

RECONSTRUCTION IN THE PICTORIAL SPACE: ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES AND URBAN DEPICTIONS OF CAIRO IN ORIENTALIST PAINTINGS (1)

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1. This article is based on the doctoral dissertation entitled 'Orientalist approaches in painting and architectural reality: Cairo', completed in 2023 in the Turkish-Islamic Arts Programme of the Department of Art History at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Some of the insights presented in this article were previously shared in the context of a presentation titled "Between the Imaginary and the Reality: The Visual Document Quality of Orientalist Painting in Architectural History Studies," delivered at the international symposium 'Rethinking Orientalism: On the 20th Anniversary of Edward W. Said's Death,' held at Yalova University (31 October – 2 November 2023)

'I never saw such a variety of architecture, of life, of picturesqueness, of brilliant colour, and light and shade.'
(W.M. Thackeray, 1846, 279)

INTRODUCTION: IMAGE AS AN EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY

Images gain value as much as literary texts and verbal witnesses when bearing witness to history. These images not only carry the visible form of the object into the future, but the testimony of created images sheds light on the history of material culture while enabling us to understand the history of mentality (Burke, 2001, 9). Thus, images acquire multiple meanings beyond being mere aesthetic elements. The testimony of an image to history is a product of the gaze that creates it. As John Berger (1972, 8-10) emphasises, the way we perceive objects is shaped by our thoughts and beliefs. So much so that looking is also an act of choice and the way of seeing is hidden in every image. This proposition can also be argued for the image of the East, which was continuously produced throughout the 19th century. In the 19th century, many Eastern cities, particularly Cairo, attracted European painters, travellers, architects, and writers. Their fascination with distant geographies was reflected in their paintings, which soon spread across Europe. Scenes from daily life, and, city and architectural views produced during this process, have reached the present day. In addition to being works of art, the images have been used as visual records/documents in many fields, especially in architectural history research.

The use of 19th-century Orientalist paintings—which, in the broadest sense, depict the East (Thornton, 1994, 4)—as documentary evidence poses challenges, as these resulting images are products of a century in which art was deeply intertwined with contemporary ideology. Regardless of outcome, artistic production cannot be detached from the artist's emotions and worldview. The search for absolute truth in art production

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2. This issue falls within the field of semiotics, which is widely discussed in various branches of science. (Guiraud, 1955). The number of studies evaluating architectural production within the scope of semiotics has significantly increased in recent years (Eco, 2019).

3. The emergence of Orientalist thought as a concrete indicator in 19th-century Western art has been addressed by various researchers. Rana Kabbani's *Europe's Myths of Orient* (1986) examines how Orientalism shaped the Western construction of the East, while John Sweetman's *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture 1500–1920* (1988) focuses on the impact of Orientalist art in Britain and America. Linda Nochlin's influential article *The Imaginary Orient* (1983) provides a critical perspective on the representational practices of Orientalist art, significantly contributing to academic debates in this field. John MacKenzie's *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (1995) evaluates the role and influence of Orientalism in art history from a broad perspective, while Meyda Yeğenoğlu's *Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* (1998) delves into the Western imagination of the Eastern female figure. Christine Peltre's *Orientalism in Art* (1998) explores the historical development and visual representations of Orientalist art. Gérard-Georges Lemaire's *The Orient in Western Art* (2000) examines the transformation of the image of the East in Western art, whereas Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts' edited volume *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography* (2002) brings together different disciplines' perspectives on Orientalist art and its critiques. Roger Benjamin's *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (2003) analyses how art reinforced France's colonial narrative. Roberts, in *Contested Terrains: Women Orientalists and the Colonial Harem* (2002), discusses representations of harems by Orientalist artists and their colonial context. Although this brief article does not directly reference all these valuable works, their contribution to the conceptual foundation of this study is undeniable.

or questioning the artist's intention with cultural or ideological judgements undermines the scientific approach to a certain extent. Descriptions can be real or imaginary, objective or subjective (2). However, this distinction necessitates an important inquiry into how they should be evaluated within a historical context. Indeed, the representative power of Orientalist paintings, their message-laden nature, and their continued use as historical visual materials in academic research challenges their classification as mere artworks produced solely for aesthetic purposes. In this regard, with the increasing debates on Orientalism in the 20th century, Orientalist paintings began to be analysed from perspectives beyond their aesthetic value.

In Orientalist-themed paintings, subjects such as women, children, the harem, daily life, and war have been assessed and criticised holistically. The strong ties between the imagined spaces within the pictorial realm and the painter's own imagination have been questioned. Today, it is widely acknowledged that many Orientalist artists maintained close relations with colonial authorities and that the East was subjected to a visual othering process through these paintings (3). However, the scope of criticism directed at this artistic tradition, which continues to be followed with great interest, particularly in the Islamic world, remains relatively limited (Rabbat, 2020). Furthermore, these paintings continue to be utilised in various studies as historical documents. One of the primary reasons why these paintings can so easily be used as documents or records is that they employ highly deceptive techniques to create what Roland Barthes (1986, 141-148) terms the effect of the real (*effet de réel*), which constructs an exotic atmosphere that has a high margin for misrepresentation. This phenomenon stems from the ability of the constructed image—its message—to convince the viewer of the reality of an event or space, regardless of its historical accuracy. Consequently, the viewer is drawn into an illusion. Among the key elements generating this 'effect of the real' in these paintings are the depictions of Islamic architecture, which constitute the main focus of this study.

Architectural imagery has often played a central role in Orientalist-themed paintings, sometimes serving as the principal subject of a composition, and at other times functioning as a complement to an overarching exotic theme. However, the fact that the paintings possess a highly constructed composition with a strong effect of reality gives rise to a paradox, with the visibility of architectural elements within the pictorial space in an identifiable manner. This leads to the assumption that these depictions faithfully represent historical reality. As a result, architectural and art history research continues to accept these constructed architectural images as visual records, interpreting them as reflections of historical structures and a kind of mirror into the past. Yet, from a scholarly perspective, regarding such works as absolute historical sources is highly controversial. Therefore, this debate necessitates questioning the role of images in the production of historical knowledge. Is an image merely a reflection of the external world, or does it construct a new reality as a visual representation in its own right? Questioning the epistemological status of visual representation is a critical step not only in assessing the relationship between artwork and its documentary accuracy, but also in evaluating the kind of knowledge it produces. W. J. Thomas Mitchell (2005) argues that visual representation should be seen not just as a record but also as a means of construction of meaning. In this context, the historical testimony of images should be assessed not only based on their content but also through the lens of the context in which they were created and the meanings they

generate. Given that Orientalist paintings are shaped between the artist's imagination and their perception of reality, it is essential to develop a critical perspective on how these works should be utilised in architectural, urban and art history studies.

