Reckoning with an Imperial Legacy: 
Ottomans and Byzantine Constantinople

The Ottoman world of the later fifteenth-century created a wide range of cultural products that articulated Ottoman responses to the Constantinopolitan past. Some of these remained specific to this tumultuous period of encounters and transformations. One does not, for example, see the Byzantine eagle, or any other spolia featuring figural imagery displayed in public spaces past the first decades of Ottoman rule in Constantinople/Istanbul, as one does over the portal of the bedestan, the commercial center built within the first decade of Ottoman rule in the city. Other products of the Ottoman encounter with Constantinople were inscribed in the city’s long term history, such as the image of the Ottoman sultanic mosque, which bore the mark of Hagia Sophia’s superstructure for over three centuries.¹ This paper focuses on a less explored aspect of the Ottomans’ relationship to Byzantine Constantinople, one that has nevertheless marked the city’s long term history: the monumental layout of the city, with its colonnaded streets punctuated with monumental fora, and the conception and creation of Ottoman monuments in relation to that layout. Focusing on the relationship between what have been conceived as the city’s two selves, I explore the ways in which Constantinople’s urban structure informed the shape of Ottoman Istanbul. A revival of aspects of early Byzantine Constantinople, as well as continuities in particular urban patterns of late medieval Byzantium, I hope to demonstrate, underlined fifteenth-century Ottoman interventions to the cityscape.

A complex, and often ambivalent interaction between utility and symbolization must be taken into consideration for an assessment of Ottoman uses of Byzantine structures in Constantinople. Doubtless informed by the vicissitudes of building the infrastructure of a capital city out of the ruins of another, choices involved in Ottoman interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape were simultaneously shaped by construals of and attitudes towards the Byzantine imperial capital. Hence the title of this paper, «reckoning with» Constantinople. This is a borrowing from Donald Preziosi, who has suggested that reckoning, in its dual meanings of «coping with» and «thinking with», can be a key to understanding the processes through which visual environments are created and interpreted. For this duality underlines the relationship of the subject to the object, making that relationship, in turn, the object of study. The emphasis on the relationship between the visual environment and its viewers posits the user as an always active, complicit, constructing and construing subject. «Image construction and image construal overlap, interpenetrate, and afford opportunities for orchestrating meaning through use». The collapsing of construal and construction, and the privileging of the user as an active subject proves useful for an understanding of the Ottoman reconstruction of Constantinople, and the complex of appropriations, interpretations, and rejections of aspects of Byzantium that constitute a central part of that reconstruction.

The two major urban centers of the Ottoman realm prior to the conquest of the Byzantine capital, Bursa and Edirne, had mainly developed outside of the walled enclosures of the captured cities. Neither the specifics of the site, nor the politics of possessing it would have allowed for constructing an Ottoman Constantinople outside of the walled enclosure of the Byzantine city. Hence the significance of questions regarding the Ottoman interpretation and uses of the Constantinopolitan cityscape: the decision to inhabit Constantinople meant an

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2 Françoise Choay, tracing medieval attitudes towards monuments of antiquity, notes the difficulty of distinguishing «between measures dictated by utility and those inspired by historical interest or yet the will to affirm an identity through monuments”; Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, tr. L.M. O’Connell, London 2001, 26.


6 Although it might be possible to interpret the development of the Eyüp quarter as in line with such a notion of extramural urban development, this district surrounding a saint’s tomb was obviously conceived as a suburb rather than an urban center.
Ottoman encounter with the late Roman and Byzantine legacy within the space of the imperial city, which was in turn to effect the making of a new sensibility regarding the Byzantine past.

Drawing attention to aspects of urban form in Ottoman Istanbul and particularly to the fate of Constantinople's monumental street layout as it became a site of Ottoman constructions, I must first grant that those who shaped the Ottoman city remained conspicuously uninterested in geometrically conceived street layouts and public squares. Disinterest on the part of the Ottomans in the orderly and uniform appearance of streets and squares has led in turn to a disinterest on the part of most modern scholars of Ottoman Istanbul regarding

Fig. 1: Istanbul at the end of the 15th century, with the reconstruction of the Mese superimposed. Adapted from Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul: Byzantium, Konstantinopolis, Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts. Tubingen 1977, 32.
the role main arteries and squares played in newly emerging urban configurations. If this predilection is largely rooted in paradigms of Greco-Roman and Baroque urbanism within which Ottoman spatial configurations lack form, stepping outside of the paradigm may allow for an alternative assessment of emerging notions of urbanism in Ottoman Istanbul. Viewing Ottoman uses of Byzantine urban spaces outside of a geometric principle proves fruitful, as Ottoman interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape no longer appear as solely destructive of a former order. Such interventions, instead, are readable as constitutive elements of a new urban configuration that took shape alongside the making of an imperial Ottoman polity. Central to the making of that polity was the re-imperialization of Constantinople, its capital city.

