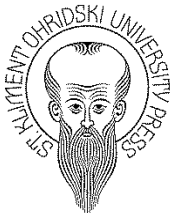


Developments in Social Sciences

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Recep EFE
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Chapter 28

The First Woman Architects in the History of Republic of Turkey: Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen

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INTRODUCTION

Although gender is a concept that is based on biological differences, it has certain other aspects in social life. The bases of these aspects are based on the roles referred to women and men by the society. Although these roles differ according to societies and time, they define the limits of what a woman or man can do, how s/he can live, and how s/he can behave. This type of role is defined as the *Social Gender*, and imposes a social norm that determines the professions that might be performed by women or men to the society, because “According to feminist writer Kamla Basin, in current social gender stereotype, while women are associated with several terms like ‘body’, ‘emotions’, ‘nature’, ‘subject’, and ‘special’; men are associated with terms like ‘mind’, ‘culture’, ‘logic’, ‘object’, and ‘public’. These characteristics not only refer to opposite poles, but they also create a hierarchy. Mind is superior to body, the logical and objective one is superior to the emotional and subjective one” (Narrated by Kocabiçak, 2005). These concepts are associated with humans not in an innate manner, but in later years in life, and have been the bases of the disintegration based on gender in professional groups. Especially in patriarchal and underdeveloped countries, this *disintegration* is experienced in a dominant manner in social life. The rights acquired by the Turkish women and the process through which the women were integrated in the society in the face of this disintegration started with the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy, and gained speed after the proclamation of the Republic in Turkey.

The Ottoman State brought the women rights into the agenda with Westernization Projects in those times, and several rights were -although partly- granted to women. In this respect, not only were high schools and teacher training schools opened for the purpose of ensuring that women participated in social life as better wives and mothers through education, but also women were accepted at universities as students. As a stage of this process, “the *Inas Sanay-i Nefise Mektebi*¹ was established in Istanbul in 1914 for the purpose of providing artistic education to girls, and the first students of this school were the daughters of prominent families of bureaucracy who accepted Westernization for the first time in the Ottoman Society” (Sağlam, 1996). First higher education opportunity for girls was provided in this school. The scope of these innovations that were performed for the purpose of ensuring the improvement of women rights was expanded with the Republican Period, and an approach that included women in the society with all aspects was adopted. The developments after the Republican Period, which was accepted as the process in which a modern society was intended to be created, enabled Turkish women to participate to social life in an active manner before many other countries, because in a public environment that is dominated by men, the existence of women as members of the society and their participation in

professions are considered as an important indicator of being developed and as a sign of democratic opinions in those times. In this context, after the *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Law* (Law on Unity of Education) that was enacted in 1924, women and men had the same educational conditions, and co-education was adopted in 1927 without discriminating between genders. In 1926, women and men were given the same status before the law with the *Medeni Kanun* (the Civil Law); and the gender discrimination in marriage and inheritance was ended. In 1930, women were given the right to participate in municipality elections. One of the innovations of that period was the grating of electing and being elected as member of parliament for Turkish women in 1934 before many western countries. In 1935, out of the 399 members of the parliament, 17 were women. With these legal regulations, Turkish women were included in daily life in a fast manner as a member of professions by receiving education in a secular system. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk mentioned the necessity of this process and the fact that Turkish women were equal to the women and men all over the world with the following words; “For our honored women, the real struggle and the field in which the real victory must be won is being equipped and ornamented with culture and real virtue rather than success in shape and clothing. I am one of those who never doubt and believe that our women will not be left behind the European women; on the contrary, they will surpass them in many fields with their light, knowledge and culture” (Narrated from Kocatürk by Feyzioğlu, 1995).

