From Muslim piety to Turkish reason

Kemalist reinterpretations of the *vakıf*

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Abstract: *When the Republic of Turkey inherited Ottoman Empire's remaining territory, the Kemalist regime endeavored to foster a national culture that was to be distant enough from its predecessors and close enough to the West. The official discourse on cultural heritage in the decades following the republic's establishment in 1923 placed great emphasis on the material remains of Anatolia's pre-Islamic civilizations. This paper questions whether a kind of parallel discourse, led by the bureaucrats of the Directorate of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), who had been entrusted with the task of rehabilitating and maintaining the Ottoman Empire's architectural heritage, can be identified.*

When the Republic of Turkey inherited the Ottoman Empire's remaining territory, the Kemalist regime endeavored to foster a national culture that was to be distant enough from its predecessors and close enough to the West. In other words, the new nation required a historical pedigree that extended beyond the Ottoman period. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, newly established state institutions such as the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) and the Turkish Language Association (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) worked towards creating the scientific backbone of this project by conducting targeted, systematic research. The so-called People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) and their elaborate communication networks were to simultaneously spread these findings and the ideals they represented throughout the country.[1]

The official discourse on cultural heritage in the decades following the republic's establishment in 1923 placed great emphasis on the material remains

1 For the origins and functioning of People's Houses see, for example: Karpat (1963) and (1974); Şimşek (2005); Toksoy (2007); Çeçen (2015).

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of Anatolia's *pre-Islamic* civilizations. Supported by state-sponsored excavations and research, this process was shaped by the effort to locate a more ancient Turkish presence in Anatolia, while downplaying the more recent Ottoman past.[2]

This paper questions whether a kind of parallel discourse, led by the bureaucrats of the Directorate of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), who had been entrusted with the task of maintaining the Ottoman Empire's architectural heritage, can be identified. This discourse's formation will be reconstructed based on the texts aimed to reframe *vakıf* heritage from a Turkish national perspective and that were written by the members of the directorate. These sources uniquely document a process in which a patrimonialization of Ottoman-period buildings was advanced even within the prevalent national historical narrative of the 1930s and 1940s.

Vakıflar in transition

In the Ottoman and wider Islamic context, *vakıf*s (religious endowments) may be described as mostly philanthropic establishments that delivered various social services, such as health, education, and social welfare.[3] They functioned largely independently of state authorities, managing their own assets according to their own regulations.[4] Not only active in charitable work but also in housing and building activities, *vakıf*s were an essential part of daily life in the Ottoman Empire.[5]

Although the first efforts to centralize the system go back to the mid-18th century, it was only in 1826 that the foundation of a ministry titled *Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti* (Ministry of Imperial Endowments, a.k.a. *Evkaf Nezareti*) made permissible substantial intervention by the state.[6] In 1924 it was transformed into a general directorate that functioned under the republic's prime ministry. In 1937 a programmatically named "Committee for the Abolishment of the *Vakıf*s" then initiated a country-wide process of redistribution of *vakıf*

2 For critical approaches to the period's heritage perception, see for example: Tanyeri-Erdemir (2006); Redford (2007); Atakuman (2008) and (2017).

3 For detailed analyses of the *vakıf* system in the Ottoman Empire, see for example Öztürk (1995); Çizakça (2000); Zencirci (2015).

4 Öztürk (1995), p. 31.

5 Güzel (1986), p. 203.

6 Ibid., p. 69.

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properties. This invasive process continued into the 1950s.[7] As the majority of Islamic period monuments (as well as pre-Islamic ones that were put under the jurisdiction of a foundation in the Ottoman period) were related to a *vakıf*, the republican directorate had now a major role in the management and maintenance of this heritage.[8]

