

Displaying the Turkish History Thesis & dealing with antiquity, its art and architecture in the early Turkish Republic

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Abstract

The Republic of Türkiye, founded in 1923 after a long series of wars, promoted cultural activities concentrating on the history of the state and nation in order to secure its authority both within and outside the country. An effective and significant element of these cultural activities was the conception and teaching of the Turkish History Thesis, claiming the continuity of the Turkish dominion of Anatolian and Eastern Thracian lands since prehistory.

This paper studies the Turkish History Thesis's perception of classical antiquity with a special focus on its material display at the exhibition held at Dolmabahçe Palace in 1937, on the occasion of the Second Congress of Turkish History organized by the Turkish Historical Society.

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Keywords

Antiquity, Classical, Exhibition, Turkish History Thesis.

1. Introduction

Formed after a period of wars (1914-1923), the young Republic of Türkiye faced many claims on its land from neighboring cultures based on historical bonds. In order to refute these demands while strengthening the identity of the citizens of the new country, the Turkish History Thesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*, “Thesis” hereafter) was put forth. It was shaped under the politically guided environment of the 1930s, affected by the prevailing European trends in the study of the pasts of nations. The Thesis considered Turkish people as the inhabitants of Anatolia since prehistory, a continuous population who lived under different names. According to the Thesis, Turks migrated from Central Asia in prehistoric periods, and in addition to Anatolia, settled in various lands in China, India, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Aegean Islands, Thrace, and Greece whilst introducing their culture and technical knowledge to peoples of those lands. By underlining the perceived similarities in different aspects of anthropology, linguistics, religion, and arts, the Thesis established a strong relationship between Turkish and Chinese, Indian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Median, Persian, Parthian, Sasanian, Egyptian, Hittite, Minoan, Mycenaean, Etruscan, Phrygian, and Lydian cultures. In line with the affinities found in these areas of study, the Thesis considered Sumerian, Hittite, Median, and Etruscan civilizations to be of Turkish origin while attributing certain levels of Turkishness to Minoans, Mycenaeans, Greeks, and Romans, which were regarded as shaped under the influence of the former civilizations mentioned. Thus, the Thesis presented a rather ambiguous accommodation to antiquity or classical antiquity within Turkish history. The earliest examples of this tendency can be seen in some of the cultural activities of the young Turkish Republic. The most symbolic among these can be deemed classical antiquity’s inclusion to Turkish history exhibition held at Dolmabahçe Palace which was organized to accompany the Second Congress of Turkish History in 1937. A highly important event

visualizing the claims of the Thesis for both scholars and the public, the exhibition’s section of classical antiquity will be the focus of the following essay with original archival documents after brief information on the Thesis’s approach to the period.

2. Perception of history in the period

As great empires dissolved, and nation states emerged in the late 19th-early 20th century, archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics served as a motivator in the search of the origins of nations. Cultures were deemed continuous within the borders of a state since prehistory and cultural assets unearthed were regarded as materials from a predecessor. These links with prehistoric communities gained significance after World War I, and in extreme cases, they were used as pretexts for occupations (McCann, 1994; Anthony, 2000; Arnold & Hassmann, 2000; for a compilation of different European national discourses which were influential until 1940’s, see Ersoy, et al., 2010).

As it is well known, several neighboring nations demanded land from Türkiye in the early years of the republic (a phenomenon accented since the Ottoman Empire was marked as “the sick man of Europe” in the middle of 19th century). The issues faced by the republic can be summarized as following; Syria was under French mandate in the 1930s with borders officially determined in 1921 but the province of Hatay remained as an issue until 1939 (Khoury, 1987), Armenian policy on “Greater Armenia” emerging in the 19th century was resolved in 1923 with Treaty of Lausanne (for Nerses Varjabedian’s visit to British ambassador Henry Lanyard in 1878 on the matter, see British Foreign Office Archive FO 424/68, no. 639) but the debates continued. Possibly the most well-known case belongs to Greece who sought to revive the former Byzantine Empire and form a state encompassing Western Anatolia, Crete, and Cyprus with Constantinople as the capital since 19th century and with the Asia Minor Expedition occupied Izmir in 1919 (Hamilakis, 2007, p. 53, 107). In the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, Greece gained

some portions of Thrace and Western Anatolia (Erim, 1953, pp. 554-558) and after several battles had to leave Anatolia and Turkish Thrace following the Armistice of Mudanya in 1922 and the relations between two countries only began to normalize after the Greco-Turkish Treaty of Friendship in 1930.

All these occurrences pressured Türkiye to address the subject of legitimacy of the young state while citizens of the former empire were to be solidly reunited around a new national identity to prevent further conflicts. Within this context, Turkish History Thesis asserting that Anatolia had always been a “Turkish homeland” is widely related with the political and cultural issues of the era.

Different scholars explained the grounds for this new ideal with several prominent phenomena: asserting a deeply rooted presence of Turks in Anatolia against the demands of Greece, Syria, and Armenia, providing Turkish origins for the European norms and thus naturalizing their adoption in Türkiye, claiming that all citizens of the country were once Turks who forgot their mother tongue over time (Eissenstat, 2007, pp. 49-50); attributing a civilizing role to Turks in response to philhellenism that emerged in 18th century Europe (Copeaux, 2008, pp. 48-49); and proving the existence of Turks in Anatolia via modern scientific methods as a reaction against the contemporary Western thought which considered the Ottoman Turks non-natives in the country (Toprak, 2012, p. 204). The secularizing aspect of the Thesis has also been noted repeatedly since the Thesis evaluated Turkish history and identity separate from religion. Nevertheless, the variety of studies on Anatolian civilizations perceived as Turkish in the early years of the republic has been evaluated as the foundations for later research in archaeology, history of art, and architecture in Türkiye. The reflection of these diverse studies is found in the current tradition of site works indiscriminating towards different cultural layers (Özdoğan, 1998, p. 117, 2006a, p. 55; Ergin, 2010, p. 42; Güven, 2010, p. 52).

