

Istanbul Taksim Republic Monument as an example of public art

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Abstract

Statues erected in public spaces are important elements of city squares and also represent traces of culture that are transferred into the future. These monuments are sometimes built for purposes of propaganda and at other times to commemorate a particular event, but whatever the reason for their creation, they are significant structures that serve as points of social interaction within the communities of which they are a part. When their relationship with the environment is firmly established, these monuments also assume an urban identity. The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, wished to have the establishment of the new political model and the “nation state” emerging with the proclamation of the Republic (29 October 1923) symbolized through the language of architecture. Thus, as he promoted the slogan of “reaching the level of contemporary civilization,” he expected to have this concept reflected in architecture as much as possible in the physical sense during the Republican period of institutionalization. Part of his plan to achieve this was to create and activate public spaces in the urban landscape. This led to the monumentalization of the art of sculpture and to the appearance of the city squares of modern Turkey, where the statues that were the works of art displayed in these public spaces came to represent Atatürk and the newly established social order. This article aims to analyze how one of the symbols of Turkish architecture and of the Republican Period, the Taksim Republic Monument in Taksim Square, Istanbul, took shape as a public monument, and attempts at the same time to describe its social relationship with the surrounding environment.

Keywords: Turkish architecture of the Republican Period, Public spaces, Public Art, Taksim Republic Monument.

1. Introduction

With the proclamation of the Turkish Republic (29 October 1923) by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkish society entered into a period of social, cultural and economic change. Based on the premise of initiating a modernization of the country and introducing reformist measures, the Kemalist regime embraced a highly modernistic ideology, exhibiting this by means of social engineering at all levels. This was why goals were set to symbolize the achievements of the Republic (Uluğ, 2004: 42-43).

The architecture of the New Republic sought to reflect the slogan of “reaching the level of contemporary civilization” in the physical environment (Batur, 1994: 449). Along with the establishment of the “nation state,” Atatürk chose to have contemporary architecture manifest as the symbol

of the new state and the new regime as a representation of the liberation of the country and the independence of its peoples, who were finally able to stand alone (Batur, 1994:449).

Atatürk decides at this time to establish cities and squares planned in line with the model of the “nation state.” He invites the German architect and urban planner Prof. Hermann Jansen to Ankara, the city that he chose to make the capital of the Republic, to work on a development plan for the city (Sözen, 1984: 67). The idea of establishing a new capital involved creating a symbol that would stand for a modern society and a modern age. Atatürk aimed to modernize the new capital in terms of an urban identity. His intention was to symbolize and call attention to the new urban character of the new model of the state. It was for this reason that the concept of “new” in the modern cities symbolized the “nation state” (Uluğ, 2004: 50). Jansen

created a futuristic and developmentalist urban plan with wide boulevards and linear avenues (Tankut, 1993: 67). Recreation areas, squares, parks, green spaces, pedestrian spaces and open areas for the public were among the new urban spatial elements of the Jansen plan. These new facilities to which the public was being introduced pointed to a change in the urban character. To follow Jansen's efforts were the concepts introduced by the Austrian architect Prof. Clemens Holzmeister, who came to Ankara and recommended emphasizing the key points of many new structures in Ankara with parks where monuments would rise up (Osma, 1996: 132).

The efforts to modernize the cities of the Republican Period were not limited to the capital. There was also a desire to punctuate the public spaces and squares of the Ottoman Empire's weary capital city of Istanbul with the kinds of spatial arrangements that were being designed and introduced to the public in the same period. During this era, many city squares, especially in Ankara and Istanbul, contained statues of Atatürk that symbolized the Republic and the new social order while also making a political statement. As a result, the establishment of the Republic brought with it physical changes in the appearance of the cities (Sözen, 1984: 171). The statues of Atatürk created after the proclamation of the Republic became an expression of loyalty to the Atatürk regime. The monumental sculptures found in the public parks, squares, avenues, streets and other areas that were part of the urban fabric were symbolic works that led people to expand upon and make more meaningful their perception of the environment (Osma, 1996: 130). These works were considered representations of the political strength and power of the newly formed Republic, modernizing Turkish cities on the one hand while also contributing to the development of the art of sculpture in Turkey (Osma, 1996: 132).

