

Pioneering Turkish Women of Cyprus

"Bellapais Inner Wheel Club"



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PIONEERING TURKISH WOMEN OF CYPRUS

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PREFACE

The times we live in are the legacy passed down to us by the pioneers of the past. ‘Today’ was inherited by all... Those who struggled for years, who gave their efforts, embraced this country in their hearts as their homeland and enriched it... It is essential that we look at our own past and all the WOMEN PIONEERS to understand the point we have reached today; for ‘yesterday’ matters.

Our book is comprised of the short life stories of 78 TURKISH CYPRIOT WOMEN PIONEERS; and shows the important place of gender equality in a society. We understand that women’s rights are human rights. We understand that marginalising and rendering women ineffective only prevents them from enhancing and strengthening the society they live in. Understanding the place and contributions of women in a society is imperative for comprehending the contributions they will make to our country’s future.


Our book includes the biographies of 78 successful, highly confident and visionary women who earned their success. Undoubtedly, we bear in mind that there are many more TURKISH CYPRIOT WOMEN PIONEERS and we will continue to include their life stories in the second volume of our book.



It is our pleasure to share this collective work in the hope that it will inspire all our readers, particularly the younger girls in our society who may take our pioneers as role models. I would like to express our deepest gratitude, not only on my behalf but also for the B.I.W. Club, to Canan Tan and Nermin Bezmen who have enriched our book with their literary contributions. I would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to İsmail Bozkurt, Ferhat Atik and Orkun Bozkurt, all of whom are accomplished names in the Turkish Cypriot Literature.

Especially to the members of our Executive Board, I would like to extend my gratitude to Ayşem Erişir, Berin Avunduk, Havva Tatar, Andaç Peynirci Bektaş and İlgen Andır who devoted their efforts with me to the preparation of our book, that surely, will guide not only the younger generation, but all of us; will inspire and become a lasting work in the collective memory of our society. I would also like to thank all our remaining members for the support and trust they put in us during this process.

The existence of women in the flow of life and history throughout the centuries is self-evident. With selfless valiance, Turkish Cypriot women displayed tremendous efforts for their families and the public. When needed, they stood against their enemies to protect their coun-



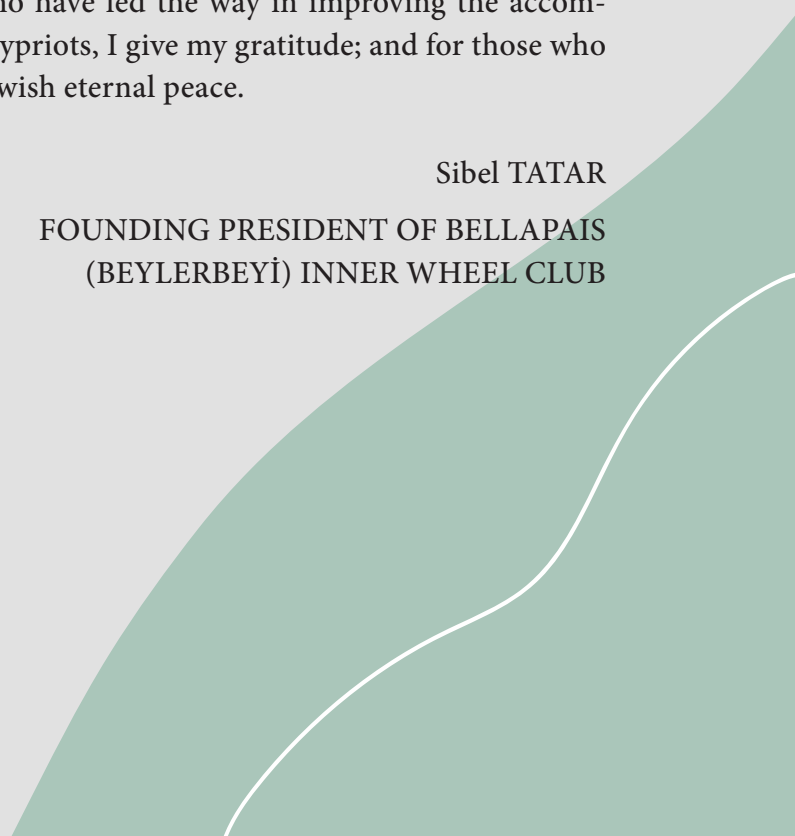
try, they birthed its future generation, raised them to the best of their abilities and strengthened their society by providing social, economic and emotional support. Now let us break our chains, take a step forward, and with the aid of our book, make our own decisions freely, dare to dream and take bold steps towards accomplishing them.

As we hope that it will shine a light upon the values of our past, our book presents the importance of women's efforts in improving any society. May it be a single individual or the entire world, the existence of women and men is a critical element of our ongoing journey through history.

To our women who have led the way in improving the accomplishments of Turkish Cypriots, I give my gratitude; and for those who are no longer with us, I wish eternal peace.

Sibel TATAR

FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF BELLAPAIS
(BEYLERBEYİ) INNER WHEEL CLUB





AKİLE BODAMYALIZADE

FIRST FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT

Considering the narrow-minded times, she receives an extensive education. Her beliefs and goals are ahead of her time. She never refrains from doing what she must to reach her goals. In defiance of the country's situation, she chooses to think and live progressively.

