

BUILDING ARCHITECTURAL NETWORKS: PROTESTANT MISSIONARY SCHOOLS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

OBJECTIVES

The increase in the global network of modern schools introduces diversity into pedagogical approaches while bringing the campus typology into culturally diverse geographies and creating a productive experimentation ground for architectural practice. The recent expansion of American campuses abroad, however, is regarded as a form of cultural imperialism. This project's historical examination challenges such unidirectional assessment. The internationalization of modern education can be traced to nineteenth century missionary encounters that have had lasting effects on East-West relations. American protestant missionary schools in the former Ottoman Empire were originally conceived for proselytizing purposes, but they soon detached themselves from their denominations to offer science-based, liberal education. Zooming in on case studies from the port cities of Izmir (Turkey) and Beirut (Lebanon), this project examines the communicative role of architecture not only in the transcultural context of missionary efforts of building schools but also in the formation of communities, and cross-cultural networks in a global context.

This research program has several important objectives in terms of knowledge creation. It will produce the first critical architectural history of the following institutions: American Collegiate Institute (1878) and International College (1903-1936) in Izmir, and Syrian Protestant College (1866, today's American University in Beirut) and International College, which relocated from Izmir to Beirut in 1936. It will fill a gap in the scholarship on the history of missionaries by addressing the spatial forms the missionary encounter took on. It will contribute to histories of colonial architecture and urbanism, of institutions of knowledge, and of global architectural practice.

The excavation of these schools' architectural history will allow for an interpretive framework to understand the constitution of "architectural networks" which consist not only of human actors – including, in this case, the missionaries, benefactors, architects, craftsmen, teachers, staff members, students, students' families, and local authorities – but also of non-human actors – such as architectural correspondence, construction schedules, building contracts, buildings, building components, materials, technical systems, architectural design proposals, permits for buildings, and (photographs and other) representations of buildings – that mediate relations between human actors. This project will treat architecture not just as a context of social action but as an actor of its own.

CONTEXT

Originality: It is commonly acknowledged that school environments impact learning in significant ways yet there is little corresponding research nuancing this assumption. Empirical research tends to focus on comfort and the performance of students and teachers in the delivery and absorption of curriculum (Higgins 2005). We propose to look at missionary schools as

environments of knowledge production about other cultures. Nineteenth-century overseas educational initiatives of North American missionary institutions provide a fascinating historical lens through which to view the transcultural issues challenging contemporary schools.

Our study implies understanding the history of the relationship between North America and the Middle East is fundamental to interpreting what is happening today. Yet, this history is predominantly written and discussed as one centering on oil extraction and party level politics. We argue this history stretches further back, and that North American missionaries have had an important role to play. North American (American and Canadian) missionaries were initially concerned with saving Native Americans by converting them to Christianity (Higram 2000). But when efforts to assimilate these populations ran their course, missionary organizations turned their attention overseas. Americans were first, arriving in the Ottoman Empire as early as 1819, with the additional motivation of reclaiming the Holy Land. Canadians focused instead on East Asia, sending missions to Japan, Korea, and China from 1872 onward (Ion 1999). Yet, despite cultural differences between the U.S. and Canada, and between the sponsoring religious denominations, the overall evolution of North American missionary activity displayed remarkable consistency (Higram 2000). Even as sponsorship changed hands — from religious societies to governments to secular institutions — missionary enterprises became firmly embedded in their host societies, responding to local needs and demands. Over time, these missionary enterprises were enlarged to include the building of schools, hospitals, and other social-service institutions. In both the U.S. and Canada, visions of the “non-West” were shaped through encounters at these institutions, especially the schools. Such experience in turn affected attitudes toward development aid in the post-World War II period, and it continues to affect international initiatives today.

