



# The Relationship of Movie Theater and Audience: The Case of Ankara Büyük Sinema<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Throughout the history, cinema and architecture have evolved in different ways by establishing a direct connection with the social, political or cultural structure of the period. The establishment of the Turkish Republic led to the construction of numerous buildings in urban and public spaces, aligning with the new form of government. Simultaneously, radical changes occurred in cultural and entertainment structures as another facet of westernization. Starting from the 19th century, the role attributed to movie theaters, upon entering Ottoman territory, underwent significant changes throughout that period. Cinema venues became a symbol of modernization. After Ankara was declared as the capital of the Turkish Republic, cinema venues, which had been concentrated in Istanbul before, began to gain more space in the city with the effect of the changing cultural/artistic environment, and in time, a city-specific cinema-going culture emerged in Ankara. From the 1920s to the present day, the importance of cinema venues in Ankara have increased for both the memory of the city and the memory of the audience of that period. Although there are numerous studies on cinema venues in architectural literature, it is challenging to find studies specifically addressing the impact of architectural structure on the audience's viewing experience. Since the oral history research is sampled with ordinary people, there is a chance for the exploration of unwritten historical events or specifying uncertain dates of those to be included in the literature. Cinema venues are not only places where screenings are held, but also places where the experiences are embodied in the memories of the audience. For this reason, this study will analyze data from oral history studies conducted by researchers in the field of cinema studies. It is aimed to examine the effects of the cinema environment of Ankara and the cinema buildings of the period on audience memory. Since the most noteworthy movie theater in the memory of the participants was the *Büyük Sinema*, this study aims to investigate how that building remains in the audience memory and how the architectural aspects affect audience experience.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema places are significant public spaces which provides entertainment and socialization opportunities, and cultural practices to individuals. These spaces play an important role in the shared cultural history of society. Those are the places where individuals' daily life practices take place. Therefore, they offer cultural cues and provide insights into individuals' lives and cultures. Cinema spaces serve as arenas of interactive communication where past life experiences and cultural activities are manifested. They should not be perceived as mere physical spaces; rather, they play a crucial role in memory formation, influenced by the social and cultural conditions of society.

Memory is socially shaped, even though it appears to be individualistic. Social memory encompasses a wide range of individual memories and personal memory. As Connerton (1999) emphasizes, the act of remembering, no matter how individual, is related to the world of thought that other people have. This world of thought develops through the mediation of individuals, places, histories and language; that is, through the whole material and immaterial life of the society in which we live or to which we belong[1].

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Therefore, the term "collective memory" does not carry a figurative meaning. Memory is not only based on the memories of the individual, but is also formed by the accumulation of shared experiences. Therefore, even if the act of remembering is influenced by the characteristics and perspective of the individual, social influences are largely determinative. Assmann (2001) talks about two types of social memory: communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory encompasses memories of the recent past and consists of memories that individuals share with their contemporaries [2]. This type of memory includes short-term, generational and individual memory [3]. Cultural memory, on the other hand, focuses on specific points of the past that go beyond daily events and allows memories to gather around symbolic figures. According to Assmann, cultural memory is a form of collective memory and this type of memory has a symbolic structure that can be transmitted from one generation to another [2]. Sturken (1997) defines cultural memory as "shared memory outside the official historical narrative, enriched with cultural meanings and cultural products". What stands out in cultural memory is not the actual history but the remembered history [4]. From a collective perspective, according to Halbwachs (1992), memory is "not a given but a socially constructed notion"[5]. In this context, memory has a community-based aspect. It is a form of memory and remembrance shaped by the relationship of the individual with a group or community and the perspective, shared values and cultural practices that this relationship reveals, rather than the individual's existence on his/her own. Michale Schudson (2007), similar to Halbwachs, argues that memory is a collective phenomenon because it is primarily associated with a set of cultural practices and institutions such as institutions, rules, laws, standardized practices and records rather than individual human minds [6].

Collective memory is a dynamic phenomenon shared by members of a community that shapes their past and present. In the words of Pierre Nora (2006), "Memory is always life itself, produced by living groups." [7] Nora, argues that memory constitutes history. In this context, the concept of memory spaces gains importance. According to Nora, sites of memory can resolve the ambiguities inherent in both memory and nation through their presence and their effects on reality. Sites of memory encompass not only tangible and material phenomena, but sometimes tangible elements such as memorials to the dead, national archives, and sometimes human memory based on abstract foundations such as lineage, race and religion. The oral history work used in this study overlaps with Nora's concept of memory sites. While concrete memory sites such as newspapers and archives are referred to, human memory also refers to abstract memory sites [7].

