

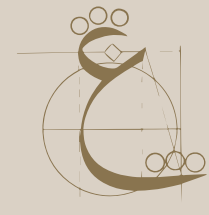


# kadim

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08



*kadim*

*“Kadim oldur ki  
evvelin kimesne bilmeye”*

*Kadim* is that no one knows what came before.

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**Blessing, Patricia.**  
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DAMLA GÜRKAN ANAR\*

ABSTRACT

Patricia Blessing's *Architecture and Material Politics in the Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* explores fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture in Anatolia and the Balkans. Her inquiry attempts to map the networks of patrons, architects, and artisans and to portray the architectural and decorative styles in the lands of Rum within this era. The book argues that fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture was enriched by the Saljuqid, Timurid, Mamluk, and Byzantine architectural cultures, and it was shaped by multiple actors with diverse backgrounds within an environment where cross-cultural contacts played a crucial role.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Architecture, Islamic Architecture, Ottoman Tiles, Cross-Cultural Contacts.

ÖZ

Patricia Blessing'in *Architecture and Material Politics in the Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (On Beşinci Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Mimarlık ve Maddi Politika) kitabı, Anadolu ve Balkanlar'daki on beşinci yüzyıl Osmanlı mimarisini inceliyor. Çalışma, söz konusu dönemdeki hâmi, zanaatkâr ve mimarların bir haritasını çıkarmayı ve Rumi coğrafyadaki mimari üslup ve süsleme tarzlarını tasvir etmeyi hedefliyor. Kitapta, bu dönemdeki Osmanlı mimarisinin Selçuklu, Timurlu, Mamluk ve Bizans mimari kültürlerinden beslendiği ve kültürler arası temasın önemli bir rol oynadığı bir ortamda, farklı aktörler tarafından şekillendirildiği savunuluyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı Mimarisi, İslam Mimarisi, Kültürel İlişkileri, Kültürlerarası Temaslar.



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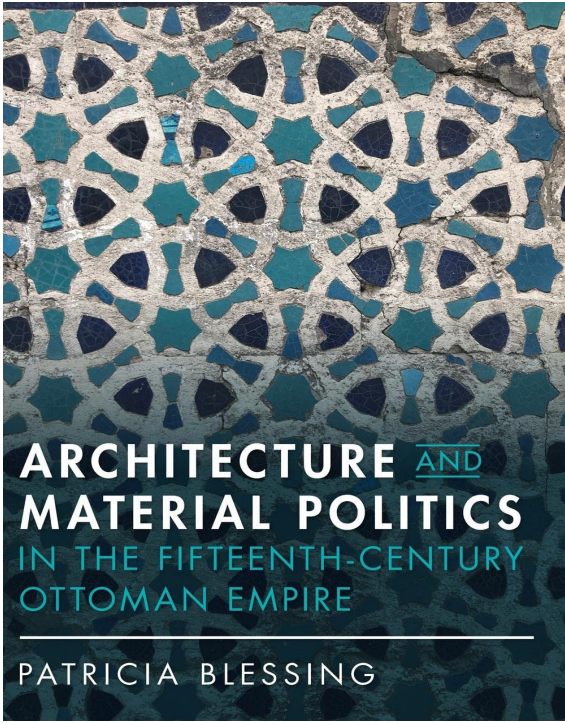
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*Architecture and Material Politics in the Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* is the second book by Dr. Patricia Blessing, an Assistant Professor of Art History at Princeton University specializes in Islamic architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia during the late medieval period. Her first book, *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rûm, 1240-1330* (Ashgate Variorum, 2014), explores the transformation of Anatolian architecture and cities following the Mongol conquests. Blessing's second book focuses on the architectural culture of the fifteenth-century Ottoman lands in Anatolia and the Balkans. By examining patrons, architects, builders, architecture, materials, and ornamentation of several monuments

in various cities from Amasya to Istanbul and Skopje, *Architecture and Material Politics* aims to depict the architectural landscape of the fifteenth-century Ottoman realms. The book conceptualizes fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture as a confluence of stylistic, material, and decorative elements from diverse cultural milieus, including Saljuq and Mongol Asia Minor; Byzantine Anatolia and the Balkans; Mamluk Syria and Egypt; and Timurid Iran and Central Asia. It argues that transregional networks of mobile architects and artisans, extending from the Balkans to Central Asia, as well as itinerant templates and designs on paper, served as agents of cross-cultural interaction, contributing to the formation of an architectural culture in the lands of Rum in the fifteenth century.

