



The First Koç Han: Pioneering Modern Architecture in Ankara

İlk Koç Han: Ankara'da Modern Mimarinin Öncüsü

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Abstract

Koç Holding is the most established conglomerate in Turkey. The company's beginnings date from the mid 1920s, when Ahmet Vehbi Koç, founder of Koç Holding, had his first own company registered with the Ankara Chamber of Commerce. In 1932, Koç moved his business from his father's store on Anafartalar Street to a new building, the first Koç Han, erected the same year on Çankırı Street Nr. 13 in Ulus. The building's designer was Swiss-Austrian architect Ernst Arnold Egli, who had come to Turkey only five years earlier upon invitation by the government to work as chief architect of the Ministry of National Education. During his stay, which lasted from 1927 until 1940, Egli realized about 40 projects and worked on many more. Koç Han is the rare example of a commercial building by Egli. At a time when the urban aspect of the old town center of Ankara consisted mostly of one- or two-storeyed stone-and-wood houses, the first Koç Han represented an altogether new building type for the town, in being a multipurpose edifice with space for shops at street level, with large storage facilities below ground, and providing offices and housing on the upper floors. The functional rigor of the plan and the sober modernism of the building's facades contrasted strongly with the architecture of the time. In this respect, the first Koç Han was a strong statement regarding Ahmet Vehbi Koç's belief in a modern Turkey and to the contribution of the building's architect, Ernst Arnold Egli, to this project.

Keywords: Modern architecture, First Koç Han, Vehbi Koç, Ernst Arnold Egli, Commercial buildings, Ulus, Ankara

Öz

Koç Holding Türkiye'deki en köklü sanayi grubudur. Holding'in tarihi, kurucusu olan Ahmet Vehbi Koç'un ilk şirketini Ankara Ticaret Odası'na kaydettirdiği 1920'lere kadar uzanır. Vehbi Koç 1932'de işlerini, babasının Anafartalar'daki dükkanından Ulus'ta Çankırı Caddesi 13 numarada inşa ettirdiği ilk Koç Han'a taşır. Binanın tasarımcısı Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'nın daveti üzerine baş mimar olarak çalışmak üzere beş yıl kadar önce Türkiye'ye gelmiş olan İsviçreli-Avusturyalı mimar Ernst Arnold Egli'dir. Mimar Egli, 1927 ile 1940 yılları arasında Türkiye'de geçirdiği süre boyunca yaklaşık 40 proje gerçekleştirir ve birçok farklı projede de görev alır. Koç Han, Egli'nin tasarladığı nadir ticari binalardandır. Eski kent merkezinin çoğunlukla bir ya da iki katlı ahşap-kagir evlerden oluştuğu bir zamanda ilk Koç Han, caddeye açılan dükkanlarıyla, yeraltında geniş depolama olanaklarıyla, üst katlarda ise ofis ve evler için sunduğu alanlarla Ankara için yeni bir bina tarzıdır. Planın fonksiyonel titizliği ve binanın dış cephelerinin sade modernizmi dönemin mimari anlayışından son derece farklıdır. Bu bağlamda ilk Koç Han, Vehbi Koç'un modernleşen Türkiye'ye olan inancını ve sorumluluğunu; binanın mimarı Ernst Arnold Egli'nin bu projeye katkısını güçlü bir şekilde ifade etmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Modern mimari, İlk Koç Han, Vehbi Koç, Ernst Arnold Egli, Ticari binalar, Ulus, Ankara

Introduction

Whoever walks past Çankırı Street Nr. 13 in Ulus, Ankara, will probably not notice the building itself. The gaze may rather be drawn to the opposite side of the street and of Ulus Square, to the highly ornamented Neo-Renaissance İş Bankası building and the equally impressive, monumentally modernist Sümerbank General Directorate. What this person may not know is that the building on Çankırı Street Nr. 13 was actually built around the same time as the two bank buildings across the square, which were erected in 1929 and 1938¹ (Figure 1).

As a matter of fact, Çankırı Street Nr. 13 is one of the first modern office buildings in downtown Ankara and as such a milestone in modern Turkish architecture. Its construction connects two personalities who shaped the early Turkish Republic each in his own way.

One was Ahmet Vehbi Koç (Figure 2), entrepreneur and founder of what today is Turkey's largest industrial conglomerate. The other was Ernst Arnold Egli, born in Austria, architect, designer of numerous public buildings of the early Republic and teacher of the first generation of modern Turkish architects. Not much is known about the building itself and the circumstances of its formation. Neither the

architect nor his client mention it more than fleetingly in their reminiscences. "I decided to open a department store at Ulus Square in Ankara, opposite the present İş Bankası building. The space was then occupied by an old office building. It was like the old hans of Ankara; shops faced the street, but it had an inner courtyard. Professor Egli of Vienna, an architect, was in Turkey at the invitation of the Minister of Education. I had plans drawn up by him and constructed a building that was considered very modern compared with the Ankara buildings of that day," Vehbi Koç recollects in his memoirs (Koç, 1983, p. 56). Egli himself mentions this commission even more fleetingly, only referring to having designed "three business/apartment houses in Ankara" in the early 1930s (Egli, 1969, p. 65).

Vehbi Koç was born in Ankara in 1901 to an old Ankara family. His grandfather was a well-off official of the Ottoman government who also traded in wheat; his father, medrese-educated, eventually followed the grandfather by entering the wheat-trade business (Koç, 1983, pp. 11-12). From the very young age of 16, Koçzade Ahmet Vehbi was working as a merchant and entrepreneur, continuously looking for new business opportunities. In the first ten years of his professional career, his activities were mostly tied to his father's. In 1926, he took over his father's



Figure 1. View of Çankırı Street from Ulus Square in the 2013 Koç Han is the third building to left, İş Bankası and Sümerbank center and right.

Source: Photograph of Fadime Küçükhüseyin.



Figure 2. Vehbi Koç in his office at Koç Han, 1939, May 1.
Source: Photograph of Vehbi Koç, 1939.

business which became registered as “Koçzade Ahmet Vehbi” at the Ankara Chamber of Commerce. From that first moment of entrepreneurial independence on, and through his entire life, Koç ventured into a large variety of trades, often working in cooperation with large European and American companies, as sales representative and agent, then as licensed manufacturer of foreign products. In 1963, his industrial companies such as Arçelik (kitchen and household appliances), Turkish Iron Casting Foundry Inc. (Türk Demir Döküm Fabrikası) and Otosan (automobiles) were grouped under the common roof of Koç Holding Durable Consumer Goods Group. In 1984, Koç withdrew from business life and dedicated himself primarily to his philanthropical work. He died in 1996 in Antalya.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, when Koç started to trade with goods from the Ottoman capital İstanbul, Ankara was a provincial Anatolian town with a population approximately 20.000-25.000. Its history, however, goes back to the Roman Empire and even to the times of the Phrygian culture in the 7th and 8th century BC. In that period, Ankara was an important center on the “Royal Road” built by Persian king Darius which connected the Aegean coast and Babylon and continued further east towards central Asia. In fact, trade always played an important role in the city’s history and caused many ups and downs in its development. With its new role as the Republic’s capital, however,

unprecedented changes were about to come, turning the quiet and dusty market town into an administration and services center for the entire nation, with an urban population reaching well into the millions in only 80 years.

Vehbi Koç certainly had the business instinct and senses to seize the opportunities that arose from this particular incidence. In the mid and late 1920s, he tried his hand—often simultaneously in a variety of trades, i.e. grain, building supplies, as well as textiles and leather. After a while, he opened a hardware store which he enlarged to include textile supplies, glassware and others. Later on, Koç also managed to become the Ankara representative of a well-known department store—from which he bought goods—in İstanbul, which sold fridges, radios and other branded consumer goods. In 1928 he took on the Turkish distributorship for Standard Oil Company, the huge American petroleum company founded in 1870 by John D. Rockefeller.

From the 1920s onward, building activities in Ankara soared up. The construction boom triggered by the relocation of the capital from İstanbul to Ankara not only required petroleum and gasoline for driving trucks and engines, but also building materials in enormous quantities. It also provided for many commissions to architects and builders. For a farsighted and talented entrepreneur as Vehbi Koç this was an excellent context in which to enter new areas of business. With the enormous requirements regarding the construction of the new capital—ministries and schools, universities and hospitals, train stations and even air fields had to be built, and of course housing for the many people who came to Ankara to work for the government—there was a plethora of opportunities. To expand his business into construction materials and then into contractor work for the government seemed a sensible decision at the time.

In fact, in 1932, Vehbi Koç received a major governmental contract when he was assigned the electrical installations and elevators of Numune Hospital, the new state hospital of Ankara. This commission did not just fall into his lap, though. In his memoirs, Koç recalls that it was very difficult to convince Refik Saydam, Minister of Health at that time, that a Turkish firm would be capable of handling such a job. The minister demanded that Koç, as a measure of quality assurance, had to provide for a foreign business partner in order to win the tender for building hospital. “Turks cannot manage to do this job. I shall give you the contract only if you prove you have a foreign partner,” Vehbi Koç



Figure 3. Ernst Egli in Vienna, circa 1927.
Source: Photograph of Ernst Egli, ca. 1927.

remembers Saydam saying. Koç managed to find a partner firm in Germany (Koç, 1983, pp. 45, 52).

