

FROM FAIRY TALES TO NIGHTMARES

A HISTORY OF TURKISH DIGITAL GAME DEVELOPMENT 1989 - 2006

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This paper will try to summarize the history of digital game development in Turkey. Starting about 20 years later than the first computer game ever, Turkish digital game industry had a very slow development rate. The primary objective is to provide an improved insight into the efforts of both amateur and professional digital game developers in Turkey.

The beginnings: 1980's and 1990's

Yilmaz and Cagiltay are categorising the history of digital games in Turkey in 3 stages: Amateur stage in 1980's, semi-professional stage in 1990's and professional stage after 2000.(Yilmaz & Cagiltay, 2005) According to them, digital game design in Turkey starts with the book "Applied BASIC" by Ozden Kilicbay in 1984. "Applied BASIC" "...covers a special section which explains simple tricks of writing games and gives source codes of simple games." (Yilmaz & Cagiltay, 2005, p: 3) In 1986 Kilicbay publishes his second book "Comodore 64, Peek-Poke & Machine Code" which includes games source codes written in BASIC programming language. These two books are the first publications in Turkey on game programming.

In 1989 Byte Computer Company releases the first Turkish computer game "Keloglan"¹. Created by "adventure game creator", "Keloglan" was a text adventure game with static 2D graphics for Comodore 64. "Keloglan" or "Bold-Boy" is the name of a traditional fairy tale hero with a naughty character. The game design reflected his personality; writing cusses in the command line was replied by the program with another cusses. In 1991 Lucus Team publishes the second Turkish text adventure game "Asterix" for Amiga 500 series computers. The game was based on the European comic hero with the same name.

¹ "Keloglan" or "Bold-Boy" is the name of a traditional fairy tale character.

In November 1990 the APUC (Amiga Professional Users Club) led by Sedat Cologlu started to work on the first Turkish turn based strategy game “Hançer” (Dagger) based on the history of the Ottoman Empire. Developed for the Amiga 500 series, the game also showed educational characteristics. The designers “...paid attention for details including important historical events, accessories of medieval age, children psychology etc. Many academicians including educators consulted them.” (Yilmaz & Cagiltay, 2005, p: 4) Although only The Ottoman Empire was playable, the game presented 8 nations and 40 cities on a game-map showing Europe and North Africa. The game was released in 1992 with Digital Dreams brand with an advertising campaign in Turkish game magazines with US \$15 retail price and according to Yilmaz and Cagiltay sold more than 2200 copies in 2 years. (Yilmaz & Cagiltay, 2005, p: 4)

In 1993 SiliconWorx published “Umut Tarlaları” (Fields of Hope) for Amiga 500 series. “Umut Tarlaları” was a farm management simulation game which included multiplayer features up to 4 players and the lead programmer was Ozgur Ozon. “Umut Tarlaları” was also important for its original music score. The game sold more than 1000 copies with an un-professional voluntary distribution system. (Yilmaz & Cagiltay, 2005, p: 5)

In 1995 SiliconWorx published their second game “Istanbul Efsaneleri: Lale Savascıları” (Legends of Istanbul: Tulip Warriors) also for Amiga 500 series. “Istanbul Efsaneleri” was the first Turkish fantasy role playing game. Designed in a funny and comical style, the game was set in an alternate Istanbul. Players could select one of five species to create their characters. These species included “students”, employees”, “dumps”, “luuts” and “whores”. In-game objects include weapons like slippers, rulers and armor like carpenter shirts, white undershirts and shirts with metal-music paintings. Spells were replaced by curses and magicians were replaced by characters like “the silicon father”. The game was also important for its use of full-motion-video technique in the cut-scenes and its original music score. In 1996 a PC CD-ROM version of the game is published by SiliconWorx by the aid of Compuhiliacs. Raks Music Company distributed the PC version with a retail price of US \$35. Both Amiga 500 and PC versions were sold around 4000 copies. In 1997 45000 additional copies has been given away by a game magazine as bundle.

