

Research Article

Different Political Impacts on Making of Western-style Art and on Art Education in Turkey

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ABSTRACT: It was not possible to mention a Western-style art education and an artistic production of current quantity and style two centuries ago in Turkey. In other words, existing style of art and art education in Turkey has a quite short history. Thus, it is logical to confer that a quick and radical period of change in Turkish art world was experienced within a pretty short time. In this study, putting forth the emergence and development of Western style painting and the education of painting in Turkey with its main lines, it was tried to analyze that how did the process of change affected the actors in the field of art. As a result of this analysis, it was concluded that as the artistic change in the field of painting in Ottoman Empire and in the following Turkish Republic did not arise out of internal dynamics of artistic production field, but from the Westernization desire of the political power, nearly everything about art was in the monopoly of the political power about art for a quiet long time, and there had been no other social stratum supporting and demanding art, the artists had established clientelist relationships with the political power especially till the 1940s and formed a language of painting parallel to the demands of the political power.

Keywords: *Sociology of Art, Turkish Art History, Art Education, Artistic Change, Westernization*

Introduction

The unchangeable criterion of following a career in arts and thus getting accepted to the art field is to have an education in an art school. In today's Turkey, this works effectively and there are more than one hundred plastic arts departments and ten-thousand graduate students. Besides, an Istanbul-centered, colorful field of artistic production which interacts with Western art world and an art market having a remarkable economic value exist. But works produced in art circles and exchanged in the art market as well as art education in today's Turkey are completely Western-style.

However, if we had viewed Turkey two centuries ago, we would have encountered with a quite different scene. Because it was even not possible to mention a Western-style art education and an artistic production of this quantity and style two centuries ago. In other words, existing style of art and art education in Turkey has a quite short history. Thus, it is logical to confer that a quick and radical period of change in Turkish art world was experienced within a pretty short time.

In this sense, it is quite educatory to examine and explain this notable change in Turkish art world causally.

First Contact with Western Art

As we all know, Ottoman Empire ruled over a wide geographical area including Turkey's today lands from 1299 to 1922. Painting meant miniature and calligraphy, which were far away from Western painting tradition, in the Ottoman Empire - an absolute monarchy shaped by Turkish-Islamic culture principally. Just like other art branches in Ottoman Empire, both architecture and miniature existed through a patronage system under the dominance of top government

officials with the Sultan in its center -which can be named as the Palace (Saray)- and were shaped under the influence hereof. As pointed by the fact that works produced were generally monumental pieces of architecture, this patronage system was functioning for the architecture more effectively rather than miniature and calligraphy (Gardner, 1986: 303; Kuban, 1970: 213-214).

The first contact with Western style painting and thus the first diversion from traditional Ottoman art occurred while Mehmet the Second was ruling the empire (1451-1481). Having extended his command in Europe after conquering Istanbul and other regions in the West, Mehmet the Second began supporting traditional painting art by founding a place for miniaturists (nakkashane) in the Palace and employing many famous miniature artists but expressed his interest in Western-style oil-painting rather than miniature. He was so keen on this kind of painting that not only did he invite famous Italian painters like Gentile Bellini and Constanza de Ferrera and wanted them to draw his portrait, but also sent Sinan Bey to Italy for getting painting education, which was a first in the Ottoman history up to that time. Sultan's inclination toward Western-style painting form made an evident impact on people maintaining their lives by the patronage of the Palace. In this way, miniatures began to be drawn benefiting from features of oil-painting (And, 2002: 108; Şeyhsuvaroğlu, 1960: 21).

This period of change, which was fully and completely as a result of Sultan's political inclinations and desires, ended after Sultan Bayazid the Second, his son, who were loyal to

traditional art, came into power (1481-1512). In fact, his period became into a period of reaction against inclination to the West and miniature as the traditional book furnishing method gained dominance again. But Oriental art tradition showed its effect at this time as a consequence of interaction with Iranian miniatures. Classical style of Ottoman miniature began to be shaped and reached its peak in the period of Süleyman the First (1520-1566).

