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MESUT DINLER

**Modernization through Past:
Cultural Heritage during the late-Ottoman
and the early-Republican period in Turkey**



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In copertina:

Istanbul, Bosphorus and Golden Horn with Galata Bridge in the late nineteenth century.
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INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'cultural heritage' continuously changes; it is a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. In this sense, heritage becomes temporal; its definition changes with time because it is defined by the present. Cultural heritage is a contemporary product and preservation of it depends on who defines it.

The use of cultural heritage as a tool of the predominant power structures has drawn the attention of academics, especially since the 1980s. Scholars developed a critical approach towards cultural heritage to underpin how this notion (cultural heritage) served the needs of power holders. This critical approach developed through some milestone works of scholarship that were not primarily produced to make a contribution to heritage studies; nevertheless, these works influenced preservationists as much as other disciplines¹.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, these works prompted a critical scholar perspective towards historic preservation, which would emerge as a discipline in the twenty first century, however, indeed there existed a critical perspective before that². For instance, as early as 1939, Grahame Clark expressed his concerns on the use of archaeology for nationalistic purposes³. Andrea Emiliani⁴, in 1974, argued that a control mechanism is needed for the ruling class who can use cultural heritage according to their own will.

¹ The milestone works that formed this critical approach are Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992 [1926]; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Pierre Nora (ed.) *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols., Arthur Goldhammer (trans.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1996-1998; Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, Lauren M. O'Connell (trans.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

² Indeed, even in the late nineteenth century there existed a criticism that was related to historic preservation. This approach had internationally evolved throughout the twentieth century. Some reference works are highlighted throughout the book in order to understand and evaluate preservation within a wider framework.

³ Grahame Clark, *Archaeology and Society*, Methuen, London, 1939.

⁴ Andrea Emiliani, *Una politica dei beni culturali*, Einaudi, Torino, 1974; republished Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2014. Emiliani is also the founder of l'Istituto per i Beni Culturali dell'Emilia-Romagna (1974) and he is a professor of Italian art history. In this work, written in an era of debates on regional governance scheme Italy, Emiliani questioned the role of art historians to prevent political exploitation of cultural heritage.

Especially in the first decade of the 2000s, with this critical perspective, cultural heritage began to be discussed not necessarily only by architects, archaeologists, planners, or *restuoratori*, but also by scholars of a wider range of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, museum studies, cultural studies, etc. In the 2010s, this growing academic interest has triggered institutionalization efforts. Several research centers, academic journals, and university departments were established to support and encourage researchers to study cultural heritage from a critical perspective⁵. Aligned with this critical perspective, historic preservation has begun to be discussed from various aspects that included, but were not limited to, the relationship between cultural heritage and politics, national identity, identity making, writing of history, ethnic conflicts, gender, indigenous communities, intangible values, international diplomacy, genocides and social confrontations, etc.⁶. Within this multidisciplinary framework, this volume discusses the notion of 'cultural heritage' and historic preservation with its relation to modernization. Various disciplines (art history, sociology, political history, architecture, etc.) have differently defined 'modern'/'modernity'/'modernization'. In this volume, modernization is used in the interpretation for which it is "associated with a set of ideas and social and economic conditions that emerged in the course of the Enlightenment, and is linked historically with the rise of nation-states and political forms based on liberal government"⁷.

This volume is produced from the author's PhD thesis⁸ which investigated how historic preservation and cultural heritage were managed by predominant power structures, especially in times of sharp changes within the state structure. The title of this book, *Modernization through the Past*, relates to the aforementioned formulation of 'cultural heritage' framed not in terms of tangible or intangible entities to be preserved, but rather as a 'process'. This process is operated on by present conditions to selectively define the past in order to produce a history. The context for this

⁵ Academics from Australia, Sweden and the UK established the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in 2010. An academic journal, *the International Journal of Heritage Studies*, started to be published to support studies in this area. Centre for Critical Heritage Studies was formed in 2016 at the University of Gothenburg. As a part of this research center, University College London Centre for Critical Heritage Studies was also formed.

⁶ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, New York, 2006. Niamh Moore, Yvonne Whelan (eds.), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, 2007. Brian J. Graham, Peter Howard (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, 2008. Rodney Harrison (ed.), *Understanding the politics of heritage*, Manchester University Press & the Open University, Manchester, 2010. Helaine Silverman (ed.), *Contested Cultural Heritage: Religion, Nationalism, Erasure, and Exclusion in a Global World*, Springer, New York, 2013. Peter F. Biehl, Douglas C. Comer, Christopher Prescott, Hilary A. Soderland (eds.), *Identity and Heritage Contemporary Challenges in a Globalized World Identity*, Springer, Cham, 2015.

⁷ Rodney Harrison, *Heritage Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 23.

