

Italian Architects and Builders in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey

Italian Architects and Builders in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey:

Design across Borders

Edited by

Paolo Girardelli and Ezio Godoli

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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and Modern Turkey: Design across Borders

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Graphic design by Emiliano Bugatti

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5194-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5194-7



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INTRODUCTION

Paolo Girardelli and Ezio Godoli

Recent scholarly developments in cultural, visual and historical studies have brought to the fore a variety of neglected connections between regions that appeared traditionally separate. For the Mediterranean, the necessity - and the advantage - of exploring contacts, influences and encounters across political frontiers had been acknowledged already in 1949 by Fernad Braudel, with his groundbreaking study of the “fluid continent” during the 16th century. Braudel’s work had little concern with artistic and architectural phenomena of encounter and hybridity; but it inspired, directly or otherwise, later generations of cultural historians working on other geographies and periods, who began to challenge in all fields, including the visual and the spatial field, longstanding academic practices of a nationally or religiously bounded approach to the past. Conventional notions of “Islamic” art and architecture are far more problematic and debated today than they used to be when these areas of inquiry emerged in academic scholarship. Attempts to read the Italian and European Renaissance in a broader Mediterranean perspective, that includes the Ottoman or the Mamluk heritage (and beyond), are examples of the possibilities that a trans-national approach to art and architectural history may disclose¹. In this context, one prominent scholar concluded that “the idea that the west is eternally opposed to the east, that the east stood still while the west progressed, should be relegated to the horse-and-buggy era as something once believed but no longer credible, like the flat earth, spontaneous generation, or the medical use of leeches²”. But the studies that emerged out of this “paradigm shift” have privileged the early modern world - a context when the imaginary (if not the political) boundaries between nations had not yet been established as firmly as they were to be in the 19th century. For later periods, for the 19th and early 20th century, scholarship on encounters and interaction has focused primarily on colonial situations and imperial dynamics³, or on the broad scenarios of non-Western modernization⁴.

1 Howard, 2000; McLean, 2005; Necipoğlu, 2005; Jardine and Brotton, 2005; Goody, 2010.

2 Darling, 1998: 243.

3 Çelik, 1997 and 2008; Wright, 1991; Hanssen et al., 2003; Gresleri et al., 1993.

4 Çelik, 1986 ; Volait and Nasr, 2003.

The empirical outcome of this critical and theoretical stance is still in its way, and the present work may be seen also as part of this outcome. This collection of studies on the Italian presence in the urban and architectural histories of the late Ottoman Empire and republican Turkey is a selection of papers initially presented at an international conference on the same theme, in March 2013⁵. This was the fourth meeting in the framework of a long-term research project on the Italian presence in the architecture and urbanism of the Mediterranean, following former editions held in Alexandria (2007), Tunis (2009) and Tirana (2011). The essays included in this book constitute examples of productive cross-fertilization between different geographical and conceptual approaches to the study of historical environments and landmarks. Our aim was to explore an area of interactions that may be considered atypical in many respects. The contribution of Italian architects, artisans and workers of the building sector to the renewal of Ottoman and Turkish cities from the late 18th to the 20th century, was not framed in the usual mechanism of colonial power that shaped the urban form of cities like modern Algiers, or the towns of Italian possessions in Africa and in the Dodecanese. Nor is it understandable as a form of cultural imperialism. The Italian architects and builders whose experience is analyzed in this book, approached urban spaces remarkably different from the environment of their provenance without the backing or the authority of a colonial institution. They acted rather as consultants and participants, negotiating their place in a constantly redefined project of modernization⁶. With all its peculiarities and idiosyncratic facets, their experience is also inspiring for other types of research on modern cultural encounters developed along “horizontal” lines, in the absence of compelling hierarchies and power structures. Organized in sections around four thematic/chronological cores, the book works as a general, if incomplete, survey of Italian imprints on the architecture and urbanism of the Ottoman and Turkish geography. It presents an assessment of paradigmatic cases, based largely on archival unpublished sources, and showing how much the research on this “shared heritage” has developed since the first, pioneering studies of the last four decades of the 20th century.

The early studies of the 1960s and 1970s, mainly journal articles, were focussed on Raimondo D’Aronco and the Italian contribution to Art

5 “Italian architects and builders in the Ottoman empire and modern Turkey”, Italian Institute of Culture and Boğaziçi University, March 8-10, 2013.

6 Girardelli, 2012.

Nouveau in Istanbul⁷. Since the early 1980s began the rediscovery and a more systematic study through archival sources of the work of D'Aronco, with the exhibitions in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome (1980)⁸ and in the Villa Manin of Passariano (1982)⁹, and especially with the international conference "Raimondo D'Aronco and his time", held in Udine in June 1981¹⁰, which saw the participation of Turkish scholars as well. These initiatives were followed closely by the monographs of Manfredi Nicoletti (1982) and Vera Freni and Carla Varnier (1983), and by the publication of the architect's correspondence, a helpful source for a better understanding of his relations with other actors of the building sector in Istanbul¹¹. In 1992 and 1995, two conferences have played a crucial role in promoting a new phase of studies¹², not exclusively focused on the work of protagonists as D'Aronco or Gaspare Fossati (on which new works continued to be published¹³), but also providing a broader view of the activity of Italian architects, contractors and craftsmen in Turkey, during the Ottoman and Republican periods. The contribution of younger Turkish scholars also began to emerge in this period¹⁴. On this basis, the studies of the past fifteen years have examined the migration of Italian architects, contractors and master builders towards Turkey within a more general flow of migration to the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, managing to reconstruct routes and encounters in the decades of the slow process of demise of the Ottoman Empire. New findings came in particular from research carried out for the project "Shared heritage, knowledge and know-how applied to architectural and urban heritage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Mediterranean"¹⁵, supported by the European Commission with funds of the "Euromed Heritage II", and from the series of conferences opened in Alexandria in 2007¹⁶.

