

Succession of the Sacred Topography of Constantinople/Istanbul: Reasons and Methods

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Abstract—The article discusses the process of forming the sacred topography of the new capital of the Ottoman Empire. After the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans who were not interested in creating a new hierotopia used the already prepared sacred topography of the Byzantine city. In turn, this topography was dictated by the features of the terrain and water supply. The Anatolian architecture has already developed some specific types of structures that served as markers of Islamization, and it was precisely such buildings that were included in the Ottoman program for the replacement of ancient shrines. The effectiveness of such a program is indicated, in particular, by European maps and engravings.

Keywords—*Ottoman architecture; sacred topography; hierotopy; the replacement of shrines; kulliye*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam throughout its history has had to resolve issues of its coexistence with other beliefs and the development of another's cultural heritage. One of the most important tasks was the visual indication of presence and domination in the conquered territories. This task was complicated by the fact that Islam developed its own idea of space, which was different from temple religions and excluded the reproduction of sacred images and modeling of spatial relationships (hierotopy). Nevertheless, borrowing from the already existing urban environment, Islam did not ignore its religious connotations, but replaced its meaning as far as possible.

One of the most complex examples in terms of the development of sacred space was Constantinople. The city that became the capital of the Caliphate was full of ancient and Byzantine monuments included in various ceremonial programs. For several centuries the Ottoman sultans have consistently carried out a program of "replacement of shrines," using ancient monuments in their own ritual programs.

II. LEGACY OF THE RELIEF OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The choice of a new capital by Constantine the Great is usually explained by the unique location of the city on the cape between the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn Bay. Such an arrangement provided, firstly,

excellent conditions for a potential defense of the city (as practice has repeatedly proved); secondly, transport links with the ports of the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, supplying the city with necessary goods and active trade; and thirdly, control over communication between Asia and Europe, as well as north and south [1].

However, the rapid growth of the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and then of the capital of Byzantium, caused predictable problems with water supply [2] [3]. The cape, on which Constantinople was located, did not have rivers and large streams, and it was difficult to deliver fresh water from the Golden Horn to the hill. This problem was partially solved thanks to the Roman aqueduct system — already in the second half of the 4th century the hills of the city were connected by the aqueduct of Valens, which became part of the plumbing system that brought water from the reservoirs of the Belgrade forest. Famous underground cisterns were used to accumulate water reserves. There were more than forty of them in Constantinople. Constructive logic predetermined the construction of aqueduct and cisterns on the watershed of the Marmara Sea and the bay — from here water was transported by gravity to the northern and southern quarters below [4].

And here it is important to note that it was the watershed line that became the most important factor in the formation of the topography of Constantinople: along it was Mesa, the "middle street", which was the main artery of the Byzantine capital. Mesa passed from the Great Imperial Palace, located on the eastern tip of the cape, to the Forum Taurus, and here it was divided connecting the city center with the gate in the walls of Theodosius. It was on Mesa that the main city squares, forums, temples, including the church of the Holy Apostles — the imperial necropolis were located. Mesa was a ceremonial highway, both secular and religious, with festival and mourning processions, monarch trips, and religious processions passing through it [5]. Not surprisingly that Mesa became the basis of the spatial program of urban development and the axis of the sacral topography of Constantinople. However, this question is well studied by Byzantinists and specialists on hierotopy (discipline about sacred spaces).

III. ASSIGNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHRINES

This sacred topography was preserved even after the fall of Byzantium and the transformation of the Great City into the capital of the Ottoman state. By this time, Islam has already gained tremendous experience in "symbolic appropriation of land", which, according to Oleg Grabar, has become an important factor in the formation of Islamic art [6]. New owners needed not only to indicate their presence, but to do it with the help of forms recognizable by the local population.

