

# Formation and Sustainability in Historical Squares: An Analysis on The Example of Nicosia Historical Urban Texture

By Prof. Dr. Zihni Turkan<sup>1</sup>

## **ABSTRACT:**

Squares, which are social meeting and community areas of societies, have shaped important public open spaces of settlements. Located in historical urban textures, such spaces are also a source reflecting the history of the city with the artefacts from their formation processes. The squares acquired their identity through surrounding formations from different periods in the history of Cyprus and have come to the present day with their active lives. Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares in the walled city of Nicosia have developed from their first formation during the Lusignan period of the island up until Venetian, Ottoman, British, Republic of Cyprus. The historical squares, which completed their development relatively during the British period, have been damaged by multi-storey reinforced concrete buildings, which are controversial and incompatible with traditional architecture, added to their textures because of inadequacies in protection, especially after the mid-1970s, and their historical textures have lost their sustainability. This study aims to analyse the historical squares in Nicosia, which have been formed over a period of more than eight hundred years with cultural heritage works from different civilisations, and to reveal the damage caused to their identities by incompatible buildings added to their textures and the importance of sustainability in historical textures with protection.

*Keywords: Square, sustainability, texture, Nicosia, historical*

## **1. Introduction**

The island of Cyprus, due to its strategic location in the Mediterranean, has had a very rich history with many civilisations that have dominated here, and their cultural heritage and historical urban textures with their open and closed spaces have continued their formation and development until today. The historical texture formations, which generally started with architectural buildings from the Lusignan period, have continued their existence with the developments belonging to the Venetian, Ottoman, British, Republic of Cyprus and later on.

Squares that are within the historical textures have also contributed to the formation of textures as important open public spaces. The squares, which are shaped by surrounding formations and gained identity respectively, have welcomed the social, political, commercial and cultural activities of the citizens within the social history of the cities.

<sup>1</sup>Near East University, Faculty of Architecture, Near East Avenue, Lefkoşa / Northern Cyprus  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5266-5192>

Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares, which are important components of the historical texture in the city centre walled city where the historical urban texture of Nicosia is located, have left their mark on the social history of the city people with the surrounding textures that contributed to their formation. The squares started to emerge during the Lusignan period of Cyprus (1191-1489) with the surrounding texture elements of this period. Sarayönü Square, Lusignan Palace, Selimiye Square, St. Sophia Cathedral and İnönü Square were first introduced with a gate of the city walls and continued their development with architectural works of the Venetians (1489-1570), Ottoman (1571-1878) and British (1878-1960) periods respectively. Squares were mostly shaped during the British period, with the boundaries being largely formed by elements of the surrounding texture. In the Republic of Cyprus (1960) and following periods, multi-storey buildings built with modern materials and reinforced concrete frame system, which were added to the historical texture, conflicted with the texture in the historical squares of Nicosia, in contrast to the buildings built with traditional materials and traditional techniques. Deterioration in the historical texture and incompatible new building, especially since the mid-1970s, have negatively affected and interrupted the sustainability of the historical urban texture in general and the historical squares in particular. This situation, which is caused by inadequacies in conservation, should be taken into consideration by the relevant authorities of local and central governments, and the necessary actions should be taken urgently to ensure that historical squares, which are very important public open spaces in terms of the social history of cities, can be carried into the future with their original formations.

Historical squares as significant public spaces and protected areas should develop in harmony with the historical urban texture in which they are located to maintain their historical qualities during their formation process. Nicosia's historical urban texture serves as an open-air museum with its rich cultural heritage together with historical squares that have an important place in urban life since their first formation and still exist with the same functions. Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares were selected as the subject of our research to analyse the sustainability of the development of these squares in harmony with the historical texture.

The squares in Nicosia within the rich historical texture with monuments from different civilisations in the history of Cyprus, have also left their traces on the social history of the city. Our research focus on the formation processes of the historical squares of Nicosia, which still continue their formation and development with the architectural works of different cultures, and to reflect the sustainability of their development in harmony with the historical texture.

The formation and development of squares, which are vital elements of historical urban textures for urban life, symbolise the history of the city. Nicosia, the capital city, has been the governance and commercial centre of the island in every different period of sovereignty since its foundation with historical components consisting of both indoor and outdoor spaces with the heritage of different periods. The fact that there is no study on the sustainability of the harmony of the squares, which are located within this texture and still functioning, with the historical texture during their formation process makes our research important. Moreover, the importance of these public spaces, their past and present places in the social history of the city, their importance in urban life and their contribution to future urban studies on Nicosia increases the importance of our research.

The overall history of Nicosia as the basis of this study, its historical urban texture, the research method, the formation and development of Nicosia's historical squares Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares, the related assessment on the scope of the study findings and the associated outputs constitute the limitations of our study.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Nicosia in history

Nicosia, the lasting capital of Cyprus throughout the history, is located on the Mesarya Plain, the largest plain of the island. The long history of Nicosia that goes back to two thousand five hundred years, is revealed by the Bronze Age remains found during excavations in and around the city (Gürkan, 2006). It is known that Nicosia took its name from the Greek word Levkae, meaning poplar grove, and was previously called Levkusa (Gürkan, 1989; Gürkan, 1996).

Before Nicosia became a settlement, the city of Ledra, which was founded in the VII century BC, was located in the south-western part of the city where Ayia Paraskevi and Ayii Omoliate hills are located (Anonymous, 1982; Gürkan, 1989). In 280 BC, Levkon, the son of the Egyptian king Ptolemy I, built Ledra, which was destroyed by Arab raids, in the place of the present Nicosia, and the city took its place in history with the name Levkontheon (Anonymous, 1978; Gürkan, 2006), (Figure 1).



