



21. Raimondo D'Aronco, letnia rezydencja Ambasady Włoch w Therapia, 1905; za: M. Nicoletti, *Raimondo D'Aronco*, Mediolan 1955
 21. Raimondo D'Aronco, Summer residence of Italian Embassy in Therapia, 1905; from M. Nicoletti, *Raimondo D'Aronco*, Milan 1955

BETWEEN WESTERNIZATION AND ORIENTALISM: ITALIAN ARCHITECTS AND RESTORERS IN ISTANBUL FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH

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When Constantinople was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453 it seemed for a while that everything had been lost and that relations between Western Europe and the capital of the new empire would be dramatically curtailed.

In reality diplomatic, cultural and commercial exchanges soon resumed, facilitated in part by the fact that, just four days after entering the city, the conquering sultan, Mehmed II, confirmed all the privileges that the Genoese community resident at Galata had obtained in 1204, at the time of the Fourth Crusade: freedom of entry into the city, transit, property ownership and residence; freedom of religion and trade; autonomous jurisdiction of civil and penal cases among non-Muslims and the right to be assisted by an interpreter in those that involved Muslims. If we think that as early as 1303 it had been possible to fortify the settlement and in 1348 to construct its

central feature, the Galata Tower, it is evident that the 'Magnifica Comunità di Pera' possessed the status of an autonomous colony in full, with its own laws and its own language, religion and culture¹.

The new Ottoman rulers had found in Constantinople a multi-ethnic and multicultural city: Greeks, Armenians, Italians, Bulgars, etc. constituted important communities, in terms not just of numbers but also of the commercial and professional activities in which they were engaged. The need to establish lasting modes of coexistence with them was inescapable. Mehmed II also adopted the title of 'Emperor of the Romans and Protector of Orthodox Christianity', and had himself crowned as such by the Patriarch of Constantinople in person.

So while they were often at war with the West (and Venice in particular), the sultans permitted and facilitated the development not only of trade but also

¹ A. Pannuti, *Istanbul's Italian Levantines among the Other Non-Muslims: A community's fortune and dissolution despite identity preservation*, PhD in Italian Studies, Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3 University, 2004, pp. 4-5; see too: A. De Gasperi, R. Terrazza,

Italiani di Istanbul: figure, comunità e istituzioni dalla Riforma alla Repubblica (1839-1923), Fondazione Agnelli, Turin/Centro Altreitalie, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Istanbul 2007.

of cultural relations. It was not uncommon for them to request the services of artists and architects from Europe and in particular Italy, aware of their reputation and appreciative of their worth and skill: we know that in 1479 Gentile Bellini was summoned to court to paint the portrait of Mehmed II the Conqueror; he was followed by Agostino Veneziano, engraver of two portraits of Suleiman the Magnificent. In 1475 Aristotele Fioravante was paid a sum of money for the design of a bridge between Istanbul and Pera and Leonardo da Vinci designed a bridge over the Golden Horn, presenting his proposal to Sultan Beyazid II in a letter of 1503. Even Michelangelo was asked to design a bridge, again between Istanbul and Pera².

Thus the status of Italian architects and artists at the Ottoman court remained high: they were always well received and often entrusted with prestigious tasks.

Over the years the community of Italians (known as Levantines) grew in size, reaching a peak of 12/14,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 20th century, partly as a consequence of the numerous exiles who took refuge in Galata and then Pera during the years of the Carbonari insurrections of 1820/21 and the revolutions of 1848. Among them, it suffices to recall Giuseppe Garibaldi, who lived in Istanbul from 1828 to 1831.

In fact it was in the early decades of the 19th century that job opportunities for Europeans and Levantines grew even more substantial: conscious of the need to reform the administration and political conduct of the empire, clearly in decline when compared with the military, technological and economic successes of the European powers, the sultans embarked on a crash course of reforms. Mahmud II turned his attention first to the army. In 1826 he bloodily suppressed the Janissary corps, which since the end of the 18th century had on several occasions put up violent resistance to the early attempts at reform. He then transferred the imperial residence from the Topkapi Palace to the first Dolmabahçe Palace (later renamed Beşiktaş), on the European side of the Bosphorus. He installed a new army, commanded by officers loyal to him, in the old military district of the Janissaries, destroying every physical trace of their

history in the city. On the site of the second courtyard (demolished) of the neighbouring Beyazid Mosque he laid out a new square, the first in the whole of Ottoman Stamboul, to be used for military parades and the empire's principal civil celebrations. Finally he had the first bridge built over the Golden Horn – a bridge of boats – and carried out the first improvements of the road system, making it possible for the sultan to go by carriage from his new residence at Dolmabahçe Palace to the Serasker Gate, the monumental entrance to the military district located on the new square – the Beyazıt Meydanı – which from that moment on became the civil and political centre of the city³.

Mahmud II was succeeded in 1839 by his son Abdülmecid. After consolidating his military power, he issued the Gülhane Edict (1839), launching a series of administrative reforms (the Tanzimât): these declared that all subjects of the sultan were equal before the law, independently of their religion or any other distinction; conscription was also introduced and the tax regime was made more equitable.

