

Kurkpınar Oil Wrestling

Edirne, Turkey

*three days
thousands of wrestlers
tons of olive oil
since 1361*



by Aydemir Ay

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Without Kevin's help editing (and rewriting) my English, this book would not be finished. Whom always encouraged me to consider foreigners' point of view, who we hope will learn about this part of Turkish culture and history.

To my family, my wife Gülce, and my son Arhan.

And finally to all the people who laughed at me for trying to write this book....

Dedicated to my uncle, Yusuf Ay

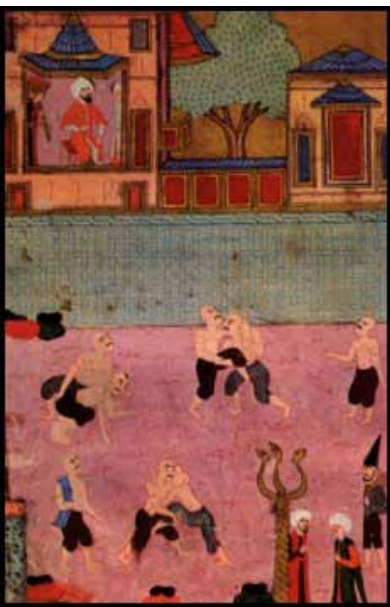
Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling *The World's Oldest Championship*

Unlike any sport you've seen, Edirne's Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Competition and Festival combines Muslim culture, Turkish tradition and summertime spectacle. Held just outside Edirne on the Sarayıçi Peninsula (one-time site of the Ottoman capital's palace), the centuries-old sport can't be missed if you're in Turkey at the end of June. The wrestlers are the biggest and oiliest from around Turkey. Wearing the traditional leather shorts and buckets of olive oil, they compete for the title of Baş Pehlivan, Head Wrestler. A month of festivities, pop concerts, gypsy markets and three days of competition lead up to the final match when the winner becomes a national hero and takes his place in sporting history.



The History of the Kırkpınar

The Kırkpınar dates back to the origins of the Ottoman Empire and today is part of modern Turkey's cultural heritage. Whether legend or based on a true story, the Kırkpınar likely began in 1361, when Süleyman Pasha, son of the second Ottoman sultan, attempted to take Domuzhisar in Thrace from the ruling Byzantines. As there was little else to do on the long trek across Thrace, his 40 soldiers started wrestling. By the time they reached Samona (now in Greece), the 40 wrestlers were narrowed down to only two brothers, Ali and Selim. Well-matched, they wrestled for so long trying to defeat the other that they died of exhaustion on a field in Ahırköy near Edirne. Forty springs appeared on the site of Ali and Selim's graves, a remembrance of the original 40 wrestlers. It was named Kırkpınar (*forty springs* in Turkish), though it is now in Greece.



After the Balkan War and World War I, the site of the modern wrestling was moved to Virantekke near Edirne. Turkish Republic and the setting of the border with Greece, the current site of Sarayıçi was chosen. Ali and Selim wrestled so long that they died of exhaustion. To prevent a repeat of tragic history, matches today are limited to 40 minutes. If there is no pinned-down loser, the two wrestlers continue for 10 more minutes. Judges award points which determine the winner.



Weight Divisions of Kırkpınar Wrestlers

| | |
|---|--|
| Tozkoparan (youth class) | ages 12-15 |
| Deste küçük boy (light welterweight) | 65 kilos |
| Deste orta boy (welterweight) | 75 kilos |
| Deste büyük boy (middleweight) | 80 kilos |
| Küçük orta küçük boy (light heavyweight) | 85 kilos |
| Küçük orta büyük boy (heavyweight) | 90 kilos |
| Büyük Orta Büyük Boy | The winners of Küçük Orta Küçük Boy |
| Baş Altı | The winners of Büyük Orta Büyük Boy |
| Baş pehlivan (heavyweight winner) | |

Inside the Palace:

Sarayıcı hosts the modern Kırkpınar Games. Before the conquest of İstanbul in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, Edirne was the capital of their Empire. It was called Adrianople until 1361 when the Ottomans took it for its important position so close to Europe. As the capital of the expanding Turkish Empire, Edirne was graced with beautiful architecture, including a 2000-room palace at Sarayıcı. Edirne is surrounded by rivers and branches of the Tunca form the peninsula of Sarayıcı, inside the palace in Turkish. Sarayıcı was the location of the Ottoman Imperial Palace when Edirne was the capital of its empire and visitors can see some ruins of the grand palace. Begun in 1450 by the second Ottoman Sultan Murat, the palace was finished by Fatih Sultan Mehmet, who later took Constantinople and turned it into İstanbul. The glorious building was neglected and abandoned in favour of palaces in the empire's new capital. Long used as a center for hunting in the Thracian woods, it also hosted circumcision festivals, vacationing sultans and the signing of peace treaties.

In 1876, the palace was mostly destroyed. Expecting a Russian attack from the Balkans, the governor of Edirne, Cemil Paşa, and Ottoman Commander Müşir Ahmet Eyüp Paşa, loaded up the cellars of the palace with arsenal and weapons. To prevent the Russians from seizing the arms, they blew it up, burning down the palace in the process. Not surprisingly, only parts of the kitchen remain today.