It should be noted that in a number of cases the Anatolian town-planning practice did not at all face the problem of marking the old city as belonging to a new ethnic group and/or denomination: for example, taking Arkadiopolis on Meander, the Turks of the Principality of Aydin kept the Byzantine town intact, but founded a new settlement Tire on a neighboring hill, over time simply swallowed the old settlement [7]. However, in Constantinople, which became the new capital of the Muslim state, such an option was not possible: the Islamization and Ottomanization of the city had to take place precisely from within and bear the character of a symbolic designation of the new dominion.

By the middle of the 15th century Ottoman practice had already developed such visual indicators. First of all, it was a special type of mosque — *ulu-jami*, a hall building erected as a victory memorial [8]. In addition, the Ottoman architecture has already developed a special type of charitable complex called *kulliye*, which included, in addition to the mosque, educational institutions of madrasas, dormitories, caravanserais, canteens, baths, and the founders' mausoleums. It is not difficult to understand that the polyfunctionality of such complexes required the creation of the necessary infrastructure, because of which the *Kulliye* became the centers of gravity of the population and the core of new quarters [9].

Thus, the buildings, in addition to performing cult and social functions, have become a tool for visualizing of political rhetoric.

On the hills of Constantinople, the solutions already found by Ottoman architects and the scale of the hall space covered by domes have found a powerful incentive for further development in a nonsynchronous, but no less important "competition of opportunities" with St. Sophia. The great temple, built by Justinian, was destined to become one of the iconic religious monuments of Islam, just as the Damascus Basilica of John the Baptist became the Umayyad mosque and the Temple Mount of Jerusalem became the "Most Distant Mosque" (*Masjid al-Aqsa*). Turning the temple of Hagia Sofia into the Aya-Sophia mosque, Mehmed the Conqueror only followed the algorithm laid down by his predecessors [10] [11] [12].

Of course, Mehmed II and his advisers (no matter the Turks, Slavs, Greeks or Italians, Muslims or Christians) realized the spiritual role of Constantinople and the rhetorical significance of its transformation into the capital of a Muslim state. A necessary part of this process was the creation of an Islamic sacred topography to replace the old Christian, the

appearance of its own memorials, religious and political. Mehmed II was well educated, he knew ancient literature and was inspired by the example of not only the Prophet, but also Alexander the Great, who was perceived as the unifier of Europe and Asia. Sultan studied topographical works and initiated several simultaneous large projects, he was well aware of the programmatic role of the new architecture in the process of the Ottomanization of Constantinople [13].

An important event was the foundation of the Fatih *kulliye* with a huge mosque in 1463, a decade after the conquest of Byzantium. This complex, which included the Tomb of the Conqueror, had both unprecedented dimensions for Ottoman architecture and an amazing symmetrical layout, demonstrating familiarity with the town-planning projects of Renaissance Italy. The role of the Fatih mosque in the building can be estimated from the engraving of Pierre Coek van Alst [14]. But for us it is important that the Fatih complex was laid on the 4th hill of Constantinople on the site of the Church of the Holy Apostles destroyed two years earlier — the second most important temple of Constantinople [15]. The founding of the Muslim ensemble at such a landmark place for both sacred and real topography of Constantinople (on the crest of the watershed of the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn) should be considered as another (after the conversion of St. Sophia) act of "substitution of shrines" putting Mehmed the Conqueror in one row with Constantine the Great and Justinian.

IV. ISTANBUL PANORAMA: REAL AND DESIRED

The next large mosque, Bayazid-jami, was erected on the top of the Third Hill in 1500–1506. The Constantinople Forum of Theodosius, modeled on the Roman Forum of Trajan, on which were, in particular, basilicas, baths, a fountain, triumphal columns and arches, became the place for the foundation of the *kulliye* Bayazidiye. Obviously, it is precisely from the ruins of the Byzantine forum that the spolia used in the construction of the complex originate [16] [17]. It is easy to assume that the scatter of buildings to the Bayazidiye, which runs counter to the clear planning of the previous sultan's ensembles, indicates a desire to preserve the already existing buildings, including remnants of the forum, near the Old Palace (*Eski Saray*) of Mehmed II.

