

Ottoman Architecture and the Impact of Westernization

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The Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), strategically positioned at the intersection of Europe and Asia, long served as a critical connection for exchanging cultures and ideas. Its architectural landscape stands as a powerful testament to this intercultural dynamism. This paper discusses how the foundational elements of the Ottoman Empire’s architecture embody a rich blend of Islamic, Byzantine, Persian, and, in later periods, European influences, mirroring the Empire’s diverse societal landscape and political authority,¹ while discussing the significant impact and adoption of Westernization on Ottoman architectural traditions. By examining the trajectory of Ottoman architectural traditions, these structures transcend their role as mere symbols of imperial might, actively fostering cross-cultural interactions and leaving an enduring architectural legacy that was both influenced by and contributed to global architectural trends, especially in the wake of Westernization. This blend of diverse influences is evident in the early Ottoman period (1299–1453), in which Byzantine-Ottoman “overlap” architecture emerged and the later adoption and adaptation of Persian garden designs as influenced by the Safavid Empire (1501–1736), primarily located in what is now modern-day Iran.² However, the eighteenth century witnessed an increased engagement with European styles from Ottoman elites, often occurring through diplomatic missions such as that of Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, who was sent to Paris in 1720 and brought back plans and drawings of French palaces like Versailles and Marly.³ From this, Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical elements began appearing in Ottoman architecture.⁴

The dual role of Ottoman architecture as a symbol of power and a facilitator of cross-cultural exchange is rooted in the empire’s positioning of itself as the heir to the Roman and Byzantine legacies, as well as its later engagement with global early modernity.⁵ The significance of this dual role lies in how the Ottoman Empire utilized architectural innovation to reassert political legitimacy while simultaneously integrating diverse cultural vocabularies to create a unique, hybrid identity.⁶ The grand imperial mosques, such as the Süleymaniye, served as visual manifestations of

¹ Şule Kiliç Yıldız, “A Review Of Byzantine Studies and Architectural Historiography In Turkey Today,” *Metu Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 28, no. 2 (2011).

² Rudolph P. Matthee, ed. *The Safavid World* (Routledge, 2022), 1.

³ Ali Uzay Peker, “Western Influences on the Ottoman Empire and Occidentalism in the Architecture of Istanbul,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 26, no. 3 (2002), 140.

⁴ Robert Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity and Cultural Appropriation in Early Ottoman Architecture,” *Muqarnas* 12 (1995), 48–62.

⁵ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 55.

⁶ Shirine Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions of Early Modernity and the ‘Inevitable’ Question of Westernization,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63, no. 1 (2004), 35.

Ottoman imperial and religious authority. At the same time, the construction and patronage of diverse architectural projects, including incorporating foreign influences, demonstrate an openness to and engagement with other cultures, albeit sometimes framed as asserting Ottoman superiority, as seen in the comparison between the Sa'dabad and Isfahan's Chaharbagh.⁷ The mobility of cultural forms during the eighteenth century highlights a broader context in which the Ottoman Empire actively participated in transregional artistic overlap.⁸

To make this argument, I draw upon works by Robert Ousterhout, Ali Uzay Peker, and Shirine Hamadeh, alongside an analysis of monuments built during the Ottoman Empire's reign, such as Topkapı Palace, the Dolmabahçe Palace, Sa'dabad Palace, Orhan Gazi Camii, Nurosmaniye Mosque, and the Süleymaniye Mosque.

