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ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY IN SMYRNA FROM THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY TO 1922

Key words: history, sport, athletes, Greece.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was analysis of data regarding athletic activities of the Greek community in Smyrna such as physical education school classes and sport clubs as well as consequences of the Ottoman policy, from the end of the 19th century to 1922. Magazines and newspapers from the period as well as sports club archives were used as sources. The examination showed that the athletic activity of the Greek minority in Smyrna was remarkable and pioneering. More than 20 sports clubs were founded between 1890 and 1922 in Smyrna. They all combined educational, musical and athletic activities in one. The oldest Greek athletic club of Smyrna was Orpheus founded in 1890; however, the most famous was the Panionios Gymnastic Club founded in 1898. Athletics was a means to cultivate Greek national identity and a cultural link between the Greeks. The athletic clubs of Smyrna organized annual games and international meetings and won numerous distinctions. The Panionios Gymnastic Club of Smyrna established the Panionia Games in 1896, attended by Greek athletes from Constantinople, other cities of Asia Minor and from all over Greek areas. The successes of the Greek athletes of Smyrna can be traced back to the Zappas Olympics in 1859, the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 as well as to the Intercalated Olympic Games in 1906. The destruction of Asia Minor in 1922 was a terrible blow to Hellenism. It also meant an end to the athletic activity in Smyrna as the Greeks were forced to leave Asia Minor – their places of birth and their property.

INTRODUCTION

Smyrna (Greek Σμύρνη, Turkish Izmir) is today the third most populous city and a major seaports of Turkey. Its strategic location in the Gulf of Izmir of the Aegean Sea has given Smyrna tremendous political and economic advantages in history.

Smyrna was founded in the 11th century BC by the Aeolians. It was seized by the Ionians before 688 BC. Antigonus I, King of Macedonia, restored the city in the 4th century BC [1, pp. 12-36]. In the 4th century AD the Smyrna became a part of the Byzantine Empire, and in 1424 was taken over by

the Ottoman Turks. The Greeks claimed Smyrna after World War I (1914-1918), and by the terms of the Treaty of Sevres from 1920, the administration of the city and its Ionian hinterland was assigned to Greece for four years. The plan in the treaty was to cede parts of Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor, including the city of Smyrna, to Greece. The city was occupied on May 15th 1919 by Greece with the Allies' approval [2, pp. 24-37]. By 1922, the Greek forces which had pushed into Anatolia were driven back to the sea, and in September 1922 Smyrna was recaptured, burned and destroyed by the Turks. According to the London Daily Chronicle of September 18, 1922, 125,000 Greeks and

Armenians were killed and the respective city neighborhoods were set on fire when the Turkish army reoccupied Smyrna [3, pp. 38-49; 5, p. 15; 21, pp. 136-140; 22, pp. 145-156].

At the time of its destruction it is probable that the number of Smyrna inhabitants exceeded five hundred thousand. According to the U.S. Consulate the official figure was four hundred thousand, of whom one hundred and sixty-five thousand were Turks, one hundred and fifty thousand Greeks, twenty-five thousand Jews, twenty-five thousand Armenians, and twenty thousand foreigners: ten thousand Italians, three thousand French, two thousand British and three hundred Americans¹ [5, p. 152. 10, p. 370].

The civilization of this ancient and beautiful city was essentially Greek but also had a strong multicultural character [4, pp. 6-12]. In no other city in the world did East and West mingle naturally in so spectacular a manner as in Smyrna. This multiculturalism was obvious as evidenced by the coexistence of Greek, English, French, Jewish and Turkish daily and weekly newspapers as well as various national consulates and chambers of commerce. In 1920, 8 Greek, 6 Armenian, 5 French, 5 Jewish and 7 Turkish newspapers were being published in Smyrna. There were English, French, Italian, Dutch and Greek chambers of commerce and consulates of Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, United States, Spain, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Iran, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Sweden and Denmark [15, pp. 33-38].

In Smyrna, until the destruction of Asia Minor, a flourishing Hellenic population had co-lived peacefully with other ethnic communities. The two main native Greek schools in Smyrna were

the Homerion for girls, and the Evangelical School for boys, the latter under British supervision. In total, in Smyrna at the beginning of 20th century there were 16 Orthodox Church schools, 9 Greek private schools, 5 schools for girls, 9 Turkish schools and 14 schools for foreigners [9, pp. 160-161. 15, pp. 29-31. 16, pp. 142-145].

