H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Shirine Hamadeh. *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. 368 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98667-8.

Reviewed by Fariba Zarinefab (University of California at Riverside)
Published on H-Urban (September, 2009)
Commissioned by Alexander Vari

Architecture and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul

Shirine Hamadeh's book is a timely contribution to the architectural history of Istanbul in a little-known yet crucial period of its history. In a creative attempt and in the absence of architectural plans and few surviving buildings (palaces), Hamadeh uses various mediums such as poetry, chronograms, and Ottoman and European paintings to reconstruct the architectural and social history of imperial palaces, palatial gardens, and fountains that were built by members of the royal family. Many of the palaces, such as the famous Sa'dabad built during the Tulip period (1718-30), were destroyed either by the rebels in 1730 or at the order of Sultan Mahmud I. Hamadeh convincingly puts to rest many myths regarding the Tulip period. Critiquing the paradigm of Westernization, she draws our attention to both continuity and change in Ottoman architectural forms as well as the rise of an "Ottoman idiom" that was a combination of Eastern/Ottoman and Western forms in architecture and decorative patterns. She points to receptivity and flexibility in the adoption of new motifs in art and architecture and calls it a process of "décloisennement," or opening up culturally and socially. Further, she underlines the importance of the ruling elite–particularly the grand vizier Damad Ibrahim Pasha (1718-30)–Ottoman princesses, as well as the average citizens of Istanbul, whom she defines as the "new bourgeoisie" in this construction boom. Moreover, she shows that in the post-Carlowitz period and after 1699, the sultan and his grand vizier were consciously engaged in the projection of imperial power within and outside the empire, exemplified by relentless building activity and the conquest of the waterfront in Istanbul.

The book is divided into eight chapters and contains three maps, numerous illustrations and paintings by European and Ottoman artists, as well as photographs taken by the author herself. It also contains the author's translations of Ottoman chronograms and poetry. It is a well-written and well-documented book, sumptuously illustrated, that displays the author's multiple skills and passion for her subject.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the relocation of the imperial seat of power from Topkapi Palace to the suburbs on the waterfront. The royal family built and restored more than 300 imperial palaces, numerous palatial gardens, pavilions, fountains, bridges, water infrastructure, and roads in 150 years. Sultan Ahmed III and his grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha commissioned the building of the palaces of Sa'adabad and Hürremabad in Kağithane, Çirağan in Beşiktaş, Hümayunabad in Bebek, etc. Beşiktaş was the strategic location for most for these palaces due to its proximity to Topkapi Palace. The relocation of non-Muslims and the demolition of their buildings sometimes preceded the rise of new palaces and gardens.

This trend followed the relocation of the ruling class from Topkapi Palace to the waterfront suburbs. The excursions of the imperial family to the waterfront resorts occasioned elaborate processions, pageantry, and displays of state splendor. The waterfront had been transformed into an imperial processional stage. A large convoy of imperial women and children, slaves and servants moved to the suburbs during the summer season, participating in banquets and festivities and placing Ottoman grandeur on public display. This also prompted the enclosure of suburban palaces within walls and gardens, state control of public space, and greater policing of the shores along the waterfront.

Chapter 3 underlines the ceremonial, festive, and practical aspects of the new palaces and palatial gardens along the European shores of the Bosphorus. Following perhaps their pastoral ethos, members of the ruling dynasty found numerous occasions to retreat, feast, and celebrate, such as Ramadan and the births and weddings of Ottoman princesses. What was different was the open display of festivity, which projected Ottoman power–no

longer concealed within the confines of Topkapi Palace–along the waterfront. The new palaces and residences were built with timer on a brick-and-stone base in contrast to the old imperial palaces, following the pattern set in the rest of the city. Unlike Topkapi Palace, they were not isolated and enclosed behind walls and trees nor did they follow a formal pattern. They were exposed to the public who viewed the palaces from their boats on the Bosphorus. Moreover, many of the new palaces and residences like Çirağan were also used for diplomatic purposes and other affairs of government. The monarch and his family came out from the confinement of Topkapi Palace and openly participated in festivities and banquets.

