

## AN ARCHITECTURAL EXAMINATION OF EARLY BANK BUILDINGS IN TURKEY

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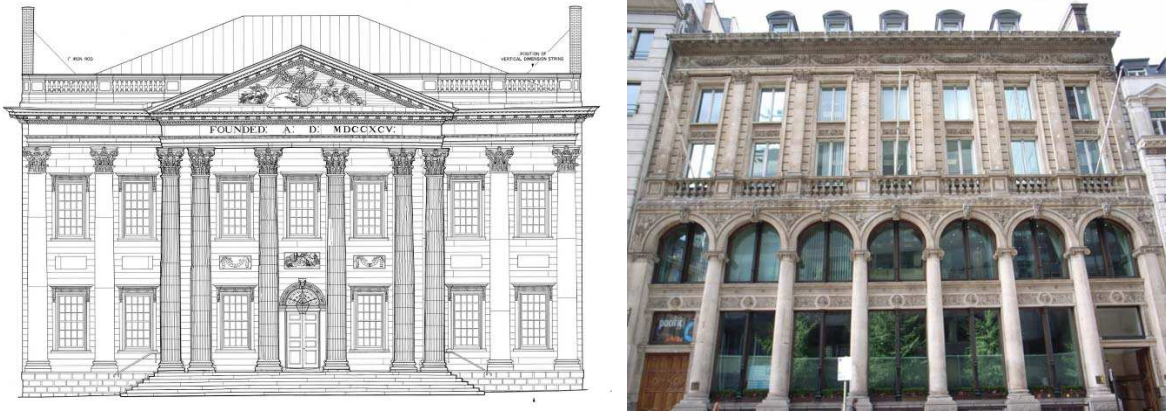
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The emergence of modern banking practice in the 17th century generated a new type of building for banks especially in Europe, and starting with the first half of the 19th century several bank branches throughout the world have been built. This paper focusing on the early examples of bank buildings in Turkey, examines the architectural characteristics of the first bank buildings that were designed by the Italian architect Giulio Mongeri, in order to understand design criteria of the buildings and define whether they represented European approach of bank architecture. Giulio Mongeri was the leader of the First National Movement in Turkey and the bank buildings examined for this paper are the finest examples. The examination of Mongeri's bank buildings revealed that the buildings were designed according to the functional needs and the spatial organization had similarities representing contemporary requirements, although façades were heavily ornamented in a way that was unique to nationalist architecture in Turkey. As a result of the examination it can be suggested that while bank branches throughout the world have common architectural characteristics and that they were adopted by Giulio Mongeri in early Turkish examples, local and traditional features were also added to represent the period they were built.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Ankara, Bank buildings, Architecture, Giulio Mongeri.