Figure 1- Cyprus map (URL 1)

Nicosia was the most important city of the island during the Roman period (50 BC - 395 AD) and the Byzantine period (395 - 1191 AD) (Gürkan, 1989). The city developed during the Lusignan period (1191-1489); churches, palaces and residences were built in the city that is surrounded by 7500 m. long walls with five gates fortified with towers (Balkan, 1998; Gürkan, 2006). During the Venetian period of Cyprus (1489-1570), there were no investment on the island except for military expenditures; the walls remaining from the Lusignans were demolished and the present 4800 m. long, circular walls were built instead. The walls have eleven bastions and three gates (Famagusta, Kyrenia, Paphos) (Anonymous, 1978; Balkan, 1998). In 1571, during the Ottoman period (1571-1878), Nicosia was again chosen as the capital and became the capital of Cyprus Beylerbeylik (a large administrative entity in Ottoman Empire), a province of Anatolia

(Darkot, 1993; Gazioglu, 1994). The Ottomans made a great contribution to the development of Nicosia. Mosques, inns, baths, fountains, fountains and houses were emerged in the city from the first years of the period where Nicosia also served as the commercial centre of the island. The inns (Büyük Han (Great Inn), Kumarcılar Han (Gamblers' Inn) built during this period also contributed to the economic and social development of Nicosia (Anonymous, 1982; Gürkan, 1989). With the lease of Cyprus by the Ottomans to the British in 1878, the British period (1878-1960) began (Alasya, 1988; Metin, 1959; Balkan, 1998; Serter, undated). Nicosia developed with the economic prosperity introduced by the British. In the city, public buildings, social buildings and residences were built in the British colonial architecture; with the arrival of motorised vehicles to the island, the streets were widened, and the city grew and expanded outside the city walls (Gürkan, 2006; Balkan, 1998). Nicosia, which was also the capital of the Republic of Cyprus founded on 16.08.1960, has become an important centre of the Middle East with its recognition by the world states. Nicosia International Airport has further improved the city's transit position in the Mediterranean, and the city has gained significance in terms of trade and tourism. In late 1963, Nicosia was divided as north and south due to the political conflicts between the Turkish and Greek communities. Development in the city, which was the centre of two separate administrations, stagnated for a while; with the new political change in 1974, the division of the city was in a way confirmed respectively. Nicosia continues its development as the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the north and the Republic of Cyprus in the south.

## **2.2. Nicosia historical urban texture**

Historical urban textures are the settlement areas covering architectural artefacts, open public spaces and all other ruins that have survived from past. These areas exhibit the socio-cultural qualities, economic structures, lifestyles, artistic perceptions of different civilisations throughout the historical process and convey information (Çelik and Yazgan, 2007). Historical urban textures are like bridges connecting the past and present. Despite the rapidly changing living conditions, cultures, traditions and buildings in the world, they are open-air museums that show us the living settings of the past (Ahunbay, 2004; Kuban, 2000).

Nicosia has always been the capital in the very rich historical past of Cyprus with its historical urban texture that is almost an open-air museum with architectural artefacts and urban elements belonging to various cultures. The oldest monuments from the Lusignan period are in the historical old city centre of Nicosia, and it continues its existence as a mosaic of cultures that exhibits the traces of the Venetians, Ottomans, British, Republic of Cyprus and later periods until today.

The Lusignan period (1191-1489), which started in 1191 in Cyprus, was the period when the historical texture in Nicosia started to get its first shape. The Lusignan administration chose Nicosia as its capital city and allocated some of the country's revenues on the development of the city. Thus, the city spread its fame beyond the borders of the island with its cathedral, palaces, churches, chapels, pilgrimages, monasteries, mansions and orchards (Gürkan, 2006; Balkan, 1998). The Lusignans surrounded Nicosia with walls with five hanging gates (Keshishian, 1978), the construction of which was completed in 1383 (Figure 2).

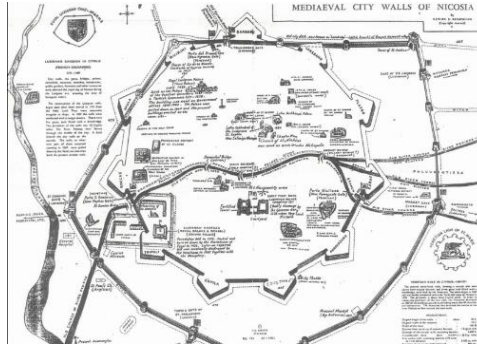


Figure 2- Nicosia City Walls during Lusignan (1191-1489) and Venetian (1489-.....) Periods (K. K. Keshishian – *Medieval City Walls of Nicosia*, 1959)

The Gothic-style St. Sophia Cathedral (Selimiye Mosque), which has a crucial role in the formation of the urban texture. Additionally, St. Catherine Church (Haydarpaşa Mosque), the second largest religious building of the city, is also from this period. The Gothic doors, windows and arches on the architectural works also contributed to the formation of the historical texture. The Lusignan Palace, which gives its name to today's Sarayönü Square, took place in the northwest corner of the square as an important element in the urban texture with its administrative building identity until the British period (Gürkan, 2006; Keshishian, 1978, (Figure 3).



Figure 3- Lusignan Palace - 1905 (A. Sayıl)

During the Venetian administration (1489-1570) Nicosia maintained its status as the administrative centre of the island but lost its previous importance. Yet, majority of taxes were sent to Venice, except for military expenditures. Many buildings and walls originated from the Lusignans were demolished, the city was reduced in size and the present city walls were built (Cobham, 1908; Gürkan, 1989). The construction of city walls was finalized in the year of 1570 (Yıldız, 1994), (Figure 2). The Venetian Column, which is still located in the centre of Sarayönü Square and is the symbol of the city, was added to the texture during this period as a symbol of the Venetians' dominance on the island. Other important monuments of the period are the Gothic style St. Nicholas Church (Bedesten) adjacent to the south side of St. Sophia Cathedral (Selimiye Mosque), the Venetian House (Stone Works Museum) in Hagia Sophia Quarter and the Venetian House next to Turunçlu Mosque.

Nicosia maintained its identity as the capital (Theocharides & Stavrides, 2012) during the Ottoman period (1571-1878) which was very important in the formation and further phases of the historical urban texture with works in the style of Turkish architecture. The mosques, inns, baths, houses and fountains within the current historical texture were from this period. The Büyük Han completed in 1572, is the first Ottoman period work in Nicosia (Turkan, 2007; Anonymous, 1982), (Figure 4). The wide and straight streets and large squares left by the Lusignans and Venetians have narrowed due to the new construction over time, and curved and dead-end streets have emerged. The historic neighbourhoods of Arabahmet and Hagia Sophia, which incorporate the residential architecture consisting of traditional Turkish houses, also found their identity in this period. The twenty-three bazaars were created in Nicosia, the trade and craft centre of the island, revitalising the city trade (Gürkan, 1989; Gazioğlu, 1994).



