# The Formalism and the Real: Bruno Taut's Translation of Neues Bauen in Exile

Paola Ardizzola

K] There are many facets of Modernism and modernity as well as many ambivalent aspects. What does that mean for our own concepts and visions?

> «All nationalist architecture is bad, but all good architecture is national.» Bruno Taut, *Türk Evi, Sinan*, Interview with the architect, 1938

emigration and exile

processes of transfer, translation, and transformation

dialogue between modernity and tradition

Although Bruno Taut did not take part directly in the making of the Bauhaus, his theoretical contributions—«Eine Notwendigkeit» (1914) and «Ein Architekturprogramm» (1918), to name just two—were crucial to Walter Gropius. Both architects took advantage of this productive mutual exchange, and when Taut was forced to flee—first to Japan (1933) and then to Turkey (1936)—, he brought his vision of Modernism to the East. This contribution aims to analyse the way Taut translated his aesthetical and ethical vision of architecture while in exile, his educational approach in the Middle East and his influence on the coeval society. Indeed, starting from formalism, he succeeded in establishing a sensitive dialogue between modernity and tradition without neglecting Functionalism and rationalism, but rather integrating those components he had already referenced while working in Germany, such as topography, climate and the psychological needs of individuals.

Bruno Taut's Oeuvre in Exile—A Seminal
Contribution to Re-defining the Architectural
Historiography of Modernism

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Rome in 1963, Bruno Zevi emphasized the effectiveness of history of architecture as a methodology of architectural doing¹ and underlined the importance of extra-European architectural experiences: «The human affair in architecture is teeming with unused values, hypotheses left unresolved, exploded liberating motions that were immediately inhibited and suffocated.»² Despite the mainstream's celebration of the famous protagonists of Western architecture, there is a growing approach of including <a href="heterodox">heterodox</a> contributions to architecture by countries considered peripheral as an essential means for re-defining the architectural historiography of Modernism. Among them, Bruno Taut's oeuvre in exile appears as a seminal contribution.

In 1918, Taut published «Ein Architekturprogramm», a short provocative text that was printed on flyers, in order to easily reach the working class. This example clearly shows his social commitment related to architecture: «Art—that is one single

marginal counter-history architectural historiography of modernism

[K]

social and political commitment

dismantling arts' hierarchical order

thing, when it exists! Today there is no art. The various disrupted tendencies can find their way back to a single unity only under the wings of a new architecture, so that every individual discipline will play its part in building. Then there will be no frontiers between the applied arts and sculpture or painting. Everything will be one thing: architecture.»<sup>3</sup> In February 1914, in the article «Eine Notwendigkeit» in the journal *Der Sturm*<sup>4</sup>, Taut had already written about this issue—and again in 1918 in his article «Ein neues künstlerisches Programm» in the journal *Die Bauwelt*: «The ultimate goal is the gathering of the arts under the wings of a great architecture.»<sup>5</sup>

In these articles, Taut was proclaiming the credo that in 1919 became the programmatic foundation of the Bauhaus! To what extent is Walter Gropius, who followed Bruno Taut as a leading member in the «Arbeitsrat für Kunst», founded in 1918, indebted to the architect from Königsberg? If we follow Gropius' own words, then they shared this idea and were acting in concert. The productive mutual dialogue between the two architects was to be longstanding, as is reflected in a photo of them Fig. 1 sunbathing on the roof terrace of Gropius' house in Dessau.

# The Japanese Years (1933–1936)

In 1933, Taut moved to Japan, fleeing Nazi Germany. He started to record his impressions of Japanese art and architecture and, by summer 1933, he had already written his first essay on the topic Nippon mit europäischen Augen gesehen,<sup>7</sup> a critique of cultural development in Japan during the early 20th century, which emphasized the considerable architectural choices that came from reinterpretation of tradition. Later, the full-bodied volume Houses and People of Japan<sup>8</sup> with hundreds of photographs was presented as the chronicle of a journey towards the traditional architecture and historical urbanism contextualized in the Japanese people's cultural significance. The book ends with an account of the visit to Katsura Villa Fig. 2, a 17th-century residential building. Its simplicity, purity, and proportion were further celebrated in Gedanken über Katsura,9 a collection in sixteen sheets of drawings and explanatory captions Fig. 3; one of them states *Kunst ist Sinn* (Art is sense), a minimalist statement that perfectly epitomizes his approach to architecture as a form of art. Taut found in Katsura the antecedent features of Modernism. In the Fifties, Gropius visited the Japanese