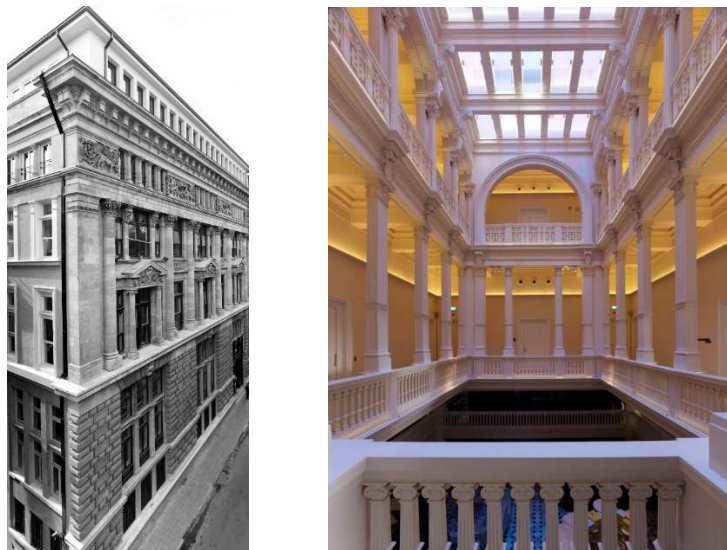
### Introduction

Banking activities going back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium B.C. in Babylonia and ancient Egypt were stemmed from the requirement that grain harvests be stored in centralized state warehouses and soon private banks dealing in coinage and precious metals were established (Davies, 1994). During the medieval period in Italy, the Medici bank set up by Giovanni Medici in 1397 was so successful that the scope of the business had expanded throughout Europe and branches of the Medici Bank were established as far as London (Goldthwaite, 1995). Banks have become an integral part of the economy in Europe since 17<sup>th</sup> Century (Davies, 1994) and in the United States of America by 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Klebaner, 1974). The modern banking system has been originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of industrialization and the need of capital which could no longer be met by individual financiers. In terms of architectural design of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century bank buildings, they were based on historicist styles, mostly ancient Greek, with their balance and symmetry (Figure 1) and were rich in ornamentation aiming to convince customers of their reliability (Vandeweghe, 2013). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, the neo-classical architecture of bank buildings was abandoned and buildings were designed like Italian Renaissance palaces (Figure 2) to symbolize stability and continuity of financial institutions (Vandeweghe, 2013).

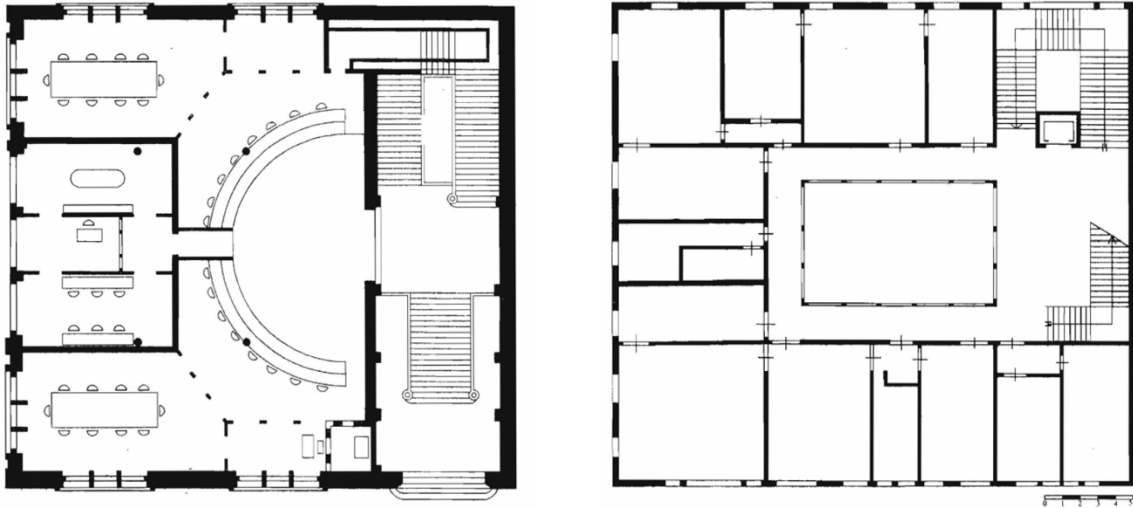


**Figures 1 & 2.** (left) First National Bank of the United States, Philadelphia, 1791, designed by Samuel Blodgett (Url 1), (right) Royal Bank of Scotland, Bishopsgate, London, 1877, designed by Thomas Chatfield Clarke (Url 2)

While banks and bank buildings gained importance in Europe starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Imperial financial system was totally different than the western ones. Nevertheless, the westernization of the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century initiated a new period, which resulted in the introduction of new types of buildings such as banks in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first ever national bank established by the Ottoman administration in joint partnership with British, was the Ottoman Bank in 1856, which was followed by Ziraat Bank in 1888. The Ottoman Bank survived until 2001 and the Ziraat Bank is still the most important state bank in the country. The first Ottoman Bank building in Istanbul was designed by Alexandre Vallauray in 1890 having two different façade organizations, while the main façade looking towards the street was in neoclassical style (Figure 3), the rear façade had orientalist elements (Aktemur, 2005). The plan of the building was divided into three parts in the ground floor, staircases, service bench and offices, while the upper floors were organized as offices surrounding an atrium (Figures 4, 5 & 6).



