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Art Deco a Frustrated Style and Reflections from Ankara - Turkey

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Abstract

Architecture carries a strong effect on people as life passes physically between what is constructed. The ambience of the works of architecture differs in time, place and society. These differences are observed and named as “styles” in general. The periods that past styles have been exercised happened to be very slow in Antiquity, in a world of tranquility and stability. Its acceleration increased with the technological developments and now, it is nearly too hard to trace the differences occurring during the life span of a human.

It is difficult to distinguish the styles at the period when one lives in, but easy to see and understand when observed as the past. However, there are ways to describe a certain style in general by examining the features controlling the daily use objects, buildings and even settlements. Every period reflects a certain aesthetic understanding observable on everything that is manmade. From this point of view the basic style governing the 20th century can be named as Modernism. On the other hand, the Modernist Movement in architecture and design carry varieties or branches in it. Some are distinct and powerful, while the others have been left in shadow. Art Deco is one of the latter, and therefore is chosen as the subject of this article.

The reflections of Art Deco differing from place to place will be examined over the city of Ankara, chosen as the case study. The style is tried to be explained in the conditions it was exercised during the establishment years of the Turkish Republic and the reasons for their conservation is discussed.

Anahtar kelimeler:

Art Deco, modern hareket,
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**Art Deco Hakkı Yenmiş Bir Üslup ve Türkiye - Ankara'dan
Yansımaları**

Zühal ÖZCAN*

Öz

Hayat fiziki olarak içinde geçtiği için, mimarlığın insanlar üzerinde güçlü bir etkisi vardır. Mimarlık eserlerinin ifadesi zamana, yer ve toplumlara göre değişiklikler gösterir. Bu değişiklikler gözlemlenmiş ve genel olarak "üslup" diye adlandırılmışlardır. Sükûnet ve durağanlığın hâkim olduğu Eski Çağlar'da üslupların uygulanması çok yavaş olmuştur. Üslup değişimlerinin hızı teknolojik gelişmelere bağlı olarak giderek arttı, o kadar ki bir insan ömrü içindeki değişimlerin hızını takip etmek çok güç. İçinde yaşanan dönem içerisinde oluşan üslupları ayırt etmek güçtür fakat geçmiş dönemler incelendiğinde görebilmek kolaydır. Bununla birlikte, gündelik hayatı kontrol eden günlük nesnelere, yapılar ve hatta yerleşimler incelendiğinde, belli bir üslubu tanımlayabilmek mümkündür. Her dönem insan eliyle yaratılmış her şey üzerinden gözlemlenebilecek belli bir estetik anlayışı yansıtır. Bu noktadan hareketle, 20. yüzyıla hükmeden temel üslup Modernizm olarak adlandırılabilir. Öte yandan mimaride ve tasarımda Modern Hareket kendi içinde çeşitlenmeler ya da dallar içerir. Bunlardan bazıları belirgin ve güçlüyken bir kısmı da gölgede kalmışlardır. Art Deco bu ikinci gruptandır ve bu nedenle bu makalenin konusu olarak seçilmiştir.

Ülkeden ülkeye değişen Art Deco, araştırma örnekleme olarak seçilen Ankara'daki yansımaları üzerinden incelenecektir. Üslup, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluş yıllarındaki koşullar içinde açıklanmaya çalışılmış ve korunmalarının gereklilik nedenleri tartışılmıştır.

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Introduction

The styles in art and architecture have found places to themselves with changing life spans. Some like the Ancient Egyptian has survived for thousands of years where the eye-catching Gothic of the Medieval Ages has lasted for only two centuries approximately. As we come closer in time it can easily be observed that the styles of the last 150 years had hardly a life time of 20-25 years. Among them some could even be popular for 10 or 15 years utmost. Art Nouveau of the 19th and Art Deco of the early 20th centuries can be named among them. The subject of this paper is to make a review of the Art Deco style over the European and USA examples and to select their reflections in Ankara-Turkey. The aim is to introduce and discuss the Turkish Art Deco within the frame of Modernist Movement examples, so as to put a small asterix to remember their importance and value in making an urban identity.

