

Chapter 7

VISIONS AND TRANSITIONS OF A PILGRIMAGE OF CURIOSITY: PIETRO DELLA VALLE'S TRAVEL TO ISTANBUL (1614–1615)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Pietro Della Valle's travel narratives related to his visit to Istanbul (1614–1615) during his voyage to the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India. It focuses on the Ottoman capital; its architecture, including mosques, mausoleums, palaces, and kiosks related to the sultans and dignitaries that Della Valle covered extensively in his travel accounts; as well as other "curiosities." Della Valle's self-fashioning through his pilgrimage of curiosity reveals the identity and the milieu of this Roman nobleman who styled himself as *il pellegrino* (the pilgrim). His travel to Turkey in the early seventeenth century coincided with the reign of Sultan Ahmed I, a time when Europe and the Ottoman Empire were redefining their relationship. Published in the 1650's, Della Valle's *Viaggi*, describing his travels, was widely disseminated throughout Europe. The essay analyzes how Della Valle connected the European/Italian and Ottoman worlds through myriad boundary crossings as a cultural mediator, translator, and transmitter during a time of transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque age. The chapter's conclusion suggests that Della Valle's travel accounts not only communicated the Ottoman World to European audiences of his time but also played a significant role in shaping European perception of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, before the introduction of Orientalism.

Keywords: Pietro Della Valle, travel, curiosity, Istanbul, cultural transitions

In memory of Semra Germaner (1944–2015)

DURING HIS TRAVELS extending from the Ottoman Empire to Persia and India, aristocrat and traveller Pietro Della Valle (1586–1652) spent more than a year, from

August 15, 1614 to September 25, 1615, in Istanbul.¹ Della Valle's detailed letters recounting his travels began to be published during the second half of the seventeenth century and were disseminated in Europe rapidly. Della Valle's *Viaggi*,² relating his travels in the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India was printed in Italian in Rome in 1650–1663 with the note “*con licenza de' Superiori*” (permitted to be published). This book was later translated to French (1661–1663), Dutch (1664–1665), and German (1674). *Viaggi*'s sections covering Della Valle's travels to India and accounts related to his return to Italy were translated to English (1664). In later years, *Viaggi*, which had been widely circulated through Europe, became a source of inspiration to travellers as well as one of the best-known and most influential literary works of the seventeenth century.³ Goethe indicated that Della Valle was one of the writers who introduced him to the East and was a primary source in the structuring of his work *West-östliche Divan*.⁴

Unlike his predecessors, Della Valle was neither a missionary nor a tradesman; as he pointed out, he was a pilgrim and his journey was “decidedly a pilgrimage of curiosity.”⁵ His observations as a self-fashioned nobleman are enlightening about his identity and taste. His travels in Turkey coincide with the period of Ahmed I (r. 1603–1617), a time when Europe and the Ottoman Empire were redefining their relationship. Della Valle's *La Turchia*, the first volume of his travel accounts, emerged in 1650. Although considerable research has been devoted to Della Valle and his travels, rather less attention has been paid to his visit to Istanbul. This essay investigates Della Valle's perceptions

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1 Ettore Rossi, “Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano (1586–1652),” *Oriente Moderno* 33 (1953), 51.

2 Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino, descritti da lui medesimo in lettere familiari all'erudito su amico Mario Schipano. Divisi in tre parti cioè: La Turchia, La Persia e l'India colla vita e ritratto dell'autore* (Brighton: G. Gancia, 1843); For the first edition of the book see Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il pellegrino: con minuto ragguaglio di tutte le cose notabili osservate in essi: descritti da lui medesimo in 54. lettere familiari ...; mandate in Napoli all'erudito ... Mario Schipano: diuisi in tre parti, cioè la Turchia, la Persia, e l'India ...* (Rome: Appresso Vitale Mascarde, 1650–1663).

3 Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *A Century of Advance: Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 380.

4 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the West-East Divan*, trans. Martin Bidney and Peter Anton von Arnim (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010).

5 Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Della Valle, Pietro (1586–1652)” in *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*. vol. 1, *A to F*, ed. Jennifer Speake (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), 326.

and interpretations of Istanbul's visual culture "between two worlds"—European and Ottoman—in the early modern period. We focus on his view of the Ottoman capital, its architecture, including mosques, mausoleums, palaces and kiosks related to the sultans and dignitaries that Della Valle covered extensively in his travel accounts, as well as other "curiosities." In so doing, we aim to reveal how he connected the European/Italian and Ottoman worlds through myriad boundary crossings as a cultural mediator, translator, and transmitter during a time of transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque age.⁶

A Self-Fashioned Man: Pietro Della Valle's Life and Travels

Pietro Della Valle was born in Rome on April 11, 1586.⁷ There were two cardinals from the Della Valle family, one of the noble families of Rome, during the terms of Pope Honorius II and Pope Leo X. The family gave its name to a street in Rome and a church (Sant' Andrea Della Valle) built in the 1590s. Della Valle, who received a Catholic education, was interested in music and literature and was thoroughly acquainted with the history and culture of the antique world. He was also a member of the *Accademia degli Umoresti*, one of the leading culture academies of Rome and Naples.⁸ Della Valle might have encountered Oriental manuscripts in Naples.⁹

The expedition to Barbary that Della Valle undertook with the Spanish fleet in 1611 aroused his interest in the East. In pursuit of this interest, Della Valle decided on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The suggestion of his close friend Mario Schipano,¹⁰ an academician from Naples, to make this trip influenced his decision. Della Valle and Schipano agreed to correspond and exchange information during his travels. Della

6 See Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani, eds., *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550–1700* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

7 For Della Valle's life and travels see Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Vita di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino* (Rome, 1662); Ignazio Ciampi, *Della vita e Delle Opere di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino: Monografia Illustrata con Nuovi Documenti* (Rome: Barbèra, 1880); Luigi Bianconi, *Viaggio in Levante di Pietro della Valle* (Florence: Sansoni, 1942); Chiara Cardini, *La Porta d'Oriente: Lettere di Pietro della Valle: Istanbul 1614* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2001); George Bull, *The Pilgrim. The Travels of Pietro della Valle* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); J. D. Gurney, "Pietro della Valle: The Limits of Perception," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 49 (1986): 103–16; Severina Parodi, *Cose e Parole nei Viaggi di Pietro Della Valle* (Florence: Presso L'Accademia Della Crusca, 1987); J. H. Whitfield, *Pietro Della Valle* (Birmingham, 1992); Ettore Rossi, "Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano," 49–64.

8 Michele Maylander, *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia*, vol. 5 (Bologna: Cappelli, 1930), 369–81.

9 See *La Conoscenza del Mondo Islamico a Napoli (XV–XIX secolo) / The Islamic World Through Neapolitan Eyes (Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)*, ed. Luca Berardi (Naples: Università di Napoli, 2015).

10 Even though he sometimes uses friendly language, the fact that he addresses him as "your highness" (V. S.) shows his deep respect for Schipano, who seems to have directed Della Valle's letters with his questions.

Valle planned to describe the events, customs, people, and places, and Schipano was to organize the letters in a historical narration. Guided by his curiosity and considering the Orient “a valuable subject of learning,”¹¹ Della Valle’s travel was a part of his self-fashioning.¹²

Della Valle’s travel started in Venice in 1614 and extended to the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India. During his trip to the Ottoman Empire between the years 1614 and 1617, Della Valle visited Istanbul, Alexandria, Cairo, the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Baghdad. He met Sitti Maani Gioerida in Baghdad and married her in 1616 after which they continued the journey together. Pietro and Maani proceeded to Persia in 1617 and witnessed the Safavid campaign against the Ottomans in northern Persia. In his letters, Della Valle described Lar, Isfahan, Persepolis, and Shiraz in great detail. Upon his wife’s death, on December 30, 1621,¹³ during their visit to Persia, Della Valle had her body embalmed using the techniques he had learned in Egypt, and he carried it with him for almost five and a half years until she was buried in his family sepulchre in Rome with a grandiose funeral ceremony on March 27, 1627.¹⁴

After his travels to Western India in 1623–1624, he set out for Muscat and Basra. On his return trip, he travelled to Alexandria and then set sail for Italy, arriving on February 5, 1626. Della Valle continued his studies and, with his particular interest in music and literature, set up a “cabinet of curiosities” in his palace.¹⁵ He died in 1652 and, like his wife Sitti Maani Gioerida, was buried in the family sepulchre in the Santa Maria in Ara Coeli Church in Rome.

The information and descriptions in the letters Della Valle wrote during his twelve years of travel to the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mongol Empires are one of the major sources regarding the early seventeenth century characteristics of the places that he visited. Della Valle’s pilgrimage, as Rubiés writes, “was a quest for a positive and universal human quality behind cultural and religious differences.”¹⁶ As a “cosmopolitan humanist traveler”¹⁷ and on-scene witness, Della Valle’s travel accounts narrating Istanbul reflect multifold transitions across both time and geography.

11 Michael Harrigan, *Veiled Encounters: Representing the Orient in 17th-century French Travel Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 11.

12 Robert John Weston Evans and Alexander Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

13 Rossi, “Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano,” 52.

14 See the memorandum book which contains poems in Arabic, Armenian, French, Greek, Italian, Latin, Persian, Spanish, and Turkish: *Funerale della Signora Sitti Maani Gioerida della Valle celebrato in Roma l'Anno 1627 descritto dal Signor Girolamo Rocchi* (Rome, 1627).