**Figures 3 & 4.** The Ottoman Bank Branch in Istanbul (Photos by Cemal Emden, Url 3)



**Figures 5 & 6.** Ground floor (left) and first floor (right) plans of the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul (Aktemur, 2005: 9, 10)

The first Ziraat Bank Building in Istanbul, on the other hand, was a more modest building designed by Mr Oseb (a local master builder) in 1891 (Hazar, 1986: 266) and had a symmetrical façade organization (Figure 7). The plan of the building represented a common spatial organization in traditional Ottoman houses, it was divided into three equal parts having a hall in the middle where the entrance and the staircase were found in opposite ends and offices reached from the inner hall, while upper floors were similarly divided into three parts and offices were again located on opposite sides of the hall. The comparison of first buildings of Ottoman Bank and Ziraat Bank shows that different architectural styles and spatial organizations were evident in the early buildings depending on the designer and the investment made by the banks. Ottoman Bank was founded with British capital and the contribution of French partners (Url 4), while Ziraat Bank was rooted on benefit funds and totally a national corporation (Url 5).



**Figure 7.** The Ziraat Bank Branch in Istanbul (Url 6)

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire started to lose power and land as a result of defeats in the Balkan Wars and the First World War, which resulted in the war of independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The new Turkish government declared that Istanbul was the capital of the Ottoman Empire and a new capital city for the new Republic was needed. Once Ankara was chosen as the new capital city, the construction and development of the city became a significant issue, especially in terms of constructing building for state organisations, constitutions and corporations. As well as Ottoman Bank and Ziraat Bank, İşbank was established in 1924 and new buildings to serve for the three banks were required.

This paper aiming to examine architecture of early bank buildings in Turkey, focuses on the building for the aforementioned banks designed by Giulio Mongeri between 1924 and 1929. In order to identify the architectural style of the buildings, the plans of ground floors and main façade organizations are examined for the study.

### **Architecture in the Early Republican Period and Giulio Mongeri**

One of the outcomes of the westernization period of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the increase in the number of architectural offices owned by foreign architects in Istanbul. There were 19 offices in 1890 owned by Greek, Armenian and Italian architects (Cervati, 1889/1890: 601) and 130 offices in 1912 (Cervati, 1889/1890: 800,801). As a result of the wars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of foreign architects decreased considerably, furthermore the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and selection of Ankara as the new capital were also other reasons for the decrease in the number of architectural offices in Istanbul. However, there was a desperate need for foreign experts as there were not enough educated Turkish architects and planners. In fact there were only two Turkish architects by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Istanbul, Mr Vedat Tek (opened his office in 1898 (Batur, 2003; 63)) and Mr Kemalettin (opened his office in 1900 (Yavuz, 1981: 59)). The foreign architects who were also teaching at Universities such as Alexandre Vallauray and Giulio Mongeri were significant actors both in educating young Turkish students and also in designing new buildings required for the new capital city.

Giulio Mongeri was an Italian architect who was born in Istanbul in 1849. He was graduated from Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan and returned back to Istanbul in 1906 (Can, 1993). He designed several buildings in Istanbul, such as St Anthony of Padua Church (1912), Karaköy Palace (1920), Maçka Palace (1920), Italian Consulate (1928) and Taksim Memorial's Plinth (1928) (Sözen 1984: 39) and he also contributed to the built environment of the newly established capital city of Turkish Republic, Ankara with bank buildings. In fact head offices for the three main banks (Ottoman Bank, Ziraat Bank and İşbank) in the new capital city were designed by Giulio Mongeri (1873-1953).

