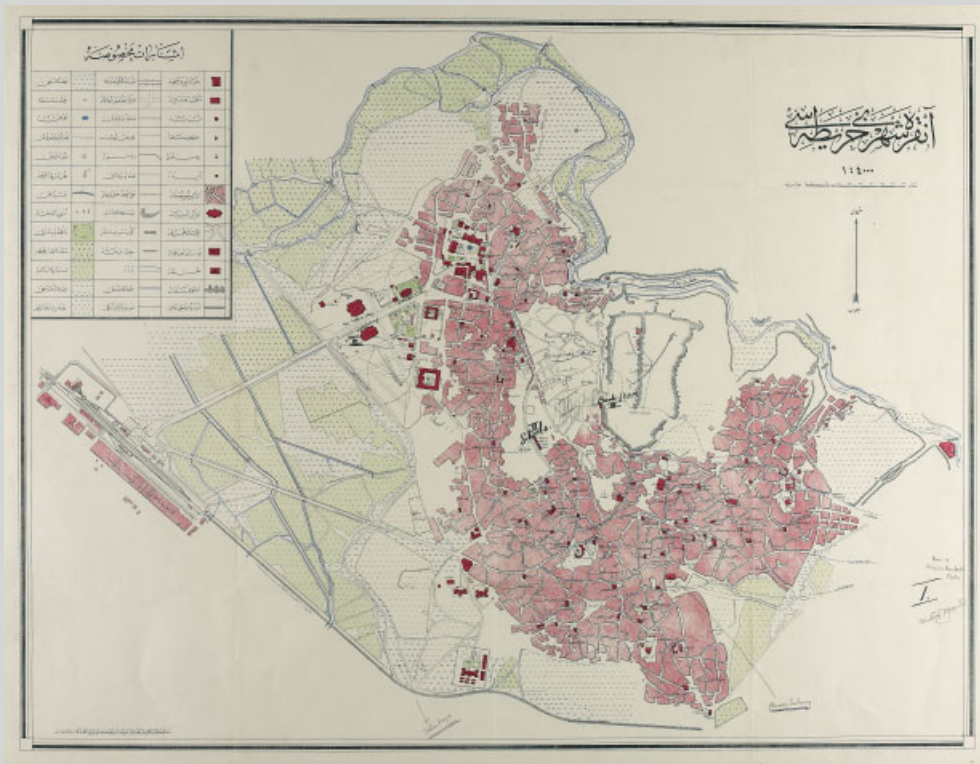


# ANKARA





# THE MAKING OF EARLY REPUBLICAN ANKARA



**Zeynep Kezer** outlines the ascendancy and development of Ankara from an obscure, central Anatolian town into a capital city that was to become the focus of the new nation state. Informed by German architectural and technological expertise, it was executed to rigorous Modernist planning principles and aesthetics, and came to represent in urban form the polarisation of pre-republican and republican Turkey.

A 1926 map of Ankara (above) and Jansen's finalised masterplan of 1932 (opposite). Note the contrast between the geometric layout of the new streets and Ankara's existing urban fabric.

The making of Ankara is inextricably linked to the story of the Turkish Republic. The city rose to prominence as the staging point of the War of Independence, waged by the Nationalists, to liberate the country from Allied occupation in the aftermath of the First World War. In 1923, upon victory, rather than returning to Istanbul and restoring the empire, the Nationalists, under Atatürk's leadership (from 1919), moved the capital to Ankara, founded a republic, and embarked upon sweeping reforms. Turkey's leaders were determined to mark a new beginning and intended the move to physically and symbolically distance the new regime from the Ottoman capital and the social, political and economic order it represented. The contrast between the two capitals could not have been greater: Istanbul, a city of striking natural beauty, strategically positioned on a crucial passage between Asia and Europe, had been home to two empires for over a millennium. Ankara was a small, impoverished central Anatolian town which, despite its long history, had few attractions to offer. But Ankara's relative obscurity made it easier to frame it as a blank slate on which to inscribe the ideals of the new nation-state.