It is necessary to emphasise that this article does not claim to question or debate the imaginative world of the painter. This article—rather than discussing Orientalist discourse, Orientalist art, or the conditions of its emergence—aims to generate thoughts and propositions on the use of artist-created imagery as a primary source in scholarly studies, specifically in architectural history research. It seeks to critically examine the image's role as a witness to history in the light of concrete data. While the study primarily focuses on oil paintings, it also opens a parenthesis for prints, considering both their role as sources for oil paintings and their independent engagement with similar approaches. The geographical scope is limited to the city of Cairo, a favourite among Orientalists, which experienced a turbulent period in the 19th century due to colonial endeavours and frequently appeared on canvases with its cityscape and numerous examples of Islamic architecture.

ORIENTALIST PAINTINGS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Although the geographical and cultural boundaries between the East and the West had become clearer much earlier, the genuine interest in and curiosity about the East reached its peak in the 19th century. Prior to this period, cityscapes and architectural views were not entirely free from cultural judgments, yet the primary aim was to observe and document the era (Morkoç, 2007, 86). For over a century, from the invasion of Egypt—which prompted Europe to turn its gaze toward the East with great enthusiasm—to the beginning of World War I, when intercontinental travel was relatively disrupted; numerous architects, urban planners, and painters visited Eastern cities for various reasons. The majority of Orientalist paintings were produced during this period. Napoleon's expedition to Egypt marked the first steps of orientalist studies that would become increasingly linked to imperialist policies. A large group including scientists, engineers and illustrators from different fields of study was formed and a great deal of information on Egypt was systematically catalogued. Thus, *Description de l'Égypte*, which includes a rich collection of drawings, sketches and maps, was prepared between 1809 and 1828. *Description de l'Égypte* is considered the first systematic work of orientalism as it is an archive of information on Egypt with multifaceted content (Said, 2017, 90-97). It contains many visual documents on the city and its buildings. However, recent studies have documented that this important source contains incorrect information (Raymond 1994, 3-18). Subsequent studies led to paintings depicting topography and local clothes with picturesque and mystical admiration. In time, paintings with orientalist themes turned into a means of representation in which architectural structures, landscapes and traditional life, as well as spaces and local costumes, were animated in pictorial form. In the meantime, the power of representation to convey a message established strong ties with the colonialist politics of the period and led to Orientalist paintings being widely discussed in the following century. The artistic productions of the so-called Orientalist painters were subject to criticism for legitimising the imperialist policies of the West.

Walter B. Denny (1983, 266) categorises the images in orientalist art as 'Rapportage Orientalism, Political Orientalism and Exotism'. In Rapportage Orientalism, figures and events belonging to the East and the Orient were represented as they appeared in reality, with religious practices, weddings and celebrations routinely presented as subject of documentary works. In Political Orientalism, images of the East were used to convey religious and ideological messages with an anti-Islamic approach. In these paintings, especially those portraying war scenes used to convey political messages, the West's growing Islamophobia becomes apparent, reinforcing a negative image of the East. However, in these scenes, the image of a 'helpless West' and a 'barbaric or oppressive East' is not always prevalent.

The East is sometimes depicted as a savage, oppressive, and barbaric force, while at other times, it appears as a helpless entity surrendering to the superior power of the West, presented with a dual image that varies depending on the overall context of the scene. Exotic Orientalism, on the other hand, includes works that are sexist and focus on the female body, that are contrary to historical reality, far from equality and cultural tolerance, and that aim to reveal emotions that are more negative. John MacKenzie (1995, 50), unlike Denny, evaluates orientalist paintings according to the stages of change in the subjects represented by the artists, starting from the 18th century. According to MacKenzie, the first phase of Orientalist painting includes painters such as William Hogarth (1697-1764) and Gavin Hamilton (1732-1798), neither of whom had direct experience of the East. The second stage includes painters such as Vivant Denon (1747-1825) and David Roberts (1796-1864), who based their work on topographical and archaeological reality. They were followed by romantics such as Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860), who expressed their imaginative and emotional worlds through images of the East. Towards the end of the 19th century, topographical and romantic paintings gave rise to the orientalist-themed works of Horace Vernet (1789-1863), Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876), and Jean Léon Gérôme (1824-1904). In the final phase, Eastern aesthetics is represented by painters such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841- 1919) and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). The classification of Orientalist paintings by scholars generally follows similar approaches, whether based on chronology or content.

Conversely, other controversial aspects of Orientalist paintings that can be seen without the need for any categorisation involve the message that the painter gives or aims to give to the audience, rather than the subject matter of the paintings. Still, the more imagery-laden a work or text is, the more deeply the audience participates in the creator's perception of what is seen, focussing on the relationship between the object and the creator rather than the object itself (Berger, 1972, 8-9). In most Orientalist paintings, the way of perceiving Islamic cities is observed along with daily life in the East. The city presented in the paintings does not contain an absolute view. Different representations of cities and buildings, guided by the artists, emerge in the visual exploration of the Islamic cities in the East. In Orientalist paintings, images, objects and structures create message-laden representations and transform them into shortcuts, positioning the viewer in a single place with specific meanings. The accuracy of the depiction is not always important; imagination plays a major role in the construction of the object characterised as exotic, as well as the surrounding landscape (Çelik, 2013, 44). In this context, it can also be argued that the majority of Orientalist paintings are pastiche, arbitrarily compiled from sketches and photographs,

with very limited documentary qualities (Denny, 1993, 221). Indeed, photography, the most important invention of historical documentation in the second half of the 19th century, was used as a visual aid for painters. For instance, although it is known that Gérôme made use of photography extensively while creating his pictorial constructions, the resulting works show semi-imaginary spaces created from collages compiled from photographs. Although photographs were utilised in the paintings where Islamic architecture forms the décor, there was no obligation to remain faithful to the reality of that building, notwithstanding their verifiability. This approach can be interpreted with the category that Erwin Panofsky named as a secondary or extensional meaning in the process of evaluating the work of art. Panofsky (2018, 28-30) states that the field of iconography is formed by identifying certain symbolic images, stories and allegories in the composition. His examples are based on religious themes whose stories are familiar to the wider society. The iconographic analysis approach also finds its counterpart in orientalist paintings. For example, a hookah, turban, veil and shalwar conjure the Islamic city; the representation of a life without movement symbolises laziness, while a woman in a hammam symbolises sloth. Thus, the secondary meaning may become dominant in orientalist paintings. It is known that the paintings about the East have a fiction in which imagination and reality are intertwined, possess the power to create the other in the representation of the non-self, and that they have a message-laden nature due to their view of the female body (Nochlin, 1983). The architectural image is as important as other means of representation in constructing this imaginary world, acting as a complementary feature.

