



BRILL

MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL OF CULTURE AND
COMMUNICATION 8 (2015) 192–214



brill.com/mjcc

'What is a Beautiful Body?'

*Late Ottoman 'Sportsman' Photographs and New Notions of Male Corporeal Beauty**

Murat C. Yıldız

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,

Department of History and Armenian Studies Program, USA

mcyildiz@umich.edu

Abstract

This article examines the emergence and spread of the 'sportsman' genre of Ottoman photography in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Istanbul. The 'sportsman photograph' depicted young men posing shirtless or wearing tight-fitting athletic attire, flexing their muscles and exhibiting their bodies. These images were embedded in a wider set of athletic and leisure activities and constituted novel social and photographic practices. By tracing the deployment of 'sportsman' photographs in sports clubs and the press, I argue that they cemented homosocial bonds, normalized and popularized new notions of masculinity, confessionalized the male body and reconfigured the ways in which Ottoman Muslims, Christians and Jews performed and conveyed their commitment to middle-class notions of masculinity and the self.

Keywords

body – masculinity – Ottoman – Middle East – sports

* Research for this article was generously supported by grants from Fulbright, the American Research Institute in Turkey and the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies. I want to thank Lucie Ryzova for her insights and suggestions, and Ziad Abu-Rish, Arash Davari, Ahmet Ersoy, James Gelvin, Lynn Hunt, Susan Slyomovics, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and feedback. My gratitude goes to Prof. Ethem Tolga, Çağlar Şavkay, Dino Belalilis and Daniel Ziffer for granting me permission to reproduce these images. I also want to thank Münevver Eminoğlu, Tanaş Belalilis, Mehmet Şenol, Duygu Erözbek, Filiz Dağdeviren and Yorgo Demir.

In 1915, the Ottoman Turkish *Navy Magazine* ran an article in its regular sports column entitled 'What is a Beautiful Body?' (*Donanma Mecmuası* 1915: 81). In the opening paragraph, the author established that the article would 'analyze beauty from the perspective of a physical training specialist'. Such a view was 'scientific' and treated 'health' as corporeal beauty's defining characteristic. 'When speaking of beauty', it asserted, 'the first characteristic that should come to one's mind is health'. Published during World War I, the article echoes a broader conversation in late Ottoman Istanbul about the ideal male body. However, its emphasis on health diverged from other competing understandings of physical beauty prevalent at the time. As the author put it, 'The [true] meaning [of beauty] is not what is used *among the people* (*beynelhalk*) [emphasis mine]' (*Donanma Mecmuası* 1915: 81). If health was not commonly understood as a beautiful body's defining characteristic, then what was? What kinds of new notions of male beauty were emerging here? And what role did photography play in this transformation?

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ottoman Muslim, Christian and Jewish citizens living in urban centers of the empire celebrated and promoted a new masculine corporeal aesthetic, and by consequence condemned an older one. The defining characteristics of this new body were proportionality, a slim waist, defined biceps, a straight back and a broad and hairless chest.¹ The new look was deemed 'beautiful'—because it was based on physical exercise as a personal effort, itself a new bourgeois value—and thus 'civilized'. This late Ottoman conception of a modern, urban masculinity, which echoed similar ideas and values in major urban centers around the world, stood in stark contrast to older Ottoman views on the body and its relationship to social status. Whereas a corpulent physique had historically exemplified financial prosperity, strength, virility and social status, with Ottoman men even embracing the sobriquet 'the fat one' (*şişman*) (Ginio 2006: 93; see also Felek 2014), a plump belly now came to represent incompetence, lethargy and physical inferiority.

The development of this new conception of masculine beauty was indelibly shaped by the dissemination of the camera into the everyday lives of Ottoman society and the democratization of photographic practices in general. The mushrooming of photography studios throughout Istanbul, the invention of

1 The majority of shirtless 'sportsman' photographs that I have encountered depict a hairless upper body. However, there are some exceptions. This suggests that although it was common for young men to use depilatories, during this period some continued to regard body hair as a marker of virility. For example, see Zabel Yessayan's memoir (2014: 65) in which she describes her uncle Khatchig's 'hairy chest' as a sign of strength and virility.

consumer-friendly snapshot photography, as well as greater access for men (and women) to have their pictures taken either in a studio or in their home resulted in the proliferation of diverse genres of portraiture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (cf. Graham-Brown 1988; Erdogdu 2002; Ersoy 2012; Micklewright 2000, 2003). Among these vernacular genres was the 'sportsman photograph' that depicted young men posing shirtless or wearing tight-fitting athletic attire, flexing their muscles and exhibiting their bodies.

The emergence and proliferation of the sportsman photograph was connected to the growing popularity of gymnastics and team sports, such as soccer and hockey, among upper- and middle-class young men of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Istanbul. Muslims, Christians and Jews 'worked out' a shared understanding of sports and corporeal development in schools, voluntary athletic associations, newly constructed urban spaces and the press (Yıldız 2015). This new 'civic' culture centered around the belief that physical exercise represented an effective means to form robust young men, and by extension, modern communities (or millets), and a civilized empire.

The sportsman genre of photography emerged in conjunction with the spread of sports clubs in various neighborhoods of the imperial capital during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). While young men developed their bodies by lifting weights, running and jumping, photography served as their medium of choice to record, display and communicate their masculine looks to each other. Postcard-sized photographs were circulated as tokens of friendship among friends, colleagues and family during the Hamidian era. This rather limited, personal circulation changed, however, after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The abolition of the Hamidian regime's censorship policies and the mushrooming of a robust multilingual print media played an important role in significantly broadening the circulation of the sportsman genre in public culture, further popularizing a particular vision of male corporeality as a defining feature of late Ottoman urban masculinity.²

This essay discusses the sportsman genre of late Ottoman photography as embedded in a wider set of athletic and leisure activities and constitutive of novel social and photographic practices. The deployment of these images—first through social networks and later through the press—cemented homosocial bonds, and normalized and popularized new notions of masculinity across confessional lines. But it also confessionalized the male body, and reconfigured the ways in which Ottoman Muslims, Christians and Jews performed and

2 Although here I focus exclusively on men, it should be noted that that photographs, drawings and caricatures of women exercising also appeared in the late Ottoman press, as discussed in Frierson (1996).

conveyed their commitment to middle-class notions of masculinity and the self. By tracing the intersection of the sportsman photograph and print media, this essay also proposes that images of the sportsman made visible the shifting boundaries of public propriety. Circulated in the print media, these photographs opened up debates about what constituted a 'nude' body. While physical culture enthusiasts viewed these bare-chested images as embodiments of an ideal middle-class look and aesthetic, others were critical of men posing without their shirts.³

Over a decade ago, Wolf-Dieter Lemke, writing on photography in Arab cities of the empire, implored scholars to treat photographs as neglected sources that could tell us a great deal about 'an unprecedented interest in the individual' during the period (Lemke 2002: 249). Many historians of the Middle East have since drawn important insights into the cultural and social transformations of the late Ottoman era by taking photographs seriously as historical sources. Stephen Sheehi traces the emergence of a 'bourgeois individualist subjectivity' by examining the work and reception of local photographers in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Lebanon (Sheehi 2007: 179). Others treat photographs as a lens to observe changes in consumption and identity. Nancy Micklewright focuses on candid family snapshots in late Ottoman Istanbul to discuss the nexus of domestic consumption and new bourgeois identities (Micklewright 2000; 2003).

