

## A New Heart for a New Nation. Nation Building and Cultural Transfer in Kemalist Ankara in the 1920s and 1930s

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This article is about the creation of the new Turkish capital, Ankara, as a modern European city project in the 1920s and even more, as a substantial part of the Turkish reform movement after 1919. Turkey represented an extreme case among those non-colonized countries that strove after World War I to achieve a new national political identity by means of a radical Westernization. At the time, the entire Middle East entered a period of political motion. New nation-states were formed from the bankrupt estate of the Ottoman Empire or – like Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine – were held as semi-colonial protectorates. A special form of modernist orientation toward the West can be observed in the Zionist settlements of Palestine, but also in Iran, a country not characterized by the Arabic tradition.

The modernization of Turkey after 1925 was carried out exclusively by the new Kemalist élite under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Paşa (since 1934: Atatürk, i.e., “father of Turks”). It was a “revolution” (İnkılap) from the top down with an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial thrust, inspired by the slogan “to be Western in spite of the West.”<sup>1</sup> It served to secure national sovereignty and formation of a unified identity of the young Turkish republic, which went hand in hand with propaganda against any and all Ottoman and Arabic traditions, against Islam and against national minorities such as Kurds and Greeks.

This resulted in a paradoxical situation: Turkey had escaped colonization from the outside (as intended by the Allies) after its defeat in World War I. But as part of the Kemalist modernization, which was motivated as liberating, it enacted an inward colonization that inevitably led to strong social tensions. Expulsion of the Greek minority (after the Greek attack of 1922), suppression of various Kurdish uprisings, the one-party system carried by the Republican People's Party in effect until 1946, and three military coups happened until 1980. The nationalist, secular, and étatist concept of Kemalism could not be maintained otherwise.

Seen from today, the situation looks – according to Yavuz – as follows: “Modern Turkey, like a transgendered body with the soul of one gender in the body of another, is in constant tension. ‘White Turks’ regard themselves as Western souls in the body of a foreign socio-political landscape. Its body is native to the land, but its soul is alien. The soul of ‘White Turkey’ and its Kemalist Identity is in constant pain and conflict with the national body politic of Turkey.”<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the “white Turk” denotes the carrier of the secularist Kemalist revolution that of “black Turk”, the carrier of the culture, rooted in Ottoman and Islamic tradition. That, in one image, is the “interior-colonial” situation of Turkey.

Atatürk's presidency (1923-38) can be divided into the first phase of structural modernization (laicism, the judiciary, language and writing, the emancipation of women, dress code etc.) until 1930, and the second phase, when the representation of the new through architecture and the cityscape itself plays a crucial role in politics. Thus, it is only during the 1930s that representational forms of early Kemalism developed, involving photography beside architecture or the fine arts. The latter was clearly instrumentalized by the representatives of the Kemalist elite as visual propaganda for the reform process. The different stages of development between 1930 and 1950 demonstrate that one cannot speak of a homogenous development of modernism. The architectural discourse vacillated between the radical influence of “Neues Bauen”, as the insignium of the new, and the Turkish search for an identity in its own architectural tradition that led to the “Second National Style” at the end of the 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

Ankara and Istanbul presented various aspects of urban modernization appeared in very different ways in Kemalist propaganda. The new national capital, Ankara, erected as a segregated modern “garden city” (Fig. 1) to the design of the Berlin city planner Hermann Jansen became the staging area of Kemalist experiments in urban planning and architecture. The heart of the new nation was built here, visually dominated by the sober monumentality of Clemens Holzmeister's government precinct and the modern and in part vernacular school and university buildings by the Austrian-Swiss architect Ernst Egli and the German Bruno Taut. Different stylistic levels of Modernism were used to represent different realms of Turkish modernization, such as nationalism and national authority through the army on one hand, education and emancipation on the other.