15 Joseph Connors, “Borromini, Hagia Sophia and S. Vitale,” in *Architectural Studies in memory of Richard Krautheimer*, ed. Cecil Striker (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1996), 44–45.

16 Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 366.

17 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 397.

The Road to Istanbul: Troy and the Shared Tradition of Pilgrimage

After going from Naples to Rome, Pietro Della Valle went to Venice on June 8, 1614 to set out from Malamocco on an old galleon named *Gran Delfino*. Once the ship left the Italian peninsula behind, Della Valle begins to quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus, in a sense, he makes Virgil's work his guide on this journey and he refers to the lines "*Unde iter Italiam cursusque brevissimus undis*" (and the shortest course by sea to Italy) from the *Aeneid* for the Ceraunian Mountains (Albania) that are the travellers' first station.¹⁸ Della Valle calls the East "*Aurora*," following Virgil.¹⁹ This location, also referred to as the Otranto Strait, is the shortest passage to the east. The reference reminds the reader of the Ottoman campaign to Otranto in 1480–1481, known in Europe as the Ottoman invasion of Italy.²⁰ Correspondingly, when describing Europe's interest in the Turks, Yérasimos identifies the first period as starting with the conquest of Constantinople and extending to the death of Mehmed II, with some highlights such as the conquest of Negroponte and the capture of Otranto. He identifies the second period as "beginning in the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent and ending with the Ottoman–Venice Treaty (1573) following the Battle of Lepanto."²¹ By citing geography on his road to Istanbul, Della Valle is also referring to history, as can also be seen in the following lines.

As the voyage proceeded, the ship passed close to the ruins of antique Buthrotum, present-day Epirus south of Albania. After staying four days in Corfu, Della Valle headed for Zakynthos Island. He states that on the way he saw the Echinades islands where a sea battle took place earlier, most probably referring to the Battle of Actium or/and the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. At his next stop, after Zakynthos and on the way to Chios, he notes "Negropont" that witnessed the Ottoman–Venetian battle of 1463–1479. Following his stay in Chios, Della Valle proceeded to Tenedos on August 3, 1614. He went by boat from Tenedos to Troy, a venue he had read a lot about, with his servants, Tommaso and Lorenzo, and a priest named Andrea. They were joined by a Franciscan monk from Istanbul. Although Della Valle believed he was seeing the ruins of Antique Troy, he had in fact encountered ruins of the Roman period.²² After viewing the ruins and flora of the area, Della Valle and his companions returned to Tenedos, where they spent the night.²³

Moreover, intending to present the historical geography of his destinations, Della Valle collates quotations from mythology, works of writers of antiquity²⁴ as well as those of his contemporaries, and his personal experience. For instance, it is obvious that Della Valle employed Filippo Ferrari's *Epitome geographicum: in quattuor libros divisum* published

¹⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, III:293.

¹⁹ Rossi, "Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano," 59.

²⁰ For the Ottoman occupation of Otranto see Norman Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453–1505* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²¹ Stéphane Yérasimos, *Hommes et Idées dans L'Espace Ottoman* (Istanbul: Éditions Isis, 1997), 49.

²² Rossi, "Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano," 51.

²³ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 3–5, 9, 16.

²⁴ These included Procopius and Solinus as well.

in 1605; a copy of this book with Della Valle's own notes is preserved at Biblioteca Estense in Modena.²⁵ Pierre Bélon's *Les observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses mémorables trouvées en Grèce, Asie, Judée, Égypte, Arabie et autres pays estranges*, published in 1553, is also one of the major sources that he consulted.²⁶ He referred to Bélon for existing information as well as a way of highlighting his own new, and contradictory, information. For instance, in Troy, quoting Virgil as well as the writings of Pierre Bélon, Della Valle indicates the existence of structures that Bélon did not record.²⁷ He writes of taking a stone from these "precious ruins," ascending to the highest point, and drawing a sketch—to be coloured later—of the area, including Mount Ida. By reporting that the numerous column bases he saw at the seaside in Troy were not smaller than those of the *Rotonda* [Pantheon] in Rome, Della Valle connects the two cities to each other.

Troy holds an important place in his first letter describing his journey to Istanbul. One reason that Della Valle gave such wide coverage to Troy is no doubt the many meanings attributed to the city for centuries, such as the legend of Troy. One of the first of these attributes is the belief that the ancestry of the Romans goes back to Troy. In this context, Della Valle describes Troy with a quote from Virgil: "*et gentis cunabula nostrae*" (the cradle of our races).²⁸ Another aspect of the importance of Troy is its embodiment of the notions of East/West as well as the concepts of "empire" and "dominion."²⁹ Ousterhout points out that following the inclusion of Asia Minor in the Roman Empire, Troy came to be considered the "mother city" of Rome and that "pilgrimage" to Troy became an ideological obligation for Roman emperors.³⁰ Maintaining this antique tradition, after the conquest of Istanbul the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II visited the city³¹ previously visited by the Roman emperors Julius Caesar, Hadrian, and Caracalla.³² Della Valle, who went to see the city just before his arrival in Istanbul, considered Troy the first important stop of his pilgrimage. Before reaching the Ottoman capital, he once again reminds readers of the key concepts of the Trojan legend. However, Della Valle presents the ancient traits of these settlements in mythology rather than describing their use by the Ottomans. Noting that the Dardanelles divide Europe from Asia, he draws a parallel with

25 Salvante, *Il Pellegrino in Oriente*, 290.

26 Pierre Bélon, *Les observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses mémorables trouvées en Grèce, Asie, Judée, Égypte, Arabie et autres pays estranges* (Paris: G. Corrozet, 1553). Pierre Bélon's book is noteworthy about displaying the botanical diversity at the Ottoman Lands to Europe. See also Luigi Zangheri, "Il Giardino Ottomano, L'Italia e la Cultura Europea," in *Incontri di Civiltà nel Mediterraneo. L'Impero Ottoman e L'Italia del Rinascimento, Storia, Arte e Architettura*, ed. Alireza Naser Eslami (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2014), 91.

27 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 11–12, 15.

28 Virgil, *Aeneid*, III:105.

29 Robert Ousterhout, "The East, the West, and the Appropriation of the Past in Early Ottoman Architecture" *Gesta* 43 (2004), 165.

30 Ousterhout, "The East, the West, and the Appropriation," 165.

31 Kritovoulos, *Kritovulos Tarihi 1451–1467*, trans. Anı Çokona (Istanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2012), 537.

32 Ousterhout, "The East, the West, and the Appropriation," 165.

the Strait of Messina. In his narrative, geographical citations such as Messina, Otranto, and Negroponte tacitly become historical zones of connection. As a “cosmopolitan humanist traveller,”³³ when describing structures and geography, Della Valle generally draws parallels with Italy and accentuates the resemblances rather than the differences between Italy and the Ottoman Empire.

The “On-Scene” Witness: Topography of the Ottoman Capital and Urban Projects

Della Valle departed from Gallipoli on a small boat and reached Istanbul on August 15, 1614. The letters written by Della Valle, who came to Istanbul at the age of twenty-eight, show that he was a very curious, exceptionally attentive person who had a facility for languages and could easily establish contacts with people. Della Valle lived in Pera in a house that was connected to the French embassy where Achille de Harlay de Sancy, a linguist and ambassador interested in the Orient, was in mission (1611–1620).³⁴ Della Valle usually sent his letters to Naples with a Dominican priest.³⁵ The ten letters penned from Istanbul give detailed descriptions of locations, people, life, and events of the Ottoman capital. As an on-scene witness, he observed this period in an accurate and detailed manner; thus his letters are of a documentary character.

His letter dated October 25, 1614 is from Istanbul. He must have thought that Schipano, to whom the letter is addressed, wanted him first to describe the works of Antiquity in the city, as he begins his own observations with the comment that, having studied the earlier works on this subject, Petrus Gyllius has provided lots of information and that he (Della Valle) would be unable to say anything more. Gyllius’s *De Bosphoro Thracio libri III* and *De topographia Constantinopoleos et de illius Antiquitatibus libri IV* dated 1561, describing Istanbul’s antiquities, was one of Della Valle’s main sources.³⁶ In his letters, Della Valle indicates that he aims to follow the path of Gyllius who had visited Istanbul fifty years earlier. In contrast to Gyllius, however, Della Valle was interested in Ottoman Istanbul as well as its antiquities.

Hester, in her study on Baroque travel writing, argues that *Viaggi* presents a “performative (and theatrical) force” that “moves along several interconnected lines.”³⁷ Through his narration, it is often seen that Della Valle acts as a performer and spectator. For instance, Della Valle writes that he has counted more than seven hills in Istanbul

³³ Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 397.

³⁴ For Harlay and Della Valle see Emanuel Constantin Antoche, “Un Ambassadeur Français à la Porte Ottomane: Achille de Harlay, Baron de Sancy et de la Mole (1611–1619),” in *Istoria ca datorie. Omagiu Academicianului Ioan Aurel Pop*, ed. Ioan Bolovan and Ovidiu Ghița (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Romana, Centrul de Studii Transilvania, 2015), 747–60.

³⁵ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 91. Della Valle’s residence may have been a private unit within the French embassy.

³⁶ Procopius was also one of the Della Valle’s sources; Procopio Cesariense, *De Gli Edifici di Giustiniano imperatore*, trans. Benedetto Egio (Venice, 1547); Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 33.

