



The Politics of Architectural Discourse: A Comparative Study of Renaissance Treatises and Mimar Sinan's Risales

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Abstract

The 16th century witnessed some of the most transformative moments in history, marked by the intersection of diverse theories and practices across different geographies. These changes in political life are also reflected in the historiography of architecture. This article compares two treatises from the Italian Renaissance —those of Giorgio Vasari and Andrea Palladio— with Mimar Sinan's risales within the context of political discourse and architectural expression. Similarities and differences characterizing architectural writing are examined through cultural contexts. The comparison focuses on the style and structure of the texts, followed by an analysis of prefaces, chapter organization, and narrative strategies employed in recounting personal and professional trajectories. The article investigates the purpose and scope of these writings, along with their approach to describing buildings and processes. The identity of the architect is explored in relation to governance and their contemporary professional networks, while considering the cities they encountered and their relationship with religion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse of architecture has witnessed the development of in-depth academic research across different cultural landscapes and eras, each contributing to the evolution of design principles and aesthetic ideologies. This comparative study examines two treatises from the Italian Renaissance alongside Mimar Sinan's treatises through the lens of political discourse and architectural expression. The study aims to identify similarities and differences that characterize the writing of architectural works in different geographies. The 16th century was a period of development characterized by significant political and social changes in both geographies.

Architects didn't just aim to create buildings that would stand the test of time; they also sought to ensure their work and ideas would be remembered through the written word. While Renaissance thinkers like Andrea Palladio and Giorgio Vasari meticulously documented their era and its history, the lack of similar systematic studies in the Ottoman tradition has left gaps in our understanding of their architectural theories and practices. To address these lacunae and engage with the textual traditions that shaped architectural memory, this article takes a closer look at some key texts: Palladio's *Four Books on Architecture*, Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, and Sinan and Sai Çelebi's works, including *Untitled Treatise*, *Risâletü'l-Mi'mâriyye*, *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'mârîn*, *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*, and *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*. These particular treatises were selected because they represent self-authored or institutionally mediated reflections on architecture, written by figures who simultaneously occupied design and historiographical roles in their respective contexts. While this study does not aim to provide an exhaustive survey of architectural treatises in either tradition, it focuses on representative figures whose dual engagement with practice and textual production enables meaningful comparison.

To support this comparative reading, and in addressing the narrative and ideological dimensions of architectural treatises, this study draws on a range of scholarly works that have examined the intersection of authorship, institutional power, and cultural production. Patricia Rubin's analyses and situate Vasari's

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historiographical strategies within Renaissance humanism and explore how biography became a vehicle for constructing artistic identity and legitimizing cultural narratives at *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (1995). James S. Ackerman's *Palladio* (1991) investigate Palladio's engagement with classical models, his methodical use of visual representation, and his positioning of architecture as a discipline rooted in theory and proportion. On the Ottoman side, Gülru Necipoğlu's *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (2005) provides a foundational interpretation of Sinan's self-representation and authorship, embedded within the hierarchical and religious structures of the Ottoman court.

Together, these studies frame the comparative scope of this article and support its central claim that architectural authorship is a culturally contingent construct, shaped by differing relationships between the individual, the state, and the intellectual systems in which they operated. While these studies provide deep analyses of each figure individually, this article builds a comparative dialogue among them, focusing on how different modes of authorship and historiographical strategies reflect contrasting socio-political realities. To maintain analytical depth within a wide-ranging comparative framework, the article focuses specifically on three architect-writers whose treatises are central to their respective cultural traditions.

2. METHOD

This study delves into the architectural writings of Giorgio Vasari, Andrea Palladio and Mimar Sinan using comparative textual analysis to explore how each approached architectural discourse. The research illuminates the unique ways in which these figures were conceptualized and communicated their ideas about architecture. Primary sources include Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists*, Palladio's *Four Books on Architecture* and Sinan's *Untitled Treatise*, *Risâletü'l-Mi'mâriyye*, *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'mârîn*, *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye* and *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*. These texts were chosen because they represent reflective, authorial engagements with architecture, written by figures who were both practitioners and documentarians of their respective traditions. These sources are critically analysed to reveal how each author situated architecture within their specific cultural and historical contexts.

To enrich this analysis, the study also draws on secondary sources that examine the intellectual, political and artistic environments in which these works were created. Using a qualitative approach focused on content analysis, the research identifies key thematic and structural differences between the texts. It pays close attention to elements such as prefaces, chapter divisions, and language that reveal the authors' intentions, audiences, and conceptualizations of architecture. Beyond the texts, the study situates these works within broader traditions of architecture and historiography, considering the influences on their narratives, such as patronage, state ideology, and professional practice.

While previous scholarship has explored architectural authorship in single cultural contexts—such as Ackerman's work on Palladio or Necipoğlu's monograph on Sinan—comparative analyses across Ottoman and Renaissance treatises remain rare. This article aims to address this gap by placing these texts in dialogue with one another, without imposing a false equivalence.

By blending historical analysis with literary study, this research offers valuable insights into how architectural theory and biography have been constructed across cultural landscapes. It not only highlights the distinct voices of, Vasari, Palladio and Sinan, but also the interconnectedness of architecture, culture, and history in shaping their enduring legacies.

To support this cross-cultural comparison, particular attention has been paid to source selection and interpretive strategy, especially when engaging with the Ottoman treatises. While the study draws on English and Turkish translations of the Ottoman texts, limitations related to genre, translation, and the asymmetrical nature of the sources are acknowledged. The aim is not to assert a one-to-one correspondence between the works, but to explore how differing historical and institutional frameworks shape the way architecture is narrated and remembered. These methodological considerations are further complicated by the structural disparities among the primary texts themselves.