The case studies of our project are chosen deliberately: 1) Colleges with boarding facilities and in relatively isolated campus settings provided opportunities for missionaries to teach by example, and to learn from their students about their host culture and the diverse communities it was made up of. In the Ottoman Empire, American missionaries were largely forbidden from proselytizing among Muslims, and thus directed their efforts to local Christian communities (e.g., Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Apostolic and Catholic Armenians, Syriac Orthodox, Copts, and Maronites). In this competitive and conservative environment their religious teachings had limited transformative power or potential to convert adults. As an institution of learning, the school, especially the boarding school in an isolated campus setting, presented an opportunity for extensive contact with young people. There were already two kinds of schools catering to non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire; these could be classified roughly as minority schools, established by local groups, and missionary schools established by Western (largely European) organizations. The first such missionary school was Saint Benoit, established by French Jesuits in 1583. Schools built by Italian, German, Prussian, Russian, English, and American organizations followed it. By the late nineteenth century, the educational efforts of American missionaries surpassed all others. Americans eventually created a vast network of home schools, high schools, seminaries, and colleges that extended across the Empire, from its large port cities to small towns and villages of eastern Anatolia. 2) Our case studies comprise of the most prominent and earlier schools. This is both practical, as records about these constitute the bulk of the missionary archives, and significant from a disciplinary point of view, as it was for these schools that the services of professional American architects were solicited. 3) Furthermore, our case studies are located in the port cities of Izmir and Beirut, which provide

comparable urban settings as “provincial capitals” of the Ottoman Empire.

Scholarly context, and the contributions of this study: North American institutions of higher education continue to grow in terms of foreign presence — from study abroad programs to satellite campuses. Most recently, the conglomeration of new campuses tied to such institutions in the Gulf States has garnered significant media and academic attention. This phenomenon may be explained offhand via theories of "globalization" or "cultural imperialism." But what is missing from the present-day picture is a historical perspective that can guide future architectural practice. This is what this study sets out to provide. North American missionary colleges were not — and, for that matter, contemporary institutions of transcultural learning can never be — simply transplants of foreign formal attitudes or vehicles of imposed ideology, or “outposts of empire.” They are also constituted by locally driven change, and, as such, act as independent cultural agents.

Today, scholars credit such American missionary schools with promoting women’s education and coeducation, and with spreading such ideas as feminism, nationalism, humanism, and secularism (Aksu 2008). Interestingly, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM: the Board, hereafter) never gave its missionaries the task of building secular educational institutions. *Through a close reading of correspondence between the Board and the missionaries and an investigation of the diaries of missionaries who founded the schools, we seek to show how the missionaries were themselves transformed through the architectural production of the schools.*

The story of missionaries — usually written by and from the perspective of missionaries, or, alternatively, by nationalist historians — often fails to explain the full nature of the transcultural exchange their activities brought about. Thus, scholars have only recently begun to assess the impact of the educational component of the missionary enterprise on American and local attitudes (Oren 2007; Makdisi 2008; Sharkey 2008). There also remains a tendency in existing literature to view modern schools as a conduit for official ideology (Sakaoglu 2003; Alkan 2008). Missing from this assessment are studies that deal with the influence and power of education to affect cultural attitudes in more subtle and pervasive ways. The study of architecture may be critical in this regard. *Examining architectural drawings and correspondence, this study will show how the initial designs of college buildings and campuses intended to affect the habits and inclinations of the students, and how designs for women’s and men’s institutions differed. Based on architectural analysis and readings of graduates’ memoirs, we will evaluate the effectiveness of the spatial imagination for the schools.*

In order to augment the impact of schools, missionaries sought grandiosity. They envisioned campuses as landmarks, and deliberately employed monumental proportions and out-of-place architectural idioms. To produce this image, they commissioned well-known architectural firms from the U.S. (Majstorac-Kobiljski 2010). For instance, George B. Post, New York’s “star architect” who is credited with founding the first modern architectural office, was chosen for Syrian Protestant College. Disappointingly, the architectural monograph on his oeuvre, *George B. Post, Architect: Picturesque Designer and Determined Realist*, does not dwell on his overseas works at all (Landau 1998). Indeed, the earliest global work by North American architectural firms is largely tied to missionary activities and ideals — an aspect surprisingly absent from scholarship on the topic of American architecture abroad (Cody 2003; Cody’s other work on China addresses missionary schools directly). Histories of university planning and

architecture in North America do not even mention the vast number of American schools and college campuses built overseas (Couldon 2011; Turner 1984). *By exploring American architects' overseas work and situating it in relation to their work in North America, our project will advance our understanding of the history of global practice.*