The Kırkpınar stadium is now the largest building on Sarayıcı. The open air stadium hosts the actual wrestling event as well as popular entertainments in the days before the matches. It can seat 25,000 wrestling fans under the Edirne summer sun, so wear a hat. The stadium's wooden seats are numbered, so don't worry about getting there early. English is not widely spoken but say "Kırkpınar" and you'll be pointed in the right direction. You should worry though if you want to spend the night in Edirne during Kırkpınar. You cannot reserve your

hotel room early enough and expect to pay higher than normal prices. Pitched tents are common in front of the Selimiye Mosque and on the Sarayıçi grounds. Toilets are inside and outside the stadium, including one equipped for special needs.



During the Kırkpınar festival, Sarayıçi is transformed into a spectacle of local culture. Joining the thousand wrestlers are several thousand tourists and locals. There are many restaurants and shops for bargain hunters. Picnicking around the stadium is common and you can always be serenaded by a gypsy band. The gypsies have a large settlement in Edirne and will play for a few lira. In the stadium itself are more official festivities including nationally famous pop singers and Turkish folk dancing groups.

The Kırkpınar is also well-known for the variety of food available during the festival. Take advantage of the chance to eat authentic Turkish and local food. Around the stadium are all kinds of restaurants specializing in *gözleme* (a kind of Turkish pancake), *çevirme* (roasted lamb), a local speciality, the ubiquitous Turkish *köfte* (meatball), *döner* (shaved meat cooked upright on a spit), and various grilled meats followed by a shot of Turkish *rakı* or a cup of *Turkish coffee*. A gypsy woman can even read your fortune from the moist coffee grounds.

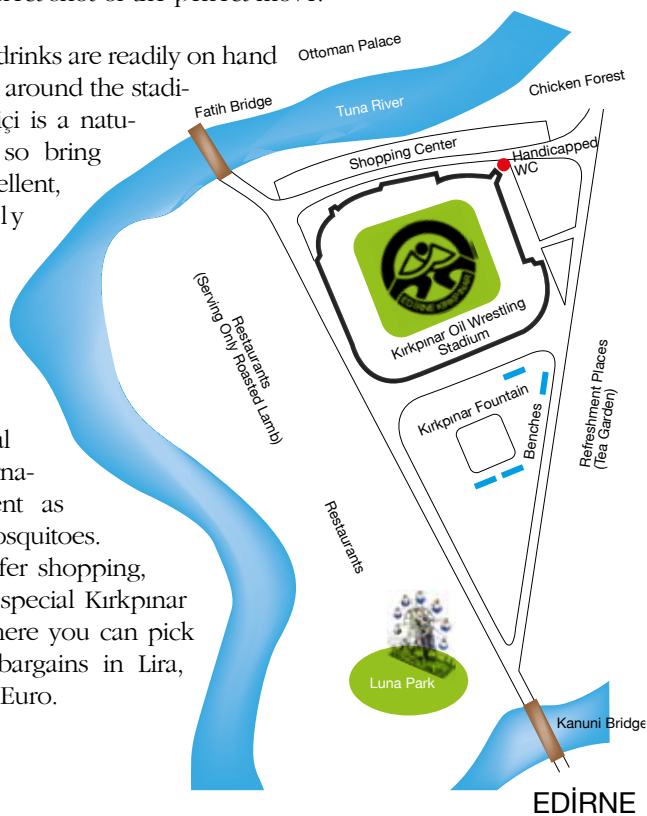
For the more adventurous, try the Ağa Köşkü restaurant, a self-service barbecue restaurant that supplies the meat and the grill but you do the work yourself. Located inside the Chicken Forest, the protective trees offer relief from the sometimes soaring 45 degree (113 F) temperatures.



Getting In

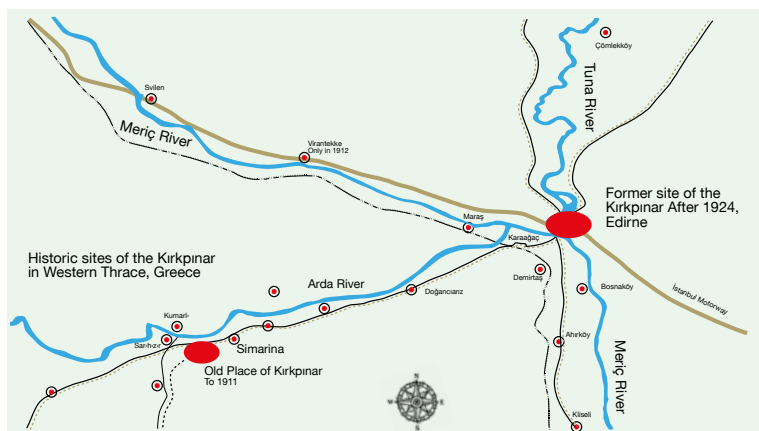
Tickets to the Kırkpınar are sold as three-day block passes allowing Oil Wrestling fans the opportunity to see all the matches. The stadium has numbered seats but many spectators stand to see the matches from a better perspective. The summer sun can be extremely hot. Some organizations offer free paper hats. Film, however, is unavailable outside the city so bring enough and a strong zoom lens to get the perfect shot of the perfect move.

Food and drinks are readily on hand inside and around the stadium. Sarayıcı is a natural space so bring insect repellent, especially for the evenings when the stadium becomes a venue for national and international talent as well as mosquitoes. If you prefer shopping, there is a special Kırkpınar market where you can pick up great bargains in Lira, Dollars or Euro.