The very first Ottoman interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape shortly following the city’s conquest, the conversion of the Hagia Sophia, and the decisions for the construction of a palace and a citadel, underlined a focus on imperial Byzantine loci (fig. 1). Mehmed II’s first palace was conceived as a citadel situated above what at the time remained of an urban settlement in Constantinople. To his Greek chronicler, this was «the finest and the best location in the City»: a vast enclosure that measured about a mile in circumference, occupying part of the Forum Tauri, and the slopes descending towards the Golden Horn. The late-fifteenth century city view by Giovanni Andreas di Vavassore shows the column of Theodosius as a prominent feature within its walls, at the southwestern corner of the enclosure (fig. 2). An eyewitness account of Mehmed’s funeral in 1481 mentions a place de serraglio where the procession, on its way to the New Mosque where the sultan was to be buried, arrived. Here the many wives and concubines of the sultan appeared in a gallery of the palace dressed in black, where they cried and wept until the procession was no longer visible. The gallery was possibly the belvedere of a gate complex, modelled after ceremonial palace gatehouses that were part of Islamic as well as Roman and Byzantine palatial traditions. The place, on the other hand, must have been the remaining section of the Forum Tauri, which now constituted a forecourt to the palace.

Following Kritovoulos further, we read of «the construction of a strong for-

8 The Topkapı too was to feature such a gate complex, which constituted a node between the palace and the city, and simultaneously communicated with the remains of the Chalke gate complex of the Byzantine Great Palace across from the Augusteion; see Gürro Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, Cambridge Mass. 1991, 37-40.
Fig. 2: The Old Palace and the column of Theodosius. Detail from a later 16th century copy of the Vavassore view, first published ca. 1520.

This was the star shaped citadel, the first such product of Renaissance architectural design to be given tangible form, placed at the Golden Gate where the southern branch of the Mese met the Via Egnatia (fig. 3). Although the strategic significance of the site suggests itself as the primary factor in the decision to build a citadel here as a stronghold against attack or internal strife, the location and shape of the citadel are also indicative of Ottoman attitudes towards the city’s Byzantine past. In the same way Mehmed’s New Mosque was to replace the

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Fig. 3: The citadel, "Seven Towers", drawn by Francesco Scarella, ca. 1685. From "Francesco Scarella e i suoi designi di Costantinopoli (circa 1685)", Aufsätze und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Südosteupolas und der Levante, Munich 1976.
church of the Holy Apostles in the following years, the citadel replaced and rendered obsolete what once was the ceremonial entrance to the Byzantine city. The gate, which, as noted by Cyril Mango, resembled a Roman triumphal arch rising to some 12 meters and featuring a complex composition of spoliated antique and Byzantine figural reliefs, became itself an immense piece of spolia incorporated into the Ottoman military structure, like so many other Byzantine relics to be incorporated into Ottoman monuments within these decades.

Building the star shaped citadel flanking the Golden Gate and thus blocking what had once been the city’s ceremonial artery, the Ottoman rule would focus on the northern section of the city and the artery that traversed it. The Charisiros/Edirne gate was now the point where the sultan entered and left the city on military campaigns in the Balkans and on trips to Edirne. That the Edirne gate led to the township of Eyüp (as the Golden Gate had once led to Haleb, in a comparable, if not identical relationship to the city) is an equally important point that underlines its newly gained centrality. Formerly house to the monastic church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Eyüp was the site of the first large scale religious building complex to be constructed by the Ottomans near, if not in, Constantinople (fig. 4). The mausoleum and the accompanying mosque complex here, completed in 1459, marked the ‘discovered’ grave of a companion of the prophet, and thus celebrated a millenial Muslim presence near Constantine’s city. A locus central to the construction of the city’s Ottoman-Islamic identity and to the set of practices that underlined dynastic continuity, Eyüp was to remain a primary node of the ceremonial movements in the city through its Ottoman history. A processional pattern that incorporated the mausoleum complex might have been established from early on, as suggested by a sixteenth century source that notes Mehmed’s visits to the tomb.

