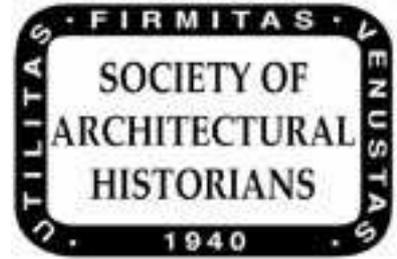




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Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation (1808–1918)

Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation (1808–1918) by Stefan Weber

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being built with nationalist subjects. The book invites reflection on the experiential and ideological repercussions of the medium today.

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Note

1. Pioneering studies of the medium from the late 1970s and 1980s have tended to provide broad overviews. They coincided with the emergence of experiments and writings on virtual reality, visual culture studies, and the rediscovery of the history of the panorama as the first mass medium and they called for the conservation of surviving panoramas, leading to the establishment of the "International Panorama Council" in 1992. Some of these studies are Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978); Stephan Oettermann, *Das Panorama* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1981); trans. as *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania!: The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Trefoil, in association with the Barbican Art Gallery, 1988).

Stefan Weber

Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation (1808–1918)

Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009.
2 vols. Vol. 1: text, 464 pp., 646 illus. (some in color); vol. 2: catalogue, 664 pp., 666 illus. (some in color), 1025 ground plans, 7 city plans folded in back pocket. \$245, ISBN 8779344240

Stefan Weber's monumental two-volume study of modern Damascus is an extraordinary contribution to the study of urbanism and architecture in the modern Middle East, as well as to the study of Mediterranean urban history generally. It is the product of years of fieldwork, of architectural and urban surveys, of archival research, and most of all, of thoughtful analysis. At two hefty volumes, the work dwarfs any other study on modern Arab cities, literally as well as figuratively.

Damascus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's oldest cities, is best known to architectural historians as one of the most important centers of the

classical Islamic world. Over the course of the long nineteenth century, however, Damascus, like many provincial centers of the Ottoman Empire, underwent a tremendous transformation. Modernization altered its development by adding new neighborhoods, large thoroughfares, urban squares, public buildings, commercial infrastructure, and domestic architecture. Zeynep Çelik's recent book, *Empire, Architecture and the City*, presents an overview of these developments throughout the empire, and shows how the Ottoman center staged its visions of empire through the construction of public space in its Arabic-speaking provinces.¹ Weber's book places Damascus, a provincial capital, at the center of analysis, providing a history of a single city and its buildings and people with an unprecedented degree of richness and depth. His book highlights the links and distinctions in urban and architectural practices between Damascus and Istanbul, the empire's capital, and between Damascus and many Arab cities to which it relates, including Beirut, Aleppo, and Salt (in present-day Jordan). Yet we also have unexpected comparisons, as with Bitlis (in present-day Turkey).

It is no accident that the historic photographs on the cover of both volumes prominently feature people. Volume 1 shows a public street, the Darwishyya, around 1890, with a crowd of mostly men eyeing the photographer curiously, conveying the sense of an emerging public sphere, while volume 2 features an image of mostly women and children at home, forming a tableau of domesticity in the interior courtyard of Bayt Lisbuna around 1900. Throughout the book Weber emphasizes the social dimension of urban change and architecture: he follows those who make spaces, those who use them, and those who alter them. Likewise, the book is in conversation with other recent urban studies of the former Ottoman provinces that seek an alternative to metropole-centered methods for the study of empire and those that privilege the nation-states that succeeded the empire.² Like these studies, *Damascus* highlights the negotiation between capital and province, and emphasizes Ottoman centralization as well as local agency, cooperation, and resistance. Thus Weber

skillfully introduces individuals such as the modernizing Ottoman governor Husayn Nazim Pasha, who spearheaded the development of the new residential neighborhood of al-Muhajirin (1895–1911), where he built himself a modern villa on the slopes of Mount Qasyun, with unobstructed views of Damascus (1: 98–103). Members of local notable clans such as the Mardam Beks seized new opportunities to secure their family's ascendancy, reflected in the choices made in constructing their businesses and homes (1: 58–63). Fatima and Ahmad Mukhtar Mardam Bek modeled the new mores of the age when they had their photographs taken together, she with her face uncovered (1: 62, 1: 408). We encounter powerful individuals who instigated change, such as the Christian scholar and diplomat Mikha'il Mishaqa, who successfully mediated among Ottoman, European, and American economic interests (1: 68–69), but also anonymous everyday urbanites who used the new tramway, asserted new notions of citizenship, relaxed at the riverfront cafes, and attended some of the Middle East's earliest purpose-built movie theaters (Shahbandar Cinema, built in 1916, survives in good condition: 2: 48).