This concept has now disappeared within a crowded metropolis of 4 million people with little remaining of its founding days. Although Ankara has been an outstanding example of the 1920s and 1930s debate on city planning, it is little known in a European context. In comparison with other national town planning enterprises such as Gdynia in Poland, Canberra in Australia, or the colonial concepts of Beirut or Algiers, Ankara was deeply rooted in the German city planning discourse that came up around 1910, when

1. For a good overview of these issues, see: Sibel Bozdoğan: “The Predicament of Modernism in Turkish Architectural Culture”, [in:] *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, Seattle and London, 1997, pp. 133-156, quote pp. 136-137; Sibel Bozdoğan: *Modernism and Nation Building. Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, Seattle and London, 2003.

2. M. Hakan Yavuz: “Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere”, [in:] *Journal*

*of Foreign Affairs*, No. 54, 1, 2000, pp. 21-42, quote pp. 25-26.

3. Bozdoğan 2001 (as note 1); Bernd Nicolai, “Modernization in Europe's Shadow. Kemalist Turkey as Seen Through Photography and Architecture”, [in:] Katja Eydel, *Model ve Sembol. Die Erfindung der Türkei*, New York/Berlin 2006, pp. 73-87.



1 a, b. Ankara, view over the city in the 1930s. Archive of the author

Hermann Jansen – the Ankara city planner from 1929 until 1939 – won the first prize in the Great Berlin competition.<sup>4</sup>

The Ankara plan was based on the principle of segregated, functional city, an ordered organism for new citizens, containing all achievements of hygiene, dwelling, education, and national identity according to Western models (Fig. 2). Beside all functional efforts, the city was to give a physical expression of urban unity, and city planners such as Jansen were concerned about its architectural design. This differed from functional town planning concepts of the radical CIAM avant-garde around 1930 – with Le Corbusier and Ernst May at the top – such as segmented city concepts (satellites) for Frankfurt and Moscow by Ernst May, the “ville radieuse” of Le Corbusier, or Luis Sert’s GATEPAC-Plan for Barcelona. All these remained almost utopias. The CIAM functional city became part of the debate as early as the end of World War II.<sup>5</sup> During the 1930s Jansen was regarded as one of the most advanced city planners, highly experienced, with a great reputation, dealing with international projects such as the extension of Madrid and several Turkish towns.<sup>6</sup>

Jansen should design the new Turkish capital as a green “garden city” with cluster-like areas for the government (Fig. 3), the university, and the business center (Fig. 4), The old city remained besides it as a picturesque reminiscence of Ankara’s long lasting tradition. But from the very beginning local speculation and arguments about responsibility between Jansen and the Ankara Town Planning Commission stymied proper realization of the plan.<sup>7</sup>

4. Wolfgang Sonne, “Ideen für die Grossstadt. Der Wettbewerb Gross-Berlin 1910”, [in:] *Stadt der Architektur-Architektur der Stadt*, ed. by Joseph Paul Kleihues, Thorsten Scheer et al., exh.-cat. Neues Museum, Berlin 2000, pp. 67-77. Dieter Frick, “Le concours du Grand Berlin, 1910”, [in:] *La Ville, art et architecture en Europe 1870-1993*, exh.-cat., Centre George Pompidou, Paris 1994, pp. 140-143.

5. Koos Bosma and Helma Hellinga, “German Urban Planning, between periphery and region”, [in:] *Mastering the city*, ed. Koos Bosma and Helma Hellinga, exh.-cat. Rotterdam, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 62-67, here pp. 62-63.

6. On Jansen’s life and work only little research has been done so far, cf. Wolfgang Hoffmann, “Hermann Jansen”, [in:] *Baumeister, Architekten, Stadtplaner. Biographien zur baulichen Entwicklung Berlin*, ed. Wolfgang Ribbe and Wolfgang Schäche, Berlin 1987, pp. 387-406.