In 1996 Cartoon Animation Studios led by Fahim Hadimoglu released their first game “Dedektif Firtina” (Detective Storm) for PC. It was the first Turkish cartoon-animated icon

adventure game. Its comedy-mystery story was written by Nuray Hadimoglu. Recent data on the reaction of the players to the game on the other hand is confusing. According to Chip Magazine the game was well accepted (n.a., 2005, p: 32), but Kilyusufoglu claims that it was not well received (Kilyusufoglu, 2005, p: 96). Although it's not addressing to the player's feedback response to the product, Aykut Guner's critique in 1997 in Gameshow magazine is interesting; he calls the players who didn't buy the game as "traitors"(Guner, 1997, 37).

"Gercegin Otesinde" (Beyond Reality) was the second and last game released by Cartoon Animation Studios in 1998. It was an interactive-movie adventure game for PC. The game had an acting cast of 19 and the background images were designed in 3D. The game was written again by Nuray Hadimoglu. Although it had similar mystery themes with "Dedektif Firtina" it had a more serious promise. Starting with a murder in Turkey the story ended in an ancient temple in Peru. The game also introduced the first Turkish computer game heroine, Ayca who was trying to find the murderers of her older sister. Also from the perspective of marketing "Gercegin Otesinde" was a bigger approach than "Dedektif Firtina". It was the first and till now the only Turkish computer game promoted by a music-video on television. The music was recorded in Boston and the music-video was made by Izzet Oz Productions in Istanbul. (Suzen, 1998, p: 23) The game was sold with a retail price of US \$29. Like "Dedektif Firtina" recent critiques do not agree on the qualifications of the game. Likewise with its predecessor Chip Magazine has a positive approach (n.a., 2005, p: 32) and Kilyusufoglu has a negative (Kilyusufoglu, 2005, p: 96) approach towards the game.

After the release of "Gercegin Otesinde" in 1998 for four years no Turkish computer game was released but many projects were initiated. Many of these projects ended without any outcome but some reached a higher level than their predecessors.

Game development after 2000

In 2000 Mevlut Dinc came to Istanbul from England. Dinc, known as Mev Dinc in the international game market was a Turkish game developer working in England. Dinc was also the founder of Vivid Image Company. He was looking for the opportunities to create a computer game industry in Turkey. In this purpose he has founded his Istanbul based company Dinc Interactive and made presentations in Turkish Universities.

In 2001, with the Coca-Cola's online "Serinyer" game, Yogurt Technologies Company introduced the adver - gaming concept to Turkey. The episodic adventure game was about the stories of characters living in a digital neighborhood and the player had to follow these characters to gain "ice-cube" points. The winner was also added into the game as a digital cartoon character. Followed by many other games, Yogurt Technologies continued to develop online adver – gaming projects till 2005.

Also in 2001, Mevlut Dinc met Galip Kartoglu. Kartoglu, who was a student then at Yildiz Technical University and was working in Istanbul Technical University (ITU) Software Development Center as a programmer, was working on an amateur fighting game for PC which would later be known as "Dual Blades". Dinc and Kartoglu decided to turn the project from a PC game to a Nintendo Game Boy Advanced (GBA) game. With a development crew of seven university students with Kartoglu as the programmer, Dinc as the producer and Abdul Kerim Keskin as the animator they prepared the GBA version in one year. The game was developed mostly in ITU Software Development Center. In 2002 "Dual Blades" is released with the Vivid Image brand by the international publisher Metro3D. It was promoted as "the first combat game exclusively for the Game Boy Advance" (n.a., 2002). It was a fighting game with "single player" and "player versus player" modes. It featured a "power combining system" which was very new for the genre at that time. This system allowed the player to create her/his own fighting style. The storyline also had local influences: "the game takes place in 150 B.C. in the Hun Empire. Alperen has harnessed incredible energy by merging his soul and the immortal weapon known as Dual Blades. The task ahead of the game player is to battle a variety of foes to earn the right to face Alperen and claim the legendary sword." (n.a., 2002). Characters in the game included besides the international known ninjas, knights and American adventurers; an Ottoman warrior named Efe and Nagasapa, an innocent-looking old lady who is in fact a Khazakian sorceress. Dual Blades had an ESRB Rating for "Mature" Audiences and a retail price of US \$29.95. The game was sold more than 10000 copies in the international market. Although not a big hit it was a debut for Dinc Interactive.

