

# KİTAP DEĞERLENDİRMELERİ

Patricia Blessing, *Architecture and Material Politics in the Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. P. 284

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What if early Ottoman architecture were to be read not as a precursor to classical forms, but as a dynamic field shaped by cultural translation and political mediation? This is the interpretive lens through which Patricia Blessing approaches the 15th century, offering a nuanced study of how architectural production functioned as both a visual and material expression of evolving imperial identity. The book, which consists of five chapters in addition to the Introduction and Conclusion, has rich and elaborate visual content covering almost half of its total volume. The introduction begins with a discussion of the concepts mentioned in the title and the temporal and geographical boundaries it covers. With the term “material politics,” the author refers to the flow that occurred during the coordination of Ottoman architecture, which completed its formative process from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 15th century and took on a centralized system. In other words, by focusing on the preferences of decision-making patrons, designing artisans, and builders—as well as the mobility of these actors and the objects they produced—the book argues that the characteristics of Ottoman architecture during its formative phase reflected intertwined visions of the past, present, and future within a diverse and rich architectural language. These influential dimensions are brought to the fore through the work’s critical engagement with the geography in which this architecture emerged. Indeed, by underlining the Rumi identity, the region in question is depicted as a focus of interregional interaction from

Central Asia to the Mediterranean beyond its regional dynamics with its multicultural-lingual-ethnic structure.

While the book's assumptions about the whole subject matter are shaped along these lines, it concentrates on highly representative structures in Anatolia, the Balkans, and Istanbul. Again, as described in the introduction, aesthetic investigation in the book is methodically shaped by paying attention to the mediation of the sensory with the written. In this sense, design details and constructive wholes are critiqued and placed in a regional or inter-regional interaction network through the depiction and perceptual witnessing of literary expressions and written documents.

Çinili Köşk, built in Istanbul in the mid-15th century, is the first focal point of the first chapter, "Imperial and Local Horizons: Looking East and West." The author argues that the work is not directly and exclusively Persian or Karamanian in terms of its plan, design, and ornamentation styles, or textual content, but rather a combination of Byzantine and Timurid and possibly even Karamanian influences. Other case studies in this chapter include the Mausoleum of Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha in Istanbul during the same period, which can be read as a Timurid-style work, unlike other works built by the same patron, and the Alaca Türbe in Skopje, which is rare for the use of tiles in the exterior decoration. The pursuit of the material politics described in the introduction is also discussed within the framework of the examples focused on in the immediate aftermath of the conquest. Indeed, the Ottoman style of Mehmed II's reign, which sought a balance between Central Asian and Iran-centered Timurid, modern Karamanid, and 13th-century Seljuk Anatolia, as well as Renaissance Italian and Byzantine styles, is analyzed by examining its interactions with these examples. In this sense, the author, going backwards in time in the following chapters, actually preferred to explain the atmosphere she would arrive at within the framework of the explanation provided in the opening. It can be said that the author prioritizes the comprehensibility of her thematic analysis, rather than a chronological follow-up, by addressing in the first chapter the time that marks the end of the period the book covers. As a matter of fact, the material politics she depicts in this chapter are traced back throughout the book among the foci of material structure in question. Again, as a constant question in the text, the near and distant references of the Ottoman architectural identity in the details of the past and future begin to be questioned here.

Turning chronologically to the reign of Çelebi Mehmed, the second chapter titled "Immersive Space: Empire Building and the Ottoman Frontier" focuses on the sultan's mosque-zaviye complex built in the capital

Bursa. By focusing on the stone and tile work, the author analyzes the interaction with Islamic architecture in the post-Mongolian Iranian basin and Central Asian styles. In the aftermath of the interregnum, Mehmed I's creation of a lieu de mémoire, a place of memory, in Bursa is depicted as involving a significant transformation around a new union of the Timurid present and the Anatolian past. At the same time, the style created around the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule through the use of Byzantine, Timurid, and Seljuk aesthetics is evaluated. In this sense, the attribution of the tiles in the work to the masters of Tabriz and the first steps of the process leading to the emergence of central workshops are discussed.