Akile Bodamyalızade is one of the intellectual women of her time. She is a woman who cares for education, concerns herself with the happenings in her country and the world, thinks about how to further herself and follows the agenda of the day. She witnesses the Second World War in Germany where she went to study with her sisters. She faces numerous difficulties while trying to return home but she finally comes through with the help of the Turkish Embassy.

Akile Bodamyalızade chooses to be a civil servant; the most prestigious occupation of the day. During that time, she is the first and only female civil servant. Surely, she suffers the difficulties that come from being the only woman in her field; however her courage overcomes all obstacles. Like all her sisters, she is a born and bred follower of Atatürk and she becomes an observant of his teachings. She always preserves her bonds with her family and her siblings. Despite all times past, she preserves her astounding intelligence and memory until her death at 94 years of age.

Ferhat Atik



AKİLE İŞİN

FIRST TURKISH CYPRIOT FEMALE SPEAKER

Once, there was a young student at Victoria Girls' High School; named after the well-known British queen. It was the colonial period in Cyprus and that student, the girl named Akile, was deeply upset! Upset because they could not fly the Turkish flag or could not sing the Turkish national anthem but instead, had to sing the British national anthem.

Born in Pınarbaşı Village, she was orphaned at a very young age. Her childhood was spent at Menteş Farm with members of her extended family. When one of her relatives took her in and they moved to Lefkoşa, she was far behind in her lessons. In a few months however, she closed the gap and even got ahead of her classmates. She even became the student representative. Since the English language was well taught at her school, she got the opportunity to study at the renowned Cambridge.

Being trained in teaching, she became the first Turkish speaker and program producer at Cyprus Radio. She drew attention with her cultural and social programs. She simultaneously carried out broadcasting and taught at the Teacher Training Academy. In Turkey, she got the opportunity to meet Hasan Ali Yücel; the Minister of Education at the time.

Nearing the year 1960, she and her family migrated to England where she continued teaching. There, she established the Turkish Cypriot Women's Charity and held its presidency. The charity became a member of World Women's Association.

As a woman full of spirit, she now leads a life of retirement in London.

İsmail Bozkurt



AYDIN SENNAROĞLU

FIRST FEMALE DOCTOR OF MEDICINE

Sennaroğlu finished primary school in Paphos, secondary and high schools in Lefkoşa. When still in primary school, she witnessed the black-out nights of the Second World War. Remembering the sorrows of those dark days, her parents did everything within their power so their daughter could receive an education. She too would face and overcome all obstacles during her higher education with perseverance and determination.

After her graduation and studies, she returned to the Island. Right after her return, she organized the medical community and inspired them with teamwork. With her efforts, she contributed immensely to the eradication of the Tuberculosis (Consumption). In a time when gender equality was still an unfamiliar concept, she became a successful doctor of medicine who served far and near, just like her colleagues from the opposite sex. Aydın Sennaroğlu is our community's first female doctor to have received a gold medal for her achievements in the field of medicine. Her achievements surpass the field. She also shined in social circles with her appreciation of others and philanthropy. She always valued patience rights and maintained her good-humoured nature in her duties.

With her husband Özdemir, they showed all kinds of devotion in raising their children. After twenty-five years of marriage, her husband passed away. She always took pride in how their children grew up as individuals with great awareness after the efforts they made as a couple. As the first female doctor of our country, Aydın Sennaroğlu took her place among the cherished individuals in our society.

Ferhat Atik



AYLA HAŞMETLİ

FIRST TURKISH CYPRIOT FEMALE CONSERVATORY GRADUATE THEATRICAL PERFORMER

Once in the Lefkoşa of 1950s, when women were highly disregarded, a young girl of ten began her theatrical journey. In spite of her conservative upbringing and with the support and guidance of respected individuals of the day, she left Cyprus and became the first Turkish Cypriot girl to have received a conservatory education. When finished and returned, she had earned the right to be mentioned in history books and encyclopedias as the first theatrical performer. Being all that, she was among those who laid the foundations of the 'First Stage' (that later became the State Theatres) and who prepared the grounds for the Turkish Cypriot community theatre.

There were countless challenges and little resources but their excitement was palpable. They would work with joy, yet in a well-disciplined fashion; that is how they overcame those hardships and impossibilities.

When only thirty-six years old, she grew weary and turned her back on theatre due to the 'impolitic' and 'indifferent' attitude she experienced. When combined her own lack of assertion, she decided to take a back seat.

Since then, she appeared on stage only once as a 'guest'.

She does not regret her education and can regularly be spotted among the audience. After all these years, she still feels a sadness for the ongoing impolitic and indifferent attitude. She cannot understand why the State Theatres is not yet provided with facilities of its own.

Nowadays, she goes on with her life surrounded by her children and grandchildren; and she also writes verses. She describes herself as the "Modern Aynalı*".

The plateau she was awarded by her old conservatory as an unexpected moment in her life became her latest excitement in her profession.

İsmail Bozkurt

