

TURKEY

The cinematograph first entered the Ottoman palace in 1896 as the sultan's entertainment. The following year, the first public exhibition took place in the Sponeck pub in Istanbul. Cinema remained itinerant in Turkey until 1908, when Sigmund Weinberg, a Romanian citizen of Polish descent, opened the first movie theater, Pathé, in Istanbul. By the 1920s cinema had become a part of everyday life in the country's big cities, and a decade later magazines were already referring to a social "illness" called "cinemania." Cinema was the most popular mass entertainment in Turkish popular culture until the 1970s, when television was introduced.

When Turkish filmmaking became an industry in the 1950s it was catering to an audience whose expectations had been being shaped by foreign films since the 1920s. American films have always had an immense influence on mainstream Turkish cinema, and European films and movements have served as consistent models for filmmakers in search of alternative cinemas. Despite the foreign influences, Turkey's Westernization and modernization movements dating back to the 1920s, together with political and economical instabilities, have provided filmmakers with a rich source of inspiration, sometimes culminating in very original films. Nevertheless, ninety years of Turkish filmmaking, which has produced some six thousand films in a wide variety of genres and movements, lacks a coherent identity and style as a national cinema.

THE OTTOMAN AND EARLY REPUBLICAN PERIODS

The army officer Fuat Uzkınay's short documentary *Ayastefanos'taki Rus Abidesinin Yikilisi* (The Demolition

of the Russian Monument at St. Stephen, 1914) is generally acknowledged as the first Turkish film. In 1915 General Enver, who was influenced by the practices of the film unit of the German army, established the Army Cinema Department with Weinberg as its first commissioner. This department and, later, the semiofficial organization the Veterans Association pioneered film production during the Ottoman period with war documentaries, newsreels, and a few features. In 1916 Weinberg attempted to make the first feature film, *Himmet Aga'nin Izdivaci* (*The Marriage of Himmet Aga*), but the shooting was interrupted with the conscription of the actors due to the Dardanelles War. The film was completed by Uzkınay in 1918. *Pence* (*The Claw*, 1917) and *Casus* (*The Spy*, 1917) by the journalist Sedat Simavi, were the first features shown to the public. The first period of Turkish feature filmmaking, consisting of eight films (mostly war and spy films and comedies adapted from French plays and Turkish novels), ended with the establishment of Turkey's first private studio, Kemal Film, in 1922.

Turkey entered a fast process of modernization with the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923. Within the framework of republican projects intended to create a new Turkish identity as well as a nation-state, government reforms distanced the country from its Islamic and Eastern past and brought it closer to contemporary western societies. Although the new republican state included music and performing arts in its modernization agenda, it did not touch cinema at all, nor did it attempt to press cinema into service in the construction of the new national identity. Lacking both state support and intervention, Turkish filmmaking

began to take shape in the hands of Kemal Film and its director, Muhsin Ertugrul (1892–1979), one of the leading actors and directors of Turkish theater at the time.

Ertugrul dominated Turkish cinema until the late 1930s with some thirty films that all looked like plays on celluloid in terms of *mise-en-scène* and acting. After a transition period (1939–1950) during which theater's influence continued despite the end of Ertugrul's monopoly, Turkish films began to have a more cinematographic quality. Along with Lütfi Ömer Akad, who was the most significant director of the "cinematographers' period," Metin Erksan (b. 1929), Atif Yılmaz (b. 1926), Osman F. Seden (1924–1998), and Memduh Ün (b. 1920), were the pioneers of the development of a cinematic language in Turkey during the 1950s.

YESILCAM (GREEN PINE) CINEMA

Cinema in Turkey meant mostly European and American films until 1948, when the 75 percent municipal tax on exhibition was reduced to 25 percent for indigenous films. After this tax break, which would be the only state support for film until the mid-1980s, an indigenous film industry based on private capital and enterprise began to take shape in Yesilcam Street of Beyoglu, Istanbul. With the rapid increase in the number of film companies, domestic films, movie theaters, and audiences, cinema ceased to be an elitist activity in big cities and became a popular entertainment spreading to even the small villages in Anatolia by the 1950s.

Yesilcam, which soon became the little Hollywood of Turkey with its own genres and star system, enjoyed its heyday between 1965 and 1975, with a yearly production of two hundred to three hundred films. In 1966 Turkey was fourth, just behind India, in world film production, with 238 films. Many of these were moralistic melodramas focusing on the theme of modernization and the relationships between heterosexual couples from different social and economic classes, which affirmed traditional gender roles and social values against "degenerate" modern lifestyles: *Surtuk* (Streetwalker, 1965), *Karagozlum* (My Dark Eyed One, 1967), *Ask Mabudesi* (Love Goddess, 1969). Also popular were serial comedies: *Hababam Sinifi* (Class of Hababam, 1975–1978), *Turist Omer* (Omer the Tourist, 1964–1973), *Tosun Pasa* (Tosun Pasha, 1976), *Kapicilar Kirali* (The King of Doorkeepers, 1976); historical action and adventure serials and films: *Kara Murat* (Karamurat, 1972–1978), *Malkocoglu* (1966–1971), *Adsiz Cengaver* (The Warrior Without a Name, 1970); and detective and gangster films: *Cingoz Recai* (Recai the Shrewd, 1969), *Vur Vur Kac Kac* (Hit Hit Run Run, 1972), *Umutsuzlar* (*The Hopeless Ones*, 1971).

