

Gymnastics In The Late Ottoman Empire And The Young Republic Of Turkey (1863-1984)

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ABSTRACT

As in many other civilizations, the Turks have historically placed a high value on their physical strength, upheld a lifestyle intertwined with sports, and considered it essential to make sports activities a part of their lives. Modern sports practiced worldwide began to enter the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat Reform Era and steadily diversified during the Constitutional Monarchy Era, which marked the first stage of political, cultural, and legal liberation. The most significant outcomes were achieved in sports during this period, taking the initiative to introduce modern gymnastics to the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. This study aimed to assess the development of gymnastics in the late Ottoman Empire and the young Republic of Turkey (1863–1984) and reveal the institutions and individuals that played critical roles, as well as their efforts and influences, in the emergence and development of gymnastics in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. For this purpose, the study used the historical document review method, one of the qualitative research approaches, and accordingly reviewed state and university libraries and periodicals to access the relevant data. As a result, the study provided information about the dawn and historical development of gymnastics in the late Ottoman Empire and the young Republic of Turkey.

Keywords: Gymnastics, Ottoman, Selim Sırrı Tarcan, Republic of Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The Greek word "gymnastics," derived from the word "Cimnus," passed into Western languages. It entered our language in the last half of the 19th century. An Ottoman writer described it as "all kinds of physical activities performed to pass the spare time and have fun" (Kahraman, 1995, p. 481). Physical activities, such as gymnastics and training, have a long history. People engaged in physical activities to carry out tasks such as eating, sheltering, defending, and attacking by performing physical action throughout prehistoric times (Fişek, 1985, pp. 10–11). Hence, they always had to keep their bodies strong for survival. The religious and political ceremonies of the ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Indus civilizations represent the earliest examples of gymnastics (Baysaloğlu, 1994, p. 11).

With a history spanning approximately 2000 years and developed during the Roman and Greek empires, gymnastics is among the rare sports that teach individuals how to use their entire body effectively. As people adopted a sedentary life, the unique and lively dances of tribes in religious ceremonies held at specific times were accepted as the early examples of today's gymnastics (Pajek et al. 2010, pp. 15–27).

As in many other civilizations, Turks have lived intertwined with sports throughout history. Turks always valued physical strength and sports activities and considered them vital for their regular lives. Their nomadic lifestyle, animal husbandry activities, and conquest perceptions all indicated the significance of physical prowess. Similarly, physical activities, such as wrestling, swordsmanship, archery, horsemanship, horse racing, polo (çöğen), javelin throw, football (tepük), running, hunting, catch, swimming, matrak (a combat sport), tomak (a wooden ball game), stone throwing, tuluk (jumpsuit) game, weight lifting, and greasy pole, have a critical place

in Turkish culture, indicating the value attributed to physical strength (Dever, İslam, 2015, p.47).

The Ottoman era also involved numerous physical activities. Mountaineering, sword-based sports, hunting, wrestling, and archery were among the activities carried out with rules in Ottoman sports organizations. Kırkpınar wrestling, a historically famous organization, also started during the Ottoman period. Sports activities were also incorporated into educational establishments like madrasahs and Enderun (a special school in the Ottoman palace) when the Ottoman state was founded (Soyer, 2004, p. 221).

Until the Tanzimat Reform era (1839), Ottoman athletes were referred to by the name of the sport they practiced; for instance, Cindi, Wrestler, Archer, Hunter, Rammer (Tomakçı), and Macer (Gürzcü). The effort made for all these sports was called by one word: "exercise." After the Tanzimat Reform era, however, the whole-body activities were called "gymnastics," and those who performed them were called "gymnasts" or "exercisers" when they were done in a European style. The terms "sports" and "athletes" were first used widely in the Republican Era, which began after 1930.