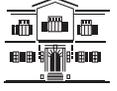
The notion that Turkish planners and builders were not up to the task of establishing the infrastructure for the Republic and its capital was widespread in government circles in the 1920s and early 1930s. Especially in the key positions—chief architects of ministries, urban planners, head officials of the city’s building authorities—the government relayed almost entirely on foreign experts to establish the State’s infrastructure. Between 1924 and 1942, there were almost 40 architects and urban planners from various Central European countries—and many other foreign experts—employed by the city and state government. Among these were Paul Bonatz, Carl C. Lörcher, Ernst Egli, Martin Elsässer, Franz Hillinger, Clemens Holzmeister, Hermann

Jansen, Theodor Jost, Robert Oerley, Hanz Poelzig, Ernst Reuter, Wilhelm Schütte, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Bruno Taut, Robert Vorhoelzer and Martin Wagner (Atalay Franck, 2011, p. 45).

For Koç, his venture into the contracting business when he was only around thirty years of age was certainly not risk-free. Although the Numune project would lead to other contracting commissions—from other state hospitals to parts of the national railroad—Koç was not happy with the way these commissions were handed out by the government. The assignments were based on a bidding system that would always prefer the lowest bidder. This had consequences both for the clients and the contractors alike, in that the contractors had to cut many corners regarding the quality of the construction in order to make a profit from their commissions. According to his testimonies, this was one of the reasons why Koç shifted his business interests to other areas of commerce and industry, where his good sense of business made him see better potentials.

It is a mark of Koç’s independence as an entrepreneur when he decided to build a new center for his business activities. The plans to build Koç Han links Koç—for a brief moment in time—Koç to the foreigner Ernst Egli, the architect of the Han. Egli was born in 1893 in Vienna, son of a Swiss father and a Slovakian mother (Figure 3). He came to Turkey in 1927, at only 34 years of age, upon invitation by the government to work as chief architect of the Ministry of National Education. He had been recommended for this task by Clemens Holzmeister, a well-known Austrian architect and professor of architecture at the Vienna School of Fine Arts, where Egli was his assistant. The invitation had originally gone to Holzmeister himself, but Holzmeister claimed to be too busy with other endeavours, proposing his assistant instead (Egli, 1969, p. 41).

Egli was appointed as the architect-in-chief for the Ministry of National Education (Maarif Vekâleti). Almost simultaneously, he was commissioned with the reformation and modernization of architectural education at the *Academy of Fine Arts in İstanbul*, nowadays *Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University*. After a preparatory period of two years, Egli was appointed dean of the School of Architecture at the Academy, a post he held until 1936 when he resigned from both posts mainly because of budget disputes (Egli, 1969, p. 75; Nicolai, 1998, p. 39). After his resignation, Egli received only few new commissions as an architect. In 1940, he decided to move to Switzerland, home country of his father



but a foreign land to him. Already during his stay in Turkey, Egli devoted a part of his efforts to questions of urbanism and city planning, working on a number of master plans for Turkish cities such as Edirne and Samsun. In Switzerland, his professional focus shifted entirely from architecture to urban planning. From 1942 to 1963 Egli taught at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, first as senior lecturer for the history of urbanism, then as professor for urbanism. Egli was also co-founder of the ETH's Institute for Town, Regional, and National Planning. Between 1948 and 1950, Egli worked as a United Nations (UN) expert and city planner in the Middle East. From 1953 to 1955, Egli returned to Turkey to teach city and regional planning at the School of Political Sciences of Ankara University (Mekteb-i Mülkiye, today Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi). He died in 1973 in Meilen near Zurich.

The Commission

Egli's influence on Turkish architecture in the 1930s emanated as much from his work as a teacher as from his designs for public and private clients: mostly the Ministry of National Education and the Turkish Aeronautical Association (Türk Hava Kurumu), but also wealthy officials and industrials. His influence was thus twofold: through his exemplary work as an architect and through his work as a teacher, educating the first generation of modern architects in Turkey. In this, Egli also played a role in the advancement of the national project for the modernization and westernization of the country. Like modern clothing and the Latin alphabet, modern architecture was part of the repertoire of the state for the promotion of the new order. It was believed that modernism as one of the underlying principles of the new nation would only establish itself in society if it would show in—and give form to—every important aspect of public life, including architecture (Bozdoğan, 2001, pp. 62-80).

In the 13 years of his stay in Turkey, Egli realized about 40 projects, many of which take an important place in the canon of early Turkish modernism. Among these are: State Conservatory of Music (Devlet Konservatuvarı) (1927-1928), Turkish Court of Accounts (Sayıştay) (1928), İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute (İsmet Paşa Kız Enstitüsü) (1930-1934), Higher Agricultural Institute (Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü) (1930-1933), administration building of the Turkish Aeronautical Association (1933-1934), school building of the Turkish Aeronautical Association (1936-1938), Ankara University School of Political Sciences (1935-1936), Villa

Ragıp Devres (1931-1932), Villa Fuat Bulca (1934-1936), Embassy Buildings for Switzerland and Iraq (1936-1938) (Atalay Franck, 2012, pp. 244-245).

As a foreigner and high-ranking official, Egli was frequently interviewed by journalists and quoted in the newspapers on various matters regarding the modernization project (Egli, 1969, p. 69). It may have been through this that Vehbi Koç got to know Ernst Egli, or through his own governmental contacts. He may also have witnessed the construction of Egli's first major statement as an architect in Turkey, the conversion and enlargement of the headquarters of the Court of Accounts on İstasyon Street, just around the corner from Koç's building lot on Hâkimiyet-i Milliye Square.

In his memoirs Vehbi Koç describes how he decided, in 1931, to build a business office for his growing enterprise. Around that time he had travelled to Europe² where he was impressed by huge department stores, especially the Galleries Lafayette in Paris and the Kaufhaus Wertheim in Berlin,³ which obviously stimulated his trader's spirit.

I was greatly impressed by the splendid department stores in the cities we visited. The 'Galleries Lafayette' attracted my attention. What impressed me most however, was the 'Wertheim' in Berlin, which stocked every conceivable item. I went to this store perhaps ten times, and measured it; it was 245 metres in length. I said to myself that they were human beings, like us, and if they could do it, so could we, even if on a smaller scale (Koç, 1983, p. 56).

The idea for Koç Han may have emerged from these impressions. But Koç Han was no department store; it was much smaller than those grandiose palaces of commerce in Berlin and Paris which had impressed Koç so much, and it was an altogether different type of building, a multipurpose edifice whose structure reflected the smartness and versatility of its owner (Figure 4). The building was to provide space for shops at street level, with large storage facilities below ground. On the upper levels, the floor plans allowed for various uses, especially housing and office, depending on the owner's own demands or on the demands of other people and companies to whom Koç would let room. This versatility shows Koç's business understanding in that he obviously wanted to have all options at hand to make sure the building would not lie waste, but produce income as all his other business endeavours. Koç Han was a "ticarethane" of a new, modern kind, a "maison de commerce," as it was referred to on Koç's stationery at that time. Occasionally,



Figure 4. Koç Han.

Source: Photograph of Koç Han, n.d.

it was also called “Koç Apartmanı.” On Egli’s drawings and plans, the building was referred to as “Koçzade Hanı Projesi” (Project of Koçzade Hanı).

European and Turkish Context

In Europe, the 1920s were a period characterized by a number of developments, some contradictory to each other. The decade was marked by democratic emancipation countered by the rise of fascism, technological progress, global economic turmoil resulting twice in truly ruinous inflation in many countries but especially devastating in Germany, and an unprecedented and radical development in art and architecture (Haubrich, Hoffmann and Meuser, 2011, p. 112). Turkey was in many ways less affected by these economic, social, and cultural turbulences. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the War of Independence, it was less tied into the financial and trade currents linking the economies of the western nations, and it was socially focussed inward to the project of building the new, modern nation.

Architecture had a particular role in the process of nation building. Modern architecture in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s is different from western modern architecture not only in its formation, but also in its development program. After World War I and the War of Independence, Turkey was economically grounded and torn by factional strife. As Afife Batur points out, the priorities of the new government had to be quite necessarily on the reconstruction of the infrastructure, the roads and railways, the war-ravaged cities of Western Anatolia, and the organization of the capital. For a few years, almost the entire output of the construction industry was dedicated to the public sector and—to a much lesser degree—to housing (Batur, 1984, p. 74).

Like modern clothing and the Latin alphabet, modern architecture was part of the repertoire of state propaganda for the new order. It was believed that modernism as one of the underlying principles of the new nation would only establish itself in society if it would show in—and give form to—every important aspect of public life. Architecture was to provide the stage for modern society and republican authority. It was to be progressive and dynamic as well as functional. But simply copying foreign styles would not do, for the underlying principles of modernity could not be understood—and disseminated amongst the new generation—in such a way. Foreign experts were to show the path through the exemplary quality of their work and through their teaching (Atalay Franck, 2012, pp. 31-36).

These were the expectations Ernst Egli was confronted with when he came to Turkey in 1927. It was his task to give a distinctive modern shape to the buildings financed by the Ministry of National Education, the university institutes, the lyceums and schools. Like the overall program of “Westernization” and “Nationalization,” the demands regarding the new architecture were in themselves contradictory. Nationalism was a key aspect of Kemalist reform; it was central to the modern Turkish society. The western world—which was perceived as superior economically, technically, socially and culturally—was considered exemplary to all aspects of the public and private domain. It was to be at the same time “western” in appearance and provide for a clearly “national” identity, different from the West, distinctive of the Turkish Nation.

The lack of domestic expertise for the project of modernization was one of the “structural dilemmas” of the new state: Its Ottoman élite was discredited, because affiliated with the defeated regime of the past, or simply not knowl-



edgeable, and the next-modern-generation of bureaucrats, engineers, economist, and architects was not yet educated. The task of giving the nation its new face had to be entrusted to foreign experts⁴ (Batur, 1984, p. 76).