3. TEXTUALIZING ARCHITECTURE: RENAISSANCE AND OTTOMAN TRADITIONS

The Renaissance was a period of deep connections between art, science, philosophy, politics, and architecture. Architects of this period often worked under the patronage of powerful political figures and designed buildings that were not only symbols of wealth and power, but also of cultural and ideological dominance.

A number of important treatises were published during this period, which greatly influenced the intellectual and artistic community. These works allowed architects to share their methods, showcase their designs, and influence architectural practice. Some of the most important examples include Sebastiano Serlio's *I Libri di Architettura*, Giorgio Vasari's *Le Vite de' Più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, e Architettori*, and Andrea Palladio's *I Quattro Libri Dell'architettura*. These texts had deep roots in the foundational works of Vitruvius' *De Architectura* and Leon Battista Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria*, both of which laid the groundwork for theoretical and practical advances in architecture.

In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire began to develop its own tradition of architectural writing. The famous architect Mimar Sinan pioneered this by documenting his works and aiming to leave a mark on the historical record. His close friend Sai Mustafa Çelebi also played a key role, contributing two important treatises, *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân* and *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*. Although these texts deal with many of the same issues, each emphasizes different structures, suggesting that they offer complementary perspectives on the architectural achievements of the period.

The tradition of writing about architecture in the Ottoman Empire continued to grow beyond Sinan and Çelebi. Other influential figures, such as the architect and historian Ali Kuşçu, contributed to these works with his *Risâletü'l-Muhammediyye*, which focuses on the geometric and mathematical foundations of Ottoman design. The *Kitab al-Mimar*, attributed to an anonymous Ottoman architect, also contributed by providing architectural plans and drawings of important buildings, offering valuable insights into the craft for future architects.

All of these treatises, which aim to document the architectural achievements of the empire, reveal different approaches and priorities. Some, like Sinan's, are more personal and reflect his individual experiences, methods, and challenges as an architect. Others, like Çelebi's, offer a broader perspective, emphasizing the teamwork involved in Ottoman construction and the roles of various craftsmen, engineers, and laborers. Together, these writings form a complex and layered record of Ottoman architectural practice and provide rich resources for historians and architects alike.

4. KEY FIGURES: GIORGIO VASARI, ANDREA PALLADIO, AND MIMAR SINAN

4.1. Giorgio Vasari and *The Lives of the Artists*

Giorgio Vasari, who is considered the first art historian, was an Italian architect, painter and writer. Born in 1511 in Arezzo, Tuscany, Vasari was the son and grandson of craftsmen. Vasari, who showed interest in art from an early age, carried out his work under the patronage of the Medici in Florence from 1530 onwards, and was left without a patron when Alessandro de Medici was killed in 1537. After this event, he traveled to Rome and Venice. Although he made paintings in which the influences of Michelangelo and Andrea del Sarto were seen, the book "*Le Vite De' Più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, e Architettori*", the first edition of which was published in 1550, brought him to the forefront as a writer. Vasari not only documented the lives of artists in his book but also provided important information about the cultural and artistic environment of the Renaissance while covering the broad period from the 13th to the 16th centuries. As Patricia Rubin has demonstrated, Vasari's *Lives* should not be read merely as a collection of biographies but as a carefully constructed historical narrative that elevates the artist as a central figure of cultural renewal, grounded in Florentine civic ideology [1]. When viewed from a contemporary perspective, it can be said that although the events recounted in the book are not entirely true, it is still used as an important source for understanding the personalities, lives, successes and failures of many Renaissance artists.

Vasari also advanced his career in architecture, playing a role in the construction and renovation of various buildings, including the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the design of the current Uffizi Gallery. He also served as the court architect of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. Giorgio Vasari passed away in Florence on June 27, 1574, leaving behind a lasting legacy as both an artist and a pioneering figure in the field of art history

His approach, blending anecdotal storytelling with critical analysis and historical context, laid the groundwork for the field of art history [2]. Despite its occasional factual inaccuracies and the bias toward Florentine artists, Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* remains a foundational text in the study of Renaissance art and offers invaluable insights into the artistic and cultural developments of the period [3].

4.2. Andrea Palladio and *The Four Books on Architecture*

He was born Andrea di Pietro della Gondola in Padua in 1508 and later took the surname *Palladio*. Andrea Palladio stands out as one of the most important architects of the Renaissance. Palladio, who worked as an apprentice to stonemasons from a young age, was taken to Rome by Gian Giorgio Trissino in 1541. In Rome, he began to study classical architecture and ancient buildings. During these travels, the architect, who admired ancient structures, adopted classical proportions, orders and symmetry in his designs. These principles are clearly seen in his designs for his legacy villas and country houses.

I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura (*The Four Books on Architecture*) was first published by Palladio in 1570. Much of Palladio's theoretical foundation draws from Leon Battista Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria*—the first major architectural treatise of the Renaissance, published in 1485—as well as from the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius [4]. As James S. Ackerman argues, *The Four Books on Architecture* should be understood not simply as a manual of rules and proportions, but as a deliberate intellectual project that elevates architecture to the level of a liberal art rooted in classical knowledge and humanist values [5]. According to Ackerman, Palladio's systematic approach—through both text and drawing—reflects a broader Renaissance ambition to rationalize and legitimize architecture as an autonomous discipline. This effort to align architectural practice with the legacy of Vitruvius and Alberti also served to position the architect as a learned professional, capable of both building and theorizing. Seen in this light, Palladio's work is not only a reflection of Renaissance ideals but also a political and cultural statement about the architect's role in society.

A complete English translation of *I Quattro Libri* was published in 1715 by Giacomo Leoni, an enterprising Venetian architect who had settled in London. In the following years, Palladianism became the dominant style in England [6].

