

## A Splintered Icon

### The Tensions of Politics, Ideology and Representation in Early Republican Ankara

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Ankara rose to prominence as a makeshift center of command when, following the devastating defeat in WWI, most of the Ottoman Empire came under occupation. Throughout 1920, renegade nationalists journeyed to Ankara, which they then used as a base to stage an all-out Liberation War (1920-22). At the urging of the local elite, Ankara's townsfolk threw their lot with the nationalists, providing much needed material, monetary, and moral support for the war.

Upon victory, rather than returning to Istanbul and restoring the Empire, the nationalists proclaimed Ankara as their new capital, founded a republic, and embarked upon a formidable course of sweeping reforms designed to reinvent Turkey as a modern nation-state. These reforms featured the most decisive and comprehensive incorporation of Enlightenment ideas into the nationalist ideology and they were intended to transform areas of the public and private lives of the citizenry, which would previously have been inconceivable.<sup>1</sup>

Within this context, beyond a mere change of address for the seat of power, the nationalists regarded the building of a new capital as an extraordinary opportunity for inscribing the structural transformation of the state into the

**Figs 1,2,3:** Republican Propaganda Images featuring the construction of the New Ankara and its elite, engaged in "modern" leisure activities, tennis, horseback riding etc.



<sup>1</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Critique of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 131; Bozdogan, Chapter 2 from manuscript /page yet undetermined in the actual publication.

physical landscape. They envisioned Ankara as a model site where the socio-spatial practices of a new and progressive way of life could be put into practice and an alternative political consciousness could flourish. Hence during the early years of the Republic, images of Ankara's rapid growth, its new architecture, and its thoroughly "modernized" citizens and their activities were disseminated nationally. Since the making of the new capital and the building of the nation-state were so closely associated, images of the former undertaking were frequently used as concrete "evidence" of the fulfillment of the latter.

Nevertheless, far from forming a unified and coherent body of iconography, these images bore highly ambivalent messages about the making of Turkey's new capital. In this paper, by identifying the contradictions and omissions they contain, I explore the contentions between the various actors who sought to shape Ankara and the underlying tensions between their personal, political, and ideological motives.

### An Invisible City

In his novel "Ankara", Yakup Kadri, a prominent member of the nationalist intelligentsia, recalled:

*Especially after the occupation of Istanbul in March 1920, Ankara had acquired a mysterious magnetism. Like a secret password toward freedom and redemption, when uttered, Ankara's name lit people's eyes with hope and anticipation. . . Ankara, the ideal, loomed in their imagination like a promised destination shrouded in magic. . .*<sup>2</sup>

Without a doubt, the most indelible memory for the nationalists who came to Ankara in the 1920's was the striking view of the Citadel perched on a promontory hovering over the vast Central Anatolian plain. During the war, this image became so thoroughly identified with the nationalist cause that it came to be widely seen as the physical vessel of one of modern Turkey's central foundation myths.

In the early years of the Republic, the image of Ankara's Citadel circulated nationally in banknotes, commemorative medallions, posters, school textbooks, and the commercial logos of Ankara's more prominent new businesses.



**figure 1** Turkish Banknote and detail. The medallion at the center features a peasant and oxen in the foreground. To his left, on the background is an image of the first building of the Grand National Assembly, to his left is the Citadel. This configuration is stylized: not only was there no agricultural field in front of the Grand National Assembly, but the Grand National Assembly and the Citadel could never really be seen together from such an angle. This, however, would not be known to those unfamiliar with Ankara. The image suggests that the city, the assembly and the peasant are working together to build the new nation-state.