2.1. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*

[Outlines of Turkish History]

Firstly, it would be appropriate to take a brief look at the narrative of the Thesis regarding classical antiquity in a schoolbook: *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*. This book, which can be considered the most comprehensive manifestation of the Thesis, was prepared by the Turkish Historical Society’s (Türk Tarih Kurumu, then known as Türk Tarihi Tedkik Heyeti) members, Afet [İnan], Mehmet Tevfik [Bıyıklıoğlu], Samih Rifat [Yalnızgil], Yusuf [Akçura], Reşit Galip [Baydur], Hasan Cemil [Çambel], Sadri Maksudî [Arsal], Şemsettin [Günaltay], Vasıf [Çınar] and Yusuf Ziya [Özer] in 1930 and printed hundred copies for revision by historians and intellectuals. It was widely criticized, generally based on the briefness of the section on Ottomans (Uzunçarşılı, 1939, p. 349). However, thirty thousand copies of its “Türk Tarihine Methal [Introduction to Turkish History]” and “Orta Asya [Central Asia]” chapters were published in 1931 and distributed to schools (İğdemir, 1973, p. 5) under the name *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları: Methal Kısmı*. [1]

The book highlighted that the first great civilization of Anatolia was Turkish: the Hittites, considered one of the main sources of classical antiquity, were regarded Turkish based on the era’s archaeological data (*Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, pp. 229-247). The collective work asserted that “the people of Asia Minor are Turks known under the names like Hittites...They are related to Sumerians and Elamites, the autochthon peoples of Mesopotamia. Indeed, the islands and the continent west of them, even Thrace, were initially populated with the same race [Turkish]” (p. 231) [2]. The Hittites were followed by the Phrygians and then the Lydians who influenced the Etruscans via linguistics and arts (pp. 247-254). The book considered the Aegean Basin in general to be of Turkish origin with a claim for the word “Ion” being derived from Turkish “iye”, while regarding “Euboea” as derived from “oba” (pp. 265-266). The Thesis deemed the Cycladic culture of having Asian Turkish roots, while putting forward the idea that Mycenaean state was established by Turks (pp. 275-281).

According to the *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, which had a section titled “Yunan Medeniyetinin Doğduğu Yer Anadoludur [Greek Civilization Originated in Anatolia]”, the Achaeans and Aegeans were Turks that built Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, migrated to Anatolia during the Doric invasions and in turn, exported their culture to Greece (p. 285). As the chronology moves forward, the archaic and classical periods of Greek culture were explained with a strong emphasis on the contributions of Western Anatolia (pp. 293-304).

The Etruscans constituted another important section of the book, which described them as civilizers, animal domesticators, and pottery makers of prehistoric Italy (pp. 311-312). They were also considered to have been introduced to the Bronze Age culture via Asia Minor’s influence, settling in Italy later. An inscription on the Lemnos Stele was used as further evidence for Lydian and Etruscan relations and to support the claim that Etruscans were one of the older Turkish nations (pp. 317-318).

Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları mostly consulted the toponyms to relate them with Turkish identities, especially for Bronze Age cultures that were studied on the basis of phonetic similarities between languages. The target audience here was the pupils. The adults, teachers, and scientists were brought closer to the Thesis through a series of cultural events that will be detailed below.

3. First Congress of Turkish History: Dealing with antiquity or classical antiquity

One of the most important events in this regard was certainly the First Congress of Turkish History, which was organized by the Turkish Historical Society and held at Ankara Halkevi on July 2-11, 1932. The congress was the place where the Turkish History Thesis was proposed and discussed, although the main aim of the event was to inform history teachers about the new curriculum based on the Thesis ([Sagay], 2010, pp. 5-14). There was only a single paper on classical antiquity during this event, which was delivered by Hasan

Cemil Bey [received the last name Çambel after 1934’s Surname Law], the director of the Turkish Historical Society and a member of the national parliament, the conference was titled “Ege Medeniyetinin Menşesine Umumî bir Bakış [A General Overview of the Origins of the Aegean Civilization]”. This contribution summarized the notions on how the Aegean civilization was shaped by the Hittites; the Minoans, Mycenaeans and Ionians, and how they were of the same roots (Turkish). He noted the brachycephalic nature of human remains in Crete and the skeleton attributed to Socrates as further proof for racial affinity [3]. According to Hasan Cemil Bey, classical Greek antiquity constituted only a small branch of Turkish History (pp. 199-214).

The first congress witnessed several objections towards the book *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları: Methal Kısmı*, and in turn, the Thesis. Most famous objections were raised by Zeki Velidi [Togan] Bey, titled “Ortaasya’da Kuraklık Meselesi [The Issue of Drought in Central Asia]”, questioning the official reasoning behind the Turkic migrations (2010, pp. 167-193) upon Reşit Galip [Baydur] Bey’s paper “Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî bir Bakış [A General Overview of the History of Turkish Race and Civilization]” (2010, pp. 99-161). Zeki Velidi Bey’s reviews were followed by a heated discussion between Zeki Velidi Bey and Reşit Galip [Baydur] Bey. It should be noted that after the first congress, all debates were included in the proceedings as discussions after the related presentations.

However, in the context of classical antiquity, Istanbul University’s faculty member Fazıl Nazmi [Örkün] Bey’s criticisms are significant. These were printed under the title “Liselerle Ortamektepler İçin Teklif Edilen Tarih Kitabında Nazarı Tenkidimi Celbeden Noktalar [Some Points Which Caught My Attention in the Proposed Book for High Schools and Middle Schools]” after Hasan Cemil Bey’s presentation. While he mostly addressed the choice of words along with transliteration and typing errors in the schoolbook, his most detailed objections were re-

garding the identifications of Greek toponyms with Turkish words (2010, pp. 215-221). On behalf of the Turkish Historical Society, his criticisms were replied by Samih Rifat [Yalnızgil] Bey who claimed that the belief in the existence of autochthon Greeks were refuted by new data from recent archaeological studies and the toponyms must no longer to be deemed as Greek ([Yalnızgil], 2010, pp. 225-228).

