

# “Ottoman” VS “Turkish”: Rhetoric and Architectural Practice on the Eve of the Division of the Empire

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**Abstract**—The article considers the formation of the national style of Turkish architecture in connection with the change of political rhetoric. Adjustment of eclecticism in the era of Tanzimat (mid-19th century) expressed in adapting of European historical styles to Ottoman conditions was replaced by an attempt to create its own neo-Ottoman style which corresponded to the development of the political doctrine of Ottomanism. After the Young Turks Revolution the national paradigm that had already been formed was declared a corresponding rhetoric of Turkism and was used to create the architecture of the first decade of the Turkish Republic. Thus, the same artistic realities were assessed in different ways depending on the political situation, and this approach is preserved in contemporary historiography.

**Keywords**—*Turkish architecture; Tanzimat; historicism; neo-Ottoman style; Turkism; political rhetoric*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2018 a number of conferences devoted to the centenary of the "collapse of empires" were organized in various scientific centers of Russia — scientists drew attention to the almost simultaneous cessation of the existence of the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian empires as a result of World War I and tried to determine the commonality of the cultural processes that took place. However, in a number of cases, one more event was ignored: on October 30, 1918 the Armistice of Mudros which marked the beginning of the partition of the Ottoman Empire was signed on Lemnos [1].

This catastrophe was not only political but also ideological. For several decades the Sultanate cherished hopes that Istanbul would become the world capital, and now the city was occupied by foreign troops; there were European squadrons in the Bosphorus; French, British, Italian, Greek administrations were in charge of various regions of Asia Minor. The Turks faced the issue of survival — both state and national.

It is necessary to understand how these factors were combined in the self-awareness of Ottomans in the early 20th century.

## II. FROM HISTORICISM TO NATIONAL STYLE

From the middle of the 19th century the Sultanate implemented the policy of Tanzimat (“renewal”). The Ottoman culture declared itself to be Europeanized, tried to apply various European styles. However, in the second half of the 19th century the insufficiency and slow changes led to the formation of the doctrine of “Ottomanism”, an oppositional ideological trend that, on the one hand, insisted on constitutional reforms, and on the other, actualized the public discussion about the place of Ottoman culture, the “golden age” of the Empire and the possibility of “Ottoman Renaissance” [2].

Since the middle of the 19th century, precisely during the period of the intensified Westernization of Ottoman culture, European architecture turned to the creation of “national” styles united by the term “historicism”. The appeal to “historical” trend, inspired by differently directed searches for the civilizational origins of national cultures and their architectural expression, had various manifestations [3].

The invited European masters not only mechanically transferred historical styles to Turkey but tried to develop a kind of “neo-Islamic style” that, in their opinion, had to Constantinople as the capital of the caliphate, eclectically mixing in the decoration of buildings elements of Arab, Persian, Indian, Moorish cultures. In addition, a number of architects tried to impose on Istanbul the variations of the popular in Europe neo-Gothic style (the Crimean memorial church, the Bulgarian church of St. Stephen, Agia Triada cathedral in Taksim). The Westernized “retrospection” turned out to be only a marginalization for the development of Ottoman architecture, although it is certainly spectacular [4]. The rejection of such experiments by the most “ottomanized” part of the intelligentsia, the striving of the nationalists to oppose their enriched history (not always clearly identified), the enforced political doctrine of Ottomanism has gained strength exacerbated the need to accentuate its primary sources, specifically the Anatolian cultural heritage, as the basis for the national architectural style [5].

An important step towards self-analysis and self-identification was the preparation of the fundamental work “*Usul-i Mi’ mari-i Osmani*” (“Foundations of Ottoman Architecture”) for the World Exhibition in Vienna in 1873

[6]. The folio luxuriously published in several languages contained the first conditional periodization of Ottoman architecture and accented elements of the proper "Ottoman style". The paradigm of this style was presented quite schematically, but covered both technical methods and architectural details, as well as the decorative design of buildings. One of the goals of the book was the romantization of the glorious past, the "golden age" of the Ottoman dynasty, after which the culture of the Tanzimat era and especially the rule of Abdul-Hamid II was to be perceived as an "Ottoman Renaissance". This led to the formation in the Turkish architecture of a peculiar version of historicism, almost synchronous to the European search for national historical styles — neo-Ottoman style [7].

It should be noted that in the last decades of the 19th century the Ottoman empire was able to offer not only program architectural landmarks but also tools for its implementation in the practical field. In the 1880's the State Administration of Civil Works was formed, which was responsible for the distribution of state contracts and control over their execution; the Academy of Fine Arts was opened, where, according to the European model and under a separate program, the architects were trained; Later, the School of Civil Engineers was established, where architects were also taught. These organizations supplemented the already existing Sultan' architectural school, the Military Technical and the Engineering Schools, the graduates of which determined the appearance of the cities of the Empire, and the unified training of masters assumed the practical implementation, consolidation and dissemination of the neo-Ottoman style [8].

