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ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF HOTELS
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ISTANBUL

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Synopsis

Hotels in the contemporary sense were established in Istanbul in the late 1830's. This paper examines the facilities available to travellers prior to that date and studies the reasons leading to the opening of the first hotels in that decade. Hotels were basically a concept alien to the Ottoman society of that day and they were opened by foreigners for the benefit of other foreigners. The paper examines location, management and standards of the hotels and there is a brief profile of the activities of Migirdiç Tokatlian an enterprising businessman who established a small scale hotel empire. There follows an architectural analysis of the main hotels' brief descriptions of hotels both down town in Pera and in resort-places on the Bosphorus and the Princes' Islands.
The initial aim of this paper was to study the architectural and social impact of the appearance during the first half of the XIXth century of hotels in Istanbul. However as we set out gathering data we soon discovered how scant the available information was. We therefore had to put up with a less ambitious program by limiting ourselves to raise a few tentative questions on a hitherto neglected aspect of the urban transformation of Istanbul during the past century. (1)

Hotels provide on a temporary basis lodgings, nourishment and occasionally entertainment. They are therefore inevitably associated with one or another aspect of travel and travellers. This may be one of the reasons why such establishments were so late in appearing in Ottoman Turkey and why they experienced so much hardship in striking roots. Indeed, travelling was until very recently a concept alien to the average Turk who usually contemplated the very idea of moving around from one place to another with abhorrence. Officials sent out on missions to the provinces were able to take advantage of an intricate system of corvée, inherited from the Byzantine whereby the local notables were to provide free accommodation to touring representatives of the central and provincial administration. (Kudumiyet/Tesri fiye) The gentleman of leisure who travelled for pleasure or self-improvement was a very rare species and traders bringing their wares to the larger market-places were catered for in the kervansaray or the han. The Western travellers who ventured into the Ottoman East had the choice of either with their own nationals who had settled locally or of asking the hospitality of Orthodox convents or monasteries. Greek monks provided lodgings for travellers well up to the 1870's. A French guide-book notes that the Greek monks had no excessive pretentions to austerity and that they welcomed travellers. The monks did not supply food to their guests but on the other hand they were profusely generous with their wine. (2)

Much has been written on the kervansaray and the han. Let us simply recall briefly that a han was a large, square building usually of stone with a spacious inner court around which store-houses for merchandise were lined up. On the upper floors were to be found sparsely furnished rooms along a vaulted passage built on columns, this circular gallery opened on the inner court. The clientele of the hans were usually traders and merchants who took a room for themselves on the floors and a depot on the court for their goods. Business was conducted in the han itself where all kinds of commercial transaction took place. Most of the Istanbul hans were divided on national lines and traders belonging to the same nationality would congregate in one particular han. The XIXth Century French writer Gérard de Nerval, for instance, gives an account of one such han frequented mostly by Persian fur merchants. (3) It is interesting to note that a Greek form of the Ottoman word, "Khani" has come by extension to be used in the sense of a common village inn. A guide-book gives a vivid though uninviting description of the amenities offered by the average Greek Khanî in the 1870's:

Le Khani est un batiment où l'on ne trouve que le toit et les quatre murs. Il se compose d'une chambre unique les fenêtres quant il y en a sont à peine fermées par un volet de bois. Quelquefois un plancher une espèce de lit de camps, rarement une natte en forment l'ameublement. Les tables et surtout les chaises y sont presque inconnues Le voyageur doit apporter avec lui son lit, ses provisions de bouche. Le landemain on paie au Khanî un prix assez élevé pour un gîte aussi mauvais"(4). Let us also point out that the first
Hotel opened in Edirne in the late 1860's, the "Auberge de l'Etoile" was in fact built on the lines of a traditional one-storeyed han with rooms for travellers on the upper floor overlooking a square yard with a fountain in the middle. As usual rooms were hardly furnished at all and food was not served in the hotel (5).

One can therefore assume that hotels are a foreign accretion grafted upon the local texture. Indeed a travelbook published in 1839 warns the travellers to Istanbul not to expect much as far as material comfort goes but adds "toujours l'industrie des nations civilisées s'y est largement installées depuis quelques années pour assurer toutes les commodités de l'existence matérielle."(6) The writer proceeds to state that among those imported "commodités" there are several moderately priced and well appointed hotels.

