

KÂMURAN SIRRI (1891-1935): A BIOGRAPHY OF AN ELECTRICAL ENGINEER

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Electrical engineering was a newly emerging profession in the second half of the 19th century. The gradual dissemination of electric telegraph and telephone lines, and the widening of electric power distribution over the world created a demand for electrical engineering. However, education in electrical engineering in Turkey started only in the early 20th century when an Engineering School opened in the Robert College in Istanbul in 1912.¹ About 15 years later, an Electromechanical Institute was created in 1926 in the Faculty of Science of the Istanbul Darülfünunu to teach electrical engineering.² Beforehand, most of the electrical engineers in Turkey were foreigners. The number of Turkish electrical engineers was very low, and they were educated abroad. Kâmuran Sırrı was one of them. The present article aims to construct the biography of him who lived in late Ottoman and early Republican periods; to examine the conditions which oriented him to become an electrical engineer, and to find out how he performed his profession within his social environment.

Social ladders in becoming an electrical engineering: Family and schooling

The father of Kâmuran Sırrı was Giritli Sırrı Pasha (1844-1895), a successful administrator of the Abdulhamid II's reign (1876-1909). He had served as a governor in Trabzon, Kastamonu, Ankara, Sivas, Diyarbakır, Adana and Baghdad between 1879 and 1895. Sırrı Pasha was a devout intellectual, a man of letters and a poet.³ His first wife was Leyla [Saz] Hanım (1850-1936)⁴

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¹ Arzu M. Nurdoğan, "Robert Koleji mühendislik okulu (1912)," *Dıvan Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, vol. 14, nr. 26, 2009/1, pp.203-232.

² Emre Dölen, *Türkiye Üniversite Tarihi 2: Cumhuriyet Döneminde Osmanlı Darülfünunu (1922-1933)*, İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010, p. 238-247.

³ Cemal Kurnaz, "Sırrı Paşa," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol.37, pp.127-129.

⁴ Leyla Hanım was a notable poet and musician. She composed nearly 200 songs in the classical Turkish music tradition. For her life and works see Nuri Özcan, "Leylâ hanım," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 27, p. 158; Nezih H. Neyzi, *From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey: Kızıltoprak Stories*, İstanbul: Peva, 1999

who came from an aristocratic family. She was the daughter of Ismail Pasha (d. 1879), a court physician at Topkapı Palace. Beside practicing medicine, Ismail Pasha was entrusted with the governorship of Crete and Izmir, and he served also as Minister of Education. During his term of office in Izmir, Giritli Sırrı Bey was Ismail Pasha's secretary. Ismail Pasha arranged the marriage of his daughter Leyla with Sırrı Bey. The couple had four children: Yusuf Razi [Bel] (1870- 1947), Vedat [Tek] (1873-1942), Nezihe [Beler] and Feride [Aynî] (d.1942).



A portrait of Kâmuran Sırrı (1891-1935). Rasih Nuri İleri Archive, courtesy Atilla Oral.

Sırrı Pasha traveled extensively throughout the country for his administrative duties. Some of the provinces in which he served did not have either a good climate, or were very underdeveloped or very far away from the capital city. Despite these challenges, Leyla Hanım and the children accompanied him until Sırrı Pasha's assignment to Diyarbakır and Baghdad as governor. According to Nezihe Neyzi's (1923-1999) accounts,⁵ Leyla Hanım did not follow him to Diyarbakır and Baghdad because she had realized that her

⁵ Nezihe H. Neyzi was the grandson of Feride Aynî. His book *From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey: Kızıltoprak Stories* is a peerless source for family history of Sırrı Pasha and Leyla Hanım based on documents and memories collected from the family members.

husband had a second wife. Kâmuran Sırrı was born in Diyarbakır in 1891 from Sırrı Pasha's second wife.⁶

Kâmuran Sırrı was four years old when his father passed away. He was probably raised by his uncle, Mustafa Nuri Bey (1851-1923). Kâmuran Sırrı had good relationships with his half-brothers and sisters; their connection did not break after the father died. He used to visit his sister Feride Aynî in Istanbul occasionally.⁷ He also kept in contact with his paternal cousins, and I believe that his relationship with his uncle Mustafa Nuri Bey and his sons Celal Nuri İleri (1882-1938), Suphi Nuri İleri (1887-1945) and Sedat Nuri İleri (1888-1943) was closer.