Every sector of the administration of the state and the economy had to be involved in the programme of modernization: roads and railways, urban infrastructures, the army, public buildings and spaces, banks and insurance companies, commercial activities; to achieve this the contribution of Europeans would be indispensable: engineers, architects, physicians, technicians and workers with expertise in these new sectors, as well as craftsmen and artists, were offered great opportunities for employment. They were taken up not only by the community of European origin – a great many of them Italian – settled in Galata (the Levantines), but also by a new wave of immigrants, lured by the revival of the economy and the demand for new skills.

The young sultan Abdülmecid had got to know Gaspare Fossati, an architect from Ticino but trained in Italy, first in Venice and then at the Accademia di Brera in Milan, when, in 1837, in his capacity as official architect of the Imperial Court of St Petersburg, he had been given the job of building the new Russian embassy in Constantinople, which would be opened in 1845. The imposing neoclassical building soon assumed the character of modernity

² I.N. Asanoglu, *The Italian contribution to 20th-century Turkish Architecture*, in *Presence of Italy in the Architecture of the Islamic Mediterranean, Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1990, p. 154.

³ G. Yeşilkaya, *From a Courtyard to a Square: Transformation of the Beyazıt Meydanı in early nineteenth-century Istanbul*, in "Middle East Technical University Journal of the Faculty of Architecture" (METU JFA), 2007, no. 1, pp. 71-91.

and its architect, Gaspare Fossati, became, in the eyes of the sultan and his ministers, its first and most refined exponent.

At the Accademia di Brera in Milan Fossati had received a thorough multidisciplinary education that had made him an exponent of the neoclassical style. He had refined this in St Petersburg, in contact with the work of Luigi Rusca and above all Karl Rossi⁴.

While awaiting approval of the design and the subsequent construction of the building, he had been engaged in several other works, including the church of San Pietro for the Dominicans in Galata and several designs for churches in the Theme of Cherson and on Corfu and Malta.

During the early years of his stay in Constantinople Gaspare had obviously had an opportunity to observe and study both Byzantine and Ottoman architecture. He painted a view of the interior of Hagia Sophia in watercolour that very first year of 1837. Innumerable studies and sketches of buildings in Constantinople have been preserved in the Swiss archives⁵.

It was from Fossati that Abdülmecid commissioned the new works of architecture whose functions and style were supposed to make them a tangible and visible sign of the new policy of reform: the Bab-ı Seraskerat military hospital (1841 – the first building in the city to be built of brick using modern techniques); the House of the Guards in Karaköy (1843); the Darülfünun (the first building designed for a modern university, it was later used for other purposes – Finance Ministry, Justice Ministry, Assembly of the Congress and the Senate – before being destroyed by a fire in 1933); the Evrak (Archives – floors, stairs and doors made of iron to make them fireproof); the palace of Mustafa Reshid Pasha at Baltalimanı. Finally, it is worth mentioning a project, never realized, for a monument to the Tanzimât that was to have been built in the Beyazıt Meydanı – evidence, once again, of the faith that the sultan had placed in him by entrusting him with the celebration of his reform policy⁶.

But the studies of Gaspare Fossati's youth had not been limited to the field of neoclassical architecture: in the Italy of the early decades of the 19th century

a great deal of attention had begun to be focused on the study of ancient monuments and their restoration. The training of an Italian architect of the time could not fail to include a good grounding in the field of the survey and drawing of monuments, as well as a long stay in Rome, in contact with the city's cosmopolitan milieu of artists and travellers on the Grand Tour. Fossati lived in Rome from 1827 and 1832 (with visits to Naples and the archaeological sites of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Capua and Paestum). These were the years of Raffaele Stern and Giuseppe Valadier's restoration work on the Arch of Titus and the Colosseum, of the reconstruction of San Paolo fuori le Mura by Pasquale Belli and the emergence of an archaeological culture (Luigi Canina and Antonio Nibby in Rome, Pietro Bianchi in Naples). Fossati did not fail to visit the construction sites and excavations underway, as is documented by numerous sketches, views and measured drawings in the archives at Morcote and Bellinzona. He had certainly gone to see St Peter's too and acquainted himself with the repair work carried out on the dome by Giovanni Poleni and Luigi Vanvitelli through the introduction of iron hoops⁷.

However, the most important work realized by Fossati (who in the meantime had been joined in Istanbul by his brother Giuseppe, who would go on to design a number of significant works himself, including the Dutch Embassy and the Naum Theatre), and one of the most prestigious assignments to which an architect could aspire in Istanbul at that time, was the restoration of the church of Hagia Sophia (in those days, as is well-known, used as a mosque). Over the centuries the building had already undergone several interventions of restoration. Among the principal ones: in 1317 during the reign of Andronicus II, in 1346/7 by Giovanni Peralta and in 1573 by the great Sinan. Two earthquakes (1766 and 1802) had undermined its stability again, to the point where one of its cupolas had collapsed in 1839.

The Fossati brothers officially took on the commission in 1847, not without opposition from Islamic clerics, who were not happy about the most

⁴ G. Goodwin, *Gaspare Fossati di Morcote and his brother Giuseppe*, in *Presence of Italy...*, op. cit., pp. 122-123. See too C. Palumbo-Fossati, *I Fossati di Morcote*, Bellinzona 1970.

⁵ See T. Lacchia, *I Fossati architetti del sultano di Turchia*, Rome 1943.

⁶ G. Yeşilkaya, op. cit., p. 82.

⁷ See R. Grassi, L. Pedrini Stanga, *La formazione di Gaspare Fossati come architetto e restauratore*, in V. Hoffmann, S.

