

From Germany to Japan and Turkey: Modernity, Locality, and Bruno Taut's Trans-national Details from 1933 to 1938¹

Burak Erdim

Ph.D. Candidate, Architectural History

Through the carefully phrased dictum, “All nationalist architecture is bad, but all good architecture is national,” Bruno Taut (1880-1938) expressed to his students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul his critical position toward the formal concerns of both the National and the International styles in architecture.² At the same time and perhaps less explicitly, this phrase conveyed the predicament that many modern architects faced as they began to draw attention to particular qualities of place and culture within the modernizing and yet nationalizing contexts of new nation states during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In an attempt to resist not only the homogenizing agendas of paternalistic states, but also the capitalist and imperialist subtexts of international styles, Taut devised an architectural program that simultaneously contained both regional and trans-national components.³

Just before his untimely death during his exile in Istanbul (1936-38), Taut was able to put this program to use in the design and construction of his last major commission, the Faculty of Languages, History and Geography building at the Ankara University in Turkey (1937-39) (Figure 1). It is interesting to note that existing readings of this building have not been entirely consistent with the ideas expressed in Taut's architectural program from this period. For example, Taut's particular conception of proportion is hardly mentioned in the existing discussions of this building, while, in Taut's program, proportion is not only identified as the most definitive component of architecture, but it is also made site- and culture-specific in contrast to its more traditional conception as an autonomous ordering system confined to the rationality of an exclusive architectural discourse.⁴ The following paper re-visits Taut's work during his exile, first in Japan (1933-36) and then in

For other studies that discuss Bruno Taut's work in Turkey, his trans-nationalism or what Esra Akcan has referred to as a vernacular cosmopolitanism, see Esra Akcan, “Modernity in Translation: Early Twentieth Century German-Turkish Exchanges in Land Settlement and Residential Culture” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005). Also see, Sibel Bozdoğan, “Against Style: Bruno Taut's Pedagogical Program in Turkey, 1936-1938,” in *The Education of the Architect*, ed. Martha Pollak, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 163-192; Bernd Nicolai, *Moderne und Exil: Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei, 1925-1955* [Modernists and Exile: Germanspeaking Architects in Turkey, 1925-1955], (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998); Manfred Speidel, “Doğallık ve Özgürlük: Bruno Taut'un Türkiye'deki Yapıları [Naturalness and Freedom: Bruno Taut's Buildings in Turkey],” *Bir Başkent'in Oluşumu: Ankara, 1923-1950* [The Making of a Capital: Ankara], (Ankara: TM-MOB, 1993), 52-66.

² Bruno Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi* [Lectures on Architecture], Trans. Adnan Kolatan. (Istanbul: Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi. 1938), 333.

³ By the term, “international styles”z, I am referring not only to the International Style as defined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson in 1932 (See, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's, *The International Style*, 1932, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966)), but also to Classical Architecture which is of course an international style in itself. In my opinion, the similarities between these two camps have not been adequately explored while the differences have been exaggerated. The popularizing agenda of the International Style was all too clear to Taut since he had already fought a battle against the *design for export* policies of the German Werkbund before the First World War. See Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

⁴ In his lectures, Taut discussed five components (proportion, technique, construction, function, and quality) as a way of defining, “What is Architecture?”, which became the title of the opening chapter of his book, *Mimari Bilgisi* [Lectures on Architecture].

Turkey (1936-38) in order to provide a reading that is more consistent with the ideas expressed in his final architectural program.

As a result of this re-examination, the paper makes two primary claims. First, it argues that the masonry coursing pattern of the Faculty of Languages building, which has been repeatedly identified as the primary nationalizing component, could instead be read as a trans-national element. A site- and culture-specific proportional system is then uncovered, based on Taut's program, as the actual regionally responsive element since this proportional system may have informed not only the dimensioning of the masonry pattern, but also the dimensional relationships throughout the whole building. Second, the paper suggests that while the regional and the trans-national components of Taut's architectural program served to challenge the formal and the theoretical limits of European Modernism, they also reflected Taut's existential conception of modernity as he sought to understand and legitimize his unusual position working as a displaced western expert. Working from this displaced position and in what was then considered to be the margins of modernity, Taut felt that the dialectic between the local and the global was essential not only to the continuation of his own career, but also to the continuous development of modern architecture. He therefore promoted a sustained interaction, instead of a *resistance*, between different cultures and regions and between the regional and the trans-national components of his architectural program.⁵

One can begin the analysis of Taut's program by asking the question: What did the word, "international" mean to Taut, during the early- and mid-1930s, relative to, for example, the formalistic and the stylistic use of this word, by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson

5 Here I am referring to the resistance that is advocated by Kenneth Frampton's influential essay, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, (New York: Norton 1983), see especially the sub-chapter titled, "The Resistance of the Place-Form," 26-28. Frampton suggests that developing nations should foster a resistance or at least a critical acceptance of the social and economic systems that are devised by industrialized nations. Even though Bruno Taut and Kenneth Frampton would have disagreed on this issue of resistance, it is interesting that they both focused on tectonics in their discussion regarding the dialectic between the global and the regional. At the same time, it is interesting to note that while Frampton sees the tectonic as the regionally defined element, Taut finds it to be the manifestation of a universal logic of construction that is responsive to specific physical phenomena, but transcends regional or national boundaries.

during those very same years?⁶ For Taut, the word, "international" certainly had social, political as well as artistic implications and reflected the actual conditions of the displaced trans-national populations that were created in Europe following the end of World War I. At that time, many ethnic and minority groups were relocated or massacred as they did not fit the homogenizing populations and identities that were being invented by the new nationalist states.

Along with many others across the extended geography of Europe and Eurasia, Taut experienced a life-changing displacement when the Nazi regime declared him a cultural bolshevik in 1933 particularly due to his extensive interest and involvement in the Soviet Union between 1931 and 1933.⁷ Following a successful career as an expert and leader in modern housing design in Berlin, Taut had to flee Germany in order to avoid imprisonment and possible execution. After accepting an invitation from the Japanese Federation of Architects, Taut left via Switzerland and began a long and arduous journey at the age of 53. He traveled over land and sea routes through Marseilles, Naples, Athens, Istanbul, Odessa, Moscow, and Vladivostok in order to get to Japan.⁸ Why did Taut go through such trouble to go to the East, while, for example, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe came to the United States?⁹ Kurt Junghanns argued that the East and particularly Japan attracted Taut as its architectural tradition responded to the tectonic and the spiritual principles of the new architecture.¹⁰ But, what were these principles and in what particular ways were these principles to challenge the limits of European Modernism?

Taut provided answers to these questions in lectures, essays, and books that he began to develop during his exile in Japan where he was not given substantial architectural commissions. Instead, the Japanese Federation of Architects entrusted him the task of formulating a theoretical foundation for the development of a modern Japanese architecture based on an analysis of historical and regional precedents.¹¹ Toward this end, on October

6 As Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson sought to popularize Modern Architecture in the United States, they deliberately avoided its social and political content and defined it as the International Style in purely formal terms. They wrote, "There is, first, a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles, with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration, mark the productions of the international style," in their book, *The International Style*, 20. Also see, Le Corbusier's formal and static five points: *pilotis*, roof garden, free plan, horizontal windows, and free façade, in, "Five Points towards a New Architecture," 1926, in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, Ulrich Conrads, ed., (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 99.

7 Kurt Junghanns, "Bruno Taut," *Lotus* 9 (1975): 221.

8 Sibel Bozdoğan, "Against Style..." 164.

9 Wolfgang Pehnt, for example, has pointed out the similar roots, common beliefs, and the close friendship and collaboration of Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe especially during the years immediately following World War I. See, Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973). Taut's journey to the East could also be compared and contrasted with Le Corbusier's journey to the East which extended only as far as Istanbul in 1911 when Corbusier was young and at the beginning of his career. See, Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret), *Journey to the East*, Ivan Zaknic, ed. and trans. with Nicole Pertuiset, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), and, Ivan Zaknic, "Of Le Corbusier's Eastern Journey," *Oppositions* 18 (1979): 86-99.

10 Junghanns, 221.

11 Aside from his remaining manuscripts and letters, most of which can be found in the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, most of Taut's writings from this period can be found in the following publications: *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, (Tokyo: The Society for International Cultural Relations, 1937); *Houses and People of Japan*, Tokyo: Sansendo Co. Ltd., 1937, 2nd ed, 1958; and, *Mimari Bilgisi [Lectures on Architecture]*, Trans. Adnan Kolatan. (Istanbul: Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi. 1938).



Figure 1
Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography building at the Ankara University in Ankara, Bruno Taut, 1937-39.