Figure 4- Great Inn (Author - 2024)

Nicosia became the administrative centre of Cyprus in the Colonial period (1878-1060) that started with the British rule in 1878 (Markides, 2012). The influence of Ottoman architecture continued in the construction of the city for some time, and then, cut stone, multi-storey public buildings and residences with ornamented facades were built in parallel with the economic recovery in the island. The palace from the Lusignan period was demolished in 1901 and replaced with the government mansion (Bağışkan, 2005; Turkan, 2008),(Figure 3). With the arrival of motorised vehicles to the island, streets were demolished to have wider streets for traffic flow instead of the narrow streets of Nicosia (Dixon, 1879:15). The city walls on both sides of the Kyrenia Gate were also destroyed to create traffic axes so that motor vehicles would enter and exit (Figure 5).



Figure 5- Kyrenia Gate (Author - 2024)



North Nicosia, the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with the change in the political situation in Northern Cyprus on 15.11.1983, has entered a new development process as a business, commercial as well as an administrative centre. The settlement has largely moved outside the city walls; the demographic structure of the city walls has changed, the use of historical buildings here have been switched to the people with low economic and social status, and the historical texture has been damaged by physical destruction. The inadequacies of the central and local administrations in conservation have led to the continuous destruction of the historical urban texture of northern Nicosia, while conservation measures in southern Nicosia have not yet reached world standards.

### 3. Methods

In our research, qualitative research method has been used based on a literature review on the conceptual foundations and the formation of historical squares and fieldwork on historical squares. First of all, a detailed literature review was carried out by examining the sources such as books, journals, articles, theses published on the historical background of Nicosia since its foundation and the formation and development of the Nicosia's historical urban texture in different periods as the basis of our research, and the necessary information was compiled respectively. Moreover, information was gathered from the relevant sources about the formation and development of Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares, which are located in the historical urban texture of Nicosia, which have an important place in the social history of the city and still maintain their square functions. The current conditions of the historical squares have been determined through detailed observations and photographs. In line with the findings regarding the squares, the sustainability of their formation has been evaluated and the results of the effects of formations incompatible with the historical texture have been revealed and suggestions have been presented.

### 4. Case Study (Squares of Nicosia historical urban texture)

Squares are important public spaces where the people of the city meet, share, and host social, political and commercial activities. The squares located in the historic city wall of city, which has always been the administrative centre of the island in the history of Cyprus, have left their mark on the history of the city with their hosting of people of Nicosia during the early and development phases. The historical squares in the city, which continue their formation and development with cultural heritage architectural artefacts from various administrations, still continue their existence with their active lives.

#### 4.1. Sarayönü Square

Sarayönü Square, which is the oldest part of the historical urban texture of Nicosia and the symbol of the city, is an important public space where surrounding texture has been formed with artefacts from different periods in the history of Cyprus. A two-storey palace, *La Baume*, was built in 1427 as an administrative building in the north-western part of the square, which was first formed during the Lusignan period (1191-1489) (Keshishian,



1959), (Figure 3). The palace, which gave its name to the square, was used as an administrative centre building for nearly five hundred years in different periods.

The Lusignan Palace continued to serve as the administrative centre during the Venetian rule in Cyprus between 1489-1570. There was also a small Latin church opposite the palace. The Venetian Column (Obelisk), which is still located in the centre of the square today, was brought from the ruins of Salamis during this period and positioned in the courtyard of the Latin church opposite the palace as a symbol of the Venetians' rule on the island. The seventy centimetres in diameter and six metres high column, topped with a statuette of St. Mark of Ardlan, was placed on a hexagonal base (Anonymous, 1978). The transportation axis to the city centre starting from the Kyrenia Gate of the Nicosia city walls built during this period was directly connected to this area; therefore, it contributed on the formation of the texture of Sarayönü Square.

The Lusignan Palace was used as an administrative building during the Ottoman period (1571-1878) where the Venetian column was removed, and the Latin church was converted into a mosque. To the northeast of the square area, an octagonal, Gothic style fountain structure (Anonymous, 1982; Bağışkan, 2019) was built, and rows of mudbrick shops were built to the east. The Latin church was demolished in 1820 and a mosque (Ordu Önü Mosque) was built in its place, thus the Turkish architectural style was included in the texture formation of the square for the first time (Anonymous, 1982; Bağışkan, 2005; Balkan, 1998). The Ottoman period was a period of development for the surrounding texture formation of Sarayönü Square and the process of the square becoming a commercial centre as well as an administrative centre started (Figure 7).



Figure 7- Ottoman Blockade of Nicosia (1570) (Map Department Office of T.R.N.C.)

During the British administration (1878-1960), which started in Cyprus in 1878, the Lusignan Palace lost its character as an administrative building and the demolition works, which started in 1901, were completed in 1905. In place of the palace, the Government House (Courts Building), which is still in use today (Gürkan, 2006, Hikmetağalar, 1996), and the Police Headquarters building was built on the north side of the Government House. The new buildings have the characteristics of British colonial architecture in terms of material, plan scheme and covering system. The Ottoman period fountain in the square area was preserved and the Sarayönü Mosque was built by the Evkaf Administration in 1903 after the Ordu Önü Mosque was demolished in 1902 (Anonymous, 1982; Aslanapa, 1975). The Venetian Column in the courtyard of the mosque was removed

with its pedestal in 1914 and placed in the centre of the square. A sphere was installed instead of the St. Mark's Lion, which was previously located on its top (Figure 8).