About The History and Principles of Art Deco

In the late 19th century Art Nouveau started as a movement more than a style with a purpose of defeating the “revivalistic” approaches of the day (Duncan, 1994), but the new art swayed between the curvilinearity of Victor Horta and calm, serene, linear lines of Charles R. Mackintosh (Fiell & Fiell, 1995). Around 1890 Henry van de Velde and William Morris were trying to find a new formula to achieve the “aesthetique moderne”. Art Nouveau became very popular in a short time and has been exercised nearly in all European countries from Britain to Italy, from Spain to Latvia. It even spread to Istanbul and found considerable supporters among architects, designers and contractors (Barillari & Godoli, 1997). Its influences spread to far West; Louis C. Tiffany became well-known with his lighting elements. Just like its birth, the fame of the style dropped down in a very short time and died after the 1st World War at the beginning of the 20th century.

Art Deco emerged around 1920s and somehow shaped within the frame of Modernist approaches. The Dutch De Stijl of Western Europe found a common language with the Bauhaus School of Walter Gropius (Droste, 1993) and Russian Constructivists (Ouroussoff, 2017). It can be stated that Art Deco is an extension of Art Nouveau but highly refined with the effects of European Modernists, applied with superlative craftsmanship and use of new materials. Unfortunately, just like Art Nouveau, it did not last longer than twenty years, but the influences were seen up to 1950’s especially in countries like Turkey. Sharing a similar fate with Art Nouveau, Art Deco lost its popularity with the 2nd World War (Duncan, 1995).

The Characteristics Summarizing Art Deco

The two terms “abstraction” and “simplification” can be accepted as the basic principles of Art Deco. The style being melted in the pure lines, strict geometry and the “less is more” statement of Modernism, Art Deco acted like a transitional period between Art Nouveau and the Modernist Movement. The era was a time of unexpected inventions like the TV and discoveries like Tutankhamun’s grave in Egypt, giving way to Egyptology, as well as the Maya and Aztec remains of the continent of America. It was the days when Russian dancers left their homeland after the 1917 October Revolution. They brought a new outlook and aesthetic taste to the European stages, especially to France. The emerging machine evolution with repeating and overlapping production, mixed with the streamline voyages between Europe and USA. The peak point of Art Deco design can be mentioned as the 1925 Paris International Exposition. Indeed the style borrows its name from this fair; “Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes.” In France, it found a colorful and playful arena to itself, being first applied in the “Haut-Couture Ateliers” of the day. The fashion show halls of the famous tailors / creators like Lanvin, Chanel and later Cardin hosted and spoiled their clients in a new atmosphere designed in bright stunning colors mainly red, blue and black.

Each of the events described above formed one of the characteristic principles of Art Deco. The bright colors of fashion studios mixed with the golden reflections of Egyptian art and with the strict zig-zag lines of the Maya architecture. The streamliners gave the main clues for horizontally elongated lines, curving forms, sometimes nautical elements (Cerwinske, 1981). The overlapping continuity of the machine production emphasized their repetitions, the circular forms reminded the shafts and portholes of the ships. The dancers found their place in graphic arts and sculptures.

The role of the newly invented synthetic resin “bakelite” which was widely used in daily life objects must be denied. The world was introduced with a new material, the plastics, as well as a new set of building materials, mainly in the developing reinforced concrete technology (Akman, 2003). However, Art Deco was disguised in the USA and accused of being the aesthetic taste of the “middle class consumers”.

Art and Architecture of Art Deco

Art Deco has mainly been repeated in nearly all the branches of art, interior design and architecture. It is interesting to note that the style has found a place to itself concerning the work fields of artists and artisans both.

