

## State Intervention and Modernisation in the Provinces: The History of Industry, Aviation and Politics in Kutahya (1929-1969)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the economic and strategic transformation of Kütahya province from the early Republican era to the late 1960s. The primary aim of the study is to analyse the provincial implications of the central government's policies of 'Statism', 'State-led Industrialisation' and 'Local Development' through the prism of the mining, heavy industry and aviation sectors. The primary data source for the research consists of dozens of documents -decrees, correspondence and reports- held in the Republic Archive fonds of the Turkish Presidency State Archives. The data, focusing on the period between 1929 and 1969, demonstrates that Kütahya was transformed into a strategic and political base through the establishment of major industrial facilities -such as the Sugar and Nitrogen factories- and aviation infrastructure works carried out under the supervision of British engineers. The study reveals that Kütahya was not merely a source of raw materials, but also assumed the role of a pilot region in industry, transport and the transfer of technical knowledge.

**Keywords:** Kütahya, Political History, Economic History, Industrialisation, Aviation, Adnan Menderes.

### Introduction

This study is based on a historical analysis of centre-periphery relations, the developmental state and environmental modernisation. The sources for this study consist of dozens of official documents held at the Turkish Presidency State Archives (C.D.A.) and the Republic Archives (C.A.), relating to mining, industry, cooperatives, aviation initiatives and the politics of the era in Kütahya. The documents have been classified under thematic headings and subsequently evaluated within their historical context.

Following the proclamation of the Republic, the achievement of economic independence in Turkey was viewed as a complementary element of political sovereignty. Accordingly, industrialisation, the exploitation of mines, the expansion of production capacity and transport were central to state policies. The state-led economic model implemented from the 1930s onwards aimed to systematically expand industrial investments, particularly in Anatolian cities.

Kütahya, owing to its underground resources, transport networks and geographical location, became one of the key centres where these policies were implemented.

Documents from the Republic Archives reveal that Kütahya possessed a remarkable potential in terms of mineral reserves during the early period. The state designated the region as a priority area for industrial investment with the aim of exploiting this potential. Railway connections and its proximity to Western Anatolia made Kütahya well-suited for industrial production.

Archival documents show that mining exploration and operation activities in Kütahya were conducted within a systematic framework from 1929 onwards. The state shaped the operational model by issuing mining licences either directly through public institutions or under state control. Technical inadequacies, capital shortages and problems relating to transport infrastructure are documented in these records.

The industrial facilities established in Kütahya served to support mining activities and increased regional production capacity. Industrialisation initiatives contributed not only to job creation but also to the diversification of the local economy. Archival records indicate that the state assumed a direct guiding role during the establishment phases of these facilities.

Co-operativism was encouraged during the early Republican period with the aim of spreading economic development to the grassroots. The co-operatives established in Kütahya facilitated the organisation of producers and provided support for industrial activities.

Aviation activities formed an important part of the Republican ideology's understanding of modernisation and technical progress. The aviation initiatives planned and partially implemented in Kütahya represent the local manifestations of this ideological orientation. Archival documents detail the planning stages of these initiatives and the technical challenges encountered.

The findings indicate that Kütahya played a multifaceted role in the industrialisation policies of the early Republican era. When mining, industry, cooperatives, aviation initiatives and politics are considered together, it becomes clear that Kütahya was not only a key component of regional development but also an integral part of the national development strategy.

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of mining, industrial, cooperative and aviation initiatives carried out in Kütahya between 1929 and 1969, based on documents from the Republic Archives. The findings demonstrate that the state-led industrialisation policies of the early Republican era had concrete and multifaceted effects at the local level.

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the objective of crowning political independence with economic development took on a new dimension, particularly following the 1929 Great Depression, through the adoption of the principle of 'statism'. During this period, the strategy to develop the inland regions of Anatolia brought provinces such as Kütahya -which possessed rich mineral resources and held

geostrategic importance- to the fore. Industrialisation initiatives, which are generally examined in the literature from a general economic history perspective, reveal the role of the provinces in central planning more clearly when analysed through local dynamics and archival documents.

