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Artefacts of Atça

An architectural heritage might also be called an “artefact” because its elements stand as witnesses to cultures, actors and events that occurred during the lifetime of the building. (“What is Architectural Heritage”)

We are surrounded by artefacts, these buildings, everywhere in large cities or small towns. Alexandra Lange put it best:

We walk among them and live inside them, largely passive dwellers in cities of towers, houses, open spaces and shops we had no hand in creating. But we are their best audience. Owners, clients and residents come and go, but architecture lives on, acting a role in the life of the city and its citizens long after the original players are gone. (Lange 2012)

I met these lines in the Places Journal of which I am a subscriber, and it made me awaken dramatically. The styles of the buildings surrounding us, their sustainability, their cultural role, and their connection with the past... These issues are mostly neglected in our daily conversations. It made me understand the fact that maybe, nearly every day, we pass by an artefact and do not even recognize it.

I am a high school student attending The Koç High School. Every summer, I spend some time in our summer house located in the Aegean Region of my country Turkey with my family. Aegean is well known for its historical richness and many old architectural and cultural beauties. On one of our travels to our summer house, we stopped by a small town

with a population of 8000 named Atça. As soon as we entered the town, we realized that the layout of the town was really impressive and very different from other towns. Although we had only thought to grab a cup of coffee and continue with our travel, we stayed there for hours instead since this town had lots of things to tell us. Then, I decided to visit this town again and introduce it and its surroundings to people as much as possible.

The very first interesting thing about this small town is the nickname used by its habitants: Paris!

Yes, you read correctly. This town is also called Paris. During the Turkish War of Independence in the 1920s, this town was totally destroyed. There were hardly a few buildings left and its view was a real disaster. A city planner who was working on the renovation process of cities in the country was passing by Atça and he visited this small town. This city planner named Abdi Bey had been trained in Paris and surprisingly, he drew up all the plans for this town inspired by Place Charles de Gaulle in Paris.

There is a tiny circle in the middle of town that hugs its visitors. As you can see, there are cute local coffee shops on this square. A cup of Turkish coffee is only 13 liras which means less than a US dollar.

The main 8 avenues of the town all reach this circle, much like the 12 main avenues of Paris that reach Place Charles de Gaulle.

Naturally, as a student who would like to study architecture, my eyes see these old buildings as standing with silent pride and high elegance through their rich cultural history.

There is a crucial mosque at this square. It's called Bayramyeri Camii. It looks simple without fancy details. Plain and silent. It's what's inside that matters in this case: There is a tree nearly 300 years old here and it is written on that tree that it is a silent witness of mass

killings committed during the war. A couple of families from the local public and small kids were killed here.

In André Aciman's words; "Writing the past is never a neutral act. Writing always asks the past to justify itself, to give its reasons... provided we can live with the reasons. What we want is a narrative[.]" (2013).

Here, there is a touching story that can show us how humanity can lose control and do awful things. In this case, what I want is not to concentrate on who is guilty and who is not. What I wish is for humanity to never stoop to this level; the level of killing innocent children alongside their families and discarding them as if they are worthless.

Under this tree, I also wished for an end to all wars and conflicts around the world.

There are still more sights to see in and around Atça. Their train station was opened in 1882. The train connects Atça and nearby cities, and there are 6 train rounds daily.

There are a few ancient cities near Atça that one may visit:

Nysa on the Maeander is one such ancient city very close to Atça. After Ephesus, it is regarded as one of the most well-preserved ancient cities. The famous geographer Strabo is known to have been educated there. The ancient town of Mastaura is another nearby ancient city that had been founded in the watery marshes nearby the Maeander River, surrounded by high hills. It is believed to have belonged to the kingdom of Lydia in ancient times, somewhere between 1200 and 500 BC. Lastly, the ancient town of Orthasia is also quite close by.

If you ever visit the Aegean region in Turkey, please do not skip over this cute town that has many stories to tell¹.

Note

¹ For an audio-visual presentation of this text with scenes from Atça, you can visit
“The Paris in Türkiye” Youtube video organised and hosted by the author.

Works Cited

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