The process was fraught with difficulties. Turkey's new leaders wanted to build a capital comparable to its European contemporaries, but they lacked the expertise and means necessary to realise this goal. They were under

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mounting pressure to provide space for basic government functions, and shelter for the exponentially growing population, but did not have a shared conception of how to proceed. Moreover, there were profound rifts between the incoming republican cadres, who sought to use their newly acquired power to steer development towards areas of their choice, and Ankara's natives, who felt excluded from decisions regarding the future of their town. The former were further divided among themselves due to political differences and personal rivalries. These conflicts and constraints had a lasting impact on the course of Ankara's development.

Ankara's first masterplan was commissioned in 1925 to Carl Lörcher, a German planner who had previously worked for the Ottoman government. Using the Citadel as a focal point, Lörcher charted a web of baroque-inspired avenues, flanked by perimeter blocks. Republican Ankara's first landmarks – new administrative buildings, banks, cultural institutions, recreational facilities and residential structures – were built along these avenues. Designed in the Ottoman Revivalist style, these were the work of architects such as Giulio Mongeri recruited from the Istanbul Fine Arts



above: Aerial photograph of Ulus, developing according to the first portion of Lörcher's (1925) plan which included various institutions of the new state, designed mostly in the Ottoman Revivalist style. From *Bayındırlık İşleri Dergisi*, 1935.

left: Four ribbons of photographs comprising the ideals that shaped Turkey's capital – political Ankara, revolutionary Ankara, cultural Ankara and urbanist Ankara – converge and intersect with the implied horizontal axis of time (the numbers 200, 1800, 1937 represent the passage of years). The model and the images frame a statement by Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, acknowledging Ankara's 'Sacred Place' in the nation's history. From *La Turquie Kamaliste*, December 1937.

Academy, or those such as Kemaleddin Bey, Vedat Tek and Arif Hikmet Koyunoglu from defunct Ottoman government agencies. Their architecture combined distinctly modern building programmes with a Beaux-Arts-inspired compositional sensibility and an ornamental vocabulary that showcased the distinctiveness of national origins – a practice that had parallels in other areas of cultural production, especially in music and literature, in Turkey and in Europe's other neophyte nation-states.

Lörcher's proposal comprised two parts. While the aforementioned designs pertained to areas in or near Ankara's existing fabric, his plan also had to respond to the inexorable push for southbound expansion that had gained momentum as the republican elite rushed to take up residence near Atatürk's home in Çankaya. The 6.4-kilometre (4-mile) distance between the two areas posed a challenge for any planner, considering there was neither the population nor building density to sustain growth as a congruent urban whole. To integrate the two, Lörcher formalised the path between them as a wide tree-lined avenue (Atatürk Boulevard) and, along the way, proposed a series of monuments and activity hubs, the most prominent of which was the Government Quarter.

The ambivalent adoption of Lörcher's plan fomented chaos. By the late 1920s, emphasis had shifted to the south, sidelining Ankara's historic core. As the government vacillated between different alternatives, slums, squatters, speculative land deals and unsupervised construction projects proliferated all over town. Eventually, in 1928, to reign in haphazard developments, the government organised a competition for a masterplan and selected the proposal by Professor Jansen of Berlin, who went on to enjoy a longer tenure and relatively more support than his predecessor.

Lörcher and Jansen introduced planning principles that differed fundamentally from Ankara's established settlement patterns. Both prescribed a change in scale and new paths of movement through the city. Whereas pre-republican Ankara had narrow and irregular streets, the newly planned districts had a regular geometry, bigger plots and wider streets. Rather than conforming to the topography, the new layout imposed a geometrical pattern of preconceived paths and nodes highlighting the new capital's monuments. In addition, Jansen instituted the concept of zoning by clustering together similar land uses and buffering them from each other with green belts. Zoning was antithetical to Ankara's long-standing spatial logic, which featured a fine-grained mix of religious, commercial and residential uses that were not necessarily demarcated from one another.

Jansen's plan, which allocated distinct zones for residential, industrial and administrative uses, labelled the Citadel and its environs 'Altstadt', as if to imply that the function of pre-republican Ankara as a whole was 'to be old'. This categorisation was



View towards Ulus along Atatürk Boulevard. Republican Ankara's earliest landmarks, designed in the Ottoman Revivalist style: (left to right) The Evkaf Apartment Block (Kemaleddin Bey, 1928); the Ottoman Bank and Agriculture Bank (both by Giulio Mongeri, 1926 and 1926–9); and, in the distance, Clemens Holzmeister's Modernist Central Bank (1931–3). On the avenue's right bank, the Real Estate and Orphan's Bank Headquarters (Holzmeister, 1934) and the cupola of the Customs and Monopolies General Directorate (Mongeri, 1928). Anonymous postcard. From *Ankara Posta Kartları ve Belge Fotoğrafları Arşivi Kataloğu*, 1993.