Client and Agent

The Koç Han project had different meanings for Koç and for Egli: For Vehbi Koç, it was a further step as a business man to have a “company headquarters” which was more than just a shop. It was also important to move from the back streets of Ulus district to the top business address of Ankara in the 1930s, for what was Hakimiyet-i Milliye Square and is now called Ulus Square was not only the primary trade and banking spot of Ankara at that time—with İş Bankası and Ziraat Bankası⁵ on or near Hakimiyet-i Milliye Square and soon afterwards Sümerbank headquarters, replacing the Taşhan building (Figure 5). It was also where İstasyon Street, today’s Cumhuriyet Street, began which linked downtown Ulus to the new main train station and along which a number of key buildings of the early years of the Republic were located, the first parliament, Ankara Palace Hotel (Ankara Palas Oteli)⁶ by architects Vedat Tek and Kemalettin Bey, and the Court of Accounts designed by Ernst Egli (Figure 6). And it was the starting point of Atatürk Boulevard, the new main North-South axis of the city.

For Koç, commissioning Egli with this project was probably a matter of considerable prestige. Egli was one of the highly respected foreign expert in top ranks of the state administration. He was young, like Koç himself, both representing the new generation. And Egli had access to the inner circles of the government, even to the president of the Republic himself, Mustafa Kemal. For Vehbi Koç, the project was proof of his belief in the new creed of Turkish society. He as a citizen and businessman worked hand in hand with the government in establishing Turkey as a progressive, modern, and civilized nation. Free trade and enterprising spirit were also marks of the new Turkey. Like his business endeavours, the modern architecture of his company office showed Koç as a believer in a future which was promising to hard-working and open-minded entrepreneurial people who had a feeling for the social and political agenda of the country under Atatürk. Koç obviously saw the future in the West and in Western goods and lifestyle. He recalls how he studied intensively the management of the great, long-standing companies of Europe and America, such as Siemens, Ford, and General Electric in order to gain knowledge for his own business activities (Koç, 1983, pp. 98-101).

Finally, the project may have served as a reference to Koç’s claims as a builder, a “show piece”. Koç showed-on a small scale-that he was able to build in the “modern style” and with modern materials, especially reinforced concrete (Figure 7).



Figure 5. Çankırı Street and Ulus Square, 1931
Source: *50 yıllık yaşantımız*, 1975, s. 52.

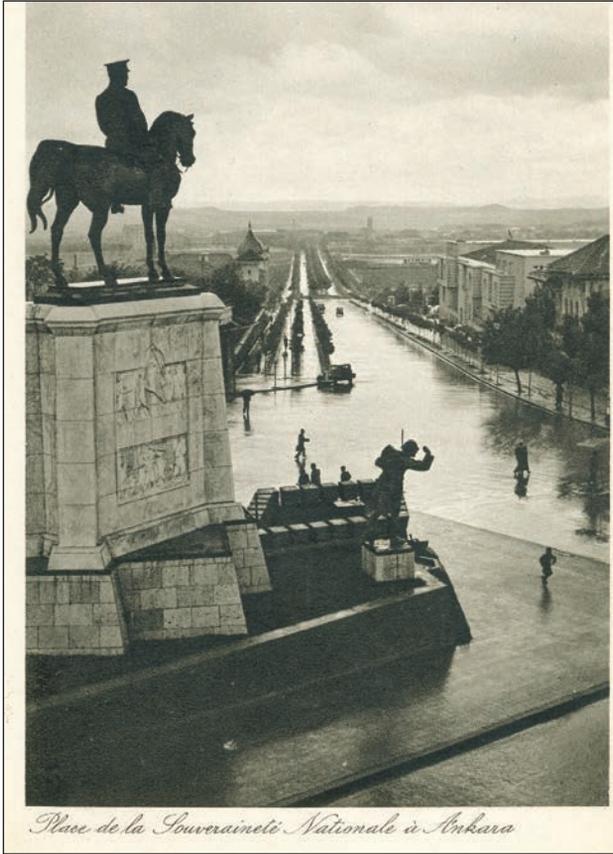


Figure 6. Looking down İstasyon Street from Zafer Anıtı (Victory Monument) in Ulus Square, with the Turkish Court of Account on the right and Ankara Palace Hotel on the left on İstasyon Street.

Source: Zafer Anıtı, n.d.

It is difficult to say what the assignment meant for Egli, as there are no direct testimonies. The early 1930s saw the peak of his professional career as an architect. He was working on many projects simultaneously, such as the Higher Agricultural Institute buildings in Dışkapı, the İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute and the Girls' Lyceum, both on or near Atatürk Boulevard, but also private commissions for residential buildings from the circle of influential people around the president of the Republic (i.e. Fuat Bulca, Şükrü Koçak). But Egli was always tempted to try his hand on other kinds of ventures, too-such as the project for Koç Han.

Urban Planning for Ankara and Ulus

Making Ankara the new capital had its geostrategic reasons but also advantages regarding the promotion of the republican revolution. Ankara was not chosen for its histori-



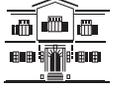
Figure 7. View of the construction site, 1932.

Source: Photograph of Koç Han, 1932b.

cal dimensions; the focus was not backward, but forward. The new republic needed an empty stage for its program of social, cultural and technical reform, and the small provincial town lent itself like a clean sheet of paper.

Around 1930, Ankara had a population of over 100.000, more than five times the number of ten years earlier, and it was still growing rapidly. "Such an unusual rate of population increase is not only devastating for post-war poor countries, but also for well-developed, prosperous nations" (Cengizkan, 2011, p. 27). Urban planning was of primary significance; its primary goal was to keep the outcome of this unprecedented growth somewhat under control. In 1924 (revised in 1925), Ankara had received its first urban master plan from the hands of Carl Christoph Lörcher, a German architect and urbanist. "Parallel to the emergence of Ankara as the capital city, the modernization efforts were based on a quest for planned development, planned growth and planned construction. The claim to prove that the young Republic was different from the Ottoman Empire heavily influenced the core of all initiatives related to devising a city plan and identifying the natural elements and associated values for Ankara as a new city" (Cengizkan, 2011, p. 31). By 1927, some basic assumptions governing the Lörcher plan had already lost their validity; and the areas assigned in the plan for building proved to be actually insufficient. After a competition, Ankara Municipality chose the project of Hermann Jansen-architect, urbanist, and professor at the Berlin Technical University-as the basis for the revised master plan.

Jansen's motto for his Ankara project was "within the boundaries of the possible." It included attempts at enhancing Ulus, the old city center to the south and west of the cit-



adel (Cengizkan, 2011, p. 35). However, by this time it was clear that the government offices could not be accommodated in Ulus. Both Lörcher and Jansen planned for a new government district a few kilometers further south, along the Kavaklıdere Creek, and for new upscale housing neighborhoods even further south in Çankaya and to the west of the train station, in Bahçelievler. Parts of Ulus, especially along Çankırı Street to the north of Ulus Square, were socially rather low scale, with many inexpensive hotels and restaurants and other establishments for entertainment. Both the Lörcher plan of 1924-1925 and the Jansen plan a few years later tried to redevelop Ulus-which had suffered severe damage in a 1917 fire that destroyed about a third of the buildings by rearranging the plots, introducing new secondary roads for better traffic management and defining areas for educational and health services buildings.

The major development of Ankara was to take place further south, however, on the other side of the railway tracks. Large boulevards were to connect the new government district in Kızılay with its parliament and ministries buildings with Çankaya still further south, where the residences of the president of the Republic, of the prime minister, and of other high-ranking officials of the new administration and the embassies were situated, and the Garden-City type suburb of Bahçelievler in the west (Cengizkan, 2011, pp. 32-33).

The Design of Koç Han

Despite the rapid development of the government district and the new residential neighborhoods to the south and west, Ulus was still the main business and trade district of Ankara, a marketplace for the surrounding villages and for the distribution of all kinds of goods that came into the city from a far into its neighborhoods-grain, vegetables, construction materials, and clothing supplies. The site acquired by Vehbi Koç for his Han was ideally located right on Ulus Square, but the plot itself was of a slightly less than optimal shape, with its irregular, slanted shape. The mix of building types and styles in this urban fabric in the late 1920s was considerable-the Beaux-Arts style of the İş Bankası building, the so-called First National Style” (a mix of classicist and Ottoman elements) of the old parliament and of Ankara Palace Hotel on İstasyon Street as well as of Ziraat Bankası on Atatürk Boulevard, all placed in the “medieval” pattern of old Ulus with its mostly single- and double-storied wood-and-stone storehouses, craftsmen’s shops, inns, and tenements.

The first modern building around Ulus Square was Ernst Egli’s completely restructured and enlarged Court of Accounts of 1928 on İstasyon Street, originally built in 1925 by “First National Style” school of architects Nâzım Bey and Arif Hikmet Koyunoğlu. Only four years later, Vehbi Koç commissioned a building with a truly modern appearance and layout for his company offices.

The lot itself was not empty, when Koç bought it. There was a building in place since the early 1920s (Figure 8). Sources suggest that it served as a diagnostic and treatment laboratory for a nearby veterinary clinic.⁷

From the archives of Ankara and Altındağ Municipality, the process of designing Koç Han can be reconstructed as follows: In 1931, under the impression of his journey to Central Europe, Vehbi Koç decides to erect a multipurpose store and office building for his firm, and he commissions Ernst Egli with its design. Early in 1932, the first drawings of the building in 1:50 scale are presented to the client (Egli and Schmeer, 1932).

