

Chapter 4: The Sultan's Ceremonial Axis

Implicitly since at least the beginning of the 17th century, and explicitly, during the 18th and after, the Divan axis or northern Mese—as well as part of the Beyazıt-Aksaray-Hekimoğlu route—was considered the Imperial route, was called Divanyolu and involved in important processions.

Thévénot had seen, in 1655-56, a three to four-feet-wide belt of sand strewn in the middle of the road to mark and ease the Sultan's passage.⁶¹ Pietro della Valle mentions the “...*strada ...dove ill Rè & altri personaggi sogliono far le entrate più solenni...*”⁶² In the 18th century not only the passage of the Sultan but also that of his nearest relatives must not have been infrequent and, perhaps, with the relaxation of court ceremonial, some solemnity had been lost.⁶³ Chronicles report that

⁶¹ Jean Thévénot, *Voyages en Europe, Asie et Afrique*, Amsterdam 1727 (3rd edition), 272. Charles Diehl, *Constantinople*, Paris: 1924, 90, quotes the *Journal* of Antoine Galland who in the 17th century calculated that the sultan's march through the city took five hours.

⁶² Viaggio 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, da diversi luoghi..., Rome: [1650] 1660, 56-57. See also Sieur du Loir, *Voyage du Sieur du Loir, contenu en plusieurs lettres écrites du Levant, avec plusieurs particularités.... Du Grand Seigneur, la Religion & les mœurs de ses Sujets*, Paris: chez François Clouzier 1654, 55-64, containing a long description of his walk through the main street: he describes on one side of the Beyazıt mosque a long gallery where “gentillesse comme on fait à Paris au Palais, hormis des rubans, parce qu'ils n'en portent point” were sold (58); Şehzade mosque is at the end of “une rue ... belle et large [ou] on vend les arcs, les fleches & les cervois”, in the same street (from Okçular in Beyazıt to Şehzadebaşı) he describes “la Vieille Chambre des Janissaires.... proche de là... deux colonnes ... Bruslée, la seconde appelée hystoralle, est où se tenoit autrefois le Marché des Femmes... Dykili-Tach...” (59-60).

⁶³ Cfr. Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: the Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Cambridge MA-London: The MIT Press 1991, 258: “..the 18th cent marked an increased relaxation of the ceremonial code...”.

after the enthronement of Osman III in 1754, his mother moved to the Topkapı Palace from the Old Palace in a closed litter and greeted the crowds “*Bila-bicab kafesleri açub*”, (shamelessly opening the grills despite the Islamic principle of closure).⁶⁴

The Sultan’s relation to the city, its rites and customs, is a subtle and not always palpably described mix of aloof separateness and boisterous exposure. Was not the separateness of the Topkapı Palace,⁶⁵ reached from the Divan Yolu only after a detour around Ayasofya, scarcely visible from anywhere but across the street, and yet with all the traffic it generated—troops, conspiring groups, goods, craftsmen, Divan officials, princesses—all moving within reach of, or physically within, the main thoroughfare; was not this contiguity-separateness, the key to understanding the interplay of attention and neglect, order and chaos, possession and abandon which formed and yet de-structured the axis as an architecturally perceivable artefact?

Military parades

The most impressive and perhaps more involving of the state processions, the week-long parade of troops and Pashas outing for campaigns in the West, must have had a strong impact on the people of Istanbul, and exposed the heart of the Ottoman political system and its tensions in dealing with the population. Those parade-like marches developed along the five kilometres of the Edirnekapi-Topkapı route. They touched (and if my analysis of street topography is correct, ran through and stopped in), the Fatih building compound in view of Sultan Mehmet Han’s *türbe*, and perhaps would have been involved as much in the other Mehmet’s (Şehzade) complex if the

⁶⁴ Necdet Sakaoğlu, art. “Osman III” in *Dünden bugüne İstanbul*, VI, 154-157.

