

# Reading Sedad Hakkı Eldem in the context of the skein metaphor: An alternative analysis

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## Abstract

Sedad Hakkı Eldem's architectural contributions encompass a diverse array of built and unbuilt projects, discourses, texts, and particularly a multitude of sketches from his youth. This breadth makes it challenging to encapsulate Eldem's architecture in a single characterization. Previous attempts in Eldem literature to define his work through selected buildings, thoughts, or texts offer a convenient shortcut but risk overlooking its full continuity. Upon closer examination of Eldem's oeuvre, spanning from his childhood to the final years of his life, a discernible continuity emerges within this diversity. It also becomes evident that the foundations of Eldem's architectural genre were laid in his formative years.

This paper aims to offer an alternative interpretation of Eldem's architecture by unveiling this underlying continuity and foundational elements. Instead of focusing on specific buildings selected subjectively, as is the case in existing readings on Eldem, this paper seeks to evaluate Eldem's architectural ethos within a broader framework. Drawing inspiration from Carlo Emilio Gadda's metaphorical notion of a "skein", the study perceives Eldem's architecture as intricately woven. The paper employs Italo Calvino's insights on this metaphor to explore Eldem's childhood and youth, which served as a nexus of intercultural influences between Europe and Istanbul. It claims that this period was pivotal in shaping the skein of his architectural vision. By exploring the interplay between the experiences and productions of Eldem's "formative years" and those of his professional life, this paper asserts that his legacy can be traced through the diverse tapestry of his work.

## Keywords

Notebooks, Regionalism, Sedad Hakkı Eldem, Skein, Turkish architecture.

## 1. Introduction

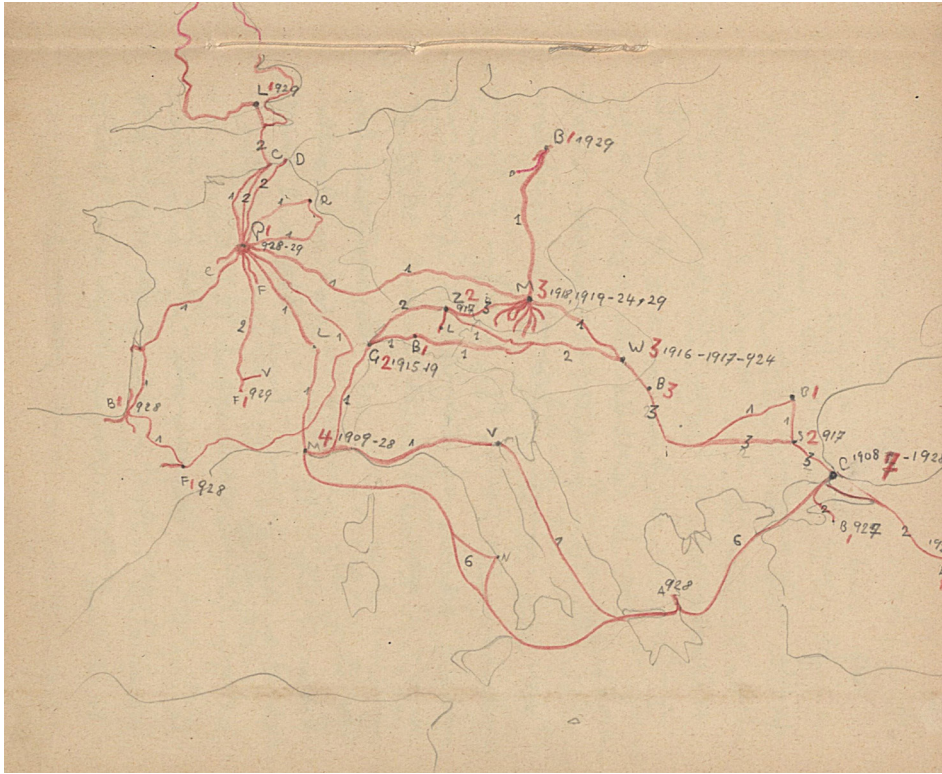
Born in 1908 in Istanbul, into a high-ranking bureaucrat family dedicated to the development and dissemination of Turkish art and culture in Ottoman Türkiye,<sup>1</sup> Sedat Hakki Eldem is one of the most prominent figures of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Turkish architecture. He spent most of his childhood and youth in various European cities where he completed his primary and high school education, influenced by both Western and Ottoman cultures. He returned to Istanbul and began studying architecture at the Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi in 1924. Upon graduating from the Academy<sup>2</sup> in 1928, Eldem received an *ikmâl-i tahsil* scholarship, covering a three-year trip to Europe, during which he enjoyed significant freedom in deciding how to spend his time.<sup>3</sup> Between 1928 and 1930, he traveled to France, England and Germany.<sup>4</sup>

His two-decade-long journey of intercultural exchange during his foundational years profoundly shapes Eldem's architectural practice. Sibel Bozdoğan refers to these years as the "formative years" (2005), during which geographical and cultural intersections

are not only physically mapped out by Eldem himself (see Figure 1) but are also deeply imbued with emotional significance. The individuals he encountered, the places he explored, the buildings he studied, the experiences he gained, and the books he examined all serve as defining nodes within this intricate network. These nodes are not isolated; rather, they are interconnected through Eldem's creative output.

The sketches found in his early notebooks,<sup>5</sup> the multitude of buildings he constructed, the projects that remained on the drafting board and his extensive writings, collectively constitute these creative outputs. Through these works, Eldem explores various concepts such as regionalism, modernism, nationalism, and critical regionalism.

Throughout his multifaceted life, characterized by roles as an architect, professor, bureaucrat, and writer, the interconnections between these nodes and roles continuously multiply. As a result, Eldem's professional portfolio expands and diversifies, evolving into a complex web of creations. Over time, it becomes increasingly challenging to discern a singular narrative or identity within his body of work, leading some



**Figure 1.** Depiction of Eldem's journeys taken between 1908-1929, as mapped out by himself (SALT Research Archive).

to perceive it as the product of disparate hands (Vanlı, 2006).