While these initial constructions situated a number of Ottoman focal points on the ceremonial artery of the Byzantine city through the first years of Ottoman

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10 On the Golden Gate as a triumphal monument, and a reconstruction of its structure and form, see C. Mango, «The Triumphal Way of Constantinople and the Golden Gate», DOP 54 (2000), 174-188.

11 For an assessment of the political significance of this «discovery», see H. İnalçık, îstanbul: An Islamic City», Journal of Islamic Studies 1 (1990), 2-4.

rule, the decision in 1459 to construct a new palace, the Topkapı, on the site of the ancient acropolis marked a further step in Ottoman uses of Constantinopolitan urban space. The Ottoman house now moved into the gravitational center of Byzantine Constantinople. The triad that occupied the religio-political center of Constantinople, of the Great Palace, Hagia Sophia, and the Hippodrome, was to be reproduced in the triad of the New Palace, Ayasofya, and the
Atmeydani. The first courtyard of the New Palace and its imperial gate near the Hagia Sophia were now the starting point of imperial processions that would pass through the Augustaion to proceed along the Mese/Divan Yolu, tracing in part the itinerary and architectural markers of the ceremonial route of the early Byzantine city.
The set of public and private constructions sponsored by the sultan and the ruling elite in the decade that followed the foundation of the new palace were steps in the creation of a legible imperial environment in the city, following the decision to move the seat of rule from Edirne to Constantinople definitively.\(^{13}\) The construction of a new mosque complex, the largest to be built by the Ottomans to date, on the site of the Holy Apostles was part of this newly launched project.\(^{14}\) With its siting, layout, architecture, and epigraphic programme, Mehmed II’s complex was designed to reproduce and represent a new political configuration and a new hierarchy which redefined the state’s relation to the religious establishment (fig. 5). The expansive building complex owed its layout to notions of ideal planning developed in contemporary Italy;\(^{15}\) the New Mosque, as it was referred to by contemporaries, was the product of a synthesis of Ottoman mosque architecture of the pre-conquest period and the architecture of the Hagia Sophia.

The Holy Apostles was demolished to open space for the mosque. The dynastic locus of Byzantium, the site which represented the millennial succession of Byzantine emperors, became the site of one of the most powerful symbols of Ottoman Istanbul.\(^{16}\) A monument that was comparable in significance to the Hagia Sophia was erased from the topography of the city, while the significance of the site as a dynastic locus, transposed now into an Ottoman world of meaning, was perpetuated. The desire to replace the dynastic church of Byzantium with an Ottoman monument thus appears to have been a primary motive in the construction of the New Mosque. Its location on the recently restored waterway system must also have made this a preferable site. The proximity of the Holy

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\(^{13}\) For an assessment of this process, and for discussions of particular building projects in the context of the larger urban programme launched by Mehmed II, see my forthcoming \textit{Constantinopolis / Istanbul: The Making of the Ottoman Capital City}.

\(^{14}\) The mosque was built between 867/1463 and 875/1470, as noted in its foundation inscription. The completion of the other buildings of the complex might have continued into the following decade.

\(^{15}\) Marcel Restle has driven attention to the striking similarity between the plan of Mehmed’s complex and that of Filarete’s Ospedaletto Maggiore in Milan, whose design predates the Ottoman building by a few years only, and has convincingly argued that the layout of the complex carries the impact of Renaissance ideal planning principles; M. Restle, «Bauplanung und Baugesinnung unter Mehmed II Fatih», \textit{Pantheon} 39 (1981), 361-367.

\(^{16}\) The church was given to the patriarch Gennadios as the seat of the Greek Patriarchate shortly after the conquest and was deserted when the patriarch, not feeling secure in this uninhabited area, asked to be moved to the monastery of the Pammakaristos. Gennadios’ request has been noted in an anonymous fifteenth-century Greek chronicle: \textit{Emperors, Patriarchs, and Sultans of Constantinople}, ed. and tr. Marios Philippides, Brookline Mass. 1990, 57.
Apostles to the northern branch of the Mese, on the other hand, reinforced the emphasis earlier Ottoman constructions had already laid on this artery.

