XI. ve XVIII. yüzyıllar
İSLÂM-TÜRK MEDENİYETİ VE AVRUPA
Uluslararası Sempozyum
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THE SPLENDOUR OF OTTOMAN CONSTANTINOPLE IN
THE GAZE OF SOME VENETIAN TRAVELLERS (16TH CENTURY)

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Constantinople has always attracted visitors from all over the world because of its beautiful monuments and its charming and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Both economic and diplomatic reasons induced Venetian Travellers to move from Venice and its hinterland to Constantinople and back after the city's conquest. They are bailos, ambassadors, writers or nobleman among an ambassador's suite sent to Constantinople from the beginning of the 16th century.

The most remarkable reports of these travels, with particular references to the monuments, are those of Pietro Bragadin (1526), Francesco Della Valle (1531-1535), Luigi Bassano (1537-1540), Alvise Renier (1550), Catharina Zen (1550), Nicolò Michiel (1558), Marco Antonio Pigafetta (1567-1568), Francesco Sansovino (1568), Aurelio Santa Croce (1573), Andrea Badoaro (1573), Costantino Garzoni (1573-1574) and Marco Antonio Tiepolo (1576) (M. Antonio Tiepolo (1576). Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano del clarissimo bailo M. Antonio Tiepolo. In Alberi, E. (1840) Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato, Serie III, vol. 2, Firenze, 167-168.)

The tumultuous population of the conquered city, where all monumental elements and the defensive system were substantially left unaltered from the Byzantine capital, proceeded according to a criterion of progressive "Turkization": churches were turned into mosques, and a new system of monuments progressively transformed the appearance and structure of the Imperial Capital. The 16th century has been a crucial moment for the transformation of the city. It is interesting to look at these changes through the gaze of Venetian Travellers. Their accounts are very rich of detailed descriptions both of contemporary buildings such as the Sultans' mosques or the Ottoman Palaces and the Byzantine monuments such as the Hippodrome and Hagia Sofia. This fruitful contact allowed the Venetians import some traditional customs of the Turkish way of life into Europe. Customs, which maybe at first sight struck negatively the imagination of the Europeans, but at the end were adopted and practised, till our days.

This work deals with Ottoman Constantinople in the 16th century and its monuments in the gaze of some Venetian Travellers. These accounts are reports of Venetian diplomats sent to Constantinople from the beginning of the 16th century. They are bailos, ambassadors, writers or nobleman among an ambassador's suite.

Contemporary eyewitness accounts provide the sole subject matter, sometimes accompanied by my own evaluations. All accounts used in this work are in Italian so I did not quote the source directly but simply paraphrased them. Unfortunately, a number of first hand accounts still remain unpublished and at the present time, they are not easily accessible. Of course, my contribution does not exhaust the subject but I shall achieve my purpose if I introduce the subject.

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Chronology of the accounts
Pietro Bragadin (1526)\textsuperscript{1}
Francesco Della Valle (1531-1535)\textsuperscript{2}
Luigi Bassano (1537-1540)\textsuperscript{3}
Alvise Renier (1550)\textsuperscript{4}
Catharin Zen (1550)\textsuperscript{5}
Nicolò Michiel (1558)\textsuperscript{6}
Marca' Antonio Pigafetta (1567-1568)\textsuperscript{7}
Francesco Sansovino (1568)\textsuperscript{8}
Aurelio Santa Croce (1573)\textsuperscript{9}
Andrea Badoaro (1573)
Costantino Garzoni (1573-1574)\textsuperscript{10}
Marco Antonio Tiepolo (1576)\textsuperscript{11}

Ottoman Architecture: mosques, mausoleum and hospices

The tumultuous population of the conquered city, where all monumental elements and the defensive system were substantially left unaltered from the Byzantine capital, proceeded according to a criterion of progressive "Turkization": churches were turned into mosques, and a new system of monuments progressively transformed the appearance and structure of the Imperial Capital.

Costantino Garzoni, in 1573, says that in Constantinople there are many impressive buildings, both ancient and contemporary. Among all contemporary buildings he finds the mosques the most magnificent examples of architecture.


Francesco Sansovino (1568). Dell'Historia Universale dell'origine et imperio de' Turchi, Venice.


Francesco Sansovino, writing in 1568 about Turkish mosques, says that these buildings are all beautiful, richly embellished, and well kept.

