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Histories, Spaces and Heritages at the Transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek State

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Introduction

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Texte intégral

1 The Ottoman past in Greece is a *foreign country*, to paraphrase David Lowenthal's book title, regarding the distinction between the past and the attitudes toward the past, including nostalgia, aversion to the past, selective remembering and forgetting.¹ While the above statement largely describes the attitudes towards the Ottoman past manifested within the modern Greek public sphere, the academic study of Greece under Ottoman rule and the imprint of this era on the Greek state, albeit belatedly, today constitutes an established and thriving research field. History, as a discipline, is clearly in the lead in this development, with other fields like archaeology,² architecture,³ and urban studies, as well as disciplines like anthropology, (ethno)musicology and philology gradually catching up, thus contributing to the widening of the research scope. Echoing these developments, this dossier is the outcome of an attempt at an interdisciplinary approach to the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek state via the study of lived space and material culture. Based on a five-year research project⁴ under the same title hosted in the French School at Athens, this dossier is a collection of individual case studies that set up a framework for the critical discussion of the abovementioned transition.

2 The transition is considered as a *longue durée* phenomenon, that begins with the Greek Revolution of 1821, continuing with the annexation at the beginning of the 20th century of the northern territories of today's Greece and parts of the islands in the Aegean Sea, and concludes with the aftermath of the Population Exchange in 1923. All the studies address questions related to the multiple approaches towards lived spaces and material culture throughout this period, and to the diverse conceptions of these elements as "heritage" in modern Greece. Consequently, the selective and, in certain



cases, manipulative approach to Greece's Ottoman past is a recurring theme in all contributions. As this research project has demonstrated elsewhere,⁵ this is a heritage constantly under negotiation.⁶

3 The common thread that runs through all contributions in this dossier is the approach to space and its material constituents as products of social processes;⁷ that is, as inseparable from the lives of the people who shaped and inhabited them, and in conjunction with the broader political context and its impact on the afterlives of these structures. In this sense, all studies approach space and the built environment as a dynamically embedded feature of the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek state. This approach contrasts with the one that analyses space as a static background to major political events and changes. Consequently, the social production of space is highly implicated in all core issues at stake in the above-mentioned transition. These include the constitution of citizenship, of statehood and, in general, of polity. The streets and open spaces of Ottoman Thessaloniki hosted public ceremonials whose performative character enacted the citizenship of the ethno-religiously diverse subjects of the sultan.⁸ Similarly, the change in the arrangement and usage of the interior of the mosque of Ragıp Paşa in Nafplio contributed to the legitimization, in bodily symbolic terms, of the first Greek House of Parliament and consequently of the Greek state.⁹ Urban centres and their fabric actively took part in the political transition by becoming fields of intensive social interaction, that was not necessarily top-down in nature. On the contrary, the case studies featured, point to the great potential of spatial practices in widening the limits of the process through which subjectivity is constituted.

4 The focus on the entangled relation between humans, space and material culture constitutes a challenge on the methodological and analytical level. All contributors responded to this challenge by using a range of interdisciplinary methodologies aimed at the critical study and analysis of the nuances and complexities of spaces in transition. Without overlooking the necessity for primary historical research in the field of Ottoman archaeology, architecture, and the history of urban centres, the featured studies employ a wide array of analytical concepts that draw from sensorial history, performance and postcolonial theory, and the study of affect, and offer innovative and stimulating analyses. In addition to the theoretical approaches, all the studies explore and present rare, unpublished material that includes Greek and Ottoman administrative documents, narrative sources in various European languages, maps, images, movies, recordings, as well as ethnographic data. Furthermore, sources published in the past are revisited and re-examined, subjected to new readings. The different types of sources are discussed comparatively within the individual studies and can also be considered complementary and in conversation with each other within the framework of the dossier.