For many years, cinema has done its historiography through directors and films. However, since the 1980s, it has been realized that cinema is a broader and layered social event. For this reason, a new idea of film historiography was put forward. Since then, researchers have included the narratives of ordinary people in historiography through the oral history method. While the new cinema historiography includes studies on the consumption and circulation of films and cinema as a field of socio-cultural change, it also includes micro-historical research on places of cinema exhibition [8]. Oral history emphasizes that events are ordinary and belong to everyday life. It is accepted as an important source for the preservation of collective memory and the reconstruction of cultural heritage. It transcends the limits of power-centered historiography and offers a perspective that does not ignore the history and experiences of ordinary people. Thompson explains oral history as follows: "it is a research method that contributes to the construction of the histories of societies by extracting and evaluating personal testimonies or experiences of a certain period from the depths of memory, and by compiling memories of all kinds of human relations, domestic lives, mother-child relationships, changes in small settlements, the history of everyday life, it provides information that written history cannot detect. It is therefore a type of history built around people" [9].

According to Traverso (2009), both history and memory arise from the same concerns, and what they share in common is the assimilation of the past. The primary source that assists history in assimilating the past is memory itself, that is, the witnesses of the past [10]. Witnesses of the past can convey more than official history as they experience events themselves. From this perspective, the method of oral history becomes more comprehensible, because oral history reveals the unwritten and offers an alternative historiography that draws strength from the memory of witnesses. In addition to transforming the content

and purpose of history, oral history also opens up new areas of research. The subjects of research are no longer the worn volumes of old catalogs [9], but living people.

Movie theaters embody the memory of a society and bear the imprints of its past. Consequently, movie theaters should not solely be viewed as venues for passive movie-watching; they also serve as vital spaces for social interaction, shared experiences, and the strengthening of cultural bonds. Hence, understanding the social and cultural value of movie theaters is important for understanding the history of cinema and the pasts of societies [2].

In the interviews conducted by the researchers with the audience of the period, it was revealed that the cinema experience is not remembered apart from of the place. These places play an important role in the shared cultural histories of societies. They are basically the places that shape the memory of a society and carry the traces of the past. In this context, movie theaters cannot only be considered as places where movies are watched. They are also important places where individuals interact socially, have common experiences, and strengthen their cultural ties. The cinema space also stands out as a "communication space" that differs from "place". People transfer their powers of communication to the space, making it a place of communication as well [8].

Memories of the cinema experience are usually associated with the movie theater itself. The smell of the movie theater, its atmosphere and the associations it creates with the movie watched together become vivid memories in people's minds. Therefore, movie theaters are important not only as a screening venue, but also as a social platform and a place of social interaction. According to Paech and Paech (2000), movie theaters are also valuable as a space that reflects the cultural fabric of society and open people up to different perspectives and experiences. Movie theaters are also part of the history and culture of cinema. An experience spent in a particular movie theater can be identified with that place and become an icon that reminds us of that place. Some famous movie theaters may have historical significance and reflect the cultural background of an era. Even the architecture, decoration and atmosphere of movie theaters have an impact on the audience's experience [11].

Movie theaters, with their interior and exterior spaces, offer important clues to understand the relationship they establish with their audiences. The exterior design of the building determines whether it is an independent structure, a large cinema complex or a small alternative theater. With their architectural layout, movie theaters clearly reveal the "place" where they position their audiences. In addition, details such as the design of the door through which the audience is greeted at the entrance to the movie theater and what kind of experience they will encounter inside are also important. Each movie theater is associated with a unique audience. As a result, the interior and exterior spaces of movie theaters constantly remind the audience of their class identity [12].

This study aims to examine the cinema environment in Ankara, the cinema buildings of the period and the place of these buildings in the memory of the audience by analyzing the interviews in oral history studies in the cinema literature. In the light of the data conveyed by the participants, since the Büyük Sinema is the most memorable cinema venue in the memory of the audience, the study aims to determine the overlapping and diverging points of the architectural features of this building and the way it remains in the memory, and to investigate the effect of architecture on the audience's attitude and viewing experience through the selected building.