Getting There

Sarayıcı is about 1.5 kilometers from the center of Edirne. There are minibuses and other confusing forms of public transportation, but there are easier ways to get there.



The best way is to walk. Walk along the *Saraçlar* (the main cobblestoned street) past the *Üçşerefeli Mosque* and the old Turkish bath until you reach *Sarayıcı*. You'll cross the *Tunca* river, an old Ottoman bridge and get a sense of the place as it was during Ottoman times, avoiding the more modern parking problem. Otherwise, take a *phaeton*, a horse-drawn, highly decorated carriage. The price is anyone's guess, so use your best bargaining skills to hitch a ride to *Sarayıcı*. They can be found all over town, as can taxis.

Inside the History of the Palace



Sarayiçi has many historical buildings and structures everywhere on the hilly island. The entrance (Kanuni-Saray) and exit (Fatih) bridges are Ottoman as is the Yeni Saray (the very old New Palace now in ruins). You can explore the ruins of the Imperial Kitchens, Imperial Bath and the Main Gate of the Palace. Follow the Pehlivan Path (Wrestler's Path) through the Chicken Forest. Many of the sites are unmarked so ask locals to have a peek at the Kırkpınar Invitation Candle, the 150 year old tree or the Hall of Justice. If you leave Sarayiçi completely, a mere 800 meters away is the restored Sultan Beyazid II mosque and mental hospital complex, now an impressive museum with a cafe. The complex was named Europe's most beautiful museum in 2004.



The Cazgır

The Kırkpınar has its roots in Islam. Even the bare-chested uniform follows Islamic codes of dress and the Cazgır, the emcee of the Kırkpınar, gives a prayer before matches. He then announces each wrestler, identifying his hometown, province and (surprisingly) the wrestler's main move to defeat his opponent. The introduction of the wrestlers is also done poetically and, upon hearing his name, the wrestler steps forward. A Kırkpınar must-see is the opening ceremony when the cazgır makes his speech and then conducts the ceremonial peşrev with the wrestlers.



The Cazgır Speaks

Before the matches, the Cazgır makes a speech advising the wrestlers to take it all very seriously. Note that the crescent and star are Islamic symbols (found on the Turkish flag) and that pehlivan means wrestler in Turkish:

You, Spectators, come here
The wrestlers will wrestle here
Foreigners do not know Karakucak
Kırkpınar is the championships of oil wrestling
Wrestle; and prove that you are followers of Koca Yusuf and
Aliço, heroes of oil wrestling.
Don't deface our glory!
Don't humiliate anyone, no matter who he is!
Imagine the crescent and star are on your chest
Train yourself, apply yourself and wrestle!
Don't expect anything good to happen if
It snows in August,
If a bee colony doesn't swarm,
And a wife gets up after her husband
Not every brave man can be a pehlivan
A bad child bankrupts his rich father
A dressy wife bankrupts her husband
A thrifty farmer goes bankrupt from his stupid obstinacy
Behold, Pehlivan, if you are not well-prepared to wrestle
Your rival will beat you.

The Age of Ağas

Historically, the Ağa is responsible for organizing and promoting the Kırkpınar event. Elected from the villages and towns where the wrestlers came from, the Ağa was known for his honesty, honour and devotion to the sport. He would announce the date of the Kırkpınar in the villages, attracting spectators and promoting the event. In the tradition of Turkish hospitality, the Ağa had to accommodate guests who came to watch the sport and gave him horses, sheep, goat, cattle, grain and even money in return. The Ağa had his own special



costume, a Rumeli made of linen with a silk belt.

Today, the Ağa is still responsible for organizing the Kırkpınar festival, though he is not elected. An auction is held and the position of Ağa goes to the highest bidder. On the account of being an Ağa, after a fearsome auction last years' Ağa Seyfettin Selim got the bid by paying 322.000 Turkish Lira (\$224,625, 161,079). He hopes to be Ağa for three consecutive years so that he can be the owner of the golden belt permanently. Former Edirne mayor İbrahim Ay (1983-89) began awarding ceremonial silver belts to Ağas who held the position three times in a row. Later, competition to be Ağa become more exiting when the silver belt turned to gold.

Peşrev

Ceremony, as much as athleticism, is an important part of the Kırkpınar. After the Cazgır gives his speech, the wrestlers perform the Peşrev, a centuries old ritual dance. Taking large strides down the field, they slap their calves, showing off their oil, leather and deep tans before wrestling.



Clothes Make the Wrestler

More than just a 14th century fashion statement, the wrestler's leather shorts (kısbet) are fundamental to the Kırkpınar sport itself. Because the wrestlers are drenched in oil, the kısbet becomes a vital tool for opponents to defeat their rivals. Traditionally made of six layers of buffalo hide and weighing 13 kgs,



the kısbet is flat at the top with a drawstring pulled tight to prevent an opponent from gaining access inside the shorts and holding on. The form-fitting kısbet is equally tight around the legs, making it more difficult for opponents to grab loose leg cuffs. Wrestlers, however, can slide their hands inside their opponents' shorts. By either grasping onto the ends of the pant legs or utilizing the firm grip between his opponent's waist and belt, the wrestler can turn his opponent and pin him down. Another version of the kısbet is the *purpul*, a cheaper, American-made kısbet for first-time or poor wrestlers, mostly used during youth, oil-free wrestling.