5 The dossier is made up of five articles that are framed by an introductory article entitled “Ce que nous avons hérité des Turcs’ : perceptions de l’héritage ottoman en Grèce au début du xx^e siècle”, by Méropi Anastassiadou-Dumont, a member of the Advisory Board of this research project. In her article Anastassiadou-Dumont offers an overview of Greece's Ottoman heritage and covers a wide range of fields that extend from language and architecture to music and cuisine. She distinguishes between those features that modern Greek state and society accepted as heritage and contrasts them with the elements that are still contested to this day. Anastassiadou-Dumont foregrounds the complex and diverse relationship the modern Greek state and society maintains with this past as opposed to a singular approach. The author masterfully captures the nuances of the bigger picture of the relationship, and in doing so, provides the necessary framework for the studies that follow.¹⁰

6 Anastassiadou-Dumont's article is followed by four articles that focus on specific case studies of transition. Kalliopi Amygdalou and Elias Kolovos study the restructuring of space in the case of the 1825 conversion of the Ragıp Paşa mosque in Nafplio into the “first Greek Parliament House”, during the Greek Revolution, as a necessary stake to signal the social and political change, entailing continuities and ruptures, as well as in-between situations. In these situations, elements of the previous cultural regime



coexisted with those of the wider demand for a revolution towards modernity. The authors highlight, in particular, the transition from one context to the other in various ways; the way the old rituals associated with the previous religious use of the building were replaced, contributing to the desacralization of the building; the use of the flag as a visual symbol *par excellence* that expressed the new sensory regime of the building's operation, which in the past was largely determined by ritualistic sound practices; and, finally, the posture of the bodies in the main hall of the former mosque, where Muslims used to enter without shoes, stepping on the carpets to then bend over to pray, which was then replaced by people who visited the place standing upright, stepping on Maltese plates with their shoes on, and sitting on stools or seats.

7 In the article “Under One Dome? Rituals of Transition in Ottoman/Greek Thessaloniki”, Eleni Kallimopoulou focuses on the relationship between public space and ritual in Thessaloniki during the transition from late Ottoman rule to the first years following its annexation by the Greek Kingdom. Kallimopoulou demonstrates how the visit to the city by Sultan Mehmed V in 1911 and the public celebrations that followed, became an occasion where intercommunal antagonisms were expressed. Celebratory constructions and events like triumphal arches, school-songs and parades formed a performative assemblage through which the subjects of the city's various ethnoreligious communities negotiated notions of communal identity and Ottoman citizenship. Six years later, the very same public space was to be reconstituted in the framework of the nationalisation and Hellenization of the city, this time through the performative efforts by the Greek state that involved public religious rituals by the Greek-Orthodox church. Through this genealogy of public rituals in Thessaloniki, the author foregrounds how the performative approach to space can contribute to the “nuanced cultural histories of transition”.

8 In their article “Moving Objects, Images, and Memories: Hamza Bey Mosque/Alcazar Cinema as an Affective Archive of Thessaloniki”, Kostis Kornetis and Panagiotis C. Poulos explore the successive transitions of the city of Thessaloniki after 1912 through the life-story of one building: the Hamza Bey Mosque. The authors examine the changing usages of the building from a religious space of the remaining Muslim community after the city's annexation to the Greek state, to a cinema (Alcazar), that attracted viewers mostly from the community of refugees from Asia Minor who had settled in Thessaloniki after the 1923 population exchange. Kornetis and Poulos approach the Hamza Bey Mosque/Alcazar as a material component of Thessaloniki, entangled in the shaping of the subjectivity and collective experiences of its inhabitants. The authors draw their analytical tools from post-humanist materialism and employ the notion of spaces as “emotive domains”.¹¹ Through this notion, they demonstrate how different social subjects (owners, spectators, public intellectuals, artists etc.) relate to the building in specific affective ways. Their personal experience of the Mosque/cinema, the authors argue, construct a type of “affective archive” of Thessaloniki. They conclude that viewing Hamza Bey Mosque/Alcazar as an “affective archive”, foregrounds overlooked aspects of the social, political, and demographic transitions in question.