Schlüter (eds.), *Santa Sofia ad Istanbul. Sei secoli di immagini e il lavoro di Gaspare Fossati (1847-49)*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Casa del Mantegna, Mantua 1999. On the repair of the dome of St Peter's, M. Como, *Un antico restauro statico della cupola di S. Pietro a Roma*, in *Lo specchio del cielo*, ed. by C. Conforti, Electa, Milan 1997, pp. 245-259.

important Muslim monument in the city that was the seat of the Caliphate being placed in the hands of 'infidels'. They finished the work in 1849. It had been a difficult and complex undertaking, largely due to the fact that the church/mosque was suffering from grave structural problems.

Twelve columns of the exedras were found to be misaligned and it proved necessary to replace their bases and straighten them where they were out of plumb; many of the metal tie rods of the dome and galleries had to be replaced; a circular chain was located at the base of the great dome (on the model of what had been done to St Peter's in Rome) and another chain, hidden under a plaster moulding, was inserted along its square support; two turrets with staircases, probably added at the time of Sinan's restoration, were removed to reduce the load on the structures beneath; the buttresses built in the time of Andronicus II were cleaned up and relieved of the debris accumulated over the course of time; the arches set on top of the buttresses to support the dome, judged to be an excessive burden on the structure and of no relevance to the statics of the dome, were removed; the lead cladding of the dome, damaged by seagulls and pigeons, was repaired and restored; the marble facings inside were secured again, with the gaps filled with slabs taken from the floor or reproduced in stucco; the stucco decorative friezes were remade; the three large windows of the apse were restored, the internal fittings realized at the time of the conversion of the church into a mosque were repaired, restored or remade and the new *hünkâr mahfili* (imperial loge) constructed to the design of Fossati himself. Finally the minaret built by Mehmed II was raised to make it the same height as the one constructed by Beyazid II and the whole of the outside wall was repainted in alternate stripes of mustard yellow and red.

An attempt was also made to uncover the mosaics, which had first been blackened with the smoke of burning straw to conceal them from view and then covered with a coat of plaster, but the decision was taken to postpone the action, out of fear of a reaction from Islamic zealots. Thus after the plaster had been removed and the mosaics cleaned, restored and surveyed, they were covered up again, 'so that they

may survive until they are revealed to view in the future, given that for the moment it is prohibited by religion', declared the sultan. And in confirmation of the church's conversion into a mosque, verses from the Qur'an were inscribed in large letters on the inside of the dome's base and large medallions installed with the names of Allah, Muhammad and the first six caliphs. Another Italian, Antonio Fornari, carried out the restoration of the painted parts and the geometric decorations of the plaster that had covered the mosaics⁸.

The restoration of Hagia Sophia was undoubtedly the work of greatest prominence carried out by Gaspare Fossati (with the help of his brother Giuseppe): while the new constructions he designed, despite being important commissions and works of architecture representative of the new regime of reform, do not stand out particularly from the academic neo-classical production in Europe of the time, the interventions on the great Byzantine building demonstrate the considerable engineering skills of the architect from Ticino, who has to be given the credit for having preserved for posterity the huge church, whose structures survived extremely well the earthquake of 1894 (although not the mosaic facings, many of whose tesserae fell to the ground in a golden rain).

The restoration of Hagia Sophia was not the only occasion on which the Fossati brothers showed an interest in the theme: Giuseppe took charge of a project for the area of the Hippodrome, where he set out to unearth the *spina*, its central axis, extending the excavations to the whole of the circus⁹, and submitted a proposal to the competition that the Turkish government had announced in 1866 for the restoration of the Column of Constantine (the Burnt Column on which Barborini was later to work). In this case Giuseppe had suggested proceeding with great caution: "Conserver la couleur du marbre donné par le temp (sic), se garder bien de la polir et tâcher de l'uniformer (sic) dans les nouvelles pièces à ajouter, au ton pittoresque general (sic), afin de ne pas priver le monument historique, ou affaiblir l'antiquité qui lui est due"¹⁰. Gaspare on the other hand supervised the restoration of the baths of Mustafa Nuri at Çekirge in Bursa, damaged by the earthquake of 1856¹¹.

⁸ See G. Goodwin, op. cit., pp. 124-126, and G. Fossati, *Aya Sofia, Constantinople: as recently restored by order of H.M. the sultan Abdul-Medjid. From the original drawings by Chevalier Gaspare Fossati*, London 1852.

⁹ T. Lacchia, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁰ The report, preserved in the archives in Bellinzona, is published in its entirety in T. Lacchia, op. cit., pp. 96-98.

¹¹ P. Girardelli, *Gaspare Fossati in Turchia (1837-1859): continuità, contaminazioni, trasformazioni*, in "Quasar", 1997, no. 18, p. 14.

While carrying out these important undertakings the indefatigable brothers had also taken on other, apparently minor tasks, on behalf of private aristocratic clients. These included *yalis* (summer houses built of wood on the Bosphorus), the tomb (*türbe*) of Reshid Pasha and other small-scale works, which often remained on the drawing board or in the state of the initial idea. It is worth emphasizing the fact that in these works, as in the imperial loge of Hagia Sophia, the neoclassical rigour of the official works of architecture was watered down to create a language better suited to Ottoman tradition, with ‘stylistic and typological contaminations’¹² that anticipated by several decades the architectural choices of the next generation of European architects to operate in the Ottoman capital.

