



The Creation of a Natural History Display at the Yıldız Palace by Fausto Zonaro and Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa

Fausto Zonaro ve Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa Tarafından Yıldız Sarayı'nda Bir Doğa Tarihi Teşhirinin Yaratılışı

Müjde Dila Gümüş¹ 



ABSTRACT

Related to the increasing interest in natural history in Europe in the 19th century, natural history collections were established in various institutions in the Ottoman Empire. Yıldız Palace was among the collection centers during Abdülhamid II's reign (r. 1876-1909). The Sultan's collection used to be exhibited in the natural history museum within Yıldız Palace and at various points of the palace. The collection items were distributed to multiple educational institutions, mainly to the Ministry of Education, following Abdülhamid II's dethronement. This article focuses on two glass cabinets designed as natural history displays with landscape paintings on the interior surfaces and taxidermized birds inside. The cabinets were assembled at Yıldız Palace at the beginning of the 20th century, and have been preserved in the Istanbul University Faculty of Science since the 1930's. Besides being examples of the display practices at Yıldız Palace, the cabinets are relevant in an art historical aspect since the paintings in them carry Fausto Zonaro's, Hüseyin Zekâi's, Halid's (Naci), and A. Nicot's signatures. The cabinets exemplify a unique collaboration of four artists, each of whom had served in Yıldız Palace with different titles during Abdülhamid II's reign. Within this article's scope, the cabinets mentioned, which have yet to be examined in an art historical context and have been overlooked in the literature on related painters, are introduced in detail, emphasizing the paintings they carry. In relation to the critical importance of Yıldız Palace as a self-representation medium for Abdülhamid II, it is argued that natural history displays at the palace were a component of the modern appearance of the Sultan. The primary sources of the study consist of publications and archival documents from the Abdülhamid II era, photographs from Yıldız Albums, and inventory records of Istanbul University. **Keywords:** Late Ottoman art, Yıldız Palace, Abdülhamid II, Fausto Zonaro, Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa

ÖZ

19. yüzyılda Avrupa'da doğa tarihine yönelik ilginin artmasıyla ilişkili olarak Osmanlı Devleti'nde de çeşitli kurumların bünyesinde doğa tarihi koleksiyonları oluşturulmuştu. II. Abdülhamid dönemindeki (sal. 1876-1909) koleksiyon odaklarından biri de Yıldız Sarayı'ydı. Padişahın koleksiyonu Yıldız Sarayı bünyesindeki doğa tarihi müzesinde ve sarayın çeşitli noktalarında teşhir edilmiş, II. Abdülhamid'in tahttan indirilmesinin ardından ise başta Maarif

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Nezareti olmak üzere çeşitli eğitim kurumlarına dağıtılmıştır. Bu makale, 20. yüzyılın başında Yıldız Sarayı'nda iç ve dış yüzeyleri manzara resimleri ile kaplanarak içerisinde tahnit edilmiş kuşlar sergilenmiş olan ve 1930'lardan beri İstanbul Üniversitesi Fen Fakültesi'nde muhafaza edilen iki adet camlı dolaba odaklanmaktadır. Yıldız Sarayı'ndaki sergileme pratiklerini örnekleyen camekanlı dolaplardaki resimlerin, Fausto Zonaro, Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa, Halid (Naci) ve A. Nicot ve imzalarını taşımaları; konuyu sanat tarihsel açıdan önemli kılmaktadır. Dolaplar, her biri II. Abdülhamid döneminde farklı unvanlarla Yıldız Sarayı'nda görev yapmış olan dört sanatçının ünik bir iş birliğini örneklemektedir. Daha önce sanat tarihi disiplini açısından incelenmemiş ve ilgili ressamın üzerine olan literatürde ele alınmamış olan bu dolaplar, makale kapsamında, taşıdıkları resimlere özel bir vurgu ile detaylı biçimde tanıtılmıştır. Yıldız Sarayı'nın II. Abdülhamid ile adeta özdeşleşen ve onu temsil eden bir nitelik taşıması ile ilişkili olarak, saraydaki doğa tarihi teşhirlerinin, padişahın modern imajının bir parçasını meydana getirdikleri öne sürülmüştür. Çalışmanın birincil kaynaklarını II. Abdülhamid döneminden çeşitli basılı kaynaklar, arşiv belgeleri, Yıldız Albümlerinden fotoğraflar ve İstanbul Üniversitesi'nin envanter kayıtları meydana getirmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Geç dönem Osmanlı sanatı, Yıldız Sarayı, II. Abdülhamid, Fausto Zonaro, Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa

The nineteenth century was a time when curiosity and interest in natural history bloomed. As a result of the enthusiasm to collect, identify, and moreover to display, the quality and quantity of natural history collections improved. Natural history museums and curio cabinets were the main mediums of display.¹ In parallel, panoramas and dioramas developed as new display methods.² Footsteps of the shift in the human-nature relationship can also be traced in the Ottoman Empire. Established in 1839, the Imperial College of Medicine's natural history museum (*Mekteb-i Tibbiye Numunehanesi*) was the first one of the Empire with a zoology, botany, and mineral collection.³ Within the initiatives of other institutions, natural history collections/museums were mainly created and maintained for educational purposes in Ottoman Istanbul during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴ Concurrently, Ottoman palaces were another center for nature-focused collections. The history of accommodating various wild or exotic animals in the Ottoman Palaces goes back to the centuries before the nineteenth century,⁵ but the context mentioned in this article is the systematic selection of animals as a result of a "modern" curiosity. Among his broad interests, Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) had a special kind of enthusiasm for collecting animals; especially pigeons, parrots, and rare species of birds.⁶ Thus, he had a vast collection of birds from all over the world in Yıldız Palace. Some of his birds were taxidermized following their death and displayed in curio cabinets.⁷ This was also a common practice in the 19th Century. In this article, I aim to provide a close reading of Abdülhamid II's curio cabinets which were decorated as natural history displays with four artists' collaboration; Fausto Zonaro, Hüseyin Zekâi, Halid (Naci), and A. Nicot. **(F. 1, 2)**

- 1 Curio cabinets containing objects such as medals, stuffed birds, fossils, swords, etc. existed starting in the Middle Ages. Their components were completely eclectic until the late eighteenth century, but after that time, a cabinet usually contained natural history objects, specifically. As small-scale museums, the cabinets could have been in various shapes, such as a little box with drawers or an elegantly crafted wood-and-glass display case. They served as a repository for all manner of collected natural objects. Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 107. For an early essay on the history of Natural History Museums, see Oliver Farrington, "The Rise of Natural History Museums," *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 42, no. 1076 (1915): 197-208.
- 2 Claudia Kamecke and Rainer Hutterer, "History of Dioramas," in *Natural History Dioramas: History, Construction and Educational Role* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015), 7-21.
- 3 Feza Günergün, "Mekteb-i Tibbiye-i Şahane'nin 1870'li Yılların Başındaki Doğa Tarihi Koleksiyonu," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları II* (2010): 337-344. Semih Çelik, "Science, to Understand the Abundance of Plants and Trees," in *Environments of Empire: Networks and Agents of Ecological Change. Flows, Migrations, and Exchanges* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 88.
- 4 The natural history collection of Saint-Joseph College appears as an important example in this context. For further information on the collection, see Şennur Şentürk, *Nuh'un Gemisi Beyoğlu'nda* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 1998).
- 5 Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York, Cambridge, Mass.: Architectural History Foundation, MIT Press, 1991), 204, 206. Feza Günergün, "Türkiye'de Hayvanat Bahçeleri Tarihine Giriş", *I. Ulusal Veteriner Hekimliği Tarihi ve Mesleki Etik Sempozyumu Bildirileri. Prof. Dr. Ferruh Dinçer'in 70. Yaşı Anısına*, Ed. Abdullah Özen (Elazığ: Fırat Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006).
- 6 Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Ötesi* (İstanbul: Özgür Yayınları, 2003), 198. Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Bu Mülkün Sultanları* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2015), 465-466.
- 7 Ayşe Osmanoğlu, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamid* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2016): 33. Diren Çakılcı, "Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Hayvan Merakı: Yıldız Sarayı'nda Kuşluk-ı Hümâyun Teşkilatı," *Tarih Dergisi* 68 (2018): 84-85.



