SINAN’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DESIGN OF GALATA WATERFRONT

It is well known that at the time of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople the Latin quarter of Galata which was mostly inhabited by Genoese formed a strongly commercial urban entity. Together with Constantinople proper and the town of Scutari (Turkish Usküdar) on the Asiatic shore, Galata composed the threefold urban system of the Byzantine capital, soon to be developed as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The physical structure of the Latin quarter, as consolidated over more than two centuries, was similar to that of some late medieval European harbour towns: a walled town including a series of level streets that run approximately parallel to the coastline, and were intersected, generally at right angles, by another system of steep, partially stepped lanes. The most important lanes, connecting the hilltop Galata Tower (then called Christ’s Tower) to the harbour formed the main commercial axis into which faced the public buildings, including the famous Genoese Merchants’ Loggia, and the market place. This layout survives today in the Galata Kulesi Sokak (the street of Galata Tower) and Persembe Pazar (the Wednesday Market).

We know that the Genoese authorities who had observed a neutral attitude during the siege of 1453, succeeded in maintaining most of the privileges and commercial rights which had been given to them by the Byzantines. In fact, during the first decades following the conquest, the town of Galata still kept its role as an essential complement to the economic life of the Ottoman capital; it did not greatly change its shape and structure. But very soon the conquerors realized the importance and the convenience of Galata, and generally of the whole surrounding area, especially westward along the northern shore of the Golden Horn (where the district of Kasimpasa had developed), and eastwards along the European coast of the Bosphorus (where different Turkish villages were built up).

A number of official Ottoman institutions were also established, in and around the Latin walled city from the time of Sultan Mehmet Fatih. Among these were Galata Saray, the Imperial College where the Court pages were educated; this occupied a large estate in the so-called Pera vineyards on the hillside country beyond Galata town. Halfway from the Galata Saray to the Galata Tower, a Dervish tekke or convent was built in 1492 on the site where there still existed in the 18th century a complex called the Galata Mevlevihane.

Near the eastern walls the Emperor Fatih also built the gun foundry to serve as the main artillery arsenal. But it was only in the middle of the 16th century that the Ottomans began to give a new planned definition to Galata, by constructing three different building complexes, all of them designed by Mimar Sinan. These buildings were sited outside the walled town of Galata. In the very centre of this quarter, during the reign of Fatih, another commercial building of the Bedesten type was erected facing the Genoese marketplace called Platea Longa: this was a compact nine-domed construction were precious goods were stored and sold.

The first work in Galata by Mimar Sinan was the Caravansaray of Rustem Pasha (1544-50), also called Kurshunlu Han ("the lead caravansaray"). This was built near the Bedesten just mentioned, upon the site of the demolished church of St. Michael. As usual for this kind of building, the caravansaray was given the shape of an arced two-storeyed inner court; but due to the reduced space, Sinan was forced to adopt an elongated rectangular plan, with cross-shaped stairs unusually located in the middle of the court.

The second work carried out by Sinan was the Sokollu Cami, commissioned in 1577 by famous Sokollu Mehmet Pasha; it is also called Azapkapi Cami ("Mosque of the Bachelors"), because it was located just outside the Azapkapi Gate in front the western corner of the town wall. This site corresponded to the landing place of the Golden Horn ferry, later replaced by a frail wooden bridge (seen in 19th century engravings) and most recently by the Atatürk bridge. As the terrain where the mosque had to stand was low and subject to floods, the prayer hall (modelled on the eight pillared model of the Selimiye Cami in Edirne, 1569-75) was raised upon a vaulted stone basement (the so-called fevkeni or raised mosque). It thereby occupied a prominent position, underlined by a slender minaret at the western corner. In the lower level some shops were arranged. This solution had already been adopted by Sinan in the Rüstem Pasha Mosque, 1555-56, and was not unusual in other Islamic countries like Fatimid Egypt (e.g., the as-Salih Talai Mosque in Cairo, 1180) and Tahirid Yemen (e.g., the al-Amiriyya madrasa-mosque in Radah, 1504-05). The rent of these shops was assigned as usual to the maintenance of the mosque, which was surrounded by other dependences.
Let us recall that the same Sokollu Pasha had also commissioned Sinan in 1571-72 to build another mosque and külliye in Istanbul, in the Kadırga district facing the Marmara Sea; this külliye was maintained by taxes collected from the Galata merchant people. The third and most important of Sinan’s urban projects for Galata was erected just outside the eastern end of the city walls, not far from the artillery arsenal, where the Golden Horn joins the Bosphorus. It consisted of a medium-size külliye, the biggest on the northern side of the Golden Horn, including a beautiful double-naved mosque (conceived on the same spatial model as Hagia Sophia, on a much smaller scale), a theological school (maodraşı), a public bath (hamam), and the mausoleum (türbe) of the founder, the admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha. All these buildings were built on the sea shore, as would be appropriate for an admiral, and were intended to serve the surrounding districts inhabited by seamen.