However, the projects of what architectural monuments of the "Ottoman Renaissance" have not been embodied in the material at the end of the 19th century. After a massive earthquake on July 10, 1894, the government did not have to impose an ideological style but to restore a huge number of buildings, for which European restorers, architects and engineers were involved.

The former students of the Ottoman engineering schools had to undergo training under the direction of the masters of the historicism that had already surrendered the position and entering the modernist fashion, and this leadership could not stop the westernization of Tanzimat architecture. In the Istanbul buildings of the 1890s only some of the most distinctive iconographic elements of the "Ottoman architectural paradigm" were used: portico on pointed arches, low helmet domes, remote cornices on brackets, tile friezes.

These same textbook elements were transferred to the Turkish architecture of the first decade of the 20th century when the national cadres who had received only construction but also restoration experience began to work independently. A breakdown of the neo-Ottoman style in the performance of young architects became relatively small: private tombs, railway stations, piers, quarter mosques, mansions, many of which were later destroyed or rebuilt.

The mosque of Zihni-Pasha (1900~1904, architect M. Vedat Tek) in Erenkoy at the Asian part of Istanbul is indicative — a small square in plan pavilion, topped with a

gable roof that covers the base of the dome drum [9]. The original plan is illustrated only by the north-western facade, which has a slightly protruding three-span portico and a high attic floor separated by an unprofitable cornice. The main decorative element of the facade is the lancet arches of the portico on faceted supports and narrow lancet windows on the sides of the portico. The decorative elements used by the Vedat Tek make the mosque not a neo-Ottoman monument but rather a "pan-Islamic" one, associated with a certain "Moorish" style.

### III. REPRESENTATIONS OF PATRIOTISM

However, by the end of the 19th century the ideas of renewing the Empire turned out to be compromised. After the loss of the Balkans, Tunisia and Egypt it became clear that the project of spiritual association based on citizenship and religious affiliation was untenable. The political successors of the "new Ottomans" were the Young Turks armed with the nationalist doctrine of "Turkism", declaring the priority of belonging to the Turkic nation.

If in European the terms "Ottoman" and "Turkish" were used as synonyms, then within the Ottoman Empire itself there was a serious difference in their use. The word "Turk" was often used for the Anatolian peasant, far from the benefits of Westernized civilization. However, in the first 10 years of the 20th century a number of different organizations include in their names the word "Turk" (for example "Turk society", "Turk motherland"). The national idea in the Ottoman Empire developed precisely as an antithesis to unification on a religious basis, implied by the theory of "Ottomanism."

Quite an ingenious explanation of the opposition of such usage was given by Reshad Nuri Gyuntekin in the novel *–Yeşil Gece* ("Green Night", 1926), whose character inclines the interlocutor to a moral choice: *–Let us imagine that two armies met in battle, one consists of people of non-Turkish nationality, but our brothers in religion, say, Hindus, Chinese, Javanese; the other is of our Turkish brothers, but not Muslims. Now let's say you need to help one of these armies. Which side would you join? <...> If you help non-Muslim Turks, then you are just a nationalist. If you join the non-Turk Muslims, then you are an Islamist. Either that or another..." [10]*

The same novel contains another telling quote. The school teacher complains: "Only because I called the curriculum for my native language the "Turkish language" program, the head of the department of public education nearly kicked me out of school. If in this region the highest official in charge of enlightenment forbids our native language to be called what it is called, and considers it a crime when we say "Turkish language" instead of "Ottoman", how can we call the power ruling in this city the national and patriotic?" [11] Thus, the notion of "patriotism" is associated primarily with the ability to accent nationality, contrasting it with state unity which is perceived as artificial.

However, it quickly turned out that the declarative Turkic rhetoric, which sounded more and more clearly and aggressively, could be expressed clearly only, with the

help of works of art. It should be noted that the entire history of Ottoman culture demonstrated the effectiveness of architecture as a means of visualizing political ideas, and the neo-Ottoman style was no exception.

The ideologist of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gokalp, who insisted on the primacy of popular culture before the official ("sultan's"), initially pointed to the need to resort to traditional forms, including folk crafts [12]. Later Gokalp appeared to some common for the Türks cultural values, but what are these values and exactly how should they be expressed exactly remained unclear.

The Young Turks Revolution of 1908 restored the constitution and the parliamentary system; a year later the parliament deposed sultan Abdul-Hamid II and transferred power to the constitutional monarch Mehmed V Reshad. These events were rightly interpreted as a demonstration of the inconsistency of the ideology of official Ottomanism and the victory of Turkism [13].