This perception may hold true when analyzing Eldem's buildings individually, as each may seem to bear a distinct signature. However, a comprehensive understanding of Eldem's architecture necessitates grasping the interconnect- edness of this skein and the network of relationships that underpin it. Only when viewed holistically can the richness and complexity of Eldem's architectural legacy be fully appreciated.

This study endeavors to capture and convey the inherent complexity of Eldem's architecture, situated at the convergence of literature. Employing a metaphor borrowed from Carlo Emilio Gadda's novels, Eldem's architecture is conceptualized as a "skein," with an attempt to elucidate its intricacies drawing upon Italo Calvino's insights on Gadda. The study focuses on elucidating the formation of this skein— Eldem's architectural oeuvre—through the delineation of its constituent points and connections.

Much like a writer selects a singular event from an infinite array of possibilities and develops it with fundamental assumptions to represent the broader spectrum of potentialities within a story (Calvino, 2007), this study centers on Eldem's early productions, deemed emblematic of the overarching multiplicity of his work. This deliberate focus, not only practical within the confines of this study but also philosophically resonant, hones in on Eldem's formative years, when the foundations of his architectural identity were first laid. These nascent creations, documented within his notebooks, unveil Eldem's distinctive approach to architectural composition—an adaptive practice that both diversifies his output and leaves a discernible imprint within its diversity. This trace, characterized by the modernization of traditional elements, permeates Eldem's entire body of work, enduring until the culmination of his career.

In a similar vein, this text weaves its own narrative skein, offering an alternative perspective on Eldem's architecture while also highlighting the potential for enriching existing literature.<sup>6</sup> The readings on Eldem, often conduct-

ed by various scholars, primarily focus on his post-1930s projects, neglecting his earlier works, which deserve recognition in the literature to gain a holistic understanding of his architecture. By foregrounding the significance of Eldem's early notebooks, often overlooked in scholarly discourse, this study seeks to alleviate the congestion in architectural scholarship, presenting a fresh lens through which to examine his contributions.

## 2. Skein metaphor:

### Interconnectedness of everything

In his book *American Lessons*, Calvino (2007) initiates the chapter dedicated to the concept of multiplicity by incorporating an extensive passage from the novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto De Via Merulana* (The Awful Mess on Via Merulana) by Italian author Gadda. This excerpt, which Calvino deems a superb preamble to his reflections on the theme, portrays actions as intricate patterns influenced by a multitude of converging causes. Gadda employs terms like "knot", "tangle", and "skein" to depict the complex nature of these patterns. According to Calvino (2007), Gadda's lifelong endeavor was to "depict the world as a knot, a tangled skein of yarn, without diminishing its inextricable complexity in the least" (Calvino, 2007, p.116). Drawing inspiration from Gadda's representation, Calvino (2007) develops his own ideas throughout the chapter. He explores the proliferation of possibilities in contemporary novels, which he views as a network of connections between events, people, and objects in the world. Calvino (2007) examines the potential of this approach in enriching narratives, emphasizing the interconnectedness and multifaceted nature of human experience.

By applying the network of connections approach to the field of architecture, where numerous cultural, artistic, social, and economic influences intersect, architectural practice is conceptualized as a complex interplay of various facets of the world. This includes buildings, journeys, events, people, emotions, sites, and thoughts. This framework provides a practical foundation

for interpreting Eldem's architecture as a skein—a metaphorical entanglement of interconnected elements.

Within this skein, individuals, places, buildings, experiences, and literary sources serve as defining points, shaping Eldem's architectural vision. The architectural productions themselves—comprising buildings, sketches, articles, books, and notes—act as the threads that bind these points together, forming a cohesive narrative of his creative journey. Through this lens, Eldem's architecture emerges as a tapestry woven from the intricate connections between these diverse elements, reflecting the complexity and richness of his multidimensional practice.

## 2.1 First windings of the skein

Eldem begins weaving his skein of interconnected experiences during his childhood years. His family connections serve as the initial nodes within this skein. Due to his father's diplomatic postings, Eldem spends much of his formative years in various European cities, including Geneva, Zurich and Munich, where the foundational points and connections of his architectural journey take shape. Immersed in the ambiance of these cities, he explores books and magazines on architecture found in the libraries of the houses where he resides. Inspired by these resources, he creates drawings that mark the earliest connections between these formative nodes (see Figure 2).

During this period, Eldem encounters influential architects and their works such as Karl Friedrich Schin-

kel, Bruno Taut, and Bruno Paul. Additionally, he has the opportunity to meet Adelbert Niemeyer, a friend of his uncle Osman Hamdi Bey. His visit to Niemeyer's house was a significant event where Eldem was deeply moved by the intimate atmosphere, perceiving the rooms as living personalities and the house as a harmonious part of nature and its inhabitants. He explains this experience saying: "It was as if the house, the rooms were living together with the family. Some places had not taken shape for years. The rooms had names, as if they were like living personalities. They were a reflection, a part of those who lived inside" (Eldem, 1983, p.6). It was not only the house, but the furniture inside it also influenced him deeply: "This decor was not mere decor. As if it was a part of the nature, a part of those who lived inside. It was formed with them and maturing together with them. They had no artificial existence of their own, and certainly no pretensions" (Eldem, 1983, p.6). This experience, emphasizing anonymity and being part of nature, leaves an indelible impression on Eldem, who never forgot the lessons imparted by this eminent figure.

The seeds of Eldem's discourse on the anonymity<sup>7</sup> of architecture, a theme he would later revisit during his travels in Anatolia with his students, were likely sown during this encounter and the lessons learned from Niemeyer. This foundational experience shapes Eldem's understanding of architecture as a living, organic entity intimately intertwined with its surroundings and inhabitants, devoid of artificiality or



**Figure 2.** Drawings created at the age of sixteen (SALT Research Archive).

pretense—a principle he would carry with him throughout his career.