Figure 1, 2: Cabinet A (left), Cabinet B (right). (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

I argue that among reflecting Abdühamid II's interest in natural history and animals, the cabinets were also significant in a self-representational context. Together with the Sultan's comprehensive library, theatre, museum, and various collections in Yıldız Palace, the natural history collection was a component of the modern appearance of Abdülhamid II.

Being preserved at the Istanbul University Faculty of Science collection since the 1930s, the cabinets have never been examined in detail from an art history perspective. Feza Günargün was first to mention them as “bird cabinets” which transferred from Yıldız Palace to Istanbul University in her article on the history of zoos in Turkey.⁸ Oya Özuluğ and Nilgün Kaya introduced the cabinets in a more specific way; their text was accompanied with photos of the cabinets and the revealing of Zonaro's signature on one of the background paintings. Both publications linked the cabinets with Abdülhamid's particular interest in collecting animals.⁹

8 Feza Günargün introduced the cabinets briefly in her article on the History of Zoological Gardens in Turkey. Feza Günargün, *Türkiye'de Hayvanat Bahçeleri*, 199.

9 Oya Özuluğ and Nilgün Kaya, “Yıldız Sarayından Gelen Kuş Dolapları,” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Biyolojik Bellek Koleksiyonları, c. II: Zooloji*, yay. haz. Orhan Küçükler (İstanbul: Nobel Tıp Kitabevleri Yayınları, 2017), 97-104.

Besides speaking about how zoological objects used to be exhibited in Yıldız Palace, the cabinets are relevant in an art history aspect. The fact that the inner surfaces of the cabinets carry landscape paintings enables us to discuss them in the context of a natural history display. As the signatures on the paintings reveal, at least four artists were appointed in the decoration process. While Fausto Zonaro (1854-1929), and Hüseyin Zekâi (1860-1919) were responsible for the landscape paintings at the inner surfaces, two employees of the Yıldız Porcelain Factory (*Yıldız Porselen Fabrika-i Hümayunu*);¹⁰ Halid (Naci) (1875-1927) and A. Nicot decorated the exterior surfaces. In addition to containing overlooked pieces by the four artists mentioned, the cabinets also highlight an unconventional task undertaken by the painters Abdülhamid II commissioned.

Abdülhamid II's "all sorts of curiosities:" Yıldız Palace as a Self-Representation Medium

Yıldız Palace was a unique settlement identified with Abdülhamid II, where the sultan spent all his time, except for exceptional cases like yearly Ramadan visits to Topkapı Palace (*hırka-i saadet ziyareti*). Situated behind high walls, the palace was architecturally established almost as a small city. Yıldız Palace is composed of various buildings in several scales, kiosks, pavilions, romantic gardens filled with rare plants and animals, greenhouses, pools, bridges, and an artificial lake. Apart from the residential buildings, the Palace also contains museums, libraries, factories, a theatre, stables, and birdhouses.¹¹ (F. 3)

10 The Yıldız Porcelain Factory was established in 1894 by Abdülhamid II to provide tile/porcelain objects for the Palaces. Önder Küçükerman, *Dünya Saraylarının Prestij Teknoloisi Porselen Sanatı ve Yıldız Çini Fabrikası* (Ankara: Sümerbank Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1987). The factory is also referred as *Yıldız Çini Fabrika-i Hümayunu* (Imperial Yıldız Tile Factory) in some documents from the Abdülhamid II era. Sinem Serin, "Yıldız Çini/Porselen Fabrikası" (master's thesis, Istanbul University, 2009), 11. In this article, it will be referred to as the Yıldız Porcelain Factory.

11 François Georgeon, Sultan Abdülhamid (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012), 173-181. For detailed information on Yıldız Palace, see Bülent Bilgin, "Türk Saray Mimarisinin Gelişmesi Çerçevesinde Yıldız Sarayı" (PhD. dissertation, Istanbul University, 1993); Afife Batur, "Yıldız Sarayı" *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, v.7 (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993), 520-556; Pars Tuğlacı, *Osmanlı Mimarlığında Batılılaşma Dönemi ve Balyan Ailesi*, (İstanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1981); Deniz Türker, "Ottoman Victoriana: Nineteenth-Century Sultans and the Making of a Palace, 1795-1909" (PhD. dissertation, Harvard University, 2016).



Figure 3: Yıldız Palace; Ada Kiosk, a greenhouse, and the Cihannüma Kiosk. (Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90552/31)

When Halid Ziya, renowned Turkish author and the chief secretary of Sultan Mehmed V (r.1909-1918), visited Yıldız Palace following Abdülhamid II's dethronement, what drew his attention maybe the most was the broad scope of the former sultan's interests. In his memoir, he depicts Abdülhamid's carpentry atelier, collection of animals, plants, etc., in a semi-ironic approach under the title "all sorts of curiosities."¹² The sultan's curiosities walked hand in hand with an impulse to collect and exhibit. Accordingly, they also determined the spatial establishment of the palace.

12 Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray*, 198-206. *Kuşluk-u Hümayun*, an imperial organization established by Abdülaziz to maintain the living spaces and caretaking of the sultan's animals, had also developed during Abdülhamid II's reign. Additionally, various architectural interventions were applied in Yıldız Palace to provide living spaces for the sultan's animals. For a detailed examination, see, Diren Çakılcı, *Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in*.



Figure 4: Imperial Library at the Yıldız Palace.
(Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90552/36)

As well as reflecting the sultan's personal curiosities, the components of the palace also composed a medium of representation. During Abdülhamid II's reign, the Ottoman state had initiated a series of steps and precautions to manage the empire's image and to show the Ottoman empire was a part of the "civilized world."¹³ Since Yıldız Palace was identified with Abdülhamid II and hosted foreign guests of various ranks, including the German Emperor Wilhelm II (1888-1918) and ruler of Qajar Iran, Mozaffar al-Din (r. 1896-1907). The palace held crucial importance in a representative context. The libraries, factories, a theatre, museums, and various collections exhibited in the palace's different sights helped create the desired civilized and refined appearance for the empire. (F. 4) Containing taxidermized animals, butterfly and flying bug samples, the natural history museum (*tarih-i tabii müzesi*)¹⁴ was a vital part of the modern sights of Yıldız Palace.

13 Selim Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998): 135-149.

14 Osman Nuri, *Abdülhamid-i Sani ve Devr-i Saltanatı: Hayat-ı Husûsiye ve Siyâsiyesi* (İstanbul: Kitabhane-i İslam ve Askeri, 1911), 454. According to Osman Nuri, the nature museum was a room located in a kiosk near Hamid Pool at the inner garden (*iç bahçe*), and the same building also contained Abdülhamid II's library and other collections.