Two huge buildings of Mehmed II and Bayazid II, clearly visible from the south, from the Sea of Marmara, and from the north, from Pera, on both sides closed the territory of the Old Palace with adjacent gardens. In the topography of the Ottoman *Constantiniye* the new complex took no less significant place than the Fatih ensemble.

The next sultan's order is associated with the memorial *kulliye* of Selim I Yavuz, pledged in 1520 [18; 19]. After the huge mosques of Fatih and Bayazid, Selimiye-jami looks like archaism. However, the Selim Yavuz complex was erected on the Fifth Hill of Istanbul, facing the Golden Horn — such an arrangement complemented the chain of large mosques (Bayezid–Fatih–Selimiye–Eyüp) descending along the bay and provided the best perception of architecture from the water, from the harbor, turning Selimiye-jami in one of the "business cards" of the Ottoman capital for foreigners

arriving by sea. An important circumstance for the choice of location was probably the fact that the new *kulliye* "wedged" into the Greek quarter of Fener, which retained the existing churches, including Pammakaristos monastery, which was the residence of the patriarch; the appearance of the Sultan mosque here established the literal dominant of the minarets over the crosses. Finally, the ruins of a Roman cistern, used both as a foundation and as a source for spolia, served as a factor for the construction of the Sultan's complex — the third Sultan mosque in Istanbul also "inherited" the ancient monument.

The next stage of the ottomanization of Constantinople is connected with the works of Sinan. The mosques erected by the great architect turned out to be visual markers of the ultimate power of the Ottoman dynasty and formed a new horizon line. By 1548 on the southern slope of the Third Hill, in the immediate vicinity of the Old Palace and Bayazid-jami, a memorial mosque Sehzade appeared [20] [21]. Sehzade-jami with two 55-meter minarets became the middle link in the chain of Ottoman dominants on the line of the Istanbul watershed, which was recorded, for example, on the famous "Panorama of Constantinople" by Melchior Lorich [22].

Kulliye Sehzade was another step in the project of demonstrative appropriation by the Ottomans of the ancient Byzantine "context" of Constantinople: from the north, the ensemble is limited to the aqueduct of Valens, and in the north-eastern part of it there is a building of the Komninan church of the Our Lady Kiriottissa (Kalenderhane mosque), in turn, erected in place of the Roman *termae*. Sehzade-jami, like the other "great Ottoman mosques" that occupied the peaks of the Istanbul hills along the watershed line, turned out to be included in the program of "substitution of shrines" as part of the Ottomanization of the Second Rome.

And here we should return to the plan of Constantinople, the sacral topography of which was largely determined by the Mesa, in turn, followed the city's water supply system [23].

Obviously, the choice of place for the memorial sultan's *kulliye* erected in the new capital during the first century after the conquest of Constantinople was largely dictated not only by the terrain and the possibilities of the best view, which provided the dominant domes and minarets in the panorama of the city, but was also the task of creating a new sacral topography. At the same time, Ottoman urban planning could not adopt the traditional methods of hierotopy, consisting in the reproduction of ready-made images [24]. Muslim (including Ottoman) rulers did not reproduce specific structures or spatial relations, but acts of the Prophet: the subject of the action was more important for them than the object.

Probably, it is possible to say that a different method of hierotopy was implemented in Constantinople: the Ottomans took advantage of the ready sacral topography that had been created by other religions and cultures for centuries, and successively "replaced" significant objects that existed in urban areas (temples, necropolis, forums, cisterns) by own (mosques and *kulliye*). In the space of Constantinople, saturated with religious and political connotations, the

Ottomans not only destroyed or expropriated the alien monuments, but filled the City with their own buildings, visually marking the "finding of Istanbul" with Muslim religious buildings and memorial ensembles, and at the same time "expropriating" ready-made connotations.

