

MARKING TIME, MARKING MOVEMENT: Mexico City's Ottoman Clock Tower as a Transnational Expression of Immigrant Identity

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An ornate Ottoman clock tower unexpectedly pierces the skyline of Mexico City's historic district, marking the century-long presence of a significant Arab immigrant community in the country (Figure 1). The timely tower, standing at the corner of Bolívar and Venustiano Carranza Streets, was a diplomatic gift donated by the Middle Eastern community in Mexico to President Porfirio Díaz on September 9, 1910.¹ The clock tower displays an innovative ornamental and architectural hybridity, bearing Spanish and Ottoman decorative tile motifs as well as numerals in both Roman and Arabic scripts across its four clock faces. This unique monumental timepiece embedded in the urban fabric of the *Distrito Federal* commissioned by the Arab-speaking immigrant community from the Levantine provinces of the Ottoman Empire can be seen as a global extension and adaptation of Sultan Abdülhamit II's ubiquitous clock tower program, which blossomed in the late nineteenth century. By tracing the development of Ottoman clock towers in the empire to its immigrant periphery across the ocean in the expatriate colony of Mexico City, I argue that over time, these structures transformed from symbols of sovereignty into colorful expressions of local, collective identity.



FIGURE 1. Ottoman clock tower in Mexico City. "Reloj Otomano," Instagram, accessed March 4, 2016, www.instagram.com/p/6qf0JaoB08/. Photograph courtesy of the artist, Elvis Dino Esquivel, 2016, www.elvisesquivel.com

The Ottoman clock tower in Mexico City and those erected throughout the Ottoman Empire before its fall, in particular the Dolmabahçe Palace Clock Tower in Istanbul and the Hamidiyyeh clock tower of Beirut, share an aesthetic pluralism that reflects shifting socio-political discourses at the turn of the twentieth century. The functional and decorative features of the timepieces can be read as the visual expression of a complex dialogue in which the modernizing Ottoman Empire, its provinces, and immigrant communities negotiated relationships at home and abroad in the turbulent modern era. These visual and architectural “clock tower conversations” reflect not only changes in timekeeping methodology but express transnational notions of identity—reaching well beyond the traditional boundaries of the nation-state.

Transfers of Time and Space: The Immigrant Patrons of the Clock

The Ottoman tradition of utilizing clock towers as a tool to construct local identity, claim a space in the urban environment, and serve as a mechanism of political diplomacy is reflected in the vibrantly tiled clock tower that stands in the heart of Mexico City. The clock itself was sponsored by immigrants who left the *mashriq*, or Eastern Mediterranean provinces under Ottoman rule, for the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As scholars such as Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp and Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos have shown, a large population of these immigrants began to settle within Mexico City prior to World War I.² Although these immigrants were primarily from Syrian and Lebanese provinces of the empire, they were generically referred to as *turcos*, or Turks, throughout Latin America due to their legal status as Ottoman subjects at the time.³

The so-called “*turco*” migrants came from a number of Ottoman provinces in the Levant, who left their homeland because of the economic strife caused by the burgeoning Ottoman debt to Europe. A large number of émigrés from Beirut, in particular, arrived in Mexico because of the failure of the local silk industry due to sudden increase in international competition with Japan. Syrian and Lebanese migration to the Americas was also spurred by increasingly violent religious and sectarian tensions between the Muslim Druze and Maronite Christians communities in the Ottoman provinces. In 1860, an estimated 12,000 Maronites in Mount Lebanon were massacred by the Druze and 10,000 Christians were killed in Damascus.⁴ The violence instigated a wave of minority movement abroad. Between 1878 and 1909, 28 percent (over one-fourth) of all Middle Eastern immigrants who emigrated abroad arrived in Mexico. Eighty-six percent of these “*turcos*” declared themselves Catholic, which has been interpreted by historians as a strategy by Maronites to blend into the larger religious culture of Mexico.⁵

The urgency of the diaspora situation gave birth to a lucrative but corrupt migrant shipping industry that specialized in carrying desperate and often misinformed

immigrants to the most convenient North or South American port for a great profit. The exploitation was criticized in a 1907 Protestant mission report:

The emigrant business has become very profitable...a long chain whose links are located all the way from Syria to North and South American seaports... Word will come to avoid New York if diseased; then go to Mexico...at present the flow is towards Argentina...It is a system that results in much human suffering, troubles, jealousies, and sometimes crime.⁶

While condemning the inhumanity of the migrant shipping practice, the report also hints at discourses of disease and “degenerate” connotations of crime that had begun to surround the Middle Eastern migrants. The Ottoman émigrés were viewed as dirty and illness-ridden by the Mexican elite and confronted with intense xenophobia. In 1907, the *Mexican Herald* announced:

Mexico has long been the stamping ground of Syrians and other foreigners who come to this country because they have been denied admission to the ports of the United States because they are victims of disease...the steamship companies will hereafter have to be more than usually careful for if they bring trachoma sufferers to this country or they will be at the expense of giving them a free trip back to their homes.⁷

