


İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi

Research Article

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The Concept of ‘Great Man’ in Ziya Gökalp’s Sociological Theory



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Abstract

Raised in final years of Ottoman Empire and shaped by its historical environment, Ziya Gökalp remains one of the most influential thinkers whose ideas help illuminate the trajectory of Turkish society and newly founded Turkish Republic. This study examines Gökalp’s approach to the concept of Great Man within the framework of his sociological thought. By studying Gökalp’s approach to the concept pertaining to Western and Ottoman intellectual traditions, the article traces historical roots of Great Man theory. It argues that Gökalp’s understanding of Great Man cannot be reduced to well-known individual–society or actor–structure dichotomy of sociology. Rather, it represents a distinctive mode of reading history and social transformation through moral, cultural, and civilizational lenses. The study compares Gökalp’s ideas with those of several Turkish sociologists, including Z. F. Fındıkoğlu, and also with the views of Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herbert Spencer, Galriel Tarde, highlighting convergences–divergences concerning the origins, functions, and societal roles of extraordinary individuals namely great man–heroes. It demonstrates that Gökalp synthesises elements from positivism, German idealism, and Ottoman intellectual traditions to articulate a dual typology of great men: The Reformers[Müceddid], who embodies the collective conscience, and the Inventors[Mubdi] representing the creative spirit of civilization. The article concludes that the concept of Great Man, as addressed by Gökalp, emerges primarily in periods of historical crisis—moments when societies confront moral disintegration and seek intellectual, cultural, political renewal. Thus, Gökalp’s treatment of the topic reflects both a sociological and civilizational response to the deep social traumas of his age.

Keywords

Gökalp · Carlyle · Heroes · Great Man · Genius · Culture · Civilization · Ottoman Empire



“ Citation: ŞAN, A. R. (2025). The Concept of ‘Great Man’ in Ziya Gökalp’s Sociological Theory.. *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi*, 45(2), 840-865. <https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.2025.45.2.1007>

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As an intellectual who was raised during the final period of the Ottoman Empire and whose identity was shaped by that historical context, Ziya Gökalp’s ideas continue to serve as a guide for understanding the trajectory of Turkish society under the global conditions of the twenty-first century. Thus, there remains a need to revisit the issues, concepts, and theories that Gökalp once studied in a more thorough and comparative manner.

For this purpose, the present study first analyses how Gökalp approached the notion of the “great man” and discusses the role this concept played within his sociological thought. The following section seeks to identify the roots of “Great Man” theory among Turkish intellectuals—including Gökalp’s own interest in the topic, his conceptual framework, and a sociological and historical analysis of his engagement with the idea—and Western thinkers. This discussion is guided by a central question: Why did these intellectuals consider it necessary to study the concept of the ‘great man’? The final section examines how selected Turkish sociologists have reflected on this issue.

Gökalp played an important role in the last days of the Ottoman Empire and in the construction phase of the newly founded modern Turkish Republic. Since the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had begun to struggle to maintain its traditional political and military position. The military defeats that had begun particularly in the seventeenth century, along with territorial losses in the empire’s influence, brought economic crises as well as political and social problems. The Westernisation movements initiated under Sultan Selim III (1761–1808) and continued by Sultan Mahmud II (1785–1839) entered a political phase with the Auspicious Incident (1826) (the abolition of the Janissary Corps), Tanzimat (1839), and The Imperial Reform Edict (1856). With the proclamation of the First Constitutional Era in 1876, a constitutional and parliamentary system was introduced; however, owing to the 1877–78 Ottoman-Russian War, the parliament was dissolved by Sultan Abdülhamid II. Despite new attempts to reform imperial governance, the empire was unable to reach the solutions it required (Duymaz, 2024, p. 25–26). While adopting Westernisation as a political remedy, imperial statesmen also sought to preserve the empire’s distinctive identity—both cultural and religious. On the one hand, political institutional reforms and new educational establishments were advanced within the framework of the Westernisation policies pursued by Ottoman statesmen;



on the other hand, the continued existence of traditional educational institutions and the political status of the caliphate constituted the principal topics of debate in the political and intellectual life of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire (Coşkun, 2004, p. 67).

Ziya Gökalp was born in 1876 in the city of Diyarbakır—one of the major centres of the empire—to an educated and distinguished family (Duymaz, 2024, p. 27), at a time when both political and intellectual circles were searching for solutions to the empire's mounting problems (Duymaz, 2024, p. 37). Gökalp's life coincided with periods of profound political transformations. The year of his birth witnessed the first experiment with a parliamentary system, which, however, proved short-lived. Gökalp would later witness the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908, the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II, and ultimately the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923. Without doubt, this turbulent era had a significant influence on the formation of Gökalp's ideas. It is recounted that the early development of his political thought began under the influence of his secondary school teacher Dr. Yorgi at the "*Diyarbakir İdadisi*," an institution opened by Abdülhamid II (Korkmaz, 1994, p. 17).

During his youth, as he witnessed the disintegration of the empire (Parla, 2009, p. 21), Gökalp simultaneously became involved in oppositional activities, eventually leading to his arrest and imprisonment in 1897 (Duymaz, 2024, p. 90). After spending one year in prison, he was exiled back to Diyarbakır, where he continued his work—taking on various roles, such as teaching and clerical duties—until 1910. In that year, he travelled to Salonica for the Third Congress of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and settled there (Duymaz, 2024, p. 110). Gökalp remained active within the CUP during and after the Second Constitutional Era and played a prominent role in the establishment of its Diyarbakır branch. In 1910, he was elected to the central administrative body of the Committee and subsequently relocated to Salonica. From 1912 to 1918, he continued his life and work in Istanbul. Duymaz (2024) characterised Gökalp's intellectual stance in that era with the following terms:



“Gökalp, as is well known, did not hold an ‘individualist’ or ‘liberal’ outlook. He advocated instead a ‘communitarian’ and ‘solidarist’ understanding. Moreover, because he knew the Turkish nation well, he adopted as a realistic political stance the need for a ‘hero’ who could lead the country out of its crisis. His relationship with Enver and Talat Pashas were not one of authorities or admiration. Likewise, it would be mistaken to describe his stance towards Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding figure of the modern Turkish Republic, in such terms. Gökalp consistently awaited a ‘hero’ who possessed the authority and legitimacy to translate ideas into action, and he supported those whom he believed embodied these qualities” (p. 187).

