

Architecture education before ITU Faculty of Architecture: Actors shaping the architecture education in *Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* and their impact (1928-1941)

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Abstract

Istanbul Technical University (ITU) Faculty of Architecture has been one of the pioneering architecture schools for architecture education in Turkey since the 1940s. Learning about the period leading to the establishment of the faculty is essential in understanding the institutionalization of architecture education in Turkey. Having transformed into ITU in 1944, *Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi* (YMM) Mimari Şubesi (Architecture Branch) became the ITU Faculty of Architecture. Having functioned as ITU Faculty of Architecture's core, YMM *Mimari Şubesi* is still very little-known today. The usually told tale has been about the *İnşaat Şubesi* (Building Branch) being under Monsieur Dèbes' directorship that it was transformed into the *Mimari Şubesi* thanks to Emin Onat's efforts and struggle against Monsieur Dèbes. Mostly comprised of engineering classes, *İnşaat Şubesi* was considered to be reshaped through Onat's perspective on architecture and education as an actor regarded as the faculty's founder. Positioning Onat in the center, this establishment narrative conceals the other actors shaping architecture education in YMM, their objectives and reflections in the education. In this study, the history of YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* is being built through archived documents and narratives of individuals who bore witness to the period. This endeavor not only helps correct the information considered as known facts regarding the renowned actors like Dèbes and Onat but also unveils those other fundamental actors of architecture education and their influence. Discussing the period behind ITU Faculty of Architecture's establishment with all of its actors provides new ways to understand the institutionalization of Turkey's architecture education.

Keywords

Architecture education, Emin Onat, ITU Faculty of Architecture, Monsieur Debés, Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi.

1. Introduction

The institutionalization of architecture education in Turkey had unfolded in two dimensions from the 19th century to the 1950s. The first one involves the educational institution founded under the name *Mekteb-i Sanayi-i Nefise-i Şahane* in 1882, then transformed into *Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi* (GSA, Fine Arts Academy) in 1928. The other features the institution that was founded under the name *Hendese-i Mülkiye Mektebi* in 1883, evolved into *Mühendis Mektebi* (Engineering School) in 1909, into *Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi* (YMM, Higher Engineering School) in 1928, then into *Yüksek Mühendis Okulu* (YMO, Higher Engineering School) in 1941, finally to become Istanbul Technical University (ITU) in 1944. Architecture education had been formed by these two institutions until the foundation of Middle East Technical University in 1956.¹ This fact makes the history of both architecture branches/faculties significant in understanding how architecture education in Turkey has been shaped.

The phase leading to the establishment of ITU Faculty of Architecture, a key player in the institutionalization of architecture education in Turkey, is represented in the architecture history studies, narratives, and memoirs about the faculty as below: The governmental efforts to renew the architecture education in accordance with the modernism and public development activities in the early 1930s influenced YMM. According to various studies, this change manifested itself either in the curriculum or in learning content and output from lessons. However, the real transformation had taken place when Emin Onat, who was sent to ETH Zürich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) to be educated and trained as an architect, returned to the school. Upon his return to school, Onat took an opposing stance towards Monsieur Dèbes, who was in charge of YMM *İnşaat Şubesi* (Building Branch) and took over the charge of the branch in 1938. The branch curriculum was renewed, with the addition of figures like Clemens Holzmeister and Gustav Oelsner, making the old *İnşaat Şubesi*

become the *Mimari Şubesi* (Architecture Branch). Onat's *Mimari Şubesi* would become the Faculty of Architecture with ITU's foundation in 1944 (Batur, 2010; Baydar, 2012; Bozdoğan 2002; Kafesçioğlu, 2010, Sey & Tapan, 1983; Tekeli, 2011).

ITU Faculty of Architecture's foundation history that can be found in different studies embodies two main problems. The first one is that in different studies there are different information regarding people, events, and dates. For instance, there are conflicting information about Monsieur Dèbes, who was mentioned in YMM records without his forename, such as when he is referred to as an architect from École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in some resources (e.g., Uluçay & Karatekin, 1953), while in some others he is presumed as highway and bridge engineer Georges Debés (e.g., Cengizkan, 2002). There are distinctions in the establishment history of *Mimari Şubesi* which is accepted to be founded by Onat. Whether the branch was new-built or the transformed version of the existing *İnşaat Şubesi*, and the transformation it went through, are all vague. Secondly yet, more importantly, the process' being reduced to solely Onat's efforts causes other influencing actors and their impact on the architecture education go unnoticed. Although Onat's presence had been crucial for the *Mimari Şubesi* and ITU Faculty of Architecture, the period's archived documents point to a greater structure beyond Onat himself. Apparently, the actors shaping this structure had as many determining roles and impacts as Onat had, and even occasionally more.

This article focuses on the history of the YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*, the core of ITU Faculty of Architecture, between 1928 and 1941 where it was attached to *Nafia Vekaleti* (Ministry of Public Works). The documents belonging to this usually misinterpreted and often not completely known period suggest that another history for YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* is possible. Documents used as this article's sources mainly comprise of YMM *Tedris Meclisi's* (*Tedris Kurulu* after 1936; Teaching Council) meeting minutes, educational guides published by YMM, laws and

constitutions regulating the YMM, student records of L'École des Beaux-Arts de Paris in Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, and the testimonies of individuals who used to be students of *YMM Mimari Şubesi*. Telling the history of *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* with a micro-historical perspective and regarding the actors highlighted in these documents will bring about a new viewpoint for how architecture education evolved both in the ITU Faculty of Architecture and in the country.

