

## Reading the Signs of Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau in the Buildings of Raimondo D'Aronco

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### Abstract

Ottoman architecture gained a new appearance under the influence of imported architectural styles throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the Palace opening out to the world at large, inviting western artists to the Empire, the western understanding of architecture began to reign over Ottoman concepts as all structures were now included in a new stylistic organization through the influence of foreign architects. In particular, with the era of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), Ottoman architecture was impacted by the force of architectural movements originating in Europe that brought Neoclassicism, Neo-baroque, Neo-gothic, Orientalism, Art Nouveau, Eclecticism, Swiss Chalet, and the English Victoria and Art Deco styles to the foreside. The most influential of these movements in Ottoman society, however, was Art Nouveau. The most powerful representative of Art Nouveau in the Ottoman realm was Abdulhamid II's architect, Raimondo D'Aronco. A "Palace" architect, it was thanks to D'Aronco that the Art Nouveau style came to influence Istanbul's architectural traditions, and it was also through him that a new Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau with a "local" character was born. The aim of this paper is to explore the Art Nouveau style that has held sway over Ottoman architecture since 1893 through the works of its most famous implementer, Raimondo D'Aronco, and to define the characteristics of the Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau that made his designs so notable. Toward this aim, some of the architect's works have been selected and analyzed as to plan, construction system and decorative elements.

### Introduction

The Art Nouveau Movement (1880-1910) sought to revitalize and assign a new value to handicrafts, an element that had suffered diminished attention with the advent of the Industrial Age. The movement's slogan was "*Art for everyone/Art in everything*," which signified promoting applied arts as the main principle of design. This democratic art movement impacted both Europe and America, striving to capture the relationship between art, craft and industry with a contemporary approach.

Art Nouveau artists took on the task of overcoming the deficiencies of style that had emerged with the rapidly increasing onslaught of machine-produced works, breaking their ties with the past, promoting a novel and new art form that represented the free spirit of the individuals of a new era. This thinking was best reflected on the facade of the Secession Building, a major structure of the times, and in the motto, "*To every age its art, to every art its freedom*" (Der Zeit Ihre Kunst. Der Kunst Ihre Freiheit).

This intellectual movement called Art Nouveau found space to spread, helped by the facility provided by new modes of communication. The style came to position itself in every area of art and architecture, interior design, painting, furniture, fabrics, graphics, industrial arts and other mediums, entering the realm of the Ottoman population as a result of the Ottoman "Westernization" process. The process of opening out to the West in Ottoman architecture, westernization and the western influence began to be seen in the eighteenth century. In the period known as the Tulip Era (1703-1730), the wide interest in European culture led to the introduction of the Baroque and Rococo styles to Ottoman architecture, and instigated the beginning of the use of these styles in religious and public buildings as well as in civic buildings such as houses and palaces.

The imprint of western influence that started in Ottoman architecture in the eighteenth century continued throughout the 19th century. The Palace opened its doors to Western artists in this period

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and particularly after the Era of Reforms (1839), when the concepts of Western architecture had begun to dominate Ottoman architecture. With the proclamation of the Imperial Edict of Reform (*Tanzimat Fermanı*), the principle of equality between Muslims and non-Muslim Ottoman citizens was adopted, which made it possible for non-Muslim architects to start working in the market freely without having to face any legal restrictions. Among the leading clients of the non-Muslim Ottoman or foreign architects educated in Europe were the Ottoman elite and the Levantines who were living in Ottoman society.

During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), the power of traditionalism completely faded and architectural plans and decorative elements in new buildings began to reflect the characteristics of the Neo-Classical, Neo-Gothic, Neo-Baroque, Orientalism, Eclecticism, Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles. One of the architectural styles imported from the west in this period was Art Nouveau. Art Nouveau was in particular the architectural style most admired during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. In this period, important procurers of Art Nouveau industrial products were the western aristocracy and the higher bourgeoisie, among whom the style was keenly popular. The furniture produced by the French Art Nouveau designer Emile Galle was especially regarded as objects of prestige in the Ottoman intelligentsia. Daily items of use reflecting this new imported style were sold in the deluxe shops of the capital, Istanbul. These goods proved to be collectively effective in promoting an affinity for Art Nouveau in the population. The new style was known in Ottoman society as *Tarz-i cedid* (the new style) and represented the contemporary trend prevailing in the capital.

