# CHAPTER 6

# The Place and Importance of Physical Education and Sports in Turkish Culture

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## 1. Introduction

The lifestyles and cultural structures of societies are reflected in sports activities and have become one of the most prominent factors in the history of sports. Because humanity has wanted to develop its body and muscles to protect itself, primarily to adapt to natural conditions and to establish sovereignty (Özen, 2013). In the thousands of years of history of Turkish communities, Turkish folk culture, which is identified with the traditional lifestyle that has a deep-rooted history in Anatolian geography, represents a common heritage shaped by unique language, traditions and preferences and passed down from generation to generation (Karahüseyinoğlu, 2008).

Turks, who have a deep-rooted history in history, have also had a rich culture. These cultural characteristics are widely spread and Turks are sometimes associated with these cultural characteristics (Dever & Islam, 2015). However, the scarcity of studies by social scientists and the lack of source works covering the history of Turkish sports is a prominent feature that shows the low interest in this field (Karahüseyinoğlu, 2007). Turkish culture, with its deep-rooted history of thousands of years, has a richness where physical education and sports are integrated and have an inseparable place in the life of the society. With this study, it is thought that it is important to address the deep-rooted history of physical education and sports in Turkish culture from various perspectives.

This study, which aims to illuminate the place and importance of physical education

and sports in Turkish culture, examines, as İmamoğlu and Taşmektepligil (1997) state, the concentration of the ancient Turks on wrestling, archery and equestrian sports with the influence of the period and, as Özen (2013) expresses, the Turkish societies came to the fore with their warrior qualities and gained a place in the society with their success. The rich history of Turkish culture and the intertwined nature of physical education and sports require a detailed examination of this subject.

This study aims to examine the place and importance of physical education and sports in Turkish culture, as well as its historical development, social effects and its place in education. In the article, an analysis will be presented within the scope of these issues and the progress of physical education and sports in Turkish culture will be discussed.

## 2. Sports and Games in Turks

Turks, who have been intertwined with sports throughout history, attached great importance to activities such as horse riding, sword equipping, javelin throwing and wrestling in their active nomadic lives. Even when they settled down, it was observed that they did not break away from sports, and even devoted more time to it. In this process, some sports branches showed a great development and turned into ancestral sports (Turgay & Aydın, 2017). When we look at the sporting activities of Turkish communities in the pre-Islamic period, these activities come to the fore as basic areas such as archery, hunting, wrestling, and activities on horseback. These activities were carried out for combat experience and training purposes, as well as leisure activities in many places (Aksu, 2020). It is stated that the vast majority of the states that emerged in Anatolia in different periods, their military authority structures, their organization for war and their defense, attack and protection capabilities are based on sports activities (Karahüseyinoğlu, 2007).

For civilizations leading a nomadic lifestyle, horses have certainly been the closest friends. Horses have become both a means of transportation for nomadic communities and the most important weapons in times of war. While people used horses for war and transportation purposes, they also used horses for trade activities and exploring new places (Palabıyık, 2019). In this context, a few examples of games that show that many games and sports activities carried out in Turkish culture are activities involving horses or power-based competition are given in the rest of the article.

### 2.1. Horse Races

Horse races are part of the activities that Turkish peoples have carried out by integrating with horses. In the past, the skills of fast running horses and graceful walking horses were tested in such competitions. The horses that stood out in the competitions were recognized by the public and brought fame to the families to which the horse owners


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belonged. For this reason, horses with good running and graceful gaits were always valued by the public. In the past, horse races were usually organized in the autumn months. These races were usually held during festivals or memorial ceremonies organized on the anniversaries of the death of respected people (Belek, 2015).