These associations with sickness and crime would socially plague the Ottoman émigrés, who arrived during the presidential regime of Porfirio Díaz, a political era known for its engagement with a group of pseudo-scientific theorists, who advocated legislation to “whiten” the nation. Middle Eastern, Asian, and African migrants faced the brunt of racist regulations that were intended to impede their assimilation into and proliferation in Mexican society. The laws impeded the marriage of migrant men by depriving Mexican women of their citizenship should they choose to marry such a foreigner, at which point the women and their children were considered to share the husband’s nationality. Such regulations can be seen as part of a larger Latin American framework to discourage the immigration and socio-economic integration of particular ethnic groups. An example is found in 1903, as Haiti and Uruguay passed a law that, “debarred all Arabic-speakers from involvement in petty trade.”⁸

The Christian faith shared by a large segment of these new immigrants and the Mexican majority provided little initial relief from the cultural backlash against the Ottoman émigrés. Two major Maronite churches were founded in Mexico City. *La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Balvanera*, which stands near the clock tower in the downtown historic center, is now home to the Cathedral of the Maronite community in the capital and currently known as the *Nuestra Señora de los Mártires de Líbano*.⁹ Its affiliated episcopal house is situated in the Florida colony of

the southern suburbs. A Maronite expatriate priest, Daoud Ass'ad, noted Mexican disdain for the Eastern traditions of the Christian faith, complaining, "[T]he locals think there is no existence for the Catholic ceremony other than the Latin one, so they asked us to worship in Latin."¹⁰ Language and liturgical difference emerge as a source of tension in this statement, demonstrating that the transition of the Syrian and Lebanese community in the city was difficult on many levels.

This historical backdrop of the ethnic and religious obstacles experienced by the Levantine immigrants provides a new perspective with which to visually analyze the Ottoman clock tower in Mexico City. The remarkable craftsmanship and materials of the public monument testify to the fact that the Levantine community ultimately flourished in its new urban environment. However, the bold artistic decoration of the clock tower can also be seen as a reflection of civic pride and transnational heritage. In the vibrant architectural pluralism of the stately clock, a cosmopolitan amalgam of structural and ornamental forms, space, and shifting time-keeping traditions appear to celebrate transculturation.¹¹

Ottoman Time-Keeping Traditions: From *Alla Turca* to *Alla Franga*

Why would the diaspora community from the Ottoman Empire that settled in Mexico select the clock tower as their primary form of monumental representation during the Centennial? Moreover, why should these structures be understood as carrying a symbolic charge of identity, even within the new geographic regions inhabited by the empire's emigrants? To highlight the visual dimensions of power and self-representation at play in the immigrant-sponsored timepiece, one must first situate the clock tower within the greater cultural and economic context of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire and the widespread clock tower construction program implemented across its vast territories. Only then can the Mexican-Ottoman clock tower's links to sacred and secular time, its Western connotations of "progress," and its reconfigured meanings within the diaspora be revealed.

Uğur Tanyeli has argued that the Ottoman Empire underwent a "crisis of the clock" during the period of modernization in the nineteenth century in which *alla turca* systems of time were profoundly influenced by an *alla franga* time.¹² These two terms, *alla turca* and *alla franga*, were uniquely imported from the Italian language by Ottomans to describe alternate and competing timekeeping traditions within the empire during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ *Alla franga*, or "French-style," time referred to the Western European clock and its units of twelve equally measured hours in the morning (diurnal) and evening (nocturnal). *Alla turca*, or "Turkish-style" time, referred to late Ottoman timekeeping traditions in which the settings of the mechanical clock were carefully adjusted to mark the moment of sunset as the twelfth hour.¹⁴ The following brief overview of these alternate traditions and their development helps highlight the symbolic dimensions at play in

Ottoman clock towers within the empire and abroad.

Historically speaking, the mechanical clock has been identified as the first complete rupture from time measurement modes that relied on local, natural rhythms, like the sundial. Serving as the predominant mode of time measurement in the West, the mechanical clock caused a rupture between temporality, local place, and natural rhythms, which ultimately advanced the Industrial Age, according to Lewis Mumford.¹⁵ Historians identify the mechanical clock as an emblem of modernity and rationality.¹⁶ Also it functions as a pivotal component in establishing a linear construct of time that situated particular events along a progressive, historical time line.¹⁷ This linear model has been conceptually identified as a foundational point for a Hegelian view of history, linking linear progress to hierarchical Western notions of culture. Social activities and business practices were synchronized by mechanical clocks in the modern era, which enabled a large-scale uniform demarcation of time and caused the practice of modern “time consciousness” to be stressed in the Western sphere.¹⁸ According to Western traditions, the individual or communal ownership of time-keeping devices like the pocket watch or clock tower were historically tied to ideas of status, order, and privilege.