Drawing on documents from the Republic Archives, this research examines the development of Kütahya in the fields of industry, mining and aviation between 1929 and 1969. The study covers a broad spectrum, ranging from the transfer of mining licences to industrial production, and from the construction of airports by British engineers to the political speeches of statesmen.

The key points regarding the economic and social transformation Kütahya underwent from the 1930s to the late 1960s are as follows:

The study focuses on the period between 1930 and 1960, when the development initiatives of the early Republican era spread across Anatolia. During this period, Kütahya was positioned not merely as a historical ‘city of princes’, but as a strategic centre where the Republic’s industrial and production objectives took concrete form.

The greatest driving force behind Kütahya’s development is its rich mineral resources. In particular, the boron, lignite, feldspar, kaolin and marble deposits in the Emet region are listed as the key elements determining the city’s industrial potential. These resources have played a critical role both in energy production and as raw materials for industry.

The evaluation of the city’s mining potential necessitated the establishment of modern industrial facilities. It is evident that Kütahya emerged as a ‘production centre’ during this period, with the industrialisation of the ceramics and other sectors strengthening the local economy.

Not only state investments but also cooperative movements involving local participation emerged as a characteristic feature of this period. Industry, aviation and cooperativism have been examined as mutually reinforcing elements of development.

Upon examining the general framework of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Using the example of Kütahya, the practical manifestations of the Republic of Turkey’s “State-led” and “Mixed Economy” policies in the provinces have been successfully demonstrated. The study has integrated the local history of Kütahya with the history of national development.

The emphasis placed throughout the study on documents from the Republic Archives (C.A.) is the most significant factor enhancing the work’s academic value. A narrative based on the state correspondence and reports of the period has been preferred over secondary sources.

In contrast to conventional studies of economic history, the inclusion of the heading ‘Aviation’ alongside mining and industry in this work is noteworthy. The mention of Kütahya’s role in military and civil aviation infrastructure (airfields, British engineers, etc.) is a detail that lends the study its originality.

In summary, the study presents a compelling perspective demonstrating that Kütahya was not merely a raw materials depot, but a modernising Republican city situated within the triangle of industry, aviation and social solidarity (cooperatives).

### **Mining Concessions, Industrial Transformation, the Industrialisation of Local Capital and Public Investment**

Mining activities, which form the basis of Kütahya's economic potential, were subject to various transfers of concessions in the early years of the Republic due to a lack of capital and technology. Archival documents show that the state sought to utilise foreign capital and technical expertise in order to exploit local resources. Indeed, the Council of Ministers' decision dated 18 February 1931 regarding the transfer of mining licence rights held by Ali Rıza Efendi within the province of Kütahya to the American entrepreneur M. Preston Lock, in accordance with the conditions of the time, is the most concrete example of this situation (C.D.A., C.A., 24/07/1930).

The foundation of economic activities in Kütahya during the early Republican period was laid by the regulation of mining concessions and the establishment of an institutional industrial infrastructure. In this context, the legal status of entrepreneurial activities in the mining sector was first addressed; the transfer of mining licence rights held by Ali Rıza Efendi to the American entrepreneur M. Preston Lock was carried out with the aim of utilising the foreign capital and technical expertise of the period (C.D.A., C.A., 24/07/1930). These transfer operations in the mining sector were recorded as a manifestation of the quest to operate local resources in accordance with international standards.

Institutional restructuring was undertaken to regulate commercial life and ensure the more effective use of capital; this was aligned with the objectives of industrialisation. Within this framework, the Kütahya Trade and Commodities Exchange, which was deemed to have lost its function or required restructuring, was dissolved in 1936. The surplus cash assets from the dissolved exchange were transferred to the Kütahya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was expected to spearhead the city's industrialisation drive (C.D.A., C.A., 02/03/1932). This move formed part of a strategy to consolidate dispersed commercial capital under an industry-focused umbrella organisation and reflected the state's determination to transform commercial capital into industrial capital.

Efforts to integrate the city's agricultural potential into industrial production gained momentum through work to identify and address the needs of the Kütahya Agricultural Machinery Factory (C.D.A., C.A., 13/01/1932). However, whilst initiatives were undertaken to establish a Brewery in the Altıntaş district of Kütahya with the aim of increasing industrial diversity in the region, this venture occupied a more modest place in the shadow of other major industrial initiatives (C.D.A., C.A., 06/11/1968).