1935, after only two years of studying Japanese history and culture, Taut summarized his observations and suggestions in a lecture titled, “Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture” that he presented to the Japanese Society for International Cultural Relations (Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai).¹² Taut began by recognizing the limits as well as the fundamental significance of his subjective position as a twentieth-century western architect working in the East. He declared,

As an architect, my attitude toward the historic is necessarily conditioned by the artistic conception which I myself endeavor to realize. From this it follows that artists must speak and write subjectively about art. But is there any science of art which would be objective in the sense that it would present authentically not only historical data, but also stylistic questions and qualities of old works—thus giving a truly just criticism, independent of time and space?¹³

By identifying the limits of his inevitable subjectivity, Taut was making a case for artistic freedom which to him was simultaneously bound and set free by the limits of one’s very experiences and interactions. From this empirical perspective, he was drawing attention to his own interaction with Japan in order to suggest that a possible new Japanese architecture could be generated from not only a careful self analysis, but also Japan’s past and present interactions with other regions and cultures.

Once Taut established the central importance of this interaction, he continued his lecture by pointing out what he found to be shared sensibilities between western and eastern art and architecture. After all, he felt that these were the very qualities that allowed him to function in a place that was less familiar to him. In this part of his lecture, his purpose was to show, what he considered, universal concepts did not just originate from and exist solely in the West. He claimed, “Beauty may be called ‘eternal’ only when the form—whether in the Gothic Cathedral, the Doric Temple, or in the Ise Shrine and the Katsura Palace—has fulfilled to its utmost, the demands made upon it by the environment and culture of the country: in short, when it is a successful realization of the entirety of things.”¹⁴ In this way, by proposing how a universal concept such as beauty was a function of the quality of the relationship between the object and its environment and by showing how such a concept could not be limited to the West, Taut sought to dispel a certain Japanese fascination with the West. He told his audience, “the exotic no longer exists in Europe for Japan or in Japan for Europe.”¹⁵

Taut went on to show how interaction and communication between regions have always been at work in the development of, what is at times falsely considered to be, regional qualities. In order to further articulate this point, Taut showed in a diagram how various trans-national influences had always been a part of the making of Japanese art and architecture (Figure 2). He explained that both the Katsura Palace and the Nikko Temple, which were believed to be the icons of traditional Japanese architecture, were the result

¹² For the full report, see Bruno Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 1936, (Tokyo: The Society for International Cultural Relations, 1937).

¹³ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

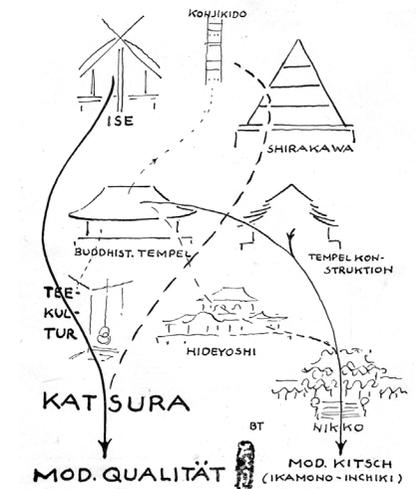


Figure 2
Diagram showing the positive and negative influences on the development of Japanese building traditions. Bruno Taut.

of strong Chinese and Buddhist influences. At the same time, Taut observed that the two buildings were drastically different in the way that they responded to the specific conditions of their sites. Tracing this difference through the genealogy of Japanese architecture, Taut identified a negative and a positive line along its development. On the negative side, Taut felt that the Buddhist Temple, even though it had contributed to the tea culture that had produced Katsura, did not respond to the qualities of its site and climate. He demonstrated, for example, that the excessively heavy roof of the Nikko Temple did not make structural sense in an earthquake-prone region since it required unnecessary bracing which negatively affected the proportional qualities of its architecture.

On the positive side, Taut defined the Ise and the Katsura as belonging to the positive side. He explained that these two buildings had trans-national origins and yet they had synthesized various social rituals, craft traditions, available materials, and the climatic conditions in order to respond to the peculiar requirements of their specific culture and site. Taut provided the ninth-century farmhouses that were preserved at Shirakawa in Gifu Prefecture as the positive local tradition that blended with the Chinese Buddhist influence to produce Katsura. The rational and responsive construction of the Shirakawa houses reminded Taut of European Gothic, medieval, and vernacular traditions. In this way, Taut pointed out that this responsiveness to site, culture, and climate was a value that was shared by the positive examples of both eastern and western cultures. In addition, he formulated that this logic of construction could become, “building art” when a dynamic and responsive proportional system reflected a harmonious relationship between the building and the site.¹⁶ Taut put forward the Katsura Palace as the perfect example that had achieved a rare unity both within and without despite its trans-national and trans-regional origins. Taut reflected,

In world architecture this Palace is one of the soundest examples of complete and perfect realization of function; indeed, in the functions of beauty and spirituality as well as that of utility. The extent to which every detail has been brought into

¹⁶ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, see Ch. 2, “Proporsiyon [Proportion],” 25.