The expansion of television beginning in 1968, as well as increasing social chaos and political violence, brought an enormous reduction in movie attendance, causing a crisis in Yesilcam towards the end of the 1970s. Because of that development, coupled with the indifference of the state, whose interest in cinema was limited to censorship until the mid-1980s, production fell to only sixty-eight films in 1980. "Sex films" that imitated Italian erotic comedies, and "arabesque films," which featured popular arabesque singers—the voices of migrants from rural areas to big cities—were the two major trends during the crisis that lasted from the end of the 1970s through the 1980s.

OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM

Despite the popular appeal of Yesilcam, criticism that it was a commercial cinema that steered away from social problems and realities motivated two major movements outside the mainstream. Alongside the social and the political developments following the 27 May 1960 revolution and the liberal social atmosphere created by the new constitution, there appeared a group of films focusing on the social problems of cities and villages, including issues of class, migration, urbanization, unemployment, and workers' rights. This "movement of social realism," which was influenced by Italian neorealism, began in 1960 with Metin Erksan's *Gecelerin Otesi* (*Beyond the Nights*) and lasted until 1965 with films by Halit Refig (*Gurbet Kuslari* [*Birds of Exile*, 1963]), Ertem Gorec (*Karanlikta Uyananlar* [*Those Awakening in the Dark*, 1965]), and Duygu Sagiroglu (*Bitmeyen Yol* [*The Road That Has No End*, 1965]). Most of the films associated with the movement were commercial failures and had to deal with state censorship, which had been in place since 1939.

Another movement outside Yesilcam practices, the "young Turkish cinema," emerged in the late 1970s with a generation of new filmmakers following the realistic path of Akad and Yılmaz Güney (1937–1984), whose *Umut* (*Hope*, 1970) became a milestone in Turkish cinema. Many of these filmmakers, including Korhan Yurtsever (*Firatin Cinleri* [*The Spirits of Euphrates*, 1977]), Yavuz Ozkan (*Maden* [*The Mine*, 1978]), Erden Kiral (*Kanal* [*The Canal*, 1978]), Zeki Okten (*Suru* [*The Herd*, 1978]), Yılmaz Güney, and Serif Gön (b. 1944) (*Yol* [*The Way*, 1982]), dealt with the social problems of rural areas from a political perspective. Their films also brought Turkish cinema international recognition at foreign film festivals. In 1982 *Yol* shared the Palme d'Or with Costa Gavras's *Missing* at the Cannes Film Festival. However, like the films of the movement of social realism, these films had to cope with censorship, and they never attained the popularity of Yesilcam films.



Yol (The Way, 1982), by Serif Gön and Yılmaz Güney, was a hit on the international film festival circuit. © TRIUMPH FILMS/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.

POST-1980 TURKISH CINEMA

After a two-year military administration following the 1980 coup, Turkey entered a new stage of social change with the capitalistic policies of the new civil government. Among the major film trends in the 1980s were films dealing with the coup's psychological effects on individuals, especially intellectuals; "women's films" paralleling the rise of feminism in Turkey and depicting female characters in search of their identities and liberty; and films dealing with cinematic practice itself in terms of the filmmaker's social roles, creative desires, and disappointments.

Turkish cinema underwent another crisis at the end of the 1980s, mainly due to the expansion of color TV broadcasting, the video boom, increasing production costs, and declining movie attendance. Beginning in 1987 Warner Bros. and United International Pictures (UIP), the distributor of the films of Paramount and

Universal, were given permission to set up exhibition and distribution agencies in Turkey. In 1989 only 13 of the 215 films shown in the country were Turkish films. By the 1990s Yesilcam had completely collapsed, having lost its audience to private TV channels and American blockbusters.

In 1990 Turkey became a member of Eurimages, the Council of Europe's fund for the joint production, distribution, and exhibition of European cinematographic works, and in the same year, the Turkish Ministry of Culture began to allocate funds to selected films. Those factors, combined with the relaxation of censorship beginning in 1986 and the expansion of private sponsorship, contributed to the resurrection of Turkish cinema in the 1990s. Several joint productions supported by Eurimages and the Ministry of Culture, such as Yavuz Turgul's *Eskiya* (*The Bandit*, 1996), were enormously popular with filmgoers. Another of these, *Vizontele*

Turkey

(2001), about the introduction of television in a small Anatolian town, topped the domestic box office with more than three million admissions. Today Turkish cinema progresses with a yearly production of ten to eighteen films. Heavy media promotion, the featuring of well-known celebrities such as showmen and models, and high production values ensure their popularity. Besides mainstream films that reveal the influence of Hollywood action cinema, films by new young independent directors such as Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan promise a bright future for Turkish cinema. Ceylan's *Uzak* (*Distant*, 2002) won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival.

SEE ALSO *National Cinema*

FURTHER READING

- Erdogan, Nezi, and Deniz Gokturk. "Turkish Cinema." In *Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Cinemas*, edited by Oliver Leaman, 533–573. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Ilal, Ersan. "On Turkish Cinema." In *Film and Politics in the Third World*, edited by John D. H. Downing, 119–129. New York: Autonomedia, 1987.
- Robins, Kevin, and Asu Aksoy. "Deep Nation: The National Question and Turkish Cinema Culture." In *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott Mckenzie, 203–221. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Woodhead, Christine, ed. *Turkish Cinema: An Introduction*. London: SOAS, 1989.

Dilek Kaya Mutlu