The book begins with a discussion of late fifteenth-century monuments in Istanbul. The first chapter focuses on well-studied monuments in the new capital, commissioned by Mehmed II and his high-ranking bureaucrats. *Çinili Köşk* [The Tiled Pavilion], a garden pavilion built in the 1470s in Topkapı Palace, is central to Blessing's analysis. She illustrates the diversity of material and stylistic references in the pavilion's architecture and ornamentation and interprets the monument as the embodiment of a sophisticated and deliberate engagement with both contemporary and past architectural cultures, including Saljuq, Mongol, Timurid, and Byzantine. Other sultanic and vizierial monuments in Istanbul and Skopje are briefly assessed within the same framework, reflecting a similar juxtaposition of diverse architectural references and stylistic modes.

The second chapter is devoted to a comprehensive examination of Mehmed I's architectural ensemble in Bursa, known as the Yeşil Complex. Blessing argues that the complex's carefully selected and combined stylistic and material references simultaneously evoke Anatolia's Saljuq past and the contemporary Timurid architecture. While architectural references to Saljuq Anatolia are interpreted as a means of asserting Ottoman political legitimacy in Anatolia—an assertion gaining prominence as textual narratives began to claim that the Saljuqs chose the Ottomans as political heirs—Timurid references are seen as signaling Bursa's emergence as a rival cultural center to Timurid Samarqand. Acknowledging the significance of the well-documented presence of Timurid artisans known as the Masters of Tabriz in the construction of the Yeşil Complex,<sup>1</sup> Blessing critiques the conventional historiographical narrative that focuses solely on Tabrizi craftsmen and emphasizes the necessity of a broader collaboration of skilled workers. The monument's multi-sensory aspects form another significant theme of this chapter. Attention is given to the interdependence of the haptic and acoustic perceptions sensed in different parts of the complex, provided by the presence of eye-catching tiles and luxury objects with textures inviting touch.

The third chapter traces the influence of Mamluk architecture and architects in the fifteenth-century Ottoman lands, focusing on monuments in Amasya and Edirne. Convent-masjids in Amasya built by Bayezid and Yörgüç Pashas, as well as the Üç Şerefeli Mosque and the Muradiye Convent in Edirne, serve as case studies for exploring the impact of Mamluk architectural forms and designs. Examples of Mamluk design elements, such as *ablaqs*, geometric motifs, and swirls, are compared with their counterparts in various Mamluk cities. Blessing argues that in addition to itinerant Mamluk architects and craftsmen—whose roles are firmly established in the literature<sup>2</sup>—scholars, envoys, merchants, and paper drawings or templates could have contributed to transferring these designs and architectural concepts to the Ottoman lands. Her discussion of blue-and-white tiles appearing in both Mamluk and Ottoman monuments highlights a shared aesthetic, reflecting common interests in Chinese porcelains and Timurid landscape paintings, and underscores the significance of Timurid-Ottoman-Mamluk connections during this period.

The fourth chapter scrutinizes the dynastic cemetery centered around the mausoleum of Murad II in Bursa. It illustrates how themes of paradise were evoked through architectural and decorative elements in Murad II's mausoleum and the accompanying dynastic tombs. Blessing argues that the Islamic concept of paradise, characterized by abundant water and lush vegetation, is invoked through tiles and wall paintings with floral designs, as well as the presence of water and green surroundings. The oculus in Murad II's tomb chamber and the open cenotaph allowing the earth on the grave to turn green, are interpreted as reminders of paradise. The mausoleum's garden setting, offering diverse smells and sounds, and its richly decorated mausolea perfumed by incense, further emphasize the space's multi-sensory facet.

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- 1 Gülru Necipoğlu, "From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990), 136–137; Mustafa Çağhan Keskin, "Siyasi-Kültürel İlişkiler Çerçevesinde Tebrizli Çini Ustaların Anadolu Yolculuğu," *Bellesten* 77 (2013), 445–450.
  - 2 Baha Tanman, "Erken Dönem Osmanlı Mimarisinde Memluk Etkileri," *Osmanlı Mimarlığının 7 Yüzyılı Uluslararası Bir Miras (İstanbul: YEM Yayınları, 2000)*, 82–90; Mustafa Çağhan Keskin, "Syrian-origin architects around Amasya region in the early 15th century," *ITU A/Z* 12/2 (2015), 19–33.