What makes the transformation and adaptation of this institution significant for the purposes of this study is twofold. First, as previously emphasized by Zencirci, the transformation of *vakıf*s was a central question in Turkey's aspiration to become a self-sufficient economy. Once the foundations were no longer able to continue their social and religious functions, their assets' sale became a significant source of state income.[9] Second, as a newly founded agency of the republic, the directorate had to go through a period of reinventing itself and adapt to the requirements of being an institution of a modern nation state. With the societal and religious prominence of the foundations being toned down, the republican directorate emerged as a key player in safeguarding cultural heritage – both practically and discursively. As the historical buildings the directorate owned began to be promoted as 'national monuments' by the mid-1930s, *vakıf* registers and deeds (*vakfiyes*) were promoted as historical sources through systematic classification, translation, and publication efforts. Through the efforts of its bureaucrats, the institution, and the heritage it represented, pursued a changed position within the new historical narrative. By tracing the institution's origins to the pre-Islamic period and emphasizing their essentially secular nature, this discourse attempted to reconfigure the *vakıflar* as a genuinely 'Turkish' creation compatible with modern life and nation-state identity. The publications discussed in the following pages offer a glimpse into the reconfiguration of the discourse on this heritage.

The process of redefining the directorate paralleled a broader reorganization in which the authority over historical properties was redistributed among the new institutional players.[10] A refunctioning of historic building complexes composed of different buildings with different functions allowed for their individual sections to be placed under the authority of different governmental bodies. It was, for instance, agreed that school buildings should be transferred to

7 Çizakça (2000), p. 56.

8 Akar (2023), pp. 167–8. According to Akar, 80% of the historical monuments in Turkey are connected to *vakıf*s.

9 Zencirci (2015), p. 537.

10 A thorough review of this legal process is to be found in Madran (1996).

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the Ministry of Education, and waterworks (including artistically relevant objects such as *sebil*s, *çeşme*s, and *şadırvan*s) and cemeteries to the municipalities, while mosques and *mescid*s were to function under the authority of the General Directorate of Foundations.[11] Various institutions, some with relevant expertise, some without, were thus put in charge of maintaining Ottoman monuments and making weighty decisions regarding their future.

In 1936 a new law regarding the foundations was issued that transferred responsibility for the historical *vakıf* buildings to the Directorate (Law no. 2762). This law also stipulated that buildings of architectural and historical value must not be sold. All this necessitated some organizational changes in the institution. For instance, the directorate was now allowed to hire external experts for the interventions it was to undertake.[12] The texts produced by the directorate from the second half of the 1930s and into the 1950s offer valuable insight into this transitional period. Hence, a closer examination of these sources provides us with clues as to where (and how) the directorate sought to position itself and the heritage it represented.

The Republic as a traditional institution's reinvigorator

The first publication important for the context of the *vakıf* institution's changing role in public discourse is titled *Cumhuriyetten önce ve sonra vakıflar* ("Endowments before and after the [establishment of the] Republic").[13] It was published in 1937 by the Directorate of Foundations on the occasion of Turkish Historical Society's second national historical congress and accompanying exhibition. The mere fact that the general directorate was included in this major event is telling. Established under the supervision of Atatürk, the Turkish Historical Society began work in 1930 as the "Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti" (Committee for the Study of Turkish History) with the primary mandate of scientifically researching the historical roots of the Turkish people. The same year, a text entitled *Türk tarihinin ana hatları* ("An outline of Turkish history") was produced by an interdisciplinary team; it would define the national historical discourse of the following decades. The preliminary findings and theories regarding the

11 Madran (1996), pp. 65–6.

12 Ibid., pp. 78–9.

13 *Cumhuriyetten önce ve sonra* (1937). All translations are the author's.

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origins and history of the Turkish people were presented to a mostly local audience in 1932 at the first congress of the Historical Society in Ankara. The second congress of 1937 was organized on a much larger scale and brought together a diverse international audience in the former Ottoman palace in Istanbul, Dolmabahçe.[14]

While the researchers delivered their current findings, the congress was enriched with field trips, an exhibition, and coincided with the opening of the Museum of Painting and Sculpture.[15] The so-called *Exhibition of Turkish History and Antiquities* ("Türk Tarihi ve Eski Eserler Sergisi") that accompanied the congress exhibited the history of the Turks beginning with prehistory and continuing into the Republican reforms. Combining artifacts from national and foreign museums with visuals consisting of photographs, texts and graphics, this exhibition was a literal visualization of the period's dominant historical narrative.[16] Particularly interesting for this study were the sections on Republican reforms and activities, for which several ministries, directorates and governmental institutions had been asked to contribute. With each governmental body responsible for its own section, they were instructed to visually present their Republican accomplishments and outlook.