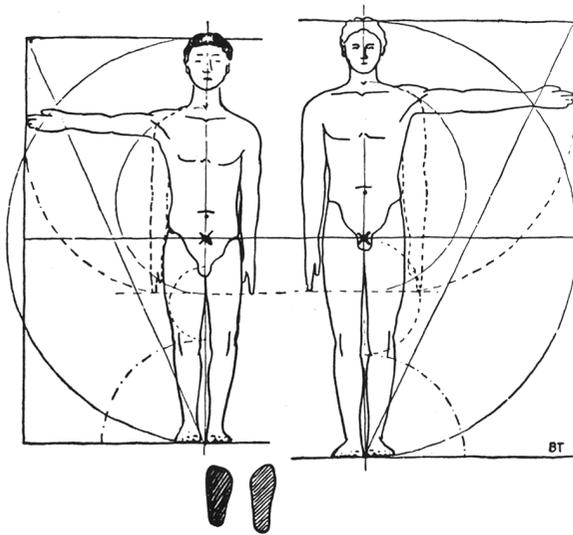


Figure 3
Diagram showing the proportional variations in Japanese and Western men, Bruno Taut, 1938.

perfect proportion with every other is worthy of great admiration. This has been so well done that although even the smallest details have their own individuality, one of them predominates to the detriment of their unity as a whole.¹⁷

Taut further articulated the relationship between proportion, site, and the trans-national logic of construction in his book, *Lectures on Architecture* that he compiled in Japan and used in his lectures in Turkey between 1936 and 1938. In the second chapter titled, “Proportion,” Taut wrote that the beauty and the specific proportioning system of the Ise Shrine are directly connected to the humidity of the summers and the coldness of the winters in Japan. He continued that the same temple would have been “dead like a fish out of water in the bright sun and transparent air of Greece.”¹⁸ In this way, proportion became the key principle through which the trans-national tectonic logic of a building could be rooted in its cultural and physical setting.¹⁹

Consequently, Taut reasoned that a dynamic and responsive relationship between architecture and the cultural landscape would have to oppose the legitimacy of universal or autonomous formal or proportional systems suggested by the International Style as well as the classical traditions in architecture. Instead of arbitrary geometrical relationships suggested by the ideal proportions of Leonardo da Vinci’s interpretation of the Vitruvian man, Taut proposed a responsive humanism by recognizing that, for example, western and eastern bodies have significant proportional differences.²⁰ He demonstrated this idea in a

¹⁷ Taut, *Fundamentals...*, 34.

¹⁸ Bruno Taut, *Lectures...*, 56. Also see, Bozdoğan, “Against Style...,” 183.

¹⁹ By fundamentally opposing arbitrary use of proportion and by linking the organization of the elements of the building to site and culture specific qualities, Taut was continuing a mode of criticism that was begun by the pioneers of the modern movement such as Horatio Greenough or John Ruskin during the first half of the 19th Century. What is different about Taut however is that while Greenough and Ruskin developed their ideas essentially in favor of a national architecture, Taut began to modify their ideas towards the development of a trans-national program.

²⁰ Based on his readings of a Japanese scientist Dr. Tadasu Misawa, Taut proposed, “...the small size of the



Figure 4
House Okura, Azabu, Tokyo, Gonkuro Kume and Bruno Taut, 1936.

diagram where he split the Vitruvian circle and the square in half so that the whole could contain more than just one man (Figure 3).²¹ Splitting the ideal figure allowed the two halves to be flexible and, while the idea of proportion remained central, the components of the circle and the square could now respond to the specific cultural and physical needs of its inhabitants. However, and this is a key point, just as the Japanese and the western bodies made up the two halves of the circle and the square in Taut’s diagram, and just as the Katsura Palace was the result of a synthesis of both Chinese and Japanese traditions, Taut felt that the program for a modern Japanese architecture, as well as the program for modern architecture, would continuously develop through an open acknowledgement of the everyday interactions that were already taking place between regions. In this way, he felt that the identity of a region could no longer be limited to static definitions and borders.

Regarding the nature of these interactions, Taut did not hesitate to note in his sketchbooks that, despite his admiration for Japanese building traditions, he kept bumping his head in Japanese houses and that the *tatami* floors were utterly cold and uncomfortable in the winter. Taut expressed this uneasy match between his aging Western body and the Japanese house through conversations that he had with his Japanese friend Mr. Suzuki,

Taut: What I do mean is the admirable way in which the Japanese house has adapted itself to the special climate of Japan and is in harmony with local customs and daily occupations... I must really rack my brains to remember a modern house which allows the wind to blow through it (commenting on the ability of Japanese houses to cross-ventilate)...

