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174 Deniz Türker, *The Accidental Palace: The Making of Yıldız in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023. 272 pages, 4 maps, 25 color and 73 black-and-white figures. ISBN: 9780271093918

Published in the Buildings, Landscapes, and Societies series by Penn State University Press, *The Accidental Palace* is the first architectural monograph on Yıldız Palace in Istanbul. Situated between Ortaköy and Beşiktaş on a steep hill overlooking the Bosphorus, Yıldız remains as inaccessible today as it was in the nineteenth century. While some of its buildings and gardens have been opened to the public as museums and parks, much of the domestic compound is occupied by Yıldız University, and multiple other structures have been intermittently repurposed for administrative and military use. Recently, in July 2024, “Yıldız Sarayı” was officially opened to visitors, who were granted partial access to several structures in the site’s administrative and domestic compound for the first time in many years, including Mabeyn Kiosk, Çit Kiosk (attributed to the Balyans), Küçük Mabeyn (attributed to Raimondo D’Aronco), the arsenal, and the private garden. Yet grasping the site in its totality remains a challenge, as the focus of the newly opened palace is restricted to the individual structures of Yıldız, excluding parts that have been privatized and the multiple edifices that are still closed off and about which the public is offered no information.

More than just a palatial complex, Yıldız is a vast urban landscape with a history longer than the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Deniz Türker’s book offers a timely and revisionist analysis of its extensive history that moves beyond an imperialist narrative of the site’s architecture and landscape. *The Accidental Palace* adopts an innovative approach in terms of both its methodology and its

content. First, Türker skillfully examines a diverse range of textual and visual materials thanks to her language proficiency. By closely analyzing a specific set of sources in each chapter, she curates the rich archival material on late Ottoman visual and material culture. Second, Türker carefully parses out the politically charged narratives around Abdülhamid II’s “fortress.” Her interdisciplinary analysis reveals that Yıldız was linked to a process of imperial self-fashioning along the Bosphorus that from the eighteenth century onward was altering the area’s topography and punctuating it with shoreline palaces, a process also linked to the city’s evolving urban ecologies during the period. Türker also connects Yıldız to the nineteenth-century modernities circulating in the world’s fairs and print media at the time, modernities that were shaping late Ottoman consumer culture and bourgeois taste in residential architecture.

Each chapter of *The Accidental Palace* examines a specific period in Yıldız’s architectural and landscape history from 1795 to 1909. Chapter 1, “Sultan Abdülhamid II’s Yıldız Palace,” begins with an overview of the current state of the Yıldız complex. Türker utilizes the narratives of an official scribe, male and female visitors, Abdülhamid II himself, and imperial family members to portray Yıldız’s administrative (*selamlık*), Şale (for hosting privileged guests), and domestic (*harem*) compounds. She reevaluates hackneyed narratives of flawed royal taste while detailing the official routines, public ceremonial, and private life of a scaling-down imperial family through a variety of building groups. The chapter maps out Yıldız, starting from an official zone defined around Mabeyn Kiosk and expanded through a rectilinear alignment of administrative units (*daireler*). In addition, there are belvedere and pavilion structures, a library, a museum, greenhouses, sheds, stables, aviaries, and hamams, as well as workshops, a zoo, a pharmacy, a porcelain factory, and a theater. This chapter illustrates the strategic locations of these structures as well as gates, water features, and an unrealized railway project to transport visi-

tors around Yıldız’s irregular topography.

Chapter 2, “Yıldız Kiosk and the Queen Mothers,” presents a captivating narrative about Yıldız’s earlier transformation into a women-only royal retreat through the efforts of Ottoman queen mothers (*valide sultans*) starting from the late eighteenth century. Using court chronicles and poetic inscriptions, the author introduces Mihrişah Sultan (mother of Selim III), Bezmiâlem Sultan (mother of Abdülmecid), and Pertevniyal Sultan (mother of Abdülaziz) as key patrons of Yıldız prior to Abdülhamid II’s move there from Dolmabahçe in 1878. Inspired by the nearby Sufi convent of Yahya Efendi, these influential women began converting the sparse urban landscape of Yıldız into a royal retreat. The first architectural developments included Yıldız Kiosk and a fountain commissioned by Mihrişah Sultan during Selim III’s reign (1789–1807). Bezmiâlem Sultan commissioned a mansion, an open-air prayer hall, pavilions, fountains, and orchards in and around Yıldız, turning it into a lush imperial garden and *valide* estate. Pertevniyal Sultan built the two-story Mabeyn Kiosk around 1865, which Abdülhamid II later repurposed as his office. Rather than simply detailing each structure’s architectural history, Türker vividly illustrates how the queen mothers’ religious sensibilities, leisure activities, and Yıldız’s unique location between the shoreline and nature-rich hillside contributed to its romantic park aesthetic.