On February 18, 1932, the request for permission to construct an “apartment and business building” on Ulus Square is handed in to Ankara Municipality Directorate of Building Development (Ankara İmar Müdürlüğü). In the submission letter signed by Ahmet Vehbi Bey, the applicant states:

I kindly request completion of the required procedures about the building construction according to 16 projects presented in two copies, on my land located between the Klüb sineması and Meydan Palace, opposite to the İş Bankası office at the Hakimiyet-i Milliye Square [*sic*] (Koç, 1932, 18 February; Figure 9).

Here, a third person of relevance to the design of Koç Han-and to both Vehbi Koç and Ernst Egli-enters the scene. Robert Oerley⁸, at that time head of commission of the Directorate of Technical Services (Fen İşleri Müdürlüğü).⁹ For Koç, Oerley was important because he was the architect of Numune State Hospital (1928-1933) where Koç had received a major assignment for the construction of electrical installations and elevators. For Egli, Oerley was both a colleague and a rival. Like Egli, Oerley was born in Vienna, Austria, and like Egli, he was a foreign expert brought into the country by the government to assist in the build-up of the new capital. He also belonged, for a short time, to Ernst Egli’s teaching staff at the Academy of Fine Arts in İstanbul. Oerley was, however, not a university-educated person, being first a master cabinet maker and a



Figure 8. Ulus Square, showing İş Bankası under construction and the building lot of Koç Han with the previously existing buildings still in place, 1929.

Source: Cangır, 2008, p. 547.

contractor, then educated at the School of Arts and Crafts. By twenty years senior to Egli, he also belonged to an older generation of builders.

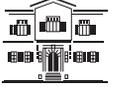
In his report in German, dated 1932, March 29, Oerley writes:

The applicant's entry must have included building plans, but the site plan was missing. After repeated requests, three location plans were submitted, which were sent back as they were incorrect and could not be used for the application for building permission. In order to clarify the situation, we have attached the planning copy of plan No. 443 (Figure 10), where the applicant's building is drawn in. The aforementioned does not take the previously announced building regulations into consideration, which borders on the Meydan Palace Hotel at the rear boundary and requires a 3 meter distance to the garden of the Halk Partisi building. Furthermore, it is not permissible to build plain walls in front of the garden of the Halk Partisi building- instead an aesthetic facade must be erected. Therefore, the floor plans of the building project facing the rear front is to be changed. The height of the building is regulated to 3 floors in this district, therefore it must be one floor less than those stated in the building plans. With regards to this, the facade on the Çankırı Caddesi must exactly match the height of neighbouring building, the Mey-

dan Palace Hotel. At the boundary to the applicant's land, this building is 12.35m in height up to the last facade component. As the street level is to be lowered by 0.66m, the applicant's building must not reach the height of 13.01 m on the southern neighboring boundary. [...] Therefore, we ask you to modify the plans according to aforementioned provisions and submit the altered plans in order to obtain building permission (1932, 29 May).

- On April 2, the translated report of Robert Oerley is handed in to the Directorate of Building Development (Oerley, 1932, 29 March).
- The following day, the Directorate of Building Development writes to Koçzade Vehbi Bey [sic], informing him officially of the negative answer to his construction request and prompting him to submit an adapted design (İmar Müdürü 1932, 3 April).
- On May 21, Vehbi Koç submits a revised design to the Directorate of Building Development. At this stage in the building's formation, it probably was to have three storeys along Çankırı Street and four storeys towards the rear (Koç, 1932, 21 May).

Two days later, Robert Oerley informs the Directorate of Building Development that the construction permit can now be issued under the condition that the height of the Koç building corresponds to that of the neighboring Mey-



KOÇ ZADE Ticarethanesi
AHMET VEHBI
Ankara, Çankırı Caddesi No.13

COTCH ZADÉ AHMED VEHBI
Maison de Commerce
ANKARA, TCHANGUIRI DJADESSI No. 13

Telefon: 1060
Telgraf Adresi: KOÇ - ANKARA
Posta Kutusu 72

Telephone: 1060
Adr. Télégr. COTCH - ANKARA
Boite Postale 72

Ankara 18 şubat 1932.-

ANKARA İMAR MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE.

Efendim,
Hakimiyeti Milliye meydanında İş Bankası karşu-
sunda Klup sineması ile Meydan-Palas arasında mutasarrıf olduğum arsama
merbut iki kopya ve =16= adet projeler mücibince bina inşa ettirece-
ğimden müktezi muamelenin ifasını rica ederim efendim.

18 Şubat 1932

18 Şubat 1932

ANKARA Ş. İMAR MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ
No. 181-E
Umumi Kurum
18. Şubat 1932

F. m. İşler

18 - E - 72

1

18 Mart 1933 - 10

Tahmin 2 181-E
16 Ocak 25/25 37

Figure 9. Vehbi Koç's request for permission to build on Hâkimiyet-i Milliye Square, 1932.

Source: Koç, 1932, 18 February.

dan Palas Hotel ("13,01 m from the future level of the sidewalk to the upper edge of the attic") (Oerley, 1932, 23 May).

- On May 25, the Directorate of Building Development informs the Mayor's Office that the permission for construction of Koç Han was granted under the aforementioned conditions (İmar Müdürü, 1932, 25 May).

Four months later, on September 22, Vehbi Koç writes to the Directorate of Building Development claiming insufficient consideration of certain elemental housing functions in the earlier plans, such as laundry, ironing, etc. He

states that, as the building was designed in the "modern style" with a flat roof without attic, there is no possibility to accommodate these functions without alteration of the volume of the building. Koç proposes to convert the street-side terrace to closed space (thereby turning it into a full floor) and adding a fifth floor of only 2,5 metres height, with terraces on both sides. He adds:

I believe that the proposed modifications on the aforementioned building with its premium location on the busiest street of the city will suit the building and also the street; they will improve the elegance of the build-

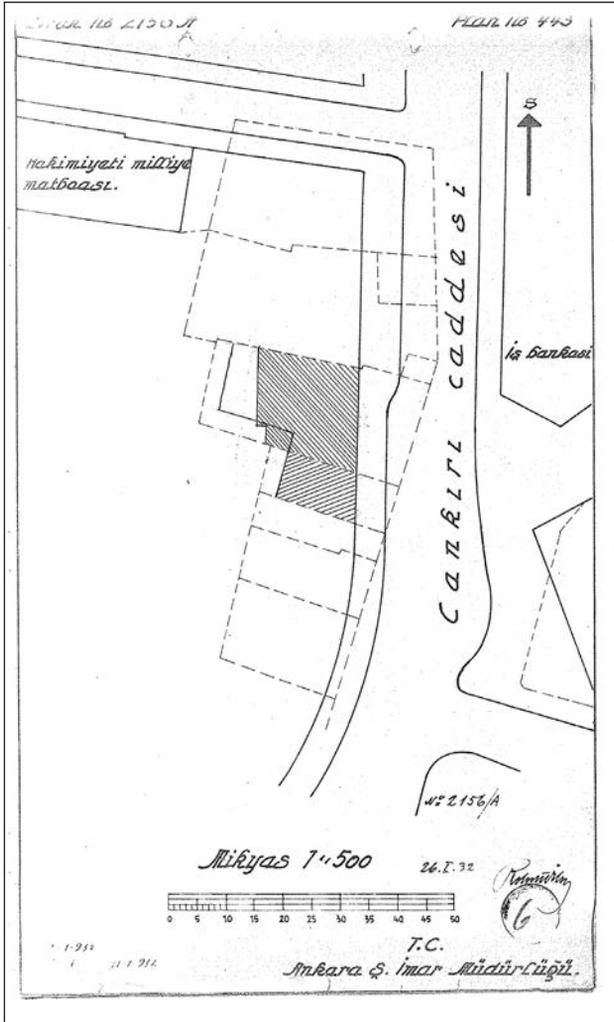


Figure 10. Plan by Robert Oerley, showing the correct location of the building lines.

Source: Oerley, 1932, 26 January, Plan no.: 443.

ing and not obstruct the overall ambiance of the street.
(Koç, 1932, 22 September).

Consequently, on October 1, the Directorate of Building Development informs the Mayor's Office that the request by Vehbi Koç has been checked and that the revised construction permit can be issued, but that the building has to be executed without the additional fifth-floor penthouse. (İmar Müdürü, 1932, 1 October).

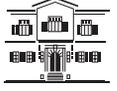
By this time, construction must have been well under way and progressing quite rapidly. But not everything went according to plan—neither to those approved by the municipality nor to those of Vehbi Koç which obviously were

not entirely congruent—for sometime in early November, a building freeze was ordered. Obviously, Koç had had the workers build a tile roof instead of the flat roof and terraces shown in the submitted and approved plans.

- On November 7, Vehbi Koç writes to the Mayor's Office about the actions of Directorate of Technical Services, confirming that he didn't exactly follow the instructions of the administration but claiming that the alterations had been necessary to protect the plumbing of the building from the weather. (Koç, 1932, 7 November).
- On November 12, the Directorate of Development writes to the, informing it that Koç's submission dated November 7, 1932 had only been approved under the condition that the fifth-floor penthouse-style addition would be omitted (İmar Müdürü V., 1932, 12 February).
- Nine days later, on November 20, Vehbi Koç submits another project change documented in form of a sketch by Ernst Egli (Koç, 1932, 20 November).
- Based on this, the Director of Development informs the Mayors' Office on November 23, that the construction permit can be issued under the condition that the fifth-floor front and rear terraces would be realized as shown in Egli's sketch and that the two lightwells would receive fire protection walls shielding the neighbouring buildings (İmar Müdürü, 1932, 23 November).