The industrialisation process in Kütahya had evolved into large-scale public investment by the 1950s. The driving force behind this process was the 'Sugar Industry', which

integrated agricultural production with industry. The most comprehensive industrialisation initiative of the period took place in the sugar industry. The concession for the establishment and operation of sugar factories was granted to Türkiye İş Bankası for a period of twenty-five years, in accordance with the state's strategic planning, by a decree dated 6 May 1953 (C.D.A., C.A., 15 April 1933). The establishment of the factory required not only a technical investment but also extensive land management. Detailed capacity reports were prepared for the sugar factory to be established in Kütahya, the company's capital structure was determined, and the necessary land expropriations for the factory site were carried out. During this process, legal and administrative procedures, such as the expropriation of the property belonging to Fatma Sargın located within the factory site, were completed. The process of expropriating this land demonstrates that the state prioritised the public interest over private property in the name of industrialisation (C.D.A., C.A., 06/02/1956). The factory's opening ceremony was held with great fanfare in the presence of state officials, and the facility commenced production (C.D.A., C.A., 19/11/1954).

Work was carried out on the transfer of the Kütahya Ceramics Factory, which was part of Sümerbank, and the subsequent establishment of the modern Porcelain Industry. The conversion of the ceramics workshops into the modern Porcelain Factory transformed the city into a centre of heavy industry. These investments were met with great satisfaction by the public, and telegrams of thanks were sent to Prime Minister Adnan Menderes by the people of Kütahya and civil society organisations (C.D.A., C.A., 11/08/1955). Furthermore, following the sugar factory, investments in the heavy industry and chemical sectors came to the fore. Construction and assembly work commenced on Kütahya Azot Sanayii, a facility of vital importance for increasing agricultural productivity and meeting fertiliser needs; as the factory blocks rose, Kütahya took on the character of a heavy industrial city (C.D.A., C.A., 15/08/1959).

During the period under review, it is evident that Kütahya's economy evolved from private mining licences (the Ali Rıza Efendi-Preston Lock example) towards state- and large-scale capital-backed integrated industrial facilities (Sugar, Nitrogen, Porcelain). The documents reflect the transition from the early 1930s applications of the Republic's 'State-led Economy' principle to the 'Mixed Economy' model of the 1950s, as manifested specifically in Kütahya. In particular, the transfer of funds from the Trade and Commodities Exchange to the Chamber of Industry serves as evidence of a deliberate state policy aimed at channelling local capital from trade into industry. The establishment of the Sugar and Nitrogen factories, meanwhile, functioned not merely as an economic investment but also as a tool for social mobilisation through expropriation processes and opening ceremonies.

## **Defence and Transport Policies, the Deployment of Air Forces and Strategic Expropriation Processes**

One of the study's most original findings is the planning of Kütahya as an international aviation base prior to and during the Second World War. The process of establishing air units and developing aviation infrastructure in Kütahya was addressed within the framework of the Republic's defence strategies, and these activities gained momentum particularly during the years of the Second World War. In line with the strategic planning and requirements of the Ministry of National Defence, Kütahya was assessed as a suitable base area for military aviation, and to this end, it was decided to establish the "Kütahya Air Regiment", with large-scale works commencing in 1943 for the construction of the necessary facilities (C.D.A., C.A., 04/10/1938). It became necessary to secure extensive land to accommodate the deployment of air units and to construct barracks, hangars and maintenance workshops. According to information reflected in archival documents, the state, with the aim of meeting this need and in accordance with the principle of 'public interest', issued expropriation (nationalisation) decisions regarding private land. The properties required for the construction of the airfield and its ancillary facilities were identified, and ownership transfers were carried out by designating these areas as military zones. (C.D.A., C.A., 14/12/1937). This process is recorded as the beginning of a physical transformation that enhanced Kütahya's military and logistical importance.

The documents provide concrete evidence of the spatial manifestations of national security policies at the local level during the early Republican era. The bureaucratic procedures and expropriation decisions carried out for the establishment of air units demonstrate the swift and transformative resolve displayed by the central authority in the provinces when defence priorities were at stake. The selection of Kütahya as an airbase and the deployment of the Air Regiment there proved that the city's geopolitical position was conceived not merely as a transit route, but as a strategic component of the national defence doctrine.