The Foundations of Ottoman Architectural Identity

Long before the transformative impact of Westernization was felt within the Ottoman Empire, much of its architectural identities were deeply rooted in a vibrant and diverse process of assimilation and synthesis of various pre-existing architectural traditions.⁹ Westernization in the Ottoman context can be defined as the “deliberate emulation of Western ways” and functioned as a “prestige culture for elites,” initially driven by a desire to adopt European technology and military organization.¹⁰ Architecturally, this manifested as “Ottoman Occidentalism,” a style where “characteristics of Western art or culture appearing in Eastern practice” were transposed into indigenous frameworks without necessarily adopting underlying European philosophical or theoretical principles.¹¹ As the Ottoman Empire incrementally expanded its dominion across Anatolia (1281–1337), it encountered and actively integrated the rich architectural legacies of numerous cultures and polities that had shaped the region for centuries, including the Seljuks, Byzantines, and Persians. This formative early period was not characterized by a monolithic or purely original style but rather by a compelling heterogeneous architecture that reflected the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and geographically diverse nature of the developing Ottoman Empire.¹² This architectural landscape represented an early form of transculturation, a complex process where different cultures meet and interact, resulting in a unique blend of practices and forms.¹³

One of the fundamental pillars upon which early Ottoman architecture was built was the inheritance of Islamic and Seljuk traditions.

⁷ Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions,” 32–51.

⁸ Nebahat Avcioglu and Finbarr Barry Flood, “Globalizing Cultures: Art and Mobility in the Eighteenth Century,” *Ars Orientalis* 39 (2010).

⁹ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 60.

¹⁰ Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions,” 33.

¹¹ Peker, “Western Influences,” 156–157.

¹² Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 60.

¹³ Avcioglu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures.”

The early Ottomans, having emerged within the sphere of influence of the Seljuks of Rum, maintained significant political, cultural, and religious ties with them.¹⁴ Consequently, they drew upon established Seljuk architectural precedents and models. This influence is particularly noticeable in the plans and vaulting forms of early Ottoman religious structures. For instance, the inverted T-plan, a distinctive feature of many early mosques in Bursa, such as the Orhan Gazi Camii, appears to have its origins in Anatolian Seljuk mosque architecture.¹⁵ Similarly, various vaulting techniques, the general layout of mosque complexes often incorporating elements like iwans, and certain decorative motifs likely had Seljuk roots, reflecting the broader Islamic artistic heritage shared across the region.¹⁶ However, it is crucial to emphasize that this adoption was not a passive imitation; the Ottomans creatively adapted and transformed these inherited elements, integrating them within their evolving and increasingly distinct architectural traditions.¹⁷ For instance, the Orhan Gazi Camii in Bursa (1334) utilized inherited Byzantine Masonry techniques, such as rough brick-and-stone wall construction, decorative bullseyes, and dogtooth friezes, which were hallmarks of indigenous workshops.¹⁸ These elements were creatively integrated with an “inverted T” plan and vaulting forms derived from Anatolian Seljuk traditions.¹⁹

In parallel and with great significance, incorporating Byzantine architectural elements and building techniques played a visceral role in shaping the unique character of early Ottoman architecture.²⁰ As the Ottomans progressively established control over former Byzantine territories, they inevitably interacted with the existing, often impressive, built environment and the skilled local workforce that had constructed and maintained it. Robert Ousterhout observes that the relatively rapid emergence of recognizable Ottoman architectural styles in the 1320s and 1330s strongly suggests the widespread employment of Indigenous Byzantine builders and craftsmen. The Orhan Gazi Camii in Iznik provides a detailed example of the methods of construction practiced by the Byzantines. Overall, many techniques and methods, such as using rough brick and stone masonry or decorative detailing, were highly common in Byzantine architecture and eventually influenced Ottoman monuments such as the renowned mosque, Hagia Sophia, built in 537 CE by the Byzantine Empire as a Cathedral and acquired by the Ottoman Empire in 1453 following the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet the Conqueror.²¹

¹⁴ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 53.

¹⁵ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 57.

¹⁶ Robert Ousterhout, “The East, the West, and the Appropriation of the Past in Early Ottoman Architecture,” *Gesta* 43, no. 2 (2004), 168.

¹⁷ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 53.

¹⁸ Avcioglu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures,” 39.

¹⁹ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 53.

²⁰ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 57.

²¹ Ousterhout, “The East, the West,” 168.