Archival collections formerly understudied from this perspective have also been used with increasingly significant results. Besides the diplomatic documents preserved in the State archives of pre-unitarian Italy (especially Turin, Naples and, for the late 18th century, Venice), and, for the post-1861 period, in the Ministry of Foreign

7 E.g. Batur, 1968.

8 Carloni et al., 1980.

9 Pozzetto and Quargnal, 1982.

10 Quargnal, 1982.

11 Nicoletti et al. 1982.

12 Petruccioli, 1992; I.F.E.A. and I.I.C. 1995.

13 Pedrini Stanga, 1992; Barillari, 1995; Barillari and Godoli, 1996.

14 Can, 1993.

15 Among the results of this research project, Godoli et al., 2005.

16 See in particular Godoli et al., 2007.

Affairs in Rome, also private collections, recently discovered archives of individual architects¹⁷, insurance companies and building firms archives¹⁸ provide an increasing wealth of documentation. Catholic sources like the archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide) in Rome, and the local parish archives of churches located in the “Latin” districts of Turkish and former Ottoman cities, also contain a variety of visual and textual materials. The discovery in Rome of the archives of Anmi (Italian Missionaries Rescuers National Association) has been particularly fruitful in this research perspective. This private association, established in 1886 on the initiative of the Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli, was initially financed by wealthy industrialists, catholic and nationalist figures committed to re-establishing a bridge between church and state after the breakup of the relationship following the choice of Rome as capital of Italy. From the time of its inception, Anmi applied to the Italian government for subsidies in establishing or consolidating Italian and Catholic presence in foreign countries. Relying on Anmi as an effective means of political and commercial influence, the Italian state delegated to this association projects related to health care and education for the Italian communities abroad, subsidized with contributions provided through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Anmi often invested in real estate funds coming from the Italian government and private donations. Its building activity, initially focused on schools, hospitals, hostels for pilgrims and missionaries, grew to include universities, apartment buildings, large hotels and sports facilities. Thereby, it became between 1890 and 1941 the most important Italian promoter of building activities in the Middle East and North Africa (excluding Libya). Anmi’s penetration into Asia Minor started from Smyrna, where in 1899 the cornerstone for the new nursery school was laid; the most significant building, however, was the girls’ school built in the city center according to the plan of the engineer Luigi Rossetti¹⁹, radically reworked by Stefano Molli. In the same period, Anmi sponsored the construction of the Church of St. Anthony and the adjoining apartment houses on Grande Rue de Pera in Constantinople, designed by Giulio Mongeri and Edoardo De Nari. Several projects dating to the years of Atatürk’s rule were never carried out, due to the new nationalist course of Kemalist politics, to the end of the Capitulations regime in 1914 (which implied also the end of foreign protection over churches), and to the challenges of French competition in controlling Catholic projects and institutions in Turkey and elsewhere. Despite these difficulties, Anmi

17 See the essays by Uras, Giacomelli, and Ricco, in this volume.

18 See Caltana and Krecic, and Fasoli, in this volume.

19 See Berkant, in this volume.

has managed considerable real estate assets, and its archives are especially important because some architectural drawings date back to the period preceding the founding of the association: for example the pencil drawing of the facade of the Italian hospital by Giorgio D. and Ercole Stampa (1873).

Outside Italy, besides the already mentioned parish archives, we should also mention diplomatic collections of the Staatarchiv in Vienna²⁰, institutions like the Società Operaia Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso in Costantinopoli²¹, founded in 1863, and, of course, the Ottoman and Republican national archives of Turkey, which recently began to be explored especially by young Turkish scholars for research on the work of Levantine and foreign architects²².

Given the multifarious aspects of Italian cultural and national identity before and after the Unification of Italy in 1861, the authors of the chapters of this book envisaged a flexible definition of Italian-ness, including subjects from pre-Unitarian states like the Venetian Republic and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, expatriates for political reasons who took active part to the Risorgimento, Levantine-Italians with plural cultural affiliation, as well as citizens of unified Italy, for whom the Italian identity was a less complex question. Even more diverse, of course, was the Ottoman or Turkish stage in which these characters acted, ranging from eastern Mediterranean port cities like Smyrna and Salonica, to the centre of imperial legacy in Istanbul, to the cities of the Ottoman Balkans, and finally to Ankara, the modern republican capital often perceived and represented as the urban antithesis of “cosmopolitan” Istanbul. In keeping with recent historiographic trends, the notion of an “Ottoman” and a “Turkish” space to which we refer is geographical but also cultural, political and historical: the former label refers to the imperial order existing before 1923 both in the capital and in the provinces, the latter indicates more precisely (but not exclusively) the Republican state and culture that emerged after the Kemalist revolution in present day Turkey. *Design across borders* offers a broad, yet focused selection of studies on a cross-cultural topic that is likely to attract the attention of architects, art/architectural historians, anthropologists, social scientists and cultural historians interested in euro-Mediterranean exchanges. It is the outcome of a variety of research itineraries that had developed along parallel lines over the past 20 years, for the first time united in a comprehensive collection in English.

