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**Late Ottoman public architecture in the provinces: The case of
Babaeski**

Geç Osmanlı taşrasında kamu mimarisi: Babaeski

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the architectural, stylistic, and spatial characteristics of public buildings constructed in Babaeski during the Late Ottoman Period, elucidating their impact on urban development within the context of post-Tanzimat centralization policies. The scope of the research comprises nine public buildings constructed between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, four of which are extant and five of which are non-extant. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study evaluates archival records, architectural drawings, and period publications, supplemented by on-site observations and photographic documentation. The findings reveal that these public buildings were not merely functional responses to administrative needs but served as spatial manifestations of the modernizing Ottoman state's bureaucratic organization, institutional representation, and center-periphery dynamics. Situated along a specific urban axis, these structures redefined public space and steered the city's morphological evolution. The emergence of a secular, administrative public core—in contrast to the traditional külliye-centered settlement pattern—represents a concrete reflection of Late Ottoman modernization on a provincial scale. Consequently, this study contributes to the literature by providing a holistic perspective on the intersection of public architecture and urban transformation in a small-scale settlement.

Keywords: Late Ottoman architecture, Public architecture, Center-periphery relations, Urban morphology.

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Geç Osmanlı Dönemi'nde Babaeski'de inşa edilen kamu yapılarının mimari, üslup ve mekânsal özelliklerini inceleyerek, bu yapıların Tanzimat sonrası merkezileşme politikaları bağlamında kentsel gelişim üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın kapsamını 19. yüzyılın sonu ile 20. yüzyılın başları arasında inşa edilen; günümüze ulaşan dört ve ulaşmayan beş kamu yapısı oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiş; arşiv belgeleri, mimari çizimler, dönemsel yayınlar ve ilgili literatür verileri değerlendirilmiş, ayrıca yerinde gözlem ve fotoğraflama çalışmaları gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, Babaeski'de kamu yapılarının yalnızca işlevsel gereksinimlere yanıt veren yapılar olmadığını; modernleşen Osmanlı devletinin bürokratik örgütlenmesinin, kurumsal temsiliyet anlayışının ve merkez–taşra ilişkilerinin mekânsal karşılıkları olarak kurgulandığını göstermektedir. Belirli bir kentsel aks boyunca yer alan bu yapılar, kamusal alanı yeniden tanımlamış ve kentin morfolojik evrimini yönlendirmiştir. Geleneksel külliye merkezli yerleşim modelinin aksine, seküler, idari bir kamusal merkezin ortaya çıkışı, Geç Osmanlı modernleşmesinin taşra ölçeğindeki somut bir yansımasını temsil etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, küçük ölçekli bir yerleşimde kamusal mimari ve kentsel dönüşümün kesişimine ilişkin bütüncül bir bakış açısı sunarak literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geç Osmanlı mimarisi, Kamu mimarisi, Merkez–taşra ilişkileri, Kentsel morfoloji.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a profound transformation within the administrative, social, economic, military, and architectural landscapes of both European nations and the Ottoman Empire. The momentum of 19th-century industrialization fundamentally restructured Europe and exerted a significant influence on neighboring states. The Ottoman Empire was among the political entities most intensely affected by the repercussions of the Industrial Revolution (Batur, 1985), which necessitated both a transition from economic dependency and a comprehensive administrative restructuring (İnalçık & Seyitdanlıoğlu, 2018).

This multi-layered process, often conceptualized as Westernization, precipitated extensive political, cultural, and social shifts. The preliminary quests for reform that emerged during the Tulip Era acquired a formal institutional character following the *Tanzimat* Edict (Acar, 2000; Yazıcı, 2007). Far more than a mere legal reform, the *Tanzimat* functioned as a systemic restructuring program designed to consolidate central authority over the provinces (Ortaylı, 2000). Consequently, from the latter half of the 19th-century, new provincial regulations reorganized local administrations, tethering the peripheral governance structure more directly to the imperial center (Türkmen, 2023).

The *Tanzimat* era catalyzed fundamental changes in Ottoman architecture, encompassing style, methodology, and programmatic requirements. Westernization, initially localized within the military sphere, gradually permeated social life, giving rise to novel building typologies to meet emerging societal needs (Acar, 2000).

During this period, urban planning paradigms, domestic concepts, and administrative forms underwent a radical metamorphosis; a diverse array of administrative, cultural, military, healthcare, educational, and industrial edifices were commissioned (Ertuğrul, 2009).

As Çelik points out, one of the fundamental components of the Tanzimat reforms was centralisation, and this policy was reflected in urban planning (Çelik, 1993). Following these centralization policies, public buildings emerged as the preeminent features of 19th-century Ottoman architecture. Their increasing typological diversity and proliferation into provincial cities serve as the most visible indicators of architectural Westernization (Çobanoğlu, 2007; Kolay, 2023). Specifically, government houses, courthouses, and modern educational institutions spread across the empire as the spatial counterparts of the new bureaucratic organization.

Throughout the 19th century, as administrative and institutional transformations accelerated in the Ottoman Empire, the organisation of the state in the provinces was restructured. Reforms in education, transportation, communication, and local administration strengthened the central authority's influence over the provinces. This process brought not only administrative restructuring but also new spatial and institutional arrangements that increased the state's visibility in daily life (Quataert, 2005).

In this context, these edifices should be understood not merely as functional enclosures for public services, but as symbolic manifestations of centralization, bureaucratic hierarchy, and the modern state apparatus at the provincial level (Koca, 2016; Türkmen, 2023). In the 19th-century, urban space became a contested arena for administrative control and state representation, with public buildings serving as the primary instruments of this socio-spatial process (Yerasimos, 1996). Thus, late Ottoman public architecture should be interpreted as a spatial marker of the evolving state-society relationship and the dynamic interaction between the center and the periphery.

Late Ottoman architecture represents a hybrid period where traditional motifs and modern elements were synthesized under burgeoning Western influence (Kuban, 1954). The trajectory that began with Ottoman Baroque (Atasoy, 1992; Acar, 2000; Başkan, 2020) transitioned into a Neoclassical phase by the late 18th century. This Neoclassical approach exerted a dominant influence on state architecture, where principles of monumentality, symmetry, and rigorous order became paramount (Eyice, 1981; Başkan, 2020). By the turn of the 20th century, a Turkish Neoclassicism (First National Architectural Movement) emerged as a stylistic resistance to European hegemony, referencing Seljuk and Classical Ottoman precedents to emphasize a burgeoning national identity (Eyice, 1981; Çobanoğlu, 2007; Başkan, 2020).

The manifestation of this modernization in provincial cities was non-linear; compared to Istanbul or major port cities, reforms in Anatolian and Rumelian hinterlands were often shaped by localized dynamics (Aytemiz, 2023). Transformation typically clustered around newly established administrative cores and burgeoning trade routes (Gençer, 2017), suggesting that center-periphery relations must be deciphered through various spatial scales.