This is how the building was accomplished.¹⁰ On the four-sided lot of slanted shape sits a four-storey volume with a penthouse-type fifth floor. Three of the limiting walls—the front and the two fire protecting walls to the left and right—are aligned with the borders of the parcel. In the rear, there is a three meter wide alley leading to a small courtyard in the south western corner of the building lot (App. 1).

The building is entered in the middle of the first floor through a door and a corridor leading to a spiral staircase in the far left corner. This corridor divides the ground floor in two areas for shops. The one to the right of the corridor—in the northern half of the lot—features a large storage area in the rear, originally most likely with an opening in the floor which allowed for lifting and lowering goods with either a crane or pulleys from and to the basement. This rear storage area protruded from the volume of the building and was lit by skylights¹¹ (App. 2).



The main access to both the basement as well as the second floor is via the spiral staircase along the southern wall of the building. To continue to the third, fourth, and fifth floor, however, one has to cross the second-floor landing to reach another staircase in the center of the building, one that is completely encapsulated by the surrounding rooms (App. 3).

This shift in the plan allowed for a more economical arrangement in that on the third, fourth, and fifth floor the space of the spiral staircase could be used as a room. It added a remarkable feature to the rear facade, too. The shift in the vertical path through the building also reminds of the principles of “Raumplan,” a spatial concept developed by the influential Viennese architect Adolf Loos, of whom Egli was a great admirer.¹²

The upper storeys of the building were set up to be of variable use.

- On the first upper floor (App. 4), three independent units—two in the front, one in the rear—were arranged around the upper landing of the spiral staircase. These were most likely meant to accommodate independent offices. The unit in the rear is connected to the ground floor shop by means of a small spiral staircase, obviously allowing the shop owner’s access to his offices and dressing room.¹³
- The landings on the second (App. 5) and third upper floor give access to two units each both of which connect the front and the rear of the building, with three to four rooms each. These units could be used as offices as well as apartments, each with a bathroom and a separate toilet.
- On the fourth upper floor, a penthouse-style unit with terraces to the front and rear can be found (App. 6).

Both from the street and from the back, the recessed penthouse unit can hardly be seen; the building is perceived as a four-storey volume. The building’s front and rear elevations are treated in a similar way, a way which is characteristic for many projects of Egli of that period. (App. 7).

The front facade is devised as a massive three-storey-high wall “floating” over a fully-glazed ground floor. The wall is punctured by three rows of tightly arranged windows which, however, do not span the entire width of the facade. The subtle vertical grid formed by the upright-format windows and the plaster panels underneath them is counterbalanced by

concrete projections that work as “sunshades” and accentuate the horizontality of the window rows (Figure 11).

This overlay of vertical and horizontal grid in a facade by means of upright format windows arranged in horizontal rows and tied together with concrete lintels and parapets are characteristic for many projects of Egli, such as the administration building of the Turkish Aeronautical Association of 1933-1934 (Figure 12) or the Gazi Lyceum of 1936. Such rows of windows were also an economical way of bringing a maximum of light into the rooms behind the facade thereby improving the hygienic qualities of the building, one of the key requirements of modernism.

However, most similarities are to be found between Koç Han and İsmet Paşa Girls’ Institute. The rear side of Koç Han is a variation of the front, again with a panel-like treatment of the wall and rows of windows. The sunshades of the street elevation are replaced in this case by narrow balconies with metal railings in filigree, a common nautical motive of modern-style architecture also used by Egli, for example in his masterpiece, the İsmet Paşa Girls’ Institute on Atatürk Boulevard. The right-hand corner of this facade is accentuated by the rounded volume housing the spiral staircase (Figure 13).

The building was executed in reinforced concrete without any load-bearing brick walls, an inexpensive construction method which emerged at the time and is still in common use today.

Koç Han as a New Building Type

As mentioned initially, Koç Han nowadays hardly draws attention from unsuspecting passers-by. In fact, it is hard to distinguish it from other, much younger commercial buildings in the neighborhood or elsewhere in Ankara—or in Turkey, for that matter. Historical photographs of Uluş and of Hâkimiyet-i Milliye Square, however, reveal the novelty of the building both formally in the city’s silhouette and typologically. In his letterhead, Vehbi Koç referred to the building as “ticarethane” or “maison de commerce”. He may have borrowed this term from office buildings he encountered in İstanbul and other big cities during his travels.

At that time, the buildings of Ankara/Uluş consisted largely of single and double-storeyed houses of the Ottoman or Anatolian type made of stone and wood. For the new businesses like gasoline, cars, household appliances, etc., Vehbi Koç helped establish in Ankara (and eventu-

ally in Turkey), the office building he envisioned which required a new kind of architecture. For a business house, functional criteria are as important as marketing considerations. In a German architects' handbook from 1928, this task was described as follows,

The building has to have a positive appeal to the people in the streets; an impressive form and high-quality materials are therefore recommended. At the same time, it has to be apparent that the company erecting a new building goes with the times and makes allow-



Figure 11. Koç Han shortly before its completion.

Source: Photograph of Koç Han, 1932a.



Figure 12. Administration building of the Turkish Aeronautical Association, front and side elevation

Source: Turkish Civil Aviation Association, 1933/1934.

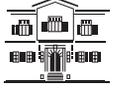


Figure 13. İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute, rear elevation.
Source: İsmet Paşa Girls' Institute, 1930.

ances for the taste of the present. This happens through choosing modern forms that hint at progress ... A new business house must also meet the requirements of the practice of operating a business today... [and] ...the requirements regarding light and air are just as important (Grimm, 1928, p. 11).

Most companies' offices are also meant to impress trading partners as well as the competitors. Predominant for a solid business, however, are the economics of a project—a business house is no exception. Here, the versatility of a building is crucial, for no one knows if today's business requirements are also tomorrow's. To design a comprehensive building was not considered a simple affair at that time (as it isn't even today). Another well-known manual for

architects from the early 20th century a source Egli often used reminds of the difficult task when designing a house suited both for business and housing purposes.

For a building which is to accommodate both office and housing, the design of the spatial layout as well as of the outer form is difficult, because the requirements of housing are completely different from those of sales room and other commercial functions. (Zaar and Kick, 1902, p. 27).

Both client and architect, Vehbi Koç and Ernst Egli were fully aware of the limits of their resources and of the resources of the country at that time, but still succeeded in making an originally modern statement. The first Koç Han was both, a sober piece of functional architecture, economic in its construction and versatile in its use to reduce the financial risk for its owner, and a bold statement about the beliefs of its creators in a successful, modern future styled on western examples and universal ideals. Incidentally, less than a decade later, Vehbi Koç built a second business house almost adjacent to the first to accommodate for his increasing need for office and showroom space. This time, however, he employed a young Turkish architect, Samih Akkaynak, educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in İstanbul. Within a decade, Turkey had shaken off the severe shortfalls of technical knowledge and expertise characteristic for the first years of the Republic, compelling her to rely so heavily on foreign expertise, and a new corps of skilled Turkish architects had emerged.

In this respect, the two business houses built by Vehbi Koç on Ulus Meydanı give testimony to a number of things, among them to Koç's growing success as a businessman and his ongoing belief in a modern, westernized Turkey, and to the legacy and continuing contribution to Turkey's architectural culture by Ernst Arnold Egli, the architect of the first Koç Han.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mehtap Türkyılmaz and Alev Ayaokur from VEKAM for their support in providing the archival material on Koç Han.

Notes

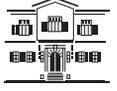
- 1 İş Bankası building was designed by Giulio Mongeri, Sümerbank by Martin Elsaesser.
- 2 Vehbi Koç's journey to Western Europe was mirrored inadvertently by a tour Ernst Egli made about the same time through Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland for what



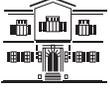
- was a “reconnaissance mission” on orders of the Ministry of National Education to study the latest developments in public and especially educational building sectors.
- 3 The iconic French Art Nouveau palace of the “Galleries Lafayette” on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris was erected in 1912 for Théophile Bader by the architects Georges Chedanne and Ferdinand Chanut. The Warenhaus Wertheim on Leipziger Strasse in Berlin was built in 1896 by Alfred Messel for the brothers Wertheim.
 - 4 The Law for the Incitement of Industry (Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu) from 1927 not only allowed for the recruitment from foreign countries of the technical personnel needed for the construction and operation of industrial plants, but also more generally of planners, engineers, and architects.
 - 5 Like İş Bankası, Ziraat Bankası (1926-1929) was also designed by Guilo Mongeri.
 - 6 Ankara Palace Hotel was initially designed by Vedad Tek, but finished by Kemalettin Bey and Mimar Alaaddin (Batur, 2003, p. 173).
 - 7 “Back then, there was a veterinary clinic in the old and shabby inn located in Taşhan district of Ankara, where we have the Koç apartment today. Captain Naki Cevat, Manager of Animal Health Department, Ministry of National Defense, built a diagnosis and examination laboratory in July 1916 using makeshift material available in those times. This military lab took care of the peoples’ domesticated animals and fought against the cattle plague epidemic which broke out in the Ankara region on October 1, 1921 by utilizing fresh bile serum method. This lab was also the basis of today’s establishment. [sic]” (T.C. M.S.B, 1945, p. 4).
 - 8 On Robert Oerley’s works in Turkey see Cengizkan, 2002, pp. 71-91.
 - 9 The Directorate of Technical Services was an organisational unit within the municipality of Ankara charged with the technical examination and approval of building projects.
 - 10 There are no architectural drawings showing the exact way the Han was erected in 1932, and no photographic documentation. The only full set of plans, sections and elevations preserved in the archives of Ankara Municipality show an earlier stage of the design with four storeys instead of the five eventually realized. Later conversions—especially on the first floor—have altered the layout considerably.
 - 11 The rear of the building has been modified in later years with a first-floor addition covering the skylights; the courtyard also no longer exists.
 - 12 “Raumplan” (space plan) is an architectural concept which calls for a complex interweaving of interior spaces and paths, all contained in a stereometric outer volume of puristic ideals.
 - 13 This staircase was most likely removed when the first upper floor was restructured.