20 See Agstner, in this volume.

21 Girardelli, 2007.

22 See Akyürek, in this volume.

The first section “Landmarks, spaces and politics”, opened by a broad overview of the architecture of Italian diplomacy (and of the changing meanings of “classicism”) in the Ottoman capital by Girardelli, includes other essays on projects and buildings with a peculiar political and strategic relevance. Agstner analyses the history of the Venetian embassy in Constantinople as it was used by the Habsburg representative, thus highlighting the life of a typically trans-national landmark. Using Ottoman archival sources, Akyürek focusses on the Ottoman agenda behind a crucial architectural project commissioned to the Swiss-Italian, neo-classical architect Gaspare Fossati: the Ottoman university or Dar-ul Fünun. Bugatti evaluates the contextual meanings of a practice of urban planning exemplified by the work of Storari in Izmir and Istanbul, a practice that was too often labeled simply as an example of imported modernity, showing how in fact it responds to the peculiar dynamics of change of a local “Levantine” urbanity. The Ottoman geography most exposed to Italian intervention on space was probably that of the eastern Mediterranean port cities, but Tomi’s essay, the last of this section, reminds us that a number of Balkan urban centers at the margins of the Ottoman world, including Iassi, Bucarest and other cities of the Danubian principalities, were also largely affected by this cultural presence. In the second section, “Individual experiences in context”, the complex phenomenology of cultural encounter implied by the main theme of the book is explored through five individual cases. Mangone traces the hitherto unknown activity of Nicola Carelli in Istanbul and other centres, arguing that in the 1830s he probably disseminated among Armenian-Ottoman practitioners the principles of Italian (and in particular Neapolitan) academic practices, through his private teaching activity. Ricci and D’Amia deal with little known aspects in the lives of two protagonists like Gaspare Fossati and Giulio Mongeri, focusing on their complex relation with Italy and Milan, during or after their involvement in the Ottoman-Turkish environment. Berkant bases his paper on a doctoral research on Italian architectural presence in Izmir, offering an original profile of the activity of Luigi Rossetti in this city, while Colonas evaluates, on the basis of new archival findings, the Italian architectural presence in Salonica.

Albeit different from a state-sponsored, colonial enterprise, Italian architectural intervention in Turkey was often backed by a variety of public and private organizations. The third section, “Institutions and investments”, is meant to highlight this aspect of the problematique. Kula Say and Cebeci base their analyses on archival documents

related to their doctoral researches. In the first case, the Italian connections and background of Alexandre or Alessandro Vallauri are uncovered and discussed, while the second case is about the strategy of investment in real estate pursued by prominent Italian-Levantine families in late 19th century Istanbul. Caltana and Krecic deal with the link between insurance companies and real estate, highlighting the involvement in this context of the Assicurazioni Generali, a firm that commissioned important architectural projects documented in its historical archives. Ottoman modernization created opportunities for a variety of foreign investors and local or foreign mediators: Fasoli analyses the roles in this context of a contractors firm and of two important protagonists, Giulio Mongeri and Edoardo De Nari, also dealt with in other sections of the book.

“Late empire to Republic: a plural modernity”, the last section, deals with Italian participation in the most dramatic cultural and political transformation in the region. Some of the projects analyzed in this section remained on paper, but all of them are important witnesses to attitudes toward modernity that emerged in the Italian-Turkish encounter. Uras opens the section with a study on a key figure in this context, the self-trained architect Edoardo De Nari, who was active mainly in Istanbul two decades before and three decades after the Kemalist revolution of 1923, and whose personal archive was recently discovered, producing substantial knowledge on a marginalized, neglected protagonist. Giacomelli’s essay evaluates the Italian participation to the international competition for the design of Atatürk’s mausoleum in Ankara (Anıtkabir), highlighting from different points of view the interesting debate about the three Italian projects included in the final selection. Ricco examines the activity of Paolo Vietti Violi for the design of a modern infrastructure such as a sports stadium in Ankara, as well as his role of consultancy for other projects in Istanbul.