Figure 8- Sarayönü Square-End of 1800 (G. Home)

With the economic advantages of the period, the single-storey mudbrick buildings in the surrounding formation of the square were replaced by multi-storey buildings with smooth cut stone, architectural features and ornamented facades. These buildings, which still exist today, formed a border to the square formation. Among these buildings, the three-storey stone building on the southeast side with a balcony on the street façade, built as the city hotel of the period, and the two-storey, arched bank building (Türk Bankası Ltd.) on the northeast side have made important contributions to the texture and development of the square. With the arrival of motorised vehicles in Cyprus during this period, the Venetian column in the centre of the square started to act as a circle for vehicle traffic as a result of the traffic arrangements made in the city. Until the end of the 1930s, Sarayönü Square, as a social meeting area in the city, hosted various entertainments and festive shopping activities during the religious holidays of the Turks as "Bayram Yeri" (Hikmetağalar, 1996), (Figure 9). Additionally, independence and protest meetings were also held in this square at the end of the British period. The name Sarayönü was formalised in the beginning of this period and in 1943 the square was named "Atatürk Square" by the mayor of Nicosia (Gürkan, 1989; Bağışkan, 2005). The British administration is the period where the surrounding formation of Sarayönü Square developed, and its historical texture gained identity in general terms.



Figure 9- Sarayönü Square during bairam (From D. Markides - 2012)

In 1960, during the period of the Republic of Cyprus, Sarayönü Square became more active in administrative, commercial and social aspects. Completed in 1962, the multi-storey, reinforced concrete frame structure Saray Hotel constituted a change in the historical texture of the square that contradicted the traditional identity; the hotel, with its height of nine storeys, overshadowed the human dimensional formation of the square. The area around the Venetian Column was widened and transformed into a circle with green areas and urban traffic was regulated. From 1964 onwards, the economic inadequacies of the Turkish community in Nicosia due to the political problems between the Turkish and Greek communities have stalled the formation, development and change processes in the texture of the square. In 1974, with the political changes in the island and the division of the island and Nicosia, Sarayönü Square became the most important centre of the city for the Turkish population. In the mid-1970s, the historical building of the Turkish Bank was demolished and replaced by a four-storey building incompatible with the historical texture. In 1975, the Department of Antiquities and Museums was established under the umbrella of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, and the historical Sarayönü Square was also taken under protection. In 1981, within the framework of Nicosia Master Plan, which started with the funding of the United Nations, Sarayönü Square was also regulated and the Venetian Column lost its feature of being a circle for motorised vehicle traffic.

Sarayönü Square located in Nicosia as the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Nicosia, which emerged with the change of administration in Northern Cyprus in 1983, has gained a more active life. The district governor's office, courthouse, central post office, Saray Hotel, banks, police directorate and workplaces located around the square have made it the centre of the city, which is constantly busy. The square also served the people of the city as an area where many social and political meetings of people of Nicosia took place. Today, Sarayönü (Atatürk) Square still maintains its importance as the symbolic square of the historical urban fabric of Nicosia with its very active life (Figure 10a, 10b).



10a



10b

Figure 10a- Sarayönü Square pla (Google Earth - 2024)

Figure 10b- Sarayönü Square (Author – 2024)

## 4.2. Selimiye Square

The formation of Selimiye Square, one of the most important historical squares of the city with its cultural heritage, located in the Selimiye Neighbourhood in the walled city of Nicosia, started with the religious buildings here since the Lusignan period (1191-1489) in the history of Cyprus (Hikmetağalar, 1996; Bağışkan, 2005). During the Lusignan period, Gothic-style St. Sophia Cathedral (1208-1319) was built on the south side of the present square, and then the Latin Archdiocese building (1329) was constructed on the north side for the residence of the archbishops who served in St. Sophia Cathedral, and thus the square formation began (Anonymous, 1982). On the southwest side of the cathedral, the church of St. Nicholas was built on Byzantine ruins in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Anonymous, 1978). Selimiye Square, which started to develop with three religious buildings, found its identity as a religious centre for Nicosia (Figure 11a, 11b, 11c).



11a

11b

11c

Figure 11a- St. Sophia Cathedral Engraving (Severis, 2003)

Figure 11b- Latin Archbishopric (Author - 2023)

Figure 11c- St. Nicholas Church (Author - 2023)

At the times of the Venetians (1489-1570), the Church of St. Nicholas, which was located here, served as the Metropolitan building of the Orthodox (Bağışkan, 2005), and a two-storey building (Chapter House) made of cut stone was built on the southeast side of the cathedral for the meeting place of the priests in the cathedral (Gürkan, 2006). Moreover, at the eastern end of the square, a two-storey Venetian House with a courtyard, built in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century for the accommodation of travellers and pilgrims on their way to the city, made an important contribution to the square formation (Hakeri, 1992), (Figure 12). The Venetian period was the development period for Selimiye Square where the boundaries started to form.



Figure 12- Venice House (Ç. Özbürak - 2023)

Throughout the Ottoman period (1571-1878), the square continued its development as the religious centre of Nicosia. The cathedral, which was the first building here, was converted into a mosque with the addition of two minarets and the name Hagia Sophia (Aslanapa, 1975; Atun, 1999). A fountain with eight columns and an octagonal cover was placed in the garden of the mosque. The St. Nicholas Church on the south side of Hagia Sophia was converted into a bazaar called Bedesten (Hasol, 1993). The Latin Archbishopric building to the north of the square was renovated by Kadı Menteş Efendi and became a kadi mansion with the name Kadı Menteşoğlu Konağı (Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion) by giving it the characteristics of a traditional Turkish house (Dağlı, 1999). The adjacent building on the east side of the mansion was turned into a Turkish House with the addition of an upper floor. In 1827-1828, a fountain belonging to the Small Madrasa was built on İdadi Street to the north of Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion and named Ali Ruhi Efendi Fountain (Small Madrasa Fountain) (Anonymous, 1982; Turkan, 2016). During the Ottoman period, opposite the east gate of Hagia Sophia Mosque, the square-planned, dome-covered library building (Sultan Mahmut II Library), built in 1829, is another important building in the historical texture of the square (Aslanapa, 1975; Turkan, 2016). Additionally, the Rüştiye, Small and Large Madrasah buildings had an added value to the emergence of the surrounding texture of the square (Anonymous, 2007). The Ottoman period was an important period of development for the texture of Selimiye Square and a period in which Turkish Architecture was influential (Figure 13a, 13b, 13c).