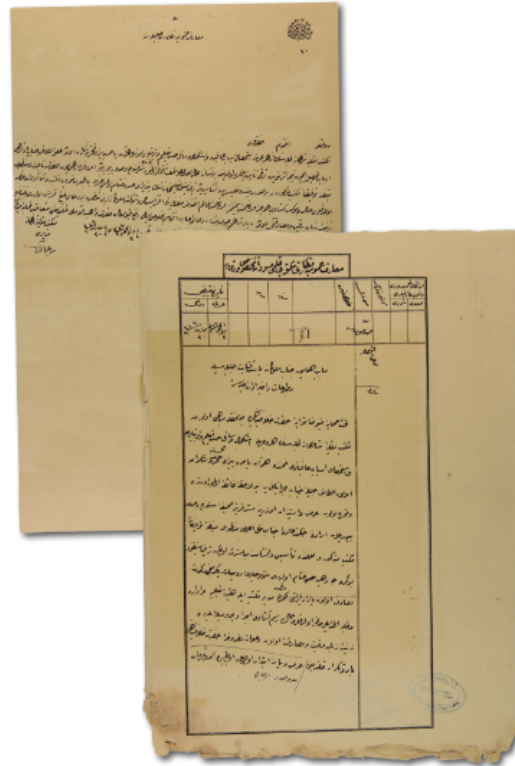
This study aimed to assess the development of gymnastics in the late Ottoman Empire and the young Republic of Turkey (1863–1984) and reveal the institutions and individuals that played significant roles, as well as their efforts and influences, in the emergence and development of gymnastics in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

Developments in Gymnastics in the Late Ottoman Period

In the Ottoman Empire, the education of gym classes in a contemporary sense began in the military schools opened in the Western style following the issuance of Tanzimat Reforms, the imperial edict of Gülhane. The first school that included swimming, gymnastics, and fencing sports in its curriculum was the Military Academy (Mekteb-i Harbiye). The swimming (İlm-i Sabâhat) course, included in the program in 1848, was put into practice with the provision of the necessary swimming equipment. The gymnastics course, however, was added to the curriculum for the Military Academy students in 1863 after supplying the proper gymnastics equipment for the course. Subsequently, Mr. Martin and Mr. Piçini were assigned to teach gymnastics and fencing courses to the Military Academy students and military officers, respectively. Following the military schools, civilian schools gradually integrated the gymnastics course into their curriculum. At Mekteb-i Sultani (Galatasaray Lycée), established by taking French high schools as an example, gymnastics courses have been in the curriculum since the school was established in 1868. Article 4 of the "Mekteb-i Sultânî Regulation," which addresses the lessons, states that the school will establish a gymnasium, and students will take gymnastics lessons using age-appropriate equipment during their education. The school also provided the opportunity to practice gymnastics during lengthy and frequent break times (Özçakır, 2015, pp. 18–25).

The opening of Galatasaray Lycée became highly effective in introducing gym classes and sports to Turkey in a modern sense. While the school completely switched to a Western curriculum in 1868, Monsieur Curel, a French teaching staff member as the gym teacher, was the person who initially introduced modern gymnastics to Turkey (Alpman, 1972, p. 62). Stangelli was the next gym teacher appointed at the Galatasaray Sultani School in the following academic year, and, with the support of the Minister of Education Münif Pasha, Stangelli helped spread this sport with out-of-school activities by opening a private gymnastics hall in Hacapoğlu Passage in Beyoğlu in 1880. Faik (Üstünidman) Bey, a successful athlete of Stangelli, was appointed the first Turkish gym teacher at Galatasaray Sultani School. Faik Üstünidman is considered the first trainer of Turkey, and he trained numerous athletes after 1879 and successfully performed his duty for 42 years. He also trained extraordinarily talented athletes and pioneered a style called "Faik Bey Ecole" in apparatus (artistic) gymnastics (Anonymous, quoted by Ballı, 2006).