³⁷ Hester, *Literature and Identity*, 59.

and, looking from a distance, has seen dense housing areas as if there were no gardens in the city. He describes Istanbul as “a figure, like from the theater, very agreeable.”³⁸ When he writes that the tiles of the houses and the lead-covered mosques in combination with the cypress trees create an exquisite view, he enables his reader almost to visualize this “extraordinary” panorama. “Looking from the outside,” he notes, “there can be no city more beautiful.”³⁹ Thinking that the comparison would please the people of Naples and especially Schipano, Della Valle adds the description “the most beautiful city of the world, just like Naples.”⁴⁰

In his description of the scenery in the dense city fabric, he particularly emphasizes Divanyolu—which caught his attention—connecting the Ottoman Palace directly to Europe through Edirne Kapı (Charisius Gate). In other words, Della Valle draws attention to Divanyolu’s strategic and, symbolically more important, theatrical functions. According to Hester, *Viaggi* is related to the “Italian culture of spectacle from the theater in Naples [...] to the extravagant Catholic ceremonies, such as holiday processions [...] that were staple in Rome at that time.”⁴¹ Della Valle writes that Divanyolu is wider, compared to other streets, and that it is the only straight road in the city, calling it the “long road.” In fact, the Ottomans renamed the old Roman road *Mese* as Divanyolu, based on the imperial processions passing through it. The road was also the main connector of the street network between the south and the north of the city.⁴²

Referring to it as “*canale*” (canal), Della Valle describes the Bosphorus in detail. His account of the Sultan’s resting area on the European bank of the Bosphorus also provides clues about the city’s topography at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The place which he depicts as a “small bay” is most likely Dolmabahçe (filled garden), converted into a square (*meydan*) by filling the sea during this period. Dolmabahçe was one of the major large-scale projects during the reign of Ahmed I. The traveller puzzled over how the square was formed. He explains that large anchors were placed in the bay and then topped with soil from nearby hills. The filled space was protected against stormy weather with levees made from large boulders. The square that he refers to as *piazza* was in fact the private gardens of the sultan (*Hasbahçe*). Della Valle recounts that plays were staged here.⁴³ The narration stresses the theatrical character of this urban space; his portrayals of Sultan Ahmed I watching the plays from his hall, which he calls *balconi* (balcony), provide visions of Dolmabahçe at the beginning of

38 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 21.

39 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 22.

40 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 40.

41 Hester, *Literature and Identity*, 58.

42 See Maurice Cerasi, *The Istanbul Divanyolu: A Case Study in Ottoman Urbanity and Architecture*, with the collaboration of Emiliano Bugatti and Sabrina D’Agostino (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2004); Albrecht Berger, “Streets and Public Spaces in Constantinople,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 54 (2000): 161–72; Doğan Kuban, *Istanbul, An Urban History: Byzantion, Constantinopolis, Istanbul* (Istanbul: Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey, 1996), 271 fig. 144.

43 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 46.

the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ *Balconi* might be the observation *loggia*, perhaps the outer sofa of the Sultan's kiosk. His descriptions give valuable information on the architectural characteristics of the earliest sultan kiosk/palace at Dolmabahçe. Other sources of the period correspond with his writings about this area. For instance, the map of Istanbul of Seyyid Nuh designed during the seventeenth century verifies the description of Della Valle (Figures 7.1–7.2).⁴⁵

Williams notes that “Renaissance pilgrims rarely write in the first person singular, about things which they have done on their own.”⁴⁶ Thus, Della Valle's underlining of his eyewitnessing singles him out from Renaissance travellers. Although Rubiés notes that “it would be exaggerating to suggest that Valle's style was directly inspired by Caravaggio's naturalism,” Della Valle must certainly have been familiar with discussions of Caravaggio's work.⁴⁷ Both Caravaggio and Della Valle lived at Rome (as well as Naples) in the early 1600s and their biographies were written by their contemporary Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–1696). In his paintings,⁴⁸ Caravaggio places himself as an on-scene witness as Della Valle likewise communicates his own experience to the viewer. Through his narrative, Della Valle performs both as spectator and on-scene actor.⁴⁹ Witnessing the construction of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque while he was in Istanbul, he writes “this new [one] that today's Sultan is building, that I re-saw this morning.”⁵⁰ Built in the Hippodrome area in 1609–1617, Sultan Ahmed Mosque was the focal point of numerous disputes. The major concern was there not being enough of a congregation in this area that was surrounded by palaces and close to Hagia Sophia (Figure 7.3).⁵¹ Moreover, some

44 “é venuto capriccio al Gran Signore di riempir tutto quel seno del mare”; Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 46.

45 See Fig. 7.1, Aygül Ağır, “Seyyid Nuh's Map of Venice (seventeenth century),” *Portolana. Studia Mediterranea*, no. 3 (2007): 315–25; see also Eremya Çelebi Kömürçüyan, *İstanbul Tarihi: XVII. Asırda İstanbul*, ed. Hrand D. Andreasyan and Kevork Pamukciyan (Istanbul: Eren, 1988), 252.

46 Wes Williams, “‘A Mirrour of Mis-haps, a Mappe of Miserie’: Dangers, Strangers, and Friends in Renaissance Pilgrimage,” in *The “Book” of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. Palmira Johnson Brummett (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 216.

47 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 387 and n81.

48 Such as *Martyrdom of St Matthew* (1599) and *The Raising of Lazarus* (ca. 1609)

49 For Della Valle as actor, see Hester, *Literature and Identity*, 61. For performing travel see Sabine Ashutting, Lucia Muller, and Ralf Hertel, eds. *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures, Transculturalisms, 1400–1700* series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

50 ‘Questa nuova che si fabbrica del Grand Signore d'oggi alla quale pur questa mattina, ho dato una rivista,’ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 149; for Sultan Ahmed Mosque see Zeynep Nayır, *Osmanlı Mimarlığında Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi ve Sonrası (1609–1690)* ([Istanbul]: İTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Baskı Atölyesi, 1975); See also Halil İbrahim Düzenli, “Mimar Mehmed Ağa ve Dünyası: Risâle-i Mi'mâriyye Üzerinden 16. ve 17. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Zihniyet Osmanlı Zihniyet Kalıplarını ve Mimarlığını Anlamlandırma Denemesi / Mehmed Agha the Architect and his World: A Study on 16th–17th Centuries Ottoman Mental Structures and Architecture in the Context of Risale-i Mi'Mariyye” (PhD dissertation, Karadeniz Technical University, 2008).

51 Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan. Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 514–15.

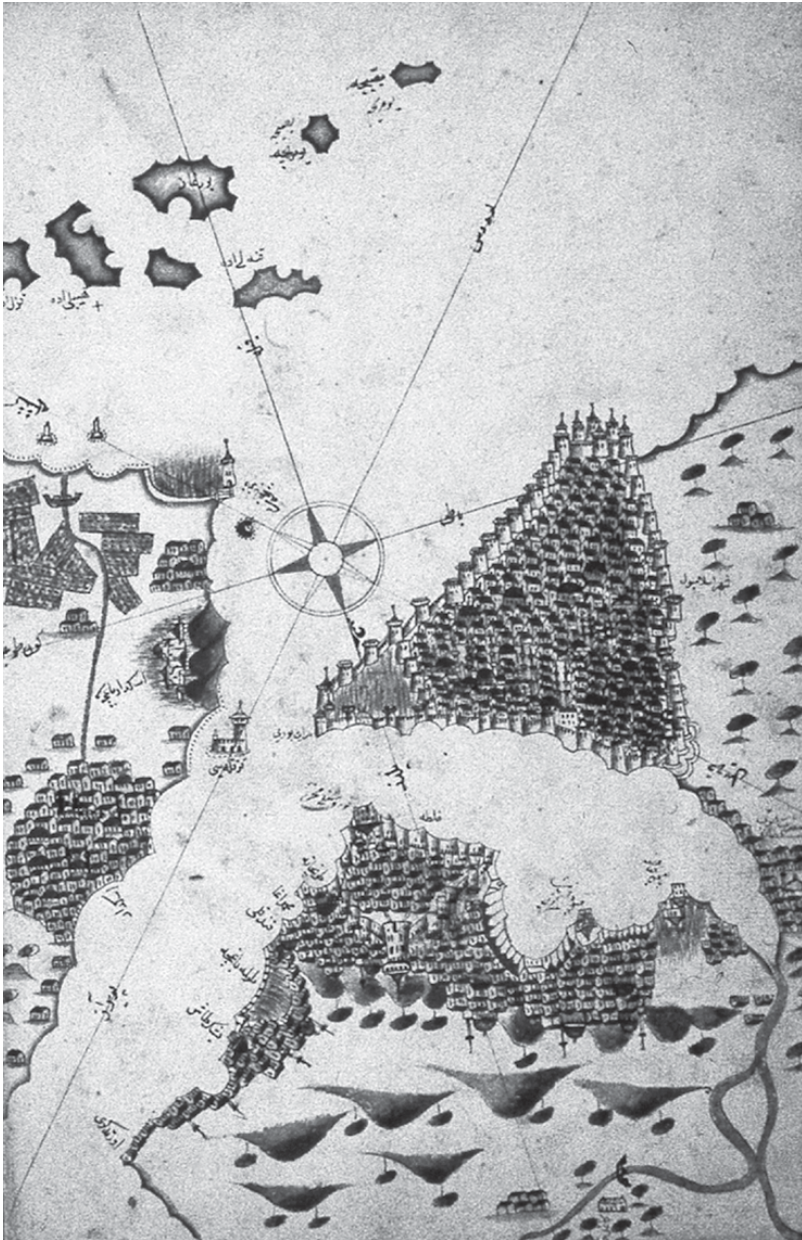


Figure 7.1. View of Istanbul, Seyyid Nuh's Map of Venice, seventeenth century. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, MS 3609, c. 10v (© Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna-Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, reproduction or duplication is not allowed).