4.3. Mimar Sinan and Risales

Born in 1489/90 in Ağırnas near Kayseri, Mimar Sinan—also known as Sinaneddin Yusuf or Abdulmennan's son Sinan—emerged as a defining figure in Ottoman architectural history. While the exact date of his birth and his ethnic background have been topics of debate, his architectural legacy is undisputed, spanning the reigns of four sultans, with notable contributions during the rule of Süleyman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III. Mimar Sinan's groundbreaking approach to architecture established him as the foremost figure of 16th-century Classical Ottoman Architecture. In a context where artists and architects were less visible compared to their European counterparts, Sinan's decision to document his works—a rarity in Ottoman culture—reflects a conscious effort to secure his legacy. In the 1580s, nearing the end of his life, Sinan began authoring his own biographies.

Sinan composed three texts: Untitled Treatise (Adsız Risale), Risâletü'l-Mî'mâriyye, and Tuhfetü'l-Mî'mârîn. The first of these, the copy known as Untitled Treatise probably serves as an index for the biography that Mimar Sinan planned to write. Risâletü'l-Mî'mâriyye can be considered an improved version of Untitled Treatise. Tuhfetü'l-Mî'mârîn, on the other hand, is distinguished from the others by its index of works, although it shows similarities to both. After writing these works, Mimar Sinan may have thought that it would be more appropriate to leave literary writing to the experts. The reason for this may

be that literary culture in the Ottoman Empire was not based on prose as in Europe, but on poetry, and Sinan did not consider himself sufficient in conveying. The most extensive biographical account of Sinan's life and career is found in the treatises authored by his close friend and contemporary, Sai Mustafa Çelebi—*Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân* and *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*—which combine personal reflection with courtly narrative and architectural documentation.

5. A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF ARCHITECTURAL TREATISES

The treatises are analyzed based on their writing styles, sections, and how they portray the identities of architects and artists. Distinct cultural differences emerge in their approaches to architectural writing. For instance, Vasari's work is poetic and detailed, Palladio's treatise is didactic, and Sinan's writings serve as both a personal account and a record of achievements.

When comparing the Italian treatises with those of Sinan, significant differences become evident in aspects such as writing style, structural composition, and overall coherence. Although a comparison based on page numbers may not be entirely precise due to the varying editions of the texts, it nonetheless provides a useful basis for forming a general understanding.

In this study, the English translation of Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists*, published by Oxford University Press in 1998, has been used. The work spans 512 pages and includes visual representations of several artists' paintings and sculptures. However, following the descriptions of artworks and the narrative progression within the text can occasionally present challenges. Vasari's language can be characterized as possessing an ornate, almost poetic quality. Given his background as a painter, it is likely that Vasari intended to translate visual expressiveness into written form. For this research, the 1965 Dover Publications edition of Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* has been referenced, which spans 581 pages. In this work, Palladio includes detailed drawings of both his own works and some of the structures he encountered in Rome. The treatise is written in prose and is relatively easier to read compared to the other two works to be examined.

Untitled Treatise, *Risaletü'l-Mi'mariyye* and *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'marin* are found in *Sinan's Autobiographies: Five Sixteenth-Century Texts*, published by Brill in 2006. The English translation of *Untitled Treatise* is about two pages, that of *Risaletü'l-Mi'mariyye* is also two pages, while *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'marin* spans approximately twelve pages.

Sinan's *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân* and *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*, published in 2003 by Koç Kültür ve Sanat in the book *Yapılar Kitabı: Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân ve Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye (Mimar Sinan'ın Anıları)*, contain 80 pages, featuring a modern translation of Mustafa Sai's writings.

Thus, the five treatises of Mimar Sinan total 96 pages. In terms of length, Sinan's writings are much shorter than the Renaissance counterparts. This difference can be attributed to the contrasting approaches to prose and verse in the two regions' literary traditions.

Sinan's texts, like Vasari's, sometimes follow a non-linear narrative structure, making them harder to follow. One striking difference is that Sinan's writings do not include any drawings, highlighting the distinct ways in which architecture is conveyed in the two regions.

Another point of comparison in these writings is the perspective from which they are written. Palladio writes in the first person, while Vasari generally uses the first person but refers to himself as "Vasari" in the section about Michelangelo. Sinan, too, uses the first person in his treatises, but in *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye* and *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*, there are sentences written in the voice of Sai. For example, in *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*, the phrase: "Raise your hand for prayer, O Sai, move your tongue in gratitude to God." [7] serves as an example of this shift. The few instances where both Vasari and Sinan's writings shift in voice might be due to different reasons. Vasari may have used his name to present himself as an independent figure in the narrative, while Sai may have aimed for his own name to be recorded in the work as the author.

Despite the significant differences among the treatises examined, contemporary historians suggest that the writers might have been aware of each other's works. As Necipoğlu points out, Vasari's depiction of the architect with divine/sacred titles like "saint" might suggest that Sai Mustafa Çelebi was familiar with Vasari's work [8].

Another connection exists between Mimar Sinan and Palladio. Norton suggests that Sinan may have obtained a copy of Palladio's text through the Venetian ambassador Marcantonio Barbaro and Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmet Paşa [9].

5.1. Central Themes and Methodological Approaches in Architectural Treatises

Vasari's treatise is organized into three sections, the first section examines the artists of the 13th and 14th centuries, the second addresses those of the 14th and 15th centuries, and the third focuses on the 15th and 16th centuries. Rather than following a strict chronological order, Vasari structures his work based on artistic schools and stylistic movements, reflecting a thematic and pedagogical approach to the history of art.