After Galatasaray Lycée, gymnastics lessons spread to Darüşşafaka (ottoman secondary school for orphans), the Naval School, and Maçka Military High School; afterward, non-Muslim schools also began to provide gymnastics courses by opening private gymnastics halls. With the inclusion of gymnastics in the curriculum, the state strived to meet the required teachers by employing some non-Muslims. Moiraux, Monsieur Curel, Monsieur Martinetti, Stangali, and Ali Faik (Üstünidman) Bey are the respective orders of the gym teachers at Mekteb-i Sultani. Translations of several gymnastics-related studies in foreign literature and the production of copyrighted works took place to introduce and promote modern gym classes (gymnastics) (Akcan, 2015, p. 59).



An Official Document on the Establishment of a Gymnastics Hall in the Mekteb-i Mülkiye:

With the request of your humble servant,

The Prime Ministry is aware that students who are overly preoccupied with academic work in schools ought to participate in gymnastics on a scheduled basis, as this will have a positive impact on their physical health. Since the outcomes of the gymnastics training provided in Mekteb-i Sultani are substantially favorable so far, and broadening this education is necessary in suitable boarding schools, it has been deemed appropriate for the moment to include it in the program of Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane [Royal School of Government; Faculty of Political Sciences]. Calculations revealed that a gymnasium in this institution would cost 60,578.88 kuruş and 19 kuruş Mecidî gold, including its details. As clarified by the contacts made with the municipality on the applied cost estimation, despite several announcements in the newspaper, there was no tenderer for the construction. Accordingly, it is viable to realize the construction through the force account. The Education Council and Accountancy Department announced that the aforementioned sum would be spent and funded from the next year's budget item for construction and that it would be submitted to the Prime Ministry for approval. Please refer to the enclosed register book, which is listed, and the detailed documents about the transactions. Thus, intending to facilitate this transaction with an appropriate opinion, I hereby submit to your valued will to take the required action.

Şevval 9, [1]316, and February 8, [1]314

The "French model gymnastics" initiated in schools in the mid-19th century could neither be adopted properly nor become widespread beyond the school walls and reached Ottoman society for half a century. The administrative strategy of Abdulhamid II, which considered all kinds of meetings with suspicion and kept them under surveillance, also induced such a contrary context (Güven, 2011, pp. 261-262). After the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, gymnastics (physical training) ceased to be a social activity performed by a select group of people in some halls; thus, it failed to reach the broad segments of society. Gymnastic practices, including horizontal bars, parallel bars, rings, and trapeze apparatus, continued until the Second Constitutional Monarchy's years (Özçakır, 2015, pp. 18–25).

As fully adapted to a Western curriculum in 1868, Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultani was the first institution to introduce modern gymnastics to Turkey with Monsieur Curel, a French teaching staff gym teacher. Curel

converted one of the buildings into a gymnasium hall within his first two years at the school and set up the equipment he brought from France in this hall. After Curel left the school, Monsieur Moiroux and Monsieur Martinetti were the other names who carried out the gymnastics activities at Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultani (Güven, 1996, p. 77).

Following the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, Selim Sırrı Bey, who adopted Swedish gymnastics—in other words, gymnastics without apparatus—made his way to Istanbul. Selim Sırrı Bey was the first person to practice gymnastics without apparatus, which was unusual to the Turkish nation at the time and was considered strange by the majority. Selim Sırrı Tarcan founded Terbiye-i Bedeniye Mekteb, a private physical training school, in Istanbul in September 1908. This school was the first physical training institution opened in Turkey, and its curriculum included gymnastics, swords, epee (meç), boxing, and shooting lessons. This school was open until April 1909, whereas it was closed in May 1909 when the Army dispatched Selim Sırrı Tarcan to study at the Higher Physical Education Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. After completing his two-year education in Sweden in just one and a half years, he was awarded the Vasa Medal by the King of Sweden. As he learned the significance and relevance of physical training in many sciences, Selim Sırrı Tarcan returned to Turkey in 1910 and resigned, after a while, from the military and committed himself to sports and physical training. There was no physical training curriculum in place at the time. While only one or two high schools included these courses in their out-of-school programs, Tarcan made his utmost effort to introduce gymnastics to girls' schools and successfully integrated physical training classes into the first and second grades of high schools in 1911. Besides the widespread artistic gymnastics in Istanbul, Selim Sırrı Bey successfully introduced Swedish gymnastics (without apparatus) to all schools through his writings and the young teachers he trained. In those years, while Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultani was the primary school with a gymnastics curriculum, the other two pioneering schools were Kuleli Military High School (Kuleli Idadi) and Naval School (Mekteb-i Bahriye) (Güven, 1996, 70–82).