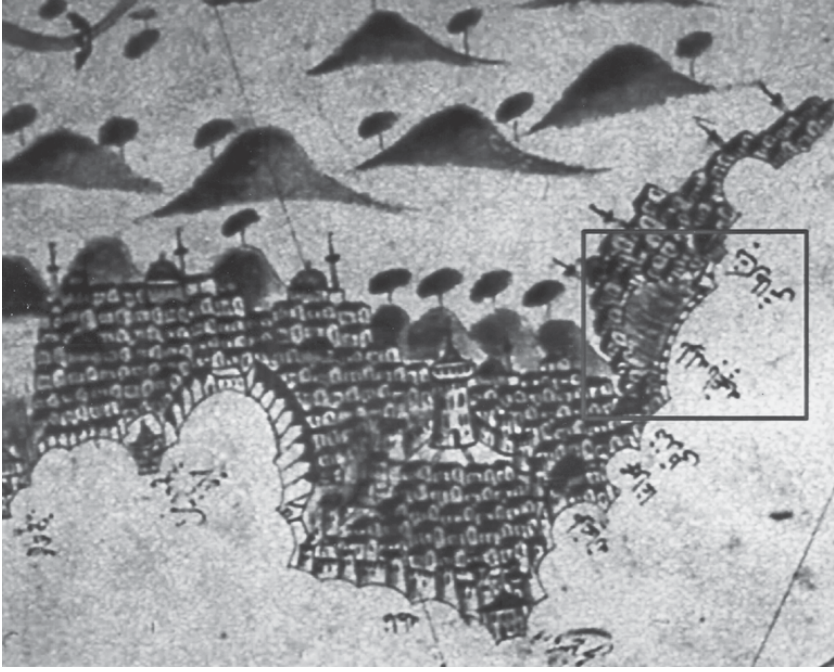


Figure 7.2. View of Dolmabahçe, detail from the Seyyid Nuh's Map of Venice, seventeenth century. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, MS 3609, c. 10v (© Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna-Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, reproduction or duplication is not allowed).

Byzantine remains and two palaces by Architect Sinan were demolished to obtain the necessary space for the building.⁵² Another criticism was that, unlike other imperial mosques, the expenditure made for the Sultan Ahmet Mosque was not met by war spoils. According to the prominent Ottoman intellectual, Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, this situation was described as sultans' spending the means of the treasury for "superfluous" construction projects.⁵³ The Venetian *bailo* (ambassador) Contarini also notes that a great amount of money was spent for the "*superbissima*" mosque.⁵⁴ Correspondingly, stating that the commissioner of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is "not intelligent," Della Valle claims that those who conduct the construction are robbing (*gli rubino*) the sultan, the workers are ignorant, and more than is necessary is being spent on machinery and equipment.⁵⁵ Della Valle's detailed descriptions about the construction process of the buildings displays his particular interest in and knowledge about the architecture. According

⁵² Orhan Ş. Gökyay, "Risale-i Mimariyye. -Mimar Mehmet Ağa- Eserleri," in *İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı'ya Armağan* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976), 158–63.

⁵³ Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 514–15.

⁵⁴ Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 514–15.

⁵⁵ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 149.



Figure 7.3. View of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque and Hagia Sophia facing each other.
Photo: Şükrü Sönmezer.

to the traveller, the most significant feature of this mosque is the fact that it faces the Hippodrome.⁵⁶ He also remarks that although the construction is proceeding slowly, when completed it will be beautiful with its white marble workmanship.⁵⁷ As witnessed by Della Valle, Necipoğlu states that “the decision to confront the ancient monument with a stunning mosque in the ‘modern’ Ottoman style involved a grand urban gesture, the remodelling of the Hippodrome.”⁵⁸

No doubt the Topkapı Palace, which only the fortunate were allowed to enter, was of particular interest to travellers and foreign delegations. Della Valle probably also shows special interest in the Topkapı Palace because he thinks Schipano would be very interested (Figures 7.4–7.5). He begins by observing the palace through the window of his house, which belongs to the French embassy. From his window he can “see” the grounds of the palace with its large gardens and the uninterrupted wall with towers that surrounds it.⁵⁹ Della Valle finds the stables and the imperial kitchens within the local

⁵⁶ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 149.

⁵⁷ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 149; for further discussion on the construction of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque see *Risale-i Mimariyye: An Early Seventeenth-century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture. Facsimile with Translation and Notes*, ed. Howard Crane (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 64–69.

⁵⁸ Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 517.

⁵⁹ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 36.



Figure 7.4. View of the Topkapı Palace. Photo: Ahmet Hamdi Bülül.

palaces better located than those in palaces in Italy. The reason that he writes first about the stables and the kitchens must be their visibility from the outside. The panorama of Istanbul made by the earlier visitor/painter Melchior Loricks can also give an idea of how Della Valle perceived the Topkapı Palace.⁶⁰

Having observed the Palace with great curiosity, he describes it in detail like a drawing. This “narration of eye witnessing” has been identified as “on the spot portraiture.”⁶¹ His accounts also contain insights about the protocol of the Topkapı Palace.⁶² During Della Valle’s stay in Istanbul, the Venetian *bailo* was Cristoforo Valier (1612–1615).⁶³ Della Valle was highly impressed by the audience of Valier and his

⁶⁰ See “Constantinople Prospect” (folded plate in portfolio) in Erik Fischer, *Melchior Lorck* (Copenhagen: Royal Library, Vandkunsten, 2009).

⁶¹ Palmira Brummett, “Introduction: Genre, Witness, And Time In The ‘Book’ of Travels,” in *The ‘Book’ of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. Palmira Johnson Brummett (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 34; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.

⁶² See Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

⁶³ Cristoforo Valier (1565–1618) died on his return to Venice. See Eric Dursteler, “The Bailo in Constantinople: Crisis and Career in Venice’s Early Modern Diplomatic Corps,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16, (2001): 17, 30; see also Serap Mumcu, “Venedik Baylosu’nun Defterleri / The Venetian Baylo’s Registers (1589–1684),” *Hilâl. Studi Turchi e Ottomani* 4 (2014), 116–17; Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *Elenco Degli Inviati Diplomatici Veneziani Presso i Sovrani Ottomani* (Venice: n.p., 2002), 32–33. It is also obvious that Della Valle was familiar with the Venetian *bailo*’s reports, since he mentions Ottaviano Bon (1604–07), Venetian representative in Istanbul.



Figure 7.5. Layout of the Topkapı Palace. Reconstruction of the period from 1871 to 1883. From Sedat Hakkı Eldem and Feridun Akozan, *Topkapı Sarayı. Bir Mimari Araştırma* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1982).



Figure 7.6. The Topkapı Palace, First Gate (Bâb-ı Hümayûn). Photo: Ahmet Hamdi Bülbul.

retinue. The procession began by passing the First Gate of the Palace (*Bâb-ı Hümayûn*) (Fig 7.6); Della Valle compares the first court of the palace with the market place of Naples (*la piazza del mercato*) to allow his audience to visualize its size. The crowd extended to the portico that was perceived as an *anticamera* (*revak*) by the traveller. He describes the procession in great detail in order to visualize it for Schipano. The traveller notes that he read Sansovino's *Dell'istoria universale dell'origine et imperio de'Turchi* which is considered one of the earliest volumes to arouse the interest of Europeans in Turks.⁶⁴

Della Valle also witnessed the Sultan's observing, from Alay Kiosk (Procession Kiosk) located on the outer wall of the palace, the Ottoman army setting out for the Safavid campaign.⁶⁵ Della Valle then follows the passage of the Ottoman troops to the Asian side where they would be stationed. He finds the arrangement of the Ottoman tents similar to the organization of the Sultan's palace. The well-ornamented tents of the grand vizier

⁶⁴ Francesco Sansovino, *Historia Vniversale dell'origine et imperio de'Turchi. Raccolta, & in diverfi luoghi di nuovo ampliata, da M. Francefco Sanfovino; Nella quale fi contengono le leggi, gli uffici, i coftumi, & la militia di quella natione; con tutte le cofe fatte da loro per terra, & per mare. Con le vite particolari de Principi Othomani; cominciando dal primo fondator di quell'Imperio, fino al prefente Amorath. 1582. Con le figvre in disegno de gli habiti, & dell'armature de foldati d'effo gran Turco* (Vinegia, 1582).

⁶⁵ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 133.