All male members of Kâmuran Sırrı's family were distinguished professionals, and some of them took active part in the formation of cultural and political life of the young Turkish Republic. Yusuf Razi Bel was a civil engineer, and Vedat Tek was a renowned architect. Celal Nuri İleri and Suphi Nuri İleri were journalists and writers as well as politically influential figures. Sedat Nuri İleri was a painter, cartoonist, agricultural engineer, and pioneered in radio broadcasting in Turkey. They all had very qualified academic education. Yusuf Razi studied engineering at Ponts et Chaussées in Paris after having graduated from the Mekteb-i Sultani in Istanbul.⁸ Vedat Tek, alike his older brother, went to the Mekteb-i Sultani but he dropped out the school and went to France. He completed his secondary education in l'École Monge and attended l'École Centrale, l'Académie Julian and l'École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts.⁹ His eldest cousin Celal Nuri graduated from the Mekteb-i Sultani and then from the Mekteb-i Hukuk (Law school) in Istanbul.¹⁰ Suphi Nuri, similarly, completed his secondary education in French-teaching colleges in Istanbul (elementary school of Saint Benoît and the Mekteb-i Sultani) and then went to France to study political sciences. He also earned a doctoral degree in law in Paris.¹¹ Kâmuran Sırrı followed a similar academic path. He went first to Mekteb-i Tefeyyüz, a private elementary school, and then attended the Mercan

⁶ Kâmuran Sırrı probably had maternal siblings: Refik İleri (Son of Kâmuran Sırrı's paternal cousin) while he was Council General in Baghdad, had met two Turkish-speaking men who claimed to be the sons of Sırrı Pasha. However, no further information is available about them and the relatives of Kâmuran Sırrı's mother. Nezih H. Neyzi, *From the Ottoman Empire...*, p. 73, 88.

⁷ Nezih H. Neyzi, *op. cit.*, p.41.

⁸ "Yusuf Razi Bel'in hayatı hakkında not," Taha Toros repository, İstanbul Şehir University e-archive, 001551730007, <http://earsiv.sehir.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/handle/11498/29438>

⁹ Bülent Tanju, "Bir Osmanlı'nın mimar olarak portresi: Vedat Tek," in *M. Vedat Tek: Kimliğinin İzinde Bir Mimar* (ed. Afife Batur), İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003, p. 2, 4.

¹⁰ Recep Duymaz, "Celâl Nuri İleri," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1993, vol. 7, pp. 242-245

¹¹ Deniz Şahinli, *Suphi Nuri İleri, Hayatı, Şahsiyeti, Eserleri ve Gazeteciliği*, Selçuk Üniversitesi Sos. Bil. Ens. Unpublished PhD thesis, Konya, 2007, p. 19, 25

İdadisi. After having graduated from the Lycée Saint-Joseph in Istanbul, he left for Paris where he completed his higher education, in the electricity division of the École Supérieure des Travaux Publics, probably in 1911.¹²

As descendants of the late nineteenth century Ottoman elite, these brothers and cousins reaffirmed their social status with prestigious professions acquired through francophone education. They studied and worked in France for a certain period and came back to work in their country. Reading these persons' lives as if they were strictly predetermined by a patriarchal tradition would be however inaccurate. For instance, Sırrı Pasha wanted his second son Vedat to attend the Ottoman Military Academy (the Mekteb-i Harbiye) and become a Pasha. Vedat on the other hand, wished to pursue his passion for architecture. The letters between the father and the son show how Vedat strove hard to convince his father to respect his own choice. Finally, he convinced him and became an architect. Bülent Tanju who studied Vedat Tek's biography, interprets these efforts as "a meaningful example which indicates the strength of seeking an individual identity¹³." Above all, the Ottoman elite families were undergoing a transformation in the late nineteenth century, and the strict patriarchal structure was dissolving. The family network here became a social setting which provided a certain intellectual capital as well as financial opportunities to materialize a good quality education.