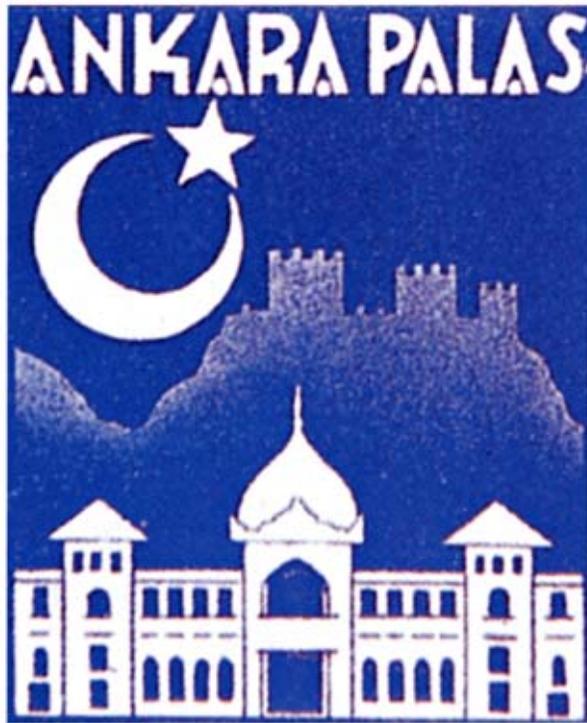
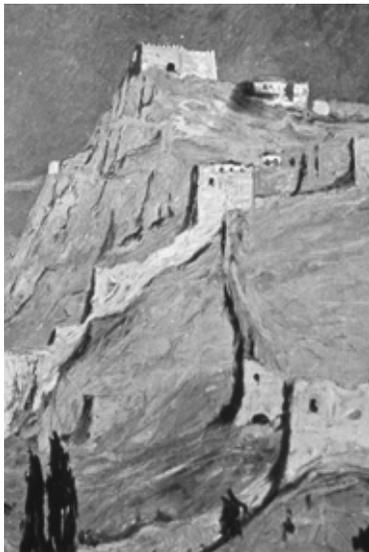


figure 2 The commercial logo of Ankara Palas Hotel



figure 3. A poster of the Citadel drawn by the famous graphic artist Işık Hulusi. As in the banknote this is an impossible view. If depicted from the same angle as the Monument, the image reveal a different view of the Citadel from the side that was packed with neighborhoods.



figs 4,5: a painting and a photograph, taken from the same distance and angle. The latter shows the residential fabric.



*Ankara, Ankara, beautiful Ankara,  
It is you the unfortunate seek to see  
And in you the forlorn find solace  
And you come through for them, beautiful  
Ankara*

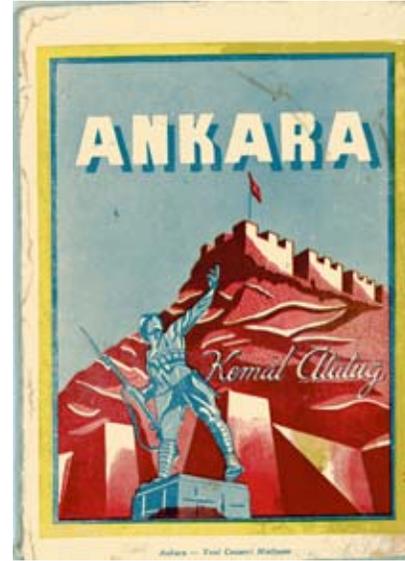
*May unruly heads raised against you be  
subdued  
May with you Turkish might overcome all odds  
The first city forged out of nothing that you are  
May your stones and your grounds live long  
Ankara!3*



**figures 5,6** Images of the Citadel from different angles showing the city's dense urban fabric.

Noticeably, in all of these images, the immediate urban context of the Citadel appears to have been edited out. In actuality, unlike these depictions, which featured it standing alone amidst the desolate landscape, the Citadel was home to several densely packed neighborhoods both inside its walls and on its foothills. The only vacant patch was on its western slope, a neighborhood, which had been devastated by a fire in 1917 and which, due to the wartime lack of resources, had not been rebuilt since.

The selective omission of the built fabric in and around the Citadel highlighted its monumental qualities while downplaying the urban life it was part of. Although it is common to take some artistic license streamlining images and conjecturing impossible views especially in logos and posters, importantly, the imagery that excluded Ankara's urban fabric, was accompanied by a constant and ubiquitous rhetoric, which reinforced the misleading notion that the new capital was built from scratch on virgin land. Not only was the image of Ankara's existing urban fabric left out of school textbooks, but students were also taught songs and poems such as the Ankara March, which similarly claimed Ankara had been born with the Republic:



**figure 7** The cover page of an elementary school text book about Ankara. Note that the abstract masses of Ankara's newer buildings have been worked into the representation, the older building stock, in contrast, is omitted.

The separation of the Citadel from its urban context implies fractures in the way Ankara was conceptualized by different constituencies in the early years of the Republic. Identifying these exclusions opens up intriguing paths of inquiry, which I explore in this paper.