Time keeping traditions in the Ottoman Empire were deeply rooted in diverse, co-existing cultural models that were strongly influenced by the religious tenets of Islam, as well as natural, socio-spatial, and secular systems. According to the Islamic construct of time, individual and social life was organized around the five daily prayers (*salat*) and calculated by the sun’s position in the sky. As devout Muslims must face the direction of Mecca during the time of prayer, activities such as work and leisure are traditionally framed around natural rhythms, local physical place, and ideological sacred space within the Islamic model of time. The position of the sun not only regulates daily life, but also calculated important religious rituals, such as the month of Ramadan. The observation of Ramadan can be seen a religious practice intimately tied to natural systems, as the body’s rhythms of rest and nourishment re-organize around sunset when the fast is broken. With such emphasis on cyclical periods of ritual, Islamic time is considered circular in the short-term experience of religious observation, but linear with respect to long-term planning and historical development.¹⁹

Due to Islam’s attunement to sun and moon cycles, a plethora of time measurement devices from sundials, to astrolabes and sun quadrants have historically been used to regulate time in Muslim empires. These mechanical devices helped to measure Islamic time and religious seasons with accuracy, so the call to prayer could be announced from minarets even if it was too cloudy to observe the sun. As an architectural structure specifically built to proclaim the time of prayer, the minaret—above all else— came to symbolically represent sacred socio-temporal time in the Muslim world, in addition to infusing it with the dimension of sound.

Historically, Islamic minarets and Christian bell towers aurally competed in the sonic atmosphere to mark the time for prayer for different religious traditions.

The concept of sacred Islamic time— embodied by the minaret— was far from the only model in the Ottoman Empire. Due to the religious diversity of the empire and its historically heavy engagement in international trade, the Ottomans had long maintained a practical, pluralistic approach to time. Western-style mechanical clocks had a long history in the Ottoman Empire, recorded in Istanbul as early as 1477, when Mehmed II the Conqueror petitioned the Venetian government for a clockmaker. By the sixteenth century, clocks were widely imported and produced by both Muslims and Europeans in the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ The popularity of mechanical clocks at this time in the empire was not primarily due to their functionality, but their association with novelty and prestige as foreign luxury objects, playing an important role in diplomatic exchange. International economics lay at the heart of marking secular time, as the mercantile need to synchronize global trade and labor provided an impetus for time-consciousness.²¹

To balance the needs of both religious and secular society, as well as international relations with the West, the Ottomans established the *alla turca* system of time measurement at the end of the nineteenth century.²² This hybrid form innovatively balanced both the spiritual and natural rhythms of Islamic time with the socio-temporal organization of the Western mechanical clock, adopting its secular structural framework while meticulously adjusting its settings to key moments of Muslim prayer. In the *alla turca* system, twelve hours in the morning and evening were similarly measured in equal units, but the moment of natural sunset was designated as 12 o'clock. This meant adjusting clockworks to the twelfth hour at sundown daily or every two days.²³ The *alla turca* system did not regard sunrise as a second 12 o'clock point, but strictly used sunset as its singular point of regulation. For example, one o'clock in the morning meant twelve hours from sunset plus one hour.²⁴ *Alla turca* time, then, incorporated the natural moment of sunset, a key reference point in the religious observations of the Ottoman Muslim majority, within the secular framework of the mechanical clock. As scholar Avner Wishnitzer has illustrated, the co-existence of both *alla turca* and *alla franga* time systems often caused confusion and frustration within the bureaucracy of the vast empire.²⁵ At the same time, these alternate time systems also reflect Ottoman innovation and socio-religious negotiations taking place in the late nineteenth century.

Traditionally, Ottoman *muvakkithanes* worked in tandem with mosque minarets to provide the public with diverse time-tracking methods. The name of these structures derives from the Ottoman word *muwaqqit*, which literally translates to “time-keeper,” and *hane*, for house. These time-keeping houses displayed an assortment of temporal measurement instruments, including mechanical clocks. The position of *muvakkit* was affiliated with the palace and appointed by the *sheik*

al-Islam, reflecting the government's careful hand in the ordering of religious time. These buildings featured prominent windows, so that clocks and devices were visible to the public from the outside. *Muvakkithanes* have functioned in part as a public clock tower and in part as an observatory since the early eighteenth century, serving as a structural testament to the history of pluralistic temporal systems in the empire. They would remain well in use until Western time was institutionalized by the Ottoman Empire in the modern era.²⁶

Clock towers first emerged in the European lands of the empire (or Rumelia), as seen in the example of the Fernat Paşa Mosque in Banyalurka in the Balkans, which dates to 1577.²⁷ However, imperial commissioning of clock towers did not take place in the heart of the eastern empire until the eighteenth century, and was not widely adopted until the nineteenth century. The first imperial clock tower campaign was initiated under Mahmud II (r. 1807-1839), who sponsored three clocks in Anatolia and an additional five in the European-most regions of the empire. A similar pattern of clock tower patronage was followed by Abdülmecid (r. 1839-1861), who ordered three more towers over the period of 1840 to 1853, and by Abdülaziz (r. 1876-1908) who ordered another six from 1865 to 1875.²⁸ Clock towers were first erected in the Ottoman Arab provinces under Ali Rıza Pasha around the 1860s, beginning with the grand clock of Trablusgrab, or Tripoli.²⁹ Notably, mechanical clock towers had a secular "Western" rather than Christian connotation, so they were not seen as in competition with "Islamic time" marked by minarets.

