

The Historic Hammams of Bursa, by Elif Şehitoğlu, (translated by Georgina Özer; Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Publications, n.d.), 164 pp., ISBN: 978-975-333-222-4, 24.00 TL

This book provides detailed information about the history of “Hammam Culture” in Bursa, the first capital of Ottoman State. In fact, the city maintained its importance even after Istanbul had been conquered and designated the new capital. It has always been known as a green city, famous for its natural hot springs and hammams, including public hammams that have survived from the Ottoman period. The book originally published in Turkish as “Bursa Hamamları” (2008) has been translated into English by Georgina Özer.

The author, Elif Şehitoğlu, is an outstanding architect, who graduated from the Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey in 1995. Since graduating, she has been involved in many significant projects in Turkey, especially the restoration of historic places in Bursa. Her 2000 MA thesis, entitled “Bursa Hamamlarının Yapısal, Çevresel, İşlevsel Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri [The Structural, Environmental, Functional Problems of the Hammams of Bursa]”, submitted to the Department of Restoration, Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul provides the basis of this book. In the preface, the author mentions several influential studies on the subject, the most important of which is Kâmil Kepecioğlu’s work *Bursa Hamamları* (*The Hammams of Bursa*) published in 1935.

In the introduction, Şehitoğlu emphasizes that the “Turkish Bath” or hammam, which fascinated European travellers to Anatolia from the 16th and 17th centuries on and inspired many writers and artists, was fundamentally a borrowed form of the ancient Roman and Byzantine cult of collective bathing. The Ottomans further developed the hammam by introducing the idea of full ablution (*ghusl*), one of the ritual acts of Islam. Thus, it evolved beyond a place for performing a ritual and became an indispensable social custom.

In the first chapter entitled “The Tradition of Bathing from Ancient Times and Hammams”, Şehitoğlu summarizes the historical evolution of the hammam concept and points out the cultural differences in ways of satisfying the need to cleanse the body. In this context, she pays special attention to the fact that the Roman baths were the first examples of the modern hammam. After dealing with how the me-

dieval Muslim world embraced and adapted the Roman and subsequent Byzantine hammams as a social institution, the book explores hammams during the Ottoman period and the emergence of the “Turkish Hammam.” Alongside technical and architectural details, the anecdotes concerning the place of hammams in Ottoman culture, especially those related to women makes the book gripping and pleasant to read.

After a brief history of the city of Bursa, the second chapter addresses the building, development, and architectural features of hammams in the city from the Roman period on. It draws attention to the rich abundance of hot and cold springs in the region as well as the geographic conditions that led to the success of hammams. These features also contributed to the development and variation of hammam culture. The book illustrates this development by narrating accounts from legends and books of travels. It then examines each of the Ottoman hammams in the city by placing them into four main groups: hammams in mosque complexes, marketplace hammams, neighborhood hammams, and spas. For each hammam, it sheds lights on details such as location, architect, construction date, architectural features, major repairs, and the current condition. It also offers a great number of photographs and drawings. At the end of the chapter, it touches on defunct hammams, which now exist only in historical registers.

In the final chapter, Şehitoğlu reflects on the dilapidation of the hammams of Bursa. On one hand, she speaks of changing hammam culture. On the other, she complains about the lack of historical awareness. Lastly, she offers proposals for the survival of historic hammams and hammam culture.

The book ends with a brief glossary for readers who may not have a firm grasp on the subject. Readers who are interested in hammam culture or the “Turkish hammam” will not only find detailed information but also the chance for an intellectual journey into the hammams of Bursa, the capital of the Ottoman state for more than a hundred years.

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