9 In the article “Talking Filth: Abjection and Modernity in Post-Ottoman Crete”, Aris Anagnostopoulos follows the genealogy of the notion of sanitation from post-Ottoman Iraklion to today's ethnographic field situated in the mountain provinces of central Crete and the city of Iraklio. Anagnostopoulos combines ethnography with historical archival research in a critical manner, to reconstruct the process of cultural constitutions of notions centred around “dirt” in Crete. Drawing on post-colonial theory, he argues that sanitation and the techniques for controlling it “become synonymous to civilizing imperatives”, and as such, function as means of imperialist expansion. The author juxtaposes the ways these techniques were implicated in Iraklio under the British occupying forces to the “performance of bodily memories of abjection” retrieved in ethnographic fieldwork. Through this juxtaposition, Anagnostopoulos illuminates the politics of modernization following the transition



from the Ottoman to the Greek state and challenges the dualistic conceptions between barbarism and civilization.

- 10 The dossier concludes with an article by Dimitris C. Papadopoulos and Anna-Maria Sichani entitled “Heritage in Transition: Challenges in Post-Ottoman Digital Humanities” that presents and analyses the digital components of the research project “Histories, Spaces and Heritages at the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek State”. These components-comprising different digital applications-developed throughout the course of the research project in a creative and critical dialogue among all members of the research team. Among the projects discussed and analysed by Papadopoulos and Sichani, the project “Senseflows: sensorial flows in Salonica at the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek State” constitutes an innovative approach to the sensorial history of transition, responding to the challenge of the digital representation of intersensoriality. Overall, all applications are discussed in conjunction to the developments in the field of Digital Ottoman Studies and to their contribution in Public Humanities.
- 11 The content of this thematic dossier connects, on a methodological level, with an article featured in the current issue under the *Controverse* section, “Pour une histoire ottomane d’Athènes” by Edhem Eldem, a member of the Advisory board of this research project. This article is based on Eldem’s keynote speech delivered in the research project’s day-conference held at the French School of Athens on 15 September 2017.
- 12 Our dearest colleague, the late Eleni Bastéa, was also an enthusiastic supporter of this research project. Eleni Bastéa, former Regents Professor of Architecture at the University of New Mexico, was a member of the Advisory Board of this research project and delivered a keynote speech entitled “Planning Modern Athens: Western Aspirations and Ottoman Legacies” at the abovementioned conference. This dossier is dedicated to her memory.

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Notes

1 Actually quoting L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953): "The past is a foreign country; they do things different there." LOWENTHAL 1985; cf. LOWENTHAL 2015.

2 See an overview in KOLOVOS, VIONIS 2019.

3 The study of the history of Ottoman architecture in Greece is a fastest-growing field, consisting of plenty of innovative monographs and articles that cover a wide range of regions, historical periods and building types. A detailed review of the relevant literature is beyond the scope of this introduction. A significant part of this literature is featured and discussed in the articles of the dossier. Yet, it is worth mentioning at this point the following two edited volumes that constitute milestones in the recent bibliography, BROUSKARI (ed.) 2008, STEFANIDOU (ed.) 2010.

4 "Histories, Spaces and Heritages at the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek State", 2017–2021, <https://otherheritages.efa.gr>

5 KOLOVOS, PALLIS, POULOS (eds.) forthcoming 2021.

6 In the field of heritage and tourism management, Tunbridge and Ashworth have proposed the term *dissonant heritage*, to express the contested nature of heritage, which can be also discussed for the case of the Ottoman monuments in Greece and elsewhere. TUNBRIDGE, ASHWORTH 1995. See also TUNBRIDGE, ASHWORTH 1999, concerning the recent reorientation of the cities of Central Europe. For a recent overview the notion of heritage contestation in modern Greece and Cyprus, see SOLOMON 2021.

7 LEFEBVRE 1974, pp. 25–26; LEFEBVRE 1991, pp. 26–27, 33; SOJA 1989.

8 KALLIMOPOULOU in this dossier.

9 AMYGDALOU, KOLOVOS, in this dossier.

10 See also, for a broader and comparative examination of the Ottoman heritage in Turkey and the Balkans, ANASTASSIADOU-DUMONT (ed.) 2015.

11 NAVARO-YASHIN 2012, pp. 167–168.

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