Abdülhamid's eagerness to present the modern components in Yıldız is evident in the route he offered to his distinguished foreign guests. Deniz Türker underlines the Palace tour's carefully choreographed nature, and names it "the Sultan's self-designed sightseeing tour."¹⁵ For example, Georgina Müller, who visited Yıldız Palace in 1894, saw the private museum, library, and garden on Abdülhamid II's advice. She defined the museum as "a building consisting of one long room," but did not write about the natural history collection.¹⁶ Mozaffar al-Din, the ruler of Qajar Iran, was one of the most important guests of Yıldız Palace. Also, he did not mention the natural history museum or taxidermized animal collection in his travelogue. However, he did write highly of the theatre, library, and porcelain factory.¹⁷ Abdülhamid II had personally shown the Shah of Iran the artefacts in the museum. Similarly, they toured the gallery between the Şale Kiosk (where the Shah accommodated) and Abdülhamid's private apartment (*Hususî Daire*), in which a painting collection -portraits of Ottoman dynastic members and war scene paintings- was on display. The Sultan told the stories of the paintings himself to Mozaffar al-Din.¹⁸ Anna Bowman Dodd, who saw the Palace a year after Mozaffar al-Din, in 1901, was the one to write about the natural history collection among other sights: "[...] a museum containing the Imperial library and a magnificent collection of miniatures, enamels, and jewels; a most luxurious hammam (Turkish bath); together with a museum of natural history- for the Sultan has that taste and delight in animals [...]"¹⁹ By comparing Georgina Müller's, Mozaffar al-Din's, and Anna Bowman Dodd's memoirs, it would not be wrong to assume the natural history museum – actually, a room inside the palace's museum- was established in 1900-1901.

Considering the natural history museum with the other specific sections of the palace, points out that the reason for the museum's and the taxidermized animal collection's establishment was not solely to entertain the sultan. The precisely planned Yıldız Palace tour provided a medium of imperial self-fashioning for Abdülhamid II; its components enabled emphasizing a carefully crafted profile for him and his palace. A modern sultan who loves theatre, plays instruments and has a certain musical taste, has a collection of paintings, is curious about rare animals, owns a comprehensive library, photo albums, and also, a natural history collection.

15 Deniz Türker, *Ottoman Victoriana*, 31-32.

16 Georgina Müller, *Letters from Constantinople* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 53-54.

17 I used the Turkish translation of Mozaffar al-Din's travelogue. Semaha Eser, "İranlı Seyyahların Eserlerinde İstanbul ve Han Melik-i Sâsânî'nin "İstanbul Hatıraları" Adlı Eseri" (master's thesis, Istanbul University, 2005), 22-36.

18 Semaha Eser, *İranlı Seyyahların*, 31-32.

19 Anna Bowman Dodd, *In the Palaces of the Sultan* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), 75. Georges Dorys's biography also introduces the natural history collection: "Imperial library, and the other part rich collections of bibelots, miniatures on parchment, porcelains, jewels, and all kinds of objects d'art; another museum of natural history, or rather of stuffed animals; an observatory, very well equipped [...]" Georges Dorys, *The Private Life of the Sultan of Turkey*, translated by Arthur Hornblow (New York: D. Appleton, 1902), 131.

Curio Cabinets of Abdülhamid II: Content, Location and Audience

Among Abdülhamid II's curiosities, birds used to hold a significant space.²⁰ "The sovereign is also very fond of birds [...] His preferences, above all, are for pigeons and parrots, of which he possesses hundreds of couples. At each step in Yıldız one comes across well-filled aviaries and pigeon houses." says Georges Dorys.²¹ According to Halid Ziya, "... since he [Abdülhamid II] was a master of this curiosity [raising and breeding pigeons], Yıldız gardens were occupied by pigeons, even more than the courtyard of Beyazıt Mosque."²² (F. 5) The number of the sultan's birds were not to be underestimated. In 1905, 120 of his birds died in their cages, and taxidermized in the Imperial Pharmacy (*Eczane-i Hümayun*).²³ Within butterfly and flying bug samples, a selection of these mounts used to be preserved at the palace's nature museum.²⁴ However, Abdülhamid's collection contained a lot more than a few taxidermized birds. Accordingly, he intended to exhibit his collection by establishing a public natural history museum. Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar stated that the second floor of the Imperial Museum (*Müze-i Hümayun*) was explicitly constructed to exhibit the Sultan's taxidermized birds. He narrated the story in his unique humorous style as follows:

The story of the expansion of the museum more is really weird. We can argue that we owe this expansion to some animals, even to some animals that are known to be soft in the brain, to birds and even to dead birds, the stuffed birds. Sultan Hamid had a lot of stuffed animals and especially birds which lost their beaks and had broken bodies at the Yıldız Palace with things ranging from the best to the worst, the most valuable to the least valuable. They started to get wormy, decay, and stink. Then Sultan Hamid ordered them to be removed from the Palace and to be kept in the museum... Hamdi Bey, who wished to add another floor to the Museum building yet had no courage to ask for permission from the government and who knew how to cooperate well with the autocracy administration, considered this a golden opportunity and knew how to benefit from it. 'There is no room in the museum. If we can add one more floor to the museum, we can place them and exhibit them easily there for ever,' and had the immediate permission to add one more floor. The birds that were in good condition were forwarded to different schools. Those which were in such a bad condition were thrown into the sea from Sarayburnu, thus the museum gained another floor!²⁵

20 Tahsin Paşa, *Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları Sultan Abdülhamid* (İstanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1931), 18.

21 Georges Dorys, *The Private*, 131.

22 Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray*, 198.

23 Çakılcı, *Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in*, 84-85.

24 Osman Nuri, *Abdülhamid-i Sani ve Devr-i Saltanatı: Hayat-ı Husüsiye ve Siyasiyesi*, (İstanbul: Kitabhane-i İslam ve Askeri, 1911), 454.

25 Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar, "Müzelerimiz ve Hamdi Bey II," *Ülkü c. III, no. 16* (Haziran 1934): 290-295.

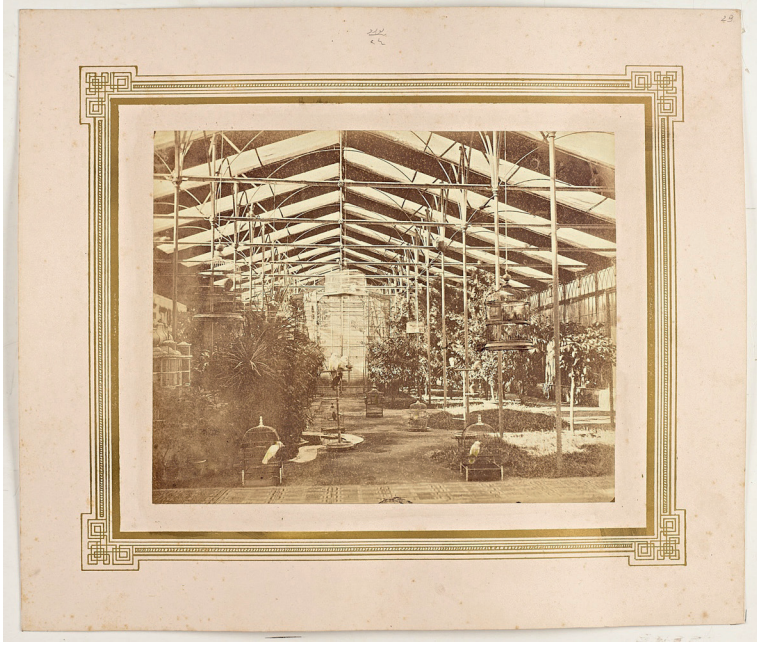


Figure 5: Interior of one of the Yıldız Palace greenhouses with birds in cages. (Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90552/29)

A second floor was added to the Imperial Museum's architectural project in 1889, a year after the beginning of its construction. However, the establishment of the natural history museum in the upper story was never realized. Instead, the second floor of the museum housed a library and studios.²⁶

Together with natural history museums, curio cabinets were another medium to display natural history collections. As mentioned before, Abdülhamid II had a museum/collection in Yıldız Palace; additionally, he supported the foundation of a public one within the Imperial Museum. The Sultan also purchased cabinets to preserve and display his taxidermized birds and arranged them to create a natural history display.