Art Deco in Art

Nearly in all the branches like graphic arts, sculpture, textile, stained glass, furniture, lighting equipment, accessories and jewelry it is possible to find a perfect example. It must be mentioned that after the highly appreciated Art Nouveau poster designs of Alphonse Mucha (Bridges, Henderson, & Dvorak, 1983), the graphic designs of Romain de Thirtoff- Ertè seem as the alphabet of 1920-30's (Figures 1 and 2). They are still elegant and carry a curvilinearity but with less, simplified lines and bright colors. The cubic geometry of Modernism can easily be read at a glance. The leaf cover of the magazine Vogue carries a special place in graphic design ("George Lepape Illustrations," 1927) (Figure 3). The orderly pure geometric shapes can easily be detected in the costumes of the day. The sculpture of the period may well be exemplified in the works of Demetre Chiparus. The reliefs of Sidney Biehler Waugh are a summary of overlapping zig-zag lines with an angularity describing the Art Deco principles in his branch of art. Artists had a collaborative production also; in a comfortable chair of Leon Buchet, the textile was designed by Raoul Duffy (Duncan, 1995) (Figures 4, 5 and 6). Ceiling fixtures of Albert Cheuret, even the stained glasses of Frank Lloyd Wright can be given as mature glass examples although fairly earlier in time(Pfeiffer, 1994) (Figure 7). Jewelry from the 1924 collection of Van Cleef and Arpels is worth mentioning, which carries clues from archaeological findings(Duncan, 1995). Although commonly accepted as an Art Nouveau designer Charles R. Mackintosh has interiors in the Art Deco style like the Entrance hall of no. 74 at Derngate Southampton as the very early steps of Art Deco (Fiell & Fiell, 1995).

Art Deco in Architecture

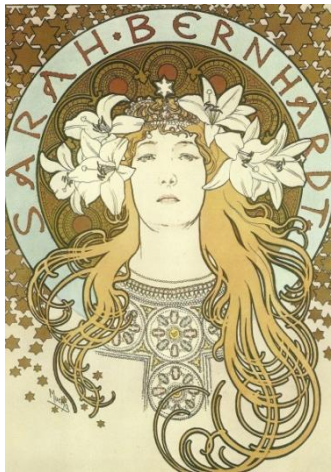


Figure 1 An Art Nouveau Illustration from Alphonse Mucha
Source: Bridges et al., 1983, p.38.



Figure 2 An Art Deco Graphic Design from Thirtoff- Erté
Source: The Prolific Art, Illustrations & Designs of Erté, 2010.

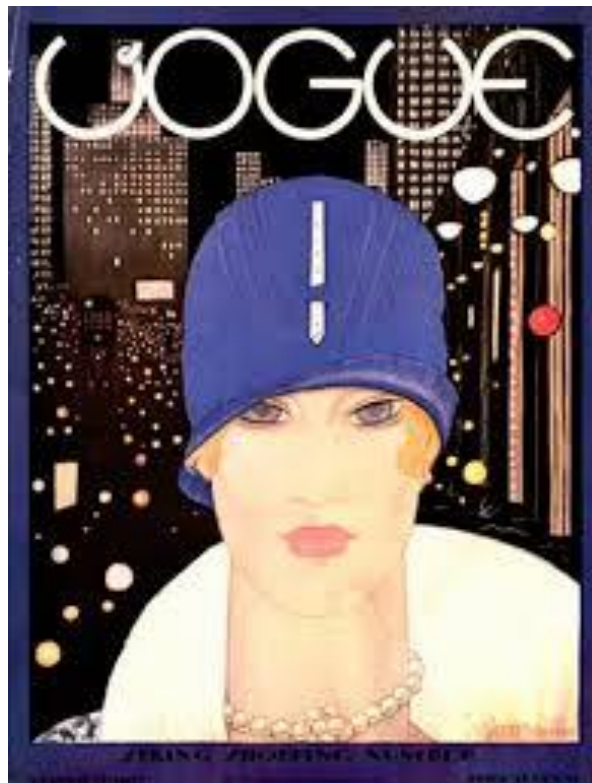


Figure 3 Illustration of George Lepape
Source: Vogue Magazine Cover, March 1927.



Figure 4 A figurine from Chiparus indicating the repeating lines of Art Deco with marble, bronze, ivory
Source: Sothebys, 1928.