Eldem's fascination with architecture gradually expands beyond individual houses to encompass the broader urban landscape. He immerses himself in observing construction sites within his neighborhood, particularly those employing traditional building

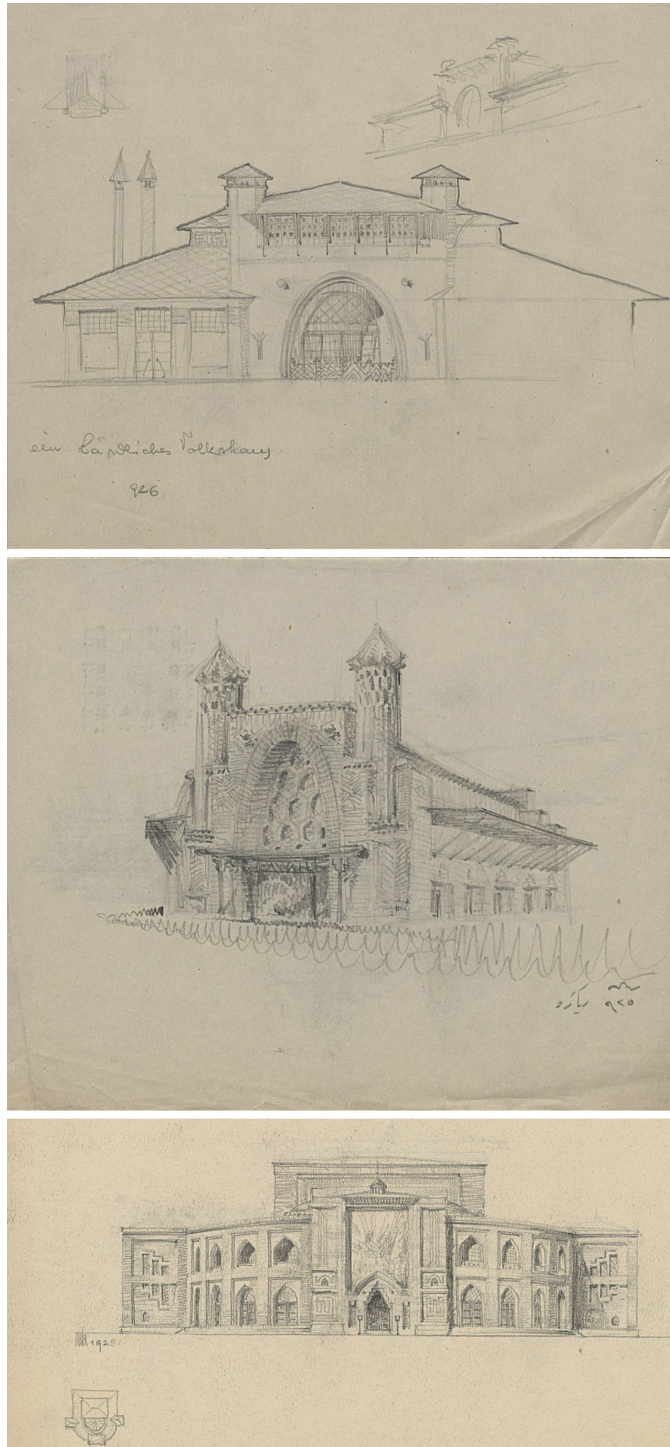
methods. Influenced by the cohesive style and materials found in Munich's historic buildings, as well as the city's dedication to preserving its architectural heritage (Eldem, 2014), his interest in architecture deepens, leading to a proliferation of points within his skein.

As his architectural interests diversify, Eldem's connections multiply. He adopts a thorough chronicling practice, which he maintains for approximately a decade, to meticulously document his evolving architectural journey. These notebooks serve as tangible records of his drawings, architectural musings, experiences, and observations. They contain a wealth of materials, including photographs of buildings clipped from magazines, sketches of architectural landmarks, watercolor renditions of interiors, scaled drawings of furniture, and as Tanyeli (2008) mentions sketches of characters from Germanic mythology. Through this meticulous documentation, Eldem's burgeoning interest in architecture becomes increasingly evident. Inspired by his European experiences and acquaintances, he resolves to pursue a formal education in architecture, setting the stage for the next phase of his journey.

Upon his return to Türkiye in 1924, Eldem continues to weave his skein, a process enriched by the geographical and cultural shift. This new environment diversifies the points within his architectural journey, consequently expanding the scope of connections—or productions—as well. Eldem dedicates himself to studying a diverse array of buildings, including mosques, hans, caravanserais, and palaces.

## 2.2 Academy years: The skein is starting to shape

During his years at the Fine Arts Academy, Eldem's notebooks are filled with designs that demonstrate his adeptness at adapting elements and proportions from Seljuk, Ottoman, and Persian architecture<sup>8</sup> for various functions. These designs encompass a wide range of structures, from hans and hotels to stations and court buildings (see Figure 3). As his repertoire of drawings multiplies, Eldem's inherent practice of adaptation becomes increasingly apparent. This practice



**Figure 3.** Designs in which Seljuk, Ottoman, and Persian architectural elements were adapted (SALT Research Archive).

allows for countless experiments, demonstrating how each architectural style and form can be tailored to complement one another. Over time, this practice evolves into what Eldem describes as the desire to imbue the traditional with a modern character (Eldem, 2014, p.43).<sup>9</sup>

Eldem's enduring fascination with vernacular architecture in Anatolia, which serves as a discernible thread connecting various points within his skein, continues to take shape during his studies at the Academy. Exploring Istanbul and several Anatolian cities during this period, Eldem develops a keen interest in traditional houses—an interest that would profoundly influence his architectural practice and discourse throughout his lifetime.

During this period, Eldem deliberately seeks out opportunities to study and sketch the timber houses of Istanbul, often opting for different routes to the Academy to immerse himself in the architectural details along the way. Furthermore, he dedicates his summers to interning at construction sites across Anatolian cities such as İzmir, Konya and Ankara.<sup>10</sup> It is during these internships that Eldem's appreciation for vernacular architecture deepens, as he observes firsthand the rich diversity of architectural traditions prevalent in these regions.<sup>11</sup>

These experiences culminate in Eldem's meticulous documentation of the historical fabric, a practice that involves capturing photographs, sketching buildings and meticulously detailing materials and joints. Through these efforts, Eldem endeavors to preserve and celebrate the architectural heritage of Türkiye, laying the groundwork for his future architectural endeavors rooted in a deep understanding of vernacular architecture.