The book concludes by examining the period in which art creation for the Ottoman court was centralized in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The final chapter investigates the formation of an Ottoman artistic and architectural canon through two newly established courtly institutions: the imperial office of architects (*hassa mimarları*) and the court workshops (*nakkaşhane*). Analyzing the *Baba Nakkaş Album* compiled during Bayezid II's reign, the author demonstrates the crucial role of paper and drawings in disseminating motifs across various media sponsored by the Ottoman court, including İznik tiles and ceramics, and in the decoration of different monuments from Amasya to Edirne and Skopje.

With its broad scope, diverse themes, and rich visual materials, Patricia Blessing's *Architecture and Material Politics* offers a comprehensive depiction and analysis of fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture. The idea of discussing Ottoman architecture within the context of a particular century constitutes the most innovative aspect of this book and its main contribution. Except for Zeynep Ahunbay's dissertation on Ottoman architecture in the seventeenth century,<sup>3</sup> this framework is unprecedented in the literature. Studying a period bridging the early and classical eras of Ottoman architecture holds particular significance for mapping connections, continuities, and shifts between these periods. The author's context-sensitive approach, which integrates intellectual, diplomatic, and political contexts into the analysis, is equally valuable for painting a comprehensive portrait of fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture.

The focus on the sensory experiences provided by fifteenth-century Ottoman buildings is among Blessing's major contributions. Research on the sensory aspects of Ottoman architecture is limited, with notable examples including the works of Emine Fetvacı, Nina Ergin, and Beyza Uzun.<sup>4</sup> Blessing's exploration of the multi-sensory nature of fifteenth-century Ottoman monuments expands this limited body of literature. Examining the haptic qualities of these edifices is particularly valuable, given the general underemphasis on touch in sensory histories.<sup>5</sup> However, the topic could be further developed, for instance, by incorporating more details on reciting practices in religious buildings or the use of fragrant incense, as documented in endowment deeds and registers.

Despite its contributions, the book has some shortcomings. One of its main arguments lacks concrete evidence. The author suggests that alongside itinerant architects and artisans, mobile templates and drawings on paper could have played a crucial role in the transmission of architectural designs and decorative models between the Timurid, Mamluk, and Ottoman realms in the fifteenth century. She contends that instead of architects and workers, templates sent to different centers or construction sites could have been responsible for the presence of Mamluk or Timurid designs and models in Ottoman buildings. Additionally, she critiques the theory of mobile workshops or architects by proposing that tiles attributed to the Masters of Tabriz might have been produced in a central location and distributed to various construction sites, a hypothesis

3 Zeynep Ahunbay, *Osmanlı Mimarisinde Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi ve Sonrası (1609–1690)* (Istanbul: Istanbul Technical University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1974).

4 Emine Fetvacı, "Music, Light and Flowers: The Changing Aesthetics of Ottoman Architecture", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 32/1 (2000), 221–240; Nina Ergin, "The Fragrance of the Divine: Ottoman Incense Burners in their Context", *The Art Bulletin* 94 (1996), 70–97; Nina Ergin, "The Soundscapes of Sixteenth-Century Istanbul Mosques: Architecture and Qur'an Recital", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67/2 (2008), 204–221; Beyza Uzun and Nina Macaraig, "Scenting the imperial residence: objects from the Topkapı Palace Museum collections", *The Senses and Society* 17/1 (2021), 68–89.

5 Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 18.



previously suggested by Yılmaz Önge and Mustafa Çağhan Keskin.<sup>6</sup> Although this hypothesis is valuable, it remains unsupported by any documentation. There are no existing templates, papers, or narrative/archival records confirming the presence of paper templates or that tiles were dispatched from a central location to construction sites before the very end of the fifteenth century.

The book's main structural weakness is its initiation of the discussion on fifteenth-century Ottoman architecture with late-fifteenth-century Istanbul. This approach implies an affirmation of the conventional hierarchy placing Istanbul and its monuments at the forefront of Ottoman architecture. It also presents practical challenges for readers, as the frequent references to subsequent chapters complicate the narrative. A more appropriate and reader-friendly approach would be to adopt a chronological order and analyze Istanbul's monuments in the fourth chapter, following the examination of diverse architectural references apparent in these buildings in the first three chapters.

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