The kısbet is kept in another traditional part of the wrestler's equipment, the zembil, a bag made of reed that also carries the wrestler's supply of oil. Like golf caddies or water boys, Master Wrestlers have apprentices charged with the duty of carrying the zembil and having it ready before the match. Hanging a zembil on a wall signals a wrestler's retirement from the sport.

Drowning in Oil

Originally, olive oil was used to prevent sunburn, though today it serves to relax tired muscles and fend off mosquitos as well as being a traditional part of the *Kırkpınar*. The oil is maintained by the *Yağcı* (*Oil Guy* in Turkish) who rushes onto the field with a full can at the request of a wrestler. A wrestler applies the oil on the field, pouring it over his left shoulder with his right hand, then onto his chest, arms and finally soaking the *kısbet*. Once he is half-drenched, the process is repeated with the other hand.



Oiling relaxes the muscles and strengthens bones. During the 2002 *Kırkpınar* Championships, 990 kilograms of extra virgin olive oil were used in three days by the wrestlers and that didn't include lunch.

By the Sweat of Their Brows



The Sarayıçi field is exposed to the Turkish summer sun with temperatures soaring above 45 °C with high humidity. To wipe away dripping sweat and olive oil from their eyes (and occasionally tears of defeat), the wrestlers use a Şalapur Cloth, a special cloth designed for this purpose. During one three-day Kırkpınar tournament, wrestlers use about 1000 metres of cloth.





And the Winner Is...

Besides the thrill of victory and the adoration of the Turkish people, winning wrestlers receive gold and cash awards. The Ministry of Sports gives prizes to the top three victors in each weight division. Awards are also given for the Best Performance by a Wrestler in the Peshrev (traditional wrestler's dance) and to the Most Gentlemanly Wrestler.



Wrestlers with more confidence can compete in the Baş (pronounced bash) category, the top category for wrestlers of any weight class. The winner receives the prestigious "Başpehlivan of the Year" award, a gold belt made of 1.45 kilograms of 14-carat gold valued at \$25,000, which, however, must be passed on to the next winner. Easily the biggest prize at the Kırkpınar, the belt is manufactured for the Municipality of Edirne which awards it at the Baş Ceremony

The following wrestlers won the gold belt 3 times consecutively and were awarded a special gold belt to keep.

1968 Mustafa Bük

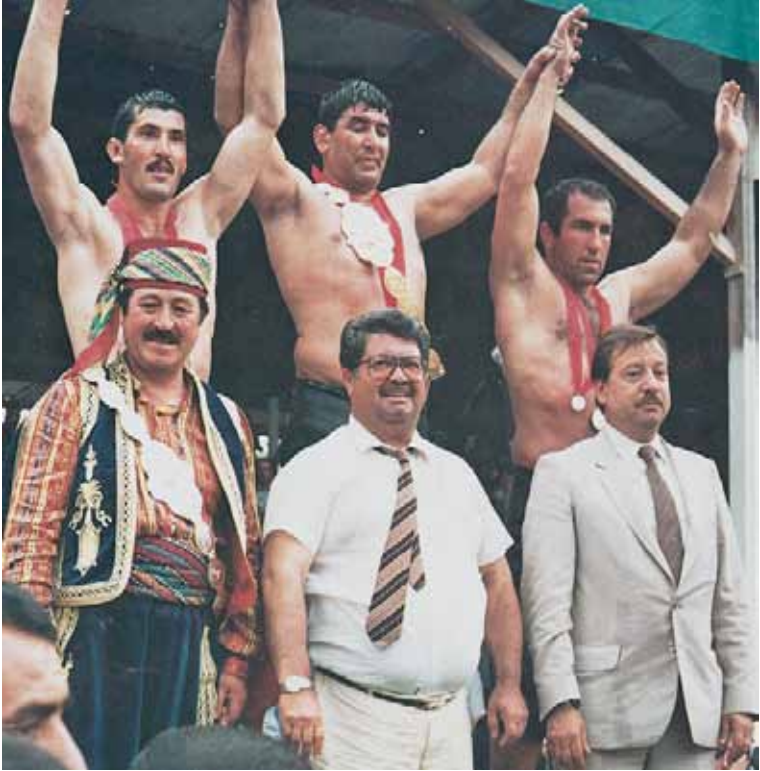
1978 Aydın Demir

1984 Hüseyin Çokal

1992 Ahmet Taşçı

1997 Ahmet Taşçı





Saffet Kayalı, Winner - İbrahim Gümüş, Recep Kılıç, Ağa Halilkılıçoğlu,
President Turgut Özal, Mayor İbrahim Ay 1986.

The 2010 Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Championship

A total of 1493 wrestlers participated in this years' Kırkpınar oil wrestling games. 52 of these wrestlers competed to become the Kırkpınar champion. More than 20.000 spectators watched this years' games. The Kırkpınar title match, dreamt about by all the oil wrestlers in the competition, was full of excitement and surprises. These 16 very ambitious and well-trained wrestlers were paired up and presented a mesmerizing show to the audience.

Another surprise was the result of the match between the legendary wrestler Ahmet Taşçı and his apprentice and wrestling student Gngr Ekin . Gngr Ekin defeated Ahmet Taşçı. After the match, Gngr Ekin kissed his former teacher's hand in respect. Mr. Taşçı is now eligible to participate in the championship whenever he likes, given that he is the holder of golden belt.

