The essays in this volume are revised versions of papers presented at the symposium “Historiography and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the ‘Lands of Rum,’” held in May 2006 under the auspices of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University, with a generous grant from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Geneva. The idea for the symposium was born in 2002 through the happy coincidence of our individual preoccupations at the time: Sibel Bozdoğan with nationalism and architectural historiography in early republican Turkey, and Gülru Necipoğlu with Orientalism and a critical rethinking of surveys of Islamic art and architecture. During our many exchanges we observed a basic connection between our pursuits that would eventually become the premise of the symposium, namely, how the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Orientalist discourses that informed the very constitution of the field of “Islamic art and architecture” by Western European scholars were often mirrored in and entangled with the nationalist narratives of local scholars in predominantly Muslim geographies, both of them doing injustice to the actual complexity of premodern histories before the advent of modern nationalism.

It is often claimed that while Western scholars have put forward a “holistic conception of Islamic art, in Muslim lands—some of which only established their territorial boundaries in the twentieth century—scholars have tended to proceed on ‘national’ lines.” In our view, this way of putting it sets up a false dichotomy. Just as Western scholars, with their retrospective search for the unifying “essence” of Islamic art in its formative period, actively engaged in ethnicizing discourses that mapped out the regional/national compartments of this “universal” visual heritage, so too did local writers participate from the late nineteenth century onwards in the production of both Orientalist and nationalist paradigms. Hence, scrutinizing the intertwined strands of these paradigms (in which international and indigenous scholars alike engaged, whether to negotiate points of convergence or of divergence) promised to complicate the reductive Western/non-Western binary that informs recent overviews of scholarship in the “Islamic field” as well as many postcolonial critiques of Orientalism.

We knew that, given the current theoretical frameworks and intellectual resources at our disposal, we were well equipped to address such issues of historiography and ideology, and the time was certainly ripe for a more nuanced critical assessment of the architectural historiography of historically and culturally “multi-layered” regions once ruled by supranational Islamic empires. Above all, since the 1980s the Orientalist constitution of the “Islamic field” (and Middle Eastern Studies) has been challenged by post-Saidian scholarship, while theorists of nationalism from Eric Hobsbawm to Benedict Anderson have exposed the historical processes of “invention” and “imagination” by which modern nations everywhere were constructed. At the same time, within the discipline of art/architectural history itself, critical scrutiny of the inherited, founding narratives and of the paradigmatic texts/authors of the field has been underway for quite some time. Whether it is within the “Western tradition” (recently dubbed the “non-East”) or the increasingly visible fields of inquiry traditionally designated as “non-Western” (under which “Islamic” visual culture is generally classified), the major thrust of recent critical scholarship has been in the direction of revealing historical complexities, contingencies, and even contradictions in the unifying “grand narratives” of canonical scholarship—in showing how
what has been taken for granted as “universal,” “natural,” or “timeless” is in fact context-dependent and historically constructed. That a critique of the “canon” does not necessarily mean discarding it altogether, but rather constructively exposing its exclusions and premises, has long been accepted in the case of the “Western canon” debates. It is in the self-reflective spirit of these wider critical trends that the present volume addresses historiography and ideology in the “Lands of Rum” (a region corresponding to the Eastern Roman domains, commonly designating Anatolia and the Balkans) in an attempt to scrutinize the intersections of Orientalist and nationalist discourses on the architectural heritage of a specific region within the Islamic world.

Our decision to focus upon a particular region was intended to promote a contextualized way of questioning both the presumed unity of “Islamic” architecture and the presumed clarity of its ethnic/national boundaries in terms of which modern scholarship has generally constructed the premodern past. Although it has repeatedly been acknowledged that “Islamic art and architecture” as an umbrella term poses inevitable problems (especially for postmedieval periods), there nevertheless seems to be a considerable sense of nostalgia for the traditional unity of what has grown to be an “unwieldy” field. This longing for the uncomplicated simplicity of inherited frameworks—a kind of nostalgic neo-Orientalism—entails a fear of fragmentation and an uneasiness about regionally framed approaches, which are seen as threatening to dismantle the “universalism” of the field by missing the larger picture and losing sight of the forest for the trees. To such anxious guardians of the integrity of the “Islamic field,” the regional focus of our symposium may well appear too narrow and overly specialized. In our view, however, one has to start with a specific place and time before moving to a more general critical assessment of “Islamic” architectural historiography, preferably on the basis of similar case studies of other regions and artistic traditions.

