

Story of the Stories for Nuclear Alla Turca

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I had known about Can Candan for a while, as an academic and a documentary filmmaker. I also knew he was making a documentary about nuclear energy in Turkey called Nuclear Alla Turca.² What I didn't know was that my very first conversation with him would lead to a rabbit hole of stories within stories, where he told me about the story of Sıtkı Bey as part of the nuclear history of Turkey, nested within the story of Candan's discovery of Sıtkı Bey, which in itself is a story of history of science in Turkey. I was very excited about this almost accidental discovery of an almost unknown figure in the history of nuclear science in Turkey, which struck me as a very STS moment. So, I contacted Candan and asked him to do an interview about Sıtkı Bey, a small part of which is what you see in the [video clip](#) prepared for this exhibit "Innovating STS in Turkey." To put another layer on top of that, this is my take on the stories and people that connect to each other and unfold in layers; connecting the past and present of Turkish nuclear arena at the background of international developments and political economy of the young Turkish republic. What drew me to this Scheherazade-style telling of nuclear history of Turkey is, first of all, the striking fact that we know so little about people and events related to nuclear energy before the conversations started on building a nuclear reactor. That takes me back to the fragmentary nature of science cultures and history of science in Turkey, which we mentioned before in the digital collection "[An Archaeology of STS in Turkey](#)." The second point was that I thought this was a great way to connect to the idea of this year's theme: innovating STS.

I believe that one way of innovating STS as a field is looking into different ways of producing, and sharing academic knowledge. The importance of this interview, and this documentary is twofold: On the one hand, the story of Sıtkı Bey is a story from the margins, and perhaps, of failure. Sıtkı Bey has not officially been an academic, nor did he manage to get the recognition he wanted from the Nobel Academy. In this sense, this is the perfect example of generalized symmetry, where the researchers pay attention to cases of scientific success and failure with equal analytical interest. In Turkish history of science practice,

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² <http://nuclearallaturca.com>

focusing on figures that have not necessarily been successful is not very common. On the other hand, Can Candan himself is not officially a historian of science, and what he does with this documentary is not aimed at an academic audience. However, it involves a tremendous (and ingeniously conducted) amount of research and systematic knowledge collection, as well as the effort to present it as a form of activism blended with public understanding of science. This is where I believe the STS innovation comes up, both in terms of methodology and engagement. During the interview, Candan told us the story of how he and his colleagues found out Sıtkı Bey's surname, for example, which involved tracing the wedding and funeral ads in local newspapers of Bursa, the city where Sıtkı Bey lived. The effort of finding Sıtkı Bey's living relatives led them to the name of an apartment building in Istanbul, which was demolished and built again with a different name during the urban renewal projects, and finding out that Sıtkı Bey's granddaughter lived in that same building. So, what started as standard archival research became a different project on the way, and I believe that was partially possible because of the format of the expected outcome that went beyond academic publication. A documentary film gives more flexibility in research methodology, even though it has its own limitations, like the need for more visual material. It also engages an audience that goes beyond academia, and as Candan also mentioned, in the critical political moment of building the first nuclear reactor in Turkey, it was very necessary to open up informed and public discussions about whether or not it should be built.

Towards the end of this interview, Candan mentioned that he was dealing with stories that look like different beads on a string. The image in my mind is more of a net, or the inverted models for the catenary arches of Sagrada Familia, bearing the weight of one another, being suspended from each other. It is this richness and connections, and weaving of this net that I find fascinating, as well as the possibilities of connecting with a different form of producing knowledge.