2. The foundation of *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* and changes of its name

As predecessors of ITU before 1928, engineering schools had a system capable of educating qualified engineers to serve in any desired field within the country through a single curriculum. A meeting took place in Ankara in February 1928 for the transformation of *Mühendis Mektebi* into a “polytechnic” where specialized departments for engineering education would be involved. In addition to school members, officials from *Nafia Vekaleti*, engineers from State Railways, engineer members of the parliament, engineer contractors, building company representatives, and representative of *Maarif Vekaleti* (Ministry of Education) attended the meeting. It was decided in the meeting that three branches would be established within the school to meet the increasing need for qualified manpower, considering the importance assigned to the idea of building the country. One of these branches would be *Mimari ve İnşaat Şubesi* (Okay, 2007; *Mühendis Mektebi*, 1928).

On May 24th, 1928, the transformation to YMM and the establishment of branches officially took place. In the YMM Constitution admitted on June 12th, 1929 (8138 Sayılı Kararname, 1929), the branch was referred to as “*Mimari ve İnşaat Şubesi (Mebani ve Şehircilik)*” (Architecture and Building Branch (Building and City Planning)). In the year 1928-1929 educational guide was published by YMM it was called *Mimari Şubesi* (*Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi*, 2001). In the syllabus proposal in July 1930 the school was

named as *İnşaat Şubesi* (YMM İdare Meclisi, 1930, July 19), and continued to be called as such during the 1930s. In the reconstruction process of YMM in the 1939-1940 academic year, the name of the branch was changed to “*Yapı İşleri ve Şehircilik Şubesi*” (Building Construction and City Planning Branch) (T.C Başvekalet Kararlar Dairesi Müdürlüğü, 1940; YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1939, December 7), however, it was again changed to *Mimari Şubesi* by the start of 1940-1941 academic year (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1940, September 24).

As mentioned above, *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* changed names five times, starting from its establishment in 1928 until 1941. The multiplicity of branch names, in a way, highlights the vague boundaries defining the area of expertise of the branch. The broad field of the branch's education seems compatible with the old custom associated with the school, that is educating specialists for all sorts of construction activities. However, the process shows the name changes are not necessarily linked to the multifaceted education, but more to the complexity brought by the influential actors' different aims and approaches towards the branch in shaping the education.

3. Actors shaping the *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*

The actors influencing the formation of *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* are, in fact, associated with the management structure of YMM. YMM was a *Nafia Vekaleti* affiliate, built upon the objective of increasing qualified manpower for construction activities by the ministry, just like the engineering schools before it. However, unlike its antecedents, it was demanded that YMM grew beyond an engineering school and became a place producing knowledge, therefore it needed to become a legal entity with financial and administrative autonomy like “its peers in Europe” (1/148 Sayılı Kanun Layihası, 1928). With the 1929 Constitution (8138 Sayılı Kararname, 1929) YMM gained rights to become a legal entity and own a separate income in addition to the sources coming from the ministry, *Tedris Meclisi* (Teaching Council) and

İdare Meclisi (Administrative Council) were assigned so that the school would have autonomy in their decisions regarding education and management. The school would be directed by the decisions taken in these councils, yet these decisions were to be confirmed by *Nafia Vekaleti*. The staff and the curriculum of the school branches were determined by *Tedris Meclisi* which consisted of “*müderis*”es and “*muallim*”s of the school. Every branch had a “*Şube Reisi*” (Branch Chief) appointed by again *Tedris Meclisi*. Branches were under the *Şube Reisi*’s responsibility. This structure of YMM demonstrates that *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* was managed by the *Nafia Vekaleti*, *Tedris Meclisi* and *Şube Reisi*, in the hierarchical order (Figure 1). These emerge as the main actors to shape the *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* between 1928 and 1941.

As can be seen below, the main actors shaping *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* had different levels of power. Their vision for the branch was occasionally contradictory and conflicting with each other. From an educational standpoint, the branch staff, a group directly influential in education, are needed to join these actors, however an influential permanent staff could not be formed from the establishment to 1940. The only exception was Emin Onat. Though, Onat’s position until 1940 had mostly been about being an actor capable of opposition against decisions and decision-makers, rather than being involved in the decision-making.

4. *Nafia Vekaleti* and its relationship with the branch

Although YMM was founded as a semi-autonomous body, the large part of its budget being provided by *Nafia Vekaleti* made the ministry have power over the school from the beginning. Decisions taken in school councils could only be executed after *Nafia Vekaleti*’s confirmation, which led to conflicts at times between the school administration and the ministry. While the ministry wanted to interfere in various school subjects from curriculum design to the determination of student numbers to be assigned to certain branches based

on governmental needs², the school administration objected to some of these interventions. With the ministry becoming discontent about this matter, first, it was decided in 1935 that the school would be managed by a director appointed by the ministry (2/2642 Sayılı Kararname, 1935), then in 1936 was made entirely dependent on the ministry by the cancellation of its legal entity and budget rights (2984 Sayılı Kanun, 1936).

The formation of *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* during YMM’s foundation was regarded as highly important by the ministry. The branch was supposed to fulfill the public construction needs, educating engineers as responsible specialists for all fields except specialization areas of *Yol Şubesi* (Highway Branch) and *Su Şubesi* (Water Branches) (1/148 Sayılı Kanun Layihası, 1928). *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*, however, started to be considered a burden about a year and a half after the school opening. The ministry proposed that the branch be discontinued and merged with the GSA *Mimari Şubesi* with an official letter in January 1930. After meetings with the ministry officials in Ankara, it is understood that the proposal partially focused on savings. It was mainly based on the idea that there would not be enough available spots for the architecture graduates’ compulsory services. The Ministry has considered that the number of engineering graduates was insufficient and opted for the sparing of funds to education of engineers instead of architects they regarded as not useful (YMM *Tedris Meclisi*, 1930, February 12).