Fig. 1 Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius (together with Erica Wittich and Ise Gropius) sunbathing on the roof terrace of Gropius' house in Dessau, 1926, reproduction 1993, Photograph: unknown

Fig. 2 Bruno Taut, photograph of Katsura Palace, Japan

Fig. 3 Bruno Taut, sketches and writings on Katsura Palace, Japan connecting architecture and nature/environment

adapting architecture to local conditions

functionism as a concept

villa as well, confirming Taut's perception in relation to modern Western architecture. According to Taut, the perfect integration of construction and environment arises from an earthly adaptation to local climatic and social conditions, by means of a justified Functionalism that is combined with the aesthetic dimension: «The very protruding canopies of the houses have (therefore) the dual function of protecting the interior from the rain and shielding the excessive brightness of the sky, at the same time inducing the gaze to direct itself towards the soil and vegetation.» On the other hand, Gropius found the value that sublimates the imperial villa in the collective spirit that generated it, by reaching a level of perfection in which «man and his way of life were the focal point of its conception.» The two architects, though only distantly related in terms of their architectural practices, found the rigour, purity, simplicity and balance of this architecture similarly appealing.

A grounded erudition emerges from Taut's texts, combined with penetrating observational ability, dictated by that intellectual curiosity which has always distinguished him. Although Taut's Japanese projects were never built, they allowed him to develop a specific sensibility towards the architecture of Japan.

## Turkey, Final Destination of the Exile (1936–1938)

In November 1936, Taut moved to Turkey, where he found a fertile environment for building his projects, leaving behind his «vacation from architecture», as he defined his years in Japan. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 and the end of the Turkish War of Independence in 1923, crucial changes had taken place in Turkey that had given rise to a new state, born from the ruins of an empire that had lasted around eight centuries. As the first president of the new Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal, later named Atatürk—Father of the Turks—, reorganized the state according to secular criteria, which called for a clear separation between the political and religious spheres. Great efforts were made to modernize the administrative apparatus, reform the law, and develop the education system.

Contributions by foreign architects played a key role in this complex process of renewal. Atatürk had invited people to conform to Western civilization—his decision that only European classical music should be broadcast on Turkish radio is famous in this respect—and opened the doors to secular Western culture What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?

international style functionalist approach rationalist approach

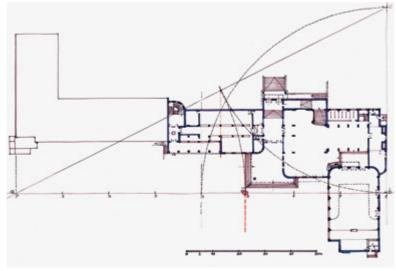
integrating buildings into their respective regions place-based approach

[B]

by welcoming European intellectuals, especially from the German-speaking world to whom he presented the compelling offer of prestigious positions in the cultural and academic fields. The German architects who helped bring about what was dubbed the «Second National Style» took three different paths: The first involved transposing the International Style mainly according to the characteristics of Functionalism and rationalism (Ernst Egli, Martin Elsässer); the second entailed using a monumental style based on markedly square-shaped geometries, rigorous symmetry, very high colonnades for a state architecture of clear nationalist inspiration (Clemens Holzmeister); the third path opted to mediate between the matrices of modernity and the reinterpretation of specific features of the place, for buildings that were contextualized by and could be referred to the cultural values of both countries.

Bruno Taut adhered to this last path. He designed several buildings in Turkey, mainly schools, only a few of which were realized,<sup>13</sup> but also the Faculty of Literature, History and Geography in Ankara Fig. 4—his first task as Chief Architect of the Government Construction Office of the Ministry of Education (since 1936)—which he created fully aware that «it will become a focal point of modern Turkish culture», as we know by a letter he wrote to Isaburo Ueno, a friend and colleague in Japan.<sup>14</sup> In this letter he also expressed his happiness that he not only had access to «excellent stone and top quality materials» but also enjoyed «complete artistic freedom». The building should thus be read in all its components as the result of a design idea freed of specific expectations, yet nonetheless controlled in every detail, as confirmed by the architect Franz Hillinger, Taut's assistant, in a letter to Walter Segal: «For this building more than 300 detailed drawings have been made, which he [Taut] has managed with great diligence.»<sup>15</sup> The building, still a powerful presence within the city due to its dimensions, presents peculiarities that lighten its monumental impact, primarily the outcome of the architectural concepts that can be observed in the German projects, mediated by the influence of Japanese culture and a tribute to Ottoman building tradition, the latter evident above all in the details. The long main volume is closed on both ends by two transversal blocks, a contrivance used for several housing estates in Berlin, while the entrance is placed at approximately 2/3 of the length of the entire elevation Fig. 5. Its imposing mass is initially interrupted by the southern, two-storey end block that contains the conference hall, and above all by