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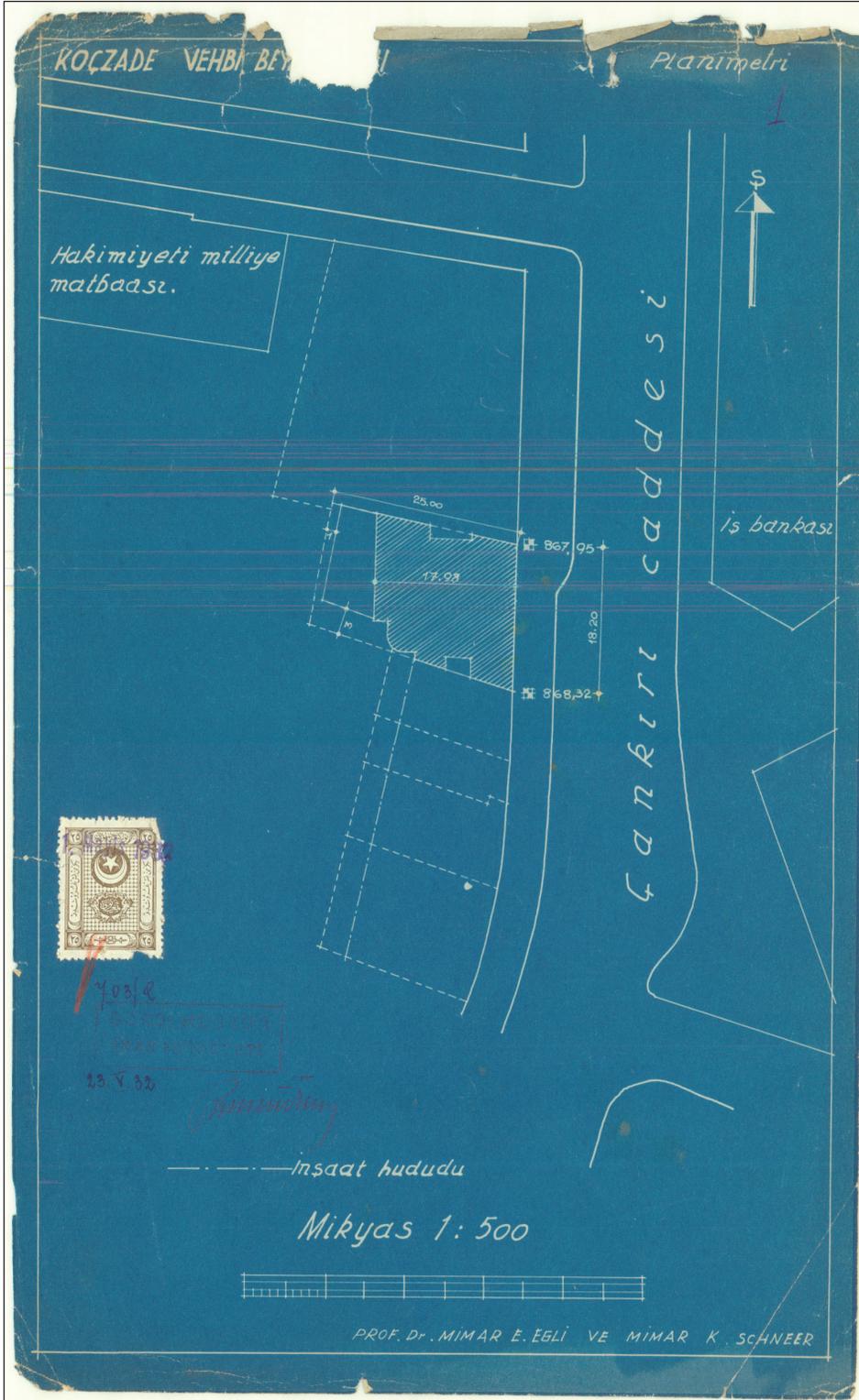
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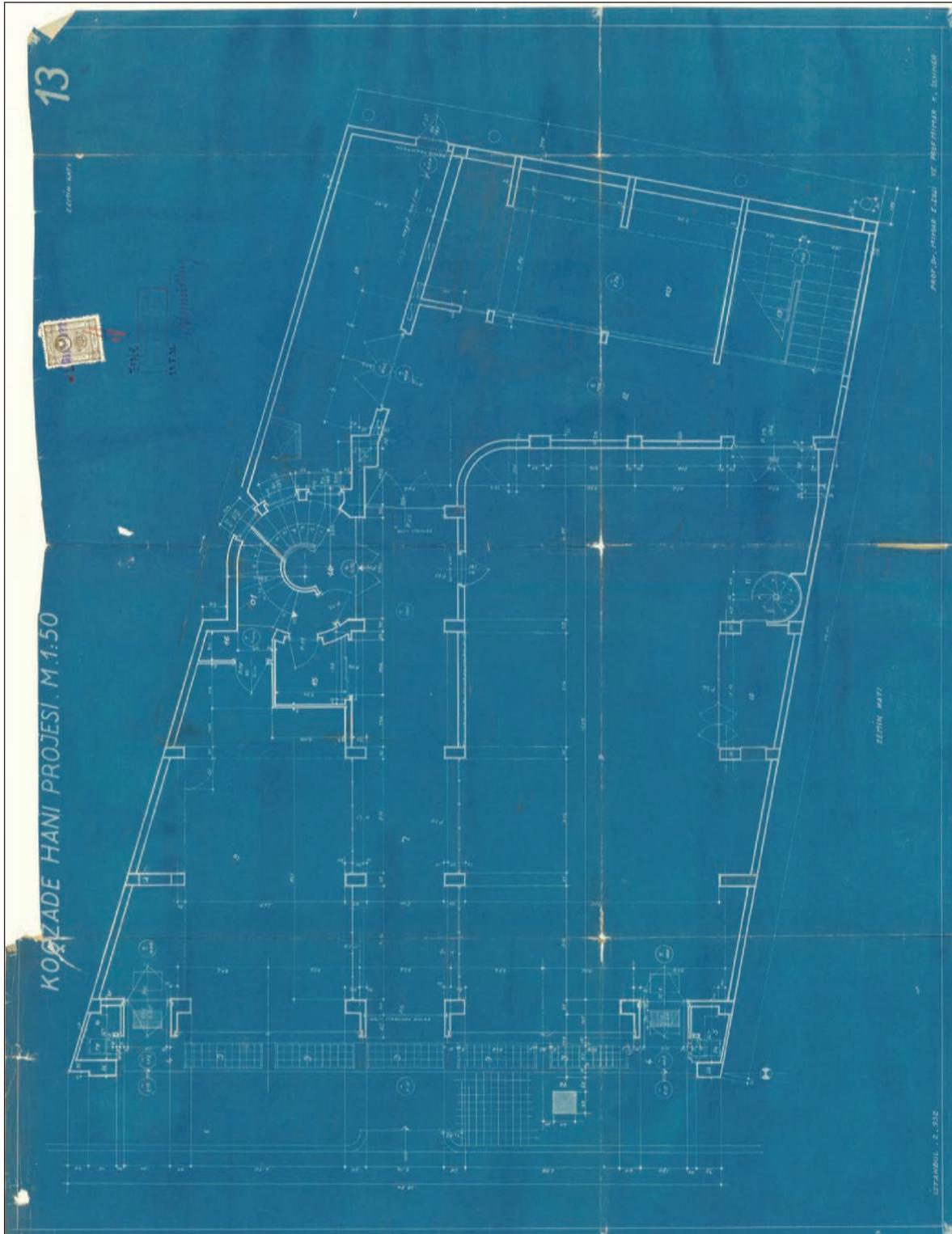
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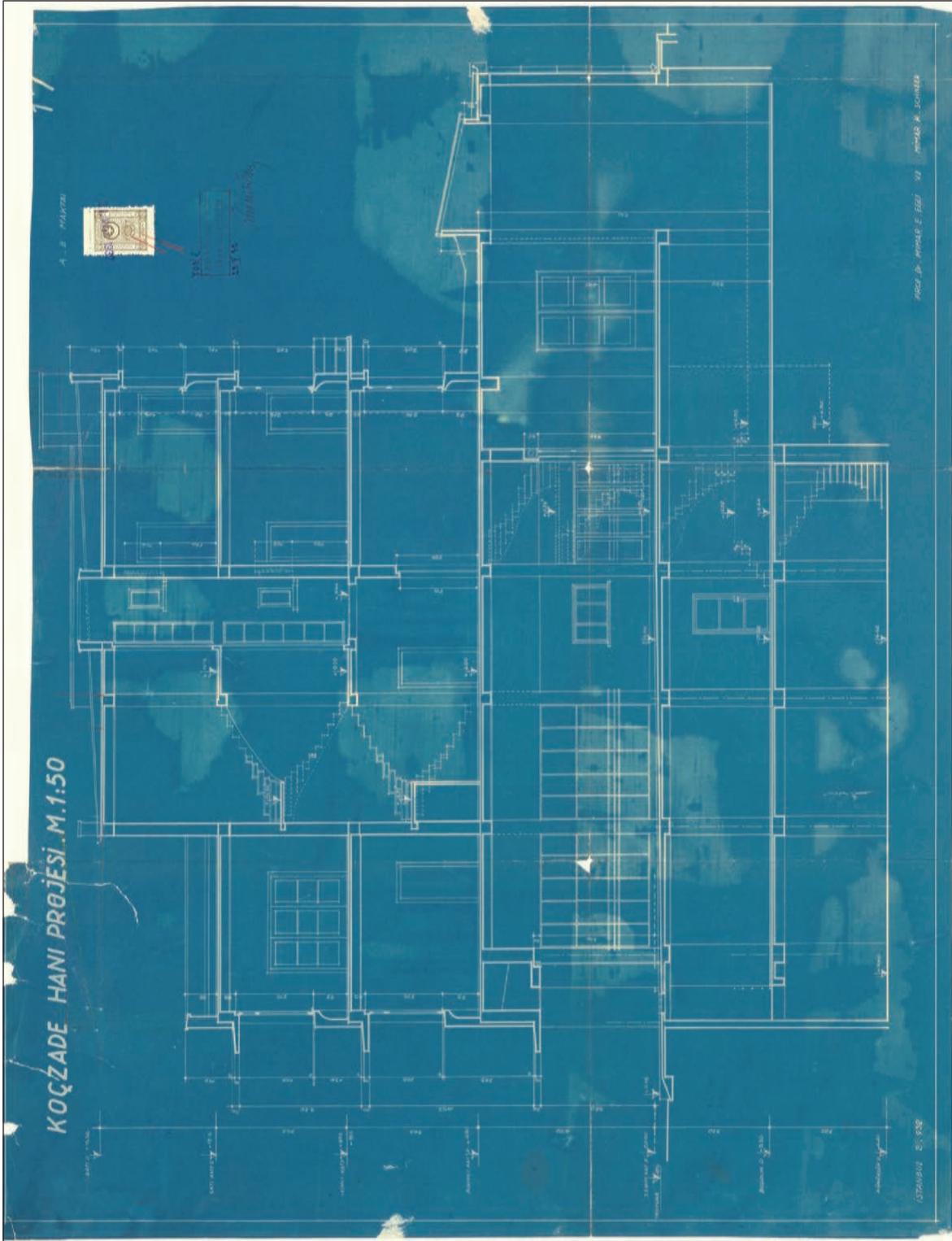
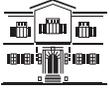
Appendix