CAIRO PAINTINGS: THE ROLE OF BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS IN PAINTINGS AND THE DOCUMENTARY QUALITY OF IMAGES

In the paintings, veiled women in public spaces and figures wearing turbans exist independent of time and place, transporting the viewer to a non-European setting. Architectural elements, similar to the veiled women, are also among the objects that carry the viewer into the Islamic world. Islamic architecture becomes an instrument of representation because it provides the desired exotic visual image. Minarets, domes, monumental doors decorated with muqarnas or interiors decorated with tiles takes the viewer on a journey to an exotic city, regardless of the geographical location of the building. The function, location and architectural features of the building lose their importance. This situation is similar to the orientalist/exotic architecture that became fashionable in Europe in the 19th century. Among the notable examples of this fashion in European Architecture, the Royal Pavilion of Brighton in England was inspired by the mosques of Agra and Delhi in India. Similarly, the rococo decorated interior decoration of the Esma Sultan Pavilion was revived in the room of the Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany in order to present exotic themes, and by the 20th century, a cigarette factory in Germany was designed as an imitation of a complex in Cairo (Sweetman, 1988; Crinson, 1996). Islamic architecture was reconstructed in Europe by detaching it from its purpose and context and giving it another function without including them. Although Orientalist/exotic architecture is not the subject of this article, Orientalist approaches in painting and architecture, which became the style of the period, are motivated by similar imaginations, and the resulting production become intellectually closer to one another. It is possible to say that these designs in architecture, which are eclectic with an optimistic approach but imitative with a more objective approach, are

4. The construction process of these Orientalist-influenced buildings varied across different geographies. For example, in the mid-19th century, a significant number of Turkish baths were built in England. In these designs, while the function of the building remained unchanged, the architectural style and interior design were reconstructed with an eclectic approach. (Pasin B. 2023) On the other hand, there are many examples where the intended use of the structure was disregarded during construction. In the 18th and 19th centuries, buildings in Europe, such as pavilions, theatre halls, and baths in Europe were sometimes designed as direct replicas of classical mosques. At this point, describing these functionally altered, directly imitated buildings as an eclectic approach would be overly optimistic.

5. Napoleon's invasion was an important step in Egypt's colonisation process. After France withdrew from Egypt in 1801, the rule of the Khedive dynasty began, and between 1805 and 1830, Egypt transformed from being merely a province of the Ottoman Empire into a powerful entity exerting its dominance in the eastern part of the empire. Until 1851, Egypt maintained its autonomy against the Ottoman state; however, at the same time, it became a supplier of raw materials to Britain. Additionally, after projects financed by Britain were implemented, British influence over Egypt gradually increased. In 1858, a law was passed allowing foreigners to own land in Egypt. By 1870, European countries began to gain political influence in Egypt under the pretext of protecting the rights of their citizens living and working there. Meanwhile, in the second half of the 19th century, the economic burden of the reforms carried out under the leadership of the Khedives led to Egypt falling into a complete debt spiral by the 1870s. After 1876, a new government was established, including a British finance minister and a French public works minister. The economic struggles further exacerbated European control over Egypt. In 1882, British forces entered Egypt. In 1885, Britain established a garrison in Egypt, taking financial control and overseeing the Egyptian military administration. The Khedivate government continued to control Egypt, though often only nominally, until 1914. In 1914, Britain officially declared the end of Ottoman sovereignty over Egypt and announced that Egypt was now a British protectorate. Thus, the 19th century was marked by political turmoil for Egypt, as it became a battleground for major global powers. With central authority weakening, two major occupations occurring, and frequent uprisings, Cairo, the capital and administrative centre of Egypt, experienced significant political, economic, and social changes during this turbulent period. This brief article does not provide an exhaustive discussion of the reforms and external debts that shaped these dynamics. However, it is important to note that the modernisation initiatives and the process of colonisation in Cairo had a direct impact on the artistic environment.

For more on this topic, see: Mitchell, 1991; Mestyan, 2017.

also maintained in the process of Islamic architecture being conveyed to the pictorial space (4). Buildings in distant geographies, which follow quite different lines of development in terms of architectural tradition and differ in building material, plan, design and architectural decoration style, can constitute the pictorial space of painting. In such representations; minarets, domes, monumental entrances, tiles, and calligraphic writing belts in pictures can be used as symbols of the Islamic city. Whether or not the building is the product of a cultural background, building material or a sense of design different from that of Istanbul, Damascus, Delhi or Cairo, loses its importance. Hence, it is not always possible to identify and define the architectural image in paintings. Especially in crowded compositions, it becomes difficult to identify the buildings used as decor, whereas in some paintings, monuments are defined by the region they are found, by the development around them and the original design of the building. Mosques, madrasahs and mausoleums are depicted with views of their facades, monumental entrances or views from places of worship, while public fountains adorning the streets, castles, and city gates are only depicted with views of their facades.

When considering the process of conveying the city of Cairo into pictorial space, one encounters an extensive visual corpus. The period during which the city and its buildings were most frequently depicted coincides with colonial initiatives in the region (5). Indeed, although there are a limited number of cityscapes and architectural depictions from before the 19th century that allow for the tracking of urban development (Abouseif, 2022, 174-195; Öner Aslankılıç, 2023, 117-122), it is evident that Western painters' substantial engagement with Cairo's architecture began during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The architects and painters accompanying Napoleon are cited as the first artists to document the appearance of buildings (Murat and Weill, 1998, 14-16). In this process, the main purpose of the representation of buildings was to transmit visual information to Europe. Louis François Cassas (1756-1827), an architect and painter who visited the city in the early period, is one of those to do so. Immediately after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, his *Voyage Pittoresque De La Syrie, De La Phénicie, de la Palestine, et de la Basse-Egypte* was published (Cassas, 1799); which included drawings of monuments in Cairo. Afterwards, the number of similar publications increased rapidly. The French architect Pascal Xavier Coste (1787-1879) met the governor of Egypt, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, through François Jomard in 1817 and worked as an architect and engineer in Cairo for a long period of time. In 1825, he was appointed as the chief architect in Egypt. In 1829, Coste returned to Paris, and in 1839, he published *Architecture arabe; ou, Monuments du Kaire, mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 à 1826*, in which he included detailed architectural drawings of the buildings in Cairo (Coste, 1839; Denise, 1983; Volait, 1998).

Émile Prisse d'Avennes (1807-1879), Egyptologist, archaeologist, architect and writer, taught in military schools for about nine years after his first journey to Egypt in 1827. In Cairo he was known as Idris (or Edris) Effendi. In 1869-1877, he published *L'Art Arabe d'après les Monuments du Kaire depuis le VIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe*, which includes engravings of buildings from Cairo (Volait, 2013). The architectural drawings of Pascal Xavier Coste (1787-1879) or Emile Prisse d'Avennes (1807-1879) were largely realistic in their approach and helped the appearance of buildings to reach the present day (Volait, 2002; Rabbat, 2010). David Roberts (1796-1864) focused particularly on the city's architectural heritage with his books of print illustrations such as *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubia*.