The Turkish History Thesis evaluated classical antiquity as partly Turkish and partly shaped by Turkish influences, strongly refuting the term the "Greek genius". The Bronze Age predecessors of classical antiquity were regarded either solely Turkish (Hittites) or influenced by and mixed with Turkish people (i.e. the Minoans and Mycenaean). The Phrygians, Lydians, Thracians and Etruscans were also seen as Turkish, and the inception of classical Greek culture was attributed to them. The Ionians were considered a continuation of the aforementioned Anatolian cultures and the "real geniuses". Therefore, even though the Thesis does not fully accept the Greek element in classical antiquity, it also could not completely integrate it to Turkish history. Rather, the Thesis chose to emphasize the role of "Anatolian Turks" in the development of classical antiquity to prevent its full credit to Greek history. Among several oppositions, Fazıl Nazmi Bey's challenges to the Thesis are significant in understanding that the Thesis was not broadly accepted by the classics scholars of the country and that the many claims for etymological continuity were deemed weak.

4. Second Congress of Turkish History: Dealing with antiquity or classical antiquity

The Turkish Historical Society organized the Second Congress, which targeted a wider audience, on September 20-25, 1937. Possibly due to its international format, the congress was held at Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul. The aim of the event was mainly to receive the approval of the international scientific community for the Turkish History Thesis, which had been studied further since 1932 with several archaeological expeditions

throughout the country as presented by Afet İnan as the first paper "Türk Tarih Kurumunun arkeolojik faaliyetleri [Archaeological works of the Turkish Historical Society]" (2010, pp. 8-15) of the congress [4].

4.1. Proceedings: Dealing with the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines

Among 93 proceedings in the congress book, 47 are by Western scholars, many of them renowned, demonstrating the accomplishment of Turkish Historical Society in engaging international researchers.

Thesis's statements mentioned above regarding Etruscans being Turks while ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures being shaped under influence of the Turkish cultures are represented in various papers of the congress.

Saffet Engin's (1900-1987) "Eti ve Grek dini sistemlerinin mukayese-i [Comparison of Hittite and Greek religions]" compared Central Asian Turkish religious elements with those of Sumerian, Hittite, Aegean, Cretan, and Greek belief systems, asserting that Greek mythology was only a continuation of products from Turkish conceptions (2010, p. 788). Engin presented some evidence for the Central Asian origins of the Hittites; furthermore, he claimed that the Etruscans were related to the Hittites, while suggesting that the double-headed eagle symbol originated from Central Asia, adopted by the Hittites and introduced to the Romans via the Etruscans (2010, p. 791).

Wilhelm Brandenstein's (1898-1967) presentation on "Etrüsk meselesinin şimdiki durumu [Present state of the Etruscan issue]" stated that the Anatolian origins of Etruscans was an undeniable fact based on ancient sources. According to Brandenstein, some characteristics of Etruscan culture, such as metalworking (especially zoomorphological styles), social life (women's role in family structure), religion (totemism), and language (plural suffixes) could be affiliated with Central Asian origins (2010a, pp. 215-218). The author said that the Etruscans might have lived in the same region of Central Asia around the same time as Turkish societies and might have migrated

first to Asia Minor and then to Italy in 9th century BCE, influencing their conquerors, i.e. the Romans (2010a, p. 219). Another article by Brandenstein, with similar assertions, “Etrüsklerin ve Tyrrhenlerin En Eski Tarihine Ait Dil Tetkikleri” also published in German as “Sprachliches zur Urgeschichte der Etrusker und Tyrrhener” appeared in *Belleten*’s issue 3-4 in 1937 (pp. 677-713, for German, pp. 714-751).

Wilhelm Brandenstein’s second paper in 1937 congress is titled “Limni’de bulunan kitabe – Etrüsklerin Anadoludan neşet ettiklerinde dair dil bakımından en ehemmiyetli delil [The inscription found at Lemnos - Most significant evidence for Anatolian origins of Etruscans]” (2010b, pp. 1044-1051). This conference provided additional proof for this affiliation by studying the Lemnos Stele, which was presented in the accompanying exhibition. Brandenstein also published a book in Leipzig in 1937, *Die Herkunft der Etrusker*, studying the roots of the Etruscans.

Waldemar Deonna’s (1880-1959) lecture at the congress, “Şark ve Kadim Yunanistan: Primitivisme = iptidaicilik ve Classicisme = klasikçilik. – Bunlar arasındaki mübadele ve muarazalar [The East and Ancient Greece: Primitivism and Classicism - Exchanges and conflicts between them]” studied the cultural exchange between ancient Greece and the “civilizations in the east”, concluding that Eastern influences on Greek art should be deemed limited (2010, pp. 874-887).

Martin Schede’s (1883-1947) paper, “Yunan ve Roma harabelerinin nevi ve ehemmiyetleri [Variety and importance of Greek and Roman ruins]” focused on the Greek and Roman architectural remains in Anatolia. Schede began with praising the congress and the exhibition: “This congress and exhibition are the most brilliant demonstration of the richness of Asia Minor in terms of antiquity. The recent interest of Turks towards the oldest cultural periods of the land is both natural and rightful” (2010, p. 794). Schede’s paper commented on architectural examples from classical antiquity and their influence outside Anatolia (2010, p. 794, 801).

Georg Rohde’s (1899-1960) paper titled “Roma ve Anadolu Ana İlahesi [Rome and the Anatolian Mother Goddess]” studied the common features of goddesses Kubaba, Kybele, Magna Mater, Artemis, and Diana, referencing the influencing nature of Anatolia in terms of religious history (2010, p. 237) [5].