The monumental statues that entered Turkish community life with the start of the Republican era were initially contracted to foreign sculptors since there were no qualified sculptors in the country as yet. In these works, Atatürk was predominantly depicted in his identity as a soldier, as a leader, and a hero (Osma, 1996: 131). There are

also a few works that represent him in civil apparel. These monuments symbolize the Republic and contemporary civilization. The City of Istanbul contracted the first of these to the Austrian sculptor Heinrich Kripllel in 1926. The sculpture Kripllel created at Sarayburnu was of bronze and rested on a marble base, depicting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's departure from Istanbul towards Samsun at the start of the Turkish War of Independence (Gezer, 1984: 76). The monument represents Atatürk as a bureaucrat dressed in civilian clothes. This sculpture was followed in 1927 by two Atatürk statues, the first being the "Statue of Atatürk on Horseback," situated in front of the Ethnography Museum in the capital Ankara, and then by the "Commander-in-Chief Atatürk Monument" constructed in Zafer Meydanı (Victory Square) Ankara, both by the Italian sculptor Pietro Canonica. The statues formed an organic bond with the setting in which they were erected and became the central features of the squares that were built around them.

This article aims to analyze how one of the symbols of Turkish architecture and of the Republican Period, the Taksim Republic Monument in Taksim Square, Istanbul, took shape as a public monument along with its other spatial components, attempting at the same time to describe its social relationship with the surrounding environment.

2. Methods

Monumental statues are the aesthetic vehicles of expression that document the social, cultural and political changes taking place in a country. Besides embodying the collective memory, these monuments become mediums through which new meanings are attributed to city spaces, thereby enriching the urban identity. Monuments complement the squares they are a part of, giving them fresh meaning and depth. This paper will analyze how the Taksim Republic Monument, one of the most important symbols of the new Turkish Republic, shaped the public space in which it was situated. It will also look into the relationship of the statue with its social surroundings. The author will first describe the political atmosphere of the times and then examine the characteristics of the setting in which the Taksim Republic Monument stands as well as the features of this piece of public art.

3. Taksim Republic Monument

3.1. History of the Monument

In the first years of the Republic, Istanbul did not have a ceremonial space or square. Upon noting the many inconvenient aspects of the Ottoman Empire's most prominent ceremonial and meeting place, Sultanahmet Square, the French architect and city planner Henri Prost, who was assigned the task of creating a master plan for Istanbul, suggested that a new ceremonial space and meeting area be organized in Taksim Republic Square (Gülersoy, 1994: 76).

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the borders of the Taksim area were occupied by cemeteries, promenades, a water distribution center, and the coffeehouses that defined the boundaries of the Pera district. Taksim took on a military function with the building of the Artillery Barracks at the beginning of the 19th century. In the 1930's, in the first years of the Republican regime, Taksim became one of the most important areas to represent the Republic (Ergin, 1994: 444). Istanbul was ready to adopt a new and modern identity with the implementation of the first city planning endeavors, the erection of apartment buildings, residential areas, stores, clubs and entertainment venues. Efforts were made to effect a spatial transformation in Taksim, which stood as the cosmopolitan countenance of social mobility.

However, Taksim did not immediately become an urban square in those years. In the Pervititch maps of 1925-1926, there is an open space in front of the Taksim Fountain and the Taksim cistern (Fig 1) (Erdin, 1994: 445). Known as the "Taksim empty space", this area was regarded as the symbol of the new state in the first years of the Republic because the modern segment of the city had already started to develop in this space in the last 20-30 years (Gülersoy, 1994: 199).

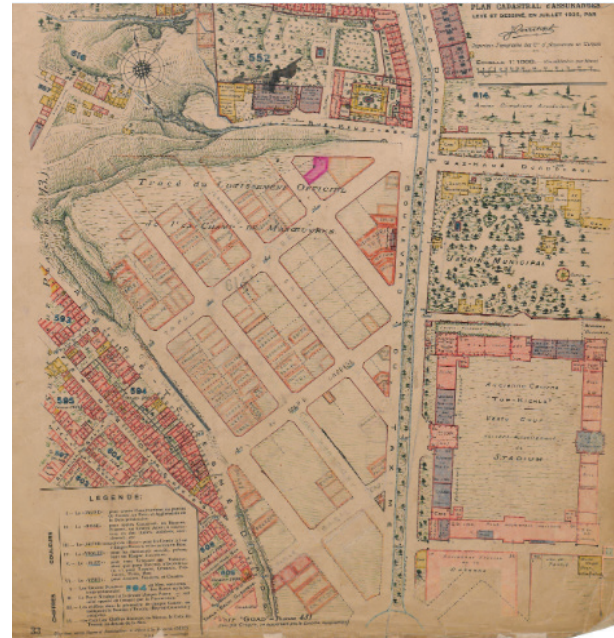


Fig 1: Pervititch Map 1925-1926 Taksim (<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/98319>)

On 1 December 1926, the City of Istanbul established a "Commission to Build the Taksim Republic Monument." Besides the funds allocated by the municipality, monies for the project were collected from the general public, corporations, banks and other institutions (Gülersoy, 1994: 199).