The real imperial embrace of the Ottoman clock tower was exerted during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The sultan instituted a widespread clock-building campaign in honor of his birthday and his Silver Jubilee in 1901,³⁰ when he commissioned nine major clock towers to be built in the greater port cities of the empire, such as Beirut and Izmir; and ordered another twenty-seven in central Anatolia. The sultan's Silver Jubilee did not only initiate a large-scale public clock tower program directly by the sultan himself but also instigated their commission by local governors and administrators in honor of his rule.³¹ The striking new prevalence of clock towers in the Ottoman Empire was intimately tied to emergent discourses of modernity and marked by the implementation of a larger public works campaign including the Hijaz Railroad.

The Ottoman Empire's socio-historical linkage of clocks to prestige, diplomacy, and modernity explain the sudden ubiquity of clock towers in the nineteenth century. Military motives spurred by the Crimean War are cited as the cause for the empire's first widespread adoption of Western standard time, when allegiances with the French and British called for temporal synchronization.³² Yet, the nineteenth-century emphasis on mechanical clock towers also appears to be linked to politically charged discussions of Ottoman decline and "Eastern backwardness." Despite the public prevalence of Islamic time measurement devices, both early modern and

modern Europeans propagated the belief that the Ottomans were reticent to adopt certain technologies. Cemal Kafadar's work has cited this European mentality in the sixteenth-century accounts of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbeq, the envoy of Charles V, who stated, "[The Ottomans] cannot... be induced as yet to use printing or to establish public clocks, because they think that ... if public clocks were introduced, the authority of their *muezzins* and their ancient rites would be thereby impaired."³³ Both early modern and modern Europeans failed to recognize the Ottomans' aforementioned large tool belt of technologies perfectly suited to the needs of measuring Islamic time, while simultaneously tracking time-keeping traditions in the West.

Because of the large breadth of clock tower constructions in the long nineteenth century, conducting case studies from the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II highlights their architectural programs and socio-political implications. Imperial clock towers in Istanbul contrast with the visual language of these towers in the key port cities of the provinces, such as Beirut. As Beirut was a primary port of departure for Syrian and Lebanese diaspora communities that left for the Americas, a comparison between the nineteenth century clock towers in the Ottoman Empire and the public timepiece commissioned by immigrant community in Mexico City in 1910 provides fresh insights. By tracing these structures from the heart of the Empire to their emigrant peripheries, a complex visual portrait of modern global culture and transnational identity emerges.

Clock Towers as Emblems of Ottoman Identity

The Dolmabahçe Clock Tower in the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul provides an important example of an imperial clock tower in the city of Istanbul. The clock tower was incorporated into Dolmabahçe Palace between 1894 and 1895. Both structures were designed by French-trained court architect of Armenian descent, Karabet Balyan and his brother, Sarkis Balyan, respectively. The palace itself was erected under Abdülmecid I (r. 1823-1861) from 1843 to 1856, and Sultan Abdülhamid II lived there until the late nineteenth century when he moved to Yıldız palace. The clock tower stands beside the Treasury of the Palace, a location that suggests prestige and is directly aligned to the European side of the Bosphorous' waterfront.³⁴

The Dolmabahçe clock possesses an Ottoman Neo-Baroque style in its design and ornamentation and appropriately matches the architectural eclectic Baroque-Rococo look of the palace. The clock tower alone is four stories tall, with fountains surrounding the entrance on the first story. Pillars flank all doors and windows, while the exterior of the first story suggests an ablaq striation pattern. Because the structure houses a variety of barometers and clocks, topped by a compass rose to display the cardinal directions, it is somewhat reminiscent of *muvaakkithanes* in its

combination of atmospheric measurement tools and mechanical clock technology.³⁵ The clock face itself is interesting for its use of abstract Arabic numerals as well as the *tughra*, or the regal calligraphic seal, of Sultan Abdülhamid II featured on two opposing ends of the tower.

The lavish Neo-Baroque style of the clock tower of the Dolmabahçe provides a strong contrast to the Neo-Moorish militaristic aesthetic incorporated on the clock tower in the then Ottoman province of Beirut. On September 25, 1897, a letter from the Ottoman Governor of Beirut, General Rashid Bey, was sent to Sultan Abdülhamit II, requesting a public clock that “shows the mandatory Muslim (prayer) times.”³⁷ The letter complains that foreign institutions have established “clock towers with bells, all of them with a Western clock.”³⁸ Thus, this document expresses a desire to mark “Islamic time” publicly, *alla turca*, as well as the desire to be included in the larger Ottoman clock tower program. Over 120 clock towers had been erected over the expanse of the empire by this time, primarily in Anatolia and the Balkans. At this point, the clock towers of Adana (established in 1882), Ankara (1884) and Izmir (1901) had all been erected. Poetic eulogies sprang up around the towers, highlighting both the political and religious value of the towers, as can be seen in this excerpt by Fani Efendi:

Such a huge masterpiece that none can compare,
Outwardly, a clock chimes, but in essence the government is calling.
O! Pray to Abidin [the Governor of Adana who commissioned the tower]’
For day and night, the tower announces the time of prayer.