We have come to believe, for reasons outlined below, that the “Lands of Rum” are a particularly fertile starting point for productive discussion. Why the “Lands of Rum” the reader may ask, as opposed to, say, the “Ottoman Empire” or “Turkey,” both of which we initially considered? We settled on our choice of terms simply because the alternatives mentioned evoked precisely the kinds of dynastic or national categories that we wished to question in the symposium. “Lands of Rum” was a more inclusive and evocative designation for generating the type of critical discussion we intended. With this term, the motivation behind our geographical focus was less likely to be construed as “seeking to understand [our] own [Turkish] heritage” or seeking to “transform...the study of Islamic art, once a branch of the humanistic study of art history open to all, into one of many fields of area and ethnic studies.” By focusing on historiographical, ideological, and methodological questions pertaining to how the architectural history of Islamic dynasties in this multicultural region was written in the modern period, we hoped (and continue to hope) to open up a debate with broader implications for other regions as well.

* * *

Few other modern nations exhibit the historical and cultural complexity of Turkey, with its tangled and difficult dilemmas of identity resulting from the multiethic and multicultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire, caught “between two worlds.” The pre-Ottoman, medieval Islamic dynasties of Anatolia were equally complex polities, whose monumental heritage is often teleologically treated as a precursor of the Ottoman period in linear constructions of regional architectural history. Consequently, both Western and native scholars have been confronted with a distinct problem in writing the architectural history of the “Lands of Rum,” and their work often reflects the ideological and/or methodological biases with which they approach the topic.

On the one hand, histories of the Ottoman and pre-Ottoman architecture of this region sit rather uncomfortably in general surveys of “Islamic” art and architecture, within which Western scholars were the first to classify these traditions. A perennial problem, implicit in the holistic term “Islamic architecture,” is that of a dubious universalism: the tendency to explain the architectures of a vast multiconfessional region by the common denominator of religion or religious culture. Another legacy of nineteenth-century European Orientalist scholarship is the equally problematic tendency to account for regional diversity in terms of “schools” designated by ethno-racial categories (e.g., Arabian, Moresque, Persian, Turkish, Indian) that have masked the multiethnic and multilingual character of premodern Islamic polities. In the classical corpus of texts on Islamic architec-
ture (most of them produced at the height of Western colonial ambitions in the Middle East and elsewhere, particularly during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire) the monuments of “Turkish” dynasties are often relegated to a lesser status than those of the “Persians” and “Arabs,” which for many European Orientalists represented the superior “sedentary” architecture of authentic “Muslim civilization” before it was overtaken by the “nomadic” Turks. Moreover, these texts often display a medieval bias that judges the monuments of predominantly Turkic “later Islamic dynasties” as derivative. They also reflect a geographical bias that privileges the “Arab” and “Persian” lands of the “medieval Middle East” as the “central zone” or “heartland” of Islamdum, at the expense of frontier regions (such as Spain, North Africa, sub-Saharan West Africa, East Africa, Anatolia, the Balkans, the Indian subcontinent, China, and Southeast Asia) characterized by more fluid and hence “impure” cultural mixtures. We believe that it is precisely this “impurity” and “hybridity” that makes the “Lands of Rum” particularly relevant for our purposes. Compared to the central zones of the Islamic lands, these frontier regions, or “margins of Islam,” have greater potential to challenge the essentialist constructs that still pervade general surveys and popular venues such as museum displays and exhibitions.

On the other hand, regional scholarship on the “Lands of Rum” produced by Western and native authors alike has been fraught with its own essentialist biases in the form of prolific constructions of nationalist genealogy. In fact, the “Lands of Rum” present an especially interesting case because the earliest examples of local counter-narratives against French and British Orientalist discourses—discourses saturated with derogatory character evaluations of “the Turks” as lacking artistic sensibility, in contrast to the exalted “Arab,” “Persian,” or “Indian” creative genius of their own colonial domains—were produced in this region starting in the late nineteenth century, before they emerged anywhere else in the Islamic world. Hence, contrary to the claim that “the notion of a distinctly ‘Islamic’ tradition of art and architecture” and “the terminology used to identify it” were entirely a product of Western scholarship, a dynamic interaction existed from the very beginning between the dialogical discourses produced by late Ottoman authors and the publications of European Orientalists. Moreover, as a number of essays in this volume demonstrate, such critical engagements on the part of Turkish scholars, albeit from defensive nationalist positions, owed a great deal to the efforts of German and Austrian art historians to promote the hitherto undervalued field of “Turkish art” at the turn of the twentieth century. The emergence of this art-historical field (parallelizing the linguistic constitution of the new discipline of Turcology, particularly in Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, and Moscow, and subsequently in Ankara and Istanbul), occurred just before the disintegration and collapse of the multinational Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires. The political alliance linking the Austro-Hungarian and late Ottoman empires as well as the Wilhelmine Reich owed much to a confluence of shared interests that offer compelling testimony on how imperial/colonial histories were intricately intertwined with the highly contested arena of art/architectural history. The resulting entangled discourses were informed by a much more complex process than the one envisioned in Edward Said’s Arabocentric critique of Orientalism, which remains silent on the presence of the Ottoman Empire as a sovereign entity in the Middle East and does not differentiate between various brands of Western Orientalist scholarship, whether French, British, Central European, or Russian.