Similarly, Robert Hay (1799-1863) made his contribution with *Illustration of Cairo*. Walter Trywhitt (1859-1932) painted *Cairo, Jerusalem & Damascus: three chief cities of the Egyptian Sultans*, a study of Islamic architectural monuments of three important cities. Belgian-born artist Walter Frederick Roope Tyndale (1885-1943) published *Below the Cataract* and *L'Egypte d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* in 1907, followed by *An Artist in Egypt* in 1912. Simultaneously with these century-long productions, building illustrations were being translated into watercolour paintings and oil canvases.

A portion of Cairo's architectural heritage can be traced through the works of numerous artists. Among them is Louis François Cabanes (1867-1947), who began his career with illustrations before turning to Orientalist subjects (Benezit, 2006, 134). Ippolito Caffi (1809-1866), another key figure, is renowned for his architectural paintings and cityscapes. Ella Mary Du Cane (1874-1943), a British watercolourist, primarily created paintings during her time in Cairo, most of which depicted buildings and architectural scenes, and these works were later published in John A. Todd's *The Bank of the Nile* (Todd, 1913). Stanislaus von Chlebowski (1835-1921), a prominent name in Orientalist painting, also contributed to this visual record. Additionally, artists such as Félix Auguste Clément (1826-1888), Adrien Dauzats (1804-1868), and Ludwig Deutsch (1855-1935), played a crucial role in documenting Cairo's architectural landscape through their paintings.

It seems possible to categorise the role of architecture in paintings in the specific case of Cairo (**Figure 1, 2**). In this categorisation, *paintings that focus on buildings* occupy the foremost position. In these paintings, the facades of buildings, parts or entire bodies of minarets, domes, and monumental gates are incorporated into the composition. In some of the scenes from daily life, the entrance facades of buildings are observed. These paintings offer representations in which the buildings can be largely identified. In some paintings, two separate buildings in different locations merge into a single space. Although collage views are created, the reality of the design remains faithful to the reality of the building. In the paintings, human figures, animals, and various objects are sometimes placed in the composition in a way that does not obscure the architectural view, while also enhancing the exotic atmosphere. Additionally, the proportional relationship between figures and buildings emphasises the monumentality of the architecture, and when this relationship is evaluating, it is observed that the actual scale of the structures can be exaggerated beyond their real-life proportions.

The second group includes *structures pointing to a place*. This group includes historical paintings, war scenes, traditional paintings, and subjects such as Surre procession (**6**), bride procession, scenes from daily life, markets, and vendors in local costumes in commercial areas. Generally, the buildings are arranged as a silhouette behind a high hill, with a section at the escape point of the painting, or in two directions along the street (**Figure 3**). The function of the building in the pictorial space is due to its function in signalling the location. The architectural image sometimes symbolises a city in the East by being placed on a hill in the background of the painting, indicating the city where the event takes place. Differences may be observed between the area where the depicted building or buildings were originally constructed, and the location imagined within the pictorial space. However, the function of architecture in the painting remains unchanged.

Similarly, as a component of the picturesque view in landscape painting, buildings facilitate the identification of the location. In the case of Cairo,

6. In the search for exotic imagery, certain traditional subjects became dominant for Orientalist painters. Since the early periods of Islam, caravans setting out for Mecca and Medina at a specific time of the year not only fulfilled the pilgrimage duty but also delivered spoils known as *surre* to the region. This grand journey, which became a tradition in Islamic societies, was one of the exotic themes depicted in 19th-century paintings. As a result, monumental gates, symbolising departure from and arrival to the city, also became traceable through these paintings.



Figure 1. The subject matter of the Orientalist painting predominantly consists of the structure itself. The exotic atmosphere is enhanced by means of human and animal figures that are seen at the front. Louis-Claude Mouchot, *Kaid Bey (Cairo)*, undated, oil on canvas, 130x91 cm, Cairo Diplomatic Club (Lemaire, 2008, 91).

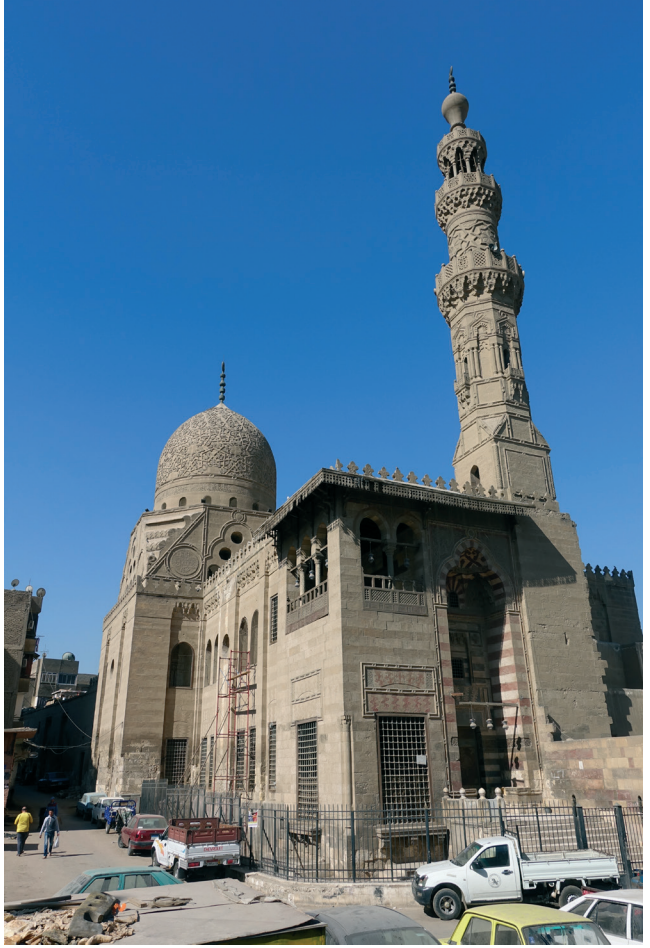


Figure 2. View of the funerary complex of Sultan Qaytbay (photo by Göksu Özden Öner, 2019).

the paintings in question also include views of buildings reflected from different angles from the banks of the Nile. In the perspective painting, the blurred structures placed at the point of escape become difficult to identify (**Figure 4**). In some paintings, it can be seen that completely imaginary

Figure 3. The painting captures a moment when ordinary people are seen on a festive day, Eid. The mosque facade in the left background was used as an image defining the space. When looking at the building details in the picture; the plan, in addition to the design, is understood to be a depiction of the Sultan Qaytbay complex with its high pedestal, elegant decorations, dome and entrance facade with sabil-kuttab (7). Félix Auguste Clément, *Pendant les fêtes du Baïram au Caire*, 1866, oil on canvas, 38.2 x 69.5 cm., Musée de Tessé (Peltre, 1998, 159).



