

Chapter 6: Change and Variations

The comparative study of available maps drawn over a period of three centuries and of the architectural typology reveals noteworthy changes, and even blatant contradictions and conflicts of ‘planning’ ideology and aesthetic attitudes in the Divan axis. This is particularly true after the Tanzimat period, but great differences in width, layout and geometry of the system can be discerned more or less in all periods.

To what degree were the differences perceived over the centuries in the layout of the axis due to effective mutations, and to what degree to subjective or to the cultural differences of the observers?

I have already observed that the deformation of the street layout in pre-18th century maps does not suggest an effective change in physical form (see Chapter 2). Buondelmonti, who had seen in pre-Ottoman Constantinople some columns of the Mese standing, nevertheless traces frankly curved paths between the monuments. To counterbalance this apparent lack of straight streets in the Byzantine city, we have Vavassore’s later image of a hesitating but vaguely linear street from Ayasofya up to Constantine’s column (fig. 6). Which is true to life? The Divan axis was traced or re-traced across vast, once urban, but at the time semi-void (or even semi-rural) space. After 1453 it had been re-urbanized at points. Not all new public uses were kept throughout the Ottoman period: many *vakif* buildings decayed or were abandoned, others were renovated where patrons saw fit. Fires gutted the quarters through which the axis ran. All this enhanced a sense of continuous transformation and contributed to the unfinished aspect of the city.

Street naming, too, was ambiguous. Written sources rarely allow us to identify streets with the precision of position and path that morphological analysis requires. Nevertheless, we can conclude that some streets did lose their relevance and were replaced by others running in the same direction; that more than one street formed the main course; that deviations were so frequent that sometimes side streets took on the function of the main street. This is very evident around Beyazit *meydan* and the Old Palace and immediately East and South of the Fatih complex. In both cases it is probably the growth of the shopping districts and of their street mesh that deviated the route from its previous linear (though never straight) course.

On the whole, the pattern of change in the course of time does not show a chronological progression of expansion or densification outwards from the centre, a process of building or renewal starting from the centre and working out to the city walls. The chronology of the monuments and the divagations of the lane confirm that urbanization, or better, Ottomanisation, invested from the very beginning the whole historic peninsula within the Theodosian walls—a vast and sparsely built territory—siting monumental buildings and collective functions along the entire axis in points disparate and sometimes quite peripheral. There was no grand princely plan but only individual *rakıf* donations, hence individual decision-making. The two complexes founded by Ali Pasha the Old (Atik) at both ends of the axis with no attempt to concentrate on an enclave or single street scene to imprint the endower's will and vision on the city in a grand design, are typical of this process. The classical period foundations (roughly of the 1520-1650 period) are dispersed over the whole length of the thoroughfare. On the contrary, the 17th and 18th century foundations tend to concentrate, with some rare exceptions, in the tract between Fatih and Çemberlitaş (see plates VI, VII).

Frequent changes in property, use and form, and the transience of a large part of the artefacts (timber housing, easily dismantled precinct walls) rendered it very difficult to maintain a recognizable formal asset of the axis at any period. Fires had a determinant role in the phenomenon of continuous change of the city image.⁹⁶ Change came also because building, demolition and rebuilding, rehabilitation of decaying structures were diffuse activities all over the axis at all times. So many mosques, fountains, palaces have been rebuilt, reconverted, or merely repaired and re-dedicated by new patrons,

⁹⁶ See: İnalçık "İstanbul", 247-48, and the entries "İstanbul", "Mustafa III", "Osman II" and "Selim III" in *Dünden bugüne İstanbul: great fires touched the area in 1718 and in 1757; the Kapalıçarşı was restored after the great earthquake of 1767; in 1808 the fire that broke out in the Cebeçiler janissary barracks ravaged the districts of Ayasofya, Sultan Ahmet and Divan Yolu. Because of the 1812 cholera epidemic the *bekâr odaları* (bachelor rooms in *hans* and shanties) were demolished. Fires broke out in 1826 in the Grand bazaar, and in 1827 around the Şehzade Acemi barracks, in 1865 in Hoca Pasha.*

that the date of their first foundation and that of effective construction of the standing monument are hopelessly intermixed for all but the most important and well studied cases.⁹⁷