Starting in the early twentieth century and intensifying with the creation of the secular Turkish Republic in 1923, ethnocentric nationalist perspectives have led native scholars to highlight the “Turkish” element over the “Islamic” in Seljuk, Beylik, and Ottoman architecture or to foreground the “purity” of these building traditions by marginalizing the formative input of many centuries of cross-cultural exchange with both Anatolian/Balkan Christendom and Europe. Another bias of nationalist paradigms has been their anachronistic focus on the present borders of modern Turkey, to the exclusion of neighboring Islamic regions such as western Iran/Azerbaijan, Iraq, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, Arabia, and North Africa—former provinces of the Ottoman Empire—which, in turn, have developed their own exclusivist traditions of Orientalist as well as nationalist historiography. In the symposium we sought to address the currency of comparable discourses over a broader Islamic geographic range by inviting papers that extended the horizons of our inquiry beyond the “Lands of Rum” to areas associated with the “Arab,” “Persian,” and “Indian” traditions of art/architecture. For the sake of focus, we decided not to include papers addressing the nationalist architectural historiographies of non-Muslim nation-
states that partitioned the once-unified territories of the Ottoman Empire, a subject that certainly deserves comparative analysis in the future.

In short, the premise of the symposium that resulted in this volume was our conviction that the tendency to read the past through the optics of present-day national boundaries has long obscured the synchronic unities and complex intercultural exchanges across the Balkans, Anatolia, the Middle East, and beyond that existed prior to the rise of modern nation-states and their teleological, diachronic historiographies of architecture from ancient to modern times. Without considering these unities and transcultural interactions, any “ethnicized” reading of architectural history in terms of exclusive national categories is highly problematic—at least as problematic as the blanket term “Islamic art and architecture” that has plagued the field with its specious “universalism.”

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Following the structure of the panels in the symposium, the papers collected in this volume are thematically organized in three sections and preceded by an introduction (originally the keynote lecture). The introductory essay, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the ‘Lands of Rum,’” problematizes the essentializing uses of ethno-racial or regional identities, with specific reference to the concepts of “Rumi” and “Rumi-ness” in late medieval and early modern written sources. The papers in the first section, grouped under the subtitle “Ethnicized Discourses on the Arts and Architectures of Islamic Geographies,” critically address paradigms and methodologies pertaining to the art/architectural historiography of Anatolia, Syria/Egypt, Iran, and India, exposing not only the anachronistic uses of ethnic and national categories, but also the medieval and geographical biases underlying the construction of the “Islamic field.” The second section, subtitled “Dominant Narratives in Historiographies of the Ottoman Architectural Heritage,” examines in detail paradigmatic texts that have focused on this postmedieval tradition of architecture, exhibiting the entangled relationship between Orientalist and nationalist discourses from the late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. The essays in the final section, assembled under the subheading “Interface of Historiography with Institutional Practices in Modern Turkey,” bring the discussion to the present by analyzing the ways in which contemporary policies of archaeology, museology, and preservation have been informed by and diverge from the “grand narratives” of art/architectural historiography.

All of the papers published in this volume look closely and critically at some of the key texts, personalities, and narratives that have shaped the historiography of architecture in the “Lands of Rum” and beyond, scrutinizing their ideological subtexts and methodological biases while concurrently retrieving some of their overlooked insights. Here are some of the questions we asked the authors of these papers to address:

To what extent is the premodern architectural heritage of the “Lands of Rum” “Islamic”? To what extent is it something else? To what extent and from which period onwards is it “modern”? What are the limits and problems of ethnicized readings of architecture in the “Lands of Rum” and elsewhere? Are the terms “Rum Seljuk,” “Bey,” and “Ottoman” interchangeable with “Turkish”? Can we talk about different but simultaneous threads within nationalist historiography, a “critical” one (against the “universalist” approaches of Orientalist frameworks) vs. an “ideological” one (in its espousal of exclusive particularistic identities)? In what ways is art and architectural historiography an autonomous field? From the late Ottoman Empire into the Republic, what role has the historiography of art and architecture, as well as related institutions of archaeology, museology, and preservation, played in constructing particular definitions of Turkish identity? How can new critical scholarship contribute to the questioning of existing ideological paradigms, not only in the “Lands of Rum” but also in other regions and artistic traditions?