All authors agree that the mosque of Sultan Süleyman, decorated with fine marbles is undoubtedly the most remarkable example of this kind of architecture. The two best accounts about this building has been reported by Marc'Antonio Pigafetta in 1567 and Costantino Garzoni in 1573. According to Pigafetta the mosque is situated in a very notable place of the city: the site chosen was the third hill along the Golden Horn, maybe the most dominant area of the city. In fact, a sloping site of over seven hectares overlooking the Golden Horn was made available when the Old Palace went damaged in a fire. The building presents a round plan, with in the middle four huge marble columns and four massive interposed pillars covered by marbles. Above these columns and pillars stands a large lead roofed dome. Inside the mosque, on the eastern side, on the left corner, there is a stand or platform, similar to a little room (the mahfil), circumscribed by a marble shutter (named gelosia in the text), supported by nine tiny marbled columns and reachable trough few marble steps, which the Sultan steps up when he comes to the mosque for the prayer. In front of this small room there is a spacious pulpit (named pergamo in the text) which the priest steps up holding a sword in his hand to read the Holy Qu'ran (alcorano in the text), and this is called antipo. Clean carpets (stole in the text) cover the floor. In the night, an extraordinary number of lamps and candles (cesendoli in the text), illuminates the mosque. According to Francesco Sansovino, in general, inside the mosques there are only books, lamps and carpets for prayer on the pavement. In the middle of every mosque there is a pulpit (pergolo in the text), which the priests used to step up for preaching. The staircase has 30 degrees of ationincl. Every Friday, the priest steps up on the staircase with a Turkish scimitar in his hand, which symbolises the defence of the Muslim Faith against the infidels. Costantino Garzoni considers the mosque of Sultan Süleyman as large and magnificent as Hagia Sophia. Beautiful porphyry columns and others precious materials embellished the building. Outside there are many spacious square courts, plenty of fountains in the middle; there are also four bell towers or minaret, very high, each one characterised by three spiral staircases, which are used by the clergy to call the believers to the prayer. To this purpose, the description of the open atrium of the mosque written by Marc'Antonio Pigafetta, seems very interesting. From the western side there is a beautiful square shaped atrium, with huge and gorgeous columns and fine marbles, which supports extraordinary carved vaults. Everything here is covered by marble. And in the centre of this atrium there is a charming fountain, which seems a bedstead (lettiera in the text), characterised in the middle by an exquisite, large marble cup from which the water spouts out. In each of the four corner of this atrium there is a

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12 Catharin Zen, who visited Constantinople 17 years before Pigafetta, says that at the time he was writing, the works for the construction of the Mosque of Sultan Süleyman were only just started but the Sultan was resolute to build the richest, the largest and the best mosque ever seen in Constantinople. For this reason the Sultan has demolished a large piece of the Old Palace.

13 Also Francesco Sansovino mentions the spiral staircase in his general description of the Ottoman mosques. See: Sansovino (1568: 8-9).
very high tower, in the place of the bell towers, where the priests (*meizini* in the text), very aloud, call the believers to the prayer.

Others authors such as Alvise Renier (1550), Catharin Zen (1550), Nicolò Michiel (1558), Aurelio Santa Croce (1573) add further information about this mosque. For examples, Renier says that there was an expenditure of four million of ducats for the construction expenses only, which does not includes the moneys for marbles and columns. Michiel considers this mosque the biggest ever made, with beautiful and polished stones and lead roofed. Santa Croce adds that the magnificence of this mosque exceeded all the other mosques and had an annual endowment of 200,000 sequins. He adds that in this mosque there are four columns of immense size, but badly executed: in fact they have the same diameter from the base to the top.

Sultan Süleyman died on 7 September 1566, during the siege of Svigetvár, in Hungary; his embalmed body was brought to Constantinople later that year and buried in the cemetery behind his mosque. Süleyman's octagonal tomb was completed a year later. When Marc'Antonio Pigafetta visited the mosque in 1567, the works of the mausoleum were almost finished. But, what is extraordinary in this account is the very well done description of a "portentous" incident occurred when Pigafetta was in Constantinople. Among all the stones and building materials that were near the tomb for its construction, he saw four marble slabs, which measured more than 9 feet long, of very old age and wholly carved with Greek letters. These slabs were taken from Haghia Sophia on 8 August 1567. What happened? Pigafetta says that few days after his arrival at Constantinople, one night the city was shocked by a strong earthquake. The day after, the priest and *mophti* said that the earthquake occurred because of some stones, decorated with profane letters not suitable for their religion, stones, which were still preserved inside Haghia Sophia. And for this reason they ordered to move these stones from Haghia Sophia into the floor of Sultan Süleyman's tomb. According to Pigafetta, the inscriptions on these marble slabs were relative to the decrees of a Council, which took place in Constantinople when one "Emanuelo" was the emperor of Byzance.\(^\text{14}\)