The working life of an electrical engineer

Kâmuran Sırrı was trained in French institutions and gained his first professional experience during his two-year internship in a machine factory, *l'Usine Jacquet Frères* in Vernon, France.¹⁴ His writings in *Şehbal*, a famous Turkish magazine published between 1912 and 1914 in Istanbul, give clues about the years he spent in France. On the other hand, his articles, mostly about electricity and its applications, reflect his views on the industrial backwardness of Turkey in comparison to European countries. That was a frequently questioned issue at that time. As a young optimistic engineer, Kâmuran Sırrı set forth that everyone in the society must take a step forward without hesitating how small this step is, or how long it will take to achieve a developed industry. In all likelihood, moving forward is better than remaining inactive. Although he did not suggest it as an ultimate solution to ameliorate the economy of Turkey, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of small or low-budget industrial enterprises. In an article in *Şehbal*, he tells the story of his encounter with a French paper-manufacturer. Kâmuran Sırrı was sent to a small factory owned by

¹² Mehmet Zeki, *Türkiye Teracimi Ahval Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1929, p. 168.

¹³ Bülent Tanju, *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁴ Mehmet Zeki, *Türkiye Teracimi Ahval Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1929, p. 168.

this manufacturer to repair its engines. The manufacturer was originally a farmer but had established a factory for producing low quality brown packing paper. According to Kâmuran Sırrı, the building of the paper factory was very weird (*garip ve gayri muntazam*) and its machines were not used properly. Yet, the owner succeeded to produce useful goods, to make profit and even had the potential to upgrade his business.¹⁵ Apparently, by relating his experience in France, Kâmuran Sırrı wanted to stimulate the wealthy readers of *Şehbal* to become entrepreneurs.

In fact, Kâmuran Sırrı became an entrepreneur himself. He founded a small machine factory in Istanbul, at Kalafat Yeri (present day Perşembe Pazarı) next to Fermeneciler Street. The factory was located in an industrially and commercially vibrant zone between Galata, Karaköy and the Arsenal in the Golden Horn. The establishment, titled *Osmanlı malzeme ve alât-ı mihanikiye ve elektrikiye imalathanesi* (The Ottoman workshop for materials, mechanical and electrical instruments), started manufacturing on 3 May 1919. He produced engines such as marine engines, waterpumps and steam-driven astern engines with a capacity ranging from 15 to 20 horsepower. He also produced press-formed metallic material and mechanical instruments. The factory also provided repairing-service for all sorts of engines as well as making electricity installation projects.¹⁶

Kâmuran Sırrı also designed electrical devices. He introduced his “Turkish invention” under the columns of *Şehbal* magazine in 1913. According to him, the device (*mukatta-i cereyan aleti*) provided “an intermittent current to the light bulbs of flashing advertising signs.” At the time, there were various methods of supplying intermittent current to flashing light bulbs and Kâmuran Sırrı had published an informative article on this topic in the previous issue of *Şehbal*.¹⁷ He claimed that “his technique” would reduce the cost. He explained the working of the device and gave a sketch for it (see below). To get his invention approved he applied for a patent to European countries such as Germany, France, Belgium.¹⁸ Kâmuran Sırrı also developed a new model of electric stove for cooking and heating foods. İsmail Suphi [Soysallıoğlu] in his article published in *Âti* newspaper in 1918, enthusiastically presented Kâmuran Sırrı’s useful “invention.” According to him, the model manufactured by Kâmuran Sırrı was better than the similar products imported from Europe in terms of its longevity and energy-saving properties. Besides, he had used only