Probably owing to the fact that the branch had been referred to as *Mimari*

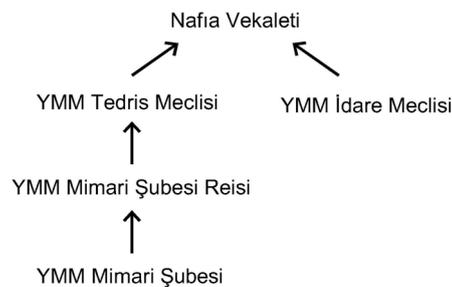


Figure 1. The management of YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*.

Şubesi in the 1928-1929 guide and a Beaux-Arts graduate architect had been appointed as its director, *Nafia Vekaleti* must have thought the branch is far from educating the engineers they envisioned in the beginning. YMM members objected to the GSA joining decision, claiming the branch, unlike its equivalent in GSA, addressed the public construction works of the country as an “architectural engineering” branch (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1930, February 12). In June 1930, after some contacts with the ministry undersecretary and Monsieur (Ernst) Egli, the chief architect of *Maarif Vekaleti Tatbikat Bürosu* (Ministry of Education Practice Office), the proposal for merger was canceled (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1930, June 7). It is worth looking at the fact that the branch began to be called *İnşaat Şubesi* following this incident (it is addressed as such in the syllabus proposal; YMM İdare Meclisi, 1930, July 19). This could have been a deliberate decision to get in the way of joining attempts as well as highlighting its difference with the GSA.

However, in 1932, due to financial difficulties and its limited budget, *Nafia Vekaleti* proposed once again to merge GSA and YMM branches (1/357 Sayılı Kanun Lâyihası, 1932). An objection letter explaining the differences between the two branches was again prepared to prevent the joining (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1933, February 1). Since the cost-saving proposal also included the joining of common classes of YMM with the current classes of *Darülfünun*, this second attempt also did not bring any results when *Darülfünun* was closed in 1933.

Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi which was regarded as crucial by *Nafia Vekaleti* in the beginning had lost importance in time for it started to be seen as a branch training only “architects”. During its time as a *Nafia Vekaleti* affiliate, among other branches, the lowest number of students (62 out of 364 who graduated between 1931 and 1939 were *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* graduates; see list of graduates, Uluçay & Karatekin, 1958) and teaching staff (in the 1936-1937 academic year there were two *muallims*, one *muallim muavini* and an assistant; YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1936, October 3)

were allocated for the branch. As *Tedris Meclisi* substantially agreed with *Nafia Vekaleti* on the importance of engineers training, the branch curriculum was either designed accordingly, or no sufficient funds were provided to educate a qualified branch staff.

Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi managed to survive despite the reluctance of *Nafia Vekaleti*. When the ministry went through a management change in 1939, the new management provided support for the renewal and development of YMM (Okay 2007; Taylan, 2010). This renewal process covered *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* just like the other branches.

5. *Tedris Meclisi* and its opinion on the branch

Tedris Meclisi was one of the councils formed to enable self-government of the school and made decisions about curriculums and staff. Although the council could act autonomously in its decision-making, it was not independent of *Nafia Vekaleti*'s power, had to submit own decisions to the ministry for approval, and was also assigned the task to design the curriculum based on country needs - this also meant the needs of the ministry (2984 Sayılı Kanun, 1936).

Almost all members of the school were engineers, therefore the council was also a community of engineer *muallims* or *müdürlükler*. Monsieur Dèbes, the architect in charge of the *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* since 1930, attended the council meetings for the first time in 1938, while Emin Onat did for the first time in 1939. This means YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* had been shaped by engineers for years.

Once *Tedris Meclisi* was established in 1929, it made two important decisions regarding *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*. The first was sending three students who completed their first three education years in the school's common branch to Europe, two to train as mechanical engineers, the other as an architect, to provide *muallim muavini* (teaching assistant) on the school budget. Feyzi “*Efendi*” and Emin (Onat) “*Efendi*”'s nominations on behalf of *Mimari Şubesi* were submitted to *Maarif Vekaleti* for their decision (YMM Encümeni Tedris, 1929, June 26). Elect-

ed to study in Zürich, Onat would complete his studies and return to the school in 1935. The second important decision was to bring a *muallim* from Europe who was professionally capable of framing and managing the branch (YMM Encümeni Tedris, 1929, June 3). Fikri (Santur) *Bey* was to be the substitute manager of the branch until this “foreign professor” was found (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1929, July 25). As Santur started to look for a European candidate and Monsieur Dèbes would be appointed as the branch head following the period which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

It is possible to find *Tedris Meclisi*’s opinion on *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* in their objections against the 1930 and 1932 attempts of joining it with GSA. It was stated that the branch taught not only architecture but “architecture engineering”. Furthermore, that architecture was then acknowledged as a technical profession rather than fine arts and architecture branches in Europe operate within engineering schools. The education given in the branch adopted a more technical approach, shifting from aesthetical objectives towards engineering (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1930, February 12). “The function of the branch” was elaborated further to provide an opposing stance to the attempt in 1932. As this elaboration suggested, the branch was training architect engineers to be qualified for subjects like construction of roads, sewers, and sanitary systems in the cities and towns, related building construction works and static calculations, heating, and lighting (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1933, February 1).

It is hard to tell how much these opinions of *Tedris Meclisi* reflected on the curriculum before 1937. The earliest complete syllabus found dated back to the 1937-1938 academic year. This syllabus had classes that could be regarded equivalent to the above needs as “applied electricity”, “public works construction”, “lifting equipment”, “topography”, in addition to “architecture” and “city planning”. Yet, the debate during the syllabus preparation meetings (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1937, June 23) demonstrates the uncertainty and disagreements about the expectations

on the branch’s education. According to some engineer members of the council the “topography” class hours had to be increased, considering branch graduates would work as “civil engineers” in municipalities. This raised objections that branch graduates would work as “architects”. According to another belief branch, graduates would not only be architects but also “urban engineers”. Fikri Santur expressed his opinion as follows:

“This branch is an architecture branch. In case this is acknowledged as a fact then the topography classes in the syllabus are adequate. In case this is not an architecture branch, then it is a whole different topic to talk about. Then we should close the branch.”