The architectural style of these three buildings is known as the 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement, which was effective in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As well as Giulio Mongeri, Mr Vedat Tek, Mr. Kemalettin and Mr. Arif Hikmet Koyunoğlu were the leading architects designing buildings in that style. The 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement of architecture was characterized with using Seljuk and Ottoman elements of architecture and decoration, aiming to develop a nationalist architectural style (Sözen ve Tapan, 1973). However this style was criticised because of having a spatial organization that does not represent contemporary approaches and because of giving unnecessary emphasis to decoration which reduced efforts to create a national consciousness against figurative composition (Sözen and Tapan, 1973). It is claimed that Mongeri used to say "*let's see façades first, not plans*" and that architecture was considered as a façade art in those days (Sözen, 1984: 31). On the other hand, Aslanoğlu (1995: 14) supports the idea that Mongeri did not only take the site into consideration in the plans of the bank buildings, he also paid attention to functional needs as central service halls were included in the plans.

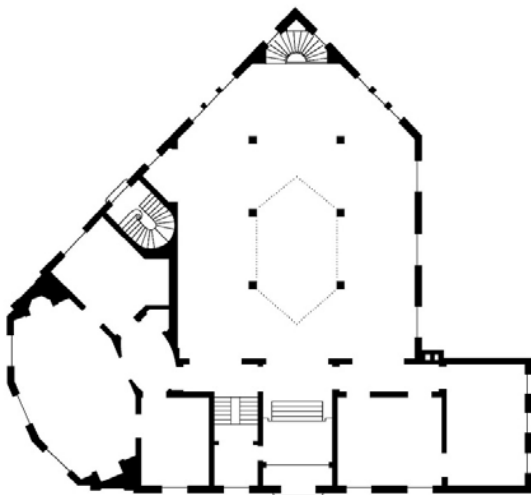
Within the scope of this paper Mongeri's Ottoman Bank, Ziraat Bank and İşbank buildings in Ankara, which were the early examples of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement in Turkey are examined focusing on the ground floor plans and main façade organizations of the buildings.

### The Ottoman Bank Building

The building, being the earliest bank building by Mongeri, is located on a corner plot, on the newly developed Atatürk Avenue in Ankara. Built in 1926, the building is composed of a basement and three storeys. The entrance of the building was given from Atatürk Avenue, which was organized symmetrical despite the slope that creates a higher elevation in the southern corner (Figures 8 & 9). The examination of the plan shows that the central service hall was reached directly from the entrance and that it was supported with staircases that give access to the basement and the upper floors (Figure 10). The ceiling of the central service hall was covered with a hexagonal skylight to bring daylight into the main space of the bank, however it was later covered with concrete floor (Figure 11). The rounded corner of the building was allocated for the director of the bank and the director's office was connected to the central service hall with a secondary semi private hall. Both the director's office and the connecting hall were designed in an elliptical form. The first floor of the building was designed to include two apartments for the directors (Url 7), while the third floor originally included a terrace only. In terms of the façade organization of the building, pointed arches were used in the ground and first floor windows, which were also supported with copies of traditional bay windows on the façade facing Atatürk Avenue on the first floor level, probably referring to the residential use in that floor.



Figures 8 & 9. Photos of the Ottoman Bank building (D.S.Okesli)



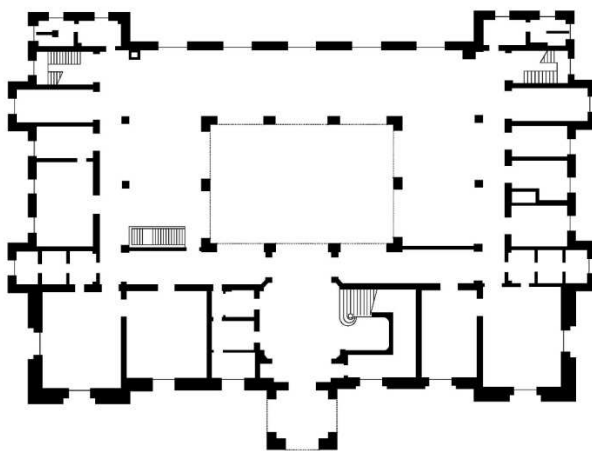
Figures 10 & 11. Ground Floor Plan of the Ottoman Bank (redrawn from the original drawing in Url 8) and the central service hall (Url 8)

