

Dear Colleagues and Students,

You are kindly invited to the seminar entitled 'Shaping Ottoman Muslim Women: Reformists' Discourses on Women's Physical Exercise in the Late Ottoman Era' organized by the Department of History.

Date: 24 September 2026, Thursday

Time: 16.30

Avenue: A-130 Seminar Room

Title: Shaping Ottoman Muslim Women: Reformists' Discourses on Women's Physical Exercise in the Late Ottoman Era

Speaker: Ayşenur Dağlı, Bilkent University

Abstract:

This study investigates the late Ottoman reformist discourse, through contemporary media, concerning gendered approaches to physical exercise. According to the reformists of the late Ottoman era, Muslim women were frequently characterized as psychologically fragile and physically inactive, rendering them unequipped to fulfill their roles as capable mothers. Given that strong families, specifically strong mothers, were essential for modernizing and building the nation, the social and physical conditions of women were framed as a critical problem requiring intervention. To counter female lethargy and vulnerability, reformists undertook the task of educating women and encouraging physical activity. The recommended exercises for women differed from those prescribed for men, keeping them away from intense exercises or competitive sports. Instead, the female body was carefully shaped to optimize reproductive health and childbearing capabilities. However, the goals of becoming better mothers, living healthier lives, and building a stronger nation were often not enough to motivate women to exercise regularly. Therefore, reformists strategically introduced the promise of enduring aesthetic beauty as an additional incentive.

Bio:

Ayşenur Dağlı is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University. Her research focuses on physical culture and gender during the late Ottoman era. Alongside her research, she has been a part-time instructor at Bilkent University.