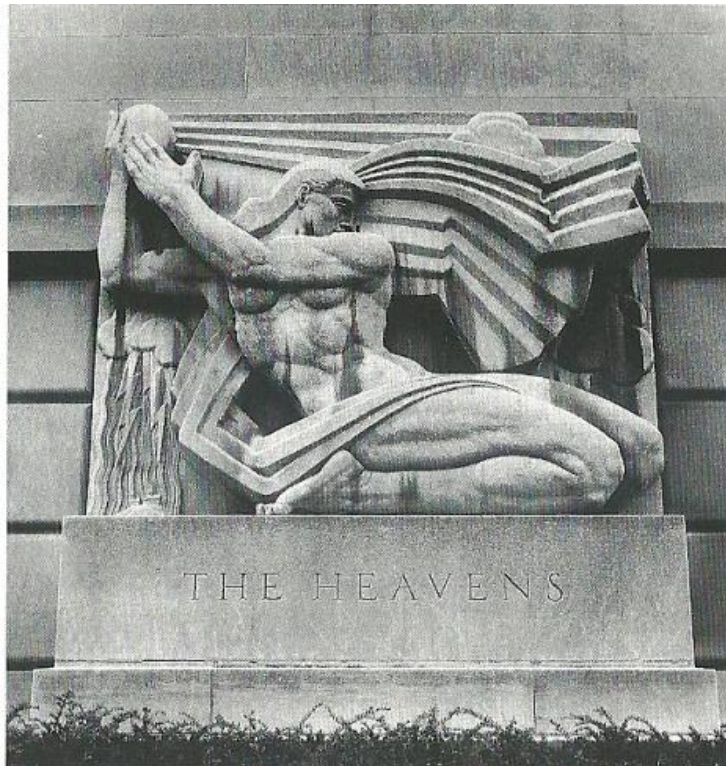


Figure 5 The relief on Buhl Science Center, Pittsburgh, 1940
Source: Duncan, 1995, p.140.



Figure 6 A Comfortable Chair of the Period
Source: Duncan, 1995, p.43.

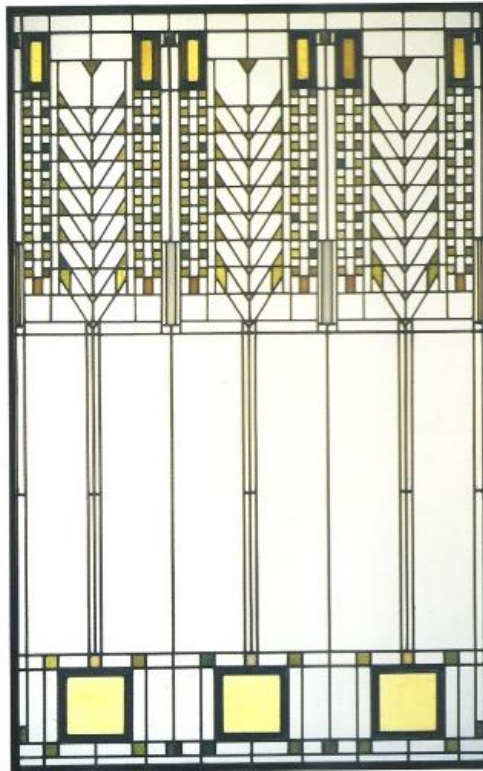


Figure 7 Stained Glass from Darwin D. Martin House, New York
Source: Fiell & Fiell, 1995, p.71.

Perhaps the best-known Art Deco building is William van Allen's Chrysler Building in New York constructed between 1928 and 1930, The Empire State Building followed it with a similar architectural understanding. However, Eliel Saarinen's Helsinki Station is accepted as the earliest example representing the Art Deco principles as a whole. A keen eye can easily detect the lighting fixtures, façade reliefs, sculptures, functional interiors and the general volumetric composition of the building with linear and curved contours, revealing the Art Deco aesthetique. In USA, the reputation of the Old Miami Beach buildings has been given back later in the 1980's. The post office and performance (cinema, theatre) buildings carry a distinctive place among the dwellings which are mostly used for touristic purposes today. Some easily reveal the link between streamliners of the day clearly (Figure 8). The interiors were enriched with sequential scenes of wall paintings as in the Miami Beach Post Office (Cerwinske, 1981) (Figures 9 and 10)

It is a truth that the highly appreciated Art Deco came to an end with the IInd World War but has not been forgotten completely. It has been repeated twice; firstly, during the 1960's and secondly during 1980-1990's. The latter being a part of Post-Modernism applied in USA with the name "Deco Revival". In his Portland Building in Oregon constructed in 1982, Michael Graves made a new attempt to revitalize the style but stayed as a personal approach emulating the history. Currently, the style lives and finds a place on the TV screens in the "Hercules Poirot" character of Agatha Christie or as the "Great Gatsby" watched with interest in a successful movie film.