Mr. Suzuki: Ah, well, you may be right. But then, you see, for modern life the old style of building is not suitable at all. Talking of projecting roofs, for example, you must admit that we have no use any more for these dark old-fashioned rooms

Japanese is no peculiarity of race but a consequence of their style of living, their food and customs.” Similarly, Taut felt that architectural proportion should be a function of culture as well. See, Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 41. While such pseudo-scientific theories on race and culture are of course highly questionable, Taut’s particular use of this is interesting and can be analyzed further.

²¹ This diagram first appeared in his, *Houses and People of Japan*, 41; and later in, *Lectures...*, 65.

in the interior...

Taut: Nobody said you were to imitate the old style completely! That would be as terrible a mistake as slavish imitation of foreign styles...²²

On the one hand, Taut's conversations with Mr. Suzuki remind one of the hierarchical dialectic in Plato's *Republic* where the teacher/master, in Taut's case, he and the West, provide the logic that the student or the East eventually comes to follow. On the other hand, Taut's conversations provide one of the most direct accounts of the nuances and the power structures that can be present in a dynamic encounter between the self and the other or between two subjects as they try to resolve the infinitely complex issues of tradition, modernity, and identity. It is significant that Taut sought to develop ideas through these very conversations towards the conception of not only a new Japanese architecture, but also an architectural process that could consistently be responsive to the continuous interaction between the local and the global forces. A similar interaction occurred in 1936 when Bruno Taut designed Villa Okura with Gonkuro Kume, as an example of what a new Japanese architecture could be (Figure 4). The building made extensive use of the horizontal sun-shading devices and clerestory operable windows in order to block direct sunlight during the summer months while allowing the warm air to rise and escape through the high awning windows, therefore creating both ventilation and air movement.²³

Even though horizontal sun-shading devices were a specific response to the traditional forms, building techniques, and the oppressive humidity of the Japanese summers, Taut felt that the relationship between the sun-shading devices and windows could be rearranged and adapted to the sun angles, temperatures, humidity levels and most importantly the cultural requirements of other regions. Taut felt that the careful adjustment of such features to cultural and climatic conditions would begin to provide the site- and culture-specific proportional system that would enable a harmonious relationship between the

²² This passage is taken from, Bruno Taut, "Houses and People of Japan," *Daidalos* 54 (1994): 65-66. For the full conversation see, Bruno Taut, "What now? (Chapter XI)," in *Houses and People of Japan*, (Tokyo: Sanseido Co. Ltd., 1937, 2nd ed, 1958), 255-274.

²³ Villa Okura was also designed specifically to accommodate Western furniture such as chairs, tables, armchairs and couches, etc.

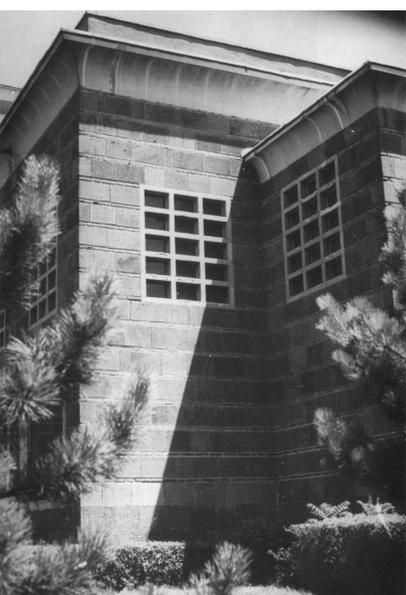


Figure 5
Alternating brick and stone masonry pattern of the Faculty of Languages building.

building and the cultural and the physical environment. On October 10, 1936, following an invitation from the Turkish Republic, Taut left Japan and arrived in yet another unfamiliar place, Istanbul, in order to teach as the head of the Department of Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts and to serve as the chief architect of the Ministry of Education and Public Works.²⁴ While in Istanbul, Taut repeatedly made use of the similar sun-shading devices not only in his own house in Ortaköy, but also in order to bring natural light deeper into the classrooms of a number of school buildings that he designed in Ankara, Izmir, and Trabzon, Turkey.²⁵ In this way, Taut felt that the trans-national logic of construction contained mobile components that could be adjusted and made site- and culture-specific through the use of proportion. This simultaneously regional and trans-regional program also allowed Taut to legitimize his position as an architect who could move from place to place and respond to the architectural needs of a variety of settings and cultures.