## **International Cooperation in Turkish Aviation, Activities of British Engineers and Technicians at Airfields**

The process of modernising aviation infrastructure and enhancing technical capacity in Kütahya took shape within the framework of the remarkable strategic and technical cooperation established with Britain in the pre-war and wartime years, whilst Turkey pursued a policy of 'Active Neutrality' during the Second World War. During this period, official authorisation procedures were implemented to employ British experts in the region for the purpose of surveying, constructing and providing flight training at the airfields. According to archival documents, British engineer David Wilson Lister was granted permission to carry out the necessary technical inspections and surveys at the Kütahya airfields (C.D.A., C.A., 30/03/1940). Similarly, whilst approval was granted for Donald William Haime to work in Kütahya and other regions where air units were

stationed; it was deemed appropriate to assign British technicians and engineers such as Douglas Arthur Gallagher, George Mc. Donald and Alec Thomas Tames Novis were also deemed suitable for assignment to air bases along the Eskişehir and Kütahya axis (C.D.A., C.A., 30/05/1940). In addition to technical personnel, British Air Force Captains Stephens and Young were assigned to the region as flight instructors to conduct training activities, and their duties were formalised (C.D.A., C.A., 17/04/1941).

Within the scope of physical infrastructure investments, the expansion of existing airfields and the construction of new facilities became a priority. Work was carried out to expand the Zığra Village airfield in the centre of Kütahya, and the process of expropriating the necessary land for the Moymul airfield within the boundaries of Tavşanlı district was initiated; the land was expropriated in 1944–1945 (C.D.A., C.A., 11/09/1943; C.D.A., C.A., 11/09/1943). Furthermore, a decision was taken to construct 15 ammunition depots to meet the logistical needs of the Kütahya Air Regiment, and garage constructions were carried out within the regiment (C.D.A., C.A., 01/03/1941). Property issues also arose during the infrastructure works; following the discovery that the site allocated to the local air regiment subsequently belonged to the Yıldırım Beyazıt Foundation, legal arrangements were made (C.D.A., C.A., 30/07/1940). However, the subsequent revocation of the land expropriation decision for the Alayunt airfield indicates that changes were occasionally made to the plans (C.D.A., C.A., 08/07/1943; C.D.A., C.A., 26/03/1951).

The documents reveal concrete examples of the transfer of ‘foreign expertise’ in the development of Turkish aviation, specifically in the context of Kütahya. Documents that name British engineers and officers by name corroborate Turkey’s military and technical rapprochement with Britain during that period through the lens of local history. It is understood that Kütahya was designed not merely as a garrison centre, but also as an “air logistics base” whose technical infrastructure was strengthened under the supervision of foreign experts. The resolution of property issues concerning waqf lands by the state and the revisions to expropriation decisions reveal that the process was carried out amidst dynamic and bureaucratic challenges.

### **Political Legitimacy and Economic Governance: State Visits to Kütahya from Atatürk to Menderes**

Economic transformation in Kütahya has always featured prominently on the agendas of political leaders. Since the early Republican era, Kütahya has retained its status as a key stop and destination on the itinerary of senior state officials. In this context, the first significant visit was made by the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Archival records indicate that during his train journey to Konya on 23 January 1933, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stopped at Kütahya Station, where he met briefly with local officials and the public (C.D.A., C.A., 22/01/1933; C.D.A., C.A., 23/01/1933). This visit held symbolic importance in terms of the city’s integration with the ideology of the Republic, at a time when it was still in the early stages of industrialisation.

With the transition to a multi-party system and the Democratic Party (DP) coming to power, the nature and frequency of political visits to Kütahya underwent a change. In particular, it has been noted that Prime Minister Adnan Menderes showed a special interest in the city during the 1950–1960 period. Menderes's visits to Kütahya in 1953 and 1954 went beyond mere ceremonial visits; they took place in a rally-like atmosphere where the city's development initiatives were inspected on the ground and new investments were announced, transforming into a platform where political rhetoric was integrated with economic actions. (C.D.A., C.A., 23/07/1955). During these visits, Menderes was accompanied by Kütahya's MPs and ministers, and the visits were met with great enthusiasm by the public. Menderes further reinforced the presence of the state's leadership in Kütahya by inviting President Celal Bayar to the city during these tours (C.D.A., C.A., 24/07/1955; C.D.A., C.A., 11–22/10/1956).