The earliest data to trace back the usage of cabinets' to display taxidermized birds in Yıldız Palace is a document from the Ottoman State Archive dating 1889. It states that a few birds were placed in special cabinets (*tuyur-u mütenevvi' koleksiyonunun mahsus dolaplara vaz' ettirildiği*).²⁷ Even if it is not possible to detect if the mentioned cabinets are the ones we have focused on

26 Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 157. For detailed information on the construction of the Imperial Museum, see Pelin Gürol Öngören, "Displaying Cultural Heritage, Defining Collective Identity: Museums from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early Turkish Republic" (PhD. dissertation, Middle East Technical University, 2012), 91-114.

27 BOA, Y.PRK.EŞA.8/78/1. (5 Cemazeyilevvel 1306 [7 January 1889]). Document was signed with the date 5 Kanunusani 89; month and day in Rumi calendar, year in Gregorian calendar.

or not, the document demonstrates that back in 1889, Abdülhamid's taxidermized birds had been preserved in specially organized cabinets. Ayşe Osmanoğlu, daughter of Abdülhamid II, briefly mentions the cabinets' purchase order and painting processes in her memoir. She wrote XV. Louis style cabinets²⁸ were ordered from France to display taxidermized birds.²⁹



Figure 6: The photograph of the cabinets when they were on display at the Şale Kiosk. (Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90552/78)

As stated above, in addition to reflecting Abdülhamid II's curiosities, the natural history museum in the palace was also significant in a symbolic manner. The cabinets containing the stuffed birds we have focused on in the article can also be evaluated in the same context as the museum. Determining the cabinets' original location is essential to the discussion and conceptualization of their target audience. Luckily, a photograph from Yıldız Albums reveals the room – or at least one of the spots- they used to occupy. (F. 6) The cabinets used to decorate “the ambassador's room,” which was in the lower story of the Şale Kiosk's “new apartment” (*Şale Kasrı Hümayununun yeni dairesinde alt katta süfera odası*). The room mentioned is located on the first floor of the unit Sarkis Balyan built as an extension.³⁰ Compared to the

28 For similar furniture examples in XV. Louis style see Roger de Felice, *French Furniture Under Louis XV*, trans. Florence Simmonds (London: William Heinemann, 1920), 127-134.

29 Osmanoğlu, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamid*, 33. Cabinets for the Galatasaray Numunehanesi were also not produced in the Ottoman Empire; they were ordered from Vienna in 1938. Semih Çelik, *Science, to Understand*, 90.

30 Feryal İrez and Vahide Tezgör, “Yıldız Sarayı Kasrı Hümayunlarından Şale,” *Milli Saraylar* (1992): 106-107.

popular rooms and salons of the kiosk, the ambassador's room seems like a relatively small and modest room.³¹ Ayşe Osmanoğlu also testifies that the cabinets were located in the Şale Kiosk but she does not mention the ambassador's room; instead, she gives the second-floor corridor as their location.³² A few possibilities appear to explain the contradiction between the photograph and Osmanoğlu's memoir. First of all, it is highly possible that there were more than two taxidermized bird cabinets in the palace,³³ a few located on the second floor, and two in the ambassador's room. Alternatively, they could have transferred from one place to another. Lastly, Ayşe Osmanoğlu might be confused about the location of the cabinets. In another photograph of the Şale Kiosk's new apartment's interior, glass cabinets can be seen on both sides of the corridor on the lower floor. They were located at the corridor to the entrance's right, a highly visible place. Although it is not clear in the photograph what was exhibited, it is clear that the cabinets were placed there to display what they contain. (F. 7)



Figure 7: A photograph from the Şale Kiosk's interior.
(Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90552/13)

31 For a detailed examination of the rooms and salons of the kiosk, see İrez and Tezgör, *Yıldız Sarayı*.

32 Osmanoğlu, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamid*, 33.

33 According to Yıldız Palace Museum's inventory, there were four glass cabinets for birds. Murat Candemir and M. Hanefi Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin Tasfiyesi. Yıldız Sarayı Müzesi Tasfiye Komisyonu Defteri* (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2010), 125-126. There exist four cabinets in total in Istanbul University's collection today, which I will mention in the next chapter.



Figure 8: General view of the Şale Kiosk.

(Abdullah Fréres-Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. NEKYA90469/23)

Containing the Ceremonial Apartment (*Merasim Dairesi*), the Şale kiosk was a prestigious building where the most high-ranked guests of Abdülhamid II used to be hosted.³⁴ (F.8) Wilhelm II was accommodated in the Şale Kiosk on both of his visits,³⁵ as well as Mozaffar al-Din in 1900. Fausto Zonaro's memoir testifies that before Wilhelm II's second visit, the chief court painter was assigned to choose a group of paintings for the decoration of the Şale Kiosk.³⁶

34 Şale Kiosk's first unit, which was constructed before 1879, was a modest building compared to the two extensions built in 1889 and 1898. The first extension project carried the chief court architect (*sermimar-ı devlet*) Sarkis Balyan's signature and was erected for Wilhelm II's first visit to Istanbul. For the German emperor's second visit, the second extension, which also contains the iconic ceremonial apartment, was constructed by Raimondo D'Aronco. İrez, Tezgör, "Yıldız Sarayı," 94-125. Afife Batur, "Şale Köşkü," *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* 7 (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı, 1993), 132- 135. For an examination of the Şale Kiosk in relation to its surrounding buildings, see Türker, "Ottoman Victoriana," 32-33, 177-180.

35 Feryal İrez, "Belgeler Işığında son Alman İmparatoru II. Wilhelm'i Konuk Eden Bir Kasrı Hümayûn," *İki Dost Hükümdar Sultan II. Abdülhamid Kaiser II. Wilhelm*, ed. İlona Baytar (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2010): 47-59.

36 Fausto Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında Yirmi Yıl, (Fausto Zonaro'nun Hatıraları ve Eserleri)*, tr. T. Alptekin, Lotto Romano (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008), 183-185. In addition to decorating the Şale Kiosk for Wilhelm II's accommodation, Zonaro also documented the imperial visit by two paintings: "Kaiser Wilhelm and His Wife at Yıldız Şale Pavilion," "Kaiser Wilhelm and His Wife on Dolmabahçe Quay." Zeynep İnankur and Semra Germaner, *Oryantalizm ve Türkiye* (İstanbul: Türk kültürüne Hizmet Vakfı, 1989): 173, 174. Zeynep İnankur also points out that these paintings were probably made based on photographs. Zeynep İnankur, "Zonaro'nun İstanbul'u," *Doğumunun 150. yılında Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro* (İstanbul:

The cabinets might be located in the ambassador's room or the kiosk's second-floor corridor in the scope of Zonaro's "curation." Since one of the paintings in the cabinets' inner surface holds Zonaro's signature, the cabinets must have been painted after 1896, when he started to work at the Yıldız Palace.