This study examines the public architecture of Babaeski during the late Ottoman period, specifically from the mid-19th to the early 20th-century. Existing literature has predominantly focused on the Semiz Ali Pasha Mosque (Kuran, 1986; Eyice, 1989; Müderrisoğlu, 1993) or the Train Station (Doğan, 2016; Yıldız, 2013, 2019). However, the 19th-century public buildings of the town have yet to be holistically analyzed within the framework of architecture and urbanism. This lacuna in the literature suggests that the role of these buildings in urban morphology and historical continuity has remained largely under-assessed.

This study assumes that the public buildings constructed in Babaeski during the Late Ottoman Period were not merely products of functional needs; rather, they played a decisive role in urban development as spatial and architectural reflections of post-Tanzimat centralization policies at the provincial scale. Accordingly, the study discusses how these buildings transformed Babaeski's spatial organization, public center design, and understanding of architectural representation.

The objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the public buildings of Babaeski—a settlement that originated as an Ottoman *menzil* (waystation) and was subsequently reshaped by late-era administrative restructuring. The central argument posits that these buildings emerged as spatial representations of post-Tanzimat centralization, redefining the city's morphology by establishing a new public focal point along a linear administrative axis. These structures are not merely functional shells; they are the spatial instruments through which the bureaucratic organization, center-periphery dynamics, and ideological aspirations of the modernizing Ottoman state were materialized at the urban scale. Through this analysis, the study aims to elucidate the decisive role of public architecture in the transition of Babaeski from a traditional *menzil* settlement pattern to a modern administrative center.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The primary material for this study comprises the urban fabric of Babaeski, situated in the Thrace Region, and the public edifices commissioned therein during the late Ottoman period. Positioned along the vital transit corridors between East and West, Babaeski represents a multi-layered settlement at the crossroads of military, commercial, and cultural interactions.

Due to its strategic geopolitical orientation, the city has hosted various civilizations, resulting in a unique urban palimpsest shaped by historical continuity.

While the exact founding date of Babaeski remains uncertain, archaeological evidence indicates settlement continuity extending to the Thracian cultural sphere and the Bronze Age (Mansel, 1938; Mansel, 1940; Özdoğan, 2011). Owing to its strategic position on the Via Militaris, the city gained military and commercial significance in antiquity and continued to function as an important regional administrative center during the Byzantine period (Mansel, 1938; Dursunkaya, 1948; Soustal, 1991). Following its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in the mid-fourteenth century, Babay-ı Atik developed into a major menzil settlement (Kazancıgil et al., 2014). The construction of the Fatih Mosque in 1467 marked the beginning of Ottoman urban development (Ayverdi, 1973; Tuncel, 1974), while the sixteenth-century Semiz Ali Pasha Complex became the principal spatial focus of the classical Ottoman city, organized according to the traditional külliye-centered settlement model (Müderrisoğlu, 1993). By the 19th century, the Tanzimat reforms and the expansion of transportation infrastructure reshaped Babaeski's urban development. The railway, together with public buildings constructed along the Edirne–Istanbul axis, established a new administrative core that transformed the traditional settlement pattern. Within this context, the study focuses on public buildings constructed between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. This includes extant buildings such as the Train Station, the Former *Rüştiye* (secondary school), the Provincial Administration Building, and the Babaeski *İptidaisi* (Primary School), as well as non-extant buildings—the Former Municipality Building, the Former Government House, the İnönü School, the Sarı School, and the Former Gendarmerie Station Building—all of which are evaluated based on primary data.

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach, employing document review, content analysis, and field research methods for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research enables the holistic examination of phenomena within their natural contexts and the interpretation of historical and cultural processes (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). In architectural research, the combined use of archival documents, visual materials, and on-site observations to evaluate data related to historical and built environments is considered a fundamental method that enhances the reliability and interpretive capacity of the research (Groat & Wang, 2013). The theoretical framework was established through a comprehensive literature review on Ottoman modernization, public buildings, and Late Ottoman architecture.

The primary data sources, comprising archival documents, plan drawings, historical photographs, land registry records, and written sources, were evaluated using the document review method. Document analysis is based on the systematic examination of written and visual materials containing information about the phenomenon or phenomena under investigation (Bowen, 2009; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011).

In this context, documents from the Babaeski Municipality Archive and the personal archive of Architect Mucit Öztapak were examined; data on structures that no longer exist were re-evaluated using archival records, old photographs, and primary written sources.

The data obtained were classified and interpreted using content analysis. Content analysis is an analytical technique that enables similar data to be grouped and interpreted within the framework of specific concepts and themes (Krippendorff, 2004; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). In addition, field studies were conducted to document the current state of the surviving structures; these structures were observed on site, photographed, and their architectural features recorded. Each structure was evaluated in terms of plan layout, facade arrangement, construction technique, material use, and stylistic features; their locations within the city were examined morphologically, and their relationship with the spatial development of Babaeski was interpreted. Thus, architectural data and urban development processes were considered together, and the effects of Late Ottoman Period public buildings on the city scale were evaluated using a holistic and interdisciplinary approach.

3. LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN BABAESKI

The late Ottoman public buildings in Babaeski are classified into two groups: extant public buildings and non-extant public buildings. Within this framework, nine public buildings are examined, including four extant and five non-extant examples. Figure 1 illustrates their distribution within the urban fabric.

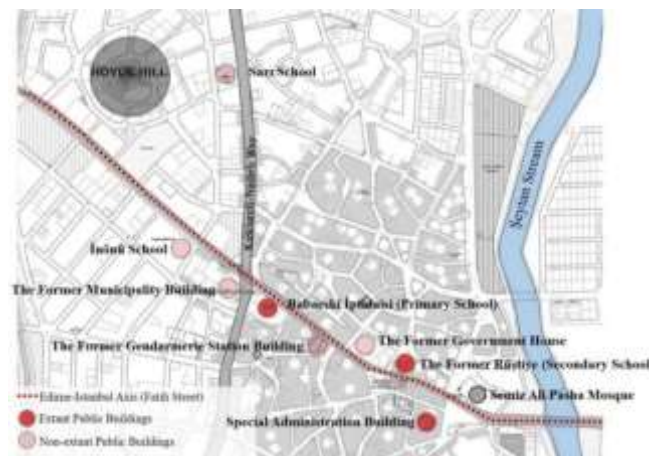


Figure 1. Location of late Ottoman public buildings in Babaeski

3.1. Extant Public Buildings

The extant corpus of late Ottoman public architecture in Babaeski comprises the Babaeski Train Station, the Provincial Administration Building, the Former *Rüştiye*, and the Babaeski *İptidaisi*. These buildings serve as the remaining physical evidence of the town's modernizing administrative and social fabric.

