

Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform/ Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage/ Chapter 198

On the Balyans with Büke Uras

TOPICS: From Collecting Being a Collector to Architectural Historiography, ttThe Birthinception of the Balyans Book, The Importance of the Balyan Family Archive, Prejudices against Balyan Architecture in the 20th Century, Sarkis Balyan: Modern Ottoman Architect

Nükhet Everi: Today we are together with Büke Uras in the interviews we organised for the Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform’s “Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage” on the backs of our cultural heritage. Büke Uras is a graduate architect, architectural historian, and writerauthor. We will talk towith her about her book Balyans (Balyanlar). Büke, hello, can we get to know you could you please introduce yourself?

Büke Uras: Thank you for inviting me. I am a graduate architect and architectural historian. I studied architecture at La Sapienza University in Rome and continued my architectural career between New York and Istanbul for many years. I currently live in Paris andwhere I continue my architectural career. My interest in architectural history started with collecting Ottoman architectural drawings and documents. I started writing articles based on my collection and this led me to architectural historiography. My first exhibition was the Eduardo Denari exhibition at the Istanbul Research Institute in 2013. My second exhibition was onabout Nazımiyaver Yenel in 2017.

Nükhet Everi: This has been a very interesting journey. How did your interest in the history of architecture begin?

Büke Uras: My interest in the history of architecture started with my curiosity about Ottoman architectural drawings and documents. Especially mMy interest in the works of the Balyan family in particular led me to do more in-depth research in this field. This family has a very important place in Ottoman architecture. The drawings and documents in my collection gave me the opportunity to learn more and write articles on this subject. In time, this led me to turn tospecialise in architectural historiography.

Nükhet Everi: Now let's move on to your book Balyans. How did you start this project? Can you tell us the story of the book's birthinception?

Büke Uras: The idea for the Balyans book was proposed to me by the Hay Car Association (Hay Car Derneği). The aAssociation thought that a new and comprehensive book about the Balyans should be written and offered me this project. In this process, I received great support from Arsen Yarman and Kevork Özkaragöz. The research process was quite intense. In 2014, the donation of the Balyan Family Archive to a state institution in Armenia provided an important resource for our work. Thanks to this archive, we had the opportunity to analyse the Balyan family's understanding of architecture and the buildings they builtconstruction in more depth.

Nükhet Everi: What did you find in the Balyan Family Aarchive? What new information did you discover during your research?

Büke Uras: In the archive, we found original drawings and documents of many of the buildings builtconstructed by the Balyan family. These documents allowed us to see the design processes and the buildings’ alternative projects of the buildings. It also helped us to better understand the Balyan family's architectural understanding and innovative approaches in the Ottoman period. This archive has once again revealed how valuable the Balyan’s architectural heritage of the Balyans is.

Nükhet Everi: What was the Balyan family's understanding of architecture? What distinguishes them from other architects?

Büke Uras: The Balyan family brought important innovations into Ottoman architecture. Their understanding of architecture had a structure that combined traditional Ottoman architecture with Western architecture. In this way, they built many important buildings. The Balyans attracted attention not only with the aesthetic appearance of their buildings, but also with their functionality and durability. For example, works such as Dolmabahçe Palace and Ortaköy Mosque show how skilled and innovative they were.

Nükhet Everi: How did the Balyan family's buildings contribute to Ottoman architecture?

Büke Uras: The Balyan family made great contributions to Ottoman architecture. Their buildings brought a breath of fresh air to Ottoman architecture. They created many important works by combining Western architecture with Ottoman architecture. These works are among the important architectural structures not only of the period but also of today. The Balyan family's understanding of architecture brought an innovative perspective to Ottoman architecture and this heritage has preserved its value until today.

Nükhet Everi: How was the writing process of your book? Nevzat Sayın made a very impressive comment about your book.

Büke Uras: The writing process of the book was quite intense and meticulous. We analysed the previous works written about the Balyan family and researched the documents in the archives in detail. Nevzat Sayın's comment is really very valuable. He stated that the book tells/relates about historical and social figures beyond architectural styles. This was very important for us because we wanted to describe not only the Balyan family's architectural works of the Balyans, but also their influence in the historical and social context. In this respect, Nevzat Sayın's comment is a great honour for us.

Nükhet Everi: The Balyan family faced some prejudices, especially in the 20th century. What do you think about these prejudices?

Büke Uras: Yes, unfortunately the Balyan family faced many prejudices throughout the 20th century. Under the influence of modernism, architectural structures influenced by historicism were criticised. The decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and the policies of the Republican era-policies also contributed to these prejudices. Today, however, these prejudices have diminished, and we continue our efforts to ensure that the Balyans family receives the recognition they deserve.

Nükhet Everi: Is there an architect in among the Balyan family who inspires you in particular?

Büke Uras: Definitely Sarkis Balyan. What we call the Balyan Archive is actually the personal archive of Sarkis Balyan. Sarkis Balyan is one of the important figures who made the transition from an anonymous journeyman/master builder to a modern architect in the 19th century. He attracts attention with his visibility and modernity. He was one of the first Ottoman architects to have his portrait painted, which shows/reflects his modernity and self-confidence. Sarkis Balyan's works also stand out with the innovations he brought/contributed to Ottoman architecture. His buildings brought a breath of fresh air to Ottoman architecture.

Nükhet Everi: What should be done to raise public awareness about the protection of cultural heritage?

Büke Uras: It is very important to raise awareness in society for the protection of cultural heritage. For this, first of all, we should firstly include more cultural heritage issues in the education system's curricula. The importance of historical and cultural values should be explained to students in schools. In addition, awareness should be raised among local people should also be aware of this issue. Events and tours organised in important cultural heritage sites such as Ani can help the public understand the value of this heritage. Media and social media can also play an important role in this regard. The protection of cultural heritage is everyone's responsibility of everyone, not just that of experts.

Nükhet Everi: What are your future plans? How will you continue your work in Ani?

Büke Uras: Our future plans include investigating the seismicity of the structures in Ani, ensuring that the structures under the protection roofs dry out, and conducting new analyses using three-dimensional data of the structures. We also plan to create identity cards for all the buildings in Ani and submit them to UNESCO. These identity cards will contain detailed information about the history, architectural features, and restoration processes of the buildings. In addition, we aim to better understand the historical texture of the city by conducting regular archaeological excavations and research in Ani.