Perhaps less immediately apparent in the structural framework of early Ottoman buildings, Persian influence also subtly but significantly shaped the broader Ottoman aesthetic.²² The Seljuks acted as vital inheritors and disseminators of Persian architectural traditions, which were subsequently transmitted to the Ottomans through the legacy of their Anatolian Seljuk forerunners. The Persian-inspired elements, particularly evident in plans and vaulting forms, were integrated into the Ottoman architectural vocabulary as part of a broader Turco-Islamic heritage. Consequently, the early Ottoman structure often displayed a mixture of forms derived from Seljuk precedents alongside indigenous local techniques.²³ Later periods saw more direct engagement, such as the eighteenth-century Ottoman fascination with the Safavid Chaharbagh as a model of garden design, suggesting a continued and evolving connection to these Eastern aesthetic sensibilities.²⁴ Although Ottoman architectural features signify a complex blend of cultures, the broader cultural environment of the Islamic world, heavily influenced by Persian elements, undoubtedly contributed to the development of Ottoman artistic taste.²⁵ An example of this Persian influence is the eighteenth-century Sa'dabad Palace, which Ottoman contemporaries explicitly situated within a Persian architectural framework rather than a Western one.²⁶

The rich convergence of Islamic/Seljuk planning and vaulting concepts, Byzantine construction techniques, decorative detailing, and overall Persian aesthetic influence meant that early Ottoman architecture served as a concrete expression of the emerging Ottoman Empire and its diverse cultural makeup.²⁷ The resulting architectural landscape became a hybrid form that reflected the Ottomans' political and religious affiliation alongside their territorial expansion and the practical integration of the local Byzantine population and their skills.²⁸ Ousterhout characterizes this phenomenon as "Byzantine-Ottoman overlap architecture", highlighting the fusion of Byzantine construction methods and materials with building plans often inspired by the Seljuks. This integration mirrors the broader absorption of Byzantine institutions, administrative practices, and populations into the evolving Ottoman Empire structure.²⁹

Even in this foundational early stage of the empire, architecture held considerable symbolic significance in projecting imperial authority. While perhaps not achieving the overtly monumental scale of later imperial mosques in Istanbul, the very act of constructing new buildings in conquered territories served as a visual marker of Ottoman presence, power, and the establishment of a new order. The transformation of

²² Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 32–51.

²³ Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity," 53.

²⁴ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 41.

²⁵ Kiliç Yıldız, "A Review of Byzantine Studies."

²⁶ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 41.

²⁷ Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity," 48–49.

²⁸ Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity," 50.

²⁹ Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity," 48.

significant Byzantine churches into mosques, such as the conversion of Hagia Sophia into Aya Sofya (1453), communicated Ottoman domination and the ascendance of the new Islamic political and religious order, overall playing a crucial role in articulating the evolving identity and authority of the Ottoman Empire.³⁰ The transformation of significant Byzantine churches into mosques, most notably the conversion of Hagia Sofia into the Aya Sofya (1453), served as a foundational act of symbolic appropriation that communicated Ottoman domination, and this established an “Islamic presence” over the conquered landscape.³¹ Crucially, the emergence of the empire was fundamentally linked to the spread of Islam, as the early Ottomans were *gazis* (holy warriors) whose primary mission was to fight for the Muslim faith, a religious drive that necessitated the standard practice of transforming the cathedral of a conquered city into a mosque to signal the ascendance of a new political and religious order.³²

The Ottoman Encounter with Westernization: Adoption and Adaptation

The eighteenth century witnessed an intensification of interactions between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe, fostering strong grounds for cultural exchange that left a lasting mark on Ottoman architecture. This distinction is important as it reflects a geopolitical and cultural shift where the Ottoman Empire retreated territorially from Eastern Europe while strategically pivoting toward Western Europe, specifically France, as a primarily diplomatic and prestige model.³³ This enabled a selective hybridity where French Baroque and Rococo aesthetics influenced imperial architecture in the capital, while Central and Eastern European markets remained essential sources for specific luxury commodities like Bohemian porcelain.³⁴

