

Book Description

Damming

Since its inception in 1923, Turkey has built more than 800 dams within its borders to regulate floods, provide water, and produce electricity. In line with the World Bank's vision, the construction of dams, and other infrastructures, begin to be perceived after World War 2 as a necessary step for the country's economic development. This post-war enthusiasm for infrastructural development reached a peak with the Keban Dam built between 1965 and 1975 on the Upper Euphrates in Eastern Turkey. Financed by multiple global loaning institutions, designed by a New York-based industrial firm, and raised on the ground by an international team of technical experts, the dam also constituted a learning experience for a young cohort of Turkish engineers working for the newly established State Water Works (DSİ), as well as temporary work for more than 2,000 manual labor, Kurdish for the most part recruited across Eastern Turkey.

Once finished, the dam produced 25% of the country's electricity and became the centerpiece in the reorganization of the country's power grid thanks to a \$25 million World Bank loan for transmission lines sending electricity from Eastern Turkey to Ankara and Istanbul. Keban constituted a shining icon of progress for Turkey, a dream come true for its politicians, and the pride of engineers who were, literally and figuratively, participating in the nation's construction. Celebrated as an engineering feat, the mega-infrastructure also paved the way for more ambitious constructions on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, announcing what would become full-fledged state-sponsored "development." Initiated in 1984 around the building of dams, the Southeast Anatolia Project or GAP, a development scheme intended to alleviate economic and social disparities in the country, is perceived today as the state's economic answer to its "Kurdish Question."

Rescuing

The rapidly rising water of the Keban Dam reservoir threatened to inundate much of the region's cultural heritage. In an effort to document its endangered archaeology, an international and multidisciplinary rescue project was initiated as early as 1966. Despite much initial skepticism, the limited amount of time and money, and the fact that surveys and excavations of this scale had never been undertaken in Turkey before, the rescue project is remembered today as a "turning point" in the history of Anatolian Archaeology. Besides collecting material evidence from every period of the region's history and prehistory, the project gave a young generation of scholars their first field experience, allowing them to experiment innovative techniques alongside architects, sociologists and ethnographers recording the area's more contemporary present.

Given the destruction of a living landscape accompanied by the inundation of its cultural heritage, it is necessary, I argue, to situate these scientific achievements in a broader perspective however. In *Submerged Stories*, I ask: How could the project be successful when so much was left destroyed? How could archaeologists have collected as well as simultaneously ignored so much evidence? Finally, why is it considered a turning point if it had no impact locally? To answer these questions, I scrutinize the manner in which (arti)facts are produced during archaeological excavations. The book "follows" archaeologists during and after fieldwork to examine how certain types of evidence were selected and rendered visible, while others, if not completely erased, were marginalized. In the end, it explores the sidelines of archaeology's

outdoors laboratory, the edges of its field photographs, and the paratext of its site reports in search of places where the discipline's scientific logic falls apart and traces of "submerged stories" make their unexpected appearances.

Submerged Stories

Found on the sidelines of science, submerged stories are never entirely obliterated from the archaeologists' reconstruction of the past. Submerged connotes invisibility but not complete erasure. Inundated, drowned, washed away, but never entirely vanished. In the case of Eastern Turkey, submerged are the stories that do not quite fit in the nation's dominant vision of the past --Armenian and Kurdish pasts, for instance, erased from official state archives but never entirely obliterated. Hidden tales of displaced villagers and voices of silenced minorities that cannot completely go away. Marginalized, and almost made invisible, they are ready to make unexpected, and sometimes very violent, comebacks at any time. A past that will not pass, submerged are these stories precisely because they can resurface to our historical consciousness depending, so to say, on the height of the water level.