⁸ Mesut Dinler (2018) *Building the Heritage: Politics and Historic Preservation in Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to the 1980s*, supervisor: Prof. Rosa Tamborrino, Politecnico di Torino, Turin.

process is the 'city', because cities are in a continuous process of change. Similar to cultural heritage, cities are also reshaped in each period by urban planning activities that are designed by social dynamics. Thus, a research which deals with historic preservation as practiced through cultural politics will inevitably investigate the history of urban planning⁹. To plan a city is an act to generate a future strategy, a future image for an urbanized land with a history. Thus, to study the history of urban planning is, in a way, to study the relationship between past, present, and future where a plan for future is generated in present based on past. For this reason, in addition to architecture, archaeology, and museums, urban planning activities in Turkey are also investigated since these reveal some major preservation issues, especially in İstanbul and Ankara; the former with its history as capital of two empires lasting for almost a millennium and six centuries respectively, the latter serving as the capital of the Turkish Republic since 1923. The choice of these two cities is particularly significant since the state agenda on historic preservation is more transparent and state authority on cultural heritage has been well-observed.

State, according to Pierre Bourdieu, "is the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital"¹⁰. It is through such a process of concentration that state can exercise its power. Conceived as such, the relationship between state power and cultural heritage requires an underpinning of multiple layers of complexities such as identity making, repression/oppression, social inclusion/exclusion, democracy, gender, etc. When the case in question is Turkey, a new layer must be added to these complexities regarding the question of the religious minorities who are considered minorities of contemporary Turkey (the Armenian and Greek populations) were original communities of the Ottoman Empire having lived in Constantinople even before the Ottoman conquest. However, with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century within post-French Revolution global circumstances, this population became a minority one faced with a nationalist state agenda that included repressive practices¹¹. Following the foundation of the Turkish Republic, nationalism targeted other ethnic minorities (e.g. the Kurdish population). These nationalist practices, as will be discussed in the third chapter, were reinforced through strong state programs

⁹ Rosa Tamborrino showed that protection of old artifacts and urban transformation projects are inevitably linked. This relationship operates in a complex way that actors of urban projects do not necessarily perform against conservation of cultural heritage. On the contrary, urban projects prompts the concern for conservation simultaneously. Cf. Rosa Tamborrino, *Parigi come modello, 1852-1902: idee e progetti di trasformazione della città e conservazione dei beni architettonici*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Politecnico di Torino, 1994.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field", Loïc J. D.Wacquant and Samar Farage (trans.), *Sociological Theory*, 12, 1, 1994, pp. 1-18: 4.

¹¹ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Türk or Türkiyeli? The reform of Turkey's minority legislation and the rediscovery of ottomanism", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, 3, 2007, pp. 423-438.

regarding cultural heritage. It should be emphasized that the modern Turkish project of nation-making, similar to other experiences worldwide, was race-based so that contemporary Turkish political problems (especially those related with minorities) are still discussed as issues stemming from the 1920s and 1930s¹².

These conflicts exist in many layers that historic preservation intersects with identity politics since historic preservation, through preserving cultural heritage, generates a representative narrative; and any criticism on this narrative must address identity politics. It is important to remember Hamilakis' remark¹³ that cultural heritage has been used as a device of modernism in the service of nationalism. There is a global pattern in exploiting cultural heritage to the benefit of the modern constructions of the nation¹⁴. In that sense, it should also be noted that Turkey is not unique as a state establishing itself as a modern nation-state by exploiting cultural heritage. As Thomas notes, it is no coincidence that nation-states (as products of modernism) have exploited archaeology, which has emerged (or been transformed from the Renaissance-born interest in antiquities) as a scientific discipline in order to satisfy modern man's need to rationally understand his roots¹⁵.

This volume also discusses historic preservation in its relations to power structures investigating how modernization efforts necessitated a cultural heritage doctrine in order to control the past primarily for the goal of nation-making. Such research is a difficult task addressing this vital question in the discipline of historic preservation; who preserves what, for whom, when and in which conditions?¹⁶. However, acknowledging that this is a complex issue that addresses the aforementioned layers of cultural heritage, this volume focuses on the actions of power holders in two capitals (İstanbul and Ankara) in order to understand the motives and means underlying the exploitation of cultural heritage by authorities. To investigate this question Turkey presents an extraordinary case. The continuous de(re)construction process of heri-

¹² Soner Cagaptay, "Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40, 3, 2004, pp. 86-101.

¹³ Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

¹⁴ Neil A. Silberman, "Promised lands and chosen peoples: the politics and poetics of archaeological narrative", in P. L. Kohl, C. Fewcett (eds.), *Nationalism, politics, and the practice of archaeology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 249-262.

¹⁵ Julian Thomas, *Archaeology and Modernity*, Routledge, London, 2004.