After the declaration of the Republic, Selim Sırrı Bey was assigned to direct gymnastics lessons in schools. Selim Sırrı (Tarcan) took advantage of this position and sent Vildan Aşır Savaşır and Nizamettin Kırşan to Sweden for training. Subsequently, the discipline of artistic gymnastics trained some of the most well-known athletes, including Mehmet Fetgeri, Şevket Kugul, Esat Kazancı, Fikret Korkmaz, Atıf Gençsoy, and Nihat Yılbar. Notwithstanding the ongoing efforts to institutionalize gymnastics in Turkey, the Turkish Gymnastics Federation was established in 1957 and became a member of the FIG (International Gymnastics Federation) in 1960. The Federation organized interregional competitions from 1957 onwards, and Turkish gymnasts began participating in international competitions from 1960 onwards. Nihat Yılbar had the opportunity to study gymnastics techniques in Germany in 1960 and shared his experiences upon returning to Turkey. The Student Games held in Rome, the 1962 Prague World Championship, and the 1967 Tunis Mediterranean Games were the major international organizations that Turkish gymnasts participated in during this period. In 1970, studies were initiated for primary school children in the Ankara, Çankırı, Manisa, and Adana regions. In 1972, the first coaching program was organized, and the gymnasts participated in their first-ever senior individual Balkan Championship in 1973. While gymnastics teacher Selim Sırrı Bey helped popularize Swedish gymnastics in Turkey, artistic gymnastics failed to gain traction and reach its full potential in the educational system. The next period saw the steady development of gymnastics in Turkey (History of Gymnastics, 2024).

Official Documents on the Assignment of Gym Teacher Selim Sırrı Bey to Darüşşafaka (ottoman secondary school for orphans):



BOA, MF. MKT, 1056/20

BOA, BEO, 3532/264852

His excellences,

In the records dated March 15, 1324, written by the commission established for the improvement of Darüşşafaka's affairs and submitted to your Ministry, it was requested that the gymnastics course be added to the curriculum by the decree of the high caliphate, in comparison to other schools, and that the teachers of the abolished Tribe School [the School of Tribesmen] be transferred with their salaries. However, since the wage allocated for the teaching of the said course is at the disposal of your Ministry's treasurer, Selim Sırrı [Tarcan] Bey has already accepted to continue the lessons voluntarily, albeit aiming for an appointment in the future, and he has applied to the school today and started the lesson. I respectfully submit the information to your high knowledge and permission.

During the Second Constitutional Era, one of the highly influential figures in physical training, Selim Sırrı Bey, studied in Sweden for about a year. Upon his return, he established Swedish gymnastics as a valid method of physical education through his ongoing efforts as a practitioner and supervisor. Consequently, he made a successful transition from artistic gymnastics to Swedish gymnastics, which is scientific and physiological in nature and can be practiced by anyone. Hence, the tireless efforts of Selim Sırrı Bey in introducing, adopting, and popularizing Swedish gymnastics cannot be ignored in this change of perception that affected the entire field of physical education, from the name of the course to the location where the course was held, the equipment (apparatus) used, and the content of the course. It is possible to observe the substantial outcomes of these efforts in both periodical publications and copyrighted and translated books. As a result, Selim Sırrı Bey provided a wealth of information on Swedish gymnastics in his books, allowing a pedagogical approach when teaching the physical training courses included in the civic school curriculum (Özçakır, 2015, pp. 18–25).

