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FOOTBALL IN OTTOMAN MACEDONIA

Abstract. – This article aims to explore the extant sources documenting the emergence of organised football in Ottoman Macedonia – mainly newspaper articles and notes by local chroniclers. In Ottoman Macedonia, football was mainly played in Salonica by the sons of the Jewish, Greek, and Western bourgeoisie, and in Bitola by the sons of rich Aromanians; after the Young Turk Revolution, it was played by western-educated Turkish officers in Skopje and Bitola, and by some citizens of Naoussa, Veria and Edessa in southwest Macedonia. The sport may have made a late start, but it walked the same route as football in Great Britain and Western Europe did. It started as a sport for the city élite, who quickly got fed up with the novelty and turned to seeking new thrills in other sports; had it not been for the Balkan Wars and WWI, football would have probably become a real working-class sport as early as the 1910s – as it did during the Interwar period in the former territories of Ottoman Macedonia that became part of Greece, Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Key words. – football, Salonica, *Union Sportive*, *Omilos Philomousson*, *Audax*, Championship, Intercalated Olympic Games, Bitola, Skopje, Naoussa.

In the summer of 1896, a journalist of a French-language Jewish newspaper published in Ottoman Salonica advertises the latest sports spectacle in the city with a lively notice:

“While in Paris, London and everywhere else people are passionate about horse racing, cycling, yachting and a host of other sports, each more fashionable than the last – Salonica, faithful to its past, seems to only be passionate about *pehlivan* fights, a revival of the ancient gladiators. When famous wrestlers go head to head, the Salonican feels the same thrill felt by the Catalan at the spectacle of a bull fight, in which a bull is put to death. Today, our fellow citizens will find ample material to indulge in this guilty pleasure; we have been informed that several *pehlivans* have arrived in Salonica and will soon be competing in Besh-Chinar. We have had the opportunity to see some of these wrestlers. Such build! Such muscle! Such rugged fellows!”¹

Even on the brink of the 20th century, oiled wrestlers – those remnants of a foregone era, when the Ottomans were powerful, and the Europeans would say “as strong as a Turk” – offered the only sports distraction for the people of Salonica; and *fin de siècle* Salonica was hardly a remote Ottoman *kasbah*. The largest city in Macedonia had traditionally been an administrative centre and an army stronghold, experiencing steady growth through the last third of the 19th century to become the unchallenged commercial centre of the Balkan Peninsula and the third largest port of the Ottoman Empire, handling almost 11% of the total Ottoman import-export trade. With its booming trade, it was a place where Jews, Turks, Greeks, and Slavs lived and prospered together; notably, it also hosted a small, economically-strong colony of western Europeans. Traditionally, the Europeans congregated around the Catholic church in the western part of the city, the so-called *Frangomahala*, maintaining direct contact with the local *bourgeoisie*. These Europeans opened the gates for a rapid penetration of European culture in terms of worldview, fashion, literature, and entertainment, with the wealthy Jewish and Greek *bourgeoisie* in the city beginning to challenge their religious leaders, establish schools and newspapers, and subsidise European languages, education, and ideas.² Led by this *bourgeoisie*, Ottoman Salonica embraced Europe; however – at least until the early 20th century – it failed to embrace European sports. In Salonica, like elsewhere in Ottoman Macedonia, fitness was still being eclipsed by strength.

This was made quite clear to the Parisian Jew André Lévy, who in 1898 gave a lecture on the importance of sports for one’s physical and mental health. Mr. Lévy preached in a desert. As one local journalist observed, his

¹ Journal de Salonique, 24.08.1896, 1.

² Mazower 2005, 211; Gounaris 1993, 499-501, 513; Bouroutis 2019, 68-70.

lecture served no purpose, as “young people from Salonica only care about their clothes, never having beaten any other record in their lives, but the record number of turns of their sensational neckties.” It would be many years before they embraced sports like cricket, or football;³ even four years later, the English painter, illustrator and journalist of London’s *Daily Graphic*, William T. Maud, described Ottoman Macedonia as a backwards land, having neither horse races, nor football.⁴

In the UK, modern football emerged as a reaction to various social and cultural historical processes that took hold in Britain during the industrial revolution; most important among them was the new relationship and concern of Victorian society with physical and mental health. True men were expected to be healthy and ethical, keeping their feelings and their bodies disciplined at all times. This masculine identity detached the members of the British *bourgeoisie* and the artistocratic *élite* from the sickly lower classes and, accordingly, the members of the *élite* strove to keep their bodies healthy through sports, including football. The earliest football clubs were a place for social get-togethers, associations thoroughly *élite* in character. While the working class was unable to practise sports due to limited leisure time, football met the needs of the *élite* for exclusivity and differentiation. However, the reduction of working hours and the increase of workers’ wages brought the game closer to the lower classes. The *élite* went on to seek new sports; the 1880s saw football become the sport of the British worker.⁵ This process was replicated in western and central Europe, where football likewise emerged as an *élite* sport, soon to be taken over by the working class. One would expect that, if football came to Ottoman Macedonia, it would first be accepted by the *élite*. But, who exactly constituted the Macedonian *élite*, and was there a “Macedonian *élite*” to begin with?

At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly three-quarters of the population in Ottoman Macedonia was rural and lived in poverty.⁶ On the other hand, most of the urban population consisted of Muslims who saw the new sports – especially football – as an extended hand of Western European values, and tried to keep away. Football was perceived as a part of Western culture and, accordingly, Muslim society viewed those who played it as opponents

³ Journal de Salonique, 3.10.1898, 3.

⁴ Carpenter 2003, 144.

⁵ Koller, C., Brändle, F. (eds.) 2015, 8-23, 41-44.

⁶ The percentage of urban and rural population in Ottoman Macedonia in 1900, as well as the distribution of urban and rural population among different peoples, is calculated following the statistics of Vassil Kanchov. See: КѢНЧОВЪ 1900, 140-290.

of Islam. Muslim scholars drew analogies between football and the battle of Karbala, a gory event which saw the head of Husayn ibn Ali, Muhammad's grandson, cut off and kicked around by his murderers. Playing the ball was sin, and, therefore, forbidden. Football kits were seen as contrary to the Islamic dress code, and, finally, there was a widespread opinion that football distracted the young Muslims from their pursuit of knowledge. Such perceptions were bolstered by the position of Abdülhamid II's regime towards political and social gatherings, as well as its hostility towards any attempt to organize the youth in sports clubs.⁷ The Macedonian Slavic population was predominantly rural; the approx. 17% who lived in the cities were mostly small-scale craftsmen with no opportunities for leisure. Most of the Greek-speaking population lived in the countryside; the approx. 26% of Greeks living in the cities never formed a large and wealthy "aristocracy", except in Salonica. The few Jews in Ottoman Macedonia lived entirely in the larger cities. In some places, like Monastir / Bitola, they were among the poorest classes in the city; in other places, – Salonica, for example – they dominated the city *bourgeoisie*. Thus, with its rich Jewish and Greek trade class, and its well-off colony of Westerners, Salonica was the prime candidate for the birthplace of football in Macedonia.

FOOTBALL IN OTTOMAN SALONICA

There is an almost unanimous view among researchers in modern Turkey that football was first played in Salonica in 1875 by the British living in the city,⁸ a view maintained even in some publications of the Turkish Football Federation.⁹ Our attempts to reach the main source of this information ended in a blind alley, with authors mainly quoting one another or offering no source at all; others have tried to discover the source, also to no avail.¹⁰ Mainly due to its colony of Europeans, Salonica remains one of the three most serious candidates for the birthplace of football in the lands of the Sultan, and the first ball in the Empire may have, indeed, been kicked on one of its fields. The unsourced claims by Arıpınar may still be right, that football in Salonica may have expanded enough that, by 1890, a great rivalry among the teams of

⁷ Kahraman 1995, 672; Okay 2002, 7-8; Sancaktar 2007, 162-163; Günay 2017, 922.

