

A charitable and modest social aid organization: Topkapı Poor People's Association*

Hayırsever ve mütevazı bir sosyal yardım kuruluşu: Topkapı Fukaraperver Cemiyeti

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ABSTRACT

In our history, there are many health and social service organizations with deep-rooted pasts and traditions, especially Kızılay, Darülaceze and Yeşilay. Topkapı Fukaraperver Association, founded in 1908, continues its services in İstanbul Topkapı in a determined, confident, modest and uninterrupted manner with the excitement of the first years. The activities of the association, which has adopted the principle of extending a helping hand to people in need, being able to solve their problems and meeting their needs to the extent possible, are still carried out with the devoted and patriotic efforts and endeavors of its board of directors, members and volunteers. When examined, it will be seen that the association has an experience that can lead and be an example for many social service organizations today. This article will attempt to summarize the activities of the association from its establishment to the present day and will focus on the aid provided to those in need. It is possible to find practical applications and examples of our understanding of civilization that advises, recommends and even orders to help the helpless, the strange, the destitute and the poor in the Topkapı Poor Society.

ÖZ

Tarihimizde Kızılay, Darülaceze ve Yeşilay başta olmak üzere köklü bir geçmişi ve geleneği bulunan pek çok sağlık ve sosyal hizmet kuruluşu vardır. 1908 yılında kurulan Topkapı Fukaraperver Cemiyeti İstanbul Topkapı'da ilk yılların heyecanı içinde kararlı, kendinden emin, mütevazı ve kesintisiz bir şekilde hizmetlerine devam etmektedir. Muhtaç durumda bulunan insanlara yardım elini uzatmayı, onların sıkıntılarını çare olabilmeyi ve ihtiyaçlarını imkânlar ölçüsünde karşılayabilmeyi ilke edilen cemiyetin faaliyetleri halen yönetim kurulu, üyeler ve gönüllü çalışanlarının fedakâr ve hamiyet dolu çaba ve gayretleriyle sürdürülmektedir. İncelendiğinde cemiyetin günümüzdeki birçok sosyal hizmet kuruluşuna öncülük edebilecek ve örnek alınabilecek bir tecrübeye sahip olduğu görülecektir. Bu makalede cemiyetin kuruluşundan bugüne kadarki faaliyetleri ana hatlarıyla özetlenmeye çalışılacak ve ihtiyaç sahiplerine yapılan yardımların neler olduğu üzerinde durulacaktır. Biçare, garip, kimsesiz, fakir insanlara yardımcı olmayı öğütleyen, tavsiye eden ve hatta emreden medeniyet anlayışımızın pratikteki uygulama ve örneklerini Topkapı Fukaraperver Cemiyeti'nde bulabilmek mümkündür.

INTRODUCTION

Many societies have been established in Türkiye for years to combat poverty. One of these societies is the Topkapı Society for the Poor, headquartered in Istanbul. The society has been operating continuously for 116 years. Despite its activities for so long, it is not an institution that is well-known or recognized by society. In this article, the activities of the society, which have been carried out admirably for years, will be shared with the scientific world to some extent.

The article consists of three main sections.

- 1. The Reason for the Establishment of the Society and Its First Activities
- 2. Its History
- 3. Its Current Activities

Orphanages, Soup Kitchens, Caravanserais, Darülacezes, Avâz Foundations, Societies for the Poor, Ottoman Red Crescent Society, Müessesât-ı Hayriye-i Sıhhiye Administration, Darüleytams, etc. in the Ottoman State. institutions are health and social service institutions



The old mansion where the society has been serving for 45 years. The sign above its door says “Topkapı Poor Supporters’ Organization”



Temporary building where work was carried out between 1945-1969



Today's building

opened for the purpose of helping each other. (For more information, see Sarı et al., 2019).

