

**The Central Institute of Hygiene: Modernism and Gender in  
Early Republican Turkey**

**Kivanc Kilinc**

**Ph.D. Candidate**

**Department of Art History  
State University of New York at Binghamton**

© 2010 by Kivanc Kilinc  
[kivanckilinc@yahoo.com](mailto:kivanckilinc@yahoo.com)

I first visited the Rockefeller Archive Center in 2006 to identify research materials about the Central Institute of Hygiene in Ankara, which was built with the assistance and financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in the 1920s and 1930s. With a Rockefeller Archive Center grant-in-aid, I returned for additional research in the archives of the Rockefeller Foundation on March 17-19, 2010.

With the help of archivist Mary Ann Quinn, I was able to identify a significant number and variety of materials related to public health work in Turkey and the Central Institute of Hygiene (CIH) in particular. Of particular interest were the site plan and blueprints, including oversized architectural plans for the School of Public Health and the Serum and Vaccine building designed by Robert Oerley in 1928. Other documents provided general background on the development of public health in republican Turkey, such as documents concerning the visits by Refik Bey and Dr. Asim Bey to several public health institutions and facilities in the U.S. in 1929. I also examined notes from interviews with the Prime Minister Ismet Pasha, and the Minister of Public Health, Refik Saydam, as well as other government officials, which provide the overall historical context for the birth and development of the CIH. Also useful were the quarterly and annual reports of the RF's International Health Board/Division in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s, many written by RF representative, Ralph K. Collins, as well as his survey, "Public Health in Turkey" (1926). I also read the letters and travel diaries by Dr. Frederick Russell, Dr. Selskar Gunn, Dr. Wilbur Sawyer and Dr. George Strode on the RF's role in the development of public health services and nursing education in Turkey, as well as the correspondence and diaries of Hazel Avis Goff (director, Nursing School), F. Elizabeth Crowell (RF nursing officer), Dr. Husamettin Kural (president, Turkish Red Crescent Society) and Dr. Kamil on such issues as the development of medical education and the School of Public Health, the appointment of Dr. Collins as the first dean of the school and the accommodations of the students, nurses and directors. The RF files also contain materials on other health institutions in Turkey that provided

medical or nursing education, such as the Women's College in Istanbul (1926) and proposed Health Center in Istanbul (1931-1938).

I used this sizeable collection of RF documents, photographs, and architectural drawings of the CIH to focus my research on the social and architectural history of this institution. The inauguration of CIH in Ankara on May 27, 1928 was the most significant step toward the implementation of a centralized public health system in republican Turkey. The CIH complex consisted of three main buildings -- the Department of Bacteriology and Chemistry; the School of Public Health; and the Serum Building -- and made visible many aspects of the project of public health and social assistance. This coeducational institution trained personnel in public health work, offered training for preventive health and provided diagnostic laboratory services. It was also an important hub for the generation of propaganda concerning public hygiene and the production of serum and vaccines.

Foreign institutions and experts played a major role in the development of Turkey's public health system, as well as in CIH's construction, program and influence.[1] The RF provided funds for equipping the first building (Department of Bacteriology and Chemistry) and the construction of the remaining ones (1932), including the Service School to carry out the Institute's educational work. In 1936 this school evolved into the School of Public Health, and its first dean was Ralph Collins, a member of the RF's International Health Division.[2]

The three CIH buildings were examples of modernism in architecture, which transmitted ideas of social modernism through ambitious social programs of public health and education. I was interested in the first building not merely for the significant role it played in Turkey's public health system; nor for its "decidedly modernistic" style.[3] My primary concern has been about the ways in which the naked female body was officially used here for the first time in Turkey in a place easily accessible to the predominantly male public, both symbolizing and contributing to the transformation of the so-called "Turkish republican woman" in the national imagination.

When the Department of Bacteriology and Chemistry opened, its most distinguished architectural element was the bare-breasted mythological figure of *Hygeia* (Hygiene), located on the exterior façade above the main entrance. Designed by the Austrian sculptor Wilhelm Frass,[4] the figure embodied the Greek Health Goddess -- the daughter and assistant of the god of medicine, Asklepios.[5] Hygeia symbolized, in Collin's words, "Science in the Battle against Disease." [6] The "unusual" architectural, symbolic and programmatic qualities of its design turned this public health institution into an urban signboard for disseminating the ideas of the healthy body, nation and state.

My research has shown that this figure of Hygiene, looking intently toward Ankara's largest boulevard from the entrance of the Bacteriology and Chemistry building, was but one example of the uneven terrain on which gender, architecture and urban design were articulated in Ankara

during the 1930s. More specifically, my project sought to investigate the spatial politics behind this particular representation while exploring the ways in which public health projects became venues for the production of gendered national subjects in early republican Turkey.

