This is an important scientific study on Istanbul’s architectural history, as it encompasses a period of two thousand years. The author emphasises that the East-West dichotomy and historical evolution characterise Istanbul. According to the author, urban history cannot be defined without taking into consideration societal patterns. Therefore, the historical, social and cultural aspects take the lead in the narrative.

The book covers the history of the city from the settlement of its very first colony (Megara) to the modern day; the author provides the modern and antique names of each district and quarter. As the title reveals, the book divides the history of the city into three eras: Byzantium, Constantinople and Istanbul. In each era, the urban features, such as the city walls, palaces, monuments and religious structures (mosques and churches), arcades, basilicas, procession areas, forums, residential and public buildings, are studied in a blend of archaeological and historical approaches.

The book also addresses the impact on the urban architecture of the critical historical events, which influenced the evolution of the city from Pagan to Christian and subsequently to a
Muslim identity. It refers to the designation of the city as the capital of the Roman Empire and the recognition of Christianity as the dominant religion, the iconoclasm movement, the Latin invasion, the Macedonian and the Comnenus dynasties and the capture of the city by the Ottomans.

The author also discusses the effects of later events on the city’s architectural history, such as the urban growth experienced in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth-century reforms, the Union and Progress era (1908-1918) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) which impoverished the city.

He then extends his analysis to the Republican era, looking at the modernisation efforts and discusses the reconstruction practices of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes which led to the uncontrolled and unplanned urbanisation that took place in the 1950s, with a view to their social, economic and cultural consequences. The author extends his analysis to the present day on the unchecked growth of the city and refers to the attempts made in order to control it by the coup d’etat of the 1960s, the construction of the two bridges over the Bosphorus, the implementation of new laws and legislations, the construction of sky-scrapers, and the massive business centres. According to the author, the problems of the city did not seem insurmountable at the end of the nineteenth century, but by the 1960s the scale of its problems and the needs of the city had reached an unprecedented level. The author sees the creation of chaotic physical surroundings by Turkish society as a cultural problem, and concludes that there remains no other historical or foreign example for modern-day Istanbul to follow.
The book is enriched by the fact that it analyses the urban structure of the city alongside its historical past and investigates the urban texture of Istanbul through primary sources. By covering a period extending more than two thousand years the book has earned an important place amongst studies on urban and architectural studies.

Feryal Tansuğ

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