

Bosphorus boat crossings
Turkish shadow puppet journeys



7 April 2022

Free

Room 3

Object in focus

Supported by

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust

Two friends on a boat:

Turkish shadow puppet journeys

Turkish shadow theatre is a traditional form of entertainment popular since the 16th century. Organised as plays and performed in public and in private houses, shadow theatre was particularly popular during the month of Ramadan and to mark significant life events. Usually performed by one puppeteer, sometimes with the help of an assistant, the plays are a depiction of the everyday life and struggles of ordinary people. Combining humour and satire the plays could reflect the social and political issues of the time.

Two plays, *The boat* and *The boat trip to Yalova*, present two friends from the same neighbourhood, Karagöz and Hacivat, trying to earn a living by ferrying passengers and goods across the Bosphorus. The journeys back and forth are full of ups and downs. Through the boat crossings on the water, other journeys can also be extrapolated: the journey of two friends as they struggle through life to make ends meet and feed their families, but also journeys involving the audience, carrying them to an imaginary world where anything is possible.



Two friends on a boat

Turkey, 1880s-1950s

Karagöz and Hacivat are the two main characters in traditional Turkish shadow theatre. Karagöz, with a black rounded beard and red hat (fez) is dressed with a European style jacket. His hat is articulated and shows his bald

head, suggesting the strong wind over the water. Hacivat, on the right, is wearing traditional clothes. They are depicted on a wooden rowing boat, *caique*, used to take passengers along the Aegean coast and across the Bosphorus to Yalova.

As 1969,03.282

Turkish shadow theatre is a traditional form of entertainment popular since the 16th century when it was introduced to Istanbul from Egypt.

Organised as plays and performed in public and in private houses, shadow theatre was particularly popular during the month of Ramadan and to mark significant life events.

Usually performed by one puppeteer, sometimes with the help of an assistant, the plays are a depiction of the everyday life and struggles of ordinary people. Combining humour and satire the plays could reflect the social and political issues of the time and were always up to date as they could incorporate contemporary narratives within the basic plot.



The plays revolve around two main characters: Karagöz and Hacivat, two friends living in the same neighbourhood in Istanbul. Their various adventures or misadventures as they try to survive and meet their families' needs form the core of the plays.

Karagöz, with the round beard, is really the main character. His name has become synonymous with Turkish shadow theatre. He is illiterate, rude and deceitful. He frequently gets into fights with his friend Hacivat. But he is also funny, helpful and in most cases turns out to be a hero.

Hacivat is very different. He is the opposite of Karagöz. He is polite and refined, and has some knowledge of a variety of subjects. His knowledge, however, is often minimal and superficial, and his inability to take decisions causes arguments with Karagöz. He has a neat pointed beard.

In addition to Karagöz and Hacivat, there are a number of other characters in the play. They represent the inhabitants of Istanbul and visitors to the city from other regions in Turkey, or from other countries.

Two plays feature a rowing boat which Karagöz and Hacivat use to carry passengers and goods across the Bosphorus.

The boat

In The boat, Karagöz and Hacivat are unemployed and to avoid their wives leaving them they take a job rowing a boat and carrying passengers across the Bosphorus. They come across all sorts of complications and have funny conversations with the passengers.

Boat trip to Yalova or Pleasure trip to Yalova

In this play, Çelebi, a young handsome womaniser, wants to take his beloved to Yalova and hires Karagöz and Hacivat to take them there. While Çelebi goes to buy food for the trip, his beloved is teased by Karagöz who tells her nonsense stories. Other passengers want to join the trip, and so as not to annoy Çelebi, Karagöz and the woman hide them in a storage jar and in bags, only to be discovered by Çelebi on his return.

The British
Museum



Bosphorus boat crossings **Turkish shadow puppet journeys**

7 April 2022
Free
Room 3
Object in focus