

“Distant Neighbours, Close Memories: 600 Years of Turkish-Polish Relations” at Sakıp Sabancı Museum

Sabancı University’s Sakıp Sabancı Museum is hosting the “Distant Neighbours, Close Memories: 600 Years of Turkish-Polish Relations” exhibition on 7 March – 15 June 2014 to commemorate the 600th anniversary of relations between Turkey and Poland.

The exhibition is opening under the patronage of the presidents of Turkey and Poland, supported by the ministries of foreign affairs and culture in both countries, with exhibits loaned from the collections of museums, archives, libraries, monasteries and churches in Poland, together with objects from Topkapı Palace Museum, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art and Sadberk Hanım Museum in Turkey, making a total of 348 exhibits.

The exhibition has been organized with the financial and institutional support of Sakıp Sabancı Museum and its esteemed sponsors and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland. It is accompanied by a wide range of cultural and art events.

The “Distant Neighbours, Close Memories: 600 Years of Turkish-Polish Relations” exhibition covers a period beginning in the first half of the 15th century and continuing with trade, peace and war up to the late 17th century, when the Second Siege of Vienna became a turning point not just in relations between Ottoman Turkey and Poland, but in the history of Europe.

In this context, historical developments in the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Poland are reflected in documents, maps, paintings, personal possessions of eminent figures, accessories and printed material. The exhibition presents visitors with examples of trade goods, and Ottoman tents, weapons and other artefacts abandoned after the army’s defeat at the Siege of Vienna, alongside objects that illustrate the border clashes and other stages leading up to the siege.

In the wake of the Treaty of Carlowitz, Poland and the Ottoman state, which over the centuries had shared the stage of history sometimes as neighbours and sometimes as enemies, now shared a similar fate, despite one being on the losing and the other on the winning side. While the Ottoman state went into decline, struggling for survival by diplomacy or war as circumstances required; the kingdom of Poland was attacked by Austria, Prussia and Russia, its powerful neighbours and former allies at the victory of Vienna, which now seized vast tracts of Polish territory in both east and west. Finally in 1795 the country was partitioned by these powers and Poland ceased to be an independent state.

The Ottoman state refused to recognize the right of the invading powers to partition Poland and in palace protocol the place of the Polish ambassador was preserved. On formal state occasions it was always declared that the Polish ambassador was “delayed on his journey and so unable to attend”. During this period the wars of the past were forgotten as and Polish political refugees who included members of diverse political groups attempting to restore the country’s independence, intellectuals, high ranking officers, soldiers and diplomats received their most steadfast support from the Ottoman state. A Polish battallion made up of political refugees and known as the Sultan’s Cossacks fought side by side with Ottoman soldiers against Russia on several occasions, notably in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Some of these people are known to have played influential roles in Ottoman reform movements. This period is illustrated by documents, paintings and other diverse objects.

Sakıp Sabancı Museum director Dr. Nazan Ölçer said the following about the exhibition: “Commercial and cultural relations between Poland and Ottoman Turkey, which began in the 15th century and reached their zenith in the 17th and 18th centuries, made major contributions to the arts in both countries, in particular influencing the tastes, dress and way of life of the Polish elite. Since a relationship going back 600 years could not be represented by material from Poland alone, we were obliged to find a contemporary Ottoman equivalent for every object brought from that country. Official and private correspondence between the kingdom of Poland Kingdom and the Ottoman state, portraits of ambassadors, their retinues, and important Polish and Ottoman figures and their families, as well as personal notes reflecting contemporary events, have taken their place in the exhibition scenario that tracks this eventful history almost step by step.

We wanted church vestments made of Turkish fabrics worn by high ranking Polish clerics, tents and weapons presented as gifts or left behind on the battle field, and diaries kept on battle fronts to give insight into diverse aspects of the past. We have always upheld the principle that history should not be just a series of victories and defeats, so one of our main aims has been that this exhibition should reveal the factors lying behind these and penetrate the power equations and human personalities with all their strengths and weaknesses. The objects, documents and pictures included in this exhibition demonstrate that notes taken by a contemporary observer can sometimes provide more insight than long historical accounts, and that even battle fields can have an aesthetic dimension.”

Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, said of the exhibition: “There are few countries that have established such uninterrupted partnerships during their history. The commemoration of the 600th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries this year is an outstanding opportunity to promote awareness of Poland. During this year more than a hundred cultural events will be held and we plan to present the Turkish public with matchless examples of

Polish culture. This exhibition at Sakıp Sabancı Museum is one of the major events on the Polish cultural programme. The exhibition's title symbolizes and perfectly reflects the character of our relations; it is indeed true that despite the distances between us, both countries have many similarities and share old memories.”

Director of Warsaw National Museum **Agnieszka Morawińska** commented as follows on the exhibition: “Our exhibition brings together diverse elements that demonstrate the rich history shared by Turkey and Poland. By means of this exhibition we aimed to present art lovers with the most beautiful examples of Poland's secular heritage and church collections. At the same time our exhibition examines the shared aspects of art history between both countries. Dedicated work by experts from Poland and Turkey has played a major part in the outstanding achievement of this project. I wish to say that owing to their meticulous and dedicated efforts in the course of preparing this exhibition, it has avoided superficiality and biased conclusions.”

As part of the “Distant Neighbours, Close Memories: 600 Years of Turkish-Polish Relations” exhibition, a two-day programme of lectures will take place on 7-8 March from 14:00 to 18:00. Turkish and Polish academics who are participating in this conference programme will discuss various aspects of art and commerce at different times over the six centuries covered by the exhibition, and examine political and cultural relations between the Ottoman Empire and Poland in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In addition Polish films will be screened throughout the exhibition, accompanied by discussion forums to be attended by the leading directors of contemporary Polish cinema, Krzysztof Zanussi and Dorota Keszczawska. In addition there will be concerts by musicians from Poland and educational workshops for children. The museum's Changa restaurant will continue its series of menus on the theme of the current exhibition, which began with the Rembrandt, Monet and Anish Kapoor exhibitions. This time the restaurant is presenting a menu inspired by Poland's traditional foods and cooking techniques.

The main sponsor of the “Distant Neighbours, Close Memories” exhibition being held on the 600 Yeras of relations between Turkey and Poland is Turgut Pharmaceuticals A.Ş. Supporting sponsor is Gülermak A.Ş., accommodation sponsor is The Grand Tarabya, and educational sponsor is West Istanbul Marina.

The Project is organized as part of the 2014 cultural programme celebrating 600 years of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Poland.