7. On the Ankara Pna Gönül Tankut, *Bir Başkent’in İmarı: Ankara 1929-1939 (The first master plan of Ankara capital)*, Ankara 1991; Bernd Nicolai,

The city, planned for a maximum of 350,000 inhabitants, was to be defined by large intersections of axes adapted to the topography. Along these arterial roads, Jansen planned closed block periphery development with single-family homes inside. The residential construction lessened in density as it extended southwards towards the new center called *Kızılay* – the name of the newly built administration building of the Red Crescent, built 1929/1930 – and *Yenişehir* – the New Town – finally giving way southwards to very spacious villa developments and the embassy quarter of Çankaya. An industrial area was planned in the west along the railroad line with working-class areas extending northwards from there. The educational district would extend in the east towards Cebeci. Altogether the plan comprised a modern zoning scheme divided up by large green areas, although individual areas were often insufficiently linked. Huge areas remained empty space until the 1950s. The new city heart did not develop at the crossing point of the plan’s four major parts, but in duplicate at the old town Ulus and in Kızılay, the current town center.

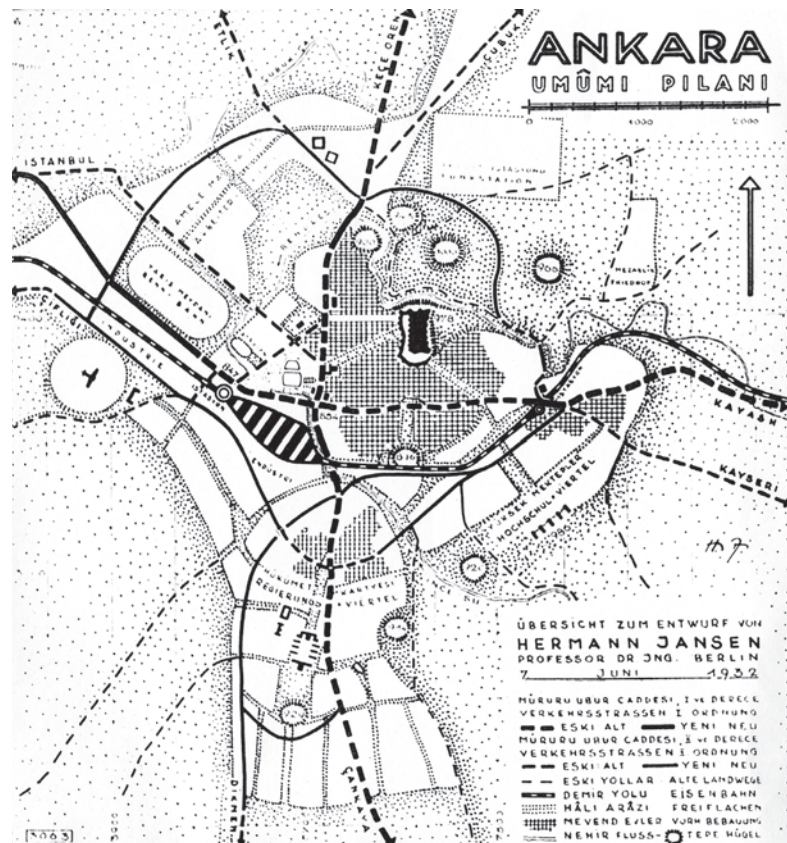
The crowning moment in the area, which rises south, is the government quarter, which extends in a wedge for 700 meters from Kızılay southwards. Echoing German post-1910 garden city plans in which Jansen had taken part, the government forum, with the parliament at its tip, was supposed to rise here as the new “city crown.” Clemens Holzmeister, a well-known church architect in Austria and Germany during the 1920s, fled from Nazi occupation of Austria to Ankara in 1938, stayed in Turkey until 1954. He had been involved in architectural projects in Ankara since 1927. Virtually overnight Holzmeister became the government architect of Turkey. His conception of the government district had to be integrated into the Jansen plan which caused some serious conflicts between the two architects.<sup>8</sup>

It should hardly come as a surprise that the first

*Moderne und Exil. Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei 1925-1955*, Berlin 1998, esp. pp. 67-76.

8. Nicolai 1998 (as note 7), pp. 70-71.

2. Hermann Jansen, Ankara-plan, 1932. Jansen Archive, Technische Universität Berlin, Architektur Museum



representative buildings were those of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff. Monuments were created here for the crucial powers responsible for successful creation of the Turkish republic, the third pillar of the state. Aside from the parliament and the executive, it was the entity that had produced Atatürk himself: the Army. Until today it remains as untouchable institution, the keeper of the Grail of Kemalism.