In the final championship match, the two finalists, Mehmet Yeşilyeşil and Ali Grbz, displayed several interesting techniques. The winner was not determined during regulation match play, so overtime was needed; whichever wrestler scores the first point becomes the winner. However, they used up all the overtime so the match was extended until one of them got a point. Finally, Mehmet Yeşilyeşil used a single leg tackle to grasp his opponent and scored the winning point. The entire audience seemed to agree that both finalists demonstrated considerable talent and endurance. Their determination to win excited and entertained the crowd. Both wrestlers are university students and wrestle in the same club (The Municipality of Antalya Belek Wrestling Club). Mehmet Yeşilyeşil won his second Başıpehlivan title.



The 649^b Kırkpınar Championship in 2010 Results

THE WINNERS OF LIGHTWEIGHT

- 1 *Fatib Sultan Mehmet Alabacak* K.Maraş
- 2 İsmail Varol Antalya
- 3 Erkan Ertan Karamürsel
- 3 Hasan Cengiz Antalya

THE WINNERS OF HEAVY WEIGHT

- 1 *Süleyman Aykırı* Antalya
- 2 Ali Altun Antalya
- 3 Ünal Karaman Çorum
- 3 Ahmet Selbest Antalya

HEAVYWEIGHT WINNER

- 1 *Mehmet Yeşil Yeşil* Antalya
- 2 Ali Gürbüz Antalya
- 3 Serмест Bulut Antalya
- 3 Serhat Gökmen Kocaeli

THE TOP WRESTLERS WHO MAKES THE BEST PESREV

- 1 *Asil Çelik* Edirne
- 2 Muzaffer Caner Koşum Edirne
- 3 Hüseyin Yellice Antalya

THE MOST GENTLEMAN WRESTLER

- 1 *Tansel Umut* Edirne

THE MOST TECHNICALLY-SKILLED WRESTLER

- 1 *Tabir Borucu* Antalya

8-10 YEARS OLD

- 1 *Ensar Bıyık* Sakarya
- 2 Serdar Yıldırım Sakarya
- 3 Batuhan Güzel Antalya
- 3 Eyüp Sabri Çavdar Kocaeli

10-12 YEARS OLD

- 1 *Süleyman Çetin* Antalya
- 2 Fatih Kurnaz Çorum
- 3 Muhammed Hubeybergin Ankara
- 3 Ahmet Çoban Manisa

10-12 YEARS OLD

1 *Hasan Güzeller* Antalya

2 Ramazan Sarı Kocaeli

3 Yusuf Yalın Sakarya

3 Okan Şahin İstanbul

12-14 YEARS OLD

1 *Abdulrefik Öner* Kocaeli

2 Rıdvan Kaya Sakarya

3 İsmail Enes Eyice Manisa

3 Yavuz Şen Antalya

14-16 YEARS OLD

1 *Yusuř Can Zeybek* Antalya

2 Yaşar Şan Ankara

3 Muhammet Üstel Ankara

3 Oğuzhan Borucu Antalya

LIGHT WELTERWEIGHT, 16-18 YEARS OLD (maximum 2 years' experience, maximum 70 kilos)

1 Mustafa Batu Antalya

2 Arif Çevik Çanakkale

3 Yusuf Minta Antalya

3 Ümit Kurtođlu Antalya

WELTERWEIGHT 18-19 YEARS OLD (maximum 90 kilos)

1 *Burak Eryılmaz* Ankara

2 Remzi Kaplam Antalya

3 Samet Özaslan Tokat

3 Osman Sarıdemir Antalya

MIDDLEWEIGHT, 19-21 YEARS OLD, (maximum 90 kilos)

1 *Eyüp Kıyı* Ordu

2 Resul Tarı Kocaeli

3 Recep Taslak Samsun

3 Dođan Yılmaz Konya

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT 85 KILOS

1 *Serdar Doruk* Kocaeli

2 Serkan Üđdüler Edirne

3 Abdülhamit Altun Kocaeli

3 Özer Ay Kocaeli

HEAVYWEIGHT 90 KILOS

1 *Atilla Balcı* Tokat

2 Mustafa Okullu Antalya

3 Oktay Sancak Ankara

4 Mecit Yıldırım İstanbul

Famous Wrestlers

Throughout the history of the Kırkpınar, some wrestlers have gained infamy. Here are a few notable oil wrestlers:



Koca Yusuf is easily the most famous historical Kırkpınar wrestler. Fittingly, he had a mysteriously tragic death, dying in a ship wreck on his way to Turkey on June 4, 1898. His first victory was in 1885 when he defeated Kel Aliço. This was followed by a spectacular run of success as he defeated every wrestler he met in Europe. In America, he defeated its champion and today is memorialized in the Cazgır's opening speeches. Yusuf had an ego to match his numerous victorious matches, declaring, "As there is only one sun in the sky, so is there only one Yusuf on earth." His winning style was brutal, both in official and training matches.



