

## 7 Single p(a)lace, multiple narratives

### The Topkapı Palace in Western travel accounts from the eighteenth to the twentieth century

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Topkapı Palace, built by Mehmed the Conqueror in Istanbul during the mid fifteenth century, was the main seat of the Ottoman rulers for more than four centuries.<sup>1</sup> This extraordinary royal complex positioned at the tip of the Historic Peninsula and surrounded with high walls was defined as a “city-within-the-city”. This imperial self-sufficient city with an area of 700,000 square meters and thousands of inhabitants, could be accepted as an Islamic city par excellence. However, rather than focusing on the “golden age” of the Topkapı Palace, namely fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this chapter includes numerous travel accounts depicting the royal complex after its gradual abandonment following the seventeenth century. As stated by Nebahat Avcioğlu, “most interpretations of Topkapı, identifying it as the ultimate icon of the empire, have aimed at, and to a certain extent achieved, a coherent historical narrative of its development, but have also paradoxically invalidated the study of the palace after the “classical” period (sixteenth century) when the presumed signs of decline and decentralization of the empire had begun to appear, particularly during the eighteenth century and afterwards.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter will map the transformation of the Topkapı Palace during the period between the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, from a secluded and glorious seat of the Ottoman rulers to a tourist spectacle, and aims at questioning the role of travel accounts in this construction.

The Seraglio, or ‘mysterious’ palace of the Islamic ruler, has always attracted western visitors and the life behind its walls, and especially the harem, was a great mystery for the westerner desirous of grasping and representing the *Serail*. Each travel account was in fact an act of re-presenting and constructing the truth. Travel accounts, while depicting the Topkapı Palace, also took part in the process of meaning making and each piece of travel writing performs as a tool for understanding the episteme of both those being represented and those who were representing. Instead of focusing on a specific traveller from a specific era, this chapter suggests a comparative reading of numerous travellers’ accounts on a rather long time period. In other words, it aims to trace the on-going and never-ending process of how a space turns into a place, through narratives and by addressing the changing perception and representation of one particular monument through the eyes of travellers of different periods. French post-structuralist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari suggested that

the nomad himself does not change in the course of travelling, but instead transforms the space, or the meaning of space. The changing perception of social space, in Lefebvrian terms, with respect to the changing temporal context, may be readily observed using travel accounts produced at different periods. Thus not only the mobility of the individual within space but the versatility of meaning with respect to space-time could be analysed.

Even though architectural transformations of the royal complex were not deciphered in travellers' accounts in detail, the palace was perceived and depicted entirely differently during different eras. During the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, not only the act of travelling but also the nature of the visitors drastically changed. Once opening its doors solely to diplomatic envoys and royal visitors, *le Palais du Grand Seigneur* (the Palace of the Grand Signor) became a part of the grand tour conducted by western elites during the nineteenth century; and eventually, by the twentieth century, *le Vieux Palais* (the Old Palace) actually turned into a popular tourist destination, a must-see spot for the modern traveller. This transformation may be observed thanks to the royal decrees (*firman*) found in the Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry, granting entrance permits to the palace grounds. Therefore, this chapter does not focus on the mobility of the nomadic individual but on the mobility of meaning attributed to place, which is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through various media, one of which being the travel literature.

### **The transformation of the “non-transforming” palace<sup>3</sup>**

The majority of the travellers to Constantinople relied on earlier depictions of the city and seemed not to be aware of even the most obvious and symbolically significant changes that took place in the royal complex.<sup>4</sup> Against this general misconception, the Topkapı Palace faced several morphological modifications between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though it was not always being actively used by the royal family. However, these architectural transformations were mostly unnoticed or even ignored by the travellers who were more interested in discovering the exotic life behind the walls of the palace. These voyagers assumed that the orient was frozen in time and did not notice the actual physical transformation that took place in the royal complex over time. However, a closer look at their depictions reveals that the perceived meaning of the royal complex faced a severe transformation, and this chapter hopes to unveil the diachronic aspects of meaning with respect to changing time and socio-political context.

French gem merchant and famous traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who visited Constantinople twice during the late seventeenth century, published his six-volume book recording his voyage to the East. One of the volumes, *Nouvelle relation de l'intérieur du serrail du Grand Seigneur* was published in 1675.<sup>5</sup> Here, he depicted the imperial complex and the royal life within the Topkapı Palace, using two eyewitness accounts. Tavernier must have seen the palace

himself and actually managed to enter the second courtyard as a part of the entourage of the French Ambassador Marcheville. In his letter to the king of France, he compared the richness, beauty and the grandeur of the Ottoman palace to French ones; and of course favoured those in his own country. During the *ancien régime*, diplomatic visits and unauthorized sneaks were the only possible ways to go beyond the first court of the palace, which was an oriental mystery for the Europeans. At any rate, his depictions of the inner sections of the palace must have depended on second-hand information gathered from two out-of-favour servants from the palace, whom he met during his travels:

The Ottoman Court, which makes so much noise in the World, has not, to my thinking, been yet sufficiently well known, if I may judge of it, by what I have seen thereof myself, and have heard from several Persons. I do here communicate a faithful and ample description thereof: which I have extracted, as well out of what I had observed myself, in the several Voyages I made to Constantinople, as out of the informations I received from two intelligent Persons, who had spent many years in the Seraglio, in very considerable Employments.<sup>6</sup>

