

# Editors' Introduction: Culture, diplomacy, representation: "Ambivalent architectures" from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic

Elvan Altan Ergut and Belgin Turan Özkaya

This collection of essays looks at what we call the "ambivalent architectures" produced in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican contexts, approaching the latter as shifting and varying entities shaped by the negotiations of trans-cultural forces rather than fixed and homogenous bodies closed to outside influences. Analyzing the shaping of these by various actors' diplomatic moves, it questions the "imperial" and "national" formations conventionally accepted as reference points for the study of architecture. The authors dwell on a range of "artifacts" of architecture, including archaeological and urban cases, from the nineteenth century foreign embassy buildings in the capital of the Ottoman Empire to their Turkish Republican twentieth-century counterparts abroad; from the early twentieth-century urban plans of İstanbul by French and German experts to the mid-century radio broadcasts and printed media about space and architecture that configured American-Turkish relations; and from the first "national" museums in İstanbul and London in the nineteenth century to British exhibitions travelling in Turkey in the mid-twentieth century. The analyses focus on how objects as well as ideas travelled from one context to the other, and how they were displayed to the "other" as represented by and in "architectures". Thus, discussing intertwined cultural relations via processes of political negotiation, the essays by and large engage with different levels of "representation" to understand the changing meanings of "architectures" in the complex contexts of the period.

Architecture as a discipline seems self-evident. But is it? Before exploring "ambivalent architectures," it may be useful to clarify the often forgotten social and cultural roles of architecture, and the implications

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Elvan Altan Ergut, and Belgin Turan Özkaya Middle East Technical University.

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of these for architectural history. Architecture, conventionally assumed to be about masterpieces and styles, is also about space and representation. It both shapes the spaces of social and cultural performance and represents the social and the cultural. As a consequence of what has come to be defined as the “spatial turn,” in the last decades space as an object of inquiry and an analytical category has been vigorously studied in many fields including, among others, geography, political theory, cultural studies, and post-colonial and gender studies.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the discipline that actually studies architecture itself, i.e., architectural history, despite its ability to read space and decipher architectural representation, has only very recently started to be seen as able to undertake similarly active socio-cultural analyses.

In this issue of *New Perspectives on Turkey*, we—as architectural historians—approach architecture as an agent of the social, and as spaces of social performance that both represent and shape society and are in turn shaped by it. The detailed historical study of “architectures” in the following essays discuss how the social, the cultural, and the spatial have been constructed simultaneously, revealing the fascinating intricacies of politics played out in trans-, cross- and inter-cultural frameworks of the Ottoman/Turkish contexts from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

The complex cultural and political negotiations presented in these cases ground our use of the term “ambivalent” to define a theoretical frame for the discussion of “architectures.” We have used the term profusely in the last decade in a series of loosely connected projects and events with colleagues from different parts of the world in order to question the homogeneity of architectures, and hence cultures at large, which are conventionally defined with reference to established spatial boundaries. This critical approach was initially defined in the conference session titled “Ambivalent Geographies: Situating Difference in Architectural History”; and the discussion was developed during a workshop at METU on the topic that focused on the late Ottoman and the early Turkish Republican periods in a comparative perspective.<sup>2</sup> These resulted in the “Ambivalent Geographies” project, which aimed “to advance East/West debates by opening up the field of inquiry into the relations of the British with the Ottoman Empire and the nation states

1 For an evaluation of architectural history in relation to the spatial turn in the humanities, see Nancy Stieber, “Space, Time and Architectural History,” in *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*, eds. Dana Arnold, Elvan Altan Ergut and Belgin Turan Özkaya (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 171-182.

2 We organized the session at the SAH/INHA Conference in Paris in 2005. See <http://inha.revues.org/174>. The METU workshop was organized in 2006 together with Dana Arnold.

established in the Middle East in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.”<sup>3</sup> The project thus started as an inquiry of geographical “difference” in architectural history, developed into the analysis of the Ottoman/Turkish case within a trans-cultural framework and expanded to become a scrutiny of Anglo-Ottoman interactions, aiming to disrupt the by-now-tired “consolidated vision” of a divided world.

This has helped us question not only the much-maligned dichotomy of East/West but also other well-established binaries such as center/periphery and traditional/modern—much used in conventional historiography—to comment on the historical as well as the geographical “difference” critically scrutinized in recent literature in relation to the regions and periods we are interested in.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on examples from the Middle East to the Balkans and North Africa, we have also attempted to problematize the burden of such hierarchical oppositions and proposed the term “edge” to understand the “ambivalence” of architectural production in such geographies.<sup>5</sup>

The cases studied in these earlier projects and publications have revealed the perennially changing and haphazard nature of geographical categories that delimit cultures within political boundaries. While the frame of analysis in this collection is defined with reference to the late Ottoman/early Republican Turkish territories, the aim is to problematize the fixed and homogenous meanings and roles attributed to space and explore the different and often ambiguous representational work “ambivalent architectures” may realize *vis-à-vis* competing yet interdependent processes led by various actors.<sup>6</sup> Highlighting the agency of the

3 See <http://archweb.metu.edu.tr/disbaglantilar/archist/ambivalent/index.html>. The project was supported by the British Academy Middle East Capacity Sharing Initiative, Southampton University and Middle East Technical University between 2009 and 2011.

4 For a recent critique of writing the art and architectural history of an hierarchically divided world, see Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014). A growing but still limited literature along these lines mainly focuses on the twentieth century as the period of ‘modernism’ and ‘modernization’ in ‘other’ parts of the world, among which the Middle East and the Mediterranean seem to have come to the fore. See Sandy Isenstadt, and Kishwah Rizvi, eds., *Modernism and the Middle East. Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008); Jean-François Lejeune, and Michelangelo Sabatino, eds., *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean. Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Duanfang Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism. Architecture, Development, Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Panayiota Pyla, ed., *Landscapes of Development: The Impact of Modernization Discourses on the Physical Environment of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

5 See Elvan Altan Ergut, and Belgin Turan Özkaya, eds., “Special Issue: Modern Architecture in the Middle East,” *Docomomo Journal* 35 (2006); and Belgin Turan Özkaya and Elvan Altan Ergut, eds., “Special Issue: Transpositions on the Edge of Europe: Difference and Ambivalence in Architecture,” *Journal of Architecture* 16, no. 6 (2011).

6 See Martina Becker’s and Burak Erdim’s respective reviews in this issue on two significant contri-

multiple networks effective within and beyond conventional borders, our anatomizing of different geographies has suggested the unexpected ways through which “difference” could work in diplomatic negotiations and cultural production. Through their comparative and inclusive analyses of such intertwined relations, the essays in this collection open up discussions about the ambivalent yet active presence of “architectures” in these political and cultural processes.

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contributions to the studies on late Ottoman and early Republican Turkish contexts in a comparative and inclusive perspective: Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840-1880* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Duke University Press, 2012).