

ESTABLISHING THE SUSTAINABLE IDENTITY OF A HISTORICAL CITY FIELD OF RESEARCH: IZNIK

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SUMMARY

Iznik is an Anatolian settlement which assumed significant roles in the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. Although part of the city has been completely destroyed, the city will gain an identity which can be handed over to the coming generations if its accumulated heritage can be combined with present-day living.

1. HISTORICAL REFERENCES AND PRESENT-DAY DATA IN THE CITY

The foundation of Iznik is attributed to Antigones (d. 301 B. C.), one of the commanders in Alexander's army. The kings of Bithynia, one of the kingdoms established in Asia Minor, mostly lived in their palaces in Iznik. This practice continued until Nicomedia I had a settlement organised and palace built in Nicomedia/Izmit in 264 B.C^[1]. In an early description, Strabon says that this rectangular city, surrounded by walls of 16 stad/2893 m., had four gates, that the streets crossed each other at right angles and that from a stone placed in the center of the Gymnasium at the junction of the two main streets all four gates could be seen^[2]. There are no remains left from the defence system of this period, from the Gymnasium or from the other buildings. The present-day defence system, which consists of the main walls, the front wall, the ditch and the towers and which has a perimeter of ~4970 m., must have been on the North-South and East-West street and further back. For at the junction where the two main streets meet near the Hagia Sophia Church-Mosque the four gates can still be seen today.

This city, which became the abode of the governors in the reigns of Nero (96-98), Trajan (98-117) and Hadrian (117-138), had been built in Hadrian's time^[3]. The images of temples and

two-storey basilicas on most of the coins from that time provide interesting visual data^[4]. Some sections of the ancient walls which are still standing, the Theatre which is attributed to the Roman civilisation, and the Roman Gebäk are some traces left to the present day from that period. Under the rule of the Byzantine State, Iznik became a settlement where religious buildings could be densely found. In the present-day urban pattern the locations of such constructions as the Hagia Sophia (Vth-VIth centuries), some part of which is still standing, the Böcek Ayazma (Sacred Spring), the Koimesis Church with its remains (VIIIth century), the Byzantine Churches (Church B and Church C) between the Theatre and the Yenisehir Gate, the church near Istanbul Gate (Church A) can still be identified. However, the locations of the buildings whose names are mentioned only in some sources, like the Archistratège Church, the Armenian Church, the Saint-Antoine Church, the Agalma Monastery, the Ay Kyriötisas Monastery, the Neophyte (Martyr) Monastery, the Tornikios Monastery, St. Trinite, and the St. Tryphon Church cannot be identified^[5].

When it became the capital of the new Byzantine State (1204-1261) founded by Emperor Theodoros Laskaris after the Latins seized Istanbul, the traditions related with the state and the church were re-structured in Iznik^[6]. Some important construction activities like surrounding the city with a front wall (Dukas Vatatzas, 1222-1254) and building the men's school, the palace of the Patriarch, the hospitals, the charity institutions, the fortified castles, and the churches at the borders were all accomplished during this period. Theodoros Metodikes, in his book *Nikaeus* written in the second half of the XIIIth century, describes the city as a place surrounded by vineyards, meadows, gardens, orchards and poplars, situated within a defence system with ditches and as a settlement having wide streets, dense buildings and a multi-layered pattern in which could be found various buildings like churches, monasteries, homes for the elderly, hospitals, an asylum, fountains, and cisterns.

Before the Ottoman rule, Iznik had come under Turkish hegemony twice. The first time, Suleyman Shah, Sultan of the Anatolian Seljuks, captured Iznik in 1075 and made it his capital. According to Anna Komnena, the Sultan lived outside the city walls, in the Palace of Sultanikion, surrounded by gardens^[7]. After Suleyman Shah died, his son Kiliç Aslan had a palace built to his name in Iznik. Anna Komnena says that the Sultan lived in the city and in this palace; with his children and his wives^[8]. The first Turkish Period came to an end when the Crusaders captured the city in 1097. Iznik came under the rule of the Anatolian Seljuk State a second time between the years of 1105 and 1147^[9]. It is known that in the first Turkish Period, Kiliç Aslan wanted his soldiers to live in Iznik with their women and children, that he had invited various poets from Arabia and Persia and that he had also brought some eastern artists into the city^[10]. In the second Turkish Period, it is not clearly known what the quality of the social structure was in Iznik. Along with the class of administrators and of the military, a certain number of Muslim population must have settled here and realised some construction activities. However, nothing is known about the possible products of the construction activities undertaken in these periods.