## **2. METHOD**

In this study, an exploratory research method was adopted by using a secondary data collection approach. Secondary data can be defined as data other than primary data and previously collected for a different purpose. The oral history studies used as secondary data in the study constitute the data of two different studies. The first study is supported by TÜBİTAK and conducted by Hasan Akbulut (2018) with the code "115K269" and titled "Going to the Cinema as a Cultural and Social Practice: An Oral History Study on Audience Experiences in Turkey". The project is based on interviews conducted by the researchers with moviegoers in Ankara, Istanbul, Kocaeli and Antalya between 1960 and 1980. The oral history method

and interview technique used in the project were applied through the interview form developed by Akbulut, and as a result of the research, oral history interviews were conducted with 100 participants in 2015-2016. The fact that the research was conducted in four cities is due to the fact that these cities are related to the development of cinema, industrialization and modernization process in Turkey [13].

The second research used in the study is the PhD thesis titled "Audience and Space in Cinema: Changing Cinema Audience Culture in Turkey" written by Burak Medin (2017) and conducted in 2017 at Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Radio, Cinema and Television under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Zakir Avşar. In his study, Medin examined the changing culture of cinema attendance since the 1960s in the context of audience and cinema venues in the city of Ankara in Turkey. In his thesis, he conducted oral history interviews with a snowball sampling method and conducted oral history interviews with a total of 90 people with moviegoing experience in Ankara and asked 54 semi-structured questions to the sample group [14].

This study, in which studies conducted by different researchers were used as secondary data, basically consists of two stages. In addition to the oral history interviews used as secondary data, newspapers and magazines of the period were also utilized in the data collection phase. Aiming for an interdisciplinary approach, the study analyzes the interviews conducted by cinema researchers in Turkey who study the audience with oral history technique in the axis of city-space-memory. The research focuses on the way in which the architectural features of the Büyük Sinema remain in the audience's memory of the period through the cinemas of Ankara.

### 3. THE EARLY YEARS OF CINEMA IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE CINEMA ENVIRONMENT IN ANKARA

It can be found in Osmanoğlu's (1984) memoirs, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamit*, that the first movie screening in the Ottoman Empire was organized by a Frenchman named Bertrand at Yıldız Palace in late 1896 and early 1897, during the reign of Abdülhamit II.

"Bertrand was a mimic and juggler, and every year he would ask my father's permission to go to France, learn some new things and come back. He brought cinema to the palace. At that time, cinemas were not like they are now. The screen would be thoroughly wetted with big brushes and small pieces would be shown. These pieces were very dark, and the movie would be over in a minute. Nevertheless, we liked it because it was something new" [15].

Following the screenings at the Palace for the royal family, the first public cinema screening in the Ottoman Empire was held on December 12, 1896 at the Sponek Beer Hall. According to Çeliktemel-Thomen (2015), this cinematograph screening in Istanbul was the first private movie screening organized for "members of the press and a few invited guests". The public was introduced to the cinema after the protocol screening on December 12 [16]

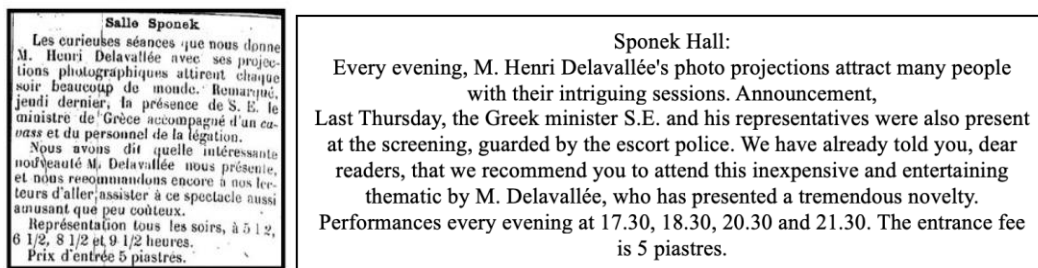


Figure 1. Advertisement of the Stambol Newspaper dated December 25/26, 1896 [16]

Ercüment Ekrem Talu (1943), who was among those who watched the first cinematograph show, gives the following information about the first movie screening in his article titled "The First Cinema and Gramophone in Istanbul" written years later. Talu, who was 8-9 years old at the time, states that in 1896 or 1897, he first met with the cinema in the large and chilling hall of a beer house, which had lost its

original function for that day, and that he looked at the 1-1.5 square meter screen in front of him, unable to make sense of it [17].



