

Dossier Editorial: Cultural Transitions in Ottoman Architecture

Bilge Ar
V. Gül Cephaneçigil

Recent decades are marked by profound transformations in the field of architectural history. While the well defined borders of the national grand narratives dispersed within the social and political changes; the discipline turned towards new areas, going beyond canonical themes, giving rise to interdisciplinary interpretations and integrating more transitional zones both in time and geography. In this context the wide range of time, domination over vast areas of different geographies, inheritance from many rooted former civilizations and benefiting from the interactions between the East and the West made the architecture of Ottoman Empire a very fertile ground for these studies. The dossier about the cultural interactions in the Ottoman architecture seeks to provide a discussion ground for such approaches. The articles in the dossier try to evaluate material, human, social and political factors that gave birth to the cultural transitions in Ottoman architectural production through centuries.

The article “Spolia Usage in Anatolian Rulers: A Comparison of Ideas for Byzantines, Anatolian Seljuqs and Ottomans” by Ar treats spolia material as a transmitter of culture between civilizations. The article is searching for meanings behind the usage of spolia material comparing ideas within a very wide range of time and a large geographic area.

Keskin’s article on “Syrian-Origin Architects Around Amasya Region in the Early 15th Century” on the other hand treats human factor in cultural interactions. Focusing on a case study of Amasya the author portrays the translocation network of the master builders and their effects during the formation of an Ottoman style.

The appropriation of architectural forms by different social ranks constitutes another aspect of transitional

zones. Kawamoto, in his article entitled “Courtyards and Ottoman Mosques in the 15th and 16th Centuries: Symbolism, Mimesis and Demise” handles the transmission of symbolic meanings through courtyards in Ottoman mosques in the context of different patrons.

Reinterpreting major monuments of Classical Ottoman architecture, the article “Suleymaniye Complex as the Center of the World” by Mårtelius, examines cultural interactions in a much wider scale covering the West, the East and the Far East.

Orlandi’s article titled “In Search of an ‘Ottoman Landscape’: Sinan’s Works in Thrace as Expression of Tangible Heritage”, steps out of the capital, spreads towards rural areas and other cities on Thrace region and examines Sinan’s architecture within the context of creating landscapes.

Expanding the borders, Manahasa and Kolay focus on the variations in the Ottoman architectural presence in Albania in their article; “Observations on the Existing Ottoman Mosques in Albania”.

Both the desire to embrace novelities among the sultan and bureaucratic elites and the cosmopolitan character that Istanbul acquired in the 19th century resulted in new conditions suitable for new cultural interactions. While European architects’ activities introduced new architectural vocabulary in the city, their way of practice brought change in the reception of the profession. The two articles that focus on the British architect William James Smith handles him as a revealing example of this era. While the article by Ağır, Batur, Cephaneçigil, Kula Say, Topçubaşı and Uğurlu evaluate his professional career in the Ottoman Empire; Saner, Denktas, Mater and Öztürk focuses on his architecture and its relation to antiquity and the historicist context of the era.

The presence of European and Levantines communities called for a considerable building activity in the city. Sağ’s article focusing on the British Post Office in Istanbul traces the history of a service building that fulfills the needs of these communities.

Politics and diplomacy constitute

another major factor shaping the architecture of the city. The article by Göğüş and Kuban on the German fountain of Kaiser Wilhelm II in Sultanahmet evaluates it within the context of German-Ottoman relations.

The formation of a nation state and the appropriation of modernist planning acted as a deteriorating factor to

the multicultural fabric of the cities constituted by several cultural transitions in the Ottoman Empire. Cephaneçigil's article tries to understand the transformation of this character by tracing the construction and the deconstruction processes of the 19th century Armenian church buildings in Gaziantep.