Eldem's dissatisfaction with the classical education provided by the Academy prompts him to seek solace in the historic quarters of Istanbul, where the traditional essence remains intact. His critique of the Beaux-Arts approach to education coincides with a broader intellectual discourse unfolding globally.<sup>12</sup> During this period, Lewis Mumford's scathing critique of the beaux-arts school in America and his advocacy for regionalism begin to

gain traction (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1989). This synchronicity marks Eldem's initial engagement with the principles of critical regionalism.<sup>13</sup>

The process of winding the skein initiated by Eldem continues to unfold, now infused with memories and influences from his experiences in Istanbul. What Eldem once felt in Munich during his childhood, he now experiences again in Istanbul as a student. Exploring the historic quarters of the city, Eldem is struck by a sense of harmony emerging from the juxtaposition of large and small buildings, each contributing to a rhythmic composition rather than conforming to a rigid classical order. His aim is not just to observe from a distance but to immerse himself in the local community, seeking a genuine connection with the people (Eldem, 1983).<sup>14</sup>

Guided by principles rooted in the scale of buildings, their aesthetic values and their symbiotic relationship with the inhabitants, Eldem's architectural quest in Istanbul represents a natural extension of the journey that began on the streets of Munich and continued through his encounters at Niemeyer's house. Rather than adhering to a linear or hierarchical approach to architecture, Eldem weaves his architectural vision into a skein, intertwining recollections and forging diagonal or vertical connections.

Within this intricate tangle, the points are not consumed in isolation but are continuously rewound and reused, revealing new connections with each iteration. Sketches, notes and thoughts serve as threads that weave in and out of the narrative, each contributing to the rich tapestry of Eldem's architectural journey.

During his student years, Eldem's studies marked a distinct departure from the conventional norms prevalent at the academy and within the architectural practice of his time. While his peers focused on mastering the prescribed proportions and rules of classical architecture, Eldem's fascination lay elsewhere—specifically, in the organic evolution of historical urban patterns that seemed to emerge almost spontaneously.

His distinctive perspective did not go unnoticed. Giulio Mongeri, an Ital-

ian architect teaching at the academy, initially reacted with skepticism upon seeing Eldem's drawings, but later came to appreciate and support his unconventional approach. Despite Eldem's departure from the traditional studio teachings, Mongeri recognized a deeper significance in his work. He sensed that Eldem's exploration of historical urban patterns tapped into something beyond the confines of classical architecture—a quality that Eldem himself described as a harmonious relationship between humans, structures, topography and nature (Eldem, 2014).

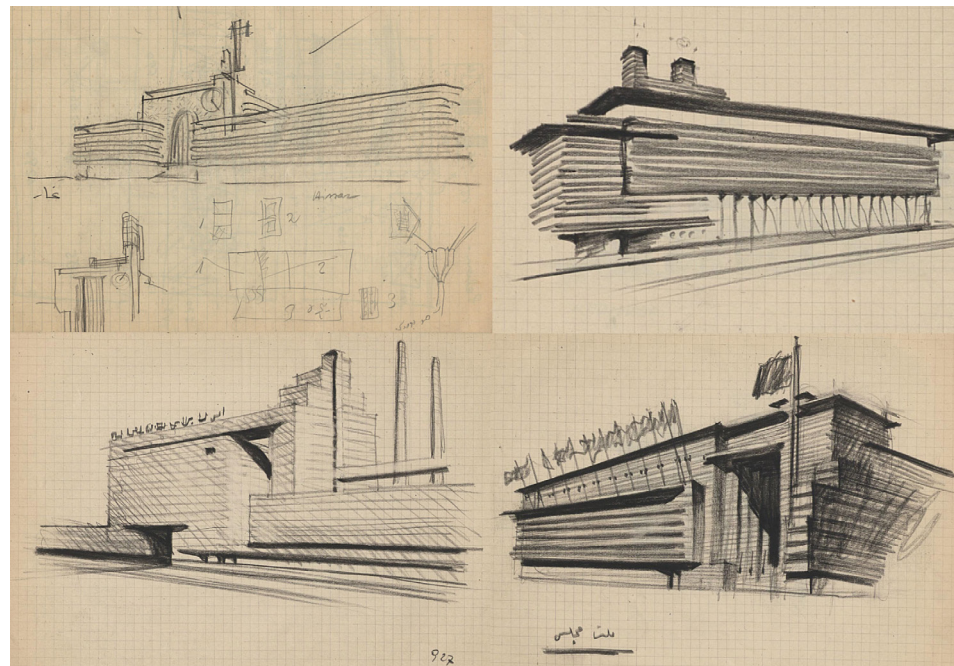
For Eldem, this something represented a profound understanding of the intrinsic connection between the built environment and its surroundings—a theme that would become central to his architectural philosophy and practice. Through his studies, Eldem's appreciation for the organic beauty of historical urban landscapes deepened, setting the stage for his future contributions to the field of architecture.

Eldem's poetic language eloquently captures his profound appreciation for the intricate relationship between humans, structures, topography and nature. In his observations of Ankara, he was deeply moved by the city's untouched urban texture and undulating topography, which he likened to a fairy tale world, almost as if crafted by

the hands of God (Eldem, 1983). Conversely, Istanbul evoked a sense of awe and admiration, described as an infinite treasure adorned with landscapes of irresistible beauty.

It is important to note that Eldem's interest in traditional civil architecture was not driven by romanticism or nostalgia, but rather by a desire to establish a rational yet romanticized relationship with historical textures and architectural forms. He held a genuine fascination for the Turkish house, asserting that Turkish architecture was more than just a collection of picturesque motifs. Instead, his aim was to infuse these traditional architectural forms with a modern character (Eldem, 2014), echoing Mumford's criticism of picturesque and nationalist regionalism.

Like Mumford, Eldem resisted the pervasive influence of modernism, which he derisively referred to as international cubism. In his memoirs, he expressed his rebellious stance against both the domed, arched Neo-Turkish style and the homogenizing tendencies of international cubism (Eldem, 1984b). Eldem's critique of modernism stemmed not from a rejection of its underlying principles, but from its failure to adequately incorporate local values and contexts into architectural practice. He believed that true progress



**Figure 4.** Various designs inspired by Erich Mendelsohn's style (SALT Research Archive).

in architecture necessitated a synthesis of universal principles with local traditions—a sentiment that would later align with the principles of critical regionalism.