Tevfik Taylan opposed to these as follows:

“Some classes within our *İnşaat Şubesi* are more than any architecture school would require. For instance, the reinforced concrete class ... is probably far more hours than what GSA has. In fact, we call our branch an architecture-engineering branch and accept architect engineers as different than architects. For topography (class) it is indeed necessary to acknowledge this difference. Especially for the public construction works in our country the need for topography is obvious.”

In consequence of these arguments, it is observed in the curriculum of 1938-1939 that the practice parts of the topography and reinforced concrete classes were increased while architecture class hours were decreased (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1938, April 5).

In accordance with *Nafia Vekaleti*, *Tedris Meclisi*, despite their inner arguments, set objectives to educate architect engineers for city-building, intending to preserve the education’s outweighing engineering aspect.

6. Monsieur Dèbes and his impact on the branch

When it was decided to bring a European *muallim* to manage the branch (YMM Encümeni Tedris, 1929 June 3), the branch substitute chief Fikri Santur consulted Monsieur (Albert-Louis) Gabriel, *muallim* of *Darülfünun* of that time, to find the foreign *Muallim*. Gabriel wrote in his letter in August 1929 that he found several candidates but did not make any

decisions(!) yet (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1929, August 1). In his September letter, he recommended “the Beaux-Arts graduate” Monsieur Dèbes, stating he would accept a contract that would start in December and end in June. The appointment of Dèbes (Figure 2) was decided by a unanimous vote in *Tedris Meclisi* (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1929, September 17).

What was known about Monsieur Dèbes as he started to work at *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* was nothing more than Gabriel’s statements in his letter. The fact that even his forename was not known, made it harder to identify who Dèbes was. Called by various names like Deb, Debs, Deps in various news of his era, he was mistaken for the *Ponts et Chaussées* (Bridges and Roads) Chief Engineer Georges Debès³ who was the author of “*Kagir, Beton ve Betonarme*” published by ITU. Based on the information that Dèbes was an École des Beaux-Arts graduate, individuals with the surname Dèbes were traced in published lists of Beaux-Arts graduates and various archives as part of my doctoral study. Comparison of a signature on a handwritten note in the École des Beaux-Arts register book (Dèbes, 1928) with Monsieur Dèbes’ signature in his note in the *Tedris Meclisi* meeting records (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1932, October 30) made it clear that those two



Figure 2. Albert Joseph René Dèbes (Uluçay & Karatekin, 1958).

were the same persons (Figure 3).

Born in 1895, Albert Joseph René Dèbes attended the workshops of Gustave Umbdenstock and Paul Tournon in École des Beaux-Arts in 1917 and 1918. He took the school entrance exams in 1920, attended second-year classes in 1920, and first-year classes in 1921. He won first medal and first prize in the Rougevin competition in 1924 (Figure 4), and the second medal and first prize in the Rougevin 1928 competition. He graduated in November 1929 (Dèbes, 1917-1929) and a month later started his duty in YMM.

Albert Dèbes had been regarded as the head of *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* from December 1929 to April 1940 (his contract would be annually renewed by the majority of votes among *Tedris Meclisi* members until April 1940), however, was never been acclaimed as *Şube Reisi* officially. He did not own the titles of *müderri* or *muallim* as the school constitution required him to become the chief. According to the council members, someone who recently came to Turkey would have language barriers, probably not wish to accept the responsibilities of *Şube Reisi* which mainly entailed administrative duties, therefore it would not be suitable to give such a person the responsibility (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1929, December 19). This way, Dèbes did not take part in *Tedris Meclisi* and stayed out of branch matters.

Dèbes was consulted for matters like identifying the aim and content of the education of the branch, establishing the curriculum and staff, etc. Following the attempt to merge the branch with the GSA in 1930, Dèbes was sent the current curriculum, asked to prepare a new one (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1930, June 7). There are no written documents showing Dèbes’ detailed plans for the branch. However, it is observed that he demanded more architecture classes in the branch which had numerous engineering classes as part of its curriculum. He proposed to give supplementary classes to *Mimari Şubesi* students in *Ortak Şube*⁴ (Common Branch) and let architecture students move to their branch classes earlier. *Tedris Meclisi* decided an early diversion was not possible, however, Architecture students were to be given painting classes in Or-

tak Şube as preparatory classes (YMM Tedris Meclisi, November 1930, 22).

As mentioned before, *Tedris Meclisi* played a greater part in determining the class hierarchy in the branch's 1937 curriculum than Dêbes. It can be considered that Dêbes, as the chief as well as the instructor, participated in the formation of content of classes like architecture and city planning (Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi, 1937). Yet, at this point, it is necessary to point out that YMM modeled similar polytechnics and high technical schools in Europe in the shaping of its education. In the 1937 curriculum meetings, both *Nafta Vekaleti* and *Tedris Meclisi* members had curriculum proposals similar to that of Berlin Technische Hochschule (TH) (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1937, May 18). However, the proposals discussed in the council did not include *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* curriculum. It would be hard to claim that this curriculum was designed based on the Berlin TH model (see TH Berlin, 1936). It was different from TH curriculums in Europe (Berlin, Zürich, and Stuttgart) for not covering architecture theory, architecture history, art history, variety of drawing/painting/pattern classes, despite having common building equipment classes like building construction, statics, heating, and ventilation. On the other hand, architecture classes had a structure involving information about building typologies (Figure 5) as in ETH Zurich (see ETH, 1936). It is hard to tell if this class structure, which continued to be used after the transformation to ITU Faculty of Architecture, was formed with Dêbes' individual preferences or not. It could also be suggested that Dêbes could be asked to prepare architecture classes similar to TH's, considering *Tedris Meclisi's* influence. Onat's contribution to this content is a low chance since he joined the army at the beginning of 1937 (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1937, January 19).