Nevertheless, the two best descriptions of this tomb come again from Marc'Antonio Pigafetta and Costantino Garzoni. From the eastern side of the mosque there is the tomb of Rossa, mother of Sultan Selim (*Selino* in the text), buried with one of her sons, with a lot of lighted candles and oil lamps. Her coffin is decorated with her turban set with a lot of jewels and plumes. Nearby there is the tomb of Sultan Süleyman, bigger than his wife's and decorated with refined marbles and with a number of oil lamps, which are lighted up only on some particular days of the week. The round shaped mausoleum holds the lead coffin of the sultan, covered by a black cloth and by his turban set with several jewels and plumes. Around their coffins there are priests, who pray continually for their souls.

\(^{14}\) Manuele I Comneno (1143-1180)?
Beyond the Mosque of Sultan Süleyman, Zen mentions the Mosque of Sultan Mehmet (sultan Mahamet in the text), the great Mosque of Sultan Beyazit (sultan Baisith) and the Mosque of Sultan Selim (sultan Selin). He adds that there is also the Mosque of Ahmet (Ameth), son of Sultan Süleyman, who has recently died. I am inclined to think that Zen has mistaken Ahmet with Mehmet, of Sultan Süleyman's son, who died in 1543. However, all these mosques are beautiful, adorned and very illuminated day and night.

Santa Croce considers the mosque built by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror one of the finest in the city: he says that the mosque, which is endowed with an annual income of 750.000 sequins, is situated in the most attractive place of Constantinople and it is embellished by an extraordinary number of the greatest columns that he has ever seen. Annexed to the mosque there are eight buildings or medrese.

In fact, in Constantinople, each Sultan in turn had erected beautiful buildings for charitable purpose. Garzoni says that the Turks build mosques, hospices and schools and beautiful caravanserais, for lodging travellers and merchants. Marc'Antonio Pigafetta says that outside the atriwm of the Mosque of Sultan Süleyman, across a small street, there is a very spacious hospice, or imaret (amorath in the text), where every day the food is distributed to 500 poor. Pigafetta visited the refectory, the very well full larder and the kitchen. According to Garzoni, travellers are given food and lodging for three days and a daily meal of bread, meat and soup is given to the poor. Nobody is turned away, rich or poor, Muslim, Christian or Jewish. To this interesting report Michiel adds that close to this mosque there is a large medrese where all those students, who are interested in law or in Arabic language, can lodge and study.

**Ottoman Palaces**

Constantinople's Old Palace stood in the site that is now occupied by the university, between the Beyazid and the Süleyman mosques. After the Sultans moved their residence to the palace at Topkapı, the Old Palace was used to house the Imperial Harem. Unfortunately, this palace is not standing anymore, but trough Garzoni's account we know that Sultan Süleyman took half of its grounds to build his mosque. According to Zen the Old Palace was very large and it was the place where the Sultans' widows used to live in, with others ladies, and daughters of important personalities with a large number of slaves and servants. More detailed is the description of the Old Palace given by Luigi Bassano between 1537 and 1540. He says that the second palace of the Sultan is situated in the middle of the city and it is called Ischizerai (Eski Saray: i.e. The Old Palace). It is a large squared palace, 2 miles in circuit, with tall walls but without towers; there are two gates, one always closed and one open with more than 30 guards. Within the walls there are 25 houses, each one separated from the others, featuring several rooms, halls and kitchens. There are also two beautiful loggias where the Sultan often comes in the summer season to eat and sleep.