Indeed, Eldem's practice of adaptation extended beyond merely incorporating local architectural forms into new buildings at various scales. He also demonstrated a remarkable ability to transform alien forms into ones that resonated with his own sensibilities and experiences. In other words, Eldem's approach involved more than just superficial mimicry, as he engaged deeply with the essence and underlying principles of diverse architectural styles and forms. Rather than simply copying external appearances, he engaged in a profound process of reinterpretation and synthesis.

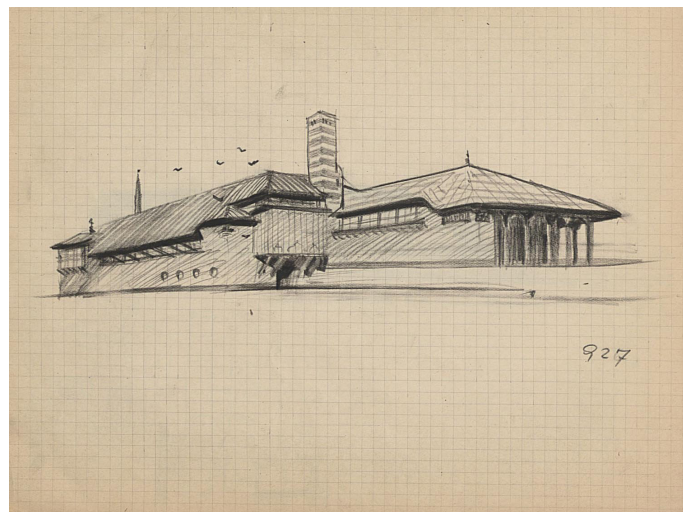
Among the sketches from his Academy years, one can find drawings intended for various functions such as parliament building, railway stations and factories. These sketches feature architectural elements like bay windows, eaves and chimneys that clearly reference Erich Mendelsohn's horizontally stressed lines (see Figure 4). Additionally, a sketch dating back to 1927 illustrates Eldem's endeavor to locally adapt the Arts and Crafts movement. This adaptation is evident in the alternating brick and stone-walled chimneys, ribbon and circular windows, porticoes, flat roofs, overhangs and decorative elements at the corners (see Figure 5). It is clear that the young architect-to-be aimed to internalize every style, form and attitude he encountered.

### 2.3 The skein is continuing to be re-wounded in Europe

Upon graduating from the Academy in 1928, Eldem was awarded an *ikmâl-i tahsil* scholarship, granting him the opportunity to embark on a three-year journey across Europe. As an architect deeply interested in vernacular values, he revisited the continent where he had spent his childhood. Between 1928 and 1930, Eldem traveled extensively throughout France, England and Germany. During his journey, Eldem adopted a nomadic approach, preferring to itinerate among various locations, explore diverse architectural issues and

collaborate with different architects across various offices. This choice allowed him to continually expand the nodes and interconnections within his skein. His upbringing in Europe within a multicultural environment facilitated this fluidity of movement and interaction. This contrasts with the experiences of other architects who traveled to Europe around the same time, such as Seyfi Arkan, who primarily confined themselves to a single office in France (Tanyeli, 2008). Eldem's extensive travels afforded him the opportunity to visit and study the works of modern architectural masters such as Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe.<sup>15</sup> Notably, he frequented the Bauhaus in Dessau, immersing himself in its innovative architectural milieu (Eldem, 2014).<sup>16</sup> During his time in Europe, Eldem briefly collaborated with architects Adolph Thiers and Hans Poelzig, the latter of whom was esteemed as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul during that period. These diverse experiences further enriched Eldem's architectural education and shaped his evolving architectural vision.

In the initial phase of his journey, while residing in Paris, Eldem produced numerous drawings depicting country houses envisioned within the Anatolian landscape. These houses, constructed from wood, adobe, or stone, reflected a strong awareness of regionalism (Bozdoğan, 2005). The



**Figure 5.** A house design employing the language Arts and Crafts movement (SALT Research Archive).

young architect also criticized Le Corbusier's ideas on residential architecture, noting in his notebook: "Let us not forget that a passenger ship or an airplane has nothing to do with residential architecture" (Eldem, 2008, p.159). In a period characterized by criticism of modernism (Bozdoğan, 2009), this note indicates his keen awareness of the ongoing debates and his position within them. He continued to maintain this position throughout his professional life, yet without engaging in such theoretical discussions.

The Berlin notebooks contain sketches of modernist houses, apartments, mosques, theaters, opera halls,<sup>17</sup> shopping structures, various furniture and interiors. While primarily focused on studying theater and cinema buildings in Poelzig's office (see Figure 6), he also continued his exploration of residential architecture.

Eldem's nodes expand to America through Frank Lloyd Wright. Eldem found inspiration in Wright's Prairie Houses, featured in the Wasmuth album. He drew parallels between the horizontal lines, rows of windows, eaves and hipped roofs of these houses and the architectural features of Anatolian houses. Eldem believed that these Prairie Houses reflected a profound connection with nature, a quality he deemed intrinsic to Anatolian cities (1983).

Eldem's romanticized yet rationalized interests become more crystallized here. He continues to produce housing schemes, while simultaneously becoming acquainted with the language of modernism. He sketches modernized

houses made of reinforced concrete, drawing inspiration from vernacular architecture. In his architectural oeuvre, or skein, the desire to modernize the traditional remains a consistent effort throughout his life. This continuity is not solely based on quantity but also reflects an attitude guided by the pursuit to "give a modern character" to the traditional Turkish house, as later articulated by Eldem (2014, p.43). This quest became a lifelong pursuit for Eldem.