This growing body of literature on Middle East photography is moving away from an understanding of photographs as mere 'illustrations' of past events or 'representations' of past phenomena. It increasingly draws on insights of historians of vernacular photography who argue that photographs—especially vernacular photographs, such as commercial studio portraits, candid home snapshots, and others—should be understood as both material and social, or *agentive*, objects whose meaning does not reside merely 'in the image', but equally in the diverse modes of exchange and circulation in which they were embedded (see Edwards 2012 for an extensive summary). I am thus primarily interested in the interplay between the historical development of the sportsman photograph as a visual genre, concomitant changes in print media and the

3 The photographs discussed in this essay are representative of a larger body of understudied images that are either stored in the dusty archives of sports clubs in Istanbul or scattered in private collections in Turkey and around the world. They were procured in 2012 from the archives of the Kurtuluş Sports Club (Kurtuluş Spor Kulübü) and the Galatasaray Museum (Galatasaray Müzesi) in Istanbul and Daniel Ziffer's private collection in Tel Aviv. Galatasaray's archive has hundreds of photographs of club members and over twenty photo albums. Hercules' archive is more modest in scope: it has dozens of individual and group photographs and two photograph albums.

production and dissemination of a new masculine corporeal aesthetic through these venues.

Tokens of Friendship: 'Sportsman' Photographs in Sports Clubs

Sports clubs were one of the main spaces in which Muslim, Christian and Jewish young men in late Ottoman Istanbul met to socialize and play sports. They were part of a growing trend of voluntary associations throughout the empire; these associations included educational, philanthropic, political, scientific and literary clubs (see, for instance, Göçek 2002; Watenpaugh 2006).⁴ Sports clubs were exclusively spaces of male sociability⁵ and represented crucial sites where historically novel, young peer (generational) male subjectivities were formed, negotiated and performed. Their popularity and social relevance reflected two related ideas among upper and middle-class circles of Istanbul: first was the idea that exercise and a 'beautiful body' meant that one was a modern, cultivated and successful man; second, that a 'sedentary life' (*oturucu bir hayat*) had adverse effects on the bodies of Ottoman citizens. According to Selim Sırrı, a Turkish educator who went on to become the Ottoman Empire's General Inspector of Physical Training (*Terbiye-i Bedeniye Müfettiş-i Umumisi*), 'one of the most important reasons for our illnesses is a sedentary life. We are always sitting in houses, government offices, workplaces, coffee houses, and casinos' (Sırrı 1908: 89). Sırrı encouraged young men 'to bring an end to this life of sitting' by walking, doing gymnastics and exercising their bodies (Sırrı 1908: 89). Sports clubs served as the main spaces in which young men could put these ideas into practice. Young men learned how to dress, talk and socialize through, and in between, exercising or playing; or, on other occasions, listening to lectures and reading. In these spaces, a new Ottoman middle class was produced through the activities young men did together: playing games, reading books and magazines, or taking pictures.⁶

4 While much has been written on late Ottoman associational life, scholars have either focused on how voluntary associations created novel forms of individual and group identities that foregrounded civic bonds and transcended ethno-religious divisions (Watenpaugh 2006), or on the role of ethnically and religiously homogenous organizations in the development of fissiparous movements during the late empire (Göçek 2002). These approaches fail to account for the fact that many late Ottoman voluntary associations were far from being ideologically pure spaces and fostered both ethno-religious and shared civic bonds.

5 There were exceptions, however. For example, the Jewish Gymnastics Club of Constantinople (Israelitische Turnverein Konstantinopel) created a women's section in 1906.

6 This view of class draws insights from a growing body of literature that understands the

Muslim, Christian and Jewish members of these clubs took photographs of themselves and of each other—a practice that had many purposes, motives and effects. Dressing up in one's best clothes and posing for the camera—whether for the professional photographer in a studio or among amateurs at home and during leisure activities—was an established practice in which young men asserted their status and professionalism as modern urban Ottoman subjects. The sportsman photograph, as a distinct genre of vernacular portraiture in which young men posed either bare-chested or clad in athletic attire, celebrated new imageries of male corporeal beauty, which was constructed as an integral part of this emerging Ottoman bourgeois masculinity. Such photographs were used for private exchange and to strengthen homosocial bonds among friends, relatives and colleagues. Some photographs may have ended up compiled in private albums (see Ryzova 2014; and her essay in this volume). Alternatively, club members also organized these images into club-specific photographic albums that were displayed in the reading rooms of their respective clubs.⁷ These photographs and albums served as a visual history of the club, as records of the achievements of its members and the clubs as a corporate body, and as a means to record, perform and demonstrate the member's success in achieving an ideal masculine look and identity.

The first two images (figures 1 and 2) show the most popular posture assumed by club members in studios during this period: they stood bare-chested, and staring straight at the camera, flexing their muscles with their arms crossed. Notably, the posture of both pictures is identical. As was common for this genre of photographic objects, one of these photographs has the member's name written in the corner; the other does not. Figure 1 is of Nikolas Alibrantis, a member of the Hercules Gymnastics Association (*Gymnastikos Syllogos Eraklis*). Figure 2 is of an unnamed member of the Galatasaray Physical Training Club (*Galatasaray Terbiye-i Bedeniye Kulübü*).

Hercules and Galatasaray were well-known exclusively male sports clubs that were associated with ethno-religious communities. Hercules was a Greek association, established in October 1896 in Tatavla, a heavily Greek populated area of Istanbul (*Tataoulis Gymnastikou Syllogou Hirakleous* 1896).⁸ Galata-

middle class in the region as a cultural construct, not an empirical category. See, for example, Watenpaugh (2006); Di-Capua (2008); Jacob (2011); Ryzova (2014).

7 The archives of the Hercules Gymnastics Club and the Galatasaray Physical Training Club in Istanbul hold such 'club' albums.

8 The Hercules Gymnastics Association (*Gymnastikos Syllogos Eraklis*) changed its Greek name to the Kurtuluş Sports Club (*Kurtuluş Spor Kulübü*) during the early Turkish Republic when the name of the club's neighborhood Tatavla was also changed to Kurtuluş (meaning

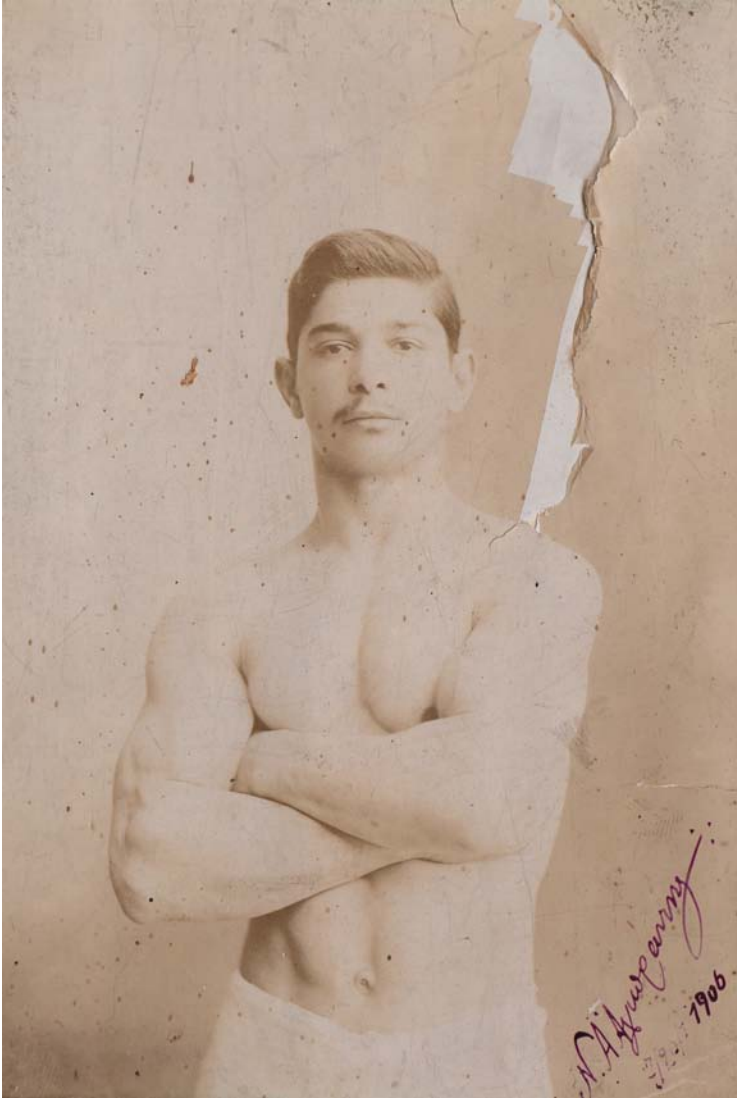


FIGURE 1 *Nicolas Alibrantis, a member of the Hercules Gymnastics Association*
KURTULUŞ SPORTS CLUB ARCHIVE 1906