3.1.1. Babaeski Train Station

Location and Historical Context: Situated on Şehit Komiser Yurdatapan Street within the Gaziosmanpaşa Neighborhood, the Babaeski Train Station was commissioned between 1910 and 1912 as a constituent of the Rumelian Railway Line (Figure 2) (Engin, 2007). The station complex is composed of four distinct functional units: the main station building, a residential lodging unit, a weighbridge (scale), and auxiliary service facilities (Figure 3). The advent of the railway catalyzed a profound transformation in the regional socio-administrative hierarchy. The strategic importance of the station, coupled with rapid demographic expansion, necessitated the reorganization of the urban fabric; consequently, the Gaziosmanpaşa Neighborhood was formally established in 1950 in an area previously annexed to the Hamidiye Neighborhood (Öztabak, 2014a). Throughout the early 20th-century, the line sustained significant structural damage during the Balkan Wars and World War I. Dismantling of certain sections commenced in 1917, ultimately leading to the total cessation of operations in 1987 (Doğan, 2016). At present, following the termination of passenger transport, the station building and its auxiliary structures remain redundant, marking a period of functional obsolescence within the city's industrial heritage.



Figure 2. Rumelian Railway and Babaeski-Kırklareli Railway route (Yıldız, 2013)

Figure 3. Babaeski Train Station site plan (Prepared by the author based on the Babaeski Dev. Plan)

The main station building features a rectangular footprint and a two-storey massing. The ground floor is organized around a central entrance hall, flanked by passenger waiting rooms, the station master's office, and a ticket hall/counter section. The first floor was originally conceived as the station master's private residence and additional staff quarters.

Structurally, only the spaces situated to the left of the entrance hall include a basement level. Vertical circulation is facilitated by a wooden staircase positioned in the northwestern (left) corner of the building, with a latrine integrated into the stairwell (Figure 4a). A comparative analysis between the original architectural drawings and the as-built structure reveals a significant discrepancy: the enclosed bay window (*çıkma*) depicted in the project was ultimately constructed as an open balcony. Evidence suggests that this deviation was not a subsequent modification but rather an intentional design revision implemented during the construction phase. Following its completion, the edifice underwent several structural interventions that substantially altered the first-floor spatial configuration. A secondary wooden staircase was added to the women's waiting room on the ground floor to provide direct access to the upper level. Furthermore, the eastern (right) terminus of the first-floor corridor was partitioned, and three adjacent rooms were amalgamated to form an independent residential unit. The kitchen and hallway were reconfigured through new partition walls, and an additional toilet was installed above the original stairwell (Figure 4b). These modifications effectively transformed the building's internal organization to accommodate two separate family residences, thereby compromising the original programmatic unity (Yıldız, 2013).



Figure 4a-b. Original plans, sections and elevations of the building, and survey floor plans (Yıldız, 2013)

The principal entrance facade (eastern elevation) is characterized by a monumental central portal flanked by two rectangular windows on either side. This portal, serving as the entrance to the waiting hall, exhibits a distinctive Neoclassical character. It is framed by engaged columns (columns positioned adjacent to the wall) that support a lintel featuring a decorative relief with a ram's head motif on the keystone—a symbolic element often associated with power and station architecture of the period. A horizontal transom window is integrated into the lintel assembly. The balcony situated directly above the portal is supported by two robust corbels (buttresses), with two rectangular windows mirroring the ground floor arrangement on either side (Figure 5a).

Consistent with the late 19th-century architectural trends, the building demonstrates clear Neoclassical attributes in its symmetry, monumental proportions, and tectonic articulation. Currently, the ground floor window openings have been sealed, compromising the original transparency of the facade (Figure 5b).



Figure 5a-b. Entrance facade: original facade (Yıldız, 2013) and current façade (Author's archive, 2025)

The platform facade (western elevation) features four rectangular doors that provided direct access to the ticket hall, the first and second-class passenger lounges, and the third-class waiting room. Each door is paired with a rectangular window, maintaining a rhythmic void-to-solid ratio. The first-floor arrangement mirrors the eastern elevation, with a central door opening onto a balcony flanked by four windows. In contrast to the highly articulated east and west elevations, the north and south facades are blind, lacking any fenestration. Similar to the entrance facade, the ground floor apertures on the platform side are currently obscured or closed (Figure 6a-b).



Figure 6a-b. Platform facade: original facade (Yıldız, 2013) and current façade (Author's archive, 2025)

Construction Technique and Materials: The station building utilizes a load-bearing masonry system with brick walls. The structural transition between levels is managed through varied flooring systems: the ground floor is capped with a vaulted masonry slab, whereas the first-floor ceiling utilizes a traditional timber joist system. In larger spans, such as the central entrance hall, the wooden beams are reinforced by resting on steel profiles—a typical hybrid solution of the late Ottoman industrial period. The roofing structure employs a complex timber truss system, combining suspension and seating mechanisms to provide structural stability (Yıldız, 2013).

Auxiliary Structures: Lodging, Service, and Infrastructure: In addition to the main station, the complex includes three auxiliary structures, all sharing a rectangular plan and a gabled roof typology.

Lodging Building: This single-storey residential unit is currently in a dilapidated state. The western elevation features two rectangular doors and two framed windows, all of which have been sealed with concrete. The eastern facade contains two rectangular windows, while the narrow north and south elevations possess unique apertures—wide at the base and narrowing toward the top—suggesting a specific functional or ventilation requirement (Figure 7a). **Service Building (Toilets):** A single-storey structure situated to the north. It features rectangular windows on its east and west facades. Access is provided via two framed doors on the northern side, one of which has been permanently sealed (Figure 7b). **Weighbridge Building:** Also a single-storey gabled structure, this unit was designed for high accessibility, featuring four large framed doors (two each on the east and west facades) to facilitate weighing operations. The north and south elevations contain two framed windows. Due to its current redundant status, the large operational doors have been sealed with concrete (Figure 7c).



Figure 7a-b-c. Current status of lodging building, toilets and weighbridge building
(Author's archive, 2025)

3.1.2. Special Administration Building

Location and Historical Context: Situated in the Gazikemal neighborhood, the building occupies a strategic corner plot at the intersection of Fevziye and Fatih Streets. While a precise construction date is not documented, the spatial configuration suggests a late 19th-century origin (Canitez, 2012; Öztapak, 2014a). Historically, it functioned as the first branch of the *Ziraat Bank* in the region starting in 1880, operating within a property leased from its Greek owner until 1927. Following the bank's relocation in 1957, the edifice housed the *Babaeski Special Administration (İlçe Özel İdare)* from 1963 to 2000 (Çelik, 1970; Öztapak, 2015). It currently serves as the Gazikemal Neighborhood Headman's Office (*Muhtarlık*).

Plan Characteristics: The two-storey structure is accessed via the northern facade on Fevziye Street. The ground floor features a dual-entrance system: the western (right) portal leads to the rear courtyard and the vertical circulation hub, while the eastern (left) portal provides access to commercial units (shops). Architectural analysis indicates that the staircase was originally an open-air courtyard element but was later enclosed during the building's tenure as a bank to ensure interior continuity (Figure 8a) (Canitez, 2012). The first-floor layout follows the central hall (sofa) plan—a traditional residential typology adapted for institutional use—comprising a central hall flanked by two rooms on either side, with a balcony projecting from the principal facade (Figure 8b).

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The northern elevation displays an asymmetrical ground floor with two portals and two windows, one set within a recessed niche, while the first floor maintains a more rhythmic arrangement with six windows. The eastern elevation is blind, as it abuts neighboring structures, whereas the western elevation contains two windows on the upper level. On the southern elevation, the stairwell projects outward as a risalit-like volume, featuring four windows on its western side.

