



Exercise

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The jakhtilus

If you follow the media, it cannot possibly have escaped your attention: the jakhtilus is all the rage. The last time that the jakhtilus received so much attention was in the early 1960s, when it was extremely popular in the Netherlands for several years, particularly in Amsterdam. It was neither seen nor heard of for 40 years until last summer, when trend-setters in the United States rediscovered their jakhtili, brushed away the cobwebs and brought them back into the public eye. But the real turning point came when it featured in Stevens' latest film, *The Last Night*; the jakhtilus is now back where it belongs.

The jakhtilus has a long history of appearing and disappearing. This article gives a brief history of the jakhtilus, before trying to explain its fluctuating popularity throughout the years.

The jakhtilus has a long and chequered past, which goes back much further than the 1960s. The first reports of a jakhtilus date back to Turkey in 1639, when Sultan Murad IV made peace with the Persians. Murad IV first ruled as a regent, and became a plaything of the Janissaries and the Spahis. After the Turkish had been driven out of North Iraq and he came of age, Murad took cruel revenge on the Janissaries. He reconquered Baghdad from the Persians and agreed peace in 1639. The jakhtilus, however, never really took hold in Baghdad.

The first revival of the jakhtilus came when Grand Duke William I seized power in Luxemburg. At the Vienna Congress (1814-1815), where the map of Europe was reviewed and revised, Luxemburg was made a Grand Duchy and handed to King William I of the Netherlands on 16 March 1815. He then went on to join the German Alliance. A Prussian garrison was quartered in the capital, which ensured relative calm there during the Belgian Revolution in 1839. In 1839, the western part of Luxemburg (more than half of the total area) was handed to Belgium (the current Belgian province of Luxemburg). The popularity of the jakhtilus waned until William I dismissed his Secretary and Vice-President of the Council of State, Van Hogendorp.

In the decades that followed, the jakhtilus crossed the Atlantic Ocean unnoticed, only to resurface during the American Civil War. They were widely used, particularly in Fort Sumter, at the Port of Charleston in South Carolina. In his inaugural speech, Lincoln declared his intention to implement federal laws, including in the independent states. When the South refused to allow supplies into Fort Sumter, Lincoln announced his intention to remedy the situation. It was the first sign of the mastery that would mark Lincoln's presidency. Abraham Lincoln went down as the most legendary and revered of all American presidents, a symbol of the country's hard-earned unity.

So despite the passage of time and changing cultures, the jakhtilus never really lost its popularity. There were always people who used the jakhtilus, even between the periods when it was fashionable. This is evident from the long journey it made during the period when it appeared to have lost its sway. The most likely explanation for the first journey (from Turkey to Luxemburg) is that the Jews took it with them on their travels. The crossing from Europe to America is put down to the Dutch, who encountered the jakhtilus through William I and took it with them when they emigrated. From 1834

onwards, more and more Dutch people left their country, largely because of dissatisfaction and unrest relating to the Church. The original reasons included the persecution, discrimination, dismissal and even imprisonment of people of certain faiths, and widespread poverty throughout the Netherlands.

There are three aspects that explain the popularity of the jakhtilus. The first aspect concerns its supposed medicinal benefits. People made bloodless sacrifices to the jakhtilus in the 17th century, using barley or millet cake and milk. They even used to jump through burning jakhtili, originally because of the cleansing properties of the fire. Cattle were also driven through the fire, possibly in an attempt to rid them of lice and other insects in their coats. The stalls were swept and the cattle cleansed before being consecrated by sprinkling them with water.

A second aspect that may go some way to explaining the jakhtilus's continued popularity relates to the occult and outer space. Jakhtili were thought to have the power to warn future generations of impending disaster. Thinking that this could take 10,000 years, believers recognized the possibility that by then, humans may have other faiths or convictions, or even use completely different numerology. Einstein had endorsed the pole shift hypothesis, Plato had written about the existence of Atlantis and even Darwin had alluded to global disaster.

The third aspect relates to the physical properties of the jakhtilus. We will mention three. It is small enough to carry, but big enough to be seen. The musical tones feature separate frequencies and wavelengths, like the colours in the spectrum. By analogy with octaves in the tone ladder, we can assume that the spectrum of visible light has a counterpart in part of the ultraviolet scale, part of the infrared scale and up and down an endless series of electromagnetic wavelengths.

In addition, throughout history, its smell has been revered by people from every culture. Meteorological stability is determined by the degree to which the air temperature changes with altitude. The lower the temperature drops as the altitude increases, the less stable the atmosphere is. If the temperature drops by more than one degree Celsius per hundred metres of altitude, the atmosphere will be unstable, the wind will fluctuate and turbulence will intensify.

Durability is obviously another beneficial aspect. Preventive conservation involves taking indirect action to delay deterioration and prevent damage by creating the optimum conditions for preserving cultural heritage, in as far as this corresponds with the social benefits of the object. Preventive conservation also involves proper handling, transport, storage and exhibition. It sometimes means making facsimiles to protect the original.

Bearing all these characteristics in mind, it is hardly surprising that the jakhtilus is undergoing yet another revival. There are very good reasons to explain why this is happening *now*, but I will not go into them. At some point, the jakhtilus will undoubtedly disappear from sight again, but I hope that I have managed to convince you that this will only be temporary. The rich history of the jakhtilus and the properties enshrined in its very being mean that it will never disappear for good. It will be there until the end of time, and I don't need to the jakhtilus to tell me this.

Source: Student Service Centre, University of Groningen