## 2.4 Returning to Türkiye:

### A beginning to a multifaceted life

Eldem's *ikmâl-i tahsil* journey concluded prematurely when he was offered a teaching position at the Academy of Fine Arts. He returned to Istanbul in 1930. During those years, similar to many parts of the world, there was a surge in nationalist rhetoric. Architecture, by its very nature, was shaped in parallel with this political discourse. In this period, Eldem practiced modern forms inspired by tradition, as evidenced by the Firdevs Apartment Building (1934) and the Thermal Hotel in Yalova (1935). However, he also authored highly nationalistic texts such as *Milli Mimari Meselesi* (1939) and *Yerli Mimariye Doğru* (1940). His collaboration with Emin Onat on the designs for the Istanbul University Faculty of Science and Letters and Ankara University Faculty of Science further illustrates this nationalistic discourse. Accordingly, during these years, Eldem's skein expanded to incorporate this nationalist discourse.

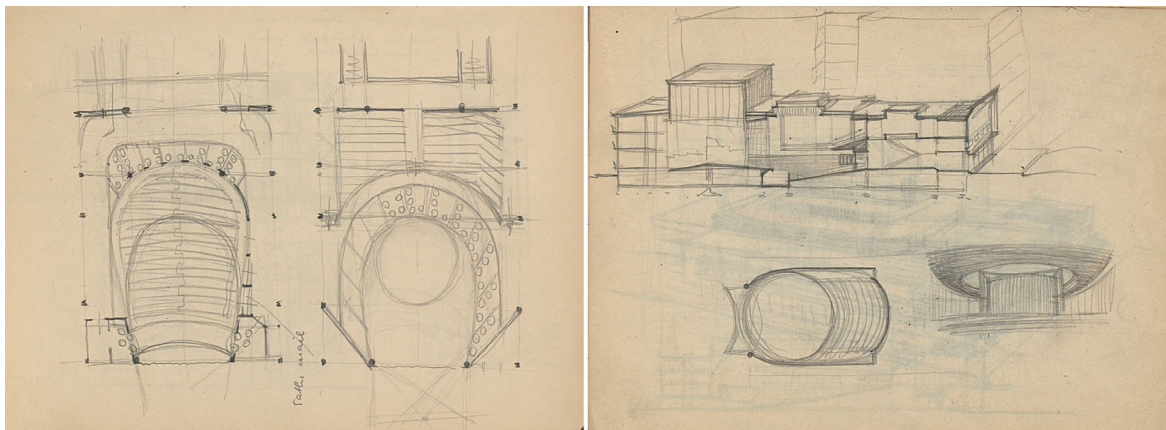


Figure 6. Opera and theatre hall building designs (SALT Research Archive).

Although Eldem never fully abandoned nationalist discourse, he refrained from writing such highly nationalistic texts later in life. Nevertheless, the texts he penned during this period shaped the perception of his architecture through a nationalist lens (Vanlı, 2006; Sözen & Tapan, 1973).<sup>18</sup>

The National Architecture Seminars initiated by Eldem at the Academy also contributed to this understanding. In these seminars, Eldem organized numerous trips to Anatolian towns with his students, documenting many vernacular buildings. Similar to his childhood experience at Niemeyer's house, these efforts could be regarded as examples of folklorist regionalism" (Pavrides, 1989), romantic regionalism (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1989), or romanticism (Colquhoun, 1996), rather than outright nationalism. Eldem later published these surveys in a book titled *Türk Evi* (Turkish House) (1954, 1984a, 1986, 1987). In addition to his monumental three-volume work *Turkish House*, which could be considered his magnum opus, he authored books on notable examples of civil architecture, including palaces, mansions and pavilions.<sup>19</sup> Based on these studies and surveys, he designed a series of houses, particularly along the Bosphorus, which reinterpret the forms, proportions and elements of traditional residential architecture.

The adventure of intercultural exchange slowed down after his return to Türkiye but never truly came to an end. The renowned architect, who had the opportunity to travel to North America and Europe during his professional life, engaged in letter exchanges and book sharing with architects in these countries (Özlüdil, 2009). He remained informed about developments in the field of modern architecture through various books and magazines and continued to adapt these ideas in his own projects.

### 3. Infinite array of possibilities in professional life

As the familiarities, buildings and places visited increased, the skein interconnecting everything is also got bigger. Just as in Gadda's novels, in which every object, every event

and every subject is in relation with each other and this is described as a universe of infinite relationships (Calvino, 2007), Eldem's designs exhibit an almost endless diversity, in which every building, every event, every architectural attitude, every place is in relation with each other. For instance, shortly thereafter the discourses of national architecture, in the 1950s, he collaborated with the American architectural office SOM on the Istanbul Hilton Hotel project, internalizing the pioneering experiments of the International Style (see Figure 7). Eldem has been criticized as an architect who occasionally compromises his principles (Hollein, 2005) with this hotel project. However, although this project represents a very different architectural language, it is surprising to find a similar façade and mass arrangement in the Yalova Thermal Hotel built in 1934 (see Figure 8). Eldem had already experimented with this façade arrangement, which is a standard feature of all Hilton hotels, at least ten years prior. Besides, considering the aim of the Hilton hotel program, which is one of the branding devices in American expansionism (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2012), it is evident that Eldem and international modernism intersect at the point of taking regionalist values into consideration.

During the 1960s, characterized by architectural pluralism (Yücel, 2007), Eldem engaged in the design and con-



**Figure 7.** Hilton Hotel designed by SOM in collaboration with Eldem (SALT Research Archive).

struction of buildings across various scales, styles and functions. His productions in the 1960s can be aligned with the notion of architecture without architects, which was a highly popular and dominating concept of that time.<sup>20</sup> In alignment with the tourism promotion laws, an extension of the neo-liberal economic policies of the 1980s (Tanju, 2009, p.267; Gül, 2017), he even proposed a skyscraper at the location now occupied by Süzer Plaza in Istanbul, which can be evaluated within the framework of capitalist regionalism, as suggested by Tzonis and Lefaivre (2012), who consider it the final stage of regionalism. However, none of these evaluations individually characterizes Eldem as strictly regionalist, modernist, nationalist, or critical regionalist. Regardless of the perspective from which one tries to evaluate him, it will be insufficient and incomplete.