### The Ziraat Bank Building

The building is located on a plot 100 meters away from the Ottoman Bank. Opened in 1929, this building is one of the finest examples the 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement with its façade ornamentation. The plan of the building has a rectangular layout with four corner towers and the entrance of the building is from Atatürk Avenue (Figures 12 & 13). The examination of the plan shows that the central service hall is reached directly from the entrance and it is surrounded with offices as well as staircases connecting the ground floor with the basement and the upper floors (Figure 14). The ceiling of the central service hall was covered with a rectangular skylight having stained glass ornamented with wheat figure (Figure 15). The plan organization is symmetrical as the façade, however the towers do not necessarily represent similar function, while the ones facing Atatürk Avenue consisted of large offices, others at the rear included toilets and staircases. Similar to its portico the façade of the building was ornamented using Ottoman design elements such as pointed arches and floral designs.



Figures 12 & 13. Photos of the Ziraat Bank building (D.S.Okesli)



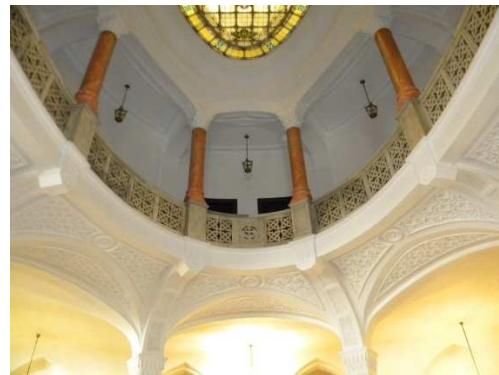
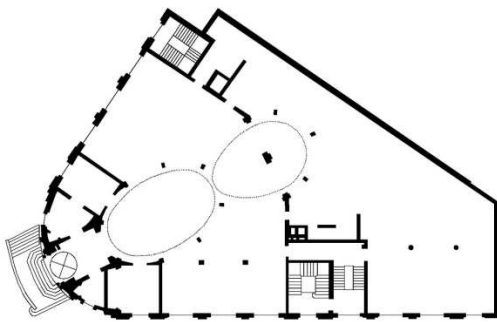
Figures 14 & 15. Ground Floor Plan of the Ziraat Bank (redrawn from Alfieri, 1990: 152) and the central service hall (D.S.Okesli)

## The İşbank Building

The building is located on a corner plot on Çankırı Avenue which connects Atatürk Avenue with the northern parts of the city towards the city of Çankırı. Both İşbank and the Ottoman Bank were designed giving emphasis to the corner and creating offices for the directors. Built in 1929, the building consists of a basement and five storeys and the entrance is given from the rounded part of the building which faces the corner connecting Çankırı Avenue and Çam Street (Figures 16 & 17). The examination of the plan shows that the central service hall was reached directly from the entrance and that it was supported with staircases that give access to the basement and the upper floors (Figure 18). The ceiling of the central service hall was covered with two elliptical skylights to bring daylight into the main space of the bank (Figure 19). The façade of the building was neatly decorated using Islamic and Ottoman elements, symmetrical and balanced composition was enriched using balconies, pilasters, reliefs, pointed arches and a wavy eave covering the main entrance.



Figures 16 & 17. Photos of the İşbank building (D.S.Okesli)



Figures 18 & 19. Ground Floor Plan of the İşbank (redrawn from Alfieri, 1990: 149) and the central service hall (D.S.Okesli)

### The Evaluation of Plan Organization of the Buildings

In order to discuss the idea supported by Aslanoğlu (1995: 14) that Mongeri took functional needs into consideration as central service halls were included, spatial organization of Mongeri's bank buildings in Ankara are examined in comparison with western examples. As seen in Figure 20, entrance halls were directly connected with the central service hall which included skylights in various forms to bring daylight into the main space of the banks. It is also seen that direct access from the central service hall was given using two staircases and a third staircase was added in the plan of Ottoman Bank and Ziraat Bank, which had access both from the central hall and the main entrance. In the plan of the Ottoman Bank, the director's office was located in the ground floor and separated using a secondary private hall, as the first floor of the building was designed to house apartments. In the plans of Ziraat Bank and İşbank, on the other hand, all the offices were treated equally.