The result was the creation of a chain of large mosques stretching from the Hagia Sophia across the hills — Bayazid, Sehzade, Fatih, Selim Yavuz, Eyup — which basically coincided with Mesa [25]. The domes and minarets of the huge buildings erected during the first century after the fall of Byzantium formed a new horizon line familiar to the European "species of Constantinople", and the large *kulliyes* created a new topography and urbanism of the Muslim city.

The main factors of this process are:

- dominants of relief, providing the best overview of new memorials;
- ready-made water supply system, necessary for the functioning of the *kulliye*;
- the availability of building materials (especially architectural spolia);
- the rhetorical significance of the venerated places, their veneration by the non-Muslim population of Istanbul.

To tell the truth, from the middle of the XVI century in a number of cases, architects of the sultans had to "wedge" into Ottoman buildings in order to erect new imperial mosques: for example, Sinan when planning Suleymaniye-jami needed to destroy the gardens of the Old Palace, the builders of Yeni-jami in the early 17th century demolished the Jewish quarters in Eminonu, the architects of Nurosmeniye-jami in the middle of the 18th century expanded the territory of the burnt mosque at the expense of trading shops near the Grand Bazaar [26] [27] [28]. However, in the following centuries the Byzantine heritage of Constantinople remained a significant foundation (both rhetorically and constructively) for Muslim construction: for example, the *kulliye* Sultanahmet "inherited" the Great Imperial Palace, and the complex of the Laleli mosque (1760–1763), as well as Selim Yavuz-jami, raised above the old cistern...

The appeal to the processes of architectural ottomanization of Constantinople demonstrates that attention to the "significant associations" enshrined in hierotopy and the visualization of the idea of appropriation were important factors in the development of both Ottoman ideology and Ottoman architecture. At the same time, Ottoman urban planning, assuming the Byzantine heritage and the finished spatial connotations of the new capital, was forced to adapt to the natural conditions that had once led to the sacral topography of Constantinople, consciously or unconsciously focusing on the top of the hills, the watershed line, the water system of the ancient city.

It is necessary to stipulate that the Ottomanization in the perception of both the Turks and Europeans occurred faster than the ancient monuments disappeared. The Theodosius

column near the Bayazid mosque remained until the beginning of the 18th century, the grandiose substructures of the southern part of the hippodrome near the Sultanahmet ensemble were occupied by university buildings only at the turn of the 19th — 20th centuries, and the obelisks in front of the Blue Mosque still stands, but for example, cartographers from Antwerpen placed in the famous atlas "Civitates orbis terrarum" (1572–1576) a slightly modified plan of Giovanni Vavassore, in which only St. Sophia and the Fatih *kulliye* are highlighted. On the "Panorama of Constantinople" by Yasar Isaac in the middle of the XVII century the city is filled exclusively with mosques, the domes and minarets of which are crowned with crescents. The scattered Byzantine "antiquities" that filled Istanbul were no longer perceived as a worthy legacy of the previous culture. The architectural indication of the victory of the Ottomans proved to be an effective means of "monumental propaganda".

V. CONCLUSION

The archeology and the history of art, as a rule, deal only with the results of cultural development, with material objects, but both disciplines are aimed at reconstructing the process of human activity itself. Comparison of works of art with each other and with verbal sources, traditional for art historians, should be complemented by the formulation of questions typical of other scientific disciplines. The explanation of the continuity of certain phenomena or images does not always lie in formal, religious, political reasons. Until now, few people paid attention to such a driving force as saving efforts. If the old fulfills its functions, then why invent a new one? That is exactly what happened during the Ottomanization of Constantinople — the Ottomans used the terrain, water supply system and even the existing sacral topography of the city, changing only the markers of its religious and political affiliation.

An appeal to the processes of architectural ottomanization of Constantinople demonstrates that attention to "significant associations" enshrined in hierotopy and visualization of the idea of appropriation remained important factors in the development both of Ottoman ideology and Ottoman architecture centuries after the stage of the formation of the culture of Islam.

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