3

Ankara Ankara güzel Ankara  
Seni görmek ister her bahti kara  
Senden yardım umar her düsen dara  
Yetersin onlara güzel Ankara  
Bircuna göz diken dik baslar insan  
Türk gücü orada her zoru yensin  
Yoktan varedilmis ilk sehir sensin  
Varolsun topragin tasın Ankara

### The Making of “Old” Ankara and “New Ankara”

Romance with the idea of Ankara as a mythical place faded quickly once the nationalists moved there. Initially, fired by their idealism, they had been eager to dig their heels in the heartland and fight the occupation despite all odds. But their enthusiasm was dampened by the less than ideal conditions of life in Ankara. Having seen more than its share of natural disasters, economic decline, and wars Ankara, much like the rest of the Ottoman Empire, was impoverished and dilapidated. Journalist-author Vala Nureddin's impressions of his first morning in this small provincial town were especially dire:

*We woke up to Ankara's sunshine in the morning. The brief stroll we took around town felt more like walking through cinders in a giant fireplace. There was no sign of civilization, no vegetation, just the smell of ashes in dark and crooked labyrinthian pathways. Because it had suffered two consecutive devastating fires, Ankara's lack of charm was beyond description.*<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the nationalists and Ankara's natives had little cultural affinity with one another. The nationalists sought recognition for what they viewed as their superior skills and more refined tastes as well as an appreciation of their heroic mission. But the validity of their credentials and the righteousness of their convictions were not self-evident to their local counterparts. Ankara's natives, in turn, found the sudden influx of strangers disruptive and were reserved, if not apprehensive, in their interactions with them. As Vala Nureddin wrote:

*One could distinguish the newcomers from the locals anywhere, anytime. The two crowds stood apart like oil and vinegar. On the one hand, the newcomers wanted to rise to the top like oil. On the other, the natives were as sour as vinegar toward them.*<sup>5</sup>

Both sides held off on acting on their disagreements since they considered the arrangement temporary. However, once the war

was over, the conflicts that had been brewing under the surface began to crop up. The locals had mixed feelings about the nationalist bid for power and decision to stay in Ankara. As the denizens of a small and impoverished town, they were proud of their contribution to winning the war and hoped to benefit from the change, but they also knew that their town was no longer theirs alone.

Much ink has been spilled on speculations about why the nationalists relocated Turkey's capital. In retrospect, their choice appears to have been overdetermined. Moving away from Istanbul clearly presented strategic advantages. From a military standpoint, straddling across an open international waterway, the former Ottoman capital had a vulnerable location. Moreover opponents of the nationalists and their powerful networks were concentrated in Istanbul. By relocating in Ankara, the nationalists effectively cut their rivals off from the locus of political power.

Publicly, the nationalists emphasized the moral dimension of their choice: they identified Ankara with the virtues of the Republic and the modernization project. To them, Istanbul represented all the shortcomings of the Ottoman government and culture, its corruption, its backwardness, its lack of purpose. In Istanbul the interests of a privileged few overrode those of the nation; foreign powers exercised undue influence on national affairs; and those who ruled the country were out of touch with the needs, desires, and suffering of those whom they ruled. In contrast, Ankara was in the heartland, immune to foreign influence, and it was just as poor and neglected as the rest of country. In Ankara the leaders would live close to their polity and share the same fate with them. Finally, the nationalists saw a blank slate in Ankara: Unlike Istanbul, Ankara had very few Ottoman landmarks, and thus could be shaped anew in the image of the modern Republic.

Although Turkey's leaders wanted to build a modern city that matched the sophistication and grandeur of its European counterparts, they lacked the professional expertise and the means necessary to realize this vision. Moreover, in a town with an extremely inadequate building stock they had to quickly provide the institutional buildings to accommodate the government and respond to the housing demands of a fast-growing population. While they vacillated between various alternatives, slums, squatters,

<sup>4</sup> Vala Nureddin quoted in [Senyapili, 1970 #329], 29.

<sup>5</sup> Vala Nureddin, quoted by Önder Senyapili in “Ankara ‘70” Mimarlik, March 1970pp:30

speculative land deals, and unsupervised construction projects proliferated. Eventually, in 1928, to reign in the haphazard growth, the government organized a competition and selected Herman Jansen from the Berlin Technical University to draw up a master plan for Ankara.

Jansen introduced modern principles of urbanism, which were quite different from Ankara's established settlement patterns. First, he prescribed a change in scale and new paths of movement through the city. Pre-republican Ankara had narrow and irregular streets, while the newly planned parts of the city had a regular geometry, bigger lots and wider streets. Rather than conforming to the topography, the new layout imposed a comprehensive preconceived pattern of paths and nodes that highlighted the monuments of the new capital. Second, Jansen instituted the concept of zoning: he grouped similar land uses together and proposed wide greenbelts as buffers between them.<sup>6</sup>

These ideas were antithetical to the spatial logic of the existing city. Jansen sought to override this contradiction by subordinating the Citadel and its environs to his scheme, and assigning them a single land use. However, unlike the single use zones around them, the Citadel and its environs comprised a fully functional city integrating multiple uses in a compact area. Its fine texture of mixed uses spilled unto each other. Religious buildings, commercial structures, small workshops and neighborhood stores intermingled with residential uses without clear demarcations. Jansen's decision to reduce this area to just another single-function zone implied that he had assigned the "Old town" as a whole the exclusive function of "being historic."