The perception of continuous transformation, of juxtaposed decay and new grandeur, is true of all pre-modern great historical centres in the Mediterranean.⁹⁸ Rome was an arcadia of ruins, fields, empty lots and of monuments ancient and contemporary. In Istanbul, great fires, the typological trend to low densities and garden enclosures, the transient tenure of palaces and *konak*, the not so rare abandonment of *vakıf* buildings (both confirmed by chronicles and documents) accentuated the feeling of continuous transformation. The diffusion of provisional booths and sheds, which we can see in drawings and photographs, must have aggravated that feeling and rendered, in any epoch, difficult to perceive the monumental aspects of the overall structure. Street level rose or dropped at even greater rates than in Rome.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Reconstruction and reuse were particularly important in the tract between Ayasofya and Beyazıt. One example of reuse of a site is that of the Çorlulu Ali Pasha complex near Parmakkapı (now Çarşıkapı), which is believed to have been built on the site of the old Simkeşhane (gilding workshops) after being bought from its patroness who built the larger and renewed Simkeşhane Han in Beyazıt. See *Garden of the Mosques* 28, 86; and also, İnalcık “Istanbul”, 241. This is a simple case because architecturally both buildings were new.

⁹⁸ As Kostof asserts “...in cities only change endures...all cities are caught in a balancing act between destruction and preservation...deterioration of the urban fabric isa constant”. Spiro Kostof, *The city assembled: the elements of urban form through history*, London: Thames and Hudson 1992, 105, 280, 290.

⁹⁹ In Imperial Rome the ground level rose 120 cm from the Augustan to the Constantine period. In İstanbul, writes İnciciyan (*XVIII. Asırda*, 67-69) the column of Constantine had its base 5 meters (sic) under street level. The grading of the Divanyolu after 1867 brought around a drop of street level in front of the Mahmut II funerary complex, giving it its queer look raised on rhetorically monumental steps.

Another sign of change in the course of time was the increasing cultural and political introversion of *intra muros* Istanbul from the 16th century up to the 19th as opposed to Galata and the port quarters. This certainly gave distinctive functional attributes to the Divan axis (within which the western tract took on an even more introverted character), and practically meant closure to the activities of foreign residents. As a matter of fact, Elçi Han (sometimes called by foreigners Deutsche Haus), which had been the residence of foreign emissaries and merchants in the 16th century, ceased to be so around mid 17th when it was allocated to the representatives of vassal states. International trade, leisure activities not of Turkish-Ottoman character developed elsewhere. So did administrative functions as Bâbıali took over the functions once dealt in the individual pasha *konaks*. Retail commerce, Ottoman type leisure activities, housing and religious activities augmented. But, as we shall see, the second half of the 19th century brought a very interesting inversion of trends. For a few decades, not only Western style theatres and cinemas but also internationally linked activities took root along the axis.¹⁰⁰ So much so, that between roughly 1880 and 1920 the throbbing and modernising heart of the city was centred in the Şehzade-Firuz Ağa tract, a sort of *ante litteram* Beyoğlu-Taksim.

Perhaps the most important changes in the place of the various tracts of the axis in the town structure and their symbolic weight became manifest after 1860, but it was a phenomenon in preparation

¹⁰⁰ Was the settlement of certain United States agencies on and near the axis, around the end of the 19th century and during the Allied occupation of the city, a sign of the return of foreign agencies to a district of increasing importance and tending to modernise? See the Pervititch maps which show an American Hospital in a *konak* near the Kara Mustafa *medrese*, the YMCA in Beyazıt (Jacques Pervititch *sigorta haritalarında İstanbul: İstanbul in the insurance maps of Jacques Perrititch*, Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı, 2000). I am told by Paolo Girardelli of Boğaziçi University that the *American Bible House* (or *Han*) was in Mercan, east of the Serasker (ex Old Palace) area in a building designed by Giorgio Domenico Stampa, Istanbul architect of Italian origin, and that the Armenian Protestant church in Gedikpaşa (founded 1830, built 1911), just south of the Divanyolu must have been connected to American missionary activity.