Of course several absences will be noticed, but they usually regard protagonists and buildings (like D’Aronco, or the church of S. Antonio in Istanbul) on which much scholarship is already available, and was mentioned in the references. The aim of the book was to present new research based on unpublished materials, and little studied aspects of the Italian-Turkish encounter in architecture, rather than elaborating a comprehensive synthesis. It was also that of showing that architectural and urban history can be a major vehicle of cross-cultural understanding. In this more ambitious sense much remains to be done, but we hope that the modest examples and cases analysed here may inspire further research and studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank institutions and individuals who contributed in many ways to this project. The conference on which this book is based was realized with substantial support from the Italian Institute of Culture in Istanbul and its acting Director Maria Luisa Scolari, as well as from Boğaziçi University. The same Institutions also contributed to the production of the present volume. The Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University, the Romanian Cultural Institute in Istanbul and its Director Silvana Rachieru, helped with financial and organizational support. Scholars and colleagues who took part to the conference but whose contributions could not be included in this volume should also be mentioned: Afife Batur, Cengiz Can, Ayşe Güngör, Ketty Migliaccio, Ulisse Tramonti. Emiliano Bugatti and Esra Ansel assisted in several stages of the book project. We apologize for others who may have been omitted by mistake.

In memoriam

One of the contributors to this volume is unfortunately no longer with us. Rudolf Agstner (1951-2016), was a prominent Austrian diplomat and scholar, who contributed tremendously to historical and archival research on the culture and space of international relations. We remember fondly his commitment to scholarship as well as to this particular project, and regret that our esteemed colleague and friend could not see the final outcome of our common efforts. This work is also dedicated to his memory.

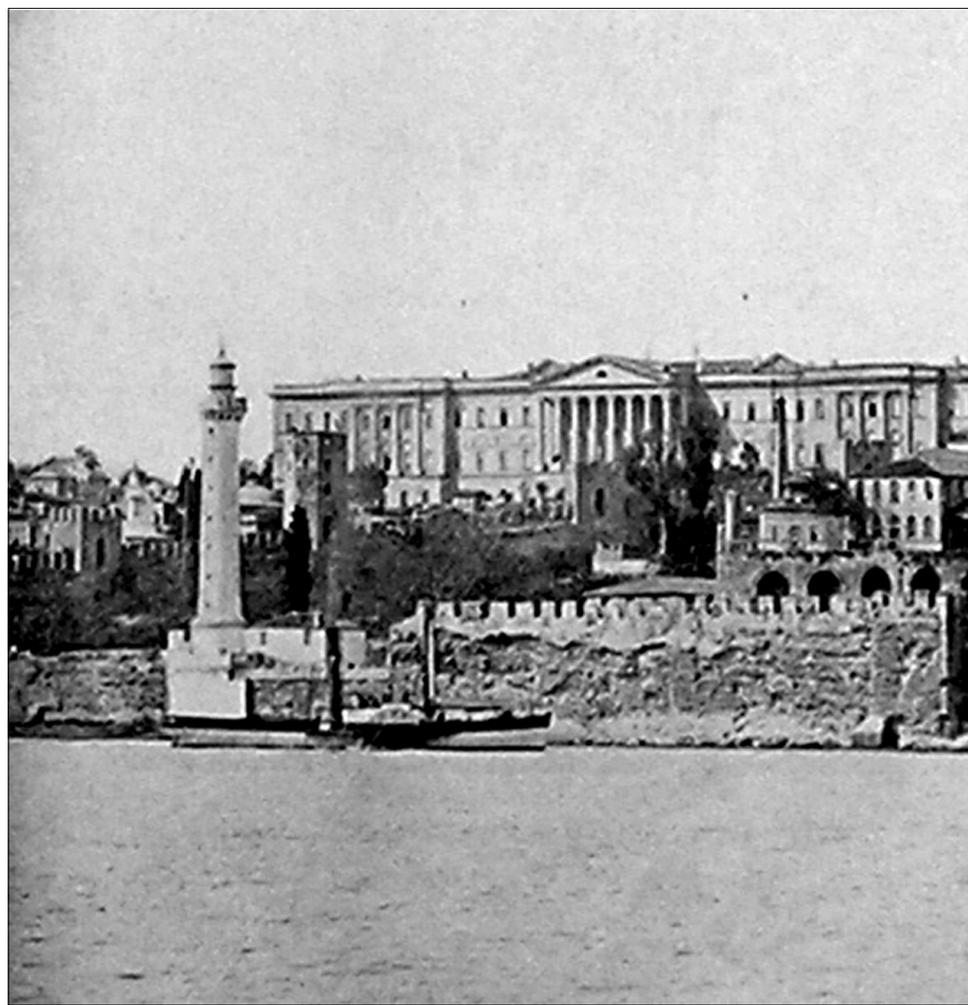
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PART I

LANDMARKS, SPACES AND POLITICS





FROM ANDREA MEMMO TO ALBERTO BLANC: METAMORPHOSES OF CLASSICISM IN THE ITALIAN BUILDINGS FOR DIPLOMACY (1778-1889)

Paolo Girardelli

Istanbul was one of the first capital cities in which European powers established permanent diplomatic representations. Some embassies of the Ottoman capital were housed, at least since the 18th century, and in some cases earlier, in buildings designed and constructed *ad hoc* rather than in local rental houses – as was customary for other capital cities. During the 17th century and later, the presence of foreign diplomats in a cohesive social and physical space – the district of Pera, developed outside the walled Genoese settlement of Galata – contributed to shape not just locally but internationally the notion and the practices of a *corps diplomatique*¹. Due to the peculiar historical topography of Istanbul, where many landmarks acquired meaning and status from their hierarchical positioning within a distanced gaze, embassy buildings strived to enjoy a high visibility, and competed with each other in a deeply politicized landscape. The architecture and the landmarks of foreign and non-Muslim communities were exposed to the changing effects of the so-called “Eastern Question”, a set of contentions, power balances and negotiations revolving around the supposed decline and “imminent” dissolution of the Ottoman empire, during the last two centuries of its existence².