In addition to Selim Sırrı Bey, his students, close friends, and contemporary intellectuals also performed similar studies on physical training during this period. The prevailing stance of these experts was that it was unwise to disregard the social sphere for a powerful army to develop. They also emphasized that individuals in society should be in minimal physical, mental, and spiritual states to readily perform their military duties before coming to the barracks. Hence, the responsibility of this state should be on the shoulders of schools and gym teachers. Intellectuals interested in physical training during this era were not against gymnastics, though they had varying opinions about how to perform gymnastics. They all concurred that gymnastics had a scientific basis and that professionals in the field should train students. They also agreed that gymnastics should play an essential role in the lives of individuals and society (Akcan, 2015, p. 83).

In the following years, the Beşiktaş Ottoman Club, which mainly focused on gymnastics, paved the way for the practice of this sport, widely spreading it among many young individuals in 1903. In this sense, the Istanbul Tatavla (known as Kurtuluş today) Club sent two Turkish gymnasts, Yorgo and Niko Alibanti Brothers, to Athens in 1906 to participate in the Intercalated Olympics for the first time. Yorgo Alibanti broke a world and Olympic record with 11.4 seconds in the "climbing a 10-meter rope with two hands" competition in the Olympic Games gymnastics competitions and won the gold medal. Afterward, Aleko Mulos competed in the Olympic Games held in London in 1908, allowing our country to participate in its first official Olympics (Şengül, 1999, p. 122).

Development in Gymnastics in the Young Turkish Republic Period

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the state institutionalized a Western format in physical training and sports. Considering these activities, new and modern applications of gymnastics and sports were at the forefront, in line with the state's policy. These practices involved educating gymnastics and sports trainers, integrating gymnastics and physical training lessons into school curricula, opening schools to educate gym teachers, providing equipment and materials for sports branches to the extent possible, building facilities, and participating in competitions. However, with the declaration of the Turkish Republic, the government held several "Gymnastics Festivals," which have great significance for national education, physical training, and sports. Indeed, Selim Sırrı Bey, who introduced the physical training and sports virtues of developed Western countries to our nation in the pre-Republican period in 1916 and 1917 under the name of Gym Day (İdman Bayramı), was the first person to organize the gymnastics festivals. Nevertheless, the war prevented these events from taking place later, and twelve years later, after the declaration of the Turkish Republic, the Ministry deemed it appropriate to organize the Celile Gymnastics Festival officially in March 1928—during the time of Mustafa Necati Bey as the Minister of Education. Thus, on May 10, 1928, in Ankara, on May 11, 1928, in Istanbul and Izmir, and in several other Turkish provinces, the vigorously young individuals of the Republic schools were able to colorfully display the physical and moral benefits they gained from gymnastics (Güven, 2002).

One thousand girls and two thousand boys from various high schools, teaching schools, and middle schools participated in the First Gymnastics Festival organized in Istanbul. This festival venue was the courtyard of the Military Barracks, known as Taksim Gezi Park nowadays. Selim Sırrı Tarcan unambiguously outlined the physical training goals in a speech he addressed to the Turkish nation on the occasion of the First Gymnastics Festival. Accordingly, he emphasized the following statements: *'Gymnastics is neither a skill nor an art restricted to the powerful individuals, but a conscious means of training; that young individuals will learn to save and manage their strength economically through gymnastics; that everyone of all ages, men, women, adults, and children, can benefit from gymnastics; that women need physical training more than men; and that strong mothers will raise strong children'* (<https://saltonline.org/tr/2552/gecmisten-gunumuze-19-mayis-ataturku-anma-genclik-ve-spor-bayrami>).



Selim Sırrı Bey inaugurated the 'First Gymnastics Festival' with a speech from the podium in Istanbul on Friday, May 11, 1928.

The first gymnastics festival organized in Ankara was at İstiklal Field. Students from girls' high schools, boys'

high schools, and middle schools participated in the festival. Gazi Mustafa Kemal also participated in the festival, observed the gym activities, and complimented the students. The festival started with the gym activities performed by the girls' high school students. Nuriye Hanım, the most senior female gym teacher at girls' high schools, supervised these students. Following the girls, the students of boys' high schools performed their gym showcases under the supervision of the male gym teacher, Zeynel Bey. The spectators in the stands embraced and warmly applauded the students dressed in uniform for their extremely well-groomed activities when they performed the movements. Then, the students file past the Gazi in perfect order (Güven, 2022).