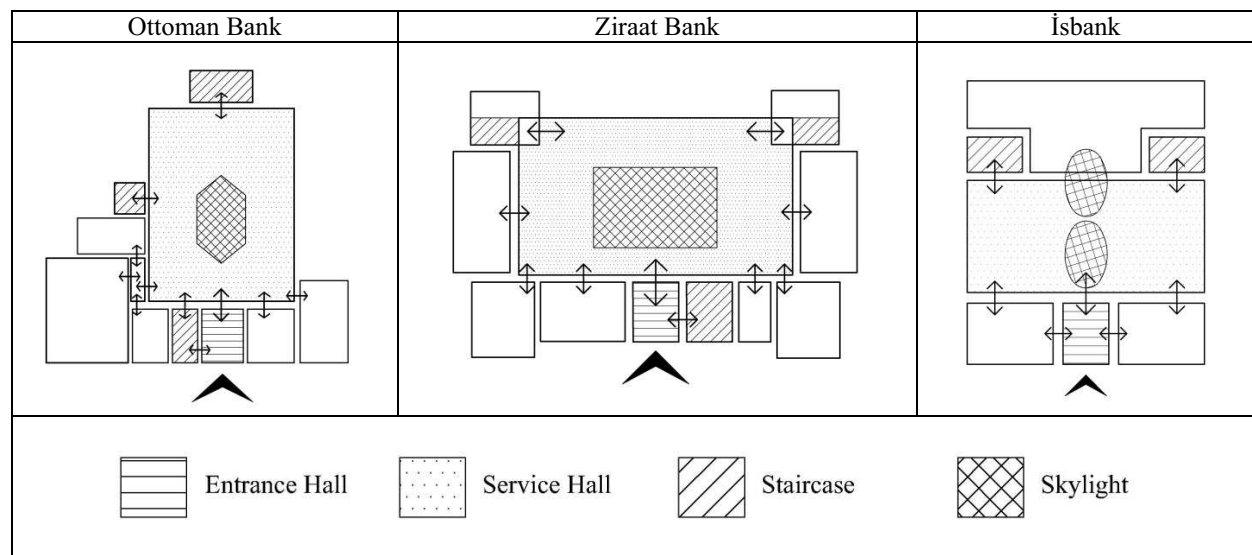
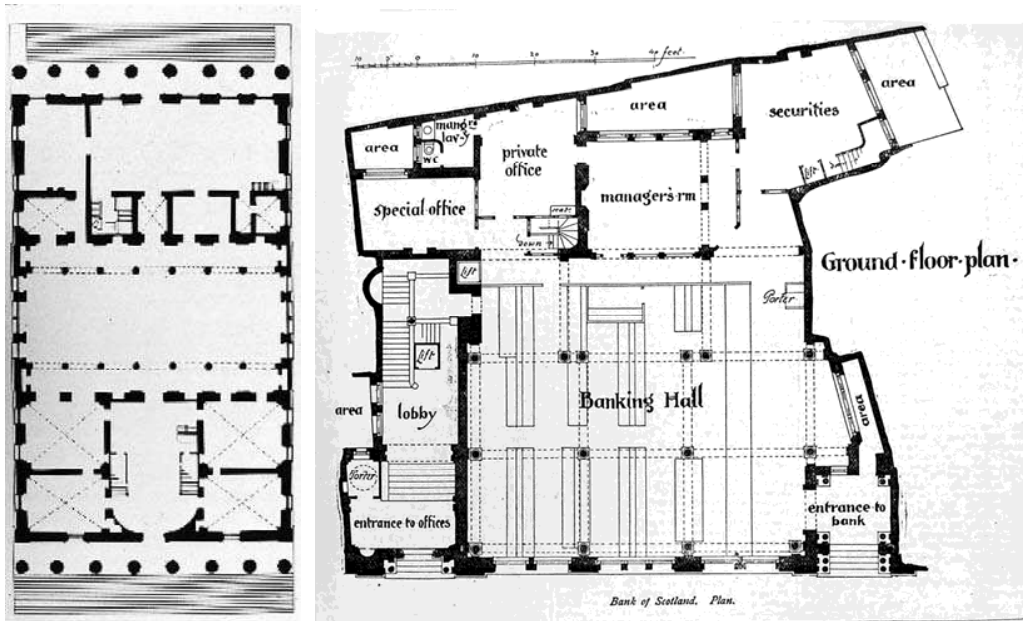