Following his visit to Constantinople during the late eighteenth century, British traveller and ideologist Elias Habesci adds a significant sub-title to his travel accounts: *The present state of the Ottoman Empire [ ... ] including a particular description of the court and seraglio of the Grand Signor.*<sup>7</sup> Apparently, European readers were eager for information on the mysterious seat of the Ottoman Sultan. Rather than providing an architectural or physical description of the complex, Habesci explained the political and military system and the royal function of the palace. He was probably not able to actually see the inner courts of the palace himself but since the Topkapı Palace was at the core of the Ottoman way of ruling, it was necessary to understand it in order to comprehend how the palace and the state functions as stated by Habesci:

When they speak of Seraglio, they do not mean the apartments in which the Grand Signor's women are confined, as we are too apt to limit the word, but the whole inclosure of the palace in which the Ottoman monarch resides, together with his household; that is to say, all the officers, guards, Women, and slaves, employed in his immediate service. The extent of this vast inclosure might well suffice for a moderate town [ ... ]<sup>8</sup>

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite a shift in emphasis towards other imperial complexes other than the Topkapı Palace, *Saray-ı Cedid* kept its significance as the primary seat of the Ottoman court. Even if the sultans did not always reside there after the seventeenth century, imperial imagery continued to be synonymous with the Topkapı Palace. In short, until the late eighteenth century, the palace was considered to be the main seat of the Ottoman rulers and visits to this secluded complex were exclusively diplomatic.

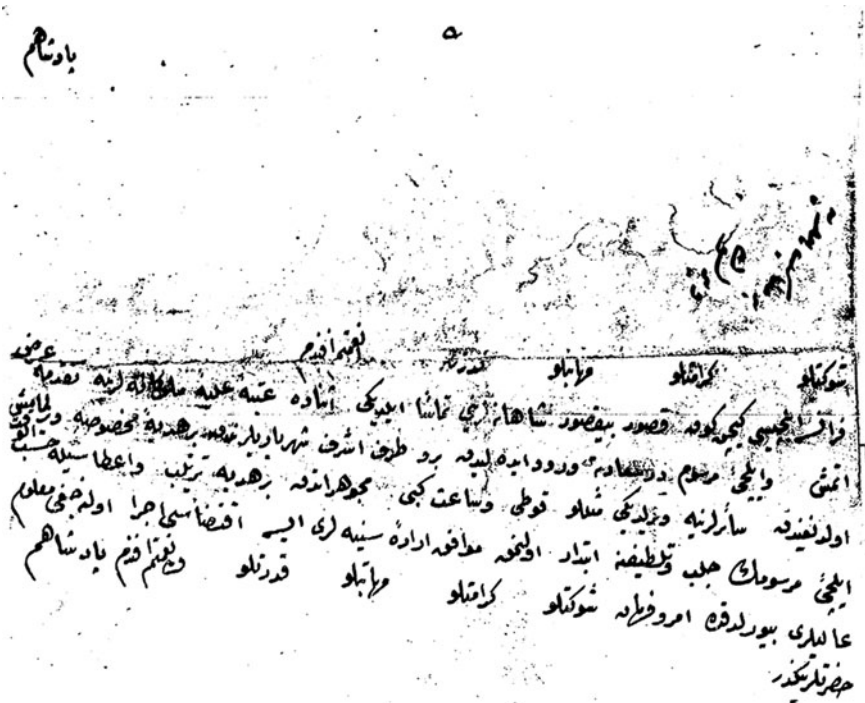


Figure 7.1 The permit decree dated 1804 for the contemplation of the palaces. (Ottoman State Archives).

The Topkapı Palace, as the official seat of the sultan, has always been visited by ambassadors and diplomatic envoys. However, by the nineteenth century, the act of visiting has changed in its form and meaning. Rather than paying a formal visit to the sultan, European ambassadors and high-ranking officials asked to visit the palace grounds. The earliest archival document, a petition for the “contemplation” (*temaşâ*) of the palace grounds, was dated 1804. These permits were given as a diplomatic courtesy, first to the French ambassador and then to those of Britain and Russia. The political and pompous tone of the documents also suggests that the visits carried a diplomatic function.<sup>9</sup>

### Visiting the unvisitable

Against the increasing number of diplomatic visits to the palace grounds, for the ordinary traveller of the early nineteenth century, entrance to the royal complex was not as simple. As far as we can understand from the travel accounts, it was possible to see the inner sections of the palace for those with necessary connections and sufficient funds for bribery. English naturalist, mineralogist and traveller Edward Daniel Clarke, during his travel to Istanbul around 1814, had the chance to visit the Topkapı Palace twice. His first visit

included a tour of the first court and the Imperial Armoury located in St Irene, where he saw antique weapons and armour belonging to Byzantine emperors. In his second visit he was able to sneak into the inner parts of the Seraglio with the help of a German gardener who worked there. He mentioned that during Ramadan the palace was almost empty, but his memoirs prove that some parts of the palace were actively used, as he recorded the signs of residential use in the Harem and private pavilions of the sultan:

Opposite to the entrance, on one side of the apartment, was a raised bench, crossing a door; and upon this were placed an embroidered napkin, a vase, and bason, for washing the beard and hands. Over the bench upon the wall, was suspended the large embroidered porte-feuille, worked with silver thread in yellow leather, which is carried in procession when the Sultan goes to mosque, or elsewhere in public, to contain the petitions presented by his subjects. Within a small nook close to the door was also a pair of yellow boots; and upon the bench, by the ewer, a pair of slippers of the same materials.<sup>10</sup>