According to Şapolyo, Ziya Gökalp’s political and scholarly life began in Salonica (1943, p. 71). Gökalp’s position within the central administration of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) continued until the Armistice period (1918). Through his later works— Turkification, Islamisation and Modernisation (1912-13), The Principles of Turkism (1923), and History of the Turkish Civilisation (1925) —he influenced the ideological foundations of the newly established Republic of Türkiye, while his earlier involvement in the activities of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) during his youth led to him being regarded as the organisation’s ideologue and theorist (Duymaz, 2024, p. 147-148). During a period in which the Ottoman Empire was losing power and heading towards dissolution, Gökalp actively developed unique political and social proposals for solutions.

The concept of the “great man,” “genius,” or “hero” has been a prominent topic in Western literature and early Republican Turkish thought (Carlyle, 2021; İzzet, 2002; Gökalp, 2014). Ziya Gökalp, the founding figure of Turkish sociology who reflected deeply on the social problems of his time, gave an important place to the notion of the “great man” within the sociological framework he sought to construct.

As Coşkun states, Ziya Gökalp, both as an intellectual of the Empire¹ and as a thinker of the newly founded Republic of Türkiye, regarded the social and political developments in which he lived as the most fundamental element of his sociological thought. Taking this premise as his starting

¹Ziya Gökalp as an Intellectual of the Empire’, Istanbul University Journal of Sociology, 2004.



point, he sought to propose solutions to the sociopolitical problems of his time. This endeavour is clearly visible in both his early writings and the works he produced during the years surrounding the proclamation of the Turkish Republic. Bulut (2015, p.81) describes Ziya Gökalp as a “thinker caught between the social and the political,” who was able to develop a systematic line of thought in response to the problems confronting Turkish intellectual and political life while also establishing close contact with the discipline of sociology, which was still in its early-formative stage in the West. His relationship with the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who had a profound influence on the development of Gökalp's own sociological thought, can be regarded as an indication of the functionalist attitude that became a defining feature of his approach to the societal-political issues that concerned him.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) dealt with the problems arising from the transformations occurring within French society during his lifetime and sought to develop possible solutions to them. Playing a major role in the institutionalisation of sociology as an academic discipline, Durkheim also worked to establish the social foundations of the nation-state model he proposed as a solution to France's political crises (Bulut, 2015, p.86; Balcı, 2014, p.318). The functionalist attitude previously mentioned in relation to Gökalp's engagement with Durkheim can be observed at this point. Gökalp's interest in the sociology of Durkheim cannot be understood merely on an intellectual level. Influenced by the German intellectual tradition (Bulut, 2015, p.87), Gökalp's adoption of Durkheim's sociology can also be seen as the outcome of a political stance—the one that sought to address the needs of the newly founded Republic and explore how Turkish society could achieve a new sense of cohesion in accordance with the demands of the newly established modern Turkish state.

The primary objective of Ziya Gökalp's sociological thought was to provide the new Turkish state with an ideological foundation and, in this context, to construct a solidarity-centred model of Turkish society through the formation of a Turkish common identity. The period during which Gökalp developed his ideas was, as is well known, a “crisis-ridden” era (Gökalp, 2014, p.50; Gökalp, 1981, p.139), marked by the Ottoman Empire's severe territorial losses as well as the internal-external crises it faced. The three major political currents that dominated pre-Republican intellectual debates—Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism—were all attempts to address these political challenges (Gökalp, 2019b, p.45). Gökalp's (1912, p.49) approach represented a synthesis of these movements; he



articulated this integrative vision through his famous statement, in his article series 'Turkification, Islamisation, and Modernisation' written in 1912-1913: "I belong to the Turkish nation, the Islamic ummah, and the Ottoman civilisation." However, both the consequences of the First World War and the political developments of the period transformed Gökalp's synthetic approach, leading him to assert that the political and social foundations of the new Republic should be built upon Turkism. Although this particular aspect lies beyond the scope of the present study and will therefore not be elaborated here, it should be noted that in both his late Ottoman and post-Republic writings, a common feature is evident: Gökalp's understanding of Turkism was not based on ethnic affiliation but rather conceived as a notion centred on language and culture (Gökalp, 1976, p.18).

At the core of the sociological theory Gökalp sought to construct was the question of how Turkish society could properly adapt to the process of Westernisation, which the Ottoman bureaucratic elite regarded as the prescription for "salvation." The central problem of the envisioned system was how to engage with the "new" without denying or erasing the identity of the past. Gökalp's synthetic approach becomes evident precisely in his engagement with this problem. This tension—between preserving one's own culture and establishing new contact with Western civilisation—was addressed through one of the most fundamental distinctions in Gökalp's sociology: the dichotomy of Culture and Civilisation (Hars–Medeniyet). In this classification, Gökalp maintained that the Turkish nation could establish a healthy relationship with Western civilisation without severing its cultural ties to its own past, as, in his view, the sphere of civilisation belongs to all humankind (Kabakçı, 2011, p. 211).

Although Ziya Gökalp grounded the core of his sociological thought in Durkheimian sociology, he did not adopt it in a wholly derivative manner; rather, he made adaptations suited to the specific conditions of Türkiye (Gökalp, 1981, p.55; Kabakçı, 2011, p.209; Bulut, 2015, p.89). Moreover, it cannot be claimed that Durkheim was the sole influence on the development of his sociological thinking; other intellectuals Gökalp followed include E. Demolins, Fouiller, Gabriel Tarde, Le Bon, and Bergson (Gökalp, 1981, p.54–55; Kabakçı, 2011, p.210; Heyd, 1950, p.44). Therefore, Gökalp's sociology cannot be understood solely within the framework of the French sociological tradition and the Durkheimian school. It is also known that Gökalp was significantly influenced by German thinkers. According to Heyd (1950, p. 66), Gökalp's classification of culture and civilisation was inspired by the community–society (Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft) distinction of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. In his



first article in the *Türk Yurdu* magazine, Gökalp (2019a, p.131) used the community–society terminology; however, he later published the same article in his book *Turkification, Islamisation and Modernisation* under the title Cultural Group and Civilisation Group [Hars Zümresi ve Medeniyet Zümresi]². According to Ziya Gökalp (Gökalp, 2019a, p.57; Gökalp, 2023, p.19–20), civilisation refers to the international, whereas culture denotes the national; civilisation can be transferred from one nation to another, but culture cannot; civilisation is produced through method and reason, whereas culture is shaped by inspiration, intuition, and sentiment; civilisation comprises the sum of economic, religious, and legal ideas, whereas culture encompasses religious, moral, and aesthetic feelings. Since the focus of this study is not on Gökalp's culture–civilisation classification—both a synthesis and a distinction—nor on the source from which this theory was derived, the discussion is limited to this point. What is important here is that Gökalp's sociological thought was not drawn from a single source; while it was largely influenced by the French sociological tradition, it was also shaped by German social theorists.