The General Directorate of Foundations was a part of this section as well. In accordance with the guidelines provided by the Historical Society, the Directorate put together a display showing the history and evolution of the institution, supported with documents and visual material (Fig. 1). The first historical section was to be followed by the Republican principles and plans of the directorate, accompanied by related quotes and instructions of the President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the Prime Minister, İsmet İnönü. They were also asked to provide interior and exterior photographs of buildings constructed by the Directorate after the advent of the Republic. To create contrast, the exhibition would also include a section on the corrupt state of the Directorate in Ottoman times. This section was to be supplemented with any historical documents or photographic evidence that clearly conveyed the message that, under Ottoman rule, *vakıf*s as institutions had continuously been corrupt.[17]

14 Tanyeri-Erdemir (2006), p. 383, 385.

15 Köksal (2021), p. 94–5.

16 For details on the objects and topics handled in this exhibition, see Özkılıç (2016).

17 Türk Tarih Kurumu (1937), p. 66–67. I am grateful to my colleague Merve Özkılıç for sharing this publication with me.

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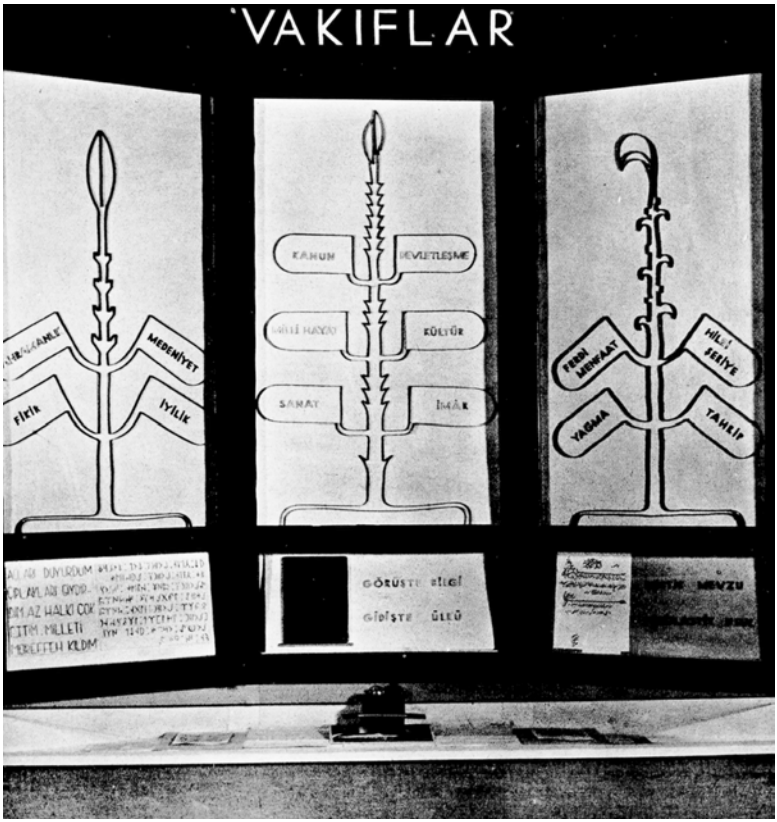

Fig. 1: A photograph showing the section of the General Directorate of Foundations at the exhibition at the Turkish Historical Congress in 1937. The branches on the first two images symbolize the principles of the directorate, while the last one refers to the institution's corrupt state during the Ottoman period. Source: La Turquie Kemaliste 21–22 (1937), p. 90.

The aforementioned text that accompanied the congress narrated a history of *vakıf*s and attempted to locate them and their buildings within the dominant discourses of the period. It is a richly illustrated text with black and white photos of selected buildings. The opening statement elaborated on the historical connections between institution and nation:

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> The foundations were born out of the generosity and patriotism in the soul of the Turks. The history of the endowments begins with the history of the Turks … The Republic is trying to rebuild the monuments that the empire left in ruins. During the reign of the sultanate, there was a deficit in the budget of the endowments. The principle of Republican endowments is: balanced budget, regular payment. One for all, all for one.[18]

According to this representation, the *vakıf* as an institution had been in a deplorable state before the Republic came to its rescue. After a discussion on foundations' origins and significance for Turkish culture, the narrative details the reasons for why and how practices came to be so corrupt. Regarding the period before the 18th and 19th centuries, the foundations were represented as characteristically Turkish institutions that produced remarkable works of architecture and helped those in need. The text's anonymous authors also claim that the charitable works of the *vakıflar* played a significant role in the Republic on the road to becoming a modern state.[19]