Figure 4. A detailed view of the structure is not provided in the picturesque view where the Nile River and Muhammad 'Ali Mosque appear together. Apart from the general mass of the building, its elegant minarets and its dome appearance, no distinctive feature can be observed. Ernst Karl Eugen Koerner, *Die Alabastermoschee Kairo*, 1883, oil on canvas, 87x127 cm., Private Collection.



landscapes have been created. The painter, who appears to endeavour to gather multiple buildings in a single space, removes the buildings from their original location and places them in a different setting. On the other hand, structural elements that do not exist in reality can be added to the composition. In this situation, which emerges especially in imaginary landscapes, Islamic architecture appears to serve no purpose beyond being an image that defines the East.

In landscape paintings, one of the most important elements in representing the city is the depiction of elongated/slender minarets within the pictorial space. Elevated dome drums and, slender and rising minarets surpass the actual mass of the buildings. The volumetric and dimensional differences are created to emphasise the splendour of the building. In the same group, there are also collage views in a single landscape. For example, as can be seen in Bernhard Fiedler's engraving *Cairo landscape* (**Figure 5**), while the general design of the buildings in the view extending from Cairo Citadel to Saladin Square is quite realistic, the pyramids of Giza were added to the horizon line as part of the landscape, creating an imaginary Egyptian landscape. This view was also reproduced in oil paintings (**Figure 6**) (Öner Aslankılıç, 2023, 245).

Paintings in which the building can at least be identified can be categorised as *building element/building detail behind the monumental figure(s)*. In this group of paintings, only a limited view of the building can be seen behind the figure. In addition, the identity of the building loses its importance, and the building detail becomes the exotic decor of the pictorial space. If the subject matter is religious rituals, tiled walls and flamboyant mihrab facades appear in the interior as the decor. Therefore, the paintings that can be classified in this group are those where the exotic theme is dominant. In these paintings, mostly created by academic painters; traditional themes, worship scenes and market settings stand out, featuring widespread lighting, bright colours, and meticulously detailed patterns in the costumes of the figures. A meticulous approach to detail is evident. In paintings where identifying the building becomes more difficult, the architectural structure, in a sense, loses its identity. The depiction of space varies depending on the subject of the painting. For example, Ludwig Deutsch's

7. The Sebil-Kuttabs, a unique architectural structure of Egypt, consisting of a fountain on the ground floor and a school on the upper floor, began to be constructed either as part of *kulliye* facades or as independent buildings during the Mamluk period. They were frequently depicted in street scenes of Cairo. For more detailed information on Sebil-Kuttabs, see: Mostafa, 1989.



Figure 5. General view of Cairo, print, 1878 (Ebers, 1878, 176).



Figure 6. Tony Binder, *Blick über Kairo*, 1931, oil on canvas, 50.5x76 cm., Private Collection.

well-known *Praying in the Blue Mosque (Le Caire)* is one of the paintings, in which the tiles of the Mausoleum of Aqsunqur (Blue) Mosque (Ibrahim Agha Mustahfizan Tomb), dating to the Ottoman period (Wiet, 1966, 107), can be clearly traced (Figure 7, 8).

Figure 7. Ludwig Deutsch, *Praying in the Blue Mosque (Le Caire)*, 1898, oil on canvas, 69x60.5 cm, Chalmers Collection (İnankur, Germaner, 1989, 40).

Figure 8. Interior of Ibrahim Agha Mustahfizan Tomb covered with tiles (photo by Göksu Özden Öner, 2019).

In the paintings, various manipulations on the structure can only be detected with a detailed look. In paintings with traditional themes, architectural elements in the background can be detached from their reality to make them visible. Minarets, in particular, undergo changes in size and proportion in the paintings; their body becomes thinner and longer, and therefore can be depicted in excess. Like minarets, dome pulleys can also exceed their dimensional characteristics in the pictorial space. In addition, domes can move away from their original form and take the



form of onion domes. Onion domes, which are seen as an integral part of Islamic architecture, are seen in many paintings, regardless of how accurately they depict the real building. A similar approach is found in window arches, with many arch forms resembling the Moorish arch in many depictions of space. Therefore, for some artists, forms of domes and arches seem to have taken their inspiration from Andalusian architecture. In this context, the regional styles of Islamic architecture are ignored, and designs can be limited to a single form when needed. Therefore, in the paintings, the structure may lose its identity both in its overall design and in its details. On the other hand, the paintings as a whole exhibit a high level of realism with building materials, facade appearance, minarets, domes, interior geometric decorations, tiles, inscription bands, colourful marble panels, and geometric and floral ornaments. However, this realism in details can create a misleading representation of the actual design of the structure. The location of the building, its intended purpose, function, and overall integrity become less important. The structure becomes merely a complement to the orientalist narrative, a part of the exotic theme. Therefore, the final categorisation consists of paintings in which the orientalist approach is most dominant. The depiction of buildings that diverge from their reality is not limited to oil paintings, which are the main focus of this article. With the widespread use of mechanical reproduction techniques in the 18th century, the number of printed images increased, playing a fundamental role in forming a visual repertoire for the study of architecture and artworks. Considering that printed images aimed to meet the expectations of those interested in scientific observations, they were often valued as documents (Arnold, 2002, 450). As such, architectural depictions in printed images tend to convince the viewer of their authenticity more quickly, making them more widely used as documents. However, as seen in imaginary Cairo landscapes (**Figure 5**), architectural details often diverge from reality not only in cityscapes but also in printed images that focus directly on buildings (**Figures 9, 10, 11**). Just like in canvas paintings, the shapes, proportions, and dimensions of buildings in printed images often stray from their real-life counterparts (**8**). Beyond these formal differences, the reconstruction of buildings within the pictorial space is detached from their physical context—for example, the texture of materials or the absence of landscaping—demonstrating that these recreated representations are based on the imagination. Therefore, the artificial composition is a creation distinct from the object it references.

Printed images were also used as visual sources by painters and were reproduced into oil paintings. This process led to imaginary landscapes or architectural depictions being reproduced multiple times in different techniques and circulated widely. The repeated reproduction of the same view reinforced the illusion of the imaginary depiction being seen as authentic by the viewer. It should be noted that this phenomenon was not exclusive to the East; many Western architectural depictions were also transferred into printed images, incorporated into contemporary historical consciousness, and used as visual documents in architectural history studies. Dana Arnold (2002) argues that the created images, rather than being merely an aestheticised historical narrative, represent another form of history and knowledge that exists in the realm of sensory perception. A similar conclusion can be drawn when examining the printed images of Cairo. The prints of architectural structures in Cairo do not provide a reliable narrative for the city's urban or architectural history. Against this background, using printed images as direct and unquestioned documents in architectural history research may result in misleading assumptions.

