



Book Review

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Are you an Architecture Student? (Mimarlık Öğrencisi Misin?)

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MİMARLIK ÖĞRENCİSİ MİSİN?



HAVVA ALKAN BALA

YEM  Kitabevi

The cover of the book "Are you an Architecture Student?" (Mimarlık Öğrencisi Misin?)

The book named as ““Mimarlık Öğrencisi misin?” (Are you an Architecture Student?)” written by Havva Alkan Bala, published by YEM Publishing in 2020 is a guide for architecture students. The book is a simple, sincere guide to architecture students and even educators with both its content, design, and approach. While guiding, the book does not dictate, show the correct path, or be distant from the reader. On the contrary, the author uses the language of "we" with an empathetic approach. This book is useful for architectural literature since architecture is a multidimensional and multidisciplinary profession in terms of its scope and components. The richness of the area where the profession has spread is reflected in the meaning of architecture. Architecture; the solidified music for Schelling (1859, p. 177), the great book of humanity to be read again and again from marble pages for Victor Hugo (1831, p. 229), for Hegel simply everything (Tschumi, 1998, p. 220), the way of thinking for Leach (2005, p. viii), for Barthes, it is always a dream-an expression of a utopia and, a function-an instrument of a convenience (2005, p. 166), for Mayne (2005) a way of seeing, thinking and questioning our world and our place in it.

Vitruvius, perhaps the first architectural theorist in history, expressed the multi-layered characteristics of the profession, and education in this context, exactly two thousand years ago. He considers talent important to be a good architect but could not be an architect only with talent without education. According to him, architecture is omniscience, that is, it requires knowing and comprehending everything (see: Figure 1). Therefore, an architect; must study geometry, history, philosophy, music, medicine, law, astrology, and astronomy. Thousands of years ago, the need for the architect to be versatile stands in front of us in an unchanged way today. This requirement can be attributed to the profession being nourished by science and art, its being at the centre of life, and inevitably placed in every moment of life.



Figure 1. Roman mosaic, depicting the architect and his assistants, Bardo Museum, Tunisia (MacDonald, 1986, p.35).

Although education, which is based on various grounds in the theoretical and practical field, ultimately provides professional gains, it brings unique problems and difficulties for all actors involved in education. Architectural education has been pedagogically in the focus of researchers from different views, and it has been tried to develop methods and approaches aimed at solving the problems and improving education. It is noteworthy that the target audience of the most studies and research subjected to architectural education is educators. However, students are also participant of the education process. In addition to the challenging and stressful nature of the education, the demanding characteristics of the training program structured with theoretical and practical content, which requires skills, can be shown as the source of the problems that architecture students sometimes experience during their education. From this point of view, it is seen that the book makes a difference in the literature on architectural education by making architecture student the subject, with the language that directly addresses him. In essence, the book aims to take care of those who are new to the adventure in architecture, to give them an idea of what they may encounter during their education, and in a way to be a companion. The intention of the book is not to give some advice to the beginner, but to convey what awaits him/her at the beginning of the road, to guide him on how to complete this adventure more efficiently. Another remarkable aspect of the book is the author's appeal as an owl to those who have just started their journey in architecture. The owl metaphor is used to represent the situation of the young architect candidate and even to facilitate his/her understanding of this situation. Obviously, this representation is quite effective and convenient by the characteristics of an owl are attributed to the architect such as its wisdom, superior point of view, and, its distinctness from the others with his living at night (see: Figure 2).



Figure 2. An owl figure with the questions in his mind from the book (Bala Alkan, 2020, p.138).



In terms of its general fiction, it is seen that the structure of the book consists of three main parts. The first part is devoted to understanding architecture. This part is structured with questions such as "What is architecture?", "Is it a profession that can be done by those without talent?", and the question of "Interior or Exterior?" that every architect heard at least once during his career from the first day of his/her education. In this section, the extraordinary nature of the education environment is also emphasized through the answers. As a matter of fact, for most beginners, the studio environment is a medium for discovering oneself and the limits of what they can do. The studio has its own rules, and sometimes the beginner may find it difficult to cognize this. In the meantime, although studying in the studio environment seems fun, enjoyable and the environment sounds unregulated in a way, *"architecture is too convivial to be done seriously, and it is too serious to be disregarded."* (Bala Alkan, 2020, p.33).

The second part, which prepares the newcomer in the metamorphosis for the moment he will emerge from his cocoon, is devoted to the practices of being an architect. Preparation is supported by giving an implicit reading list in the section where mental and behavioral preparation is transferred in the education process. The book calls for the beginner to "be different" through the common features of the characters presented in the readings, as by pursuing what you believe, but not to be contrarian, do it creatively in thought and action. Mallgrave (2010) interprets the difference of the architect from an even more different (!) perspective. According to him, the architectural profession requires a wide range of technical skills, professional knowledge and equipment. What is required to be successful in the highly competitive profession is to be creative. Creativity, as the ability to respond to a known problem in a different way than ever, is the playground of the architect. Emphasizing that creativity is a learnable skill, Mallgrave (2010) states that the function of the mind of architects to process certain information is highly developed with his study in neuroscience, and defines this mind that works differently as the "architect's brain". The profession of architecture requires reading, seeing, and traveling a lot, in a way, to accumulate everything about human, nature, and existence. The architect's brain has the cognitive skills to process, associate, understand and interpret the accumulated things, and in some cases, it has evolved to manipulate them in an unusual way.

The third part of the structure is on the post-diploma phase. The common concern of every architect candidate is what he or she will do after graduation. Perhaps the main reason for this concern is to break away from the comfortable and unlimited environment of the studio and become aware of the reality framed by the boundaries that can be encountered sometimes under the name of regulation and law, sometimes economy, sometimes as opportunities and stakeholders. However, the book did not forget to prepare owls on this subject and presented a list of things to do.

It is clearly understood that, behind this book which simply comes up with the question of "Are you an architecture student?", lies the academic experience of Havva Alkan Bala, as well as the experience of an educator, which has been the gain of many years. Book: certainly will guide the owls who have just started their journey and especially those who intend to become an owl by getting ready to the journey. As an academic, working in the field of architectural education, what this book makes me think is how common our concerns in education and how universal values of architectural education are. At the end of this brief critique, I wish to contribute to the student readers' journey of architecture, so my last word to the owl who wants to be able to fly higher is spread your wings widely and fill them full of wind.

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Resume

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