The well-preserved government district was shaped with strong parallels to the architecture of Italian Fascism, especially in Holzmeister's Governor's (Vilayet) Square project in combination with the Ministry of Interior and construction of the State Supreme Court (1933 to 1935) (Fig. 5). But Holzmeister oriented himself even more on the idiom of a sober monumental architecture that had characterized the 1927 competition for the League of Nations building in Geneva. He had entered the contest together with Ernst Egli.<sup>9</sup>

The task facing Holzmeister was to give adequate architectural form to the authoritarian constitutional state of Atatürk, which he himself called a "sign of ordered power"<sup>10</sup>. The strong parallel to Italian Fascist architecture in the government district reflected the instability of the Kemalist system in the early 1930s, as Feroz Ahmad claimed: "Around 1930 in the eyes of many Kemalists, liberalism and democracy were discredited by the instable situation of West Europe. One-party systems like in the fascist Italy were regarded as an attractive alternative."<sup>11</sup> At last in 1936 Atatürk himself blocked all further tendencies towards dictatorship, displacing the mighty party secretary Recep Peker and proclaiming the constitutional, democratic character of Turkey.

Holzmeister's monumental style thus differs clearly from that of his disciple and fellow designer Ernst Egli, who served as architect of the Ministry of Education from 1927 to 1935. The modern architecture that Egli would design consisted primarily of buildings for schools and university, representing the realm of advanced modernization: the citizen emancipated by education, the spread of literacy, and the emancipation of women – in short Western standards were the desired results. On this note, construction of schools and buildings of higher education became a synonym for modern Turkey.

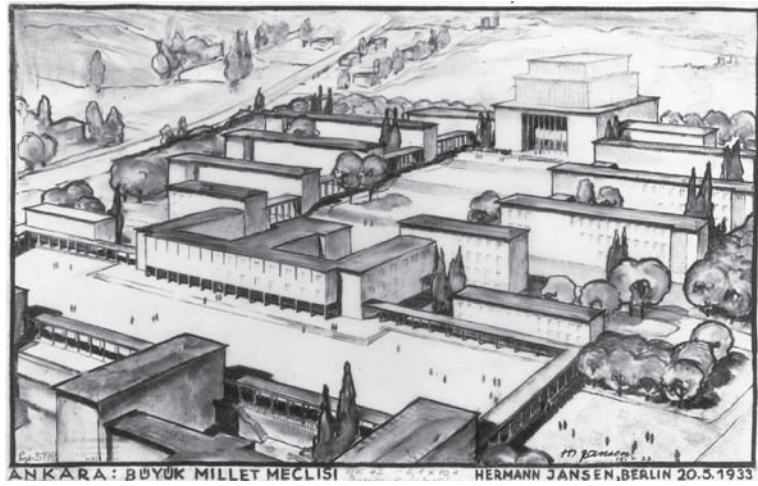
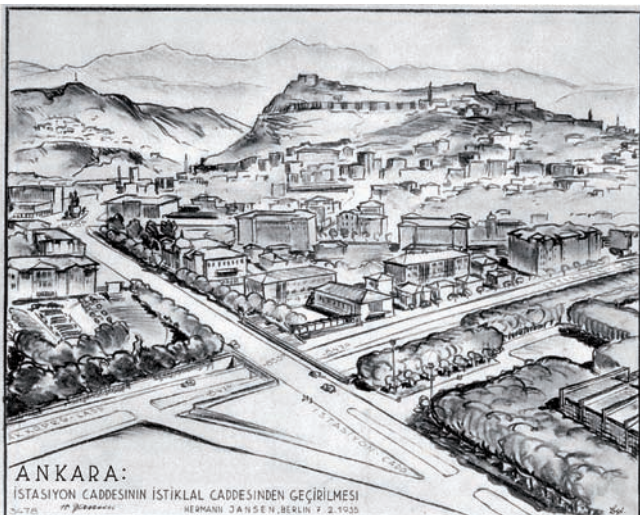
Egli was not "modern" in the sense of the avant-garde

9. The project was published in Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst 11 (1927), p. 351.

10. cf. Bernd Nicolai, "Zeichen geordneter Macht" Clemens Holzmeister und die Türkei, *Clemens Holzmeister*, ed. Georg Rigele and Georg Loewit, exh.-cat. Innsbruck 2000, pp. 116-137, esp. 118-124.

