

LANA SALEH:

BOOKLET OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION (PHD):

**Damascus in the Ottoman Period (Sixteenth
Century -Eighteenth Century)**

-A Comparative Study-

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Abstract:

The Ottomans seized Syria in 1516, introducing a new era that endured for four hundred years. Early architectural changes, notably in Damascus and Aleppo, associated with the Ottoman occupation, confirmed their arrival. However, from the middle of the sixteenth century, when architecture was required to serve as a means of expressing sultanic authority, these architectural projects took a new direction. As a declaration of the primacy of the sultanic center and its strength, Ottoman architectural and cultural traditions began to spread throughout the provinces.

This dissertation presents the study of Damascus throughout the Ottoman era, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It discusses how Damascus changed during the Ottoman period regarding the urban development of the city. Additionally, it examines the emergence of new architectural designs for religious, commercial, public, and residential structures, as well as the factors that contributed to the development of the local Ottoman style. Finally, it compares the Ottomanization process between two Syrian provinces, Damascus and Aleppo.

I. Introduction

The Ottomans seized Syria in 1516, marking the beginning of a new era that lasted for four hundred years. Early architectural changes in cities like Damascus and Aleppo, associated with Ottoman occupation, served as visible signs of their presence. However, from the mid-sixteenth century onward, architecture took on a new role as a means of expressing sultanic authority. This shift led to a redirection of architectural projects, emphasizing the significance of the sultanic center and its power. Ottoman architectural and cultural traditions subsequently spread throughout the provinces, serving as declarations of sultanic primacy and strength.

During the Ottoman period, a new style of mosque, *madrasa*, and *türbe* emerged, reflecting a heightened interest in religious buildings that were regularly used by the majority of the populace. Additionally, religious institutions such as *tekkes*, which did not exist during the Mamluk period, began to appear. These religious structures served as reminders to the inhabitants of the strength and generosity of the sultans and rulers who founded them.

The relative political stability introduced to the area encouraged the growth of trade and commerce. This economic prosperity was marked by the relocation of the commercial center in Damascus and the emergence of new types of commercial buildings, such as the *bedestan*, which were previously unknown. Additionally, a new design featuring domed courtyarded *khans* became widespread in Damascus.

Although the Ottoman sultans and rulers primarily focused on religious architecture to affirm Ottoman grandeur and on commercial buildings to support trade and generate revenue for endowments, they did not pay particular attention to *hammams*. Despite the substantial financial resources required for their construction and maintenance, *hammams* were important social structures in Damascus during the Ottoman era, complementing religious and commercial buildings. Several Ottoman-era *hammams* have survived in Damascus, offering a glimpse into their historical significance.

Last but not least, Aleppo came under Ottoman control following the conquest in 1516, and it grew in prominence alongside Damascus. This was a contrast to the Mamluk era (1260-1516), when Aleppo functioned as a secondary border city while Damascus was second only to Cairo in importance. However, the two cities developed very differently under Ottoman rule. Additionally, Aleppo was supported with numerous vizierial projects, which gave it a recognizable Ottoman imprint.

This dissertation intends to shed light on the adjustments made to Damascus' urban planning during the Ottoman era, as well as to offer an understanding of the significance of Ottoman architectural projects in Damascus, considering the urban context in which they were built, the patrons who funded them, and the connections between Ottoman and Syrian architectural styles. Lastly, since Aleppo and Damascus both developed under similar conditions, it is important to compare the Ottoman initiatives in these two provinces.

II. Scope

1. Geographical Focus: the study covers the old cities in Damascus and Aleppo.
2. Time Period: the study concentrates on the period between 1516-1800.

III. Problem and research questions

There is no denying that Damascus was significantly impacted by the Ottoman occupation (1516-1918), particularly in the architectural aspect of the city. The main question here is whether the Ottoman Empire's architectural art was imported and used in its original form, or if it was altered in accordance with regional arts.

The Ottoman occupation was preceded by a long history of previous civilizations. Damascus had a strong architectural tradition before the arrival of the Ottomans, with many significant structures clustered in key areas of the city. So how did the Ottomans use architecture to shape Damascus as an Ottoman city?

During the Ottoman period, Aleppo enjoyed a level of importance similar to that of Damascus due to its commercial significance. However, did the Ottomanization process proceed equally in both cities, or did each city undergo its own unique development?

IV. Objectives

This study examines how much Damascus evolved over the Ottoman era, especially between 1516 and 1800, in terms of urban growth and architectural achievements in religious, commercial, public, and residential structures. It will concentrate on investigating how these new projects contributed to Damascus' perception as an Ottoman city. Similarly, other examples of religious, commercial, and civic structures from Aleppo will be shown to compare the context of development between these two Syrian provinces during the Ottoman period.

Consequently, the study's objectives can be summed up as follows:

- 1- Study the urban development of Damascus from its establishment until the Ottoman occupation, specifically focusing on developments until the end of the eighteenth century.
- 2- Provide examples of religious, commercial, and civic structures from the Mamluk period to evaluate changes during the Ottoman period and identify local influences in architectural projects.
- 3- Present architectural examples from the Ottoman Anatolian Peninsula to illustrate Ottoman influences on regional architecture in Damascus throughout the Ottoman era.
- 4- Compare Damascus during the Ottoman period with Aleppo to identify additional factors contributing to provincial Ottomanization, such as geographical location, religious significance, and commercial role.