But there was a strange situation. "Ottomanizm" was able to express its values, which could attract few people, with the architecture of the neo-Ottoman style, backed up by the academic training of the masters and large projects implemented by several ministries (for example, complexes of the Post Office and Istanbul University that changed the face of entire districts in the historical part of Istanbul). Turkism, which gained a visible political victory, not only had no means to visualize its idea but could not even formulate in what specific forms this idea could be presented. Only folk crafts, about which Ziya Gokalp spoke, were clearly not enough for that.

At the same time, attempts to identify any unique features of Turkish architecture proper came up against the inability to isolate them from Ottoman architecture. It turned out that the paradigm of the neo-Ottoman style, developed within the common European eclectic "historicism", boiled down to the use of decorative domes, pointed arches, canopies on consoles and tile panels, perfectly suited also for "revolutionary modern", which in the later Turkish historiography was called "First national architectural movement" (Birinci Ulusal Mimarlık Akımı). Its history formally begins with the establishment in the revolutionary year 1908 "Association of Architects and Engineers", which declared the need to search for national roots and accentuate precisely the "Turkic" elements in official art [14].

However, republican historians of architecture have been persistently trying to give out wishful thinking. The reference point for the "First National Movement" became the complex of buildings of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph in the Istanbul district of Sirkeci, erected by Mehmet Vedat Tek, one of the key figures of the neo-Ottoman style, who worked since the end of the 19th century and successfully continued his career already in the Republic of Turkey until the 1940s. [15]

This point is really quite convenient for historiography – the Istanbul Post Office was put into operation in the first year after the Young Turks Revolution, in 1909. But its construction was started as early as 1905 and the project was

designed in 1903, when neither the Turkish modern nor any "national architectural movement" existed. The "slenderness" of this monument in contemporary Turkish historiography is explained by references in its design to the pre-Ottoman artistic traditions up to the Seljuks of Rum; however, the following questions: which elements of the Post Office building go back to the Seljuk architecture, at what point between 1905 and 1909 the "neo-Ottoman paradigm" could be replaced by the "Seljuk" one, and where this latter could have appeared in the first decade of the 20th century, – were not only left unanswered but not even delivered.

Thus the formation of the "First National Architectural Movement" should be characterized as a rhetorical appropriation of practical developments of the neo-Ottoman style. Both the masters and training programs and the actual architectural practice remained the same. The urgent desire for a speedy revolutionary renewal was reinforced neither by an understanding of tasks and methods nor by the development of forms that corresponded to new content with the exception of the opposition of the "Turkish" to the "Ottoman" [16].

Here again the already cited novel by Gyuntekin is indicative – in one of the episodes the projects of reconstruction of the madrasa building are discussed: "On all sides there were objections: "No, no! None of these projects corresponds to the Muslim and Turkish architecture..." But you can not create a building for a new school in the old style. It was necessary to find a solution in the project to combine modern requirements for school buildings with the style of the old architecture" [17]. At the same time what are these "modern requirements" – none of the characters in the novel try to formulate, and what is meant by an unsuitable "old style", – one can only guess.

An example of the adaptation of the forms of the "neo-Ottoman style" to the Young Turk ideology is the Khobyar Mosque built by Vedat Tek as part of the Post Office complex [18]. Its forms are clearly inspired by the Ottoman mausoleums and –baroc" fountain pavilions of the "gallant age" of Ahmed III, there is a set of elements necessary for the neo-Ottoman buildings – a small dome, a remote cornice on brackets, pointed arches, tiled panels. But it should be noted that having habitually used all these decorative elements to disguise a completely modern building the architect tries at least partially to "de-ottomanize" the image – in tile panels blue shades are used, contrasting with the yellow lines of vegetable ornamentation, but without using green and red colors that made famous works of Iznik workshops, strongly associated with the flowering of Ottoman art, and the frames of the facades are decorated with rows of muqarnas referring to pre-Ottoman architecture.

In a number of small mosques in the 1910s by Ahmet Kemalettin, another leading master of the First National Architectural Movement, attempts to create a generalized image of the Early Ottoman cult building of Western Anatolia also should be noted, avoiding deliberate "Ottomanisms" imposed by the "Foundations of Ottoman

Architecture" and mandatory for the buildings of the first decade of the 20th century.

Turkish masters of the 1910s created a generalized architectural image referring not even to certain historical monuments (as was in the architecture of the "Ottoman Renaissance") but rather to a vague idea of compliance with a certain period, region, ethnicity, actively and deliberately applying anachronistic constructions and elements of decoration up to the products of traditional crafts so appreciated by Gokalp in modern buildings. Such exploitation of the "quotations" fully corresponded to the methods of Modern style and restrictly of national neoromanticism. However these were practical searches for a certain correspondence of the architectural image with the desired Turkic idea, an image that apparently never existed and is created more likely from the spirit of contradiction by rejecting associations with the "golden age" of Ottoman culture. The visual reference points of the national idea were still missing.