**Figure 2.** Salih Erimez depicting the first movie screening for *Perde ve Sahne* magazine in memory of Ercüment Ekrem Talu [17]

Pera, where these screenings were held, was a place where non-Muslims lived at the time, so it was not a place where Muslims preferred to go. Therefore, two months after the first cinematograph screening, M. Henri Delavelle started to organize film screenings at the *Fevziye Kiraathanesi* in Şehzadebaşı, where Muslims lived more. Describing the carnival-like streets of Şehzadebaşı on a Ramadan night in 1898, Sami Paşazade Sezai (1860-1936) described the juxtaposition of Karagöz and the cinematograph as "a strange contrast". It seems that after 1898, cinema became a part of Ramadan activities in Istanbul with the increase in the number of films coming from abroad. Sami Paşazade Sezai, who depicted this situation by creating a bit of a West vs. East contrast, evaluated cinema as a "marvel of art" brought to "ancient Asia" from the West, that is, from the "new world" [18].

As can be seen, cinema was initially a mobile practice in the Ottoman Empire as it was in the rest of the world. Itinerant filmmakers travel to different venues for screenings. Films were shown and watched in various public spaces such as coffee houses, beer houses, circuses, fairs, casinos, schools, theaters, association buildings, meeting and conference halls, and gardens, often in combination with other events, shows and entertainment. The first established movie theater in the capital was opened in Tepebaşı in January 1908 by Sigmund Weinberg, the Istanbul representative of the French company Pathé Frères. Following the Pathé Cinema, the number of movie theaters gradually increased from 1910 onwards. Until 1914, movie theaters in Istanbul were owned and operated by non-Muslim Ottomans, Levantines and foreigners. Cinema life is concentrated in the Galata-Pera region, where these segments of the population predominate. Beginning in the first months of 1914, one theater after another is opened by Turks, and cinema rapidly spreads to Muslim/Turkish areas of the city [19].

While the people of Istanbul first experienced the art of cinema in temporary venues and later in permanent movie theaters since the late 19th century, the first cinema screening attended by the residents of Ankara dates back to the 1920s. It is known that the first cinema in Ankara was located in the 1920s in the *Millet Bahçesi*. Although information about this building is unfortunately limited, it is stated that it was a two-story wooden building according to oral history narratives. There were lodges at the back of the lower floor and the upper floor (balcony) was reserved for ladies [20]. Ceyhun Atuf Kansu, one of the people who remembers the movies he saw at the movie theater in *Millet Bahçesi*, tells the following story: There used to be a *Millet Bahçesi* in the Ulus area where the business houses are now rising. At one end of this garden, where acacias shaded the station road, Ankara's first movie theater used to operate [21].

Although Ankara's first cinema building was the *Millet Bahçesi Sineması* in the national garden, oral history interviews indicate that film screenings in Ankara began at the *Hamid-i Sanayi Mektebi*. This can also be seen in the oral history interviews conducted by Burak Medin (2017) as part of his thesis. The

participant born in 1949, although not only in his own memory but through the memories of the older generation, stated that film screenings started in Ankara in the early 1920s before the cinema buildings appeared and that the first film screenings were held at the *Hamid-i Sanayi Mektebi* [14].

"Cinema screenings in Ankara were held during the years of the national struggle. Ankara residents get acquainted with cinema in 1919-1920s. In the early 1920s, movie screenings started even before the cinema buildings appeared. We know this from Fuat Bayramoğlu's memories. For example, there is now the Industrial Vocational High School building on Atatürk Boulevard near Ulus. It is the *Hamid- i Sanayi Mektebi*. It is said that the first movie screening was held here" [14].

### 3.1. Post-Republican Ankara Cinema Halls and the *Büyük Sinema*

When the historical process is analyzed to reveal the post-Republican Ankara-cinema relationship, the following picture emerges, Ankara was chosen as the capital city to reflect the ideology of the new regime established in 1923 and assumed a pioneering role in introducing the Western lifestyle and modern urban and architectural approach to the country. In pre-Republican Ankara, public spaces were limited to coffee houses, bedestens, hans and baths. However, after the declaration of the Turkish Republic, public spaces, which are the places where daily life will take place, begin to be reshaped with the efforts to become a nation-state and the modernization movements in the sociocultural field; the foundations of areas such as libraries, theaters, parks and restaurants are laid. In this period, the cinema space begins to become popular in the city and appears as a place of entertainment or socialization for both the republican elite and ordinary citizens. With the Republic, there is an increase in the number of movie theaters in Ankara. Between 1920 and 1950, Ankara's first movie theaters opened in and around Ulus, known as the old city [22].

There is a general similarity between oral history narratives and official history regarding the history of cinemas opened in and around Ulus in Ankara: The same participant in Medin's (2017) study, born in 1949, made a similar listing to the literature.