saray was a predominantly Turkish club that was located in the heart of the capital's most Europeanized district, Pera, and on its most fashionable street,

independence in Turkish). Both name changes were constitutive of broader Turkification policies instituted during the early republic.

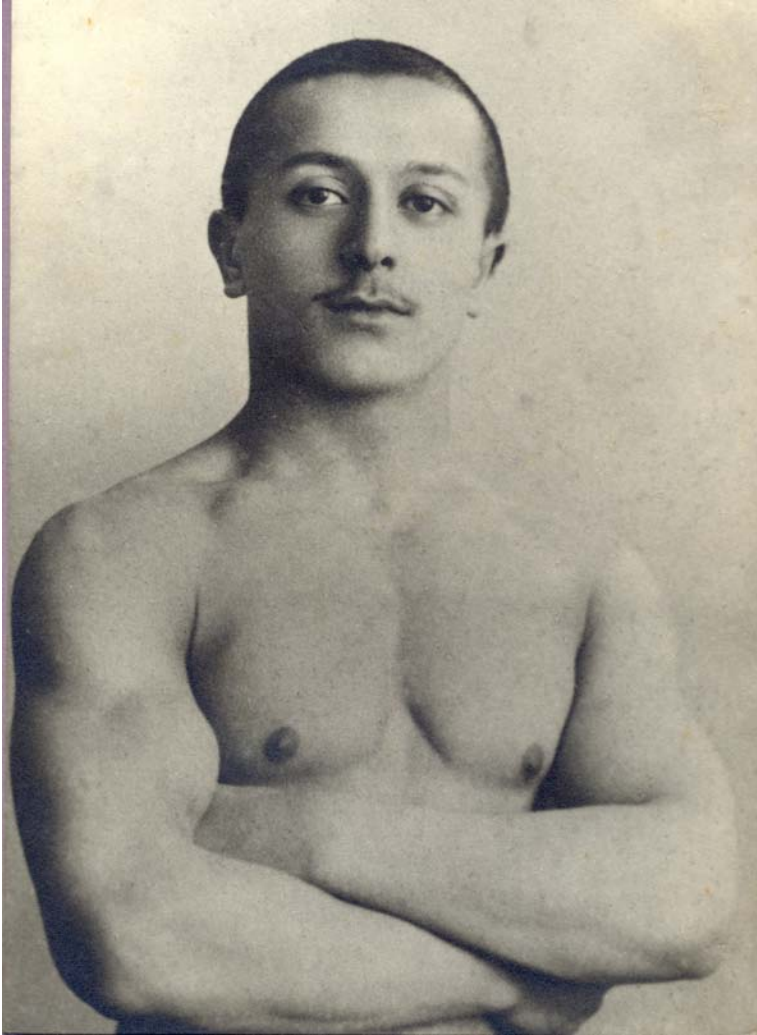


FIGURE 2 *An unnamed member of the Galatasaray Physical Training Club*
GALATASARAY MUSEUM ARCHIVE ALBUM 42 UNDATED

Grand Rue de Pera.⁹ Graduates of the Imperial School (Mekteb-i Sultani), which was also known as the Galatasaray lycée and was the most prestigious

9 The distinction between being Muslim and Turkish became increasingly blurred in the imperial center during the second constitutional period. Descriptions of Galatasaray in the press and the club's internal records refer to it as a Turkish association. Nevertheless, the club was neither religiously nor ethnically homogenous. For a discussion about the overlap of these identities and the reification of others, see Gingeras (2009); Kayalı (1997).



FIGURE 3 *Members of the Hercules Gymnastics Association*
KURTULUŞ SPORTS CLUB ARCHIVE, UNDATED

state secondary school in the imperial domains, established Galatasaray in October 1905.

The next two photographs (figures 3 and 4) show another common type of this genre, notably group photographs. Figure 3 shows five unnamed members of the Hercules Gymnastics Association posing bare-chested, dressed in black shorts. Each man is flexing both his upper and lower muscles, while facing the camera and posing. Figure 4 depicts three men with handlebar mustaches dressed in identical white athletic apparel and surrounded by a balance beam, dumbbells and clubbells. The man sitting on top of the balance beam, L. Shoenmass, is posing with his arms crossed, the man on the left, J. Kornfeld, is leaning against the beam, with his right hand formed in a fist resting on his hip, and the man on the right, Albert Ziffer, is standing erect, while clenching his fists behind his back. The three men were members and administrators of the Jewish Gymnastics Club of Constantinople (Israelitische Turnverein Konstantinopel), which German-speaking Jews founded in Pera in January 1895.

The differences between figures 3 and 4 go beyond the merely visual. Shoenmass, Kornfeld and Ziffer are posing in tight-fitting athletic attire, whereas the upper and lower bodies of the unnamed members of Hercules are uncovered. These images are not unique; rather, they reflect the sartorial preferences that members of each club tended to choose when posing for their 'sportsman' photographs. Both groups pictured here represent gymnasts; but the different social character and ethos of these clubs may provide a clue into these preferences. Hercules, like Galatasaray, was an exclusively male space. The Jewish Gymnastics Club, however, had both male and female members. Starting in 1906, the club's leadership promoted the idea that gymnastics and exercise were

