

PIERRE DE COUBERTIN'S TURKISH FRIENDS

THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT IN TURKEY WAS BORN IN ISTANBUL



Kemalettin Sami



Resit Saffet Atabinen



Selim Siri Tarcan

In the first quarter of the century, the development of sport in the Ottoman Empire, first of all, benefited greatly from the progressive movement of the "Young Turks". With the institution of the Republic, there came a tremendous stimulus from its founder Kemal Atatürk, himself a great athlete and imbued with the educative values of sport. Among the various reforms which were to give rise to the construction of modern Turkey, he endorsed the recognition of sports associations and the introduction of compulsory physical education. This will for progress was sustained by men such as Selim Siri Tarcan, first IOC member in Turkey from 1908 to 1930, Ahmet Toksöz, Ali Sami Yen and Burhan Felek, who were among the early leaders of the Turkish Olympic Committee, and Resit Saffet Atabinen, IOC member from 1933 to 1952. With them, Pierre de Coubertin maintained relations of friendship, to the great benefit of the development of sport in Turkey. In his *World History of Sport and Physical Education*, from which the text below is an excerpt, Carl Diem describes the conditions in which this development took place.

The text that is published here is preceded in the "Olympic Idea" by a description of the changes Mustapha Kemal desired in order to create modern Turkey at the end of the First World War.

The introduction of western sport also belonged to these reforms (*introduced by Mustapha Kemal*). The Young Turks were of course ahead in this respect. Since 1900, one of the pioneers was Selim Siri Tarcan (1874-1957), the first modern sports teacher, a powerful athlete, but also a stirring speaker, a winning stylist, a widely educated, attractive personality. First an officer, then from 1895 to 1899 a gymnastics teacher in Izmir, at the same time always a revolutionary against the corrupt sultanate, military sports teacher and writer in Istanbul, he had himself trained at the Swedish Gymnastics Central Institute in Stockholm from 1908 to 1910 and was then appointed by the Minister of Culture as General Inspector of Physical Education. He now developed the whole school instruction according to this system. But one of the first things he did was to introduce gymnastics for women. After the First World War in 1919, he organized a gymnastics teachers seminar in Istanbul. In 1923, after further studies of Tarcan in Europe, particularly in Germany, the emphasis being to Europeanize sport as a whole, his institute was transferred to Ankara as "Beden terbiyesi Endstitüsü" and the German sports teacher Dainas was engaged as initial step towards the modernization of Swedish gymnastics. Also other German, Hungarian, etc., teachers were active in individual sports areas, for instance, Abraham and Prack for general education, later an American teacher for athletics, Tegethoff for swimming, English football coaches, French riding instructors, Dr. Riedel as lecturer for the agricultural university in Ankara — the latter, together with Abraham and others, introduced skiing in Turkey.

Atatürk's government recognized that at first only sports associations on western lines, but without tradition, had come into being and that the emphasis tended to be on competition. It seized the initiative and from government circles set up a sports council (Teknik Heyat) consisting of several people. The General Secretary of the People's Party took over control and appointed a German expert, Carl Diem, who toured Turkey in 1933 and elaborated a proposal for a law.

According to this, a public office for physical education was to be set up and a Turkish supreme sports association founded, further to these a youth organization and cultural associations which had to become involved in sport. In



Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, committed sportsman.

the development phase the leaders in the associations were to be elected by these but proposed to the State for confirmation, while the latter appointed its own officials in charge of sport in general. The bill was worked on by the Turkish authorities and ratified by Parliament on 20th June 1938. The first person to be appointed general director was Colonel Celal Göğdag, trained at the Berlin Institute, and later Nizamettin R. Kir-san. The physical training institute which was originally planned and Carl Diem was to run, which the Second World War prevented, has not yet been founded. On the other hand, the Gymnastics Seminar in Ankara which is now called after Atatürk has been developed in such a way that its training work has found universal recognition.

At the same time, the association movement was supported and the National Olympic Committee under Rechid Saffet Atabinen and Ekrem Rüstü Akömer gained a deserved reputation. The

various associations under the Olympic Committee now include football, athletics, cycling, wrestling, shooting, swimming, mountaineering and skiing as well as tennis. There is also still the wrestling association according to old rules with its headquarters in Edirne, the old Andrinople. The government has a decisive influence on the activity of the associations. The climax of sports life is the "Sportbayram" introduced by Tarcan, a national youth festival held annually on 19th May, on the day when Atatürk landed in Samsun in 1919 to begin his liberation campaign (...).

Large public sports facilities are being created by the State, the Vilajets and the towns. The national stadium was built in Ankara according to the plans of an Italian architect. A small stadium looking over the water in Istanbul, on the Bosphorus, in that valley of Dolma Bagtsche near the Galata Serail through which Mohammed the Conqueror, in 1453, took his fleet on a board chute into the Golden Horn locked until then with an iron chain. In its vicinity is an open-air stage also intended for gymnastic competitions, built on the lines of the Theatre of Pergamon. The long planned main stadium of this historic city is to be built outside the walls near the Adrianople Gate.

In Izmir and at other places, there are municipal sports centres and new ones are being planned. The "Sports Centre for Everyone" is being prepared — Turkey has long had its "People's Houses", "Open Door" houses which everyone can use and which form the cultural centre of attraction and at the same time the pride of the communities in small towns or villages.



The Olympic flag flying over the Istanbul stadium.

In Carl-Diem, *Weltgeschichte des Sports und der Leibeserziehung* (World History of Sport and Physical Education) from page 1085 onwards., Cotta-Verlag Stuttgart, 1966.