During the later years of the era of Mahmud II—the Ottoman sultan known for his modernizing reforms, particularly in clothing and in the abolition of the Janissary army—John Auldjo visited the first court of the imperial complex but was not able to proceed to the second court of the Topkapı Palace. The brave traveller, geologist, writer and artist famous for climbing the summit of Mont Blanc was incapable of seeing the inner spaces of the Topkapı Palace. He confessed that he thought about bribing the guard but did not dare to.<sup>11</sup> During the same period, in 1833, famous French writer, poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine also attempted to enter the third court. Lamartine was a remarkable man and one of the most important Orientalists of his time. During his journey to the Holy Lands he stayed in Istanbul and wrote extensively about the socio-political context and the places he visited. On his visit to the Topkapı Palace, he attained the first two courts without difficulty, but the guard on the third gate would not let him go further, even though a high-ranking Ottoman officer accompanied him:

And we next entered the last court of the Seraglio, which is inaccessible to all persons but those who have official employments about the palace, and to the ambassadors on the occasion of their reception. [ ... ] Having reached the last gate, the soldiers on guard obstinately refused to let us pass. In vain did Rustem Bey make himself known to the officer on duty. In reply to his applications, the latter referred to his instructions, and declared that he should risk his head by allowing me to enter.<sup>12</sup>

On their way back, Lamartine and the Ottoman officer met by chance the royal treasurer of the palace and, with his help, they were privileged to enter the inner parts of the Seraglio. Apparently, until the early nineteenth century, it was not possible for every European to go beyond the first court of the

Topkapı Palace: the royal complex, hidden behind its walls and cypress trees, did not display itself to the western gaze. Many European travellers depicted the sublime panorama of the Seraglio and the Historic Peninsula from the sea and, more often than not, speculated on the mysterious life in the palace and Harem, contributing to the fund of Orientalist clichés.

### **The abandoned palace**

By the late eighteenth century, Ottoman sultans began to spend less and less time within the walls of the Topkapı Palace. It is accepted that by the reign of Mahmud II the royal complex was virtually abandoned.<sup>13</sup> According to the European travellers, Ottoman sultans' desire for westernization accelerated their move from the Topkapı Palace and historic parts of the city towards more westernized areas of Istanbul. Lady Julia Pardoe, daughter of Major Thomas Pardoe, was a well-recognized figure, poet, novelist and traveller. Her father's post allowed her to travel to Constantinople in 1836, when she became one of the first British women to write on the Orient. According to her illustrated travel account depicting Constantinople, Sultan Mahmud II compared the Topkapı Palace to its European counterparts and rejected the architect, who had suggested that the Topkapı Palace was superior to any other palace in the world. Pardoe described how Mahmud disdained the secluded architecture of the Topkapı Palace and dismissed his architect with these words:

You are unsuited for the undertaking that I contemplate; for none, save a rogue or fool, could class that place ... that place, hidden beneath high walls, and amid dark trees, as though it could not brave the light of the day, with these light, laughing palaces, open to the free air, and the pure sunshine of heaven. Such would I have my own, and such it shall be.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of Mahmud's reign both the format of the visits and the character of visitors to the palace had been transformed. By 1838, Constantinople and the Topkapı Palace started taking part in the Grand Tour of the European aristocracy. With the rising interest in Greek antiquity and following the Greek War of Independence, Greek territories, the Balkans, the Dardanelles and Constantinople became a part of their itinerary. According to Ottoman archival documents, the European aristocrats, together with their spouses or associates, were given special permits to visit the palace grounds. These *firman*s covered not only the Topkapı Palace but permitted entrance to imperial mosques and other shore palaces. Unlike the diplomatic language of the earlier Ottoman *firman*s, these documents were solely written as a response to the petitions and did not address any political issues. However, the format of the document (*Hat-ı Hümayun*, a direct order of the sultan) indicated the significance of these visits.<sup>15</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Topkapı Palace continued to be a place of interest for the Western visitors, who were eager to discover the inner parts of the palace that had been forbidden to their ancestors. In 1846,

the establishment of a dual collection of weapons (*Mecma-i Esliha-i Atika*) and antiquities (*Mecma-i Asar-ı Atika*) in the former church of St Irene also attracted the attention of European visitors. The armoury, located in the first court of the palace, housed not only ancient weapons but Janissary costumes, objects of antiquity, and ancient relics.<sup>16</sup> The travel notes of Théophile Gautier, published in 1853, presented a remarkable change at the Topkapı Palace.<sup>17</sup> A French romantic poet, novelist, critic, journalist and traveller, Gautier had an enormous impact on European literary tradition with his travel accounts. He described how the once secluded and mysterious imperial complex had opened its doors to visitors, especially those of European origin; with all the collections and spectacles surrounding it, the palace itself had evolved into a tourist attraction. According to Gautier, when the sultan was in his summer residence, the palace could be visited with a *firman*. He also mentioned that tourists must bring their slippers with them to the palace, removing and replacing their shoes a total of at least eight times before they might enter the various buildings within the palace. His disdainful tone could easily be recognized. According to him, the palace was nothing like the Alhambra but had been “erected without any preconceived plan, according to the caprices and needs of the moment”:

When the Sultan inhabits one of his summer palaces, it is possible, if provided with a firman, to visit the interior of the Seraglio but do not let that name suggest the paradise of Mahomet. “Seraglio” is a generic word which means palace quite distinct from the harem, the dwelling of the women, the mysterious place into which no profane enters, even when the houris are absent. Ten or twelve people usually collect for the visit, which involves frequent bakshish, amounting altogether to not less than one hundred and fifty or two hundred francs. A dragoman precedes the company and settles troublesome details with the keepers of the doors. Undoubtedly he swindles you, but as you do not know Turkish, you have to submit. One must take care to bring slippers, for if in France one uncovers on entering a respectable place, in Turkey you take off your shoes, which is perhaps more rational, for you must leave at the threshold the dust of your feet.<sup>18</sup>