The architectural language is defined by segmental arches crownings the apertures, framed by decorative brick jambs. The tectonic expression is further emphasized by brick pilasters (columns) at the corners and a prominent cornice moulding that defines the roofline. These elements collectively reflect the Neoclassical influences prevalent in the late 19th-century Ottoman provinces (Figure 9).

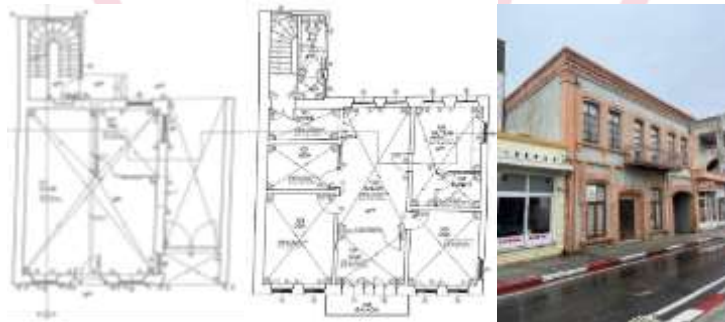


Figure 8a-b. Plan of the ground and first floors of the building (Canitez, 2012)

Figure 9. North façade (Author's archive, 2025)

Construction Technique and Materials: The building is constructed using a load-bearing masonry system, with brick walls resting on a robust stone foundation. It is capped by a traditional hipped roof. Exposed brickwork is utilized both structurally and decoratively in the jambs, corner pilasters, and cornice moldings. Notably, the timber joist flooring and the wooden ceiling on the upper floor remain as original structural components, preserving the building's material authenticity.

3.1.3. The Former *Rüştiye* (Secondary School) Building

Location and Historical Context: Situated at the intersection of Hamam and Adil Onat Streets within the Hacıhasan Neighborhood, the exact construction date of the Former *Rüştiye* remains undocumented. However, its origin is closely linked to the period following the post-*Tanzimat* educational reforms. Archival records from 1889 (BOA, H-01-03-1307; File No: 113, Folder No: 73) and entries in the 1903 Education Yearbook (*Maarif Salnamesi*) confirm its active educational role during the late 19th-century.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Girls' School (*İnas Mektebi*) in 1907 within this precinct highlights its continued pedagogical function into the early 20th-century (Figure 10a) (Öztabak, 2015). Consequently, the building is estimated to have been commissioned in the late 1880s.

To accommodate the growing need for secondary education, additional volumes were appended to the structure between 1950 and 1951. Following 1961, the edifice was repurposed as a Girls' Vocational High School, a transition that necessitated significant modifications to its original spatial configuration and structural components (Figure 10b) (Öztabak, 2015, pp. 86–87). The building later served as a military guesthouse after 1980 and as an annex to the Public Education Center (*Halk Eğitim Merkezi*) post-2003. Although it was registered as a cultural asset in 2014 and briefly renovated by the municipality for public use, the structure is currently vacant.



Figure 10a-b. The former *Rüştiye* building, 1908 and Girls' Vocational High School period, after 1961 (Öztabak, 2023)

Plan Characteristics: The building originally featured a two-level spatial organization comprising a basement and a ground floor. In its primary state, the principal entrance was situated on the northern elevation, facing Adil Onat Street. The basement level was organized around a longitudinal corridor running along the southern facade, providing access to three rooms located to the north. External access to this level was facilitated by a separate staircase (Figure 11). The ground floor, consisted of a central hall flanked by two classrooms. Substantial structural interventions in the early 1950s radically transformed the building's spatial hierarchy and planimetric organization.

An additional mass was appended to the structure, significantly increasing its footprint. This new section included a basement containing three rooms and a corridor. On the ground floor, the programmatic requirements were expanded to include five rooms arranged around a new entrance hall and a longitudinal corridor. A pivotal modification during this period was the relocation of the main entrance; a wide staircase set within a recessed niche was constructed facing Hamam Street, effectively shifting the building's orientation. Consequently, the original northern entrance was sealed and repurposed as a service (toilet) area. This intervention fundamentally altered the spatial perception of the original plan, obscuring the primary design logic of the late 19th-century structure (Figure 12).

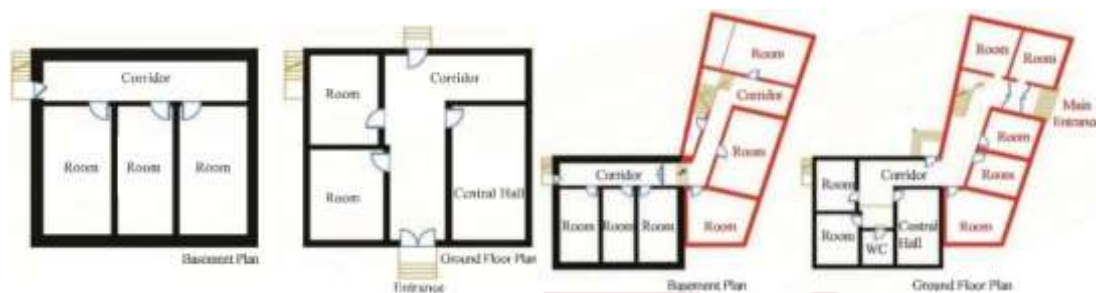


Figure 11. Plans of the first building (Öztabak, 2015)

Figure 12. Plans of the building after 1951 (Öztabak, 2015)

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The edifice epitomizes the rigorous symmetry characteristic of late Ottoman educational architecture. The northern elevation, the original principal facade, is organized around a central axis; the double-winged main portal is elevated by six steps and articulated with a segmental arched jamb. This entrance is flanked by narrow apertures and rectangular windows framed by matching jambs.

The architectural language is enriched with tectonic details, including vertical pilasters, pediment arrangements, and a profiled cornice crowning the structure. This rhythmic fenestration extends to the basement level with symmetrical segmental arched windows (Figure 13a). The 1950s western addition partially compromised the compositional integrity, introducing an asymmetrical arrangement (Figure 13b). Stylistically, the building represents a synthesis of traditional Ottoman motifs and Western-influenced Neoclassicism, where the emphasis on axial symmetry reflects the institutional aesthetics of late 19th-century bureaucratic modernization.



Figure 13a. South and east facade of the original building (Öztabak, 2015)

Figure 13b. Current Status of the building (original building on the left, the additional mass on the right) (Author's archive, 2025)

Construction technique and materials: The building utilizes a load-bearing masonry system, characterized by a material differentiation between levels: the basement is constructed with robust stone walls, while the primary elevations are composed of brick. The building is capped with a traditional hipped roof. Originally, the roof was finished with traditional Turkish tiles (*alaturka*); however, during the extensive structural interventions and additions of the 1950s, the covering was replaced with Marseille tiles, a common material shift in mid-century renovations.