On October 10, 1936 Taut arrived in Istanbul at the height of what was later termed as the Second National Movement in the History of modern Turkish architecture.²⁶ This movement, which was advocated largely by Turkish architects, came as a backlash against the popularity not only of the International Style, but also of the almost exclusive preference of the Turkish Government for foreign architects.²⁷ Within this context, Taut's alternating stone and brick pattern (*almashik*) that covered the exterior of the Faculty of Languages building was interpreted by architects and scholars as a welcomed attempt at regionalism

²⁴ This was Taut's second significant encounter with Istanbul. Taut first came to Istanbul in 1916 in order to develop a proposal for the German-Turkish House of Friendship Competition in Istanbul. He was one of the eleven participating architects (Walter Gropius was also invited, but could not come since he was serving in the German military). The competition was organized by the Deutscher Werkbund and the twelve German architects who were invited to the competition were chosen by the Werkbund as well. The participating architects also acted as the judges and German Bestelmeyer's proposal was chosen as the winning entry. However, the House of Friendship was never built since Germany and the Ottoman Empire lost World War I and consequently their hopes of extending Germany's trade bloc all the way to India through the Persian Gulf. Therefore, Taut's original intellectual and architectural interest in the East went hand in hand with German Imperialism. For further details on the competition see, Deutschen Werkbund und der Deutsch-Türkischen Vereinigung, *Haus der Freundschaft in Konstantinopel, Ein Wettbewerb Deutscher Architekten, mit einföhrung von Theodor Heuss*, (München: Verlag von F. Bruckman A.G.), 1918; and Süha Özkan, "Türk-Alman Dostluk Yurdu Öneri Yarışması, 1916 [Turkish-German Friendship House Competition, 1916]," *O.D.T.Ü. Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi [M.E.T.U. Faculty of Architecture Journal]* (Fall 1975): 177-210. Taut's second destiny with Turkey came in 1936 when Hans Poelzig (another House of Friendship architect), who was to take Ernst Egli's position at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, died unexpectedly before his (Poelzig's) arrival. Following a long elimination process complicated by the preferences of Nazi sympathizers in Turkey, Taut was finally offered the job based largely on Martin Wagner's recommendations. Wagner was already in Turkey at that time.

²⁵ For an extensive analysis of Taut's school buildings in Turkey see, Burak Erdim, "Lost in Translation: the Encounter between Bruno Taut and the Turkish Republic from 1936-38," (Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 2004). Also see relevant essays in, Bernd Nicolai, *Moderne und Exil: Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei, 1925-1955 [Modernists and Exile: Germanspeaking Architects in Turkey, 1925-1955]*, (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998).

²⁶ For a survey of Modern Turkish Architecture see, Renata Holod and Ahmet Evin, eds., *Modern Turkish Architecture*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984). One should note that some of the periodizations used in this reference have been called into question by more recent and more detailed analyses. For example, see, Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

²⁷ Sibel Bozdoğan, "Nationalizing the Modern House: Regionalism Debates and Emigré Architects in Early Republican Turkey," (in English) in Bernd Nicolai, ed., *Architektur und Exil: Kulturtransfer und architektonische Emigration 1930 bis 1950*, (Trier: Porta Alba Verlag, 2003), 185-186.

by a foreign architect (Figure 5).²⁸ This interpretation was largely due to the fact that the *almashuk* pattern that Taut used throughout the building was conveniently considered to be solely Turkish and was associated only with early Ottoman and Rum-Seljuk building traditions within the nationalizing context of the new Turkish State. However, just as Taut had recognized the international origins and the trans-national tectonics of the Katsura Palace, he must have also noticed that this particular wall pattern had been used in the construction of both Turkish and Byzantine buildings not only in Istanbul, but also throughout other parts of Turkey, Greece, Italy, and the Balkans.²⁹ In this way, just as Taut was finding tectonic parallels between the European Gothic and the Shirakawa houses, he may have found that this particular pattern provided him with a cultural and tectonic continuity from Germany all the way to Istanbul. Therefore, instead of celebrating an isolated national character, this detail may have served to create a continuity rather than a discontinuity, both historically and geographically for Taut, between regions and cultures.

At the same time, even though the actual origins of the *almashuk* pattern was not exclusively national or regional, the particular proportional system that Taut established through the use of this pattern may have provided the means through which a more specific relationship was established between the building and its location. In the interior, one finds that the horizontal coursing of the masonry modulates the dimensioning of every component of the building. Stair riser dimensions, height and width of window openings, and ceiling heights were all established by the proportional system set up by the tectonic logic of the masonry pattern (Figure 6).³⁰ Therefore, it becomes



Figure 6
Stair detail,
Faculty of Languages building.