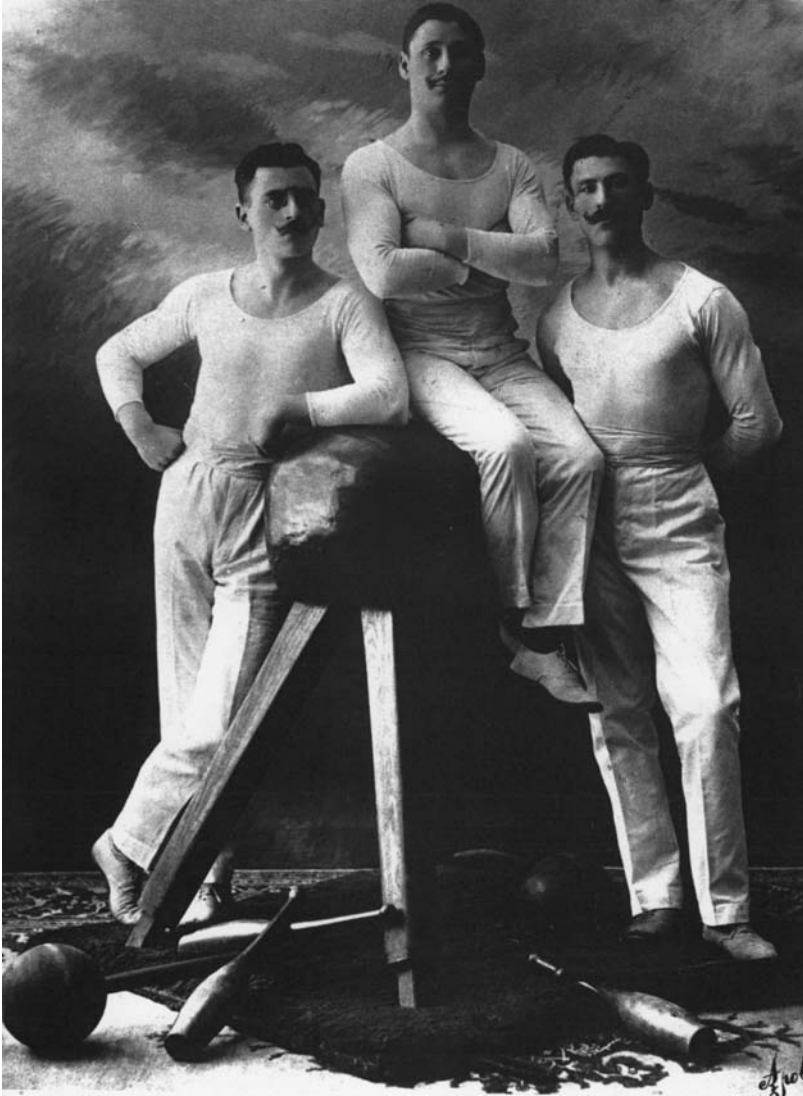


FIGURE 4 *Members of the Jewish Gymnastics Club of Constantinople: Starting from left to right, J. Kornfeld, L. Shoenmass, Albert Ziffer*
PRIVATE ARCHIVE OF DANIEL ZIFFER 1907

not only mediums through which a new man was created; they were also fun, modern, leisure activities that all Jews—men, women and children—should perform. The presence of female members in the Jewish Gymnastics Club may have played a role in discouraging men from taking and sharing photographs of members posing bare-chested or in shorts.

Istanbul's Multilingual Print Media and the New Public Life of the Semi-Nude Sportsman

The circulation of vernacular photographs of semi-nude men was at first limited to personal circles of friends, colleagues and members of voluntary associations during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. This changed, however, after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The promulgation of the Press Law (*Matbuat Kanunu*) in 1909 brought, to some degree, a relaxation of the Hamidian regime's strict censorship rules (Yosmaoğlu 2003), and facilitated the establishment of a physical culture press (among other types of publications). This physical culture press included daily newspapers and illustrated sports magazines published in different languages. Four magazines were particularly notable (see figures 5 and 6): three were written in Ottoman Turkish, *Futbol* (Football), *Terbiye ve Oyun* (Education and Game) and *İdman* (Sports), and one was written in Armenian, *Marmnamarz* (Physical Training).¹⁰ All four emerged in the span of five years, between 1910 and 1914. While some were short-lived and others irregular, their popularity was indisputable. Together, these publications exposed a wider array of Istanbul's denizens, not just members of athletic associations, to novel conceptions of male beauty.

Articles in these magazines focused on particular sports, scouting and other sport-related leisure activities, but also on wider issues of health, hygiene and lifestyle. Written by educators, leading members and administrators of sports clubs, doctors and government officials, they insisted on the idea that young men should cultivate a well-defined, robust figure by regularly performing physical exercise in schools, in the gymnasium, and at the sports club, in order 'to improve and take care of the body' (*Marmnamarz* 1911c: 1). They provided readers with ample guidelines and illustrations—in text and image—on how such an ideal body should look: it should be 'proportionate' (*tenasüp*) and 'elegant' (*zarafet*). An elegant body, according to *Terbiye ve Oyun*, was comprised of 'beauty [and] proportion in posture and movement' (Sırrı 1911: 86). These ideas and debates appeared alongside images of semi-nude young men flexing their muscles. Through this juxtaposition of images and text, editors established a firm connection between the physical shape of an ideal male body and broader modern middle-class values.

10 *Futbol* was established in October 1910 and was limited to seven issues, published irregularly. *Marmnamarz* was founded in February 1911 as an illustrated monthly publication. In 1912, it started publishing on a biweekly basis, and maintained this until December 1913. *Terbiye ve Oyun* was published biweekly for a year, from August 1911 until August 1912. *İdman* published thirty-one issues from May 1913 until May 1914.

شبه ۳۲۶ شبرن نای ۳ چهارشنبه ۶ نومبر

ساحب امتياز :
مصطفى ضيا
آيوه فيثاق
شبه لکى ۲۵ آنى آياى
۱۵ غروشدور

آدرس : باب على جاده شنده
۷۷ نومروى عثمانلى مزيت
اقتصاديه کشخامسى

Rédacteur en chef :
Ali Maddid



سر محرر :
على ماجد

مسلكمه موافق هرتوخ آتار
مع الفتونيه قبول ايديليز
كوندريه بيك اوراق سر محرر
نامه كوندريليديز

تاريخ انتشارى ۳۲۶

Address :
Librairie Ikhtissad en face
de la Sublime Porte, N°77

فوت بول

شبه لک هفتده بردفمه انتشار ايدر سپور غزن ته سيداز ششمسى ۲۰ ياره دور ششمسى ۲۰ ياره دور

وطن پرور على ماجد بيك انديه
زياده موجود السالارى اويچ
تسعه تفریق ايارم . برى قسم
الكلوب عسا كهلى طوغرى پازان
وسويوليتار ، ايكي قسم اكلامبول
عسا كهلىز منقشور يا كيش پازان
وسويوليتار ، اوجيه قسم سكونى
اخياره ماده عاليچايانه چاشلار دور .
بري قسمك برناجزى اولفته وار
اوجيه قسمده نام اونوز شتاك
برنجيره كار مخصوصيم . بر سويولدم
بر يازدم بيك چاشلدم ، ششمسى به
قدار يشده برمش اوله ف يكلرجه
طاهرلم بولاره شاهد عادل درر .
وقوعبولان طلب اوزرينه هر كسك
اكلابه به چكي درجعهه كوچاك
كوجوك فوت بول مقاله لرى هديه
تاپيزى اولق اوزده هفتعلق (فوت
بول) نام سپور غزن ته سته تقديم
ايشكله اولاد وطنى مستيد ايشكى
بر وطنيه مقدمه عه ايدلم .

سوكلى قينتل وطن داشلرم
فوت بول هتدمه سولتمده بولق
قدار بر بويوك خطلا اوله من فكر
وعسا كهلى طوغرى و دوزكون
اولمافه برار هم چنكلىرته اولاد .
لرينه دى عبت حقيقى اوليسان
بر طاقم آدملا ه بوله چيرچلاق ،
پاغور و قار ائمه بمساده تيزين
كوشك تاثيرى ائمه ديوانه كى
هوا ايه دولش بر مشتين طوبوك



سپور غزن على فاتق بيك
Sportsman Ali Fatk Bey

ايفتمندن طولومياچى ، سوريى ، كوشكى كى قوشوب ، بربرى
دورنك ، قفق ، ايتك ، جامورله بولاق ناوله يور و قضاوقوعيو .
لدى دى آره صره كوزيله يور ، بوندى مشرندن ايشقه نه فاده
اوله يولور دييورلر ، لکن او انگلر قوم نجيب ايله سار ملل مشتمده
بولارك عكسى سويه يورلر باشلارنده صاغرا عقل اولانلر تفریق ايتسوتار
واكلامه چاشينلار دييورلر .