The inclusion of women in the field of architecture, which is considered as a masculine profession, was realized in the Republican Period. “Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen, who were the graduates of State Fine Arts Academy, Master Architecture Department in 1934; Şekure Üçer Niltuna, who graduated from this school in 1936 and Leyla Turgut, who graduated in 1939, were among the first-generation women architects of Turkey” (Narrated by Özgüven based on the Students’ Registers of Architect Sinan University, Architecture Department, 2002). As of 1940, the number of women architects increased. The newly-established universities and architecture departments have important roles in this. In addition, it must be born in mind that the first women architects Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen encouraged other women. According to Dostoğlu (2002), when the position of women in the developments in the field of architecture after the proclamation of the republic in Turkey is examined, it is observed that there are certain effects of the transition from a patriarchal and religious structure to a secular structure are visible. This transition shows the difference between Turkey and the western countries where women are included in professional fields, because the education of women was cared and prioritized in all fields not only in architecture but in all fields until 1950s in Turkey. Women took their position in working life together with men in a fast manner. As narrated by Dostoğlu (2002) from Wright, the process in which women were accepted in architecture in Europe was realized in mid-18th century and early 19th century; and women were considered as second-class citizens in this process. In Beaux-Arts, which is the active workshop tradition of the period, male dominance was observed, and the fields like housing and especially interior areas, which were considered as *female requirements*, were left for women. It is possible to claim that the official date in Turkey when women were included in a professional field like architecture, which was considered as a male-dominated profession, was 1934, because Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen, who were the first architects, graduated in that year. In the present study, the importance of these two women architects and their contributions to the country have been examined

based in literature review. The purpose of this study is to cast light on a period in which it is difficult to establish connections between being women and being architect is difficult.

THE FIRST WOMEN ARCHITECTS IN TURKEY: LEMAN TOMSU AND MUNEVVER BELEN

The Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi or in other words, *Mekteb-i Sanayi-i Nefise-i Şâhâne*, which means School of Fine Arts, (Architect Sinan Faculty of Fine Arts), was the first place where architectural education first started in Turkey at 1883. “Our first women architects graduated in 1934 from architecture schools, which is 51 years after the architecture education started in Turkey. Women in Europe started architecture education in late 19th century; for this reason, women could become architects in Turkey 44 years after their colleagues in Europe. However, Turkish women architects were granted the right to be architects with diplomas before the women architects in western countries” (Çekirge, 2015). The first women architects with diplomas of Turkey are Leman Cevat Tomsu and Münevver Belen.

Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen completed their secondary school and high school educations at Erenköy Girls’ High School. In this way, their first meeting was at secondary school. “Erenköy Girls’ High School is one of the institutions that played important roles in active participation of women in an equal way with men in social life, which was the vision of Atatürk” (Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013). Erenköy Girls’ High School is one of the institutions that played important roles in active participation of women in an equal way with men in social life, which was the vision of Atatürk. When the Year Book of the 1957 graduates, who celebrated the 50th anniversary of the graduation in 2007, was examined, it is observed that the majority of the girl graduates chose professions like pharmacy, lawyer, architecture, economy, teaching. It is even observed that some of these graduates were the firsts in their fields both in the world and in Turkey. In this respect, according to the archived information provided by Erenköy Girls’ Highschool Association, “Erenköy Girls’ High School was the high school from which the first Member of Supreme Court, who was not only the first in Turkey but also the first in the world, the first Member of the Chamber of Accounts in Turkey, the first member of the Council of State, the first radiologist, the first astronomer, the first Security Inspector, the first dentist, the first pharmacist, the first anthropology professor were graduated from, and it was also the first institution where the first two women architects of Turkey were educated before university” (URL-1). Leman Tomsu, who graduated from the high school in 1929, was named as *The First Woman Architect in Turkey* in the list *The First Women in Their Fields after Graduating from Erenköy High School*.

The school, which graduated the first people in their fields, also graduated two women architects in the field of architecture. The friendship of Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen in Fine Arts Academy was no doubt based on the Erenköy High School. Their life stories intersected at this point. Although Leman Hanım and Münevver Hanım are at the same age, they could only meet at the first grade of secondary school because Münevver Hanım graduated Primary School in İzmit. According to Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan (2013), who narrate from Bercis Levend (Münevver Belen’s daughter), Münevver Hanım stayed in the school as a permanent boarder, Leman Hanım went to her family at weekends as weekly boarder. It was also

mentioned that the family of Münevver Hanım had a small income, and for this reason, she did not travel to Izmir except for religious festivals; and spent her summer vacations in Kandilli Girls' High School together with other permanent boarder students. For this reason, Münevver Hanım was a guest to Leman Hanım's family several times. Bercis Hanım mentioned that the two architects had a close friendship in this period.



