

invisible in visible visibile

VI Congresso AISU
VisibleInvisible: percepire la città tra descrizioni e omissioni

a cura di
S. Adorno, G. Cristina, A. Rotondo

Catania, 12-14 settembre 2013



SCR MM

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I.
Identità urbane:
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Ömer Faruk Güneç

Reading a City through Historical Documents: Dichotomy between Textuality and Visuality

Understanding a city, period, sociality and even a building through historical documents leads these records inevitably to instrumentalization. Documents-oriented studies could be based on two different routes. On the one hand, unpreserved spaces could be roughly and doubtfully rebuilt, on the other, any places maintained would be interpreted.

In Turkey, the architectural academia has recently been dealt with these documents in terms of historiography along the two axes mentioned above. This increased interest also has revealed many terms such as structure of city, everyday life, domestic culture, in other words, diversely perceived spaces, periods and individuals. The purpose of this study is not to discuss the historiography of architecture conceptually. The main aim is to scrutinize the contents of historical documents such as *house sales* (hüccets) as an assessment tool for reading a city. In this regard house sales recorded in *ser'iye sicils* during the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century are questioned regarding housing culture in the case of the city of Mardin, and house sales are even problematized.

The contents of these documents are significant in two ways. First, descriptions of space in records expose clearly the contents of houses. Thus, possibilities/impossibilities defined by the document intended to be uncovered. Second, there is an actual tension between textuality (historical records) and visuality (structure of the city) in the case of Mardin maintaining its own unique morphology. This tension also similarly has

been at the heart of any interpretation of cities or buildings that were not managed to protect its existence.

Historical Documents

There has recently been a compelling change in architectural history, particularly with the use of historical documents as a principal asset. There have been so far some studies trying to read a city in terms of housing culture, environmental behaviour, and the world of mentalities too. The academia, in Turkey, has a tendency to produce a variety of ways of thinking through a new confrontation with the records. Inevitably, some documents recorded during the Ottoman Empire stand out as well. Because of the variety of archives, it offers many opportunities in some areas such as space, routine life, structure of city, consumer culture. For example, *vakıf tahrir defteris*¹, *vakıf istibdal documents*² and *ser'ıye sicils*³ are very meaningful and useful to discuss the period, society, space. Furthermore, *tereke* (inheritance) records⁴ could be substantial to demonstrate or recreate everyday life, material culture even if it in some point would be inadequate. In detail, *vakıf records* besides including descriptions of spaces also provide historical footnotes reflecting the number of households and township, range of housing standarts in time of recording.

Besides *ser'ıye sicils* provides relatively abundant materials due to being the register book of the court of the law. It also offers some leads to rebuild the period of the register because of including a variety of cases such as marriages, divorces, purchases-sales, announcements, *tereke* etc. For example some clues can be found in this historical records in order to interpret social fabric about marriage/divorce rates, forms of relationship between central and local administration, social fabric, inheritance law.

Additionally, property sales (*hujjat*)⁵ in *ser'ıye sicil* are very provocative. Hujjat was actually recognized in the legal system of bilateral agreements rather than *kadi's* decision. Simply, in modern epistemology hujjat would be equivalent to deed so the court is equal to a notary. A copy of hujjat was recorded while other parties were given copies. There

is no doubt that requesting a hujjat from the court was economically entailed. Therefore, in this study, documents are evaluated as much as hujjats were recorded.

Moreover, hujjats encompass some properties and various components of the space such as *beyt*, *dâr*, *menzil*⁶, *manzara*⁷, rights of using water/stream, vineyards, orchards and mills. Even more, it is quite possible to encounter donkey sales in relatively local geography, Mardin. Further through property sales, it can be roughly analyzed some contents such as forms of realization of sales contracts, price analysis, boundaries, and among whom the sale is of. It is an inevitable fact that direct sales of *dâr*, *beyt*, *menzil*, *manzara* constitute a principal relationship with architecture that is undeniably sociality itself. Also evaluating historical documents in the context of terminology, prices, rights which were sold, organization of space, and social relationship allows us to at least create the way of interpretation about the period.

Possibilities/Impossibilities Defined by Hujjat

Reading a city through historical documents prompts an individual to face the complicated issue that the historical record perfectly reflects the date of its registrarion. It is directly related to the problematic referring to the sanctity of documents. In other words, it also could be described as fetishism. Therefore the approach may be discussed with a couple of questions: what do house sales contribute to interpretation of the city? What kind of possibilities/impossibilities does the hujjat manifest? In other words, how can documents be located as a material in the field of architectural historiography?

If some kinds of unsustainable places could be read through records, studies are accompanied by many ambiguous thoughts. For example, an assessment on 16th century Istanbul, in which there is no trace of houses except documents, naturally omits the sense of the city. There is not only the case of Istanbul but also some document-oriented studies about Kayseri, Trabzon are restricted on a certain level. Nevertheless, in the case of Mardin it is relatively clear to make a connection between

textuality and visuality because both historical documents and visual material can be touched on. Hence this study is denoted by juxtaposition.