Öküz ("the Ox") Kara Mehmed Pasha (1614–1616)⁶⁶ have been organized like the rooms of an Ottoman palace and, by using *Çuha* fabrics, some types of court were formed at the centre of the groups of tents.⁶⁷ In a similar way, this detailed textual description of groups of tents can often be seen in the illustrations of Torquato Tasso's (1544–1595) *Gerusalemme Liberata* published in 1590. One can say that Della Valle incorporated Tasso's visual information into his text. As Hester also points out, Della Valle's account "incorporates elements of Italian literary texts and genres most notably Petrarchian lyrical poetics, the epic (especially those of Aristo and Tasso)."⁶⁸

Della Valle provides valuable information about the *konaks* (palatial mansions) of the viziers. During his stay at Istanbul he witnessed the execution of the grand vizier Nasuh Pasha (1611–1614). While writing about the grand vizier, Della Valle gives clues about his palace. His mansion at the seashore had a stable with many magnificent horses.⁶⁹ Nasuh Pasha's palace, with its stables that could accommodate several horses, probably occupied a large area in the city.⁷⁰ While accompanying the Venetian *bailo* (Valier), he also had the chance to visit the *konak* of the new grand vizier Öküz ("the Ox") Mehmed Pasha. Della Valle reports that, like the Topkapı Palace, the building serves as the residence as well as the office for the viziers. By comparing the architectural organization of Mehmed Pasha's *konak* with that of Topkapı Palace, he in a way investigates the palatial typology. His information that, like Topkapı Palace, the *konak* has a *appartamento delle donne* (space for women) and there is a gatekeeper at each gate reveals additional significant clues about the typology.⁷¹ He describes the *konak* in great detail, noting its several gates and interconnected courts. The stairs located in the last court lead to the rectangular private audience hall where the Pasha receives his official visitors.⁷² By reporting that he was struck by the length of the timber used in this room, supplied from the Black Sea region, Della Valle provides significant architectural details of the period's building techniques and materials. The open hall that he mentions might be the *sofâ* of the *konak*. He reports that a series of *sofâs* surround the three sides of the room. His descriptions give important information about the interiors of the vizier *konaks* which

66 Mustafa Naima, *Târih-i Na'imâ: (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn fî hulâsati ahhârî'l-hâfikayn)*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), 2:416–17.

67 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 123.

68 Hester, *Literature and Identity*, 52.

69 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 52; Horses were particularly important in the Ottoman Empire. It was not permitted to export Arabian horses except as gifts. For instance, the sultan had given to the Venetian *bailo* Cristioforo Valier a horse along with some precious textiles, which shows that the Venetian *bailo* had established a good relationship with the Sultan. See Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *Venezia Porta d'Oriente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 107.

70 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 53. For further discussion on waterfront palaces see Tülay Artan, "The Kadirga Palace: An Architectural Reconstruction" *Muqarnas*, 10, Essays in Honor of Oleg Grabar (1993): 201–11.

71 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 63–65.

72 See Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 40–41, especially see illus. 13 for the comparison with the Sokollu Mehmed Pasha's Palace (ca. 1570s).

did not survive: "sitting on the *sofâs* covered with carpets and the walls of the room are covered with *maioliche* (tiles) mainly in blue." As commonly seen in large *konaks*, the building does not face the street; the walls surrounding its gardens open to the street by some windows. This account of the *konak* conveys to readers that high garden walls are a main characteristic of Ottoman residential architecture.

Della Valle writes that large gardens or orchards are set in Üsküdar and along the villages of the Bosphorus, with spacious residences, owned by Ottoman dignitaries, lining the seashore.⁷³ These mansions with seascapes possessed landscapes composed of alleys, pools, fountains, cypress trees, and diverse flowers.⁷⁴ He describes the Ottoman garden kiosks, employing the word "pyramid" when explaining their form.⁷⁵ He is interested in the garden kiosks because of their distinctive character as open to the landscape, having shutters but no doors or windows, and interiors furnished by *sofâs*. His depiction of the houses, facing the Bosphorus and having gardens in their backyard, are reminiscent of the Ottoman waterfront palaces and kiosks that would be built widely starting the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Moreover, the theatrical character of the waterfront residences (*yalis*) must have been well perceived by Della Valle.⁷⁷

The Go-Between: Translating Ottoman Architecture

In his second letter, dated October 15, 1614, Della Valle describes Hagia Sophia and the mosques of Istanbul in great detail. Speaking of the flawless beauty of mosques, the traveller explains that four or five mosques commissioned by various sultans are of great interest.⁷⁸ This treatment indicates that Della Valle perceived accurately the representational role and visibility of sultanic mosques within the city. In this part of the account, the comparison between the Istanbul mosques and San Pietro in Rome is noteworthy. Della Valle employs the term *tempio* (temple) instead of *moschea/moscheta* (mosque).⁷⁹ Equally important, saying that mosques are in the form of *tempio*, Della Valle refers to architecture of antiquity and uses the words *quadro e tondeggi* (quadrangular and round) to indicate to

⁷³ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 22–27; see also Gönül Aslanoğlu Evyapan, *Old Turkish Gardens. Old Istanbul Gardens in Particular* (Ankara: METU, 1999).

⁷⁴ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 30; See Maurice Cerasi, "Open Space, Water and Trees in Ottoman Urban Culture in the XVIIIth–XIXth Centuries," *AARP Environmental Design* 2 (1985): 36–49.

⁷⁵ For Ottoman garden kiosks see Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *Türk Bahçeleri* (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1976), 291; Nurhan Atasoy, *Hasbahçe. A Garden for the Sultan: Gardens and Flowers in the Ottoman Culture* (İstanbul: Aygaz, 2002), 28.

⁷⁶ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 22, 29; See Shirine Hamadeh, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

⁷⁷ See Tülay Artan, "Architecture as a Theatre of Life: Profile of the Eighteenth Century Bosphorus" (PhD dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989).

⁷⁸ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 23. The mosques in question are the Fatih, Eyüp, Bayezid, Şehzade and Süleymaniye sultanic mosques.

⁷⁹ Sansovino also employs the word *templum/tempio* for the 'mosque'. Sansovino, *Historia Uniuersale*, 45.

their design.⁸⁰ This usage obviously recalls the quadrature of the circle, one of the fundamental geometrical issues of antiquity as well as Renaissance architects. Klaiber states that “libraries such as Sant’Andrea della Valle [...] possessed several of the standard architectural books in various editions, including those of Palladio, Serlio, Vitruvius (including Barbaro’s edition), Alberti and Labacco.”⁸¹ Della Valle may have been familiar with the works of the Renaissance architect and theoretician Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554) and may have consulted *Il terzo libro (...) nel qual si figurano, e descrivono le antiquita di Roma, e le altre che sono in Italia, e fuori d’Italia* during his journeys.⁸² Serlio’s seven books on architecture had been compiled in one extended volume, with the addition of an index by Gian Domenico Scamozzi and his son Vincenzo Scamozzi; the volume was published in 1584.

Della Valle also must have also read the works of Vincenzo Scamozzi, who was one of the influential architects and theoreticians of Italy in the early seventeenth century. In his *L’Idea dell’Architettura Universale (The Idea of Universal Architecture)* published in 1615, Vincenzo emphasized the universality of antique architecture and its application to contemporary designs. In this context, Della Valle draws attention to the similarity between the Istanbul mosques and Michelangelo’s San Pietro design with its domed central plan scheme, and he presents the concepts of antiquity and universal architecture. A compelling example of the influence of the San Pietro in Rome on Della Valle is his project to design a “New Rome” in 1619 for the Christian community of Isfahan. In this new city, the church and the piazza that he proposed to build would employ San Pietro and Michelangelo’s Piazza del Campidoglio, in small scale, as exact models.⁸³

The Renaissance period revived antiquity both in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, and Hagia Sophia became one of the prototypes for new buildings. Della Valle remarks that, similarly, Turks employed Hagia Sophia, which they encountered when they came to Istanbul, as a model for their mosques.⁸⁴ In addition to comparing the major buildings of the Ottoman Empire and Italy during his period in the former, Della Valle also includes influential structures of antiquity. For instance, according to Della Valle, Hagia Sophia is

⁸⁰ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 23.

⁸¹ Susan Klaiber, “Architecture and Mathematics in Early Modern Religious Orders,” in *Geometrical Objects: Architecture and the Mathematical Sciences 1400–1800*, ed. Anthony Gerbino (Cham: Springer, 2014), 104.

⁸² Margaret Daly Davies (ed.) *Pietro della Valle’s research and documentation in the Levant, Part I: Della Valle’s exploration of the ruins of Persepolis in 1621 excerpts from: Pietro della Valle: Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino. Con minuto ragguaglio di tutte le cose notabili osservate in essi* (Rome, 1650–63), including: “Giovan Pietro Bellori: Vita di Pietro Della Valle il Pellegrino,” in *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Rome, 1662) (Fontes 66) (Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek der Universität Heidelberg, 2012), <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2012/1868> accessed November 2014.

⁸³ Rossi, “Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano,” 61.

⁸⁴ Hubertus Günter, “Doğuda ve Batıda Antikitenin Yeniden Doğuşu,” in *Mimar Sinan’ı Anma Etkinlikleri 2010: Sinan ve Çağı* (Kayseri: Mimarlar Odası Kayseri Şubesi, 2011), 221–36; for further information, see Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 82–103; Doğan Kuban, *Ottoman Architecture*, trans. Adair Mill (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors’ Club, 2010), 458–67.

not as large as old San Pietro (fourth century) and it is its dome rather than its longitudinal basilical plan that is noteworthy.⁸⁵

Viaggi takes the reader on a journey of perception and comparison, crossing boundaries of places, times, and people. Discussing the use of Hagia Sophia in the Ottoman period, Della Valle notes that the Sultan preferred Hagia Sophia for worship due to its proximity to the Topkapı Palace, and he maintained a special entrance to the building as well as a private place where he prayed. He indicates that the Turks valued and appropriated this influential building of antiquity. Della Valle had a clear perception of the close relation between the Ottoman Palace and Hagia Sophia.⁸⁶

When describing the exterior spaces, Della Valle dwells upon the innovation brought to architecture by the Turks. Remarking that the domes were covered with lead, he also points out that niches, ledges, and other similar elements were used to make windows and spans more pleasing to the eye.⁸⁷ Repeating that Turks imitated Hagia Sophia in the mosques built in Istanbul both in the past and recently, Della Valle adds that they organize the central dome and other domes according to their taste.⁸⁸ Della Valle pointed to large courtyards surrounded by porticos with lead-covered domes built in front of mosques and the *şadırvans* (fountains) in these courtyards as another innovation. Continuing to list other elements that are distinctive to him in the exterior, Della Valle uses the terms *campanile* in the form of *candeliere* to describe the minaret, but he does not fail to point out that there is a crescent rather than a cross at the finial.⁸⁹ More importantly, Della Valle thought that if he made drawings of these mosques that looked particularly attractive with all their *ornamenti* and took them to Italy, the architects there would want to imitate these buildings.⁹⁰ In this context, Joseph Connors reveals that in his design of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza (1642) in Rome, Francesco Borromini probably made use of the information provided by Della Valle.⁹¹ Della Valle must have been particularly familiar with Borromini as the dome of his family church, Sant'Andrea Della Valle, was designed by leading Baroque architects Francesco Borromini and Carlo Maderno in the early 1620s.⁹² Moreover, the dome of Sant'Andrea Della Valle, as explained by Huemer, is considered "as the first to be remodeled on" Michelangelo's design for San Pietro, a building that Della Valle (re)visits through the *Viaggi*.⁹³

85 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 23.