The purpose of this study was an analysis of data on athletic activities of the Greek community in Smyrna, such as physical education school classes, sport clubs, as well as consequences of the Ottoman policy, from the end of the 19th century to 1922. Magazines and newspapers from the period (Smyrne, Amaltheia, Ionia, Armonia, Proodos, Kosmos) [7, pp. 38-43] as well as sports club archives were used as sources.

SUCSESSES OF GREEK ATHLETES OF SMYRNA UNTIL 1906

The first successes of the Greek athletes of Smyrna can be traced back to the Zappas Olympics. Athletes from Smyrna participated in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Zappas Olympics in 1859, 1870 and 1875, respectively. The Olympic winners included Petros Velissariou in 1859, Melegkoglou Demetrios in 1870 and Molakidis Kostas in 1875 [13, pp. 14 & 20; 20, pp. 28-29; 11, pp. 14-15]. Athletes from Smyrna also took part in the Tenia Games, held in the Aegean island of Tenos in 1895, where five of them won victories [18, 18 August 1895; 13, p. 46]. Smyrna was also represented by five athletes at the first modern Olympic Games in Athens 1896, who were members of the Greek national team. One of them, George Tsitas, won a second Olympic victory in Greco-Roman wrestling [11, pp. 31-32]. In 1906 eleven athletes from Smyrna participated as members of the Greek national team in the Intercalated Olympic Games [24, p. 124. 13, p. 168 & 187]. A football team from Smyrna also took part in those games, and it comprised players of different origins: 9 English, 1 Armenian and 1 French [11, p. 164. 6, p. 589. 20, p. 125].

SMYRNA ATHLETIC CLUBS

Before 1890 Smyrna had lacked an organized gymnasium or an athletic club. The organized athletic movement of Smyrna has its roots in the city's music and intellectual societies [11, p. 20]. In

¹ The population figures of different nationalities living in Smyrna at the end of the 19th century are imprecise. There are three different and contradicting census reports regarding the composition of Smyrna population at that time. According to the Ottoman census, from 1906/1907 to 1914 the total Smyrna population included 127.365 Greeks, 79.423 Muslims, 12.858 Armenians, 24.403 Jews and 16.922 Europeans (French, German and English). According to the Greek census the number Greeks was 177.365. According to the census of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the region (santzaki) of Smyrna in 1912, the total population of 754.046 included 449.044, Greeks, 219.494 Turks, 11.395 Armenians, 18.130 Jews and 55.568 other nationalities.

the 1890s all these societies, whether educational, musical or athletic, served the common national purpose. Gymnastics and athletics contributed a great deal to the development and proliferation of Greek national ideology since they were considered the living heritage of ancient Greek civilization. For that reason the majority of those clubs adopted names derived from antiquity, such as Orpheus, Pelops, Apollon, Panionios, etc.

Apollon Club

The Apollon Club was founded in 1891 as a spiritual and musical society and obtained an active athletic department in 1894. For the first time, the Apollon athletes took part in a game that was organized in Bournova by English sports lovers [11, p. 28. 20, p. 70]. In 1901, Apollon organized boat races and in 1904 began to organize the annual Apollonian Games [13, p. 139. 20, p. 63]. The games had a multicultural character thanks to the participation of Greek, Armenians, French and English athletic clubs of the city. The prizes for the winners were money, shot guns, silver plates, telescopes, shoes, as well as statues like in Greek antiquity [8, p. 25]. Apart from the above the Apollon club organized musical performances,

philological and historical lectures and literary competitions [17, 6 February 1908].

In 1904 the club took part in the Panhellenic Games, and in 1906 Apollon athletes also participated in the Intercalated Olympic Games of Athens [11, p. 124. 12, pp. 168-174]. The Apollon Club introduced boxing to Smyrna and organized a football team which won many victories against English and Armenian teams as well as against football teams of crews of foreign warships visiting the port [11, p. 214] (Fig. 1).

Sporting Club

The Sporting Club was founded in 1896, and acquired its building on the quay in 1914. Its facilities were luxurious and included an indoor gym, tennis court, golf course and football ground. The club members were Americans, British, French, Italians, Armenians and Greeks. The multicultural character of the club was also reflected in the composition of its administrative council, which in 1920, for instance, consisted of two Britons, two Frenchmen, one Armenian and seven Greeks. The members of the club trained in tennis, cycling, football and volleyball sections [15, p. 32].