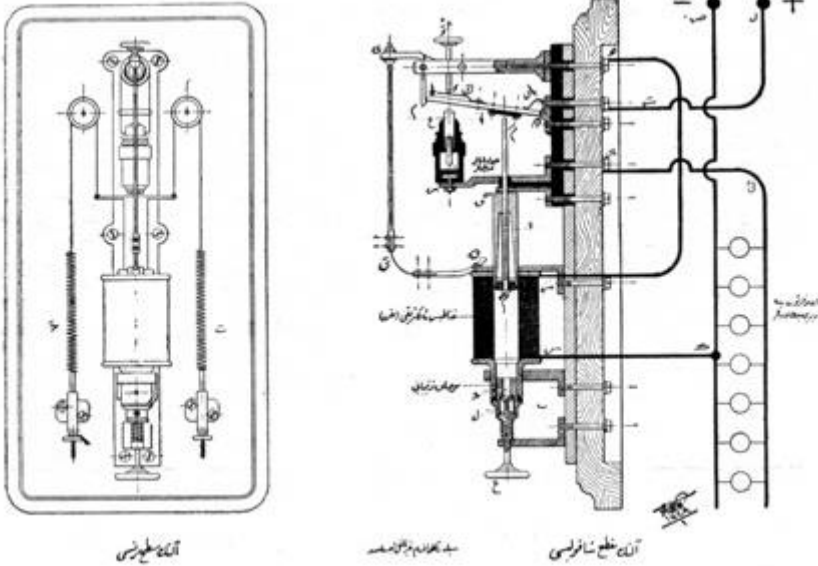
¹⁵ Kâmuran Sırrı, *Şehbal*, nr. 71, 1 Mart 1329 (14 March 1913), pp. 446-447.

¹⁶ Mehmet Zeki, *ibid.* “Türklerde çalışma kabiliyeti,” *İleri*, 24 July 1919, p. 2.

¹⁷ Kâmuran Sırrı, “Elektrikli ilânların tertibatına bir nazar,” *Şehbal*, nr. 69, 1 Şubat 1328 (14 February 1913), pp. 414-415.

¹⁸ Kâmuran Sırrı, “Bir Türk ihtirama dair,” *Şehbal*, nr. 80, 1 Ağustos 1329 (14 August 1913), pp. 152-153.

local products.¹⁹ It has been argued that he had more inventions such as clocks and bombs (*saatler ve bombalar*).²⁰



The electrical device “invented” by Kâmuran Sırrı (*Şehbal*, nr. 80, 14 August 1913, p.153)

Teaching was another line of work in Kâmuran Sırrı’s professional career. When he came back to Istanbul from France in 1913, he started to give courses on “combustion engines” and “industrial electricity” at the vocational technical school (Istanbul Mekteb-i Sanayi).²¹ He also wrote a text book on combustion engines in 1914.²² Later in his life, he worked in Adana Technical School as well. While he was teaching, he also worked as a contractor for the general electric lighting project of Adana and as an operating engineer in Tarsus Electricity Company around 1923. In his Adana years, he wrote a three-volume book on electricity and its applications addressed to industrial workers and technicians.²³ He left Adana because of his health problems and went back to Istanbul. The next institution he worked in was the Şirket-i Hayriye, a steam

¹⁹ İsmail Suphi [Soysallıoğlu], *Âtı*, 13 March 1918, p.2

²⁰ İstanbul Şehir University e-archive, Taha Toros repository, newspaper cuttings. <http://earsiv.sehir.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/handle/11498/25427>.

²¹ Mehmet Zeki, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²² Kâmuran Sırrı, *İnflaklı Motorlar Suret-i İmal ve İstimalleri*, İstanbul: Cihan Matbaası, 1335 (1919), 311p.

²³ Kâmuran Sırrı, *Ameli Elektrik-i Sanayi ve Tatbikatı* (3 vols.), İstanbul: Vatan Matbaası, 1926. The preface indicates he completed the book in 1923, in Tarsus.

navigation company where he worked as chief engineer and inspector. His career took him to Istanbul as the representative of the global company AEG where he worked for two years. Then, he moved to Izmir around 1930s to work in Izmir Municipality as an engineer.²⁴ Towards the end of his life, he moved to Ankara and acted as the director of Ankara Technical School from 1931 to 1934.²⁵

The teaching of engineers at educational institutions was partially related to the increase of schooling in the young Turkish Republic. Educational institutions needed teachers endowed with scientific and technical knowledge. On the other hand, by providing a regular income, schools were reliable shelters for engineers. One may find engineers in 1920s Turkey who were working at schools while simultaneously running their own small-business.²⁶ Kâmuran Sırrı's example was not an exception. However, Kâmuran Sırrı's affiliation with technical schools did probably characterize his profession in a different way than that of engineers who worked in higher educational institutions and/or engineering schools, or those who occupied posts in bureaucracy. One aspect of this characterization originated from the engineering knowledge he rendered to students. Technical schools used to train workers and foremen for industry through practice-oriented education, and Kâmuran Sırrı, as a teacher, had to convey sophisticated electrical-mechanical knowledge to students with inadequate mathematical and scientific basis. Another aspect was related to the general mission of these schools for raising industrial workforce for the Turkish Republic. Thus, Kâmuran Sırrı might have found himself associated with this national mission. Finally, a technical school was a social setting which put a *paşazâde* engineer in a different interaction with the working class. Here the engineer was not a charitable who voluntarily taught science and techniques to the to-be workers.²⁷ The relationship of the engineer and the to-be-workers in the technical school was not an employer-employee interaction either. This social setting might have transformed Kâmuran Sırrı both professionally and politically.

