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Woman Pioneer in Archeology and Conservation in Turkey: Halet Çambel

Introduction

The fate of Turkish history changed with the end of the Ottoman Empire period. In 1923, Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Republic of Turkey was founded under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This new period was the starting point of a modernization process. This 'modern movement' has led to making a series of Republican reforms in order to change the country's political and social structure such as figures and symbols of the Ottoman Empire and their replacement with secular values for the new nation-state.¹

The Ottoman society based on Islamic rules was formed with gender discrimination by placing men world on a privileged level. In short, the sharia rules were preventing women from being involved in the public daily life. Although these rules were alleviated in the Late Ottoman Period, the place of women in the male-dominated society was still limited. On the contrary of Ottoman Empire, women's rights had a privileged position for the Republican authorities. This priority has emerged with a Republican reform as 'equality of women and men' and was became a legislation in 1926. The reform includes the parity of the genders for several rights such as education, conjugal rights, voting right etc. Considering, for some European countries this equality entered into force in 1940s, it should be emphasized that the Republic of Turkey have a farsighted and modern ideology.² This parity was

1 Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Washington, DC: University of Washington Press, 1997).

2 As an example, in Italy, the women had gained the gender equality in 1948 (Italian Constitution 1948).

also regarded as a representation of the modernization of young Republic in all spheres. By this means, the achievements of women have been getting visible since the foundation of the Republic.

Halet Çambel (**Fig. 1**) was one of the pioneers of getting women's achievements visible in professional and public daily life.³ She was born in 1916 and was raised by an elite Ottoman family. During that time, they were living in Berlin. Her father,⁴ Hasan Cemil Bey, was an active and motivated figure to develop the Republican ideology; he also was a close friend of Atatürk.⁵ Her mother, Remziye Hanım, advocated women's rights since she met with feminism ideology in Berlin.⁶ In this framework, it can be said that Çambel's family life has led her to grow within a modern and intellectual atmosphere that gives a privileged place to Turkish women.

Considering the Turkish history, the initial studies on the archaeology started in the 19th century. Although in the Last Period of Ottoman Empire, the prevalence of archaeology was understood, archaeological research still had a limited place in the architectural context. Besides, in this period, the great majority of the research in Anatolia was carried out by foreign professionals.⁷ The awareness of the intrinsic value that Turkey has in all spheres and its development through these values were the crucial order of the new nation-state. Atatürk was aware of the capacity and value of Anatolian Cultural Heritage. In 1930, Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) was established in line with the Atatürk's order. The main of the society was to follow the Turkish trace by searching the roots in Anatolia. Accordingly, many excavations were held in Anatolia with the



Fig. 1. Halet Çambel in 1940s. Source: Archive of Halet Çambel at Halet Çambel-Nail Çakırhan Research Centre for Archaeology, Vernacular Architecture and History. Courtesy of Boğaziçi Uni-versity, Halet Çambel-Nail Çakırhan Research Centre for Archaeology, Vernacular Architecture and History.

3 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London : IB Tauris, 2004).

4 Her father was serving as the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire in Berlin.

5 Melih Güneş, *Halet Çambel ile Buluşma* (İstanbul: Chamber of Architects İstanbul Branch, 2012), 15

6 İsa Küçük, *Halet Abla Destanı* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2010), 34

7 Wendy MK Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2003).

support of the Society.⁸ It can be said that these initiatives were a turning point for archaeological research in the Turkish history.

By the modern movement, it was attached particular importance to the education of Turkish youth. In the process of the secularism and the adoption of the values of the Republic, the youth who are well-trained in art, technique, and science was needed to awaken and develop the social structure. Therefore, the youth were encouraged to study in Europe by specializing in various fields. In fact, the young students were sent to Europe for education in the Last Period of Ottoman Empire, as well. Nevertheless, this possibility was not available for the women. After 1923, under the 'equality of women and men' reform, the 'modern movement' paved the way for the education of Turkish women. But, it was difficult to reverse traditional habits in an instant. Although Atatürk has worked for adaptation of this situation, he has not been able to achieve this goal in every segment of the society. At this juncture, the daughters of the elite families formed the first generation to benefit from the reform. As a result, they presented the role model as a 'modern Turkish woman' for the women from urban middle classes and rural areas.