The Commission decided to entrust the creation of the monument to the Italian sculptor Pietro Canonica (1869-1962), who had previously come to Ankara to produce the much admired bust of Atatürk. Besides this work of sculpture, Canonica had contributed a statue of Atatürk, which rested on a high pedestal and portrayed Atatürk in a general's uniform, standing upright, leaning on his sword. The statue was erected in 1930 and was located at the traffic island in the center of Zafer Meydanı (Victory Square) on Atatürk Boulevard in Yenişehir, Ankara (Fig. 2) (Gülersoy, 1994: 199). The area around the monument was landscaped in the layout planning such that it would accommodate potential ceremonies that were likely to take place in front of the Republic Monument. The building of the pedestal and the landscaping was handled by the Italian architect Giulio Mongeri in 1928 (Ergin, 1994: 444).

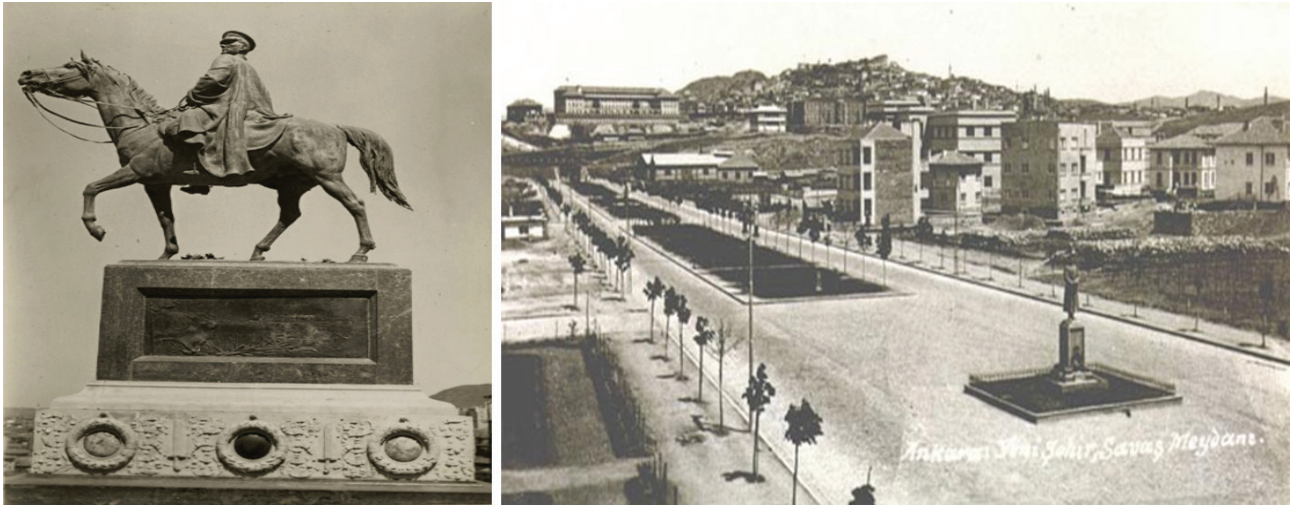


Fig. 2: Right: Atatürk Statue in Zafer Meydanı (Victory Square) in Yenişehir, Ankara (Sözen 1984). Left: The Statue of Atatürk on Horseback in front of the Ethnography Museum (Sözen 1984).

The Republic Monument was unveiled on 8 August 1928; it is a work of figurative art weighing 184 tons and represents Atatürk and the newly formed social order (Fig. 3). It was shipped to Istanbul from Rome 2.5 years after its completion. Two Turkish sculptors—Sabiha Hanım and Hadi Bey—assisted Canonica in the undertaking (Gezer, 1984: 134).

The monument stands at the center of a circular space in Taksim Square, which had been chosen to be the new ceremonial area of the Republic (Fig 4-5). Four landscaping arrangements can be seen in the circular space. The monuments of the Republican Era are the first works of figurative expression that depict Atatürk and introduce the new social order. Planning the location of these monuments included the landscaping of the surrounding area so that it would accommodate the ceremonies that were expected to take place in front of the statue (Ergin, 1994: 444). Thus, the monuments brought with them the creation of a ceremonial space in the urban fabric.