Struggle for Life
La vie c'est la lutte

حيات مبارزه در
فوت بول و سار سبورلر ك مقصدى
جدمى و اساساً اخلاقه شفق اولبر شتمدن
مسلكى بوسوتون باشنده در . اكر
نوت بول و سپورلر سالك و چويوبه
برابر اخلاقى دى تربيه و انكارى
توسيه خدمت ايتامن اولسه ايدى
هيچ بروقت شايه قضاويلر و اوروا
قلعه بنده دى بوقدر ايلرى كيدوب
رغبت عموميه مظهر اولساز ايدى
مادامه انسان عظيمى ايتهدن اولان
ايى ماده دن ، ينى نهايت غرور قادر
برلكده بولنه چق روح ايه جسدمن
مركدر ، نفس و بونالده كى حالى
ييلان هر كس ايجون ايشوايكي ماده نك
برلكده ترقيته چاشفق بر استفاده
اولفته برابر بر وطنيه ، و سپورلر
ايسه بولونه نك حسن مسورتكه
ايفاشه السالارى موافق قيه چق بر
واسطه در . چارلر ده فوت بول ميدا .
لرلر ده باش اچيق تيز هوا نفس
ايدرك درت طرفه كمال سربستى
ايله قيش و ياز موسلرلر ده قوشان
دلى قابيلرى كوزوبده قوش ايدرك
اولاد لرينه فوت بول اولر ايتقندن فورقان
پدر و والدر امين اوليسلرلر ك
بوشاهه ايتكلىر شير و زياست
بديندن ، باشقه برى ككدر .
سپور فوت بولر اولاد و ايبانى
چنكلىرته بولون نه چابار نه سوريى
نه كوشكى و نه دمه طولومياچى اولسى

FIGURE 5 Front page of one of Istanbul's multilingual sports magazines FUTBOL, 16 NOVEMBER 1910

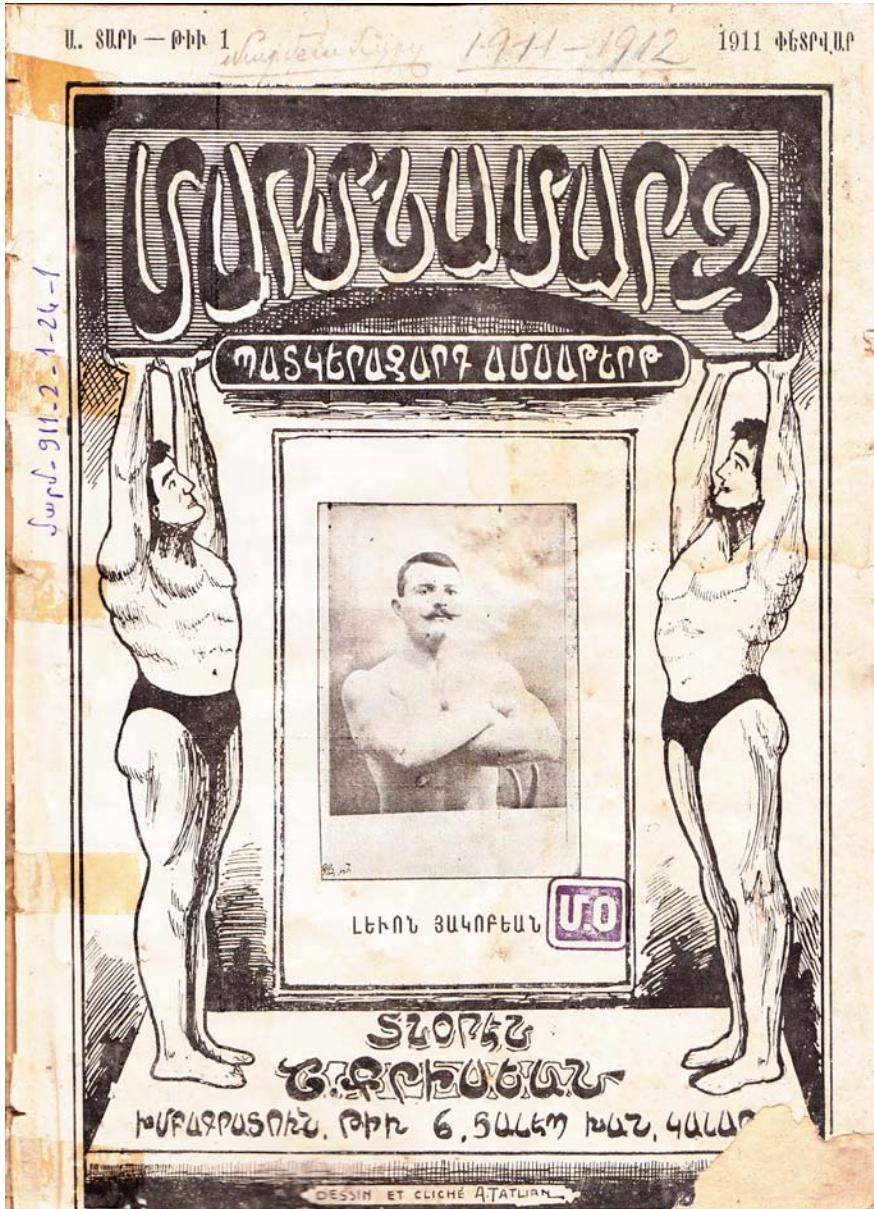


FIGURE 6 Front page of one of Istanbul's multilingual sports magazines MARMNAMARZ, FEBRUARY 1911



FIGURE 7

Advertisement for Fortin pills that combat fatigue. Surrounding the image of the muscular sportsman are the words 'strength, health and youth' (kuvvet, sıhhat, gençlik).

İK DAM, 20 SEPTEMBER 1920: 4

These periodicals celebrated and encouraged what they considered to be 'worthwhile' and 'meaningful' corporeal concerns for the expanding urban middle class. *Marmnamarz* chastised men and women for their superficial concern with 'exterior beauty'. According to an article entitled 'The Beauty Competition' (*Martsum Marmnagan Keghetsutyan*), very few people paid heed 'to bodily care ... and comprehend [the importance of] physical beauty' (*Marmnamarz* 1911e: 161). By condemning frivolous concerns with one's appearance, such as wearing the latest fashion, *Marmnamarz* was not privileging the internal over the external: both were supposed to work in tandem. Personal effort and exercise were middle-class masculine values that enabled men to construct a well-proportioned, beautiful body, and vice versa: a beautiful body was a sign of the values within. This line of argumentation stood in contrast to that found in other types of publications, which offered quicker approaches through consumption. For example, Istanbul's multilingual daily press is replete with advertisements for pills (figure 7) that promised to provide men with vigor and muscle.¹¹ Physical culture journals were extremely suspicious of these mirac-