⁶⁵ See Necipoğlu Topkapı, 242: “The palace was not only an architectural manifestation of Ottoman absolutism; its architecture in turn actively informed the discourse and conceptualization of empire for generations... standing isolated... majestically raised over the Byzantine acropolis, the new order superimposed upon the old”, and 251: “Friday prayers, when he (Mehmet II) paraded from his palace to the imperial mosques...”.

original project of a symmetrical outer court on the Eski Odalar grounds had been realized.⁶⁶

Naima mentions the ‘magnificent’ procession of the army and the *merkeb-i hümayun* (the Sultan’s and his retinue’s procession) with the *ulema* and *kübera* (the grandees) at the start of the campaign of June 1596 against the Hungarians and Serbs from Edirne.⁶⁷ He does not describe it in detail, but it must have been very similar to those in Istanbul. D’Ohsson’s description of the seven days of passage of troops and officials and statesmen for Emin Mehmet Pasha’s 1769 Russian campaign, and his account of the troubles which accompanied the campaign procession point to a level of symbolic interference between the powerful and the subjects coming to light in some, but not all, points and structures of the city.⁶⁸ The Conak-Toughi emblem (the *Konak tuğu* horse-tail banner) was exhibited to the public for six weeks, at the end of which it was carried to the military camp in Davut Pasha outside the city. The next day, the janissary craftsmen units as well as many other *odas* and dervishes started from the Atmeydan. The procession was long and variegated: first come the farmers, then booksellers, millers, tailors etc, all in military uniforms. Two days later, the janissaries with their dervishes and music went out through two wings of crowds of men and women. In the following days other troops followed. The last day was dedicated to the procession of the Grand Vizier, the banners, the Grand Mufti in *kotchî* (open coach).

⁶⁶ And at this point, I would speculate if Sinan’s genial innovation of lateral arcades for the Sultan mosques had not been thought of as a fit backstage for, or architectural commentary to, the processions.

⁶⁷ Naima, *Naima Tarihi*, 143.

⁶⁸ D’Ohsson *Tableau*, III 420-23. Benvenga also describes a 17th century *alay* towards Edirnekapı during the beginning of a military campaign: Abbate Michele Benvenga, *Viaggio di Levante con la Descrizione di Costantinopoli e d’ogni altro accidente*, Bologna 1688, 206-20. See Chapter 9 for imperial ritual and daily urban life.



Fig. 21: *A procession winding through the Divanyolu during the reign of Soliman the Magnificent. Engraving by Pieter Coeck van Aelst around 1535. The engraving has been reversed in printing so as to show in the correct topographical sequence the mosque of Firuz Ağa on the left and the Fatih complex in the background, upper right.*

The whole ceremony was overseen by the master of ceremonies and his three assistants. As usual, there were disorders because of the turbulence of the troops and the fanaticism of the dervishes and the emirs: some hundred non-Muslims were killed and the Muslims who tried to defend them were wounded. In the following days ten of the disturbance makers were hanged. In 1793 Abdül Hamit I abrogated the *alay* tradition and the campaign against Austria started without that ceremonial.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, “*Cevdet Paşa Tarihinden Seçmeler*”, İstanbul 1994, 189.

Necipoğlu's interpretation of the Istanbul Sultan mosques as an ideal itinerary linking the Imperial mausoleums along the Divanyolu⁷⁰ affords us still another key for understanding the complex ideological perception of this axis, made of overlapping and sometimes diverging layers of values, uses and symbols, of single 'stations' architecturally and monumentally defined, but which was not modelled homogeneously in all its length.

A large number of Sultans had been buried aligned along this long route: Mehmet II (d. 1481) at Fatih, Beyazıt II (d. 1512) at Beyazıt, Selim II (d. 1574), Murat III (d. 1595), Mustafa I (d. 1623) and Ibrahim (d. 1648) in Ayasofya, Ahmet I (d. 1617), Osman II (d. 1622) and Murat IV (d. 1640) in the Sultan Ahmet ensemble nearby. But not all the sultans had their tombs on the Divan axis. Süleyman the Magnificent (d. 1566) had chosen a site on the axis for that of his son, not for his own and for his father's (Selim II d. 1520), having favoured isolated and impressive hilltop sites at noteworthy distance from the thoroughfare for their *keülliyeye*.⁷¹ Other sultans in different epochs had imitated him.