This return to East, following Mehmet the Second, included some other implications beyond artistic interest. It is known that Bayazid the Second and Selim the First, successors of Mehmet the Second, essentially were struggling politically and militarily for and interacting with the East i.e Islamic regions, as different from Mehmet the Second.

That is why similar improvements that were experienced in the period of Mehmet the Second, could only happen after more than two centuries, in the period of Ahmet the Third (1703-1730) when intense interactions with the West occurred again. As a consequence of technological and political developments in the period of Ahmet the Third, who was similar to Mehmet the Second in being keen on painting and being a calligrapher, press became free in 1726/7 within the Ottoman Empire. Printing and distribution of figurative books via printinghouses made Ottoman people, who were distant from painting due to the Sunni Islam's influence, get used to and have interest for painting a little bit within this period. And painting become into an artistic style seen on walls, cupboard doors, ceilings as a part of interior decoration in pavilions and mansions, where especially upper-class people lived. Having covered schematic landscapes and still-life paintings, this new style was quite close to Western-style painting, yet, still there were no individual characteristics of related works; all of them seemed to belong to one person (Arık, 1976: 18; Gültekin, 1992: 11; Tansuğ, 1999: 42-45; Renda and Erol, 1980: 50).

Orientation to Western Art

In the art history of Ottomans, a radical transformation to be continuous afterwards happened in the period of Selim the Third (1789-1807). In this period, distinct from others, Ottoman government understood that losing lands to Europe after Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) depended not on personal, but on structural problems and accepted that Empire started to decline because Europe was being capitalized so fast and it could not fight with European rivals on military, economic and political bases. More importantly, as a consequence of reports to this end, the idea that only reaching technological development level of West could resolve this problem became dominant among statesmen. This political inclination initiated the modernization process or Westernization process, both of which were referred synonymously, continued up to this day and mostly carried out by political rulers.

The first step to modernization, as could be expected, was to organize a Western-style army which could defeat European armies and open a Western-style military engineering school for educating army officers. In 1795, Imperial School of

Territorial Engineering (Mühendishane-i Berri Hümayun) was opened. The importance of this school was that for the first time in Ottoman's history of art and education, a school had painting courses not for artistic aims, but for correct drawing of nature and objects. Since there was no one to give this education, foreign tutors came from Europe to instruct for painting classes similar to other courses. Painting courses were also on the curriculum of Imperial School of Naval Engineering (Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayun), opened immediately after Imperial School of Territorial Engineering, Ottoman Medical School (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye) (1827) and Ottoman Military School (Mekteb-i Harbiye) (1834). In 1829, Ottoman state began sending these students, who graduated from above-mentioned schools, to Europe for further education. Among these schools, all of which were military, Ottoman Military School was the most important one for the painting art. In this school, painting lessons were not like insufficient first level classes just like in other schools; but were given in different classes by European teachers and divided into three parts as perspective drawing, oil-painting and water-colour painting. Moreover, two different sections were made up for the education of army officers to become tutors in military school in the next years and one of these two sections was painting class; for that reason a military class of infantry soldiers came into being (Gültekin, 1992:11; Cezar, 1971: 325; Başkan, 1994:3).

Even though none of these schools were opened to train artists, they have been influential in Turkish history of art. As an unintended consequence, not only army officers, engineers and doctors graduated from these schools, but also first Turkish generation of painters including Ferik İbrahim Paşa, Şeker Ahmet Paşa, Tevfik Paşa, Hüsnü Yusuf Bey, Servili Ahmet Emin Bey, Osman Nuri Paşa, Hüseyin Zekai Paşa, Süleyman Seyyit Bey, was trained in these schools. In the meantime, military painters met the need of painting instructors, which arose after all public and private school began giving painting lessons as from 1851. Thus, Ottoman state benefited from army officers' knowledge and experiences in art teaching, organizing exhibitions, and making up state collections and consultancy services for the government and Sultans. Shortly, Westernization, orientation and institutionalization processes of art were conducted consistently with the help of army officers until 20th century (Toprak, 1962: 234-235).