The third chapter, "Under the Influence: Creating Cosmopolitan Architectures," focuses on the aesthetic influence of the city, particularly in relation to the transit links with Mamluk territory. The argument is that the well-travelled roads, which were frequented by merchants and ambassadors as well as scholars, were also traversed by artisans and practitioners, and even their works. Providing a glimpse of Amasya, which never left the Ottoman sovereignty during the interregnum period, this chapter discusses the Mamluk style that had already reached Anatolia through the beyliks, as well as the Seljuk and Ilkhanid traces. As a concrete example of Mamluk influence, the Amasya Bayezid Pasha Mosque-Zaviye, built in 1414, is taken as a case study, and the roles of the maker subject are discussed. Then, integrated into this intellectual flow, the central role of paper in the production and transmission of architectural and artistic design is addressed, and the author continues the chapter with an analysis of the Yörgüç Pasha Mosque-Zaviye in the same city in 1430. In this section, the author also analyzes the plan and ornamentation of the Üç Şerefeli and Muradiye mosques built in Edirne based on their similarity of origin. The fourth chapter, "Building Paradise: Afterlife and Dynastic Politics," focuses on Muradiye in Bursa, which Mehmed I had already built, but which was expanded by his successor, Murad II, to evolve into a dynastic funerary complex. Until the mid-16th century, Muradiye was a site for the burials of members of the dynasty and is depicted as an Ottoman necropolis. In particular, the imagination of the afterlife as a space organized around a written description/pre-vision in Murad II's *vasiyetname* (testament) and the design details of his mausoleum, which concretizes this with abstractions in the lived world, make it possible to examine this structure of consciousness at different levels of production in this section. The use of space, especially as a depiction of paradise, and the construction of details such as marble, tiles, and the sky around intertwined preferences make it possible to examine an aesthetic expression that aims to depict the transcendental.

The last chapter, “An Ottoman Aesthetic: Consolidation circa 1500,” addresses the centralization of design around this date, in parallel to other mechanisms of the state. In particular, Baba Nakkaş’s album constitutes a source of detail about the architectural production that was placed in the orbit of the centralized workshops. Thus, the role of paper in this artistic centralization is also exemplified. Referring to the epistemological evolution of the Ottoman Empire in the period in question, the examples of classified knowledge in different fields are mentioned, and the steps towards increasing the accessibility of design initiatives by templatizing them and the construction of constants in the field of art are examined. In this sense, the chapter focuses on individual works in Amasya, Edirne, Istanbul, Serres, and Skopje and shows that, apart from naive references to the previous period, design elements and visual structuring can be read in an Ottomanized style. Finally, an example in Adana, where the Ottomans could exert indirect, if not direct, control, under the patronage of Ramazanoğlu, constitutes the final case study in this chapter.

Throughout the text, the author approaches inscriptions on stone or tile as interior or exterior design details almost exclusively from a semantic point of view. Approaching these design details, especially within the framework of the analysis of the interaction of style and origin, Blessing does not directly address the calligraphy as a font in terms of its school, variety, and history. Although she occasionally mentions the types of script in these design details and even makes very modest connections compared to the other branches, the author frequently includes the content of these texts and the relationship between the space use and the ornamentation preferences that follow these designs throughout the text. An addition could have been made to the centralization of knowledge that the author touches upon in chapter five. It is known that Şeyh Hamdullah, who is only mentioned in the text within the framework of his Sufi connection, contributed to the systematization of calligraphy in the same period.

The identity of Ottoman building activities before Sinan and the issues of the origins of styles and preferences of this system remain an understudied line of inquiry in Ottoman architectural history, mainly due to the scarcity of sources. Patricia Blessing’s work on the details of 15th-century Ottoman buildings and their preferences makes a valuable contribution to this field.