Figure 8 House designed to represent a streamliner by H. Hohauser, 1939

Source: Cerwinske, 1981, p.23.



Figure 9 Miami Post Office Building

Source: Cerwinske, 1981, p.18.



Figure 10 Wall Paintings in Miami Post Office Building (muralist Charles Hardman)

Source: Cerwinske, 1981, p.104.

A New Republic, a New Capital in the Middle East

After the decline of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 1st World War, the newly established state is named as the Turkish Republic. The new start has needed a new capital. Tankut (1993) indicates that Ankara has been established as an administrative center directed to the western, contemporary, rational world leaving the eastern one in the past. Ankara became not only a symbol but took over a new understanding by being the capital of a new way of living. Achieving an organized well-planned city had been the main aim of the founders. The first planning attempts started as early as 1924-25 but at the end of a competition held in 1928 Hermann Jansen's plan was approved.

Depending on the planning principles accepted, the city began to be shaped with buildings necessary for the new Republic. The former buildings of Ankara or those constructed at the early years of the republic, generally reflect an eclectic style trying to continue the Neoclassicism, embedded in a cover of Ottoman and Islamic architecture (Aslanoğlu, 2001). At a very early date like 1929 it was seen that the new Republic should also share a contemporary formation in architecture, just like in all the branches influencing public life.

Historically 1930s had been the years when European architects were invited to Ankara to shape the new outlook of the city. Their mission was not only designing the Modern buildings but to train the young Turkish architects and designers to continue the job that they would be responsible in the near future.

Among these foreign architects who had the first chance to have their buildings constructed, had been A. Ernst Egli and Clemens Holzmeister (Kortan, 2014; Tankut, 1993). The catastrophic years of Germany during 1930's indeed became the great chance of Ankara. German architects who had adopted Modernist Movement and obliged to leave their country were willingly welcomed in Ankara; namely, Ernst Egli, Clemens Holzmeister, Bruno Taut, Theodor Jost, Robert Oerley, Theo Leveau, Martin Elsaesser, Paulo Vietti-Violi, Paul Bonatz. The young Turkish architects some trained in Europe before, and understood the importance and value of the Modernist Movement like Şevki Balmumcu, Seyfi Arkan, Şekip Akalın, Sedat Hakkı Eldem, Sami Arsev had a leading role in shaping new Ankara as the desired capital city.

Modernist Movement Examples of Ankara

Although the buildings shaping the city had administrative functions they were not limited with governmental buildings. The construction of the schools, hospitals, banks, service and entertainment buildings, sports complexes, even houses, the city parks and squares were among the agenda of the Republic. Most of the ministries and the active National Assembly building were designed by Clemens Holzmeister. The main axis starting from the city center Ulus and elongating towards the new residential zones at the south (Yenişehir) hosted the Modern Movement examples. The banks, university and exhibition buildings, parks, squares accompanied with monuments, ministries were aligned at both sides of it and crowned with the National Assembly Building.

Namely, the best known works on education belong to Ernst Egli and Bruno Taut while the project of medical institutions belongs to Robert Oerley and Theodore Jost. The designer of banks varies; Martin Elsaesser, Clemens Holzmeister, and a Turkish architect Seyfi Arkan can be mentioned (Cengizkan, İnan, & Cengizkan, 2011). The city park named as "Gençlik Parkı" later, designed by Theo Leveau. He has also been the designer of an entertainment building at the

new dam area, the new recreational zone of Ankara (Orhan, 2009). It is possible to make a long list of the public buildings but the new residences were not that lucky. They lost their places easily as they could not resist to the high rent demands starting from 1960's.

The Modernist Period buildings are detectable with their cubic shapes, flat roofs, band or serial window openings and monumental appearances like their European contemporaries. Straight vertical and mostly horizontal lines dictate the main design characteristics. The only exception can be mentioned as the Saraçoğlu District at Yenışehir designed by Paul Bonatz (Sey, 1998). He has not only used the Modernist principles but has made a good interpretation of the timber constructed traditional Ankara houses, both in their appearances and interior designs. Among the design efforts which are tried to be summarized above, a group of buildings carry the traces of the popular characteristics of the time.