Here, I will compare the histories of two important Italian diplomatic landmarks of Istanbul, belonging respectively to the late Venetian state and to the early unification period. Palazzo Venezia, on the slopes of Pera, was used from the 16th century as the residence of the Venetian *bailo* or representative to the Porte. Until the end of the 18th century this structure, restored and rebuilt several times, had always retained the local character of a timber *konak*, the isolated wooden mansion typical of notable Ottoman citizens, sometimes invested with public functions. But in 1778 the *bailo* Andrea Memmo (1729-1793, Fig. 1) decided to refurbish entirely its architectural image, by

1 Berridge 2007.

2 Girardelli 2013.

commissioning a neo-Palladian structure³ (Fig. 2). After the end of Venetian independence, and until World War I, the building was used as an embassy by the Habsburgs, who reconstructed it entirely in 1918 (as explained in R. Agstner's essay in this volume). With the Unification of Italy in 1861, and with Palazzo Venezia in Austrian hands (even after the annexation of Venice to Italy in 1866), the need for an adequate embassy building was felt, and insistently reported to Rome by the newly appointed Italian ambassadors, who resided in a rather modest (modest by the diplomatic standards of Istanbul) building on the Petits Champs of Pera: the present seat of the Italian Institute of Culture. In 1888 Ambassador Alberto Blanc (1834-1904, Fig. 3) attempted to upgrade the architectural image of Italy in the Ottoman capital by personally funding a new official residence near the German embassy and in a dominant position overlooking the Bosphorus (Fig. 4), at *Gümüşsuyu*.

Like Memmo, Blanc also had to negotiate at home and in Istanbul the political and architectural constraints implicit in the construction of a highly representative "foreign" landmark. Both buildings are examples of a long-standing, local re-elaboration of "classical" architectural images. James Ackermann observed in an essay on Palladio that the category of classicism was mainly constructed by modern art historians: few architects of any period, considered as classical, classicist or neo-classicist in current literature, would have accepted this label to describe their work⁴. Without venturing into complex theoretical discussions, by "metamorphoses of classicism" I simply refer here to the dynamic process through which images and models of the European tradition – be they Vitruvian, Palladian, neo-Renaissance or "enlightened" in the sense of 18th century neo-classicism – were transformed and adapted to an urban and cultural context that differed from that of their origin. The chronological gap between the *bailo* Memmo and Ambassador Blanc does not impede considering the affinities and parallels between these two diplomats, who invested in architecture as a political and diplomatic resource. In his correspondence with Rome, Alberto Blanc expressly mentioned that his building, formally used as an embassy for a very short period, resembled the Palazzo Venezia built 110 years before. In between these two periods and two landmarks, I will also overview other examples of the Italian contribution to the designs of embassies in Istanbul.

3 Bertelé 1932, Girardelli 2013.

4 Ackerman 2002.

Palladio on the Bosphorus

Andrea Memmo, pupil of the “enlightened” scholar and architectural theorist Carlo Lodoli (sometimes considered a Venetian counterpart to Laugier), and divulgator of his ideas on architecture⁵, has been dealt with by such authorities as Emil Kaufmann or Joseph Rykwert, and more recently by several other scholars⁶. He was not formally trained as architect, but his achievements as patron of the arts include the realization of Prato della Valle at Padova⁷, a suburban, insalubrious area that was turned into a fashionable square and promenade, decorated with statues. Designed between 1775 and 1786, its construction went on after Memmo’s death in 1793 (Fig. 5). In 1767, Memmo had also prepared a general curriculum for the establishment of an Academy of the “arti del disegno” in Venice⁸. But his architectural experience as “author”, inspirator and patron – in 1778-80 – of the reconstruction of the Venetian embassy in Istanbul is usually given only marginal attention. Images of the two projects, Prato della Valle and the *casa bailaggia* (as the Venetian embassy was often called in official documents), appear under the hands of Memmo (left and right, respectively) in the portrait he commissioned to Giuseppe Pirovani in 1786 (Fig. 1). The portrait, executed while Memmo was ambassador in Rome and had been recently appointed *procuratore di San Marco* by the Serenissima, shows that he apparently attached a comparable importance to both the achievements of Padova and Istanbul in his own self-presentation⁹.