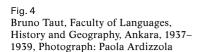


Fig. 5 Bruno Taut, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Ankara, 1937– 1939. Plan of the ground floor with golden ratio, Drawing: Paola Ardizzola

Fig. 6 Bruno Taut, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Ankara, 1937– 1939. The main entrance, Photograph: Paola Ardizzola

Fig. 7 Bruno Taut, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Ankara, 1937– 1939. The main hall. Photograph: Paola Ardizzola





dialogue between modernity

the episode-entrance, which resembles the entrance to a Shinto shrine: A column stands above the stairway-stylobate, supporting the wide roof with its Samurai sword profile, clad in copper plates, a characteristic theme of the domes of many mosques, while the edges of the two volumes that define the compressed space, in this case the lobby, bend along a gently curved radius that serves to emphasize the entrance Fig. 6. In Berlin, Taut had often used the contrivance of the curved wall in correspondence with the corner. However, the rounded corner, a main theme for many Expressionist architects, is used here with a different meaning: not at the end of the building, but doubled, in order to define a space which does not yet lead to the main hall, but to a vestibule with several features. First of all, it is a passing space, connecting the main façade with the east elevation, reached by a double stairway overlooking a small park. Its Functionalist character asserts itself as the point of intersection for accessing various rooms: the hall, offices, archives, and front desk. Yet the Functionalist aspect is a pretext for asserting a spatial conception that Taut undoubtedly learned from Sinan, the builder of the great Ottoman mosques in the 16th century, which have no main entrance to reach the grand prayer hall: From the exterior, they resemble an impregnable fortress, and it is only possible to enter into the magnificence of the enormous domed spaces by taking an almost hidden passage. Their complexity can be perceived only through movement, a perception that implies the presence of man as the completion of architectural space. This attribute, sought by many masters of the Modern movement, is celebrated by Taut in the shadow of the Ottoman tradition when he refuses to offer an immediate and total perception, denying the direct epiphany of the architectural organism, revealed only through movement. The unifying dimension of Western perspectival observation is opposed to the plurality of points of view that is characteristic of the Ottoman culture of representation and settlement, implying a user in motion, free to discover space through time. Avoiding the placement of a direct entrance in the main hall, Taut searches for the same sense of astonishment; for example, via a side door to the vestibule-corridor—in reality a glazed surface flanked by two pillars entirely clad in thin and extremely refined turquoise majolica—, one approaches an unexpected and disarming space, an absolute temple to civil society Fig. 7. As the mosque was historically the place where all activities of traditional Muslim society were carried out, the large hall of the Faculty of Letters is the nerve centre that characterizes



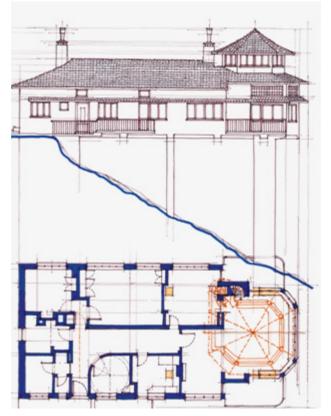


Fig. 8 Bruno Taut, House on the Bosphorus, Istanbul, 1938. South/east front towards the sea, Photograph: Haruhiko Fujita

Fig. 9 Bruno Taut, House on the Bosphorus, Istanbul, 1938. Plan and west elevation, Drawing: Paola Ardizzola

- [C] How can we explore the kinds of stand taken by Bauhaus and Modernist architects and designers and their consistency?
- [K] There are many facets of Modernism and modernity as well as many ambivalent aspects. What does that mean for our own concepts and visions?

the function of a public building fit for containing mankind's noblest activities.