Hotels seem to have appeared in Istanbul in the 1830's as a result both of the increased mobility caused by the extension of steam navigation and of the opening up of the Ottoman Empire to foreign trade and finance which resulted in an influx of would-be entrepreneurs visiting the Ottoman capital and provinces. Indeed, during the following decades most of the major cities got endowed with one or more establishments providing "ce confort relatif que l'on est bien heureux de rencontrer dans les petites villes d'Orient après de longues journées à cheval et les stations dans les hans ou chez les paysans".(7)

That these establishments were foreign both in their inspiration and their inception is testified by several factors, the first being of a semantic nature. Bianchi's French-Turkish Dictionary published in 1846 gives a corrupted form of an Italian word, lostariye as a Turkish equivalent for hotel. The well-known Turkish lexicographer, Şemsettin Sami Bey, in his Kamus-u Türki published fifty years later defines a losariye as being a small lokanta, another word of Italian origin which again according to the Kamus is a place "where foreigners and travellers may lodge and obtain nourishment". In his French-Turkish Dictionary published in the same years Şemsettin Sami translated hotel with the word misafirhane. As a second choice he gives a phonetical transliteration in Ottoman of the word hotel. The Kamus defines a misafirhane as being an alla franca building equipped with all the pre-requisite for comfort and rest. It is interesting to note that Şemsettin Sami who had adopted the axiom of Messrs Littré and Larousse that a dictionary without examples is not a dictionary, chose his with a definite didactic view. In the entry for lokanka one can find a statement to the effect that "we stayed in a clean 1.". Similarly the example used to illustrate the verb konmak , (to stay in a place, to lodge) is a sentence reminding strongly of the kudumiye/tesrifiye taxes: passing through there we stayed at the house of one of the local gentry."

But enough of linguistics. Glancing through the various lists of hotels that opened in Istanbul and the provinces during the nineteenth century one finds out quickly that these establishments catering for Europeans were owned and run by Europeans. There was also the occasional non-moslem Ottoman. But one has to wait till the 1880's to find a Moslem Ottoman and a Hacı at that, running a hotel, one Hacı Ahmet Nuri Efendi who owned the Hotel-Restaurant de Roumelie at Sirkeci. One can only speculate in our present state of knowledge that the Hacı may have been a refugee or immigrant...
or an immigrant from one of the Roumelie Provinces ceded to Aus­
tria, Romania or Bulgaria and that he may have observed before his 
departure the benefits of such establishments. Still this is mere 
speculation as he may alternatively chosen the name of his hotel 
because of the proximity of the newly opened railway station of 
the Chemins de Fer de Roumelie.

Hotels catering as we have sair mainly for foreigners were establi­
shed in those parts of Istanbul where these were more numerous. 
Pera with its large community of resident foreigners and non-moslems 
had naturally pride of place. In the earlier years some hotels w 
were also established around Galata, The business quarter but th 
these establishments soon turned seedy and the better class of 
customers deserted them in favour of the Pera hotels. Likewise t 
the two villages on the Bosphorus, Büyükdere and Tarabya with a 
large and distinguished foreign community were soon to boast of 
not a few hotels. Hotels were also established in the Moda peni­
sula on the Asian shore where an important English colony had 
settled. The English were also instrumental in the opening of 
hotels on the Princes' Islands when these islands were 
turned into fashionable summer resorts during the 1880's. With 
the inauguration of the Sirkeci railway station, several hotels 
were established close to the station though one does not witness 
a similar phenomenon with the opening of the Haydarpaşa station, 
starting point of the Anatolian Railway.

The Pera hotels were usually to be found in the proximity of the 
foreign embassies and their names bear testimony to the nationa­
liity or the allegiance of their owners : Grand-Hotel Français, 
The Prince of Wales, Hotel de Breslau, Hotel d'Angleterre, de Ro­
me, d'Athènes etc. The inevitable Hotel Du Terminus or Hotel 
de la Gare does not unfortunately appear among the Sirkeci hotels, 
their owners being more imaginative or geographically minded 
with such names as Hotel d'Europe, de Sofia, d'andrinople though 
a French widow run a Hotel-Restaurant-Brasserie desChemins de Fers 
Orientalx just opposite the station.