When Memmo reached the Ottoman capital, the Russian-Ottoman conflicts that began in 1768 had only temporarily come to a halt with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), which ended exclusive Ottoman control of the Black Sea, also opening the Straits to the passage of foreign ships¹⁰. In many historians’ opinions, this agreement marked the true beginning of the so-called “Eastern Question”, exposing the Ottoman state to the threat of Russian expansionism toward the Mediterranean, and preparing the ground for the ensuing contentions of the 19th and early 20th century. In my view, it also exposed the urban and architectural structure of Pera, the district of diplomacy, to an unprecedented set of challenges and pressures. Here, the building

5 Memmo 1834. This edition adds a second volume to the original work published in Rome in 1786.

6 Kaufmann 1964; Rykwert 1980; Pasquali 2003; Consoli 2006; Neveu 2011.

7 Neveu 2011.

8 Pasquali 2003.

9 Busiri Vici 1974.

10 Rogakis and Stagos 1987.

of the Serenissima found by Memmo was, like most other foreign embassies, a timber structure of the Ottoman type (Fig. 6), which had been recently restored by his predecessor, the *bailo* Renier¹¹. The only prominent European features of its design were details of the garden, like the rusticated piers of a gate (surmounted by marble globes), and parts of the interior furniture. By contrast, the nearby, almost adjacent French palace had been recently reconstructed in neo-classical or Greek revivalist forms, with ionic colonnades and pilasters. The contrast between the two buildings is evident in an engraved panoramic view of the French palace and gardens based on Hilair's drawings of 1776 (soon after Renier's restoration), with the Venetian building in the background (Fig.7)¹². What is visible of the façade in this image corresponds to the 1746 layout documented in Bertele's study (Fig. 6), and confirms that Renier did not alter the structure and shape of the old wooden, Ottomanizing embassy.

The French project had begun in the same year of the Kaynarca treaty (1774), under the patronage of Ambassador Saint-Priest¹³. With his successor, the savant and collector Choiseul-Gouffier (in Istanbul as a traveller and scholar in 1776, and later as ambassador between 1784 and 1792)¹⁴ the French embassy became also an academic and political site, where archaeology, classics, oriental studies, painting, the natural sciences, and the renewed interest in the destiny of the Greek subjects of the sultan would find an appropriate architectural framework. The building and its premises were later described by Léonce Pingaud, biographer of Choiseul Gouffier, as an "oasis" of civilization where scholarship and the political concern for Greek emancipation developed in harmony¹⁵. Memmo was probably less interested than Choiseul-Gouffier in archaeological research and

11 The restoration commissioned by Paolo Renier (*bailo* between 1769 and 1773) is remembered by an inscription still visible in the ground floor of the building reconstructed by the Austrian administration in 1918. For this reason, probably, most accounts of the history of Palazzo Venezia (including Pedani 2013) refer to Renier as main patron of the building. However, from all archival, iconographic and contextual evidence it is clear that the most conspicuous imprint on the residence of the *bailo* is the one left by Memmo, and lasting until 1918. Renier's role was probably emphasized due to his later appointment as *doge* (1779-1789) of the Venetian Republic, an honor not bestowed upon Memmo.

12 J. B. Hilair (1753-1822) accompanied Count Choiseul-Gouffier in his 1776 archeological tour of the Eastern Mediterranean (see *infra*).

13 For a comparison of the Venetian and French buildings, see Girardelli 2013.

14 Cavalier and Gaggadis-Robin 2007. In his 1776 tour of Greece, Anatolia and Istanbul, Choiseul was surrounded by a team of scholars and artists, including the authors of the illustrations to his *Voyage pittoresque* (Choiseul-Gouffier 1782-1822)

15 Pingaud 1887, 181.

collecting, or in the emancipation of the Ottoman Greeks; but the nearby neo-classical palace must have exerted a decisive influence on his decision regarding the Venetian residence. Although this had been restored, as mentioned, a few years earlier, the new international situation created by Russian pressures and European-Ottoman responses, resulted at Pera in an increase in diplomatic rivalries and competitive displays, so that Memmo decided to radically upgrade the image and the structure of his embassy in a Palladian style (Fig. 2). In his words, the “magnificence” of the Venetian embassy would count more than military force in Venice’s relations with the Ottomans¹⁶. The results of Memmo’s efforts are visible in an anonymous drawing of the Palais de France from the late 18th century (Fig. 8).

Before starting the work, Memmo had to persuade the Venetian Senate of the urgent necessity for a radical upgrading. He went as far as commissioning from the naval engineer Paolo Mastraca a set of drawings (unfortunately lost) representing the dignified state of the other embassies in contrast with the Venetian one. The *bailo* remarked, with some exaggeration, that the other palaces were all in a “European” style, no longer in that mixture of “Turkish and modern Greek” taste which characterized the older embassies, including the Venetian palace restored by Renier¹⁷. It would be interesting to understand better what exactly Memmo meant with this expression, condemning the supposedly hybrid, Greek-Turkish character of the old-fashioned embassies. Considering that he and his predecessors often employed Greek master-masons (who were strongly present in the building sector of timber houses in Pera) in the maintenance and repair of the embassy, we may assume that Memmo’s dismissive expression referred to the local practice of Ottoman residential timber architecture, executed by Greek masters and workers. This local tradition is being abandoned in favor of “truly European” styles, claims Memmo in his desire to persuade the Senate that a de-Ottomanization of the image of the embassy was strictly and urgently necessary. We know that this remark was tenable especially for the French residence, but certainly not for the Dutch one (so prominent in Memmo’s accounts), whose southern elevation remained largely Ottoman and wooden even after the 1767 reconstruction¹⁸. The claim can be only justified if one keeps

16 Archivio di stato di Venezia, (hereafter ASV), Senato, dispacci – Costantinopoli, busta 222, c. 170v, 6 May 1781, Andrea Memmo to Senate.