Adalı Halil had an even more impressive winning streak than the current star of the Kırkpınar, Ahmet Taşçı. Adalı won 18 times in a row, having been coached by Kel Aliço. Today, Kırkpınar wrestlers seek inspiration by visiting his grave and saying prayers. Eventually, Adalı Halil became better than his famous teacher, the former Kırkpınar champion Kel Aliço. Halil showed he could be a great wrestler at an early age; at birth, he weighed nine kilograms. At 16, he was already defeating established Kırkpınar heroes. By 20, he was wrestling with Koca Yusuf and Kurtdereli Mehmet. His match with Kurtdereli is legendary, being the only time in Kırkpınar history that a tie was declared. At the urging of Aliço they became blood brothers, didn't wrestle again, and remained equals. In Europe, Halil was known as "The Second Koca Yusuf" and "The Turkish Lion". When he was in the USA, he had reached 120 kilograms with a 125 cm chest and defeated everybody. His career ended in retirement after his defeat by his old master Aliço.



Gaddar Kel Aliço was the 19th century Kırkpınar Number One, having won a remarkable 26 consecutive titles. Having coached Adalı Halil, he retired after losing to Koca Yusuf. So feared as an opponent was Kel Aliço that he frequently won the Başpehlivan title without even wrestling. Known far and wide as undefeatable, Aliço simply hung his *kisbet* in the field to signal his intention of wrestling. His prospective opponents, anticipating a humiliating defeat, withdrew from the competition and Aliço won by default. At the age of 70, he successfully bet his friends that he could beat his young apprentice Adalı Halil within half an hour. Born in Ozikovica, Bulgaria in 1844, Gaddar Kel Aliço was a royal wrestler in the Sultan's palace. Befitting such a pedigree, he would have won the gold belt 8 times if there was a gold belt during his times. Aliço died near Ipsala in the province of Edirne.



Kurtdere'li Mehmet's victories were during the last years of the Ottoman Empire, but unlike the last sultan, Mehmet was never defeated. He emigrated from Deliorman, Bulgaria to Balıkesir in Turkey, defeating all the famous wrestlers of his time and gaining fame in France, Great Britain and America. Mehmet was born in Deliorman in 1869 and became the Kirkpınar Başpehlivan after defeating Adalı Halil and Kara Osman. His real claim to fame was his career in France. He and Katrancı Mehmet were brought to Paris by the French wrestling organizer Dublier.



Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ

Holding the record for the most consecutive Baş Pehlivan wins since the founding of the Turkish Republic (8 from 1935-1942), Hüseyin Alkaya of Kırcaali almost made it 9 times straight. During his first final in 1934 against Mülâyim from Gostivar, the two Pehlivan's tied and shared the title. The Kırkpınar has long had associations with Islam and Hüseyin Alkaya, born in 1908, put them into words. The Kırkpınar, he said, is the Kabba for Turkish wrestlers. The Kabba is the holy place Muslims go to on their pilgrimage to Mecca.



Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel

Ahmet Taşçı is the record-holder for winning the Baş competition. Between 1990-2000, he won the Baş title 9 times and twice took the Gold Belt. Taşçı is a national hero and celebrity, and his fans, mostly from Eastern Turkey, annually make the trek to Edirne to watch their hero live. He can also be counted as the only Kırkpınar wrestler with a significant international following. Not content with mere glory in Turkey, Ahmet competed in the 4th Sumo Wrestling Championships and came in third. He vows to retire as a Kırkpınar wrestler after winning his third Gold Belt.

Father of Turks

Any visitor to Turkey will soon learn about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Turks revere him for claiming a geographical region as a democratic homeland from the dust of the Ottoman Empire and westernizing Turkish culture. Atatürk's words grace public buildings, schools, statues, monuments and are memorized by Turkish children. Naturally, a letter he wrote to a Kırkpınar wrestler has taken on some serious significance to Kırkpınar tradition:



To the wrestler Mehmet of Kurtdere,

I have come to know you as a wrestler of world renown. I have also learned that you described the secret behind your success in the following words: 'In every wrestling match, I picture the Turkish nation supporting me, and I think of our national honour.'

I admire what you say as much as your deeds. Therefore, I am recording your statement to be a professional maxim for all Turkish sportsmen to demonstrate how pleased I am with your statement.

Enclosed is a small gift for you and your children. I wish you a long, healthy life.

Kemal Atatürk.

The Başpehlivans Since The Founding Of The Turkish Republic.

- 1924 Abdullah with moles
1925 Yusuf from Geçkinli
1926 Kara Emin from Edirne
1927 Rifat from Manisa
1928 Ahmet from Mandıra
1929 Mülayim from Gostivar
1930 Kara Ali Acar from Bandırma
1931 Kara Ali Acar from Bandırma
1932 Kara Ali Acar from Bandırma
1933 Kara Ali Acar from Bandırma
1934 Mülayim from Gostivar and Hüseyin from Tekirdağ (tied)
1935 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1936 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1937 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1938 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1939 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1940 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1941 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1942 Hüseyin Alkaya from Tekirdağ
1943 İbrahim Erdi from Babaeski
1944 Süleyman Ertaş from Hayrabolu