Inevitably, the papers published in this volume barely scratch the surface of the formidable questions we initially posed. Given the implications and ongoing relevance of these issues today, however—not only for research and scholarship but also for architectural education and practice as well as the work of museum professionals, exhibition organizers, archaeologists, and preserver/restorers—we believe that they will provoke further debate. We hope that by taking issue with the ideological premises of received historiographic traditions, these papers will collectively contribute to the project of rewriting the “universal” and regional surveys available to us today, as well as to the transformation of institutional practices informed by these surveys.19

Cambridge, MA
NOTES
1. The symposium convened May 11–13, 2006, at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, MA. We would like to thank the panel discussants—David Rosdouh, Zeynep Çelik and Renata Holod—for valuable critical insights that, along with comments made by the audience, have contributed to the revised papers published in this volume.
2. Sibel Bozoğan started working on this topic in 2002 with a PostDoc Fellowship at Harvard University. During the same year, Gülnur Necipoğlu organized “Surveying Islamic Art and Architecture: A Symposium,” held May 17–18, 2002, at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, MA, under the auspices of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University. The symposium included sessions titled “Thoughts by the Authors of Surveys of Islamic Art and Architecture,” which featured papers by Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, Barbara Brend, Robert Hillenbrand, and Robert Irwin, and “Thoughts on the Future of Surveys,” comprising papers that addressed publishers’ concerns, museum perspectives, and the impact of surveys on teaching.
3. Stephen Vernoit, “Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850–c. 1950,” in Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1950, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London and New York, 2000), 53. This claim has recently been repeated in a polemical overview of the state of the field, where it is maintained that “the study of Islamic art and architecture...was invented at the end of the nineteenth century and was of interest primarily to European and later American scholars.” Arguing that “there is no indigenous tradition in any of the Islamic lands of studying Islamic art,” the authors assert that “there are very few positions teaching ‘Islamic art’ in the Islamic lands themselves, where professors and students largely study the arts of their own countries. Thus, one is far more likely to encounter Egyptians studying and teaching Egyptian art in Egypt, Turks studying and teaching Turkish art in Turkey, or Iranians studying and teaching Iranian art in Iran. In other words, the concept of a universalist ‘Islamic art’ remains specific to the West.” See Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” Art Bulletin 85, 1 (Mar. 2003): 153, 157.
6. See, for example, the special issue “Rethinking the Canon,” Art Bulletin 78, 2 (1996).
8. It was far from our intention to privilege the spatial/geographical over the temporal/historical dimension in the study of architectural history. The methodological pitfalls of geographical approaches have been cogently analyzed in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Toward a Geography of Art (Chicago and London, 2004), a book of collected essays that attempts to develop a “geohistory of art” combining chronological/historical and geographical factors. Kaufmann observes (100) that “monographic series, such as the Pelican History of Art, still present material according to national categories, even when such categories did not exist in the period they denote.”
9. Blair and Bloom, “Mirage of Islamic Art,” 174, 176. The authors nostalgically recall that during the 1970s “we and our fellow students were virtually all white, non-Muslim Americans,” but observe that now “white non-Muslims are becoming less dominant in the field.” They believe that the new generation of Middle Eastern and Muslim students/scholars, largely aiming to “trace their roots,” are somehow more ideological than the leading Western scholars who have established the field of Islamic art and architecture; although the authors view this new diversity as “welcome,” it “raises complicated issues about who is doing what for whom.” They write: “The interests and opinions of those seeking to understand their own heritage can be very different from those who are seeking to understand and explain something they consider somewhat distant in time and space...While we admire students’ eagerness to understand what they identify as their own heritage...we are concerned that this approach transforms the study of Islamic art, once a branch of the humanistic study of art history open to all, into one of many fields of area and ethnic studies, sometimes organized along national or eth-
nic lines. It is, in our view, a sorry commentary on our field that at the graduate level most students from Iranian backgrounds study Persian art and students from Turkish backgrounds study Turkish art. Blair and Bloom not only assign value-free objectivity (and superiority) to studying a distant culture not one’s own (a pursuit almost exclusive to Western scholars) but also, by logical extension, deny the capacity for objectivity to those studying their own culture, particularly when the culture in question happens to be non-Western. It seems that students/scholars originating from the Islamic lands can never get it exactly right, unlike Western scholars, who are able to observe the challenges of the field from their panoptic, disinterested vantage point, with deep concern for the “universalist” humanistic foundations of the field. For the ethno-racial ranking of “Persian,” “Arab,” “Indian,” and “Turkish” art, in which the “Turks” occupied the “lower rung,” see Vermio, Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview,” 6–7, 19, 22, 40–41.