As you may forecast, in consequence of sending some students to Europe for further education as well as European character of both style and content of the above-mentioned education with European tutors, students of these schools not only adopted Western-style of painting, but also inspired by Western-style life and thinking. This inspiration reached such a level that nearly all political actors supporting Westernization, highly influential after the last period of Ottoman Empire, were the army officers, who graduated from these schools.

Institutionalization of Western-style Art

After adopting Westernization as a principal state politics rather than an idea being in the ruler's direction, all Sultans following Selim the Third showed interest in painting and supported it. Selim the Third made Konstantin of Kapıdağ draw the pictures of Ottoman Sultans and made Mustafa Rakım Efendi draw his own portrait. Mahmud the Second (1808-1839) furthered and made something strange according to Ottoman lands where Sunni Islam was in power; he made painters draw his portraits called Blessed Portraits and made them hang on military barracks, schools and government offices with ceremonies and thus he became the first to come out from his hollow among Sultans, who had been invisible for a long time. Moreover, he came out not with traditional turban and coat, but with similar clothes to those of Western monarchs. The period of Mahmud the Second was also a quite important transformation process for painting art; because miniature, whose production decreased almost completely as from 19th century, disappeared and replaced with Western-style pictures painted by oil and water (Cezar, 1971: 33; Şeyhsuvaroğlu, 1960: 34; Berkes, 1973:149-152).

When traditional painting was defeated by Western-style painting, various activities began to be arranged by Ottomans. In this sense, first painting exhibition was held by Oddeger and Oreker, Australian painters, in the Palace in 1845 for Abdulmecid the First (1839-1861). First public exhibition was the year-end exhibition held by students of Ottoman Military School with the help of European tutors in 1849 (Öner, 1995: 19). Prohibition on sculpture, whose ban was more stricter than painting in Sunni Islam, could only be abolished after Abdulaziz the First (1861-1876) got impressed with the statues of rulers in a journey to Europe in 1871 and made Fuller sculpture his own statue. In 1882, a trail was blazed in Ottoman history and an exhibition of waxworks belonging to Italian artists was opened in Beyoğlu called as Little Europe of Istanbul (Renda, 2002:141). In the same period, Muslim painters also began exhibiting their works together with Christian Ottomans and Europeans and founding art clubs. First of these exhibitions was First and Second Fine Arts Exhibitions held with the help of Şeker Ahmet Paşa's enterprises in the year of 1875. In 1880 and 1881, art club Club Alphabet (Elifba Kulübü) held two exhibitions in Istanbul. In 1901, 1902 and 1903, another art club named First Hall of Istanbul (İstanbul'un İlk Salonu) held exhibitions in Istanbul. In these public exhibitions, in which foreign people and non-Muslim Ottomans also joined, not only people of the Palace but also people from other classes of the society bought paintings. Thus, a kind of art market, though being small, began constituting in Ottoman lands (Cezar, 1971: 426-444).

Now, it is necessary to remind that this Westernization process forced political system to change in the second half of 1800s. At first, after Imperial Edict of Gulhane was declared in 1839, basic rights such as protection of dignity and property were assured for all Ottoman citizens, and Muslim and non-Muslim citizens were tried to be given equal rights with the enactment

of Edict of Reform. In 1876, with a further move, an Ottoman Basic Law (Kanuni Esasi) was prepared under pressure of a group consisting of young army officers supporting Westernization mostly, called Young Turks (Jön Türkler). With this Constitution, some of Sultan's powers were transferred to a parliament for the first time in Ottoman history. And with this transformation, called the First Constitutional Period, political system of Ottomans was evolved from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy.

In the consequence of these developments, first initiations began for opening a painting school to provide Western-style art education. After French painter Guillemet, who came to Istanbul for drawing Sultan's portrait and began living in Istanbul as from 1865, and his wife opened a course called Academy of Pattern and Painting in 1874, government decided to found a Fine Arts Academy in 1877 and assign Guillemet as its head. However, this academy, about which we have no historical knowledge, could possibly never get opened (Cezar, 1971: 431).