Figure 1: The “Our Former Graduates who are the First Women in Their Fields” Certificate obtained from Erenköy Girls’ High School Members Association Archive, (URL-1).



Figure 2: Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen (Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013).

In 1929, Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu graduated from Erenköy Girls' High School, and decided to study in the field of Architecture together. The years they spent together during their childhood and teenage periods made these two pioneer women come closer to each other. However, their friendship, which continued in Fine Arts Academy, was not as close as in their teenage years. "The academic life of Münevver Hanım, who continued her education with a scholarship, continued in the Girl Teachers section which was allocated for such students in the dormitory. It is known that because of the hearing loss that was caused by the measles she had in her childhood years, Münevver Hanım had difficulties in hearing the classes given in wide studies with high ceilings of the academy. Leman Hanım shared her class notes with Münevver Belen and supported her in not being behind in the academy education" (Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013). The couple decided to study architecture in the academy after graduation, and had to keep their friendship in a limited manner in the academy because the dormitory life was finished. "However, some photographs in their private albums show that both Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu participated in overnight technical trips together with their male friends in their classes. This situation makes us think that families and social environment had a flexible approach with the enthusiasm of the early republican period, and encouraged women to acquire a profession" (Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013).



Figure 3: In Yalova Technical Trip (From Bercis Levend Family Archives, Narrated by: Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013).

Münevver Belen is one of the key persons that were considered to be influential in Leman Tomsu's life in selecting this profession. Both of them created a common target, and supported each other. Münevver and Leman Hanım continued their friendship and professional togetherness until 1940s. The projects and competitions they participated together are the most important indicator for this. "Münevver Hanım married Professional Engineer Mithat Gözeler in 1940, and Bercis Gözeler was born in 1941 froze this friendship relation. Münevver Belen Gözeler worked as a state official to repay the scholarship and retired from Nafia Management. Münevver Belen Gözeler spent summers in summer house whose project was prepared by herself, and spent winter months in their apartment on Hüseyin Gerde Street, and died after a disease on February 6, 1973" (Dostoğlu and Erkarlan, 2013).

After her graduation in 1934, Leman Tomsu did not produce projects only under the administration of the state, which is different from the life of Münevver Hanım. She started to work in Istanbul Municipality, Development Directorate, and worked under the management of Martin Wagner, who was a specialist in urban design. She was influenced by Wagner in this way, and she went to Germany with the reference of Wagner. "After her Germany adventure, which lasted for one year, Tomsu returned to Istanbul, and worked in several projects. Then, in 1941, she was accepted at Certified Engineering School, and was assigned as the assistant to Prof. Emin Onat. While no one had a doctorate degree in those times, the thesis of Leman Hanım (her work with the title "Houses of Bursa") was published. She mentioned that a new national architecture should be created in Turkey, and that architects should make use of modern techniques" (URL-2). These ideas show parallelism with the Second National Architecture Movement in those times. In this process, she signed under many projects together with Emin Onat and worked together.

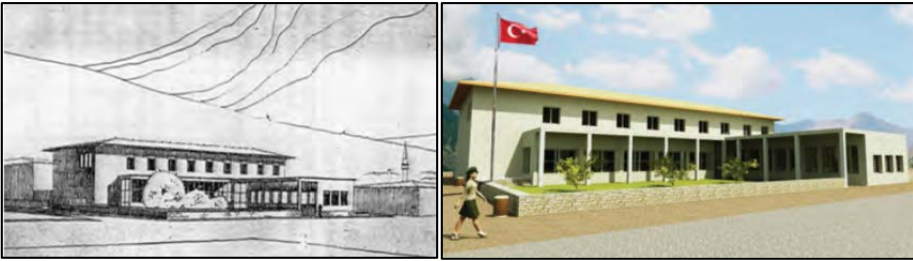


Figure 4: Karamürsel Community Hall Project . (Dostoğlu ve Erkarlan, 2013).

