

February 24, 2017

Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay Wins the 16th Vehbi Koç Award for Her Contributions to Cultural Heritage

KOÇ HOLDING CHAIRMAN ÖMER M. KOÇ:

“TODAY WE REWARD ONE OF MANY UNKNOWN HEROES WHO DEDICATE A LIFETIME TO DEFENDING OUR HERITAGE.”

The Vehbi Koç Award recognises outstanding individual or institutional contribution to raising the quality of life in education, health or culture; this year’s recipient was Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay for her pioneering work in cultural heritage. Speaking at the award ceremony, Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç said: “We are delighted that our family and the Vehbi Koç Foundation are not alone in carrying out sterling work in the preservation of our cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations: today, hundreds of scholars meticulously pursue the past, and document their findings with equal attention to detail. Unsympathetic restorations, and destruction of the variety and integrity of cultural heritage, on the other hand, persist as regrettable aspects of life. A scholar, a civil servant or an ordinary citizen speaks in defence of a monument, a historic building or a great collection that would otherwise remain mute. Sadly these unknown heroes don’t always succeed. Today’s recipient of the Vehbi Koç Award is one of these unknown heroes – or more accurately, a heroine. Please don’t think I’m doing her an injustice: her fame is assured in her own field around the world, but her name might not be known to many of us otherwise.”

Every year the Vehbi Koç Foundation, a pioneer establishment in its field in Turkey, rewards an individual or institution for outstanding contribution to education, health or culture, in alternating order. This year, it was the turn of culture, and the 2017 Vehbi Koç Award winner was announced at a meeting attended by members of the Koç family and guests. A shortlist of three candidates was drawn up by the Selection Committee headed by Prof. Dr. Mehmet Özdoğan, and the Vehbi Koç Foundation Board of Directors selected Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay for her work in cultural heritage. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay, the sixteenth winner of the Vehbi Koç Award, is one of the top conservation experts in the world. She has developed a unique approach to protect a vast range of cultural assets from archaeological sites through to Ottoman buildings, has proven this approach in the restoration projects she has undertaken, and is now a leading authority frequently consulted by UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites on all matters pertaining to Ottoman buildings outside the borders of the Republic of Turkey, as well as the theoretical debates on the science of architectural conservation.

Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay was given the sixteenth Vehbi Koç Award by Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç.

Ömer M. Koç: “Turkey is one of the first names that come to mind when it comes to cultural heritage.”

Speaking at the award ceremony held at the İş Arts and Culture Centre, Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç described Turkey as one of the first names that come to mind when it comes to cultural heritage, one that had hosted ancient civilisations in eastern and western Anatolia, and added: “Seljuk and Ottoman civilisations embraced the tradition of adorning these lands with their own creations. Whether out of economic or cultural reasons, the Ottomans sadly failed to properly treasure this legacy in their final years. Major progress in the early years of the Republic included training archaeologists as the authorities took every opportunity to emphasise the duty of the state and citizen alike to safeguard the legacy of past civilisations.”

Ömer M. Koç: “We, the Koç family and the Vehbi Koç Foundation, do our utmost to protect this cultural heritage.”

Expressing his pride in the fact that the Koç family and the Vehbi Koç Foundation do their utmost to protect this cultural heritage, Ömer M. Koç continued: “Our journey began with the Sadberk Hanım Museum in 1980, the first ever private museum in Turkey, continued with the Rahmi Koç Museum and attracted a much wider audience with the Pera Museum. Koç University’s Anatolian Civilisations Research Centre soon grew into a true reference centre and a role model to cultural institutions. Launched by the Vehbi Koç Foundation, the Vehbi Koç Ankara Research Centre in the capital, and the Suna and İnan Kiraç Mediterranean Civilisations Centre in Antalya quickly developed and joined the Koç University, where I am convinced they will both flourish.”

Ömer M. Koç: “Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay is one of our unknown heroes famous around the world in their own fields.”

Ömer M. Koç continued: ‘We are delighted that our family and the Vehbi Koç Foundation are not alone in carrying out sterling work in the preservation of our cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations: today, hundreds of scholars meticulously pursue the past, and document their findings with equal attention to detail. Unsympathetic restorations, and destruction of the variety and integrity of cultural heritage, on the other hand, persist as regrettable aspects of life. A scholar, a civil servant or an ordinary citizen speaks in defence of a monument, a historic building or a great collection that would otherwise remain mute. Sadly these unknown heroes don’t always succeed. Today’s recipient of the Vehbi Koç Award is one of these unknown heroes – or more accurately, a heroine. Please don’t think I’m doing her an injustice: her fame is assured in her own field around the world, but her name might not be known to many of us otherwise.’