- 1945 İbrahim Erdi from Babaeski
- 1946 Şerif Ünal from Sındırgı
- 1947 Çolak (missing an arm) İsmail Atay from Düzce and Hayrabolu
Süleyman Ertaş from Hayrabolu (both disqualified).
- 1948 Mustafa Yenici from Babaeski
- 1949 Şerif Ünal from Sındırgı
- 1950 Süleyman Ertaş from Hayrabolu
- 1951 İrfan Atan from Adapazar
- 1952 Tarzan Mehmet from Balıkesir
- 1953 İrfan Atan from Adapazar
- 1954 İbrahim Karabacak from Samsun
- 1955 İrfan Atan from Adapazar
- 1956 İbrahim Karabacak from Samsun
- 1957 Kara Hasan Acar from Bandırma
- 1958 Adil Atan from Adapazar
- 1959 İbrahim Karabacak from Samsun
- 1960 İbrahim Karabacak from Samsun
- 1961 Mehmet Ali Yağcı from Sındırgı
- 1962 No winner (decision by the Committee of Referees that there
was no wrestler in attendance deserving of the title)
- 1963 Sezai Kanmaz from Adapazar
- 1964 Mehmet Ali Yağcı from Sındırgı
- 1965 Kara Ali Çelik from İzmir
- 1966 Mustafa Bük from Ordu
- 1967 Mustafa Bük from Ordu
- 1968 Mustafa Bük from Ordu (Gold Belt)

- 1969 Nazmi Uzun from Babaeski
- 1970 No winner (decision by the Committee of Referees not to declare a winner after a 6 hour unresolved final between Kara Ali and Aydın Demir)
- 1971 Hasan Şahin from Denizli
- 1972 Arap Mustafa Yıldız from Akhisar
- 1973 Davut Yılmaz from Ordu
- 1974 Kara Ali Çiçek from İzmir
- 1975 No winner (games interrupted)
- 1976 Aydın Demir from Karamürsel
- 1977 Aydın Demir from Karamürsel
- 1978 Aydın Demir from Karamürsel (Gold Belt)
- 1979 Sabri Acar from Bandırma
- 1980 Mehmet Güçlü from Muğla
- 1981 Arap Mustafa Yıldız from Akhisar
- 1982 Hüseyin Çokal from Denizli
- 1983 Hüseyin Çokal from Denizli
- 1984 Hüseyin Çokal from Denizli (Gold Belt)
- 1985 Sabri Acar from Bandırma
- 1986 İbrahim Gümüş from Balıkesir
- 1987 Recep Kılıç from Hatay
- 1988 Recep Gürbüz from Antalya
- 1989 Saffet Kayalı from Balıkesir
- 1990 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
- 1991 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
- 1992 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel (Gold Belt)

- 1993 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
1994 Cengiz Elbeye from Antalya
1995 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
1996 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
1997 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel (Gold Belt)
1998 Cengiz Elbeye from Antalya
1999 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
2000 Ahmet Taşçı from Karamürsel
2001 Vedat Ergin from Ankara
2002 Hasan Tuna
2003 Kenan Şimşek
2004 Recep Kara
2005 Şaban Yılmaz
2006 Osman Aynur
2007 Recep Kara
2008 Recep Kara
2009 Mehmet Yeşilyeşil
2010 Mehmet Yeşilyeşil

Edirne: A Crossroad to History

Edirne, once the capital of the Ottoman Empire, is the historic connection between Europe and Asia, located in the northwest corner of Turkey, where the three Thracian nations, Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, meet. Historically, Edirne was the seventh largest city in Europe and the launching point for the Ottoman sultans' conquests west into Europe. Today, it is the border crossing point for backpackers heading east from Europe to Turkey's famous cultural heritage and Aegean and Mediterranean beaches. Emperor Hadrian founded the city and named it Hadrianopolis, but when his Roman Empire famously fell, the city went to the Byzantines. In 1361, Sultan Murat of the Ottoman Empire took it and made it his capital. The Greeks had it for a time after that but, in 1922, it was reclaimed by the Turks and called Edirne. As the capital of the Ottoman Empire (it was preceded by Bursa and succeeded by İstanbul), Edirne was graced with a large number of historically and architecturally important works, the main one being the Selimiye Mosque, considered the finest of all Ottoman mosques. The city is located in a picturesque forest of poplar trees at the confluence of the Tunca and Meriç rivers where nature and Ottoman history converge. Take a stroll along the river banks or through the woods and discover the ruins of the Ottoman Empire's governing palace or the Beyazid sanatorium. Shamefully ignored by tourists, Edirne has retained its unique mix of modern Turkish culture and its



more cosmopolitan past, unscarred by western fast-food or name-brand tourism. Edirne is a perfect introduction to Turkish culture: genuinely welcoming and genuinely Turkish. Edirne, with its mosques, religious complexes, bridges, bazaars, caravanserais and palaces still in use, is a living museum.

Mosques are a big part of Edirne, with one of Turkey's grandest, the Selimiye, front and centre. Perched on Edirne's central hill, the Selimiye mosque dominates the city. It is the self-declared masterpiece of the Ottoman architect Sinan and as such can be seen from all points in Edirne, and even from Greece across the rolling Thracian landscape. It is Edirne's main attraction, an outstanding example of Ottoman-Turkish art, a monument to the Muslim faith and a must-see for tourists in Turkey.

Built in 1569-1575 for Sultan Selim II, the Selimiye is a masterwork of serenity and beauty. Its 31.3 meter dome (43.28 meters up) is smaller than the Süleymaniye's in İstanbul, but its effect is greater. It is supported by 8 inconspicuous pillars creating the sense of a great, open space. The 435 windows allow in plenty of light to illuminate its fine decorations of 16th century İznik tiles, marble, mother of pearl and Islamic inscriptions. The four tall, thin minarets (70.89 x 3.80) appear to be only two when approaching from İstanbul by highway. The courtyard is a fine, pleasant green space and contains a Turkish language-only Turkish and Islamic Art Museum. The Selimiye is an active place of worship and, unlike the Blue Mosque in İstanbul, is not overrun with non-Muslim tourists. The combination of its architectural achievement and authenticity as a place of worship in active use is unmatched in Turkey. Proper dress and behaviour are a must but it is easy to stroll around in the atmosphere. The Arasta Bazaar in front is a worth a look or spend some time in one of the many surrounding cafes underneath this tremendous building.