Gaspare went back to Morcote and then Milan in 1862, preceded a few years earlier by his brother Giuseppe; in 1869 both took Italian citizenship, realizing the Risorgimento dream to which they had been committed since 1848. Gaspare died at Morcote in 1883, Giuseppe in 1891.

In the same years in which the Fossati brothers were working on Hagia Sophia, the Ottoman government launched a series of administrative reforms: the first building regulations were issued for Istanbul (1848) and the city was subdivided into 14 districts (1857) on the model of the Parisian *arrondissements*. On an experimental basis, however, the implementation of this new system was limited in administrative terms to the *Sixième arrondissement*, the district of Pera and Galata¹³.

In reality, the area of the Stamboul peninsula suffered from grave urban problems: a labyrinthine road system, with narrow and tortuous streets and many dead ends, and above all a great vulnerability to fires, as almost all the residential buildings in the city were constructed of wood.

Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the politician who had inspired the Tanzimât reforms, had had the chance, during his diplomatic missions in Europe, to see what was happening in terms of the urban reorganization

of the great cities of the continent: the geometric rules that inspired the town-planning schemes and regulations governing street fronts were able to bring order to the cities, making internal connections easier and allowing a better response to military and civil emergencies, especially fires, to which, as has been pointed out, the historic centre of Stamboul was particularly vulnerable: in the second half of the 19th century alone there were 229 fires in the city, some of them on a large scale like the one in the neighbourhood of Aksaray that had destroyed over 650 buildings in 1856¹⁴.

A first document, dated 1839, written in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic script and unsigned, but for these reasons in all likelihood produced by the Ottoman administration and not European experts¹⁵, had indicated the lines of intervention that were to be followed: the creation of a series of broad, tree-lined streets with pavements that would link the centre of the city with its main gates, the layout of tree-lined squares around some mosques or other public buildings, a ban on the construction of wooden buildings (or at least a requirement to build firewalls inside houses), the fixing of height limits for buildings and the definition of a hierarchy of streets on the basis of their width (from 15 metres for the broadest to 7.50 for the narrowest).

Relaxing these conditions, the building regulations of 1848 would divide the new roads to be built into three major categories of width, 7.60, 6.00 and 4.50 metres respectively, require a firewall to be installed every ten houses and call for the elimination of dead ends ‘wherever possible’.

Following the fire in Aksaray, an Italian engineer, Luigi Storari, was charged with compiling an inventory of the burnt areas and drawing up a plan of reconstruction that would take its inspiration from European rules of town planning: in fact Reshid Pasha was convinced that only Western experts had the topographic skills to undertake this task¹⁶.

The imperial order received by Storari specified that the new road scheme should be based on a regu-

¹² See: op. cit., pp. 9-18.

¹³ See S. Yerasimos, *La tentation de l’Occident – L’expérience municipale*, pp. 412-416, in S. Yerasimos, M.F. Auzepy, G. Veinstein, A. Ducellier, *Istanbul*, Paris 2002.

¹⁴ Z. Çelik, *The Italian Contribution to the Remaking of Istanbul*, in *Presence of Italy...*, op. cit., p. 128.

¹⁵ See M. Gül, R. Lamb, *Mapping, Regularizing and Modernizing Ottoman Istanbul: Aspects of the genesis of the 1839 Development Policy*, “Urban History”, 2004, no. 31, p. 425.

¹⁶ On the urban transformations in Istanbul in the 19th century see: Z. Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul. Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Seattle-London 1986; E. Ardaman, *Perspective and Istanbul, the Capital of the Ottoman Empire*, “Journal of Design History”, vol. 20, 2007, no. 2, pp. 109-130; E. La Spada, *Istanbul: il processo di occidentalizzazione della capitale ottomana nel XIX secolo*, in E. La Spada (ed.), *Città del Mediterraneo tra VIII e XIX secolo. Trasformazioni urbane tra Settecento e Novecento*, Reggio Calabria 2006, pp. 163-193.

lar geometric layout, with broad streets set at right angles. The road system he planned (1856) centred on the new Aksaray Caddesi, straightened, widened to 9.50 metres and intersected perpendicularly by secondary streets of 7.60 and 6.00 metres. To emphasize the new urban character that this portion of the city was to assume, Storari smoothed the corners of some junctions to 45 degrees, thereby creating open spaces that, while they could not be described as 'squares', made it possible to punctuate the street with buildings whose fronts could be made suitably monumental¹⁷.

The model of the more or less orthogonal road grid, interspersed with these oblique widenings, became a sort of leitmotiv of the later plans drawn up by Storari following fires in other parts of the city for as long as he held the post of municipal town planner (until 1864): for example at Mirahur in 1856 again and at Salmatomruk, Fener¹⁸ and Küçük Mustafa Paşa in 1862. Thus Istanbul was being modernized, taking on a more European look: it was precisely this that started to draw criticism from some Turkish architects, who saw it as a translation into urban planning of the 'hypocritical and unnationalistic spirit' of the Tanzimât¹⁹. Evidently the competition from Western rivals was causing some annoyance to the local specialists.