Art Nouveau originally entered the Ottoman Empire via imported daily items and eventually found its reflections in architecture. In this period, Art Nouveau was implemented by minority architects and their foreign counterparts in all building types. The striking dominance of Art Nouveau began to be seen in the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Most of the buildings in Ottoman architecture in which the new style was used were residential structures. During this period, notables of the state and the non-Muslim affluent begin to build shoreside mansions (*yali*), pavilions (*köşk, kasır*), embassy buildings, shore palaces and summer houses along both banks of the Bosphorus. The most prominent representative of Art Nouveau in the Ottoman realm was Raimondo D'Aronco, the "palace architect" of Abdulhamid II. It was thanks to D'Aronco that the Art Nouveau style came to influence Istanbul's architectural traditions, and it was also through him that a new Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau with a "local" character was born.

The aim of this paper is to explore the Art Nouveau style that has held sway over Ottoman architecture ever since 1893 through the works of its most famous implementer, Raimondo D'Aronco, and to define the characteristics of the Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau that made his designs so notable. Toward this aim, some of the architect's works have been selected and analyzed as to plan, construction system and decorative elements.

## Methodology

European architectural styles started to influence Ottoman architecture as from the beginning of the 18th century, impacting plan types, facade arrangements as well as interior decoration. As a result of this westernization movement, traditional Ottoman architecture began to exhibit foreign elements from this time onwards.

In particular, with the era of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), Ottoman architecture was impacted by the force of architectural movements originating in Europe that brought Neoclassicism, Neo-baroque, Neo-gothic, Orientalism, Art Nouveau, Eclecticism, Swiss Chalet, and the English Victoria and Art Deco styles to the fore. The most influential of these movements in Ottoman society, however, was Art Nouveau. The most powerful representative of Art Nouveau in the Ottoman world was Abdulhamid II's architect, Raimondo D'Aronco. Thanks to the works of D'Aronco, the Art Nouveau style came to exert an influence on traditional wooden architecture in Istanbul, and it was also through D'Aronco that a new Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau carrying the local spirit was born in Istanbul.

The aim of this paper is to explore the Art Nouveau style that has held sway over Ottoman architecture ever since 1893 through the works of its most famous implementer, Raimondo D'Aronco, and to define the characteristics of the Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau that made his designs so notable. Toward this aim, some of the architect's works have been selected and analyzed as to plan, construction system and decorative elements. As visual material, the author has used photographs that she herself has taken as well as images from printed sources, together with plans and drawings of the architect.

## Raimondo D'Aronco

Born in 1857 in Gemona del Friuli, Raimondo Tommaso D'Aronco died in San Remo in 1932. The Italian architect practiced in Turkey over the period 1893-1909. He was from a family that worked in construction. In 1887, D'Aronco attended architecture and ornamentation courses at the Art Academy of Venice and as soon as he graduated, started working in his first position at the Massa Carra Institute in 1881-1882. This was followed by his work at the Palermo Technical Institute in the period 1883-1885 and then at Messina University in 1886.

In 1893, the architect from Gemona del Friuli was invited to participate in the conceptualization of the exhibitions that were going to be on view at the Ottoman Agricultural and Industrial National Exhibit, thus beginning his contacts in Turkey. When he came to Turkey in 1893 at the age of 36, he had already become a very well-known architect in Italy. D'Aronco stayed in Turkey until 1909, the year that Abdulhamid II was dethroned.

D'Aronco took part in the restoration of major buildings, particularly belonging to the Palace and to the mosques under the auspices of the Religious Directorate that had been damaged in the Istanbul earthquake of 1894. The architect used this opportunity to learn about Ottoman structures. D'Aronco always made it known that he was influenced in these Ottoman restorations by the French restoration theoretician Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, for whom he had great admiration.

D'Aronco, the "Palace architect," blended stylistic elements of Turkish architecture with Art Nouveau. Approaching his first buildings in Istanbul with a revivalist and historicist viewpoint and using the elements of Islamic-Ottoman art, the architect later turned toward Art Nouveau after 1900. Also influenced by the Austrian school, D'Aronco was the architect to introduce the flavor of Art Nouveau to Ottoman culture (Savaş, 1995). The elements of Islamic-Ottoman ornamentation meshed with D'Aronco's eclectic taste, creating a unique interpretation of Art Nouveau.