Chapter 4 focuses on the emergence of public gardens built by members of the ruling class on the waterfront in Emirgan and Kağithane. They represented an extension of the burgeoning urban culture of coffeehouses, taverns, and street performances. The royal family played an important role in converting some royal and palatial gardens into public gardens as the court lost interest or stopped using them. Fountains and coffeehouses were the focal point of public gardens and squares (*meydan*), which reflected a growth in the recreational activity of the public. The state built mosques on the waterfront that created fluidity between sacred and recreational space, encouraging more sociability. The boundary between imperial and non-imperial and private and public gardens became fuzzy as the royal family became more visible and displayed its wealth and ritual to public gaze. Its sense of pleasure trickled down to all segments of society. At the same time, the state contained public life and ritualized leisure by creating sumptuary laws and converting the royal gardener's corps (*bostancı)* into moral police to dictate the new forms of public life, maintain order, and enforce sumptuary laws. Appealing to sensual rather than spiritual sensibilities in order to gather the congregation was the new trend.

The creation of a new poetic discourse on the theme of the garden was specific to the eighteenth century, as the author demonstrates in chapter 5 with numerous examples of beautifully translated divan poetry. Most of this poetry has to do with the seeking of forbidden (homosexual) love in palatial gardens and public parks, away from the gaze of the public. The author argues that this poetry was more in touch with popular culture and reality than the idealized idioms of the classical cannon, which had to do with the diffusion of patronage and more open forms of sociability. The image of the garden is that of a public hangout, a social and open space for ordinary men, women, and children. The active presence of women in the garden was novel in both verse and painting.

Chapter 6 and 7 focus more specifically on building chronograms in verse, particularly on hundreds of fountains, waterfront palaces, and exteriors of mosques, which became a feature of eighteenth-century Istanbul. A genre of poetry developed which the author describes as an "architectural discourse" that praised the founder and his patronage, the building, and its visual aspects, with a novel appreciation for architecture. The dramatic use of poetic idioms like light and reflection in describing the waterfront palaces and public fountains, and their sumptuous decoration with images of flowers, fruits, and trees, were drawn from nature. The author argues that mimesis and the realistic analogy between art, poetry, and nature in a shared idiom that permeated architectural landscapes were peculiar to the eighteenth century although the naturalistic floral decoration and motifs had been part of the Ottoman visual repertoire. Moreover, she rightly notes in chapter 8 that the Ottoman-European cultural and artistic interaction was not new to the eighteenth century and had existed for over two hundred years.

In the final chapter (8), Hamadeh disputes the view of some scholars that the eighteenth century witnessed a sudden drive to Westernize and argues that the adoption of French and Italian neoclassical, rococo, and baroque motifs were selective. Receptivity in aesthetics and art, she argues, created an architectural idiom that was highly hybrid and reflected the religious and ethnic diversity of the capital. She does not agree wholeheartedly with the dominant view that Ottoman palaces like Sa'dabad were modeled after French palaces. She also stresses the continuing influence of Persian poetry, art, and culture on Ottoman aesthetics. Ottoman novelty in art and architecture remained connected to what was familiar. Here, the author could have used a broader comparison with similar artistic and architectural developments in late Safavid Iran, a topic that deserves a comparative study. Moreover, the encounter between the Ottoman Empire and the West was mutual as the Europeans became more receptive to Ottoman artistic expression and material culture and settled in the imperial capital in growing numbers.

Nevertheless, Hamadeh offers a convincing argument in deconstructing long-held myths about the eighteenth century and the Tulip period as a turning point in the Westernization of Ottoman art and architecture. She instead underlines continuity, receptivity, and fluidity in aesthetics that resulted in a hybrid Ottoman id-

iom in the capital that was bound to tradition as well as novelty. What was new was the increasing role of non-courtly residents in this process. This book is indispensable to urban historians and historians of Ottoman art and architecture. The author as well as the University of Washington Press must be congratulated for producing a fine and elegant book that will be read and considered for some time.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Fariba Zarinefab. Review of Hamadeh, Shirine, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. September, 2009.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25289

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.