Furthermore, this era was characterized by more frequent and sustained diplomatic missions, increased trade, and the rapid circulation of European goods and ideas within Ottoman society.³⁵ Ottoman intellectuals and elites displayed a growing epistemological interest in cultural differences, moving beyond prior perceptions of Western inferiority to a deeper appreciation of European advancement in various fields such as the arts and sciences.³⁶ Following the establishment of the first Ottoman printing press in 1720, officials and travellers began to document their experiences in Europe, discussing perspectives regarding social organization, technological developments, and aesthetics, mirroring a simultaneous European fascination with the Orient.³⁷ This reciprocal

³⁰ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 48.

³¹ Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 50.

³² Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity,” 50.

³³ Peker, “Western Influences,” 139.

³⁴ Peker, “Western Influences,” 140.

³⁵ Peker, “Western Influences,” 140.

³⁶ Peker, “Western Influences,” 142.

³⁷ Peker, “Western Influences,” 143.

curiosity and exchange laid the groundwork for the introduction and selective assimilation of European architectural styles into the Ottoman environment. This was grounded in new patterns of mobility among adventurers, merchants, and envoys who acted as vectors for cultural forms. The most significant groundwork was laid by the aforementioned Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, who was explicitly instructed to collect information on French civilization and returned with architectural plans and views of palaces like Versailles and Marly.³⁸ This diplomatic mission stimulated a dialogue where Ottoman intellectuals enlightened Europeans about their own empire while simultaneously introducing a “prestige culture for the elite” in Istanbul, where Western artistic knowledge began to be admired as a marker of status.³⁹ The selective nature of this assimilation is evidenced by the Ottoman tendency to adopt Western details, such as French Baroque and Neoclassical motifs. For instance, the Nurosmaniye Mosque (1749–55) represents a clever transposition of foreign vocabulary into indigenous elements, maintaining traditional Ottoman spatial concepts while integrating undulating cornices and a unique horseshoe-shaped courtyard.⁴⁰

The impact of this intensified interaction manifested in the gradual adoption of European architectural styles, prominently Baroque and Rococo, which gained traction in Istanbul and other urban hubs during the first half of the eighteenth century. Later in the century, elements of Neoclassicism began to appear, often associated with a more formal aesthetic. These styles were not adopted outright but rather filtered through the lens of Ottoman artistic traditions, resulting in a distinctive hybridity.⁴¹ The Sa’dabad Palace (1722), commissioned during the Tulip Period (1703–1730), serves as an early example of this integration with its site plan and decorations exhibiting a “Baroque flavour” while uniquely displaying its role as a manifestation of the Tulip Period’s newfound “openness to Europe.”⁴² The creation of a Baroque axis in the Kagithane Valley, complete with marble-paved riverbanks, a kilometer-long straight-lined canal, fountains, formal gardens, and complex water cascades that mirrored European pleasure retreats, highlighted the increased engagement with Western spatial concepts and aesthetics.⁴³ The distinction of engagement of Western architectural influence from other cultural adaptations lies in its intentionality and its role as prestige culture. It was also often part of a “competitive discourse” intended to redefine sovereign identity. The Ottomans used Western forms to create a “new style” that allowed them to participate in global early modernity. Furthermore, although the spatial layout of the Sa’dabad mirrored French models, the Ottoman poet, Ahmed Nedim, used it to affirm superiority over Safavid Persian models, explicitly

³⁸ Peker, “Western Influences,” 152.

³⁹ Avcioğlu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures,” 8.

⁴⁰ Peker, “Western Influences,” 151.

⁴¹ Peker, “Western Influences,” 151.

⁴² Avcioğlu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures,” 8.