11 For example, see *Sabah's* advertisement for Furtin pills (9 March 1912: 5). Furtin pills were

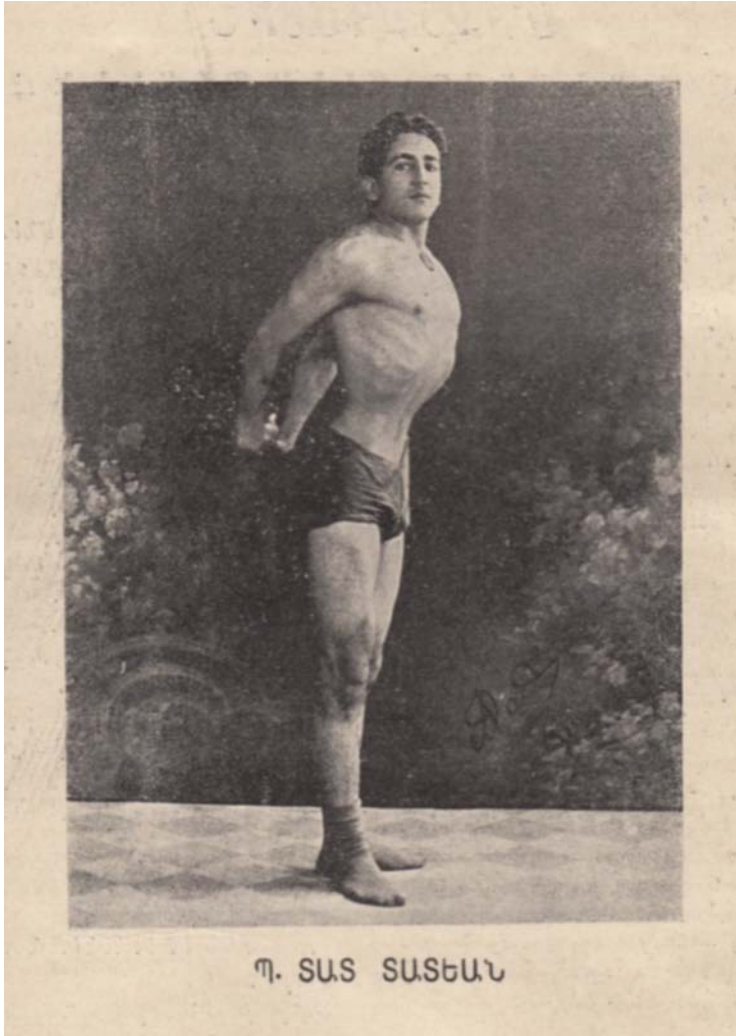


FIGURE 8 *Photograph of Dad Dadian, winner of the 'beauty competition'*
 MARMNAMARZ, NOVEMBER 1911: 297

ulous health potions. They posited that developing and appreciating a well-proportioned, beautiful body, was a prize that emerged not from consumption, but from effort, and 'worthwhile' leisure activity, notably sports.

one of the many miraculous health potions that promised men the ability to develop a robust, virile body through consumption of these potions. Together, they constituted an emerging commercial field that targeted middle-class residents of Istanbul and other urban centers of the Ottoman Empire as their primary consumer.

Journals soon created entire sections for photographs of semi-nude young men, run as regular features. *İdman*'s section was entitled 'The Exhibition of Robust Bodies' (*Sağlam Vücutlar Meşheri*), and was described by the journal's editor as a space in which readers could 'look at the "servants of the body and health" (*vücut ve sağlamlık fukaraları*)' (*İdman* 1913: 219).¹² Similarly, the editor of the Armenian magazine *Marmnamarz*, Shavarsh Chrissian, regularly published pictures of young men and encouraged readers to admire and emulate these examples. The portrait photographs published in *İdman* and *Marmnamarz* also included captions which reveal the ethno-religious identity of the robust bodies. The image below of Krikor Hagopian (figure 9), for example, is collated with a description that establishes that he and his brother Levon Hagopian are among the 'few Armenian youth who take care of their bodies ... [and] glorify the Armenian name (*Hay anunē*) through their bodies, will, and muscle' (caption on image in *Marmnamarz* April 1911: 88). Photography served here as one of the most important tools of popularizing the physical culture press; photography served to record, promote and normalize a distinct male corporeal aesthetic. By regularly publishing images of sportsmen, editors also promoted photographic practices, as scores of young male readers wanted to own and share their own pictures to prove that they belonged to this new masculine ideal.

But how 'civic' was this new masculine ideal? On one level, this new bourgeois ideal of corporeal beauty and its underlying modern urban values were shared, admired and adhered to by young middle-class Ottoman men of diverse religious and linguistic backgrounds (and indeed, this masculinity had a global dimension) who aspired to this modernity. On another level, these venues in which young men cultivated this new ideal—associations, clubs and the press—remained firmly divided along confessional lines. Thus, these spaces might have shared an ideal, but they also cultivated an exclusive ethno-religious identity among their readers and patrons, who were identified and addressed as belonging to a distinct community. For example, Ottoman Turkish sports periodicals, like *İdman*, juxtaposed discussions about 'the Turkish generation' and 'our athletes', and used the first person plural 'we' and 'Turks' interchangeably (*İdman* 1914: 189; *İdman* 1913: 219). Similarly, *Marmnamarz*

12 The use of the word *fukara*, which literally means 'poor men', in the section's caption is significant because of its connection to Islam. Muslims have historically used the term *fukara* (sing. *fakir*) when referring to mendicants and Sufis as servants of God (Green 2012: 239). *İdman*'s use of *fukara* also conveyed the meaning of servant, but challenged the traditional Sufi understanding by replacing God with the body and health. Thus, service to the body and health was compared to service to God.

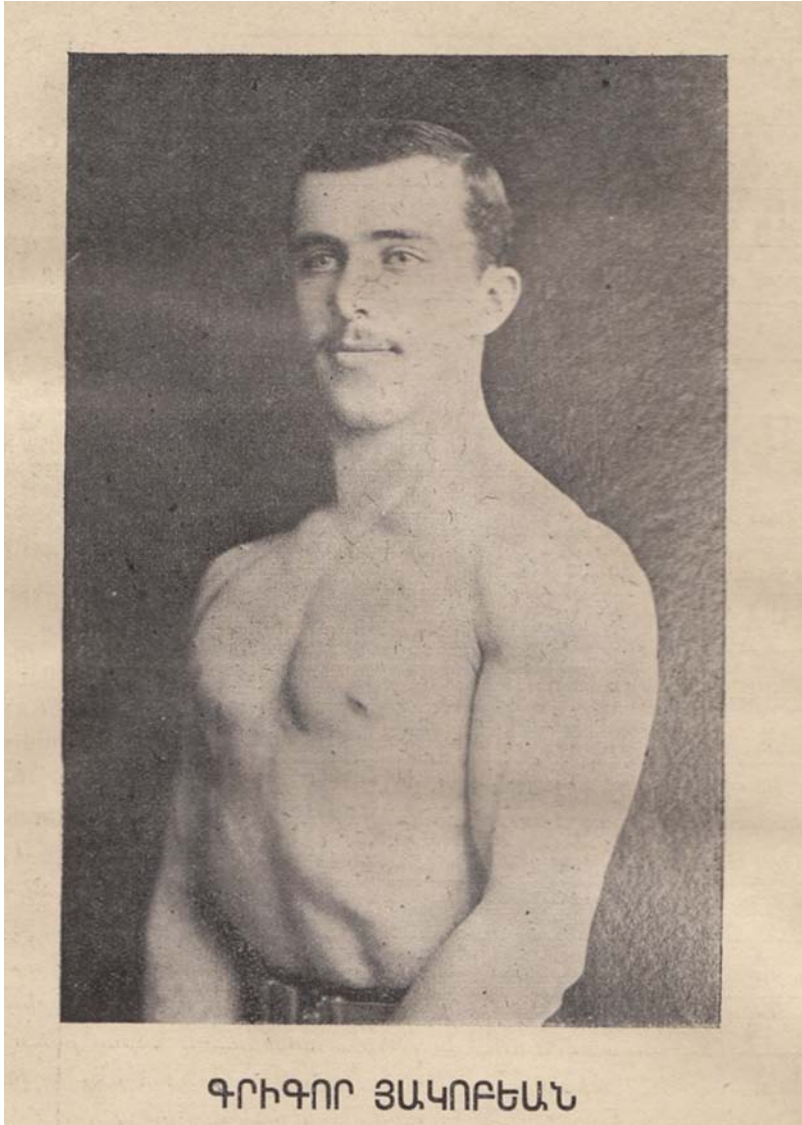


FIGURE 9 *Photograph illustrating the strong, robust bodies of readers*
 MARMNAMARZ, APRIL 1911: 88

oscillated between using 'Armenian youth' and 'our youth' (*Marmnamarz* 1911d: 30; *Marmnamarz* 1912: 411). The sportsman photographs circulating in the physical culture press thus not only made new notions of masculinity and corporeal beauty both desirable and normative, but they simultaneously presented this modern male body as a confessional one.