In a similar approach, Clemens Bosch’s (1899-1955) paper, “Tarihte Anadolu [Anatolia in history]” referred to a frequently used metaphor, Anatolia being “the bridge between Asia and Europe” that witnessed different cultures, while adding “Anatolia’s role throughout history was not limited to providing passage. All foreign societies, all of which we know to enter Anatolia, settled here, gradually integrating with Anatolian communities and cultures” (2010, p. 802). Bosch continued with a focus on Roman and Byzantine civilizations; according to him, the Roman and Byzantine empires did not belong to a single society, the essence of their empire could be used by different societies and Byzantium showed a significant Anatolian quality. He mentioned that “A study and investigation of Byzantine monuments on Anatolian soil reveals that they have been created by Anatolians, certainly not by inexistent foreign Byzantine conquerors”, and concentrated on the Anatolian features of Roman and Byzantine cultures. Bosch [6] claimed that the Mother Goddess cult witnessed in Anatolia from an earliest period laid the foundations for the later cults of Kybele, Magna Mater, Hera, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athena, Gaia, Leto, the Muses, and even the Virgin Mary (2010, pp. 806-807).

Gyula Moravcsik’s (1892-1972) lecture “Türklüğün tetkiki bakımından Bizantolojinin ehemmiyeti [Importance of Byzantinology for the study of Turkishness]” studied Byzantine written sources that contained close relations with a variety of Turkish communities such as the Huns, Avars, Seljuks, Khazars, Göktürks, Pechenegs, Oghuzs, Kumans, Bulgars, Magyars, and Ottomans. The paper also commented on the Turkish influence on the Byzantines, “Byzantium learnt many things from Turks and borrowed

many civilized elements. Especially in terms of clothing, Turks had strong influence... In Byzantine military organization, influences of the Turks, especially those of the Göktürk and Avar can be found” (2010, pp. 486-487).

An overview of aforementioned papers of the congress shows that Saffet Engin, a member of the Turkish Historical Society with a background in sociology and education, made similar claims about relationship of the Etruscans with the Austrian linguist Wilhelm Brandenstein who would later become the director of the Institute for Comparative Linguistics at the University of Graz (1941-1967). Saffet Engin differs from Brandenstein in his strong belief for the Turkish nature of Anatolia throughout history and he can be described as an eager supporter of the Thesis, which can be also seen by his *Ülkü* article “Anadolu’da En Eski Türk Medeniyeti ve Cihan Medeniyetlerine Hakimiyeti [Oldest Turkish Civilization in Anatolia and Its Dominion Over World Civilizations]” in 1934 which described the Hittites as Turkish with heavy influence on ancient Greece. Engin also authored a three-volume book between 1938-1939 titled *Kemalizm İnkılâbının Temel Prensipleri* [Basic Principles of the Kemalist Revolution], which occasionally referenced the idea that classical antiquity had Turkish roots, even putting forward that “Introducing and promoting the works of Greek literature, philosophy and arts, which are Turkish in origin...is also a matter of national honor” (p. 115).

Swiss archaeologist Waldemar Deonna, a professor in the University of Geneva and curator of the Geneva Archaeological Museum and director of the Geneva Museum of Art and History, did not refer to claims of the Thesis while explaining that he saw little Eastern influence on Greek art. Similarly, German archaeologist Martin Schede who was the director of the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul between 1937 and 1945 limited his paper to the features and importance of Greek and Roman art developed in Anatolia. German classical philologist Georg Rohde presented a paper describing the Anatolian origins of Magna Mater. He worked as a professor at the Facul-

ty of Language and History – Geography in Ankara between 1935 and 1949, took part in efforts in establishing the department while educating many important Turkish philologists, including renowned Azra Erhat. Rohde also published the book *Büyük Ana Magna Mater* [Great Mother Magna Mater] in 1940 with Ankara Halkevi. German ancient historian and numismatist Clemens Bosch who worked as a numismatist at Istanbul Archaeological Museums in 1935-1939 and as an ancient history professor at Istanbul University between 1940-1955, focused only on the significance of Anatolia throughout history in his paper. Hungarian philologist and Byzantinologist Gyula Moravcsik who taught Byzantinology at the University of Budapest between 1936 and 1967, famous for his edition of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De Administrando Imperio* with R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest, 1949), considered the influence of the Turks on Byzantine society in his paper. Thus, Bosch, Rohde, and Moravcsik indirectly supported the Thesis, but in the case of Moravcsik, the cultures regarded Turkic origin can be safely identified as such.

In parallel to congress papers, Remzi Oğuz Arık’s 1934’s paper on Karalar excavations in *Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi* mentioned that the “Greek miracle” could be dismissed based on the research of early 1900s, asserting the Hellenistic Period was nurtured by Anatolian motifs, techniques, and thought (p. 162). Arık was the first archaeologist of Turkey with formal education and directed many significant excavations of the country, such as Göllüdağ, Alacahöyük, Çankırıkapı, Karaoğlan, Hacılar, Alâddin Tepesi, and Bitik. His report on Alacahöyük works in early 1937 (which were included in the 1937 exhibition) also refers to “autochthone” people of Anatolia in the Chalcolithic Age who impacted later art (1937, p. 219).

Nationwide and international echoes of the second congress should be underlined here. Daily newspapers of the era, such as *Ulus*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Kurun*, *Akşam*, *Haber*, *Son Posta*, and *Son Telgraf*, widely featured the news of the congress, sometimes dedicating several pages to print the Turkish texts

of papers presented. They also give information about the live radio broadcast of the congress via İstanbul Radyosu. Ülkü magazine's news section in the issue of October 1937 focused on the congress and informed the readers about the closing speeches of congress, which were delivered by the foreign delegates [Richard] Hartmann and [Oswald] Menghin on behalf of Germany, [Jan] Rypka on behalf of Czechoslovakia, [Louis] Delaporte on behalf of France, [John Linton] Myres on behalf of England [7], [Stefan] Przeworski on behalf of Poland, [Ettore?] Rossi on behalf of Italy, [Eugen?] Zichy on behalf of Hungary, [Axel Waldemar] Persson on behalf of Sweden, [Jon] Nestor on behalf of Romania, [Spyridon] Marinatos on behalf of Greece, and [Fehim] Bayraktareviç on behalf of Yugoslavia ("Haberler", p. 178 and for daily newspapers "Tarih kurultayı muvaffakiyetli mesaisini dün bitirdi", p. 7) [8]. One of the reasons behind this success was surely a rich exhibition on Turkish history accompanying the event. The following section will focus on the exhibition's organization and the contents related to Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures.