Halet Çambel was one of the first beneficiaries of the reform. In 1935, she won a scholarship from the French Government and started her high degree education by studying of archaeology and Near Eastern cultures and languages at Sorbonne University in Paris. The fact that Çambel's father was one of the founders of Turkish Historical Society affected her interest in the field of archaeology.⁹ Çambel took lessons from world famous professionals.¹⁰ She carried out her studies in Paris until the start of the Second World War. In 1940, she had to return to Turkey and began to work with Professor Helmuth. Theodor Bossert as his assistant at newly founded Archaeology Department of İstanbul University.

Halet Çambel and Karatepe

Çambel's high reputation was shaped by Karatepe-Aslantaş works. Karatepe (Black Hill) is a Late Hittite Site from 8th BC period and located in the southern Turkey. In 1946, she started to work Karatepe-Aslantaş excavation under the Professor Bossert's directorship. Among the archaeological expeditions of the unknown Iron Age Kingdom, a bilingual inscription in Hittite Luwian hieroglyphic

script was discovered.¹¹ The discovery of the Hittite language had begun in 1834 when Charles Texier came to Boğazköy. By Karatepe archaeological find, the discovery was completed in 1949. Today, Karatepe-Aslantaş Site is known as the site where Hittite hieroglyphs had become understandable.¹² Bossert had lead the excavations until 1952 when he decided that there was nothing more to work in Karatepe. The decision of Bossert means to leave Karatepe her fate. But, Çambel had thought differently than his professor: she suggested that the archeological finds and in-situ remains must be preserved and be exhibited. Thus, Çambel has decided to stay and lead the restoration project by herself. It was the starting point of dedication her life to Karatepe.

During that time, the commonly used preservation approach was to transport the finds and individual assets, and to exhibit them at museums. As a visionary archaeologist who follows the developments in the world, she had a quiet different opinion from the general protection perception. The restoration project of Karatepe was based to run an in-situ preservation approach. By the Çambel's communication with Cesare Brandi, the Central Institute of Restoration (Istituto Centrale del Restauro)¹³ provided a team of experts from Italy. Çambel together with the team has started to work in 1952. Brandi came to Karatepe and examined the site.¹⁴ The personal contribution of Brandi was the significant turning point to shape the future of Karatepe. As soon as the architect indicated that the superficies of the remains had to be covered, a temporary roof system was established. Meanwhile, an open-air museum project has also emerged from Brandi and Çambel's studies. On the advice of Brandi, Franco Minissi has designed the preliminary project of the museum. But, the fact that Minissi had prepared it without coming to the Karatepe, the project was incompatible with the particular topography of the site. Therefore, on the advice of Çambel, the elaborated-final project was prepared by Turkish architect Turgut Cansever.¹⁵

After the long war period, it was difficult to facilitate a construction project on a densely forested hilltop without a road connection. As a result, although the construction started, the contractor quitted the job. Thus, Halet Çambel and her husband, Nail Çakırhan have taken the responsibility

8 Mehmet Özdoğan, "Halet Çambel," *Proceedings Of American Philosophical Society* 161 (2017), 3.

9 Özdoğan, "Halet Çambel."

10 Charles Picard (classical archaeology and Hellenistic art history), M. Louis Delaporte (Hittite language), René Labat Asurca and Eduard P. Dhorme (Hebraic), Georges Contenau (archeology of Asia Minor).

11 Halet Çambel, "Karatepe: An Archeological Introduction to a Recently Discovered Hittite Site in Southern Anatolia," *Oriens* 1, no. 2 (1948), 147–162.