The book's next section was dedicated to the mismanagement of the endowments in the Ottoman period. The *Evkaf Nezareti* (Ministry of Endowments), established in 1826, was blamed for not having been able to manage continuous corruption and misuse. This caused numerous historical monuments in Istanbul and the countryside to be neglected.[20] The text supports its case with examples of archival documents that clearly portrayed the decisions made in the period as being substantially faulty. It claims that truly sustainable improvements in the system were only implemented in the republican period, when determined measures were taken to save monuments from complete disintegration. This was announced in the book with a new chapter programmatically titled: "[When the] Republic was born, endowments were reinvigorated."

The section most interesting for the purposes of this paper is the overview of protection and repair projects undertaken by the directorate. Here, again, the negligence of the Ottoman administration was represented as the principal

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18 "Vakıflar Türkün ruhundaki cömertlikten ve ulusseverlikten doğdu. Vakıfların tarihi, Türkün tarihile [sic.] başlar. […] İmparatorluktan bir harabe halinde aldığı âbideleri cumhuriyet mamure haline getirmeğe çalışıyor. Saltanat devrinde vakıflar bütçesinde açık vardı. Cumhuriyet vakıflarının prensibi: denk bütçe, düzgün ödeme. Birimiz hepimiz, hepimiz birimiz için." *Cumhuriyetten önce ve sonra* (1937), p. 3.

19 *Cumhuriyetten önce ve sonra* (1937), pp. 5–8.

20 Ibid., 10.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839471043-010 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-NC-ND

reason behind the ruination of many monuments. Following the disposition of the sultanate, the administration of endowments had joined the efforts of the Republic to save this heritage.

The text also explained the principles underlying preservation and restoration work. Priority was given to monuments that were in serious danger of collapsing. However, the area around them was also seen as a space of improvement potential. Now, monuments were no longer regarded as isolated entities. Ideally, the surroundings of monuments were cleared by removing later additions and better maintaining green areas and courtyards. Once again, contemporary efforts were contrasted with alleged negligence during the Ottoman administration. The latter had shamefully tolerated the attachment of newer additions – mainly shops – to the walls of historical buildings. Similarly, more recent paintwork in the interiors was considered bad practice examples that covered the earlier, beautiful, (more) 'Turkish', decoration.[21]

According to the text's authors, the preservation of antiquities and the safeguarding of national monuments had become fundamental tasks of the directorate. The centuries-long neglect that caused irrevocable damage would not be repeated under the republican regime, which was committed to saving this heritage.[22]

The new *Vakıflar* administration, like many other early Republican institutions, was evidently aware of the advantages of visual representations. Following its participation in the Turkish Historical Society's exhibition, the directorate created two different displays (one in Ankara called *Vakıflar Galerisi* and one in Izmir International Fair) that told the story of this institution and its current activities. It is possible to attempt a reconstruction with the help of the catalogue and visual material. The larger and more comprehensive of these displays was in the building of the newly established directorate in Ankara. According to its catalogue, the exhibition consisted of seven panels and two showcases that included original documents.

The first panel attempted to make a correlation between the difficulties mankind encounters, its need to improve lives and the creation of the *vakıf* system. Under the heading "Humankind and Nature," the striking collage in this panel contrasted images of prehistoric "cave man" with photographs of various *vakıf* buildings from Anatolia as symbols of advancement and civilization (Fig.

21 *Cumhuriyetten önce ve sonra* (1937), pp. 31–2.