The new role of the Topkapı Palace in the changing socio-political context of the empire reflected the developing priorities of the Ottomans and their transforming perception towards historic edifices, or perhaps monuments. French scholar and theorist Françoise Choay argues that the concept of a monument is a modern construction and a product of memory and identity. For her, a monument could be defined as “any artifact erected by a community of individuals, events, sacrifices, practices or beliefs [ ... ] to recall the past while bringing it to life as if it were present”.<sup>19</sup> In this context, the lost glory of the empire was recalled and the past was brought into life with a romantic ideal for “living and staging” the past, to visually reconstruct the broken link between the past and the present.<sup>20</sup> An Ottoman document dated 1857



Figure 7.2 Postcard showing the abandoned palace. (Author's collection).

responded to a petition by an “English Gentleman” to visit the mosques, the imperial palace, armory, the Imperial Mint and the Janissary collection. These tourist spots located in and around the Topkapı Palace give us clues about the new function of the palace and the changing profile of its visitors.<sup>21</sup>

By the nineteenth century, the thick veil of mystery had started to disappear, and the palace embraced new sets of meanings. After the relocation of the royal family to the Dolmabahçe Palace, the Topkapı Palace adopted different functions and faced a drastic, if gradual, transformation. The Italian traveller, journalist and novelist Edmondo de Amicis underlined the mystery and significance attributed to the main seat of the Ottoman sultan for many centuries. In his esteemed book *Constantinople* (1878), considered to be one of the best descriptions of the city during the late nineteenth century, he critically analyzed the Topkapı Palace:

There is not indeed in all Europe another corner of the earth whose name alone awakens in the mind so strange a confusion of beautiful and terrible images; about which so much has been thought, and written, and divined; which has given rise to so many vague and contradictory notices; which is still the object of so much insatiable curiosity, of so many insensate prejudices, and so many marvellous histories. Now-a-days every body can go in, and many come out with their expectations somewhat chilled. But we may be sure that for centuries yet to come, when perhaps the Ottoman domination shall be but a reminiscence in Europe, and upon that loveliest



of the hills, the populous streets of a new city shall cross one another, no traveller will pass that way without seeing in his fancy the image of the Imperial palaces that once stood there, or without envying us of the nineteenth century, who still could find in those places the vivid and speaking memories of the Ottoman reign.<sup>22</sup>

Amicis seemed to be convinced that the Ottoman reign would soon come to an end. According to him, it was a waste of time to try to depict the current situation of the rundown palace, as it would disappoint even the most modest expectations. Instead, he gave a detailed description of the Topkapı Palace during its golden age. This half-real, half-imaginary depiction sought to reconstruct the lost grandeur of the main seat of the Ottoman Sultans as well as reconstruct the mystical orientalist dreams of the Europeans who had been highly disappointed when they actually saw the complex. In other words, the imaginary representation of the palace during the golden age seems to be more desirable than the actual palace itself.

### **The palace museum**

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the palace was beginning to be positioned as an actual museum. The Collection of Antiquities located at the former church of St Irene was renamed as the “Ottoman Imperial Museum” in 1869; the bylaw of antiquities was issued the same year; and in 1870 a British history teacher, Edward Goold, was appointed as the museum director. A catalogue of the collections in St Irene was eventually created and, in 1872, Dr. Anton Philip D  thier, a German, was appointed as the museum director, remaining in post until 1880.<sup>23</sup> In his memoirs, Dethier defined the current situation of the palace as abandoned. For him, the Tiled Pavilion, St Irene, the Janissary Museum and the Imperial Mint were the actual places of interest within the Topkapı Palace.<sup>24</sup>

Both the collection of antiquities displayed in the Imperial Museum and the palace itself had become a tourist spectacle. In quite a number of Ottoman documents, European travellers were asking to visit both the treasury and the Topkapı Palace. In these petitions the imperial treasury was now mentioned before the imperial palace.<sup>25</sup> This hierarchical shift, despite being a minor change, indicated that the main destination of their visit was the treasury, with the palace being more of a complementary setting.

Tours to the palace seem to be standardized by the late nineteenth century. This carefully choreographed spectacle was depicted in detail by many of the travellers. Like a guided museum tour, this prominent visit was pre-arranged in order to display the grandeur and prosperity of the Ottoman state for the eyes of the European visitors. According to travel accounts, visitors who had been able to obtain the necessary permit were first greeted in front of the *Bab-ı Selam* gate (first gate of the palace) by Ottoman officials before entering the second court of the complex. After paying a short visit to the Audience Hall



Figure 7.3 Tiled Pavilion as the Archeology Museum. (Deutsche Archäologische Institut, Istanbul, D-DAI-IST-9344, Sebah & Joaillier).

(*Divan*), the Throne Room (*Arz Odası*), the library of Ahmet III, and the Bagdat Kiosk, the visitors were finally brought to the Mecidiye Kiosk, which was decorated in French style.<sup>26</sup> Even though this Western ambiance might be disappointing for the European eye longing for orientalist flavours, some specific spectacles found their place in their memoirs. But, while Edwin Grosvenor enjoyed the beauties of the Mecidiye Kiosk, its spectacular view, and the special treats offered by the Ottomans, he still described his visit with a certain degree of disappointment, as only those parts of the Topkapı Palace specifically designated for the Western gaze could be seen.<sup>27</sup>

This well-staged tour was more or less the same for most of the visitors and presented the modern face of the empire to its selected visitors. Georgina Adelaide Müller depicted this spectacle in detail during her visit to the palace in the late nineteenth century:

We were early, and the keeper of the Treasury was not ready for us; we were therefore taken at once to the Medjidiyeh Kiosk, standing on a terrace with flowers, from which we had a delightful view [ ... ] The kiosk is furnished in French style, and when we had enjoyed the view to the utmost we returned to one of the large rooms, and refreshments were

offered us. A very sticky sweetmeat or jelly was brought in a large glass vase and handed round [ ... ] Cigarettes were then handed round, and lastly, a picturesque group of slaves entered in white dresses, with turbans, carrying coffee-cups upon golden trays. Those offered to gentlemen had golden holders, richly engraved; those for the ladies had holders of filigree gold, thickly set with diamonds. Lastly came the kahveji. Across his left arm shoulder hung a superb cloth of crimson embroidered in gold, which was removed by another slave, and we discovered in his hands a tall, slender coffee-pot of pure gold, from which he proceeded to serve us. Were amused at the anxious care which the precious cups were counted as we gave them back.<sup>28</sup>

This very particular tour of Ottoman self-representation was staged to emphasize the glory and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire for the European gaze. The whole spectacle, in fact, epitomized Ottoman self-orientalization<sup>29</sup> and portrayed the widening distance between their own past and their purposeful representation of that past. The tour was crowned with a visit to the Imperial Treasury where the doors were opened with a symbolic ceremony. The visitors were able to have a quick glance at the Ottoman treasury under the surveillance of several Ottoman officers; here they might admire ostentatious jewellery and spectacular thrones, jars full of coins, gifts from various countries, and the costumes of the Ottoman sultans from Mehmed II to Mahmud II. Edwin Grosvenor provides us with a detailed account of the nature of the visit and the objects on display:

One still beholds quantities of precious stones, elaborate harness mounted in gold, saddle-cloths wrought with pearls, marvellously fashioned clocks, splendid porcelains, gold and silver chased arms and armour, cups encrusted with diamonds, and a maze of objects of rare and perfect make to gratify every wildly extravagant whim. Yet, when all is seen, the impression left behind is one of blurred confusion and disappointment, rather than of admiration and surprise. The most remarkable possession of the first is a Persian throne of beaten gold, into which handfuls of rubies, emeralds, and pearls have been wrought in mosaic. In the gallery, in glass cases on wooden frames, are arranged in chronologic order the gala robes of each sultan from Mohammed II to Mahmoud II. The fez and Cossack costume of the latter contrasts strangely with the flowing, graceful attire of his predecessors.<sup>30</sup>

### **A place for tourists**

Parallel with the development of tourism as a popular and cultural practice in Europe—rather than being a strictly aristocratic pleasure for a limited group—more and more people started travelling to other countries and

experiencing other cultures. The widening network of railways, in particular, facilitated this growth in mass tourism and numerous travel guides were published, covering a wide geographic area. An early example, *Hand Book for Travellers in Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor and Constantinople*, published in 1845, had included a section on Seraglio but clearly stated that no-one could proceed beyond the *Divan*: “thus far may strangers enter the Seraglio; a man’s curiosity might cost him dear, should he proceed further”.<sup>31</sup>

By the turn of the century, Constantinople was included in such well-known guides as *Guides-Joanne* (1894), *Black’s Guide books* (1895), *Baedeker* (1905), *Les Guides Bleus* (1920), and *Guide touristique* (1925), all of which carry a very different tone from that of the 1845 publication.<sup>32</sup> By the late nineteenth century, a visit to the Topkapı Palace and the treasury had become part of the tour and they were positioned as the “must-see” spots of Constantinople together with Hagia Sophia, the Hippodrome, the Byzantine remains and so on. This categorization of Istanbul’s tourist spots gives us an idea about the perception of the urban setting as a spectacle. The index of *Les Guides Bleus* on Constantinople categorized Istanbul with the sub-titles: Situation, History, Main Attractions, Pera and Galata, Stamboul, Towers, the Golden



Figure 7.4 Opening ceremony of the Imperial Treasury. (Abdulhamid II Albums, Library of Congress).

Horn, the Turkish Quarter, Religious Edifices, Imperial Palace, and Museums. A comprehensive list of edifices, their pictures, and even plans were also included in these guides.

*A Guide to Constantinople* by Demetrius Coufopoulos (1895) was a later example of the travel books on Constantinople. According to the 1902 edition, entrance to the Topkapı Palace was free of charge but the costs and bribes totalled £5–7 for the *firman*, which also provided access to other palaces such as Dolmabahçe and Beylerbeyi. Transportation from one palace to another was provided with sultanic *caïques*, which indicates that, during the time of Abdulhamid II who was residing at Yıldız, other shore palaces were included in the tourist spectacle as well. After providing brief information on the Topkapı Palace and the spectacles of the first court such as St Irene, the Imperial Mint, the School of Fine Arts and the Imperial Museum, the guide focuses on the treasury. Giving a stereotypical description of the treasury and the items displayed, the guide also mentions the “bronze statue of the late sultan Abd-ul-Aziz on horseback” which was displayed next to the sword of a Byzantine emperor. Following the treasury, the tour continues with visits to the Throne Hall, the Library of Ahmed III, and the Bağdat Kiosk, ending in the Mecidiye Kiosk where “refreshments, consisting of Turkish sweets and coffee” were served; here, the guests were directed to the terrace to enjoy the “splendid view”. The guide emphasized that the foreigners were not admitted to the relics room (*Hırka-i Şerif*), which was only open to visit during the fifteenth day of Ramadan.<sup>33</sup>