12 Çambel, "Karatepe."

13 Today's Istituto superiore per la conservazione ed il restauro.

14 During that time, the director of the institute was Cesare Brandi (1906–1988) who was a very leading figure for the formation of the theory of restoration. His studies had great influence to instigate deep cultural changes. Brandi is also known with the construction of the first shelter for an open-air museum in Italy, Sicily.

15 Halet Çambel, "The Open-air Museum of Karatepe-Aslantaş: A Many Sided Project," *TÜBA-KED -Turkish academy of sciences journal of cultural inventory* 8, no. 8 (2010), 131–136.



Fig. 2. Karatepe open-air museum.
Source: Mehmet Özdoğan-Zeynep Eres, "Protection and Presentation of Prehistoric Sites: A Historic Survey from Turkey," *Origini* 34 (2012), 474.
(Copy-right: Mehmet Özdoğan and Zeynep Eres)

of the implementation of the open-air museum.¹⁶ They started to work under hard conditions and restricted feasibility (with the building materials transported by them on horseback). Meanwhile, she had started to work for protecting the site with their cultural landscape. In 1958, the declaration of Karatepe-Aslantaş National Park (The area covers a land of approximately 7715 hectares) was accomplished. It is the first national park in Turkey and has generated a model to following national parks. In 1961 the construction of the museum was completed by the remarkable efforts of Çambel and Çakırhan (Fig. 2). Since then, the finds are preserved and exhibited in their authentic and natural location. Thus, Çambel became the first archaeologist in Turkey who accomplished the 'in-situ preservation' approach as a model.

Halet Çambel was aware that besides the importance of in situ preservation with its context, it was important to ensure collaboration with the local community for sustainable protection. She states her opinion as 'Without informing the public, you cannot maintain a museum in an empty space, on a void (*Halkı bilgilendirmesenz bir hiç içinde bir boşluk içinde bir müzeyi ayakta tutamazsınız*)'.¹⁷ In other words, her preservation approach was not only based on a range of rules, but was based on generating solutions for social problems.

During that time, the principal livelihood of inhabitants at Karatepe was the forestry products. Çambel had ensured other job opportunities to prevent harming the forest. In doing so, she gave

¹⁶ It should be underlined that during that time, Nail Çakırhan (1910–2008) was a poet without any construction experience. But, after the Karatepe implementation, he has continued to work with Turgut Cansever as an architect. In 1983, he won Aga Khan Award for Architecture for leading the environmental friendly architecture by using wood instead of concrete.

¹⁷ "Toroşlardan Bir Efsane: Halet Çambel," Documentation (2003), UCTEA Istanbul Branch .

importance to the possibilities existing in the local community tradition, rather than giving new jobs. She has opened courses to improve skills of carpentry, forging, in particular, kilim weaving.¹⁸

The description of the process with her words as follows:

Firstly, it is necessary to provide a job opportunity for the community.... There is a remarkable tradition of kilim weaving. But, they always use dyes that cannot withstand water.... We have encouraged a woman and within 4 years, a kilim has weaved with natural dyes. Then everybody became interested.... And this has now become a handcraft. (... *İnsanlara evvela bir meslek, bir iş olanağı sağlamak lazım... oranın çok iyi bir kilimcilik geleneği var. Fakat kilimcilik geleneğinde hep suya dayanamayan ve boyası akan boyalar kullanıyorlar.. bir kadını özendirdik ve 4 sene içinde ilk doğal boyalarla bir kilim dokundu. Ondan sonra herkes merak saldı.... Ve bu artık orda bir elişi haline geldi*).¹⁹