²⁴ Mehmet Zeki, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²⁵ http://uluseml.meb.k12.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/06/01/118514/icerikler/icerikler/okulumuzun-tarihcesi_35494.html (25.11.2016)

²⁶ See Meltem Akbaş, "Elektrik mühendisi Mehmet Refik Fenmen: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e yenilikçi ve yorulmaz bir aydın," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları* (Atilla Bir Armağanı), vol. IX (1-2), 2007-2008, pp. 101-118.

²⁷ The 19th century Ottoman elite, both military and civilian, taught in the Cemiyet-i Tedrisiye-yi İslamiye, a charitable society for the education of Muslims.

Engineers, industry and the working-class

Apparently Kâmuran Sırrı was always keen on writing. He began writing a science column for *Şehbal* when he was 21 years old. Another journal Kâmuran Sırrı nurtured with his articles was *Fen ve Sanat* (Science and Industry). With its 11 issues published between 1913 and 1914, it was a short-lived journal addressing to industrial workers, masters and technicians. Articles were written in plain language, volumes were slim and the price quite affordable. The articles focused mainly on various industrial techniques and aimed to help the readers to improve their knowledge on their professions such as foundry, fitting, introducing various engines, automobiles or electrical devices etc. The journal was published by a small group of students and instructors of the civilian and military technical schools of Istanbul. The “Managing editor” and the “editor-in-chief” was the same person: Mustafa Nafi Bey. He was also the author of many articles. The perspective and the mission of the journal put forth by him was the following:²⁸

“We know that our fabrics are not as esteemed as the fancy fabrics manufactured in Europe, because our artisans do not have innovative and progressive ideals. In Europe, there are hundreds of technical schools and plenty of publications on scientific and industrial issues while here we demand very less or even nothing. Our purpose must be understood clearly; above all we will make an effort to develop a national industry in terms of science and art; we will work to enhance Ottoman artisans and the Ottoman civilization.”

Mustafa Nafi was a fitter (*tesviyeci*) graduated from the technical school which trained workers/masters for the military factories (İmalât-ı Harbiye Sanayi Mekteb-i Âlisi). His work-life started in 1911. Then, he was sent to Paris – probably by the government, together with other workers – to master his art. Upon his return to Turkey, he began teaching in the Istanbul Mekteb-i Sanayi. He published *Fen ve Sanat* between 1913 and 1914 together with students and teachers of the military and civilian technical schools including Kâmuran Sırrı. Mustafa Nafi was imprisoned for three months in 1914 as a consequence of one of his articles published in *Fen ve Sanat*.²⁹

In his own words, Mustafa Nafi became a member of Turkish socialist-communist societies after 1910.³⁰ His political identity makes us to focus more

²⁸ Mustafa Nafi, *Fen ve Sanat*, nr.1, 1 Ağustos 1329 (14 August 1913).

²⁹ *Fen ve Sanat*, nr. 3, 3 Teşrin-i evvel 1329 (16 October 1913), p. 41; *Fen ve Sanat*, nr.5, 9 Teşrin-i sani 1329 (22 November 1913), p.80; *Fen ve Sanat*, nr. 8, 18 Kanun-ı sani 1329 (31 January 1914), pp. 129-130.