8. The arch formations on the door differ in both drawings, and *Description de L'Egypt* drawing includes stone decorations connected to the architecture, while the entrance pediment shows only three window openings. Considering that the main purpose of both drawings was to compile a visual document of Cairo's architectural monuments, the differences in the details of the architectural drawings are striking. Indeed, although the drawings were published at almost the same time, the differences in the details of the two drawings call into question their documentary quality.



Figure 9. Perspective view of the Bab El Futuh, illustration, 1809. (*Description de L'Egypt. Le Kaire, Etat Moderne*, V. I, 47, 1809).

Figure 10. Ali Bey el Abbassi (artist), Jacob Plocher (engraver), Bab El Futuh, 15.5x18.7 cm. print on paper, 1818-1822. (V&A Museum SP.13).



Figure 11. Bab El Futuh (photo by Göksu Özden Öner, 2019).

SELECTED BORDERS: CITY DESCRIPTIONS AND THE CITY OF CAIRO IN PAINTINGS

The buildings that can be identified from the paintings are documents of the painters' road map within the city and their view of it. The constant repetition of a certain area in the street views creates a city image whose boundaries

are determined by the painter. The mosques and complexes that can be identified through the paintings are located in certain parts of the city, often close to each other. In a significant number of the paintings, the buildings clustered on two streets named al-Mu'izz (Al-Muizz li-Din Allah al-Fatimi Street) and al-Darb al-Ahmar. The area, also called al-Mu'izz, is the most vibrant part of the city, serving as the rib of Fatimid Cairo (Raymond, 2018, 226). Due to the central and symbolic position of the area, many large mosques, mausoleums and rulers' mansions were built from the Fatimid period until the end of the Ottoman period (Çelik, et al.

1994, 77). Al-Mu'izz, also a centre of attraction as a commercial area with a colourful image, preserves its historical-touristic importance in the city today as an area where many buildings belonging to different periods create a picturesque view. Al-Hakim Mosque (990-1003), al-Aqmar Mosque (1125), Complex of Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun (1284-5) and Mosque-madrassa of Sultan al-Zahir Barquq (1384-86) are the most important historical monuments in the city. These buildings were sometimes depicted in street scenes together with the surrounding buildings, and at other times through views of their façades or interiors.

It can be observed that the area named al-Darb al-Ahmar is also the subject of street scenes and the buildings in the area are often used as decor in paintings. In the 13th century, this area started to develop with the population growth and by the 14th century, it was surrounded by numerous manufacturing workshops, becoming a centre of craftsmanship. During the Ottoman period, the construction of commercial complexes continued with initiatives encouraging urbanisation. In the 19th century, economic difficulties led to the decline of commercial activities in the city, a loss of importance for the area and the abandonment of many buildings (Rashidi, 2004, 55-65). The area, which has recently become one of the touristic areas again after major restoration projects, includes important monuments such as Amir Aqsunqur Mosque (Mosque of Ibrahim Agha) (1346-7) and Mosque-madrassa of Amir Khayrbak (1520-21). European painters preferred these commercial districts because of the colourful appearance of the narrow streets surrounded by monumental buildings. The streets surrounded by small utility items, shops and stalls offer the desired colourful and chaotic appearance. Given this context, the representation of religious buildings in street views is determined by the architectural design of the building as well as the exotic appearance offered by the area in which it is located. On the other hand, the continuity of the city's commercial district and bazaar settlement in Cairo (Raymond, 2018, 226) brings together details of multiple buildings from different centuries in a single street scene. Thus, a diversity of Islamic architecture is also presented in the paintings.

Another part of the complexes and mosques that can be traced in the paintings is located in and around Saladin Square. The presence of many Mamluk period buildings, especially the Mosque-madrassa of Sultan Hasan (1356-61), in the square, which developed parallel to the settlement of Cairo Citadel, is an area where the architectural identity of the city can be represented. The Muhammad 'Alī Mosque, built in 1830 within the boundaries of the Cairo Fortress, and the madrasa of Amir Iljay al-Yūsufi (1373), located on a street near Saladin Square, were painted many times by different painters in different techniques and styles. In addition, the area of the Mamluk cemeteries and the Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay (1472-4), one of the most important buildings of the period, has been portrayed on canvas many times.

On the other hand, settlements away from the city centres were established in Cairo as early as the 17th century. The borders of the southern and then western parts of the city expanded. Amir's residences were built in the Azbakiyya district and new neighbourhoods were created (Lane, 1896, 71). The city plan in the *Description de l'Égypte* shows settlements on regular parcel traces in the western part of the city (**Figure 11**). It is understood that the area, which can be identified on the map, was the new settlement area

Figure 12. M. Jomard's plan of Cairo, 1809 (*Description de Egypt l'Egypte, Etat Moderne* Vol.I, New York Public Library Digital Collection).



established in the 17th and 18th centuries and that a regular planning was carried out unlike in the city centre (Raymond, 2018, 60-61).

In the meantime, throughout the 19th century, when painters conveyed countless city and building images to the two-dimensional plane, the changes that had begun in Cairo in the 17th-18th centuries had gained major momentum. This process began in 1805 when Muhammad 'Alī Pasha was appointed to be governor of Egypt (Hunter, 1999). Within the scope of the innovation efforts carried out by Muhammad 'Alī Pasha, new residential areas were established in the city (Raymond, 2000, 299-306). The second major step in urban planning took place when Khedive Ismāil Pasha commissioned Pierre Grand to transform Cairo into a modern city (Abu-Lughod, 1965, 440). From the second half of the century onwards, Cairo was divided into two contrasting faces, Old and New Cairo. The Azbakiyya district, which was already inhabited by the wealthy population in the 17th and 18th centuries, was designated as the centre of the new city (Arnaud, 1993, 82). Important gardeners and landscapers of the period like Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps (1824-1873) and Gustave Delchevalerie (1841-1899) were invited to the city, therefore prompting the organisation of many gardens in the western part of the city in imitation of English and French garden styles (Wilkinson, 2010, 125-147; Fondu, 2010, 245). This western part in the city, in all likelihood, with its familiar face, did not attract the attention of painters who were eager to discover exotic scenes. In fact, the eastern part of the city, deemed suitable for painting and corresponding to Max Weber's image of *the Islamic city*, is bounded by the district called Islamic Cairo (9) (Figure 13).