As a requirement of the modern movement, it was important to increase the rate of literacy all around the country. One of the Republican reforms was Alphabet Reform (the change of the alphabet from Arabic to Latin script) in order to acceptance of usage the Latin characters. The majority in Karatepe was illiterate and a lack of education places existed.²⁰ Çambel has initiated the collaboration with Republican authorities to bring the facility of education. But, limited funds of the Republic were not sufficient. Like all the Turkish youth living in the first years of the Republic, Çambel had contributed to develop the country as a fundamental duty by believing in the Republican ideology. Therefore, she has organized the inhabitants to make them build their own schools. As a result of the problem of finding teachers for the new schools, she has undertaken this task herself by having help from her friends. In this period, famous Turkish figures in different fields of specialization²¹ came to Karatepe and contributed the dissemination of Turkish language. By this contribution, Turkish culture has gained important literature works. Çambel's initiatives in the modernization framework dominated Turkey were not limited to the language. She also gave importance to the ethnographic research the folk culture which was being lost. Therefore, the local narratives, myths, folk songs, cradle-songs and toponyms have been collected and documented.²²

Considering the intangible cultural heritage was defined by UNESCO in 2003, Çambel's attention for the intangible assets that were achieved in the 1940s shows us her vision was ahead of her time. Her preservation approach was based on the preservation of the individual tangible assets with

¹⁸ The world famous kilims known as the 'Karatepe Kilims' are the results of this effort.

¹⁹ "Toroşlardan Bir Efsane: Halet Çambel," Documentation.

²⁰ "Toroşlardan Bir Efsane: Halet Çambel," Documentation.

²¹ Aşık Veysel (folk poet), Sabahattin Eyüboğlu (writer, academician), Yaşar Kemal (writer), Pertev Naili Boratav (writer, folklorist), Füreyâ Koral (the first Turkish professional female ceramic artist), Ruhi Su (folk music artist).

²² As an outcome of these works, in 2006, a book consisting the local narratives *Karatepeli Fıkraları* and a dialect dictionary *Türkmen Ağzı Sözlüğü* were published.

intangible contexts. Briefly, tangible and intangible cultural heritage were always inseparable and interlocking approaches to Çambel's vision.

As mentioned above, under the framework of the modern movement, it was important to contribute to the development of the country and disseminate the Republican reforms. Nevertheless, it was difficult to eradicate the traditional perspectives of the community, in particular, the rural areas. According to historians, Halet Çambel was not only an archaeologist but also was an effective figure of republicanism.²³ In other words, she has been a role model at Karatepe for the creation of public awareness of modern Turkey as well as of the modern Republic women in the terms of equality of women and men. The local community has been calling her as Halet Abla.²⁴ During her funeral, a villager from Karatepe said 'Halet Çambel was maybe an academican for you, but for us she was the mother of Karatepe (Halet Çambel sizin için belki bir akademisyendi ama bizim için Karatepe'nin anasıydı)'.²⁵ These are the evidences of how they sincerely adopted her personality and the importance of the region.

Halet Çambel As An Academician

In the Early Republican Period of Turkey, scientific institutions and universities with modern education have been established, and the youth have been provided to work there. In 1950, Istanbul University Prehistoric Department was established by Çambel together with Kurt Bittel.²⁶ The lessons given to the students by Çambel have been related to the analysis, the principles of scientific work and literature review.²⁷ But, her program was based an indissoluble bond with the academy and professional practice. Thus, field surveys and implementations have always been the main focus of Çambel's academic program. She has worked with a team consisting the students and she has always taken into consideration the on-site learning approach.

In continuation time of the Karatepe implementations, Çambel has participated and worked on several projects, in particular, focused on Anatolian research.²⁸ In addition, Çambel has followed the

changes of the technology and has collaborated with the leading research institutes of the world. Aiming to transfer of knowledge and skills to Turkey, Çambel has provided collaboration with the Professor Robert J. Braidwood and Linda Braidwood from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Between 1963 and 1972, they have carried out the 'Southeast Anatolian Joint Prehistoric Project'.²⁹ Within the scope of the project, the first comprehensive surface survey was carried out in Turkey (from the foothills of Toros Mountains to Mardin and Urfa). By the efforts of Braidwood, the specialists from the fields of archaeobotany, archaeozoology, geoarchaeology, environmental archaeology and archaeometry (the fields which have newly begun to develop in the western world) have participated the joint project.³⁰ While the project was continuing, they also have lectured at the Istanbul University. The project, which was accomplished using new methods, has an important place in Turkish archaeology.