It is also hard to claim that Albert Dêbes played a significant role in the formation of branch staff. Before the appointment of Dêbes, it was decided that the assistant to be selected as interpreter to the foreign professor be a fresh graduate of the school who was "into architecture" and "capable of

growth by learning from the prospective professor" (YMM İdare Meclisi, 1929, November 25). When looking at the practices, the demands of the Dêbes' assistant candidates to become prospective educators of the school were ignored, as their only role of assisting Dêbes as interpreters continued. Upon Dêbes' demand for an assistant for painting classes in 1930, YMM fresh graduate engineer Feridun Arısan was hired, at *Tedris Meclisi* member Fikri Santur's suggestion. In 1935, the GSA graduate architect Orhan Safa, during his visit to Zeki Sayar in his office, heard about Feridun Arısan's search for an assistant who knew French well, applied for the position at the school, and was accepted "without any formalities required" (Safa, 1995). YMM graduate

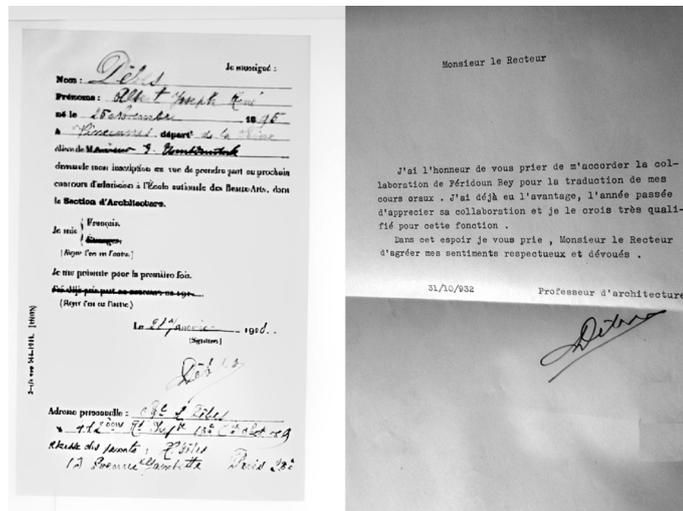


Figure 3. Student record, on the right; Dêbes' signature in the *Tedris Meclisi* record, on the left.



Figure 4. Dêbes' 1st prize and 1st medal winning project in Rougevin competition in 1924 (*École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts* (Paris), 1924).

engineer İhsan Bingüler “was reached by chance and hired in 1936 because it was necessary to find someone as Dèbes’ interpreter” after the branch assistants joined the army (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1937, January 19). With the task of assistant selections being left to personal relationships and coincidences, there was also no declared intention in training a persistent staff for the branch. Dèbes’ two recorded attempts to send an assistant for training in Europe were both prevented by *Tedris Meclisi*. Proposals to send his assistant İhsan Bingüler for training in a building branch in Europe (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1938, May 3) or for an internship in France were put off by the council showing the restrictions with the budget as an excuse, with the arguments that Bingüler was a *Yol Şubesi* graduate, appointed as Dèbes’ assistant due to his

good French knowledge, and whether he wanted to become an architect through that internship (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1938, May 17). Instead, engineering assistants from other branches were sent to Europe.

Though he instructed the core courses as architecture and city planning, Dèbes, the person in charge of *YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*, did not completely seem to be the person to give the branch a structure. The reasons could be either him being a foreigner without a network, not being empowered to get directly involved in decision-making, or his lack of interest in the future of the branch. It is possible to say Dèbes had been of far less influence than the *Tedris Meclisi* and *Nafta Vekaleti* on *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*, during his time on duty.

7. Emin Onat against Monsieur Dèbes

Emin Onat was one of the three people who were sent to Europe for *muallim muavini* training during the school’s establishment in 1929. Sent to Zürich ETH for architecture education, Onat completed his studies in 1934. Although the idea of having Onat and the two others do internships or doctorates was brought to the agenda (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1934, April 17), the doctorate idea was postponed because the school immensely needed these students as *muavins* (YMM Tedris Meclisi, 1934, November 27). Onat (Figure 6) became part of the branch in 1935 with the title *muallim muavini*.

Emin Onat did not have a say in the branch management as *muavin*. Still, upon his return complaints against Dèbes and his teaching style emerged. As the extension of foreign teacher contracts had been discussed in *Tedris Meclisi* in 1936, Mukbil Gökdoğan presented a report to the council. According to the report, Dèbes did not attend 79 classes out of his total 147 classes, and this situation improved a bit when reported to the school management. However, he did not attend any architecture studio hours for his eight design classes, causing the students under his responsibility to spend the year without any academic “benefits”. If the total amount is calculated by the 13.5