### Istanbul's first Art Nouveau building: Casa Botter

D'Aronco gifted Istanbul with many buildings during the era of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)—each one more interesting than the other—but Istanbul's oldest and first Art Nouveau building, Casa Botter, became a symbol of the Art Nouveau style in Ottoman architecture. The structure, located on the Grand Rue de Pera (today's İstiklal Caddesi), is dated to 1900 and presents a statue-like plastic interpretation.

It was built for the private tailor to the court of Abdulhamid II, the Dutchman Jean Botter, and its narrow facade depicted the style of the times, while the building itself was set upon a long plot of land. The building was designed in accordance with European tradition to have a residential and commercial function (hotel) and consisted of seven floors with a basement, ground floor, a first floor that was planned as a workshop, another three floors, and a penthouse. There is a terrace above the half-story on top. The section of the ground floor that looks out into the street belonged to the Showroom and Sales Salon of the Botter House of Fashion. Its brick arch floor is of brick and its facade is stone-covered. The building's entrance is at the side, and it exhibits the elliptical plan of the Art Nouveau style, also containing a spiral staircase, its banister again decorated with Art Nouveau motifs (Fig. 1).

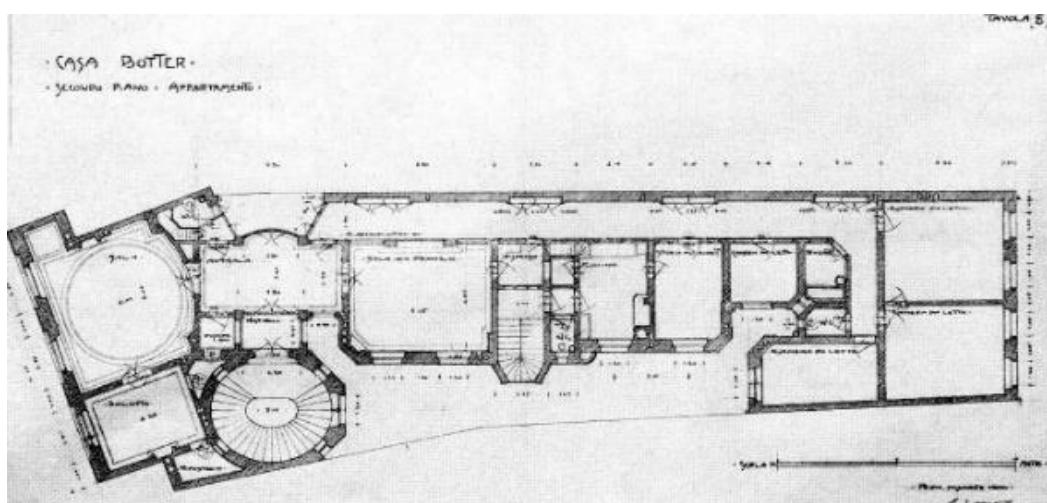


Fig. 1. Plan of the Botter Apartment Building (Archivi Degli Architetti).

D'Aronco used the yellows and reds of his much-favored Mackintosh roses on the stained-glass windows illuminating the staircase hall. On the entrance door to the building can be seen a floral decoration in the Vienna Secession style, composed of intertwined branches and roses (Fig. 2). Along the length of the facade onto which Botter's study and reception rooms look out is one of the most striking sections of the building. This is a balcony with a cast iron balustrade that is decorated with medallions and floral-patterned lamps in the famous "whip blow" style of Art Nouveau (Fig. 2). It is obvious that these elements of illumination, with their floral patterns, closely resemble the lamps on the facade of Glasgow Art School, designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