17 Ibid.

18 Girardelli 2013.

in mind the diplomatic *adagio* attributed to Henry Wotton: “*Legatus est vir bonus peregre missus ad mentiendum rei publicae causa*”: an ambassador is a gentleman sent abroad to “lie”, or to exaggerate, for the public good. And in Memmo’s view, the public good of Venice was dependent on the image of its embassy.

In the early stage of the project, he had considered shifting the seat of the embassy to a higher location, along the Grand Rue (present-day İstiklal): this was in fact becoming the new centre of diplomacy, and the privileged site of upper class Perotes. The French and the Venetian residences had been established in close proximity to each other, on the slopes of Tophane, in the 16th century, when the Grand Rue was a country road connecting vineyards and scattered landmarks. But, in time, the sub-urban, salubrious hill outside the congested settlement within the walls of Galata had acquired social prominence, especially as large parts of Galata and lower Pera began to be Islamized during the 17th and early 18th century. The European powers who had a less rooted presence in the Ottoman capital (if compared to Venice and France), and who built new embassies at Pera in the 18th century, preferred locations along the new urban artery. Holland, Great Britain, Prussia, Naples and Russia had positioned their residences here, contributing to the escalation of real estate values along the Grad Rue: in the end Memmo had to give up, for reasons of financial shortage, the project of changing site.

Remaining, then, in a location that had started to become marginal, Memmo succeeded in his main objective of improving the image of the embassy by constructing solid foundations in brick and stone, that supported an imposing arcade of 15 bays on the eastern elevation; and by giving to its façade a Palladian character, associated by Bertelé with the image of Palladio’s Villa Foscari, the “*Malcontenta*” (c.1560). But the building was not completed when Memmo’s mission ended. In a report on the expenses (largely advanced by the *bailo*, in some cases without waiting for approval from Venice) to the Senate, Memmo’s successor Agostino Garzoni states that with less than 30,000 piastres his predecessor had been able to create a landmark comparable to the Dutch and the French palaces, whose costs had been respectively over 200 and 190 thousand piasters¹⁹. Garzoni also noted that these two other buildings were very close

19 ASV, Senato, dispacci - Costantinopoli, busta 223, c. 23r, 18 Dec 1782, Agostino Garzoni to Senate. This is not the overall expense, which in the end, counting Garzoni’s intervention, some interior decoration and other works not included in this estimate, amounted to 69,822 piastres (Bertelé 1932, 311).

to the Venetian palace, and for the Turks they appeared together in the same glance²⁰. The nearby church and convent of Santa Maria Draperis, still existing in its basic layout and built entirely in masonry in around 1769, had cost more than 250 thousands piasters. In the accounting report sent by Garzoni, the expense for timber was almost four times the cost of bricks and stones (7441 p. and 1972.19 p. respectively)²¹. A Polish “architect”, member of the Trinitarian order, father Orłowski²², was involved in the project and rewarded with 300 piastres, while a superintendent (“soprastante alla fabbrica”) called Antonio Vittoli, received half of this modest amount. Besides, the aforementioned naval engineer Paolo Mastraca was often consulted, and also executed technical drawings – probably as part of his engagement at the embassy and without receiving extra payment. The new residence, notwithstanding an initial intention of shifting from wood to masonry, is still largely a timber structure, albeit resting on masonry foundations.

Speaking of construction materials, one should remember that recent readings of the architectural theories of Memmo’s mentor and ideal model, Carlo Lodoli, underline not so much the alleged “functionalism” of his position, but rather his insistence on a principle of “truth”, his critique of ornament not in itself, but of ornaments concealing or altering the visual/ structural consistency of a building: most famously in the case of forms originally conceived for wooden structures, and then transferred to stone by the tradition of Vitruvian classicism²³. The second volume of the 1834 edition of Memmo’s work on Lodoli contains an index of topics (never developed or exposed in detail by the author) that would form the bulk of Lodoli’s never written treaty²⁴. It includes an argument on the “insussistenza in pietra” (inappropriateness to, or inconsistency with, stone) of the five classical orders. Memmo himself developed at length this argument in the second volume of the Zara edition of his *Elementi* (1834). He was, in sum, a follower of Lodoli especially inclined to reflect on the nature and properties of materials, on the visual/representational syntax and logic to which they should be subject. In Istanbul he was confronted with the Ottoman monumental architectural legacy of stone that does not follow the Vitruvian orders,

20 Ibid. “le sono tutti e due dirimpetto, ed ai Turchi tutti e tre sotto il medesimo punto di vista”.

21 Ivi, c. 25r.

22 Reyhmann 1966-1968. According to Bertelé, also technical staff of the Arsenal of Venice were employed on the construction site.

23 Consoli 2006.

24 Memmo 1834, vol. 2, 49-62.

and that he occasionally praised²⁵. He also observed the development of wooden constructional systems that sometimes did employ (as in the French embassy) the classical orders in a simplified version. If the classical orders were not a visual language appropriate for stone, may we imagine that Memmo implicitly legitimized his use of an architectural language condemned by Lodoli as he resorted to wood instead of stone, thus going back to the “origins” and to what he believed to be the authentic roots of that system? The question may remain unanswered, but one should note that after Memmo several Europeans with a classical or less classical background, from Charles Cockerell to Nicolas Huyot, from the diplomat and writer Antonio Baratta to the Fossati brothers²⁶ and Raimondo D’Aronco, were fascinated by, or at least interested in, the local Ottoman timber structures.