4.2. Exhibition of the second congress of Turkish History

4.2.1. Idea and organization

To accompany the congress, an exhibition on Turkish history was prepared to present material evidence for different aspects of the Turkish History Thesis, while demonstrating the fast modernization of the young republic with a central section. Hasan Cemil Çambel's letter to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on 24 May 1937 outlines the reasons for the request of Turkish Historical Society to prepare the exhibition which can be summarized as; demonstrating the tangible evidence to the scientific papers of the congress to prove the Thesis, presenting an up-to-date exhibit of the creativity and leadership of Turkish people throughout history, demonstrating the progress of the republic with documents from related government institutions, providing a venue for education of history teachers (BCA 030-0-010-000-000-117-817-10).

The highlight of the event was the opening ceremony led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding president of Türkiye, on September 20, 1937, at 10.00 o'clock [9]. After the opening ceremony, groups of parliament members, congress guests and school teachers were given tours of the exhibition: the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods were explained by Şevket Aziz Kansu and his assistants; Bronze Age Turkistan, Iran, Egypt, Sumer, and Anatolia were presented by Hamit Zübeyir Koşay and his assistants and/or Hans Henning von der Osten and his assistants; the Bronze Age Mycenae, Aegean, Crete, Babylonia and Iron Age were narrated by Arif Müfid Mansel and his assistant and/or Helmuth Theodor Bossert and his assistants; the Greek, Roman and Byzantine section was highlighted by Aziz Ogan and his assistants; Eurasian Turks (Huns, Magyars, Göktürks, Scythians and Avars) were described by Reşit Rahmeti Arat, László Rásonyi, M. Fuat Köprülü, M. Abdülkadir Erdoğan and Mükrimin Halil Yinanç; the Ottoman Period was detailed by Hamit Ongunsu and Tahsin Öz and his assistants; miniatures and calligraphy were recounted by Fehmi Ethem [Karatay]; the Turkish Republic was explained by İhsan Sungu; and contemporary museums and excavations were summarized by Hamit Zübeyir Koşay (*Türk Tarih Sergisi Programı*, 1937). Even though we do not have a list for the curators, we know that there was a preparation committee chaired by Aziz Ogan, the general director of the museums of İstanbul (BCA 030-0-010-000-000-117-817-10). Nonetheless, we can assume that the scholars providing tours acted as the curators for the sections they had guided. This idea is strengthened by an article from September 27, 1937's *Tan* newspaper, informing us that in fact, Tahsin Öz selected the tiles to be included in the exhibition, while Abdülkadir Erdoğan selected the mother-of-pearl decorated artifacts ("*Tarih Sergisinin İçinden Röportaj*").

What is known about the preparations includes that the layout plan of the exhibition was designed by Martin Wagner, an employee of the İstanbul Municipality during the period (Oran, 1957, p. 83). In his oral history inter-

views, architect Feridun Akozan accounted his university years at the Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi (then Academy of Fine Arts, Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts today), mentioning that he worked as an assistant to Wagner during preparations and they had assistance from Ankara Yapı Usta Okulu lecturers along with carpenters and masters from Yıldız Akademisi (Üşenmez, 1989). According to Akozan, Atatürk had visited the hall and observed the preparations every other day (Üşenmez, 1989). The maps used in the exhibition were prepared by Emin Halid Onat and Afet İnan (İnan, 2006, p. 117).

After Atatürk's request, it was decided to have the exhibit as a permanent feature at the palace; however, after remaining open to public for over a year between September 1937 and November 1938, the exhibition was dismantled upon Atatürk's death in order to place Atatürk's catafalque inside the Ceremony Hall of Dolmabahçe Palace (İğdemir, 1973, p. 45; Üşenmez, 1989).

Although the second congress has been studied by several scholars and its exhibition was briefly mentioned, its contents were not evaluated in detail before Özkılıç 2016 (e.g. see, Bayındır-Uluskan, 2010; pp. 266-267; Özdoğan, 2006b, pp. 37-39; Pala, 2008,

pp. 93-94, 97-98; Atakuman, 2008, p. 229; Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006, p. 385). There is no published catalog of the exhibition, and the data regarding the contents have been scattered among several sources. The majority of documents consist of the images and partial lists in the archives of Turkish Historical Society, which were studied and scanned by the author of this paper. Another important source is the *La Turquie Kémaliste's* special issue for the congress (no. 21-22) with an introductory exhibition article by İhsan Sungu and a photography album at the end of the journal (Sungu, 1937 and "L'Exposition de La Société D'Histoire Turque 1937: Annexe Photographie", pp. 58-96). There are also several correspondence documents regarding preparations housed at the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, Directorate of State Archives (BCA). Proceedings of the congress, published as *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi, Kongrenin Çalışmaları, Kongreye Sunulan Tebliğler* (first in 1943 and then in 2010) provides insight into the motives behind the inclusion of artifact groups, while daily newspapers of the era have additional images and some complementary information for the contents not known from other sources. All these data allow us to reconstruct many important points: The presentation of the objects followed a straight chronology with twelve sections, A) Paleolithic and Neolithic; B) Chalcolithic; C) Bronze Age; D) Bronze Age; E) Iron Age; F) Classical Antiquity and Byzantium; G) Turkish Eurasian cultures; H) Turkish Central Asian cultures; I) Seljuks and Turkish Principalities; J) Ottomans (golden age); K) Ottomans (decline) and L) the Turkish Republic. Following a U-shaped plan inside the Ceremony Hall of the Dolmabahçe Palace, the exhibition had the republic at the center with another U-shaped structure (Figure 1). Thus, the section of the republic was visible from nearly all compartments of the layout. There were also two rooms that remained outside the exhibition area marked by curtained passageways flanking the bust of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk made by Josef Thorak (later purchased by the Turkish Historical Society). These