13a



13b



13c

Figure 13a- Selimiye Mosque -1878 (Ç. Özbürak - 2018)

Figure 13b- Beşiktaş - 1878 (J. Thomson)

Figure 13c- Turkish House (J. Thomson)

During the British administration (1878-1960), the Hagia Sophia Mosque and the Bedesten building were repaired, and the name of the mosque was changed to Selimiye in 1954 (Bağışkan, 2019). The Bedesten was used as a wheat store and warehouse. The Venetian House, located on the east side of the square, was converted into the Stone Works Museum. The Grand Madrasa, located to the northeast of the square, was used as a poorhouse until 1934, and then a religious school consisting of side-by-side rooms was built in its place by Evkaf. Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion was used as the residence of the Secretary General of the British Administration between 1878 and 1924 and as a school (Ayasofya Girls' Primary School) after 1925 (Bağışkan, 2005). The three-storey Rüştiye building opposite the mansion was demolished in 1897 and replaced by a single-storey school (İdadi) building. Between 1920-1940, three two-storey residential buildings were constructed on the west side of the square, defining the western boundary of the square (Figure 14a,14b). At the end of this period, the formation of the surrounding texture of the square was completed and the square gained active use.



14a

*Figure 14a- Religious school (Ç. Özburak - 2018)*

14b

*Figure 14b- Residences on the west side of the square (Ç. Özburak - 2018)*

Established in 1960, the Republic of Cyprus had a short period of existence at the end of 1963 due to the political problems between the Greek and Turkish communities. During this period, no changes were introduced in the texture of the square. The square remained in the Turkish part of the north of Nicosia, which was divided into north and south since 1964. In the mid-1960s, the Mujahideen Monument was placed on the east side of the square, north of the library (Hakeri, 1992). Thus, the monument gave the square a military ceremonial function (Figure 15). The Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion continued its educational function, while the building built on the site of the Grand Madrasa was utilised as a hostel for the poor.

*Figure 15- Mücahitler monument (Ç. Özburak - 2018)*

Until 1983, when the TRNC was founded with the new administration in Northern Cyprus, there was no development in the square, and even the historical texture was worn out. In the new period, the square continued to exist as an important historical square of Nicosia with its existing religious, educational and commercial activities. The Selimiye Mosque was restored and renovated, and the Bedesten was restored as a cultural centre in 2004 under the financial sponsorship of the United Nations Development Programme. Following its restoration in 1985, Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion has been used as the working office of the Union of Turkish Cypriot Municipalities. The two-storey building on the eastern side of the mansion, which has Turkish House characteristics, was used as a restaurant for a while after its restoration in 2004, and today it has the function of Yunus Emre Foundation Nicosia Branch cultural services building. The one-storey school building opposite the Kadı Menteşoğlu Mansion is now serving as the production and sales place of the Folk Arts Association. The Venetian House and Sultan Mahmut

Library on the east side of the square have become museums affiliated to the Department of Antiquities and Museums. The two-storey residences on the west side of the square were restored and functionalised for entertainment purposes. The new building added to the historic texture during this period is the reinforced concrete building built on the east side of the two-storey Turkish House style building to the north of the square. The building, which was constructed after the demolition of an existing historical building on the site, was designed as two-storey and with a bay window to harmonise with the historical texture of the square. Moreover, the rectangular shaped windows with wooden shutters and the sloping roof covered with tiles were aimed to be relatively harmonised with the historical texture. Since the lower floor of the building is used as a restaurant, it restricts the use of public space with its large number of tables and chairs in the square. Selimiye Square was closed to vehicle traffic following pedestrianisation works completed in 2001 with the financial contributions of the United Nations. The square, which hosts social events such as various meetings, exhibitions and festivals of the city and continues its active life with food and beverage, entertainment and cultural activities, also has a vital role in the city tourism with its historical artefacts (Figure 16a, 16b).



16a

16b

Figure 16a- Selimiye Square plan (Google Earth - 2024)

Figure 16b- Selimiye Square (Ç. Özburak – 2018)

### 4.3. İnönü Square

İnönü Square, which is one of the important historical squares in the historical urban texture of Nicosia and is located on the south side of the Kyrenia Gate, one of the three gates of the city walls surrounding the city today, constitutes the centre of the historical texture of the Kyrenia Gate. The gate, which is in the north direction among the five gates with suspension bridges of the walls built around Nicosia in 1383 during the Lusignan period, is located approximately on the site of the existing Kyrenia Gate. This gate, which provides access to the city for those coming to Nicosia from the north, constituted the basic element in the historical texture formation of the historical square. With the Venetian period (1489-1570), the walls built by the Lusignans were demolished and the current walls with eleven bastions and three gates were built around the city. The northern gate (Proveditore Gate) played an important role in the formation of İnönü Square, as it was actively used for the transportation of people coming from the north of the island, from the Kyrenia side, and was at the starting point of the axis reaching the city centre (Figure 2).

During the Ottoman period (1571-1878), the square further developed with the Mevlevi Tekke built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the northern direction. The tekke, which was built for Mevlevi activities in Cyprus, is in the form of a complex with a courtyard consisting of semahane (ritual hall), tombs, dervish rooms, guest rooms, kitchen spaces (Atun, 1999; Balkan, 1009; Gürkan, 1996). On the north side of the gate on the west façade of the tekke, a fountain with a large, pointed arch was built in cut stone with a square plan and a water tank (Anonymous, 1982; Aslanapa, 1975). The Ottoman cemetery was located on the north side of the gate in the north of the texture (Salvator, 2012). The present Kyrenia Gate was repaired in 1821 and a guard room made of smooth cut stone with a square plan and a dome cover was built over the gate (Yıldız, 1994). The active use of the Kyrenia Gate during this period made a significant contribution to the formation of the square texture here.