Within the Ministry of Education, Taut's main activities were working as Professor of Architecture and designing school buildings—five of these were realized, which is a significant number, considering that he spent only two years in Turkey. Their Functionalist layout, in line with modern educational theories, is accompanied by details and arrangements studied in relation to each site, in a balanced synthesis of modernity and tradition. The school building also played a paradigmatic role in the politically important task of disseminating the republican ideology. The German architect had arrived in a country where architects, as Manfred Speidel pointed out, «were involved in a decade-long debate on what the architecture of the new Turkey should be. Taut demonstrated his response through the projects for the schools whose special features were innovative for the time: respect for the inherent characteristics of materials, proportions, quality and functionality as guarantors of continuity between past, present and future.»<sup>16</sup> Taut's schools became a point of reference for school buildings all around the country.

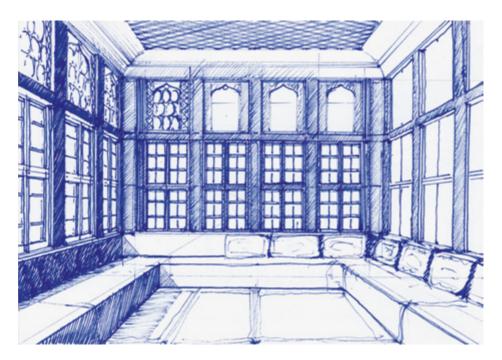
«Perhaps the most beautiful and undoubtedly the most human construction built by Taut», to cite Bruno Zevi, is Taut's own house in Istanbul (1938) set on a hill overlooking the Bosphorus and deploying a daring cantilever Fig. 8. «This small villa raised up on four high columns evokes, in the undulating play of the roofs, the rhythms of Japanese domestic architecture. Its red walls stand out amidst the green of nature; the living room is connected by an inner staircase to the turret-studio wrapped by a continuous semi-hexagonal window that brings together all the panoramic axes of the Bosphorus.»<sup>17</sup> For any scholar of *Neues Bauen*, this house is the most disconcerting work of architecture one might stumble upon. Its adherence to the criteria of the Modern movement is apparently legible only in its plan, where the functional distribution of the spaces dominates as forcefully as in the homes designed for the housing estates Fig. 9.

The double-height living room references the architect's climatologic conception, which notes that it is a good idea to filter the intense light of the Mediterranean: For this reason, the same room features different typologies of windows, depending on whether they are positioned above or below the sun-breaker that runs the entire length of the building. The roofing echoes the traditional Turkish pavilion roof, with a simultaneously Japanese flavour.

functionalist approach

dialogue between modernity and tradition

rethinking modern architecture dialogue between modernity and tradition [K]





Figs. 10a, b Bruno Taut, House on the Bosphorus, Istanbul, 1938. Typological comparison between the typical living room of the Turkish vernacular home, the diwan, and the living room in the Taut house. Drawings: Paola Ardizzola

- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?
- [K] There are many facets of Modernism and modernity as well as many ambivalent aspects. What does that mean for our own concepts and visions?

The German architect certainly acknowledges the characteristics of Modernism in his project; otherwise he would not have written, in a letter to Carl Krayl, fully aware of the revolutionary impact of his residential project near Berlin: «A new Dahlewitz is being born here».¹8 Nevertheless, in a very refined way he also took into consideration the features of traditional architecture, coming from specific concerns like local climate, as a means of generating an effective continuation with the past, by denying a Modernism with no relation to history and past culture, fully aware that Modernism *tout court* had failed worldwide to give a proper answer to human needs within the modern city.

For Taut, the synthesis of *Kultur und Zivilisation* [culture and civilization] continued to be the primary target. For example, in the living room of his house in Istanbul, there is also a sense of warmth and intimacy through its interior space Figs. 10a, b, which reflects that of the *diwan*, the Turkish living room, the main space of the house, whose inner perimeter surrounds comfortable seating while the continuous horizontal glazed surfaces refer to the 18th-century Ottoman residence.