Articles in the newspapers of the period also denote a new form of travel writing. J.C. Robinson, the Constantinople reporter of *The Times*, provides an in-depth account of his visit to the Topkapı Palace, depicting the Treasury and the items exhibited, in his article dated 8 December 1885.<sup>34</sup> Even though the content of the article was not much different from the travel accounts mentioned here, what is significant is the fact that the tour of the palace, the collection, and the whole experience became a public event. The author emphasized the mysterious aspects of the Topkapı Palace and how hard it was to obtain a decree (*Irade*) from the sultan, probably to promote his visit, as he compared the Imperial Treasury to the mythical treasuries of the ancient past. A correspondent’s note regarding this article (again published in *The Times*) was also quite interesting. He mentioned that, contrary to Mr Robinson’s claims, the tour of the treasury, far from being an exceptional privilege was, rather, a popular spectacle, offered to those who could afford it or who had an academic interest in it. The same person also stated that “the great museum of Constantinople, though it is not so styled, is of course the Sultan’s Treasury in the Seraglio”.<sup>35</sup> This powerful statement in fact reflected the reality of the time, as the modern Ottoman Imperial Museum (Archaeology Museum) had not yet been opened in 1886; the new museum building would later be opened in 1891. Moreover, the treasury better reflected the Ottoman wish of satisfying the oriental appetite of European travellers.



Figure 7.5 Chronological display of the costumes of the Sultans in the Imperial Treasury. (Abdulhamid II Albums, Library of Congress).

### Topkapı as *lieu de mémoire*

The Ottoman regime had changed following the coup of 1908, shifting from absolutism to constitutional monarchy. With this socio-political rupture, the distance between the past and present was deliberately created and extended. The past, even the near-past of the despotic Abdulhamid II, was regarded as the ‘old regime’, and things related with that past were loaded with new meanings and new connotations. It could be said that the gradual museumification of the Topkapı Palace was virtually complete after 1908. Apart from the Ottoman Imperial Museum, which, by then, had gained an international reputation thanks to its director Osman Hamdi Bey and to the collection of Islamic Arts displayed in the Tiled Pavillion, the Topkapı Palace itself was officially transformed into a museum. Stripped of its imperial and sacred connotations, the palace was positioned as cultural heritage, as an architectural edifice, as a historic monument, and as a *lieu de mémoire*. An outcome of a modern awareness of the rupture between the past and the present, ‘*lieu de mémoire*’ was defined by Pierre Nora as an instrument for bridging the distance between memory and history:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.<sup>36</sup>

During the Second Constitutional Era, local visitors—Ottoman citizens—started visiting the museum with a special permit. For instance, by the end of 1910, the need for issuing tickets for the “benefit of the nation” was mentioned in an archival document.<sup>37</sup> However, I believe that the palace-museum’s target crowd continued to be European travellers. Even though foreign visitors were required to apply for a permit through their embassies, no personal data was required from them. During the post-1908 era, group permits were granted for foreign tourists.<sup>38</sup> Within the limits of this research, the largest number of visitors given a permit with one single authorization document was dated 1911, and approved the visit of 600 American tourists.<sup>39</sup>

Surprisingly, the more Topkapı has opened its doors to foreign visitors, and the more it became a modern museum staged for the western gaze, the more it has lost its previous charm as a mysterious and forbidden castle of oriental imaginary. Many of the twentieth-century travellers explicitly state their

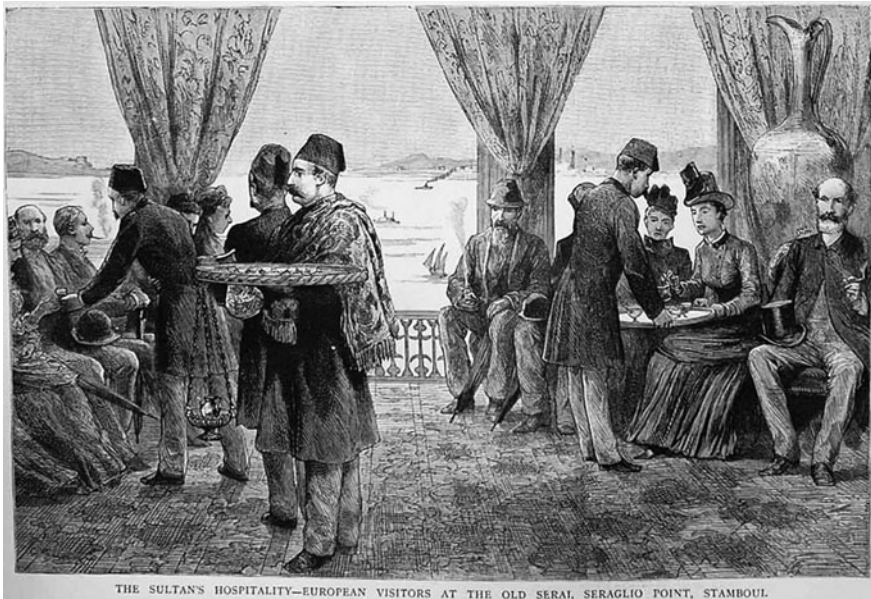


Figure 7.6 “The Sultan’s Hospitality – European Visitors at the Old Serai, Seraglio Point, Stamboul”, (The Graphic, Dec. II, 1886 Constantinople Illustrated, courtesy of Saadet Özen).

disappointment following their visit to the palace. Harrison Griswold Dwight, son of an American Congregational missionary, was born in Constantinople in 1875 and wrote several accounts of Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire and the Orient. In his book, *Constantinople old and new* (1915), Dwight made a rather architectural and technical description of the harem following his numerous visits to the complex. He rightly claimed that the harem, once forbidden to any man in the world, and the most secluded part of the Ottoman palace, had now turned into a mere resort for sightseers:

The dramatic contrasts and disappointments one could imagine made a true term to all the passionate associations of that place. No one lives there now. When a few years have passed and no breathing person has any vital memory connected with it, the harem of the old Seraglio will be, like how many other places devised by a man to house his own life, a resort for sightseers at so much a head, a mere piece of the taste of a time.<sup>40</sup>

The architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, was another western traveller visiting and writing on Constantinople. In his renowned *Le Voyage d'Orient*, he expressed his preference for the historic and exotic parts of the city as opposed to modern and westernized Pera.<sup>41</sup> With romantic and orientalist tendencies, he admired the mystic and melancholic image of old Istanbul, decorated with glittering minarets and domes under the fog. Defining Dolmabahçe and Çırağan palaces as “dreadful”, he did not hide his affection for the historic peninsula. During his several boat trips around the shores of Istanbul, he drew numerous sketches of the Seraglio from the sea. Astonished with the sublime silhouette of the palace, he wrote:

Beyond the prow the rooftops of the seraglio rose in tiers between the cypresses and the sycamores—a palace of poetry, a creation so exquisite that it cannot be dreamed of twice. From there came the theory you already know. The mist of light upon the sea was dissolving into this great back lighting that extended as far as Mihrimah outlined against a sky annihilated with brightness. I don't believe I shall ever again see such *Unity!*<sup>42</sup>

However, Le Corbusier never entered the Topkapı Palace that he so much admired. The iconic image of the city, the notable silhouette of the Seraglio, stood for the actual place. The representation replaced the represented. The Topkapı Palace had been transformed once again in the eyes of a foreign visitor; its image now represented the lost glory of the Ottoman golden age, the irreplaceable past, the lost orientalist dream of the Western mind.

## Conclusion

Ottoman Constantinople had always been a source of interest and wonder for the western traveller, who was eager to depict its beauties and mysteries.



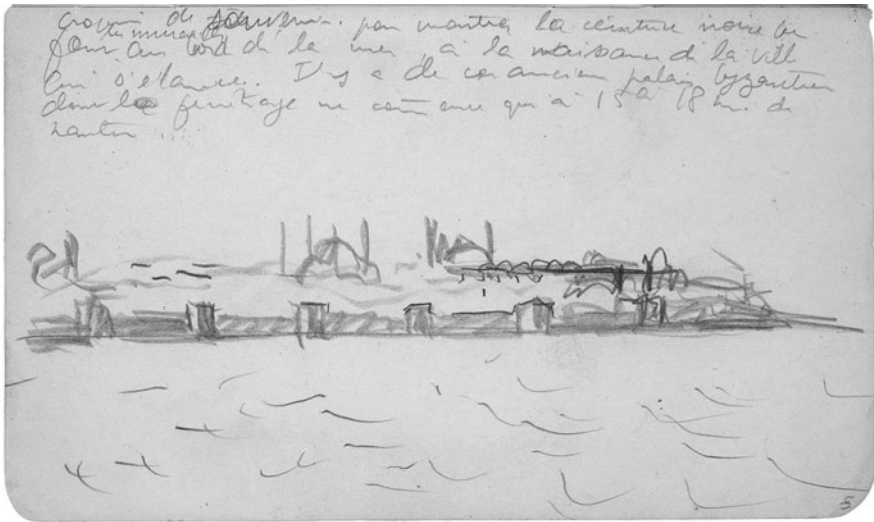


Figure 7.7 The seraglio from the sea. (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, *Le Voyage d'Orient*, © FLC/ADAGP, 2014).

Seraglio, a city-within-the-city, located at the tip of the Historic Peninsula, visually and symbolically represented Ottoman governance and lay at the heart of European curiosity and admiration. Since its construction in the fifteenth century, the royal complex had been depicted textually, visually, or both, and mediated by the western gaze. Such illustrations, and their evolution—from simple engravings to perspectival drawings, from paintings to panoramas, and from photographs to postcards—could not, by reason of space, be included here. Nevertheless, it has been possible to critically analyse travellers' accounts from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries chronologically in order to present the changing tone and discourse. By focusing solely on the Topkapı Palace, we have seen how both the act of travelling and the travellers themselves have changed over time, undergoing a transformation in their expectations and experiences. In other words, a discursive analysis of multiple narratives on a single palace illustrates the role of travel literature in the construction and production of knowledge. Thus, here, travel accounts are accepted as epistemological tools for constructing the 'self' and the 'other' with respect to changing temporality.

In conclusion, this chapter has shed light first on the multiple perceptions of a specific monument, and second, on how the genre of travel literature changed over time. It is important to underline the impact of such travel writing on the perceived meaning of the palace, transforming it from a secluded mysterious complex to a tourist spectacle. Since the Topkapı Palace remained physically more or less intact for long periods of time, the changing expectations and experiences of the Europeans, together with the changing tone of their memoirs, emphasize the epistemological role of travel writing. In other words, western

travel accounts not only reflect the changing meaning of the palace but also take part in this meaning-making process of the place.