From mid 17th century to mid 19th, the central thoroughfare was no longer favoured for funerary sites. We perceive two distinct trends: one chose building compounds dominating the view from the sea, the second opted for those in touch with the daily commercial life of the town. Curiously (or should we say, significantly?) this period corresponds roughly to that of the predominance of the Pasha sites on the axis. There is a hundred and forty year long period, from 1648 to 1789, in which the Sultans seem to prefer burial in centrally located mosques within important commercial areas, or in existing

⁷⁰ Gülru Necipoğlu, "Dynastic Imprint on the Cityscape: the Collective Message of Imperial Funerary Mosque complexes in Istanbul" in *Cimetières et traditions funéraires dans le monde islamique: actes du colloque international... Istanbul, 28-30 septembre 1991*, eds. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Aksel Tibet, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1996, II 23-36.

⁷¹ The Sultan Abdülmecid (d. 1861) also is buried in the Selim complex.

külliye, all off the axis except the Lâleli ensemble, which is, however, on its southern and minor branch.⁷²

In mid 19th century, Mahmut II (d. 1839) broke this trend and chose a highly symbolic site, reasserting the Divan Yolu as the theatre of the state's power.⁷³ It is no longer the domain of the great pasha families but that of the new balance emerging from the Gülhane Ferman constitutional reforms which crown the efforts of the Sultan and of the progressive components of the state apparatus. The Mahmut II mausoleum was conceived as part of a cemetery which would, in the course of time, hold important members of officialdom. Its position, too, on the crossroad to Bâbüâli, the seat of government, throws a very meaningful light on the link between the Sultan and Bâbüâli in the mid decades of the 19th century.

⁷² Mehmet IV (buried in the Eminönü Valide Camii) to Süleyman II and Ahmed II (both in the Süleymaniye complex) to Mustafa II, Ahmed III and Osman III (also in the Valide Camii), Mustafa III (d. 1774) and his son Selim III (d. 1808) in Mustafa's mosque in Lâleli, Abdül Hamit I (d. 1789) in his Bahçekapı *külliye*.

⁷³ See Necipoğlu *Topkapı*, 31 -34. Even if the Divanyolu was not the main or only site for the ritual visit to the royal tombs, it still was the route to reach them.

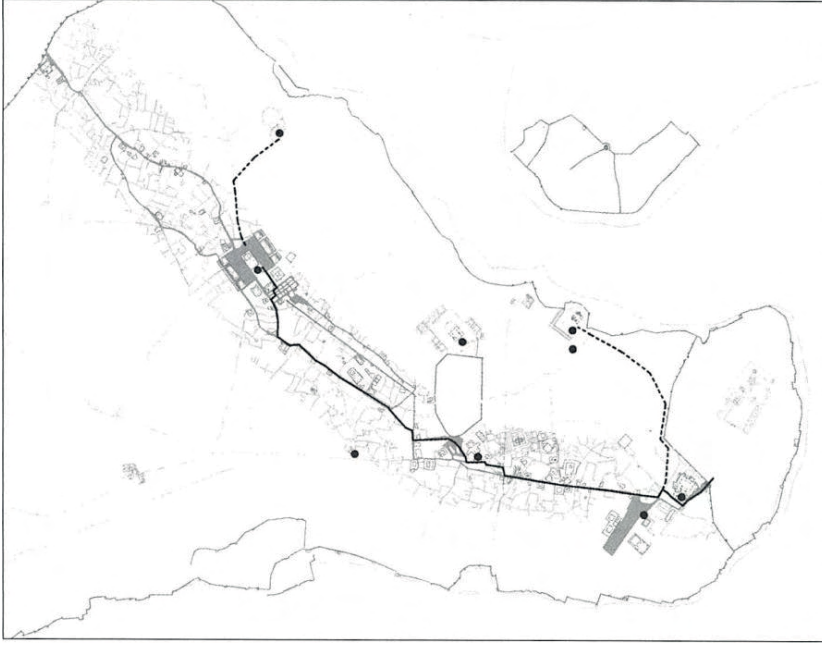


Fig. 22: Funeral processions and mausoleums of the sultans. Each dot represents a mausoleum or group of mausoleums.

This mausoleum and the Fatih and Şehzade *türbe* are the only points where the reigning Ottoman dynasty made manifest to the busy life and traffic of the city core its cult of the dynastic dead. In both cases (and similarly in the Ayasofya precinct, which did not have, however, the same impact on city life, and in the Abdül Hamit I *türbe* which is in a different part of the city centre) passers-by could see directly the mausoleums and offer their prayer.