### 2.2. Beyge

Beyge is recognized as one of the oldest and most popular horse races among Turkish communities. There are three different types of Beyge, Alaman Beyge, Kunan Beyge and Uşkır Beyge. The difference between these types is that the distance run varies. Alaman Beyge is undoubtedly the most important type because the longest distance is run in this race. Beyge and Alaman Beyge are run on rough terrain and horses are made to run fast. Beyge and Alaman Beyge races are recognized as the most important racing and sporting events that teach perseverance, endurance, courage, heroism, bravery and intelligence (Yücel, 2010).

### 2.3. Mounted Javelin

The Mounted Javelin competition starts with a rider from one of the opposing teams stepping forward and throwing his javelin at one of the other team players in the procession stall. After this action, the athlete, who returns to his own team, is quickly followed by the player of the opposing team and his javelin is thrown. Players who hit the opponent with the javelin knock the opponent out of the game and score points for their team. If the javelin is caught in the air, it can be thrown back to the opponent. The athlete who does not hit his opponent even though he has the opportunity to hit him also scores points for his team. Equestrian Javelin game shows itself as a branch that is a part of our culture by bringing together human characteristics such as skill, courage, agility, nobility and compassion along with sportsmanship (Aydın, 2021).

### 2.4. Gökbörü

Gökbörü game is a type of game played by riding a horse. In this game, a goat whose head is cut off is filled with straw and its belly is sewn up. In this game, which is played over a large area, the players aim to quickly move the goat to the marked area and score points by doing so. In this game, an intense struggle with the opponents is required and it is important that both the player and the horse are strong (Güven, 1992; cited in Bayır and Küçükbasmacı, 2022).

### 2.5. Girlbug

The type of Gökbörü game played during marriage ceremonies was called kolbörü or kızbörü. In this game, the bride would kidnap the slaughtered goat while the groom and other young people would chase her and the bride would try to protect the goat. This game was usually organized to prove the bride's riding skills, defense skills and strong structure (Sarı, 2017; cited in Palabıyık, 2019).

### 2.6. Çevgan

"Gûy u Çevgân", which gained great fame in the Middle Ages, is a game in which players on horses try to pass a ball called gûy between two posts of the opposing team with their agility sticks. This game is a sporting event that requires both skilled equestrian skills and teamwork and strategy. Players compete against each other to get the gûy into the opponent's goal with fast and agile movements, while the opposing team tries to prevent the ball's passage by playing defense. The team that is successful in the game of Gûy u Çevgân is victorious as the side that demonstrates both shooting skills and team cohesion in the best way. This game has an important place in the society of the period as an activity that glorifies values such as courage, athleticism and strategic thinking (Karabey, 2012).

### 2.7. Horse Archery

Turks are known for their skillful horseback riding and arrow shooting. Over time, arrow shooting activities turned into a race. "It is known that ceremonial arrow shootings were held in ancient Turks and this tradition is understood from Chinese sources during the Han period (Aydın, 2021). One of the important factors in the settlement of Turks in Anatolia was their ability to use the bow and arrow professionally. In ancient Turks, arrow meant "tribe, tribe, tribe". Turks used horse archery in many ways for political, military, sports and ceremonial purposes. In marriage ceremonies, young individuals usually performed activities such as shooting the arrow to the farthest possible distance and shooting arrows towards the target (Polatcan, 2022).

### 2.8. Wrestling

It is one of the oldest sports of the Turks. The origin of the word wrestling is based on the word "kures" of Uzbek and Bashkir Turks (Polatcan, 2022). The types of wrestling, which has a special place in Turkish culture, are as follows: Karakucak, oily, aba, shalwar and some types of wrestling practiced by Crimean Turks. People who wrestle in our country and other Turkish regions are generally called "pehlivan" (Özen, 2012).


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### 2.9. Tepük

Tepük is a sports activity played by the Turks in the XI century. The game tool has a flat and round shape and does not resemble a soccer ball of today. The game is based on bouncing the game tool while standing and can be played between two opposing players. There is not much information about the rules of the Tepük game. However, in the Divan-ı Lügat written by Kashgarlı Mahmud in the XIth century, it is stated that the game is based on kicking with the foot (Yıldıran, 1997).