After the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era (1908), the leading civil society organizations established for aid purposes were the Poor People's Associations. The most important of these associations, which were established in almost every neighborhood of Istanbul and rushed to the aid of every poor person regardless of religion, language, or race, were the Topkapı Poor People's Association, the Kadıköy Poor People's Association, and the Eyüp Sultan and Surrounding Poor People's Association. (Usta, 2016, pp. 04-105).

The Ottoman Poor People's Association was established in Topkapı, where the poor were very numerous and therefore needed the most aid. The association began its first activities in the Topkapı Branch of the Union and Progress Association. The founders of the association were primarily Dr. Galip Hakkı [Üstün] Bey, Onnik Mardirosyan, Bodos and Cemil Efendis, Nafiz Bey and Hakkı Efendi. (Mutlu, 2017, p. 41-42).



Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey, founder of the Topkapı Poor Society (1875-1938)

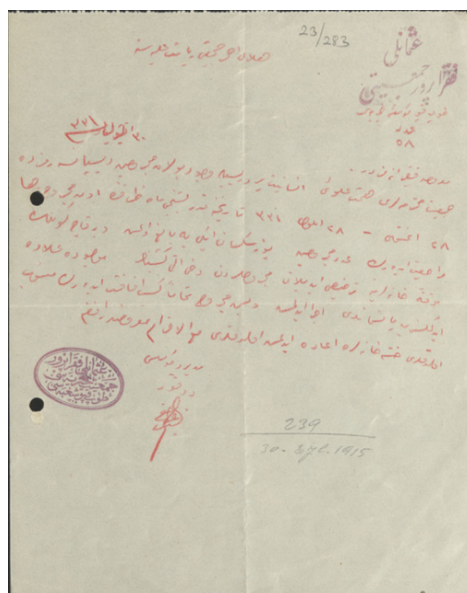
After the Ottoman Society for the Poor dissolved itself, the Topkapı Branch remained independent and continued its activities under the name of Topkapı Poor Support Institution.

The Topkapı Poor Support Society cooperated with the Ottoman Red Crescent Society during the Balkan Wars and World War I, and helped Balkan immigrants who took refuge in the Ahmet Paşa, Tekkeci, Fatma Sultan and Ereğli mosques and other small mosques and mosques, and established soup kitchens and pharmacies. (Özbek, 1998, p. 4, 9).



The Society distributes bread and food at the soup kitchen it opened together with the Red Crescent in 1915.

During the days when the Battle of Gallipoli was still ongoing, he treated the wounded at the Mecruhın Dispensary, one of the health institutions where wounded Ottoman veterans who were allowed to go home were treated. After their check-ups and dressings, the veterans who regained their health were returned to



the Hilal-i Ahmer hospitals they had come from. (Red Crescent Archives, Box 23, File 283).

An archive document showing that the wounded veterans of Çanakkale, who were dressed at the Mecruhîn Dispensary, which was established with the help of the Red Crescent Society and affiliated with the Topkapı Branch of the Ottoman Society for the Poor, were returned to the hospitals where they had been staying after regaining their health (Red Crescent Archives, Red Crescent Archives, Box 23, File 283).

During the armistice years, he also established soup kitchens in Yenibahçe, Topkapı and distributed hot meals to the families of soldiers and the poor every day.

Establishment

On a cold and snowy February day in 1908, when economic difficulties were experienced, Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey was sitting in the Topkapı Pharmacy with his friend Pharmacist Onnik Efendi. An old man with torn shoes who passed by the door was coughing despite being sick. Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey gave all his attention to that man and felt quite sad. He decided that this misery needed to be fought and that he would do everything he could. (Kesler, 1932) Since similar charity organizations were on the agenda in Europe at that time, Galip Hakkı Bey made the first attempt by bringing up the subject with his friend Onnik Efendi. (Ülgen, 1938)

Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey's attention was drawn to the half-moon-shaped piggy bank in the pharmacy and he put a tenner in it. Thereupon, Onnik Efendi also put in a tenner like Hakkı Bey. The first capital of the society was thus formed. The activities were started with twenty coins put into a piggy bank with the money of that time (Kesler, 1932). When the Ottoman Poor People's Society was abolished, it left its legal rights to the Topkapı branch. The Topkapı Poor People's Society continued its activities in this way. (Ülgen, 1938)

The society helped the poor and destitute in 14 neighborhoods of the Topkapı district. People who received help from this society came to the hospital on a certain day of the week in a registered and regular manner and underwent a health examination. When they came to be examined, they were also provided with goods and food. (Bildik, 1949)

The society never extended a helping hand for donations and never forced donations to be made to it. For this reason, the society could not receive much help from the public for a while. In fact, the society was on the verge of closing after a while. (Sabah, 1967) However, it continued

on its path, albeit with limited activities, and aimed to serve all the poor, regardless of religion, language, race, or sect. (Ersoy, 1987)

Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey set some principles for the society. These are (Kesler, 1971):

1. Beggars should not be helped.
2. Since begging is considered bad, the society should never beg and everyone should be able to donate of their own free will.
3. The society should always continue its activities in cooperation with larger organizations, foundations, municipalities, and the state.
4. The services of the society should be performed by those who donate to the society and receive aid.
5. In addition to helping the poor, the health, clothing, and education needs of orphans or destitute children who need to be cared for should be met and they should be taken under protection so that they can become educated and professional individuals.
6. Activities should be carried out quietly.
7. Society should never have any ties with politics.



A mother of five children living on the streets is taken under protection by the society

Name Changes

Topkapı Fukaraperver Müessesesi-i Hayriyesi was named Topkapı Türk Fukaraperver Hayır Müessesesi in 1913 and later simplified and became known as Topkapı Poor Aid Institution in 1934. In 1948, it finally changed its name to Topkapı Fukaraperver Association and continues its activities under this name today. (Darülaceze, 1978)

Investigation Studies

A strict and secret investigation is initiated regarding whether those who want to benefit from the association in terms of health and social services are truly poor and first they are required to obtain a poverty certificate from the headman of the neighborhood they are staying in. After that, after a more detailed investigation, it is learned that they do not have income from other sources, they receive assistance from the association, membership procedures are initiated and finally, an introduction card is given to the families accepted to the association. Each family given an introduction card is required to show these cards when they come for monthly distribution. (Özaksoy, 1986)

The Society was entitled to be included among the Public Benefit Associations with the decision numbered 6/12699 of the Council of Ministers on 2.11.1969 (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988).

The Purpose of Establishment of the Society

Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey listed the purposes of establishment in a general assembly meeting as follows (Pala, 1975):

1. To provide education, training and needs of orphans, orphans or destitute children in need of care.
2. To come to the aid of families who are deprived of the head of the household and become miserable and to meet their needs, and to take children under protection if any.
3. To send doctors to the homes of the poor and weak free of charge to cure their illnesses and provide free medicine.
4. To distribute yoghurt and bread to the poor and weak.
5. To help those who are able to work but cannot find work to find work.
6. To refer people who are homeless and those who cannot be cared for at home to the hospital.
7. To examine sick and ill people who apply to the society on examination days free of charge.

8. To help people who are materially and spiritually affected by disasters.

Activities of the Society

Clothing Aid

Clothing is distributed to registered families twice a year, in summer and winter. Families receiving aid come in groups of thirty on certain days to get clothes. Most of the clothes to be distributed are used and donated clothes. The clothes brought from home or brought as alms from clothing stores are arranged on hangers or shelves in the upper floor hall of the building by volunteer workers of the society, separated by gender and size (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988).