"If we are going to talk about an independent building where movies are shown, it is the *Kulüp Sineması* on Çankırı Street, 1926. This cinema was renamed *Halk Sineması* in the 1930s. Later it was named *Park Sineması*. This is the first independent cinema building in Ankara. (...) The second cinema is *Yeni Sinema*. It was established in 1928. It was next to the current Sümerbank building. No. 5. (...) Apart from that, *Süs Sineması* was established at the end of the 1930s next to the Child Protection Building on Anafartalar Street, which was also part of the *Sinema-İş Limited Şirketi*. In the early 1940s, a fourth cinema arrived. *Sümer Sineması* on the side facing Denizciler Street. (...) As can be seen, the emergence of cinemas has always been in the old city, that is, on the main Ankara side." (Male (ST11-1949) [14].

Until the 1950s, Ulus was the city center. As of the 50s, this centrality shifts towards Kızılay, which is called the 'new city'. The 'new city', a developing residential area, rises to an important position on the map of the city within fifteen years starting from the 1940s. In these years, many cinemas begin to open in the 'new city'. The first cinema in the 'new city' is the *Ulus Sineması*. The second cinema is the *Ankara Sineması* in 1943. Until the opening of the Arı Sineması, the biggest cinema in Ankara was the *Büyük Sinema* [22].

One of the participants in the oral history study, who was born in 1947, describes a similar historical process, except that the first cinema opened in the 'new city' area was not the *Ulus Sineması* in 1939, but the *Hale Sineması* in 1928. Perhaps the reason why the *Ulus Sineması* is considered the first in the literature is that the *Hale Sineması* also functioned as a casino.

"The first cinema in the new city is in 1928. Now there is the Military House building. There was a one-story block in the place of that building. The name of this place was *Hale Gazinosu and Sineması*. *Hale Gazinosu* brought cinema service to the people of the 'new city' as a saloon cinema. In 1939, the *Ulus Sineması* was established under the Soysal Building, which is now the Soysal Business Center. This cinema endured until approximately 1968. This was followed in 1942 by the *Ankara Sineması* in the 'new

city'. Now there is the Balıkcıoğlu Han, at the beginning of Necatibey Street. It is right at the foot of the bridge. As the third cinema, the *Büyük Sinema* was opened in 1949 in the building where the *Büyük İşhanı* used to be, near the Zafer Square, where the Jewelers' Bazaar is now. Thus, the number of cinemas in Ankara started to increase". Kadın (ST35- 1947) [14].

The expansion of Ankara in the 1950s resulted in the emergence of satellite cities. This situation led to the appearance of neighborhood cinemas over time. Neighborhood cinemas created a different audience profile. Audience culture began to be shaped according to the neighborhood where the cinema was located. The same participant listed the neighborhood cinemas as follows. Local cinemas began to emerge in the satellite cities on the periphery of Ankara, such as *İnci* and *Cebeci Sineması* in Cebeci, *Renkli Sinema* in Bahçelievler, and *Alemdar* and *Seyran Sineması* in Yenimahalle [14].

There is an audience, interpreted as elite by people belonging to the middle- and lower-income groups, who prefer the cinemas in Ulus and its vicinity, which is defined as the old city, and the cinemas in the new city. In oral history narratives, going to the movies is not only a pastime but also a matter of culture and a ritual for that audience. For the audience outside these cinemas, especially those who prefer neighborhood cinemas, going to the cinema and watching movies is an important form of entertainment rather than a matter of culture [13].

Oral history narratives and written sources have showed that cinema screenings in Ankara started in the 1920s. It increased rapidly with the emergence of neighborhood cinemas in the 1950s. All these cinemas have taken place in the memory of the audience of the period with their different characteristics and have been the subject of oral history narratives. In the Tübitak project conducted by Hasan Akbulut (2018), as a result of interviews with 22 participants who went to the cinema and experienced cinema culture in Ankara between 1960-1980, the list of remembered cinemas in Ankara emerged as shown in the table and the most memorable cinema was the *Büyük Sinema* [13].