**Fig. 2. Beyoğlu Botter Apartment (Author).**

D'Aronco has chosen to use a trio of arrangements in the building facade. The workshop floor is separated on the facade with curvilinear groups of motifs separated by five bands of moldings (Fig. 2). The three residential floors are distinguished by four vertical pilasters that rest on curvilinear stone consoles that are decorated with rose motifs. The pilasters on the two corners end in women's faces, while those in the middle have medallions that carry whip blow motifs hanging downward (Fig. 2, 3). The whip blow motif can also be seen under the women's faces, around which ribbons and bows accentuate the typical rose theme of Art Nouveau floral patterns. The walls in-between the pilasters are additionally and abundantly filled with rose motifs (Fig. 2, 3). The receded half-story above these three floors ends in a curvilinear wall which has a balcony in the middle with a bay window that has a cast iron railing (Fig. 2). Motifs of medallions of twisted branches and whip blows are repeated in the rails on the balcony. The center of the terrace above the half-story boasts of the same iron railings decorated with the curvilinear lines of Art Nouveau, as in the half-story below (Fig. 3). The two corner walls at each end of the terrace have been raised as a gable wall and decorated with a concentration of rose motifs.

One of the turning points in D'Aronco's professional life was the Casa Botter, and the element that reflects the splendor that is Art Nouveau is the entrance to this building. The two ends of the arched door are curvilinear and provide an extraordinary accent to the design. On top of the arches and inside the cartouches at the edges of the door are whip blow motifs with a plethora of roses on the ends (Fig. 2).

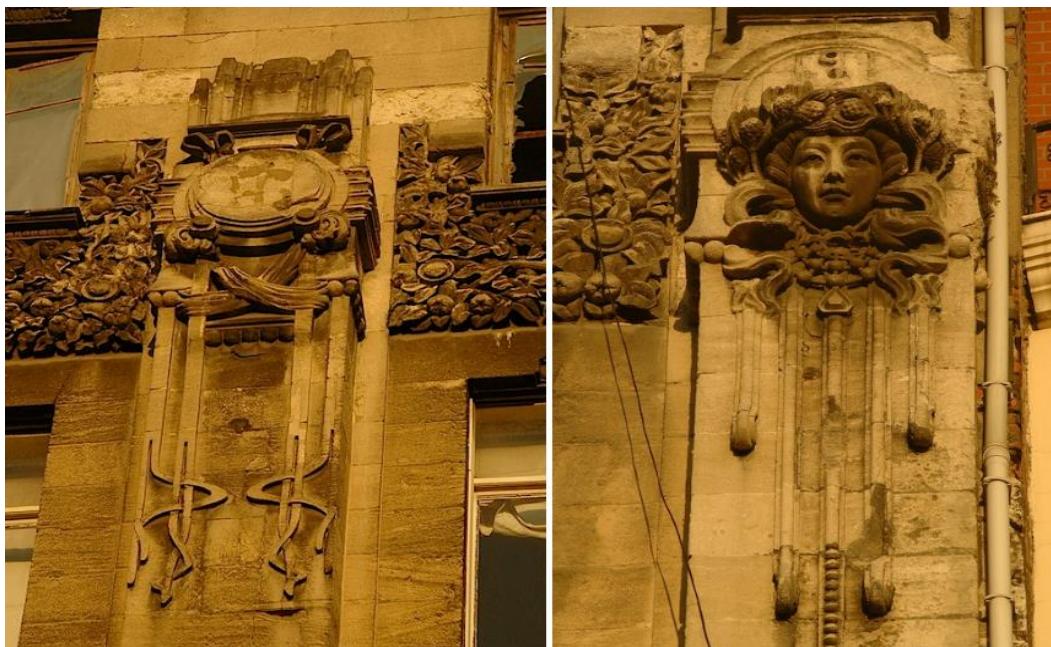


Fig. 3. The pilasters defining the residential floors (Archivi Degli Architetti).

#### The “New Style” in Ottoman Tomb Traditions: Tomb of Sheikh Zafir

Upon the wishes of Abdulhamid II, to whom Raimondo D’Aronco reported directly, the architect designed a tomb (türbe) in 1903-1904 for Sheikh Muhammed Zafir Efendi, the leader of the Sazeli Religious Order to which the Sultan belonged. The tomb stands on Istanbul’s Yıldız Hill. The structure is a complex or *kulliye* of a tomb, fountain, and library. For the tomb itself, the architect preferred to use a square plan, in contrast to the classic Ottoman tomb that was of a polygonal form with a dome covering.