Palladio's *Four Books on Architecture* is structured around four main themes: Fundamentals of Architecture, Residential Architecture, Urban Architecture, and Temple Architecture. This thematic organization not only reflects his engagement with Vitruvian principles but also emphasizes his intent to offer practical guidance for architectural practice. In contrast, Sinan's treatises are mainly concerned with the architect's own works and thus result in autobiographical sketches of the career of the architect and his achievements. The form of these texts allegorizes the increase and decrease in the work of Sinan, respectively, and provides clues on Sinan's academic conception and the cultural background in which he operated. Rather than presenting a comprehensive architectural theory, Sinan's treatises are rooted in personal narrative and the documentation of his monumental contributions to Ottoman architecture. As Gülru Necipoğlu notes, Sinan's treatises should not be interpreted as efforts to assert an individualist artistic identity, but rather as institutional texts shaped by the bureaucratic and ceremonial structures of the Ottoman court. In these writings, Sinan's voice emerges not as that of an autonomous artist, but as a loyal servant of the state, articulating architectural accomplishment through the lens of dynastic service and collective imperial representation. Necipoğlu emphasizes that this form of authorship reflects a distinctive Ottoman mode of professional self-fashioning, one that prioritizes duty and continuity over stylistic innovation or theoretical speculation [10].

5.1.1. Analyzing the Prefaces of the Treatises

The prefaces of the treatises provide insights into how political and religious structures shaped architectural narratives in 16th-century Italy and the Ottoman Empire. Prefaces are an important source for understanding Vasari. The author began the preface of the treatise by explaining historical processes. While mentioning that sculpture and painting were attributed to the Egyptians, he first mentioned that God used them in creating nature and expressed his gratitude [11]. There are contradictory expressions in the work. He mentions that important artists went to Constantinople when the Eastern Roman Empire was established, and that art in Europe declined even further [12]. This framing situates Vasari's historical account within a teleological narrative of cultural loss and renewal.

Palladio's preface, by contrast, contains few political references. It includes the architects he was inspired by. He first referred to the books of Vitruvius, Alberti, and Vasari, and then he used important figures such as Giacomo Sansovino [13]. Palladio concludes by expressing his gratitude to God.

In each of Sinan's treatises on the other hand a long space is first devoted to praising God. *Risaletü'l-Mi'mariyye* starts with the phrase: "All praise, gratitude, and unparalleled glory be to that magnificent Creator, Allah, the Almighty" [14]. Similar sentences are also present in the other four treatises. Later, the creation of man is discussed. In *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'marin*, where man is described as: "He created humanity by kneading water and mud and made it more distinguished and superior than other creatures through "the veil of perfection" [15]. The reason why the creation of man is discussed in each treatise may be that it

was used as an intermediary phase after God to praise the Prophet. In the treatises, Hz. Muhammad is described with words such as the beloved of Allah,” “the reason for all creation,” “the master of all creation,” and “the essence of creation.” This is followed by praise for the reigning Sultan of the time.

When the three works are examined, it is seen that the figures given in the preface that give the first impression about the work are different from each other. While Palladio expresses his gratitude to God after mentioning the figures he was inspired by, Sinan's treatises include God, the Prophet and then the sultans. Vasari, however, begins by referencing Alberti, whom he describes as "our artist," indicating that he considers him the progenitor of the development of art, before speaking of God, though his references to God focus more on his relationship with mankind rather than expressions of gratitude [16].

Vasari's treatise diverges from the others by discussing the origins of painting, sculpture, and architecture, as well as the decline of these arts following the fall of the Western Roman Empire. He refers to the groups responsible for this decline as “barbarians” [17], a term also used by Palladio in reference to those who disrupted the classical legacy of Ancient Greece and Rome. In both cases, the term functions within a classical historiographic framework, referring to non-Roman or non-classical groups rather than to any specific later religious or ethnic identities. In contrast, Sinan does not articulate a narrative of artistic decline rooted in a lost golden age. Rather than looking backward to a distant classical past, his writings reflect a vision centered on his own time. While engaging with earlier structures—including Ottoman monuments and Hagia Sophia—Sinan positions his own works as surpassing them, presenting the classical phase of Ottoman architecture as both a culmination and a pinnacle of architectural achievement within a continuous imperial tradition.

5.1.2. Exploring the Chapters of the Treatises

Vasari divided his into three parts while Palladio structured his treatise into four books. In the case of Mimar Sinan's treatises, this division does not occur, as each treatise consists of a single section. In terms of internal organization, Vasari provides information closer to his own time in his work. He characterizes the three periods he defines: the first as more immature, the second as having more pattern and a better style, and the third as the period of maximum progress. In the first section of his book, Vasari focuses on the lives of two artists. The work includes numerous events, but certain notable points stand out in the overall structure. Alongside the artists' works, the places of birth, their students, and occasionally the names of family members are provided.

The relationships between the patrons and the artists also play a significant role in the book. In the first section of Palladio's work, there are descriptions of materials, their uses, the quality of soil, foundations, wall types, methods used by the ancients in stone wall construction, column types, their bases, capitals, the forms of the architrave, the places the architect visited, proportions, and other building elements. The book also includes detailed information about the dimensions of each building element, materials that can be used, and warnings about incorrect uses. Palladio's work appears to have a didactic aim. He states:

“Although Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti, and other excellent writers have established very useful rules regarding the selection of materials, I will still make sure to mention the most fundamental ones so that this work will not seem lacking” [18].

Illustrations accompany each chapter to reinforce the textual explanations. Occasionally, Palladio interjects his own aesthetic opinions, such as:

“However, in many ancient buildings, I have seen Attic bases placed under the columns of this order, and I like this way more, so I have drawn this base on top of the pedestal” [19].

However, he argues that these aesthetic tastes should also adhere to certain rules, and it is by following these that the ancients produced beautiful works:

“Although variety and novelty can please everyone, these should not violate the principles of art and the dictates of reason. Therefore, one can see that although the ancients show variety, they never deviated from the universal and necessary rules of art, as will be evident in my books on ancient works” [20].