⁴³ Peker, “Western Influences,” 150.

comparing it to the Chaharbagh of Isfahan to assert that the Ottoman capital had outdone its Eastern rivals.⁴⁴ While Seljuk and Byzantine examples reflect the integration of indigenous labour, Sa'dabad represents the integration of global ideas, functioning as a "mirroring device" where the Ottoman elite used both Western Baroque and Eastern Persian aesthetics to redefine their own sovereign identity in an increasingly connected world.⁴⁵ Even in provincial towns, the influence of Western styles became evident in the decor of houses and mosques. By the late eighteenth century, the commissioning of European architects like Antoine Ignace Melling on renovation signified a direct embrace of Western architectural design principles.⁴⁶

The Nurosmaniye Mosque (1748–55) stands as a critical case study embodying the synthesis of Ottoman architectural traditions and Western decorative styles. This imperial mosque incorporated a rich array of Western, specifically French, Baroque, and Neoclassical decorative details. This included scrolls, cable and round mouldings, heavily moulded cornices, engaged pillars which merged with said cornices, and fluted capitals.⁴⁷ Alongside these Western-derived features, the Nurosmaniye introduced novel elements within the Ottoman mosque typology, such as its abundant fenestration creating transparent facades and a horseshoe-shaped courtyard, which suggested a symbol of royalty.⁴⁸ Conversely, European travellers and historians interpreted Nurosmaniye's features as a direct consequence of the Ottoman ruling elite's conscious adoption of Western tastes and a tangible manifestation of their "Westernizing inclinations." For instance, English visitor James Dallway reported that Mahmud I had "procured designs of the most celebrated European churches" with the intent to adopt their plans for his mosque. Similarly, the Reverend Robert Walsh claimed that the Sultan "sent architects to collect the models of the Christian cathedrals in Europe" so that the Nurosmaniye could be "constructed from the perfections of them all."⁴⁹ Moreover, French author Marie de Launay, writing in the nineteenth century, interpreted the style as a "depraved taste" resulting from an "engouement général" (general infatuation) for Western "sciences and exotic arts."⁵⁰ This discrepancy in interpretation emphasizes a fundamental aspect of the Ottoman engagement with Western architecture: while Western forms were undeniably incorporated, their significance and motivations were perceived differently by Ottoman and European viewers. The Ottomans integrated these elements into their evolving aesthetic, often prioritizing innovation

⁴⁴ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 37.

⁴⁵ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 33.

⁴⁶ Peker, "Western Influences," 153.

⁴⁷ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 36.

⁴⁸ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 36.

⁴⁹ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 28.

⁵⁰ Peker, "Western Influences," 161.

and the creation of a unique Ottoman architectural expression that drew inspiration from diverse sources.⁵¹

This selective adoption and adaptation of Western architectural style within the established Ottoman building practices can be understood through “Ottoman Occidentalism.”⁵² While European Orientalism was often based on “interpretations” and romanticized, second-hand depictions rather than “faithful reproductions”, the Ottoman elite sought direct access to primary and technical sources.⁵³ However, this engagement was largely confined to decorative and stylistic elements applied to existing Ottoman buildings and construction types. The Ottoman approach involved a “clever transportation of a foreign vocabulary into a perfectly dominated Indigenous poesy,” emphasizing adaptation and integration rather than mere imitation.⁵⁴ This selective assimilation highlights the Ottoman agency in navigating cultural exchange, demonstrating a capacity to absorb and reinterpret foreign influences within their established artistic and cultural parameters.

The Debate of Ottoman Traditional Decline Following Westernization

The impact of Westernization on Ottoman architectural traditions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a complex and often debated topic. The debate regarding Ottoman “Westernization” primarily centers on whether the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries represent a period of cultural decline or a creative reformulation of identity. Bernard Lewis represents the traditional view, interpreting the adoption of European Baroque and Rococo motifs as a “faltering of cultural self-confidence. This perspective is critiqued by revisionist historians like Shirine Hamadeh, who argues that the era was not one of decline but of “early modernity” characterized by a “new style.”⁵⁵ Further, Peker (2002) argues that while the elite embraced Western surface details as a “passing fancy,” these innovations lacked the underlying theoretical foundations of European architectural movements. While European influences undeniably permeated Ottoman architectural frameworks, the notion that these influences caused a straightforward decline and overtaking of Ottoman styles is an oversimplification, as argued by scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Shirine Hamadeh.⁵⁶

Previously mentioned, the Nurosmaniye Mosque is one of the earliest and most prominent examples of this integration. This adoption of Western forms was partly driven by an increased diplomatic exchange with European powers. While trade and mercantile activity were vital in

⁵¹ Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions.”