This expansive diversity inherent in Eldem's evolving skein presents a formidable challenge to those seeking to encapsulate his work within a singular architectural framework. From this vantage point, Eldem emerges as an architect who, as noted by Hollein (2005), occasionally negotiates his principles, operates within the confines of professionalism as observed by Özkan (2005), and undergoes periodic shifts in his architectural identity, as

discussed by Vanlı (2006). In essence, the variations within his body of work are subject to criticism, as they create the impression that each of these works could have been conceived by different architects.

Those criticisms echo sentiments expressed about writers in literature, suggesting that "the more the work tends towards multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the self of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth (Calvino, 2007, p.131)." However, Calvino counters this criticism by arguing that a human being is a composite of experiences gained, information learned and books read. He suggests that every life is "an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles," (p.131) where everything is rearranged in every conceivable way. So it is by the very nature of a human being to display diversity in his actions, thoughts, emotions and productions. This judgement, which may also be the case for an ordinary human life, is explicitly admissible for someone involved in architectural practice where many cultural, artistic, social and economic fields intersect. And if this architect is someone like Eldem, whose architectural practice is formed in an intercultural itinerary, an abundance of multiplicity is almost an inevitable outcome.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Calvino (2007) claims that, in Gadda's novel, "... the least thing is seen as the center of a network of relationships that the writer cannot restrain himself from following, multiplying the details so that his descriptions and digressions become infinite" (p.117). As this study attempted to address, Eldem pursues every form he sees with a never-ending desire, resulting in such a variety of productions as if this defines a cluster that expands infinitely. Just as a novel "feels necessary to exhibit all its energy at the initial moment" (Calvino, 2007, p.149), Eldem produces various productions that are as diverse as possible, by exhibiting all his energy in the early period. This phase, commencing with an architectural lesson at Niemeyer's



**Figure 8.** *Yalova Thermal Hotel (Arkitekt).*

house and extending until 1930, marks the inception of the initial windings of Eldem's architectural skein. While Eldem continued to pursue diversity in his professional life, the constraints of building practice often tempered this intensity. As he embarked on a quest to imbue traditional forms with a modern character, Eldem simultaneously engaged with phenomena such as regionalism and modernism, pushing the boundaries of exploration as far as possible. This diversity evident in his productions allows for, and in certain instances demands, an approach to his architecture from various perspectives, thereby enabling alternative evaluations.

Motivated by this aim, this study approached Eldem's architecture as a skein, emphasizing the inherent diversity within it and focusing on the journey marked by an intercultural exchange. While highlighting the pivotal role of this exchange in shaping Eldem's architecture, symbolized by the skein, the findings also underscored the importance of comprehensively considering Eldem's architecture as a unified entity, encompassing his productions from his youth. Eldem's early designs and his memoirs, recounting experiences from nearly sixty years ago, undoubtedly offer new perspectives for evaluating his architecture. These interpretations are expected to enrich recent scholarly works exploring the various facets of modern Turkish architecture. By placing Eldem's work within a broader narrative, future research can continue to reveal the multifaceted influences that shaped his distinctive architectural legacy.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Eldem's grandfather on his mother's side, İbrahim Ethem Paşa, was a grand vezier and was responsible for the preparation of Usul-i Mimari-i Osmani. His uncle Osman Hamdi Bey was founder of the Academy of Fine Arts, where Eldem would enroll in 1924, and of the Archaeological Museum.

<sup>2</sup> In 1928, Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi was renamed as the Academy of Fine Arts.

<sup>3</sup> Eldem stated that students who won this scholarship were given the right to spend it as they wished. (Eldem, 2014).

dem, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The scholarship covered three years, but in 1930 he was offered to teach at the Academy of Fine Arts. So, he cut short his trip and returned to Türkiye.

<sup>5</sup> Today, these notebooks are in different foundations or personal archives, including the Aga Khan Archive, SALT Research Archive and Koç University Archive. The Koç University Archive, which also contains documents related to Eldem's professional life, is inaccessible due to copyrights. In this paper, drawings from notebooks that are available online through SALT Research Archive are used. There is no physical access to the notebooks. In the last part of the Sedat Hakkı Eldem book, which is edited by Uğur Tanyeli and Bülent Tanju, these notebooks are classified according to their years and places where they are kept and their contents are shared with small images. For detailed information see; Eldem et al., 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Foundational works on Eldem's architecture can be listed as follows:

The Sedat Hakkı Eldem book, which was edited by Süha Özkan, Sibel Bozdoğan and Engin Yenil, was published in 1987 in English and in 2005 in Turkish, and can be considered the first comprehensive work on Eldem's architecture. Published as the fourth book of the Third World Architects series, this work aimed to introduce Eldem to the international architectural field. In her comprehensive text in this book, in which she mentioned the diversity and multiplicity in Eldem's architecture, Bozdoğan established a chronological narrative to fulfill the aim of the book. In her text, which she divided into sections, she followed a linear narrative without establishing a relationship between these sections.

Tanyeli's book in 2001 not only lists Eldem's buildings chronologically, but also includes a comprehensive assessment on Eldem's architecture, his personality and his teaching position. In this assessment, he mentioned of the diversity and multiplicity in Eldem's architecture and the unity in this architecture. Besides, he touched upon Eldem's early productions, which he classified as the first period, produced

between 1928 and 1934. Nevertheless, he did not establish a relationship between these productions and Eldem's architecture.

The Sedat Hakkı Eldem book, which was published in two volumes within the scope of the 100th anniversary of Eldem's birth and 20th anniversary of his death, is the most comprehensive book on Eldem and his architecture to date. Published in 2008, the first volume focused on childhood and youth. In this book, Tanyeli constructed an alternative reading of Eldem by using Eldem's early years, notes and drawings. His objective was not merely to provide an alternative interpretation of Eldem, which in some instances targeted Eldem's personality, but to deconstruct the constructed, somewhat mythologized identity of Eldem. This interpretation is not intended to display the unity to which he referred in his 2001 book. Published in 2009, the second volume is important in terms of providing a comprehensive catalog of Eldem projects as well as opening fresh discussions on alternative Eldem readings. For instance, Bozdoğan's text constructed an alternative narrative centered on Eldem's early inspirations from Mediterranean vernacular architecture, using two drawings and notes dating back to the beginning of his academic years. She placed Eldem in the Mediterranean Modernism discussions.