Information on the northern branch of the Mese in the mid-fifteenth century is at best sketchy. Pierre Gilles refers to «the broad way that stretches along the top of the Promontory from the Church of St. Sophia to the Gate of Adrianople», but his peculiar timeless prose that often does not distinguish between ancient configurations and what was visible to him in the 1530's makes it difficult to verify his statement. Travelers’ and pilgrims’ accounts from the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries make no note of the section of the artery between the Forum Tauri and the Charisios Gate. The siting of several Ottoman religious and charitable buildings dating from the later fifteenth century onwards, on the other hand, suggests that the straight course of the Mese was either lost by the second half of the fifteenth century, or that it was altered by new constructions, Mehmed’s complex being the first to start this process. Nineteenth century maps show the northern branch of the then Divan Yolu going through the outer courtyard of the mosque, to follow a winding course that reaches the Edirne Gate. This layout has important implications in terms of the relation of the complex to its urban context and to the main ceremonial artery of the city. While the Byzantine artery is reconstructed as following a straight line to the south of the Holy Apostles to reach the Charisios gate, its Ottoman revitalization involved a shift in this course: it now had a slightly northerly route, and the street took one directly into Mehmed’s new complex, rendering it more prominent within the city, increasing its visibility through obligatory passage (fig. 6).

Among the set of structures built by members of the ruling elite within these decades is the religious/charitable complex built by Has Murad Pasha, a Palaio- logos by birth and one among the Byzantine recruits of aristocratic extraction who now constituted the ruling elite of the Ottoman state. Occupying a site on the southern branch of the Mese, Murad Pasha’s mosque was built just to the

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20 For a recent discussion of the relation of the Holy Apostles complex to the Mese and proposals regarding the layout of streets surrounding the complex, see Berger, «Streets and Public Spaces in Constantinople». 
north of a monumental arch, whose fragments were discovered in 1956 within the enclosure wall of the complex. The same excavation uncovered the fragments of a colossal statue of a river god, which had been described in 1411 by Manuel Chrysoloras as «a statue made of white stone or marble, which seems to rest on

\[\text{\footnotesize 21 For the excavation results, see Feridun Dirimtekin, «Ayasofya ve Ona Bağlı Binalarda Araştırmalar», Ayasofya Müzesi Yılığı 1 (1959), 3-5; R. Janin, «Constantinople byzantine. Découvertes et notes de topographie», RÉB 21 (1963), 256. For the river god, see Nezih Fıratlı, La sculpture byzantine figurée au Musée archéologique d’Istanbul, Paris 1990, no. 507.}\]
its elbow», on «the same road and just above the source of water that runs through the city». This monumentally defined spot, situated at the intersection of the Mese and the River Lycus, has been identified alternately as the area of the Forum Bovis and the Forum Amastrianum (fig. 7). Murad Pasha’s complex,


23 The identity of this monumentally defined spot has been a point of debate among scholars of Byzantine Constantinople. Wolfgang Müller-Wiener located the Forum Bovis in this spot,
situated to the north-northwest of the forum area, presents the first instance of a trend that would continue into the sixteenth century: the construction of religious complexes on the fora of Byzantine Constantinople. Bayezid II's grand vizier Atik Ali Pasha was to build on the Forum of Constantine, the sultan himself was to choose the Forum Tauri for the large complex he founded in 1500.

Scholarship on Ottoman architectural and urbanistic practice has generally interpreted these choices of site as the result of an incompatibility between large open urban spaces and Ottoman/Islamic notions of urbanism. Ottomans, according to this interpretation of their urban practices, cluttered up the Byzantine fora with a host of public and private structures, for public squares in the western sense were alien to Ottoman urban life, and social life in cities was centered around religious complexes only. Other reasons and concerns behind the choice of these locations for the construction of Ottoman public buildings suggest themselves. The remains of the forum's architectural and sculptural furnishings, lying to the south-southeast of the Murad Pasha mosque, suggest that building up open space was not a particular concern for the Ottoman builders. The choice of the forum for Murad Pasha's buildings, on the other hand, underlines once more the concern with monumentalizing the city through the establishment of Ottoman foci in central locations. Sparsely populated and full of unbuilt areas, gardens, and orchards, fifteenth-century Constantinople would not have presented the builders with any difficulty as to available construction sites other than the Byzantine forum. The use of the forum area, on the other hand, would enhance the visibility of the buildings, both through the space it provided around the complex, and through its siting on one of the main arteries of the city leading to the recently completed citadel.