It does not seem possible to detect when the cabinets were placed in the kiosk precisely, but being held in the Şale Kiosk means that they were on display for the distinguished guests. Zonaro mentions that Abdülhamid II carefully monitored him while he was choosing the paintings to be displayed at the Şale Kiosk, and he even made significant changes by considering political nuances.³⁷

In addition to the displays at the palace's nature museum, which unfortunately we do not have a visual record of, a piece of the Sultan's collection was on display at Şale Kiosk. Both locations, the ambassador's room and the second-floor corridor of Şale Kiosk used to be on the foreign visitors' route, since not every visitor hosted at the Kiosk might have had the chance to visit the museum. Thus, the curio cabinets were a part of the representative context of Yıldız Palace.

Painters and Paintings of the Cabinets

According to Ayşe Osmanoğlu, the inner surfaces of the cabinets were decorated with landscape paintings, and the stuffed birds were placed as they were flying to create an illusion. What she describes is a diorama-like installation, a popular display method since the nineteenth century.³⁸ Precursors of habitat dioramas (which are defined as perfect combinations with scientific accuracy, art, and technology) are examined in three groups: artificial, geographical, and biological groups. Artificial groups contain an unnaturally large number and diversity of species in a particular landscape. Geographical ones display animals or plants from a specific geographical region or a specific environment. Finally, biological groups show a piece of nature with a natural combination of habitat, plants, and animals, as if taken from the wild.³⁹ In order to evaluate what type of group was assembled in Abdülhamid's cabinets, we need to examine the relationship between the background paintings and the exhibited birds.

Before focusing on the painters and the paintings of the cabinets, I would like to draw attention to a claim by Ayşe Osmanoğlu. According to her, Abdülhamid II himself painted the background paintings of the cabinets she mentioned.⁴⁰ Her claim about Abdülhamid II's artistic contribution is undoubtedly intriguing, but since the two cabinets' inner surface paintings

Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1004): 14.

37 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*, 183-185.

38 Claudia Kamcke and Rainer Hutterer point out the inconsistencies in terminology for diorama-like objects or installations, both in the literature and public use. Kamcke and Hutterer, "History of Dioramas," 11.

39 Kamcke and Hutterer, "History of Dioramas," 11-12.

40 Osmanoğlu, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamid*, 33. Besides commissioning numerous artists, Abdülhamid II himself was interested in painting. But any work documented as being made by him has not yet been identified. Ayşe Eray Yüksel, "Sultan Abdülhamid'in Sanat Hâmilîği," *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi XXVI/2*, (2017): 261-293.

hold signatures, they cannot be associated with the former sultan. However, there are two more cabinets in the Istanbul University Faculty of Science collection without signatures on paintings, which were most probably also brought from Yıldız Palace.



Figure 9, 10: Cabinets with anonymous paintings. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

Right after Abdülhamid II's dethronement, a committee was established for the liquidation and distribution of the Yıldız Palace Museum's collection. The committee members prepared a detailed register that contains the latter destinations of the museum objects.⁴¹ Among them, there are four glass cabinets containing stuffed birds. Two of the cabinets' descriptions are compatible with the ones carrying unsigned paintings in Istanbul University; two meters high, and ornamented with metal.⁴² (F. 9, 10) Since I could not reach any document or photograph to clarify their history, and the paintings in them do not hold any signatures, I have not included them in this article. The unsigned amateur paintings on their inner surfaces bring Ayşe Osmanoğlu's statement to mind, though we do not have satisfactory data to attribute them to Abdülhamid II. The inventory list says that the cabinets used to contain canaries and doves,⁴³ which are not directly related to the background paintings.

41 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 19.

42 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 125-26. Metal ornaments are mostly destroyed but can partly be seen on top of the cabinets today.

43 İbid, 125.

Cabinets included in this article contain eight paintings in total; each has a large inner surface painting and three smaller outer surface paintings. While the paintings on the outer surfaces of the cabinets were purely decorative, the background paintings were chosen to create a natural history display. One of the inner pictures holds Fausto Zonaro's,⁴⁴ the other Hüseyin Zekâî's signature. In this article's scope, it is detected that two of the exterior surface paintings were signed by A. Nicot, and one by Halid. All four artists, Zonaro, Hüseyin Zekâî, Halid, and Nicot, were commissioned by Abdülhamid II on different occasions at some point in their careers. Briefly zooming into the four artists' biographies would enable an understanding of their commonalities and differences. It would also provide a ground to evaluate the cabinets as art historical objects.

Italian painter Fausto Zonaro, who wrote a memoir regarding his years in Istanbul, is the most well-known among the four artists.⁴⁵ He studied at the Technical Institute of Lendinara and the Cignaroli Academy in Verona, and mainly lived and produced in Venice, Paris, and Naples during his early career.⁴⁶ He came to Istanbul in 1891, and not long after his arrival, he stepped into the Ottoman capital's art scene. In addition to working as a commissioned artist, he also gave private painting lessons during his first years.⁴⁷ In 1896, Zonaro completed one of his masterpieces, Ertuğrul Cavalry Regiment (*Ertuğrul Süvari Alayı Köprüde*), which reflects the official aspect and the realism of the oriental world.⁴⁸ Right after the presentation of the Ertuğrul Cavalry Regiment to Abdülhamid II, Zonaro was appointed as the chief court painter (*ressam-ı hazret-i şehriyari*).⁴⁹ The gardens and kiosks of Yıldız Palace were one of his first subjects as a court painter. A year later, in 1897, Abdülhamid II wanted Zonaro to paint a picture depicting the Greco-Turkish War. Following the completion of "The Attack" (*Hücum*), Zonaro was awarded an Osmâni medal, as well as the keys to the home-studio in Akaretler No: 50.⁵⁰ In addition to working on a wide selection of themes, ranging from everyday life scenes in Istanbul to portraits of different court and statesmen's portraits⁵¹ as the chief court painter, Zonaro was also in the commission responsible for the establishment of the Museum of Old

44 Özüluğ and Kaya, *İstanbul Üniversitesi*, 97-104.

45 For detailed information about Zonaro's biography see Erol Makzume and Osman Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003); Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*; Fatma Ürekli, *Sarayın Son Başressamı: Fausto Zonaro*, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2017). For the most comprehensive list of Zonaro's paintings see Makzume and Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı*, 144-355.

46 Makzume and Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı*, 20.

47 For Zonaro's first years in Istanbul, see Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*, 47-124.

48 Francesca Midiri, "Fausto Zonaro: An Artist of Several Styles," in *Fausto Zonaro Vita E Luce Tra Fasti Ottomani e Belle Époque Italiana/Life and Light Between Ottoman Splendour and Italian Belle Époque*, (Florence: Citta Metropolitana di Firenze, 2015), 54.

49 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*, 149.

50 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*, 166-173.

51 For detailed information about Zonaro's biography see Erol Makzume and Osman Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003); Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*; Fatma Ürekli, *Sarayın Son Başressamı: Fausto Zonaro*, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2017). For the most comprehensive list of Zonaro's paintings see Makzume and Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı*, 144-355.