As requested, a 25-meter tall clock tower was indeed erected in the city; construction began on January 9, 1897, the birthday of the sultan. The structure was executed in an Orientalist style with all the hybrid trademarks of architectural pluralism. The entrance floor of the tower features piebald borders with a small inscription and minute *muquarnas* ornamentations above the main doorway. The second floor boasts gothic windows while the third floor features small, latticed balconies. The structure is topped with a belvedere and a roof of stepped crenellations. Built adjacent to military barracks from local stone materials of cream and red coloring, the tower again features four clock faces, with two sides bearing Arabic numerals and the opposing two faces showing numbers in Latin script. According to a primary source account of the clock tower’s inauguration, the clock and its bell proclaimed “the time in Arabic,”⁴⁰ which likely should be understood as the local or provincial term for “*alla turca*” time; the Islamic time system adapted for measurement on the Western clock face via its settings. The imperial symbol of the Hamidian *tughra* was notably placed above the entrance to the tower.⁴¹ The decorative program dramatically intertwined imperial and local identities across the architecture of the clock.

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Both Fani Efendi's poem and Rashid Bey's letter illustrates that the clock towers were keenly associated with Islam, rather than secular notions, and public structures that were coveted signs of Ottoman gubernatorial allegiance and religious identity. They also illustrate the role of local entities in clock tower construction. Unlike the palace-affiliated clock towers of Sultan Abdülhamid II, neighborhood or provincial clock towers were primarily either constructed by requesting imperial funding, or were locally sponsored with the help of governors or private patrons. These imperially associated, but ultimately civic towers were often carefully negotiated by governors or politically savvy local agents, garnering imperial support by requesting the clock towers be erected in honor of the sultan. Thus, the clocks were tied to notions of both imperial and local identity.

The emergence of powerful, provincial agents in clock tower commissions may have provided a gateway for local religious groups to begin erecting their own clock towers in urban spaces across the empire, transforming a temporal symbol of empire into an expression of collective minority identity. Ottoman imperial regulations had historically instituted a list of legal prohibitions against building church bell towers. Yet scholar Mehmet Bengü Ulueguin has convincingly argued that the prevalence of Abdülhamit II's clock towers in the nineteenth century provided Christian minority groups with a mode of re-introducing the church bell tower, due to the shared architectural and functional similarities of these public structures. For example, clock towers near the Hagia Fotini Church in Izmir and a Catholic church in Anatolian Mersin also served as these churches' belfries.⁴² The architecture of clock towers merged structurally with church bell towers sponsored by Christian communities in the empire, providing these minorities with a means of publicly marking their own religious traditions temporally and spatially within the urban fabric.

Clock towers in the Ottoman Empire then, which had once been firmly associated with the sultan, are seen as architectural tools wielded by minorities to claim a place for their faith in the provinces. This innovative and agentive use of the clock tower by minority Christian Ottoman subjects in the imperial provinces can be seen as a parallel, and perhaps even a precedent, for the clock tower patronage by the empire's emigrant communities abroad.

The Mexican Clock Tower in the Centennial Moment

Inaugurated on September 22, 1910 by the immigrant community in honor of President Porfirio Díaz, the Ottoman clock tower in Mexico City echoes the basic visual language and diplomatic function of the imperial clocks dotting the homelands of the migrants. The project was unveiled with lively fanfare by the *Comité Otomano del Centenario de la Independencia de Mexico* (Ottoman Committee for the Hundredth Anniversary of Mexican Independence) in honor of the Mexican Centennial, under the leadership of Antonio Letayf.⁴³ Amidst a parade of Mexican and Turkish flags, Letayf delivered a patriotic speech, accompanied by the playing of the Ottoman hymn by the local police band.⁴⁴ The colorful clock structure was designed by engineer Gabriel Oropeza and received on behalf of President Porfirio Díaz by his Minister of Relations, Enrique Creel de la Barra.⁴⁵

A large plaque on the side of the structure proclaims its collective patronage, clearly reading in sans-serif font, “*La Colonia Otomana a México, Septiembre de 1910*” (Figure 2.) The plaque demonstrates that its immigrant patrons still strongly identified as Ottomans at the moment of its construction, despite the turmoil that led to their emigration. The plaque and clock itself seem to visual embody sociologist François Dubet’s statement, “Identity becomes stronger the more it is reaffirmed by social distance.”⁴⁶

As a civic clock tower, the architectural framework of Mexico City’s Ottoman clock is much more simplified than the multi-floored towers of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Instead of stories stacked with mechanical devices, the clock tower in the historic center features a single pedestal base, topped by a four-faced clock marking time on each lateral surface. A poly-lobed horseshoe arch is featured on the façade of the base, creating a sculptural *trompe-l’oeil*. The use of pairs of Corinthian columns is also visually reminiscent of the columns that grace the base of the clock tower of the Dolmabahçe Palace. In keeping with the temporal organization of the Ottoman clock towers, the Mexican structure also features two faces bearing Arabic numerals, and alternating faces in Latin script showing standard Western time (Figure 3.) The structure is topped by a cerulean blue onion dome and series of three stacked bells (Figure 1). The use of bells on the clock tower may reference the aforementioned Christian clock towers erected by minority groups in the Ottoman Empire, which doubled as religious belfries.