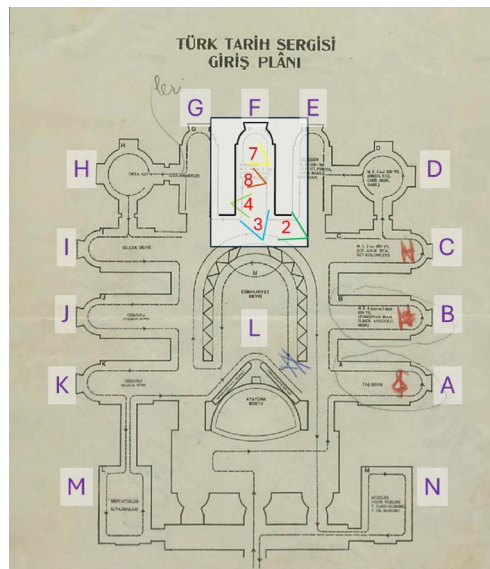


Figure 1. Layout of the exhibition (altered from Boğaziçi University, Aziz Ogan Archive, OGNIST0101303 to include the codes of sections mentioned in the text and the numbers of the following photographs from the compartment of Etruscans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines to show the angle they were taken from).

two, rather remote spaces were situated towards the Ceremony Hall's entrance and housed two nonchronological exhibits: M) Turkish manuscripts and miniatures and N) Republic's history, museology, and excavation studies.

The financial support for the exhibition was essentially secured through the existence of the section on the republic since the budget of the Ministry of Culture fell short and was compensated by additional funds from ministries of justice, foreign affairs, finance, internal affairs, agriculture, health and welfare, economy, customs and monopolies, and public works (BCA 030-0-010-000-000-117-817-10). Two booklets were printed in parallel, *Türk Tarihi ve Eski Eserleri Sergisi Hazırlık Planları No. 1*, conveying the success of the governmental institutions in modernization, and *Maliye: Türk Tarih Kurumu Sergisi 1937*, explaining the principles and functioning of the Ministry of Finance.

Here, it is worth mentioning that the republic section of the exhibition leaned toward comparisons between the last 150 years of the Ottoman Empire and first 14 years of the republic as the state organizations visualized the impact of the reforms with graphs. An important kiosk of this section is titled "San'at [Art]" divided into two with "İmparatorlukta San'at [Art in the Empire]" and "Cumhuriyette San'at [Art in the Republic]", showing their different approaches to the fine arts. From the images selected for the sculpture and architecture (such as Ankara Sergi Evi, Camlı Köşk, Ulus Zafer Anıtı, etc. in comparison to Abide-i Hürriyet, Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şahane, and Dolmabahçe Palace, etc.), we can deduce that the adoption and adaptation of contemporary art styles were one of the showcased values of the era.

4.2.2. Dealing with the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines

In the long chronology from prehistory to the Turkish Republic, the exhibition featured Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures as well. They were included as a group in a single section (one of the fourteen compartments in total), chronologically placed between the sections of the Iron Age and the



Figure 2. Entrance to the exhibition's section on the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines (Turkish Historical Society Archive).



Figure 3. General view of the exhibition's section on the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines (Turkish Historical Society Archive).



Figure 4. Etruscan images with copies of the Nisyros grave stele and Branchid statue (Turkish Historical Society Archive).



Figure 5. Artifacts from Istanbul Archaeological Museums, from left to right: Bust of Alexander the Great, seated Kybele statuette and Ephebos sculpture (copy), also see Table 1 (Turkish Historical Society).



Figure 6. Artifacts from Istanbul Archaeological Museums, from left to right: Roman grave stele (copy), emperor Valentinianus II (copy), a magistrate statue (copy) and panel of Saint Eudokia, also see Table 1 (Turkish Historical Society).



Figure 7. Showcase for Greek Art, 5th-4th centuries BCE, the Hellenistic Era (Turkish Historical Society Archive).

Central Asian Turks (Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3). Since the exhibition program booklet names Aziz Ogan as the guide to guests of the congress, it can be assumed that he was the curator

of this sector (*Türk Tarih Sergisi Programı*, 1937).

Exhibiting freestanding or wall-mounted sculptures, a sarcophagus, grave stela, a column capital, and copies of a few architectural decorations and statues (Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6), the compartment also housed two showcases for small finds (Figure 7 and Figure 8). The showcases were titled “Roma ve Bizans Sanatı [Roman and Byzantine Art]” and “Yunan Sanatı, 5:4 inci Asır, Helenistik Devri [Greek Art, 5th-4th centuries, Hellenistic Era]”, they mostly contained terracotta, ceramics and metal vessels, figurines, and jewelry. Additionally, there were two smaller freestanding showcases, one for a rather large vessel and another for an unidentified structure model (possibly a Thracian tumulus, seen at the center of Figure 2). The display was supported by several images hung on the walls. As the showcases contained original small finds, freestanding objects were mostly gypsum copies of sculpture. This decision must have been made to decrease the problems of transport. Some copies carried on shelves on the walls must have provided more efficient use of the space as well.

The archives of the Turkish Historical Society do not have any artifacts list for this section, but their photography archive, along with images and articles appearing in the contemporary newspapers and *La Turquie Kémaliste*, enable us to identify the included artifacts. Table 1 contains a list of artifacts based on the pictures from the Turkish Historical Society Archive while Table 2 contains the list of images that can be seen supporting the display. [10]

The general outline of the section does not follow a strict chronology, the latest artifact of the section is a 12th century AD column capital, which is neighbored by a copy of an early Roman sculpture, marking the exit towards the Central Asian and Steppe Cultures section.

Most of the objects in this section seem to be loaned from Istanbul Archaeological Museums, while the Lemnos Stele that provided significant support for the Thesis must have been loaned from the National Archaeology

Museum of Athens in Greece (Figure 3, lower right).