However, Luigi Storari's planning activities were not limited to the reorganization of districts of the city devastated by fire²⁰: taking advantage of the introduction of regular ferry services along the Bosphorus, he argued for the creation of two new neighbourhoods, to be used as summer residences by the European community of Pera and the Europeanised Ottoman élites, as well as the staff of foreign embassies. Thus in 1856 the 'Quartier de la Paix' was constructed in the village of Büyükdere and the following year the 'New Village in Bojagikioi [Boyacıköy]'. This last was a settlement of considerable size: 45 square blocks of 70 metres

on a side, arranged in a rectangular grid, with the main street punctuated by the usual corners at 45 degrees²¹.

Shortly after Storari's dismissal the largest fire in the history of Istanbul broke out: on 18 September 1865 the area comprised between the Sea of Marmara in the south, the Golden Horn in the north, Beyazıt Külliye in the west and the complex of Hagia Sophia/Sultan Ahmet in the east went up in flames. The reconstruction, guided by a Commission for Road Improvement (Islahat-ı Turuk Komisyonu – İTK) set up for the purpose, was carried out between 1865 and 1869²².

The overall plan drawn up by the İTK did not set itself the sole objective of reconstructing the area with regular grids of streets and buildings more resistant to fire: given that the intervention concerned one of the most monumental parts of the city, criteria of urban planning were sought that would be able to 'make the most' of its principal components. In the spirit of the time, the principle of isolation of the monument, widely applied all over Europe in those years, was adopted, freeing it from the nearby buildings that, over the course of the years, had obstructed or marred its view. Thus the wooden houses adjacent to Hagia Sophia that had not been destroyed by the fire were demolished, their place taken by a large square, with the aim of establishing a visual connection between the two contrasting monumental buildings: Hagia Sophia itself and the great mosque of Sultan Ahmet²³.

Another monument, smaller in size but no less important, stood on Divanyolu Caddesi, the old Byzantine artery linking Hagia Sophia with the city's ancient forums: this was the Column of Constantine, erected by the founder of the city and one of its oldest surviving monuments.

The job of laying out the area around the column was given to another Italian, the architect Giovanni Battista Barborini (or Barberini), who was already

¹⁷ Z. Çelik, *The Italian Contribution...*, in *Presence of Italy in the Architecture*, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁸ See M. Kapiti and Ö.S. Ökten, *The Structural Systems of Semi-masonry Houses built at Fener (Istanbul) in 19th Century*, in P.B. Lourenço, P. Roca (eds.), *Historical Constructions*, Guimarães 2001. The essay describes the building techniques adopted for the reconstruction of the district: masonry on the outside and wooden structures inside, with particular attention paid to the control of fire in kitchens.

¹⁹ Z. Çelik, *The Italian Contribution...*, op. cit.

²⁰ On the plans for reconstruction of the districts destroyed by fire see: P. Pinon, *Trasformazioni urbane tra il XVIII e il XIX*

secolo, in "Rassegna", *Istanbul, Costantinopoli, Bisanzio*, no. 72, pp. 53-61; P. Pinon, *The Parceled city. Istanbul in the Nineteenth Century*, in A. Petruccioli, *The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture*, Cambridge (MA) 1998. Storari had also been charged with drawing up the cadastral plan for the city of Izmir, in 1854; see Ö. Eyüce, *Konak Square. From Past to Present in Pictures*, in "Ege Mimarlık", 2000-03, no. 3, p. 5.

²¹ Z. Çelik, *The Italian Contribution...*, op. cit., p. 130.

²² See P. Pinon, *The Parceled City...*, op. cit. In one section the set of building regulations and guidelines for the drawing up of plans of reconstruction is described in detail.

²³ Z. Çelik, *The Italian Contribution...*, op. cit., p. 132.

known for a series of important commissions carried out in Istanbul in those years:²⁴ he had collaborated on the design of the Ottoman Pavilion at the Paris Exposition of 1867, under the guidance of the Frenchman L. Pervillé, designer of the pavilion of the Ottoman General Exposition of 1863, the first ‘Orientalist’ building to be constructed in Istanbul by a European architect. The Paris project consisted of a complex of three buildings: a mosque, a kiosk and a bath, inspired by Ottoman and, more in general, Eastern and Persian architecture.

Barborini had gone on to design many buildings for private individuals in Pera, including three theatres, as well as a small square and a short avenue in front of Pera Town Hall.

Barborini’s intervention in the area of the Column of Constantine (the Burnt Column or, to the Turks, Çemberlitaş, the ‘Hooped Column’) consisted in the restoration of the construction (1866), carried out on the basis of the studies made by Gaspare Fossati earlier²⁵, and the laying out of a small triangular square around it, intended, in line with 19th-century practice, to enhance the monument by clearing it of the constructions that were smothering it. In addition to the intervention on the Column of Constantine, Cengiz Can attributes to Giovanni Battista Barborini the second University Building (today the Museum of Printing Press), the Palazzo Corpi – now the seat of the US Consulate – and the Town Hall of Beyoğlu. Afife Batur also assigns the Latin Catholic Church in Kadıköy to him²⁶.

The attention paid to the city’s monuments is an indication of the change in attitude that was shortly to take place with regard to Istanbul’s historic heritage, and not just that of the classical and Byzantine city but also the Ottoman one.

The Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Külliye can be considered the earliest example of Orientalizing eclecticism realized in the city. It is made up of a mosque, a mausoleum, a fountain, an *imaret* or soup kitchen, a library and a school. The works, carried out between 1870 and 1872, are attributed to three architects, an Armenian (Agop Balyan) and two Italians, G. Cocifi and Pietro Montani, who is referred to in the Ottoman sources as Montani Efendi. It is not clear exactly who designed each of the different buildings²⁷, but Montani Efendi’s knowledge of Ottoman architecture is undeniable: in 1873 he would make an important contribution to a volume on Ottoman architecture, published in three languages, French, German and Turkish, and commissioned by the Ministry of Public Works for the Universal Exposition in Vienna²⁸. On that occasion Montani had prepared several measured drawings of monumental Ottoman works of architecture and numerous drawings of decorative details. Although the work is criticized today for not having fully grasped the ‘tectonic’ aspect of classical Ottoman constructions and of having limited itself to surveys of the plans of the buildings and some of their decorative elements²⁹, it can nevertheless be regarded as one of the earliest examples of an attention on the part of European architects for Ottoman architecture as works of historical and artistic value worthy of being studied and presented to the world for admiration. Montani even attempted a classification of Ottoman architectural orders, along the lines of those of classical antiquity.

The Pertevniyal complex itself had not been free of casual touches: in the mosque the use of lancet windows, some ornaments of Indian origin and a dubious handling of the architectural elements of transition between the outer walls of the mosque and the dome above make it a building ‘in the Turkish

²⁴ See A. Batur, *Italian Architects and Istanbul*, in *Presence of Italy...*, op. cit., pp. 136-138.

²⁵ A. Batur, *Italian Architects...*, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁶ See C. Can, *Tanzimat and Architecture*, in N. Akin, A. Batur and S. Batur (eds.), *7 Centuries of Ottoman Architecture: A Supra-National Heritage*, Istanbul 1999, pp. 135-142; A. Batur, *Notizie sugli architetti italiani o di origine italiana che hanno lavorato a Istanbul e su Raimondo D’Aronco*, in V. Comoli (ed.), *Storia e restauro del Liberty in Turchia*, Turin 2006. C. Can also refers to the work of another Levantine architect: Giorgio Domenico Stampa, designer of the Iranian Embassy and the Italian Hospital in Istanbul.

²⁷ A. Batur, *Italian Architects...*, p. 138. Diana Barillari attributes the architectural design of the mosque to Baylan and its decoration to Montani, while assigning its monumental entrance to Cociffi. See D. Barillari, *Architettura neo-ottomana*

a Istanbul. Dalla teoria alla costruzione, in L. Mozzoni and S. Santini (eds.), *Architettura dell’Ecclettismo. La dimensione mondiale*, Naples 2006, pp. 261-293.

²⁸ The text in French is by Marie de Launay, the drawings are by Montani Efendi, Boghos Chachian and Maillard, while the chapter ‘Documents techniques’ is by Montani; Editore Sebah, Constantinople 1873.

²⁹ See: D. Barillari, *Architettura neo-ottomana...*, op. cit., in which many pages are devoted to commenting on the work; P. Girardelli, *Pietro Montani e il concetto di “stile ottoman” nella seconda metà dell’Ottocento*, in *Architettura e architetti italiani ad Istanbul tra il XIX e il XX secolo*, proceedings of the conference at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Istanbul, 1995, pp. 79-86; and A. Batur, *Italian Architects...*, p. 138.

manner' rather than a construction belonging fully to the Ottoman tradition. On the other hand such a free-and-easy approach was typical of much European 'revival' architecture, which often made use of pastiches of styles and decorative motifs in the construction of buildings that were supposed to put the public in mind of a historical era or a particular 'exotic' function³⁰.

Another Italian contribution to the understanding of Istanbul's architectural heritage deserves mention: the volume published in 1890 by Giuseppe Fossati (the younger of the two brothers responsible for the restoration of Hagia Sophia), a year prior to his death³¹. It contains the studies that the brothers had carried out over the course of their long stay in Istanbul.

Thus the last decades of the 19th century saw the emergence of new tendencies: the interest in Ottoman monuments went hand-in-hand with the first 'neo-Turkish' reactions to the rapid Westernization which had been forced on Istanbul society. The neoclassical language – although contaminated by touches of Orientalism – that had characterized the period of the Tanzimât gave way to a form of eclecticism partly inspired by European models and partly attentive to a revival of the Ottoman and in general Oriental tradition of construction and, above all, ornamentation.

This tendency had already found expression in some buildings for the sultan and his court, in particular in the grand new residence of Dolmabahçe, constructed between 1844 and 1856 in the place of the previous wooden structure built on the orders of Mahmud II by Garabed and Nikolos Baylan, heirs of a family of Armenian architects in the service of the imperial court.

The successor of Abdülmecid, who died in 1861, was Abdülaziz, another fervent admirer of the West. Under his rule the process of modernization of the empire continued: a rail link between Istanbul and Europe (1874), construction of the city's first underground railway (1875), modernization of the Navy. But it was also a period of economic crisis and political unrest: the sultan was deposed by a group of officers in 1876 and found dead a few days later. After a short interregnum, a new sultan ascended the throne, Abdul Hamid II. The initiator of an anti-Armenian policy, he dismissed the Baylans

and turned to new architects of European origin or training: it was the turn of Alexander Vallauray and Raimondo D'Aronco.

The former, born 1850 in Istanbul, was of uncertain nationality (in some documents his name is given as Vallauri), but certainly French by training, while the other was from Gemona, in Friuli, where he was born in 1857.