Written sources indicate that after Iznik had been included in the Ottoman territory, a great number of buildings were constructed. It is known for sure that during the rule of Orhan Bey, 16 buildings were constructed, these being 6 mosques and mesjids, 2 madrasahs, soup-kitchens, and bams^[11]. According to Evliya Çelebi, in the XVIIth century there were 26 mosques, 7 madrasahs, 46 boys' schools, seven dervish chapels, 7 soup-kitchens, 2 double

baths, public fountains and charity fountains, 600 shops and 1 caravanserai^[12]. Cuinet says that in the XIX century, the city had 14 mosques, 2 mesjids, 2 madrasahs, 1 soup-kitchen, 1 church, 1 junior high-school and 7 primary schools, 5 inns, 4 bakeries, and 75 shops^[13]. At present, Early Ottoman architecture is represented by 13 buildings: 3 mosques, 2 soup-kitchens, 4 hammams (2 public and 2 private baths), and 5 tombs. The graphic design presented by the physical formation of the city indicates that the settlement spread towards the eastern half of Iznik. In the western half, no significant building activities were realised; rather, the urban pattern developed on the eastern side of the street between Istanbul Gate and Yenisehir Gate.

After the second half of the XVth century, construction activities in Iznik came to an end. In the descriptions of the physical space of the city given both by Muslim and Christian travellers, it is constantly emphasised that the city was in ruins and decaying. The improvements in the art of tile-making continued up to the XVIIth century in Iznik. After that date, Iznik lost its significance as a settlement due to the regression, which was also reflected onto the art of tile-making. The administrative position of the city went parallel to this recession. Iznik, whose title of being a Sanjak (governor of a province) was taken back during the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror and which later became a centre town in the Bursa Province, turned into a town of the Yenisehir administrative district in the Hüdavendigâr Province in the XIXth century. Thus, because it remained backward in terms of administrative, economic and political aspects, there came a reduction in the physical size of the city, and with that destruction. In other words, before the policies adopted in later periods which changed and transformed cities, Iznik had been considerably destroyed.

2. PRESENT-DAY IZNIK AND THE BASIC FACTS OF THE CONSERVATION APPROACH

The city entered the XXth century as a settlement which had not been integrated into the system. As a result, although Iznik took its place in an area which enjoyed considerable economic investments and dense industrial buildings, it was delayed in displaying the influences of these factors compared to other settlements. In the 1930s, that part of the city remaining inside the walls made up only 1/3 of the city and it had the characteristics of an area clashing with its history consequently, in spite of the destruction and recession, there is mention of the fascinating influence of the natural environment of the city and the values it comprised within itself^[14]. These descriptions indicate at once to what extent the city had lost its characteristics and how the traces of the historical values it contained created a certain impression. At the end of the XXth century Iznik still retains the road pattern of the Hipodamian Period, which was brought to daylight by the excavations made in the 1950s, the defence system, the archaeological findings of the Roman and the Byzantine Periods, some buildings and remains of certain constructions from the early Ottoman architecture, and a settlement pattern comprising all of these. Only in some sections around Istanbul Gate and Lefke Gate there are some constructions with commercial functions outside the walls. The urban pattern has spread all over the area within the city walls leaving spaces for a road or sometimes green areas between itself and the defence system. In its recent condition, Atatürk Street, extending between Istanbul Gate and Yenisehir Gate, and the Kiliç Aslan Street extending between Göl Gate and Lefke Gate are still the two main arteries of the city. However, this has now become a secondary - transit - by-road used by those going to the east

and south of Anatolia, for the city gates at the end of the two main streets open onto some other roads leading to Anatolian settlements, as was the case in the old times.

Present-day Iznik has dwellings, some buildings with commercial and touristic functions, and also public buildings. The dwelling houses are dispersed to all quarters of the city. In the eastern half of the city, where the Ottoman settlement pattern still survives, vernacular architecture is still represented with a few examples, displaying its typical characteristics like wooden frameworks, mud-wallings etc. In between these houses can be seen some stonework building formations, made after the 1950s but in harmony with the existing pattern. However, at a much later time, illegal buildings called "gecekonu" (squatter houses) in Turkey, infiltrated the pattern. Strangely enough, these illegal buildings have also merged with the traditional pattern rather harmoniously. On the other hand, legal buildings constructed in the last decade offend the eye with their low-quality architectural properties, although they do not exceed the maximum construction height of the city.

Commercial transactions take place on the two main streets of the Hellenistic Period and in their close vicinity. The traditional shopping area still stands on the eastern side of the Kiliç Aslan Street and in the side-roads opening onto this main street. At this commercial centre there are shops and stores mostly selling foodstuffs and clothing. There have been some efforts to revive "Iznik-type tile-making" by establishing a technical college and a foundation which take their place among these shops. A small number of repair-shops belonging to the small-scale industry can be found in between the urban pattern. On the lake shore outside the walls there are a series of tourism-accommodation facilities serving various functions like restaurants, cafes and motels. For Lake Iznik and its vicinity make up a location close enough for the inhabitants of large cities like Istanbul and Bursa to spend their week-ends or to have their summer houses here. The position this city occupies in the worlds of the Ancient Greece and of old Christianity also attracts foreign and native tourists alike. However, the fact that it happens to be within easy reach of Istanbul and of Bursa has caused the tourism activities in Iznik to be dependent on short-term daily trips. For this reason, there has been no need to build large-size hotels.