House sales in 19th century Mardin could be an example to start to argue the approach. At the beginning, the textual structure of the document is of vital role to uncover its possibilities and it is essentially crucial to reveal its impossibilities. What is a hujjat composed of?

In the first place, some details can be clearly found in hujjat⁸ such as buyers, sellers, content of property, price, and the date. Moreover, due to written identity of buyer and seller in detail, the ties of kinship among individuals and their social status can be determined. Nonetheless, the definition of space creates the outbuilding and equipment of the property sold. So a house (dâr) could be imagined according to its definition. Also spatial organization may be drawn and understood in this light. Then there is no doubt that language is so manipulative that recreating spaces described in hujjat is equivalent to face complex connection between textuality and visuality.

House sales can be used as a quantitative assessment tool, as well [fig. 1]. For example, the rate of the *havş* (courtyard), *matbah* (kitchen) and *manzara* is roughly calculated in all documents and *cubb ma* (water well), *cubb main* (water well that is for daily using), *hamam* (bathroom), *kenif* (toilet) are of structural importance in terms of hygiene. All hujjats cannot include data about structure of space, but some of them shall be added material information such as *kâgir* (stone), *turab* (soil). Additionally, through quantitative analysis, it can be accounted how many hujjat were recorded in each ser'iyе sicil, thus a map consisting of property sale would be drawn by years.

In the second place, the boundaries of space are usually written in detail. Although in some cases there is a definition, such as, it is so famous for the local inhabitants so it does not need to write it. Even some houses, belonging to famous persons recognized by the public, served as a *landmark* while boundaries were detailed. Along with this, currencies and the way of selling and purchasing can be roughly identified because house sales are including the price and how a person paid such as beforehand, in advance and half-price in advance.

Furthermore, in Mardin, the content of house sales is not only composed of the description of space but also interestingly it includes *the right to use space*, which was sold, for example *the right to use the rooftop/terrace for sleeping, the right to use the rooftop of the kitchen, the right to walk and the right to authorize*. These terms could show a pattern of purchase and sale. In the light of these habits, social relationship networks could be interpreted. Hence, textuality makes possible some way of understanding at least over *hujjat*.

In the third place, almost no information regarding the function could be found in the documents. There are some terms such as *beyt sagire* (small room), *beyt âher* (another beyt), *beyt feris* (furnished room), and *beyt safir* (unfurnished room). It can be said that whereas some suggestions would be made for their function, it is impossible to assert either their definite function or organization of spaces. Therefore, function and spatial organization are too vague because the house is constantly put into words with its formal characteristics in property sale.

Further it is quite complicated to understand how the space was used when it was jointly sold in percent of 1/3, 1/4, and 1/6 due to lack of available information. More complications are generated in case of the buyer and seller more than one person, as well. More likely while people shared property in such percent, it is so dubious how people use it. Therefore the correlation between space and intimacy could not be argued, but only some suggestion shall be offered in that case.

Even though there is an opportunity to combine all house sales records dating back to 19th century Mardin, city's topography cannot be understood through documents. So all general discourse for skyline of the city based on documents is unmeaningful because of ambiguity of these terms: *fevkâni* and *tahtani*⁹. In addition to that, it is also impossible to grasp the topography of the city locating at the hillside. Due to these vagueness, it is definitely paralogism when how many floors the house has is offered. In other words, this saying itself constructs an obvious anachronism. It is not only about topography and floors but also the organization of space and its form, privacy, intimacy, users.

In the case of Mardin, there is an opportunity denoted by juxtaposition. For example, spaces described in hujjats can be visualized in detail and terminology shall be overlapped with places. *Fevkânî* and *tahtani* which were ambiguous can be understood in its own way. While visuality and textuality are somehow overlapping, skyline of the city begins to appear with its own structure. Eventually an example of house plan can be matched with its description.

Beginning

Representational ability of any historical documents is ineludibly problematic. The dichotomy of possibilities/impossibilities inevitably becomes an obstacle for the architectural historiography written through historical documents. For example, many studies which are about unpreserved cities are attempts to recreate them virtually through documents. It is natural that through textuality, house typology can be drawn as much as evaluating individuals. Therefore, making typologies in record-oriented studies shifts its way which is almost allegoric, figurative and inconclusive. In other words, historical records which are freezing sociality are only tools in order for reconstructing its period. Along with this, the sanctity of document can be one-dimensionalized every each time when documents are interpreted. The historian has to establish close ties between textuality, visuality and spatial experiences in order to make his, or her, narrative more meaningful. These plural explanations actually help him, or her, to define routes for writing a documentary history of architecture, at least.

Notes

¹ It provides an inventory of property owned by the foundations (*vakıf*). It includes some details of properties such as where they locate and description of space et al. For more information; U. Tanyeli, *Osmanlı Metropollerinde Evlerin Konfor ve Lüks Normları*, in *Soframız Nur Hanemiz Mamur Osmanlı Maddi Kültüründe Yemek ve Barnak* [trn. Z. Yelçe], edited by S. Faroqhi, C.K. Neuman, İstanbul,

Kitap Yayınevi, 2006, pp. 333-349; S. Yerasimos, *16. Yüzyılda İstanbul Evleri*, in *ivi*, pp. 307-332.