28 For example, Sedad Hakkı Eldem wrote, “Bruno Taut ... attempted to impart a Turkish character to his brick and stone walls and was, in my opinion, highly successful.” See, “Towards a Local Idiom: A Brief History of Contemporary Architecture in Turkey,” (*Zodiak* 10, (September 1994): 43.

29 See Robert Ousterhout’s “Ethnic Identity and Cultural Appropriation in Early Ottoman Architecture.” (*Muqarnas*, 12 (1995)): 48-62, where he demonstrates the transnational origins of this particular masonry pattern. He argues that at times and in particular cases, the same masons may have built both the Christian and the Muslim buildings.

30 I have not yet been able to verify whether, for example, the stair riser dimensions are different from the standards suggested by the German version of the Architectural Graphic Standards. My current estimates, which are derived largely from photographs, show that the riser dimensions that Taut used are on the lower end of international standards. These dimensions also seem lower than the ones Taut had used in similar

possible to suggest that this proportional system may have been adjusted to be responsive to the physical, cultural, and climatic conditions of Ankara.³¹ In this way, while the constructional logic remained trans-regional, its particular dimensions may have been designed to respond to particular local conditions. Consequently, in Taut’s architectural program, an autonomous system such as proportion was made site-specific while the basic tectonic system of a building was seen as the trans-regional element, providing a continuity between cultures and regions as it reflected the trans-national logic of construction.

One could suggest that, through the components of this architectural program, Taut was not only trying to invent a responsive Modernism that could grow out of the specific conditions of each place and culture, but he was also attempting to construct a continuity out of the discontinuous fragments of his own life and work.³² Stone construction and stone coursing patterns, for example, had held considerable importance to Taut since his formative years. While training at a Building Art Vocational School (*Baugewerksschule*) in Königsberg between 1897 and 1901, Taut had worked as a mason’s apprentice in a construction firm.³³ In addition, years later, while working under his most influential mentor, Theodor Fischer, Taut worked on the design of many stone buildings including those at the Jena University. The components of these buildings resemble the window pattern, the entrance canopy, and the stone coursing pattern of both the Faculty of Languages building in Turkey and the Villa Okura in Japan.³⁴ By pointing to the similarities in these examples, one could argue that Taut was trying to establish parallels between his trans-national experience and the tectonic traditions of these regions. The possibility of such a continuity served to legitimize Taut’s at times unwelcomed position as a western expert who was to understand regional conditions better than his/her local colleagues. In this way, his responsive proportional system served to create a continuity not only between regions, but also between the fragments of Taut’s career allowing him to reconstruct its parts as vital components of an ongoing investigation regarding the dialectic between the regional and the trans-regional.

In Japan, Taut had shown how trans-national encounters between China and Japan had found a synthesis in the constructional and the proportional system of the Katsura Palace. Similarly in Turkey, Taut sought to synthesize trans-national sources through the use of a proportional system that was responsive to the Turkish culture and climate. One

buildings in Germany. These findings could support the thesis that Taut may have used a different dimensioning system in Turkey. The masonry system is not structural and serves as a cladding system that covers the concrete structural frame. Nevertheless, its pattern defined by the alternating courses of stone and brick manifests the proportional system that orders the whole building.

31 It has been suggested that Taut was preoccupied with discovering the underlying golden section in the proportional principles of Ottoman architecture so as to apply them to the design of the façade of the Faculty of Languages building. See Bozdoğan, “Against Style...,” 184.

32 For a more extensive discussion of the idea of translation in Bruno Taut’s work, see Esra Akcan, “Modernity in Translation: Early Twentieth Century German-Turkish Exchanges in Land Settlement and Residential Culture” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005), 690-739.

33 Rosemarie Haag Bletter, “Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart’s Vision: Utopian Aspects of German Expressionist Architecture,” (Diss. Columbia University, 1973), 544.

34 In addition, during the 1920s, during his own architectural practice and collaboration with his brother Max Taut, Taut had used coursing patterns similar to that of the Faculty of Languages building. See the various stone coursing patterns used both on the exterior and interior of buildings in, *Max Taut: Bauten*, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2002). One explanation of this similarity is that Taut was exposed to the *almashuk* pattern when he came to Istanbul in 1916.