A note in Pierre Gilles' description of Constantinople suggests a further reason for such choices of site. He reports having been told by an «ancient native

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Fig. 8: The Hippodrome/Atmeydani in a later 16th century copy of the Vavassore view, first published c. 1520.

of Constantinople» that Mehmed had bestowed the grounds of the Forum Tauri to those who would build on it, because like the Hippodrome, it was full of wild and uncultivated trees and was only a shelter for thieves and robbers. The image of Constantinople in Hardtman Schedel’s Weltchronik, where trees grow in ruined buildings, conveys the same impression. It was not the incompatibility of an urban ideal with what Constantinople offered its new inhabitants that determined the fate of the Byzantine fora, then, but the city’s current condition, and a complex of symbolic and utilitarian choices regarding the use of its former layout.

The most conspicuous, and surprisingly little noted, indication that building up public spaces or replacing them with religious structures was not a primary motive in Ottoman interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape is the Hippodrome (fig. 8). Sparse, yet significant information on the use of the Hippodrome through the early years of Ottoman rule in Constantinople survives. In the image by Vavassore, published around 1520 based on an original dating to the late fifteenth century, the sphendone and the entrance complex, to be spoliated in

26 Gilles, The Antiquities of Constantinople, 151.
the construction of the Suleymaniye mosque and complex in the 1550’s, are still intact. A hagiography completed in 1484, the «Velâyetnâme-i Otman Baba», informs us that the Hippodrome, or in its translated name, the Atmeydanı, was already a central spot in the city by the end of Mehmed’s rule. The heretic dervish and his followers rather tightly escape being brought here, the text suggests, to meet their end at the stakes and hooks awaiting them. An opposition between the city’s center and edge, a metaphor also for proximity and distance vis-à-vis the state, is articulated here through a narration of the steps through which the dervishes are taken to a convent near Silivrikapı/Pege Gate along the land walls, and not to the Hippodrome. The «Velâyetnâme», work of an author at the margins of the emerging Ottoman order, does not allow us a more precise view into the events regarding the dervish’s trial. It does nevertheless give us a glimpse of the Hippodrome as one of the sites in which the conflict between the heretic leader and the palace was acted out within the capital city, foreshadowing its centuries long use as the stage where palace and city met for the administration of justice, for state ceremonial, for urban festivities and for expressions of popular dissent.

The growing importance of this site in the life of the Ottoman city can be traced through a set of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century interventions. The building of a mosque by Firuz Ağa, keeper of the treasury, at a highly prominent site at the intersection of the Mese and the Hippodrome, near his palace located above the Basilica cistern, in 1490 was followed by the construction of an open prayer platform (namazgah) to its west. The buildings of Firuz Ağa marked a significant instance of the introduction of an Ottoman visual idiom to the area; another definitive move in this direction also took place during the reign of Bayezid II, with the construction of the palatial complex that was to carry the name of its first prominent resident, Süleyman’s grand vizier İbrahim Pasha. The Hippodrome preserved its obelisks and the serpent column, and for a short while, it also featured a set of statues the grand vizier had brought from Buda following the Hungarian campaign. Significantly, the Ottoman structures followed and reproduced the longitudinal boundaries of the Hippodrome which, by the later sixteenth century, had become the city’s primary ceremonial space.