Figure 1. Apollon Club Football Team, 1921

Pelops Club

The foundation of the Pelops Club in 1908 was the initiative of Homer Onasis and Anastasios Chatziemmanouel [20, p. 70]. The main goal of the club was promotion of gymnastics and especially gymnastic performances in sea sports. For that reason, Pelops had the character of a sea sports club such as the Smyrnan Club of Rowers (Omilos Ereton) [16, pp. 184-185]. Pelops was the chief organizer of rowing and swimming races in which all the athletic clubs of Smyrna and suburbs participated. The Pelops club organized also the last swimming races in Smyrna, a few days before the Turkish destruction of Asia Minor on July 31, 1922. One of the 100 m and 1600 m race winners was the famous shipping magnate, Aristotle Onasis [20, p. 71].

Orpheus Club

In 1890 some Smyrnans keen on music in cooperation with graduates of the Aronis School founded the Orpheus Club to cultivate music and athletics [18, 3 February 1894; 13, p. 27]. In 1893 some Orpheus members formed a separate organization, the Gymnasion club whose major goal was to promote athletic activities among its members [20, p. 29; 11, p. 25].

In 1897 the Gymnasion was one of twenty-eight Greek clubs which contributed to the foundation of the Panhellenic Sports Federation. It is worth mentioning that from these founding clubs only three came from outside mainland Greece (Gymnasion of Smyrna and two other clubs from Cyprus) [13, p. 80. 11, p. 45].

Panionios Club

In October 1898, Orpheus and Gymnasion merged again to form the Panionios Gymnastic Club [11, p. 32]. According to the Panonios charter adopted in 1906, its main goal was promotion of gymnastic and athletic ideas and sports for all, without any social discrimination [14, Article 14]. Ladies (married or not) could also register as members [14, Article 5].

In 1899 the Panellenios Club of Athens invited Panionios to take part in the Panhellenic Games called Soteria [13, pp. 91-93. 8, p. 71]. Panionios also participated in the Panhellenic Games held in Athens from 1904 to 1922. Many Smyrnan athletes such as D. Karampates, G. Retelas and G. Sakellaropoulos won Panhellenic victories and their records became famous. The Panionios athletes also took part as members of the Greek national team in the Olympic Games of



Figure 2. Panionios Club Football Team, 1922

1906, 1912 and 1920 [11, pp. 174-175]. It is also worth mentioning that from 1903 to 1914 the Panionios Club was supported financially by the Greek government [20, p. 54]. (Fig. 2).

PANIONIAN GAMES

The Panionian Games were founded in 1896, two years before the foundation of the Panionios club [13, p. 74. 11, p. 51]. The inspiration for these games was the English sports spirit. It was not surprising as, in fact, all kinds of sports races had followed the English system (yards or miles) until 1900. Another inspiration was the introduction of football into the games program [11, pp. 63-66].

In 1899 Panionios started holding the Panionian Games on an annual basis. From that date on athletes from mainland Greece as well as from Samos, Lesbos and Chios were also invited. All the sporting clubs of Smyrna as well as clubs from Constantinople (Theseus, Hercules), Egypt (Athletic Club of Alexandria), Athens (Ethnikos of Piraeus, Panellenios), Cyprus (Athletic Club of Cyprus), Patras (Panachaikos), Samos (Gymnastic Club) and athletic clubs from the region of Asia Minor Cydonies and Pergamon took part in the Panionian Games [13, pp. 74-96. 20, pp. 55-85].

The games also saw the participation of such English athletes as Pegkely and Siraud, who won a great number of titles in sprint events [20, p. 61]. The Armenian athletic club also took part in the games, and three Armenian athletes (Giontran, Sahinian and Ampetian) won jumping events and races. In 1918, right after the end of World War One, the Turkish club of Altay also took part for the first time [20, p. 82]. However, many Turks had participated as independent athletes in the Panionian Games earlier [13, p. 122], and Turkish sport officials were members of the panel of umpires [20, p. 84]. (Fig. 3), Undoubtedly, the Panionian Games had a multicultural character. For example, the 6th Panionian Games saw the participation of 42 Greeks and 12 foreign athletes [20, p. 62].

Until 1922 nineteen Panionian Games had been held with more than of 1,600 participants [20, p. 58]. From 1907 the organization of the Panionian Games was sponsored by the Hellenic Olympic Committee [20, p. 69]. We should mention here the important contribution of Smyrna's Orthodox bishop Chrysostom, who offered the ground for the Panionios stadium [11, pp. 122-127. 23]. The bishop also eagerly supported the organization of school games (Fig. 4).

