

THE FUNCTION OF THE ORNAMENT: BIRD PALACES IN OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE

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“... The evolution of the culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use... There is no longer any organic connection between ornament and our culture...”

Louis Sullivan, *Ornament in Architecture*, 1982 [1]

Introduction

In the history, Ottoman Architecture showed a worth mentioning approach towards encountering birds into architecture by allocating spaces for them to shelter inside the ornamenting elements on the facades of the buildings. Bird palaces, are specific facade elements and unique examples for establishment of an organic bond between the culture and the architectural ornament. Such approaches for building facades are so rare to see in the history of architecture. In the literature, this value given to the birds indicated to stem both from the religious identity of Ottomans and the Turkish Culture inherited from the central Asia. [2]

Human beings, who are the main subject of architectural space, are privileged users of architecture. Even the negative spaces, which can be defined as hollowing out of the void created by building in the environment, is again tend to be conceived in the content of visual contact of the privileged user of the architecture. Inevitably, buildings are creation of openness and enclosures to be explored and occupied by the other beings of the earth; such as plants, animals and as in focus of the study, the birds. Negative spaces of architecture, determined by the facades, the roof and the shell of the building, are open for a variety of spatial qualities to be redefined by those unintentional users of architecture.

Architecture is the human's resistance against the nature. Nature withstands architecture, by trying to penetrate into it, in order to include it. Today, building's relationship with birds is also an encounter of this kind, which mostly ignores and excludes bird's existence in the content of architectural space. According to the estimates, between 365 million and 988 million birds die from crashing into windows in the United States each year. [3] Counter to that, birds, which are known as the innate architects of the nature, persist to interact with architecture by nestling to suitable gaps left over by architecture. Swallows are famous for the architectural masterpieces they build on the ceilings of balconies out of mud, while the chimneys of the buildings create safe coves for a variety of birds including seagulls, storks and ravens. Smaller birds such as sparrows and finches hide into the tiny holes between the window frames and the wall openings in order to survive through the cold days of the winter. The window sills are preferable spaces for doves and pigeons to stay warm. So birds are undercover figures of our architectural environment, and a part of the culture and everyday life.

Modest inclusion of these interactions and acceptance of bird's spatiality as an aesthetic value for architecture culture, makes the bird houses and bird palaces of Ottoman architecture very radical and unique. Even though there is no historical relation between, bird palaces and the theory, these examples of architectural ornamentation can be re-interpreted as a good stance against an important amount of literature written about the existence of ornament as an unnecessary element, by the western-based theoreticians at the beginning of 20th century. Against the aesthetic theory that is raised by the Modernist thought depends on mechanical reproduction techniques, and its nature of standardization, Ottoman bird palaces are re-functioning of the ornamentation. Ever since Viennese Architect Adolf Loos had disparaged ornament as unnecessary, childish and even criminal, architecture realm dragged into an understanding, which is freed from all kinds of ornamentation, indicating the rise of the Modernist thought. [4] As a precede of Loos, Louis Sullivan's criticism towards ornamentation in architecture created a milestone which has been adopted and projected for many times by Modernist architects in the following period. As asserted by the Modernist radical aesthetic definition the production of noble forms is only possible by getting rid of ornamentation which is nothing but a time-consuming, superfluous labor work. Modernism took function of the building and the needs of the ideal user which is defined as the modern man as a superior source of information while leaving cultural, traditional and other aspects of architecture aside.

Today we still carry the concerns defined by the Modernist architects about a hundred years ago. In the digital era we live in, production and construction techniques has evolved to a level that allows production of unique pieces and one-offs without causing extra costs. Since standardization ceased to be an economical saving and customization is no longer a money-saver, Modernist radical aesthetic lost its main economical reason for being the major design principle for architecture.

Objectives and Methods

From that conceptual framework the study aims to bring a new perspective to the Bird palaces of Ottoman architecture, other than as naive ornaments decorating the facades but special spatial element as a redefinition of the negative space. Bird palaces are reflections of culture into the architectural space, as an opposition to the prevailing Modernist aesthetic prejudices architecture still tends to believe today.