It is interesting out that the three Pasha involved with these architectural and urban changes in the Latin area of the Ottoman capital were high officers of the Ottoman court who came from Christian Europe countries: this confirms the mingled roles of the different ethnic groups in the Ottoman world and the cosmopolitan vocation of the Empire.

Rüstem Pasha (1500 ca.-1561) born in Bosnia, probably in Sarajevo from a Christian family, and after having served as Governor in some Anatolian provinces, became Grand Vizier or Prime Minister. He was also the author of a chronicle of the Ottoman Empire up to 1561, and married Mihrimah, the daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent. He commissioned Sinan to build many mosques and public buildings for various towns in Anatolia and Thracia.

Sokollu Pasha (1505 ca.-1579) was also of Bosniac birth and, enrolled on the devşirme system in the Imperial military service, he took part in campaigns in Hungary and Azerbaijan, as well in naval expeditions in Tripolitania. He became Kapudan Pasha, Great Admiral of the Ottoman fleet, succeeding in this charge to the famous Khairaddin Barbarossa. He too became the son-in-law of a Sultan, because he married Esmehan, the daughter of Sultan Selim II.

Kılıç Ali Pasha was of Italian birth, precisely...
THE PANORAMA OF ISTANBUL BY J.M. FERAUD (1826-1831)

GALATA FROM AN OLD ENGRAVING
A VIEW OF THE QUARTER FROM THE GALATA TOWER (PHOTO A. PETRUCCIOLI)
from Le Castella, a village on the Ionian coast of Calabria, and his Christian name was Giovanni Dionigi Galeni. In a Turkish attack on his birth place, he was captured, enrolled in the Ottoman Navy, converted to Islam, and adopted the name of Kılıç Ali "the Great Sword" (then Italianized as "Occhiati"); he later became an admiral, and was Governor of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. Let me conclude these notes by stating the obvious: all of the urban changes introduced by Sinan inside and outside the Latin districts of Istanbul ought to be considered within the general context of his projects for the Bosphorus conurbation. The built-up area of Galata was in any case quite different from the other districts: it resulted from a series of western-type features, having an almost regular street gridiron, a shortage of open spaces, and blocks of masonry constructions. This situation offered to him a compact preexistant reality which formed an impediment to free planning, but also gave him a stimulus and an object confrontation. A kind of challenge that was certainly accepted by Sinan and suggested to him an adequate response suited to the specific character of the site. The lack of sufficient unbuilt territory for new urban facilities was counterbalanced by the choice of focal points at which to develop strategic operations: as a matter of fact, new buildings were located, consciously enough, in key positions, from both a functional and visual view point, in relation to the already urbanized area. Sinan's projects started and accompanied a long process of opening the walled town to the external world, so giving it a more active role in the Golden Horn townscape, and connecting it more closely to the whole urban system. This radical change of a medieval Latin district into a living section of a modern cosmopolitan conurbation was parallel to, but different from, the analogous changes that the same architect was carrying on at the same time on the opposite shore of the Golden Horn: here, in fact, another kind of urban space, that of Byzantine Byzantium was being transformed into the space of Ottoman Istanbul. But this confrontation did not cause conflict, rather, it provoked and expressed the con-
vergence of different ways of conceiving the town which characterized Ottoman urban culture and which, in the works of Sinan, invented a unique way of planning and designing the Imperial City.

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2 J.K. Kramers, s.v. Sokollu Muhammed Pasha, ibid., vol. 4, pp. 495-96.