Great Man in Society

“The representatives of a nation are only its geniuses and heroes. Geniuses are the heroes of intellect, while heroes are the geniuses of will.”

(Gökalp, 1981, p. 52)

The distinction between culture and civilisation is one of the most prominent classifications in Gökalp's sociology. He sought to provide a theoretical foundation for each element of his sociological thought through this classification. In the following sections of this study, it will be shown that the concept of the great man is also addressed within this framework in a functional position. Gökalp (1981, p.139–140) conceives the cultural development of any given society as consisting of four stages: tribe, clan, ummah, and nation. In his words (1981): “The period in which society passes from one stage to another is called the crisis period (*période critique*), while the period in which order prevails at each stage is called the organic [teazzi] period (*période organique*)” (p.139).

²In the introduction to *Makaleler V*, a collection of Gökalp's writings, Rıza Kardaş states that the distinction between culture and civilisation is a direct product of the German tradition (1981, p. 12).



In this approach, which evokes Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity and their reflection in social life and penal sanctions, it is evident that Gökalp was not solely influenced by Durkheim. In the period Gökalp calls the *teazzi*, the existing social structure exerts a strong influence over the public, and accordingly, sanctions are in place. During the transitional crisis (*buhran*) periods, however, the old social structure has lost its authority, while the new organisational framework has not yet been fully established, resulting in the emergence of new sanctions and practices in social life. According to Gökalp, the appearance of great men in social life occurs precisely during these transitional periods (1981, p. 140). Here, the most critical aspect of Gökalp's approach to the issue of great men becomes apparent: in his view, a great man is not a product of the existing social structure; rather, it is the crisis periods, which he also refers to as periods of renewal (*teceddüt*), that give rise to the great man or the genius³.

Gökalp's definition of the great man cannot be understood independently from his sociological thought. According to Mehmet Emin Erişirgil, who cites Gökalp, the most abundant manifestation of common sense (custom [*örf*], expressing the social conscience) appears in geniuses. Geniuses are those who most clearly embody and live social customs. Gökalp calls those who fulfil the requirements of social custom "heroes" and expresses the relationship as follows: "Geniuses are theoretical heroes, and heroes are practical geniuses" (Erişirgil, 2007, p.146). Those, as Gökalp states, with less social common sense cannot attain this representational role, and great men especially emerge in times of crisis.

According to Gökalp, the heroism desired by the "Turkish spirit" only manifested during the Battle of Çanakkale (1915-1916). Here, Gökalp's connection between sociology and social reality becomes evident. Based on the understanding that a hero or genius cannot always be present, he asserts that it is the discipline of sociology that can identify the national conscience in such circumstances. He maintains that the development of the national conscience can be scientifically discerned through sociological studies employing the sociological method, as well as through the truths revealed by comparative analysis (Erişirgil, 2007, p.145-146).

³Gökalp uses the terms 'great man' and 'genius,' but also employs the words "exquisite"[*güzide*] and 'enlightened.' Although these concepts are sometimes used with different meanings, it can be said that they are used with an elitist approach. In addition to these concepts, Gökalp sometimes used terms such as 'hero,' 'select,' 'elite,' and 'social medium' (Gökalp, 2014, p.58).



Gökalp addresses the issue of the great man primarily in relation to the principle of sociological determinism. According to his classification, there are two types of great men: *müceddidler* [reformers] and *mübdîler* [inventors]; in this study, the terms will be used as such to avoid any loss of meaning. Gökalp (2014) defines these concepts as follows:

"Reformers [*müceddidler*] (such as religious reformers, great conquerors, great revolutionaries, and great heroes⁴) are individuals of strong faith and fierce determination who have succeeded in initiating major historical movements. Inventors [*mübdîler*] are those who bring about great renewal and progress in any branch of knowledge and civilisation through discovery, invention, or reform." (p. 49).

According to Gökalp, the division of great men into two classes reflects the existence of two types of solidarity within the social structure: in the first type, shared feelings are central, whereas in the second type, the division of labour is the core. In a social structure where feelings occupy the central position, this form of solidarity produces reformers [*müceddidler*]; in a structure where the division of labour is fundamental, it produces inventors [*mübdîler*] (Ülken, 2021, p. 456). For the emergence of *müceddid* great men, a social structure centred solely on shared feelings is insufficient; their appearance requires the occurrence of a major national disaster or victory or the emergence of a significant crisis (Gökalp, 2014, p.50). Gökalp describes *müceddid* great men precisely in terms of the crises and tensions of his own time: they are pioneering individuals who strongly and clearly sense in their own spirit a unifying current developing within the nation. Accordingly, he regards the great man as a symbolic expression of collective conscience.

Regarding the other type of great man, the inventors [*mübdîler*], emerge as a product of a social structure based on the division of labour. According to Gökalp, *mübdîler* are produced by the need for division of labour in social life and the consequences of its implementation. Great men, who represent a conscious form of social solidarity and movements, arise precisely because of these processes. Gökalp (2014, p. 57) states: "Those who manifest a cultural current belonging to the collective conscience are called *müceddid*, and those who represent a civilizational current

⁴The list of heroes cited by Gökalp in his article corresponds almost exactly to the examples of heroes given by Thomas Carlyle in his book *Heroes*, which will be discussed in later sections of the article.



pertaining to professional consciences are called *mübdî*." Furthermore, great men who express the collective conscience of the society in which they live do not always achieve this entirely of their own will. According to Gökalp, this representation can only be realised through the development of the national ideal.

Gökalp designates a person whose creative intelligence is inspired and who possesses a degree of volitional agency as a genius (*dâhi*). Under the broader category of great men, the geniuses he examines exhibit certain distinctive characteristics: while they also draw their inspiration from the social structure in which they live, the mere presence of favourable social conditions is not sufficient for the emergence of a genius; the individual must also possess certain unique personal abilities. In this sense, a genius is someone who represents, through specific talent, the element of genius latent within the social, cultural, and political structure of any given nation. As Gökalp notes, not every individual has the capacity to serve as a "social medium" (*içtimai medyum*) (Gökalp, 2014, p. 58).