Ottoman government was able to realize this aim in 1882; first official school of arts was opened under the name of Fine Arts School (Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi). Having inspired by Paris Ecole Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux-Arts and consisted of European and Christian Ottoman tutors, Fine Arts School started giving education with painting and sculpture classes in 1883; and in 1892 engraving classes were added to curriculum (Gezer, 1984: 15-17).

Official justification note of Fine Arts School, dated on 1st January 1882 and published by the government, was a summary of both political atmosphere of that period and state's view on art. Even the first paragraph of this note, which had a quite nationalist language, said that: "Communities within Ottoman Empire, especially Turkish people, had a sense of art inherently, but they chose to express this tendency in big buildings, thousands of things to be used rather than with painting or sculpturing." And it added that one of the functions of this school was to restore and preserve existing works. It continued like that: "Turks produced and possessed precious pieces of art, but they produced nothing anymore and the existing ones were disappearing day by day. Moreover, there are no cadres to restore these unique works, which were damaged." The aspect relevant to economic connections with Europe was explained as such: "In accordance with the benevolence of our government, an instance of the goodness, this issue must be focused on and all the powers must be used to create necessary tools for recovering art in our country. Because it is certain that importing industrial goods of Europe to our country, impossibility for preserving the old situation and lack of education and private establishments which will improve and popularize the sense of beauty ruin our sense of beauty (...) Handling this problem of fine arts will contribute to country greatly and have positive effects on domestic industry in crisis." In the very same text, expectations from Western-style education was stated like this: "To realize what is designed will be easy due to the fact that nature in our

country is very beautiful and our people have impeccable taste. Although it is difficult for those getting educated in traditional arts to put aside their sense of art and not possible to forget what they know, hope for correcting something which has not been fully established is quite strong. Private institutions for fine arts will bring gradual improvement in this issue in a quite short time and these institutions will not send students abroad, but rather both train talented artists who will possess impressions and knowledge about our own country and features and compose a genuine Turkish art. Shortly, without imitating attitudes and styles of famous artists, we should make effort for depicting things unique to nature and our country's spirit and features and events related to country's history." (Cezar, 1971: 447).

In spite of that ambitious beginning, accepting students without making examination and sending graduate students to foreign cities, mostly to Paris, for advanced art education with state grant given for two or four years, interest in Fine Arts Academy was so little. It was so little that only one student finished painting and sculpture classes per year. Most of the students of this school, which did not have so many, consisted of Christian Ottomans rather than Muslim people. For example; while in 1890, totally four Muslim students were studying in this school, up to fortieth year of its foundation, the number of Turkish sculptors graduating from this school could reach four (Gezer, 1984: 15-17; Berk, 1937:11; Arseven, 1993:42).

Despite all, this school was influential essentially not only in that period, but also in Turkey's art world until 1950's. The reason hereof was this: Above-mentioned school remained as the only school to train artists; in the Turkish Republic, its name was The Great Fine Arts Academy (Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi Alisi) then became Fine Arts Academy (Sanayi-i Nefise Akademisi) in 1927-28, and then State Fine Arts Academy (Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi) (Cezar, 1973: 12; Çubuk, 1977:3).

5. Relations between Art and Political Power

In 1908, substantial political transformations, which would change Ottoman history radically, began. In that year, Abdulhamid the Second, who re-established absolute monarchy by suspending constitutional law and abolishing parliament in 1878, was dethroned with a revolt led by army officers supporting Westernization and constitutional monarchy was again proclaimed. In 1913, members of Union and Progress Party (İttihad ve Terakki Fırkası), which was the biggest and most organized group within those arranging the revolt of 1908 and had strongly secularist, modernist, positivist and (Turkish) nationalist views, seized the power in an absolute way. The aim of this group, whose administrators were mostly army officers educated in Western-style military schools, was not to modernize the state but to transform society with a revolutionist programme conducted by the state. The ideology of this party, whose name (Union and Progress) made clear references to the positivist sociology of Comte, was "Turkization, Islamization and Westernization" as Ziya

Gökalp (2000; 2001), a Durkheimian sociologist and official ideologist of the party, interpreted.