Atatürk at the 'Gymnastics Festival' of schools in Ankara on May 10, 1928

Gymnastics festivals continue to be held annually under different names, such as School Day and Gym Day. Taksim Stadium hosted the Second and Third Gymnastics Festivals on May 17, 1929, and May 23, 1930, respectively. The Fourth Gymnastics Festival, on the other hand, was held on May 15, 1931, at the Istanbul Stadium and was also celebrated in Izmir province. The Sixth Gymnastics Festival was held on May 19, 1933, when five thousand students sang the National Anthem in unison. These recurrent festivals annually provide a significant opportunity for Turkish youth, who are gradually rising morally, intellectually, and physically, to demonstrate what they have achieved (Güven, 2002).

Gymnastics Festival was later accepted as an official holiday under the name of "May 19 Youth and Sports Day" with the paragraph amended to the second article of Law No. 2739 by Law No. 3466 dated June 20, 1938 (Gök İ. Y., Dayı F., 2020).

After the victorious War of Independence, the new government carefully discussed the issue of education, given that education is crucial to developing a nation intellectually, spiritually, and physically. The continuance of the "Education Congress," which convened in July 1921 but failed to conclude its tasks, resumed between July 15 and August 15, 1923, and passed into Turkish education history under the name of the "First Scientific Committee." The Scientific Committee, including Selim Sırrı Bey, concluded that providing gym teachers with training constituted a "Governmental Duty." Accordingly, Selim Sırrı Bey sought to prepare students at the teaching school, spread physical training to other schools, and introduce gymnastics to girls' schools and even religious (mission) schools and madrasahs, and became successful (Şakar, 2019) (Güven, 2002).

Selim Sırrı Bey initiatively planned to establish a teaching school for gym teachers to prevent physical training classes from being idle classes at the national level and meet the increasing demand for gym teachers. In this context, the construction of a teaching hall next to the Girls' Teachers' School in Çapa, Istanbul, started in 1926 and finished in 1927, thanks to the efforts of Necati Bey, the Minister of Education of the Republic.

In the 1927–1928 academic year, the "Gym Teachers Course—Gym Teacher Training Course," which provided one-year theoretical and practical training for girls and boys, was opened in this physical training hall. Three Swedish gym teachers were invited to teach these courses. The first teacher was Inge Nerman (daughter of Miralay Nemnan, the most famous gymnastics master in Sweden) for female candidates. The second teacher was Rangar Johnson for male candidates, and the third teacher was Suen Alexanderson for massage and medical gymnastics. Graduates who completed this course were given a certificate of competency and the title "Physical Training

Teacher," after which they were assigned to secondary schools (Tazegül, 2022).

In the initial years after the declaration of the Republic, Selim Sırrı Bey sent some young students to Sweden for studies on coaching gymnastics lessons in schools, which led to the spread of Swedish gymnastics. If Faik Bey's students, like Selim Sırrı Bey, had been able to go abroad and receive gymnastics training and be included in the school curriculum, the development of artistic gymnastics (with apparatus) could have been much earlier in Turkey. Notwithstanding this, artistic gymnastics persisted under the protection of a group, and the efforts of Küçük Faik Bey, Mehmet Fetgeri, İlhami Bey, and Şevket Bey assuredly enabled it to pass on to the next generations. On the other hand, Mazhar Kazancı Bey and his students ensured that artistic gymnastics was handed on from generation to generation in Turkey, just like a relay race (Ballı & Doğan, 2021).