Apart from a genius shaped by social conditions, an individual can also exert influence on social life through scientific means. Here, Gökalp suggests that, beyond the classification of great men and geniuses, a scholar who fulfils the requirements of the science of sociology—by accepting social reality as the most fundamental and unquestionable truth—can also affect society.

On the Roots of the Great Man

Up to this point, how Gökalp addressed the issue of the 'great man' and the function it held within his own sociological thought have been examined. Under this heading, the intellectual sources that led Gökalp to engage with the concept of the great man are explored from a historical perspective.

Ziya Gökalp examined the issue of the "great man" in his article 'The Influence of Great Men on Society', published in the *Journal of Sociology* in 1917—his only independent study devoted exclusively to this subject. Understanding the historical context in which Gökalp explored the "great man" concept is crucial. When he wrote the article, the Ottoman Empire was experiencing one of the most intense phases of the First World War. The empire was struggling to maintain its positions on several fronts (Palestine, Yemen, and Hejaz). Between 1918 and 1923, the capital city, Istanbul, was



occupied by British, French, Italian, and Greek forces in accordance with the Armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918). Gökalp was teaching sociology at Istanbul University when he was arrested by British forces in January 1919. He was then exiled to the islands of Limni and Malta, where he spent a year and a half away from his family and homeland (Durakbaşa, 2005, p. 123).

In the article he wrote in 1917, Gökalp does not cite any direct references regarding the concept of the great man. However, he touched upon the topic in a fragmented manner in several of his other writings⁵. For instance, in his article titled "A Few More Words on the Question of Reward and Punishment" published in *Yeni Mecmua* on April 4, 1918 (and later included in *Makaleler V*), Gökalp cites the work of the German-French social scientist Maurice Block, "*Petit Dictionnaire Politique et Sociale*" (Short Political and Social Dictionary) (1896). From this source, he provides an extended translation of the entry "Esprit public" by the French critic Émile Montégut (Montegut, 1896, p. 293), in which Montégut contrasts public opinion (*efkâr-ı amme*) with public conscience (*ruh-i amme*). Throughout the translation, it is emphasised that public opinion represents a condition distinct from public conscience and that the true "greatness" of great men lies not in their representation of public opinion but in their embodiment of public conscience—which Gökalp identifies with custom [*örf*] (Gökalp, 1981, p.125–132; 1918, p.131).

The 1918 article mentioned above was written after Gökalp's 1917 essay "The Role of Great Men in Society." Since Gökalp provided no references to other works in his first essay on the subject, this section examines writings from his era that addressed similar themes so that the roots of Gökalp's interest in the subject can be traced. Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary to briefly discuss how the French thinker Émile Montégut, whom Gökalp directly cited in his 1918 article, approached the question of the great man.

The French critic Émile Montégut translated Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850) into French, thereby introducing the work and its ideas to France. Montégut's main concern in writing

⁵In his article dated June 19, 1922—published in *Küçük Mecmua* and later compiled by Ötügen Publishing—Gökalp, in his piece titled "Reflection: Towards Genius", writes: "...the first source of genius is the people. Geniuses are the conscious consciences of the people."

Gökalp also made several remarks on the issue of the great man in his personal correspondence with his family. In a letter written in 1919 during his exile to his daughters, Seniha and Hürriyet, he states: "What makes a person truly human are knowledge and morality. One must strive to attain these two things! If disasters lead a person to moral elevation, they become a great blessing. It is always calamities that raise great men." (Tansel, 1989, p. 19).



his commentary on Emerson is expressed as follows: the egalitarian tendencies of the period, while undermining political aristocracy, would also trigger a process that could ultimately endanger the very notion of genius itself (Virtanen, 1948, p.1268). Therefore, it can be said that Montégut, approaching the issue from a more conservative perspective, attached particular importance to the question of the great man within this intellectual atmosphere. Montégut also wrote comparative essays examining the approaches of Thomas Carlyle and Emerson, who were among the first thinkers to produce significant works on the concept of the great man.

If we set aside the heroic series of ancient Greek thinkers⁶, the most well-known modern work on the issue of the great man—or, as it appears in the literature, the hero—is the Scottish thinker Thomas Carlyle's (1795–1881) 1841 book "*On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*."

Thomas Carlyle interprets the universal history of humanity as "the history of the great men who have laboured for the world" (2021, p.8). According to him, whatever has been achieved or accomplished throughout the world has been made possible through the intervention of great men, for these individuals possess God-given natural talents. Carlyle argues that the heroes who have appeared throughout history have manifested in diverse forms and attributes, yet despite these variations, they share the same essential qualities. As the first type of hero, he examines Odin, the central figure of Paganism (p. 9). For Carlyle, the deification of what was considered a "hero" during this period was specific to its age and reflected what people of that time regarded as truth. Here, Carlyle adopts a mode of thinking contrary to progressive interpretations of history: the act of perceiving figures as divine in earlier ages should not be dismissed or condemned retrospectively, for judging past centuries from a modern standpoint would be, according to him, an act of intellectual complacency.

Carlyle (2021, p. 15) writes, "We live in an age when only prophets or poets can teach us how to strip away insincere masks, terms, and scientific fictions." As can be observed, this statement is almost identical to Gökalp's view that the *müceddid*—the reforming great man—emerges during

⁶In a letter written in 1919 during his exile in Malta, Gökalp asked his daughters to send him Plutarch's "Lives of the Great Men" (Tansel, 1989, p.57).

In the "Heroism" chapter of his 1841 work *Essays*, Emerson writes (2022): "If we set out to explore the literature of heroism, we soon come to Plutarch, the learned and chief historian of the subject" (p.197).



times of crisis. According to Carlyle, society is built upon the worship of heroes (a term he uses to mean admiration, emulation, or following). In his view, all systems upon which human societies rest bear the imprint of heroic power—or hierarchy⁷. These assertions reveal the essence of Carlyle's social thought. The notion that human beings possess inherent differences in degree or rank can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy⁸. Carlyle also interprets society—and life more broadly—through these distinctions. For him, as long as human communities exist, heroes and the worship of heroes will persist (2021, p. 18).