The "Shy Art Deco" Examples of Ankara

Certainly, the first half of the 20th century Turkish Republic Architecture has been widely and deeply searched. The key word for the literature study condenses on Modernism, but most of them lack its link with Art Deco. Although it is difficult to detect pure Art Deco examples, as it is valid for the most European similar examples, it is worth to make an attempt to point out distinctive interferences.

The main city square at the center of the 1930's Ankara is certainly Ulus. The square at the junction point of the historical citadel and the train station axis, with the administrative axis mentioned above, seems to be the meeting point of architectural styles, even during the establishment years of the Republic. The first National Assembly built before the new state accompanies the first private sector bank of the day, İşbankası. Although the latter carry Art Nouveau details, they both share an eclectic style. Their neighboring Sümerbank designed by Martin Elsaesser is a Modernist Period building composed of two cubic parts but in a completing manner. The cubic body of the building is composed of two curvilinear parts one after the other (Özcan, 1997) (Figures 11 and 12). The entrance hall repeats the curvilinearity ending with a circular stair at the back and enclosed with a shallow dome at the top.



Figure 11 Sümerbank Building Ankara-Ulus
Source: Author's Archive



Figure 12 Entrance Hall of Sümerbank Building Ankara-Ulus
Source: Author's Archive

The train station constructed during 1935-1937 and designed by Şekip Akalın can be summarized with two side towers hiding the stairs, which are designed as two vertical cylinders. The building has a VIP hall, currently exhibited like a museum and has been furnished in the Art Deco style (Figures 13 and 14). The entrance hall of the building has a high ceiling with an empty band of 4 x 21m. The area was planned to be decorated with paintings having a subject taken

from the Independence War. In order to achieve the painting a competition was held in 1937 but unfortunately has never been applied. The models of the painting is exhibited in the Station Museum nearby (Figures15 and 16). The approach directly reminds the wall paintings of the Miami Post office building and its interior decoration. The logos over the glass work of the building are worth mentioning from the aspect of Art Deco graphic design (Figure 17). The “Gar Gazinosu” building next to the station is connected with a colonnaded concavely designed portico at one side and ends with a cubic clock tower at the other, inspiring the Old Miami District in USA (Figure 18).



Figure 13 Ankara Train Station

Source: Author's Archive



Figure 14 Ankara Train Station, the VIP Hall

Source: Author's Archive



Figure 15 Ankara Train Station, Entrance Hall Empty Wall Painting Area
Source: Author's Archive



Figure 16 Ankara Train Station, Entrance Hall The Painting Models to be Applied to the Empty Wall Painting Area
Source: Author's Archive



Figure 17 Ankara Train Station, Logo on the Glass Doors and Detail from Door Handle
Source: Author's Archive



Figure 18 Ankara Gar Gazinosu / Gar Club Clock Tower
Source: Author's Archive

On the other axis towards the Yenışehir District two unlucky Art Deco inspired buildings took place. The first is the "Sergi Evi" / Exhibition Hall designed by Şevki Balmumcu during 1933-1934 (Aslanoğlu, 2001) (Figures 19 and 20). The main body of the building ends in a convex form at one end. At the other end, a self-repeating block before a clock tower, perfectly reveals the Art Deco traces. The building has been converted into an opera house with an eclectic facade later and has lost its elegant ambience. Although the Art Deco effect could only be traced at its ground floor, the recently destroyed Belediyeler Birliği Bankası / İller Bankası designed by Seyfi Arkan can be mentioned among buildings having Art Deco inspirations (Figure 21). It will be

interesting to note that “Gençlik Parkı” / the city park on the cross axis of the train station, designed by Theo Leveau in 1936, composed around a big pool with a similar geometry connected the station to the two Art Deco inspired buildings, the Exhibition Hall and Belediyeler Birliği Bankası (Figure 22).