Although Union and Progress Party abrogated itself after Ottoman Empire was defeated in First World War, its ideological effects continued intensely until 1945, because founding members of Turkish Republic were mostly old members of Union and Progress Party or those having the same social formation as them. In Turkish Republic, which began to be built with the idea of establishing a modern, secular, Turkish nation-state and a classless, fused Turkish nation, break from Ottoman tradition was actualized radically. Respectively in 1922 and 1924, not only Sultanate and Caliphate were abolished, both of which were legitimizing Ottoman dynasty's existence, but also social life began to be arranged in accordance with the Western norms through a lot of laws and tools. Republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and reformism, principles of the new order, were accepted into the programme of Republican People's Party, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk -leader of the new Turkish Republic- and remained as the single party to rule to country until 1945 in 1931 and these principles were placed in constitutional law (1937) not just as party's principles but also principles to be adopted by people.

Artists' response to these political changes was to conform. In this sense, first art circle in the country, Community of Ottoman Painters (Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti) was incredibly quick in conforming to political change. This group was founded by M. Ruhi Arel, Sami Yetik, Şevket Dağ, Hikmet Onat, İbrahim Çallı, Hoca Ali Rıza, Ahmet Ziya Akbulut, Feyhaman Duran, Ömer Adil, Hüseyin Haşim, Hüseyin Avni Lifji, Mehmet Ali Laga, Vecihi Bereketoğlu, Namık İsmail, Celal Esad Arseven, Müfide Kadri and Mihri Müşfik, who were educated in military schools or trained in Fine Art School and then sent abroad with the state support in 1908. Abdulmecid the Sultan's Son also supported this first group of art in the country and became its honorary president. This group benefited from patronage of the Palace previously, and then, that of Union and Progress Party which was ruling in the years of First World War. In 1921, when Ottoman Empire was replacing with Turkish Republic, it changed its name from 'Ottoman' to 'Turk' and became Turkish Painters Community (Türk Ressamlar Cemiyeti); in 1926 they became Turkish Art Association (Türk Sanayi Birliği) and Fine Arts Association (Güzel Sanatlar Birliği) in 1929. This group began holding exhibitions in Turkish Hearts (Türk Ocağı), accepted as the ideologic centre, in Ankara, capital of the new regime, while they used to hold exhibitions in Galatasaray High-School in Istanbul, capital of the old regime (Giray, 1997: 4; Erol, 1984: 10). Consequently, this group, which was able to get the support of political power, not only remained as the only art group in the country for ages, but also its members became tutors and managers in Fine Arts Academy, held state exhibitions and competitions, took most of the art orders given by the state.

Similarly, first artist group of Republican area was founded by

Refik Epikman, Cevat Dereli, Şeref Akdik, Nurullah Berk, Hale Asaf, Ali Avni Çelebi, Zeki Kocamemi, Ali Hadi Bara and Ratip Aşur Acudoğlu, who were educated in Fine Art Academy and then went to France and Germany with the state grant and came back to country, under the name of Independent Painters and Sculptures Association (Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltıraşlar Birliği) in 1929 (Giray, 1997: 42-47). In fact, though this group declared their goal as artistic development just like previous one, their primary aim was to get state support. A similar group broke the dominance of this one, which established dominance and realized its goals through official art exhibitions, competitions and orders after starting working in Fine Arts Academy. Zeki Faik İzer, Nurullah Berk, Elif Naci, Cemal Tollu, A. Dino, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Sabri Fethah Berkel and Zühtü Müridoğlu, who were educated in Fine Arts Academy and then in Europe with the state grant, founded D Group as soon as they returned to country in 1933. Nurullah Berk (1933: 4) explained the artistic understanding of D Group as this: "D Group has a view saying art is for art. It will not mark a new epoch, but save the art from formality, regulations, articles, tricks, ignorance and imbecility. It will try to show that art is a matter of heart, mind and culture.", but this group also became integrated with the political rulers in a short time. Just like its predecessors, after beginning tutoring in Fine Arts Academy, it became dominant through official art exhibitions, competitions and orders in an atmosphere where it was only possible to be trained and employed in public schools, open exhibitions in state galleries, participate in state exhibitions and compete for rewards given by the state and only the state bought painting works (Tansuğ, 1999:179).