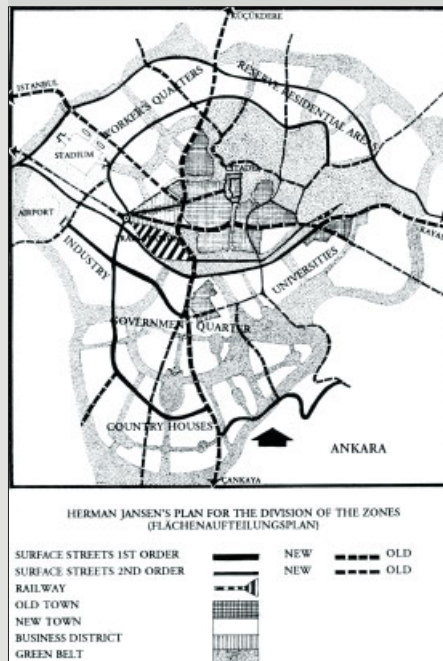


ideologically expedient for it reframed pre-republican Ankara as the perfect foil to set off the modernity of republican Ankara, the proud creation of a progressive state. It also implicitly legitimised the shifting of resources towards the south, conveniently dovetailing with the private interests of the republican elite. Ankara subsequently evolved as a binuclear capital. Kızılay emerged as a new commercial centre near the new Government Quarter, overshadowing Ulus, its counterpart in pre-republican Ankara. While Kızılay catered to the high-end tastes of Ankara's new elite, Ulus served the locals and less affluent residents, further widening and spatialising cultural and economic divisions.

Jansen continually encountered challenges from the speculatively minded and the authoritarian factions within the administration, who forced their preferences on to the plan. For instance, he retained many of Lörcher's ideas, especially for the newer parts of town and the layout of major streets. He reinforced the symbolic narrative along Atatürk Boulevard, which was to be punctuated with memorials honouring key milestones in Turkey's journey from its grass-roots independence struggle to a parliamentary democracy. However, halfway into the implementation, the presidential residence replaced the Grand National Assembly as the culmination of that narrative. Thereafter, in a shift that betrayed broader changes in Turkey's political direction and the ascendance of authoritarian factions, the construction of the assembly – the centrepiece of the Government Quarter – was delayed by decades and the civic space leading up to it was blocked by buildings and monuments dedicated to the state's security forces.

Lörcher and Jansen were two among many German architects, engineers, contractors and technicians working on a range of projects in early republican Turkey. Facing isolation in the international arena dominated by Britain and its First World War allies, Turkey had turned to its former partner, Germany, which was similarly marginalised after losing the war. Germany aggressively lobbied for a key role in shaping Turkey's reconstruction and modernisation. German-speaking central European architects – such as the Austrian Clemens Holzmeister, who designed the majority of the ministries and military buildings in the Government Quarter, and the Austro-Swiss Ernst Egli, whose work included the State Music Conservatory (1927–9), İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute (1930) and the Turkish Aviation Society Headquarters (1934–7) – also benefited from this shared cultural affinity.

The influx of professionals continued even after the regime change in Germany. Paul Bonatz, the architect of housing for civil servants in Ankara, Joseph Thorak, the sculptor who, with Anton Hanak, designed the Security



left: Ankara's zoning according to the Jansen plan (redrawn by the author).

below: Bruno Taut's Ankara University Faculty of Language, History and Geography (1935). In exile from Nazi Germany, Taut arrived in Turkey from Japan in 1936. In addition to teaching, he designed several buildings (many of them educational) despite his short tenure in Turkey. Anonymous postcard. From *Ankara Posta Kartları ve Belge Fotoğrafları Arşivi Kataloğu*, 1993.