Where did the photographs in late Ottoman physical culture journals come from? They resemble the previously discussed (figures 1–4) vernacular photographs that administrators and members of sports clubs had taken during the Hamidian period. And this is not surprising, as they were essentially the same photographs of young middle-class men, members of athletic clubs or physical culture aficionados whose private portraits the burgeoning press used to bolster its own popularity and sales. Editors encouraged readers to send their private 'sportsman' photographs to the journal to be printed. *Marmnamarz* even organized a male beauty competition as a means by which the journal promoted a distinct look and encouraged readers to take 'sportsman' photographs (*Marmnamarz* 1911e: 161). Unsurprisingly, *Marmnamarz*'s male beauty competition also carried a didactic purpose, which the editors did not fail to stress: the cultivation of robust, beautiful and healthy Armenian bodies was not just a moral endeavor but also a social duty that young men and the broader community alike needed to embrace.

But while there is a clear generic continuity with the earlier photographs, there is also—in their incarnations as photographs reprinted on the pages of the press—greater variety, which mirrors the fact that the 'archive', so to speak, becomes larger once we are allowed to see a much larger pool of this vernacular genre. The majority of these portraits capture the upper body of shirtless, well-defined young men gazing directly at the camera, sporting short haircuts and moustaches, flexing their muscles and revealing hairless chests. But the four images below in figure 10, which were featured in *İdman*'s section entitled 'The Exhibition of Robust Bodies', reveal a wider variety of postures. Celal is shown glancing over his right shoulder while clenching his hands in front of his body; Muhtar is facing the camera with arms akimbo; Fuat is tightly crossing his arms and standing at a three quarter angle; and Nedim is standing diagonally while gazing over his right shoulder and clasping his hands behind his back. While generically similar, each image is also unique and accentuates different parts of the body, thus inadvertently or consciously stressing the individuality of all four Turkish men.

Nude, or Not Nude?

Men wishing to compete in *Marmnamarz*'s beauty competition were asked to 'take an appropriate nude picture of themselves and provide their age, height, weight, profession, as well as the measurements of their chest, waist, thighs, neck, ankles and mail it to the journal (*Marmnamarz* 1911a: 219). The majority of the contestants were immediately disqualified, however, because their

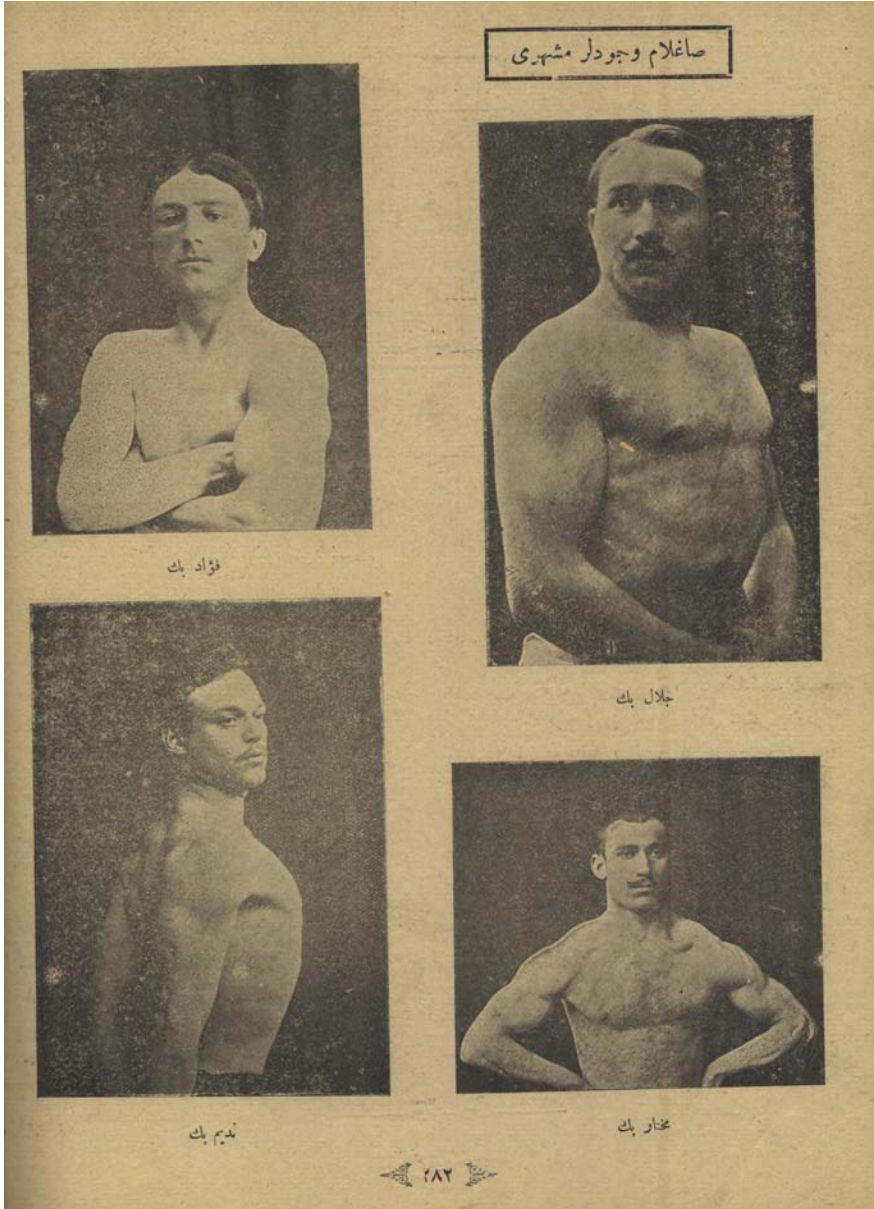


FIGURE 10 *Photograph illustrating the strong, robust bodies of readers*
 İDMAN'S SECTION ENTITLED 'THE EXHIBITION OF ROBUST BODIES',
 İDMAN, 24 JANUARY 1913: 282

photographs only showed their upper bodies; in order to participate in the competition, participants needed to send full body photographs (*Marmnamarz* 1911b: 286). The fact that the majority of the contestants sent photographs of their upper bodies—despite the journal's explicit pleas—suggests that the vast majority of readers did not feel comfortable exposing the lower part of their bodies (especially their thighs) to strangers. Nevertheless, one contestant, Dad Dadian, assiduously followed *Marmnamarz's* instructions and sent a full body photograph (figure 8). As a result, *Marmnamarz* crowned Dadian the champion of the competition and presented him with a prize for the 'beauty of his body'. *Marmnamarz* also made sure to praise him 'for not seeing anything wrong in showing his nude (*merg*) photo and not being afraid of public opinion' (*Marmnamarz* 1911 f.: 314).