The portion of land between the Golden Horn and the Marmara Sea was chosen as the site for the new palace. According to Garzoni, on the corner between the Golden
Horn and the Marmara Sea, the New Palace was built. This is the usual residence of the Sultans. The palace is 3 miles in circuit, closed by high walls without rampart or others defensive works, with the exception of the seaside walls, where there are one hundred pieces of ordnance prevalently made by iron, but in a very dilapidated state. The Topkapı evolved from the various additions made to the place by the Sultans over the centuries. A series of great fires destroyed most of the original buildings, and the Palace had to be restored repeatedly. Some structures were demolished and others added. Here we have some eyewitness accounts giving descriptions of some sections of the Palace in the 16th century. No trace of them has survived. For example, Garzoni says that the palace is rich of amazing gardens, beautiful buildings and fountains and it is situated in a very extraordinary place. Michiel says that this palace has magnificent gardens and that the Sultan has spent 300,000 ducats to build a loggia (or a kiosk) on the seashore. Badoaro mentions this loggia as an exquisite work. This is probably the famous Kiosk of Pearl or (İncili Köşk), that no longer exists.

Another pleasure building, described by Luigi Bassano, should have been a room, covered by a rounded dome, all covered by squared white glasses connected by tin bars. But the exceptionality of this building comes from a complex system of pipelines bringing the water flowing from the top of the dome to the ground. It had to be amazing! In fact it was one of the favourite places of the Sultan for sleeping during the summertime but unfortunately, at the time of Bassano’s description, the pipes system was broken and the kiosk had been neglected.15

According to Badoaro the room where the Sultan usually gives audience to the ambassadors and to others persons, is very adorned and embellished by precious marbles and porphyries, which are decorated by golden arabesques, instead of tapestry. And instead of carpets there are rich golden cloths. To one side of this room there is a stool, which is suspended one palm and half from the ground. A silk cloth embroidered by golden threads with pearls, diamonds, rubies and jewels, covers this stool. Badoaro says that the Sultan, who was Selim the Second at the time he was writing, was sitting in a little lower position than his father Süleyman the Magnificent was used to sit. Here there are two embroidered cushions with jewels. Nearly, a brazier or fireplace (focone) covered by solid gold similar to a mosaic, with beautiful carved works and jewels like rubies, diamond, emeralds and pearls. This work is estimated one million of gold. In 1576, Tiepolo gives a very similar description of the audiences' room: in fact, he says that the Sultan used to seat one palm and half from the ground (which Pigafetta calls mastabe) and the place is completely covered by richly embroidered velvets, and large cushions embellished with jewels and with precious pearls of extraordinary size.

Luigi Bassano adds that there is a third palace in Constantinople, on the seashore, in the part of the city, which faces Gallipoli. That palace is called Yedikule (ladicula in the text) which means, "castle of the seven towers". Each tower was of unbelievable height and size. This palace is completely walled up by high walls, it is well provided

15 Francesco Sansovino (1568: 20)
with ordnance and defended by 500 slaves. Every one of those towers is furnished with barrels, full of ducats and aspers and a lot of other treasures.\textsuperscript{16} This is confirmed also by Pigafetta who writes that the tribute they had to pay to the Sultan (fifteen gold-plate silver cups, two inestimable watches and 45,000 thalers) was kept in the palace of the Seven Towers.

\textit{Haghia Sophia and the Hippodrome}

After the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, usually the Turks did not suffer the Christians enter their mosques. Therefore, unfortunately, there are not many accounts describing the interior of the mosques. But for Hagia Sophia, even though it has been turned into a mosque after the conquest, we find three very interesting descriptions. They come from Francesco Sansovino, Marc'Antonio Pigafetta and Luigi Bassano. The mosque of Aya Sofia (always called \textit{Santa Sofia} in the texts) in Constantinople, close to the Sultans' Palace, is the biggest and the largest ever seen in the East. Sansovino compares the dome of Aya Sofia to that one of Santa Maria in Rome but he adds that the first is larger and higher than the other.\textsuperscript{17} Francesco Dalla Valle compares Hagia Sofia to the Church of St. Antony in Padua.