for over a century: the gradual shift in functional-political weight from the Topkapı-Ayasofya-Çemberlitaş route to the Bâbîali-Çemberlitaş route. Since 1654, when the Grand Vizier Halil Pasha's *konak* near the Alay Köşk had been confiscated,¹⁰¹ it had become, on and off for the next decades, the residence and office of the Grand Vizier in charge. From the first decades of the 18th century it was the permanent seat of the government and its growing bureaucratic services.¹⁰² This ensued in a conspicuous shift of activities from the Topkapı Palace to Bâbîali, hence a partial transfer in ceremonial symbolism and a tangible shift in effective urban traffic to and from the city's centre and main routes. And yet, for many more decades, at least till 1848, there was no direct connection between Bâbîali and the Bazaar district, which had to be reached either through Mahmut Pasha or through the Divanyolu by Ayasofya.¹⁰³ It is therefore surprising that in the planning of the Nuruosmaniye building compound, ninety years before that devious connection changed, the main entrance to the Bazaar had been enhanced by the route across the two gates of the outer court: a very strong preliminary statement for the design of a street aimed at the Bâbîali district.¹⁰⁴ By 1880 this state of things had thoroughly changed with the opening of the Nuruosmaniye and Bâbîali main streets. But the forerunner of that transformation was Mahmut the Second's funerary complex, an urban hinge underlining the passage from one axis to the other in topography and symbolism, linking as it did the new focuses of the emerging Tanzimat: the seat of government and the more dynamic aspects of 'modern' commercial and urban functions.¹⁰⁵ The Bâbîali-

¹⁰¹ Robert Mantran, *La Vie Quotidienne à Constantinople aux temps de Soliman le Magnifique et de ses successeurs (XVI^e et XVII^e siècles)*, Paris: Hachette 1965, 36-41.

¹⁰² Mehmet Nermi Haskan, *Hükümet kapısı, Bab-ı Ali: kuruluşundan Cumhuriyet'e kadar*, İstanbul: Çelik Gülersoy Vakfı 2000.

¹⁰³ See for example, the Kauffer, Melling and Moltke maps and the 1848 Mühendishane survey (figs. 8, 9, 10).

¹⁰⁴ I have dwelt in detail on this question in Cerasi "Perspective".

¹⁰⁵ For later dramatic transformations—the reorganization proposals of the "Islahat-ı Turuk" urban street reform commission (1865-69) at work after the great Hocapşa fire—see Çelik *Remaking*, 48-52. The proposals included the conservation of monuments, a symmetrical rearrangement of the Mahmut II mausoleum, the

Nuruosmaniye-Çarşı direction absorbed interests which in precedence were concentrated on the Topkapı Palace-Ayasofya-Çemberlitaş direction, freeing this last from urban density, giving it, so to speak, more breath for upper education, important official departments and monumental open space. It was not only a return of the dead Sultan's return to the Divanyolu. It was also a very strong takeover of the new state bureaucracy of symbolic space from the old Pashas.

I have already mentioned the change in size from the grand masonry palaces of the Classical period to the smaller but still large timber *konaks* dominating the 18th century scene in the midst of modest current housing. In the 19th century their size further diminished, but they became more diffuse. Some had front gardens separated from the street by walls, but mostly they had lateral or backyard gardens and they were constituted of the same architectural elements of the typical middle-class housing of traditional Istanbul, though they were more refined and very much larger.¹⁰⁶

An important historical factor of change came from the out spill of government activities out of the Bâbiâli area into the Divanyolu, and in general, from the emergence, during the last decades of the 19th century, of an upper-middle-class environment of *konaks*, coffeehouses and leisure activities of various types in the eastern tract of the axis. This went so far as to affect the funereal status of the axis. The surviving tombs nearest to the street front in the Çorlulu, Köprülü, Atik Ali and Koca Sinan *hazire* are mostly of the 19th century.¹⁰⁷ Though inhumation was always in peripheral cemeteries

definition of the Divan Yolu as a “*cadde-i cesim*”, and d tramway line.

¹⁰⁶ The educational reform of the last decades of the 19th century, taking over some typical timber *konaks* broke the masonry tradition of Ottoman *medrese* and *sibyan mektebi* as can be seen in the schools section of the Sultan Abdül Hamit photographic collection. The author remembers many state offices standing in the Fifties of the 20th century which had obviously been such *konaks*.