Fig. 3: A photograph of the unveiling of the monument on 8 August 1928 ([https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taksim_Cumhuriyet_An%C4%B1t%C4%B1#/media/Dosya:Opening_ceremony_of_the_Monument_of_the_Republic_in_Istanbul_\(2\).jpg](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taksim_Cumhuriyet_An%C4%B1t%C4%B1#/media/Dosya:Opening_ceremony_of_the_Monument_of_the_Republic_in_Istanbul_(2).jpg))



Fig. 4: The Taksim Republic Monument (Sözen 1984).

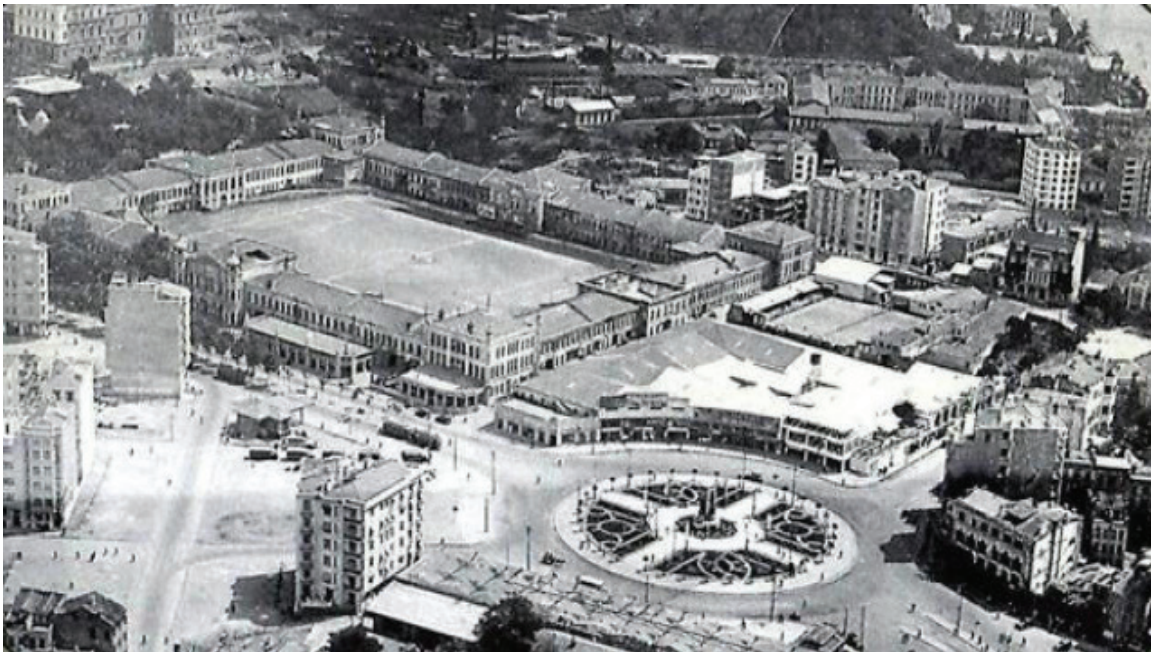


Fig. 5: The Artillery Barracks and the Taksim Republic Monument (Sözen 1984).

3.2. Characteristics of the Monument

The monument is 11 m. high and rises on a base made from pink Trentino marble and green marble from the Suza region (Fig. 6). Designed as a piazza fountain, the monument has

bronze figures on four sides which have been placed inside pointed arches inspired by traditional architecture. The arches are accented by motifs of *kabaras* (spherical sconces that symbolize the cosmos in Turkish art) on both sides (Fig 7).



Fig. 6: Taksim Republic Monument (Author).



Fig. 7: Kabaras (Author).

The north face of the monument represents the Victory of 30 August (the Great Offensive), with the other facade representing Republican Turkey (Ünal, 2002: 63). The side of the monument facing the north that depicts the Victory of 30 August displays Mustafa Kemal posed in front of his soldiers (Fig. 8). This depiction was inspired by a photograph taken of Atatürk at Kocatepe during the Great Offensive that started on 26 August 1922 (Ünal, 2002: 63). Right beside Mustafa Kemal is the representation

of a woman sitting on a blanket in the rain with a child in her arms (Fig 9: Above). The story is told that the woman is covering up the bomb shells at her side to protect them from the rain instead of putting the blanket over her child. Another female figure on this face is the female figure right behind Atatürk, extending the forefinger of his right hand forward (Fig 9:Below). Here, Canonica is referencing the role of the women of Anatolia and their efforts in the War of Independence (Arbaç, 2017: 149).