11. Feroz Ahmad: *The making of modern Turkey*, London/New York 1993, pp. 61-64; Nicolai 1998 (as note 7) p. 60.

4. Hermann Jansen, *Project for the city-center (Ulus)*. 1933. Jansen Archive, Technische Universität Berlin, Architektur Museum



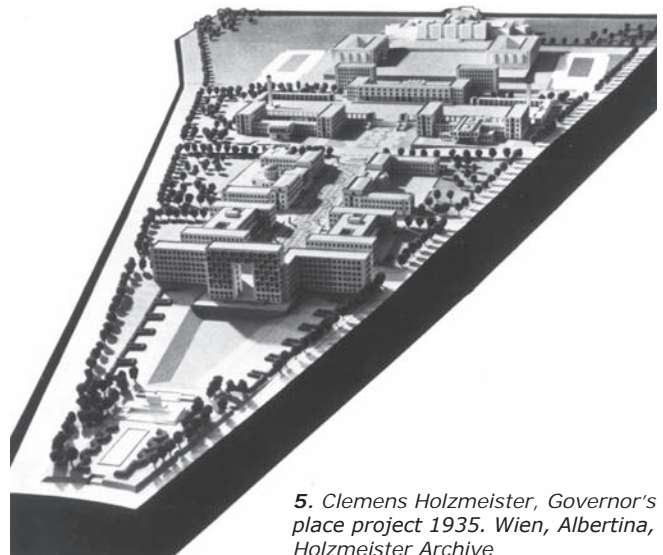
3. Hermann Jansen, *Project for the government district Ankara*, 1933. Jansen Archive, Technische Universität Berlin, Architektur Museum

of the 1920s. As an architect in the Settlers' Movement in Vienna 1920-24 and later as an assistant of Clemens Holzmeister at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (1924-27), he was devoted to a relatively conservative concept of modern architecture. Neither Egli nor Holzmeister applied the same architectural concepts to Turkey they had tested out in Vienna. Each created his own new style independently from the other. Egli's architecture is an example which exemplifies how the modern style evolved from conditions set by his clients, a phenomenon of translating modernist forms into the Turkish reform context.<sup>12</sup>

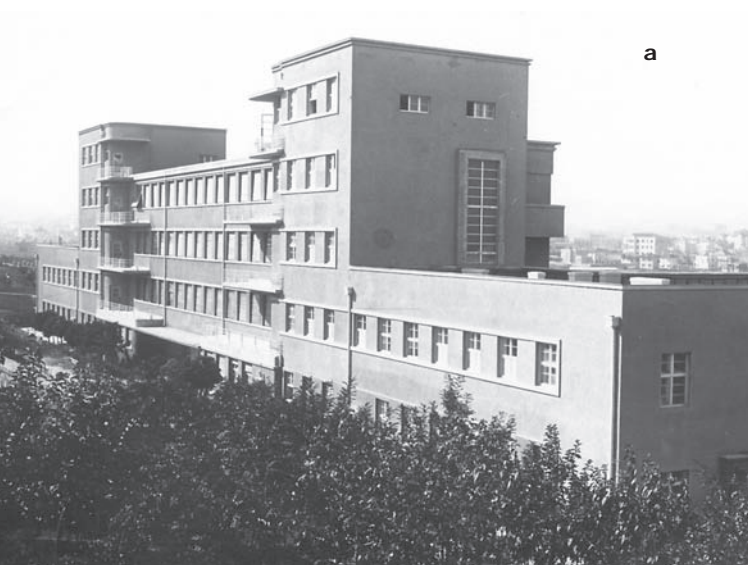
The key to Egli's turn towards modernism was a study trip he made with some officials to Central Europe in 1929-30 to work out a preliminary project for a technical university.<sup>13</sup> They made stops in Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Dresden, Karlsruhe, Munich, Paris, and Zurich. The Technical University in Berlin served as a permanent consultant. Close contacts were established with staff from the office of Erich Mendelsohn in Berlin, whose dynamic architecture must have made a great impression on Egli, although it was becoming increasingly rigid around 1930. The High School for Girls (İsmet Paşa Enstitüsü) in Ankara (1930-31), to which two