These hotels were literally small foreign enclaves where nationals 
of one country would gather to partake of their own food, wine and 
most important read their newspaper in the cabinet de lecture put 
at the disposal of their customers by most hotels. Germans, Aust­
trians, Hungarians Italians and the French had their own hotels. 
There was even one hotel for Central European Jews which adver­
tised in the Beadeker that Yiddish was spoken. Advertisements 
reflected national preferences with French-owned hotels putting 
emphasis on the " cuisine française, bon vin" theme.

Though many hotels were established after the 1840's these were 
usually small affairs in converted private houses with a room 
capacity averaging 20-30 per establishment and fairly poor stan­
dards. There are two conflicting statements which seem to indica­
te that either a certain deterioration did take place as the num­
ber of hotels increased in the 1860's or that the customers have 
learned to be more demanding. Lacroix wrote in 1839 that the Pera 
hotels are reasonably priced and that they offer adequate service. 
On the other hand Isambert writing some 35 years later is more 
severe or more discriminate : he complains of the predatoryness 
of hotel owners whom he accuses of over-charging their rooms. He 
goes as far as suggesting to the would-be traveller to take up
rooms with private individuals as being both cheaper and more convenient. The same Isambert also regrets that there are no hotels in the old part of Istanbul and suggests that Ottoman kon-aks be turned into hostels for tourists as it had successfully been done in Damascus. (It is refreshing to see that there is nothing new under the sky when one reads of the efforts of the present day Turkish Ministry of Tourism in the same direction.

As a matter of fact one has to wait till the 1880's and the 1890's to see comparatively large hotels opening in Istanbul after the great fire of 1870 and the earthquake of 1894 which devastated a great portion of the wooden part of Pera. Houses and buildings were reconstructed in stone after these two calamities. (Heretofore all the guidebooks were unanimous in advising travellers to take up residence in preference in stone buildings. The règlement of the Hotel d'Angleterre, one of the oldest in the city expressly porbad smoking in the rooms.)

The Pera Palace with 150 rooms, run by the Société des Wagons-Lits Internationaux, the tokatlian with 100 rooms, the Bristol, the Kroeker and the Hotel de Londres each with 80 rooms were established at various dates in the 1880's and 1890's. But standards must still not have improved much as by 1910 only one hotel in Istanbul, the Grand Hotel Continental et Français was recommended by the Touring Club de France. With the reorganisation of the Istanbul municipality in the 1860's control of the hotels had been given to the municipal services but this supervision seems to have been fairly light-handed. In the 1890's hotels were asked to communicate regularly to the police lists of their patrons.

The History of the Tokatlian is comparatively the best documented one among the Istanbul hotels. We shall give a brief account of it as it is a nice story of a successful business venture starting with Migirdiç Tokatlian, an Armenian restaurateur owning a restaurant near the Grand Bazaar specialized in Turkish cuisine with a chosen clientele from among the senior bureaucrats of the near-by Sublime Porte, deciding to expand his business by opening a branch on the fashionable Grand-Rue de Pera. With his new branch inaugurated in 1892 under the name of Splendide, Tokatlian deliberately changed his style from traditional Ottoman to the vanguard of technology. The Splendide with its plate-warmers, its menus hand-written in French on paper with golden frames soon became the "in" place where fashionable people had to be seen in good company. Turkish Pashas and Bey's from the Sublime Porte followed Tokatlian to this side of the Golden Horn and introduced new ways and habits to Turkish society. Soon this was not enough for the enterprising Tokatlian who opened in 1894 again on the Grand Rue a large hotel second only to the Pera Palace with lifts and all modern conveniences. He further expended his empire by taking over in 1894 a café-concert at Kalender on the Bosphorus. Finally in 1905 he opened at Tarabya a summer annex to his hotel whose inauguration was the social event of the year. A poster for the annex was designed by the famous Italian painter Zonaro.

Another interesting venture was the one run by a French doctor, Dr. Dujardin on the Moda peninsula which according to a full page advert in the Annuaire Cervati for the year 1883 appears to be some sort of a health farm with hydrotherapy and dynamotherapy offered as cures for a long list of afflictions ranging from nervous disorders to sexual diseases. The hotel had grounds over
35,000 square meters and a private dairy. According to the advert service was first rate, "digne des établissements le plus confortables de l'Europe". A special allowance was made for local customs as a private sitting-room was reserved for ladies.

We shall now briefly discuss the architectural implications of the establishment of hotels in Istanbul. The following will only provide a theoretical framework for the discussion and details will be discussed over the projection of slides.