Weapons.⁵² He prepared an album titled “L’Armée Impériale Ottoman” containing twenty-seven watercolor paintings of Ottoman soldiers in various ranks in their military uniforms.⁵³ A short while after Abdülhamid II’s dethronement in 1909, Zonaro left Istanbul and lived in Italy for the rest of his life.

Hüseyin Zekâi (1860-1919) worked under Abdülhamid II’s patronage for thirty years; from his student years at the Military Academy (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*) to 1909.⁵⁴ In 1890, twenty seven of his paintings were already in the imperial collection.⁵⁵ During his time at the palace, he was as a close aide (*yâver*) to Abdülhamid II, and undertook various artistic tasks such as the preparation of photo albums, painting the porcelain objects produced at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory.⁵⁶ He was also among the committee responsible for the preparation of the photo album regarding Mozaffar al-Din’s Istanbul visit.⁵⁷ He surveyed historic buildings in and around Bursa. He accompanied the court’s distinguished foreign visitors on their trips to the Ottoman Lands. For example, he joined Wilhelm II on his Syria tour in 1898 to give information on historical monuments.⁵⁸ Landscapes and Ottoman architectural heritage were his main subjects as a painter, yet he also produced still life, figurative, and interior paintings. Hüseyin Zekâi also wrote a book titled “*Mübeccel Hazine*ler” focusing on Ottoman architectural heritage, which was published in 1913.⁵⁹ Since the students of the Military Academy used to take zoology and botany classes, Zekâi’s educational background is also partly relevant to the specific task he undertook; creating a natural history display.

Halid Naci (1875-1927) was a student at the Naval Academy (*Bahriye Mektebi*) when he drew the attention of Abdülhamid II. Upon the sultan’s order, he started at the Academy of Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi*) as a military student. Following his graduation, Halid Naci was

52 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid’in Hükümdarlığında*, 258. As a result of the commission’s work, a group of old weapons and military uniforms were exhibited at the Yıldız Palace for a while. Ürekli, *Sarayın Son Başressamı*, 136-137. Nilay Özlü, “ ‘Barbarous Magnificence in Glass Cases’: The Imperial Treasury and Ottoman Self-Display at the Topkapı Palace,” *Muqarnas* 39 (2022): 160-161. The commission was dismissed in 1905, and the planned construction of the museum building was canceled in 1905. Zonaro, *Abdülhamid’in Hükümdarlığında* 274; Ürekli, *Sarayın Son Başressamı*, 137.

53 Ürekli, *Sarayın Son Başressamı*, 102-133.

54 Pertev Boyar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devirlerinde Türk Ressamları Hayatları ve Eserleri* (Ankara: Jandarma Basımevi, 1948), 73. Nüzhet İslimyeli, *Asker Ressamlar ve Ekoller* (Ankara: Doğuş Ltd. Şti. Matbaası, 1965), 50.

55 Zehra Güven Öztürk, “Ottoman Imperial Painting Collection Through a Document Dating from 1890,” (master’s thesis, Koç University, 2008), 84-85.

56 Boyar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 73. İslimyeli, *Asker Ressamlar*, 50.

57 For an examination of Mozaffar al-Din Shah’s visit to Istanbul, and its photographic representations, see Başak Kilerci, “Reading Ottoman-Qajar Relations through Photography: Mozaffar al-Din Shah’s Istanbul Visit” (master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2013).

58 Sema Öner, “Osmanlı Sarayı ve Yaver Ressamlar,” *Proceedings of the 11th International Congress of Turkish Art, Utrecht, The Netherlands, August 23-28, 1999*, EJOS, IV (2001): 7.

59 Naciye Turgut, “Üsküdarlı Yâver Ressamlardan: Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa,” *Uluslararası Üsküdar Sempozyumu-VI, 6-9 Kasım 2008 Bildiriler, c. I* (İstanbul: Üsküdar Belediyesi Yayınları, 2009), 127-130. Ahmet Kamil Gören, “Türk Resminin Önemli Bir Odağı: Saray Koleksiyonu”, Gülşen Sevinç Kaya (haz.), *İhtişam ve Tevazu Padişahın Ressam Kulları* (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 2012): 15-39.

sent to the Sèvres Porcelain Factory to study porcelain painting. After his return to Istanbul, he became the Yıldız Porcelain Factory's chief painter. Besides his position at the factory, he also worked on large scale oil paintings; moreover, he contributed to various magazines as an illustrator. Istanbul scenes and landscapes with human or animal figures were his main themes as a painter. Numerous porcelain objects painted by him are preserved in the Yıldız Palace and the Topkapı Palace collections.⁶⁰

A. Nicot seems to be the most mysterious character among the four artists. We do not have any data about his full name, date of birth/death, education, or former employment. Sinem Çelik's research provides a piece of information on him; based on documents from the Ottoman State Archive, she stated that Nicot was employed at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory, at least between 1895-1902. He was the factory's chief painter in 1901 and was awarded by the Sultan with a fourth-range Mecidî Order and with a Medal for Arts (*sanayi madalyası*). He worked on various kinds of porcelain objects by decorating them with still life, landscape, and figurative paintings. His paintings were similar to the Sèvres style.⁶¹

There exists a common point of all four painters, except being commissioned by Abdülhamid II. They were all associated with the Yıldız Porcelain Factory in different ways. Fausto Zonaro mentions in his memoir that he had visited the factory several times to paint some objects and help other artists. Moreover, he was even offered the position of factory manager.⁶² Hüseyin Zekâi also painted various porcelain objects at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory. As mentioned above, A. Nicot and Halid worked as the employees of the factory for years.⁶³ The curio cabinets of Abdülhamid II are the only project for now that we can say with certainty that brought all four of them together. The painting process of the cabinets is an example of how the court artists collaborated on different occasions. (F. 11)

In order to avoid any confusion between the cabinets, I will refer to the cabinet with Fausto Zonaro's painting as *Cabinet A* and the one with Hüseyin Zekâi's painting as *Cabinet B*.

60 Boyar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 118-120. Cezar, *Sanatta Batı'ya Açılış*, 212-213. Sema Karakaşlı, "Milli Saraylarda Yıldız Porselen Koleksiyonu", *Milli Saraylar Koleksiyonu'nda Yıldız Porselenleri* (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi Yayınları, 1998), 36-42. Hülya Kalyoncu, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Yıldız Porselenleri* (İstanbul: Cinius Yayınları, 2015), 90.

61 Küçükerman, *Dünya Saraylarının Prestij*, 137. Demet Coşansel Karakullukçu, *150 yılın Sessiz Tanıkları Saray Porselenlerinden İzler*, ed. İlonca Baytar (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Yayınları, 2007), 65.

62 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümlerinde*, 156-158.

63 For the list of artists whose signatures have been identified on the objects produced at Yıldız Porcelain Factory, see Küçükerman, *Dünya Saraylarının Prestij*, 137.



Figure 11: Artists and craftsmen working at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory. (Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection, no. 90552/85.)