³⁰ He went to Moscow in 1918 following the Soviet Revolution. He wished to establish contacts with the Soviet Union to learn about how he could help his working-class brothers in Turkey who, he believed, had the worst miserable life conditions in the world. There were many Turkish communists in the Soviets

on the social connections of Kâmuran Sırrı and question his political affiliations. When we compare *Fen ve Sanat* and *Şehbal*, we see that they address completely to different readers. *Şehbal* was printed on good quality European paper and decorated with beautiful illustrations and high quality photographs. It published a variety of articles and news ranging from foreign affairs to music, and science to philosophy.³¹ These features together with advertisements and announcements released in *Şehbal* show that this journal was addressing to the educated and modern men and women from middle upper classes. *Fen ve Sanat* on the other hand, was completely the opposite: It addressed the working class, the print and picture quality was poor and it used cheap paper. It was published with the limited sources of a handful people from the Istanbul Technical School. The presence of Kâmuran Sırrı here looks like as only a gesture of a gentleman-engineer supporting the students and instructors of the school in which he had taught, or assisting the newly rising industrial working class with his professional knowledge and experience. After all, these acts would be in line with his perspective about the necessity of individual efforts to industrialize the country. However, the connection of Kâmuran Sırrı with *Fen ve Sanat* circle seems to be stronger. When Mustafa Nafi got arrested, Kâmuran Sırrı became the editor-in-chief of the *Fen ve Sanat* for a couple of issues.³² Apparently, he was not only “contributing” to the journal but also embracing its ideals even if there was a political pressure on the journal.

Another journal Kâmuran Sırrı wrote for was *Sanayi Mecmuası*.³³ He published there four articles about factories in Turkey, the influence of the war on the industry and the projects for electrification.³⁴ This journal was published by İbrahim Pertev a former graduate of the technical school in Istanbul. Fifty eight issues saw the press between 1914 and 1920 - except for an unavoidable interruption during WWI. In the following years, İbrahim Pertev moved to

at that time, belonging to the competing political groups with which Mustafa Nafi and the others (namely Mustafa Suphi's circle) were in conflict. They were blaming one another for “not being true communists.” From 1919 to 1921, Mustafa Nafi, tried to lobby to gain recognition as the true representative of the Turkish working class in the Soviet Union. He also asked to become an international member of the 3rd Congress of the Communist International. His attempts failed, he was severely criticized by other Turkish communists and was finally excluded. Mete Tunçay, “Türkiye’de solun tarihinden bir belge: Türk komünisti Mustafa Nafi’nin Üçüncü Beynelmilel’e katılım başvurusu,” *Toplumsal Tarih*, nr. 144, December 2005, pp. 100-101; http://www.gwpda.org/comment/tbmm_pak.html.

³¹ For a detailed study of *Şehbal*, see Selim Ahmetoğlu, *İttihatçı Aktüaliteden Kitleleşen Popülariteye: Şehbal Mecmuası (1909-1914)*, İstanbul: Libra yay., 2010. This study also provides an index of the magazine.

³² Kâmuran Sırrı was the managing editor and editor-in-chief from issue 8 to issue 10.

³³ Zafer Toprak studied *Sanayi Mecmuası* from political history point of view by analyzing its content in relation with problems of industrialization and working-class. Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı (1908-1946)*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2016, pp. 211-227.

³⁴ Murat Koraltürk, “Sanayi Mecmuası ve dizini,” *Müteferrika*, nr. 20, 2001, pp. 41-63.

Izmir, so did the journal. Also, the title of the journal changed twice; first became *Fen ve Sanat* and then *Endüstri*.³⁵

There is a connection between Mustafa Nafi's *Fen ve Sanat* and İbrahim Pertev's *Sanayi*. The profile of readers that both journals targeted was similar and also very specific. They both had a common perspective, their contents were similar; both emerged from the Istanbul Technical School and maintained their relations with its graduates and teachers. Seemingly, İbrahim Pertev's *Sanayi* was a continuation of Mustafa Nafi's *Fen ve Sanat*.

After Kâmuran Sırrı passed away, İbrahim Pertev wrote:³⁶

“The world of science and industry in Turkey lost a man of great values in September [1935]: the mechanical and electrical engineer Kâmuran Sırrı. The death of this Turkish scholar (*bilgin*) who was my publishing companion (*yazı arkadaşı*) and dear comrade (*ülkü yoldaşı*) for a long time was a loss for the country. His scientific articles published in old magazines, his technical books written for Turkish artisans and masters, his works on science and industry will keep him alive in the memory of both today's and tomorrow's Turkish industrial generations. Turkish artisans, do read the surah al-fatihah for the soul of this good man!”