The Keban Dam constituted a "turning point" for the scientific discipline of archaeology, and also announced many of the social, economic, and political changes witnessed over the last five decades in Eastern Turkey. *Submerged Stories* traces connections, starting to emerge in the 1960s, between, on the one hand, the emergence of economic "development" and the region's broader structural modifications, and, on the other hand, changes in archaeological practice itself and, more generally, this sudden concern by the nation to "rescue" the past. But, the book first describes how the past in Eastern Anatolia becomes worth rescuing at the same time that mega-infrastructure appear across its landscape in order to then answer the following questions: Whose past is being rescued? What narratives are being favored? And, last but not least, what other stories are being left submerged?

By taking dams as symbols of the country's attempts to modernize and their associated reservoirs, these artificial lakes inundating river valleys and their cultural heritage, as metaphors for the country's "submerged stories," in the end, the book explains how technological monuments that delineate the possibilities and confines of Turkey's future can simultaneously redefine the possibilities and confines of its past.

Chapter Overview

The first part of the book *I. Damming* contextualizes the mega-infrastructure at Keban within the history of Turkish dams, shining icons of progress that have become contested objects of dispute. *Chapter 1* begins with a series of dams built around Ottoman Istanbul that witnessed the "westernization" and eventual demise of the empire. It continues with Turkey's first concrete dam built near the new capital city Ankara in 1936, which helped to launch the nation "concretely" into modernity. It later examines Turkey's earliest hydroelectric power plants financed by the World Bank in the 1950s in an effort to meet the country's rising energy needs and concurrently strengthen its "economy." *Chapter 2* scrutinizes the Keban Dam built between 1965 and 1975 on the Upper Euphrates, a first for the country in terms of cost, size, and power. Besides initiating a period of infrastructural gluttony and wishful economic prosperity, the dam also became a dream come true for some politicians and a learning experience for a young cohort of engineers preparing themselves for many more such constructions.

The infrastructure at Keban paved the way for more dams, first on the Euphrates and later on the Tigris River, announcing GAP, a development project described as the economic answer to the country's "Kurdish Question." But, while dams are understood by some as the Republic's attempt to modernize "backward" parts of the country, they have also been perceived by others as unnecessary and unwanted interventions by the state into local affairs. **Chapter 3** traces this shift in perception from shining icons of progress to contested infrastructures. More specifically, it focuses on recent agreements between the public and private sectors concerning a multitude of new dams and power plants, projects decried by citizens across Turkey as the government "selling" the country's rivers. **Chapter 4** discusses more particularly the politics of hydropower in the Dersim, just north of the Keban reservoir, a disputed area in Eastern Turkey populated by Alevi Kurds. It explains how, beyond identity politics, anti-dam activists are raising issues concerning the environment, a shift in this case reflecting a broader national trend from "Red" to "Green" political activism. In the end, the chapter clarifies how the "Campaign to Save Munzur," organized against a series of infrastructures being raised in a supposedly protected national park, testifies to a larger discontent across Turkey by citizens against the state.

The second part of the book **II. Rescuing** takes the Keban Dam Rescue Project, salvage excavations initiated in 1966 to document the region's soon to be inundated history and prehistory, as a case study to examine what it means precisely to "rescue" the past. It thus operates a shift from the social history of damming in Turkey to the politics of its past, and more specifically to some of the unexpected social effects of archaeology's scientific practice. Despite the initial skepticism and lack of funds, the rescue project allowed a young generation of scholars to successfully recover evidence from all periods of Eastern Turkey's past and experiment with innovative techniques recently made available in the 1960s. **Chapter 5** describes the kind of collaboration and imagination needed in order for this community of researchers, united in their practice, to carry out the project efficiently. After a careful historical study of the salvage excavations, **Chapter 6** examines the manner in which certain types of data were selected and rendered visible by the project's archaeologists, while others, if not entirely erased, were placed on the sidelines. In this manner, I foreground the absence from Turkey's contemporary historical narratives of its "others" whose stories submerged by a dam remain to be written.