⁵² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 2003).

⁵³ Peker, “Western Influences,” 155.

⁵⁴ Peker, “Western Influences,” 151.

⁵⁵ Avcioglu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures,” 24; Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions,” 32-33.

⁵⁶ Avcioglu and Flood, “Globalizing Cultures,” 11.

introducing luxury goods and cultivating an aesthetic taste for the West, diplomatic exchange was the primary driver for monumental architectural integration, as it provided the Ottoman elite with direct access to prestige models, official architectural plans, and a conceptual understanding of European sovereignty display, leading to greater exposure to Western artistic knowledge and material culture.⁵⁷ Additionally, European commercial ascendancy in the Middle East fostered a taste for current European styles.⁵⁸ However, it is crucial to note that Ottoman observers of the Nurosmaniye Mosque, while acknowledging its innovative character, did not necessarily emphasize the Western origins of its features. For example, these observers, such as the assistant comptroller Ahmed Efendi and chronicler Incicyan, specifically highlighted the engaged pillars whose capitals merged with moulded cornices and the excessive number of windows as the building's most appealing and novel features.⁵⁹ This contrasts with European accounts that often attributed the mosque's design directly to the adoption of European church plans.⁶⁰

Despite the increasing presence of Western elements, Ottoman architecture did not simply become a replica of European styles; rather, a process of hybridity and adaptation occurred, integrating into Ottoman traditions and techniques. For instance, the eighteenth-century Ottoman monumental architecture is noted to have revived local Byzantine building techniques while embellishing its classical style with Western features.⁶¹ In civic buildings, like libraries, Byzantine traditions even surpassed other influences, evident in features like facades with consoles, sawtooth cornices, and alternating brick and stone courses. This reflects a conscious effort to synthesize different architectural styles rather than completely abandoning indigenous styles. Furthermore, the Ottomans' emphasis on novelty during this period suggests an appreciation for innovation that was not solely tied to Western imitation but rather a broader aesthetic sensibility.⁶²

Hamadeh argues that European influences caused a decline in Ottoman architectural styles is often rooted in a Western-centric perspective that views deviation from established classical Ottoman norms as a form of degeneration.⁶³ Some European observers, such as Marie de Luanay, explicitly denounced the influence of French and Armenian artists, claiming they altered the "purity" of Ottoman architectural taste and led to "monstrous" and "flat" conceptions, suggesting that Ottoman architecture had reached its end, as emphasized by Peker. Similarly, the typological approach to architectural history, often based on Western models of linear evolution, could lead to the misconception of Byzantine (and by extension

⁵⁷ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 32–51.

⁵⁸ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 34.

⁵⁹ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 35.

⁶⁰ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 37.

⁶¹ Peker, "Western Influences," 154.

⁶² Peker, "Western Influences," 154.

⁶³ Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions," 34.

Ottoman) architecture as “small, stagnant, and dull” when compared to the grand scale and dramatic structural changes expected from Western medieval architecture. The Ottoman interest in Western civilization in the eighteenth century, while initially perhaps stemming from an awareness of European military superiority, also fostered curiosity and a desire to incorporate elements perceived as fashionable or innovative.⁶⁴