22 Ibid., pp. 34–5.

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2).[23] The next panel offered the visitor an overview of the history of *vakıf*s as an institution, which began – in line with the dominant narrative of the period – with the Hittites.[24] After the third panel, the gallery informed the visitor about the Turkish *vakıf*s beginning with examples of various public facilities, such as a hospital, a school, a soup kitchen, libraries, bridges, etc.[25] The fourth panel was dedicated to the monumental *vakıf* buildings erected in various periods and those that were being restored at the time. The text accompanying these images read that these monuments were threatened by destruction, and it was a "a national matter and the state's duty" (*yurt davası and devlet işi*) to protect and save them (Fig. 3).[26] The exhibition's fifth section presented the scientific activities of the directorate with examples of historical documents. The text on this panel was relatively long, listed a general outline of research activities and presented the preliminary results; these included scientific investigations, documentation, restoration, and publications (Fig. 4). The sixth and seventh panels were about the directorate's sources of income, the first one listing the properties that were being rented, and the second, agricultural lands.[27]

This so-called gallery was not intended as a static display, but also included an archive and a library in which scholars could conduct research (Fig. 5). Located centrally in the exhibition space was also a bust of then president Ismet Inönü in front of a map of Turkey showing the administrative structure of the directorate (Fig. 6).

23 *Vakıflar Galerisi* (1939), p. 3.
24 Ibid., 4.
25 Ibid., 7–8.
26 Ibid., 9–10.
27 Ibid., pp. 12–3.

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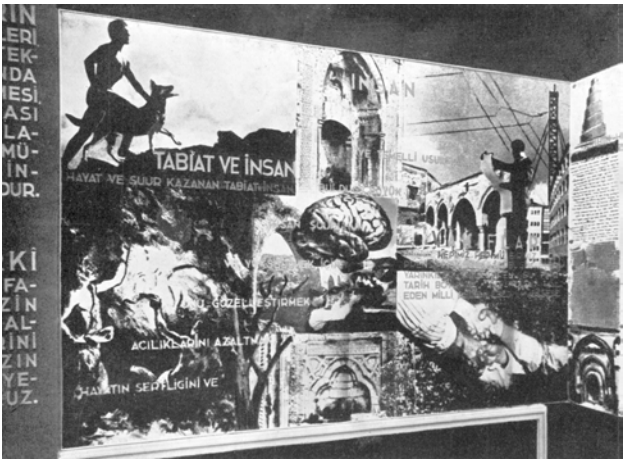

Fig. 2: Photograph from the section on "nature and humankind" in the Vakıflar Galerisi in Ankara. Source: Vakıflar Galerisi hakkında, Fig. 8.

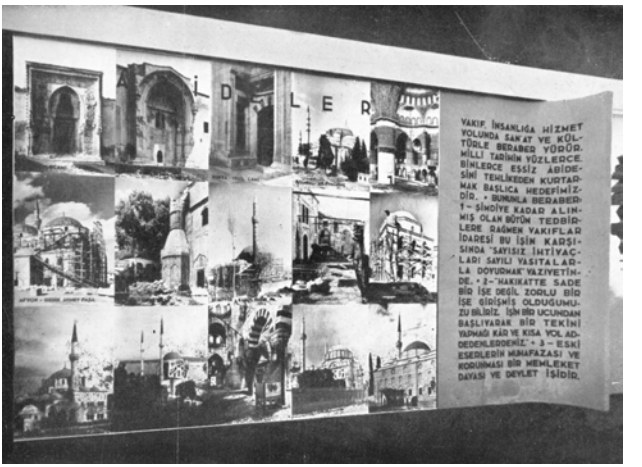

Fig. 3: A view of the section dedicated to historical monuments at the Vakıflar Galerisi. Source: Vakıflar Galerisi hakkında, Fig. 11.

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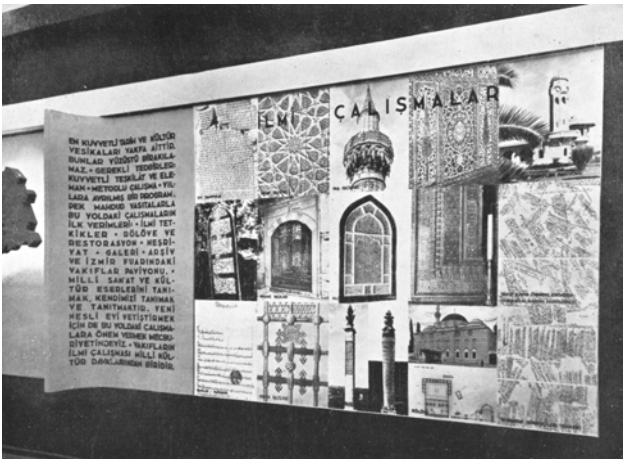

Fig. 4: A view of the section on the scientific activities of the Directorate of Foundations. Source: Vakıflar Galerisi hakkında, Fig. 14.