The Gymnastics and Scouting Federation was established in 1947, and the Swimming Specialty Club Gymnastics Championship was held at the Istanbul Open-Air Theater in 1951. Nevertheless, the gymnastics branch's financial issues forced the cancellation of the upcoming scheduled organization. There was no particular gymnasium allocated for gymnastics. At that time, gymnasts would perform shows, especially in community centers, to celebrate the anniversaries of special days such as April 23, May 19, and Republic Day. The halls where they prepared for these shows were also open for use by many branches, and their equipment should be mantled and dismantled every time during gymnastics training. With the closure of community centers in 1950, gymnasts no longer had a place to practice. Gymnasts could only find the opportunity to train late at night in the gymnasiums of some schools (such as Galatasaray College and Robert College) (Ballı & Doğan, 2021).

The Turkish Gymnastics Federation was officially established only in 1957 thanks to the enthusiastic teachers and students who were excited about gymnastics despite the long-standing infrastructure in Turkey, the adverse situations experienced, and the lack of gymnasiums, offices, officials, referees, and resources. Thus, it started its activities with the first federation president, Necmettin Erkan (Mengütay, 1988).

Nihat Yılbar, one of the famous gymnasts of the former generation, had the opportunity to study the most developing gymnastics technique in the world when he was in Germany in 1960. As a result of his discussions with the Technical Director of Deutsche Turn Schule in Germany, Adalbert Dickhut, and the Vice President of the German Gymnastics Federation, Dr. Josef Göhler, he wrote the first book on artistic gymnastics teaching and assistance methods and later translated the competition rules of FIG upon his return to Turkey. As a result, he produced the first and most influential work in the field of Olympic gymnastics in Turkey, which had numerous benefits in terms of both effectiveness and development (Özer, 1995).

Esad Sadi Kazancıoğlu wrote one of the first books after the Federation was established. Nihat Yılbar successfully completed the referee course he attended abroad and became the first international referee from Turkey. Later, Süheyl Cihaner, Osman Uslu, and Ercüment Varol became international gymnastics referees in this course, thanks to the first international referee course held in Turkey, with the efforts of Nihat Yılbar (Ballı & Doğan, 2021).

Following its establishment, the Turkish Gymnastics Federation organized several inter-regional competitions. Turkish gymnasts officially participated in international competitions after being accepted as members of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) in 1960. Accordingly, Turkish gymnasts competed in student games organized in Romania, including the Prague World Championship in 1962 and the Tunis Mediterranean Games in 1967. The Federation also initiated a program for primary school students in the Ankara, Çankırı, Manisa, and Adana regions in 1970 and opened the first coaching course in 1972. Turkish gymnasts participated in the Balkan Championship for the first time individually in 1973 in the adult category and for the first time as a team in 1975 in the youth category, together with the female athletes. Gymnastics in Turkey made a breakthrough, especially after the 1980s (Koyuncuoğlu, 2015).

The female staff from the Bulgarian Gymnastics Federation opened the "Women's Artistic Gymnastics Referee Course" in Istanbul in 1973. Upon completing the course opened for the first time in Turkey by foreign instructors, Tamay Yetişen, Seher Özak, Necla Erkut, Gönül Songür, Gönül Ercan, Tülten Cihaner, Şener Varol, Gülser Oraklıbel, Feriha Gelen, Olcay Altıntaş, Özden Tokat, Sevim Atıcı, Sabahat Tunca, and Şenay Yıldızpek became the first-ever "National Gymnastics Women's Referees" (Ballı & Doğan, 2021).

Efforts made to popularize gymnastics were invaluable due to the limited opportunities. However, the later adopters of gymnastics (flag bearers) overcame such restrictions by introducing this sport to Anatolia, training coaches, and referees, establishing international contacts, organizing domestic events, generating work, and constructing gymnasiums. They developed this required infrastructure step by step without seeking to get any fee, gain, or demand a profit; as a result, this enabled the growth of Turkish gymnastics. The fruits of all these efforts

were first seen in the Balkan Championship in 1983 when Ufuk Alpkaya won the bronze medal in the youth category, and Erdoğan Kapucu won the silver medal in the senior category in 1984 (Erdoğan, 1997) (Ballı & Doğan, 2021).