## Conclusion

[B]

If Taut took a stand in Turkey, we might say that it was in the form of an attempt to mediate between the matrices of modernity and the reinterpretation of specific traditional architectural features. In line with Modernism, a revised consideration of localism was conducted in the light of a reinterpretation. Taut's buildings look properly contextualized, carrying a dual cultural value which epitomizes two apparently antithetical components, modernity and tradition, in an effective synthesis of a different Modernism. Deprecating both the superficial imitation of previous historicism as well as devotion to the International Style, Taut adhered to the process of the growth of Turkish architecture without seeking the identity of the «Second National Style». He instead placed his architecture at the service of the individual, as per his compelling logic according to which where there is no individual, there is no architecture. In the light of this analysis, Taut was aware that modern architecture found its real quality not in exterior forms, personal style, dogmas and schematism but rather in the confrontation between tradition and industry, topography and materials, and between functionalism and community.

relationship to history relationship to traditions and cultures adapting to local conditions

self-critique of modernism

dialogue between modernity and tradition

reinterpretation of tradition

identity as a dialogic concept

self-critique of modernism diversity of modernism

- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?
- [1] What can we learn from the history of the Bauhaus and Modernism when facing current issues? And how can this enable us to gain new insights into the past?
- [O] What is the significance and relevance of the Bauhaus and Modernism today a historical phenomenon or a resource for the present? And what, if anything, constitutes their current relevance?

Entrusted with heading the Department of Architecture at the Fine Arts Academy in Istanbul, Taut did not wish to gain followers shaped by their master. For the students, he wrote the book *Mimari Bilgisi*, which was divided into seven chapters and provided with numerous illustrations ranging from contemporary architecture to ancient Eastern buildings. The book aimed to suggest the steps to achieve good design: proportion, technique, construction, Functionalism and quality, and referred to «rationalist theories» as «the headache of the hangover. [...] They fight what existed before and, like any opponent, are on the same level of what they want to oppose». <sup>19</sup> The book strongly opposed Westernization of modern architecture, viewed as cultural introversion and capable of generating that International Style towards which he always looked with great suspicion.

It is evident, through his plethora of publications, that Taut used to look back to history, and not to historicism, in order to acquire architectural knowledge in relation to the design processes of the old masters—and among them he held in particular esteem architects of the Far East and anonymous medieval architects—rather than just the stylistic code of their final buildings. Gropius went further when he excluded history teaching at the Bauhaus, because he was against uncritical teaching of sterile styles. Although arriving at different architectural outcomes, the two architects had a common ideal related to the medieval guilds (inspiration for the school system of the Bauhaus), namely, art and architecture at the complete service of the people, in order to generate a better future society. Furthermore, both believed in the free expression of the future architects they were training, avoiding recruiting disciples: «It would be an absolute horror for me if my appointment would result in the multiplication of a fixed idea of (Gropius architecture). What I do want is to make young people realize how inexhaustible the means of creation are [...] and to encourage these young people in finding their own solutions.»<sup>20</sup> The common traits reveal how powerful the season of Expressionism was for both of them, as an utopian-intellectual project to be reified in the long run.

«All nationalist architecture is bad, but all good architecture is national»—unlike Gropius, Taut taught us significantly and convincingly that it is possible to pursue an approach of conciliation between tradition and modernity.

«good design» as a concept

critique of international style

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relationship to history learning from design processes

new unity of art and the people modernist promise of a better future social-utopian aspirations

dialogue between modernity and tradition

### Notes

- 1 For a study on the subject see Paola Ardizzola: «History will teach us everything. Bruno Zevi and the innovative methodology for future design», in: EdA—Esempi di Architettura, monographic issue on Bruno Zevi for the centenary of his birth, vol. 5, n. 1 (2018), pp. 5–12.
- 2 Bruno Zevi, «La storia come metodologia del fare architettonico», in: Bruno Zevi per l'architettura, (ed.) A. Muntoni, Rome: La Sapienza University, 2002, p. 25.
- Bruno Taut, Ein Architekturprogramm, Flugschriften des Arbeitsrats für Kunst Berlin, Berlin (11918) 2nd edition, early 1919, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Archive, AfK 9, http:// germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/ deu/ARCH\_TAUT\_GER.pdf (Consulted April 9, 2020); Engl. (ed.): «Bruno Taut: A programme for architecture», in: Ulrich Conrads, Programs and manifestoes on 20th-century architecture, Cambridge: The MIT Press, Massachusetts, p. 41. [Original quote: «Die Kunst!—das ist eine Sache, wenn sie da ist. Heute gibt es diese Kunst nicht. Die zerrissenen Richtungen können sich nur zur Einheit zusammenfinden unter den Flügeln einer neuen Baukunst, so, daß jede einzelne Disziplin mitbauen wird. Dann gibt es keine Grenze zwischen Kunstgewerbe und Plastik oder Malerei, alles ist eins: Bauen.»]
- 4 Bruno Taut, «Eine Notwendigkeit», in: *Der Sturm*, 1914, 4/II semester, pp. 174–175.
- 5 Bruno Taut, «Ein Neues Künstlerisches Programm», in: *Die Bauwelt*, 1918, 9/52, p. 5.