⁸ Çağlayan, Fişekcioğlu 2004, 129; Çamdereli, Gürer 2008, 138; Çakır 2008, 170; Devocioğlu, Çoban, Karakaya 2014, 38 and others.

⁹ Arıpınar 1992, 11.

¹⁰ Yüce 2014, 21-22. Despite this, Mehmet Yüce's "Ottoman Angels" is probably the most complete study on the early days of football in the Ottoman Empire.

the English, Greek, and Italian youth in the city could fuel up the spirits there.¹¹ Nevertheless, by the end of the 19th century, football in Salonica was already forgotten. The real beginnings of the sport – or, at least, anything resembling a more serious approach to it – came in the early days of the 20th century, usually associated with the introduction of two societies: the *Omilos Philomousson* and the *Union Sportive*.

Omilos Philomousson was established in 1899 as a music and philological association of the Greeks in Salonica. In 1902, a sports section was added; football was introduced at the initiative of the tobacco merchant Kon. Tornivouka, who had just arrived from Germany. A photograph from 1902 shows that the Society had about 20 football-playing members.¹² During 1902-3, the training sessions usually took place in the green in front of the Papafio Orphanage; though, probably due to a lack of interest from other Salonicans – and, therefore, a lack of an opponent who would play the *Omilos* – the football team disbanded around 1903.¹³

The *Union Sportive* was formed in early 1905.¹⁴ Like most similar local Societies at the time, it was designed around the principle of social exclusion, reflecting the stratification of Salonican society.¹⁵ Most of the members came from the city's Jewish *bourgeoisie*; the rest was filled by wealthy Greeks, Westerners, and members of the diplomatic corps, giving the *Union Sportive* an air of internationalism.¹⁶ The Society promptly established a football team and arranged a match against the *Omilos Philomousson* in early May, 1905. It was right after this first (semi-)official match – or, at least, the first attested match in Salonica – that football fever hit the city, making the sport the main topic of discussion.

¹¹ Aripinar 1992, 11.

¹² On the photograph, as well as on the names of the members of the team, see Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 185.

¹³ Χριστοδούλου 1927, 10-11, 18-19; Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 185-186.

¹⁴ There is no doubt that the *Union Sportive* was formed in 1905. On 9th March, 1905, the *Journal de Salonique* reported that a new sports society had been formed in the city under the name of *Union Sportive*; on 5th February, 1906, the paper mentioned that the Society had celebrated its first anniversary the previous night (*Journal de Salonique*, 9.03.1905, 1; 5.02.1906, 1). We should, therefore, reject Christodoulou's claim (Χριστοδούλου 1927, 19, f.1) that the Society was founded in 1901/2 – an inaccuracy that somehow found its way to other authors (Anastassiadou 1997, 373; Tsokopoulos 2004, 3; Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 185).

¹⁵ Κουλούρη 1997, 195-196.

¹⁶ The list of members included the Belgian consul in Salonica, Aimé Cuypers; Major Garroni of the Italian military mission; the Italian fencing master, Milazzo; the Anglican priest, Tait, etc.

As hard as it would be to argue against attributing the introduction of football in Salonica to the *Union Sportive*,¹⁷ there is a logical question that needs to be answered. What is the reason for the late popularisation of football in Salonica? Even if football really was played in the city in 1875 – why did the Salonicans need 30 years to embrace it? One of the reasons, of course, was the traditional relations between the metropolis and the province, as well as the rule of thumb that novelty is first embraced in the capital, before spreading to other parts of the land. Football had been played in Istanbul since 1880, with occasional matches registered throughout the 1890s;¹⁸ still, football in the capital took off only after the birth of the Constantinople Football League, established in 1904 by four teams founded by Istanbul Britons and Greeks.¹⁹ The second reason was the Ottomans' new attitude towards the male body. In 1905, a Salonican journalist complains, blasting the citizens' obvious lack of fitness: "Foreigners are surprised by our softness and lack of energy."²⁰ Of course, this had to do with the traditional Ottoman view on the body and social status, where a corpulent physique historically epitomised financial prosperity and strength. Still, at the beginning of the 20th century, larger Ottoman cities took into account a new aesthetic of the male body, whose defining traits were good proportions, a slim waist, well-defined biceps, a straight back, and a broad chest, while a plump belly came to represent incompetence, lethargy, and physical inferiority.²¹ Accordingly, the media started promoting gymnastics and football. The third reason had to do with the ethnic and religious distribution of Salonica's population. More than half of the 100,000 Salonicans were Jews. A Jewish sports club and a Jewish newspaper were needed so that the readers would learn of the players' activities and grow accustomed to football. The *Union Sportive* was the first such club, both in Salonica and in Ottoman Macedonia.

The first match

"After only a few weeks of training, the football team of the *Union Sportive* is ready; a match against the team of *Omilos Philomousson* has been agreed. The match will take place on Saturday, around 4 o'clock, on a pitch chosen by the captains, located near the Orphanotrophio

¹⁷ Tsokopoulos 2004, 3.

¹⁸ Yüce 2014, 23-24; Sancaktar 2007, 166-167.

¹⁹ Sancaktar 2007, 167-169.

²⁰ Journal de Salonique, 17.07.1905, 2.

²¹ Yıldız 2015, 196-197.

Greek School of Arts. Should the weather remain good, a large crowd is expected to attend and cheer the skilful plays of the football players... We are currently at the height of sports.”²²

Played on 6th May, 1905,²³ the first official football match in Salonica was indeed a *jolie manifestation*. A crowd of several hundred gathered to see the latest buzz in the city. The players of the *Union Sportive* were considered favourites, as they held regular training sessions and had skilled foreign players, who had learned the game outside Salonica; still, they had to prove this on the pitch.²⁴ At precisely 4:10 pm, the Anglican priest Tait, who was given the honour of refereeing the match, signalled the start of play. The *Omilos* began with 10 players, as Sotiriadis, a future star of Salonican football, was late to the show.²⁵ “Jack”, a reporter of the *Journal de Salonique*, had the privilege of writing up the first report on a football match played in Macedonia: “The players of the *Union* wore blue shirts with red stripes, while the team of the *O.P.* was clad in white... The first 30 minutes saw a rather energetic *Union Sportive*... The players of the *O.P.* played a tighter, faster game, managing to score the first goal... This was followed by even livelier play. The *O.P.* scored two more before halftime... The referee whistled for the start of the halftime break; the teams changed sides... In the second half, the *Union* kept a tight defence against the constant attacks of the opponent; no goals were scored in the second half... Tait, the referee, awarded the victory to the *Omilos Philomousson*, who won the match three goals to nil.”²⁶

The new sport was met with mixed reactions. Many fell in love with it immediately. A spectator later recalled “marvelling at the heroism, with which his friends from the *Omilos* team deflected the battered ball.” Others, unaware of the rules of the game, were not sure when to cheer and applaud. Some were disappointed with the game’s contradictions. One attendee expressed his disappointment in no uncertain terms; taken aback by the sight of 20 people wildly and desperately kicking a ball, he commented: “Let’s get out of here, this is ridiculous! 20 people agreeing to play with a single ball!”²⁷ According to him, dignity imposed that every player should have his own ball.

²² *Journal de Salonique*, 4.05.1905, 1.

²³ Greek-language sources, observing the Julian calendar, record that the match took place on the 23rd of April, 1905.