## Notes

- 1 Topkapı Palace is the second imperial palace built by Mehmed II in Istanbul and constructed between 1460-1478. The royal complex was in fact named as *Saray-ı Cedid* (the New Palace) until the nineteenth century.
- 2 Nebahat Avcıoğlu, "Istanbul: the Palimpsest City in Search of Its Architekt", *Anthropology and Aesthetics* (2008), 196.
- 3 Ironically, my earlier research proved the opposite of what I suggest here. See Nilay Özlü, "Architectural Transformation of the Topkapı Palace in the Nineteenth Century: Tower of Justice, Bab-ı Hümayun, and the Mecidiye Kiosk", *22nd International Building and Life Congress: Architecture and Transformation*. Bursa, 2010.
- 4 For example, the tallest point of the Topkapı Palace, the Tower of Justice (*Adalet Kulesi*) was redesigned at least three times during the nineteenth century. Several beautiful water-front kiosks were erected and demolished as well. Several sections were ruined by fire and rebuilt, including the main gate (*Bab-ı Hümayun*) of the palace. This list of architectural modifications could be expanded without even mentioning the addition of numerous kiosks and the expansion of the Harem.
- 5 J.-B. Tavernier, *Nouvelle relation de l'intérieur du Serrail du Grand Seigneur. Contenant plusieurs singularitez qui jusqu'icy n'ont point esté mises en lumière* (Paris: O. de Varennes, 1675).
- 6 Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste, and John Phillips. 1677. *The six voyages of John Baptista Tavernier, a noble man of France now living, through Turkey into Persia and the East-Indies, finished in the year 1670: giving an account of the state of those countries.; together with a new relation of the present Grand Seigneur's seraglio, by the same author*. London: Printed for R.L. and M.P. and are to be sold by John Starkey, and Moses Pitt, 531.
- 7 Elias Habesci, *The present state of the Ottoman empire: containing a more accurate and interesting account of the Turks than any yet extant: including a particular description of the court and seraglio of the Grand Signor* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1784).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 9 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry. BOA.HAT.168/7136; BOA.HAT.167/7039; BOA.HAT.167/7065.
- 10 Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in various countries of Europe, Asia and Africa* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1816), 34.
- 11 John Auldjo, *Journal of a visit to Constantinople: and some of the Greek islands, in the spring and summer of 1833* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1835).
- 12 M. Alphonse Lamartine, *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages, pendant un voyage en Orient (1832-1833)*. (Bruxelles: Louis Hauman et comp<sup>ie</sup>, libraires, 1835), 225.
- 13 Barnette Miller, *Beyond the Sublime Porte: the Grand Seraglio of Stambul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931).
- 14 Julia Pardoe, *The beauties of the Bosphorus* (London: George Virtue, 1838).
- 15 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry. BOA. HAT 1189/46863, BOA.HAT 01179/46599.
- 16 Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Possessors and possessed: museums, archeology, and the visualization of history in the late Ottoman empire* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2003).
- 17 Gautier, Théophile, *Constantinople* (Paris: M. Lévy, 1853).
- 18 *Ibid.*, 220.

- 19 Françoise Choay, *The invention of the historic monument* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.
- 20 Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the rise of history* (New York: Twayne Publishers; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1995).
- 21 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry. BOA. HR.MKT.193 / 64. The document states that: “İngiltere devleti tebasından Lord Somris nam-ı beyzade madamesiyle beraber camileri ve saray-ı hümayunu ve cebehane ve darbhane ve yeniçerilerin elbiselerini seyir ve temaşa etmek sevdasında bulunduğundan lazım gelen evamir-i aliyelerinin virilmesi niyazında iltimas olunur”.
- 22 Edmondo De Amicis, *Constantinople*, trans. Caroline Tilton (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1878), 12.
- 23 Ferruh Gerçek, *Türk müzeciliği* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 1999).
- 24 P. Anton Dethier, *Le Bosphore et Constantinople: description topographique et historique* (Vienne: A. Hölder, 1873).
- 25 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry. Y.PRK.TŞF 2/78; Y.PRK.TŞF2/45; Y.PRK.TŞF 2/38. Permissions for visiting the treasury and the imperial palace.
- 26 Halil Ethem, *Topkapı Sarayı* (Istanbul: Kanaat Kütüphanesi, 1931).
- 27 Edwin Grosvenor, *Constantinople* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1900).
- 28 G. Adelaide Müller, *Letters from Constantinople* (London: Longmans, 1897), 26.
- 29 Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism”, *American Historical Review* 107:3 (2002): 768–96.
- 30 Grosvenor, *Constantinople*, 729–730.
- 31 Murray, John. *A Hand-Book for Travellers in the Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, and Constantinople* (London: J. Murray 1845), 180.
- 32 Léon Rousset, *De Paris à Constantinople: renseignements pratiques mis au courant en 1894* (Paris: Hachette, 1894); Demetrius Coufopoulos, *A guide to Constantinople* (London: A. & C. Black, 1902); Karl Baedeker, *Konstantinopel und das Westliche Kleinasien: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1905); Marcel Monmarché, *De Paris à Constantinople* (Paris: Hachette, 1914); E. Mamboury, *Constantinople, guide touristique* (Constantinople: Rizzo, 1925).
- 33 Coufopoulos, *A guide to Constantinople*.
- 34 J.C. Robinson, “The Sultan’s art treasury”, *The Times*, 8 December 1885.
- 35 “The Treasury in the Seraglio”, *The Times*, 27 December 1886.
- 36 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, *Representations*, No. 26, *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*: (Spring, 1989), 7-24 and 7.
- 37 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry, BOA.DH.MTV.29/11 “*Topkapı sarayında bulunan hazine-i hümayun iane-i milliye menfatine olarak alınacak münasib miktarda bir duhuliye (giriş bileti) mukabilinde yerli ve ecnebi zevat ve ahali tarafından temasına müsaade buyrulması*”.
- 38 After the declaration of the second Constitutional Monarchy, the palace opened its doors to hundreds of Ottoman and foreign visitors. Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry, BOA.BEO.3860.289487; İ.MBH.5/1329Ra-009.
- 39 Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry, BEO.3860/289487.
- 40 H. Griswold Dwight, *Constantinople old and new* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 260.
- 41 Le Corbusier and Ivan Žaknić, *Journey to the East* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).
- 42 Ibid. pp.151–152.

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