In contrast, Mimar Sinan's treatises, after the praises that serve as a preface, the architect begins to narrate his life. In each treatise, a similar sentence is included, where Sinan initially provides the name of his birthplace but does not mention his childhood or family. He then discusses his various assignments and his promotions as a soldier. Although he mentions these events in his treatises, he does not elaborate on the experiences within them. In the treatises written by Sai, however, the difficulties and significant figures in the processes are discussed. At the end, a list of the architect's buildings is provided. In *Tuhfetü'l-Mimārīn*, the section immediately following the list of buildings can be seen as an attempt by the architect to present a systematic explanation. It emphasizes the importance of considering architectural principles, foundation types, and the stability of the land where a structure is built.

Tuhfetü'l-Mimārīn differs from the other treatises in that it includes an epilogue section. It is also noteworthy that neither Palladio nor Vasari has such a section. In this part, Sinan explains how he was inspired by Hagia Sophia when designing the Süleymaniye Mosque. In this context, when comparing Palladio, Vasari, and Mimar Sinan, it can be said that their treatises differ in terms of writing styles. Palladio's work is somewhat didactic, while Vasari's is biographical. Sinan occupies a middle ground between the two. While Sinan's treatises sometimes include historical information, materials, forms, and dimensions of his works like Palladio, his anecdotes about his life bring his work closer to Vasari's.

6. READING THE PERSPECTIVES OF ARCHITECTS THROUGH TREATISES

6.1. The Motivations and Intentions Behind the Writings

Vasari explains the reasons for writing his book in different sentences at various points in his work. . In the preface to the first book, he describes the purpose of writing as recording the current situation in case art faces a collapse again and ensuring that it can be overcome [21]. Additionally, one of the book's objectives is to describe the challenges faced by successful individuals and the methods they used. However, in this context, Vasari also mentions in the preface of the second part that he would focus more on the characteristics of the era than on the artists themselves [22].

Palladio mentions that he wrote his book to transform the remains of ancient buildings into a form that would be enjoyable for observers and beneficial for architecture enthusiasts [23]. Looking at the scope of the book, it is clear that Palladio focuses more on ancient works than on his own structures, indicating his intention to write a book that would extensively describe ancient Greek and particularly Roman architecture.

Sinan explains the reason for writing *Tuhfetü'l-Mimārīn* as ensuring that the monumental buildings completed under his supervision remain as examples and memories in the pages of time [24].

When comparing the purposes of writing, it can be said that all three works were generally written with the goal of "recording history." However, there are differences in the details. Vasari wrote about the lives of significant artists other than himself in order to provide a light for future generations in case art collapses again. Palladio, on the other hand, describes the architecture of a different era, sometimes including his own work, to provide benefit to others. In this sense, both treatises aim to serve the public. However, it can be said that the goal of benefiting society is secondary in Sinan's treatises. During a period when there were no established examples of architectural historiography in the Ottoman context, Sinan's treatises aimed primarily to document his own era through the lens of his architectural works. His focus was on ensuring that his contributions would be remembered as defining achievements of his time. Unlike Vasari and Palladio, who construct broader historical narratives that frame individual artists and buildings within the evolution of their disciplines, Sinan positions himself and his oeuvre at the center, presenting his work as both a reflection and culmination of the Ottoman architectural tradition.

6.2. The Authors' Approaches to Describing Structures and Processes

In the second book, Palladio extensively discusses how residential architecture should be shaped according to the user. He refers to the beauty of the human body and emphasizes placing beauty where the eye can see, along with details such as the functions to be assigned to room sizes and which rooms should be used according to the season.

At this point, when discussing how decorations should be applied, the sentence "however, an architect is generally more obliged to comply with the wishes of those who are spending money, rather than with the criteria that should be taken into account" [25] is particularly noteworthy.

In the third chapter of the second book, Palladio introduces the villas he built for the city gentlemen. He describes his clients as gentlemen who possess noble, generous characters and excellent judgement, and thanks God for their listening to him [26].

From the fourth to the eleventh chapter, Palladio thoroughly examines the residential architecture of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt. In the twelfth chapter, he transitions to where villas should be located. Chapters fourteen and fifteen are dedicated to his own designs. In these chapters, he mentions the names of his clients and the regions they lived in, expressing his gratitude towards them. In the sixteenth chapter, he returns to discussing ancient villas. Chapter seventeen is dedicated to describing the innovations he implemented, how he used them, and where he positioned them. In this sense, it is evident that the order of the chapters is not chronological.

There is no mention in Sinan's treatises about how the desires of the clients influence the design language, which is found in Palladio's work. Since Sinan's treatises do not include residential architecture, except for palaces, a comparison on this specific topic cannot be made. However, Palladio's inclusion of clients' names and his gratitude towards them, in addition to describing them as having excellent judgment, bears significant similarities to Sinan's treatises.

Palladio dedicates the third book to cities. This section includes roads, the positioning of roads, roads outside the city, their names, materials used, applications in antiquity, and bridges. He mentions the bridge built during the time of Caesar, as well as ancient bridges. In chapters thirteen and fourteen, he discusses the two bridges he built himself.

Similar to Palladio's third book, Sinan's treatises also include mention of aqueduct arches and bridges. The construction of the aqueducts of Kırkçeşme, commissioned by Sultan Süleyman to supply water, and the construction of Uzun Kemer, Kovuk Kemer, Güzelce Kemer, Mağlova Kemer, Müderrisköy Kemer, and Büyük Havuz, are detailed in the section "the construction of water arches resembling the sky" in *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*. The heights of these structures are also mentioned in the treatise. Sinan provides a few pages of information about how the aqueducts were built, with a particular emphasis on the Büyükçekmece Bridge. Details regarding the decision-making process, the location research, the technical specifications, and the costs of the bridge are provided.