Jansen based his decision to physically buffer "Old Ankara" away from the "New Ankara" with greenbelts on three factors. He wanted to prevent the kind of speculative practices, which, he observed, had torn the historic fabric of European cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c., producing unhealthy, unsightly, and overcrowded slums. He believed old quarters, which imparted each city with a unique character, had to be



Figure 8. Ankara's new circulation patterns. The Citadel is the dark area, roughly in the NE quadrant of the map.



fig. 9. Jansen's proposed zoning for Ankara

protected.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, he recognized that the image of the "Old Ankara" had become fused with Republican foundation myths, which had to be

<sup>6</sup> Zeynep Kezer, "Contesting Urban Space in Early Republican Ankara," *Journal of Architectural Education* 52:1, no. September 1998 (1998), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Jansen, , 6-7.

preserved in the nation's collective memory. However, the network of roads and railroads he proposed to protect the "Old Ankara" from the encroachments of development, effectively severed it from the rest of the growing capital, isolating it as though it were an island. The greenbelts, road schemes, and the "necklace of seven squares" around it, offered vantage points from which to contemplate the Citadel at a distance, but also conferred it an object-like rather than a lived-in quality—much like its abstract iconographic representations. Designating "Old Ankara" as a picturesque still-life or a revered—but *hollowed out*—monument belied its vitality as an active urban environment which continued to house more than half of the city's population and commercial establishments.

### Out of sight out of mind

Jansen's planning decisions dovetailed all too conveniently with the nationalists' agenda. As a discursive strategy to validate their embrace of modernity, the nationalists had been pitting the Republican reforms against the legacy of the Empire in comparisons that consistently favored the former. Their rhetoric approvingly associated the Republic with modernity, progress, and dynamism, implying, in contrast, that the Empire was backward, reactionary, and stagnant. The ubiquitous deployment of visual comparisons between the "old" and the "new" further reinforced this message by rendering it concrete.



fig 10. Example of the Binary Matrix of Comparisons: art under the Empire and the Republic.

The juxtaposition of the "Old Ankara" with the "New Ankara" conformed squarely with these binary comparisons. The "Old Ankara" with its

unequivocally pre-modern spatial order, was the perfect foil to set off the modernity of the new, highlighting Turkey's grand transformation spearheaded by the Republican administration. Designating the old town as a self-contained "historic" zone was useful for the ideological purposes of the nationalist leaders, who readily labeled it as a relic of the past that, no matter how honorable, had to be left behind if the goal of modernization was to be achieved.

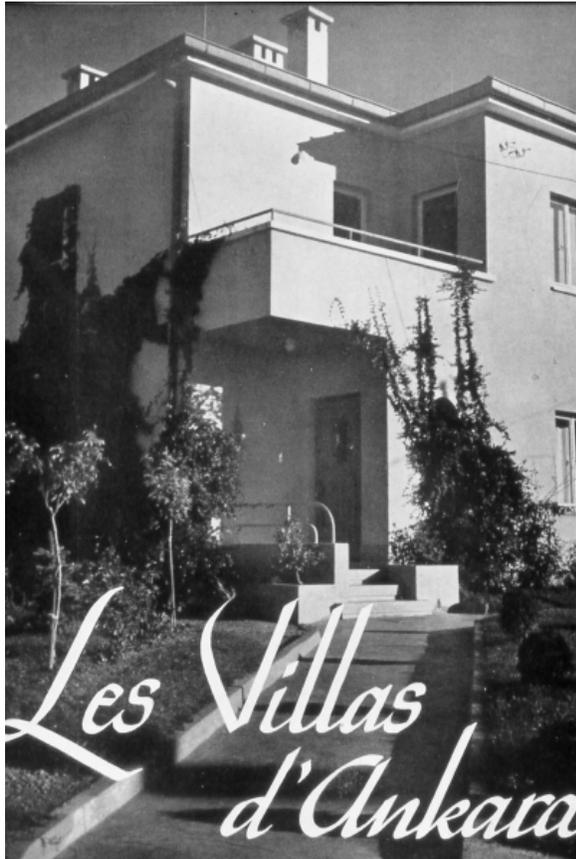


figs. 11-12 New Ankara and Old Ankara

The nationalists' stated commitment to their modernizing mission masked their less lofty pursuits for controlling the future development of the city. They claimed that retrofitting the old town would cost more than laying out a new town outside the bounds of "Old Ankara" because it was physically too congested and posed difficulties for implementing wholesale urban design decisions due to its complex ownership patterns.<sup>8</sup> Further they argued that creating new spaces were crucial for fully showcasing the achievements of the Republic. Although there was some truth to these