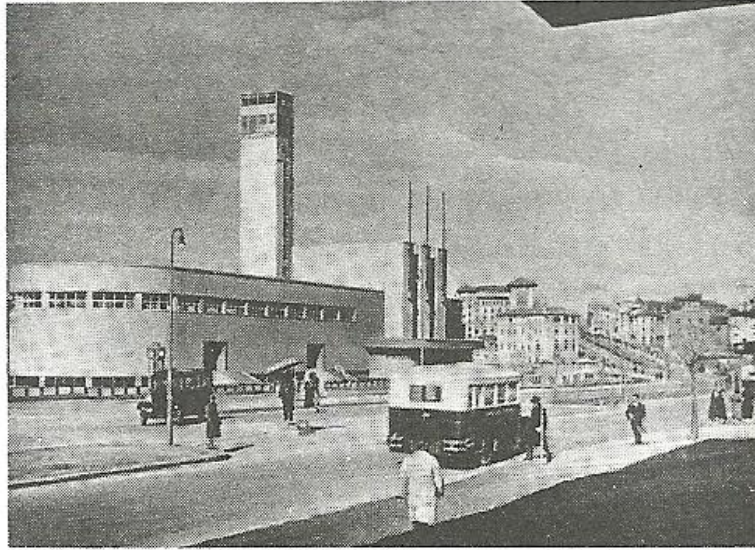


Figure 19 Ankara Sergi Evi / Exhibition Hall, 1933-1934

Source: Aslanoğlu, 2001, p.207.

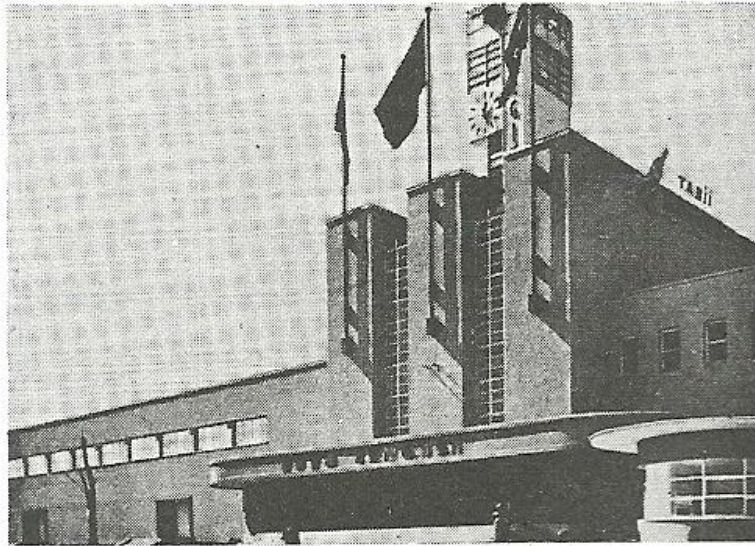


Figure 20 Ankara Sergi Evi / Exhibition Hall, 1933-1934

Source: Aslanoğlu, 2001, p.207.



Figure 21 Belediyeler Birliđi Bankası / İller Bankası Ground Floor Facade
Source: Sudaş, 2014.

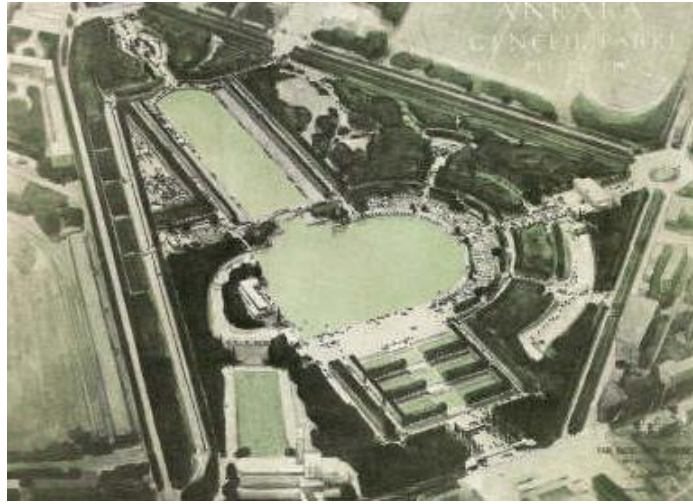


Figure 22 Gençlik Parkı Plan

Source: Bayındırlık İşleri Dergisi, Cover Leaf 1938.