Fig. 5: A view of the library of the Vakıflar Galerisi in Ankara. Source: Vakıflar Galerisi Hakkında, Fig. 15.

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Fig. 6: A general view of the gallery, with the bust of Ismet Inönü in front of a map showing the directorate's network. Source: Vakıflar Galerisi hakkında, Fig. 3.

Fig. 7: Period photograph of the Vakıflar Pavilion at the Izmir International Fair. Source: SALT Research, Ali Saim Ülgen collection, TASUH5476.

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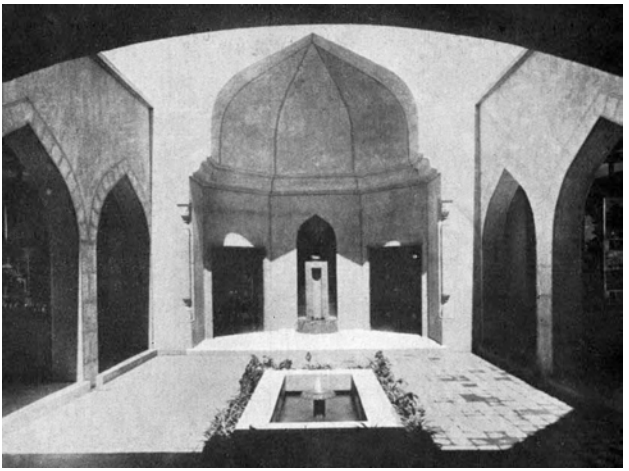

Fig. 8: Vakıflar Pavilion, interior courtyard. Source: Tansu (1938), 250.

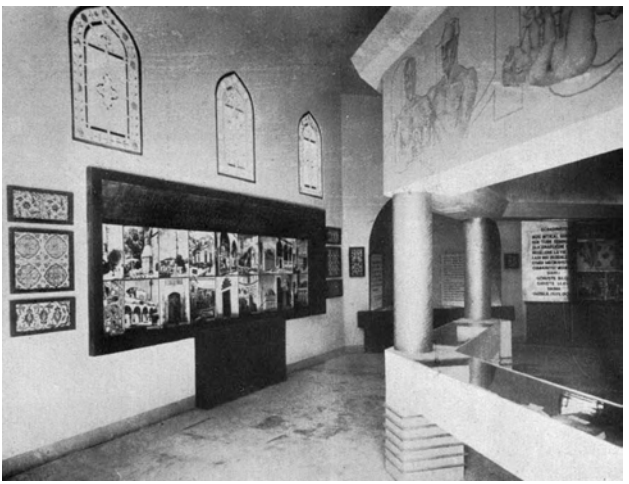

Fig. 9: Vakiflar Pavilion, interior. Source: See Fig. 8.

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A smaller-scale version of this exhibition was opened in the "Vakıflar Pavilion" of the Izmir International Fair, in a building today more commonly known as *Pakistan Pavyonu* (Fig. 7–9).[28] In a similar fashion to the aforementioned exhibitions, these displays also narrated the history of the *vakıf*s, with special emphasis on the Republican reforms. The small brochure prepared for this pavilion underlined the administration's duties in the areas of "aesthetics and archaeology". Preservation of national monuments had recently gained a significant place in their agenda.[29] The directorate was contributing to the efforts of the republican government and had focused on restoration works.[30] In addition to this scientific repair program, research and documentation efforts were also underway. The gallery established in the directorate's headquarters in Ankara was collecting books, documents, photographs and any other material related to the *vakıf*s.[31]

Tracing the pre-Islamic origins of Islamic foundations

In 1938, a public official named Halim Baki Kunter penned a lengthy article entitled "Türk vakıfları ve vakfiyeleri üzerine mücmel bir etüd" ("A concise study on the Turkish *vakıf*s and *vakfiye*s"), in which he attempted to encapsulate supposed misconceptions about the history of endowments.[32] The text, which appeared in the directorate's periodical and was published as a booklet one year later, is a systematic and academic foray into the history and origin of Turkish endowments, based on historical sources and accompanied by many images.