²⁴ Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 187.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Journal de Salonique*, 8.05.1905, 1.

²⁷ Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 187.



The team of *Omilos Philomouson* before the first clash with the *Union Sportive*

Nevertheless, football passed the overall test with the Salonicans. After the match, the teams celebrated together at the *Omilos'* bar. "Jack" was quick to offer consolation to the *Union Sportive*: "This defeat should not discourage the 'Unionists'. They could not have been beaten more honorably, and I am convinced that, with a little perseverance, they will be able to experience the joys of Victory."²⁸

Football in fashion

"Sports are definitely in fashion," writes a Salonican reporter in 1905. "The new generation of Salonicans only cares and dreams about football, canoeing, cycling, walking, fencing, etc. We congratulate and encourage the young people who prefer physical exercise to the boring booths in cafés and taverns. Sports societies are sprouting up like mushrooms."²⁹

²⁸ Journal de Salonique, 8.05.1905, 1.

²⁹ Journal de Salonique, 21.08.1905, 1.

One can only imagine the dismay of the older Salonicans – for whom the only notion of sports was a fight between two strongmen smeared in oil – at the sports frenzy that their sons and grandsons latched on to after the first football match in the city.

Sports clubs, most of them Jewish, began appearing left, right, and centre. The *Association d'Anciens Élèves* (A.A.E.) established a sports section, including a football team; another new club in town was the *Stade de Salonique*;³⁰ August, 1905 saw the rise of the next one, the *Union Amicale*, located on the quay, near *Café Sion*.³¹ In early September, a score of disgruntled members of the *Union Sportive* formed the *Audax*, with members of some importance in international circles.³² By the end of the year, the sports associations *Turnverein* and *Progrès Sportif* were the next to expand with football teams.³³ The success of the *Omilos Philomousson* inspired the Greek youth in the city. Many Greek neighbourhoods had their own small teams, with football starting to be introduced into school curricula, most notably at the Noukas Lyceum.³⁴ The other communities in Salonica were indifferent to the pursuits of the Jews and the Greeks. The Muslims, for obvious reasons; the Slavs, grouped around the Bulgarian men's high school "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" and the Serbian high school "House of Science", although possessing excellent gymnastic societies, showed no affinity for the new "élite" sports, football included.³⁵

On 30th September, the *Union Sportive* opened its new (rented) football ground at Besh-Chinar with a friendly match between the first and the second team.³⁶ The Society eventually managed to acquire its own football ground near the Papafio Orphanage, a donation of the prominent Jewish Naar family.³⁷ The city was breathing football.

On 19th June, 1905, the *Union Sportive* and the *Omilos Philomousson* played the return leg of their fixture. "It was a wonderful match of courage, agility and endurance... played with typical southern passion from start to finish," a pleased 'Jack' reports.³⁸ "The international team of the *Union*, more

³⁰ Journal de Salonique, 28.08.1905, 1.

³¹ Journal de Salonique, 21.08.1905, 1.

³² Χριστοδούλου 1927, 19, f. 1; Journal de Salonique, 7.09.1905, 1.

³³ Journal de Salonique, 8.01.1906, 1; 5.02.1906, 1.

³⁴ Χριστοδούλου 1927, 20.

³⁵ Начев 2019; Константинова 2017, 137; Новаков 2017.

³⁶ Journal de Salonique, 28.09.1905, 1.

³⁷ Χριστοδούλου 1927, 19, f. 1.

³⁸ Journal de Salonique, 22.06.1905, 1.

experienced, better trained and well acquainted with its opponents” managed to escape defeat, but once again failed to score. “As the match ended, the opponents warmly praised each other and went, all together, to the premises of the *Union Sportive*, where several speeches were given, marked by a most friendly fraternity. *Le Sport n'a pas de patrie!*”³⁹

By the end of 1905 and the beginning of 1906, the Salonicans had the opportunity to attend more football matches. In December, the *Audax* beat the Sports Section of the A.A.E. 4-1 on the pitch of the old Hippodrome.⁴⁰ The second leg was played on the 30th; the *Audax* won once again, this time 4-2 – a win that would have been even more decisive but for the fact the *Audax* played the first half with only eight outfield players.⁴¹

January 1906 saw three more exhibition matches, as the *Union Sportive* marked a narrow 1-0 win against the Sports Section of the A.A.E.,⁴² the *Audax* crushed the inexperienced *Turnverein* 5-0, and finally, the *Union Sportive* won 2-0 against the *Union Amicale*. At the last two matches, though, “the referees seemed to have forgotten their glasses, which gave rise to certain comments in the sports circles.”⁴³

All this was merely the groundwork for the biggest event in the sporting history of Salonica at the time.

The Football Championship of 1906

Lack of discipline, blaming “blind referees”, pitch invasions and rule bending are a perennial feature of Balkan football. The Salonica Football Championship of 1906 would break no stereotypes of Balkan football and its fans; on the contrary, it would offer perfect proof that its zealous manifestations stem from a century-long tradition. On 6th January, 1906, delegates of six local clubs (*Union Sportive*; *Audax*; *Turnverein*; *Association des Anciens Élèves*; *Progrès Sportif*; and *Union Amicale*) met at the offices of the *Audax* with the intention of setting the rules for the first Football Championship of Salonica.⁴⁴ It was agreed that the matches would be played on the ground of the *Union Sportive* at Besh-Chinar. The winner would receive a Cup and a cash prize, offered by an anonymous member of the *Audax*. Tickets for all matches

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Journal de Salonique, 21.12.1905, 2.

⁴¹ Journal de Salonique, 1.01.1906, 1.

⁴² Journal de Salonique, 15.01.1906, 1.

⁴³ Journal de Salonique, 25.01.1906, 1.

⁴⁴ Journal de Salonique, 4.01.1906, 1; 8.01.1906, 1.

were made available, as well as a “season ticket”, valid for all the successive matches among the six teams. The opening match between the Sports Section of the *Association des Anciens Élèves* and the *Turnverein* was scheduled for the first Saturday in February, with subsequent matches being played every following Saturday.⁴⁵ It appears that Saturday was becoming the designated day for sports, breaking some religious barriers in the process. As port and commercial activity in late Ottoman Salonica came to a near standstill on the Shabbat – the majority of the workers and traders being Jewish – Saturday was embraced as the day for leisure and recreation, and, of course, for playing football – with the majority of the players being, once again, Jewish.⁴⁶

The *Omilos Philomousson* and the *Stade de Salonique* declined the invitation, making a mess of the entire schedule. Instead of having convenient quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals with eight teams in the competition, the organizers were forced to improvise. Finally, it was decided that the *A.A.E.* and the *Turnverein* would play first, followed by the *Progrès Sportif* and the *Union Amicale*; the winners would meet in the quarterfinals. Whoever won this match would then advance to the semis and face the *Union Sportive*, with the winner of this match advancing to the final, where it would clash with the *Audax*. Alas, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

On 3rd February, “the vast pitch of the *Union Sportive* at Besh-Chinar, flattened and levelled with the greatest care, offered a picturesque view. A thousand spectators crowded around the sidelines, with the teams of the *A.A.E.* and the *Turnverein* lining up in battle order at half past two precisely. The *Verein* wore red shirts and black-striped caps; the *A.A.E.* wore white shirts belted in red, with three-coloured caps. The referee, Mr. Cauchi – a model referee, dedicated and very resilient – gave the signal for the start of the battle and of the Championship.”⁴⁷

The match ended in a comfortable 3-0 win by the Sports Section of the *A.A.E.*, who spiced up play with a number of lucid moves, met with enthusiastic cheers by the crowd. Still, the star of the match was *Turnverein* defender, Mr. Tait, whom the “Spectator”, an anonymous Salonican reporter, describes with a string of superlatives:

“The *Verein* had a formidable defender in Mr. Tait, the most vigorous and skilled footballer in the city... an unrivalled defender... a prodigious footballer with no equal in any sports society in Salonica. No ball

⁴⁵ Journal de Salonique, 8.01.1906, 1; 29.01.1906, 1.