The images supporting this section of the exhibition center around the creations of Anatolian architecture, including Pergamon's gymnasium, Temple of Demeter, Asklepion, and Red Hall Basilica, Ankara's Temple of Augustus and Byzantine Period tombs from Ürgüp. The nature of this selection seems to reflect the Thesis's emphasis on the Anatolian origins of the arts and architecture in classical and late antiquity (especially when compared to the vast variety of provenances seen in assisting images of the other sections like cultures of the Bronze and Iron ages, see Özkılıç, 2016, pp. 107-270). This idea is supported by İhsan Sungu's article on exhibition in *La Turquie Kémaliste*, which names this section as "F" and mentions that it demonstrates Anatolian influence on Greek and Etruscan cultures (1937, p. 17), indicating the selection was not strictly made by concerns of logistics.

As the congress papers refer to the Turkish History Thesis's claims about the Turkish origins of the Etruscan, Egyptian, Hittite, and Mesopotamian cultures that later shaped the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines, the exhibition also emphasizes the interactions between civilizations. The section contained a Kybele statuette, paralleling the presentations of Rohde and Bosch's centering on the mother goddess of Anatolia (Figure 5, center and Table 1). An object included to refer to linguistics; the Lemnos Stele, was one of the strongest pieces of material evidence for Etruscan and Anatolian relations. In addition to Brandenstein's paper, the stele was mentioned in *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* as evidence for the said relation along with influence of Aegean languages on the Greek language (1930, p. 303, 317).

The artifacts of the showcases complimented the arguments of the Thesis as well; pottery and metal crafts of Anatolia were associated with Turkish influence. Freestanding architectural elements, a column capital, and a relief fragment also refer to a frequently mentioned Thesis claim that is a figurative aspect of Turkish artistry. Sculpture copies, figurines, and supporting images are mostly Anatolian finds, which



Figure 8. Showcase for Roman and Byzantine Art (Turkish Historical Society Archive)

can be deemed as a reference to original Anatolian creations in arts and architecture, also emphasized by the Thesis. The three images of Etruscan art highlight the Anatolian connection proposed by the Thesis (Figure 4 and Table 2).

Another part of the exhibition which must have had Greek, Roman, and Byzantine artifacts is the section referred as "coins minted in Anatolia since antiquity", implying a chronological arrangement. Although we know of its existence from Sungu's article (p. 19), there are no other visual or written records which could enable us to identify the artifacts displayed.

The material heritage from classical antiquity has been represented as a stage within Turkish History Thesis and its visualization, Turkish History Exhibition. Meanwhile, the intellectuals of the era were encouraged by this indirect sense of ownership and used the perceived familiarity of classical antiquity as a basis for their suggestions of integrating their written sources and languages in school curriculums [11]. From the archives of Istanbul Archeological Museums, we know that the exhibition resonated with the public since it was visited by 154,125 people between October 1937 and August 1938. Considering the population of the city at the time (741,148 people according to census in 1935, Uzman, 2020), this popularity can be attributed to the enthusiasm of the era fueled by the new

Table 1. A list of artifacts based on the photographs from the Turkish Historical Society Archive.

Artifact	Date	Provenance	Housing Museum	Period
Epebos sculpture (copy)	Early Roman Period	Tralles	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 1191 (T)	Roman Period
Model (tumulus cross section?)	Archaic Period (?)	–	–	Archaic Period (?)
Charioteer relief (copy)	last quarter of 6th century BCE	Kyzikos	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 2813 (T)	Archaic Period
Seated branchid sculpture (copy)	mid 6th century BCE	Didyma	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 1945 (T)	Archaic Period
Unidentified relief (copy)	–	–	–	–
Athlete's grave stele (copy)	480-450 BCE	Nisyros	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 1142 (T)	Classical Period
Relief depicting two lions attacking a bull (copy)	8th - 9th century CE	Beyazit	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 229 (T)	Byzantine Period
Capital with Salome (copy)	12th century CE	Sebaste	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 821 (T)	Byzantine Period
Fresco fragment	Byzantine Period	–	–	Byzantine Period
Relief fragment (copy)	–	–	–	–
Red-figure pottery	Classical Period	–	–	Classical Period
Magistrate sculpture (copy)	late 3rd century CE	Aphrodisias	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 2266 (T)	Roman Period
Sarcophagus fragment? (copy)	Greco-Persian?	–	–	–
Lemnos Stele	late 6th century BCE	Lemnos	National Museum Archaeology of Athens, Inv. No. 13644	Archaic Period
Portrait of Alexander the Great	first half of 2nd century BCE	Pergamon	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 1138 (T)	Hellenistic Period
Kybele statuette	3rd-4th century CE	Nikeia	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 787 (T)	Roman Period
Red-figure pottery, Lampsakos vase and 10 more different vessels	5th to 1st centuries BCE	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Classical Antiquity
9 different figurines	Hellenistic/Roman periods	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Classical Antiquity
2 diadems	Hellenistic Period	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Hellenistic Period
Mirror	–	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Classical Antiquity
Bust shaped steelyard weight	5th century CE	Herakleia Pontike	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 6166 (M)	Byzantine Period
Bust shaped steelyard weight	Early Byzantine Period	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Byzantine Period
Icon of Saint Eudokia	late 10th - early 11th century CE	Lips Monastery	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 4309 (T)	Byzantine Period
Chalice	9th century CE	Tiran	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 1532 (M)	Byzantine Period
Plate	6th century CE	Aleppo-Stuma	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 3759 (M)	Byzantine Period
Paten	6th-7th century	Lampsakos	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, 78 (M)	Byzantine Period
6 vessels	Byzantine Period	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Byzantine Period
Lamp	Byzantine Period	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums (?)	Byzantine Period
Wrestlers' statuette	1st century CE	Antiocheia	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, 266 (M)	Roman Period
Bowl	Roman Period	–	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, 87 (ÇÇ)	Roman Period
Grave stele (copy)	Roman Period	Soa or Kotiaion	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 5 (T)	Roman Period
Statue of Valentinian II (copy)	4th century CE	Aphrodisias	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Inv. No. 2264 (T)	Roman/Byzantine Period

Table 2. A list of supporting images based on the photographs from the Turkish Historical Society Archive.