Figure 20. Spatial organization of Mongeri's bank buildings in Ankara

In terms of the functional organization, it can be argued that Mongeri's early bank buildings in Ankara were planned to include functional needs and to give emphasis to easy access to offices and especially to the central hall. Earlier western banks, such as Second National Bank in Philadelphia and Royal Bank of Scotland in London were also designed giving emphasis to the central service hall, connected directly to the main entrance (Figures 21 & 22). Nevertheless, spatial organization of the buildings were handled differently, while the Second National Bank of the USA was designed in ancient Greek style and therefore it can be accessed from two sides (although the main entrance was made clear by designing a separate space which includes staircases), the plan of the Royal Bank of Scotland included a secondary entrance for the offices upstairs.





Figures 21 & 22. (left) Plan of the Second National Bank of the USA, Philadelphia, 1824, designed by William Strickland (Url 9), (right) Plan of the Royal Bank of Scotland, Bishopsgate, London, 1877, designed by Thomas Chatfield Clarke (Url 10)

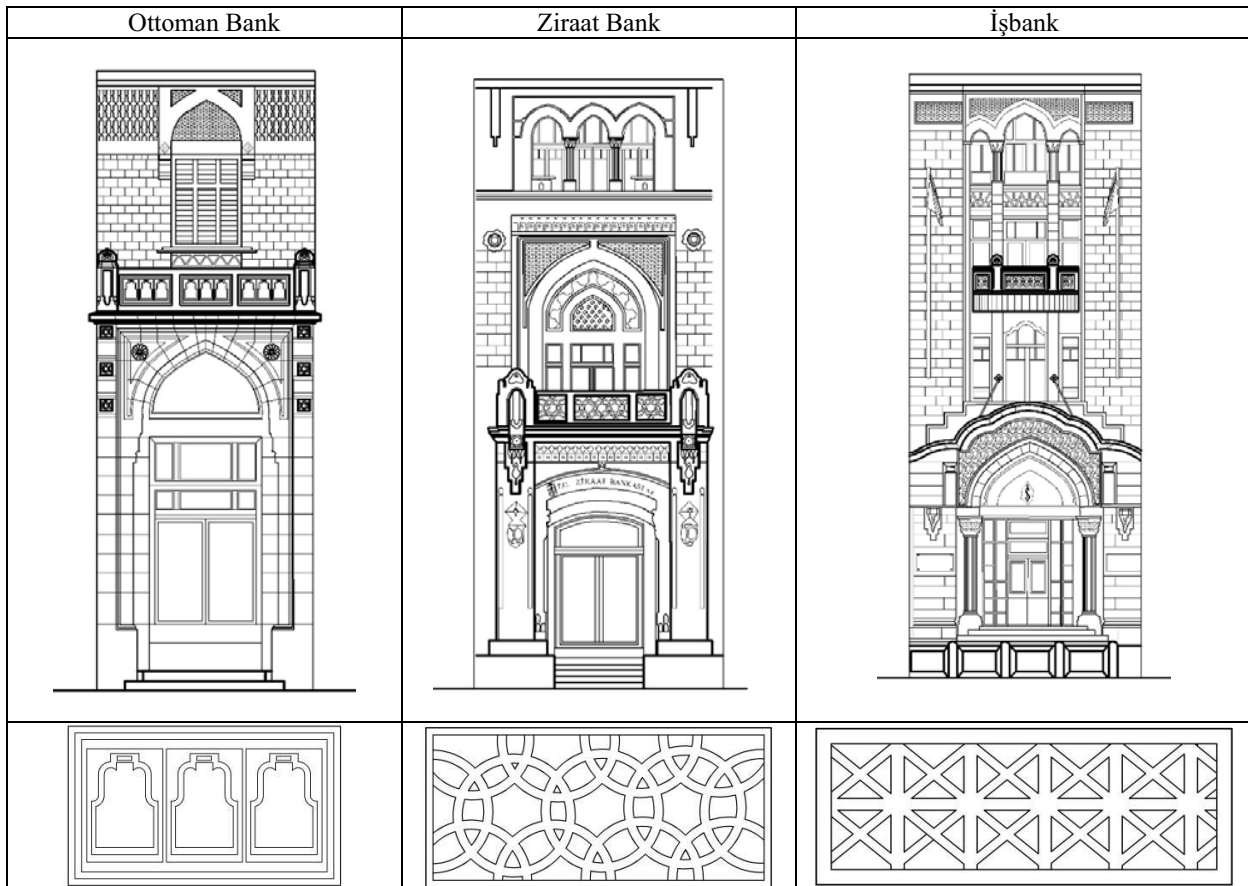


Figure 23. Main façade design of the three bank buildings and details of patterns used in banisters

### The Evaluation of Façade Organization of the Buildings

Being some of the finest examples of Turkish 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement, main entrances of the three bank buildings were ornamented using Islamic motifs. As seen in Figure 23, pointed arches were commonly used for windows and doors, all the buildings' façades were designed with balconies where the director's room or a main room was opened to. It is acknowledged as a result of the analysis that banisters of balconies were ornamented using differing geometrical patterns. In terms of window organization, it is evident that Mongeri paid attention to use various alternatives of window design. Although single pointed arched window was the common type, a trio having equal heights or giving the middle window an extra height were also used. The examination of the main façades of the buildings revealed that, similar to the symmetry of the façades on the whole, the design of main entrances were also symmetrical composing a vertical balance as well as a horizontal one. The eave covering the main entrance of İşbank was designed differently, using metal and in a wavy shape reminding Art Nouveau elements. Art Deco elements were also used especially on capitals, mostly showing modern interpretations of *muqarnas* (a type of ornamented console) in Islamic art.