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28 The prayer platform was built in 1516. On the buildings of Firuz Ağa, see Kafescioğlu, Constantinopolis/Istanbul.
29 The initial construction date of the İbrahim Pasha palace is not known with any degree of certainty, while extant documentation suggests that it was built during the reign of Bayezid II; see Tülay Artan, «İbrahim Paşa Sarayı», Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, t. IV, 128-130.
I have so far traced Ottoman uses of Constantinople's public spaces through the first decades of Ottoman rule in the city. Were these, as scholarship has silently accepted in the case of the transformation of the Hippodrome into the Atmeydanı, products of obvious choices representing unpremeditated continuities in the history of the city? To begin answering this question, we would have to know what remained of the ceremonial arteries and spaces of Byzantine Constantinople at the time of its fall. While information in this regard is partial, what we do know suggests that fragments and traces of a former monumental layout remained, rather than an intact complex of streets and fora. In his «Comparison of Old and New Rome», which he wrote in Rome in 1411, Manuel Chrysoloras, mentions the «former city gate which is on the same road» referring to the southern branch of the Mese and the Golden Gate. His emphasis, however, is on what remained of the city's monumental columns, statues and their bases «wallowing in mud and mire, having fallen into ruin», rather than the spaces that housed these.30 Early Ottoman land surveys suggest that colonnaded porticoes were partly standing at the eastern portion of the Mese. The «shops called kemer (arch)» in the proximity of Hagia Sophia, recorded in a property survey of 1489, were possibly the last remnants of the porticoed streets of the city aligned with shops. These were either shop/stoa combinations as described by Marlia Mundell-Mango, or former porticoes transformed into shops by the Ottomans.31 Information on the Mese in the Palaiologan era suggests that commercial activity was focussed on particular locations rather than stretching alongside it. Turning to ceremonial uses of the arteries, we find a similar picture. In a study of imperial and ecclesiastical processions in Byzantium, Albrecht Berger has noted that urban ceremonial through the last centuries of Byzantium had shrunk to fragments of the city's former ceremonial map. Rather than traversing the whole expanse of the Mese, later Byzantine emperors often used a sea route from the Blachernae to the Seraglio Point in their increasingly infrequent visits to the city center, for a land-bound procession to the Hagia Sophia or the Hippodrome only from there onwards.32 Accounts I have noted, of the Hippodrome and fora as overgrown with trees at the time of the city’s fall, and the Ottoman concerns with security in these spaces point in the same direction.

30 Manuel Chrysoloras, «Comparison of Old and New Rome» (supra, n. 22), 211, 214.
That Ottoman constructions were directed at sites of former grandeur is significant, for it demonstrates that the Ottoman inhabitation of the city’s Byzantine layout entailed not only the use and transformation of an extant urban order, but simultaneously the revival of an ancient one. Like Rome expanding out of its medieval core through papal projects that redefined notions of monumentality and architectural meaning within the same decades, Constantinople expanded out of its late medieval core, through projects that encompassed the whole width of the Theodosian city, creating new foci along its ancient routes. By appropriating, recontextualizing, and replacing elements of the Byzantine city, the buildings situated on these streets introduced a new visual order to the urban environment. At the end of Mehmed II’s rule, a series of Ottoman monuments had substantially altered the iconography of the Byzantine city’s ceremonial arteries, reviving a pattern in the city’s long term history, and re-inscribing it in its urban spaces.

Driving attention to a trend of revival in Ottoman urban interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape, one must also note continuities and ruptures in the uses of urban space. Not surprisingly, the fabric of the northern section of the peninsula, particularly the largely commercial quarters located to the east of the Golden Horn stretch and connected to the port, was largely preserved through the Ottoman period.33 While land surveys and endowment documents from the early 1470’s onwards suggest that the demographic structure of this area, house to the Italian trading establishments, changed radically, specific buildings, as well as its fabric remained as part of the city’s Italian and Byzantine heritage. Streets running parallel to the coastline, each, in order of a pre-modern market district, designated to a different trade or craft, have been described in similar terms by Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century and by numerous observers from the sixteenth century and later.34 Endowment documents from the later decades of the fifteenth century onwards, and cartographic evidence from the nineteenth century describe this same spatial structure. The Makros Embolos, intersecting this fabric of parallel streets to connect the Basilike Gate to the Mese uphill, continued its life as the Uzuncarşçaşı of the Ottoman city.

33 For observations on similarities and continuities between Byzantine and Ottoman residential patterns, see A. Bryer, «The Structure of the Late Byzantine Town: Dioskimos and the Mesol», Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society, ed. A. Bryer – H. Lowry, Birmingham-Washington D.C. 1986, 263-279. The following points regarding the Byzantine, Italian, and Ottoman dimensions of the use of space in the commercial district along the port are discussed in depth in my forthcoming Constantinopolis / Istanbul.