However, there is no similar level of detail provided for the arches. Both architects discuss the techniques they used, but Palladio's use of drawings and greater emphasis on technical information make his explanations more robust. According to the numbers in *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*, Sinan built seven bridges and fifteen aqueduct arches. If Palladio's book does not mention any other bridges he built beyond the two he describes, this reveals a significant difference in the number of bridges and arches between the two architects.

Sinan's treatises provide more detailed information than Palladio's work about the processes of building bridges and waterworks. He not only discusses technical accomplishments but also documents the practical difficulties he encountered. In *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*, he recounts a moment when Sultan Süleyman insisted that such issues be handled by the chief architect, remarking that "every task must be entrusted to its master." [27]. Sinan then explains to the sultan that although a waterwheel could technically be

installed where the sultan had suggested, the location would not allow water to reach all areas. This anecdote underscores both Sinan's authority as an expert and the value placed on applied knowledge over theoretical speculation within the Ottoman imperial system.

Palladio dedicates the fourth book to temple architecture. Palladio reconstructs ancient temples according to Vitruvius' principles and includes his drawings in the book. The architect states that he did not add anything of his own to these drawings [28]. After providing information about where the temples should be located and their characteristics, he opens chapters on important temples in Rome. These chapters include the names, locations, construction dates, materials, and measurements of the temples, along with drawings. After covering the temples in Rome, Palladio also discusses those outside Rome (in Pola and Nîmes).

What is different about this section is that Palladio does not include any chapters about the churches he designed. Although he mentions designing the San Giorgio Maggiore Church in Venice in the second book, where he says, "Also, the churches in the shape of a cross are quite commendable... And in this form, I designed the San Giorgio Maggiore Church in Venice" [29], it is surprising that he does not dedicate a chapter to this church.

In Sinan's treatises, the chapters dedicated to mosques, which he considers a great source of pride, hold an important place. While it is written that he built 80 mosques and more than 400 smaller prayer spaces, the number of smaller mosques varies significantly between treatises. In particular, the number of smaller mosques is reported as being between 50-70 in other treatises, which is intriguing.

The first mosque discussed in the treatises is the Şehzadebaşı Mosque. Though much is said about Sinan's hard work during its construction, no technical details about the structure are given. Instead, the mosque is described with symbolic expressions, such as "its two minarets stood tall in front of an elderly man with a generous heart, ready to serve like graceful young men" [30]. For the Süleymaniye Mosque, similar symbolic descriptions are used. For example, the marble columns' origin, the four columns representing the four caliphs, the dome resembling the sky, and the stained-glass windows resembling the wings of Gabriel [31]. One of the most striking sentences in the Süleymaniye description is, "I showed all the care and effort in it, and created a work in which all arts were completed" [32]. This can be related to the Renaissance men who mastered multiple arts. Selimiye Mosque is described in *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân* as "beyond the limits of possibility." While the mosque is described as being six ziras higher and four ziras wider than Hagia Sophia [33], these proportions appear to be symbolic rather than based on exact measurements. Similar to the other two mosques, symbolic descriptions are used for Selimiye. The dome is compared to a suspended ball, the crescent represents the prophet, and the arches to a rainbow [34]. Minarets are described as being taller than the nine layers of the sky.

When comparing Palladio's treatise with Mimar Sinan's treatises in terms of building descriptions, it becomes evident that Palladio adopts a more quantitative approach, while Sinan favors a qualitative one. Palladio places significant emphasis on ancient structures, meticulously documenting their proportions and technical details, whereas Sinan focuses on describing his own works, highlighting their symbolic and aesthetic aspects.

In comparing Vasari and Sinan regarding biographical narratives, both prioritize the storytelling of events over detailed architectural descriptions. Vasari's work, encompassing all forms of art, does not dedicate specific sections exclusively to architecture. However, he allocates chapters to prominent Renaissance architects such as Brunelleschi and Alberti. The section on Brunelleschi stands out as one of the more extensive parts of the book. Interestingly, in this section, Vasari shifts from his usual detailed descriptions of artworks to focus heavily on the events surrounding Brunelleschi's buildings, offering limited insight into their technical characteristics.

The processes Vasari describes are valuable for comparing the architectural processes of the Renaissance to those of the Ottoman period. A notable event in the life stories Vasari describes is the architects' participation in competitions to bring their projects to life. The dome of Santa Maria del Fiore was

brought to life in this manner, and the process was recorded in all its intricacies by Vasari. During this time, the assembly asked Lorenzo to cooperate, but Brunelleschi refused. The fact that the architect had the right to make such a decision is an important piece of information regarding the artist's authority. When the architect went to Rome, the overseers pleaded for his return to Florence. A true Renaissance man, Brunelleschi chose architecture because it was more useful, aiming to reintroduce good architecture [35].

The section on Alberti, much shorter than that on Brunelleschi, mainly provides information about the architect's works, but Vasari's criticisms are also noticeable. According to Vasari, there were better architects than Alberti, but due to his treatises, he was believed to be very skilled [36]. However, it is mentioned that due to his insufficient application of theoretical knowledge, he made design mistakes [37]. In Sinan's treatises, there is a narrative that cannot be considered either autobiographical or biographical. Detailed information about family and sometimes childhood, which is found in Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists*, is not present in Sinan's treatises. Regarding the period when Sinan was devshirme, Sinan mentions it in *Risaletü'l-Mi'mariyye* with the following sentence: "Now, I recall the time when this little-known servant, truly the son of Abdullah, and in accordance with the Ottoman dynasty laws and the glorious imperial customs, known as Sinan, son of Abdulmennan, came to the Gate of the State along with other devshirme children from the Karaman province and Greek lands" [38].