#### IV. DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL STYLE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

"Theoretical basis" was brought under the notion of "Turkic art" much later than architectural monuments appeared that, in the opinion of republican researchers, personified the "Turkic idea". If the neo-Ottoman style in art received academic reinforcement at the end of the 19th century, the "Turkic idea", having gained it seemed a political victory remained an empty declaration in the field of culture at the level of journal articles about a single "pan-Turkism". The slogans of Ziya Gyokalp required serious arguments, best of all found outside the circle of nationalist-minded speakers.

And these proponents of Turkism were again received from European authorities [19].

In 1917 Joseph Strzygowski published the monograph "Altai-Iran and the Resettlement of Peoples" whose main thesis was recognition of the role of nomadic tribes in the formation of culture not only in Asia but also in Europe [20]. The provisions of this book perfectly fed the pan-Turkist slogans about the unity of the Turkic world, and the importance of Turkic culture. In addition by the time of the appearance of this book Strzygovski was not only an archaeologist alone but the head of the Institute of Art History at the University of Vienna, and this status gave his opinion an additional weight.

In the same year 1917 the Hungarian Institute was opened in Istanbul, and the publication of the book "Turkish Art" by Austrian scientist Heinrich Glück, the former student of Strzygovski, was timed to coincide with this event [21]. The main task of this book was the emphasis on the outstanding of the importance of the Turkic civilization and the consideration of the Anatolian Muslim culture as a result of the mutual influence of the nomadic Turks and the Mediterranean civilization.

Certainly, the rhetoric of the Turkists could not leave these works of authoritative European scholars without

attention. The ideologist of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gokalp not only praised the books of European masters but also filled his articles with the quotations from these books.

Consideration of the common Turkic art as the initial stage of the Turkish culture proper without reference both to the Caliphate and Byzantium will be fixed in the training programs at the universities of Istanbul and Ankara and will become the general method of the national art history of the Turkish Republic, which is demonstrated in the fundamental works of the 1930s by "the patriarch of Turkish art studies" Jelal Arceven [22] and, for example, the multi-volume "Turkish architecture" by Oktay Aslanapa, published in the 1970s [23].

But the publications of European scientists did not affect the Late Ottoman architectural practice. The most famous Istanbul buildings of the second half of the 1910s were vakif khans (business centers) built in the immediate vicinity of the Post Office under Ahmet Kemalettin's projects [24]. In these buildings it is difficult to find any differences from earlier constructions that used the iconographic paradigm of the neo-Ottoman style: the same pointed arches, outward cornices and tiled panels superimposed on the modern constructions.

New forms, different from the development of the neo-Ottoman style in the bowels of the Ottoman Academy, did not appear either after acquaintance with the works of Western art historians, or after the collapse of the Empire in 1918, or even after the abolition of the Sultanate and the establishment of the Republic in 1923. Moreover after the transfer of the capital to Ankara an active construction of the buildings of state institutions was launched here in the neo-Ottoman style under the leadership of the same Vedat Tek and Kemalettin [25].

The monumental rhetoric of the "First National Architectural Movement", addressed to the history of national culture, perfectly served the ideas of spiritual succession and legitimization of the new system, and it was formally no longer important whether this rhetoric refers to Ottomanism or to Turkism. Thanks to the state order the capital paradigm spread to the province: the Turkish Republic used this style, declared "republican", for the erection of unified office buildings, schools and post offices. Only by the 1930s national neo-romanticism of the "First Architectural Movement" gave up to the mainstream of international Modernism and constructivism [26].

#### V. CONCLUSION

Faced with the urgent need to visualize the national doctrine Late Ottoman masters were forced to use ready-made recipes previously developed for the architectural expression of a completely different rhetoric. The neo-Ottoman style along with its creators survived not only during the Ottomanism that inspired it but also during the Turkism of the Young Turks, and after the collapse and abolition of the Ottoman Empire was adopted by the Kemalist Republic.

Attempts to combine architectural practice with actual political slogans make it necessary to consider the "First National Architectural Movement" as a late phase of this style corresponding to the belated transition of Turkish architecture from eclecticism to Modern style. The iconographic paradigm of the neo-Ottoman style remained unchanged and was used with equal success both by "state historicism" and national neo-romanticism movement, having stood in the struggle of political ideologies of the beginning of the 20th century and actually ignoring the destruction of illusions of "Ottoman Renaissance".

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