12. For general overview of Egli see the most recent dissertations by Oya Atalay Franck, *Politische Architektur. Ernst Egli und die Suche nach einer Moderne in der Türkei (1927-1940)*, PhD dissertation ETH Zurich 2004, and Esra Akcan, *Modernity in Translation: Early Twentieth Century German-Turkish Exchanges in Land-Settlement and Residential Culture*, PhD. dissertation, Columbia University, New York 2005; cf. also recently Bernd Nicolai, *Ernst Egli and the Emergence of Modern Architecture in Kemalist Turkey*, in *Centropa* 7 (2007), pp. 153-162.

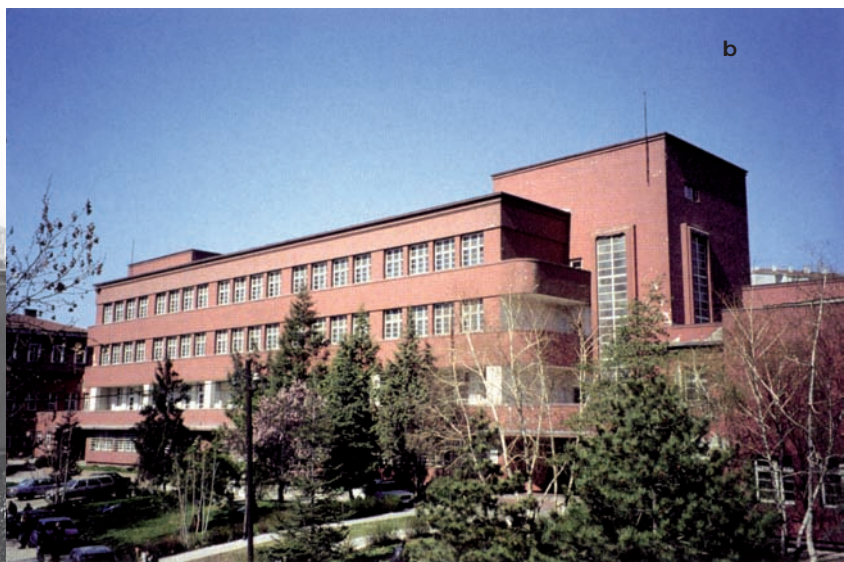
13. Ernst Egli, *Im Dienst zwischen Heimat und Fremde, Einst und Dereinst Erinnerungen*, Meilen, 1969 [Egli Memoirs] (unpublished manuscript, Wissenschaftshistorische Sammlungen ETH Zürich, Hs 787.1), pp. 50-51.



5. Clemens Holzmeister, *Governor's place project 1935*. Wien, Albertina, Holzmeister Archive



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b

6 a, b. Ernst Egli, İsmet Paşa Institute for Girls, Ankara 1930/31 and 1935, rear front. Photo: archive of the author

flanking pavilions were added in 1935, vividly displays use of mainly horizontal organizational structure and the typical corner balconies from the Mendelsohn repertoire (Fig. 6). Other school buildings like the Boy's High School (Gazi Lisesi, 1931) have a Spartan composition reminiscent to the office buildings of Hans Poelzig, especially his widely known IG-Farben headquarters building in Frankfurt.

Further influences were brought in from Swiss modernism, transmitted by the architectural journals, such as "Das Werk" and in particular paid tribute to the widely acclaimed buildings of Otto Rudolf Salvisberg<sup>14</sup>: like the Nursery and the Lory Hospital, both in Bern, and the cube-shaped monumental military command-building in the Silesian capital Breslau (Wrocław), now well-preserved here in Poland.