3.1.4. Babaeski *İptidaisi* (Primary School)

Location and Historical Context: Situated on Fatih Street within the Gazikemal Neighborhood, the Babaeski *İptidaisi* was commissioned in 1914 under the tenure of District Governor Tevfik Sırrı Gür and inaugurated in 1915 as the “1st School” (Kırklareli Provincial Yearbook, 1947; Öztabak, 2014b). During the Republican era, the institution was renamed Atatürk Primary School. The building’s pedagogical function continued under Trakya University as a Vocational School between 1994 and 2006, followed by a brief period as a healthcare facility. Transferred to the Babaeski Municipality in 2012, it has functioned as the Atatürk Cultural Center since 2013 (Öztabak, 2015). The originally expansive garden (Figure 14) was significantly curtailed after the 1950s due to the construction of a police station and a teachers’ residence. Recent renovations in 2012 involved the replacement of timber window frames, interior reconfigurations, and the paneling of the eaves.

Plan Characteristics: The building features a rigorous symmetrical plan, elevated on a high basement level to mitigate water table issues. The principal northeast entrance is accessed via a monumental five-step marble staircase leading to an external landing. Secondary access to the basement is provided by auxiliary doors flanking the main entrance. The internal organization comprises four expansive classrooms and two smaller administrative chambers situated on either side of the central entrance hall. A notable architectural feature is the projecting masses at both termini of the plan. An intermediate space opposite the entrance, currently repurposed as a kitchen, facilitates access to the rear garden (Figure 15).

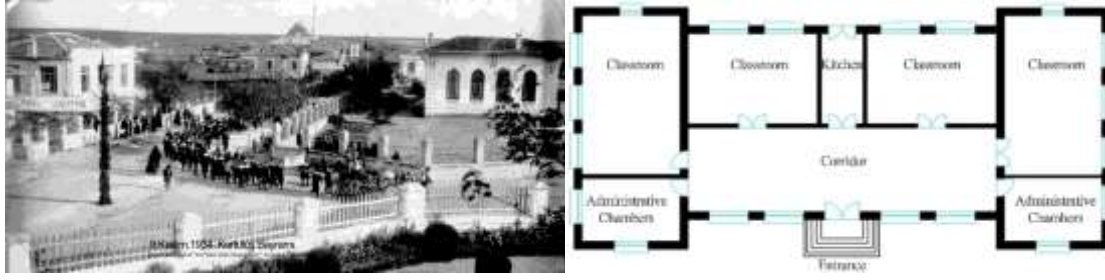


Figure 14. Babaeski *İptidaisi*, 1934 (Öztabak, 2023).

Figure 15. Plan of the building (Öztabak, 2015)

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The building's facade composition and decorative program are quintessential examples of the First National Architectural Movement. The principal northeast elevation is organized around a central axis, featuring an entrance defined by a segmental arched portal. This central bay is flanked by pointed arched windows, a motif that repeats on the projecting lateral masses. Each side facade maintains this rhythmic arrangement with four pointed arched windows, while the rear elevation mirrors the primary façade's composition (Figure 16a-b).

The tectonic expression is enriched by discontinuous moldings above the apertures and intricate plaster ornamentation below the sills. Notably, the upper levels of the window arches and the building corners are adorned with spherical and conical relief ornaments. Architecturally, the edifice bears a striking resemblance to the *Karaağaç Mekteb-i İbtidaisi* in Edirne, designed by the Technical Committee of the Ministry of Foundations (*Evkaf Nezareti İnşaat ve Tamirat Heyeti Fenniyesi*). Although the specific architect remains undocumented, the stylistic evidence strongly suggests the influence of Architect Kemalettin's design paradigm, particularly in the institutional standardization of provincial school buildings (Arslan Çinko & Eres, 2022).



Figure 16a-b. Northeast and Southwest facades (Author's archive, 2025)

Construction Technique and Materials: The structure employs a load-bearing masonry system, with a clear material hierarchy: foundations are composed of rubble stone, transitioning to brick masonry from the plinth level upwards. The building is capped with a traditional hipped roof. Significant portions of the original site boundaries remain; the garden wall is original, featuring monumental stone pillars at the main entrance gate, while auxiliary pillars utilize brick masonry. Internally, the material palette reflects various periods of use: the central hall and the rear service area are finished with ceramic tiles, whereas the administrative units and workshops feature wooden cladding. The doors and fenestration retain their traditional timber frames, preserving the building's material authenticity.

3.2. Non-Extant Public Buildings

The Former Government House, Former Municipality Building, Sarı School, İnönü School, and Former Gendarmerie Station constitute the lost public heritage of Babaeski. These edifices defined the town's administrative and pedagogical landscape during the late Ottoman period but were demolished at various intervals, resulting in the loss of their physical presence.

3.2.1. The Former Government House

Location and Historical Background: Constructed in 1894 under the tenure of Governor Abdurrahman Efendi, the building was situated on Fatih Street, occupying the site of the current Municipality Building. Archival land registry records dated March 23, 1979, identify the structure as the "Government House" located on Edirne Street within the Hacı Hasan Neighborhood. Following an ownership transfer to the Babaeski Municipality, the historic edifice was demolished in 1982 to facilitate the construction of the contemporary municipal headquarters (Öztabak, 2015).

Plan Features: The building featured a tripartite vertical organization consisting of a basement and two primary floors (Figure 17). The spatial configuration followed a rigorous axial symmetry, a hallmark of late 19th-century administrative architecture. Vertical circulation was facilitated by a central, three-flight wooden staircase, which served as the core for horizontal distribution across all levels. The programmatic distribution was organized as follows: Basement: Utilized for fuel storage (coal and wood) and specific judicial (courthouse) units. Ground Floor: Accommodated shared sanitary facilities and various administrative and judicial offices. First Floor: Reserved for high-level executive and legal functions, including the District Governor's office (Kaymakamlık), Prosecutor's office, population registry, and enforcement units.

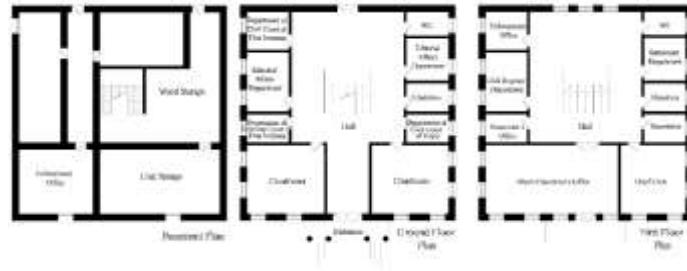


Figure 17. Plans of the Former Government House (Öztabak, 2015)

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The edifice was defined by an axial symmetry, featuring primary entrances on the north and south elevations. The southern facade, serving as the principal entrance, was emphasized by a monumental four-column arrangement. The central axis was articulated with a segmental arch, while the flanking apertures featured semicircular arches, creating a rhythmic hierarchy common in Late Ottoman administrative buildings.