After working in various roles, he mentions his promotions as a soldier. Although he refers to these events in his own written treatises, he does not mention what he experienced during these processes. In contrast, in treatises written by others, such as those by Sai, there are mentions of the difficulties he faced and important figures during the processes. For example, he was appointed as an architect to build a ship, and after being promoted to ship captain by the pasha's order, he was asked to build a bridge over the Prut River. During this time, Ayaz Pasha suggested adding a tower to the bridge, but Sinan rejected this idea. Lütü Pasha, upset by this, mentioned that Sinan's fear was to become a janissary in the castle, but after it became clear that Sinan's decision was appropriate and his successes were recognized, he was offered the position of chief architect [39]. After accepting this offer, he worked as an architect during the reigns of Sultan Süleyman, Sultan Selim, and Sultan Murad.

Sinan, in his treatises, rarely mentions his personal life or the individuals he collaborated with. However, he provides significant details about the construction processes of key works such as the Şehzade Mosque, the Kırkçeşme water supply system, the Süleymaniye Mosque, the Büyükçekmece Bridge, and the Selimiye Mosque. While historical events are occasionally referenced in his writings, these mentions lack the depth and narrative detail found in Vasari's works.

Unlike Vasari's account of Brunelleschi or the deliberate career trajectories seen in the cases of Vasari and Palladio, Sinan's entry into architecture does not appear to have been the result of a conscious artistic decision. Rather, his career was shaped by the needs of state officials and his demonstrated architectural talent. Distinct from Renaissance artists, who often engaged in multiple artistic disciplines, Sinan devoted himself exclusively to architecture, creating monumental works that addressed the functional and symbolic demands of his era.

Furthermore, the competitive environment that characterized architectural practice during the Renaissance was absent in the Ottoman context. Architectural projects in the Ottoman Empire were managed by the Imperial Architects' Corps, an institutional body directly under the authority of the sultan. This system eliminated the need for competitions, as architects worked collectively within an institutional framework rather than as independent practitioners.

The differing objectives of architects in these distinct cultural and political contexts significantly shaped the evolution of architectural practice. While Sinan is credited with introducing numerous technical and aesthetic innovations to Ottoman architecture, his treatises reveal no explicit effort to distinguish himself from or critique his predecessors. In contrast, Palladio and Vasari both exhibit a tendency to elevate the architecture of a specific period while disregarding or criticizing other traditions. This suggests that the institutionalized nature of Ottoman architecture under the sultan's patronage fostered a sense of historical

continuity. Despite his contributions to the advancement of Ottoman architecture, Sinan's writings do not indicate an intention to redefine or revolutionize the discipline but rather to enhance its existing traditions. This contrast reveals not only differences in personal authorship but also diverging political and cultural mechanisms by which architectural authority was legitimized.

6.3. Architectural Practices, Collaborative Networks, and Cultural Contexts in Architectural Treatises

While Andrea Palladio provides extensive guidance on architectural principles and classical forms in *The Four Books on Architecture*, he offers little reflection on the social or professional identity of the architect himself. In Vasari's work, there are many stories about the relationships of architects and other artists with their patrons, the administration, and the papacy. These narratives generally reflect relationships of mutual admiration and trust between artists and their patrons. For instance, Cosimo de' Medici's trust in Donatello was so profound that he entrusted his son's education to him before his death [40]. Despite such expressions of trust and respect, artists often found themselves undervalued both materially and morally. Consequently, they were compelled to accept work that did not align with their desires.

These narratives also highlight the mobility of artists within Renaissance Italy, often accompanying their patrons to new cities, where they encountered diverse influences. For instance, after Pope Leo X, who was particularly interested in natural philosophy and alchemy, ascended to power, Leonardo da Vinci traveled to Rome with Giuliano de' Medici [41]. This movement between cities not only enriched the artists' perspectives but also provided opportunities to engage with new patrons and artistic circles.

In contrast, the patron-artist dynamic described in Vasari's treatise differs markedly from that of the Ottoman Empire. When detailing the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque, Sai Mustafa Çelebi records how Sultan Süleyman's reaction to delays in the mosque's completion affected Mimar Sinan. While Sinan expresses a certain fear in this account, there is no indication of anger or direct confrontation. Although Sinan's treatises do not include discussions of his fees, it can be inferred that his position within the Ottoman court restricted him from openly criticizing governance. This constraint suggests that Sinan's writings lacked the degree of freedom seen in the works of Renaissance artists.

From patron-artist relations, the discussion naturally transitions to the collaborative and competitive dynamics among artists, another key theme in these treatises. Vasari provides a rich tapestry of anecdotes about how artists inspired one another, drew ideas from their peers, and even critiqued each other's work. These relationships, as well as their introductions to influential figures in cities they visited, reveal the social and hierarchical positions of artists and the respect they commanded. For example, Vasari mentions that Dante facilitated Giotto's introduction to Ravenna [42]. Moreover, Vasari notes that artists and architects frequently began projects they would later entrust to their assistants.

In stark contrast, Palladio's treatise is largely devoid of commentary on collaboration between architects, whether from antiquity or his contemporaries. Similarly, Sinan's treatises rarely mention the individuals who assisted him in his designs and construction activities. The sole exception is Kâtip Hasan, referenced in *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyân*. This omission may stem from the collective identity fostered by the Ottoman Architects' Guild, as well as Sinan's tendency to portray his projects as exclusively his own. This approach is also evident in the inflated number of buildings listed at the end of his treatises.

The theme of collaboration and mobility naturally extends to the broader context of travel, which played a pivotal role in shaping the architectural perspectives of Vasari, Palladio and Sinan. Vasari provides no evidence of having traveled outside Italy, while Palladio extensively toured Italy but only ventured beyond its borders once, to Nîmes, which he briefly describes in his treatise [43]. Sinan, on the other hand, particularly after joining the Janissary corps, traveled extensively across different regions. According to his treatises, Sinan visited Belgrade, Rhodes, Mohács, Austria, Baghdad, Corfu, Apulia, and Moldavia during his military campaigns. These travels significantly influenced his architectural vision. This is best exemplified in the following statement: "I worked with determination, like the fixed point of a compass, observing the center and its surroundings. Then, like the moving point of the compass, I was encouraged to travel to other lands" [44].