⁴⁶ Deccarett 2013, 110, 130-131.

⁴⁷ Journal de Salonique, 5.02.1906, 1.

that approaches him can slip past; he possesses an array of skilful moves; he has a thorough understanding of the strategy and technique of the game. A team with half a dozen players of Mr. Tait's stature would be invincible throughout the East, putting up a good fight even against the strong German or Swiss teams. Mr. Tait is heavy, fixed, riveted to the ground; no blow can move him."⁴⁸

However, the reporters were quick to single out the deficiencies. "Both teams lacked a bit of discipline," the 'Spectator' concludes. "Football requires a great spirit of selflessness. This sport is a sworn enemy of individual prowess, and, if one wishes for unity in the team, he must sacrifice his personal glory and pass the ball to his better positioned teammates."⁴⁹ The crowd was also hit by criticism; before the next match, they were advised "not to disturb the young sportsmen with cries of disapproval".⁵⁰

The advice fell on deaf ears. During the second match of the Championship, between the *Progrès Sportif* and the *Union Amicale*, the crowd kept invading the pitch and pestering the referee and the players; the incensed 'Spectator' demands that the organising committee install a wire hedge around the pitch.⁵¹ The match itself was reported to be "a bore"; the deplorable condition of the pitch that had to withstand a week's worth of rain prevented both teams from scoring within regular time. The referee and the team captains agreed to extend the game by half an hour, which proved to be a waste of time. The match was stopped to the cheers of an audience of barely two hundred, with a rematch scheduled for the following Saturday. Journalists spoke of the old problem: discipline was lacking – or was, at least, very deficient – on both sides.⁵² The rematch on 17th February was decided by a highly contested *Union Amicale* goal: a moment before the goal was scored, one of the players committed a foul in plain sight of the crowd, which went unnoticed by the referee. The Interclub Committee decided to stick to the rule that decisions made by the referee are binding, so there was no right to appeal.⁵³

The winners of the first two matches played the third match of the Championship on 24th March. The *Union Amicale* may have made it to the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Journal de Salonique, 8.02.1906, 1.

⁵¹ Journal de Salonique, 12.02.1906, 1.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Journal de Salonique, 19.02.1906, 1; 22.02.1906, 1.

quarterfinals by sheer luck, but once there, they grabbed a well-deserved 2-1 win. A young player by the name of Torrès displayed impressive shooting skill, with the reporters quick to single him out as one of the best players in the city.⁵⁴

The semifinal clash between the *Union Sportive* and the *Union Amicale* was surely one of the most interesting matches ever to be played in Salonica. In front of a crowd of over a thousand people standing all around the field – including football experts such as the consul and vice-consul of England – the *Union Sportive*, though a clear favourite, struggled against the inexperienced team of the *Union Amicale*. With both teams showing enviable discipline and coordination, it was only late in the game that the U.S. managed to break the opposition and earn their place in the final. Journalists were impressed by several players – “the incredible shooter Torrès and the goalkeeper Duegnas, a match for the best keepers in Europe, both from the *Union Amicale*; as well as the highly skilled Nehama and the top sprinter Sotiriadis from the *Union Sportive*.”⁵⁵

Surprisingly, the grand finale on 10th March did not yield the Champion. The game between the *Audax* and the *Union Sportive* ended in a draw, but there was no chance of extra time, as “a mere three minutes after the end of the second half a violent hurricane broke out and clouds of dust blinded the players.” Still, the crowd was able to witness a unique footballing feat: an own goal. A player of the *Audax* kicked the ball into his own net, “amidst wild applause and enthusiastic cheers from the crowd.”⁵⁶

The rematch, originally scheduled on 17th March, had to be rescheduled for the 31st, as Mr. Tait, who had joined the *Union Sportive* in the meantime, felt unwell. Of course, the final was covered by the reporter of the *Journal de Salonique*:

“The football Championship, which has already been going on for more than two months, came to its end on Saturday – but not in the way that the loyal fans of this sport would have wished. The weather was miserable. Rain was pouring. The pitch was soaked and slippery. The most elementary wisdom would have prevented the players from putting on their kits; however, they were tired of waiting and wanted to get it over with. Moreover, posters had been up all week, inviting the public to this final match, and despite the bad weather, spectators

⁵⁴ Journal de Salonique, 1.03.1906, 2.

⁵⁵ Journal de Salonique, 5.03.1906, 1.

⁵⁶ Journal de Salonique, 12.03.1906, 1.

had flocked in large numbers. So, it was in pouring rain that the two teams began their match. The wind blew the ball away from where the shooters were aiming. The play was not lacking in spirit, however, as both sides are excellent. The first half was not yet over when the referee – advised by many spectators, who were alarmed to see the youngsters transform into a colony of amphibians – blew his whistle to end the game. His wise decision, however, was not appreciated by the captains, who wanted to continue the game. So, play resumed despite the protests of many spectators and several team members. The ball repeatedly threatened the goal of the *Union Sportive*, but to no avail. Three minutes before the end, an incident caused a spiteful dispute. The *Audax* insisted that they were due a penalty kick after the *Union* goalkeeper had allegedly committed a foul. The referee disagreed, but at the pressing of some, and the appeasing response of the others, he agreed to blow the whistle in order to put an end to the dispute. Mr. Modiano of the *Audax* kicked the ball with force and sent it into the opponent's net, guarded on this occasion by Mr. Tait himself. The spectators cheered for the *Audax*, whose players, in turn, cried 'Hurrah for the *Union Sportive*!' For those in the know, Saturday's match was a draw. The referee caved in to pressure by giving a penalty kick, which was contrary to the rules of the game and, therefore, they add, completely unacceptable. We leave it to the Interclub committee to decide the matter."⁵⁷

The members of the Interclub committee for the 1906 Football Championship did indeed meet on 15th April, proclaiming the final null and void, which meant that the Championship would resume. Yet, since the delegates of the *Union Sportive* formally declared that their team was unavailable for a rematch, the *Audax* were proclaimed Champions and won the precious Cup.⁵⁸

The 1906 Intercalated Olympic Games

Winning a medal at the Olympics is always a big deal – even if it is an unofficial bronze medal from the Intercalated Games, won by finishing third out of four, with the fourth team withdrawing from the competition after having beaten you 5-0.

⁵⁷ Journal de Salonique, 2.04.1906, 1.