Figure 12: Fausto Zonaro's painting on the Cabinet A's inner surface. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)



Figure 13, 14: Fausto Zonaro's signature in Arabic and Latin alphabets. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

A landscape painting covers the inner surface of the Cabinet A. (F. 12) The nature theme must have been preferred to create the desired illusion, as Ayşe Osmanoğlu mentioned. As seen in the bottom corners, Fausto Zonaro signed the painting in both Latin and Arabic characters. (F. 13, 14) While remaining true to the naturalistic tradition in his portraits and historical scenes, Zonaro often departed from this in his landscape and paintings, using free brush strokes and patches of colour like the French Impressionists.⁶⁴ Unlike the military paintings Zonaro painted under the patronage of Abdülhamid II, the cabinet's background painting can be associated with the impressionist style based on the evident brushstrokes. Cabinet A's painting was not Zonaro's only work associated with Abdülhamid II's enthusiasm regarding natural history. Zonaro mentions that he had been directly appointed by the Sultan to paint a deer head, and he was given a plaster deer head with actual horns on it to be used as a model. Additionally, he observed actual deers in the gardens of Yıldız.⁶⁵

Portraying cacti, flowers, wide mountains, and a clear blue sky, the background painting of the Cabinet A depicts an uninhabited landscape without any sign of human existence. *Opuntia* types of cacti and colourful flowers in the foreground evoke a warm, but not arid climate. An examination based on the comprehensive catalogue of Zonaro's work⁶⁶ shows that he had used *Opuntia* cacti in two landscape paintings he did in Naples between 1883-85.⁶⁷ No other example exists in the catalogue besides the two examples from Naples. Why could have Zonaro revisited this particular plant for an Istanbul based painting? If it was not a random choice, it could have been related to the bird species planned to be displayed in the cabinet. Unfortunately, the cabinet's photograph from the Yıldız Albums does not allow us to detect the bird species exhibited in Cabinet A. Only a big bird- maybe a hawk, vulture, etc.- can be seen in the left bottom corner. Another source to identify the birds is again Yıldız Palace Museum's inventory list, in which it was stated that one cabinet was full of pigeons, and the other one contained pigeons and various birds (*tuyur-ı saire*).⁶⁸ A comparison of the photograph and the inventory list shows that Cabinet A was the one with pigeons and other species. Since it is not a very natural sight for large raptors and pigeons to live together in the mountains full of cacti, it does not seem possible to argue that the background painting was directly related to the bird species on display. Also, the co-existence of a large wild bird with other small ones makes it clear that Cabinet A used to contain an artificial group.

64 Aykut Gürçağlar, "Osmanlı Sarayında Bir Ressam-ı Şehriyari Fausto Zonaro ve Türk Resim Sanatına Etkileri," *9. Milletlerarası Türk Sanatları Kongresi* c.2 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Milli Kütüphane Basımevi, 1995): 219-221. Zeynep İnankur, Zonaro'nun İstanbul'u, 14.

65 Zonaro, *Abdülhamid'in Hükümdarlığında*, 281.

66 Makzume and Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı*, 144-355.

67 Zonaro depicted the same plant in his paintings titled *Campagna Vesuviana* (Vesuvian countryside) and *Studio Di Fichi D'India* (Prickly Pear Study). These two paintings can be seen in Makzume and Öndeş, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı*, 156, 162.

68 According to the inventory records, the gilded glass cabinets with paintings on the lower parts, measuring 210x95 centimeters in size, and filled with taxidermized birds were delivered to the Ministry of Education. Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 125-26.

The landscape painting with flying mallards, on the door of Cabinet A is anonymous. (F. 15) The paintings on the left and right surfaces of the cabinet are signed by A. Nicot. For the cabinet's left surface, he painted a forest road lined with trees and flying long-tailed birds, probably swallows. On the right side, similar birds are depicted as flying over a stream. (F. 16, 17)



Figure 15: Anonymous painting on the Cabinet A's door. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)



Figure 16, 17: A. Nicot's paintings on the Cabinet A's right and left surfaces. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

Hüseyin Zekâî's piece inside Cabinet B holds his signature *Zekâî Kulları* (their servant Zekâî) on the left bottom. (F. 18, 19) The composition consists of a river flowing between high and steep rocky hills. Unlike the lively and colourful atmosphere of Zonaro's painting, brown rocky hills occupy a large area in Hüseyin Zekâî's landscape. Once again, the question regarding the possible relationship between the bird species displayed and the painting's theme arouses. The cabinet's photograph from the Yıldız Albums reveals there were at least twelve birds, and the

Palace's inventory list states that the cabinet was full of pigeons.⁶⁹ Accordingly, it seems like the background painting was not directly depicting a specific habitat for the exhibited birds.

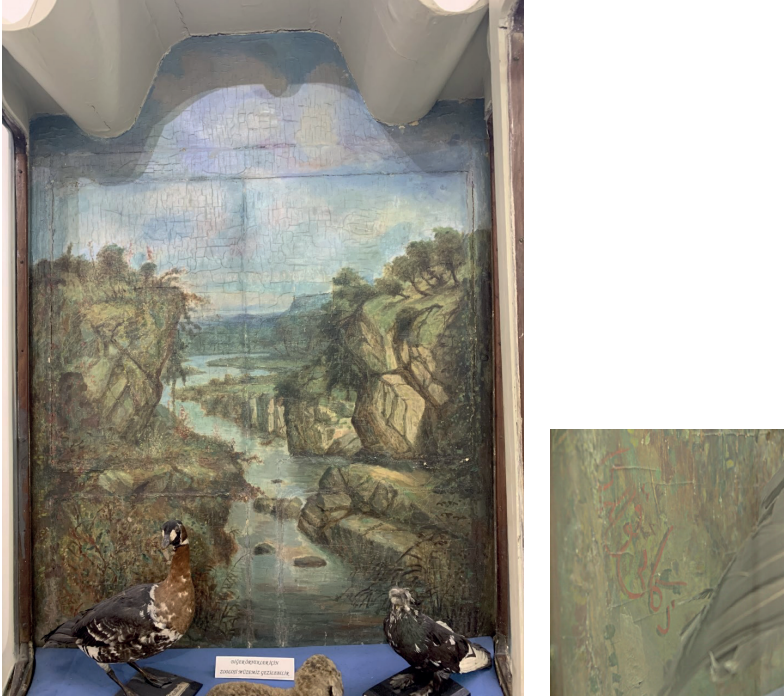


Figure 18: Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa's painting on the Cabinet B's inner surface. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

Figure 19: Hüseyin Zekâi Paşa's signature in Arabic alphabet. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

All three paintings on the outer surfaces of Cabinet B are swan-themed. An anonymous landscape scene with white swans, one flying and the other floating on a river, is located on the front door. (F. 20) Made by Halid (Naci), the painting on the right panel includes detailed leaves and a few flowers on the front. However, the swans' movement is not highlighted as in the front panel. Indeed, they seem like they are standing still on the water. (F. 21)

The painting on the left side has been recently restored. The date 2003 can be seen on the right bottom corner. An original signature cannot be detected on it, so its artist remains unidentified. (F. 22)

69 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 125-126.