should add that during the design of the Faculty of Languages building, Taut was working with other exiled Germans, Austrians, as well as Turkish colleagues and students who were themselves trying to sort out whether they belonged to their memories of the Ottoman Empire or to the nationalism and the modernizing doctrines of the new Turkish Republic. Working in this atmosphere, Taut wrote, “With my colleagues at the office of the Ministry of Education, we are working on the details of the Faculty of Languages building as if we are playing the different instruments in a symphony orchestra.”³⁵ What Taut liked about this group was that, within the group, in addition to each individual’s varied backgrounds and experiences, there was a shared and simultaneous feeling of loss and discovery.³⁶ Soon after his arrival in Istanbul, Taut wrote to his wife, “Today, living has become very hard. No one is in their real home. However, I am happily here and so busy that my head is about to explode.”³⁷ This simultaneous feeling of loss and discovery or exhaustion and rigor that Taut expressed from Istanbul, perhaps not surprisingly, resembled Marshall Berman’s later description of the experience of modernity,

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world--and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.³⁸

When Taut was faced with the loss of the familiar and the discovery of the unfamiliar, both of which, as Berman suggests, were inevitable components of the experience of modernity, he was, for the most part, able to absorb only those qualities and concepts that were already familiar or comprehensible to his western background, identity, and architectural thinking. In this way, one could argue that the interaction Taut had with other cultures had only limited success in modifying Taut’s identity. On the other hand, through his sustained dialogue with the East, Taut began to come to terms with such limitations and to formulate a way through which he could begin to design and live responsively in an unfamiliar world. As Taut was removed from Germany, he resolved to remove the ancient idea of proportion from its so-called universal reign and to make it responsive to the lives of other cultures and regions. Seen in this way, the details of the Faculty of Languages building can not be read simply as Taut’s attempt at regionalism. Instead, they were Taut’s direct response to a

35 Manfred Speidel, “Doğallık ve Özgürlük: Bruno Taut’un Türkiye’deki Yapıları [Naturalness and Freedom: Bruno Taut’s Buildings in Turkey].” *Bir Başkentin Oluşumu: Ankara, 1923-1950 [The Making of a Capital: Ankara]*. (Ankara: TMMOB, 1993), 54.

36 Wolfgang Pehnt writes, “In the expressionist context the word *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or ‘total work of art,’ had a double meaning. As normally used, it meant the union of all the arts in architecture, but it also referred to the total environment that called upon more than one of man’s senses.” The essence of the goal to appeal to a multiplicity of senses has also made its way to and necessitated the idea of teamwork in architectural practice. This idea was to later surface in Walter Gropius’s Architects’ Collaborative, for example. See, Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 19.

37 Manfred Speidel, “Doğallık ve Özgürlük...,” 58.

38 Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 15.

trans-national modernity the ubiquity of which he recognized as he began to reconsider his privileged position as a western expert.

In summary, the analysis of Taut’s journey reveals that the word “international” represented the ever-present dialectic between local conditions and global pressures that he hoped the shared experience of modernity could equally value and continue. In a similar way, Bruno Taut saw his exile, modernity, and the development of modern architecture as a dynamic and trans-national experience that was constantly and inevitably redefined through encounters between individuals and regions. In this way, Taut viewed modern architecture as the evolving product of a responsive process that would follow slightly different paths in each particular place while maintaining a trans-national character as a result of continued interactions and exchanges between cultures.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography building at the Ankara University in Ankara, Bruno Taut, 1937-39. View of the front façade and the main entrance canopy.

Source: Sibel Bozdoğan, “Against Style: Bruno Taut’s Pedagogical Program in Turkey, 1936-1938,” in *The Education of the Architect*, ed. Martha Pollak, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 176.

Figure 2: Diagram showing the positive and negative influences on the development of Japanese building traditions. Bruno Taut.

Source: Bruno Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, (Tokyo: The Society for International Cultural Relations, 1937), 25.

Figure 3: Diagram showing the proportional variations in Japanese and Western men, Bruno Taut, 1938.

Source: Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan, 1937*, (Tokyo: Sanseido Press, 1958), 41.

Figure 4: House Okura, Azabu, Tokyo, Gonkuro Kume and Bruno Taut, 1936.

Source: Winfried Nerdinger, Kristiana Hartmann, Matthias Schirren, and Manfred Speidel, *Bruno Taut 1880-1938: Architekt zwischen Tradition und Avantgarde*, (Stuttgart: Anstalt, 2001), 185.

Figure 5: Alternating brick and stone masonry pattern of the Faculty of Languages building.

Source: Sibel Bozdoğan, “Against Style: Bruno Taut’s Pedagogical Program in Turkey, 1936-1938,” in *The Education of the Architect*, ed. Martha Pollak, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 185.

Figure 6: Stair detail, Faculty of Languages building.

Source: Bernd Nicolai, *Moderne und Exil: Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei, 1925-1955 [Modernists and Exile: Germanspeaking Architects in Turkey, 1925-1955]*, (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), 92.