A significant morphological change occurred at the entrance projection; the enclosed console (bay window), supported by four columns in the 1930s (Figure 18a), was subsequently converted into an open balcony (Figure 18b). This section functioned as a ceremonial platform and featured a triple window arrangement flanked by two rectangular windows on each side. The lateral (east and west) elevations maintained a rhythmic fenestration with six windows per floor. The original roofline was characterized by a prominent pediment and raised parapets, which were later replaced by a roof system with wide eaves. While the initial facade treatment included segmental arched jambs and decorative pilasters between the window bays, these elements were stripped during a 1960s renovation. Despite these later simplifications, the symmetrical massing, wide eaves, and entrance composition remained definitive markers of the First National Architectural Movement.



Figure 18a-b. The Former Government House, as seen in 1932 and 1960 (Babaeski Municipality Culture Directorate Archive, 2023)

Construction Technique and Materials: The edifice utilized a load-bearing masonry system, displaying a clear material hierarchy: the basement was constructed with rubble stone, while the primary elevations were of brick. Internally, the floor slabs and ceilings were of timber joist construction. The building was capped with a roof finished in traditional Turkish tiles, featuring a hidden roof (parapet) detail on the principal facade. High-traffic areas, such as the entrance staircase and landing, were finished in marble, whereas the internal stairwell was wooden.

3.2.2. The Former Municipality Building

Location and Historical Background: Situated on Fatih Street, the building was reportedly commissioned in 1914 by District Governor Tevfik Sırrı Gür. It served the city's administrative needs until 1982, when it was demolished to facilitate the construction of the new Government House (Öztabak, 2015).

Plan Features: The structure followed a square plan organized over a basement and two primary floors. The basement was dedicated to utility functions, including coal and wood storage. The ground floor was centered around a spacious entrance hall, featuring a wooden staircase positioned directly opposite the portal; this level housed the engineering, collection, and accounting departments. The first floor accommodated the presidency, secretariat, marriage registry, archives, and the municipal council hall, all arranged around a central waiting hall. A defining morphological feature was the chamfered corner entrance, which provided the primary access point and was topped by a projecting balcony on the upper level (Figure 19).

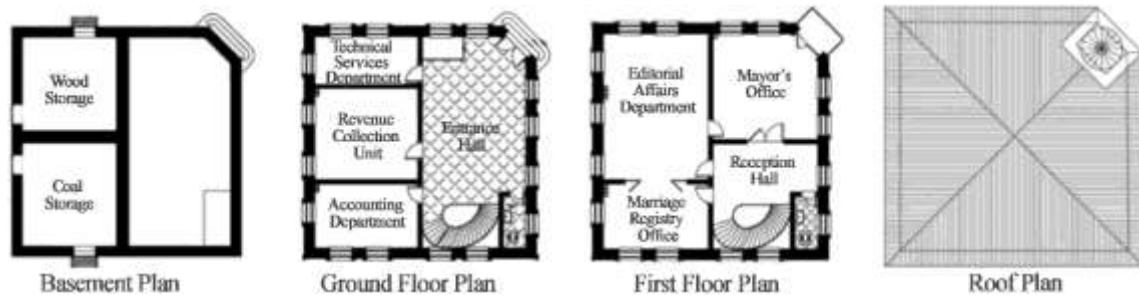


Figure 19. Plans of the Former Municipality Building (Öztabak, 2015)

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The building's architectural identity was defined by its chamfered corner entrance, a rectangular portal that served as the primary aesthetic and functional axis. This corner was emphasized on the upper floor by a projecting balcony featuring a pointed arch opening. Originally, the entrance mass extended above the roofline and was crowned with a lead-covered dome (Figure 20a), a signature element of the First National Architectural Movement. However, this dome was replaced by a pitched roof during renovations in the 1970s (Figure 20b). The elevations followed a rhythmic organization, with four pointed arched windows on each floor, visually unified by horizontal moldings (Figure 21).

Archival photographs from 1932 reveal that the roof originally featured wide eaves supported by decorative wooden corbels, which were later replaced with simplified, straight structural elements. These stylistic choices—the pointed arches, the corner dome, and the articulated eaves—categorize the building as a significant provincial manifestation of early 20th-century national identity in architecture.



Figure 20a-b. North and east facades of the Municipality Building in the 1950s and 1970s

Figure 21. West facade of the municipality building, 1932 (Öztabak, 2015)

Construction Technique and Materials: The structure was built using a load-bearing masonry system, consisting of brick walls resting on a rubble stone foundation. The floor slabs utilized a timber joist system (wooden beams), and the fenestration featured traditional wooden frames. The building was capped with a hipped roof originally finished in traditional Turkish tiles. The corner balcony was structurally supported by robust stone corbels (buttresses). While the most distinctive feature—the lead dome—was later removed and replaced with a hipped roof, the building’s material palette and craftsmanship reflected the high-quality masonry standards of the late Ottoman era.

3.2.3. The Sarı School Building

Location and Historical Background: Situated on Kırklareli Street—on the site currently occupied by the Public Education Center—the Sarı School derived its name from its distinctive yellow lime wash. It was also historically referred to as the “Hamidiye Neighborhood School.” Originally constructed as a gasworks facility to support military requirements, the building was extensively renovated in 1913 and repurposed as a primary school to address the rising educational demand (Kırklareli Provincial Yearbook, 1947). The structure was demolished in 1967 to facilitate the construction of the present institutional building.

Plan Features: Based on archival interviews and sketches by Mucit Öztabak, the building followed a single-storey-plus-basement configuration. The ground floor was organized into a principal’s office and three primary classrooms. The basement functioned as a coal storage unit (Figure 22). The inclusion of an expansive garden and a detached auxiliary toilet unit is consistent with the standardized pedagogical spatial models of the late Ottoman era.

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: Due to the scarcity of visual documentation, a comprehensive stylistic analysis is restricted. However, extant photographs indicate a rhythmic fenestration pattern where both windows and the primary portal were articulated with decorative jambs (Figure 23).

Construction Technique and Materials: The school was built using a load-bearing masonry system. The internal structural hierarchy relied on timber joist flooring and wooden ceilings. The edifice was capped by a wooden hipped roof finished with traditional Turkish tiles (Öztabak, 2015).



Figure 22. Plan of Sarı School (Öztabak, 2015)

Figure 23. Teachers and Students in Front of the Sarı School in the 1950s (Öztabak, 2015)

3.2.4. İnönü School (Treatment Centre)

Location and Historical Process: **Location and Historical Context:** Situated on Fatih Street, adjacent to the Former Municipality Building, the structure was commissioned in 1915 as a healthcare facility (Treatment Centre) at the initiative of District Governor Tevfik Sırrı Gür. It was repurposed as the İnönü School in 1931 and subsequently renamed Fatih Primary School in 1954. Following the relocation of the school to a new facility in 1962, the building was decommissioned and demolished.

Plan Characteristics: The building featured a rectangular, symmetrical plan elevated on a basement level necessitated by the site's topography. The principal northern entrance on Fatih Street was accessed via a four-step marble staircase leading to an external landing. The internal organization was centered on a main hall, flanked by two projecting administrative wings. Five classrooms were arranged symmetrically around the lateral and rear perimeters of these central offices (Figure 24). Independent access to the basement was provided by auxiliary doors positioned at the base of the main facade.