¹⁰⁷ Of course, these *hazire* have been subjected to various disturbances. I must mention some of our findings after a partial and preliminary survey on the tombs along the Divanyolu in four

after 1860-70,¹⁰⁸ the positions most visible from the street were still allotted to prominent persons. Most research conclusions point to a change in patronage and user category in the area, and a gradual appropriation of the 'aristocratic' or Pasha burial sites. Members of the higher and middle levels of Palace and Bâbiali bureaucracy, military and civilian, took over. The very large *hazire* of the Mahmut II ensemble was plausibly meant to assert this trend. It combines monumentality, symbolism and public and private piety in contact with residential urban life and within a well-defined space continuum, a very 'bourgeois' combination. Significantly, such mutations are completely absent from the socially more conservative tract west of Fatih.¹⁰⁹

building compounds. There has been considerable turnover of tombstones (very few pre-1800 tombs have survived). The tombs facing the street in the Çorlulu, Köprülü, Atik Ali e Koca Sinan are mainly of the 18th and 19th centuries, well after their foundation. It is to be presumed that the older tombstones have been substituted. The preliminary surveys were conducted for this program by Prof. Yücel Demirel, Dr. Aygül Ağır, Dr. Tarkan Okçuoğlu, Dr. Deniz Mazlum, for epigraphy and dating, and architect Emiliano Bugatti and Sabrina D'Agostino for architectural elements. There is a large amount of tombstones marking the burial-place of late 18th and 19th century personalities and their familiars in positions visible from the Divanyolu. Of the 35 tombs facing the street examined in the Köprülü *hazire*, 2 were of the first half of the 19th century and 3 of the second half; in that of Atik Ali they were respectively 40 and 7 out of 76; in that of Koca Sinan 16 and 14 out of 67; in that of Çorlulu Ali 16 and 7 out of 38. Considering the great number of illegible tombstones, this is a very high proportion. Almost all the rest are of the 18th century. Only 8 were of the 17th century, none earlier.

¹⁰⁸ The outer cemeteries of Eyüp and Üsküdar were the main burial areas. Only important personalities could be buried in central areas. Apparently, the reuse of tombs (theoretically forbidden) in central *hazire* was current practice for the privileged.

¹⁰⁹ See Edhem Eldem, "Istanbul: from imperial to peripheralized capital", in *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, eds. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce Masters, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 135-206, at p. 202:

This level of change in social milieu and in urban life had, for almost eighty years up to the early 1940s, an important place in intellectual and middleclass opinion's nostalgic perception of the 'Istanbul tradition'. It has been described in memoirs, and in the literary evocation of atmospheres, but has scarcely been registered in images.¹¹⁰

The Goad and the Pervititch maps,¹¹¹ as well as the few extant 19th century photographs, suggest that at the end of that century, 'modern' urban activities and types had inserted themselves in the existing fabric in a spontaneous and haphazard process; that some timber *konaks* and traditional houses survived among the dense sprawl of commercial buildings around the Bazaar and Mahmut Pasha; that 'European-wise' street enlargement and avenue-making coexisted with fragments of traditional urban fabric and Ottoman monuments, creating a bewildering and complex situation much like urban periphery in Western Europe or early American 'down-town'.

The continuous upheaval of functions and buildings allowed a lasting architectural mark, coherent in its grammar and urban logic,

"As with the Empire as a whole, Istanbul began to reflect a growing divide between modernity and tradition. While some of its parts adapted to the new functions and roles assigned to them, a great portion of the city, unable to conform to the new conjuncture, began to decay and stagnate." Eldem appears to see this process much later than I do, during a phase of "explosion of the city outward" when the upper classes move their residence out of the *intra muros* city and only the administrative centre remains on the Divanyolu. Considering the subtler functional changes the Divan axis reflects, I believe that the "option of asserting a more traditional or conservative stand by staying within the perimeter of the walled city" (ibid. 204) is not quite true before the turn of the century.

¹¹⁰ For the curious ellipsis of current residential aspects of the Divanyolu abundantly photographed during the second half of the 19th century by well-known professional photographers for its monumental and picturesque scenery of public buildings, street vendors etc., see my 2002 essay (now in print): Maurice Cerasi, "The Perception of the Divanyolu through Ottoman History", in: *Essays in Honour of Professor Afife Batur*, eds. A. Ağır and N. Akin, Istanbul: Literatur [2004].

¹¹¹ Insurance maps of Pervititch (see *Pervititch sigorta*).

only through the 17th and 18th centuries, certainly not a long period in the sixteen-century long history of the axis. The changes, which came later, left only contradictory signals, did not 'Westernise' the axis, nor gave meaning to the Ottoman elements (see Chapter 10).

(MC)