Kunter's text argued that research on these social institutions was generally lacking. If it this were done properly, certain misconceptions regarding the nature of the foundations could be rectified, and younger generations could learn to appreciate them. According to Kunter, one major misconception had been the direct association people commonly made between *vakıf*s and Islam. This belief had created the idea that a *vakıf* was a principally religious institution, concerned mostly with spiritual matters, thus disregarding their social

28 Built in 1937 by Harbi Hotan, the design of this small pavilion attempted to match the institution it represented. Kayın (2016), p. 15.

29 *İzmir Enternasyonal Fuarında* (1937), p. 21, 23.

30 Ibid., 24.

31 Ibid., 25–6.

32 Kunter (1938) and (1939).

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functions appreciated by so many. With strong emphasis on the national character, the text goes on to claim that the endowments not only aspired to help people, but also served to spread Turkish culture through art.[33]

Paralleling the period's official heritage discourse, this text also introduced the Hittites as, supposedly, the pre-Islamic creators of the *vakıf*s. It associated the later corruption of *vakıf*s, here presented as actually "products of realist thinking," with practices in the Ottoman period.[34] Kunter presented as evidence for his claim a Hittite tablet from the 13th century BC, preserved in what is now the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. This tablet documented how the properties in a conquered territory were to be managed. The text recounted that the Hittite king dedicated the property to the goddess Ishtar and put his son in charge of managing the foundation. The historical narration of the *vakıf*s continued with endowment documents found during archaeological excavations in Turkestan.[35] By tracing the history of the foundations to the (pre-Islamic) Uyghur Turks, the author conveniently filled the gap in the sequence until the institution was appropriated by the Ottomans. The text strongly emphasized the non-religious, rational, character of the *vakıf* institution. What had caused problems was the increasing religious connotation it acquired in the last centuries. Now it was the duty of the Republican regime to reveal the real essence of this primordially Turkish institution.

In 1941, in a small booklet entitled *Vakıflarımız* ("Our Foundations"), Kunter's chronology was repeated with great emphasis on the national character of the endowments and the artworks produced within their realm. Preservation of this heritage, representing "the unique monuments of our national art and culture," was identified as one of the directorate's main duties.[36] The directorate, under the republican regime, had already demonstrated its dedication to this duty by allocating almost 1.3 million lira to restoration projects since 1924.[37]

33 Kunter (1938), 103–4.
34 Ibid., 105.
35 Ibid., 117.
36 *Vakıflarımız* (1941), p. 26.
37 Ibid., p. 44.

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Restoring the Turkishness of the *vakıf*s

Another text illustrating the new policies adopted by the *vakıf* administration is from 1943 and was published to honor the Republic's 20th anniversary.[38] This publication, titled *20. Cumhuriyet yılında vakıflar* ("Foundations in the 20th year of the Republic") also offered a lengthy elaboration on the alleged pre-Islamic origin of the *vakıf*s and the degeneration that they suffered at the hands of the Ottomans. It then informed the reader about the directorate's new legal and financial organization, before it detailed the restoration and repairs of monuments.

In this anonymously authored text, the *vakıf*s were described as institutions that originated in compassion, humanism and patriotism. Again, the roots of Turkish endowments are traced back to the Hittites and Central Asia. Documents such as the aforementioned Hittite tablet and the Uyghur documents were once more presented as proof for the anteriority of this Turkish arrangement;[39] the later decades of Ottoman rule were represented again as a period during which the endowments, like many other institutions, suffered. The establishment of the *Evkaf Nezareti* had not been sufficient to reverse their decline. Following years of war and neglect, the republic had inherited *vakıf*s in an unkempt state.[40]

After sections on the legal and financial aspects of this transitional period during the early years of the republic, the book features a chapter dedicated to architectural monuments, the maintenance of which was considered a priority. It recounts that, since 1936, the general directorate had documented 3456 mosques throughout the country and classified them based on their historical and artistic values. While some 914 of them were excluded from the list, 1000 buildings were classified as significant.[41] These buildings, considered repre-

38 *20 Cumhuriyet yılında* (1943).

39 Ibid., p. 5.

40 *20 Cumhuriyet yılında* (1943), p. 6.