Carlyle follows a historical chronology in his series on great men, presenting examples of heroes under various guises: Odin as the hero in the form of a God, Prophet Muhammad as the hero in the form of a Prophet, Dante and Shakespeare as heroes in the form of Poets, Luther as the hero in the form of a Priest, Johnson, Rousseau, and Burns as heroes in the form of Men of Letters, and Cromwell and Napoleon as heroes in the form of Kings. As is evident, despite their differing forms, Carlyle ultimately advances a hero-centred philosophy of history (Carlyle, 2021).

Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850) adopts a similar approach. As mentioned earlier in this study, Emerson had already reflected on the notion of heroism in his 1841 collection of essays. In a footnote to that work, it is stated that Emerson was a close friend of Carlyle (2022, p.197). Emerson later elaborated upon the ideas he had presented in 1841 more comprehensively in *Representative Men*. In the section titled "Uses of Great Men," he sets forth his reflections on the subject. In the subsequent chapters, as in Carlyle's work, he presents examples of great men⁹. According to Emerson (1909, p.5), reverence and devotion towards great men constitute a structural condition inherent in all periods of human history. At its core—and from an elitist perspective¹⁰—the great man is defined as one who can overcome difficulties. Those who are capable of producing

⁷ Carlyle employs the term hierarchy in an explanatory sense, preferring instead the conceptualisation "Heroarchy" to denote the power of heroes. This concept is undoubtedly another indication of his view of world history as being centred around heroes (2021, p.17).

⁸ Carlyle himself describes those who occupy the position of heroes as being like "gold mines" (Carlyle, 2021, p.18); this metaphor recalls Hesiod's *Works and Days*, in which humankind is characterised by the ages of gold, silver, and bronze (Hesiod, 2016, p.53–54).

⁹ In order, the figures discussed are as follows: Plato (the Philosopher); Emanuel Swedenborg (the Mystic); Michel de Montaigne (the Sceptic); William Shakespeare (the Poet); Napoleon (the Man of the World); and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (the Writer).

¹⁰ In the same work, Emerson states that throughout human history, people have been subject to certain great men, and that this condition is "natural" (1909, p. 12).

solutions in areas where others lack ability are the great men of history. These individuals are also representatives of “things” and “ideas.” They are the ones who render certain raw elements and abstract notions usable for humankind. In these statements, one is reminded of Gökalp's definition of the *müceddid* great man as “the awakened consciousness of society.”

The approach of Herbert Spencer, who holds an important place in the history of sociology, stands in complete contrast to that of Thomas Carlyle. Addressing the issue from a more explicitly sociological standpoint, Spencer discusses the great man in the section titled “Is There a Social Science?” in his 1873 work *The Study of Sociology*. Without mentioning Carlyle by name, Spencer criticises the tendency to interpret the whole of world history as if sociology did not exist—as if it revolved entirely around great men (Spencer, 1873, p.30). According to Spencer, such an approach implicitly assumes that the everyday lives of ordinary people are of no importance. When it comes to the origins of the great man, Spencer offers the following distinction: either the great man must be regarded as supernatural, in which case one must attribute to him divine qualities; or he must be seen as a natural being. However, if he is considered a natural being, then it becomes necessary to take into consideration the social, cultural, and political conditions—that is, the social structure—that give rise to him. Spencer's view on the subject can be summarised in his oft-quoted statement: “Before he can re-make his society, his society must make him.” In other words, before the great man can set out to transform society, it is society itself that must first create the great man (1873, p. 35).

Another figure whose ideas may have influenced Gökalp's thinking on the great man is French sociologist Gabriel Tarde. It is known that Gökalp criticised Tarde, who explained social interaction through the concept of imitation (Gökalp, 2006, p.60–61). However, examining Tarde's views on the great man issue proves useful. Since the purpose of this study is not to explore the motives or content of Gökalp's critique of Tarde, the focus here is on the relationship between imitation and the concept of the great man. According to Tarde, the entire universe and social life are based on imitation (1903, p. 71), and imitation creates a form of social interaction between the imitator and the imitated¹¹ (Yiğit, 2021, p. 17). Among the types of imitation Tarde identifies, those grounded in

¹¹When discussing the topic, Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu refers to Tarde's historical analyses and notes that those who are imitated are great men, kings, and prophets (1971, p.71).



sympathy and obedience resemble Carlyle's approach to the great man¹², for great geniuses and inventors are also part of this dynamic (2021, p.19). For Tarde, every act of imitation presupposes an invention; each invention represents a solution to a social problem, and it becomes socialised through imitation. He describes obedience within social relations as a fundamental human need, arguing that throughout history, ordinary individuals have always felt compelled to imitate those whom they regarded as superior to themselves.

Reflections on the Great Man Theory

Thus far, Gökalp's assessments and classifications regarding the concept of the great man, together with the scholarly discussions on the origins of the "Great Man" theory, have been outlined. This section turns to the post-Gökalp period and examines the ways in which the notion of the great man has been treated within Turkish sociological literature, particularly in relation to Gökalp's intellectual thought.

A prominent Turkish sociologist Ziyaeddin Fahri Findıkoğlu (1958, p.142) describes Gökalp as a follower of all sociological traditions. According to Findıkoğlu (1971, p. 85), the very existence of social phenomena necessitates the study of great men who represent this sociological reality, since certain sociological tendencies can only be realised through such individuals, and they cannot be evaluated independently of social determinism. However, Findıkoğlu states that the approach of earlier historians and philosophers, such as Carlyle, to the great man differs, whose perspective regards the great man as a "fragment of God" and does not allow for a sociological analysis. Findıkoğlu, who examines the approaches of Ziya Gökalp and Ottoman historian Nâima (1655–1716) to the issue of the great man, notes that Nâima, inspired by Ibn Khaldun¹³, argued that societies and political formations pass through five stages, and that in the final stage—when the political structure collapses—the intervention of a "wise man" is required. In this fifth stage, which represents a period of political, economic, and social crisis, the involvement of wise men [*arif*]¹³—who could be considered

¹²In *Heroes*, Carlyle makes several remarks related to this subject. According to him, worship is essentially a form of transcendent admiration: "The worship of a hero is, in fact, the expression of a profound admiration for a great man." (Carlyle, 2021, p.15–16).