## 3. Social Impacts

Although sport is one of the cultural factors that unite human communities and form nations, it has an important effect that is closely linked to human life and contributes to leading a healthy, successful and happy life and keeping moral strength high (Ramazanoğlu et al., 2005). Sport establishes a strong relationship by intertwining with the past of the society. As a part of social dynamics, sport contributes to the development of society with a deep interest. This close connection is an indication that sport is shaped together with the social processes of society. As a part of social change, sport has also transformed depending on its content. It is observed that sports in the past were based on defense and attack depending on the period. Sports such as archery, fencing and wrestling are among the sports practiced in the Bronze Age. In the Iron Age, on the other hand, sports such as horseback riding, sailing, rowing, skiing and sledding, which are more focused on transportation and transportation, come to the fore. In slavery societies, as slave owners began to take a share of the product without producing, the existence of class leisure time emerged, which enabled the emergence of team sports as well as individual sports (Bayraktar, 2003). Social environments play an important role in the spread of sport because sport has characteristics that cover all aspects of individuals. In this context, social environments such as school, family, workplace and environmental conditions provide information on which sports branches are concentrated and show how sporting activities are evaluated. Culture, which embraces every field with a social dimension, has a feature that also includes sporting activities. Because sport, as a phenomenon that exhibits intensive human relations as well as large-scale group activities, has both a social quality and is accepted as a social need (Taşmektepligil & İmamoğlu, 1996).

## 4. Place in Education

Steppe culture, which is considered the most important element of the ancient Turkish education and training system, refers to a specific geographical region where a mobile lifestyle is evident. In this culture, the horse represents speed, freedom and sovereignty, while iron symbolizes technology, making education, self-renewal and staying energetic a necessity in the nature of life. This necessity is a process that lasts from birth until

death (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2015). The progress of modern societies in the field of sports is directly related to factors such as gender, education and sports environment. Societies with a strong education and training infrastructure bring along the development of sports (Ramazanoğlu et al., 2005).

The acceptance and spread of modern sports in countries other than the UK took place in different time periods. The process in which modern sports started to emerge in England coincides with the 1830s. In Turkey, on the other hand, the beginning dates of many sports that can be considered as modern sports and are actually of Western origin coincide with the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. During these periods, changes were experienced in Turkish cultural history and differentiations were observed in social life. At the same time, in parallel with the advances in the West, developments were recorded in every field of Turkey (Karahüseyinoğlu, 2007). In recent history, in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the solution to get rid of the disorder observed throughout the State was to be close to the West or to be similar to the West. However, in this period, "sports" was seen as an activity that was mostly practiced and organized for the purpose of war training. For this reason, sports education in the Ottoman Empire was practiced in educational institutions not as a course, but as training. The institutions that provided sports education were limited to military education and training institutions, palace education and training institutions and tekkes that provided education to the public (Çelik & Bulgu, 2010).

Today, sport has become an indispensable element of education. In addition, the media's interest in sports, people's efforts to relieve stress and maintain a healthy life, and even more importantly, sports victories with international successes play an important role in the daily life and morale of the society. All this gives sport a contemporary and important dimension (Sunay, 1998). Today, we see that sport has a great importance in terms of social unification, individual agreement and international relations. Industrialization and the parallel increase in leisure time increase the importance of physical education and sports activities, which are considered indispensable for people to lead a healthier life in physical, mental, spiritual and social terms (Altuntaş, 2019).

As a result, addressing these issues from different perspectives helped us to better understand the place and importance of physical education and sports in Turkish culture. In addition, with the increasing interest of the Turkish society in sports activities, it was pointed out that physical education and sports have become more important in Turkish society. The aim of this study is to raise awareness about physical education and sports in Turkish culture and to contribute to further research in this field. More research should be conducted on physical education and sports in Turkish culture and more awareness should be created in this field.


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