¹⁶ Mainly until the 1980s, until the postcolonial approaches received a wider international recognition in historic preservation, preservation implementations did not consider this aspect. Tamborrino and Wendrich address this problem and they argue that digital technologies are helpful to document plural aspects of cultural heritage that have been lost in these past implementations. They adopt these technologies to document the lost character of the temples in the Nubia region in Egypt. In the 1960s and 1970s, preservation of these temples was a major international debate with the Aswan Dam project. Most of the temples are today under an artificial lake produced with the dam project and seasonal flooding; except the Abu Simbel and Philae monuments which were transferred to a different zone with an international expert consensus. See Rosa Tamborrino, Willeke Wendrich, "Cultural heritage in context: the temples of Nubia, digital technologies and the future of conservation", *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 40, 2, 2017, pp. 168-182.

tage may unfold in an unobtrusive way in a country like Turkey where political changes have been constant and radical. Not only politics, but also the notions of 'religion' and 'multiculturalism' make Turkey an extraordinary case study, because, since the start of the modernization process in Turkey – a process dating back to the Ottoman period – the relationship between cultural heritage and modernization has revealed complexities that are related with historic preservation.

The volume focuses on the modernization process of Turkey covering a period from the late-Ottoman era (the long nineteenth century) until 1950. The foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 is generally regarded as a clean break from the Ottoman daily life practices and legacies for the creation of a modern secular nation. However, as will be discussed further below, there are also certain continuities and common themes. The use of cultural heritage to generate a national identity was one of these common themes. Both the late-Ottoman ruling class and the early Republican elites used cultural heritage to generate a power zone to highlight certain parts of the past while either by-passing or forgetting others.

The first chapter discusses the emergence of the concept of cultural heritage in the nineteenth-century Ottoman world. This was a period in which the Ottoman state began a process of modernization by enacting reforms restructuring the institutions of the state. These reforms had immense impacts on, amongst other things, the military, education, infrastructural investments, the role of women, minority rights, architecture, urban planning, transportation, fashion, daily habits, and art. In parallel to this process started by the late Ottoman ruling class, a consciousness towards the concept of cultural heritage was raised through preservationist efforts such as the first museum in the Empire, the first Ottoman archaeology campaigns, and attempts to collect archaeological artifacts in the capital of the Empire¹⁷.

¹⁷ These early attempts of historic preservation were taken with a dual motive; on the one hand, efforts to collect antiquities and generate regulations to claim an authority over them emerged from a reaction against the Western actors of archaeology who collected and transported artifacts to their own countries. Moreover, there was a Western attitude which suggested that *Turks* were not conscious enough to take care of these artifacts, thus, collecting them was a matter of preservation. On the other hand, through collecting these artifacts, the Ottoman ruling class and intellectuals could generate a narrative on the national past emphasizing links with Europe. Indeed, the Ottoman attitude towards archaeology in this period is strongly related with discussions on colonialism. As will be discussed further, there are similarities between Europe and the late Ottoman Empire in terms of efforts to collect artifacts. For Paris, Rosa Tamborrino showed Haussmann's efforts to preserve urban memory of Paris (see Rosa Tamborrino, "Museo, identità e costruzione della memoria urbana nella Parigi di metà Ottocento", *Città e Storia*, III, 1-2, 2008, pp. 15-36) and Viollet-le Duc's efforts to preserve antiquities (see the fourth chapter in Rosa Tamborrino, *Parigi nell'Ottocento. Cultura architettonica e città*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2005). Among other motives, both intellectuals had pedagogical motivations to educate future generations through cultural heritage. It is necessary to investigate if a similar motivation existed for Ottoman intellectuals as well. However, at least until 1903, Ottomans museums had limited access. In the mid-nineteenth century, no one could visit the museum without an official permit. Thus, I suggest that even though there were attempts to educate the public through cultural heritage, these Ottoman efforts mainly targeted the European community to inform them that the Ottomans were also European.

The second chapter investigates the legislative background of these developments and focuses on the reaction against modernizing reforms. It investigates the motivation to enact legislative arrangements which created an operational system that made it possible to claim authority over archaeological artifacts. These arrangements were vital to realize a functioning system for the cultural heritage policy of the empire. However, there was also a reaction to these policies which were designed mainly to deal with movable archaeological artifacts. The reacting community argued that the Islamic nature of the Ottoman past should be the focus of the cultural heritage policies rather than pagan and Christian artifacts.

The third chapter covers the early periods of the Turkish Republic which was founded in 1923. The Republican rulers sought to form a modern secular nation-state from a war-torn society that had been ruled by Islamic monarchy for centuries. This ambition required a rewriting of the history of the new nation allied with an intense program to undertake archaeological campaigns. New institutions and preservation councils were also established to process the new Republic's cultural heritage system. In addition, architecture and urban planning were among the main tools that the Republic operated with in order to implement a program designed to transform society.

The fourth chapter investigates how the Ottoman past was conceived during the Republican period. It focuses on how the remnants of the Ottoman legacies were regulated and how Ottoman memories were disciplined in the minds of the members of the new modern society.

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