Figure 20: Anonymous painting on the Cabinet B's door. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)



Figure 21, 22: Hâlid's (Naci) painting on the Cabinet B's right surface and the anonymous painting on the Cabinet B's left surface. (Müjde Dila Gümüş, 2018)

Studies on Yıldız, Dolmabahçe, and Topkapı Palaces' porcelain collections show that Halid Naci and Nicot frequently painted twin porcelain objects. Based on this fact, it was argued that there was a mild competition between the two artists, which resulted in them complementing each other.⁷⁰ The argument applies to the curio-cabinets, too. Besides being evident on twin cabinets, the stylistic similarity is also visible in their cabinet-paintings. A difference between them is how they depict movement; while Nicot's birds look lively and in a move, Halid's are more stable and dull. Similar examples to the paintings on the cabinets also exist on various objects painted by A. Nicot and Halid Naci at the Factory. For instance, two vases, one with the signature of A. Nicot,⁷¹ and the other by Halid⁷² are almost identical to the Cabinet B's

70 Karakullukçu, *150 yılın Sessiz Tanıkları*, 65.

71 The vase with inventory number 34/81 is in the Topkapı Palace Museum Collection. Kalyoncu, *Topkapı Sarayı*, 230.

72 The vase with inventory number 52/1429 is exhibited in the Dolmabahçe Palace, room 226. Önder Küçükerman, Nedret Bayraktar and Semra Karakaşlı, *Milli Saraylar Koleksiyonu'nda Yıldız Porseleni* (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi Yayınları, 1998), 84.

right surface painting. (F. 23, 24) This considerable similarity between the compositions by Halid and Nicot indicates that they utilized some kind of templates. Additional examples support the stated production method, such as watercolor designs made by Hoca Ali Rıza to be used at the factory.⁷³



Figure 23: Vase produced at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory and painted by A. Nicot. (Kalyoncu, *Topkapı Sarayı*, 230)



Figure 24: Vase produced at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory and painted by Halid. (Küçükerman, Bayraktar and Karakaşlı, *Milli Saraylar Koleksiyonu*'nda, 84)

From Yıldız Palace to Istanbul University: The Location and Audience Shift of the Cabinets

As stated before, following Abdülhamid II's dethronement, a group of officers were appointed to make detailed inventories of the objects and items in the Yıldız Palace Museum for the liquidation process. According to the detailed notebook the Committee members prepared, most of the objects were transferred to the Imperial Treasury (*Hazine-i Hassa*), the Imperial Museum, and the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Nezareti*).⁷⁴ Among the items distributed to

73 Nedret Bayraktar and Nur Taviloğlu, "İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesindeki Bir Albüm ve Yıldız Porselenleri", *Sanat Dünyamız* IX/28 (1983): 13-17.

74 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 19.

the Ministry of Education are six glass cabinets; two housing various sea creatures, and four containing stuffed birds. In addition to the cabinets, taxidermized animals (some solo, some with pedestals) excavated from the “Animal Museum” nearby the Ceremonial Apartment were also handed over to the Ministry of Education.⁷⁵

In the inventory records, it is stated that the gilded glass cabinets with paintings on the lower parts, 210x95 centimeters in size, and filled with taxidermized birds, were delivered to the Ministry of Education on 24 May 1910.⁷⁶ A petition was written by the Ministry of Education just the next day, stating that the former Sultan’s taxidermized bird and mammal collections had already been distributed to different educational institutions. It was also stated that the preservation of the cabinets was a problematic issue. Birds and mammals were fixed into the glass cabinets by specialized equipment, and any attempt to remove them might damage the exhibited creatures. For this reason, the birds were requested to be removed together with the glass parts of the cabinets.⁷⁷ While the glass part was described as “artistically insignificant,” the cabinets’ lower parts were referred to as “main cabinets.” As a result of the correspondence chain between the Ministry of Education, Office of the Grand Vizier, and the sultan’s chief secretary, it was decided to keep the “main cabinets” at the Sultan’s Private Treasury.⁷⁸ The glass-cabinets in Istanbul University’s collection do not carry a visible trace of any detachment, so, it seems like the decision may not have been implemented. Both the inventory records and correspondences indicate that Abdülhamid II’s taxidermized animal collection within their cabinets was distributed to educational institutions right after 1909. The cabinets were most probably transferred to *Darülfünun*⁷⁹ back then. In 1937, they were brought to the Zoology Museum of the Biology Institute.⁸⁰ An inventory record⁸¹ from the Istanbul University Faculty of Science Archive demonstrates that in 1967, the “cabinets with the paintings of Fausto Zonaro and Hüseyin Zekâi” were at the faculty’s collection.

Conclusion

Abdülhamid II’s two curio-cabinets are significant in several aspects; as unique Ottoman responses to the nineteenth century’s natural history curiosity, as symbols of the Abdülhamid II’s modernity among other specific venues and collections in Yıldız Palace, and as art historical objects. This article’s focus was providing a close reading of two particular cabinets in a representative and art history context. Positioning them among other Ottoman natural history collections was beyond its scope. These curious topics remain open to be answered in further research.

75 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 113, 117, 125-26, 131, 157-58, 178.

76 Candemir and Kutluoğlu, *Bir Cihan Devlerinin*, 125-126.

77 BOA, MF.MKT.1153/18 (15 Cemaziyelevvel 1328 [25 May 1910]).

78 BOA, İ.MBH.2/54 (27 Cemaziyelevvel 1328 [6 June 1910]).

79 Darülfünun was a higher education institution established in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. In 1933, it was re-established as Istanbul University. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “Dârülfünun”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, c 8 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1993), 521-525.

80 Özuluğ and Kaya, “*Istanbul Üniversitesi Zooloji Müzesi*”, 96.

81 Inventory list of 1967, Istanbul University, Faculty of Science archive. I am grateful to Oya Özuluğ for providing the inventory list.

As well as being reflections of Abdülhamid II's personal curiosity, the cabinets were also symbols compatible with the modern and civilised image that he wanted to maintain. The number of people who had the opportunity to visit those certain sights in the palace may not have been very large but contained an emperor and a sheik. On the other hand, the desired image for the Sultan reached a wider audience through the travelogues written by the foreign visitors. Abdülhamid II was portrayed as a sultan who enjoyed theatre, had a collection of paintings as well as rare artefacts of which he knew all their stories, was curious about rare animals, owned a comprehensive library, and acquired a natural history collection by keeping up with trending interests in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the natural history collection was on display in Yıldız Palace Museum. A part of the collection was kept in the Şale Kiosk, where the most influential guests used to be hosted, in curio cabinets decorated as natural history displays.

The cabinets were a product of a collective work of four painters commissioned by Abdülhamid II. Fausto Zonaro's and Hüseyin Zekâî's background paintings were particularly relevant since they determined the imaginary environment for the exhibited birds. However, as a result of this research, it is understood that the paintings do not seem directly related to the bird species exhibited. The characteristics of the two landscapes are also quite different compared to each other. While Fausto Zonaro created a lively and colourful composition and used free brush strokes, brown rocky hills and a calm atmosphere are dominant in Hüseyin Zekâî's piece. Examining Halid's and A. Nicot's paintings in the context of their other works gave fruitful results, such as identifying the same compositions on two porcelain objects painted at the Yıldız Porcelain Factory.

As illustrated in detail above, Abdülhamid II's cabinets cannot be defined as sophisticated habitat dioramas. The existence of at least twelve birds in Cabinet B, which creates an unnaturally crowded environment, and the co-existence of a raptorial bird and swallow-like birds in Cabinet A, indicates that the birds were not assembled in a biological or geographical context. The background paintings also do not seem directly related to the bird species exhibited. These facts demonstrate that the cabinets were diorama-like installations.

Abdülhamid II's curio cabinets, which were created through meticulous stages; from being ordered from France to artists' decorating them with landscape paintings, hold a unique status in which curiosity towards nature intersects with art on an imperial scale.

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