**Table 1.** Remembered movie theaters in Ankara [13]

<b>Ankara</b>					
Büyük Sinema	16	Kızılırmak Sineması	3	Arı Sineması	-
Gölbaşı Sineması	14	Aykut Sineması	2	Menekşe Sineması	-
Ulus Sineması	11	Karınca Sineması	2	Mine Sineması	-
Kavalıdere Sineması	9	Melek Sineması	1	Renkli Sinema	-
Akün Sineması	8	Koç Sineması	-	Batı Sineması	-
Ankara Sineması	7	Nergiz Sineması	-		-
Alemdar Sineması	4	Eti Sineması	-		
Dedeman Sineması	4	Bulvar Sineması	-		

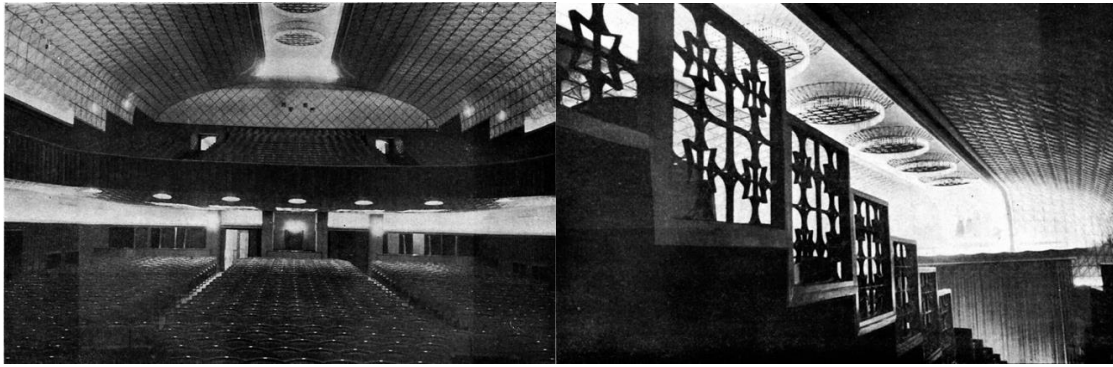
Therefore, in the rest of this article, the place of the *Büyük Sinema* in the audience's memory and the effect of the space on the cinema experience will be investigated. Architect Abidin Mortaş explains the design of *Büyük Sinema* as follows:

"Straight and wide stairs on both sides lead to the balcony. At the top of the stairs is a large foyer. During movie breaks, the audience can smoke cigarettes there and see the paintings and objects displayed on the walls and in the showcases. All the details and decoration of the building were designed to be unaffected by any external influences and to be as original and distinctive as possible, using motifs and colors. A large ticket office hall opens into a more spacious waiting room. The ceiling of this area is high enough to cover two floors, so that the balcony connects with the waiting area, providing a spacious and special effect. Since the balcony is the most popular part of Ankara cinemas, this waiting room was given importance. The ceiling is decorated with papier-mache motifs and a large crystal chandelier. Customers come and sit here long before the sessions and make use of the buffet. In general, the interior effect of the big cinema is spacious and comfortable. Luxury has been avoided and an architecture that can be achieved with simple materials and normal workmanship has been created" [23].



Although the architect avoided luxury, *Büyük Sinema* was the most luxurious cinema in Ankara in the memory of the audiences of the period, and most of the time the reason for choosing this cinema was its large chandelier, wall decorations and the atmosphere created by the architecture. Gönül Hayat Eren, born in 1937, one of the audience members of the period who participated in Akbulut's (2018) study, recalled that she usually went to the *Büyük Sinema* because she felt as if she was entering a temple with its red carpets, maroon seats, and the chill in the room she felt when she entered.

"I used to go to the *Büyük Sinema*, because the *Büyük Sinema* had a special characteristic. Red carpets on the floor and well-kept comfortable maralken (maroken) armchairs, a pleasant coolness when you walked in and those romantic songs of the sixties were playing. Well, it gives you the feeling that you are entering a temple. It was such a beautiful place. Then it wasn't just a cinema, the *Büyük Sinema*. There were many events there, theater, concerts and so on. There was a pastry shop on top of the cinema." (Gönül Hayat Eren, 1937, Konya) [13].



**Figure 4.** *Büyük Sinema* interior details [23]

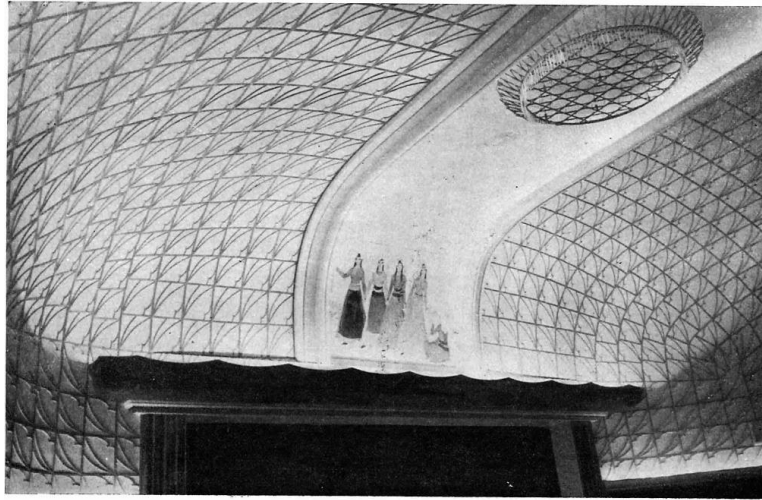
The decoration of the *Büyük Sinema* by Turgut Zaim, with three women in folkloric costumes, is described as an admirable detail:

"*Büyük Sinema* was a very beautiful movie theater. There is a picture of three women in folkloric clothes on the upper part of the stage of the *Büyük Sinema*. I will never forget that for example. It is very symbolic. When you go to a place like this or when you go to a certain place, for example, a tree is like a friend, it became like a friend for me, like this. It was nice to see them. It was a modern image anyway. I wanted such things in my life. Such things were always very important in our lives." (Ayfer Çekiç, 1950, Eskişehir) [13].

Ayfer Çekiç, mentions that she feels these women as her friends. Another moviegoer of the period, İnci Erkol, born in 1953, remembers the women on the panel as three girls, three sisters, daughters of the moon god and muses at the same time.

"I think I liked the *Büyük Sinema* the most, they had pictures on the walls. The three things, the three girls in mythology, the three sisters, the daughters of the moon god and the muses (trying to remember the Muses of Greek mythology). There were pictures of them, I loved looking at them, on the walls. There were other pictures, well, flower patterns on the walls. That entrance used to excite me a lot. That's how you go to the movies, it's such a ceremonial thing; the doors click click click. Pulling those old seats back, sitting in them, watching them, my heart would beat until the movie started." (İnci Demirkol, 1953, Ankara) [13].

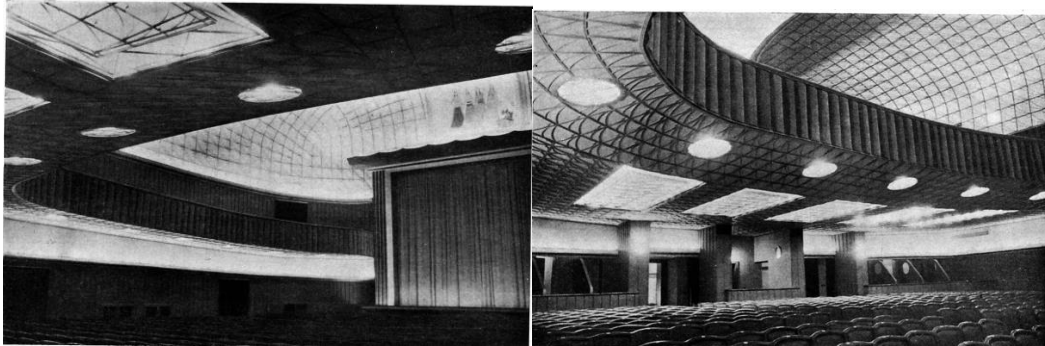




**Figure 6.** Turgut Zaim's folkloric figures [23]

Like Gönül Hayat Eren, Ulusay (2012) described the *Büyük Sinema* as a hall that makes you forget the ordinary and resembles it to a temple with its oval ceiling, comfortable seats, Turgut Zaim's folkloric figures and red curtains.

"It was a hall that made you forget the ordinariness of the outside when you entered it. This oldest cinema in Ankara made me feel like I was in a temple with its big hall, comfortable seats, oval ceiling, Turgut Zaim's folkloric figures on the walls, and the red curtain that opened and closed elegantly at the beginning, between the curtains and at the end of the movie" [24].



**Figure 7.** Büyük Sinema Hall interior details [23]

Another frequently remembered element related to the design of the cinema is the chandelier in the gallery area. Gönül Hayat Eren mentioned in her interviews that she loved this chandelier so much that she took a photograph of it and hung it in her house. In Karagözoğlu's (2004) memories, the elaborate dress of the staff, Turgut Zaim's folkloric figures, as well as the large chandelier on the ceiling were also included.

"This cinema was unlike any other cinema in Ankara at that time. First of all, the special dress of the staff was striking. A French flat cap, a cyan-colored tuxedo-style short jacket and trousers of the same color with black stripes on the sides. This was how the ticket takers at the door and the staff working inside served their customers. The lighting in the hall was from the ceiling. A large chandelier was installed. The other ceilings of the theater were embroidered. Folkloric paintings were painted on both sides of the stage. The theater was designed so that no matter where you sat, you could easily see the screen. There was a balcony and an entrance. And of course, the lodges. The lodges were for four people and very comfortable seats were provided" [25].