Leman Tomsu worked in many common projects with her former friend Münevver Belen. In this literature review, their common projects are mentioned, and their individual works were not investigated. In this respect, the Karamürsel Community Hall, Gerde Community Hall, Kayseri Community Hall Project and a private house project in Ankara Etlik are the works performed by Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu together.

In the Karamürsel Community Hall Project, which was released in 1936, Münevver Belen and Tomsu worked together. It is possible to see a mature geometric composition in this two-storey building. "The transfer to the main area from the street is realized with a low entrance façade that is added to the front façade. This transition body ensures a quality spatial hierarchy by converting the entrance into a ceremonial movement. It attracts attention that enhanced solutions are applied in the third

dimension together with meeting halls that are elevated with conscious contrast and sections, which are caught between lighter entrance body and the massive main body with fringes behind” (Dostoğlu and Erkarşlan, 2013).

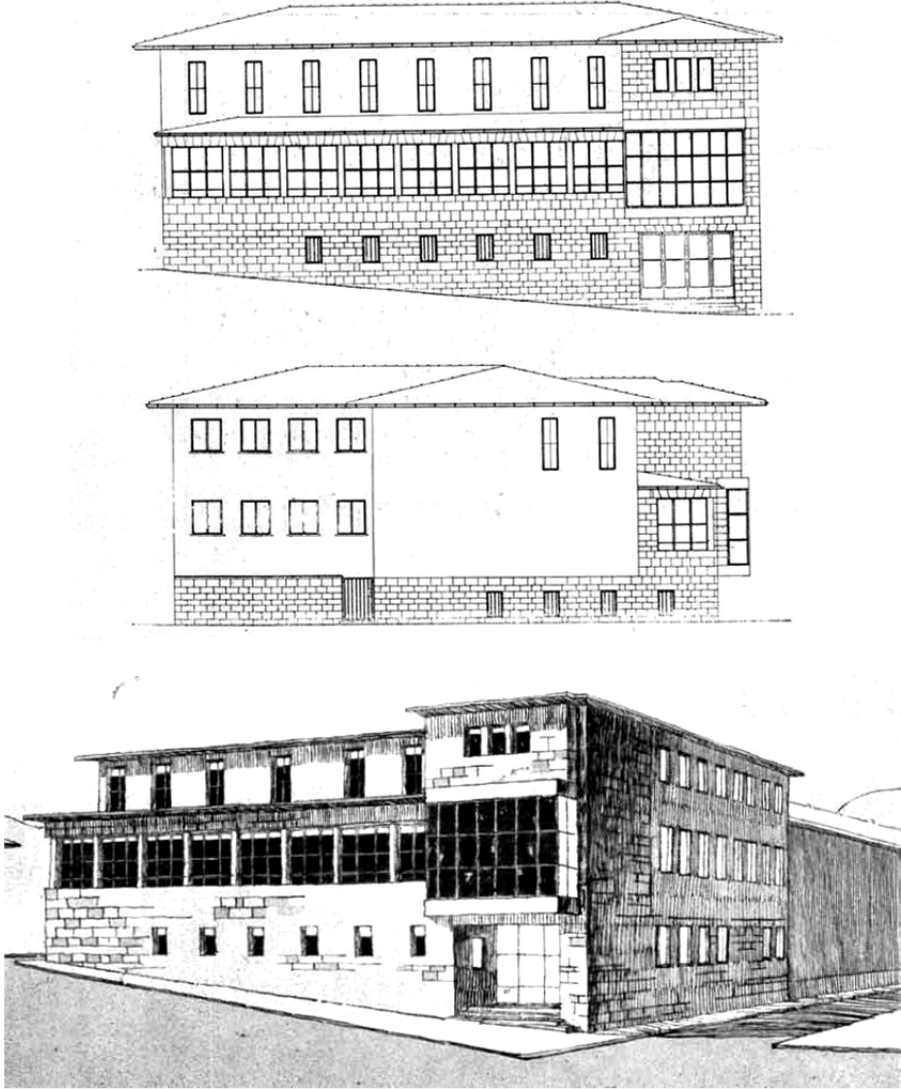


Figure 5: Architect Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen’s Gerede Community Hall Project (URL-3)

Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu told their Gerede Community Hall Projects to “Arkitekt Journal” in 1936 as follows; “This building was planned on an inclined field, and would be built without a ground floor with three floors. The building consisted of two materials. The ground floor and the first floors were planned as complete stone, and the second floor was planned as brick... The important section in the ground floor was the library that belonged to the Community Hall, because the place was suitable to

facilitate the reading of people. A small storage facility was planned for the library in the sections of the stairs opposite the hall. In this floor, an entrance is used to enter the garden from the side alley. This garden was planned as a refreshing point and an obstacle opposite the library because of the inclination of the field” (URL-3). In addition, there is a multi-purpose hall for 150 people in the first floor and a stage is planned in this hall for musical performances.

According to the news in *Arkitekt Journal* that introduced Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu in 1937 (URL-4), Kayseri Community Hall Building Project had three different entrances. The purpose was to make a differentiation between the users. The building consisted of three different sections; some of these were one-storey and some other were two-storey. In this building, there was a hall that was suitable for balls, a lounge that facilitates the relaxing of people at intervals, a classroom and a library, which were allocated to serve the society, in the second floor.

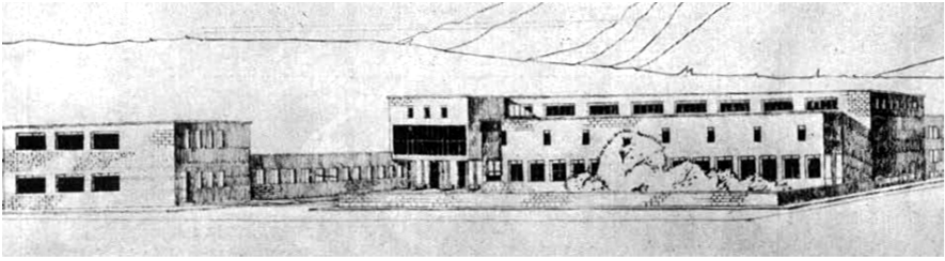


Figure 6: Kayseri Community Hall Building Project (URL-4)



Figure 7: A House Project in Etlik in Ankara (URL-5)

Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu designed a house in Etlik in Ankara. As narrated by Münevver Belen and Leman Tomsu: The field was inclined towards Ankara and towards the scenery. The building consisted of a ground floor and a basement. The entrance was located in the alley side. There was a toilet and office in one side of the entrance, and there was the door of the anteroom. Transition is made from the anteroom to the study, living room and dining room, and to the bedroom. These rooms are located on the side of the scenery. There is a terrace paved with natural stones and a pergola in

front side. A part of this terrace was separated with a wall on the northern side, and the upper part of this area was covered with a pergola to form a corner. The bedrooms are completely separated from the living quarters. The service areas are located in the northern side. The entrance to the kitchen is from the office. There is a service garden in the part that is lower than the other garden for services. The service door opens to the office. this door also leads to the ground floor (URL-5).

CONCLUSION

The participation of women in the working life required a difficult process all over the world. Especially in architecture, which is considered as a field that may be performed by the intelligence and power of a male, it was not found suitable by the people of those times for a woman to receive professional education and when graduated, to contribute to the professional field. For this reason, the first women who wanted to be architects, had to fight against these prejudices both in their educational and in working lives. In this study, Leman Tomsu and Münevver Belen, who were the first architects of Turkey, and who completed these difficult processes with success, have been told. Since they were the pioneers in this field, they also summarize the change that was brought by the Republican period. As a matter of fact, their being first women architects is a topic that may be given as an example for their colleagues in western countries. In addition, they also provide us with the most important source of women solidarity with their being the pioneers in a male-dominated field. Even after they graduated, they performed projects together showing that this solidarity continued in later years. These two architects were the two prominent names of the Turkish History because they represented the modern republican women figure and the pioneers in their fields. However, they were ignored in the history Republic and especially in the history of architecture; and the due importance was not given for their names and works in the literature.

1. İnas Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi (the School of Fine Arts) was moved to the former Parliament Building in Fındıklı in 1926, and co-education was started; and the name of the school was changed; today, the name of this school is “Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University” (Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi). In addition, this school also played a pioneering role in educating the first women architects of the Republic of Turkey.

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