Egli visited modern buildings in Switzerland on his second trip to Central-Europe in 1933 when planning the National Library and the Academy of Sciences in Ankara that was never executed. He travelled via Berlin, Vienna, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Berne to Geneva to study plans

for the League of Nation building.<sup>15</sup> Egli showed special interest in the recently opened National Library at Bern,<sup>16</sup> a symmetrical horizontally shaped building with highly advanced library infrastructure.

The main project after this trip to Europe was the Agricultural College directed by the German agronomist Friedrich Falke. It was badly restored some five years ago, lacking any sensitivity to architectonic details and materials. From 1930-33, Egli expanded the existing four institute buildings to form a campus.<sup>17</sup> The main buildings of the rectorate and the student dormitory, perpendicular to each other, share the same large passages with narrow columns, but the rest of their design is completely heterogeneous (Fig. 7-8). Grid façades alternate with horizontal structures. This cannot be explained on the basis of their functions, but also due to playful handling of European modernism. The far remembrance of Hans Scharoun's famous dormitory building at the WUWA-exhibition 1929 in Breslau (Wrocław) is one example. The other solitary department buildings, like the Viticulture and Dairy Farming Institute, had a cubic shape that

14. cf. works of Salvisberg, special issue, *Das Werk*, 16 (1929), pp. 193-216, especially pp. 211, 216, and Max Osborn, "Öffentliche Bauten und Geschäftshäuser von O. R. Salvisberg", [in:] *Moderne Bauformen*, 29 (1930), pp. 365-377.

15. Egli Memoirs (n. 13), p. 62.

16. cf. Peter Meyer, "Die Schweizerische Landesbibliothek in Bern", [in:] *Das Werk*, 17 (1931), pp. 320-350; see Monica Bilfinger, *Die Schweizerische Landesbibliothek in Bern*, Bern 2001.

17. The German state-architect Naht erected the four existing houses around 1927-8.

7. Ernst Egli, Agricultural Faculty, 1932-34, dormitory wing. Archive of the author



8. Ernst Egli, Agricultural Faculty, after restoration in 2003. Photo by Katja Eydel





9 a. Bruno Taut, History and Language Faculty (1937-1940). Photo by Bernd Nicolai

Bruno Taut would criticize in 1937 as: "Kubik (Cubic) Style which is used here as the term for Modernism." This criticism, which cannot touch the quality of Egli's buildings, rejects the method of adopting modern European architecture which was typical of the first generation of "modern" architects in Turkey.

In contrast Taut's History and Literature Faculty of the newly founded Ankara University (built between 1937 and 1940) searched for a new architecture. Erica Taut, after the unexpected death of Bruno on Christmas 1938, characterised it as the concept of an "entirely new Bruno". In a 1937 letter to his Japanese fellow Isaburo Ueno, Taut explained in respect to his newly planned Faculty building in Ankara in 1937: "That's not *kubik* (Cubique), what is here the notion for modernism. I even use different Turkish motifs."<sup>18</sup> It was a search for a synthesis between "old tradition and modern civilisation", as Taut claimed in 1938.

The representative front of the Literature Faculty is designed as a false masonry façade (Fig. 9). Different stone materials and varied articulation give a differentiated shape, and also an idea of the building's inner organisation. The protruding façade bay as new "architecture parlante" with its portico was combined with a highly functional plan. Taut's own school buildings (like Senftenberg near Berlin), or those of his brother Max Taut (like the pavilion of the Dorothy's High School [Dorotheenschule] in Berlin-Köpenik from 1928), or the concrete framework construction of his trade-union buildings are modern elements. As a principle, all form of symmetry is broken.

The back is quite a simple plaster façade, related again to Senftenberg, with vertical articulations like staircase windows that can also be seen in the front of the Atatürk-Lisesi in Ankara. The marvellous interior design of the entrance hall plays with Japanese arts-and-crafts elements that Taut had used in Japan. Last but not least, the Ottoman tradition was important for details like Turkish tiles and other elements.<sup>19</sup>

In designing the main entrance, Taut reflected his *Werkbund* years in a quite unconventional manner. The university building in Jena by Theodor Fischer, for which Taut

served as construction supervisor in 1908 and worked out many details by himself, has a similar roof over the entrance. The Jena building also has precisely the same striking design of the narrow side with its irregularly cut stone edge and adjacent plaster façade. In this sense, Ankara can be viewed as a dialogue with Jena. Taut went one step further with his projects for the Technical University and the ziggurat design for the parliament building (Fig. 10) as a new city crown in 1937. The later was also an answer to the neoclassical project of Holzmeister's Grand Assembly building for the Turkish parliament.