**Figure 7.** *Büyük Sinema ceiling detail and chandelier [23]*

It can be seen from the narratives in the oral history studies that the audience of the period preferred different forms of clothing in accordance with the structure. One of the participants, who sees going to the cinema as a ritual, mentions that the *Büyük Sinema* and *Sümer Sineması* have different rituals because the *Büyük Sinema* was a stylish place and one should had to be stylish there. From the narration of the audience of the period, it can be learned that it was normal to wear casual clothes when going to the neighborhood cinemas, but when going to the urban cinemas, especially to the *Büyük Sinema*, it was more formal due to both the social environment there and the architectural atmosphere.

“Movie theaters had their own ritual in the 1950s. For example, the *Büyük Sinema* was built as an elegant movie theater. The people were also elegant for this reason. In order for a ritual to take place, there must be different and suitable venues according to the way the ritual is performed. Cinemas should be thought of as such a place. Now the *Sümer Sineması* and the *Büyük Sinema* of the same period have different rituals. (...) At the *Sümer Sineması*, you won't find a red carpet to walk on. However, *Ulus Sineması* boasted a navy-blue carpet, while *Büyük Sinema* featured a red carpet. This makes a difference in the carpet; it makes a difference in the clothes. The usher at the *Büyük Sinema* was in uniform, but in other second and third-class cinemas the usher wore trousers and a shirt. These uniforms are tailored with thought. For example, a cyan hat, cyan/navy blue pants, patent leather shoes. The audience is different. If the ladies have a fur coat, other ladies want to come to the soiree with their fur coat.” (Male (ST5) [14].

Cinemas were important tools of the modernization project of the Turkish Republic. Women in the Republican elite became visible in social life at the balls given at the Ankara Palace, but the visibility of women in the ordinary public was realized through cinemas. Since men and women could watch movies side by side in movie theaters, this togetherness and women's visibility in the public sphere was accepted by a section of society.

Ramazan Çetin, one of the cinema workers of the period, stated that men and women could watch movies together in the *Büyük Sinema*, but this was not possible in Maltepe or other neighborhood cinemas.

“Men and women used to watch it mixed, but in some theaters, for example *Büyük Sinema*. There was *Gölbaşı Sineması* in Maltepe, this place had a lodge. *Derya Sineması*, for example. When people came as a family, husband and wife, they preferred the lodges. Of course, the prices of the lodges were a little different. The lodges were twice as expensive.” [26]



**Figure 8.** Audience at the *Büyük Sinema* [27].

## 5. CONCLUSION

During the modernization and westernization process initiated with Tanzimat and further accelerated with the Republic, Turkey underwent significant changes across historical, cultural, and economic dimensions, leading to the direct alteration and transformation of lifestyles. These processes of change are observable in daily life practices, urban architecture, production and consumption patterns, and ultimately in cultural practices. In the 19th century, cinema emerged in Ottoman territory as a continuation of the aforementioned westernization endeavors.

Based on oral history interviews conducted by researchers on audience perceptions and viewing experiences, it becomes apparent that cinema serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as a creator of alternative public spaces. Movie theaters should be regarded as venues with diverse missions catering to various target audiences. These spaces possess the capacity to foster awareness and provide an alternative relationship between space and time, beyond mere leisure activities. When considered in conjunction with the concept of public space, cinema offers a multi-faceted and multi-sourced experience by bringing together narratives from different geographies and perspectives. Moreover, movie theaters are also recognized as social spaces. Within these environments, individuals gather away from their homes and workplaces, forging connections with acquaintances and strangers alike, as well as meeting with relatives and friends. Movie theaters serve as hubs for sharing cultural and social experiences, facilitating communal interaction. Nevertheless, the stylistic distinctions among movie theaters lead to variations in the viewing experience, influencing participants' choices of venues.

In this study, which focuses on the architecture of the *Büyük Sinema*, information gathered from the audiences of the period reveals that attending screenings at the *Büyük Sinema* had a ritualistic significance. Unlike other movie theaters of the period, watching a movie at the *Büyük Sinema* required a special form of behavior. Likened to a sanctuary, the *Büyük Sinema*, with its burgundy seats, majestic chandelier, Turgut Zaim's folkloric depictions, and iconic red carpet, was etched in the memory of the audience and each element contributed to the overall viewing experience. Moreover, as one of the venues where men and women could comfortably attend screenings together, *Büyük Sinema* emerged as a republican space that symbolized urban sophistication.

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