⁵⁸ Journal de Salonique, 19.04.1906, 1.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the first Olympic Games, intermediate, or Intercalated Olympic Games were held in Athens in April, 1906. The Ottoman Empire was invited to send in athletes who would represent it at the Games. After considering the matter, the Ottoman Council of Ministers rejected the invitation – noting, however, that while it would be inappropriate for the Empire to take part in the Games, its athletes were free to participate as representatives of their respective cities.⁵⁹

Among those who accepted the invitation were the members of *Omilos Philomousson*, who sent a group of 20 athletes to Athens after thorough preparations overseen by the Greek Consul General in Salonica, Lambros Koromilas.⁶⁰ The football team representing Salonica at the Games consisted of eight players from the *Omilos Philomousson*, two players from the *Union Sportive*, and one player from the *Audax*.⁶¹ Almost all the members of the football team were Salonica Greeks; judging by the surnames, one or two may have been Aromanian, while one of them, John Abbot, although recorded in the official annals as an Englishman, was in fact a born and bred Salonican, whose family moved to the city in the late 18th or the early 19th century.⁶²

Newspapers in the Greek Kingdom closely followed the journey of the athletes,⁶³ “all of them children of the best Macedonian families”;⁶⁴ the patriotic fervour caused by the arrival of the “enslaved Macedonians” reached its peak at the port of Piraeus, followed by scenes at the Athens train station, where hundreds of locals greeted the Salonican athletes with cries: “Long live Macedonia”, “Long live our Macedonia”, and “Long live Greek Macedonia”.⁶⁵ Apparently, politics had found their way into sport; the participation of athletes from Salonica at the Games was used to encourage Greek patriotism and foster Greek interests in Macedonia, simultaneously fought for throughout the land by Greek armed detachments. That the trip of the Salonican athletes to Athens was neither naive, nor entirely in the spirit of Olympism was soon noticed by the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul, who advised their representatives in Salonica and Bitola to be very scrupulous in issuing travel papers, as the scores of Greeks who had been leaving Macedonia under

⁵⁹ Çelik, Bulgu 2010, 144; As 2016, 19; Şinoforoğlu 2020, 32.

⁶⁰ Σκριπ 6.04.1906, 3; Χριστοδούλου 1927, 21; Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 188.

⁶¹ Journal de Salonique 19.04.1906, 1.

⁶² On the rise of the Abbot family – Greek by religion, British by nationality – see: Mazower 2005, 147.

⁶³ Αθήναι 6.04.1906, 3; Σκριπ 6.04.1906, 3; Αθήναι 7.04.1906, 2.

⁶⁴ Εμπρός 7.04.1906, 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

the pretext of going to watch the Games in Athens had, in fact, been infiltrated by hostile elements. This primarily referred to the members of the Greek-Macedonian Committee, who travelled to Athens to meet their superiors and, allegedly, forge conspiracies against the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁶

At the Games, the Salonica team was joined by the team of the Copenhagen Football Association, which was representing Denmark; the team of *Ethnikos Syllogos*, joined by one player from the *Panellinios*, representing Athens; and finally, the team of Ottoman Smyrna, consisting of the sons of English, French, and Armenian merchants from the port city.⁶⁷



The football team of Salonica at the Intercalated Olympic Games in 1906

The first match of the tournament – a clash between Athens and Salonica – took place on the morning of 23rd April, 1906 at the Neo Faliro Velodrome. Judging by the scant information offered by the indifferent Athenian reporters, the match was played “in front of a very small, mostly foreign crowd... the battle was very intense from beginning to end... the Athenians were better prepared... the Greek team won by scoring five goals against Salonica, who failed to score altogether.”⁶⁸ Yet, one man thoroughly enjoyed the match despite cheering for the losing team. The correspondent of the *Journal de Salonique*, signed with the initial ‘M’, sent a report to the office in Salonica,

⁶⁶ As 2016, 20.

⁶⁷ Καίροί 8.04.1906, 2; <http://www.rsssf.com/tableso/ol1906f.html> (visited on 4 May 2021).

⁶⁸ Ακρόπολη 11.04.1906, 2; Εμπρός 11.04.1906, 2.

underlining de Coubertin's motto that the important thing at the Olympic Games is not winning, but participating:

"The *Omilos* football team fought a truly exemplary team of players. I saw this team at work in Salonica; at the New Faliro Velodrome, they outdid themselves. They were up against a team that was much more organised and well-trained, yet they fought with dignity. Those in the know expected dozens of goals; but their predictions were not entirely correct. Despite the determination, the team from Athens managed to score only five times. This is an honourable defeat for our team, considering the strong opponent they were facing – a defeat that borders on success. We are witnessing a blossoming of sports in Salonica. Let them develop. We will do better at the next Games."⁶⁹

Particularly striking in this short report is the term "our team", which the correspondent – most certainly a Salonican Jew⁷⁰ – uses to describe the biggest rival of Salonica's Jewish clubs. In Salonica, the rivalry among Greek, Jewish, and international clubs echoed the religious and ethnic differences among Greeks, Jews, and Western Europeans; once abroad, differences were put aside and local patriotism prevailed. Even the Turkish newspapers in Salonica – admittedly, with less passion than our friend 'M' – closely followed football events in Athens and kept their readership up-to-date with the results of the Salonican team.⁷¹

The second match of the tournament started at five p.m., the same day; the Danish team beat Smyrna 5-1 and secured a place in the final, where they would meet the hosts.⁷² The final game, played on 24th April was a one-sided affair that lasted only 45 minutes. With the Danes securing a comfortable 9-0 lead before halftime, Athens pulled out of the game and, after refusing to play Salonica and Smyrna for second, were promptly thrown out of the competition.⁷³ Thus, instead of playing for third, on the morning of 25th April, Salonica and Smyrna met to determine the runner-up.⁷⁴ Just like the match before, Salonica wore black, represented by the same starting 11.⁷⁵ The result was perfectly appropriate to the team's colours; Smyrna won 12-0.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Journal de Salonique 30.04.1906, 1.

⁷⁰ Possibly Moise Tiano, who attended the Games as a representative of the A.A.E.

⁷¹ E.g. the "Asir", see: As 2016, 22-23, f. 77.

⁷² Ακρόπολης 11.04.1906, 2.

⁷³ <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/ol1906f.html> (visited on 4 May 2021).

⁷⁴ Νέον άστν, 14.04.1906, 2.

⁷⁵ G. Vaporis (goalkeeper); N. Pindos, A. Tegos (defenders); N. Pentzikis, I. Kyrou, G. Sotiriadis (midfielders); V. Sarkadis, A. Michitsopoulos [captain], A. Karagkonidis, I. Saridakis, J.

The last hurrah

After organising a successful local football championship and participating at the Games in Athens, few would have guessed that Salonican football would fold without warning; yet it did precisely that. As usual, the élite tasted the novelty, enjoyed it for some time and got bored of it soon enough, while the working class had no leisure time to fill the void. From mid-1906 to mid-1908, the *Journal de Salonique* abounded with information about events in the city, but there is no mention of a football match. In March 1908, a reporter signed as ‘Méphisto’ explains what had happened:

“Two years ago we saw a sports frenzy, or rather a football frenzy; the elder youths practised with ardour, the younger ones trained daily, we even had a ‘Sports Crowd’ to admire! In less than five weeks, clubs sprouted and grew like tropical plants. The expansion was fast and thriving, but alas, the fall was even quicker and more pitiful! In less than a year, the clubs wilted and went into liquidation, with their members back in the cafés. But what was the reason for this downfall, this collapse? The fact that the sudden rise of football here was untimely, unnatural and forced. The young people who played football did not do so out of conviction or love, but rather out of snobbery, in order to show off their legs in public and to see their names printed in newspapers. This kind of success, however, can only be ephemeral. For a lasting impact, one has to work hard, and play not for the love of novelty, but with heart. The footballers at that time longed for applause, but as soon as they received a few blows, as soon as they went rolling on the grass, they found the game very unpleasant and left everything behind. They invested time and effort into setting up lovely homes, pool halls, well-stocked buffets, dances, in short, they engaged in everything, but sports!”⁷⁷

‘Méphisto’ has in mind the Jewish and international football teams in Salonica, some of which, like the *Audax*, folded around 1907-8; but a similar

Abbot (forwards). See: Εμπρός 7.04.1906, 2; Καιροί 8.04.1906, 2; <http://www.rsssf.com/tableso/ol1906f.html> (visited on 4 May 2021).