The book's most absorbing sections showcase Weber's skills as architectural historian, historian, and detective. He follows the large urban projects of the period, such as Marja Square, strategically sited, designed for new traffic patterns, centered on a monument and a fountain, and surrounded by civic and commercial buildings that are emblematic of modern Damascus (1: 114–70). Weber shows how Damascenes made use of the new buildings and institutions, along with new forms of political participation and leisure activities. Transformation is also illustrated by novel choices in domestic architecture. A new urban house type in the second half of the nineteenth century, which Weber calls the "konak house type," centered on an interior hall that governed circulation within the home, and asserted a presence on the street with ornate façades accentuated by large windows (1: 331–51). Weber shows how this new domestic architecture, so distinct from earlier house types with their open interior courtyards and unadorned street façades, did not derive from local older

types, with which it often created unexpected hybrids. Rather, the new domestic architecture represented an engagement between Damascus and the imperial center of Istanbul that affected the most intimate familial spaces and social habits. Indeed, beyond a focus on architecture alone, Weber tracks changes in clothing for men and women, new uses of space in public and in private, and new locations for leisure activities. This comprehensive approach to Damascene modernity and its rigorous documentation, especially in the second volume, sets Weber's study apart from recent books on the subject.³

Weber has assembled a varied array of sources. These include detailed architectural plans drawn by the author and a team of collaborators, rare historic maps and photographs from disparate depositories around the world, records of the Damascus law courts, municipality archives, religious endowments records (*waqfs*), contemporary newspapers including the Istanbul-based, lavishly illustrated *Servet-i Funun*, as well as European consular records, local church records, and literary sources. The two volumes are superbly produced and illustrated, and fully justify the hefty price tag.

The book is based on Weber's 2001 dissertation in Islamwissenschaft at the Free University in Berlin, but the current book is substantially edited and expanded. It was translated into English by Stephen Cox (1: 13), nevertheless, the language remains occasionally awkward for the Anglophone reader, notably due to the somewhat unusual choices in architectural vocabulary. Regardless, as both analytical study and reference work, this book is invaluable. In addition to architectural historians, preservationists will find a unique resource in the catalogue of the second volume, where entries include crucial notes about the historic importance of buildings and their current state of preservation or disrepair.

No American academic could have written this book. It is the product of a great scholar, to be sure, but it is also the product of a European research support system where years of fieldwork at an overseas research center are still possible. Weber spent five years in Damascus researching his

dissertation, supported by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI). Later, another six years at the Orient-Institut in Beirut (OIB) allowed him to refine his study and undertake other projects. (Since 2008, Weber has had a successful tenure as the director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin.) In an era when U.S. government financing of international education continues to be cut, it is difficult to imagine one of our colleagues or students being able to fund the creation of such a book, especially the second volume.

Finally, in addition to providing a new history for the development of modern Damascus, the work is imbued with the humanity of its author and even his sense of humor. Those of us who had the good fortune to overlap in Damascus with Weber, and to accompany him on his architectural strolls through the old city, could not help but conclude that not only did Stefan Weber seem to know every single stone in Damascus, but every stone in Damascus seemed to know him! Weber's book will productively dispel the widespread notion that Damascus is the quintessential "traditional," "Islamic" city, showing instead that some of its most beloved spaces are actually modern creations rather than manifestations of *La Syrie Éternelle*.

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Notes

1. Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).
2. See for example, Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, Stefan Weber, eds., *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), and Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
3. Jean-Luc Arnaud, *Damas: Urbanisme et architecture, 1860–1925* (Arles: Actes sud-Sindbad, 2006), Gérard Degeorge, *Damas des Ottomans à nos jours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994); Dorothee Sack, *Damaskus: Entwicklung und Struktur einer orientalisches-islamischen Stadt* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabner, 1989); 'Abd al-Qadir al-Rihawi, *Rawa'i' al-turath fi Dimashq* (Damascus: al-Takwin, 2005).

Wu Hung

The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010,
272 pp., 83 color and 147 b/w illus. \$50.00
(cloth), ISBN 9780824834265

Within the field of Chinese art history there are few subjects that Wu Hung has not yet tackled. He has published nearly a dozen books and articles on the subject of funerary arts alone. Wu is therefore well positioned to take on the ambitious task of determining which factors "define [the] art and architectural tradition we call Chinese tombs" (16). While some of the arguments Wu presents in this book will be familiar to readers of his previous studies, *The Art of the Yellow Springs* is by no means a recitation of old material. Rather, it devises a novel and useful conceptual framework in order to identify the persistent patterns among materials spanning a period of almost 3,000 years.

According to Wu, Chinese tombs comprise two independent architectures: above-ground structures that served as landmarks or ritual shrines and underground constructions furnished with grave goods. Wu's study focuses on the underground part of tombs, as suggested by the term *Yellow Springs*, the Chinese word for the netherworld, in the title of the book. Wu writes that before the advent of modern archaeology, it was virtually impossible to study individual graves. Although ancient writers frequently described (and often critiqued) the ritual practices associated with burials, few wrote about their specific layout and contents. Once the body was interred and the tomb sealed up, tombs became "solely the domain of the departed soul" (8–9).

Archaeological excavations in the last fifty years have changed this, contributing to a great number of scholarly works in various fields. However, as Wu points out, many art-historical studies of Chinese tombs tend to be formal analyses of individual objects in museum collections, in which little attempt is made to explain an object's visual characteristics in relation to its original function or symbolism. Following recent trends in Chinese art history, Wu argues that instead of studying