<sup>8</sup> Check for the discussions – it is in the assembly minutes – transcripts.

arguments, as their opponents pointed out, nobody really knew how feasible either option was. What everybody understood though, was that the city's new elite stood to make substantial personal gains from prioritizing development outside the old town.



**fig 13.** The Villas of Ankara: The Republican elite were able to take possession of land to the south of the city and build rather ostentatious residences.

What facilitated the implementation of these decisions despite the wishes and interests of Ankara's locals was a series of legal and institutional provisions introduced almost as soon as the relocation of the capital: When they established the new Ankara Municipality in 1924, the nationalists modeled it after that of Istanbul, but made two crucial amendments. In Istanbul those running for city council positions and those who elected them had to be property owners and taxpayers within city limits. In Ankara, these requirements were foregone. Also, in Ankara, the appointment of the city council and the mayor had been relegated to the

Interior Ministry, a policy which clearly subordinated local government decisions to the priorities of the national government. This arrangement empowered the new comers over the natives, rendering the latter legally silent. With the support of the state, it allowed the new elite to create a separate platform for decision-making, rather than having to permeate and compete with the intricacies of an existing city, its patterns of land use, land ownership and the social hierarchies associated with these. These and other arrangements that followed had ostensibly been made to streamline the implementation since the new capital had many urgent needs. But, their effect was to exclude the locals from the circuitry of power, while opening the city government to unencumbered corruption at the hands of the transplanted elite, who jumped at the opportunity.

The exclusion of Ankara's locals from political representation coincided, not accidentally, with their elimination from the verbal and visual representations of the city. The omission of the urban fabric in and around the Citadel was not simply a case of artistic license, but a deliberate political statement that reinforced the myth that Ankara was built from scratch by the founders of the Republic. While, for Ankara's new elite, the Citadel continued to conjure up romanticized memories of the Independence War, the picture had become quite different for the locals. For the latter, the Citadel, which had once been a widely shared symbol of hope and freedom, was now the zone of their confinement. In so far as it consciously excluded those who were denied political representation, the iconography of Early Republican Ankara was also a representation of its politics.

When "Old Ankara" did appear in the Republican iconography, it was used, by way of comparison, to set off the magnitude of the Republican transformations. The narrative of progress implicit in the modernization rhetoric also comprised a temporal logic that, by definition, pushed "Old Ankara" outside the historical present, relegating it to a permanently anterior time. Thus geographical separation between the old and the new parts of town also assumed a temporal dimension. While Turkey's new leaders had indeed moved physically closer to their constituency, they had maintained their distance discursively.

Nevertheless, pitting the "Old Ankara" against the new was an unstable proposition, because it

overlapped two contradictory conceptions of the former. On the one hand, the Citadel's distinctive silhouette continued to be one of the most symbolic images of the Independence War and was, therefore, capable of invoking collective memories that were indispensable for sustaining national unity. On the other hand, with its pot-holed crooked streets and run-down houses the old town was an embodiment of backwardness against which the modernity of the new Ankara and, by implication, the achievements of the Republic could be fully appreciated.

These irreconcilably discrepant characterizations of the "Old Ankara," which eluded simple representation, reveal not only the inherent tensions of within the making of Modern Turkey but also the historiographic challenge of

interpreting them. Subscribing to the official narrative masks the fractures I have been exploring. Yet drawing uncritical parallels between the modernizing elites and colonizers (and, by implication, between the locals and the colonized) is similarly problematic. Not only does such an approach retain some of the essentialist differences between Western and non-Western urban processes, but it also reduces the complexity and complicity of the personal and political stakes of historical players. Recognizing the collusions and the incompatibilities between the imperative of modernization, patriotic nationalism and personal aspiration is a gesture toward reconstructing the process by which Ankara's image was splintered and a part of it was rendered invisible. It is a gesture to make the invisible, historiographically visible.