It must be added, on the other hand, that the imperial funeral *alay*, accompanied by the new Sultan—who derived in part the dynastic legitimacy of his power from this show of loyalty to his ancestors—had to run along the Divan axis with the sole exception of the funerals for sultans to be buried in the Eminönü-Bahçekapı district and in Ayasofya. It was perhaps a sign of the times that the last Sultan to be buried in Istanbul, Sultan Reşat (Mehmet V d. 1918), had chosen his burial ground in Eyüp, and was taken there by boat along the Golden Horn, bypassing the Divanyolu, whereas, a century earlier, the funeral of Selim the Third's much respected and pious mother, Mihrîşah Sultan, also buried in Eyüp in her grand complex, had run along the axis.

We can say that the dynasty's self-exposure to the public, at least as far the cult of the dead is concerned, did not follow strict permanent rules, but that there were very clear patterns which dominated the scene for decades.

The Friday alay

The Sultans attended the Friday prayers each week in a different *selatin* (imperial) mosque. In 1610, writes Sandys, he was followed by a retinue of one thousand men.⁷⁴ Did they always ride through the Divan Yolu? If we can judge from the Selim III *Ruzname*,⁷⁵ not necessarily always, though this route did prevail. The examination of some fifty trips for the Friday *namaz* to Sultan mosques on the Aksaray e Edirnekapi routes gives a good idea of the use of space in that period, before the main changes in street width and cuts of mid-19th century. Beyazıt, Lâleli, Fatih are the main destinations, and in a surprisingly lesser measure, Şehzade, Süleymaniye and Eyüp.⁷⁶ There is an unexpected frequency of trips to Lâleli on horseback both ways; the return usually (*mütad üzre*) starts with a visit to Eski Saray or to the Lâleli sepulchre of the Sultan's father, Mustafa III. And, of

⁷⁴ George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610. Four Books containing a description of the Turkish Empire, of Aegypt, of the Holy Land*, London: 1637 (4th ed.), 75.

⁷⁵ Serkâtibi Ahmed *Ruzname*. It does not always describe in detail the routes but invariably mentions the mosques visited, and distinguishes horseback trips (*alay-ı süvar*) and boat trips (*sandal ile*).

⁷⁶ These last two mosques have been examined for comparative reasons, whereas other *selatin* mosques, such as Nuruosmaniye, Yeni Valide, as well as the Bosphorus and Üsküdar mosques have not been examined. If we can trust Ahmet Efendi's registry, the Sultan went to Süleymaniye for Friday prayers only seven times in eleven years: but then, when he went there he had to stop at the nearby Ağa Kapısı (the Janissary commander's palace) to drink the ritual cup of syrup ("*mu'tad olan nuş-ı şerbet rüsumu*"), not a pleasant incumbency for a sovereign who was trying to eradicate the power of that corps!

course, rain or other inconveniences brought about last minute changes in programme.⁷⁷

The *sank alayı* (the procession of officials with two turbans of the Sultan, a day or a few hours in advance on his passage, to announce the itinerary), also, proves the existence of alternate routes. In a later epoch, with no *sank alayı* preceding him, Selim III sought to travel on different routes on the return trip from the Friday rite. Even when he travelled by boat he would use a different landing for the return trip.⁷⁸ These apparently unimportant details explicit a strategy of exposure of the monarch, through transient events and through places not always monumental or formally solemn.

Feast processions

The Sultan's and the Imperial court's feasts had often a public finale. Courtly feasts, for weddings, circumcisions, or on less important occasions, ended with processions carrying *nahl* between the New and Old Palaces, or from this last to a *konak* or to a mosque.⁷⁹ The illumination and decoration (*donanma*, *şehrayin*) of houses and public buildings must have been a frequent event.⁸⁰

Once or twice in a century, there had also been grandiose feasts and processions offered by the sultans to the whole town populace. They were expensive and lasted weeks. Their magnificence is

⁷⁷ The Friday procession has been widely described and depicted in paintings and etchings. Dattili (Conte L. Dattili, *Aperçu de la Ville de Constantinople*, Turin: 1831, 22) insists on the Sultan's changing his destination every week. Some late 19th century travellers report the sultans' preference for the newer Bosphorus mosques.