41 Ibid. (1943), p. 15. Kunter would reevaluate these efforts in an article he penned as a "Vakiflar İdare Meclisi Üyesi" nine years later. These selected buidings, he considered, required additional measures in terms of their preservation. He admitted that in the last decades the maintenance of these buildings had not been ideal, which, he suggested, might have been due to the low salaries of the staff. He then provided a detailed comparison of the numbers of former and existing staff, implying that a better organized and larger group of people would be needed to maintain these monuments (Kunter 1952).

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sentatives of Turkish national art history ("milli san'at tarihimizin hayatı"), were meticulously studied, documented and photographed. Documentation and repair work were being done very carefully; even the smallest details of the interventions were being recorded for present and future generations. The results of the systematic restoration and documentation efforts of the previous years were compiled in an exhibition named *Vakıflar Galerisi*, already discussed above. It reportedly attracted several experts on architecture and the decorative arts.[42] This 'gallery' exhibited photographs of *vakıf* buildings from different parts of the country. In the future it would display a fine selection of Turkish decorative arts. In 1938 a smaller version of this exhibition was opened at the Izmir International Fair, in a building highlighted because it "carried the characteristics of Turkish architecture."[43]

The mere existence of this 'gallery' in the headquarters of the Directorate in Ankara,[44] interestingly, also reflects where the directorate positioned itself in the new republic. A Museum of Foundations (*Evkaf Müzesi*) had already opened its doors in 1914 in Istanbul, presenting a collection of items that had come into the possession of the Ministry of Foundations.[45]

It is important to note that the emphasis on research was not limited to this gallery. Simultaneously, the directorate had begun to systematically classify and translate endowment deeds. This work had been ongoing since 1936 and would help elucidate enlighten the history of the *vakıf*s. Publications on monuments also constituted a large part of this project and, in addition to their periodical, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, nine monographs and many brochures and reports were circulated.[46]

As research and restoration efforts on *vakıf* buildings progressed, the restorers and bureaucrats who were involved in these projects began to share

42 20 Cumhuriyet yılında (1943), pp. 15–6.

43 *Vakıflarımız* (1941), p. 23.

44 Ibid., p. 46.

45 Eldem regards the opening of this museum as a politically informed undertaking by the Ottoman Empire, which sought to adopt the museum as a Western concept that, at the same time, kept their heritage safe from the Europeans. The museum, according to Eldem (2016, p. 120, 123), was a "local version" of recent exhibitions of Islamic arts in Europe rather than offering a coherent narrative. Cephanecigil (2015, p. 490) also interprets this museum's opening as a "reaction" to the increasing cases of lootings as works of Islamic arts had become more desired in Europe.

46 *20 Cumhuriyet yılında* (1943), pp. 22–3.

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their critical opinions. One example is a lengthy article penned by Ali Saim Ülgen, a prominent architect and restorer of the period. Writing in the bulletin of the Touring and Tourism Association of Turkey, Ülgen reviewed the restoration practices of the *vakıf* buildings. For him, the many regulations regarding the maintenance of these historical buildings and the existence of a team of craftsmen that constantly worked on them enabled their survival. The *vakıf* system had suffered immensely from corruption in the last century of Ottoman rule. In the early decades of the republic, monument protection had not been a priority due to general restructuring efforts, which was understandable.[47]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have focused on the discourse put forward by the General Directorate of Foundations in the late 1930s and 1940s, a period during which the republic's redefined historical narrative was being consolidated. The publications discussed were contributions to a discourse on cultural heritage in which the Directorate of Foundations claimed a stake in the Republican project. In doing so, it also situated the remains of the Ottoman period within the Republican historical narrative. By disassociating the institution from its Islamic character and attributing to its management new duties – such as research on heritage objects, documentation, restoration – this discourse also impacted practices in the following decades. The bureaucrats of the directorate not only created a parallel narrative; they also directly contributed to the safeguarding of specific monuments and the sacrificing of others.

Contrary to a paradigm in scholarship on heritage perceptions in modern Turkey, some ruptures were not as rigid as commonly purported. The rediscovery and appreciation of Ottoman-period architectural heritage, which is usually thought to coincide with the end of single-party rule in 1945, has its roots in the 1930s. While the new nation's archaeologists and anthropologists looked for traces of its ancient ancestors, the bureaucrats and affiliated preservationists of the restructured directorate were the initiators of a parallel discourse aimed at influencing the nation's perception of a less distant past.

47 Ülgen (1946), pp. 13–4.

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