Furthermore, the concept of “Occidentalism” in Ottoman architecture suggests that the adoption of Western forms was a selective application of style rather than a deep assimilation of underlying European architectural styles. Just as European Orientalism involved interpretation and mixtures of Eastern styles, Ottoman Occidentalism involved integrating Western forms into existing Ottoman structures without always grasping or implementing a theoretical basis.⁶⁵ These Ottoman architectural shifts in the eighteenth century are best understood through transculturation. This “new style” functioned as a “clever transportation” of foreign vocabulary, allowing architects to embrace novelty while maintaining a “perfectly dominated” traditional spatial logic. Revisionist scholars argue these changes represent a deliberate reformulation of sovereign identity and early modernity. Although Peker describes this engagement as a “skin-deep style” lacking theoretical depth, it ultimately created a “dialogical co-existence” that preserved the distinct identity of architectural form. Therefore, while Western influences were visible, they did not necessarily “overtake” Ottoman architecture in a fundamental way.

The impact of Westernization of Ottoman architectural traditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was significant, leading to the integration of European stylistic elements. However, the debate in which this influence is framed as ‘overtaking’ or causing a decline in Ottoman traditions overlooks the processes of hybridity, adaptation, and the Ottomans’ agency in engaging with Western aesthetics. The relationship between Ottoman architecture and European influence was not a complete replacement but rather a dependent transformation of Ottoman styles, reflecting an overall broader shift in cultural sensibilities and interactions with the West.⁶⁶

My analysis fills a critical gap in this literature by explicitly identifying the processes of hybridity and Ottoman agency as a consistent, long-term strategy of sovereign identity rather than a reactive or superficial trend. While scholars like Robert Ousterhout have documented the “overlap architecture” and the integration of indigenous labour in the early empire, and Hamadeh has explored the social shifts of the eighteenth century, there remains a need to bridge these eras to show a unified Ottoman tradition of global synthesis. Ultimately, this work contributed to the literature by reframing Ottoman architecture not as a tradition being “overtaken,” but as an active participant in incipient globalization. I

⁶⁴ Kiliç Yıldız, “A Review Of Byzantine Studies.”

⁶⁵ Peker, “Western Influences,” 153.

⁶⁶ Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions,” 45.

propose that the relationship was a dependent transformation where Western aesthetics were synthesized with Safavid Persian, Mughal, and classical Ottoman forms to articulate modern sovereign identity rooted in internal social transformation rather than cultural submission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the trajectory of Ottoman architectural traditions in the wake of increasing Westernization during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals a discernible decline from its established classical idioms, but not a complete abolishment of its traditional styles. While the introduction of European Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical elements highly influenced later Ottoman architectural designs, this transformation can rather be characterized as an adaptation and absorption of Western elements.⁶⁷ The integration of Western motifs, often driven by a curiosity about European advancements and shifting elite tastes, frequently resulted in the application of foreign styles.

The notion of Ottoman Occidentalism as a “skin-deep style”, as argued by Peker, mirrors the often superficial and interpretive nature of European Orientalism, suggesting that the engagement with Western Architecture remained largely at the level of decorative detailing and stylistic features without adopting corresponding theoretical frameworks. Peker argues that this selective adaptation can be interpreted as a decline in the confidence and coherence of Ottoman architectural traditions, leading to increasing reliance on external traditions.⁶⁸ While acknowledging that Ottoman architects and artisans adapted and reinterpreted Western forms to some extent, the argument for decline emphasized that this adaptation often lacked the depth and transformative power to maintain the integrity and distinctiveness of Ottoman architectural traditions. The eventual emergence of eclectic and Neo-Ottoman styles in the late nineteenth century can be seen not as a resurgence of the classical Ottoman idiom but rather as an attempt to grapple with the legacy of Westernization, highlighting the extent to which its original trajectory had been disrupted.⁶⁹ Therefore, the pervasive influence of Westernization, with instances of hybridity and adaptation, ultimately led to a decline in the organic development and unique expression of Ottoman architectural traditions.

⁶⁷ Hamadeh, “Ottoman Expressions,” 34.

⁶⁸ Peker, “Western Influences,” 156–157.

⁶⁹ Peker. “Western Influences,” 157.

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