Food Aid

Food aid is provided to registered families in need on the last Saturday of each month. 14 types of dry food; cheese, olives, oil, margarine, pasta, bulgur, potatoes, flour, lentils, beans, chickpeas, 2 kg of sugar, 1 kg of rice are distributed, and 3 kg of meat, soap, various fruits depending on the season, honey, eggs, halva, hazelnut paste, jam, tahini molasses are given. Special sausage, kashar, holiday candy, pickles, pastrami, ready-made soup, minced meat, pudding, dried apricots and grapes are distributed for the month of Ramadan. A box of Turkish delight is distributed every holiday and dried nuts are distributed on New Year's Eve. Approximately 500 animals are sacrificed annually during the Feast of Sacrifice. 20-30 of these are distributed during the holiday and the rest are stocked to meet the annual needs of the families during the food distribution. Families who come to the society on Saturdays wait in the hall at the entrance of the society and take turns to receive their food and are given a certain amount of money to cover their travel expenses with their dated receipts so that they can come to the distribution on the next date (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988).

Student Aid

The association covers the school expenses of the children of families registered with the association; uniforms, dresses, shoes, stationery needs. Similarly, successful students in high school and higher education are given regular scholarships, i.e. cash aid, every month (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988).

Fuel Aid

Families registered with the association are provided with fuel assistance so that they will not be affected by the harsh weather conditions in the winter.



Children dressed by the society during the Ramadan Feast in 1931



Primary school students dressed by the society in 1969

Health Aid

The association has a pharmacy section consisting of medicines donated to the institution. On the days when patients of families in need come to the pharmacy for distribution, they are examined by charitable doctors who come to the association voluntarily to help, and their medicine needs are met. (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988) In this respect, the association also provides health services.

Social Aid

Circumcision clothes are purchased for the children of families affiliated with the association and their circumcisions are performed, and the dowries of girls

of marriageable age are provided by the association (Eyüp'te Zaman, 1988).

Cash Donations

The society does not normally provide cash donations, but it does provide cash donations when deemed appropriate by the board of directors, based on the principle of equality. If some donors request that cash donations be made for zakat, the money sent is distributed equally to the families.

Meat for Sacrifice

The poor and homeless people who receive aid from the

society have been able to eat meat even once or twice a year thanks to the society. Those who want to have sacrifices made during the Eid al-Adha have requested that the sacrifices they donate be distributed to the poor and homeless (Aripinar, 1955).

Child Care Center

The first children's care center in Turkey was opened by Dr. Galip Hakkı Üstün, the head of the Topkapı Poor People's Care Center, in 1927 (Topkapı Poor People's Care Center, 1969). One of the purposes of the Children's Care Center established by the society is to care for sick children. They were examined free of charge and their medicines were provided free of charge (Kesler, 1932).

Over time, the number of children increased and thus, in 1969, a decision was made to expand and construction began. When the records of the society were examined, it was understood that the number of children increased to 63 between 1965-1966, 73 in 1966-1967, 77 in 1967-1968 and 95 in 1968-1969. The doctors in the Children's Care Center examined both the children and the poor who applied with the children, gave them medicine or hospitalized them.

Some of the children who were cared for from infancy to university years were made aware of the social assistance they received in the society and some were instilled with a charitable understanding of life. They were even advised to study nursing, a sacred profession (Topkapı Fukaraperver Society Archive, 1969).



1932: Before and after of children who were taken under protection by the society while begging on the streets

Anniversaries

In the commemoration ceremony held on the first anniversary of Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey's death, food and fuel were provided to 250 poor people. (Yüzüncü, 1944)

Every year, the society celebrates the anniversary of the society's foundation and various aids are provided on the anniversary of Dr. Galip Hakkı Bey's death (Ülgen, 1938).



Coal distribution in 1935

In 1967, on Republic Day, 150 families received donations of aprons, shoes, sweaters and clothes for their school children (Erdem, 1967).

When the society celebrated its 61st anniversary, 160 families were given food such as meat, bread, oil, pasta, rice, sugar, soap, noodles, halva etc. and coal (Güngün, 1968).

During the 75th anniversary celebration ceremony, aid was provided to 300 families (Bulvar, 1983).