“She has a reputation for uncompromising commitment to her principles in research and implementation.”

Ömer M. Koç concluded by reading a section of the basis for selection provided by the Selection Committee: “Ahunbay is world famous for her teaching and professional career. This is partly due to the opportunities offered by the newly enlightened Turkey in the Republican era; and the consensus of opinion amongst her colleagues attributes it to relentless hard work. Zeynep Ahunbay is a scholar with a reputation for uncompromising commitment to her principles in research and implementation. Although this direct and unequivocal professional stance essential to introducing universal principles in her own county has undoubtedly taken its toll, by positively instilling them in numerous students, she has multiplied those same principles. Conferring the Vehbi Koç Award on Zeynep Ahunbay for her model career, ground-breaking contribution to the science of cultural heritage and steadfast attitude in professional ethics will surpass the personal aspect of the award, and stimulate much-needed rational and committed attitudes in all professional areas.”

Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay: “Cultural heritage is the heritage of humankind.”

The ceremony also included a short film on Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay, the recipient of the sixteenth Vehbi Koç Award. In her interview, Prof. Ahunbay expresses her pride at winning this award set up to honour someone who was highly industrious and productive, the world-famous Vehbi Koç, and adds: “Cultural heritage refers to the heritage of humankind at large, whether it originates in India, Peru or the North Pole; it’s all humankind’s work. It is an honour to be working on cultural heritage; I love my job. That’s not to say it hasn’t been tough at times: losses are heartbreaking; so many monuments are destroyed in war, and a reconstruction is never the same. Battles and skirmishes are still raging around the world even as we speak. I was devastated to see the destruction of the Aleppo Gate. Quite out of the blue, some terrorists decide to raze one of countless equally great monuments. They are devoid of all semblance of humanity. It is up to us to safeguard cultural heritage from humans and nature alike.”

Basis for Selection and about Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay:

The Selection Committee members Prof. Dr. Engin Akyürek, Prof. Dr. Sema Doğan, Prof. Dr. Aslı Özyar, and Prof. Dr. Turgut Saner, and chairman Prof. Dr. Mehmet Özdoğan summarised their basis for selection as follows:

Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ahunbay is a scholar who has developed a unique approach to protect a vast range of cultural heritage from archaeological sites through to Ottoman buildings, and has proven this approach in the restoration projects she has undertaken. She is one of the top experts in conservation in the world. A vanguard of architectural heritage conservation in Turkey, Ahunbay has trained numerous students and thereby contributed to the development of this field as a solid discipline.

Today cultural heritage is under increasing pressure; that is when the presence of scholars like Ahunbay dedicated to conservation becomes even more important. The pressure is great, the heritage deserving protection is greater, and genuine defenders of this struggle are few and far between. Ahunbay is universally respected for her stance, views and actions on scientific conservation of cultural heritage. She carries on this relentless fight to conserve architectural and archaeological treasures, and does so with her customary grace and equanimity.

Zeynep Ahunbay went to the American College for Girls in Arnavutköy before doing a Master's Degree in Architecture and Civil Engineering. Having benefited from the era of cooperation between architectural historians and restoration experts at the Istanbul Technical University, Ahunbay's professional career charted the same course, soon proven by her Ph.D. paper (1975) on the Sultan Ahmed Complex in Istanbul. She completed her Diploma Course on Conservation Studies at the University of York with a paper on the ancient city of Side; this work was later reflected in the restoration of the Temple of Apollo in Side.

Ahunbay has directed conservation and restoration projects in numerous locations such as Istanbul, Edirne, Bursa, Gaziantep, Safranbolu, Tarsus, Samsat, and Hasankeyf. Her high-profile accomplishments include Byzantine era restoration projects around Istanbul: Hagia Sophia, the Zeyrek (Pantokrator Convent) Church, and the Yedikule section of the Land Walls. She has, in the meanwhile, successfully converted her academic work on Ottoman era buildings and in particular the work of Mimar Sinan into restoration: by taking on the academic advisor role to countless institutions such as the Foundations Directorate, she has prevented major errors in restoration.

Ahunbay's theoretical approach and architectural conservation attempts cover a vast range, from the urban through to individual building and minute detail, from Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire through to various stages of the Ottoman era. Her reputation has spread beyond the borders of Turkey, and invited not only her counsel but also actual restoration work on splendid Ottoman monuments in former Ottoman lands such as Aleppo, Jerusalem, Kosovo and the Yemen. That she was invited to the International Bosnia-Herzegovina Cultural Heritage Conservation Commission formed as an outcome of the Dayton Agreement that ended the Bosnian War is significant: throughout her eight years on the commission, she has played an active role in the decisions concerning the conservation and restoration of the country's cultural assets as a whole, including the Bridge of Mostar.