The motor vehicles arrived to Cyprus in the British period (1878-1960) and thus, the city walls on both sides of the Kyrenia Gate were demolished and roads were created for motorised vehicle traffic to enter and exit the city (Gunnis, 1856; Yıldız, 1994). The Mevlevi Tekke was repaired in 1934 and after the death of the last sheikh of the tekke, Selim Dede from Damascus in 1954, Mevlevi activities in Cyprus terminated (Anonymous, 1978; Bağışkan, 3005). In 1956, a part of the Mevlevihan was utilised as a dormitory for orphaned children. The Ottoman Cemetery to the north of the gate continued its original function during the British period until 1938 (Hikmetağalar, 1996). On the southeast and southwest sides of the gate, two-storey houses with sloping roofs made of smooth cut stone were built and the architectural characteristic of the period was added to the texture. Since the beginning of the 1930s, the construction of a cinema and other social buildings in the garden to the north and northeast of the Mevlevihane transformed it into an intensively used public open space for the city. The relocation of the feast place, which was established during religious festivals in Nicosia, from Sarayönü Square to the square at the Kyrenia Gate since 1940 has added another feature to this area (Hikmetağalar, 1996). During this period, the building located on the site of today's Near East City Museum in the southwest of the gate was an important element that contributed to the environmental texture formation of the square with its coffee house and restaurant functions. The British period has been important for the overall development of the square due to its influence of surrounding texture formation and social activities. It is also known that the name of the square, İnönü Square, dates back to this period (Figure 17).



Figure 17- Mevlevi Lodge --First half of XX. century (From O. Tugun & Z. Turkan)



Following the foundation of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, a high school building (Nicosia Boys' High School) was built on the site of the Ottoman Cemetery north of the Kyrenia Gate, which had fallen into disuse during the last years of the British period. The building, which was constructed with reinforced concrete frame system and brick material, constituted the first change in the traditional architecture of the historical texture. In 1961, upon the restoration works initiated at the Mevlevi Tekke in 1962 with the decision of the Turkish Community Council, the tekke was opened to visitors as the Cyprus Turkish Ethnography Museum on 30 April 1963 (Altan, 2006; Bağışkan, 2005; Yıldız, 1994). In 1963, with the arrangements made by the Cyprus Directorate of Türkiye İş Bankası in the refuges in the north and south directions of the Kyrenia Gate, a statue of Atatürk was placed in the north direction on 29 October 1963 and a clock in the form of a metal piggy bank of Türkiye İş Bankası on a metal stand was placed in the south direction (Figure 5), (Figure 18).



Figure 18- İnönü Square - 1961 (From A. Esentepe)

At the end of 1963, only the Kyrenia Gate remained in the Turkish part of northern Nicosia upon the division of city due to the political problems and armed conflicts between two communities. Hence, the importance of the Kyrenia Gate has increased and the square formation in the south-east of the gate has entered the development process. The Ford Garage to the south of the square has been converted into a cinema; accordingly, food and beverage kiosks have been opened here and peddlers are in the square. In the east of the square, the office and bus stop of the intercity bus company (Lozan buses) became more active. The one-storey building on the corner plot to the southwest of the square was also functionalised as a pastry shop. In line with the social needs of the Turkish community in Nicosia due to the new political status in Cyprus, the eastern side of the moat on the north side of the Kyrenia Gate was organised as the Mujahitler Park and the western side as the Kuğulu Park. The intensive use of the parks in line with the recreational needs of the people of the city has accelerated the development of the texture here. The street to the north of the Kyrenia Gate (Cemal Gürsel Street) is organised as the ceremonial area of the city for national days (Figure 19).



Figure 19- Ceremony in the Historical Texture of the Kyrenia Gate -1965 (From A. Sayıl)

In 1974, the inter-communal problems that resumed embodied the division of the island. During the period of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, which was established in the northern part of Cyprus in 1975, the square entered a redevelopment process. Places such as the guest house and kitchen on the eastern side of the Mevlevi Tekke were demolished and a two-storey reinforced concrete bazaar building was built by the Cyprus Foundations Administration in 1975, with one façade along Kyrenia Street in the west, one façade in the direction of the square and the other façade along Vakıflar Street in the east. On the corner plot at the eastern end of the square, a four-storey reinforced concrete building was constructed in 1979 and the ground floor of the building was opened as a pastry shop. The one-storey building located to the southwest of the Kyrenia Gate and used as a pastry shop was demolished in 1980 and a four-storey reinforced concrete bank building was built in its place. In the same years, multi-storey reinforced concrete buildings were constructed in place of the two-storey masonry buildings built with stone material opposite the Mevlevi Tekke. These years, which are a period of change in the historical texture for İnönü Square, have been important in the development of the square texture with its commercial and social function buildings and parks, day and night uses in the life of the city.

Kyrenia Gate, which is the main access point to the historical city centre of northern Nicosia, the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus established in 1983 in the north of Cyprus, has maintained its significant position for İnönü Square. The square has become an important social and commercial centre in the city with its banks, bazaars, workplaces, food and beverage venues. Due to the new political situation and the increasing social alternatives for the people of Nicosia, the Mujahitler and Kuğulu Parks on the north side of the Kyrenia Gate lost their former importance. In 1989, the flow of motorised vehicle traffic was changed with the arrangement work carried out by the Nicosia Turkish Municipality in the square and the statue of Dr Fazıl Küçük, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, was placed in the square. Since 1990, the square has hosted social gatherings, entertainment and political meetings of the people of the city. Today, the bank building to the west of the square has changed its function and has become the Walled City Museum of Near East University. The historical İnönü Square, which still exists with its active social and commercial life in the historical urban fabric, continues to preserve its place in the memories of Nicosia people with the memories of the functions of its past formation and development (Figure 20a, 20b).



20a

Figure 20a- İnönü Square plan (Google Earth - 2024)



20b

Figure 20b- İnönü Square (Author - 2024)

## 5. Evaluation and Conclusion

Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü squares, which constitute the field study of our research, have come to the present day as cultural mosaic textures with architectural artefacts from different periods of domination in the history of Cyprus during their formation and development processes. The first formation of the squares started during the Lusignans (1191-1489), which was the development period in Nicosia, just like the early days of the historical urban texture in the city. The development of the squares, which emerged with the formation of the environmental texture formed by artefacts dating back more than eight hundred years, continued with the Venetian period (1489-1570). Although the Venetian period was only a time of defence preparation for the island against external attacks, it was influential in the formation of the squares with the works that have survived to the present day, each of which are symbols in the textures in which they are located. The Ottoman period (1571-1878), which left its mark on the historical urban fabric of Nicosia with many architectural works, also made important contributions to the formation and development of historical squares with buildings such as mosques, lodges, madrasahs, libraries, residences and fountains. The British period of Cyprus (1878-1960) was the period in which the changes in planning and architecture in the city were reflected in the squares and the historical environmental textures of these areas were largely completed. At the end of the period, in addition to the traditional stone buildings, the construction of reinforced concrete multi-storey buildings with modern materials led to a development in the textures of the squares that contradicted the past formations and negatively affected the sustainability of the historical textures. Since 1960, during and after the Republic of Cyprus, there has been no significant development and change in the squares. However, since the mid-1970s, the damage to the historical elements of Nicosia because of a policy devoid of protection and the insensitivity of the local and central administration has been reflected in the historical textures of the squares. The lack of control by the relevant institutions of the municipality and central government, which are authorized in the development of the city, has made the materials and facades of new buildings in the historical fabric incompatible with the historical buildings.