On the 80th anniversary of the association, the tradition was not broken and 350 poor people were provided with a month's worth of food (Hürriyet, 1988).

Holidays

The association provides in-kind and cash aid on holidays every year. This activity has been carried out voluntarily for years (Son Posta, 1932).

On the Eid al-Adha in 1942, 12 sacrificial animals, 500 kg of rice, and 250 kg of grapes were sent to the association by benefactors and these donations brought joy to exactly 500 families (Kesler, 1942).

Again, on the occasion of Eid al-Adha in 1968, meat, bulgur, holiday candy, and biscuits were distributed to 800 people and shoes and clothing were provided to school children (Bayram, 1968).

CONCLUSION

One of the most important characteristics of Ottoman civil society organizations is that they served all humanity without discriminating on the basis of belief, nationality, or identity, and without expecting any benefit. This understanding is a virtue that even today, the world's humanity yearns for and has still not been able to fully achieve. The implementation of this noble behavior from a century ago in Türkiye is a separate source of pride.

The Topkapı Poor People's Association is one of the rare health and social service organizations that has managed to mobilize everyone, men and women, who are compassionate, delicate, patriotic, and merciful, with its work and activities to reduce the suffering of the poor people in society, the patients without families, the helpless shivering in the cold in winter, the children without parents, the hungry and homeless citizens, and to ensure their welfare and happiness to the extent possible.

In addition to health screenings, examinations, administering medicine, sending doctors to homes

and referring patients to hospitals, many works and activities undertaken by the society, such as all kinds of gratuitous and free aid provided to orphans and orphans, their education, providing clothing for them, paying attention to their national and religious upbringing, providing their food, aid to immigrants, and providing job opportunities for the poor who cannot work, have made a splash even with limited resources. The society's works, activities and services were briefly mentioned in the work titled published by the society in 1911. (For the publication of the work, see Ahmet Zeki İzğöer, "An Important Publication of the Topkapı Poor People's Society: Muâvenet-i İnsaniyetkârâne İçin Vâsi Bir Saha-i Tatbik -İlk Giriş, Bir Hatve-i Terakki, Hayırâver Bir Netice- Bookınair, Turkish Medical Ethics, Medical Law and Medical History Research Yearbook, v. 10-14, ACR, İstanbul 2021, p. 161-189.) The sentence "helping is a duty that a person is obliged to do towards his fellow man" in the book is clear evidence of how sublime and noble the society operates with. Since 1908, the Topkapı Poor People's Society has provided admirable services in the name of poverty, instilling the idea of helping each other, unity and solidarity in society. The society still provides clothing, food, fuel, health, education, social etc. aid. continues to provide assistance to needy people. Orphaned children, elderly people in need of care and women in Topkapı and its surroundings have been registered with the society and have been receiving regular service for years. It is also known that the work is not limited to Topkapı and its surroundings and is carried out for other people in need from time to time.

This charity and social aid society with a history of 115 years continues its activities very successfully, with a simple, quiet and confident working style.

Although the society has been providing service for years, it is not very well known by the general public. In fact, the most important reason for this is that the society employees wanted to operate quietly for years.

The society consists of a three-story building. On the third floor, there are sections where clothes, toys, shoes and kitchenware are located. In other parts of the society; there is a hall where visitors sit while waiting, a barn in the backyard where sacrificial animals are kept, and a bathhouse, examination room and pharmacy at the bottom.

The building resembles both an old archive and a museum.

It has been determined that the founders of the society were not composed of high-ranking people like some other societies, but of modest and devoted people

from among the people. It has been noted that the current society employees continue their voluntary and disciplined work as they did in the past. In this article, it has been concluded that the society was founded in the Ottoman period and is one of the oldest societies after the Red Crescent. It is known that the society continues its activities today with the same purpose, without deviating from its goal and without deviating. The society has not asked for help from anyone for donations, and has managed to survive with the donations of volunteers.

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