There is a business environment here which reminds one of the medieval social organisations. In some neighbourhoods, where low-quality buildings dominate, inhabitants build wooden boxes from poplar wood to be used as containers in transporting the vegetables and fruit grown intensively in the surrounding gardens and orchards. The ground floors of some two-storey houses have been turned into small workshops where these wooden boxes are made. The upper floors are usually used as dwellings where the communal life of large families is continued. This way of living has led to an increase in the number of women working in the manufacture of wooden boxes. Those women who have finished their housework in the upper floors can conveniently come down to the workshops to participate in the making of wooden boxes. Here also, one can witness women working actively in some production processes like weaving, as they used to do in medieval households.

The fact that Iznik is situated among some agricultural settlements where the cultivation of olive groves, vegetables and fruit is prominent has also played a determining role in organising the social relationships in the city. One of the important functions of Iznik today is to serve as a trading centre for these settlements. As used to be done in the XVIIIth century, at the market

held once a week as in medieval times^[15]. The inhabitants of the area come to sell their goods and products like vegetables, fruits, hand-woven baskets etc. and to buy clothes, foodstuffs etc. they might need. In spite of the large number of businesses like greengrocers, grocers and supermarkets, Wednesday markets still bring activity and business to the city as it used to do in the past.

In the last century some work was done in Iznik for conservation purposes. By means of an organisation realised in 1959, the Hellenistic road pattern was uncovered. This brought along with it an irreversible destruction and led the Ottoman road pattern to completely disappear. Again, throughout this century restoration work was carried out on early Ottoman buildings. There is no doubt that this kind of work done with the best of intentions, nevertheless caused some details to be lost. Alternative wall patterns, arches, saw-teeth eaves, and the originality of some door and window details were damaged. In the last quarters of the XXth century conservation work was continued on the urban scale through construction plans with the aim of conservation. Although the potential for growth which threatens some other contemporary cities does not exist here, the desire to gain profits from the lands in the city prevents the construction plans with the aim of conservation from attaining their final goals. Whereas, even today Iznik is a city united with its rural environment and it goes on living almost within the confines of the city walls.

The conservation of Iznik should be approached under two main headings: the social approach and the structural approach. One of the factors determining the results obtained in the conservation of architectural heritage is presenting the qualities of the social structure. At a time when modern living is offered to the whole world through modern means of communication and economic relations, rapid transformations in the social structure may turn out to be threatening factors, especially for the architectural heritage in developing countries. For the preservation of the physical environment in an old city can only be possible either by creating a widespread "consciousness for conservation" or by sustaining, however partly, the traditional ways of living. Starting from the fact that a widespread consciousness for conservation runs parallel to the level of development in a country, the possibilities offered by the second alternative mentioned above should be given priority. However, this does not at all mean that modern living should be given up entirely. On the contrary, in its social and economic structuring, societies which display double tendencies as the traditional and the modern may be in an advantageous position. Thus, it can be said that the following characteristics of the social structure in Iznik determine the traditional dimensions of the city: its relationship with the rural areas; women participating in the business life in a way reminiscent of traditional societies; the place of shops and markets in the city life; the well-balanced relation between the city and the tourism facilities; and the present state of the art of tile-making. Consequently, this structure should be sustained and developed as it has the potential of facilitating the conservation of the architectural heritage. As for the conservation of the physical structure, this necessitates a two-scale interference: one on the urban scale and the other on the scale of individual buildings. The interventions which have priority seem to be those reminding the relationship of the city with the ancient roads in the vicinity, which indicate the significance of this city as a centre in this area, preventing the two main streets from the Hellenistic Period to be used as transit by-roads, re-organising the relationship between the defence system, the monumental buildings and the urban pattern, explaining through graphic means the situation of the underground archives or of the buildings whose

remains have been reached through archaeological excavations, preparing a catalogue of the existing monumental buildings, drawing detailed projects to show the methods of intervention, and defining the new designs in terms of maximum construction height and mass.

When investigating the problem of a city's identity, all the related historical facts should be seen as parts making up the whole. For all the civilisations and beliefs which have gone into making up this historical adventure created the cultural layers by merging into each other, by destroying each other or by overlapping with each other throughout this historical process. A part of this common heritage may have survived to the present day; another part may have disappeared or turned into archaeological sites; these sites may now be interwoven with a disharmonious urban pattern or may be under the threatening pressures of the new arrangements. However this may be, it should not prevent the city from being perceived and evaluated as a whole. Iznik, which is one of the oldest cities in Western Anatolia, gives the impression of the historical values it overtly or covertly contains; on the other hand it offers us social and economic characteristics particular to its own. To be able to define the identity of such an historical city, which combines positive and negative factors within itself, it would be necessary to find out its specific past and to connect this with the present. For when a picture of Iznik extending from the Bithynian city to the present-day Turkish city can be created in the imagination of the city-dwellers or in the minds of the visitors, conservation will have attained its objective.

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