The next chapter, “Yıldız and Its Gardeners,” focuses on the designers of this romantic park during the reigns of Mahmud II (1808–1839) and Abdülmecid (1839–1861), drawing from official gardening expense accounts and gardeners’ records. Christian Sester, a Bavarian gardener, worked as the head gardener in Istanbul from 1835 to 1866 and established a lineage of German gardeners that lasted for years, until French gardeners eventually came to prevail in the Ottoman court. Sester most importantly shaped the leveling of the hillside behind the old Çırağan Palace, constructed by Sultan Mahmud II. The gardener

also designed the transition from the formal terraces of Çırağan to the natural landscape of Yıldız, thus connecting the contrasting imperial gardens. Türker's meticulous depiction of Sester's agency in converting a grand barren urban landscape into a heavily forested area is a significant contribution to the historiography of Istanbul and its urban ecology.

In Chapter 4, "The Architecture of the Yıldız Mountain," the author examines the architectural aesthetics of Yıldız, connecting them to an international trend of wooden and prefabricated structures. Her analysis draws from architectural catalogues featuring French, Swiss, and British cottage-style residences, Nordic "frame houses," and mail-order pattern books. The projects in these print materials were adopted particularly for the timber kiosks in Yıldız, which complemented the design of its picturesque landscape. The Alpine aesthetic was deemed well-suited to the ravines and hilly terrain of Yıldız, marking a continuation of the tradition of building secluded residences for royal females, some of whom suffered from illnesses. Various models of easy-to-assemble wooden structures circulated in royal sites after the manner of Abdüllaziz's (r. 1861–1876) imperial pavilions. Following the royal preference for the English garden and cottage style, prefabricated wooden mansions with large gardens gained favor among Istanbul's urban elites as a fast and affordable solution for the city's destructive earthquakes. The bureaucratic and official elites populating the Asian shore and Princes Islands carried this versatile aesthetic to their neighborhoods. The discussions in this chapter open new horizons for further research in the historiography of Ottoman domestic architecture and the mobility of architecture as a design idea and portable object.

The last chapter, "The Last Photograph Album of the Hamidian Palace," centers on a photography album from 1905 containing sixty-four images, making it a valuable resource for art and architectural historians of the Ottoman Empire, as well as those studying visual culture and photog-

raphy. Titled *Souvenir 1905*, the album situates Yıldız within a broader context of palatial recreational sites like Maslak, Ayazağa, Çamlıca, Kağthane, and İhlamur. Its thematic curation suggests a narrative of intimate sightseeing or visual epistolary, which Türker explores engagingly and connects to broader themes of *The Accidental Palace* on the interplay of natural versus artificial and intimate versus official. The end of the book returns to Abdülhamid II, focusing on Hamidiye Mosque and Yıldız Theater as significant sites of the sultan's visual politics. While public spectacles were held at Hamidiye Mosque during prayer ceremonies, more restricted diplomatic meetings took place at Yıldız Theater.

Each chapter of *The Accidental Palace* examines Yıldız with a distinct focus, collectively supporting the bold and fitting title of Türker's narrative. Yıldız is portrayed as an accidental palace from its origins as an estate and retreat for *valide sultans*, followed by its transformation into a picturesque English garden under Sester's design. Over time, the forested hilltop of Yıldız became dotted with individually commissioned masonry kiosks, timber chalets, and hunting lodges in eclectic styles, all lacking a cohesive palatial site plan. Yıldız was an administrative space for Abdülhamid II but also his private residence, one whose intimate character he demonstrated via a carefully crafted photography album distributed as an imperial and familial gift. The urban spectacle stretching from Yıldız to Hamidiye Mosque during the Friday prayer ceremonies was complemented by smaller-scale private sightseeing tours and gatherings. Most crucially, the visibility and seclusion of the last royal seat of the Ottoman Empire were both strategically crafted and naturally influenced by the steep slopes of Yıldız descending toward the Bosphorus.

The Accidental Palace is the second title in the Buildings, Landscapes, and Societies series focusing on Istanbul, following Çiğdem Kafescioğlu's influential 2009 book *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*. Both authors earned their doctorates from Harvard University

and studied with a leading architectural historian of Istanbul, Gülru Necipoğlu. Türker provides a critical perspective on Istanbul's later period, masterfully examining it through the lens of the Yıldız palace complex. I believe *The Accidental Palace* will serve as a key resource on late Ottoman Istanbul, just as Kafescioğlu's work has for the creation period of Ottoman Istanbul. Each book meticulously captures a transformative period in the city's history, and together, they bookend the long history of Istanbul's built and natural environments together with the diverse personal and imperial visions that have influenced them over the centuries. Türker further carefully situates the formation of Yıldız Palace among the global dynamics of a nineteenth century shaped by the mobilities of print and material culture. Her book is a significant contribution to the analysis of visual and material cultures at large as a window into the evolving dynamics of gender, power, aesthetics, and landscape. I hope *The Accidental Palace* will be translated into Turkish soon, making it accessible to a wider audience, particularly to Istanbulites and students seeking deeper insights into Yıldız as a significant part of the city. I also wish that more of the site's buildings, like Set Kiosk, will be opened as museums, enabling a broader understanding of Yıldız as more than just the palace of Sultan Abdülhamid II. As Yıldız opens to the public, *The Accidental Palace* will be the main source illustrating the relationships between its buildings, gardens, and their connection to the landscape of Istanbul.

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