FIGURE 2. Close up of Ottoman clock face. Wikimedia Commons, posted May 30, 2006, accessed August 30, 2016, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail,_The_Ottoman_column_in_Mexico_City.jpg.

Photograph courtesy of the artist, Moody 75, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Another reference to Christian identity on the surface of the clock tower may be interpreted in its striking use of bright tile revetment— a major departure from the towers in the Ottoman Empire but echoing a familiar feature of Beirut and Lebanon’s mountainous landscape. The tiles weave a vibrant color palette of oranges, blues, and green florals, with a speckled band of yellow delineating the quatrefoil pattern motif. Perhaps the use of tile both nostalgically references the tradition of ceramic work in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the tiled bell tower façade of *Nuestra Señora de los Mártires de Líbano*— the church acquired by the Maronite community.⁴⁷ This and one other church (*La Encarnación*) are the only churches to feature orange, blue, and yellow Puebla tile on their façades. While the colonial church structure itself had long been in place before the arrival of Maronite immigrants, it was adopted by these émigrés who provided the parish with a large donation of religious sculpture.⁴⁸ The colorful tile work of the clock tower sponsored by the “*Colonia Otomana*” draws a striking visual parallel to the church bell tower of the Maronite community today, reinforcing the strong Christian contingent of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in the Mexican capital.



FIGURE 3. “Detail, The Ottoman column in Mexico City,” Wikimedia Commons, posted May 30, 2006, accessed August 30, 2016, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail,_The_Ottoman_column_in_Mexico_City.jpg.

Photograph courtesy of the artist, Moody 75, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Further research is necessary to determine if the Arabic-inscribed clock faces for the Ottoman clock in Mexico City were ever actually mechanically set to “*alla turca*” time. The original clockworks were commissioned to the local jewel shop, *La Esmeralda*, and its actual mechanisms were imported from France.⁴⁹ It is unclear if a Turkish-style mechanical adjustment of the monumental clock at sunset daily would be necessary outside of the empire, or useful to the predominantly Christian community in the diaspora. Rather, it appears that the Arabic numerals

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on alternating clock faces primarily served as a nostalgic reference to the unique marking of “*alla turca*” time in the historic homelands of this immigrant community. The visual allusion to pluralistic timekeeping traditions as an emblem of cultural heritage signals a shift in the functionality of time itself— no longer a system of measurement, but a marker of identity. Instead of actually using the clock to mark the Muslim call to prayer, the tower serves to signal the religiously diverse Arab-speaking immigrant community in diaspora.

The overall hybridity of the tower closely reflects the imaginative visual programs of the Ottoman clock towers in the provinces, which merged Orientalist interpretations of local style with imperial form. The inventive decorative programs of the clock towers in the provinces and diaspora community abroad may be interpreted as a reflection of Benedict Anderson’s theory of imagined community. Anderson states, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”⁵⁰ In the case of Mexico’s Ottoman clock tower, the local colors and patterns of the immigrant’s new capital city are inscribed imaginatively across the surface of the clock façade in a vibrant form. It was perhaps an awareness of the symbolic charge of these international clock towers within the vast expanses of the empire and its global networks that led Lebanese-Brazilian expatriate Michal Abed to similarly commission a clock tower in Nejmeh Square. Completed in 1934, the tower visually “chimes in” to this international clock tower conversation in a showy display of socio-economic status by featuring Rolex brand clockworks.⁵¹

The Ottoman Clock Tower in Mexico City was originally adorned with a crescent moon-shaped compass rose, similar to that of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s Dolmabahçe clock tower. However, the compass rose on the Mexican Clock Tower today brandishes three potent national symbols. The Crescent moon and star of the Turkish flag, and the silhouette of the green cedar featured on the flag of Lebanon are held together at the center by the emblem of an eagle eating a serpent—the symbol of the Mexican coat of arms that graces the nation’s flag today. Incidentally, all three of these countries worked together to restore the clock tower and remodel the original compass rose in 2010, citing the ornate directional device as a symbol of “peace, balance, and solidarity among nations.”⁵²

Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) participated in this restoration as part of a larger international campaign to restore the "Ottoman legacy outside of Turkey," according to an article in the Turkish-based English news daily, *Today's Zaman*.⁵³ The Mexican government similarly saw the restoration of the Ottoman clock as part of its own cultural heritage program. As part of its officially announced public goal of embodying a global, sustainable city, Mexico City instituted an international campaign to restore major, diplomatically donated, civic structures within the city space between 2006 and 2011. The government of Lebanon donated one million pesos towards this effort through the Aristos Consortium.⁵⁴ The restoration of the tower was publicly celebrated in a re-inauguration ceremony attended by the Lebanese ambassador Nouhad Mahmoud, Turkish ambassador Alec Kilic, the General Coordinator for International Relations of Mexico City and the Director of the Historic Center Trust Fund, Inti Muñoz Santini.⁵⁵ New political allegiances were revealed in this public display of united reconstruction, and its purportedly shared mission of international cultural preservation.