Surveys and excavations at Keban announced discontinuities in archaeology's scientific practice as well as in the state's policies concerning cultural heritage, as well as the public consciousness and cultural meaning of Turkey's past. More precisely, after the rescue project, the past in Turkey became "worth" rescuing at an unprecedented scale. **Chapter 7** examines changes brought forth by the GAP, a development project redefining Southeastern Turkey's socioeconomic identity, which is bringing unprecedented care to the management of its cultural heritage. It takes, among other examples, mosaic museums, *arkeoparks*, "otantik" restaurants, and "butik" hotels in Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır to examine how the past is being commodified in the hope of attracting tourism money. **Chapter 8** ends the book with an ethnographic exploration of the social lives of ruins around the Keban reservoir; an array of *lieux de mémoires* materializing the Upper Euphrates' contested past and "submerged stories." In stark contrast to the commodification of the past elsewhere, these abandoned mosques, ruined churches, restored fountains, cliffs of martyrs, and mythological springs, among many others, have resisted time, reemerging to the surface to tell the stories of Turkey's "others."

In the **Conclusion**, I return to the book's broader significance, including a discussion of materiality, temporality, and Turkey's "others."

Conclusion

Materiality

Over the last five decades, Eastern Turkey has witnessed the raising on its rivers of monumental infrastructures by engineers “building” the country’s future and the unearthing nearby of more minute artifacts by archaeologists “rescuing” a past about to be submerged. Both “building” and “rescuing” here involve the making of things into objects. In other words, imagining better tomorrows and inventing sumptuous yesterdays for the nation is, in actuality, to construct both of them physically. *Submerged Stories* navigates between the immaterial (the nation’s future and past as conceived by politicians, engineers, and archaeologists) and the material (infrastructural systems and archaeological artifacts that simultaneously materialized alongside one another) to illustrate how objectification is a fundamental, yet neglected in the scholarly literature, part of the process of modernization. As Turkey joins the elite group of so-called “developed” nations, its future and past, imagined and therefore seemingly immaterial at first, are being reified and transformed into concrete realities in the present. By taking this materiality seriously, the book reveals how blurry, almost invisible, the divide between material and immaterial really is and how the two are continuously complementing one another.

Temporality

In parallel to this first split, *Submerged Stories* examines another hazy rift between, this time, the future and the past. Turkey’s “modernization,” and the “development” of its eastern provinces, have been accompanied by the scientific rescue of its archaeology, the careful management of its cultural heritage, and the commodification of its past. The book argues more generally that becoming a modern nation-state implies a necessary redefinition of its past. As such, it alerts readers to another overlooked dimension of modernization, namely the types of temporality that it produces. *Submerged Stories* positions the conception of better futures through infrastructural construction and the rescue of the ancient past through archaeological practice as two inseparable parts of the same process of modernization. Furthermore, in addition to the particular tensions arising from pasts being unearthed and futures being envisioned, the book scrutinizes one more form of temporality, a “present” marginalized, when not completely ignored, within the national projects of “development” and other utopian fantasies of “modernization.”

Turkey’s “Others”

As pasts and futures are reified, it is indeed this lived “contemporary,” social realities in a present filled with political complexities, that, if not entirely excluded, has nonetheless been violently disregarded. *Submerged Stories* takes Keban, both its infrastructure and its archaeology, as a starting point to reveal the different forms of exclusionary practices within Turkey’s contemporary dreams of national modernization. By examining the production of scientific knowledge about the past, it uncovers a country’s “submerged stories” and a region’s contested past. On the one hand, the book foregrounds the absence from Turkey’s contemporary historical narratives of its “others” --Kurds and Armenians as well as displaced villagers and landless peasants whose stories submerged by a dam remain to be written. On the other hand, it explains how some of these “submerged stories,” these pasts excluded from historical discourses and national narratives, are continuously being rediscovered and reinterpreted, reimagined and revalorized, by the country’s “others,” ethnic minorities and social classes excluded from the nation-state’s vision of a supposedly better future.

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