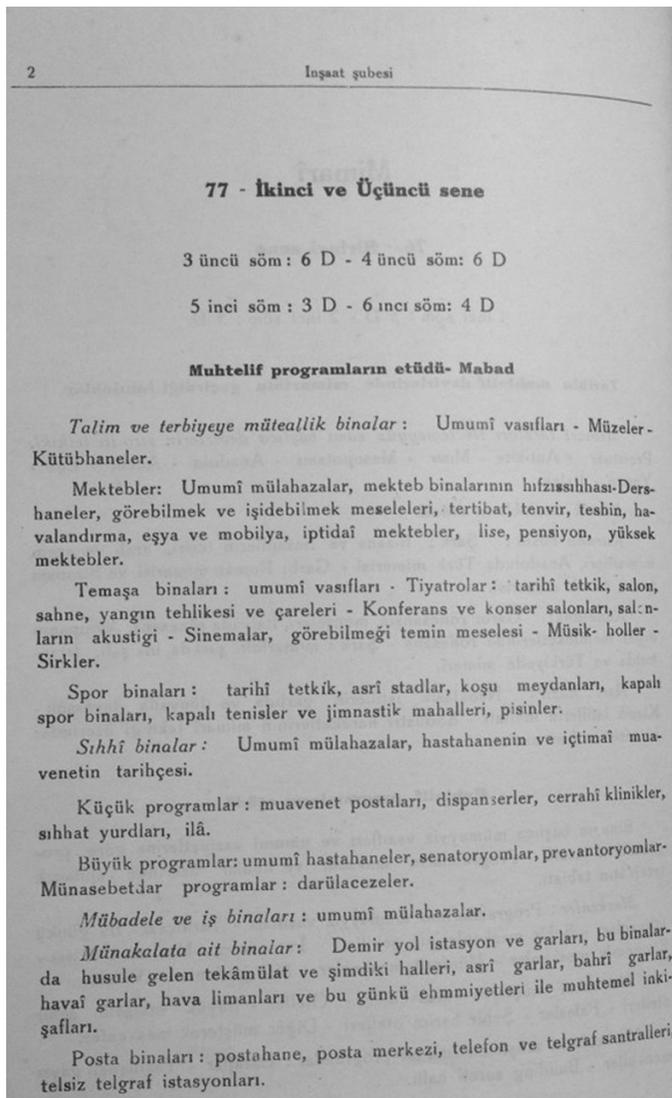


Figure 5. YMM Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi architecture class content.

Liras he earned per class, it means the country had 1094.5 Liras go to waste.⁵ As for Dèbes, he explained his reasons that no students attended the classes, they did not finish the sketch or design homework on time, there were insufficient sources of books and magazines, and the school did not provide a second drawing workshop which had been necessary for the last six years. In response to the assistants' expressing positive opinions about Dèbes, Gökdoğan demanded information about Dèbes' "professional skills and works" that were investigated during his hire, yet no one could answer (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1936, May 5). It was decided that the official reports back when Dèbes started working at the school be read. Monsieur Gabriel's letter was the only document, and it has no other information about Dèbes than that "he studied in the Beaux-Arts and he successfully worked in the (Picadelli?) theater newly built in Paris", regarding his background and professional skills. According to Gökdoğan, Dèbes could be replaced with some other professors "for the sake of the country". He stated Martin Elsaesser would happily accept this job. According to Gökdoğan, Mies van der Rohe, (André) Lurçat, (Auguste) Perret, and even Le Corbusier could be considered. Dèbes' contract could not be renewed due to a lack of majority votes during the meeting, but it was decided that he stayed until a more qualified person would be found to fill his place with a lower pay (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1936, May 8).

Mukbil Gökdoğan shared the same



Figure 6. Emin Onat (1962).

opinion about Dèbes with his close friend Emin Onat and expressed them during *Tedris Meclisi* meeting where Onat was not authorized to attend as a *muallim muavini*. Gökdoğan (1961) explained their struggle against Dèbes as below:

"Once Emin (Onat) returned all we thought about was to rehabilitate and re-build this premature branch according to the civic mindset, namely the European mindset, in a way to fit our system... On the other hand, the impossibility to integrate this model of the Beaux-Arts system, especially in the way Emin is accustomed to, causing disharmony between them, the lack of productivity caused by this, and therefore the overall incompatibility with our body, all caused us to start working towards the dismissal of this person in the appropriate way ..."

As Gökdoğan also pointed out, Onat's attitude towards Dèbes could also be based on the fact that they had different architectural backgrounds. Arif Tansuğ (1962), whom Onat worked with between 1936 and 1938 in *Yıldız Teknik Okulu* construction, believed Onat was "completely a different character than the branch chief Prof. Dèbes. They had thoroughly contrasting opinions on art". It is an understandable fact that Onat, who had a modernist education in ETH Zurich, objected to Dèbes' Academic Classicism doctrine adopted from the Beaux-Arts Ecole. Although the design classes prepared by Dèbes involved elements from the classical architecture doctrine like ornamentation, proportion, rhythm (Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi, 1937) he had his students design modernist projects fitting with the period's architecture trends that did not carry any elements from the Beaux-Arts Ecole (Figures 7-9).

Negative comments against Dèbes seemed to be caused by more than clashes of "architectural taste". It is told that in addition to neglecting his class duties he also did not fulfill the tasks given by the school. Orhan Safa (1995) mentioned about the time he assisted Dèbes that neither he worked for the urgent duty of building a dormitory building in Gümüşsuyu that he was assigned, nor did he approved the projects done by Onat and Safa. Because of this, the school was put in a difficult position

against *Nafia Vekaleti*. He was personally not liked by some assistants and students as well. Having assisted Dèbes in 1940, Kemal Ahmet Arû (2001) described Dèbes as a bizarre, snobbish man. According to him, Dèbes did not communicate with his assistants because he did not value them. Having designed an apartment building project in Dèbes's class between 1939 and 1940, Ziya Payzın (2006) stated Dèbes' clinging to his discourse of "There is no Turkish Architecture, there is Islamic Architecture" had a negative influence among students in a time with high patriotic sentiments as World War II was still going on. Ruhi Kafesçioğlu (2016) also defined Dèbes as an "extremely strict person".