¹³In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun wrote a section titled "The Stages through Which a State Passes" and examined these in five phases (2017, p.270-272).



representatives of their respective tribes and clans—is seen as useful and necessary. Nâima (1967, p.47-54) categorises these individuals into two groups: those skilled in the sword and those skilled in the pen (Arslantürk, 2011, p.115–116). According to Fındıkoğlu (1971, p.88), this approach distinguishes Nâima from Ibn Khaldun; as Ibn Khaldun maintains that reform is impossible in the fifth stage, whereas Nâima considers reform possible through the intervention of the aforementioned great men¹⁴.

“Contrary to the initial assumption that Ziya Gökalp attaches no significance whatsoever to the great man... this assessment is not correct” (Fındıkoğlu, 1971, p. 89). Fındıkoğlu begins his evaluation of Gökalp on the concept of the great man with these words. The question arises because, in Durkheimian sociology—which explains one social phenomenon through another—what position is to be accorded to the great man? Ultimately, Gökalp examines the great men he designates as *müceddid* and *mübdî* within the framework of the principle of social determinism. According to Fındıkoğlu, Gökalp particularly exceeds the bounds of social determinism through his designation of genius [*dâhi*] and his assertion that social conditions alone are insufficient for the emergence of a genius. However, regarding the question¹⁵ posed at the beginning of Gökalp’s article, Fındıkoğlu provides the following ultimate assessment: “The great man, including both *müceddid* and *mübdî*, is not a mysterious factor in social development but a result that can be understood through social causes” (1971, p.96).

Mehmet İzzet, one of the prominent figures in Turkish sociology, has offered extensive evaluations on the issue of the great man. Regarding great men as a matter of the meaning and destiny of human life, İzzet (2002b, p. 351) argues that it is inappropriate to begin the discussion with a definition of the Great Man. According to him, such definitions primarily describe how a great man comes into being and do not fulfil the substantive content that a definition requires. İzzet seeks to answer Gökalp’s question—“Is a great man the product of social conditions, or do we call someone

¹⁴According to Fındıkoğlu (1971, p. 120), Naima departs from Ibn Khaldun in this thought and comes under the influence of another Arab thinker: Abunnecip Suhrawardi (*Nehcü's-Süluk fî Siyaseti'l-Müluk* [Strategies of Politics]). This work, which can be evaluated within the tradition of political treatises, is significant in that it demonstrates one of the sources that nourished Turkish thought on the subject of great men.

¹⁵“Do the individuals we refer to as great men come into being because of certain social causes? Or do they arise from some mysterious movement of the organic whole?” (Gökalp, 2014, p. 48).



a great man because of their own particular qualities?"—in three separate articles¹⁶.

İzzet (2002b, p.357) primarily asks the following question: if, ultimately, the great man emerges as the result of a social condition, what specifically accounts for the individual's status as a great man? While social life may sometimes regard a totem or another object as sacred and invest its representational significance in that object, it is evident that the great man differs from these objects, and the nature of this "difference" requires explanation. İzzet does not completely deny the relationship between the great man and a particular social structure. His objections are not limited to the emergence of the great man; he also critiques Gökalp's classification of great men. The individuals Gökalp designates as *müceddidler*, in his own terms, include "religious heralds, conquerors, great revolutionaries, and great heroes." According to Gökalp, the emergence of these "heroes" is a consequence of the "transformations" occurring in social conditions classified as mechanical, where the division of labour and specialisation have not yet developed. However, in İzzet's view, accepting great religious leaders or great conquerors as *müceddidler* outside the framework of specialisation is mistaken (2002b, p.359).

According to İzzet, the great man can be characterised neither entirely as the social conscience itself nor as its opposite. In presenting the conclusion of his assessment, İzzet (2002b, p.360) writes: "For the ordinary person who believes in freedom, both of these options are possible, but neither is necessary." İzzet also examines the issue around the question of how much "freedom" a great man can possess. If the great man is considered, as the science of sociology suggests, a product of the society and conditions in which he lives, can freedom exist in the individual? İzzet contends that sociology as a discipline is largely indifferent to this question. Taking the analysis further, İzzet explores the issue in terms of responsibility: if social determinism is accepted as absolute—for instance, if we focus solely on the conditions surrounding a person who commits a crime and disregard their individual contribution—this serves to diminish the personal responsibility of the "criminal" as an individual. According to İzzet, the problematic aspect is as follows: if this collectivist perspective is taken as absolute, the "greatness" of the great man will also come under question because the dominant assumption will be that the primary actor is society itself (2002b, p.366).

¹⁶Three articles entitled 'Sociology, Contemporary Life, and Great Men' were published in the Faculty of Literature Journal, two in 1922 and one in 1923 (Sitki, 1931, p.36).



İzzet also applies the term great man to individuals who make significant contributions in scientific or scholarly endeavours; however, he distinguishes this type of great man from what he called the “ideological” great man—who may also be called a hero or saviour. He argues that there are substantial qualitative differences between these two types of great men. What differentiates İzzet’s approach to the issue is his focus on the source of “greatness” as a criterion. By referencing contemporary life (“muâsır hayat”) in the titles of his articles, he signals this concern. Centring on the nation and reason-based technical developments, İzzet asserts that the measure of greatness no longer resides in exceptional individuals but rather in scientific and sustained efforts grounded in experience and method. He further notes that the era in which one lives is characterised by democracy, and this context does not afford the great man a privileged position within contemporary society. While rulers in the old regime possessed a qualitatively distinct status from their subjects, in the contemporary era, these qualitative differences have disappeared, reducing the issue of the great man in modern times to one of quantitative differences. According to İzzet, the essence of contemporary democracy is the individual, and in terms of law, these individuals are equal (2002b, p. 369–373).

İzzet concludes his reflections on the great man with the following statement: “The ideas put forward today by sociologists regarding great men are not speculative but rather the products of general tendencies observable in contemporary life—in science, industry, politics, and economics” (2002b, p.380). Interestingly, İzzet attributes the disappearance of great men once again to certain social conditions¹⁷.