In the city centre is the Ali Pasha bazaar, a covered market destroyed by fire in 1992 now fully restored. Though English is scarce, good deals aren't, and many of the shops offer traditional Turkish articles and more modern fashion. Surrounding it and scattered around downtown are many good restaurants offering traditional Turkish meals not

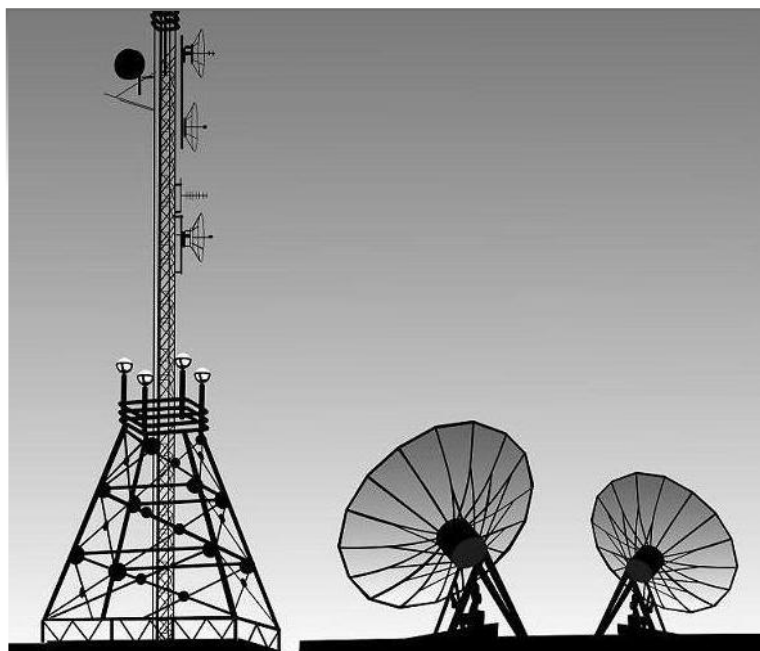
geered for tourists as in other Turkish cities (the prices are local too). If liver is your thing, you must have it in Edirne or else have Turkish tea or coffee in one of the many cafes. One of the best is Café Sera at the foot of the Selimiye, offering fine views of the mosque and the city. Even more picturesque are the restaurants on the Meriç River (Emirgan, Lalezar) with their views of the Ottoman-era Meriç bridge and Selimiye backdrop. If you haven't had enough of wrestling, try a visit to Kırkpınar House near the Municipality building, a museum restoration of a traditional wrestler's house.



Spectator Sport

If a trip to Turkey is out, tune in to the Kırkpınar live on the following frequencies:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------|
| Rumeli TV | 11096 | Vertical | 30000 | 5/6 | 265 | 313 | Türksat 3A West |
| TRT 1 | 11096 | Horizontal | 30000 | 5/6 | 513 | 512 | Türksat 3A East |
| TRT 3 | 11919 | Vertical | 24444 | | 813 | 812 | Türksat 2A West |





Aydemir Ay was born and raised in Edirne. He set up his first website, the Edirne City Guide, designed to help promote Edirne and attract tourists to the city Aydemir loves. He has written many articles about Edirne for newspapers and, with Kevin Kempe, a Canadian who lived in Edirne for two years, has produced this book, dedicated to his uncle Yusuf Ay. Aydemir studied Tourism and Hospitality Management at Eastern Mediterranean University. He lectured at Edirne Trakya University in the Travel and Tourism program and was a consultant of the Edirne Governor. Aydemir is working on further books about Edirne including a book of Edirne Cuisine, an Edirne City Guide Book and a Tour of Edirne



Kevin Kempe lived in Edirne for two years, working as an English Teacher at Edirne College. He hopes to share his love of Edirne by promoting tourism in a city he feels has been undeservedly neglected by international tourists. With Aydemir Ay, he has written this *Kırkpınar* book. He encourages the City of Edirne to promote itself internationally, certain that tourists will find the same hospitality, friendliness and history that he found living in Edirne. He currently teaches in Doha, Qatar.

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I. Kırkpınar Tarihi Kırkpınar Sempozyumu bildirileri

Aydemir Ay - Lecture notes - Tourism & Hospitality
Trakya University

Mr. Ibrahim Ay

Mr. Sinan Alışkan

Edirne newspaper

Hudut newspaper

Sonhaber newspaper



The Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Competition is the world's oldest continuously held sporting competition. Its history, dating back to the origins of the Ottoman Empire, and its modern wrestling heroes, as seen on televisions around the world, are legendary.

This book is a complete introduction to the colourful history of the games giving historical background information and practical tips to make your stay in Edirne easy and enjoyable. Whether you're a fan of international spectator sports, a lover of history, or just want to mingle with the locals over kebab and raki, this book is an invaluable guide to getting the most for your money... Or your oil.