V. Importance and Contribution

Despite numerous studies and descriptions of Damascus, the local influences during the Ottoman period, which gave rise to a unique style known as the local Ottoman style, are mostly ignored. This study analyzes Damascene buildings from the Ottoman period to identify both local and Ottoman influences. Although Damascus has been extensively studied, previous work often assumed a predominant Ottoman influence on Damascene architecture.

This dissertation examines Ottoman Damascus through the lenses of local artistic and architectural styles, presenting a comparison between Ottoman architecture in Anatolia and in Damascus, while highlighting the distinct evolution of both. Another contribution is the

comparison between Damascus and Aleppo during the Ottoman period, emphasizing the effects of each city's function on its architectural image.

Additionally, in light of recent events in the two provinces—such as the Syrian War, the earthquake in Aleppo in February 2023, and the readaptation of several structures, including the ongoing *al-Suleimaniyya* Complex project, this study serves as documentation research for the most important Ottoman structures in Damascus and Aleppo.

VI. Methodology

This thesis adopts the bottom-up approach to construct the architectural development of Damascus and Aleppo, starting from the Mamluk period and ending with the Ottoman period. It aims to develop a detailed understanding of how Ottoman architectural styles and techniques from Anatolia influenced the built environments of both Damascus and Aleppo. This method is an excellent way to build a comprehensive understanding of the cities' historical and architectural evolution. Throughout this process, the study employs multiple methodologies to progress from specific observations to broader conclusions about architectural and cultural exchanges during the Ottoman period.

A. The Descriptive Methodology

It involved gathering the most significant materials and references regarding Damascus and Aleppo throughout the Islamic era in general, and the Ottoman era in particular. Focus on key architectural structures from the Mamluk period in Damascus and Aleppo, such as mosques, *madrasas*, *khans*, public *hammams*, and houses. Gather detailed information on each structure, including construction dates, architects (if known), patrons, architectural styles, and materials used.

B. The Analytical Methodology

It studies the architectural elements, layout, facades, and decorative features of Damascene structures from the Ottoman era, aiming to identify unique local characteristics and new Ottoman

components in each building. This involves evaluating the extent of Ottoman influence, including architectural style and artistic motifs. Additionally, it analyzes the spatial organization and urban context of each structure, considering their relationships with surrounding urban fabric such as streets, markets, and residential areas. These investigations will contextualize architectural developments within the historical framework of the Ottoman period, considering political, economic, and social factors that influenced construction and architectural styles.

C. The Comparison Methodology

It focuses on comparing Damascus and Aleppo to illustrate the differences and similarities in the Ottoman complexes of these two cities. Moreover, it aims to identify common features and variations between the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, and to compare the architectural elements found in Damascus with those in Anatolia, particularly in key Ottoman cities like Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne. The analysis will highlight similarities and differences in styles, construction techniques, and decorative motifs.

VII. CHAPTERS OVERVIEW

CHAPTER I

This chapter introduces a brief description of the historical phases of Damascus, accompanied by the urban changes in each period. The main body of this chapter describes Damascus during the Ottoman period and the changes in its urban growth. It is important to note that Ottoman control in Damascus varied over time, leading to disparities in building activity. As a result, the architectural movement is split into two parts: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the eighteenth century. Additionally, this chapter lists the most significant historical and contemporary sources utilized.

CHAPTER II

This chapter attempts to explain the Damascene religious architecture of the Ottoman era. A brief description of the Ottoman religious buildings in the Anatolian peninsula, where their three phases of development will be provided, to understand the Ottoman influences on the Damascene religious architecture.

To identify any local effects on the Damascene religious structures throughout the Ottoman period, a brief description of the Mamluk mosques, *madaris*, and *türbes* (*mausolea*) in Damascus is offered.

Lastly, two sultanic complexes and several Damascene mosques, *madaris*, and *mausolea* dating to the Ottoman period are displayed to find out how a local-Ottoman style manifested itself in the Damascene religious architecture throughout the Ottoman period.

CHAPTER III

This chapter discusses how the urban planning of Damascus's commercial area evolved during the Ottoman era. It highlights the development of the city's commercial core across different historical phases to provide a clearer understanding of these changes. This evolution led to the introduction of new types of commercial structures, notably the domed *sūq* and the *bedestan*.

To analyze the Ottoman influences on commercial buildings in Damascus, the chapter first presents an overview of the *bedestan* found in the Anatolian Peninsula, followed by an example from Damascus. Additionally, it explores *hypæthral khans*, showcasing examples from both the Anatolian Peninsula and Damascus. Finally, it illustrates the domed *khans*, noting that their presence was primarily limited to Damascus.

CHAPTER IV

This chapter will clarify the general layout of the Ottoman house on the Anatolian peninsula, then discuss the origin and development of Damascene houses and the changes they underwent during the Ottoman period.

CHAPTER V

This chapter briefly covers the history of the *hammam*, along with a description of its functions, its various components, and the bath's heating system. It provides examples of *hammams* on the Anatolian Peninsula and then focuses on Damascene *hammams* during the Mamluk period to highlight the numerous influences that have shaped the architectural character of the Damascene *hammam* in the Ottoman era, which will be described in detail.

CHAPTER VI

This chapter clarifies how Aleppo and Damascus differ from one another in terms of their urban development, the architectural styles of their religious institutions, commercial enterprises, and civil buildings. It will explore the distinctions and similarities between the two cities, as well as the strength and impact of the Ottoman sultanate on these structures.

CHAPTER VII

The final chapter summarizes the results of the thesis, focusing on the studied examples of Ottoman religious, commercial, residential, and public buildings in the Anatolian Peninsula. It compares these structures with their counterparts in Damascus and Aleppo.

PUBLICATIONS

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