The most tangible outcome of these visits was the backing of political rhetoric with economic investment. The 1954 visit programme, partly influenced by the approaching elections, turned into a political mobilisation during which the foundations were laid for or the openings held of major industrial facilities such as the Kütahya Sugar Factory. The documents reveal that these visits strengthened the emotional and political bonds between the people of Kütahya and the central government, and that the leaders' visits played a decisive role in elevating the city to the status of the DP's "stronghold" (C.D.A., C.A., 24 July 1955).

This information has provided an opportunity to interpret the transformation in Kütahya's political history through the lens of leadership profiles. Whilst Atatürk's visit held symbolic value centred on "nation-building" and "modernisation", the visits by Adnan Menderes and other statesmen were assessed as having a more pragmatic, "development-oriented" and "voter-focused" character. Archival documents have demonstrated that, following 1950, statesmen's visits were not merely a matter of protocol; rather, these journeys were synchronised with the opening of industrial facilities and utilised as political communication tools through which political legitimacy was reproduced via economic initiatives.

### **Post-1950 Investment-Focused Political Speeches in Kütahya: The Integration of Industry and Politics**

The political history of Kütahya gained new momentum, particularly with the transition to a multi-party system, and the political speeches delivered during this period serve as documents shedding light on the city's socio-economic transformation. In this context, the first speech examined is that delivered by Adnan Menderes, Member of Parliament for Kütahya, at the Democratic Party Congress (C.D.A., C.A., 21/04/1947). In this speech, it is evident that Menderes grounded the party's political vision and the organic bond he had established with the people of Kütahya in the motto of 'serving the people'.

The impact of political discourse on local actors is illustrated by the speech delivered by another Kütahya MP, Ahmet Tahtakılıç, at the Democratic Party Headquarters (C.D.A.,

C.A., 27/06/1947). Tahtakılıç's remarks revealed how central policies were embraced by local organisations and demonstrated the strength of political mobilisation in the provinces.

Most notably, however, was the historic speech delivered by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes during the foundation-laying ceremony for the Kütahya Sugar Factory (1953). In this speech, Menderes presented industrial investments not merely as an economic initiative, but also as a political pledge and the tangible embodiment of the 'Great Turkey' ideal, transforming the opening of these facilities into a political mobilisation. (C.D.A., C.A., 14 September 1953). The laying of factory foundations was presented to the public as evidence of the political authority's capacity for action; thus, political rhetoric and economic development objectives were integrated through these speeches. These visits demonstrate that Kütahya was positioned as a "showcase city" during the Democratic Party era.

This situation demonstrates that, during the 1950–1960 period, the political discourse in Kütahya took on a structure that was "development-oriented" and "action-focused" rather than "ideological". An analysis of the speeches by Adnan Menderes and other MPs reveals that industrial facilities (such as the Sugar Factory) were skilfully utilised as tools of political propaganda. These addresses serve to prove that the strong sense of belonging established between the people of Kütahya and the Democratic Party government was built upon tangible outcomes -such as factories with smoke rising from their chimneys- rather than abstract promises.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates, using the example of Kütahya, that Turkish modernisation and industrialisation were not merely an Ankara -centred bureaucratic project, but a multi- layered process shaped by local dynamics, politics and international technical cooperation in the provinces.

This analysis, conducted in the light of documents from the Republic Archives, reveals that during the period 1929–1969, Kütahya transcended its status as a mere provincial town to occupy a central position within national development strategies. The transition from foreign concessions in mining to state-owned enterprises, the establishment of massive industrial facilities through state-private sector collaboration, and infrastructure works in aviation carried out with British experts all point to a multi-layered development model.