This is a loose translation of the obituary. Here, İbrahim Pertev did not describe Kâmuran Sırrı's connection with the journal as a “contribution” or “support”, but mentioned him as his “companion” and “comrade”. This expression shows that they shared a common political perspective and ideals for many years, since their Istanbul days. An in-depth analysis of the political identity of Kâmuran Sırrı is not the primary purpose of this article yet taking into consideration of İbrahim Pertev's account and Kâmuran Sırrı's close connections with the journals *Fen ve Sanat* and *Sanayi* as well as the newspapers *İleri* (and *Âti*) published by his cousins, I may suggest that he had socialist tendencies.

Conclusion

Kâmuran Sırrı worked as an engineer throughout his life. He developed electrical devices; established a machine-building factory; taught in technical schools and worked for private companies as well as for Izmir municipality. He also published technical books and articles in various magazines. His individual history allows us to follow up the career of practicing electrical engineers. By “practicing engineer” I mean the engineers who continued performing their

³⁵ Mehmet Şahinkoç, “Sanayi Mecmuası: I. Cihan Harbi yıllarında sanayileşme sorunu ve Sanayi Mecmuası,” *Müteferrika*, nr. 20, 2001, pp. 22-23; *Endüstri*, nr.13, Eylül 1936, p. 4.

³⁶ *Endüstri*, nr. 2, İlkteşrin [Ekim] 1935, p. 4.

profession in contrast to those who worked as engineers only for a short period and then became engineering school professors or technocrats. Alike Kâmuran Sırrı, there were other engineers who worked in the late Ottoman and early republican period in Turkey. Their lives still wait to be explored. If an engineer did not have any administrative task in state offices (municipalities, ministries etc.), or did not teach at any school-university or made himself/herself a person who spoke/wrote on science publicly, our knowledge about his/her life is very restricted. Particularly, we know little about those who run their own small business (installing telephones, realizing the electrification projects for houses, trading electrical devices etc.); historical sources about their projects, works, and salaries are very poor. We believe that constructing the biographies of practicing engineers will contribute to develop a more comprehensive historical understanding of the history of engineering in Turkey.

Kamuran Sırrı (1891-1935): Bir elektrik mühendisinin yaşam öyküsü

On dokuzuncu yüzyıl sonu ve yirminci yüzyılın başı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun siyasal yapısının çözüldüğü, modern Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulduğu sancılı bir dönüşüm sürecidir. Gençlik ve olgunluk çağları bu zaman dilimine denk gelen kuşaklardan, sıradışı ölçüde üretken bireyler yetişmiştir. Bu makalede yaşam öyküsü ele alınan elektrik mühendisi Kâmuran Sırrı (1891-1935), bu kuşağın insanıdır. İstanbul'da özel bir ilkokulu bitirip yine İstanbul'daki Saint Joseph Fransız Lisesi'nden mezun olduktan sonra Paris'e giderek École Supérieure des Travaux Publics'in elektrik şubesine devam etmiştir. Mezuniyetinin ardından Fransa'daki bir fabrikada iki yıl kadar makine yapımı üzerine staj yapmış ve 1913'te İstanbul'a dönmüştür. Bu tarihten ölümüne kadar geçen süre içinde İstanbul, Adana, Ankara ve İzmir'de üretken bir yaşamı olmuştur. Dönemin çeşitli dergilerinde yayımlanmış, çoğu elektrik hakkında çok sayıda popüler yazısı vardır. Ayrıca elektrik konusunda yayımlanmış kitapları bulunmaktadır. Mühendislik kariyerinin bir kısmını İstanbul, Adana ve Ankara'da sanayiye usta işçi yetiştiren meslek okullarında öğretmenlik yaparak, geri kalan kısmını ise özel sektör, devlete bağlı kurumlar ve belediyelerde elektrik ve makine mühendisliği yaparak geçirmiştir. Yayımlanmış yazıları, dönemin pek çok aydını gibi ülkenin Avrupa karşısında endüstriyel geri kalmışlığını mesele edindiğini ve bu durumu değiştirmek için çabaladığını göstermektedir. Kâmuran Sırrı'nın iktisadi kalkınmaya katkı sağlamak bakımından her bir bireyin atacağı küçük ve yavaş adımların bile bir fark yaratacağına yönelik pozitif bir tutumu vardır. En çok ilgilendiği mesele, Türkiye'de sanayi alanında çalışacak usta ve işçi ihtiyacıdır. Ayrıca kendi geliştirdiği bir elektrikli alet için Avrupa'da çeşitli kurumlara patent başvurusunda bulunmuş, İstanbul'da makine üreten küçük bir fabrika açmıştır.