Microsoft Turkey and Sabanci University organized in 2002 the first Bitek-O (Informatics Technologies Organization) Contest for elementary and high-school students. Ozan Gumus won the third price with his turn-based strategy game "Istila" (The Invasion). It was very

similar to the classic game “Civilization II” but was completely in Turkish. The game was never sold but has been given away as bundle by two Turkish game magazines in 2003.

In 2003 Dinc Interactive released with Aslan Electronics “Lanetin Hikayesi” (The Curse Story) for PC. It was an adventure game with some action sequences with a similar story to the world hit “Resident Evil”. It was like “Dual Blades” an amateur project, this time the creator was Idris Celik. Celik was an amateur programmer living in Istanbul. He created the whole game by himself in 2, 5 years and sent a beta version to Dinc in 2002. Their collaboration resulted in 2003 with the release of the game. It was not a big success and recent game critiques did not even mention it in their game-archeology articles. Yet “Lanetin Hikayesi” was the first of many amateur and professional Turkish game titles for PC after 2003.

2003 was also an important year for Turkish mobile game development. Funpac company released its first games “XR-Jetski / eXtreme Racing Jetski Edition” and “cepOkey” in this year. Between 2003 and 2005 Funpac released 3 more mobile games and in May 2005 “XR-Jetski” hits more than 150000 international downloads. The company was acquired by Mynet Company in 2005. Also starting in 2003 Tikle Company produced and published over 20 original mobile game titles. Their games ranged from puzzle games to sports and arcade titles and were sold at several national and international operators’ mobile game portals. Another company; Basari Mobile, released in 2003 the first mobile game based on a Turkish movie, "Asmali Konak-Urgup". Basari Mobile later released more than 20 similar adaptations. One particular adaptation, “Kotu Kedi Serafettin” (Bad Cat Serafettin) was important as the first Turkish comic book adaptation, based on the comic book with the same name by Bulent Ustun.

In 2004 Dinc Interactive has been restructured as Sobee Company and Dinc founded new partnerships with two important Turkish companies; Vestel and Mynet. As a result, Sobee released in 2004 on Mynet gaming portal “Futbol Menajer”(Football Manager) as a real-time multiplayer football management simulation.

In 2005 Turkish game development had a game-boom. In this year both professional and amateur game developers released more than 10 games in a wide spectrum.

A notable amateur project released in 2005 was “Koridor” (Corridor) by Hakan Nehir. Nehir has developed the game with free licensed soft wares and added his own AI solutions. Additionally, he used third party solutions for graphics. “Koridor” was accepted by Turkish game critiques as the first Turkish first-person-shooter. The main game character was a Turkish special forces agent known as “Duman” (Shadow), and had to fight against terrorists in Northern Iraq. The game has been given away as bundle by a Turkish game magazine and it’s distributed freely via internet.

“Mount & Blade” was the first Turkish multi-player-online-role-playing-game released in 2005 by Armagan Yavuz and Ipek Yavuz, a small team of indie-game developers organized as Taleworld team. In fact the name of the project was in the beginning “Way of the Sword” but the name was changed later as “Mount & Blade”. It was a freeform role-playing game that lets the player create a hero, explore the land and control a small to mid-size army. The game was set in a medieval universe and although produced in Turkey was completely in English for the international game market. With very positive critiques the game was started to be sold with a price of US \$15 on the Internet and reached nearly 1000 registered players at the end of the year.

Dora Yazilim Company and Isik Bilgisayar Company released the first Turkish computer game for girls in 2005. In “Yeliz ve Arkadaslari Makyaj Odasinda” (Yeliz and her friends in the make-up room) players could try different make-up styles on computer generated faces and print-out the results. The game had retail price of US \$10.