Zeynep Ahunbay has served as President of the Turkish National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites for two consecutive terms between 1999-2005, frequently participated in local Heritage Alert assessment boards on recommendations for the UNESCO World Heritage list, and offered advice. In addition, she has provided the staunchest possible academic support for the Turkish Chamber of Architects' efforts to conserve architectural heritage. Together with the Turkish chapter of Europa Nostra, she has assisted the work of agencies and other NGOs on the

protection of cultural assets. Architectural conservation is generally regarded as a construction issue in Turkey, one that needs little in the way of scientific publications; Ahunbay, in contrast, has published numerous articles and books. The basic textbook in architectural conservation in Turkey, the Tarihi Çevre Koruma ve Restorasyon [Conservation and Restoration of the Historic Environment] (1996) is one example; the Istanbul chapter on Dünya Mirasında Türkiye [Turkey in World Heritage] (2006) and her Cultural Heritage of Turkey (2009) are two others.

Ahunbay is world famous for her teaching and professional career. This is partly due to the opportunities offered by the newly enlightened Turkey in the Republican era; and the consensus of opinion amongst her colleagues attributes it to relentless hard work. Zeynep Ahunbay is a scholar with a reputation for uncompromising commitment to her principles in research and implementation. Although this direct and unequivocal professional stance essential to the introduction of universal principles in her own county has undoubtedly taken its toll, by positively instilling them in numerous students, she has multiplied those same principles.

Conferring the Vehbi Koç Award on Zeynep Ahunbay for her model career, groundbreaking contribution to the science of cultural heritage and steadfast attitude in professional ethics will surpass the personal aspect of the award, and stimulate much-needed rational and committed attitudes in all professional areas.

About the Vehbi Koç Foundation:

Founded on 17 January 1969 by Vehbi Koç, the doyen of Turkish industry, the Vehbi Koç Foundation is justifiably proud of its 48-year track record: scholarships provided to over 50,000 students, support extended to hundreds of projects, and dozens of institutions donated to the nation. Modern Turkey's first private charitable foundation, it has always pioneered model services with the intention to raise quality of life in education, healthcare and culture. For further information on the Vehbi Koç Foundation, please go to www.vkv.org.tr.

About the Vehbi Koç Award:

Turkey's biggest financial prize launched in 2002, the \$100,000 Vehbi Koç Award aims to recognise and reward exemplary service by individuals or institutions in the fields of education, health or culture.

- 2002 - Culture: Topkapı Palace Museum; for invaluable cultural activities,
- 2003 - Education: AÇEV, the Mother and Child Education Foundation; for successful education initiatives,
- 2004 - Health: Bilkent University Faculty of Sciences, Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics; for contributions to healthcare,
- 2005 – Culture: Fazıl Hüsnu Dağlarca; for lifelong achievement in literature,
- 2006 - Education: Nuri Okutan, Governor of Sakarya; for contribution to pre-school education,

- 2007 - Health: Prof. Aziz Sancar; for unravelling the Molecular Mechanisms of DNA Repair and Circadian Clock Control,
- 2008 - Culture: Prof. Mehmet Özdoğan; for contribution to the archaeology of the pre-history of the Marmara Region,
- 2009 - Education: Prof. Türkan Saylan; for lifelong commitment to education,
- 2010 - Health: Prof. Turgay Dalkara; for international achievement in Vascular Neurology,
- 2011 - Culture: Prof. Filiz Ali and the Ayvalık International Music Academy (AIMA); for international recognition of the young musicians' orchestra founded by Turkey's most influential musicologist and critic,
- 2012 - Education: Prof. Nermin Abadan Unat; for educating hundreds of Political Science students and academicians, and for her pioneering and exemplary work on women and international migration.
- 2013 - Health: Prof. Gökhan Hotamışlıgil; for his discoveries that transformed the medical approach to metabolic disorders,
- 2014 - Culture: Prof. Zeynep Çelik; a pioneering woman scholar in the field of Ottoman urban history, architecture and culture,
- 2015 - Education: Prof. Ali Nesin and Mathematics Village Project; for dedicating a lifetime to the study, teaching and raising the profile of science and mathematics in particular amongst the young generation, and his Mathematics Village Project,
- 2016 - Health: Prof. Kamil Uğurbil; for his body of work on the human brain.