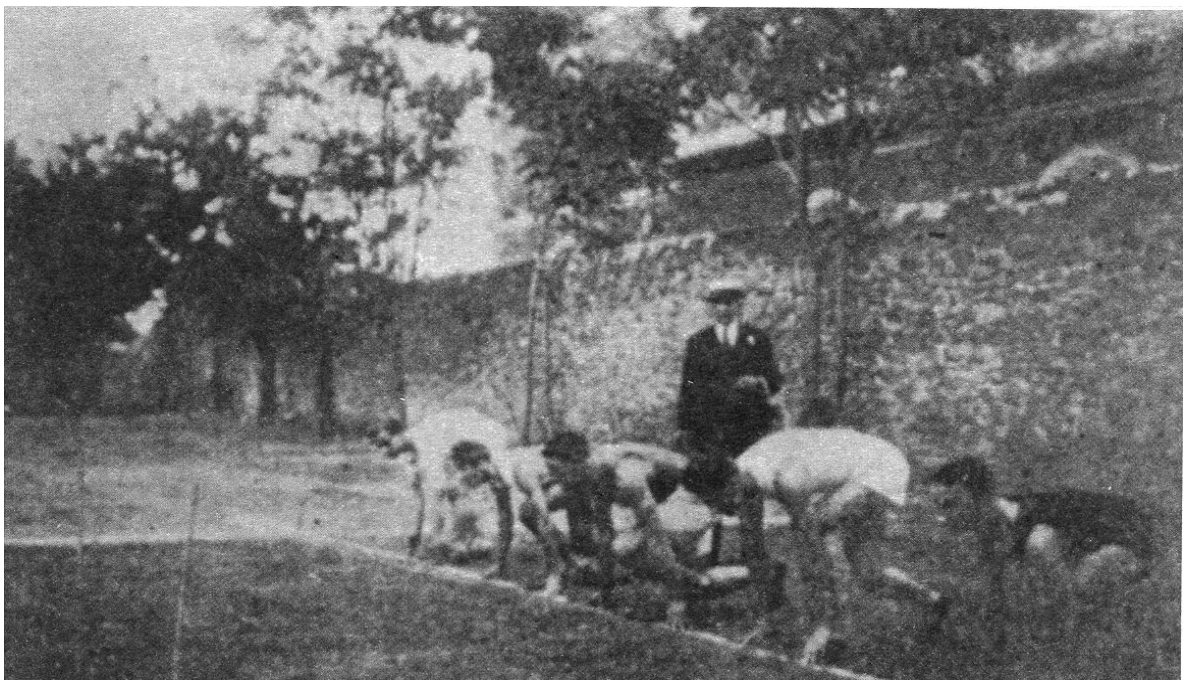


Figure 3. Panionian Games, 1918

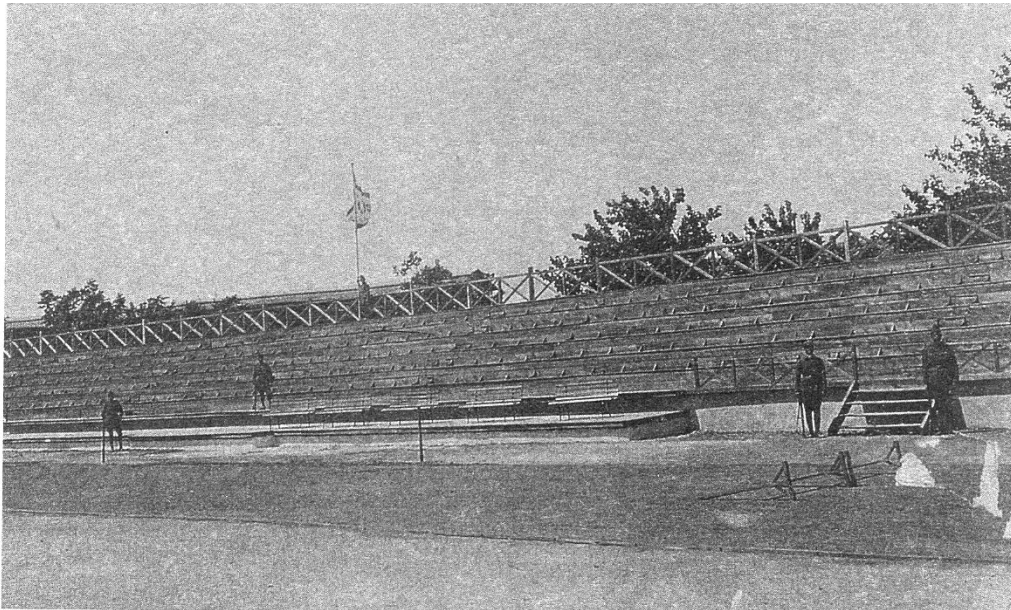


Figure 4. The Smyrna stadium, 1920

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE GREEK SCHOOLS OF SMYRNA

The oldest reference to physical education in Smyrna comes from the newspaper *Ionia*, dated 21 July 1874, which includes a news item that the Hippocrates private school built a gym and introduced gymnastics into its curriculum as an elective subject [19, 21 July 1874]. From 1901 to 1922 physical education was a compulsory subject for boys and girls.