The preface section of the book on artistic gymnastics written by Nihat Yılbar reads the following sentences: *"For years, we asked each other how to do a gym movement, what the actual technique was, and what the form of assistance should be. Some of us tried to discover the technique from the pictures we acquired; others, however, just sat there as observers,"* indicating a significant viewpoint in reflecting the truth about the gymnastics of that era (Erdoğan, 1997).

CONCLUSION

As in many other civilizations, the Turks placed a significant value on their physical strength throughout history, upheld a lifestyle intertwined with sports, and prioritized making sports activities a part of their lives. The Tanzimat Reform era witnessed modern sports practiced globally begin to enter the Ottoman Empire and steadily diversify during the Constitutional Monarchy Era, which marked the first stage of political, cultural, and legal liberation. Along with the modernization process in the Ottoman Empire, the content of sports and athletes also evolved, and traditional sports have been replaced by sports competitions defined as "modern." Gymnastics was the most essential building block of sports in Ottoman society, as it was a part of everyday life in that era. At first, individuals and then the state occasionally intervened to make the entire Ottoman society love gymnastics. The goal of promoting the practice of this sport was to raise strong and athletic generations. Accordingly, the state encouraged its personnel by sending them abroad for education, facilitating their participation in congresses, conferences, and competitions, providing apparatus (equipment) for schools, and building the required gymnasiums. In the absence of a coeducation system at that time, the inclusion of gymnastics in the curriculum not only in boys' schools but also in girls' schools, the translation of international books and magazines, the discussion of gymnastics types that were appropriate for the society, the attempt to specify the sportive structure of Ottoman society, and the decision to use the "Swedish gymnastics" type after a long search are all considered favorable outcomes of these efforts. Archives of that period report that Selim Sırrı Bey, who was at the forefront of the campaign to determine the said gymnastics style, also received a medal from the Swedish Crown for his tireless efforts. Furthermore, along with translating books and coaching, he established the first private gymnastics club to reveal how much he devoted himself to gymnastics and his goal of making gymnastics popular in Ottoman society.

With the declaration of the Republic, young Turkey followed important policies in every field under the leadership of Atatürk to reach the level of modern nations. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the state institutionalized a Western format in physical training and sports and organized gymnastics festivals, sports festivals, and gym teacher training courses as the first significant activities of our young Republic.

Yet, gymnastics acquired prominence as a component of societal modernization efforts as well as a means of physical development during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. Gymnastics gained popularity during this era for its educational and disciplinary aspects, which sought to raise young generations as individuals who were not only physically strong but also mentally strong. Especially during the Republic period, physical training and sports were integrated into the curriculum, making them an inseparable component of national education, in line with Atatürk's dictum, "a healthy mind, a healthy body."

In the early Republic years, gymnastics became widespread, from the nation's major cities to every corner, increasing public interest in sports. Compulsory physical training classes in schools encouraged children to perform sports regularly from an early age. Moreover, youth camps, summer sports schools, and various sports clubs contributed to the physical development of youth and pioneered the establishment of a sports culture in society. In this process, civil society organizations and sports federations, particularly the state, played a critical role in developing and organizing various projects and events to promote sports activities.

Especially since the 1960s, a more professional approach has been adopted in gymnastics to achieve success in the national and international arenas. Establishing sports academies and expanding coach training programs have enabled gymnastics to have a more scientific basis. Thus, talented Turkish athletes have received training in gymnastics, and successful gymnasts have emerged who have represented Turkey internationally. As a result, young athletes have found inspiration in these accomplishments, which has increased their interest in gymnastics even further.

In conclusion, gymnastics played a significant role as a sport in protecting physical health and promoting social

modernization in a period extending from the Ottoman Empire to the Young Republic of Turkey. During this era, the state also made great efforts to integrate and popularize gymnastics in society, and as a result, it amended its laws regarding sports and education. The national progress of Turkey in sports reached today is a result of these solid foundations set in the past. These efforts to make sports, and especially gymnastics, accessible to all segments of society are among the significant steps taken by Turkey on its path to becoming a modern nation.

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