During the Early Republican Period, it was clear that it was necessary to have an institutional structuring in order to ensure the permanence of the new methods used. Nevertheless, in those years the amount of the specialist who believed in the importance of archaeometry was inadequate. The specialists came together by the efforts of Çambel with the support of Ufuk Esin. In this way, the 'Archaeometry Unit' was established in 1976. Since then, the unit continues to research studies.

By the beginning of Çambel's professional life, she has gained a reputation, both for the national and international stage. In 1954, she was awarded with a membership by The International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques – UISPP), and in 1964 German Archaeological Institute (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut – DAI). In 1979 she became the first Turkish member of the American Philosophical Society. In 1986, she received the Italian Adelaide Ristori Award.³¹ On the other hand, her achievements as a woman were not limited to archaeology word. In 1936, she participated to Berlin Olympic Games by representing Turkey in the branch of fencing. By attending the Games, she became one of the first two Turkish women (with Suat Fetgeri Aseni) to take part in the Olympics.³²

23 Mehmet Özdoğan, "Halet Çambel: Arkeoloji, Bilim ve Çağdaşlaşma," (speech at the conference in İstanbul Pera Museum, İstanbul, Turkey, January 24, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcqH68KilHU> (accessed January 19, 2018).

24 In Turkish language *Abla* means elder sister. In colloquial, it is used for people who are adopted as a part of the family.

25 Özdoğan, "Halet Çambel."

26 Official website of the department <http://edebiyat.istanbul.edu.tr/prehistorya/?p=6607> (accessed January 19, 2018)

27 "Toroslardan Bir Efsane: Halet Çambel," Documentation.

28 Özdoğan, "Halet Çambel."

29 "Prehistoric Research in Southeastern Anatolia - Güneydoğu Anadolu Tarihöncesi Araştırmaları Halet Cambel and Robert J. Braidwood," Online Archive of Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, <https://oi.uchicago.edu> (accessed January 19, 2018).

30 J. Harlan B. Lawrance, W. Van Zeist, A. Jelineck and B. Howe.

31 "Halet Çambel," Women's Museum İstanbul, <http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/halet-cambel/> (accessed January 19, 2018).

32 During the Games, Halet Çambel was invited by Adolf Hitler. But she refused Hitler's invitation by saying that she would not meet without Turkish Government's permission.

Conclusion

The personality and biography of Halet Çambel confirm the changing process of women place in the social structure by the modern movement of Republicanism. She was the leading figure of the foundation and development of prehistoric archaeology of Anatolia. As it can be understood from Karatepe phase, she laid the foundation of the combination of tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Turkey. Additionally, during her life, she always felt responsible to contribute the dissemination the reforms of young Republic. By doing so, she became a role model for other women who had different social and cultural backgrounds. Her research activities and productivity never ceased until the end of her life in 2014. Besides, she had donated her mansion (Kırmızı Yalı) on the Bosphorus shores to Boğaziçi University in İstanbul. The mansion was restored by the university. In 2014 it was brought into service as a research centre by honouring their names: Halet Çambel-Nail Çakırhan Research Centre for Archaeology, Vernacular Architecture and History (Halet Çambel - Nail Çakırhan Arkeoloji, Geleneksel Mimarlık Ve Tarih Uygulama Ve Araştırma Merkezi). Currently, there are many successful women archaeologist who follows Çambel's legacy. Despite the women do still face various forms of discrimination; Çambel's legacy is still a role model for women of Turkey.