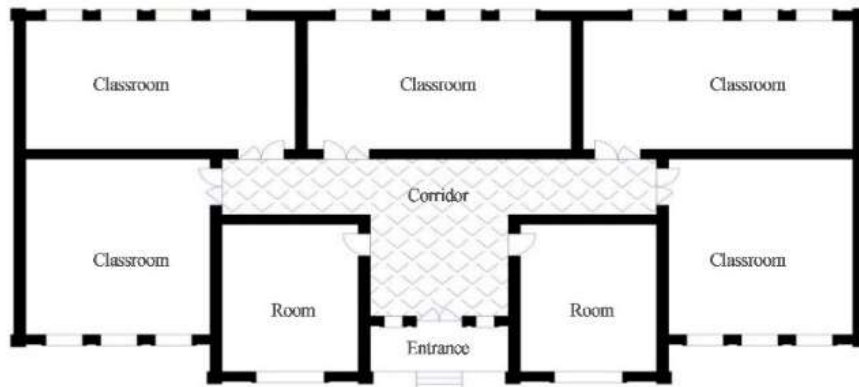


Figure 24. Plan of İnönü School (Öztabak, 2015)

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: The facade demonstrated the axial symmetry and institutional aesthetic of the First National Architectural Movement. The primary axis was emphasized by a varying roofline and a decorative dovecone detail. The entrance was set within a recessed niche, featuring a double-winged portal flanked by narrow apertures. The classroom wings contained three windows at the front and four at the rear, while the administrative sections were defined by large rectangular windows accentuated by decorative moldings. A horizontal molding line demarcated the transition from the basement to the ground floor. The entrance was topped with a calligraphic inscription reading “İnönü School,” and the roofline was underscored by a row of geometric decorative moldings beneath the wide eaves (Figure 25). The side elevations maintained a rhythmic fenestration with four rectangular windows each (Figure 26).



Figure 25. İnönü School Front Facade, 1932 (Öztabak, 2015)

Figure 26. İnönü School Side Facade (Öztabak, 2015)

Construction Technique and Materials: The edifice employed a load-bearing masonry system consisting of infill brickwork resting on a robust stone foundation. The structure was capped by a wooden hipped roof characterized by its expansive, articulated eaves.

3.2.5. The Former Gendarmerie Station Building

Location and Historical Background: Location and Historical Context: The building was situated on a strategic corner plot at the intersection of Fatih and Bederli Streets, directly west of the Municipality Building. While its precise construction date remains elusive, a document from the Ottoman Archives dated 1893 (BOA, H-17-05-1311; File No: 173, Folder No: 22) references a rented facility near the Government House for gendarmerie personnel and detainees, suggesting the structure was extant prior to this date. Due to its advanced state of decay, the building was demolished in 1980.

Plan Characteristics: In accordance with 1936 land registry records, the building is defined as “*fevkani*” (elevated/upper floor). It featured an L-shaped plan with the primary entrance oriented toward Fatih Street. The programmatic organization was divided by floor level: the ground floor housed detention cells, administrative sections, and wards overlooking the rear garden, while the upper floor was reserved for commanding officers’ quarters and executive administrative units.

Facade Configuration and Stylistic Features: Due to the loss of the structure, facade data is fragmentary. However, extant archival photographs indicate a rhythmic and disciplined fenestration pattern on the second floor, consistent with the institutional sobriety of late 19th-century military and police stations (Figure 27).

Construction Technique and Materials: The building utilized a hybrid masonry approach; while the ground floor likely followed the stone/brick masonry standards of the period, the upper floor was constructed using timber frame techniques. A notable architectural feature was the traditional roofline, defined by the extension of wooden rafters at the eaves, creating a vernacular silhouette typical of late Ottoman Rumelian architecture.

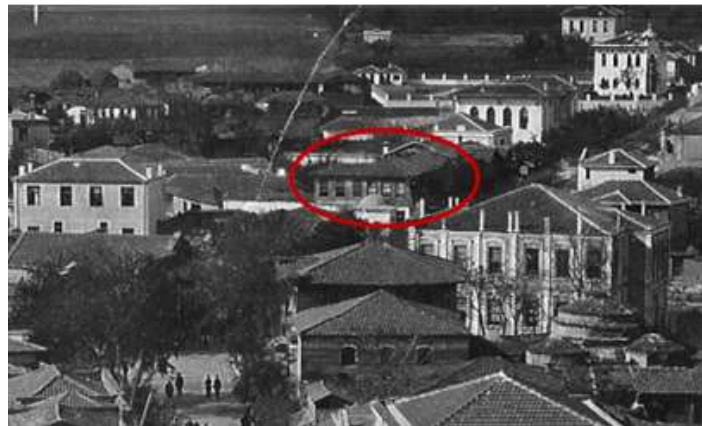


Figure 27. The Former Gendarmerie Station Building (Öztabak, 2015)

4. THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The most significant structural intervention shaping the urban development of late Ottoman Babaeski was the advent of the railway. Between 1910 and 1912, shortly before the Balkan Wars, a branch of the Rumeli Railway Line extending from Büyükmandıra to Kırklareli was commissioned for economic and strategic military reasons, leading to the construction of the Babaeski Train Station (Engin, 2007). Beyond their technical role in strengthening transportation infrastructure, railway investments served as spatial manifestations of the 19th-century Ottoman centralization and modernization policies. By integrating provincial cities into broader economic and administrative networks, railways catalyzed the formation of new urban centers (Ortaylı, 2000; Tekeli, 2011).

As noted by Başar and Erdoğan (2009), station buildings—initially relegated to the urban periphery—evolved over time into primary nodes of attraction and focal points that dictated the trajectory of urban growth.

Situated in the northwest, the railway line functioned as a physical boundary defining the western limits of Babaeski for decades. However, the station's impact transcended its transit function; it facilitated the expansion of the neighborhood fabric and the reorganization of the settlement pattern. The area, which had historically developed along a single artery and was known as the Hamidiye Neighborhood until 1950, gained strategic significance and increased population density following the station's establishment. The subsequent formation of the Gaziosmanpaşa Neighborhood in 1950 serves as a concrete testament to the urban restructuring triggered by the railway's influence (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Stages of urban development in Babaeski up to the late Ottoman period.

While the railway was the primary dynamic propelling urban development toward the northwest, the simultaneous intensification of public building production transformed the city's spatial organization. The now-lost (non-extant) Former Municipal Building, Former Government House, İnönü School, Sarı School, and Former Gendarmerie Station, alongside the extant Former *Rüştiye*, Provincial Administration Building, and Babaeski *İptidaisi*, characterize the period's architectural densification. This concentration demonstrates that post-*Tanzimat* administrative and educational reforms found their spatial counterparts on a provincial scale (Ortaylı, 2000; Tekeli, 2011).