Dadian's willingness to send his full body photograph to the magazine, despite possible public censure, suggests that not all Ottomans were as enthusiastic about seeing pictures of 'nude' young men being circulated in the press. An article entitled 'Nudity' (*Mergutyune*) published in *Marmnamarz* explains that nudity was a polarizing issue for Armenians, and possibly other Ottoman citizens. According to *Marmnamarz*, many believed that nudity was 'immoral' and would 'scandalize' humanity ("M.B." 1911: 28). *Marmnamarz* challenged this position by retorting that our 'male and female ancestors,' who walked around naked, were not immoral. Instead, *Marmnamarz* treated the human body as inherently pure and something that should be celebrated, and even treated as a spectacle:

Things that are considered impure and ugly should be covered and condemned by trial permanently, but the human body is not impure ... Nudity in *Marmnamarz* should be considered art and compared to statues. *Men should marvel over beautiful bodies.*

Marmnamarz, February 1911: 28, emphasis mine

This quote serves as one of the most lucid textual celebrations of, and justifications for, the public display of the semi-nude male body in this period. It also implicitly challenges the differences between showing images among friends and in public by encouraging readers (men in particular) to 'marvel over beautiful bodies,' irrespective of the context. 'Nudity,' it should be stressed, remained a fluid term that meant something different to different audiences. Ottoman writers and editors of the physical culture press used the term 'nude' to describe varied degrees of uncovered chests, legs and thighs, but never to refer to the phallus. In this particular context, photographs of semi-nude men were not considered provocative, on the contrary, they were visual

proofs of healthy bodies that could only belong to moral and virtuous young men.

While the intentions of the editors might have been clear, how Istanbul's expanding public read these photographs is not. The circulation of the sportsman image through young male peer networks, often gravitating around the club, and later, in the press, suggests that young men who frequented these spaces and read these publications were not opposed to seeing an image of a nude and/or semi-nude man. However, private networks on the one hand, and popular magazines on the other, were not the same thing. *Marmnamarz's* insistence that both exhibiting and gazing at the nude body was entirely morally justifiable implies that many readers in late Ottoman Istanbul thought otherwise.

Portrait photographs of young men posing shirtless or wearing tight-fitting athletic attire demonstrate that a proportionate, muscular, broad-chested, and hairless upper body in late Ottoman Istanbul represented the embodiment of masculine physical beauty and modern bourgeois values alike. Young Armenians, Turks, Greeks and Jews all celebrated, promoted and indulged in the production of novel corporeal aesthetics as a central component of late Ottoman urban masculinity. These beautiful modern bodies, however, also remained firmly confessionalized. Images of young Turkish and Armenian men exhibiting their robust physiques were collated with discussions in periodicals about how gymnastics and team sports served as the ideal means by which Turks and Armenians could strengthen their race and rejuvenate their respective communities. Thus, editors of physical culture magazines treated images of ideal male physiques as representations of a shared notion of beauty, as well as indications of the development of exclusive ethno-religious communities. These novel bourgeois bodies were thus at once 'global', 'national' and 'confessional'.

References

- Di-Capua, Yoav (2008). Common Skies Divided Horizons: Aviation, Class and Modernity in Early Twentieth Century Egypt. *Journal of Social History* 41 (4): 917–942.
- Donanma Mecmuası* (1915). İdman Sütunları: Güzel Vücut Nedir? 22 July 1915, 1(105): 81–83.
- Edwards, Elizabeth (2012). Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 221–234.
- Erdogdu, Ayshe (2002). Picturing Alterity: Representational Strategies in Victorian Type Photographs of Ottoman Men. In Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson (eds.), *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, pp. 107–125. New York: Routledge.

- Ersoy, Ahmet (2012). The Empire's New Clothes: Ethnography, Costume, and the Photographic Image in the Late Ottoman Empire. Paper presented at *Subject into Object: Photography in the Ottoman World Conference*. Bogaziçi University, Istanbul.
- Felek, Özgen (2014). Reading Bodies Holy and Royal: The Ottoman Physiognomy Tradition as Enacted in Seyyid Loḳmān's *Ḳıyāfetü 'l-İnsāniye*. Paper presented at the *Islamicate Occult Sciences Workshop*. Princeton University.
- Frierson, B. (1996). *Unimagined Communities: State, Press, and Gender in the Hamidian Era*. PhD dissertation, Princeton University.
- Garb, Tamar (1998). *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Gingeras, Ryan (2009). *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Genio, Eyal (2006). When Coffee Brought About Wealth and Prestige: The Impact of Egyptian Trade on Salonica. *Oriente Moderno* 25 (86): 93–107.
- Göçek, Fatma Müge (2002). The Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Emergence of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab Nationalisms. In Fatma Müge Göçek (ed.), *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East*, pp. 15–84. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Graham-Brown, Sarah (1998). *The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950: Images of Women*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Green, Nile (2012). *Sufism: A Global History*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- İdman (1913). Sağlam Vücutlar Meşheri. 25 December 1913, 1(14): 219.
- İdman (1914). Neslimiz. 18 January 1914, 1(13): 189–190.
- Jacob, Wilson Chacko (2011). *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kayalı, Hasan (1997). *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Second Constitutional Period of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lemke, Wolf-Dieter (2002). Ottoman Photography: Recording and Contributing to Modernity. In Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp and Stefan Weber (eds.), *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, pp. 237–249. Beirut: Beirut Texts and Studies.
- Marmnamarz (1911a). Untitled. August 1911, 1(8): 219.
- Marmnamarz (1911b). Untitled. October 1911, 1(9): 286.
- Marmnamarz (1911c). Arazin Khosk'. February 1911, 1(1): 1–2.
- Marmnamarz (1911d). Marmnashkharh: Hay Yeridasardut'ean. February 1911, 1(1): 30.
- Marmnamarz (1911e). Martsum Marmnagan Geghetsotyan. July 1911, 1(6): 161.
- Marmnamarz (1911f.). Marmnashkharh: Ardiwnk' Marmnakan Geghets'kut'yan Mrt-s'umin. November 1911, 1(10): 314–315.
- Marmnamarz (1912). Pats'uts ē: 'Marmnamarz'i G Mariwoy Pajanordagut'iwnē. November 1912, 2(21–22): 411.

- “M.B.” (1911). Mergowt‘iwně. *Marmnamarz* 1(1): 28–29.
- Micklewright, Nancy (2000). Personal, Public ad Political Reconstructions: Photographs and Consumption. In Donald Quataert (ed.), *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 261–288. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Micklewright, Nancy (2003). Late Ottoman Photography: Family, Home, and New identities. In Relli Schechter (ed.), *Transitions in Domestic Consumption and Family Life in the Middle East*, pp. 65–84. New York: Palgrave.
- Ryzova, Lucie (2014). *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sağlam Vücutlar Meşheri (1913). *İdman*. 25 December 1913.
- Sami, Şemseddin (1899). *Kamus-ı Türki*. Dersaadet: İkdam Matbaası.
- Sheehi, Stephen (2007). A Social History of Early Arab Photography or a Prolegomenon to an Archaeology of the Lebanese Imago. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2): 177–208.
- Sırrı, Selim (1908). Gençlere. *Musaver Muhit*. 10 December 1908: 89–90.
- Sırrı, Selim (1911). Nasıl Jimnastik Yapmalı. *Terbiye ve Oyun* 1 (6): 86–90.
- Tataoulis Gymnastikou Syllogou Hirakleous [The Hercules Gymnastics Club of Tatalva] (1896). *Kanonismos Tou En Tataoulis Gymnastikou Syllogou Hirakleous*. Constantino-ple.
- Watenpaugh, Keith (2006). *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Yessayan, Zabel (1935). *Silihdari Bardeznerë*. Translated by Jennifer Manoukian (2014), *The Gardens of Silihdar*. Watertown, MA: AIWA Press.
- Yıldız, Murat (2015). Strengthening Male Bodies and Building Robust Communities: Physical Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire. PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles.
- Yosmaoğlu, İpek K. (2003). Chasing the Written Word: Press Censorship in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1913. *Turkish Studies Association Journal* 27: 15–49.