Against Lörcher and Jansen's proposals, Ankara's main axis shifted towards the presidential residence in Çankaya, eclipsing the originally proposed terminus of the axis, the Grand National Assembly, the completion of which was delayed into the 1960s. The buildings that were first completed in the Government Quarter included the Ministry of Interior and Military Headquarters (1930–5) designed by Austrian architect Clemens Holzmeister, who had the implicit support of the more authoritarian factions within the republican administration, and the Security Monument (1935), honouring the police. In addition, the pedestrian portion of the now discarded north–south axis lost its character as a civic space. From *Bayındırlık İşleri Dergisi*, 1935.



Kızılay and the Government Quarter. In the foreground is the Security Monument by Thorak and Hanak, known for their work for the German Pavilion at the 1936 Paris World's Fair, and further back are the new ministries under construction. To the left Atatürk Boulevard leads up to Çankaya with new residential districts flanking it. From *Fotografla Türkiye*, 1935.



Clemens Holzmeister's Ministry of Public Works (1933-4). With the support of the more authoritarian members of the administration, Holzmeister obtained the commission for most of the buildings in the new Government Quarter, sometimes in contradiction to Jansen's overall precepts for the masterplan. His buildings featured stripped-down masses with little ornamentation, which in early republican Ankara's mostly empty landscape made them look rather out of scale, reinforcing a sense of stark authoritarianism. From *Fotografla Türkiye*, 1935.



Educational section of the Turkish Aviation Society designed by Ernst Egli, who developed a modern architectural language recognizable for the dramatic juxtaposition of distinct volumes. Egli was also commissioned to design the administrative headquarters of the same society, further down the hill, and the İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute on the neighbouring site, both facing Atatürk Boulevard. As here, the construction and completion of Ankara's new institutional and residential structures were often publicised in official propaganda publications. From *La Turquie Kamaliste*, April 1938.

Monument (1935), and the founding cadre of the Ankara Agriculture Faculty, came to Ankara via official channels. Meanwhile, Turkey actively recruited Jewish and other dissident German architects, artists and intellectuals who would be seminal in laying the foundations of modern Turkish academia. Prominent exponents of Weimar architecture – such as Bruno Taut (who also designed the Ankara University Faculty of Language, History and Geography (1935) and the Atatürk High School (1937–8), Franz Hillinger and Martin Wagner – were invited to teach at Turkish universities. And Ernst Reuter, the former mayor of Berlin, went on to establish Turkey's first urban planning programme at the Ankara University School of Political Science (he taught there from 1936 to 1948). Ankara thus became a site wherein architects of different political persuasions practised concurrently, as Turkey's leaders were more interested in the cachet of modernity they could lend the new capital than in their individual affiliations. Personal variations notwithstanding, these architects ushered in a strict, austere and classically inspired Modernist aesthetic that became closely identified with the state. Importantly, their input during a crucial stage of Turkish modernisation allowed the Germans to set the standards of architectural practice and education, securing their legacy long after they departed and Turkey forged new alliances in the aftermath of the Second World War.

As even this brief account implies, Ankara's landscape may be seen as a physical register of the formative processes of the modern Turkish state. The relocation of the capital, the polarisation of pre-republican and republican Ankara, the deferment of the construction of buildings to house democratic institutions while expediting the completion of enforcement agencies, were all inextricably linked to intense – and often contentious – deliberations among the republican leadership about the character of the new state.

Similarly, the choice of Germany as the primary source of architectural and technological expertise was directly informed by calculations about Turkey's place in the international arena. Finally, official representations of Ankara in words and images were never far from considerations of political expediency and ideological convictions. Portraying it as a city that was willed into existence by the republican leadership denied Ankara's immediate history. In so doing, not only did it tacitly sanction the exclusion of the town's natives from decision-making processes, but altogether avoided the difficult questions surrounding the demise – during Turkey's transition from empire to nation-state – of Ankara's sizable non-Muslim population and the landscapes they inhabited. Today, a handful of vineyard houses formerly owned by Armenians or Greeks, a hard-to-find synagogue, a makeshift church and a few place names offer only fleeting glimpses into what was, by all accounts, a diverse cultural landscape. Critically for the historian, these artefacts, along with the Citadel and its environs, demonstrate that rather than being a blank slate with no history, Ankara is a palimpsest that occasionally reveals the underlying layers of experience and memory it encapsulates. **D**

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