- 6 In a letter to Osthaus on 02.02.1919 (Walter Gropius, letter to (Karl Ernst) Osthaus, dated 02.02.1919, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Archive, AfK 17, folio 3(-6); Gropius described Bruno Taut as «the first architect who really grasps the idea that I have already been pursuing for many years: uniting all arts related to building and we are now acting in concert in this respect», op. cit. Marcel Bois, «Die Kunst! -Das ist eine Sache!, wenn sie da ist», http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/ articles/3207/the-art-that-s-one-thingwhen-it-s-there/de. (Consulted on April 9, 2020)
- 7 Bruno Taut, Nippon mit europäischen Augen gesehen. [Geschrieben Juni-Juli 1933], (ed., epilogue and notes) Manfred Speidel, Berlin 2009.
- 8 Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, Tokyo: Sanseido 1937, 21958.
- 9 Bruno Taut, «Reflections on Katsura», in: *Katsura: imperial villa*, (ed.) Virginia Ponciroli, Milan 2005, pp. 330–348; ibid., Manfred Speidel, «Bruno Taut and the Katsura Villa», pp. 319–329.
- 10 Ibid., Walter Gropius, «Architecture in Japan», pp. 349–358.
- 11 Bruno Taut, «Architecture Nouvelle au Japon», in: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd' hui*, 4/1935; «Architettura nuova in Giappone», in: *Casabella*, 676/2000, p. 9.
- 12 W. Gropius, *Architettura in Giappone*, Milan: Görlich, 1965, p. 33.
- 13 Considering that he lived in Turkey for only two years, he left an important legacy in terms of built architecture, although some buildings were completed after his death: the Culture Pavilion for Izmir International Fair (1938); the Faculty of Letters, History and Geography (1937–39), the Atatürk Gymnasium (1937–38), the

- Cebeci Middle School (1938–39), all in Ankara: the Institute for Girls, Izmir (1938–42); the High School for Boys, Trabzon (1937–39); and Taut's own house, Istanbul (1937–38).
- 14 Bruno Taut to Isaburo Ueno, letter dated 11/06/1937, in: Thinking for Ataturk. Two Works: the Catafalque and Anitkabir. Two Architects: Bruno Taut and Emin Onat = Für Atatürk gedacht. Zwei Werke: Katafalk und Anitkabir. Zwei Architekten: Bruno Taut und Emin Onat = Ataturk icin dusunmek. Iki eser: Katafalk ve Anitkabir. Iki mimar: Bruno Taut ve Emin Onat, exhib. cat. (ed.) Afife Batur, Istanbul, 1997, p. 63.
- 15 Franz Hillinger to Walter Segal, letter dated 04/16/1939, ibid., p. 57.
- 16 Manfred Speidel, «Bruno Taut, work and effect» (Wirken und Wirkung), in: ibid., p. 60.
- 17 Bruno Zevi, «Uno storico italiano in Turchia—Nel nome di Allah misura il tardo antico», in: *L'Espresso*, 25 January 1955, later in: *Cronache di Architettura*, volume 2, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1978, pp. 274–279.
- 18 Bruno Taut to Carl Krayl, letter dated 06/05/1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Archive.
- 19 Bruno Taut, Mimari Bilgisi, Istanbul 1938, introduction. Taut's book was written in German as Architekturlehre: Grundlagen, Theorie und Kritik, Beziehung zu den anderen Künsten und zur Gesellschaft and was translated into Turkish by Adnan Kolatan as Mimari Bilgisi. There is no complete English translation of the book, but the title is usually translated as Lectures on Architecture.
- 20 Walter Gropius, Scope of Total Architecture, New York: Collier Books, 1970, p. 17.