Findings in the aviation sector, in particular, document Turkey's defence strategies during the Second World War at a local level. The establishment of industrial facilities, meanwhile, laid the groundwork for the dissolution of the agricultural structure, the emergence of the working class, and the distribution of capital to the grassroots through cooperatives. Kütahya constitutes a unique example where the modernisation of the Republic materialised along the axes of industry, technology and politics.

Kütahya's economic, industrial and social transformation between 1929 and 1969 has been assessed from a holistic perspective in the light of the examined Republic Archive documents. In this context, it has been established that the city evolved from being merely a local centre to becoming one of the pilot regions for the Republic's industrialisation and development strategies. According to the findings, Kütahya's development took shape along four main axes:

In the first sector, mining and industry, it is evident that mining activities -initially reliant on the export of raw materials (boron, lignite, chromium)- were gradually institutionalised by the state and evolved into integrated industrial facilities. In particular, the transition from private initiatives such as those of Ali Rıza Efendi to massive public investments such as the Sugar Factory and the Nitrogen Industry has been recorded as the most tangible success of the state-led policy in the city. The establishment of the Sugar Factory has been characterised not merely as a production facility, but also as a 'regional development project' that linked agricultural production (sugar beet cultivation) with industry.

In the aviation sector, the second key area, it has become clear that Kütahya's geostrategic location was effectively utilised in military planning. The establishment of the Kütahya Air Regiment and the construction of airfields cemented the city's place within the national defence doctrine. The technical cooperation carried out with British engineers and officers during this process highlighted the role Kütahya played in international technical knowledge transfer.

Regarding the third axis -political and bureaucratic relations- it has been concluded that the city was closely monitored by the political leaders of the era. Following Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's early visit, it has been noted that Kütahya was positioned as a political 'centre of attraction' and a showcase for industrialisation under the Democratic Party, particularly during the Adnan Menderes era. Menderes's speeches at factory openings demonstrated the decisive influence of political will on economic development.

Regarding the fourth axis -social structure and cooperativism- it was observed that the social mobility triggered by industrialisation spread to the grassroots through cooperatives established by the people's own initiative. This situation demonstrated that development was not merely a top-down state project but was also embraced by local dynamics.

In conclusion, the study successfully analyses Turkey's modernisation process, which operated from the 'periphery' towards the 'centre', using the example of Kütahya. In particular, the details regarding British cooperation documents in the aviation sector and the transfer of mining concessions have addressed the 'international dimension' that is often neglected in local historical studies. The study has confirmed, through archival documents, that Kütahya's role in the history of the Republic was not limited to "ceramics and porcelain"; the city was also a "pioneering" actor in strategic sectors such as heavy industry, energy and aviation.

Primary archival documents covering the period between 1929 and 1969 have been analysed, including Council of Ministers decisions (copies of decrees) regarding the transfer of mining licences belonging to Ali Rıza Efendi to the American entrepreneur M. Preston Lock, as well as the legal texts of the concession agreements. Regarding industrialisation, the founding capital of the Kütahya Sugar Factory, protocols concluded with the Turkish Industrial Bank, and land registry and cadastral correspondence concerning the expropriation of land for the factory site from Fatma Sargın and other individuals have been documented.

Furthermore, official reports from the State Planning Organisation and relevant ministries regarding the establishment processes of the Kütahya Nitrogen Industry and Porcelain Factory, the procurement of machinery, and operational plans have been evaluated. With specific regard to aviation activities, the work permits, security investigations and confidential/open correspondence with the Ministry of National Defence concerning British engineers David Wilson Lister, Donald William Haime and other technical staff at the airfields in and around Kütahya (Zığra, Moymul) have been analysed. From a political history perspective, transcripts of speeches made by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes during his visits to Kütahya, thank-you telegrams sent by the public to the state regarding industrial investments, and information reflecting the political atmosphere of the period have been presented to the researchers' attention.

The documents constitute the fundamental data forming the backbone of the study, ensuring its scientific reliability and verifiability. The economic and political theses put forward in the study are grounded in concrete evidence through documents bearing wet signatures and seals from the Presidential State Archives (C.D.A.) and the Republic Archives (C.A.). In particular, the documents presented regarding the activities of British engineers and local expropriation processes have created a valuable repository of information that addresses the lack of 'document-based local history writing' in the literature on Turkish economic and aviation history.

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