

Information Please! Notes to accompany Nurgül Arıkan's story on pages 4-8

Muazzez İlmiye Çığ (1914-2024) - A.I. Overview

Muazzez İlmiye Çığ was a Turkish librarian, writer, and supercentenarian who specialized in the study of Hittites and Sumerian civilization. Her work in these fields significantly contributed to our understanding of these ancient civilizations, particularly in the deciphering and interpretation of cuneiform tablets.

Çığ was born Muazzez İlmiye İtil in Bursa a few weeks before the outbreak of World War I. By her 17th birthday in 1931, she earned her degree in Bursa's training facility elementary school teachers.

She graduated from İstanbul University's Faculty of Letters, where she studied Hittitology, Sumerology, and Archaeology. Following her graduation, she worked at the Museum of Ancient Oriental Works in Ankara, focusing on the classification, translation, and interpretation of cuneiform tablets.

Upon receiving her degree in 1940, Çığ embarked on a multi-decade career at the Museum of the Ancient Orient. Her dedication to deciphering and publishing thousands of tablets, which were stored untranslated and unclassified in the facility's archives, turned the Museum into a Middle Eastern languages learning center, attracting ancient history researchers worldwide.

After marrying M. Kemal Çığ, the director of Topkapı Museum, she played a pivotal role in transforming the Museum. Her efforts resulted in the creation of an archive of cuneiform documents consisting of 74,000 tablets and the copying and cataloging of 3,000 tablets. Her influence in deciphering and publishing the tablets turned the Museum into a global center for studying Middle Eastern languages and a reference point for ancient history researchers.

She became a prominent advocate for secularism and women's rights in Turkey, and an honorary member of the German Archeology Institute and İstanbul University Institute of Prehistoric Sciences. Her advocacy work, evident in her books, scholarly papers, and general interest articles, gained her renown in her profession and beyond.

In her books of the early 21st century, Çığ argued that headscarves worn by Muslim women did not originate in the Muslim world, but were worn five thousand years earlier by Sumerian priestesses as a means of initiating young men into sex. This controversial view stirred debate in the Muslim world and received worldwide media coverage. Despite the challenges and charges she faced, Çığ remained steadfast in her beliefs, declaring in her trial, "I am a woman of science ... I never insulted anyone".

Çığ turned 110 on 20 June 2024. She died on 17 November 2024, at the age of 110 years and 150 days. She was the oldest verified person in Turkey at the time of her death.

1- The Sumerians – A.I. Overview

The Sumerians were a group of people who lived in the ancient Mesopotamian civilization of Sumer from around 4100 to 1750 BCE. They are recognized for their many innovations, including:

- **Timekeeping:** The Sumerians were pioneers in timekeeping, dividing the day and night into 12-hour periods, hours into 60 minutes, and minutes into 60 seconds. This base-60 number system, a Sumerian innovation, is still in use today.
- **Writing:** The Sumerians are credited with the development of cuneiform, one of the earliest forms of writing. They used clay and stone tablets to record history, trade, and other vital information, leaving behind a rich literary legacy.
- **Plows:** The Sumerians were early agricultural innovators, inventing the plow around 3500 BCE. By 1500 BCE, they had further developed the seeder plow, revolutionizing farming practices.
- **Government:** The Sumerians established a governmental bureaucracy.
- **Architecture:** The Sumerians built monumental architecture.
- **Mathematics:** The Sumerians made significant contributions to mathematics.

The Sumerians also created the earliest version of the Great Flood tale, other biblical narratives, and the oldest heroic epic.

The Sumerians lived in city-states, each with a king or priestly governor. Canals and stone walls separated the city-states. Each was centered around a temple dedicated to a patron god or goddess.

2- Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) - WIKIPEDIA

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a figure of immense significance, was a Turkish field marshal, revolutionary statesman, author, and most importantly, the founding father of the Republic of Turkey. He served as its first president from 1923 until his passing in 1938, leaving behind a legacy that continues to shape the nation.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a name that resonates with national pride, became a hero after his remarkable leadership at Gallipoli during World War I. Despite the defeat of the Ottomans, he prevented the partition of Anatolia by leading a rebellion against the sultanate. In 1923, his efforts led to the international recognition of the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic by the Treaty of Lausanne.

As the president of the newly formed Turkish Republic, Atatürk embarked on a transformative journey. He initiated a comprehensive program of political, economic, and cultural reforms, laying the foundation for a modern, republican, and secular nation-state. His decision to make primary education free and compulsory, and the establishment of thousands of new schools, had a profound impact on the country.



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