Appointed as *muallim* upon completing his military service at the end of 1937 (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1937, October 12), Emin Onat became branch chief candidate for the first time at the beginning of 1939. Gaining the most votes, he was recommended to *Nafia Vekaleti* as the branch chief (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1939, January 10). Shortly after, in the meetings for the extension of foreign professor contracts Onat opposed the extension of Dèbes' contract with the following statement (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1939, April 18):

"In deciding the contract renewal of these colleagues, the most important thing to keep in mind is their technical capabilities. Not all architecture branch graduates, unfortunately, are capable of executing a project. Therefore they are busy doing estimations in the Ministry".

After discussions, Dèbes' contract was renewed again by a majority vote (10 out of 18). Mukbil Gökdoğan (1961) talked about their "struggle" with Emin Onat against Dèbes as below:

"Despite the (Tedris) Meclis' strict conditions ... this hard-fought battle (against Dèbes) continued and finally, through following the book, instead of tricking him and making him leave, by putting forth actual matters and events, regarding both teaching and practice, ... we were able to dismiss M. Debs from the branch. This way the first seeds of our faculty today started growing there."

Dèbes left the school at the end of YMM's reconstruction period in 1940.⁶

8. Şube Şefi Emin Onat and the transformation of the branch

A reconstruction period was started in YMM with the support of the new management taking office in *Nafia Vekaleti* in 1939. In the 1939-1940 academic year, syllabuses were re-designed, lesson contents were re-shaped to meet modern needs of the era, staff was increased, educational tools were completed and the projects aiming the further development of the school were put into effect (Taylan, 2010).

The 1939-1940 academic year, like the rest of the school, had been a year of remarkable changes within *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi*. One of the most important developments was Emin Onat's becoming the *Şube Şefi*. In the *Tedris Meclisi* meeting about the new "*Yapı İşleri Şubesi*" syllabus and the new teachers to be hired in December 1939, Professor⁷ Onat declared (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1939, December 7):

"The need for the "*Yapı İşleri Şubesi*"s rehabilitation because until today the technical aspect of the profession had been overwhelmingly emphasized in it, and the artistic aspect needed consolidation so that the education of fully qualified architect engineers could be ensured..."

To reinforce the artistic side of the branch's education, interior design, art history, Turkish architecture history, model making and free-hand drawing classes were included in the curriculum (YMM Tedris Kurulu, 1939, December 7). Despite these new classes and the architecture class hours increasing, it could not be completely restructured. Onat could not bring such a reform to the branch on his initiative because the school was still attached to *Nafia Vekleti* and managed by *Tedris Meclisi*. A new curriculum from scratch would happen only after the school's transformation to university and the establishment of the faculty.

Emin Onat's greatest contribution to the *Mimari Şubesi* was the formation of a relatively large staff including important names (Figure 10). Clemens Holzmeister, who back then had important duties in Turkey, joined the staff as a professor of architecture, while Gustav Oelsner joined as a professor of city planning.

The impact of *Mimari Şubesi*, which took shape in 1940, on the YMM's architecture education was rooted more in its teaching rather than its curriculum. The fact that the two acclaimed architects Onat and Holzmeister instructed the architectural design, which are regarded as the core of architecture education, and their communication with students brought a significant change (Payzın, 2006; Kafesçioğlu, 2010). The branch's physical environment was also renewed. The old drawing workshop was transformed into "an architectural workshop" with new drawing tables (Payzın, 2006). Having borne witness to this period, Payzın and Kafesçioğlu expressed their shared sentiment as in Kafesçioğlu's (2010) statement "We were now enthusiastic *Mimari Şubesi* students in a whole new environment, not *İnşaat Şubesi* anymore".

9. Evaluation

Gülsüm Baydar (2012) explains how the history of architecture education from Ottoman times to the Republic era can be read through personal efforts:

"...the history of architecture education can even be reduced to a few reformists' personal histories. From Abdüllahim Effendi, who wrote the first proposal for the establishment of an architecture school, to Emin Onat, who established the architecture faculty within the (Istanbul) Technical University, individuals played key roles in framing the scope of architecture education."

This approach had been repeated many times in the narratives regarding the establishment of the ITU Faculty of Architecture through Emin Onat's founder role. Taking a closer look at the events that had taken place in YMM *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* between 1928 and 1941 shows us a structure consisting of various actors taking part in the formation of the branch. Within this structure, Onat had been a pivotal actor with his vision, determination, and efforts for architecture education. However, Onat's influence had been limited by other actors' objectives and deeds, while the architecture education was molded through the conflicts and/or reconciliation acts between all actors.

In the period from YMM's establish-



Figure 7. YMM *İnşaat Şubesi* year 1933 graduate Emrullah Vehbi's student project designed in Dèbes' architecture studio (Emrullah Vehbi, n.d.).

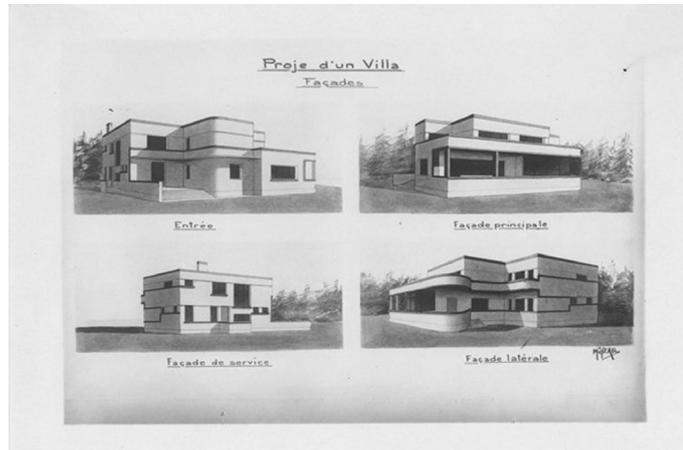


Figure 8. YMM *İnşaat Şubesi* year 1935 graduate Müfit Ali's student project designed in Dèbes' architecture studio (Müfit Ali, n.d.).