⁷⁶ Εμπρός 11.04.1906, 2; Christodoulou, who writes a couple of decades after the events, has Athens winning the first match by 4-0, and Smyrna beating Salonica 9-0 for second place. Furthermore, he lists a somewhat different team, including certain G. Samaras, A. Gavrilidis, S. Hrysidis and N. Liontas (Χριστοδούλου 1927, 21). Time and memory probably did their thing, as both the official reports of the Olympic Committee and the match reports by the correspondents give matching details differing from Christodoulou’s account.

⁷⁷ Journal de Salonique, 23.03.1908, 3.

fate befell the *Omilos* football team.⁷⁸ As a result of the economic crisis of 1906–1908, which hit Salonica with a wave of suspensions of payments and large capital losses in the Istanbul Stock Exchange, the *Omilos Philomousson* suffered significant financial losses that led to “terrible dissent between the new and the old members” and the decision by the majority of the members of the Association to dissolve the sports section. The football team stopped holding training sessions; by late 1907 or early 1908, most of the disgruntled athletes had left the Society.⁷⁹

The purpose of Méphisto’s criticism was not only to point out the dire state of football in Salonica, but also to spark its return. It worked. In late April 1908, the *Journal de Salonique* announced a match between the first team of the *Union Sportive* and the sports section of the *A.A.E.* The city was lined with posters announcing the spectacle.⁸⁰ Excited journalists pointed out that this match would be unlike any other before: “Ladies will be able to attend the match! ... The game will take place on the pitch behind the Hirsch hospital; a buffet will be set up on the ground, where comfortable seats have been arranged so that people can watch a beautiful sporting event while being shielded from the sun.” The match was an opportunity to make some money, too. “Two foreign officers have each placed a bet for one of the two rival teams.” The stake was 2000 francs.⁸¹

Finally, on Saturday, 9th May, “the festival of sport” began in front of an impressive crowd. Among the spectators were Adil bey, the President of the City; Hon. Vitalis efendi Stroumza, representing H.E. the Mufetich Pasha, who was also present at the event; Mr. Lamb, Consul General of Great Britain; Mr. Jacob Modiano, the Honorary President of the *A.A.E.*; as well as Garroni Bey, President of the *Union Sportive*. Kemal bey had been tasked with maintaining order throughout the match, while Mr. Muloc, vice-consul of Great Britain, had been picked to arbitrate.⁸² The match ended with a 3-2 win of the *Union Sportive* and a wonderful report by ‘Méphisto’, one that made everyone who missed the match regret it:

“The play itself was thrilling... After 20 minutes of playing hard, Molho scores a goal for the *Section*. The crowd applauds wildly. The surprised *Union* players charge forward, but the midfielders and the defen-

⁷⁸ Χριστοδούλου 1927, 19, f. 1.

⁷⁹ Κωνσταντινίδης 2015, 189.

⁸⁰ *Journal de Salonique*, 30.04.1908, 1.

⁸¹ *Journal de Salonique*, 7.05.1908, 1; 11.05.1908, 1.

⁸² *Journal de Salonique*, 11.05.1908, 1.

ders of the *Section* form a barrier. Torrès and Moss stop everything. The red and blacks are attacking, still attacking, they are close to the goal... Nahmias clears with a masterful kick. A new round of applause from the crowd. In turn, the players of the *Section* make a run: Saridakis shoots, Tait saves; Salmona, an excellent goalkeeper, outdoes himself. The half-time whistle is blown shortly afterwards. The captivated crowd can barely wait for play to resume. Now the *Section* has the wind against it. The *Union* forwards are tearing apart the black-and-whites with good passes. The crowd applauds the energetic and fair play of Sotiriadis. The *Union* scores a goal, Saporta soon adds a second. The public can hardly contain itself, the ladies and girls applaud wildly with their hands clad in pretty gloves! A few moments later, Sotiriadis adds a third goal to the *Union's* credit. The *Section* rallies, the captain who has now taken the place of forward works wonders, Isaac does marvels and Saridakis performs miracles! The fight becomes passionate; the ball is in front of Saridakis, he shoots and there is a second goal for the *Section*. The referee blows his whistle, there are shouts: hip! hip! hurrah!"⁸³

A rematch for Saturday, 16th May, was announced immediately. This match, refereed by one Mr. Gregoriadis, a gymnastic teacher at the Noukas Lyceum, ended in another victory for the *Union Sportive*, who won 2-1;⁸⁴ however, at a time when competition rules were not entirely clear, and football was played just for fun, it was decided to tally up the results of the first two matches (5-3 for the *Union Sportive*) and play a third match that would give the overall winner. The final leg of the series was played on 24th May, 1908. The *A.A.E.* won 1-0 – not enough for an overall victory. The reporter of the *Journal de Salonique* singled out the best players from both teams,⁸⁵ announcing that “the series has only just began, as the season is already quite advanced.”⁸⁶ The Young Turks, however, had different plans.

July 1908 signalled the beginning of the Young Turk Revolution, with Salonica becoming the seat of the Central Committee of the *İttihad ve Terak-*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Journal de Salonique*, 18.05.1908, 1.

⁸⁵ “Best among the *Union* players were Tait, Sotiriadis, Nehama, Covo, and Botton, whose play was skilful and very well combined, but they shot rather sloppily. The [Sports] *Section* [of the *A.A.E.*] had the perfect goalkeeper in Nahmias; an ideal back in Perez; Saridakis performed great dribbles. Tiano played with resolute determination, while Molho was superbly flexible and agile.”

⁸⁶ *Journal de Salonique*, 25.05.1908, 1.

ki Cemiyeti. Political parties in the city were sprouting faster than sports clubs had been three years earlier. The mood in Salonica was all politics, with no time and no desire for sports. The *Union Sportive* folded.⁸⁷ In November 1908, former members of the sports section of the *Omilos Philomousson* established a new sports club – the *Macedonian Gymnastics Society* (*Makedonikos Gymnastikos Syllogos*), which in 1910, in the spirit of Ottomanism, changed its name to *Ottoman Greek Gymnastics Association of Salonica Iraklis 1910*.⁸⁸ The members of the Association were doing their best to bring football back to the city; on two occasions, in September 1909 and May 1910, matches were announced, but were never played.⁸⁹ The third time is the charm, however, so in June 1910 the players of the sports section of the *A.A.E.* accepted a two-match challenge against the *Macedonian Gymnastics Society*. Again, in the spirit of Ottomanism – but also with a dose of concern over ethnic and religious tensions – ‘J’, a reporter of the *Journal de Salonique*, invites the public to attend Saturday’s spectacle: “And let us not forget, above all – sport, like art, has no fatherland. We will wholeheartedly applaud those who show the most commitment and those who defend themselves with spirit. See you on Saturday!”⁹⁰

The first match was played on 11th June, 1910; it was refereed by Mr. Price – which was somewhat surprising, as there had been talk of setting up an entire jury instead of a referee.⁹¹ Apparently, football fans protested against this play on the rules, so the organisers had to give in. The competition proved to be a welcome distraction from the headaches of the day and the troubles that were yet to come. The first match was attended by a crowd of a thousand people. As usual for Salonican football, both teams opted for a 2-3-5 formation. The match ended with a narrow 1-0 win by the *Macedonian Gymnastics Society*;⁹² the second match, though, saw the Greek team completely

⁸⁷ Χριστοδούλου 1927, 19, f. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 26, 29.

⁸⁹ *Journal de Salonique*, 28.09.1909, 2; 3.05.1910, 2.