Fig. 8: The monument facade depicting the Victory of 30 August (Great Offensive) (Author).



Fig 9: Above: The woman sitting on a blanket in the rain with a child in her arms. Below: Another female figure extending the forefinger of his right hand forward (Author).

The other facade of the monument depicting Republican Turkey that looks toward Beyoğlu features Mustafa Kemal in civil attire (Fig. 10). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is flanked on both sides by İsmet İnönü and Fevzi Çakmak. Behind them, soldiers and the people, including women, are depicted. This depiction of Atatürk together with the people is a recreation of the establishment of the young country of Turkey (Ergin, 1994: 445). In the group of statues by Atatürk's side can be seen two Russian generals. On Mustafa Kemal's left is General Mikhail Vasilyevich Frunze

with General Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov standing in the back. These two Soviet generals were depicted in the monument at Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's special request as symbolic of the gratitude felt toward the Russians for their assistance during the Turkish War of Independence (Ünal, 2002: 65).



Fig. 10: The face of the monument representing Republican Turkey (Author).

There are statues of soldiers carrying flags on each narrow side of the monument (on the east and west facades) as symbols of heroism, and above them are medallions carrying the portraits of two women. One of the soldiers represents peace, the other, war (Fig. 11). The soldier symbolizing peace is the “Unknown Soldier of the War

of Independence (Ünal, 2002: 63). The portrait of the woman in the medallion on the east face of the monument represents a sad, traditionally veiled Anatolian woman, while the other symbolizes a modern woman who does not wear a head covering and is looking up happily toward the sky (Fig 12).



Fig. 11: Sides of the Monument Depicting Flag-carrying Soldiers (Author).



Fig 12: Portraits of Women (Author).



Fig. 13: The Marble Basins on the Narrow Sides of the Monument (Author).

There are ornamental slabs on the bottom of the narrow sides of the monument that have marble basins beneath (Fig. 12). On the wall above the troughs, there is an 8-armed Seljuk star in the shape of a *kabara*, which is also a Turkic motif. The sculptor's original intention was to include a fountain from which water would flow into these basins but this project was later abandoned (Ergin, 1994: 445).

4. Conclusions

The monuments of the Republican Period gained importance with the increasing urban development of the New Turkish Republic and actually shaped the identity of

the country's cities. These monuments, which were planted in public spaces, serve a commemorative function in both the social and physical sense and also provide a symbolic meaningfulness to the places where they are positioned. As distinctive elements of identity, city squares and monuments are visual entities that are the images of the cities they are a part of. Monuments are complementary parts of a city square and essential to the manifestation of public art; they provide meaning while also changing the physical structure of the urban scene. They document historical events and cultural change and also carry an aesthetic value that gives new meaning to city spaces. Monuments keep alive the collective memory and enrich the identity of a city.

Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, was not only a notable military leader but also a statesman who was aware of the inspirational and uniting force of art. Atatürk wished to have monumental statues built that would stand as symbols of the War of Independence with all its reforms and would also serve as modern elements that would give Turkish cities a contemporary appearance. The building of the Taksim Republic Monument, a work of urban art that represented a new element of city life that would serve as an example for the monuments that would eventually rise up in city squares around the country with the proclamation of the Republic, provided Istanbul with a location at which ceremonies and meetings representing the new regime could take place. The area soon became a stage for receiving foreign and local dignitaries as well as a space for holding holiday festivities. Thus, following the erection of the monument, Taksim Square took on the identity of a modern urban square.

The Taksim Republic Monument was a pioneering work that reflected the urban aesthetic and identity, one that provided a theatrical background to the staging of important events that took place in the Republic of Turkey throughout the years. It created a new image of the city of Istanbul in the Republican Era and was an exemplary and monumental manifestation of the new Turkish city. Taksim Square is the most easily accessible area in Istanbul and functions as a venue for celebrations and public speeches presented by state and civil organizations on memorable days of the year. With its surrounding monument-centered landscaping that highlights its historical and cultural value, the intrinsic worth of the Taksim Republic Monument continues to be appreciated and respected among the people of today's Turkey.

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