Figure 9. YMM *İnşaat Şubesi* year 1935 graduate Müfit Ali's student project designed in Dèbes' architecture studio (Müfit Ali, n.d.).

ment in 1928 to its passing to *Maarif Vekaleti* in 1941, *Mimari/İnşaat Şubesi* shaped by the deeds of *Nafia Vekaleti* which it was attached to, *Tedris Meclisi* which took branch-related decisions,

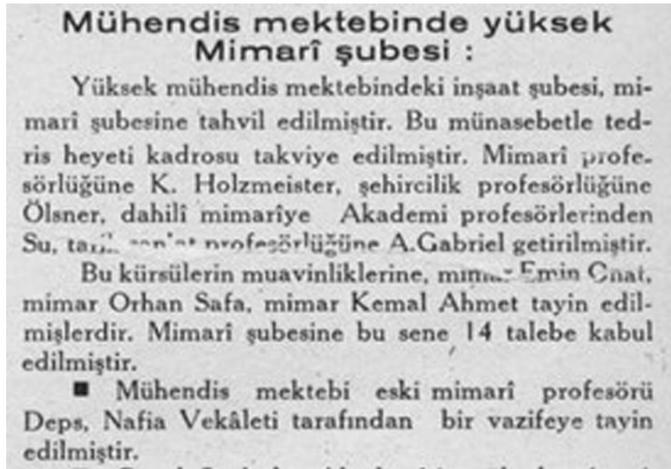


Figure 10. News about *Mimari Şubesi* published in the *Arkitekt Magazine* (*Haberler*, 1940).

the branch head Albert Dèbes and branch staff Emin Onat. *Nafia Vekaleti* as the state representative had been an actor to provide the resources necessary to maintain YMM's presence and identify its educational objectives in return. The task of shaping education following the ministry's objectives was assigned to *Tedris Meclisi*. Although the ministry and the council fell into disagreements at times, most council members had the same objectives as the Ministry. The branch was expected to train "architect engineers" fully knowledgeable about city-building. However, their qualification with a broad area of expertise had always been vague and controversial for both the ministry and the council. This notion coupled with the lack of vision and determination necessary to construct the branch curriculum and staff caused the shift from architecture towards the field of engineering, which was regarded as a greater need for the country.

Albert Dèbes and Emin Onat, although being part of the branch staff, had limited impacts on the decisions that developed the branch. Dèbes, who was brought to the branch with a reference letter that had almost no information about himself, did not, or could not, demonstrate any efforts to shape the branch. Emin Onat criticized the education under Dèbes' instruction for poor quality, but Dèbes managed to stay as the branch chief by *Tedris Meclisi's* approval until 1940. Upon becoming the *Mimari Şubesi Şefi* in 1940, Onat gained the necessary power to realize the transformation he desired. At this

point, it is important to keep in mind that Onat's role as chief could happen thanks to the voting in the *Tedris Meclisi* and the approval of the *Nafia Vekaleti*, and Onat-led transformation of *Mimari Şubesi* was again enabled by the new management of the ministry. Onat played a pioneering role by putting forward a solid will and perspective for the branch's educational objectives, content, and future. However, Onat's becoming the branch chief in 1940 can only mean an improvement in architecture education rather than a revolution because the school structure stayed the same, in other words, the *Tedris Meclisi's* authority continued. The branch staff was fortified by bringing important names, the quality of architecture classes was improved thanks to their contribution, however, it was not possible to create a fresh new curriculum that positioned architecture education in its center.

YMM's separation from the *Nafia Vekaleti* and attachment to *Maarif Vekaleti* in 1941, YMO's transformation to ITU in 1944, and finally, after the 1946 *Üniversiteler Kanunu* (Law on Higher Education), Faculty of Architecture's turning into an autonomous body caused architecture education to become increasingly independent of the above-mentioned actors. The separation from *Nafia Vekaleti* took away the pressure of training future ministry employees from the branch's shoulders, while the foundation of the university eliminated *Tedris Meclisi* member engineers' influence on the syllabus. *Üniversiteler Kanunu* rendering faculties relatively independent and enabling the formation of decision mechanisms from faculty members allowed more and insider actors to form ITU Faculty of Architecture and its education.

Endnotes

¹ *Yıldız Teknik Okulu* (Technical School) and *ITU Teknik Okulu* were among the institutions. However, these were not considered to be schools that train *Yüksek Mimar* (master architect) due to their shorter education period. Also, the majority of the teaching staff of these schools were members of ITU and GSA.

² The education expenses of most

of the students were covered by *Nafia Vekaleti*, and these students had to work there after their graduation.

³ He lived from 1876 to 1950 and worked as engineer at Ministry of Public Works (France) until 1935 (URL.1, URL.2).

⁴ Specialization branches with a three-year program started after the three-year *Ortak Şube*, where basic education was given.

⁵ Dêbes was the highest paid foreigner at YMM. In 1936, his salary was 1200 TL, on the other hand, other foreigners received a salary of 850 Liras or 700 Liras (T.C Başvekalet Kararlar Dairesi Müdürlüğü, 1936).

⁶ According to the news published in the *Arkitekt* magazine, Dêbes was appointed to another duty by *Nafia Vekaleti* (Haberler, 1940). No information could be found in the state archives about the post he held after 1940 or when he left Turkey. Dêbes died in Paris in 1976 (URL.3)

⁷ During the restructuring process in the school, the title of *muallim* was changed to *profesör* (professor) and *muallim muavini* to *doçent* (associate professor).

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