Spatial analysis reveals that these public functions were clustered along the primary Edirne–Istanbul route, currently known as Fatih Street. This arrangement represents the reproduction of public space along a linear administrative axis. As illustrated in Figure 28, the alignment of public buildings along this corridor reinforced the historical significance of the axis, forming the spatial backbone of the city. Historically, from antiquity through the classical Ottoman period, the core of Babaeski was concentrated on the western banks of the Şeytan Stream, anchored by the Roman-era fortress and the Semiz Ali Pasha Complex. However, the linear westward orientation of late 19th and early 20th-century public buildings along Fatih Street signals a departure from this traditional core. This shift points to a modern urban organization that diverged from the classical Ottoman model. During the late Ottoman era, administrative, military, and educational functions were consolidated into prominent central structures that served as visible symbols of the modernizing state (Sarı & Umar, 2023). As Kuban (2007) posits, these buildings were not merely functional spaces but symbolic elements representing state authority and modernization ideology. In Babaeski, the alignment of the Government House, Municipality, and educational facilities along the main transportation artery ensured that public power was both visible and accessible, creating a new morphological framework that guided the city's modern fabric.

5. EVALUATION

In the Ottoman Empire, spanning the late 19th to the early 20th-century, public buildings emerged as the most prominent spatial instruments of centralization policies at the provincial level. The administrative restructuring initiated by the Provincial Regulations (*Vilayet Nizamnamesi*) facilitated the proliferation of new architectural typologies—including government houses, municipal offices, courthouses, and secondary schools—across the imperial territories. Both the functional programs and the representational qualities of these edifices constituted the architectural dimension of Ottoman modernization (Kuban, 1954; Çobanoğlu, 2007).

The late Ottoman public buildings examined in Babaeski represent a concrete manifestation of this transformation within a small-scale Rumelian settlement. The concentration of these structures along Fatih Street (the Edirne–Istanbul axis) indicates that public functions were organized along a linear administrative backbone. This spatial configuration aligns with the scholarly consensus that public buildings assumed a ‘center-producing’ role within the post-*Tanzimat* urban fabric (Kolay, 2023).

In Babaeski, this nascent public axis, evolving independently of the traditional core anchored by the Semiz Ali Pasha Complex, serves as a spatial representation of the modern administrative hierarchy. Consequently, the transition in Babaeski—diverging from the traditional *külliye*-centered Ottoman urban model—demonstrates the formation of a secular and bureaucratic public core. The relationship between architectural transformation and urban morphology must, therefore, be interpreted not merely as a stylistic shift but as a fundamental reorganization of spatial power.

Typological analysis reveals that these buildings generally feature rectangular or near-square geometries, characterized by rigorous symmetry relative to the entrance axis. This symmetrical plan and facade arrangement was a hallmark of post-*Tanzimat* public architecture, designed to emphasize the institutional identity and authority of the state. Stylistically, Babaeski’s public buildings exhibit an evolution from 19th-century Western-influenced eclecticism to the First National Architectural Style of the early 20th-century. The neoclassical emphasis on monumentality and order (Başkan, 2020) is clearly reflected in the facade programs of the Babaeski Train Station and the Provincial Special Administration buildings. Furthermore, the application of the First National Architectural Style is evidenced by the use of pointed arches, horizontal and vertical moldings, and emphasized portals in structures such as the Babaeski Primary School and the Former Municipal Building (Çobanoğlu, 2007; Erarslan, 2022).

Notably, the formal relationship between the Babaeski Primary School and Architect Kemalettin’s project for the Edirne Karaağaç Secondary School serves as a critical indicator of the dissemination of ‘type projects’ from the capital to the provinces. This phenomenon reveals a sophisticated degree of standardization and model transfer in late Ottoman public architecture. Similarly, the corner entrance and domed mass of the Municipal Building echo the monumental corner arrangements prevalent in early 20th-century urbanism. Concurrently, the entrance composition of the Government House employs a representational language—characterized by a wide central opening flanked by narrow side apertures—consistent with various provincial examples. Such parallels underscore that public buildings were produced under a unified programmatic and aesthetic framework across the Empire.

The strategic investment in the railway further complicates this morphological evolution. The location of the Babaeski Train Station in the northwest and its role in steering urban growth in that direction corroborate the transformative impact of railway infrastructure on Ottoman urban morphology (Başar & Erdoğan, 2009). In Babaeski, modernization facilitated a spatial shift driven not only by administrative edifices but also by transportation networks. Synthesizing these data, it can be concluded that the late Ottoman public buildings in Babaeski fulfilled three primary functions:

The representation of the centralized state apparatus at the provincial scale;

The production of a new public center and a linear administrative axis;

The localized application of Western-influenced and, subsequently, National Architectural paradigms.

In these respects, Babaeski stands as a holistic paradigm, illustrating the concretization of modernization at both the architectural and urban scales within a small-scale Ottoman district.

6. CONCLUSION

In line with the initial hypothesis of this study, it has been concluded that the Late Ottoman public buildings in Babaeski were not merely products of functional needs; rather, they played a decisive role in the city's development as spatial and architectural reflections of post-*Tanzimat* centralization policies at the provincial scale. This finding directly addresses the fundamental research problem discussed in the study: how the public buildings transformed Babaeski's spatial organization, public center structure, and understanding of architectural representation.

These buildings transcend their roles as mere architectural units for administrative and educational functions; they are spatial instruments that embody the bureaucratic organization and the nascent concept of public visibility characteristic of the modernizing Ottoman state within a small-scale settlement.

The concentration of late Ottoman public edifices along Fatih Street catalyzed the formation of a new public center distinct from Babaeski's historical core. This linear settlement pattern dictated the trajectory of urban expansion, establishing a spatial configuration that diverged fundamentally from traditional organizational principles. With the integration of the railway infrastructure, this public axis evolved beyond an administrative precinct into a structural backbone guiding urban growth. Thus, public buildings became primary determinants in the reorganization of urban morphology. From an architectural perspective, the rigorous plan layouts, symmetrical facade compositions, and pronounced entrance portals point to a unified design language that emphasizes the representational nature of late Ottoman public architecture.

The reflection of late 19th-century Western-influenced eclecticism and the early 20th-century First National Architectural Style in Babaeski's examples demonstrates that stylistic trends originating in the imperial capital were adopted and reproduced on a provincial scale. Furthermore, the strategic placement of Republican-era structures, such as the *Ziraat Bank* and the Community Center (*Halkevi*), within this same precinct underscores the continuity of the public core established during the late Ottoman period. Consequently, these buildings should be regarded not only as products of their own era but as the foundational elements that prepared the spatial ground for early Republican urban development.

This study offers three fundamental contributions to the literature. First, it provides a holistic examination of late Ottoman public buildings in relation to urban morphology within a small-scale provincial context. Second, by reconstructing and re-evaluating non-extant structures through archival documents and plan data, it restores the visibility and continuity of local architectural heritage. Third, by interpreting public buildings through the lens of spatial representation rather than merely through typology or style, it offers a conceptual contribution to the discourse on late Ottoman public architecture. In conclusion, the case of Babaeski illustrates that post-*Tanzimat* modernization generated a distinct spatial order even in minor districts, where public buildings functioned as fundamental catalysts of urban evolution. Through these structures, the settlement transitioned from a traditional logic to a modern administrative center, whereby public space became the visible and regulatory manifestation of a new understanding of the state.

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