Another bank building which is still used as an office on the above mentioned axis is the first Etibank building designed by Sami Arsev and constructed in 1935-1936. It reveals the traces of Art Deco in its plans more than the elevations. The “Hıfz-ı Sıhha Enstitüsü” / Refik Saydam Medical Institute carries Art Deco influences with its architecture and the relief over the entrance facade. The institute complex was designed by Theodore Jost and Robert Oerly in 1927-1932 (Figures 23 and 24). The overlapping technique of the relief reminds of the works of Waugh (Figure 5).



Figure 23 Hıfz-ı Sıhha Enstitüsü / Refik Saydam Medical Institute General View
Source: Goethe-Institut, 2010.



Figure 24 Hıfz-ı Sıhha Enstitüsü / Refik Saydam Medical Institute General View
Detail from the Relief
Source: Goethe-Institut, 2010.

The list of buildings with similar characteristics can be listed as follows: “Su Süzgeci” /Water-filter Building (1935-1936 contractor Hochtief Ltd., destroyed recently), “Çubuk Baraj Gazinosu” / Çubuk Dam Refreshment bar-club (1937-1938, Theo Leveau, destroyed recently), “Dr. Celal Bey House” / Milka patisserie (1932, Muallim İlyaszade Arif Hikmet, destroyed during the first decade of 2000’s), security control Gençlik Parkı- Solmaz Kılıçtepe police station and AOÇ military control point.

Evaluation and Conclusion

It is a fascinating adventure to observe how mankind has started art at a very abstract point and has turned back to it thousands of years later. The extravagant Baroque art and architecture forced the designers to look for a new view, supported by the technical and scientific developments of the 19th century. The whole century turned into an arena of past styles, some exactly repeating the historical design principles as in Classicism, some even stricter than its original like the Gothic Revival. The desire for a new world-view connected with new building materials and with designers full of inspirations from the Far East, brought Art Nouveau. However, the painters, sculptors, graphic and interior designers and architects found what they needed in pure abstraction. De Stijl, Constructivism, Futurism and Bauhaus exercised a new understanding in architecture applicable with a plastic material, the concrete. Modernist Movement can be accepted as a result of this procedure and became a remedy to the frivolities of the near past.

Although Modernist Movement in architecture can be detected at a glance, it carries a set of diversities in itself. Art Deco can be accepted as one of these. It is a pity that it has not been given the importance it has deserved, although efforts to revitalize it has been tried persistently. As a style it has found a better place in arts more than architecture or it can be said that they occurred as details in or on buildings more than being an Art Deco building by itself.

At the beginning of the 20th century the ideals of the new Turkish Republic coincided with the new look of the designers. A new ideology needed a new architecture; certainly functional and opposite to the chaotic revivals, eclecticism of the past. Thus, the European architects, mostly the Germans found a good professional practice area. Besides, the contemporary style was so effective that it became world-wide used in a very short time. Both Modernism and Art Deco within it, shaped the capital city of Ankara.

On the other hand, cityscape turned to an arena of what is “new” only. Except a single implementation mentioned above, the traces of traditional architecture seems to be totally denied. I will be an unfair approach to blame the idea of the day because what was being done

was to save a nation from the prohibitive limits of the past. Architecture became a tool in constructing the future.

The architecture of Modernist period and design examples in Ankara still have a great importance in the formation of the city. Some have serene cubic forms, strict lines without any extra decoration over, but some differ with their geometric forms and small details. Reflections of Art Deco in Ankara can be traced in curvilinear geometric forms embedded in the cubic. They can be accompanied by overlapping or repeating lines, reliefs, logo designs. Together they witness a time which carries great importance for the Turkish Republic. They cannot be solely treated as the historical buildings of the near history because they carry a role in the construction of the contemporary world-view of a nation. It is a cultural richness and chance to have the pure Modernist and Art Deco inspired buildings nearly aligned at both sides of an axis which makes the area an open-air museum. The cityscape thus formed, is not only composed of buildings but with parks, squares and street furniture completing them designed in the same language. It is a great pity to see them destroyed unconsciously as they make up the cultural properties of Ankara which deserve to be neatly preserved and used.

Urban conservation is not a matter of selecting periods and styles of the past, the ideology of a certain period, beliefs and understanding of some, but is a matter of cultural consciousness. Urban consciousness brings urban identity, which points out that the citizens are there to own their city willingly. We owe to the past, what we have today is borrowed from the future.

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