider should reach the distance of striking the opponent's head. He should then pass his left foot to his right, placing the sword behind him, and strike with his shield, then use it to defend his knees. After that, as he passes again to reach the head of the opponent, the rider should bind up the opponent and get to a point where he can reach the opponent's legs. While he is defending, the rider should be able to parry with his shield, and should be able to strike with the Mangonel Cut to the left and to the right. After this, the riders should turn and shoot a bodkin arrow.

The Tenth Form – The Essential

This Form is that of the Essential, the way it is employed is as follows: One rider takes up entering in by coming in from the side, and should have his horse stomp its foot. After doing this [entire phrase of actions] around three times, the opponent should move his sword behind him, and strike at the back of the Teacher [i.e., the rider], and in response, the rider should take up his shield and turn and shoot a bodkin arrow. The rider should again take up his shield, move it behind him, and strike at the opponent's leg. The opponent should stand still - moving his shield to his back and to the front as need be. In this manner, he should stand taking up his shield, attacking by turning to the left, protecting his back with his shield, again turning [to attack], again placing his shield on his back and to the front as need be. After this, he should protect his knees [with sword or shield], and the riders should disperse while attacking. In doing so, this Form becomes complete.

[Concluding Remarks]: Now, these Forms of Combat in Battle (*bunūd al-ḥarbīya*) are ten. They have been explained in summary fashion. To complete one's perspicacity in such matters, each Form should be performed in its proper location in the *maydān* (*maḥallinde*), all the while looking for the right opportunity to take advantage of the opponent by shooting as many bodkin arrows at them as is feasible (*ḥarbīnin akthar ṭarīqi oldur*).