The nine-storey Saray Hotel building built in reinforced concrete frame system during the Republic of Cyprus period in the south direction of Sarayönü Square has overshadowed the square and caused the dimensional effect of the Venetian Column, the symbol of the square, and its dominance in the square to weaken. While the contemporary materials and modern facade character of the hotel building contradict the historical structures in the surrounding area, the total floor height of the building has also distorted the silhouette by being three times higher than the existing structures in the texture. The Saray Hotel building, which has the same function, located opposite to the three-storey hotel building, a traditional building of the British period, located in the southeast of the square, exhibits a great contradiction in terms of both the historical texture identity of the square and its dimensions on the urban scale. Moreover, the 3-storey business centre built in place of the two-storey, traditional architecture residence and single-storey row of shops on the east side of the square and the four-storey reinforced concrete carcass business centre built in place of the two-storey residence on the north-east corner are not integrated with the historical texture of the square; on the contrary, they constitute a great contradiction with their identity-less architecture. The demolition of the historical Turkish Bank building, which added value to the surrounding texture of Sarayönü Square, and the construction of a new building that is quite incompatible with the historical texture, beyond the destruction of a cultural heritage, has been an irreparable loss for both Nicosia and the square texture. The fact that the institutions and boards of the central government regarding the protection of ancient artifacts have not yet been formed has been an opportunity for this loss (Yardımcı, 1979). Today, despite the incompatible and contradictory buildings on the east and south sides, the square continues its important presence in Nicosia with half of its historical texture, especially with the cultural heritage artefacts from the Ottoman and British periods on the north and west sides and the Venetian Column that has withstood the years.

Selimiye Square is a significant square in the Nicosia's historical texture, which has maintained historical identity to a great extent since its first formation. The fact that the architectural works from the Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman and British periods have been reused as mosques, official offices, associations, museums and ministries has ensured that the texture is under protection. The square, which still preserves the boundaries completed with the buildings of the British period, constitutes an important public open space of the city, which is free from vehicle traffic with the pedestrianisation works carried out and provides the opportunity to serve social activities. The reinforced concrete carcass building, which is only one in the historical texture of the square, is located between the historical buildings in the north of the square and was built as two storeys in a way to relatively harmonise with the texture. The building, which has the appearance of a traditional Turkish House, is functionalised for social purposes. The Mujahideen Monument, located on the east side of the square, has also taken its place in the historical texture as a symbol of a period in the history of Cyprus. Selimiye Square still maintains its historical square identity with the artefacts of different periods in the history of Cyprus since its first formation.

İnönü Square with its first formation dating back to the Lusignan period, has maintained its importance in every period in the history of Cyprus due to the gate on the city walls within its boundaries. However, compared to the other squares of Nicosia, the renovations in the surrounding buildings during the development of its historical texture did not allow the square to maintain its historical identity. The bazaar building on the south side, the multi-storey reinforced concrete building on the southwest side and the multi-storey reinforced concrete building on the east side contradict the historical texture of the square in the past and negatively affect its historical identity. The new building (Vakıflar Çarşısı) built between the historical Kyrenia Gate and city walls built in the Venetian period to the north of the square and the Ottoman period Mevlevi Tekke to the south interrupts the history of the square. Despite the lack of sustainability of the historical texture, İnönü Square is still an important square of Nicosia, hosting social and political gatherings of the citizens.

Consequently, the squares in the historical textures of the cities constitute the most vital elements of the social history of the city as open public spaces where urbanites come together for social, political, commercial and entertainment purposes. The sustainability of the historical textures of the squares, which are formed in parallel with the history of the city, is important for the survival of the pasts of the city dwellers, which consist of the experiences lived there. This importance can only be realised with the awareness of ownership and protection.

The squares in the city wall, where the historical urban texture of Nicosia is located, constitute important symbols of the social history of Nicosia people with the earliest artefacts belonging to the present-day city texture and the first formation that started in the Lusignan period. The overall development of Sarayönü, Selimiye and İnönü Squares, which we examined in our research, maintained their historical texture identity until the end of the British period in Cyprus. Since the 1950s, multi-storey reinforced concrete carcass buildings produced with modern materials and techniques have contradicted the traditional architecture of the historical squares and the sustainability of the historical texture has been negatively affected. In Nicosia, particularly since the mid-1970s, inadequacies in conservation and the weaknesses of local and central administrations have led to the loss of identity through uncontrolled and incompatible new construction in historical squares. The loss of historical identity in Sarayönü and İnönü squares compared to Selimiye Square clearly reveals the necessity to ensure protection with rigid measures for the sustainability of the historical texture in Nicosia, which is almost an outdoor museum with its rich historical past.

To maintain the sustainability of Nicosia's historical textures, strict protective measures must be enforced. This is crucial to prevent further loss of identity in historical squares like Sarayönü and İnönü and to preserve the city's rich historical past. Effective conservation requires collaboration between local and central administrations. By working together, they can ensure controlled development and prevent incompatible new constructions that threaten the historical identity of Nicosia's squares. Community awareness and involvement are vital for the conservation of historical squares. Public engagement can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, encouraging local communities to participate in protecting and maintaining their cultural heritage.