I would like to hold on for a moment and consider some interesting passages of these accounts. They concern the state of the church/mosque at the time their authors were writing. Francesco Sansovino reports that the Turks have removed all the altars used by the Christians for the Holy Mass and they have also taken off all the living representations. Both Sansovino and Pigafetta say that the Turks have taken off only the eyes of the humans represented because they didn't want to ruin such a beautiful masterpiece of art as the mosaic work of Aya Sofia. Luigi Bassano adds that the main altar's chapel, at the present time, is huge and empty, with a small Turkish chapel in the middle, not very high from the ground, enriched by a green velvet cloth and by two gold-plated silver chandeliers with big candles. Pigafetta says that the interior has the same furniture as Sultan Süleyman's Mosque: the \textit{mahfil} for the Sultan, a pulpit for reading the holy book, carpets and lamps. The incredible number of oil lamps is mentioned also by Bassano, who said that all these lamps are lighted up at night for the prayer time. But the most interesting information comes from Sansovino who says that, at the time he left Constantinople, the bells of Hagia Sophia were kept in the Topkapı Palace and the Sultan was pretty inclined to mould them for making new bombard.

Not far from Ayasofya there is a very large unpaved open place that the Turks call the Atmeydan, which in the old times was the Hippodrome. There were many fine monuments in this place even though, before the Ottoman conquest of the city, the Hippodrome was largely in ruins.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{16} Francesco Sansovino (1568: 32)
\footnote{17} The same comparison has been reported also by Marc'Antonio Pigafetta in Matkovic (1890: 109)
\end{footnotes}
Francesco Della Valle, writing between 1531 and 1535, sees the Egyptian Obelisk erected by Theodosius the Great in 390, even though he believes that the basement of the building was the tomb of the Byzantine Emperor. He says that close to the Obelisk there are three bronze statues of Hercules surrounded by an iron chain, which were taken from Buda after the city was conquered by Sultan Süleyman.

Catharin Zen, writing in 1550, describes a spire shaped building, which stands on four bronze balls, another marvellous column made by separate stones put together without mortar resting on four marble balls. There was also a bronze column in the shape of three entwined snakes and a column with a bronze Hercules, brought from Hungary, on the top. And he probably saw another building that could be identified with the Colossus or the Column of Constantine Porphyrogenitus.

Nicolò Michiel, writing in 1558, identifies the bronze column in the shape of three entwined snakes and the column, which rested on four marble balls. In 1573 Costantino Garzoni reports a curious tale about the bronze column: in fact, he says that the population of Constantinople thinks that this column protects the city and its habitants from snakes' bites or snakes in general.

The best description of the Hippodrome is given by Marc'Antonio Pigafetta's account. He mentions the Egyptian Obelisk erected by Emperor Theodosius the Great, the bronze column and the Column of Constantine Porphyrogenitus. He says that there were also some admirable bronze statues taken from Buda by Sultan Süleyman, but they had ha to be removed because of a mophis' decision and moulded for making new pieces of ordnance. That is interesting because trough other European accounts we know that the three bronze statues formerly stood close to Ibrahim Paşa's mansion, but when he fell in disgrace and was executed, the statues were thrown down by the infuriated mob.

Conclusions

Evidently, this paper of mine does not exhaust all aspects of the subject. Travellers provide descriptions of great interest of other places in Constantinople, such as the Arsenal, the fortresses in the Bosphorus strait, the bazaar, the Byzantine ruins of the imperial palace and much more. But the choice of the descriptions for this paper has not been easy and is necessarily limited. What I hope has been highlighted with this short presentation is the richness and the importance of these accounts for the history of the Ottoman Empire, and in particular for its architecture. Trough these descriptions we are able to recover a virtual picture of lost monuments both Byzantine and Ottomans such as the glass pavilion from the Topkapi, the Old Palace, the bells of Haghia Sophia or the Byzantine marble slabs of Sultan Süleyman's tomb. Furthermore, we can add more details about city's urban changes after the conquest.

To sum up, the account of Venetian travellers are very meaningful sources for the history of Constantinople and its monuments. I would like to conclude this presentation
not with a description of a monument but with a daily life sketch, coming from the report of Gianfranco Morosini, Venetian bailo in Constantinople from 6 May 1582 to 12 June 1585.\textsuperscript{18} He says that the Turks, during the whole day, are used often to drink a black hot water, which proceeds from seeds called Caveè that seems to have the property to keep people awake. Well, exactly 100 years after Morosini's description, in 1683, the first coffee shop in Europe opened in Venice, and a few years later the number of coffee shops had grown up till the crazy number of 35 shops, and just in Saint Mark's area! This is just one of the examples which proceeds from Venetian account, so we had to conclude that his fruitful contact allowed the Venetians import some traditional customs of the Turkish way of life into Europe. Customs, which maybe at first sight struck negatively the imagination of the Europeans, but at the end were adopted and practised, till our days.