Our larger project envisions a complete study of the school campuses of North American missionaries in the Eastern Mediterranean, starting with the port cities but expanding to the smaller schools across the lands of the former Ottoman Empire, including in Anatolia, and the Balkans. The focus on port cities and earlier schools, will enable us, at this stage of the study, to identify contingencies that produced differences among the schools. *We intend to demonstrate how the schools' urban settings constituted active environments of cultural interaction and exchange, and in turn, how the schools shaped their urban settings in important ways.*

Theoretical Approach: Postcolonial, transnational, and transcultural studies in the past few decades have raised new questions about nation-based categorizations and narratives that emphasize progress for the privileged West and decline for the rest. Accordingly, studies of “architectural exchange” have become increasingly relevant to architectural historians, who have moved from earlier import-export or domination-submission models to a more fluent one of cultural translation that acknowledges unequal power relations. Many contemporary studies of the Eastern Mediterranean region, for instance, now consider ways that local design professionals have made architectural modernism their own (Bozdogan 2001; Akcan 2012). Comparative studies of the built environment in the region are also emerging; for example, Zeynep Celik's *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914* (2008) opens with a map of telegraph lines in the Ottoman Empire, emphasizing the ordering of space with new infrastructural projects.

Our project builds on this comparative approach and adds concern for how individuals were coming to terms with modernization. It will combine the methodological strengths of comparative architectural urban histories with those of architectural histories of building typologies: e.g., of houses (King 1995; Muthesius 1982), of hospitals (Taylor 1997), and of libraries (Van Slyck 1995). By focusing on the reiterative process of architecture, whereby similar architectural programs were applied in different settings, such work provides important insight as to how individuals responded to physical and cultural change. For example, they show how women could find work, travel, and leadership opportunities in new libraries and schools; and how architects could develop specialized practices as they refined plan-types for different contexts and programs.

Our study will interrogate the *spatial imagination* of college campuses abroad. As well as constituting an architectural type, schools and college campuses are institutions. In its focus on institutional buildings, our study draws from a range of studies that have looked at their disciplinary aspect; the differences between metropolitan and colonial forms of governmentality (Foucault et al. 1991; Bennett 1995; Scott 1995); and how through the ordering of space, education can isolate students in specific ways, and relate to the making of citizens (Adams 1995; Reyhner and Eder 2002; Mitchell 2002; Upton 1996; Fass, Gutman, and De Conick-Smith 2008).

During the past few decades, the development of colonial empires in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and their architecture and urbanism have received due attention (Wright 1991; Rabinow 1989; Celik 1997, 2008; AlSayyad 1992; Cohen 2002; Crinson 1989, 1996), but much

of this scholarship focuses on the top-down efforts, and secularizing aspects of colonial modernization, evading the fact that modern colonization went hand in hand with a missionary revival sending Christian missionaries to every corner of the world.

Our study seeks to reveal how various individuals, groups, and institutions, with considerable intention, articulated their positions, associated with each other, and discovered collective practices around the making of schools, the design of their campuses, and the construction and use of their buildings. Thus, buildings are considered not as static objects, but rather as “moving objects” which start at the level of idea, or proposal, and continue to move after they are built. As such, this study renews the definition of architecture as a mediating technology. It will make a unique contribution to the study of architectural history by applying the insights of actor network theory (Latour 2005). Operating in a Deleuzian framework, actor network theory has introduced a sensibility toward the active role or agency of nonhuman actors (which lack the intentionality of human actors) and the relational constitution of objects into assemblages (Farias and Bender 2010). Accordingly, no actor can itself be responsible for action; it is the whole actor-network that produces action. Actor network theory critiques abstract constructs of “society” or “context” as adequate explanations of phenomena or actions. There is no limit to the extent and number of networks or their spatial reach within a city. Many networks extend across cities, while being firmly grounded in their localities. Accordingly, missionary schools can be defined as translocal actors. They constitute a strongly defined situation that invites comparison across cities.