D’Aronco however kept the classic dome composition with its pinnacle (*alem*) in the square structure. The architect also did not forget the distinctive low drum of the Ottoman dome in his design. The tomb’s cubic geometry is altered by the four triangular corner towers that rise in conical form, narrowing upward (Fig. 4). The corner towers cut over the facade at a diagonal. At the base of the triangular corner towers is a motif depicting olive branches at each end, whereas the upper parts of the towers are decorated with braids of roses.



**Fig. 4: Tomb of Sheikh Zafir, Library and Fountain (Barillari, Godoli 1997a, 28).**

With the exception of the blind rear wall of the tomb, there is a narrow, long and high, rectangular and arched window at the center of the other three facades. These windows are reminiscent of the style of the Viennese School that the architect admired so much. The arch with the wide eaves above the windows brings to mind the barrel vaults projecting over the front of Otto Wagner's Karlsplatz Stadtbahn building. On two sides of the windows are corner borders that have reciprocal diagonally placed vertical bands on them. Starting from the middle of each window up until the arch can be found a motif composed of rectangular stone reliefs extending to the sides in triangular form (Fig. 3). Diana Barillari and Ezio Godoli assert that this motif is in the muqarnas style. The scholars state that D'Aronco has enriched the muqarnas with differing depths like a chessboard, appearing to be made of cubic forms in relief in a light-and-shadow composition. The same motif, however, can be seen in the Beethoven Frieze in the Secession building that was decorated by Josef Hoffman. A curvilinear semicircular eave (*sundurma*) can be seen above the window. This curvilinear eave is reminiscent of the eave over the door in Hoffman's Cabaret Fiedermaus. On two sides of the narrow and long window on the facade axis are low, square windows with a cast iron network.

In this building, D'Aronco uses the geometrical schemes of the Viennese School. He also does not neglect to put in curvilinear lines. The Olbrich influence is quite visible in the combination of curvilinear and geometrical designs.

#### **Ottoman Art Nouveau Roses; Vlora Han**

Another building that is believed to have been erected by D'Aronco in the Art Nouveau style, which was received with great interest in Ottoman architecture, is Vlora Han, one of the "office khans" that started to proliferate in the 19th century. The building, located in Sirkeci, dates back to 1904 and is also known as "Ferruh Bey Han."

Comprising three main floors above a ground floor and a half-story, the building was built with a masonry system of brick arch floors and walls of brick. It is made up of offices and storage spaces and stands on a triangular parcel of land. It has a spiral staircase with oval marble steps. The staircase railings are of cast iron and have been decorated with rose motifs. The building is accessed from a large entrance hall that opens out into the light-well (Fig. 5). The rooms along the front of the structure have circular French balconies with railings of cast iron (Fig. 6). The visible Art Nouveau facade elements include the windows of different geometrical forms with their chamfered corners on each floor, the big rose reliefs on each facade and the horizontal-vertical bands of molding. These moldings appear underneath the half-story on the top floor, in-between floors, and above the windows (Fig. 5, 6). The details of the structure resemble those of Casa Botter and the Tomb of Sheikh Zafir. While one of these details is the rectangular geometrically decorated band on the lower part of the side facade, another

can be seen in the cast iron balcony railings with their medallions that carry the “whip blow” motif (Fig. 5, 6).

As in Casa Botter, D’Aronco used statues in this building and these are displayed in the form of stone lion’s heads on the front of the structure and below the half-story on the top floor, fitted into the iron rosettes beneath the eaves (Fig. 6, Right). These open-mouthed lion heads are reminiscent of the lion’s head statues located beneath the eaves in Otto Wagner’s famous Majolica House. Here, the architect has, as in Casa Botter, produced a modular grill-like effect in the facade composition using vertical pilasters. The most prominent motifs in the decorative program of the building are roses on panels on every facade, as well as branches with their curled ends that enrich the ornamentation. As in Casa Botter and the Tomb of Sheikh Zafir, the floral ornamentation of Italian Liberty, the curvilinear patterns, the long vertical lines and geometrical motifs of the Glasgow School of Art and the Mackintosh influence can all be seen all together.



Fig. 5: Vlora Khan Floor Plan and Side Facade (Archeologists Association, Istanbul Branch 2017).