Although Mehmet İzzet’s views on the subject have been mentioned his short translation of the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau’s essay “What Is Genius?” is also of particular significance. In this translation, İzzet conveys the following ideas: “Sympathy” represents an intensified form of

¹⁷Hilmi Ziya Ülken, in an article written after Mehmet İzzet’s death, notes that İzzet’s attempt to transcend social determinism was influenced by Schelling and Hegel and that he consequently adopted a “synthetic” or “unifying” methodological approach (Ülken, 1931, p. 4). In the same journal, Dr. Orhan Sadettin summarises Mehmet İzzet’s conception of the great man as one in which neither the existence of the great man nor the social reality that seems to negate him is denied (Saadettin, 1931, p. 22). At the core of Mehmet İzzet’s reflections on the role of the great man within society lies the tension between social reality and the ideal, which he elaborates in his article “Fact and Ideal” (Vâkıa ve Mefkûre) (İzzet, 2002a, p. 173). In Turkish thought, İzzet illustrates this opposition through the examples of Ziya Gökalp and Tefik Fikret. As both Ülken’s earlier observation and Balci’s interpretation suggest (2015, p.179), İzzet ultimately sought to synthesise this dichotomy rather than remain confined to either side.

the social instinct; the distinguishing feature of genius lies in its heightened capacity for invention and creation. According to Guyau, great personalities and the (social) environment in which they are formed exist in a relationship of mutual interaction. Echoing Tarde's perspective, he argues that in art and social life, "two types of people emerge: innovators (reminding Gökalp's *müceddid* great man) and imitators—that is, geniuses and the people." (İzzet, 2002c, p.682). While the masses possess an instinct for imitation, genius possesses an instinct for invention. Within the society in which he lives, genius initiates new inventions and fulfils a reformatory function by improving existing practices. Guyau describes the reciprocal relationship between genius and its social milieu through three stages: the first stage represents social reality, which gives rise to genius; the second refers to the intellectual sphere that genius creates in the minds of individuals within society; and the third stage consists of followers of genius—those who imitate and disseminate genius' inventions (İzzet, 2002c, p.683).

In his 1938 essay titled "A Study on Genius," published in the magazine of *İnsan*, it is evident that Yunus Kazım Köni¹⁸ directs his critique towards the sociologists of his time. According to Köni, genius may manifest itself in the realms of science, politics, and art. However, he does not believe that genius is an indispensable quality in either scientific or political fields. For Köni, it is the artistic domain that requires genius in the absolute sense. He defines genius as "measurelessness" (Köni, 1938, p. 497). By this expression, Köni seeks to emphasise the original and unbounded character of genius, and he articulates his critique in the following terms:

"All sociologists of our age who consider themselves 'scientific' are relativists. According to these relativists, genius is the product and expression of the collective conscience. Genius, they claim, represents the emotions and ideas simmering within the conscience of society... Yet this view amounts to a denial of the very existence of genius itself... According to this thesis, the original being of genius is effectively denied."

¹⁸The journal is published by Hilmi Ziya Ülken, and the article in question was published in Volume 1, Issue 6.



As can be seen, Köni criticised both social thinkers and the discipline of sociology in his discussion of genius. According to him, what must primarily be examined is not the social environment in which genius exists but the genius himself (1938, p.498).

According to Köni, genius (*dehâ*) has never been a product of society. Emphasising that no prophet was ever esteemed within his own community, Köni describes the distinctive mark of genius as its anti-social nature (*gayri içtimaiyat*). He draws a clear distinction between genius and great man. For Yunus Kazım Köni, while a great man may serve as the representative of the collective conscience, genius does not fit into such a framework. The great man is, in this sense, a social type. Genius, by contrast, “exists outside time” and constitutes “a human response to the transience of the universe.” For Köni, genius represents humanity’s struggle to free itself from the grip of nature—it is the process of self-discovery, “of man becoming God” (1938, p.501).

Köni, asserting that genius can only be explained through another genius, cites Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch* (Superman) as an example (Köni, 1938, p.501). Nietzsche introduced this notion in his 1883 work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, describing the *Übermensch* as “the meaning of the earth” (Nietzsche, 1984, p. 20) and portraying him as a redeemer figure. The declaration “God is dead: now we want the *Übermensch* to live” (1984, p. 271) encapsulates the transformative mission Nietzsche assigns to this concept. He also emphasises that the *Übermensch* must embody human virtues such as honesty and moral excellence (1984, p. 274).

At first glance, Nietzsche’s notion appears to resemble Carlyle’s hero or Emerson’s great man. However, Nietzsche explicitly rejects this resemblance, even mentioning Carlyle by name (Meakins, 2014, p. 263). He opposes Carlyle’s idea of the “hero” because it implies an institutionalised and hierarchical conception of greatness within social life (2014, p. 265). In *The Dawn of Day* (1881), Nietzsche included a brief essay titled “Hero-Worship and its Fanatics,” in which he sharply criticises the cult of hero-worship. He argues that admiration for heroes can turn into a form of exploitation that ultimately degrades those who admire them. For this reason, Nietzsche dismisses Carlyle as an irrational romantic, detached from critical reason (Nietzsche, 1911, p.281–282).

In her article “The Problem of the Great Man in Ziya Gökalp”, Beğlü Eke [Dikeçligil] explains Gökalp’s engagement with the great man through his effort to balance the significance of the



individual with that of society (Eke, 1976, p. 64). According to Eke, both types of great men in Gökalp's framework share one essential characteristic – they bring innovation and renewal to their societies. Eke's main critique concerns the conditions under which the reformist (müceddid) great man emerges. Eke (1976, p.69) argues that while Gökalp associates the appearance of great men with periods of national crisis and the process of becoming a nation, such figures can also be found in societies that have not undergone these transformative phases. Moreover, Eke notes that the idea of the great man as the representative of the collective conscience presupposes the existence of a homogeneous social consciousness—a notion she finds problematic. In reality, she suggests, societies are composed of diverse and often conflicting social realities; therefore, the great man is inevitably exposed to the pressures and contradictions arising from these varied circumstances¹⁹.

In a paper presented in 2004, Beğlü Dikeçligil revisits the topic of the great man and notes that she first encountered the issue of the “great man” in a doctoral seminar in 1974 (2005, p. 39). She maintains the argument she put forward in her first article: According to her, by addressing the problem of the great man, Gökalp violated the methodological rules of Durkheimian sociology. For Dikeçligil, the “great man” issue is significant in that it reveals the relationship between the individual and society within sociological thought. Ultimately, by taking up the question of the great man, Gökalp “sought to transcend the narrow circle of positivism.” According to Dikeçligil, explaining the emergence of the great man essentially means asking which is the determining factor in the society–individual relationship. She argues that at the root of this opposition lies the view of idealist German philosophy—set against the positivist (determinist) understanding of the social sciences—that “reality consists of worlds constructed by individuals through the meanings they attribute” (p. 43).