Hand-over of the government and changing political agenda could be monitored by the changes of the art works' themes, of course. Especially when Union and Progress Party took over the power and Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, themes in paintings changed radically. While women could be seen rarely in these works until 1908, their visibility increased thereafter. What is more important; brave, modern women in low-cut dresses began replacing with sexually attractive and mysterious Eastern women, who were used to be portrayed with an orientalist view in the past. In the first decades after World War I, Independence War and Republic, painting works about war and heroism were produced. In these paintings, Turkish soldiers were described as invincible, strong, aggressive and victorious, yet merciful enough to help his weak enemy. After a long period of war and foundation of a new regime in 1923, healthy, energetic, strong peasant men and women whose faces reflected the happiness of working, fleshy animals and wealth of products began filling in the surface of canvases. Large scale paintings centred on agricultural themes began to be produced. These paintings were not representative of a reality, but a fiction related to an ideal community when we regard the recent war. Harvest meant new regime, while its plenitude meant wealth, abundance, health and a new life. Eventually, after 1923, one of the indispensable themes of Turkish painters was political

leaders and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the new Turkish state, as can be expected.

Only a group called The New (Yeniler), founded in 1941, could weakly oppose to this situation. These young painters, who educated themselves with their own means not benefiting from state grant and who did not regard state support necessary for artistic production, played a central role in the alteration of the relationship between political power and artists and provided first samples of critical Turkish paintings. As could be expected, this opposition was faced with censorship and criminal procedures. Not only in single-party era, but also in multi-party one beginning in 1950, opponent artists were repressed. Not only statesmen, but also tutors in Fine Art Academy were trying to put pressure on artists. This pressure reached such an extent that it became a tradition that tutors of Fine Arts Academy were assigned as experts and prepare reports in those opponent artists' cases (Yetkin, 1970: 233). Nuri İyem (2002: 132-134) one of the opponent artists, expressed pressure put by tutors of Fine Arts Academy as this: "Burhan Toprak, principal of the academy, used to call Yeniler and say them they would have regretted if they had not engaged in D Group. He used to talk like 'Finish this group and come to D Group so that we start protecting you.'"

Conclusion

As we see, the most important change in Turkish history of art was transition from miniature and calligraphy to Western-style painting indisputably. Having occurred in a quite short time, this transition, in fact, was a complete break from tradition. This process was not limited to artistic changes; it also caused some changes in social position of artists, of course. In this sense, artists advanced to be painters accepted as independent art producers from being miniaturists and calligraphers seen as book furnishers.

However, the trigger of this break in Turkish history of art was not internal dynamics of artistic production field, but political power's agenda and artistic inclinations of those who were in power. Rejection of traditional art and institutionalization of Western-style art were the consequences of Ottoman Empire's new Westernization strategy for handling the problem of declining. Declining of Ottoman Empire in comparison with the West and adopting Westernization as a solution was a very important process that firstly made change in traditional Ottoman administrative system and then destroyed Ottoman Empire and founded Turkish Republic.

That the artistic change did not arise out of internal dynamics of artistic production field, political power monopolized nearly everything about art in Ottoman Empire and in the following Turkish Republic for a quite long time, in other words another social segment supporting and demanding art did not exist caused Turkish history of art to change parallelly with political changes. In this sense, despite all artistic changes, relations between painters and political power remained similar to relations between miniaturists/calligraphers and political power. As painters, just like miniaturists and calligraphers, knew they would not have

existed without the support of political power, they efforded so much to take state's support and sustain it. Moreover, these artists were the same people who took over the Palace's power in this political change process. Both this and their common educational background and life-conditions, which provided them with the same social and cultural capital, caused them to support politics, carried out by firstly Union and Progress Party and then Kemalists, strongly not only for deriving interests, but also ideologically.

For these reasons, form of relationship between artists and political power, clientelism, was continuous both in Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. Until 1940s, most of artists did not regard a problem to be the client of political power and not to be free in artistic production; and improved a language of painting in accordance with the demands of government to benefit from political power.

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