Image of	Date	Provenance	Housing Museum	Period
Fresco detail from Tomb of the Triclinium	ca. 470 BCE	Tarquina		Etruscan
Bronze cauldron	4th century BCE	Palestrina	National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia	Etruscan
Disc of Magliano	5th–4th century BCE	Magliano	National Archaeological Museum of Florence	Etruscan
Tombs	Byzantine Period	Ürgüp		Byzantine
Upper terrace of the gymnasium	2nd century CE	Pergamon		Roman
Temple of Demeter	late 2nd century BCE	Pergamon		Roman
Upper terrace of the gymnasium	2nd century CE	Pergamon		Roman
Asklepion	2nd century CE	Pergamon		Roman
Temple of Augustus	25 CE	Ankara		Roman
Red Hall Basilica	early 2nd century CE	Pergamon		Roman

global trends about national identities. Prepared in a very limited time frame (only four months from its inception on May 24, 1937, to its opening on September 20, 1937) with a very wide scope (from prehistory to 1937), the exhibition's success attests to the devotion of the state and scholars to the subject.

5. Conclusion

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, nation states sought new national identities and ideals, severing their ties with the empire. Among the most significant aspects of these efforts were policies on education and culture, with each nation emphasizing

their own national stance. Thus, the Republic of Türkiye, the sole Turkish state established after the Ottoman Empire, concentrated on the idea of Turkishness. The new idea did not limit itself to the Turkish states in Anatolia and Thrace and sought an uninterrupted chronological line between prehistory and contemporary history as it was emphasized by the *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* and the contents of the two congresses mentioned above.

The congresses on Turkish history organized by the state reflect the efforts of the republic for the dissemination of these new ideals. In this context, the second congress held in 1937, gains more significance since it also had an exhibition emphasizing Anatolian civilizations accompanying an international symposium (a much smaller one would be organized in the Third Congress of Turkish History in Ankara in 1943, but lacked any reference to the claims of the Thesis).

The exhibition of 1937, laid out in a U-shaped plan inside the Ceremony Hall of Dolmabahçe Palace dedicated its center to the republic. Thus, the Turkish identity of the state was emphasized, while communicating the message that the young republic is the new patron and protector of the civilizations of the land. Moreover, the papers of the congresses showed acceptance toward Türkiye's patronage.

Despite their limited presence in the exhibition, the inclusion of Greek, Roman and Byzantine artifacts in the Turkish History Exhibition can be interpreted as a significant step towards the young Turkish Republic's acceptance of all architectural and archaeological remains of Anatolian cultures as its own, in spite of the tumultuous political environment of the early 20th century.

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Endnotes

[1] Both versions of the book contained the statements that "the aim of this work is to remind the dignified past of the great Turkish nation based on historical facts since their contribution and efforts to the earliest civilizations has been ignored and they have been made to suffer baseless accusations for centuries" (1930, p. 68 and 1931, p. 73).

[2] The quotes from the book have been translated to English by the author, while square brackets in quotations mark additions by the author as well.

[3] Anthropologic concerns of the period in determining differences between human races is an important component of Turkish History Thesis, which emphasized that Turkish people were regarded brachycephalic; this discussion on anthropologic classifications of human races was a very popular subject during the period and for its significance (see Toprak, 2012; Toprak, 2021).

[4] İnan gave the preliminary results of the excavations and surveys at following sites; Ahlatlıbel (1933), Karalar (1933), Göllüdağ (1934), Alacahöyük (1935-1937), Thracian mounds/tumuli (1936-1937), Ankara Castle (1937), Çankırıkapı (1937), Etiyokuşu (1937), Pazarlı (1937), Kuştepe (surveyed in 1937?), İzmir Namazgah (not dated) and Istanbul Sarayburnu (1937). It should be noted here that İnan, one of *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları's* authors, is closely related to the development of Thesis as she reports that in 1928, upon seeing Turkish people being classified as "secondary" human beings in a history book in French, she informed Atatürk who delegated the task of researching the matter to her (İnan, 1939, p. 244). She continued her studies with

a doctoral dissertation prepared under supervision of Eugène Pittard in University of Geneva on anthropological nature of Turkish people. Pittard is an important figure seen as the creator of theoretical basis for the anthropological claims of the Thesis (Toprak, 2012, pp. 200-204).

[5] Rohde had to leave Germany and emigrated to Turkey in 1935 since he faced discrimination due to being married to a Jewish woman.

[6] Similar to Rohde, Bosch left Germany and emigrated to Turkey in 1935 since he faced discrimination due to being married to a Jewish woman.

[7] Myres also wrote a small piece praising the archaeological site studies, organization of the congress, and the exhibition (Myres, 1937).

[8] Both *Ülkü* and *Akşam* only wrote the last names, thus first names have been added inside square brackets by the author.

[9] On the same day, Atatürk also inaugurated the Museum of Painting and Sculpture at the Chambers of the Crown Prince of Dolmabahçe Palace. This opening might be the reason for the exclusion of contemporary Turkish arts in the exhibition on Turkish history.

[10] In the aforementioned letter from Çambel to Atatürk, Çambel refers to exhibition contents in addition to original artifacts, such as maps for each chronological section, high-quality photographs of sites and monuments, and models and copies from museums for the artifacts that could not be transported (BCA 030-0-010-000-000-117-817-10). All of these plans, including printing an exhibition issue of *La Turquie k emaliste* seem to have been actualized.

[11] The Republic's patronage of cultural heritage of the land continued after 1937 and notions of classical antiquity were adopted in line with the ideals of the republic from literature to architecture. A more in-depth analysis on the subject is being studied by the author in a PhD dissertation titled "Perception and Heritage Value of Classical Antiquity in Art and Architecture of Early Turkish Republic" at the History of Architecture program of İTÜ under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Turgut Saner.

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