### Conclusion

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the prominent architects in Istanbul developed a new architectural style called 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement aiming to bring Ottoman, Islamic, Turkish and Western features into architecture and establish a local but also modern architectural style. Giulio Mongeri was the leader of the movement and his designs for bank buildings in Ankara are considered finest examples of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Movement.

The examination of the ground plans revealed that Mongeri had adopted a simple and functional schema and whatever the shape of the plot is he implemented the same principles to every bank building he designed in Ankara. It can be argued that Mongeri successfully paid attention to functional needs and that his designs were in line with the European and American examples. Although the plan organizations were similar in the three buildings, façade organizations of them were varied. It is acknowledged as a result of the examination that symmetry and harmony were two main issues to be dealt for Mongeri. The symmetrical design was clear in every sense and balance of Seljuk and Ottoman elements was thought very carefully.

Distinguishing motifs of Islamic architecture have always been ordered repetition, radiating structures, and rhythmic, metric patterns. In this respect, fractal geometry has been a key utility, which was used in the examined bank buildings both for banisters of balconies and also for upper parts of the windows. Other significant features employed as motifs include columns, piers and arches, organized and interwoven with alternating sequences of colonnettes. The façades of the examined buildings were neatly decorated using Islamic and Ottoman elements, symmetrical and balanced composition was enriched using balconies, pilasters, reliefs and pointed arches.

In conclusion it is possible to argue that, being born in İstanbul, studying architecture in Milan, working with Turkish and foreign architects and lecturing at Academy of Fine Arts, Giulio Mongeri tried to develop a style of architecture that brought everything he had together. His plans were modern in terms of functional organization and responding to the needs of banking activities, in line with European and American bank designs. However, the main difference was the way of emphasizing the buildings. While earlier American examples tried to copy Greek temples, European bank buildings were designed to look like a renaissance palace. The Turkish experience in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, highlighted façades using Islamic and Turkish architectural elements in a unique way of balance and pattern.

### Acknowledgment

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