App. 1. Site plan by Egli 1932.
Source: Egli and Schneer,
1932, [Planimetri].

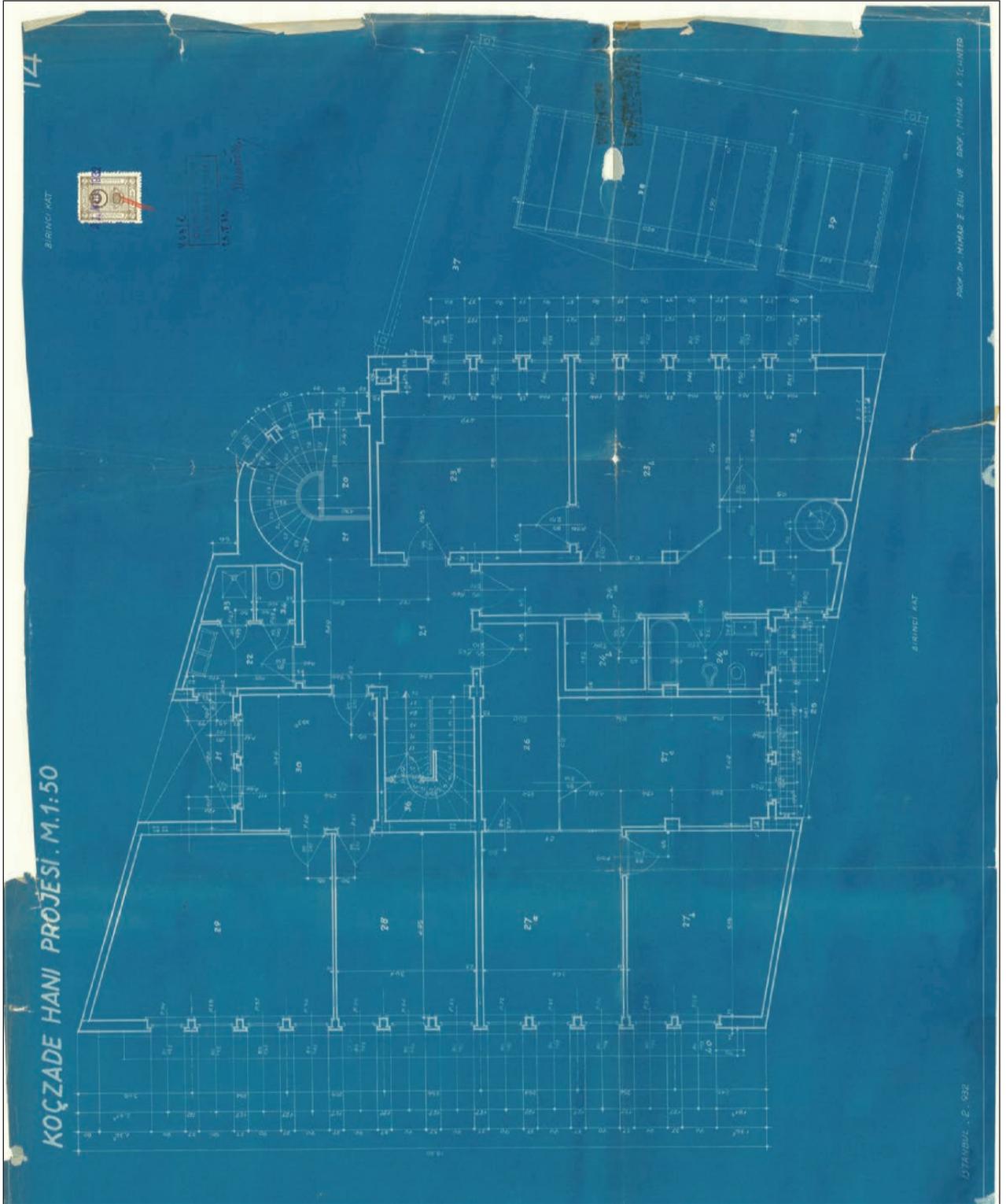
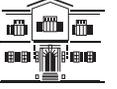


App. 2. Ground floor plan by Egli.
Source: Egli and Schmeer, 1932, Plan no: 13.

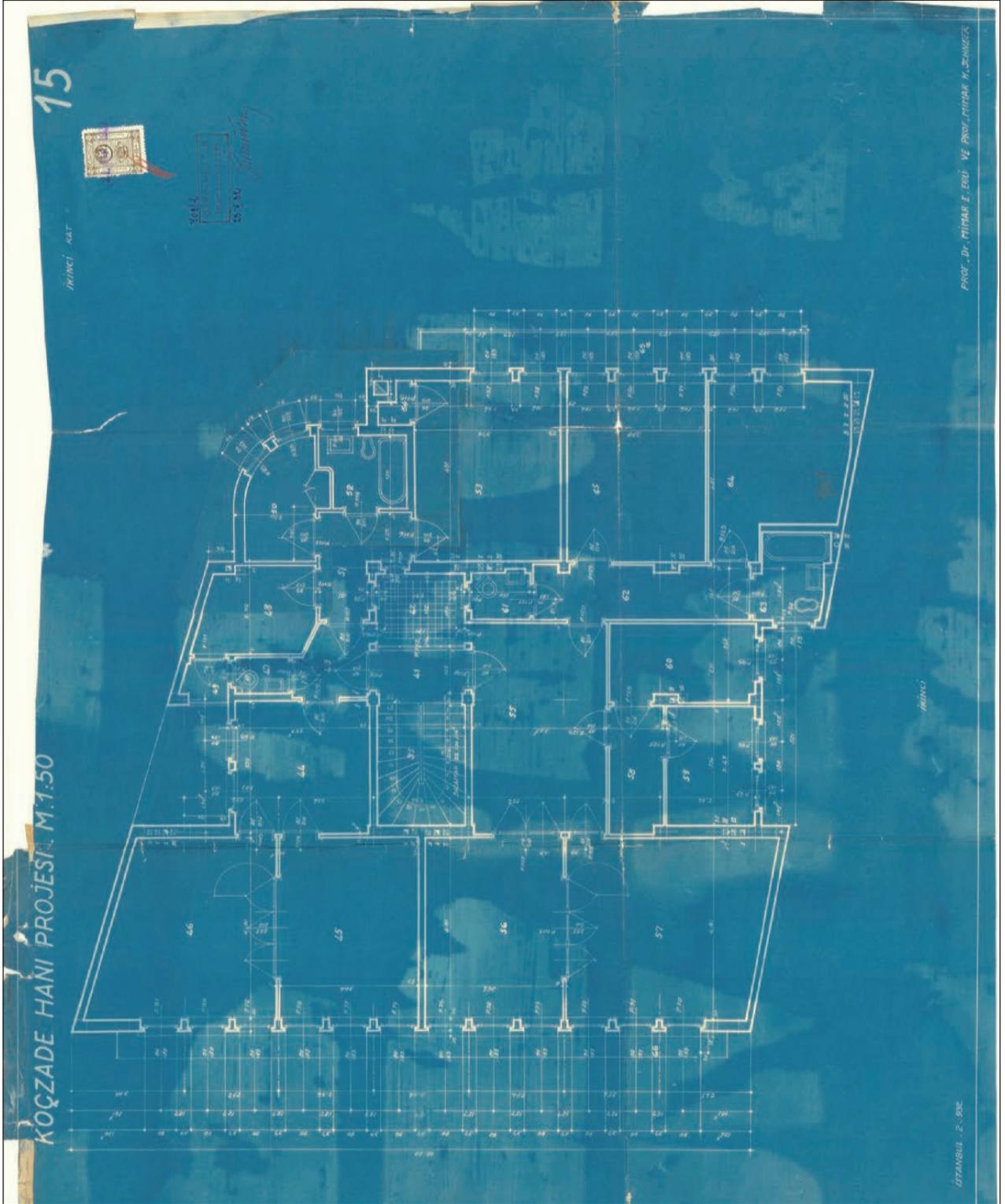
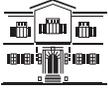


App. 3. Section through Koç Han, by Egli, 1932.

