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THE DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH DENTISTRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Introduction

Some surgeons who practised minor surgery, barbers and midwives practiced dentistry up to the nineteenth century in Turkey. Turkish people attached great importance to hygiene of the mouth. They used misvaq (a kind of toothbrush) in order to brush their teeth. Considerable information about dentistry can be found in many Turkish medical manuscripts (1,2).

Dentistry began to become a scientific discipline in Turkey in the nineteenth century, when other medical sciences also gained scientific standing (3,4). In order to practice dentistry, a special certificate was necessary in Turkey at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, those who practiced dentistry in the hospitals granted this document (instead of a diploma) to personnel. These documents were approved by the Ministry of the Medical School (Mekteb-i Tibbiye Bakanlığı) and then the Directorship of Health after 1878. These persons were called 'dentists with permission'. The first school of dentistry was opened in Istanbul (Kadirga) in 1909 (5,6).

In this paper, we have a short look at the development of Turkish Dentistry in the nineteenth century.

The Development of Turkish Dentistry in the Nineteenth Century

Turkish dentistry began to become a modern discipline in the nineteenth century, and became highly developed in the twentieth century. Turkish medicine also acquired a western character at that time. Political reforms were made in all fields and some famous military and civilian hospitals were founded where many valuable Turkish physicians served. The first modern school of medicine was founded in 1827. Its name was Tiphane and Cerrahname-i Amire (School of Medicine and Surgery)(6,7).

Some physicians wrote medical manuscripts about dentistry (8). Chief physician Mustafa Behchet Efendi (1774-1834) wrote a book called Hezar-i Esrar together with chief physician Abdülhak Molla (1786-1854), his brother. This book, which was printed by Hayrullah Efendi in 1869, contains simple knowledge about dentistry, and some mystical beliefs (9).

Moreover, some anonymous prescriptions relating to dentistry are found in a nineteenth century pamphlet. A traditional prescription entitled Tooth Powder can be given as an example from this pamphlet (10):

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“Charcoal of bark of lime (10 drachms), Peruvian Bark (10 drachms) and magnesium oxide (3 drachms) are pounded and mixed. Peppermint oil (3 drops) is added to this mixture to give it a pleasant smell. Teeth are brushed with this powder and then cleaned with water” (folio Ib) (11).

Dentistry was practiced by surgeons up to the nineteenth century in Turkey. Surgery was a technical discipline and surgeons were trained according to the system of apprenticeship to a master. A document dated 1872 says that 300 kuruş was to be paid to Mehmet Necati, who was a trainer of surgery, and notes that some surgeons practised dentistry in Istanbul (12). Trainee surgeons were taught by physicians or surgeons. Surgeons served under the order of the chief physician. Moreover, barbers and midwives also practised dentistry. We find some knowledge of surgery in a code called Kanunname-i Umumu Askeriyye (Code of Military Affairs) dated 1872. Article 42 of this code mentions the duties of surgeons, and informs us that surgeons and physicians gave dental treatment to their patients during morning visits (9).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, some development was realised in the field of dentistry in Turkey. In order to practice dentistry, a special license became necessary. This license was granted to those who were trained by experienced dentists employed in hospitals. After 1878, these licenses were to be approved by the Ministry of the School of Medicine (Mektebi Tibbiye Bakani) and by the Director of Health. These practitioners were called ‘dentists with permission’.

During this period, the practitioners of dentistry were divided into four categories:

a- Those without a medical education, who were trained in the field of surgery. They carried out minor surgical operations and practised dentistry. Some of them practised only dentistry.

b- Those who were trained by a dentist in a foreign country, received a certificate following an examination in the field.

c- Graduates from the faculty of medicine who were specialised in the field of surgery. Some of these specialists were permitted to practise dentistry only.

d- Dentists educated in the field of dentistry in foreign countries.

After the political reforms in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, we come across some famous dentists employed in military hospitals and in the Palace Hospital. Dentists, physicians, pharmacists and surgeons were under the order of the chief physician. In a health register of the palace hospitals (Topkapı Palace Hospital, Yıldız Palace Hospital etc.), we find the names of 98 physicians, dentists and pharmacists. This register was studied by Dr.DRAMUR, who identified the names, fees and other information about some dentists. For example, we learn from these documents that the famous dentist Halid Şazi Bey made four gold teeth in 1916.

Palace dentists treated their patients in the palace pharmacy. Dentists carried out dental treatment such as tooth extraction, porcelain and platinum fillings, bridges and total prosthesis (13). Moreover, modern tooth brushes were also used in the nineteenth century in Turkey.

The School of Dentistry opened in Istanbul (Kadırga) in 1909. According to the Article 32 of the Act Concerning the Practice of Medicine and Related Disciplines (Tababet ve Şübatı Sanatlarlaarnın Tarzi Icrasına Dair Kanun, no. 1219) dated 1928, those who practised dentistry had to get a diploma from the School of Dentistry. The first director of the School of Dentistry was Halit Şazi Bey, followed by Mustafa Münif Paşa (up to 1916), Dr. Mazhar Hüsnü Bey (1916-1920), Dr. Server Hilmi Bey (1922-1930), and Dr. Sait Cemil Bey (1930-1932). Training at the School of Dentistry lasted for three years up to 1933, when it was increased to four years, and then Ord. Prof. Dr. A. Kantorowicz was appointed director. The school had five professors, six associate professors and fourteen assistants (14,15). The School of Dentistry became the Faculty of Dentistry in 1964, as part of Istanbul University (16,17,18). Today this faculty is located at Çapa district in Istanbul. Today there are many other faculties of dentistry in Turkey.

In conclusion, Turkish dentistry began to develop in the nineteenth century and today it is practiced by modern methods.

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