The first gymnastic school games in Smyrna were held in June 1891 by the school pupils of Evangelical School. In 1901, gymnastic shows as well as school games were organized by the Panionios Club under the supervision of Demetrius Dallas [11, p. 80], who awarded a money prize for the winning school [20, p. 51]. For four years, from 1906 to 1909, this money prize was awarded to the Aronis school which had among its staff the well-known physical education teacher Sophocles Magnes.

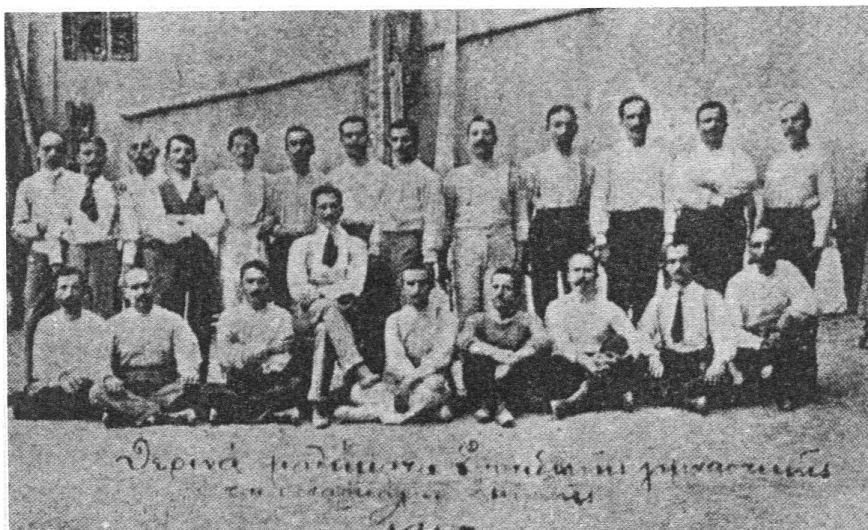


Figure 5. Summer school for Physical Education teachers from Smyrna, 1910

The shortage of physical education teachers and coaches in Smyrna necessitated the foundation of a special Summer Sports School Department in 1902 headed by Sophocles Magnes [16, pp. 180-181]. More than 200 specialized gymnastics teachers graduated from the department until 1914 [20, p. 51]. Bishop Chrysostom also founded a Swimming School for boys aged from 9 to 18 years old [11, p. 126] (Fig. 5).

All Smyrna schools as well as the International Lyceum of Maclachan and the School of Baxter took part in the school games of Smyrna [20, p. 51]. The games program included Swedish gymnastics, running races (60, 100, 200, 400 and 800 m), long jump, discus throwing, shot put and football [11, p. 164]. From 1903 to 1914 the Smyrna school games were sponsored by the Greek government and through the games the organizers could promote the athletic spirit and Greek national ideology [20, p. 54].

EPILOGUE

The athletic activity of the Greeks of Smyrna at the club level was without a doubt remarkable and pioneering in the Balkans. Athletics served as a means of developing the national ideology and as a link between the Greeks of Smyrna and Asia Minor. Through athletics the Hellenic Societies in Smyrna tightened their relationships with mainland Greece. The unification of the linguistic and culturally differentiated populations in the Ottoman Empire, was the main concern of all cultural, musical or purely athletic clubs, which operated in Smyrna.

The Greek government gave its financial support to athletics in Smyrna and invited athletes from Smyrna to take part in the Panhellenic Games and in the Olympic Games as well. From the beginning of the 20th century, the people of Smyrna, enraptured by the British ideas regarding sport, started to specialize in sports such as football, volleyball, tennis or cycling. In 1906, the football team from Smyrna took part in the Intercalated Olympic Games. The gym and the stadium in Smyrna were not only the centers of Greek ethnic survival, but also attracted people of different origins, and thus functioned as important multicultural institutions.

The destruction of Asia Minor in 1922 marked the end of the athletic activity in Smyrna as

the native Greek population was forced to leave Asia Minor. After their arrival in mainland Greece, the refugees from Smyrna transferred their athletic habits to their new home town, Athens, and founded athletic clubs under similar names (Panionios, Apollon, etc.), which later developed their renowned activities [20, pp. 128-227; 11, pp. 241-291].

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