Future research and studies on the subject should examine the preservation of Nicosia's historical squares and the sustainability of the historical texture, and encourage cooperation between local and central governments in conservation efforts. In order to preserve the historical identity and cultural heritage of these areas, continuous restoration and pedestrianization efforts, as well as community participation and sustainable development practices, should be prioritized.

## References

- Ahunbay, Z. (1999). *Taribi çevre koruma ve RESTORASYON* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). YEM publishing,
- Alasya, H. F. (1988). *Taribte Kıbrıs*. Kıbrıs Türk Kültür Derneği publishing.
- Altan, Z. (2006). *Gizemli Kıbrıs (2. Basket)*. Ateş Matbaacılık Ltd. publishing.
- Anonymous. (1978). *Lefkoşa Şebri Müze ve Eski Eserleri*, Kıbrıs Türk Müzelerini ve Eski Eserleri Sevenler Derneği publishing.
- Anonymous (1982). *Kıbrıs'ta Türk Eserleri*. Kıbrıs Türk Federe Devleti Eğitim, Gençlik, Kültür ve Spor Bakanlığı Eski Eserler ve Müzeler Dairesi Müdürlüğü publishing.
- Anonymous. (2007). *Kıbrıs'ın El Kitabı*. Galeri Kültür publishing.
- Aslanapa, O. (1975). *Kıbrıs'da Türk Eserleri*. Kültür Bakanlığı publishing.
- Atun, H.(1999). Kıbrıs'taki Osmanlı Mirası. *Osmanlı Mimarlığının 7.Yüzyülü "Uluslarüstü Bir Miras"*. YEM publishing.
- Bağışkan, T. (2005). *Kıbrıs'ta Osmanlı - Türk Eserleri*. Kuzey Kıbrıs Müze Dostları Derneği publishing
- Bağışkan, T. (2019). *Kıbrıs'ta Osmanlı, İslam ve İslamlaştırılan Eserler* ISBN 978-9963-0100-1-4. Kıbrıs Türk Eğitim Vakfı publishing.
- Balkan, E. A. (1998). *Tarihsel Süreç İçerisinde Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyetinde Toplum ve Mimarlık*. E.M.U. publishing.
- Cobham, C. D. (1908). *Excerpta Cypria*. Cambridge.
- Çelik, D. & Yazgan, M. E.(2007). According to urban landscape design, the determination of legislation and regulation for conservation of historical environment. *ZKU Bartın Orman Fakültesi Dergisi*, V.9, I.11.
- Darkot, B. (1993). *Kıbrıs. İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı publishing.
- Dixon, W. H.(1879). *British Cyprus*, London.
- Gazioğlu, A. C. (1994). *Kıbrıs'ta Türkler (1570-1878)*.
- Gürkan, H. M. (1989). *Dünkü ve Bugünkü Lefkoşa*. Lefkoşa Belediye publishing, No:5.
- Gürkan, H. M. (2006). *Dünkü ve Bugünkü Lefkoşa* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Galeri Kültür publishing.
- Hakeri, B. H. (1992). *Kıbrıs Türk Ansiklopedisi Cilt I-II*. Kıbrıs Gazetesi publishing.
- Hasol, D. (1993). *Ansiklopedik Mimarlık Sözlüğü*. YEM publishing.
- Hikmetağalar, H. (1996). *Eski Lefkoşa'da Semler ve Anılar*. Mafiret publishing.
- Keshishian, K. K. (1978). *Nicosia Capital of Cyprus Then and Now*.
- Kuban, D. (2000). *Taribi Çevre Korumanın Mimarlık Boyutu Kuram ve Uygulama*. YEM publishing.
- Menteşzade, İ. H. (1930). Lefkoşa. *Birlik Gazetesi*, I.322, Lefkoşa, 30 June 1930.
- Metin, H. (1959). *Kıbrıs Taribine Toplu Bir Bakış*. Halkın Sesi printing publishing.
- Markides, D. (2012). Nicosia Under British Rule 1878-1960. D. Michaelides (Ed.). *Historic Nicosia* (pp. 327-400). By Rimal Publications.
- Özgece, N. & Caner, G. (2023). Bölünmüş Bir Kentin Kamusal Mekân Pratikleri: Lefkoşa Surlarıçı. *IV. Kentisel Morfoloji Sempozyumu*, Konya.
- Salvator, A. L. (2012). *kıbrıs'ın başkenti Lefkoşa*. Translation: Vur Yektaoğlu. Galeri Kültür publishing.
- Serter, V. Z. (undated). *Kıbrıs Taribi*. Kema printing publishing.
- Theocharides, I. & Stavrides, T. (2012). Nicosia Under Ottoman Rule 1570-1878. D. Michaelides (Ed.). *Historic Nicosia* (pp. 231-261). By Rimal Publications.
- Tuğun, Ö. & Turkan, Z. (2020). "Kyrenia Gate and its surroundings" within the historical Urban texture of Nicosia from the past to the present. *Journal of Near Architecture* V.3, I.2, 46-58.
- Turkan, Z. (2007). Osmanlı Şehirçi Ticaret Hanlarına Kıbrıs'tan İki Örnek Büyük Han ve Kumarcılar Hanı. *I. Uluslararası Mimarlık & Taş Sempozyumu*, Antalya Expo Center, Antalya, 30-37.

- Turkan, Z. (2008). *The formation and development of SARAYONU SQUARE within the historical city texture of Nicosia*. ISBN 978-9963-9434-2-5. Işık Kitabevi publishing No:52.
- Turkan, Z. (2016). Turkish Architectural Works in Cyprus, From the Ottoman Period to Present. *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication*. V.6, I.4, 479-487. Doi:10.7456/10604100/011.
- Yardımcı, N. (1979). K.T.F.D.'nin Eski Eserleri Korumak için Almış Olduğu Tedbirler. *VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi Bildirileri*. Ankara, 550-551.
- Yıldız, N. (1994). Tarihi Çevre. *K. K. T. C.'de Çevre Sorunları Sempozyumu*, Lefkoşa.

**Internet references:**

URL 1. [https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/cyprus\\_map2.htm](https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/cyprus_map2.htm) Access: 20, May 2023.

URL 2. <https://www.orangesmile.com/gezirehberi/lefkosa/yuksekkocunurluklu-haritalar.htm> Access: 13, June 2024