Time, Transculturation and Imagined Community

By examining a variety of major clock tower structures, it is not only the breadth of their reach within the expanse of the empire that strikes the viewer, but the remarkable diversity of the visual forms exerted on each unique structure. Like the urban fabrics into which these clock towers were visually woven, no two towers are exactly alike. The Ottoman tradition of public time-keeping houses established visual continuity with the nineteenth century clock towers, facilitating easy incorporation into or placement near mosques, as was the case with the Muğla Clock Tower of 1884 and the Grand Mosque of Ursa. The clocks all visually convey notions of sovereignty, imperial expansion, and the extraordinary vastness of the empire, even during intense periods of political and economic strife.

Just as the Sultan Abdulhamit II shaped his public image through his widespread public program of monumental timepieces throughout the empire, minority groups also constructed local identity via the structure of the clock tower in the provinces as well as in diaspora. In the ever-widening circle of migration, these clocks both harkened back to the visual language of the homeland while adapting to the ornamentation and local materials of their freshly adopted territories, poetically expressing collective identity through pluralistic constructs of time. Major political shifts and the consequent adoption of new identities after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1916 would turn the Centennial monuments sponsored by its former subjects into a relic of bygone collective identity. Benedict Anderson has observed that monuments were expected to outlive those that build them, "and so partly take on the aspect of a bequest or testament. This means that monuments are really ways of mediating between particular types of past and futures,"⁵⁶ allowing us to consider

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each of these monuments as a testament to the shifting identities, social allegiances, and political concerns of the diaspora community at a specific moment in time within the urban fabric today. As Historian Ranajit Guha has observed:

The alignment of the migrant's past with his predicament in the flow of his being towards a future occurs...not through a process of recovery but of repetition...That is why the migrant's present, the moment of that tide in which his future-oriented past is being carried along, draws attention to itself invariably as a figure of ambiguity. For at any such moment, he still appears to speak in the voice of a community where he is about to find a second home... he mixes idioms and accents and is typecast as one who defies translation, hence understanding. *Our first migrant* is, therefore, *in a temporal dilemma*.⁵⁷

In many ways, the diverse Ottoman clock towers in and beyond the empire remarkably embody the temporal dilemma of the immigrant, testifying to the powerful influence of multi-cultural networks and their complex journeys across time and space via their visual and architectural hybridity.

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NOTES

¹ Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 166-67. See also Patricia Jacobs Barquet, *Diccionario enciclopédico de mexicanos de origen libanés y de otros pueblos del Levante* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Ermitaño, 2000), 335-36.

² For a full overview of immigration from the mashreq region to Mexico, see the aforementioned Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico* and Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos, "The Mashreq in Mexico: Patronage, Property and Class in the Postcolonial Global" (Ph.D. diss, University of California Los Angeles, 2009). See also Zidane Zeraoui, "Los arabes en Mexico: el perfil de la migration," in *Destino Mexico: Un estudio de migraciones asiaticas a Mexico, siglos XLX y XX*, ed. by M. E. Otta Mishima (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios de Asia y Africa, 1997).

³ Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico*, 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64. For more on emigration from the Levantine provinces, see Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender and the Middle Class in Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001); Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Ignacio Klitch, "Introduction to the Sources for the History of Middle Easterners in Latin America," *Temas de Africa y Asia 2* (1993): 205-33; Klitch and Jeffrey Lesser eds., *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America: Images and Realities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico*, 78-79.

⁷ *Presbyterian Seventy-Second Annual Report* (New York, Board of Foreign Missions, 1907), 431-2. Cited in Clark Knowlton, "The Social and Spatial Mobility of the Syrian and Lebanese Community in Sao Paulo, Brazil," in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, eds. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992), 288.

⁸ *Mexican Herald*, August 17, 1907, Document NO. 51, 463-B, RG 85, INS, NA. Cited in Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico*, 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰ "Parroquias e Iglesias de la Arquidiócesis de Buenos Aires; Nuestra Señora de Balvanera," accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.cienciayfe.com.ar/parroquias/parr012f.htm>. See also "Construyendo San Charbel," accessed July 2, 2016, http://web.archive.org/web/20090414182912/http://www.construyendosancharbel.org/construyendo_Iglesia%20Nueva.htm.

¹¹ Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico*, 150.

- ¹². The term “transculturation” was first instituted by Fernando Ortiz to describe the complex process of merging cultures while converging and defining identities in a post-colonial world. Religion, language, and urbanism are cited as playing critical roles in this process. For Ortiz’ original definition of this concept, see *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco, and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1947).
- ¹³. Uğur Tanyeli, “The Emergence of Modern Time-Consciousness in the Islamic World and the Problematics of Spatial Perception,” in *Anytime*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 159.
- ¹⁴. Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), xi-xii.
- ¹⁵. *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- ¹⁶. *Ibid.*, 158,162; See also Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Brace and Company, 1934), 12-18.
- ¹⁷. Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Tanyeli, “The Emergence of Modern Time-Consciousness in the Islamic World,” 158.
- ¹⁸. Bekir Cantemir, “The Changing Conception of Time: Calendar and Clock from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey” (master’s thesis, Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, 2004), 9.
- ¹⁹. Tanyeli, “The Emergence of Modern Time-Consciousness in the Islamic World,” 160-62.
- ²⁰. Cantemir, “The Changing Conception of Time,” 8-9.
- ²¹. *Ibid.*, 159.
- ²². *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²³. Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- ²⁴. Tanyeli, “The Emergence of Modern Time-Consciousness in the Islamic World,” 162.
- ²⁵. Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks Alla Turca*, 32.
- ²⁶. *Ibid.*, xi-xii.
- ²⁷. Hakkı Acun, *Anadolu Saat Kuleleri*, (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayını, 1994), 55, cited in Cantemir, “The Changing Conception of Time,” 115.
- ²⁸. Cantemir, “The Changing Conception of Time,” 111.