Travel not only shaped these architects' understanding of architecture but also reflected their broader engagement with cultural and religious contexts. At this point, it becomes necessary to examine how religious perspectives influenced their works and writings. Vasari made important criticisms on religion. According to him, with the acceptance of Christianity, the arts regressed even further [45]. The author criticized the clergy of the era for not being able to fulfill their duties properly. Despite this, the fact that he mentioned that there was not enough religiosity in his time shows that he was criticizing the way religion was lived, not the religion itself. Palladio, on the other hand, did not include his views on religion in *The Four Books on Architecture*. In each of Mimar Sinan's treatises, praise for God and the prophet is at the forefront. The effects of politics are seen even in the relationship with God. For example, in *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*, he said that he was "the chief architect who had many sins and hoped for the forgiveness of Allah, the Merciful", while he used the title "the forgiven sultan [46] for Sultan Selim. It was mentioned that architecture was the most difficult art and that the architect had to be religious, and that God's help was needed to find divine guidance for the immortality of the work. Sinan emphasizes the importance of divine guidance for achieving immortality through architectural works, underscoring the spiritual dimension of his craft. He writes that an architect must be devout, as architecture is "the most difficult art" and requires Allah's assistance to endure beyond its creator's lifetime [47]. However, the fact that the universe and the body are not permanent was reiterated in the same work.

When the treatises are compared, it can be said that in the Renaissance treatises, considering the gratitude lists in the preface, the author puts the human being in the foreground and expresses his gratitude to God through relationships and opportunities, while in the treatises of Sinan, he praises God and thanks Him just for the sake of being grateful.

7. CONCLUSION

The systematization of architectural practice, a hallmark of Renaissance Italy, finds no direct equivalent in the context of Classical Ottoman architecture. This divergence stems from fundamental differences in how architectural norms were shaped: while Renaissance architecture was increasingly theorized through formal treatises and framed by humanist ideals, Ottoman architectural practice evolved through cumulative traditions embedded in regional experiences and institutional frameworks. These norms were sustained by the sociopolitical and religious structures of the empire, which provided coherence without enforcing rigid codification. Yet this embeddedness did not exclude individual agency; on the contrary, it allowed for a wide range of local expressions to flourish within a shared civilizational paradigm.

Within this framework, Mimar Sinan's architectural discourse reflects a form of authorship rooted not in Renaissance individualism, but in institutional service and collective memory. As Gülru Necipoğlu argues, Sinan's self-representation is best understood as that of a bureaucratic figure whose professional merit was articulated through loyalty to the Ottoman state and the sultan's ideological agenda [48]. This positionality also shaped the form and content of his treatises. Unlike the extended, theoretically framed, and visually supported narratives of Vasari or Palladio, Sinan's writings are concise and function primarily as records of his professional accomplishments. Although these treatises occasionally reference the architect's career trajectory, the texts do not explicitly engage in political or social commentary. Instead, the structure and tone of Sinan's autobiographical writings reflect the conventions of a court-centered architectural culture, where authorship was subordinated to service and legacy was secured through monumental works rather than theoretical exposition.

This contrast in the structure and tone of Sinan's writings also helps situate them within a broader spectrum of architectural treatises. Positioned between Vasari's biographical-historical narrative and Palladio's technical-didactic treatise, Sinan's texts reflect both an intention to document architectural practice and a desire to record personal and imperial legacy. Sinan's works embody a unified vision of Ottoman architectural culture, in contrast to Vasari and Palladio, who emphasize specific periods while critiquing others. Vasari's writings foreground the social and interpersonal dynamics of the artistic community, while Palladio concentrates on architecture as a discipline. Sinan, by contrast, reflects both his personal role as chief architect and the larger political and cultural framework within which his work was produced.

When considering the role of these treatises in reading the history of architecture today, although it is seen that Sinan learned about individualization from the Renaissance and emphasized only himself (as an architect) while writing his works, it is read from the style of writing that the Ottoman state created Sinan, and that Sinan could not exist if there was no state and no sultan. By contrast, such institutional embeddedness is not as prominent in the works of Vasari and Palladio. As important members of Renaissance society, architects and artists sometimes challenged the person they encountered in *The Lives of the Artists*; for this reason, they sometimes migrated to different cities and sometimes were displaced. The absence of substantial references to power or religion in *The Four Books on Architecture* underscores Palladio's relative autonomy as an individual within his cultural context. In this context, when comparing the treatises, it can be said that the holistic identity of the Ottoman architecture and architectural environment is also reflected in the style of writing of the treatises. The same situation also reveals the effect of the existence of a person as an individual in the Renaissance on the form of literature. Consequently, although the authors may have been aware of each other's works, their treatises must be understood within the specific geographic and cultural contexts that shaped them. Ultimately, these differences in how authorship, individuality, and institutional power are represented underscore the culturally contingent nature of architectural discourse and the treatise as a genre.

The contrasting narrative styles of these treatises reflect broader cultural and institutional differences. The holistic identity of Ottoman architecture and its cultural environment is mirrored in the writing style of Sinan's treatises, just as the emphasis on individualism in Renaissance Italy shaped the narrative approaches of Vasari and Palladio. While these authors may have been aware of other architectural traditions, their treatises are fundamentally shaped by the intellectual and political institutions specific to their own cultural contexts. These treatises, therefore, not only document architectural practice but also serve as reflections of the broader cultural, political, and intellectual landscapes of their respective eras. In this manner comparative framework offers a model for rethinking architectural authorship beyond Eurocentric paradigms, revealing how different civilizational logics generate distinct forms of professional identity. Architecture here speaks not in stone alone, but in sovereignty.

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