Vallauray studied at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris between 1869 and 1878. In Istanbul he founded the department of architecture at the School of Fine Arts, devoting himself to teaching for 25 years and training the Turkish architects who would go on to become the protagonists of the Turkish national revival in the early years of the republic (Vedat Tek and Kemalettin Bey in particular).

Both Vallauray and D'Aronco were in Istanbul at the time of the 1894 earthquake. D'Aronco had arrived a year earlier, commissioned by the Turkish government to draw up the plans for the pavilions of the second National Ottoman Exposition. The earthquake forced the cancellation of the expo and D'Aronco was given the job instead of helping to restore the buildings that had been damaged, in particular at Hagia Sophia and the Grand Bazaar.

For the bazaar D'Aronco and Vallauray had come up with a highly inventive scheme: the idea was to preserve the walls that had survived the earthquake and rebuild the roofs with new vaults made of brick but supported by a metal framework made up of small inclined pillars on which stood pointed arches. However, the plan was considered too innovative and the solution proposed by the Armenian Sarkis Baylan, architect in chief of the imperial palaces, was preferred. It took a more traditional approach, which entailed reconstructing the collapsed vaults in the old way.

Milva Giacomelli has reconstructed the debate that took place over the restoration of the Grand Bazaar from the newspapers of the time³². The damage had been great but the monumental complex had not been destroyed completely: some parts had remained standing, while in others the vaults or the domes had collapsed. A proposal had been made to demolish the bazaar and reconstruct it in iron and glass on the model of European markets. The local newspapers published in English and French ("The Levant Herald", "Stamboul" and "The Oriental

³⁰ See D. Barillari, *Architettura neo-ottomana...*, op. cit.

³¹ G. Fossati, *Rilievi Storico-artistici sull'Architettura Bizantina*, Milan 1890.

³² M. Giacomelli, *Alcune precisazioni sull'attività in Turchia di Raimondo D'Aronco attraverso i quotidiani del tempo*, in "Quasar", 1997, no. 18, pp. 70-71.

Advertiser/Le Moniteur Oriental”) all opposed this idea. A lengthy article in “The Levant Herald” of 11 January 1895, which must have been written by an architect given the technical knowledge displayed, makes the tone of the discussion clear: “[...] the bazaar of Stamboul is not a market but a bazaar; i.e. a place where art objects are made and sold, where exclusively Oriental industries display their products. [...] The Grand Bazaar is, in the first place, an Oriental monument [...] let us preserve for the Orient its delightful carved and notched constructions, with rounded, elegant and slender forms [...]. Despite the large number of ruined galleries, the Grand Bazaar could be restored with the help of ironwork, with a judicious system of chains and turnbuckles installed to support the walls [...]. Thus the reconstruction of the bazaar can be done in masonry [...] it is possible to restore certain parts that are perfectly reparable [...]”³³. The argument put forward by “The Levant Herald” proved persuasive and in 1898 the restored or reconstructed sections of the bazaar (about half of the entire complex) were opened again.

Other works were supervised by D’Aronco, who had been appointed inspector general of the repair of all the mosques, the ancient city walls and the buildings of the Seraglio that had been damaged by the earthquake. He worked on Hagia Sophia from 1894 to 1902: here he found damage had been done to the dome, to some of the pendentives and to the semidome near the narthex, where cracks had opened up again, and proposed intervening with iron hoops, on the model of what had been done by Fossati about 50 years earlier. However, the works led to the destruction of part of the mosaics saved during the previous restoration, which were removed owing to the poor condition of the bed on which they were laid.

The architect from Friuli was engaged in other restoration work: on the fountain of Mahmud I in the courtyard of Hagia Sophia (1894-1900), on the fountain-cistern of Bahçekapu (1894-1900), on the mosques of Beyazid II, Sultan Ahmet, Selimiye, Yeni Camii, Kahrié Camii (formerly the church of the Holy Saviour in Chora), the Mihrimah Sultan Camii at Edirnekapi, etc. Finally he took care of the reconstruction of the Yalova Thermal Baths, an archaeological discovery attributed to research carried out by D’Aronco himself (1897-1901)³⁴.

At the same time as he worked on these restorations D’Aronco received several important public commissions: for the Imperial Military School of Medicine at Haydarpaşa (with Vallauray, 1893-1903), the Charity Bazaar at Yıldız (a temporary construction, 1897), the School of Arts and Crafts and the Museum of the Janissaries (1895-1900), the Hamidié Orphanage at Acıbadem (with Vallauray, 1900) and the summer residence of the Italian Embassy at Tarabya (1903-06, a modern reinterpretation of the wooden *yalis* on the Bosphorus). In all these works D’Aronco and Vallauray made use of a historicist language that combined Western stylistic features with clear hints of the so-called Ottoman baroque: the doors and windows of the Museum of the Janissaries cite those of the *Nuruosmaniye* Mosque, while the overhangs of the roof above the main entrance of the museum, like those of the Imperial School of Medicine, echo the motifs of the monumental portals and gates of the time of Mahmud II (Serasker Gate, Sublime Porte – but also the later portal of entrance to Dolmabahçe); the pinnacles and three-light windows of the Imperial School of Medicine also allude to Oriental and Persian motifs. It was no pedantic imitation, however, but a reinterpretation in a modern key of the last original phase of Ottoman architecture, the one stretching from the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th, that D’Aronco and Vallauray deployed in contrast to the neoclassicism or eclectic pastiches that had dominated the middle years of the 19th century, seeking the guiding thread of a tradition while not rejecting modernity.