In her book titled *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey and the Modern House*, which explores the history of German-Turkish exchanges in residential architecture through the concept of translation, Akcan (2009) dedicates a section to Eldem's early drawings. She interprets these drawings as products of a subtle "translation," making a notable contribution to the literature.

Acciai's (2018) biographical study, primarily based on Eldem's travels and his fascination with Istanbul, employs a poetic language and demonstrates the possibility of a narrative that transcends convention.

<sup>7</sup> Eldem's understanding of anonymity can be traced to the following statements: "I want architecture to be as unpretentious, as anonymous as possible"

(Eldem, 2014, p.77) "For us, the house is the world on its own, it is the décor inside the house that keeps that world alive, but those decors are also the décor, the clothes, the lives of those who live in it" (Eldem, 2014, p.95).

<sup>8</sup> Kerim Kürkçü (2023) expressed his opinion as to whether the buildings in these drawings were the result of personal curiosity or if they were investigated as part of the curriculum of the courses he took at the Academy. We would like to thank him for sharing his valuable opinions with us.

<sup>9</sup> This desire, akin to the principles of critical regionalism theory, frequently intersects with Eldem's discourses and architectural productions. However, there are instances where his approach diverges from the tenets of critical regionalism, reflecting the nuanced and evolving nature of his architectural philosophy. Taken together with the following endnote, intersections and divergences of Eldem's architecture with critical regionalism theory deserve to be thoroughly addressed in a separate study.

<sup>10</sup> Eldem's interest was not limited to the cities he visited. As can be seen in the notebooks in Kürkçü's archive, which have not yet been published, Eldem cut out photographs of buildings from newspapers and pasted them in his notebooks.

<sup>11</sup> "I had made sketches in the old districts of Ankara, the old neighborhoods of İzmir and Bursa. I spent at least one holiday in each of these three cities. (...) Especially working in a hot region, for instance in Konya, was very challenging" (Eldem, 2014, pp.40-41).

For the principal works on the Anatolian vernacular houses, see: Berk, 1951; Akok & Gökoğlu, 1946; Eldem, 1935; Eldem, 1954.

<sup>12</sup> Eldem's concerns about traditional teaching methods can be seen in the following lines: "Especially Vedat Bey had me make some tile patterns and arch sketches. These drawings always had a Europeanized layout and proportions. I used to be astonished. In one way or another, the measurements close to our people could not be found in these drawings" (Eldem, 2014, p.38). "At that time, although I was a student, I was a rebel on two sides. Firstly, I was

strongly against the domed, arched Neo-Turkish and secondly, against the international cubism” (Eldem, 1984b, p.57).

<sup>13</sup> While critical regionalism as a formal theory was introduced by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in 1981, its roots can be traced back to the earlier critiques of modernism, classical architecture and regionalism articulated by Lewis Mumford as early as the 1920s. Therefore, Eldem’s journey toward architectural exploration parallels the development of critical regionalism theory. In a sense, as Eldem begins to weave his own skein, the threads of critical regionalism theory also begin to intertwine. This convergence highlights the interconnectedness between Eldem’s architectural evolution and broader intellectual currents shaping architectural discourse during this period.

<sup>14</sup> Eldem’s summarizes his feelings about Istanbul as follows: “Istanbul was an infinite treasure (...) a vast old beauty. At that time, we felt sadness for the ruined houses. However, we could never get enough of the scenes created by the harmonious union of nature and human-made structures (1983, p.10). Eldem, who “could not get enough of the beauties” he “discovered in every new trip”, spends a few days a week wandering around Istanbul and looks for “closeness to people and the excavation with people” in these neighborhoods. He says of the inhabitants of these neighborhoods that “they were not yet completely detached from the character of that neighborhood”. Eldem stated that he collected these works in the form of sketches. He also stated that, when Mongeri first saw these drawings, he grimaced and said “what are those my snuggle bunny?”, but then he allowed him to practice so. After a while, Eldem also left the Mongeri’s studio where this classical education is given, or rather “gains freedom from the studio.” (2014, pp.38-39)

<sup>15</sup> Although Eldem stated that he had met Corbusier and Perret and had shown them his own works, he never mentioned these acquaintances in his notebooks in which he wrote almost everything sincerely. Therefore, these statements should be approached

cautiously. Tanyeli also expressed his doubts on the subject. (Tanyeli, 2008, p. 90 and pp. 104-105).

<sup>16</sup> He stated that he often visited Bauhaus and met names such as Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. The fact that he did not mention these acquaintances in anywhere else makes it unclear whether he actually met them or not.

<sup>17</sup> Eldem designed many opera halls and theatre buildings at Hans Poelzig’s office. With the experiences he gained from these designs, he wrote an article titled “Cinema Buildings” (Eldem, 1931) in Mimar magazine upon his arrival in Istanbul.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed reading on the national discourse on architecture see: Bozdoğan, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Eldem published his first book which was an output of the National Architectural Seminars, in three volumes under the title Türk Evi Plan Tipleri in 1954. He later published books such as: Köşkler ve Kasırlar (1969); Anadolu Hisarı’nda Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa Yalısı (1970); Türk Bahçeleri (1976); Türk Mimari Eserleri (1976); Rölöve II: Birgi Çakırağa Konağı (1977); Sadabad (1977); Köçeoğlu Yalısı (1977); Topkapı Sarayı: Bir Mimari Araştırma (1982); Boğaziçi Yalıları: Rumeli Yakası (1993); Boğaziçi Yalıları: Anadolu Yakası (1994)

<sup>20</sup> In 1966, E. Robert Gallagher from the California Palace of the Legion of Honor asked Eldem to send Eldem’s Turkish House books to him for the article he is writing. In return, he offered to send a book that cannot be found in Türkiye. Eldem requested from Gallagher to send him *Architecture Without Architects*, written by Bernard Rudofsky in 1964. The fact that the book was published very recently is especially significant in terms of showing that Eldem was following the current discussions and developments in the world.

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