86 See Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 150.

87 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 25.

88 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 25.

89 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 25.

90 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 26.

91 Connors, "Borromini, Hagia Sophia and S. Vitale," 44–45.

92 Sant'Andrea Della Valle had been mentioned in *Viaggi*; see *Viaggi*, xv; Howard Hibbard, "The Early History of Sant'Andrea Della Valle," *The Art Bulletin* 43 (1961): 289–318.

93 Frances Huemer, "Borromini and Michelangelo, III: The Dome of Sant'Andrea Della Valle," *Notes in the History of Art* 20 (2001): 23–29.

Della Valle, in his letter dated September 4, 1615, aims to investigate the tradition in Istanbul of central plan with dome from its beginning until the “modern” period. He visits Hagia Sophia and the Istanbul mosques one more time before leaving the city. His exposition resumes with the dome of Hagia Sophia and carries on to the construction of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. It is important to realize that his interpretation encompasses multifold transition zones. As Hester points out, “[h]e moves on different stages along both a horizontal and vertical axis: between east and west and also in descending into tombs or climbing towers, mountains, and pyramids.”⁹⁴ For instance, he notes that he climbed to the dome of Hagia Sophia which is something he did not do in San Pietro in his native city of Rome. Observing that the building is not like Bélon’s description, Della Valle uses the statement, “[o]ur Rotonda [Pantheon] is a hundred times better.” According to Della Valle, Hagia Sophia is a *mastina* (massive) building, its dome is noteworthy although not big enough, and the building cannot be compared to the Rotonda (Pantheon). Following his comparison of these two buildings, the traveller visited the mausoleum of Süleyman the Magnificent. The mosque of Sultan Süleyman (Figures 7.6–7.9) built by Architect Sinan is one of the major buildings that obviously lured the traveller by its characteristics. Della Valle wrote that the most beautiful mosque was the *Solimania* mosque of Sultan Süleyman, that mosques were given the name of the person who had them built, and that, if commissioned by a sultan, the particular sultan would also be buried there.⁹⁵

In his accounts of the mausoleums in Istanbul, Della Valle points out that beginning with Mehmed II, mausoleums were built for the sultans who commissioned mosques and were located in the mosque complex rather than within the mosque itself. He remarks that the mausoleums of sultans who did not commission a mosque in Istanbul were located within the site of the Hagia Sophia.⁹⁶ The latter mausoleums are those of Selim II (1566–1574), Murad III (1574–1595), and Mehmed III (1595–1603). The traveller informs the reader that some mausoleums had *rotonda* (circular) plan schemes, while others had *quadrata* (quadrangular) plans, almost in *tempietti* (small temples) form.⁹⁷ It is interesting to note that Della Valle, referring to the mausoleums, uses the term *tempietto*, which was employed by Renaissance architects, particularly Bramante and Palladio, for their central planned small-sized chapels. He highlights that even the most magnificent of these mausoleums, referring to the mausoleum of Selim II (1576–1577), was not more impressive than the chapel of Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585–1590).⁹⁸

Sultan Selim II had this mosque built in his name in Edirne. However, the mausoleum of Selim II, designed by the well-known sixteenth-century Ottoman architect Sinan, is located within the site of Hagia Sophia (Figure 7.10). Della Valle writes that Selim

⁹⁴ Hester, *Literature and Identity*, 59.

⁹⁵ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 26.

⁹⁶ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 38.

⁹⁷ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 38.

⁹⁸ Pope Sixtus V’s given name was Felice Peretti. See J. N. D. Kelly, “Sixtus V,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 271–73.



Figure 7.7. Süleymaniye Mosque, seen from the Golden Horn. Photo: Tarkan Okçuoğlu.

II added two minarets to Hagia Sophia along with some extensive work.⁹⁹ These two minarets, constructed following Selim II's Ottoman defeat in Lepanto, perhaps symbolize "the triumph of Islam," the (re)conquest of Hagia Sophia, and its Islamization. The mausoleum of Selim II has a dome-covered octagonal plan in a quadrangular form. Its characteristics such as the exedras used to enlarge the central area, a two-layer dome, and marble revetments are similar to those of late Roman period structures.¹⁰⁰ Particularly with its tiles, the richly decorated mausoleum of Selim II resembled "the garden of paradise" as is indicated by its inscription.¹⁰¹ Della Valle draws attention to the rich decorative program of the interior and conveys to his readers the visual richness created by the multicoloured view displayed by the elegant *maioliche*, *lavora a lettere* (calligraphy) and other [Ottoman] *arabeschi* decorations and plain white sections on the

⁹⁹ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, "The Visual Arts," in *The Ottoman Empire as a World Power 1453–1603*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqi and Kate Fleet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2:522; Apdullah Kuran, *Sinan: the Grand Old Master of Ottoman Architecture* (Washington, DC: Ada Press, 1987), 87–89; Apdullah Kuran, "Mimar Sinan'ın Türbeleri," in *Mimarbaşı Koca Sinan Yaşadığı Çağ ve Eserleri*, ed. Sadi Bayram (İstanbul: İstanbul Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 1988), 223–38.

¹⁰¹ Hakkı Önkol, *Osmanlı Hanedan Türbeleri* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1992), 164–70.

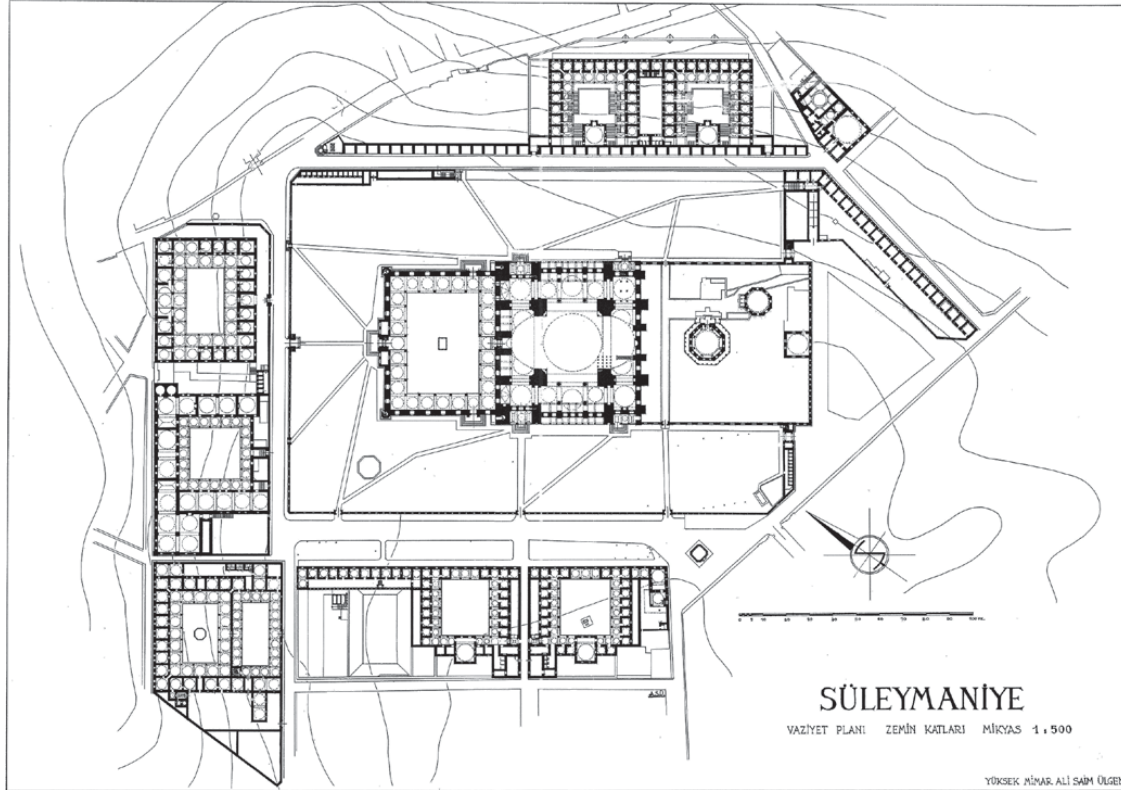
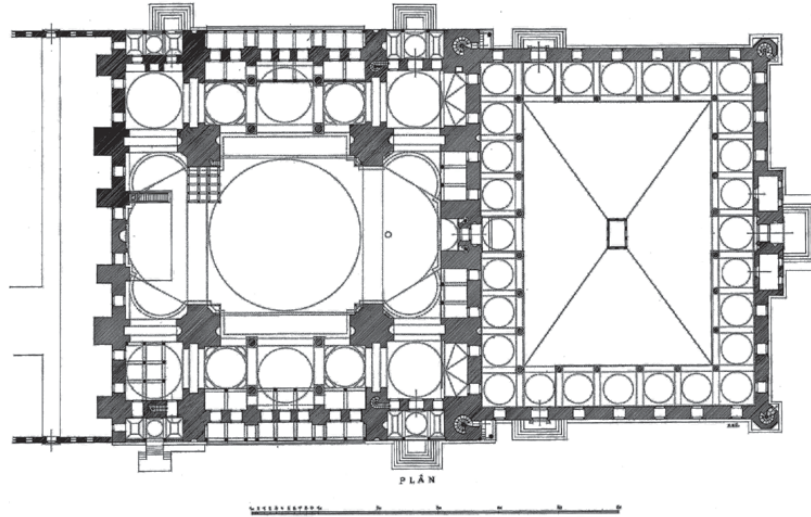


Figure 7.8. Plan of the Süleymaniye complex. From Ali Saim Ülgen, *Mimar Sinan Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989).