⁹⁰ *Journal de Salonique*, 9.06.1910, 2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Journal de Salonique*, 12.06.1910, 2. For the first time in the *Journal de Salonique* the match report includes the matchday lineups of both teams. The team of the *A.A.E.* was made up of Jews only, while the squad of the *Macedonian Gymnastics Society*, although dominated by Greeks, included several Salonican Jews. *Macedonian Gymnastics Society*: Racca (goalkeeper); Dandria, Bonis (defenders); Cosmopoulous, Kyrou, Papadimitriou (midfielders); Modiano, Kastritzis, Saridakis, Teto [captain], Sotiriadis (forwards). *A.A.E.*: Hassid (goalkeeper); Perez, Gormezano (defenders); Carasso, Nazim, Nahmias (midfielders); Botton, Saltiel, Naar [captain], Sabetaï, Florentin (forwards).

dominate and demolish their opponent by 7-0. The player of the match award went to the excellent Saridakis, “most certainly the best footballer in Salonica.”⁹³ This was football’s last hurrah in Ottoman Salonica.⁹⁴

FOOTBALL IN OTHER TOWNS OF OTTOMAN MACEDONIA

Football in Ottoman Bitola (Monastir)

Costa Dogu (1897–1977) was a fascinating character. He spent his life alone in his small, crammed home at the entrance of Bitola’s Old Bazaar, in the company of old newspapers, stamps, banknotes, photographs, books, household items, watches, letters and stamps which testified to the Ottoman and Yugoslav past of his city. Sadly, after his death, his collection was looted and scattered in many directions; a part of it was taken over by museums and archives in Belgrade, Zagreb, Bitola, and Skopje, while a sizeable chunk ended up in private collections in Greece and Serbia.

Football was one of Dogu’s great passions. Having attended the first football matches in Bitola as a young boy, he went on to become one of the founders of the football club in the city. He wrote down his memories of the early days of football in Bitola in an unpublished brochure, “Football in Bitola, 1896–1920”; fortunately, the brochure survived the looting of his wealth and is kept in the archives in Bitola.⁹⁵ This modest brochure remains the main source for the emergence of football in the city.

At the turn of the 20th century, Bitola was the administrative centre of the Monastir vilayet and the second largest city in Ottoman Macedonia. Similar to Salonica, almost every Great Power and Balkan state maintained a diplomatic mission in the city. The diverse population consisted of Turks, Macedonian Slavs, Aromanians, Albanians, Jews, and Roma. Unlike Salonica, Bitola did not have a “Frankish neighborhood”, nor western traders who would popularise the game. The Muslim ruling class did not even entertain the thought of accepting the western novelty; the Jews in the city mainly lived in po-

⁹³ Journal de Salonique, 26.06.1910, 2.

⁹⁴ The Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 and the Balkan Wars left no room for sports. Of course, this does not mean that Salonica saw no football at all from 1910 to 1912, but even if matches were played, they were recreational and out of the sight of the Ottoman authorities. Such was the match that took place at the end of November 1911 between two Greek teams, the Noukas Lyceum and a combined team of the students of the Hellenic Gymnasium and members of Iraklis. The Lyceum won the game 1-0. (Μακεδονία, 30.11.1911, 3).

⁹⁵ ДАРСМ - одделение Битола, ф. Коста Догу, „Битолски фудбал од 1896-1920“ (hereafter: ф. Коста Догу).

verty, while the Slavic majority never developed a merchant élite. The city *bourgeoisie* consisted of Romance-speaking Aromanians, themselves divided into two fractions. The first fraction encompassed the poorer strata of the Aromanian population, attending Romanian schools; the second fraction attended and financed Greek schools in Bitola, had Greek sentiments and dominated the Christian élite in the city.⁹⁶ These “Greco-Vlachs” were the first to play football in Bitola.

Bitola saw its first football ball arrive in 1891.⁹⁷ In 1896, a “ball game” resembling football was introduced to upper-year gymnastics classes at the Greek high school in the city. This game was played with goals 4–5 meters wide; instead of upright posts, the students used to place simple stones and pile up their overcoats on them. The ball was usually made of socks and old towels. The best athlete – the one who showed the greatest agility, guile, and resilience – was appointed goalkeeper. The game resembled football, but according to Dogu’s description, it was still very different to the football played in the UK:

“In the game [everyone played for himself] and made moves he considered most beneficial for the team and for himself. Things were like this because no one had the opportunity to see how the sport was really played, nor was there anyone with adequate football skills that could pass on his insight to others. Everyone wanted to try their luck. The ones who knew what they were doing were privileged and respected by their peers; the others, after the first attempts, gave up the game on their own.”⁹⁸

Football, as we know it, came to Bitola with the arrival of Ar. Ioannides, a professor of gymnastics and a man in love with football, who taught his students at the Greek high school the rules of the game as it was played in England.⁹⁹ Ioannides stayed in Bitola only for a year, and there is no mention of a football match during his time there. A photograph from 1904, however, confirms that there was indeed a football team in Bitola, the one that Koltsidas calls the *Ellinikos podosfairikos syllogos* (Greek football club),¹⁰⁰ with Dogu supplying the names of the club’s best players: Unciu Tzilli, Tzalli, and Dzima.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Lory 2009, *passim*; Γούναρης 2000, *passim*.

⁹⁷ Ф. Коста Догу; Миновски 1969, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Koltsidas 2008, 171.

¹⁰¹ Ф. Коста Догу.



The 1904 Bitola football team

Football – or something similar to football – may have been played in Bitola even before the Young Turk Revolution, but the earliest mention of a match between two teams in the city refers to the post-revolutionary period. The return of educated Turks from the West after July 1908 opened the way for football in the Ottoman military schools and the corps of the Third Army in Bitola. In May 1911 it was announced that Sultan Mehmed V Reşâd would visit the city. For the occasion, the British Vice-Consul, A. B. Geary, ordered a ball from London, while the Serbian Consul, Lj. M. Mihailović, prepared a booklet with the rules of the game, which was promptly translated into Turkish and distributed to the soldiers of the Turkish garrison in the city. At the end of May, shortly before the Sultan's visit, a team of soldiers from the Turkish garrison played a team consisting of members of the city's diplomatic corps. Nothing more is recorded about this match, except that it ended with a 2-0 win for "the Consuls".¹⁰² Somewhat surprised by the mention of Turkish soldiers playing football against a team of foreign consuls in Bitola, Bernard Lory writes: "Far from being anecdotal, this information reveals the beginnings of a novel re-structuring of the community. The two foreign bodies in the city – the consuls and the military personnel – which simultaneously represented the two poles of the modernisation of the city, met on a ground that was symbolically new in order to 'do something together according to international norms' (in other words: chase a ball)."¹⁰³

¹⁰² Миновски 1969, 9-10.

¹⁰³ Lory 2009, 595.

In the autumn of the same year, the citizens of Bitola had the opportunity to attend another game – a match between a group of soldiers from the Bitola garrison and a selection of the Military Academy. The game was played on a properly marked football field near the red military barracks in the city, with goals consisting of two uprights and no crossbar. The players were clad in football shirts.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, neither Dogu, nor others who recorded this event remembered the final result.

By this time, football had finally started to attract Macedonian Turks as well. In late 1911 and early 1912, perhaps responding to the demands of the local Turkish population, a N. Samsana published two articles in the *Yeni Fikir* (*The New Idea*), explaining the history, the rules and the characteristics of the football game to his readers.¹⁰⁵ However, it was already too late for the Turks, who would not rule Macedonia for much longer.

