

THE MEDALLION CAMPAIGN

Following the death of Atatürk on November 10, 1938, painter Melek designed a commemorative medallion in 1939 in his memory. One side of the medallion bore the inscription “ATATÜRK” and the date “10 İKİNCİTEŞRİN 1938” (an old Turkish calendar term for November 10, 1938), while the other side read: “THE TURKISH WOMAN YOU SAVED WILL ETERNALLY WEEP WITH GRATITUDE FOR YOU.” From newspaper reports of the time, we understand that Melek wanted this medallion to be utilized by or for women. However, she was unable to realize this idea at the time.

Later, shortly after the May 27, 1960 military coup, Melek came to Istanbul. During her stay, she visited Istanbul Governor and Mayor Major General Refik Tulga and spoke about her medallion sketch. Following this meeting, General Tulga referred Melek to İffet Halim Oruz through his wife Jale Tulga. İffet Halim was the President of the Istanbul branch of the Women’s Solidarity Union and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Society for Assistance to Darülaceze (Darülaceze’ye Yardım Derneği).

In a speech given by İffet Halim on April 7, 1964 on Istanbul Radio regarding the founding of the Istanbul Nursing Home, she recounted her meeting with Melek as follows:

“It was around 1960. One day, one of our female artists, painter Melek, visited Governor Refik Tulga and showed him a medallion model she had created in Paris in 1938, deeply moved by Atatürk’s death. She expressed her wish: she had designed the medallion to express the Turkish woman’s gratitude to Atatürk. If the medallion could be produced and sold by women, she wanted to use the proceeds to build a monument for Atatürk. She asked for Mr. Tulga’s support for this initiative she had been unable to implement since 1938. He recommended she speak with us. So, we met.”

During their meeting, İffet Halim proposed an idea to Melek:

“Let’s produce the medallions. But instead of a monument, let’s use the proceeds to establish a nursing home. Let this nursing home be a monument of our gratitude to Atatürk.” Melek agreed, and the decision was made to proceed with the medallion production. Melek also prepared a second version of the medallion.

At the meeting held on October 17, 1960, the Society for Assistance to Darülaceze decided to reproduce and sell the medallion and to use the proceeds to establish a nursing home outside of the existing Darülaceze facilities. Their broader vision was to expand this home into a "nursing complex" over time. The General Assembly of the Association authorized the board to establish the nursing home in meetings held on December 10, 1960, and April 13, 1963.

Melek's initial desire to have the medallion used by and for women was realized through a collaboration between the Society for Assistance to Darülaceze, the Women's Solidarity Union under İffet Halim, and the Istanbul Social Services Coordination Committee led by Hasene Ilgaz. Thus, the "Medallion Campaign" officially began. During the campaign, the medallions were sometimes referred to as the "Medal of Peace."

The new version of the medallion designed by Melek in 1961 featured the phrase:

"THE TURKISH WOMAN YOU SAVED OFFERS HER LOYALTY TO YOU" on one side, with "MELEK" inscribed in small capital letters at the bottom, and on the other side: "ATATÜRK" and the date "10 KASIM 1938."

The medallions were minted by the State Mint in two sizes using a special alloy.

- Large Medallions: 86 mm in diameter, 4 mm thick, 216 grams in weight, finished in gold gilt or oxidized versions, and came with a wooden base crafted by Bahattin Dursunoğlu.
- Small Medallions: 40 mm in diameter, 2 mm thick, 28 grams in weight, produced in gold gilt and with a handle.
- Prices: Large medallions were sold for 50 TL and small ones for 10 TL.

Sales Channels Included:

- An auction during the "Friendly Hands" ball held at Beylerbeyi Palace on August 30, 1961,
- All branches of Ziraat Bank selected by the Society for Assistance to Darülaceze,
- Through all neighborhood headmen (mukhtars) in Istanbul.

During the campaign, around 40.000 small and 1.500 large medallions were produced, and together with other campaigns, a total of 500.000 TL in donations was collected.

Meanwhile, the Association also began searching for a suitable building for the nursing home. Eventually, a building in Bahçelievler, Istanbul was found and purchased on June 3, 1964, for 600.000 TL.

To manage the establishment and operation of the nursing home, a new association was founded: The Association for Establishing and Supporting Nursing Homes, which was established on February 11, 1963, in Istanbul and gained public benefit association status in 1967. Hasene Ilgaz was appointed as the director of the Istanbul Nursing Home, and Zekeriya Salıcı as deputy director.

Finally, on July 15, 1964, the Istanbul Nursing Home was officially opened with a ceremony attended by Melek, Istanbul Mayor Haşim İşcan, and other guests. Thus, Melek's decades-old dream came true.