Sobee released in 2005 its second game for Mynet gaming portal, “Semih Sayginer's Billards Magic”. Developed with the help of and endorsed by the World Billiards Champion Semih Sayginer, the on-line player versus player billiards game featured realistic physics and real-time 3D graphics.

After four years of development Yogurt Technologies and 3te Games released in 2005 the first Turkish 3D action game “Pusu” (Ambush). The game was published by Aral Ithalat. It was a third-person-shooter with adventure game features like puzzles and a story driven game play. The game was set in a modern day Istanbul. The main character was the Turkish officer Fatih searching for his lost father. As the locations reflected Istanbul, the game design reflected the Turkish culture. According to Associated Professor Huseyin Gunduz the

symbols on the avatar of the player were in fact Turkish calligraphy writings meaning “Muhammed” and “Ali”. (Uzun, 2006, p: 104)

Between 2005 and 2006 Eurosoft Bigsoft Company released a series of computer games for PC. Their first game was “Cumhuriyet” (Republic). It was a trivia style education game about the Turkish War of Independence. Later Eurosoft Bigsoft started to release military games. Based on the real life Turkish military institutions and equipment these games were set in a series of fictional modern-time battles. “TAK320 - Türk Arama Kurtarma” (TAK320 – Turkish Search and Rescue), “F16 Savasan Sahin I & II” (F16 Fighting Falcon I & II), “Super Cobra”, “Leopard Tank” and “Commando Captain” were the titles in the series. These games were arcade style games with 2D graphics, each with different game mechanics, and each game was very simple to play. As a result of the military concept national, symbols and themes were widely used in these games.

In 2006 Yogurt Technologies prepared an adver – gaming project for Eti Company. This was not an online game like “Serinyer” but a third-person-shooter game set in Istanbul, like Yogurt Technologies’ previous release “Pusu”. “Eti Yami Mekanik Istila” (Eti Yami Mechanic Invasion) was a promotion for Eti’s new nouga-bar “Yami”. It was send to the customers by mail in return of “Yami” packages. In the game Yaman, a 3D character seen in commercial spots before, eat “Yami” bars for energy to fight robotic invaders.

Founded in 2002 by Yasin, Kadir and Yakup Demirden, Last Light company with Mevlut Dinc as producer released after four years of preparations in late 2006 “Kabus 22” (Nightmare 22). It was a 3D horror–action game set in Kadikoy district in Istanbul. The player had three characters to control, the Turkish soldier Demir, his girlfriend Ebru and the mysterious Inzar. Demir had a game time of %50, Inzar %35 and Ebru %15 of the whole game. These characters had to fight against a despot religious order and creatures named Maduns in an alternate near future. The game was published by Vestel.

In 2006 Idris Celis started to distribute a Play Station Portable version of his 2003 game “Lanetin Hikayesi” freely via internet. Both PC and PSP versions were the same except the source code language. So became “Lanetin Hikayesi” the first Turkish game for PSP.

In late 2006, two Turkish multi-player-online-role-playing-games started their open tests. One was 7 Kares' "Nette Hayat" (Life on the Net), an online environment very similar to the "Second Life"; and the other one was "Istanbul" by Sobee.

Eurosoft Bigsoft Company released second historical title in the beginning of 2007, "Barbaros". This naval strategy game was based on the 16th century Ottoman navy and had two battle modes.

Conclusion

This paper tried to focus on publicly released game projects in Turkey; so future releases and canceled projects were not mentioned. There are also a series of amateur projects not mentioned in this paper. The reason for that was the lack of clear information such as the release dates and authenticity of the source-code.

The first digital game developed in Turkey was a folktale adaptation in 1989. In 2006 "Nightmare 22" was for many critics the highest point in Turkish game development. The history shows us the importance of capital, organization and team work in game development. Yet the technology also provides amateurs and indie teams with the means of good game developments as seen in "Mount & Blade" and "Koridor". Turkish game development is no more a free time activity; it is also not a fully professionalized field. Both features will help new-comers to be a part of the international digital game industry.

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