In every respect, 1938 can be viewed as the turning point of modern architects in Turkey. That year, in which both Atatürk and Taut died, criticism of the foreign architects reached its first climax. The editor of the journal *Arkitekt*, Zeki Sayar, published his verdict: foreignness seemed just a fashion to him. He criticized Taut's history and his Literature Faculty building for its use of stone and brick architecture in concrete construction and attacked the use of raised wooden roofs. Turkish motifs should not be used, he said, without thoroughly studying them first. Here he showed himself to be an adherent of Egli, who had earlier commissioned Sedat Hakki Eldem with such systematic vernacular studies in

9 b. Bruno Taut, History and Language Faculty (1937-1940). Photo by Bernd Nicolai



18. cf. Nicolai, 1998 (No. 7), p. 140, quoting a letter of the Taut-Archive, (Akademie der Künste, Baukunstarchiv, Berlin); also quoted in Bernd Nicolai, "Bauen im Exil. Bruno Tauts Architektur und die kemalistische Türkei 1936-38", [in:] *Bruno Taut. 1880-1938*, ed. by Winfried Nerdinger, Manfred Speidel et al. Munich 2001, pp. 195-207, here p. 195.

19. Nicolai 1998 (as note 7) p. 137; also Nicolai 2001 (as note 18), p. 196.



10. Bruno Taut, Parliament building project 1937. *Arkitekt* 7, 1937

1930. In part, emigrants such as Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut fostered this discussion with their own beginnings of a vernacular modernism. On the other hand, young Turkish architects trained in Germany and France, such as Sedad Eldem and Seyfi Arkan, played a decisive role in this process. The debate was not isolated to modern architecture, but expressed a fundamental paradox within the Kemalist reform movement: the turn toward Western patterns, an exclusive emphasis on the "new", led to a loss of tradition that simultaneously conjured up the above-mentioned

identity crisis within Turkish society. The "nationalization of modernism"<sup>20</sup>, incipient already in the late 1930s, went so far as to render authoritarian patterns absolute. The Turkish approximation to National Socialist architecture within Turkey's Second National Style was mediated by the position of Paul Bonatz. He was the counselor for the key monument emerging out of this debate, as the peak of the first phase of Ankara development. The Atatürk Mausoleum (Anıt Kabır) was built between 1944 and 1953. Emin Onat and Orhan Arda combined the concept of national representation with a highly monumental style. It was no longer useful for further developing modern Ankara that in the 1950s stepped in the foot-path of America's International Style.<sup>21</sup>

By all means, the foundation of the new capital in Ankara harmonized with a very advanced city plan. Although Jansen's concept was properly developed and well established, it was difficult to execute it properly. The German city-reform debate of the 1920s could not be transformed easily to Turkish circumstances; nor was the Kemalist administration willing to give overall control to a foreign city planner. Viewed today Jansen's monumentalized garden-city was a short episode in Ankara's development, but it may serve as a model of how to reconcile urban density, traffic infrastructure, and green areas in the future.

20. Bozdoğan 2003 (as note 1); Üstün Alsaç: "The Second Period of Turkish National Architecture", [in:] *Modern Turkish Architecture*, ed. by Renata Holod and Ahmet Evîn, Philadelphia, 1984 (reprint Ankara 2005), pp. 94-105.

21. Bozdoğan 2003 (as note 1); Nicolai 1998 (as note 7), pp. 166-177; for American paradigmatic influence in the 1950s see Sibel Bozdoğan, "Democracy, Development, and the Americanization of Turkish Architectural Culture in the 1950s", [in:] *Modernism and the Middle East. Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, Seattle/London 2008, pp. 116-138.