
A work about Ottoman architecture is no easy task as the Ottoman Empire existed for over 600 years. But author Doğan Kuban is well qualified, being the leading scholar in Turkey on architectural history. Kuban believes that architectural history involves more than solely an examination of the building; he examines the historical, social, political, and artistic influences that factor into the creation of architecture. Kuban does not focus only on Ottoman architecture, but looks beyond to architectural styles and trends in other regions of a contemporary period.

The 720 pages are divided into four books. Book I lays out the background information on Ottoman literature, the artistic environment, and the structure and development of Ottoman society that would influence Ottoman architecture. In Book II, the chapters are devoted to key buildings and stylistic developments. Book III is about Sinan (the most respected architect in Ottoman-Turkish history) and the Classical period of Ottoman architecture. Book IV is about the western influence on Ottoman architecture.

This publication is intended for those who study Islamic architecture with an emphasis on Ottoman architecture. It is like a survey book but is more detailed, with in-depth sections on certain areas, such as Sinan. The book is meant for an upper level undergraduate, graduate student, or professor as it does not explain certain elements of Islamic architecture, expecting the reader to know what Kuban is talking about. The style of writing is reminiscent of a good lecture, with descriptions and images of buildings mixed with interesting stories to keep you wanting more. Kuban demonstrates excellent research using both primary and secondary resources.

Only Godfrey Goodwin’s A History of Ottoman Architecture (1971) compares in size and scope to Kuban’s. The task of undertaking an architectural history of the whole Ottoman period is a large one and thus not often approached as a whole work. Most books focus on specific periods and aspects of Ottoman architecture (Sinan, Constantinople, mosques, Ottoman architecture in the Balkans).

Throughout the book are beautiful color photographs, reproduced color and black-and-white prints and drawings, and architectural plans. Some of the photographs are a full spread allowing for the whole building to be shown or for a detailed close-up shot. There is a glossary of Turkish words, an extensive bibliography, and an index. The glossy pages allow for a beautiful background for text and image, however, it does add to the weight of this book. Overall, it is an excellent addition to a library whose focus is the history of architecture and/or Islamic art history.

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