Kâmuran Sırrı, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın son çeyreğinde yaşamış aynı zamanda dini ilimlere hâkimiyeti ve şiirleriyle tanınan ünlü bir Osmanlı valisi Giritli Sırrı Paşa'nın oğludur. Gençlik yıllarını, babası gibi bir Osmanlı valisi olan amcasının çocukları ile birlikte oldukça politik bir ortamda geçirmiştir. Bunlardan biri II. Meşrutiyet döneminde ve Cumhuriyet'in ilk yıllarında aktif olarak siyasetle ilgilenen ve ilk Osmanlı sosyalistlerinden sayılan Suphi Nuri İleri; diğeri ise, II. Meşrutiyet döneminin ünlü gazetecilerinden Celal Nuri İleri'dir. Yakın ve uzak akrabaları arasında, edebiyat ve sanat alanında ön plana çıkmış isimler bulunmaktadır. Ancak Kâmuran Sırrı'nın hayatı hakkında çok az şey bilinmektedir. Diğeri bir deyişle o, ünlü Osmanlı ailelerinin ünlü olmayan üyelerinden biridir. Makale, Kâmuran Sırrı'yı bir elektrik mühendisi olarak hayata döndürmeye çalışırken, onu, döneminin elektrik mühendislerinin sosyolojik profili bağlamında resmetmeyi hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kâmuran Sırrı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, elektrik mühendisleri, Giritli Sırrı Paşa.

Kâmuran Sırrı (1891-1935): A biography of an electrical engineer

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period of political turmoil and transformation which ended with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. Many extraordinarily productive individuals were brought up during this period. This article will focus on the life of a little-known member of this fascinating generation, namely Kâmuran Sırrı (1891-1935), an entrepreneurial and reformist Turkish electrical engineer. He had the privilege of being educated first in a private elementary school, and then in the *Lycée Saint-Joseph*, a French high school in Istanbul. He completed his higher education in Paris, in the electrical engineering section of the *École Supérieure des Travaux Publics*. He learned the basics of the profession in a machine factory in France during his two-years of internship. He turned back to Turkey in 1913 and worked in İstanbul, Adana, Ankara and İzmir until he died in 1935. He taught in vocational technical schools in İstanbul, Adana and Ankara which trained qualified workers and masters for the industry. Then, he worked as an engineer in state institutions, in the private sector and in the municipalities. He wrote on electricity in the science columns of famous magazines, he also published a couple of books on electrical engineering. His writings reveal that he dwelled on the issue of industrial backwardness of Turkey which was a frequently addressed question at that time. As a young optimistic engineer, he set forth that everyone must take a step without thinking how small it is or how long it will take to achieve a developed industry. He not only worked as a salaried employee but also was an entrepreneur who endeavoured to realize his ideas; he applied for a patent of an

electrical device that he developed himself and established a small machine factory in Istanbul as well.

Kâmuran Sırrı was the son of an Ottoman governor Giritli Sırrı Pasha (1844-1895) who was celebrated for his poetry and his mastery in religious knowledge. He lost his father when he was 4 years old. He might have spent his youth in a very political environment together with his cousins from father's side, including a very well-known journalist of the IInd Constitutional Period, Celal Nuri İleri (d. 1938) and one of the earliest Ottoman socialists Suphi Nuri İleri (d.1945). Within his close and distant relatives and family circle there were many people having a reputation in literature, art or politics. If not completely invisible among them, Kâmuran Sırrı was a shadowy figure. This article attempts to construct a biography of him and will try to picture him as an electrical engineer within social and political context.

Key words: Kâmuran Sırrı, Ottoman Empire, electrical engineers, Giritli Sırrı Pasha.

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A portrait of Kâmuran Sırrı. From Rasih Nuri İleri's Archive. Courtesy Atilla Oral.

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