XIXth century Ottoman architecture was confronted with the difficulty of having to cope with issues hitherto unknown. Answers had to be found to problems stretching far beyond the classical requirements of religious, military and civilian architecture. Demands in new spheres of activities had to be met. Pre-industrial Ottoman society had perhaps no other choice than trying to bring an eclectic solution to these new issues. Though it must be said that some Ottoman architects carried their enthusiasm for eclecticism slightly too far. The famous remark of the French poet Théophile Gautier bears testimony to these excesses: "the Dolmabahçe Palace is neither Greek nor Latin, neither Gothic nor Renaissance, neither Arab nor Turkish". The combined efforts towards eclecticism of expatriate European architects (often not the more prominent members of the profession) and of their local non-muslem colleagues were not enough to bring about a Greek revival in Ottoman architecture as it had happened in West European architecture at the same time. Islamic and Oriental forms and concepts had also to be taken into account. (8)

Hotels constitute a good example of the new type of issues Ottoman architects were asked to solve. There have been cases where they opted for an easy way out by allowing themselves to be freely inspired by similar examples existing in Europe. For instance, the neo-renaissance façade of the Pera Palace is strongly reminiscent of the Berlin Kaiserhof with its kolossal undertones. The Kaiserhof was also managed by the Wagons-lits. The architect of the Pera Palace, locally born and trained Valaury has to his credit more original works such as the Ottoman Public Debt building or the Ottoman Bank headquarters. The first building is considered to be a manifesto for modern Turkish architecture. Despite the general aspect of its façade the Pera Palace is nevertheless sui generis because of its stylistic references in both interior space and decorative adjustments. The Grand Hall (see plan - 24) with its Morisco arches and cupolas has a definitely Oriental character. The Salon Turc and the tiled fireplace in the Grand Salon (22) emphasize this. On the other hand the Toscan columns in the Dégagement, the brazero in the Bar present a peculiar contrast with the rococo and art deco furniture. On the whole the physical planning of the building adequately meets the requirements of today's hotel management.

The Hotel Bristol is a smaller hotel designed on the same eclectic lines. the Hotel d'Angleterre is, from the point of architecture of late Ottoman vintage. Its façade on the Meşrutiyet Caddeesi is a good example of the receding zigzag in classical Ottoman architecture. One finds complex references to eclecticism in the other important Pera hotel, the Tokatliyan.

In opposition to the intricate plannimetrie of the two major
Town hotels, the Pera Palace and the Tokatlian, the Bosphorus hotels had rather simpler plans which allowed them to blend smoothly with the environment. The Summer Palace in Tarabya is a delicate structure built over the grounds of a former country house. As may be seen on the photograph, the architect managed to keep the terraces and the pine-trees. The Bellevue in Büyükdere is a former private house converted into a hotel by means of adding a wing. It is also of late Ottoman vintage. The Tokatlian's wooden summer annex in Tarabya which stood in the place of the present day Tarabya Oteli has a comparatively more complicated aspect but is in balanced harmony with its background. The hotels in the Princes' islands reflect the architectural mood proper to these Islands. The Splendide with its domes, the Yatch Club with its blend of neo-clasicism, the Royal at Heybeli with its references to Greek linear concepts offer a disparate yet attaching feeling of eeriness.

As a conclusion one may ponder on the multifarious reasons why, the Istanbul hotel industry never did, after a promising start, really take off. Absence of a large local clientele, the fact that Istanbul was never an actual part of the tourist circuit ranging from Venice to the Upper Nile, the unwillingness of the local capital holders to invest in a sector which did not yield return compatible with the initial investment may account for this. It is interesting to note that similar conclusions may be arrived at in a study of the present state of Turkish hotels.

Notes

(1) - Our thanks are due to Prof. Sedad Hakkı Eldem, Mr. Taha Toros and Hasan Süzer who have kindly helped us with information and documents.
(2) - E. Isambert, Orient Paris 1873, p 49
(3) - Gérard de Nerval, Voyage en Orient II Paris 1869, p 185
(4) - E. Isambert, op.cit.
(5) - ibid p 1045
(6) - F. Lacroix, Guide du Voyageur en Orient Paris 1839 p 1
(7) - Isambert, op. cit. p 1012
(8) - Metin Sözen, 50 Yılın Türk Mimarisi Istanbul 1973 p 53