Source: Egli and Schner, 1932, Plan no: 17.

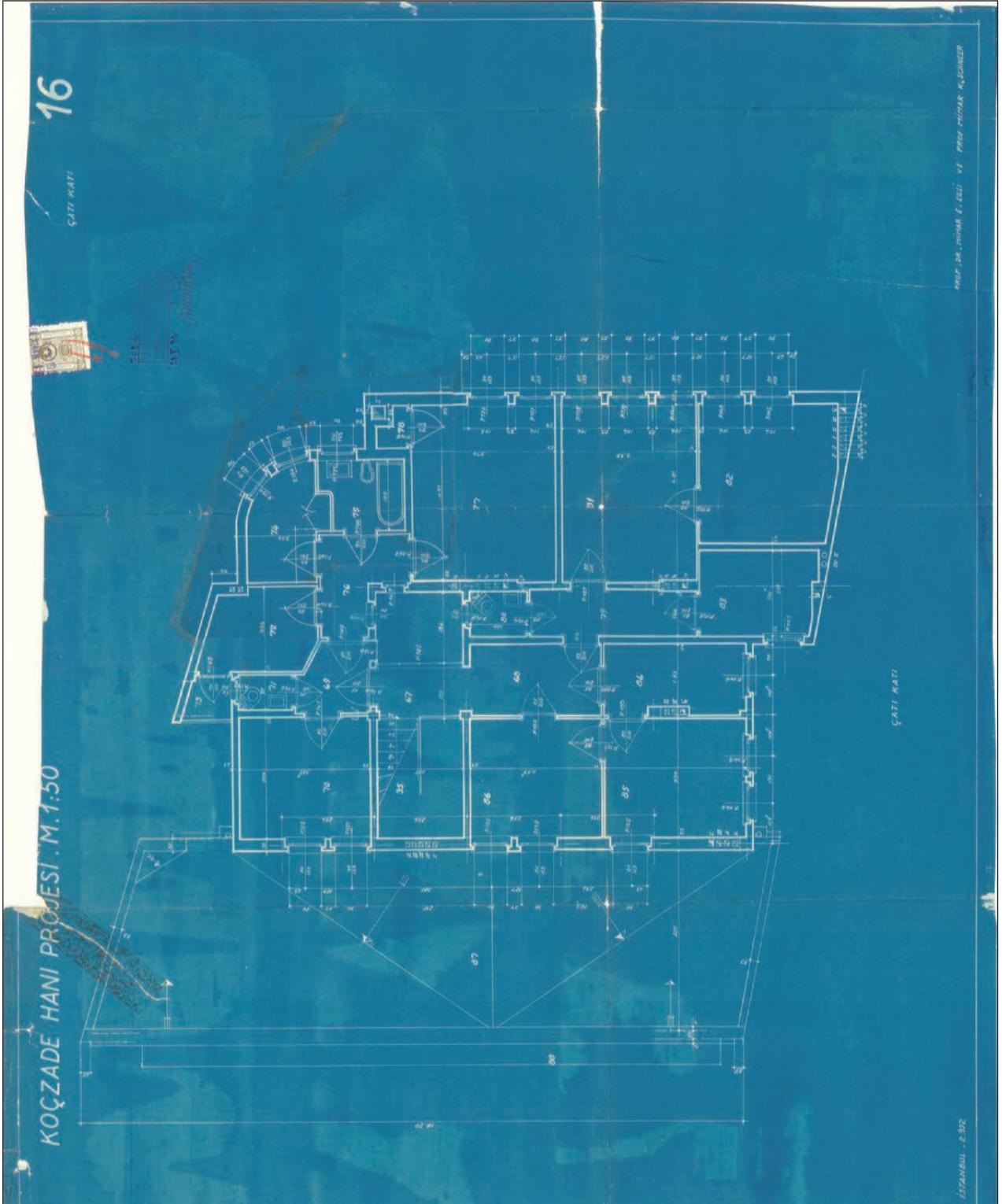
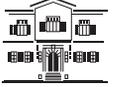


App. 4. First floor plan by Egli, 1932.
Source: Egli and Schneer, 1932, Plan no: 14.

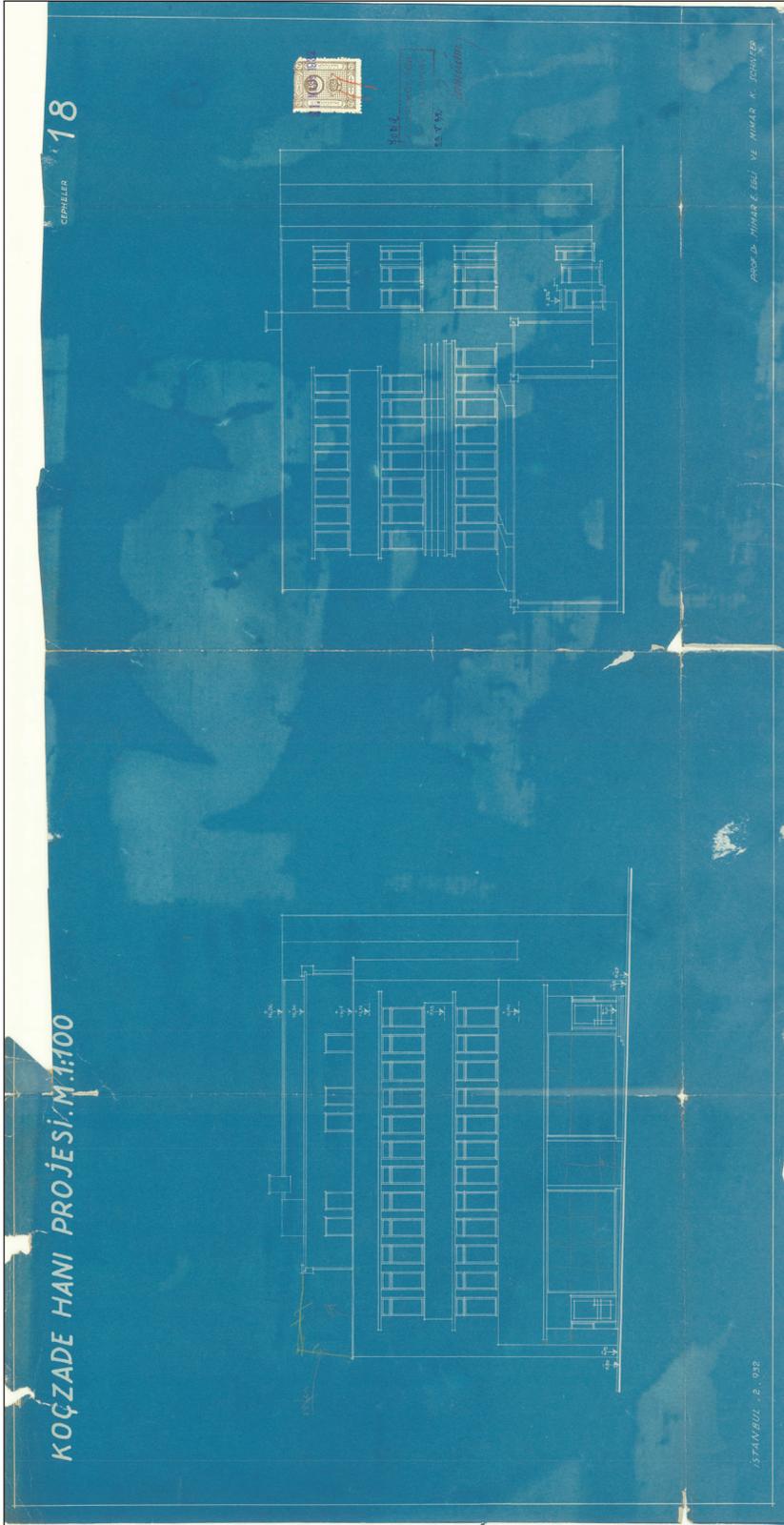
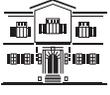


App. 5. Second floor plan by Egli, 1932.

Source: Egli and Schmeer, 1932, Plan no: 15.



App. 6. Roof floor plan by Egli, 1932.
Source: Egli and Schmeer, 1932, Plan no: 16.



App. 7. Front elevation, by Egli, 1932.
Source: Egli and Schmeer, 1932,
Plan no: 18.