11. Blair and Bloom admit that “Turkish” art and architecture pose a more difficult problem for historians than do “Arab” and “Persian” art; see “Mirage of Islamic Art,” 159.


13. The geographical biases of the two Pelican surveys (Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, Islamic Art and Architecture, 650–1250 [Hammondsworth and New York, 1987], and Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan Bloom, The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800 [New Haven, 1994]) are, in fact, admitted by the coauthors of the second volume. Blair and Bloom write (in “Mirage of Islamic Art,” 158), “The two volumes differ in their approaches, as befits the nature of the material: the first deals more with archaeological evidence and is divided regionally (perhaps with some overemphasis on the western Islamic lands) whereas the second [by Blair and Bloom] treats more individual masterpieces, usually under dynastic rubrics, and gives special emphasis to the arts of Iran [italics ours].” This conspicuous bias towards “Persian” material reveals the extent to which the authors are protective of the traditional assumptions of the “Islamic field” as primarily “Arab” in its formative period and overwhelmingly “Persian” thereafter. The premise of their volume (which omits such regions as sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa, China, and Southeast Asia) is thus the elaboration of the “canon” of “Turkish” monuments built under the Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman dynasties from a chronological manual of Islamic architecture published in Europe that privileges “Arab” monuments. Yet another early critique of European Orientalist “universalism” for its construction of a unified, imaginary Orient is provided in Celâl Esad Arseven’s 1928 survey of Turkish architecture, which in some respects anticipates Edward Said by five decades: for Arseven, see the papers of Ahmet Ersoy, Necipoğlu, and Shurine Hamadeh in this volume.

14. If for deniers of artistic creativity to the “Turks,” see n. 12 above and the papers of Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh and Gülru Necipoğlu in this volume. Counter-narratives against derogatory evaluations of “Turkish art” are analyzed in the papers of Necipoğlu and Sibel Bozdoğan in this volume.

15. For this claim, see Blair and Bloom, “Mirage of Islamic Art,” 153. In fact, one of the earliest uses of the term “Islamic” with regard to architecture appears in Marie de Launay, Pietro Montani, et al., Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan = Die otomannische Baukunst (Istanbul, 1873), 40–42. This trilingual publication, commissioned from a cosmopolitan committee of Ottoman bureaucrats and artists by Sultan Abdüllaziz for the Vienna International Exposition of 1873, glorifies the undervalued dynastic tradition of Ottoman architecture; it is analyzed in the papers of Ahmet Ersoy, Necipoğlu, and Shurine Hamadeh in this volume. Another early text that uses the same term is the 1906 essay by the late Ottoman architect Mimar Kemalettin, titled Mihrimah Sultan = (Architecture of Islam), published in İlah Tekeli and Selim İskin, Mimar Kemalettin in Yazılıkları (Ankara, 1997). This essay criticizes the omission of Turkish monuments built under the Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman dynasties from a chronological manual of Islamic architecture published in Europe that privileges “Arab” monuments. Yet another early critique of European Orientalist “universalism” for its construction of a unified, imaginary Orient is provided in Celâl Esad Arseven’s 1928 survey of Turkish architecture, which in some respects anticipates Edward Said by five decades: for Aslanapa, see the papers of Necipoğlu, Hamadeh, and Bozdoğan in this volume.


17. For the proceedings of a conference criticizing nationalist paradigms and promoting a recognition of the 700-year “supranational heritage” of Ottoman architecture, see Nur Akin, Afife Batur, and Selçuk Batur, eds., Osmanlı Mimariliğinin 7 Yüzyıl “Ulusalüstü bir Mısır” (İstanbul, 1999).

18. See the papers of Watenpaugh, Kishwar Ravji, and Finbarr Barry Flood in this volume.

19. Both types of survey continue to raise concerns about how areas of study are delimited, spatially and temporally. The value of so-called universal surveys, particularly in the “Islamic field,” where they did not exist until quite recently, is certainly not to be denied. Now that we have several examples of such surveys, however, what are urgently needed, in our opinion, are books that focus critically on particular regions or periods, generating contextually specific new interpretations that will, in turn, contribute to innovative synthetic visions in future “universal” surveys.