⁷⁸ Cfr. Berger "Processions", 81 for horse-back or boat trips of Byzantine emperors one way to or from processions. Ibid., 82-83, 85: the way by boat to Blachernai church, to the Pege and Stoudion monasteries and to St. Kosmas and Damianos was normal.

⁷⁹ See Doğan Kuban, "The miniatures of Surname-i Vehbi", and Stefan Yerasimos, "The Imperial Procession: Recreating a world's order" both in the facsimile Vehbi *Surname* volume. D'Ohsson *Tableau*, II 175: "*Divan-yoli: ... c'est-là que se font les marches solennelles dans toutes les fêtes civiles et religieuses*".

⁸⁰ Metin And, *Kırk gün kırk gece*, İstanbul: 1959.

witnessed by the *Surname* albums written by great poets and illustrated by famous miniaturists. The last such procession was enacted in October 1720 for the circumcision feast of the crown princes and of 500 children of the town people and ran through the Divan axis.⁸¹

Eyüp and the girdling of the sword

In the variegated typology of stately *alay*, the five-six hour cavalcade of the Sultan before or after the sword-girdling ceremony in Eyüp Ansar's mausoleum in Eyüp outside the city walls had a particular pregnancy.

The origin and symbolism of that ceremony has been widely, but not conclusively, discussed.⁸² What we do know is that up to 1807 the Sultan was taken by rowboat to Eyüp and having been consecrated there, rode back from Edirnekapı to the Palace through the Divan axis acclaimed by his subjects. It has been held that in 1807 Mustafa IV inverted the traditional direction of the *cülus* parade, going to Eyüp by land and returning to the Palace by boat.⁸³

⁸¹ See Chapter 2 and Vehbi *Surname*.

⁸² Cemal Kafadar, "Eyüp'te Kılıç Kuşanma Törenleri" in *Eyüp: Dün/Bugün (...sempozyum, 11-12 Aralık 1993)*, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı 1994, discusses our limited knowledge of the origin and significance of the ceremony.

⁸³ See for example, in art. "İstanbul", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988-, 5 ii 1218-19, Ahmed III's sword girdling ceremony and his return through Edirne Kapı to the Palace. Also: Necdet Sakaoğlu, "Saray ve İstanbul", in *Essays in Honour of Aptullah Kuran*, eds. Ç. Kafesçioğlu and L. Thyss-Şenocak, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayınları 1999, 278-285. İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray teşkilatı*, Ankara: 1984, dedicates some chapters to ceremonial and takes up Es'ad Efendi, *Osmanlılarda Töre ve Törenler (Teşrifat-ı kadime)*, Istanbul: 1979, for the description of the *Alay*.

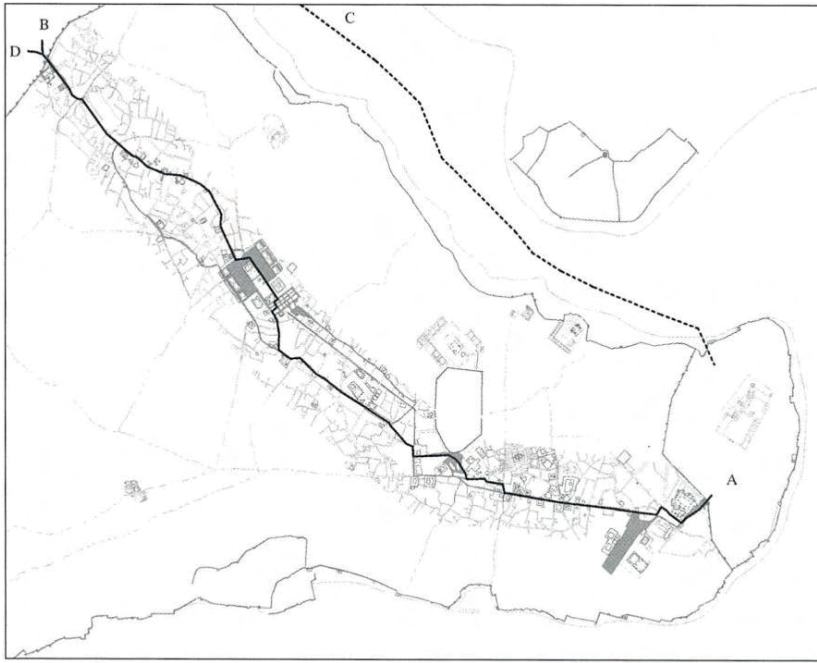


Fig. 23: Imperial processions through the city to and from Eyüp (A-B) and to the Davut Paşa military grounds (A-D). C: the sea route to Eyüp from the Topkapı Palace (A).