9. Max Weber's model of the city and his Orientalist theory that urban communities can only exist in Europe brought about debates on the concept of the Islamic city and the problems caused by this generalisation. While for some researchers, the Islamic city discourse was seen as an acceptable definition with the characteristics of cities in the East that are considered identical, for others, this approach defining the other was considered an orientalist discourse and it was argued that each city should be evaluated within its own formation dynamics. (Weber, 1958; Raymond, 1994, 3-18; Zubadia, 2006, 111-118)

The sloping narrow streets and irregular construction in the centre of the city, which Claude-Étienne Savary (1786, 114-115), who was in the city in the 18th century, mentioned with astonishment in his letters, are repeatedly portrayed on the picture plane in the following century. It can be seen that the same street, district, and similar buildings are depicted in a significant portion of the paintings (Öner Aslankılıç, 2023, 542-553). The artists' memories of Cairo and their travel notes are mostly shaped by the same areas. The developments in the city were not appreciated in the works that include the modernisation efforts in the city, the developments

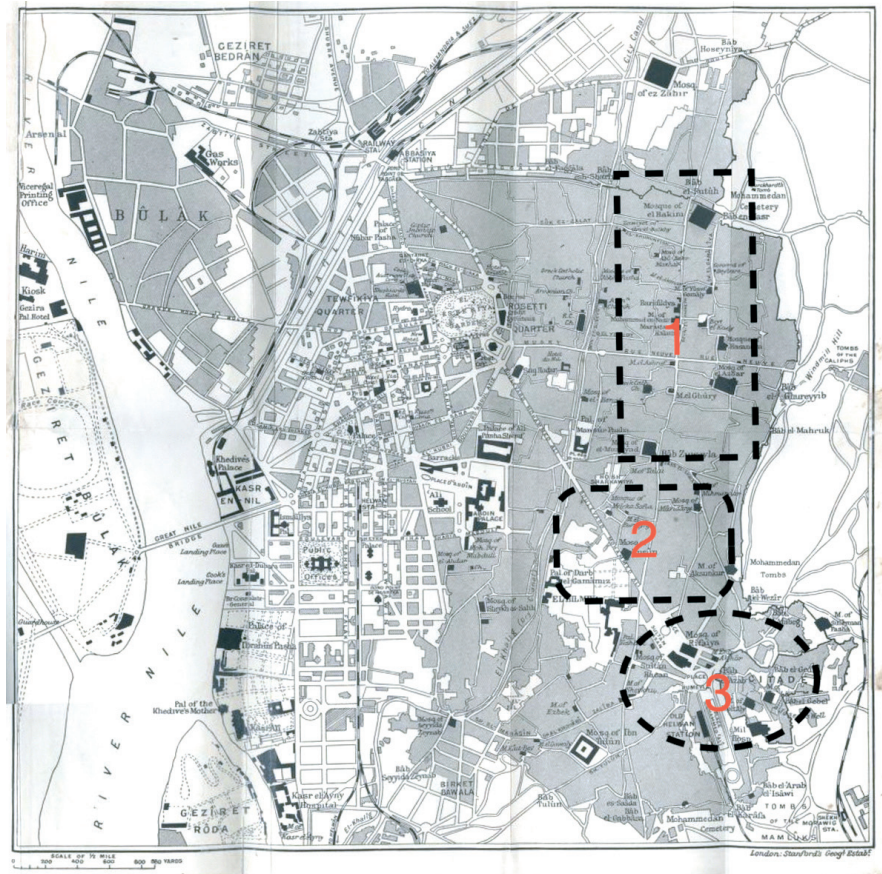


Figure 13. Map of Cairo, edited from Stanley Lane Poole (Poole, 1918.) 1- al-Mu'izz and its surroundings 2- al-Darb al-Ahmar and its surroundings 3- Cairo Citadel and Saladin Square.

in the city are not appreciated. In his book *Below the Cataracts*, published at the beginning of the 20th century, the travelling painter Walter Tyndale (1855-1943) mentions the changes in the west of the city, but criticises the innovations as having a corrupt style. In his memoirs, he emphasised that for a true experience of the East, one should visit the neighbourhoods to the east of the city, now divided into old and new (1907, 11). As a matter of fact, the regions depicted in the book are chosen in accordance with the literature. In Tyndale's (1912, 43-46) *An Artist in Egypt*, in which he focuses on the social life in Cairo, the contrasts in the city at the present time are discussed. After defining the boundaries of the city as Old Cairo with the Fatimid settlement, Cairo Citadel and Ahmad ibn Tulun Mosque (876-79), the painter defines the rest of the city as the European City. He does not include a view from the west of the city in his paintings in the book. Tyndale's approach to the city can be seen in the works of many painters and architects.

CONCLUSION

In the 19th century, one of the most important tools through which the image of the East was constructed was art. Orientalist discourse, while constructing power relations hierarchically, embodied knowledge of the East through art. Travellers' notes, literature and paintings fed and enlarged the general opinion about the East in the West. In conclusion, did orientalism studies produce knowledge of epistemological value? By all means, knowledge was produced, but the knowledge produced was wrapped in ideology. In 19th century paintings of the East, many of the

images that made up the painting were also elements of representation. Architectural depictions are also part of this large group. The architectural imagery revealed in the paintings sometimes became a historical document of architectural history research with its dominant document/data quality, far from the subjective interpretations of the painter. In contrast, imaginary city descriptions and architectural fictions with a high realism effect enabled the circulation of buildings and city imaginations that the painter constructed on canvas, which never existed, far away from the visible world.

In the Orientalist paintings, it is observed that architectural depictions can move away from their reality in terms of shape/form and proportion dimensionality. The depictions that deviate from the reality of the building are not limited to oil and watercolour paintings. Similar situations are also encountered in print paintings/drawings produced with the impulse to recognise and promote the region and its tangible cultural heritage. Therefore, when applied as a visual source for a building, it is not plausible to assume that the paintings and drawings included in the research/travel publication provide real information about the building, to assume that the publications of the period in question are reliable sources, and to attribute visual document quality to the painting without conducting a comparative evaluation. While the documentary quality can be limited in the specific case of the building, urban views also contain images that need to be examined.

In the 19th century, for countless people, literary narratives, paintings, illustrated travel books and architectural drawings were the only sources of reference to know a region or a city. Repeated descriptions of the same region and the same buildings provide limited information about the city. In Orientalist paintings of Cairo, narrow and complex streets, crowded avenues, minarets, and high domes are integral parts of cityscapes. However, the basis of creating an unbiased cityscape is based on the ability to interpret the skyline of each city, and in particular the building model, according to the current time. It is inevitable that the depiction of Cairo, one of the most significant commercial cities during the Middle Ages, will probably be based on the buildings and commercial districts of the most characteristic period. However, the city, which underwent a great change during the 19th century and gained a new silhouette with the development policies, does not offer a holistic visual experience when followed from the paintings.