İST SÜLEYMANİYE CAMİİ RÖLÖVESİ M.1/200



Y. SAIM ALI SAIM ÜLGEN 1989

Figure 7.9. Plan of the Süleymaniye Mosque. From Ali Saim Ülgen, Mimar Sinan Yapıları (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989).

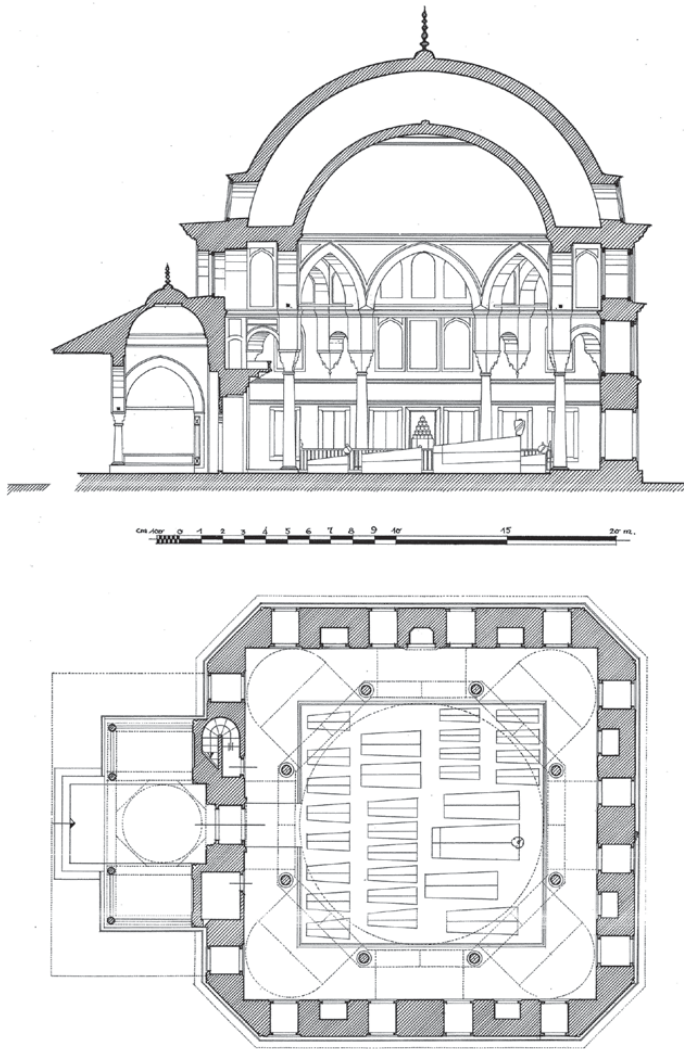


Figure 7.10. Plan and section of the the Mausoleum of Sultan Selim II. From Ali Saim Ülgen, *Mimar Sinan Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989).

walls, as well as the carpets and the sarcophagi covered in silk and gold-threaded fabrics with the turban-shaped head pieces.¹⁰²

At about the same time Pope Sixtus V as the major protagonist of the Counter-Reformation, had an important role in the shaping of Rome. For instance, one of the

¹⁰² Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 38.

most influential projects of the period was the completion of the dome of San Pietro. Furthermore, the obelisks brought from Egypt by Roman emperors were erected in the city to create focal points to which the boulevards extending the churches would lead. In this way, as Ostrow indicates, a pagan/antique monument was turned to a symbol of the “triumph of Christianity” with the erection of an obelisk at San Pietro Square.¹⁰³ In the Sistine Chapel that Pope Sixtus V had built for himself in the S. Maria Maggiore Church completed in 1589, a central plan with a dome resting on eight columns—similar to the mausoleum of Selim II—was used. The interior of this magnificent chapel built by Domenico Fontana (1543–1607), a celebrated architect of the period, was sumptuously adorned with frescos and sculptures.¹⁰⁴

Through comparing the architecture of the mausoleum of Selim II and the chapel of Pope Sixtus V, Della Valle is also comparing these two well-known and influential contemporaneous protagonists. As Della Valle mentions at the beginning of his narration, Selim II was defeated by the pope in the magnificence of the buildings.¹⁰⁵ In a sense, the comparison reminds the audience of the encounter of Selim II with the pope and the forces of the Holy League at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.¹⁰⁶

Back to Italy: Collecting and Transmitting

Pietro Della Valle’s letters, illustrating Istanbul four hundred years ago, are valuable sources for urban studies, and architectural history, as well as in many other areas. The long-standing interest in his letters can be explained by his rational view as a Roman intellectual formed within the Renaissance tradition at the onset of the Baroque age. Through his “pilgrimage of curiosity” he explored the city, art and architecture, administrative/social organization, and daily life. His writings not only recorded the Ottoman capital but also communicated the Ottoman world to the European world.

During his travels, Della Valle found numerous similarities between Italy and the Ottoman Empire in terms of topography, cities, monuments, spaces, and processions. Like many other travellers who visited Istanbul, he compared Istanbul and Rome, evaluated Istanbul’s mosques through the domed central plan tradition, and questioned the universality of the architecture of antiquity. He was also interested in buildings that reflected the Eastern tradition, such as the Ottoman palaces and kiosks. Although he investigated the Ottoman monumental architecture in detail, the traveller did not cite the names of any of the major architects such as Sinan (d. 1588) and Sedefkar Mehmet Agha (d. 1622).

103 Steven Ostrow, “The Counter Reformation and the End of the Century,” in *Rome (Artistic Centers of the Italian Renaissance)*, ed. M. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 282.

104 Steven F. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

105 Pius V was the pope at the time of the Battle of Lepanto.

106 In addition to the papal forces, The “Holy League” was composed of Venetian, Genoese and Spanish fleets.

One of the essential images that Della Valle aimed to communicate to his Italian readers was the panorama of Istanbul. The poem titled *Ninfa Galata* (Nympe of Galata), which he wrote for a girl from “Constantinopolis”, appears as a quintessential example of a poetic panorama,¹⁰⁷

Amorous, sweet wind
That ripples over the salty waves
Between the Western shores
Blow and travel to the Orient,
Reach, I beg you, that shore
Where the plane trees provide shade,
Where in the middle of the mosques
A lofty tower hovers over the roofs,
Where I find the Grand Seraglio
And the great temple of Sophia
At the foot of a lovely hill
Where I already left my soul behind ...

Similarly, he writes about the drawings of the city made by other painters as well as his own. Before leaving Istanbul, he describes a panoramic view of Istanbul displaying its towers, mosques, dungeons, and streets with trees; he desires to commission a Flemish painter to record the scene, believing it would arouse a considerable interest in Italy.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, he reports that he drew a sketch of the Topkapı Palace but he will be making a second, more accurate, one to bring back to Italy.¹⁰⁹ He writes that he will order the same for his house in Rome, for the *sofà* that he saw while visiting the palace of the grand vizier.¹¹⁰ In general, the travel accounts serve also as a source of information for those of his audience practising architecture, and the traveller takes “an active role in appropriating Turkish culture back home.”¹¹¹ For instance, in the late sixteenth century, Italian architect Palladio applied Ottoman architecture as a source of inspiration. Howard’s study shows how prints, books, and costume books as well as Venetian *bailo* Barbaro’s reports may have penetrated Palladio’s imagination and been influential in the design of the church of Redentore in Venice (1577–1592).¹¹² Similarly, Della Valle aimed to bring back images from some paintings of the imperial mosques for the architects in Italy to emulate. As

107 ‘Amoroso venticello, / Che tra i lidi d’Occidente, / Increspando le onde salse, / Spiri e corri in Oriente, / Giungi, prego, a quella riva / Dove i platani fanno ombra, / Dove in mezzo alle meschite / Alta torre i tetti adombra, / Dove incontro al gran Serraglio / E al gran tempio di Sofia / Nella falda d’un bel colle / Lasciai già l’anima mia,’ Rossi, “Pietro Della Valle Orientalista Romano,” 55. Special thanks to Elio Brancaforte for the translation from Italian to English.

108 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 143.

109 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 107.

110 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 80.