At the very beginning of the Makros Embolos/Uzunçarşı, inside the city gate alternately named Bab-1 Vasiliko and Bab-1 Feslügen in fifteenth and early sixteenth century sources (feslügen is the botanical, rather than titulary, translation of the word ‘basil’ into Turkish), was the Taht al-kal’a market, geared to retail sale to the residents of the area and to newcomers to the city. It has recently been suggested that the Byzantine name of the gate referred not solely to its imperial character, but also to the market called Basilike mentioned in a fourteenth century source. This might in turn be a marketplace for meat and other products in use as early as the fifth century. The introduction of a taht al-kal’a, or «below the citadel» area, a characteristic Ottoman urban configuration, did not entail a radical change in the commercial functions of what had been a central point within Constantinople’s port district (fig. 9).

If functions remained largely unchanged, the visual configuration of the area did not. The starting point of a main artery and a core area of the commercial district, Taht al-kal’a was one of the first locations in Constantinople to be marked by Ottoman architectural interventions. A small masjid, that of Hacı Halil, marked the southern boundary of the Taht al-kal’a market. Diagonally across from it was a double bath, which, with its stately domed apoditerium hall in all likelihood featuring an elaborate muqarnas portal, constituted an unmistakably Ottoman landmark at the start of the street that would be traversed by all who entered the city through the Vasiliko Gate and headed for the bedestan, the commercial center uphill. Constructed as part of the campaign launched by Mehmed to restore the waterways of the city and to build «splendid and costly» baths, the Taht al-kal’a bath was to remain one of the largest of its kind in the Ottoman city through the following centuries. The recent discovery of massive foundation walls belonging to a former structure suggests that here stood an important structure of Byzantine or Venetian


36 Marlia Mundell Mango drives attention to similarities between Byzantine and Ottoman urban practices, in the location of luxury markets in the vicinity of the palace; Mundell Mango, «Commercial Map», 206-207.
Fig. 9: The Basilike/Vasiliko/Feslügen Gate and the Taht al-kal'a market, with the Makros Embolos/Uzunçarşı connecting to the Bedestan area. Adapted from Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul's.
While the function of this former building, and in what degree of preservation the Ottomans found it remain in the dark, its replacement by an Ottoman structure highlights the new rule’s desire to introduce its own visual idiom to this central spot. That a large-scale bath rather than a mosque was the means of marking this principal city gate underlines a rather typical, if highly significant pattern in the monumentalization of the city in the decades that followed its conquest.

In contrast to the interventions to the Taht al-kal’a area where Byzantine and Ottoman urban practices and visual idioms were by necessity juxtaposed, the siting and architecture of the bedestan and its surrounding markets represent a rupture in the use of urban space in Constantinople. Here, rather than former configurations, Ottoman practice determined the shape of urban space. The Ottoman bedestan, with prototypes in the ancient and medieval world, housed luxury commerce and banking functions, and constituted a core around which an exclusively commercial district would develop. Proximity to the palace (Kritovoulos notes Mehmed’s order for the construction of a «very large and very fine marketplace in the center of the city, somewhere near the [first] palace»), links to the port area, and the possibility for expansion seem to have determined the choice of a site. While luxury markets of the Byzantine city were linearly placed along the Mese, the bedestan, close to this main artery, exhibited a radically different spatial configuration, a multidomed hall enclosed within heavy masonry walls, and an orthogonal street layout surrounding it.

Whether they were informed by Byzantine urban structures, or were products of earlier Ottoman and Islamic urbanistic practices, Ottoman interventions to the Constantinopolitan cityscape were shaped by an awareness of the past grandeur of the city and a desire to recreate that grandeur. This is legible, among other sources, in narratives of Mehmed II’s first encounters with Constantinople and his subsequent plans regarding it. Several sections in the chronicles of two witnesses to the era, Tursun and Kritovoulos, capture the juncture between images of the city’s glamorous past and its present reality as observed by the sultan. The Persian couplet Mehmed, according to Tursun, recites upon viewing the ruinous state of Hagia Sophia’s environs presents an image of past grandeur:

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The spider serves as gatekeeper in the Halls of Khosrau's dome
The owl plays martial music in the palace of Afrasiyab