In addition, the paintings shed light on such topics as the current condition of the buildings in their period, design features, and ornamental elements. Today, paintings and drawings are still used in restoration works and continue to have documentary value in academic publications. Furthermore, it can be argued that building depictions constitute a means for the protection of buildings. Most of the places observed in the paintings are located in historical-touristic regions, and therefore the regions where the buildings are located constitute attraction areas in the city. The fact that architectural artefacts are pictured many times serves to create urban memory, thus indirectly attributing value to the buildings in question. Although paintings have documentary value in urban and architectural history studies, each visual document should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The ties of visual data with both the imagination of the producer and the ideology of the period should not be ignored.

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SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Lot.: thing(s) to be sold

V&A: Victoria and Albert Museum

V.: Volume

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Anahtar Sözcükler: Oryantalist resimlerde mimari; kent betimleri; İslam mimarisi; Kahire; 19. yüzyıl görsel belgeleri

RESİMSSEL MEKÂNDAN YENİDEN İNŞA: ORYANTALİST RESİMLERDE KAHİRE'NİN MİMARİ YAPILARI VE KENT TASVİRLERİ

Bu makale, Avrupalı ressamların 19. yüzyıla tarihlenen oryantalist resimlerinde Doğu'daki kent ve yapı görünümünün mimarlık ve sanat tarihi çalışmalarında görsel belge olarak kullanımını tartışmaktadır. Bu yapı temsillerinin gerçekte var olan yapılar ile ne ölçüde örtüştüğünü ve oryantalist resimlerin mimarlık tarihi çalışmalarında alternatif bir görsel kayıt olarak değerlendirilip değerlendirilemeyeceği sorularına odaklanmaktadır. Oryantalist resimler üzerine yapılan mevcut çalışmalar büyük ölçüde dönemin siyasi bağlamını ve bu resimlerin doğrudan verdiği ya da vermeyi amaçladığı mesajları ele almaktadır. Ancak yapı temsillerinin mimarlık tarihi açısından görsel belge niteliği üzerine kapsamlı değerlendirilmesi gerekir. Nitekim 19. yüzyıl resimleri, mimarlık- kent ve sanat tarihi araştırmalarında önemli görsel kaynaklar olma özelliğini korumaktadır. Bu çalışma, oryantalist resimlerin mimarlık tarihi araştırmalarında nasıl bir kaynak olarak kullanılabileceğini ve

bu bağlamda taşıdığı sınırlılıkları ele alarak literatürdeki bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Makale, 19. yüzyıl oryantalist resimlerinin mimarlık tarihiyle kesişim noktalarını ele alırken, görsel temsiliyet, tarihsel gerçeklik ve mimari imgelerin inşası üzerine teorik bir çerçeve benimsemektedir. Oryantalist söylemin ve sanatın genel bir eleştirisini yapmaktan ziyade, bu resimlerin akademik bir kaynak olarak geçerliliğini pratik bir değerlendirmeye ele almaktadır. Resimlerde mimari imgelem Batılı ressam ve mimarlar tarafından 19. yüzyıl boyunca en çok ziyaret edilen kentlerden biri olan Kahire özelinde incelenmektedir. Kuşkusuz oryantalist resimlerdeki yapı betimleri, mimarlık tarihi açısından önemli görsel kaynaklar sunmaktadır. Ancak resimlerdeki yapılar; oran, boyut ve biçim açısından gerçeklikten sapmalar gösterebilmekte, kimi yapıların gerçekte var olmadığı veya resimsel mekânda biçimsel özelliklerinin tartışmalı olduğu gözlemlenmektedir. Resimlerde düş ile gerçeğin iç içe geçtiği bu tür betimlemeler, yalnızca mimari imgelerle sınırlı kalmayıp kent görünümüne yansımaktadır. Kahire’de 19. yüzyılda kent sınırları genişlemesine ve yeni yerleşim bölgeleri kurulmasına rağmen, resimlerdeki temsil, kentin genişleyen sınırlarını göz ardı ederek belirli bölgelerle sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu durum, 19. yüzyıl Kahire’sinin bütüncül bir gerçeklikten uzak, seçilmiş bir silüet ile günümüze aktarılmasına neden olmuştur.

Makale, oryantalist resimlerin mimarlık ve sanat tarihi araştırmalarında önemli görsel kaynaklar sunduğunu, ancak bunların mutlak gerçeklik olarak ele alınmaması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Oryantalist resimler görsel belge niteliği taşısa da, bu belgelerin eleştirel bir perspektifle değerlendirilmesi gerektiği belgelerle ortaya konmaktadır.

RECONSTRUCTION IN THE PICTORIAL SPACE: ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES AND URBAN DEPICTIONS OF CAIRO IN ORIENTALIST PAINTINGS

This article discusses the use of city depictions and architectural structures in the Orient, as represented in 19th-century Orientalist paintings by European artists, as visual documents in architectural and art historical studies. It focuses on the extent to which these architectural representations correspond to actual existing structures and whether Orientalist paintings can be considered an alternative visual record in architectural history research. Existing studies on Orientalist paintings largely examine the political context of the period and the direct or intended messages conveyed by these artworks. However, a comprehensive evaluation of the visual documentary value of architectural representations from the perspective of architectural history is necessary. Indeed, 19th-century paintings continue to serve as significant visual sources in architectural, urban, and art history research. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by exploring how Orientalist paintings can be utilised as sources in architectural history research by addressing the limitations they present in this context.

While examining the intersections of 19th-century Orientalist paintings with architectural history, this article adopts a theoretical framework that encompasses visual representation, historical accuracy, and the construction of architectural imagery. Rather than offering a general critique of Orientalist discourse and art, it provides a practical assessment of the validity of these paintings as academic sources. The study specifically

analyses architectural imagery in paintings of Cairo, one of the most frequently visited cities by Western painters and architects throughout the 19th century. Undoubtedly, architectural depictions in Orientalist paintings serve as valuable visual resources for architectural history. However, the representations of buildings in these paintings may deviate from reality in terms of proportions, dimensions, and forms. Some structures depicted may not have actually existed, or their formal characteristics may be subject to debate within the pictorial space. Such depictions, where fantasy and reality intertwine, extend beyond architectural imagery and influence the representations of the cityscape. Despite the expansion of Cairo's urban boundaries and the establishment of new residential areas in the 19th century, the paintings often ignore these changes and remain confined to specific, selected locations. As a result, the representation of 19th-century Cairo has been transmitted to the present day through a selective silhouette rather than a comprehensive and realistic depiction of the city.

The article emphasises that while Orientalist paintings provide important visual resources for architectural and art historical research, they should not be interpreted as absolute realities. Although they possess visual documentary value, the study demonstrates through evidence that these documents must be evaluated from a critical perspective.

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