According to Dikeçligil, the emergence of great men cannot be explained by a single scientific cause; instead of rigid determinism, she adopts an understanding that allows for multiple causes within a pattern of interaction. What truly matters here is the personality of the great man. Drawing a

¹⁹The origins of the great man problem in Gökalp's thought are examined in the following section; however, the specific issue that Eke criticises here – namely, the distinction between collective conscience (*örf* or *ruh-i amme*) and public opinion (*efkâr-ı amme*) – had already been elaborated by Gökalp himself in one of the essays compiled in *Makaleler V*. In that essay, Gökalp explicitly states that there is a significant difference between collective conscience and public opinion.



portrait of the great man similar to that of Mehmet İzzet, Dikeçligil (2005, p.50) argues that concepts such as genius and social medium carry psychological connotations. The issue of the great man—implying the individual's influence on society—can also be examined within the specific historical conditions of the period in which Gökalp lived.

In her article titled “Democracy, Equality of Opportunity, and Elites,” Amiran Kurtkan Bilgiseven presents what can be described as a classical “elitist” approach. According to this view, every society necessarily contains a distinction between rulers and the ruled (Bilgiseven, 1980, p.96; Bottomore, 1993, p.1-2). Bilgiseven, who notes that Gökalp regarded great men as individuals who sharpen the consciousness of society, examines in detail concepts such as genius, elite, and scholar. Her approach to the notion of genius is largely similar to that of Yunus Kazım Köni. However, she also criticises Köni's perspective at certain points—particularly his conception of genius as detached from time and space. For Bilgiseven, this is a problematic view, as it leads to the neglect of the psychology that gives rise to genius, namely, the social conditions in which it develops. At the same time, she argues that the emergence of genius cannot be explained solely by individual psychology (1980, p.98). Regarding the distinction between the great man and genius, she adopts Köni's approach, maintaining that the great man represents a more limited position in this regard.

Bilgiseven considers the conditions under which genius emerges to be important, yet she ultimately maintains her elitist stance by asserting that the determining factor is the spiritual element. In her view, Max Weber, through his concept of charismatic authority, expressed the most significant characteristic of genius. Bilgiseven explained the matter as follows: “We are compelled to acknowledge that genius is a characteristic which cannot be made available to individuals in a just manner through any measures of equal opportunity or within the framework of any democratic regime. Equal opportunity is, of course, highly beneficial, yet it is not sufficient to attain genius.” (1980, p. 100-101).

Conclusion

In this study, Gökalp's own examinations of the great man and the interpretations of sociologists who have analysed his thought on the matter were discussed. Gökalp situates great men within the framework of his fundamental sociological distinction between culture (hars) and civilisation



(medeniyet): those who represent culture—belonging to the realm of collective conscience—he calls *müceddid* great men, whereas those who embody civilisation—where the division of labour prevails and professional consciences manifest—he calls *mübdî* great men. This classification also demonstrates that Gökalp examined the concept of the great man in a functional manner within his own system of thought, viewing such figures not as isolated individuals but as agents fulfilling specific roles in the moral and institutional life of society.

When examining the intellectual sources that affected Gökalp's views on the great man, it would not be accurate to attribute them to a single origin. Rather Gökalp, in accordance with his general attitude towards the social sciences, synthesised a range of diverse influences. Indeed, the great man concept reflects the influence of the German idealist philosophers' notions of the hero and the genius (Balci, 2015, p. 181). It is also noted that this same influence played a significant role in the development of Carlyle's thought (Eke, 1976, p.79). Although the sources that nourished Gökalp's ideas on this topic may have reached him indirectly, they include key figures who shaped the theoretical literature on the great man: Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herbert Spencer, and—going further back—Plutarch among the ancient Greek philosophers. Even though Gökalp's writings contain no explicit reference to Ibn Khaldun, it may be argued that the approach to great men found in the Turkish intellectual tradition, particularly in the works of Nâima, who was influenced by Ibn Khaldun and developed the theory of stages [*tavırlar nazariyesi*], also had an indirect impact on Gökalp. This intellectual convergence reflects Gökalp's synthesising orientation, which sought to reconcile diverse sociological traditions within his broader framework of thought.

Another noteworthy aspect of the great man question is the fact that nearly all thinkers who have written on this subject produced their works during periods of profound crisis. Gökalp's two essays on the matter were written in 1917–1918, years that coincided with the most intense and concluding stages of the First World War (Tanyu, 1981, p.119–120). These dates, which Gökalp himself described as times of crisis, were indeed turbulent for Turkish intellectual, political, and social life. A similar situation can be observed in the case of Nâima, mentioned earlier in connection with Fındıkoğlu and identified as an intellectual source for the great man (Refik, 1932, p.5–6). Likewise, when one looks at



Thomas Carlyle²⁰ or Herbert Spencer, the historical context of their works points to the year 1841, a period in Europe still marked by the aftermath of the French Revolution, during which no definitive political or intellectual system had yet been established—a time characterised, both politically and ideologically, by crisis (Schapiro, 1945, p.106).

Reading Gökalp's treatment of the great man solely within the sociological framework of the individual–society or actor–structure dichotomy would be insufficient. Such an interpretation might offer an indirect reading, yet both Gökalp's and the other thinkers' engagement with the great man problem appears to be driven by a different intellectual motivation. The great man approach represents, in fact, an alternative way of reading history and social structure. At the historical and social roots of this issue lies the crisis-ridden character of the periods in which these thinkers lived. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Gökalp's identity as an intellectual of the late Ottoman Empire (Coşkun, 2004, p.67) endowed him with a classical worldview that shaped his interpretation of the concept of the great man—particularly in his way of assessing social and political processes. The fact that great men were often perceived as saviours in times of crisis reveals the historical and political background against which this intellectual concern emerged.



Peer Review Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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²⁰As was the case among English intellectuals of the period, developments on the European continent were closely followed. The central concern was whether England might undergo a similar revolutionary process. In this regard, Carlyle produced several works on the French Revolution (Schapiro, 1945, p.98). The same article details that the years in which Carlyle lived were a turbulent period in England, marked particularly by social unrest involving labour unions and the tensions that arose from their growing political activity.



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