Fig. 6: Vlora Khan (URL 1).

### Art Nouveau at the Breaking Point of Tradition: Karaköy Mosque

Karaköy Mosque, or the Mosque of Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha, as it is also known, was built in 1903 by Raimondo D'Aronco at the request of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Located in Karaköy Square, the mosque was demolished in 1959.

D'Aronco restored the demolished Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha Mosque with a structure that had two shop floors below and a masjid on the third floor. The building is covered with a dome with wide eaves that sits on a nonagonal plan and is decorated with the floral decorations of the Art Nouveau style. Each face of the nine-sided mass was covered with polished marble of a thickness of 4 cm, with the corners laid with gilded bronze. At the center of each facade can be seen a group of three windows (Fig. 7, left). The middle window in each group is narrow and high; the two on the sides are small and low. This arrangement of windows produces a T-shaped composition. On top of the windows is a decorative band of carved marble with floral motifs (Fig. 7, left).

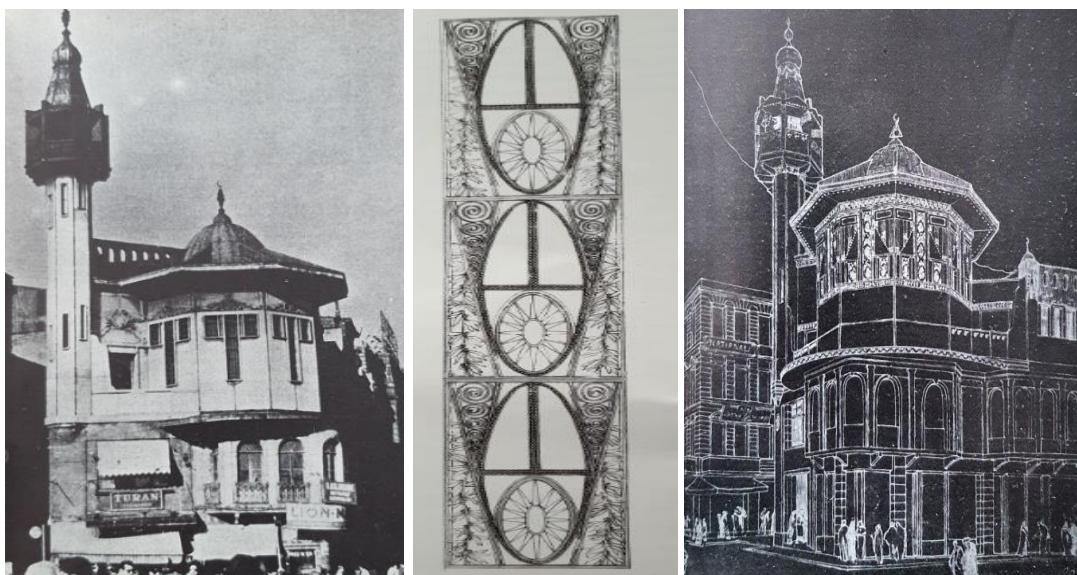


Fig. 7: Right: Drawing of Karaköy Mosque at the Udine Museum (Nicoletti 1982, Fig. 187). Center: Architect's drawing of the mosque's facade decoration (Barillari 2010, 244, 248). Left: The implemented structure (Nicoletti 1982, Fig. 184).

There is a minaret at the western corner of the masjid. The body of the minaret consists of a polygonal (octagonal) plan and its single balcony (*şerefe*) is again built on an octagonal plan. An onion dome in the Orientalist style can be seen on top of the minaret. There are again tall and narrow windows on each side of the minaret. The drawings in the Udine Museum of the masjid, which exude a highly plastic effect, reveal quite an ornamental structure, whereas in the implementation, it can be seen that this quality has been simplified (Fig. 7, Left).

Here, D'Aronco's interpretation is closer to the Jugendstil school. The arrangement of three narrow and high windows, as well as the simplicity and geometry of the facades again remind us of the Mackintosh influence. The marble plates covering the nonagonal facades and the gilded bronze coatings are reminiscent of the solutions Otto Wagner created in designing the Vienna Postal Savings Bank building. In that building, Wagner had used marble plates and gilded bronze coating on the walls. The details of the structure carry it into the atmosphere of Central Europe. The ornamental motifs the architect designed for the exterior of the mosque are again geometrical and full of decorative elements of vegetation (Fig. 7, center).