- ²⁹ Ibid., 112. The author identifies the location and dates of the three Anatolian towers as Istanbul- Deniz Hastanesi in 1827, Balıkesir in 1827, and Burdur in 1830.
- ³⁰ Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 146.
- ³¹ Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 151.
- ³² Ibid., 146-51; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 243-45.
- ³³ Mehmet Bengü Uluengin, "Secularizing Anatolia Tick by Tick: Clock Towers in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 1 (February 2010): 18.
- ³⁴ Cemal Kafadar, "The Ottomans and Europe," in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 1, Structures and Assertions, eds. Thomas Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (New York: Brill, 1994), 618.
- ³⁵ Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 25.
- ³⁶ "Clock Towers in Turkey," Turkish Cultural Foundation, accessed April 11, 2012, <http://www.turkishculture.org/architecture/turkish-culture-portal/clock-towers-in-456.htm?type=1>.
- ³⁷ "Dolmabahçe clock tower," Dolmabahçe Palace, accessed April 11, 2012, <http://www.dolmabahcepalace.com/listingview.php?listingID=8>.
- ³⁸ Başbakanlık Arşivi (BBA), YMTV 167/200, 25 Sept 1897, cited in Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 243-45.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Uluengin, "Secularizing Anatolia Tick by Tick," 20. The author cites the poem's publication in "Adana," in *Yurt Ansiklopesi: Türkiye İl İl, Dünyü Bugünü Yarını*, ed. Yücel Yaman (Istanbul: Anadolu Yayıncılık A. Ş., 1981), 1-56.
- ⁴¹ Louis Shaykhu, "al-Sa 'a al- 'arabiyya fı Bayrut," *al-Mashriq* 2 (1899), 769-74, cited in Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 247.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Uluengin, "Secularizing Anatolia Tick by Tick," 24.
- ⁴⁴ For more on Letayf's leadership role in the commission and within the immigrant community, see Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos, "The Transnational Imagination: XXth Century Networks and Institutions of the Mashreqi Migration to Mexico," *Palma Journal* 11, issue 1, (2009): 38.

45. "Ottoman Colony Presents its Gift: A Clock Tower is Given to Mexico- Banquet at Chapultepec," *The Mexican Herald*, September 23, 1910, 1-2.
46. Jacobs Barquet, *Diccionario enciclopédico de mexicanos de origen libanés y de otros pueblos del Levante* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Ermitaño, FONCA, Inversora Bursatil, and Sanborns, 2000), 335-36.
47. François Dubet, "De la sociología de la identidad a la sociología del sujeto," *Estudios Sociológicos* VII, no. 21 (September - December, 1989): 520.
48. For a detail of the tiled belfry exterior, see "Iglesia Catedral Nuestra Señora de Valvanera y Santuario de San Charbel, Cuauhtémoc, Ciudad de México," Flickr, accessed April 11, 2012, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eltb/6848763696/>.
49. "Monasterio de Valvanera, Virgen de Valvanera a Mexico," accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.valvanera.com/adoracion23.htm>; Patricia Bueno de Ariztegui ed., *Guía Turística de México – Distrito Federal Centro 3* (Mexico City: Promexa, 1984), 102.
50. "Reloj Otomano, icono de la solidaridad libanesa con México," *Informador*, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.informador.com.mx/suplementos/2016/663969/6/reloj-otomano-icono-de-la-solidaridad-libanesa-con-mexico.htm>.
51. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.
52. Maha Yahya, *Unnamed modernisms: National Ideologies and Historical Imaginaries in Beirut's Urban Architecture* (PhD diss., MIT, 2005), 250-71.
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54. Ülkü Özel Akagündüz, "Turkey Keen to Restore Turkic and Ottoman Legacy Outside Turkey," *Today's Zaman*, accessed March 13, 2012, http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=197176.
55. *Mexico City, Global City: Local Actions, International Commitment* (Mexico City: Gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2011), 138, accessed January 13, 2012, www.ciudadglobal.df.mx.
56. "Ciudad de Mexico global, acciones locales, compromiso internacional," accessed January 13, 2012.
57. Benedict Anderson, "Cartoons and Monuments: The Evolution of Political Communication under the New Order," in *Political Power and Communications in Indonesia*, eds. K. D. Jackson and L. W. Pye (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 301.
58. Ranajit Guha, "The Migrants Time," in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and the Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Marthur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 8-9.