111 Nebahat Avcioğlu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 24.

112 Deborah Howard, “Venice between East and West: Marc’Antonio Barbaro and Palladio’s Church of the Redentore,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62 (2003), 306–25.

pointed out previously, Connors argues that in his design of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza (1642) in Rome, Francesco Borromini used the information provided by Della Valle.¹¹³

Della Valle reports taking many drawings and objects back to Italy. These were sources and objects of knowledge such as books, drawings, and antique medals as well as commodities such as drugs, plants, and textiles that were typically seen in the “cabinet of curiosities” of the period. He had great interest in antique objects, and according to him each antique object is worthy of collection. As stated earlier, he writes of taking a stone from the ruins of Troy to bring back to Italy. After reporting that he purchased over thirty antique silver and gold medals, he adds that, even if he does not have enough knowledge on this matter, he will leave the choosing to his friends in Italy who are specialists.¹¹⁴ Subsequently, in the eighteenth century, the number of Europeans travelling to the Ottoman Empire to collect antique coins, medals, and inscriptions would greatly increase and royal collections would begin to form.¹¹⁵ In his letter dated September 4, 1615, Della Valle describes in detail the linguistic books that he purchased in Istanbul.¹¹⁶ Book printing and collecting, which became prevalent during the Renaissance, represent the “triumph of the book,” as described by Jardine.¹¹⁷ During this period, both Europe and the Ottoman Empire had a growing interest in books, and kings, the nobility, and tradesmen started to collect them. For instance, the first (Ottoman) Turkish language book entered the collections of the French king in 1668–1669.¹¹⁸ Moreover, although the first dragoman school had been established in 1557 in Istanbul,¹¹⁹ European interest in learning the languages of the east proliferated at the end of the seventeenth century, and France sent young students to the Ottoman Empire in 1669 to gain the education of dragoman.¹²⁰ In the same way, Della Valle wanted to communicate directly with the Ottomans and their culture. He writes of (Ottoman) Turkish, Arabic, and Persian language lessons that he took during his stay in Istanbul.¹²¹ Beside the books, Della Valle planned to take some official Ottoman documents with him on his return to Italy. He

I 13 Connors, “Borromini, Hagia Sophia and S. Vitale,” 44–45.

I 14 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 148.

I 15 Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1987), 98.

I 16 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 147.

I 17 Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York: Norton, 1996), 133–80.

I 18 Annie Berthier, “Turc,” in *Manuscrits, xylographes, estampages: les collections orientales du Département des manuscrits: guide*, ed. Annie Berthier (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2000), 54–56.

I 19 The school was housed at the Venetian Embassy in Istanbul. See Nevin and Raniero Speelman-Özkan, “I dragomanni / Dragomanlar,” in *Il Palazzo di Venezia a Istanbul e i suoi Antichi Abitanti Istanbul'daki Venedik Sarayı ve Eski Yaşayanları*, ed. Maria Pia Pedani, Hilâl. Studi Turchi e Ottomani 3 (Venezia: Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2013), 57.

I 20 See Frédéric Hitzel, *Enfants de Langue et Drogmans* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995).

I 21 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 133. Nevin Özkan, “Pietro Della Valle, Osmanlı Topraklarında Bir İtalyan Gezgin (Roma 1586–1652) Pietro Della Valle—Onyedinci Yüzyıla Ait Bir Notdefterinin İncelenmesi,” *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 46 (2006): 1–16.

writes that his Ottoman teacher's father, David—who worked at the Palace for Murad III—left behind some state documents upon his death.¹²² Della Valle was willing to take these very *curiosissime* (curious) documents, including those signed by an Ottoman prince and his correspondences with the Christian princes.

The traveller describes the costumes and headgear that he encountered in the Ottoman Empire. He notes that among the many places that he had visited before, he had never seen women and men dressed more beautifully than the Turks and Greeks.¹²³ Della Valle desired to illustrate his writings about Ottoman daily life and especially Ottoman costumes. He planned to commission an album to display the costumes of the men and women from diverse religions and nationalities living in Istanbul.¹²⁴ According to him, these drawings, made by Turks, even if not perfect, would help the Italian audience to gain some acquaintance with Ottoman styles and prove that the Turks *veduto con gusto* ("have been seen with some taste").¹²⁵ He also writes about the oil portraits of the Ottomans made by a Flemish painter that he met at the residence of the French ambassador Achille de Harlay de Sancy.¹²⁶ Previously traveller artists such as Nicolas de Nicolay (1517–1583) had produced costume books for European audiences. However, Della Valle desired to have paintings that reflect scenes from Ottoman daily life. More importantly, his writings suggest that his aim is paintings with some theatrical "*mise-en-scènes*" (staging) of daily life. For instance, in a painting that he planned to commission, three women would be sitting and having a conversation while drinking their coffee *alla turca* style.¹²⁷ Such compositions would later be widely realized by the European painters with the *Turquerie* style.¹²⁸ Carle van Loo's *Sultan's Wife Drinking Coffee* and Jean Baptiste Vanmour's *Women Drinking Coffee* are similar to the scenes that he planned to commission. The publication of the *Viaggi* in 1662–1664 in France raises the idea that perhaps the travel accounts were among the influential sources of the *Turquerie*. It is also noteworthy that painters such Jean Vanmour (1671–1737), referred to as *Peintres du Bosphore* by Auguste Boppe,

122 David must have been David Passi, an influential person serving at the Ottoman palace during the reign of Murad III.

123 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 72, 81.

124 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 120. The illustrations that Della Valle envisioned to publish as the fourth volume of *Viaggi* never appeared. In the the third volume, the editor Biagio Deversin noted that the fourth volume would not be published. Although some simple sketches and plans have been included in the previous volumes, the remaining illustrations probably may have been lost. See Cardini, *La Porta d'Oriente*, 111–12 n113.

125 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 43.

126 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 143.

127 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 144.

128 For *Turquerie* see Auguste Boppe, *Les Peintres du Bosphore* (Paris: ACR, 1989); Hélène Desmet-Grégoire, *Le Divan Magique: L'Orient Turc en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Sycomore, 1980); *Topkapı à Versailles: Trésors de la Cour Ottomane*, exhibition catalogue, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, 4 mai–15 août 1999 ([Paris]: Association Française d'Action Artistique: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, ca. 1999); see also Günsel Renda, "The Ottoman Empire and Europe: Cultural Encounters," in *Cultural Contacts in Building a Universal Civilisation: Islamic Contributions*, ed. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2005), 277–303.

were part of the retinue of the European ambassadors. Similarly, Della Valle, who resided in a house within the French embassy and was in close contact with the ambassador, can be seen as an example of the link between art and diplomacy.

The visual excitement created by the textiles¹²⁹ and preciousities of the Ottoman Empire are the main characteristics of the works of the *Peintres du Bosphore*. Similarly, Della Valle talks very often about the diversity and exquisiteness of the precious gems such as pearls, rubies, and diamonds that he saw in Istanbul. He describes his audience in front of Sultan Ahmed I who was sitting behind a small table decorated with precious gems; Della Valle indicates that he could not take his eyes away from the diamonds on the Sultan's fingers and the feathers on his headgear.¹³⁰ Elsewhere the traveller mentions a sword that he had seen in a jewellery store and which was ordered by the grand vizier for the sultan. Despite the rough and disorganized workmanship, Della Valle notes that he was impressed by the generous use of gold, rubies, and diamonds.¹³¹ He describes with great fascination Ottoman velvets, silks, damasks, textiles, and carpets, with their diverse colours and textures and sumptuous detail. He also desires to take with him on his return some textiles that he has purchased and received as gifts, and believes that they will delight the ladies in Rome.¹³² Besides their visual characteristics, Della Valle also examined their commercial value and collected detailed information about the commodities that he encountered in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Della Valle is also one of the first travellers to write about coffee and coffehouses;¹³³ besides its medical effects, he indicates the commercial value of coffee by describing it as a "good source of revenue for the Sultan because of its tax." He indicates that he will take some coffee with him on his return to Italy.¹³⁴

Undoubtedly, through his travel accounts, Della Valle functioned as a cultural mediator for the flow of the culture, knowledge, and commodities of the Ottoman Empire to Europe.¹³⁵ Through his complete book published in the 1660s in France, Holland, and Germany, his influence went beyond the borders of Italy and spread widely throughout Europe. Yet, Rubiés indicates that: "it is clear that Della Valle's self-fashioning as a curious and cosmopolitan pilgrim was socially re-fashioned, and found a niche in the intellectual gallery of Baroque Europe."¹³⁶ Although he followed the footsteps of his predecessors, his accounts display a genuine manifold repertory rather than conventional visions

129 Ottoman textiles were highly admired and sought after in Europe. See Suraiya Faroqhi, "Ottoman Textiles in European Markets," in *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, ed. Anna Contadini and Claire Norton (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 231–44; Suraiya Faroqhi, *A Cultural History of the Ottomans. The Imperial Elite and its Artefacts* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 166–72.

130 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 106.

131 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 34.

132 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 44.

133 Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 256.

134 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 75–76.

135 See Nurhan Atasoy and Lale Uluç, *Impressions of Ottoman Culture in Europe: 1453–1699* (Istanbul: Turkish Cultural Foundation, Armağan, 2012).

136 Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 386.

for the richly illustrated narratives of his successors—such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), Guillaume-Joseph Grelot (ca. 1630–ca 1680), Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667), and Jean Chardin (1643–1712). As one of the most influential travellers of the early seventeenth century, Della Valle, along with his travel accounts, is arguably one of the bridges in shaping the European perception of the Ottoman Empire that occurred in the eighteenth century, before Orientalism.