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

Compte rendu de l'ouvrage de Mesut Dinler "Modernization through Past: Cultural Heritage during the late Ottoman and the early-Republican period in Turkey", Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019

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Texte intégral

- This review sheds light on Dinler's work regarding modernisation through the past, offering valuable insights into the geopolitical importance of heritage, placemaking, and nation-building, as well as architecture, in the Turkish cultural context. While several studies have explored the connection between heritage, place, architecture, and political issues, there is a limited understanding of the geopolitical impact on heritage and architectural materiality (Lushnikova, 2016). Eisenmann's (1995) insights on the 'critical' concept in geopolitics, which are centred on the management of the potential for 'being', referencing Kant and Piranesi and focusing on 'being' in architecture, are instructive. The application of this idea in various fields such as heritage and 'modernism' demonstrates the numerous aspects of 'being' in a geopolitical setting (Scruton, 1997).
- Dinler discusses modernisation through the past, specifically focusing on two distinct timeframes, while simultaneously shedding light on the utilisation of heritage as a means of constructing geoculture among regional powers as potential of 'being' in different periods. He perceives heritage as a process that is both present-focused and future-oriented, in which realities are constructed from chosen aspects of the past. The significance of heritage in Dinler's work is dual-fold. On one hand, it serves as an essential component in nation-building initiatives; on the other hand, it carries symbolic value by embodying core national values that are propagated internationally through the use of soft power. Several academics have acknowledged the importance of heritage in the pursuit of soft power (Nakano & Zhou, 2020; Mozaffari & Akbar, 2024). Soft power is determined by how a nation is perceived within the international community and is largely influenced by the appeal of its cultural and political values to other countries (Nye, 2004).
- Dinler's work delves into Turkey's modernisation process, examining the period from the late Ottoman era to 1950. The author emphasises that cultural heritage was utilised as a form of soft power to accentuate specific aspects of the past and imagined foreign, while neglecting or disregarding others during the nation-building process. The book aims to compare the nation-building efforts to the Ottoman political landscape versus the republican one, to understand how this modernisation process shaped the cultural heritage policy and heritage diplomacy in Turkey. According to Tuathail's definition from 1994, geopolitical culture is the process by which governmental elites and cultural intelligentsia interpret and make sense of their geographical situation, historical context, and aspirations for the state within the international community of nations. Dinler's book brings valuable insights into heritage politics by reading the formation of cultural heritage policy through historical geopolitical culture during Ottoman and Republican modernisation. Dinler critically examines nation-building from the Ottoman to the Republican period, focusing on the formation of heritage consciousness as a political project. It also includes an accurate and comprehensive index, as well as a list of recommended further reading.
- The opening chapter delves into the development of the concept of cultural heritage within the 19th-century Ottoman context, examining the impact of modernisation efforts on an integral aspect of Ottoman geopolitical identity and foreign policy. This encompasses areas such as the military, education, urban planning, transportation, women's and minority rights, fashion, art, and everyday customs, which were represented as a manifestation of westernisation focusing on the Ottoman image in the West. The author posits the modernisation of non-European

territories as a process of cultural interaction with Europe and centres his discussion on the Ottoman cultural context by questioning how to emulate Europe. This chapter offers valuable insights into how archaeology was imported from the west and translated, evolving from collecting *Spolia* to conducting archaeological excavations. He contended for the deliberate formation of archaeology, art, and education from the establishment of the Imperial Museum to the founding of the Academy of Fine Arts. These institutions were established to project soft power. He characterises this period as a political chess game in which each Ottoman move followed European moves.