Later on, Tursun describes the sultan looking upon the city with the gaze of admonition, observing the contrast between its ruined and confused state, and its setting of heart-attracting beauty. Kritovoulos, author of the lengthiest accounts of the Ottoman ruler’s plans regarding Constantinople among his contemporaries, locates these always within the framework of a temporal comparison with the city’s immediate or ancient past. In 1453, narrating the monarch’s first tour of the city, he writes: «first he planned how to repopulate it, not merely as it formerly was but more completely, if possible, so that it should be a worthy capital for him, situated, as it was, most favorably by land and by sea». In 1456: «So profound was the passion that came into his soul for the City and its peopling, and for bringing it back to its former prosperity». In 1459: «Now it was his plan to make the City in every way the best supplied and strongest city, as it used to be long ago, in power and wealth, glory, learning, and trades, and in all the professions and all sorts of good things, as well as in public and private buildings and monuments». It was not only Mehmed’s eulogists but also his critics who wrote of the sultan’s involvement with the city in terms of past grandeur. In a highly negative assessment of Mehmed’s building projects and his attempts to revive the city, the anonymous author of the Chronicles of the House of Osman compared the Ottoman monarch, unfavorably, to none other than Constantine.

The treatment of particular Byzantine sites and buildings, along with new Ottoman projects, echo these various narratives in their articulation of a range of responses to Byzantium. At the end of Mehmed II’s rule, the city housed a set of monuments that juxtaposed, at times in a single building, late Roman, late Byzantine, and Ottoman visual orders (the mosque of Rum Mehmed Pasha in Üsküdar, with references to the architecture of Hagia Sophia as well as to late

39 Kritovoulos, History, 83, 105, 141.
40 Friedrich Giese, Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken I: Text und Variantenverzeichnis, Breslau 1922, 98-100. Stefanos Yerasimos has discussed the authors’ negative evaluation of Mehmed II’s building projects as indicative of their rejection of the ruler’s imperial project at large; Stefanos-Yerasimos, La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: l'édénè de l'empire, Istanbul-Paris 1990, 154-159.
Byzantine churches within a typical Ottoman layout, is the most striking example). The city’s monumental urban layout, in large part obscured at the time of its fall, was revived in an Ottoman idiom within the same period. It is not possible, however, to speak of a distanced and disinterested contemplation of the antiquities of the city, parallel to the emerging aesthetic and scholarly discourse on the ancient heritage in contemporary Italy (however grounded in familiarity, utility, and politics that discourse was). For Ottoman architectural discourse and practice of the fifteenth century were heavily implicated in the larger project of constructing the capital city of an emerging imperial polity. One must understand the conspicuous presence of the Constantinopolitan past in Ottoman urban narratives as well as in urban interventions within this context, the creation of empire on the locus of empire. Ervin Panofsky’s account of Frederick II (1197-1250) in his Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art may prove useful for understanding attitudes towards the past in the cultural milieu of Mehmed II. «He promoted the classical style as a matter of imperial policy rather than of “aesthetic” preference», Panofsky wrote on the King of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor, «and he never went so far as to exclude other artistic tendencies». Awareness of Constantinople’s past grandeur and the desire, on the part of the builders of the Ottoman state, to recreate that grandeur coincided with a broader trend that was to reshape the capital cities of the early modern world, particularly from the fifteenth century onwards. Fernand Braudel formulated this as a pact between the territorial state and the capital city: the capital city was created by an imperial or national unit, and the city, in turn, created that imperial or national unit. A new conception of the capital as the seat of the centralizing monarch, and as the site that would represent the polity was to leave its mark on a number of cities of the early modern era; concomitantly a new sense of urban scale and urban expanse was introduced to the cityscapes. Rome (the exception, nevertheless partaking in the dynamics of the period) extended

41 Françoise Choay underlines the coexistence of a largely medieval sense of familiarity, and an emerging sense of historic distance, alongside utilitarian, political and moral concerns, in the emergence of a new aesthetic sensibility regarding the antique in fifteenth-century Italy in her The Invention of the Historic Monument, 17-39.

42 E. Panofsky, Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art, Stockholm 1960, 65-67. Gülru Necipoğlu’s evaluation of the incorporation of different architectural styles into the Topkapı complex as indicative of an imperial ethos is in line with this; Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power.

out of its medieval core through papal projects within the same period; looking forward to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries one may add Isfahan and Paris to the list of capital cities to be transformed and expanded through grand projects conceived and realized by centralizing rules. To this process of state and city building, then, Constantinople offered the nodes, fragments, and traces of an ancient configuration, and the fabric of a medieval present (to cope with and to think with) for the construction of an Ottoman capital city.