The references to 18th-century Ottoman architecture are even more evident in D’Aronco’s minor works, like the series of fountains, only one of which was realized, in Tophane (1896), where, once again, the large overhang of the roof is a clear allusion to the great fountain of Ahmed III in front of the entrance to Topkapi, or the Şale Kiosk (1898).

It was for Levantine private clients, on the other hand, that D’Aronco introduced into Istanbul the Art Nouveau style, or rather that of the Viennese Sezession: for example in the collection hall and library for Memduh Pasha at Arnavutköy (1904) and in the house for the sultan’s personal couturier, Jean Botter, built at Beyoğlu in 1907 and today unfortunately in a poor state of preservation. Other

³³ The passage has been translated from the version of the entire article published in French by Milva Giacomelli: see M. Giacomelli, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

³⁴ On D’Aronco’s activity as a restorer in Istanbul see also D. Barillari, *Raimondo D’Aronco*, Rome-Bari 1995.

projects made use of the same language, such as Edhem Bey's house at Yeniköy (1900), Santoro House in Pera (1907) and the house on Anadolu Caddesi in Istanbul (1907).

D'Aronco produced many other designs, not all of which were realized, during the years he spent in Istanbul (1893-1909). Among them it is worth mentioning the small complex of the *Ṭeyh Zafir Külliyesi*: a tomb, a small library and a fountain on the hill of Yıldız. Here the Sezessionist elements are combined in a highly original way with Oriental motifs (a *mihrab*, *muqarnas*, geometric and floral decorations), but reinterpreted in a modern key³⁵.

So the short period of Art Nouveau's dominance in European left substantial traces in the Ottoman capital. Yet the style did not have time to find Turkish adherents: in 1909 Abdul Hamid II, the sultan who had patronized D'Aronco, was deposed by the military uprising of the Young Turks. Not many years later (1923) Atatürk's nationalist *coup d'état* led to the foundation of the republic and the transfer of the capital to Ankara. For several decades Istanbul went through a period of decline, while Turkish secular nationalism gave the task of celebrating its advent to new architects, with new ideas. After the rupture caused by the Italo-Turkish War, other Italians were to find work in Turkey, chiefly in Ankara: Giulio Mongeri (1873-1953), Edoardo De' Nari (1874-1954), Paolo Vietti-Violi (1882-1965) and in more recent times Luigi Piccinato, Bruno Zevi and Giancarlo De Carlo. However, it would be left to the young architects trained at European schools but brought up in the political climate of Atatürk's republic to assume the responsibility for renewing the public architecture of the great state and financial institutions, as well as that of tackling

the major problem of the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage: Vedat Tek, Kemalettin Bey, Ziya Gökalp, Ali Saim Ülgen and Vasfi He. For this new generation the European Orientalism that took its inspiration from the Ottoman baroque or that included within it more general references to Persian or Mogul architecture had been synonymous with decadence. New references were found in the purity of what was regarded as the 'classical' style of the great architect Sinan, seen however through the filter of the work of Paul Bonatz – who taught in Turkey for a long time – and, more in general, the architecture of the European authoritarian regimes of the period between the wars³⁶.

Important restoration work would be carried out on the Süleymaniye Camii and Külliye (Ali Saim Ülgen), on Sultan Ahmet again, on Fatih Camii, on Yeni Camii, on Hagia Sophia (Kemalettin Bey), etc.,³⁷ while the Frenchman Henri Prost was commissioned to draw up the first systematic master plan for the city of Istanbul (1936), which would tackle in depth the problem of safeguarding the city's historic skyline and its monumental zone (Hagia Sophia, Sultan Ahmet, the Hippodrome, the Byzantine city walls).

Thus the foundation of the republic brought to a close the 'Levantine' phase of the city's architecture. The Italian community would gradually lose its political, cultural and demographic importance, reduced to a few thousand people, most of them elderly. Yet it left an indelible mark on the city, and one which deserves not only to be remembered but also preserved from neglect and decay.

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³⁵ On the work of D'Aronco in general and in Istanbul in particular see, among others, the following works: M. Nicoletti, *Raimondo D'Aronco*, Milan 1955; M. Nicoletti, *D'Aronco e l'architettura Liberty*, Rome 1982; V. Freni and C. Varnier, *Raimondo D'Aronco. L'opera completa*, Padua 1983; D. Barillari, *Raimondo D'Aronco*, op. cit.; and the already cited works M. Giacomelli (1995) and Afife Batur (1990 and 2006). On architecture in Istanbul at the turn of the century see too: E. Godoli, *A l'orient seule l'architecture orientale convient*, in „Rassegna”, *Istanbul, Costantinopoli, Bisanzio*, no. 72, pp. 77-84.

³⁶ See M. Bernardini, *Impact of Sinan on Turkish Revivalism*, in “Environmental Design”, 1987, nos. 1-2, pp. 216-221. On the story of the preservation and restoration (and destruction) of monuments in Istanbul in the early decades of the 20th century see: N. Altınyıldız, *The Architectural Heritage of Istanbul and the Ideology of Preservation*, in “Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World”, 2007, no. 24, pp. 281-305.

³⁷ See N. Altınyıldız, op. cit.