In the collective memory, all this surely interwove emotional and dramatic perceptions of the Istanbul people's life with power struggles and representations, as we shall see when examining the roles of the Pashas. The outcome was very far from the idyllic and picturesque representations on which a very large part of the literature on Istanbul, foreign and Turkish, has indulged, ignoring all that was not *mesire*, minute life and images of the *mahalle*, feasts and fireworks, great architecture... It was also quite distant from the formally harmonious representation of power, which all of us, sensitive to five centuries of Renaissance and post-Renaissance architecture, and impregnated with memories of Classical Antiquity, tend to associate to architecturally analogical space in which stately figures move within a stately architectural stage, and architecturally magnificent space is fittingly taken up by magnificent figures and processions.⁸⁴ Pietro della Valle mentions a “...strada ...dove il Rè &

⁸⁴ The axis remained to the very end “a scraggy path...”, much as in the *Via Papale*, Medieval Rome's main processional route from the

altri personaggi sogliono far le entrate più solenni...” in which he saw a “*corteo pomposo dei vezîri che vanno al Divano*” adding “*...quasi come i cardinali in Roma... ma questo di Costantinopoli è più maestoso assai.*”,⁸⁵ and in a general way, one might read here an echo of pre-Renaissance Rome and its papal processions.⁸⁶ There was a difference, however, which might help us understand better the ideological and psychological status of the Divanyolu. In Rome, confused antagonistic and/or servile feelings were sublimated in carnival-like acts and gestures (the ‘Possesso’ or seizure of the Pope’s mount) fixed by tradition. Such was not the case in Istanbul, even though some commentators have held that the phrase “*Sultanım, senden büyük Allah var!*” (“My Sultan, [only?] God is greater than you!”) in the *alkış* had more of the warning than the praise.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the contents of representation of power and magnificence, were those of the retinue and of the processions, but were not sublimated into an overall architectural image as they did in later Rome. The Ottomans, though they did reinterpret the Byzantine imperial ideology of universal

Vatican to the Lateran, that had to submit much later to the Renaissance and Baroque political and aesthetic vision to become a precise architectural image on a grand scale (Richard Ingersoll, *The Ritual use of Public Space in renaissance Rome*, (Ph.D. thesis University of California, Berkeley 1985), University Microfilms International 1990, 177-79).

⁸⁵ Della Valle *Viaggio*, 94.

⁸⁶ As described in Ingersoll *The Ritual use*. There too, the *Via Papale* was run by ceremonies and processions, not always in its full length; streets and ceremonial roles were not fixed. There too, up to the 16th century, the route had not found an architectural vest. There too, the procession was a paradigm of the relations of the populace factions to the powerful, an occasion for giving vent to not clearly perceived antagonisms.

⁸⁷ See Konrad Dilger, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Osmanischen Hofzeremoniells in 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, München 1967, 62-70; Mehmed Zeki Pakalın, entry “*Alkış*” in: *Osmanlı tarih deyimleri ve terimleri sözlüğü*, Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1946-1956: “*mağrur olma Sultanım, senden büyük Allah var*” [quoted from Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil].

hegemony in their court ceremonies and rhetoric,⁸⁸ did not inherit even from the earlier if not from their immediate predecessors, the will to incorporate urban space in their vision of rite and magnificence. On the other hand, the thoroughfare reacquired very fast the ancient density of its urban functions, lost during the last decades of Byzantium, making difficult, even if the will had existed, to model that space into a unique and coherent architectural representation of the state's power.

We can then conclude that the highest level of urban formation and significance, the Sultan's level, did not model plastically the Divan axis (and the Divanyolu proper) after its own image, as it did in many imperial ensembles in other contexts.

But from the last decades of the 17th century a minor level of power was active in modelling piecemeal, and yet coherently, the axis.

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⁸⁸ Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954; Ebersolt *Constantinople: recueil*, appendix *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie byzantine*, 7. See also various passages in Necipovoğlu *Topkapı*.