Most of the researches on the Ottoman bird palaces wander around the humanity scale of these elements as a part of the Ottoman culture. Above that, this study aims an approach to understand bird houses as functional spatial elements in relation with the theory of ornament, but not from the point of view of the privileged user.

In the study, bird palaces will be analyzed through the visual sources, which will be gathered by literature research. As a result of the analyses bird palaces will be redefined according to their architectural styles, architectural compositions, spatial elements, construction materials and methods and spatial functions.

Decorating the facades of the buildings with birdhouses can be seen in the classical Ottoman Architecture as early as 16th century. However, most elegant pieces appear in the 18th and 19th century. Ottoman bird palaces are usually found on the public buildings such as mosques, madrasahs, inns, houses, bridges, libraries and tombs. As Erman asserted, birdhouses can be divided into two groups in terms of their way of construction, architectural

composition, and spatial needs of the user birds. [5] (Fig. 1) The first group consists of individual or adjacent small holes specifically left between the cladding of the masonry buildings. The birdhouses in the second group are like projected chambers and look like single floor villas projecting like bay window, frontage decorated with arched windows, top covered with roof or small domes.[6] Birdhouses were usually made out of stone, sun-dried bricks, stones, wood, marble or terracotta and were installed in the high and safe parts of the buildings for the birds to be protected from other animals, under eaves of the roofs, on the sunlit and wind-shielded facades of the building. (Fig. 2) (Fig. 3)



Fig. 1: On the left, an example for group one on the façade of Ayazma Mosque in Üsküdar, İstanbul, In the Middle, an example for group two on the facade of Bayezid Hasan Paşa Medresesi, İstanbul, On the right side another example for group two on the facade of Ayazma Mosque in Üsküdar, İstanbul



Fig. 2: The left top image a Baroque birdhouse on the Façade of Halep Pasajı, İstanbul, The right top image, birdhouse on the facade of Çuhacı Han made out of brick, İstanbul The bottom left image, Gothic birdhouse on the facade of Darphane, İstanbul The bottom right image, a wooden birdhouse on a residential building in Sraselviler, İstanbul . [7]

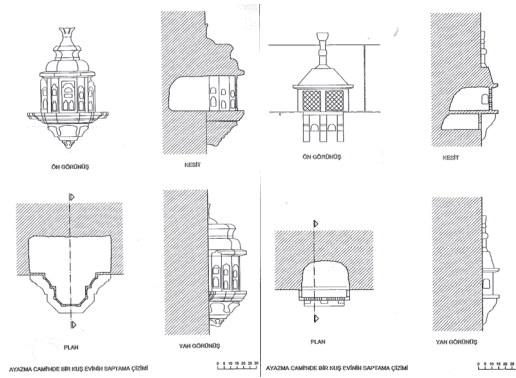


Fig. 3: Survey drawings of birdhouses on Ayazma Mosque by Bektaş Mimarlık [2]

Discussions

From that conceptual framework, the study aims to make a compilation by bringing the researches on the topic together, and make analyses of these architectural ornaments in relation with their spatial qualities and architectural compositions. The study inquires the ways building facades can be refunctioned. This study points how negative spaces can turn into other spatial definitions when the subject of architecture ceases to be understood only from the point of view of the privileged user.

The second part of the research will take place in Japan. According to Malik Aksel, bird-palaces are unique facade elements to Turkish architecture and there aren't similar examples in any other culture.[8] Cengiz Bektaş who has made researches on birdhouses and bird palaces of Classical Ottoman Architecture, tells that he found mentions in written sources about existence of such a tradition only in Japanese architecture. He mentions that he has written to two separate addresses in Osaka however couldn't get a reply back. As a second step of the study it is aimed to search for existence of such an architectural tradition during visit that will be made to Japan in the context of the conference.

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