Football in Ottoman Skopje

Skopje was the administrative centre of the Kosovo vilayet. At the end of the 19th century, nine out of ten people in the city were either Muslim or Slavic – as we saw earlier, not the best prerequisites for football to emerge. It is of no surprise, then, that even the best chroniclers of football in Skopje – such as the late Ivko Pangovski – found no mention of football in Skopje before the Young Turk Revolution.¹⁰⁶

Similar to Bitola, the emergence of the sport in Skopje is linked to the return of the Turkish officers from Western Europe, who reportedly organised the first football match in the city on 9th April, 1909.¹⁰⁷ In the match that took place on a makeshift football field behind the Teacher's school near the Islahane city park, a team of cadets from the Military Academy faced a team of soldiers from the Turkish garrison in Skopje. According to reports, it was a surprisingly cold day, so the players had to put on their military overcoats at halftime in order to keep warm and continue playing.¹⁰⁸ There is no mention of the final result.

We have no mention of other football games in Skopje, but the sport was certainly being played until the very end of the Ottoman rule. In the

¹⁰⁴ Миновски 1969, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Erkek 2012, 204.

¹⁰⁶ Панговски 1994, 9.

¹⁰⁷ This date is celebrated by the Football Federation of Macedonia (FFM) as the day of Macedonian football.

¹⁰⁸ Панговски 1994, 10.

spring of 1910, brothers Salvador and Pepi Mustafiya became the first citizens of Skopje to own a ball and regularly play football with their circle of friends in the meadow at the former girls' high school. In 1911, local Turks formed *Üs-küp*, the first football club in Skopje; the following year, on the eve of the Balkan Wars, the *Vardar Sports Club* saw the light of day.¹⁰⁹

Football in Ottoman Naoussa, Veria, and Vodená

Experts would also expect football in the Ottoman cities of Kavala and Serres, which met most of the above criteria for the emergence of the sport. Kavala was a prosperous port town in southeastern Macedonia, with a strong Greek trading élite; Serres was the seat of a *sancak* with several foreign consular offices and a large and financially stable Greek, Jewish, and Aromanian trading class. However, experts would be wrong. In 1906, the Greeks in Kavala formed the *Philippoi Gymnastics Association*, with members competing in gymnastics, athletics and wrestling – but not football. The emergence of football in Serres, as well as in Kavala, was due to the arrival of a large wave of refugees from Asia Minor in the 1920s.¹¹⁰ As for the Macedonian cities with a dominant Slavic-speaking population – such as Prilep, Strumica, Štip, Veles, Ohrid, or Kumanovo – football was either brought in by foreign troops during WWI, or it emerged as a consequence of the rise of the working class in the Interwar period.¹¹¹

The story of football in Ottoman Macedonia would have probably ended at this point, had it not been for this short passage from Allen Upward's "The East End of Europe", published in 1908:

"But the most surprising thing that met me in this small Greek town [Naoussa] away in the Macedonian highlands was an English football. The game came out there fifteen years ago; perhaps it came with the cotton mill. The townspeople showed us, with pride, the goal-posts and the ground on which the game was played."¹¹²

The fact that someone played football in the 1890s, in a small town in southwestern Macedonia, is surprising at first glance. But, Naoussa was no ordinary "Oriental" city: at the time of Upward's visit, around 1908, it had three

¹⁰⁹ Idem.

¹¹⁰ Βουζανίδου 2006, 23.

¹¹¹ Тофоски 1994; Станоевски 2017; Наџаков, Прилепчански 1991, 23-24; Најдовска 2006, 290; Стојкоски-Леџиот 2012; Трајковски, Аврамовски 1986.

¹¹² Upward 1908, 189.

cotton spinning factories and a wool weaving factory.¹¹³ By 1912, this little town controlled between a quarter and a third of the entire mechanised cotton spinning capacity of the Empire and it held much of the Empire's capacity in factory-produced woollen cloth.¹¹⁴ Naoussa was a true industrial town with a proper working class. With this in mind, Lapavitsas may be right in suggesting that football games in Naoussa were an unmistakable sign of the working class.¹¹⁵ However, workers' wages were low, at least three times lower than those in Salonica, while working hours lasted from sunrise to sunset.¹¹⁶ These conditions offered no opportunity for a division between work and leisure, as male factory workers had neither regular time away from work, nor excess money to spend on entertainment. That is why we choose to side with Goutas's explanation – that English engineers were hired to build factories and set up machinery, and that it was them who brought and played football in Naoussa.¹¹⁷

If football was already played in Naoussa, then the city of Veria is another likely candidate for an Ottoman football-playing city. Located 20 kilometers south of Naoussa, Veria had double the population – which, as in Naoussa, mainly consisted of Greeks and Aromanians – as well as a large market, where villagers from nearby villages and merchants from Naoussa sold their produce. The sources confirm that our assumptions are correct. On 30th March, 1904, a sports association by the name of *Theseus' Gymnastic Society of Veria* was founded in the city.¹¹⁸ At a meeting held on 11th April, 1904, the members decided to acquire a ball; shortly afterwards, a man by the name of Aristotelis Zografos was hired to instruct the members of the Society the rules of the game and to train them to play.¹¹⁹ Sadly, the club was short-lived, having been mentioned for the last time around the end of October 1905;¹²⁰ the locals, however, recall that members of the *Theseus* played football at a place called “Elia” in Veria.¹²¹

Naoussa's northern neighbor, the town of Vodena/Edessa is another likely candidate to have hosted a football match in Ottoman times. The popu-

¹¹³ Lapavitsas 2004, 33.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁵ Lapavitsas 2006, 679.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 679-680.

¹¹⁷ Γκούτας 1993, 31.

¹¹⁸ Πυρινός 1975, 3 (Βέροια 3/153, 16.08.1975); Ζάχος 1979, 95.

¹¹⁹ Πυρινός 1975, 3 (Βέροια 3/155, 30.08.1975); Γαλανομάτης 1999.

¹²⁰ Πυρινός 1975, 3 (Βέροια 3/154, 23.08.1975).

¹²¹ Ζάχος 1979, 96.

lation was predominantly Slavic, but preferred the Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Bulgarian Exarchate; there was also a strong Turkish minority. Still, the emergence of football in the city is mainly attributed to the proximity of Naoussa and Salonica. There is no specific mention of a football match played in Vodena; however, a 1909 photograph showing members of the *Elpis* (“*Hope*”) sports association, established a year earlier, confirms the presence of a football team in the city.¹²²



The Vodena football team and other members of the *Elpis* society (1909)

Football may have made a late start in Ottoman Macedonia, but it walked the same route as football in Great Britain and Western Europe did. It started as a sport for the city élite, who quickly got fed up with the novelty and turned to seeking new thrills in other sports, such as tennis and yachting.¹²³ Had it not been for the Balkan Wars and WWI, football would have probably become a real working-class sport as early as the 1910s – as it did during the Interwar period in the former territories of Ottoman Macedonia that became part of Greece, Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In Ottoman Macedonia, football was mainly played in Salonica by

¹²² Εδεσσαϊκή 20.09.1993.

¹²³ Anastassiadou 1997, 145-160.

the sons of the Jewish, Greek, and Western *bourgeoisie*, and in Bitola by the sons of rich Aromanians. After the Young Turk Revolution, it was played by western-educated Turkish officers in Skopje and Bitola, and by certain citizens of Naoussa, Veria and Vodena / Edessa in southwest Macedonia. Future research may show that football was played in other cities – possibly in obscure villages as well, where it would have been brought by a local worker who had plied his trade in England, Austria-Hungary or Germany.¹²⁴

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¹²⁴ Such is the case with the village of Velmevci near Demir Hisar, where the villagers have placed a football ball made of stone on top the village fountain, proudly pointing out that a man by the name of Stojan, a migrant worker in Vienna, brought a ball to the village in 1909 – so football was played in Velmevci before it was played in Bitola. (Димитров 2017, 20).

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