- 5 The second chapter explores Ottoman identity and how it was perceived in Europe, particularly through the accounts of renowned European travellers who visited Istanbul. The author delves into the political and geographical fractures that eroded Ottoman unity and the ways in which colonised and powerful territories and nations were portrayed. World fairs acted as a significant platform for nations to exhibit the images they sought to portray to the world by utilising the connotations of materials and architecture that communicated their geopolitical aspirations. Dinler discussed World Fairs to demonstrate how Ottoman architecture was narrated by foreign architects, discussing the use of World Expos as platforms for exhibiting desired images. He exemplifies the Ottoman state utilising photography as its primary means of self-communication in a pavilion designed by French architect Leon Parvillé in collaboration with Italian architect Barborini, who highlighted Ottoman architecture to Europe. In addition, Dinler's analysis does not confine itself solely to exhibition products. He also examined Parvillé's publication, which showcases technical drawings, geometric and volumetric relationships, construction techniques, and materials. This publication serves as a means of discussing Ottoman architecture within the European context, as evidenced by the preface authored by Viollet-le-Duc. He also focused on the Turk restructuring process in the Ottoman past and identified conflicts in this period, reading architecture, and planning policies. His readings of this process involve geopolitical aspects in architecture and planning, and the architectural and planning impacts on geopolitics, considering the materiality of architecture and planning actions.
- 6 The third chapter explores the early years of the Turkish Republic, demonstrating how the nation transformed from an Islamic monarchy to a modern secular nation-state, with a focus on the development of the Republic's cultural heritage system. The author delicately analyses the political mechanisms to define republican nation-building actions, touching upon the concept of 'modernist nationalism of non-colonised third world countries', citing Ayhan Akman (2004). The nation-state is a prominent concept in Turkey's geopolitical culture and has been established within the framework of the country's secularist nationalist discourse on Turkishness. The impact of nationalist ideology, which has been significantly shaped by Kemalist political and intellectual elites, has been apparent in Turkey's heritage politics and geoculture since the foundation of the Republic. This has also involved a contestation of perceptions regarding Turkey's position within global and regional landscapes.
- 7 In this chapter, Dinler mentioned a research committee seeking out the history of the Turkish nation with the aim of rewriting the narrative of the modern nation in relation to a distant past. Starting with the publication of "General Themes of Turkish History", the author plunges into the written history of the Turks and their ancestral homelands in Central Asia and Europe, as well as their forebears such as the Sumerians and Hittites. The author demonstrates how the Turks spread throughout the world, dominating and enhancing the civilisations of the lands they migrated to. He provides extensive examples of influential scholars and personalities, illustrating how they conveyed and presented Turkism, the Turks, the Turk race, and civilisation during the First and Second Turkish History Congresses. He also explained how these congresses serve as platforms for disseminating information and knowledge within the country and abroad. This has been achieved through the participation of educators, members of the educational sector, and foreign researchers who have been invited to attend. The objective is to integrate the outcomes of congresses into daily educational practices in schools across the country while also presenting the image of the history of the Turkish nation to international audiences.
- 8 Furthermore, he returned to the field of archaeology as it played a significant role in shaping a new cultural heritage system, which was subsequently utilised to project soft power. He also noted that archaeology had been employed in heritage diplomacy because of its important Western and scientific connotations. He argued for Turkish nation-building by emphasising the choice of Ankara as the new capital and drawing comparisons with Istanbul. This chapter offers important historical information and showcases architectural materiality through buildings constructed by German architects in the modern capital of Ankara, which is viewed as a crucial aspect of Turkey's central position in the global political system. The author also highlights the telegrams sent by the USSR Academy of Science and the Ministry of Culture in 1933, which were aimed at creating a documentary titled Ankara: The Heart of Turkey. This propaganda movie praised the Republic's achievement in constructing new capital. The objective of this documentary was to illustrate the contrast between the new Turkish capital and Istanbul while simultaneously emphasising how the Ottoman past is represented in Ankara.
- 9 The final chapter explores Republican attitudes towards the Ottoman past and how the Ottoman past was perceived and incorporated into the collective consciousness of modern society during the republican period. To better understand the attitudes towards Ottoman heritage, the author poses a significant question: 'Why did the newly established Turkey start a state program for the protection of Islamic monuments at a time when Ottoman practices were being abandoned in favour of secularization?' He analysed the use of planning as a tool for modernisation and conservation by the government using examples from Istanbul's planning by Prost and how these new projects were depicted in publications such as 'Guzellesen Istanbul' (Istanbul becoming beautified) or 'Yenilesen Istanbul' (Istanbul Renewed) in the 1940s. Furthermore, the author highlights the significance of 'Turkish houses' in the process of nation building and in shaping the Turkish image abroad. He uses the materiality of architecture from this period to illustrate his argumentation, providing historical accounts of the construction of modern cities and the demolition of buildings. He also discusses how the historic Ottoman house was labelled as the 'Turkish house' in the construction of geoculture during this era. The author's discussions are centred around the analysis of Eldem, Arseven, and Egli, which reveals important geopolitical motives through their international networks and research. This chapter examines the materiality of architecture through edifices and cultural heritage, and how these elements serve to promote soft power through established institutions and key players in the field.
- 10 The book offers a solid base for researchers seeking to uncover the construction process of the concept of cultural heritage reading through geopolitical culture and geopolitical representations produced through architecture and cultural heritage. Heritage diplomacy is a means of constructing a unique geoculture and is therefore involved in power struggles (Mozaffari & Akbar, 2024). Dinler's work provides priceless insights into how heritage has been utilised as a soft power to construct geoculture in the Turkish context, and at the same time, he conducts an in-depth

analysis of the material, social, and cultural aspects of these various processes of 'being' through modernisation from late Ottoman to 1950. The author presents heritage as a form of soft power, it has the ability to shape the meanings of a shared past in order to unify diverse people as a nation and redefine the nation's relationships with other nations (Nakano & Zhou, 2020), and various potentials of 'being' across different historical eras. Dinler's work could be beneficial for future research in the field of various types of heritage as a form of soft power, and it may also help highlight the construction process of geoculture in different geographies.

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