### A Change in Ottoman Fountain Architecture: Lale (Tulip) Fountain

This fountain is located at Galata Kuledibi; it was built by Raimondo D'Aronco in 1903-1904. The fountain stands right at the corner of the street. Both sides of the two-facaded fountain are symmetrical. Made of cut stone and decorated in the Art Nouveau style, the two sides of the fountain have a graded fountain arch that zig zags at the center. Inside the arch are vertical and elliptical rod reliefs that are geometrically decorated on the top surfaces (Fig. 8). At the exact center of the arch is a motif of large acanthus leaves and roses that flow down into the fountain slab. D'Aronco has placed a wide eave above the arch, one resembling that at the Tomb of Sheikh Zafir (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 8: Lale (Tulip) Fountain (Author).**

At the top of the corner joining the two facades is a sun motif with surrounding large leaves and an oval rosette. On two sides of the rosette is a braid of large leaves and roses that encircle both facades. The fountain basin (*yalak*) differs from classic Ottoman basins in that it projects outward in cubic form, revealing platforms for water jugs. Classic elements such as inscriptions, grooves for vessels, and a slab cannot be seen in this fountain.

The Tulip Fountain is a work in which Raimondo D'Aronco has greatly exhibited the influence of Josef Hoffmann. The architect has adopted the geometry of Hoffmann, one of the major architects of the Vienna Secession, in the fountain's zig-zagging arch, in the curvilinear eaves over the arch, and in the vertical rods with their elliptical ends inside the arch. The oval rosette with the large leaves around it—the sun motif—is however a Baroque motif consisting of large acanthus leaves with roses at their ends surrounding a rosette on both sides. Both geometrical and vegetative decorations have been used in the structure, which stands out as an important example of the way D'Aronco combined the Art Nouveau of Istanbul with the Baroque (Neo-Baroque) style.

## Conclusion

Raimondo D'Aronco, as one of the architects who left a significant mark in nineteenth century Ottoman architecture, adopted a multi-cultural approach to Ottoman themes, giving his own personal interpretation to Art Nouveau in the 1900's. D'Aronco's insatiable urge to experiment can be intensely felt in the buildings of Istanbul.

Art Nouveau found its niche in civil works rather than in religious buildings in Ottoman architecture. D'Aronco's vision differentiated the style from its counterparts in Europe in terms of structural characteristics, plan, and decorative elements. This gifted the capital, Istanbul, with a unique style that could be called "Ottoman or Istanbul Art Nouveau." D'Aronco, considered a pioneer in the modern

Secession movement in Italian architecture, brought the most innovative features to the *genius loci* of his designs (Barillari, Godoli 1997a, 118), blending both the vernacular and the traditional with Art Nouveau.

His works in Istanbul all bear the imprint of the architect's favored style of Viennese Art Nouveau (Secession). D'Aronco's Vienna Secession-style roses, his branches with their curled ends, all attest to how closely he was influenced by the geometry of Otto Wagner, Maria Olbrich and Josef Hoffman. As from the 1900s, the architect added his own interpretation to Art Nouveau, exhibiting both Neo-Baroque formulations and Italian Liberty themes. In the same way, Istanbul Art Nouveau also carried Islamic and Byzantine undertones.

The character of D'Aronco's Art Nouveau endeavors in the buildings of Istanbul was not only reflected in facades but was also integrated with local architecture and construction traditions and materials. D'Aronco produced the most unique examples of Art Nouveau architecture in Istanbul, remaining open to local traditions and localizing Art Nouveau without compromising any of the characteristics of the historical and cultural elements of Ottoman identity. D'Aronco's integration of Art Nouveau with local tradition was founded on a belief in the value of environmental input and a *genius loci* that ranged from western eclecticism to a reinterpretation of Ottoman forms, creating a diversity in style. The stylistic language of D'Aronco's Art Nouveau exudes a local flavor but also appears to be the adaptation of a synthesis that explores new tastes as well. It was in this way that thanks to D'Aronco, a new but "local" Ottoman/Istanbul Art Nouveau was created.

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