Although it is beyond the scope of my dissertation, my research at the RAC suggests that an examination of the role of foreign experts in determining policy, especially in hiring women for positions in CIH and related institutions, would lead to interesting insights about the politics of decision making and gender in Turkey during the early republic. For instance, in 1939, Esma Hanım, a newly graduated nurse, visited Assım Bey (Arar), a high-ranking official in the Health Ministry who appointed her to the Nursing School in Istanbul. When asked about the appointment, Assım Bey told the RF representative that he was "amazed at the effrontery of the girl when she last visited him...her demands were so exorbitant and she was so militant in her attitude with respect to assuming service that he was greatly disappointed." Yet the American director of the school, Elizabeth Crowell, insisted on hiring her, as she thought Esma was "obviously the best trained individuals in the field in all Turkey." Crowell was an RF officer and a key figure in the establishment of the School of Public Health in Ankara. Upon her request, Assım Bey, "although he has no sympathy in her attitude promised that he would do everything to get her appointed to the school."<sup>[7]</sup> On another occasion, Refik Saydam, the Minister of Public Health and Social Assistance, sought to appoint a male physician with a nurse assistant to the School of Public Health in the CIH, but Crowell, then the director of the Nursing School in Istanbul, argued against the idea, suggesting a woman director instead.<sup>[8]</sup>

The insights from my research have been integrated into my dissertation. The first chapter of my dissertation includes findings about CIH in relation to the role played by the RF in the development of public health policies in Turkey. I also used my preliminary research in my poster presentation, "Migrating Images: Relocating Discourses of Gender, Nation and State in 1930 Ankara, the *Central Institute of Hygiene*," at the Thirty-Second Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA), "Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence" in Melbourne, Australia on January 13-18, 2008. I also intend to publish an article in a peer reviewed international architectural journal; the article will focus on the CIH and its social and architectural history, based largely on the research I conducted using the Grant-in-Aid in 2010.

*Editor's Note: This research report is presented here with the author's permission but should not be cited or quoted without the author's consent. Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Ken Rose and Erwin Levold. Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research. The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.*

## ENDNOTES

---

1. According to Kenneth W. Rose, CIH was "the most important Rockefeller Foundation project in Turkey during this period." Each year, a number of male and female students received fellowships from the RF and were sent to the United States for internship. The fellowships that were granted to the Turkish students and doctors were in various specializations, but mostly concerned public health. Rose has written that "public health dominated the foundation's work in Turkey prior to 1940." The RF also recognized that nurses were an important component of the health care system, and a number of nurses received fellowships to study in the United States. Kenneth W. Rose, "American Foundations in Modern Turkey: The Rockefeller and Ford Foundations," presented at "American Foundations in Europe," Amalfi, Italy, June 28-30, 2001; Kenneth W. Rose, "The Rockefeller Foundation's Fellowship Program in Turkey, 1925-1983," unpublished paper, Symposium on "The First Turks in America." Yeditepe University, Istanbul, January 4, 2003 (2008). I owe particular debt to Dr. Rose for sharing his papers and research findings with me before their publication.

2. Rose, "The Rockefeller Foundation's Fellowship Program."

3. The quote is taken from the note written by Ralph. K. Collins on the back of a photograph (Photo No. 19888), 1. 19.1928. The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), folder 805L.

4. Wilhelm Frass was born in St. Pölten in Austria in 29th May 1886 and died in Vienna in 1st November 1968.

5. The "doctor god" was the son of "Apollon." "Asklepios" was said to have learned the art of being a doctor from "Kheiron" -- the mythological horseman who, since living in nature, held the secrets of nature. Azra Erhat, *Mitoloji Sözlüğü*[Dictionary of Mythology] (Istanbul: Remzi, 1989), 68.

6. Quoted from the note written by Ralph. K. Collins at the back of a photograph (Photo No. 19888), 1.19.1928. The Rockefeller Archive Center. folder 805L.

7. "From Dr. Collins' Diary," Ankara, September 28, 1939, folder 457, box 37, series 1.1, RG 6.1. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

8. "From Miss. Crowell's Diary," Ankara, May 23, 1935, folder 447, box 36, series 1.1, RG 6.1. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. The issue of having a foreign director was always a top

priority for the republican government, but on many occasions this did not work well for the officials. According to Miss Crowell's diary from the Nursing School, "eight Germans had been sent away by the government on account of immorality and one Austrian had to compromise herself hopelessly." "From Miss. Crowell's Diary", Istanbul, October 14, 1933, folder 457, box 37, series 1.1, RG 6.1. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.