² “İstibdal” was a procedure of exchange of properties between either a private owner and the *vakıf* or two *vakıf*. More information: H.G. Özkaya, *18. Yüzyıl İstanbul’unda Barınma Kültürü ve Yaşam Koşulları*, İstanbul, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi, 2011.

³ N. Şahin, *Batı Anadolu’da Tarihi Bir Kent Afyonkarahisar’da Gündelik Yaşam 568 Numaralı Şer’iye Siciline Göre*, Afyon, Afyonkarahisar Belediyesi Yayınları, 2008.

⁴ It was recorded after someone passed away and it includes his/her real estates, budget, home appliances, and any debts. For more information: F. Bozkurt, *Tereke Defterleri ve Osmanlı Maddi Kültüründe Değişim (1785-1875 İstanbul Örneği)*, Sakarya, Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi, 2011.

⁵ R. Özcan, *17. Yüzyılda Konya’da Mülk Satışları ve Fiyatlar*, Konya, Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi, 1993.

⁶ *Dâr* and *menzil* are equivalent to ‘house’ in terminology of modern housing. *Beyt* located in *dâr* is corresponded to ‘room’, but in some case it was referring to a house just like *dâr*. In this study *house* refers to *dâr*.

⁷ To define roughly the room locating at the dwelling units overlooks the Mesopotamian Plain.

⁸ All *hujjats* clearly do not have same structure. Some of sales only include what was sold and it does not give any other information. But generally *house sales* contain a lot of information as in the example given above. Even all attester’s identity was described in detail.

⁹ *Fevkânî*: overlying, *tahtânî*: is opposed to *fevkânî*, beneath. In Ottoman documents *fevkânî* is a two story house, and *tahtânî* is a one story structure.

هذه حصة صبي ميرد مضمونا ويوزعونها بعد ذكر ما هو لازم

تدعى على صبي مفضل المدون في جزوه بالقسمة دون غيره من البائعين ، عند
دهان موبنت فنق الوصف ودموتى بنت نحو الكبيع فاقط الموقنات
ساكان لهما ومكلمها وديرتها وتحت قرضها والقسمة بينهما بالارث الثلثة
وذلك ستة اشهر من اصل ثمانية واربعين شهرا هاجاب كل واحد
ثلاثة اشهر من الدار الواقعة في محلة الشهدا المشرفة على بروج ذي قطينة
تحت مصلحها اربعة واولها ثمانية اربعة ومعه اربعة ومصلح اربعة
وسب مائة وكثيرة وموتيرة ومصلح ذي معلية اربعة واولها ثمانية
اربع واولها اربعة ذي معلية اربعة وموتيرة المدور ودية الاصل
ورثة بنت جواد ودمعما في مملكت هضما حضا وشرقا وشرقا الالاطيق
وغضا ايضا في مملكت ودية بنت جواد وادعيا ستة اشهر من اصل
عاشة واربعة اشهر التاها بر كل واحد نصف ثمانية اشهر من البستان
الواقعة في وادي العضا المشرفة على السجى رمتوح وغيره مصلح مختلف الالاطيق
والاضراس وغيره على ما جرى البستان واهراء ماء وقهره والبيان وسكان
وبنت هبنت المدورم قبله الى المصحة ودية وادعيا من شرقا الى الدرد
وشمالا الى مملكت البانغوا المدورم ودية والاطيق والاضراس ستة اشهر
من اصل عمانية واربعة اشهر العاها بر كل واحد اربعة اشهر من الدكا الاثني
خصوصا في ارات المشرفة على السجى اربعة اشهر المدورم قبله الى حرم الامير وشرقا
الى مملكت هضما مضمونا ثمانية اشهر والالاطيق ودية الى مملكت نوره
بنت ملاعليل حجة المدورم وكان في المراتق والنواهي والحقيق بمقتضى
مقدوموه ودية ودية ومسلطه وبنات الف ومائة وسبعة وعشرون
مقتضى شتره ووجهه بدينا واستراه صبي شريفية بنت مشرفة على
الايجاب والقبول والقضه والاقتضاء والرؤية والرؤية من الطرية
في سبق البائعين المدورم ان مصلحته الموقوف لها الجسدية المذكورين
مدعى ولا مطالبة لوجهها لوجهه وسبب من الايجاب بل اني قد نعمت
السهم المذكور الجسدية للدار والبستان والدار المذكور من مملكت
خالها ومقتضى خالته في المدورم مضمونا فيهم بقرض الملايكه في مملكتهم
كيفية باشا وصبي بنتا جردى ذلك وحصره في اليوم المذكور من شهر
الدول المذكورة في تاريخه ومانته واللف

صلى الله عليه وسلم

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صلى الله عليه وسلم

Fig. 1 Two different house sale («193 No'lu Mardin Şer'iyе Sicili», Mardin, Artuklu University Library)