Documentation regarding the Venetian presence in Istanbul in the final years of the Serenissima’s independence shows that the embassy and the Venetian “nation” continued to exert an influence on architectural culture, but were also challenged by other foreign presences. The archive of the *bailo* contains, for instance, traces of a legal contention between a Venetian architect called Bonaventura Bennati (otherwise unknown, as far as I could verify) and his carpenter (*marangone*) Ridolfi, who discredited the master to Ottoman eyes, by claiming that Bennati was not capable of managing the project of a new palace for Beyhan Sultan on the Bosphorus²⁷. As a result, the project was not assigned to the Venetian but to a French “rival”, who must have been no other than A. I. Melling (1763-1831). We do not know whether the reason for this shift of the commission to another architect was really Bennati’s inability, or his assistant’s malevolence and vested interest. But the fact that a number of Venetian subjects were active in the Ottoman building sector by the end of the 18th century deserves certainly more attention. Equally noteworthy is the presence in Istanbul, in the same period, of figures like the Neapolitan architect Paolo Santacroce (mentioned by Mangone in this volume) and the Italian artists and architects engaged by Lord Elgin in his famous archaeological enterprises, to which we will briefly return.

25 “Io stesso osservai in Costantinopoli nell’ architettura tutta turca dei pezzi degni d’ imitazione, e specialmente certi capitelli”, Memmo 1834, vol. 2, 140-141. This remark occurs after some reflections on the necessity of alternative models and sources of inspirations, beyond the classical canon.

26 For Giuseppe Fossati’s design of a wooden embassy in a classicizing style, influenced by the local tradition, see *infra*. Gaspare Fossati’s relationship with Ottoman architectural culture is analyzed in Girardelli 1997.

27 ASV, Bailo a Costantinopoli, busta 358, fasc. 712, “Processo incoato ad istanza di Bonaventura Bennati contro il Marangone Antonio Ridolfi” (25 Jun 1796).

Timber to stone

While Memmo struggled to upgrade the image of the Venetian palace, all other diplomatic buildings, with the possible exception of the Habsburg official residence on the Grand Rue, were timber structures. We have already mentioned the French and the Dutch palaces, on which some graphical documentation exists. The legation of the Neapolitan state is not known in detail, but a letter in the state archives of Naples mentions a “house to be built in the fashion of Constantinople” and to be used as legation²⁸. The drawings attached to the letter were not accessible at the time of my research, but it is quite sure that the house (“alla maniera di Costantinopoli”) implied here is a wooden structure of the Ottoman type. Equally local and wooden was the Swedish legation, documented by the Löwenheim drawings in Uppsala²⁹.

The first embassy with an important place in the history of Pera to be built entirely in masonry was the British palace, which Lord Elgin commissioned at the beginning of the 19th century to one of the architects he had engaged in the archaeological works on the acropolis of Athens: Vincenzo Balestra³⁰. The laying of the foundation stone on January 18, 1802, was performed as a public ceremony in which 136 Maltese slaves, valued at 40,000 pounds and ransomed by the Ottoman government, regained freedom³¹. For the design of the palace, Balestra was instructed to duplicate, with minor additions like a domed *tholos* on the roof, Elgin’s neo-classical country residence in Broomhall, designed by Th. Harrison (1744-1829). The idea of transferring literally a European classicist design to the Bosphorus probably had no exact precedent, although the implementation of the project did not entirely match the original idea, probably for material and political reasons (Fig. 9)³². Elgin was

28 Archivio di stato di Napoli, Legazione a Costantinopoli, fascio 194, 18 May 1743 (“Pianta di un edificio da costruirsi alla maniera di Costantinopoli”). I am grateful to Rosita D’Amora for informing me about this and other Neapolitan materials.

29 <https://uppsalalibraryculturalheritage.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/5546.jpg>

30 Gallo 2009, 61-65, including two elevation and two section drawings by Balestra for the British palace. On Balestra little biographical information is available. He was a member of the Accademia della Pace, established in Rome by Felice Giani in 1790. While working in Athens for Elgin, he had at hand the drawings of the Broomhall residence by Harrison, to use them in view of a new decoration of its entrance hall (still unfinished at the time), inspired by archaeological materials. This circumstance also fostered the idea of following Broomhall’s design for the British palace at Pera. See also Pasquali 2007.

31 Nisbet 1926, 163.

32 I am grateful to Bülke Uras for locating the image of Balestra’s building (ill. 9), and to the Galerie Bassange for granting permission to publish it.

obviously competing, in this and in other initiatives, with his French counterparts: here particularly with count Choiseul-Gouffier, whose Hellenizing palace he had actually even inhabited as he settled in Constantinople in 1799. French-Ottoman relations having come to a halt after the Napoleonic campaign of Egypt, the palace built by Saint-Priest in 1774 and used as a sort of academy by Choiseul-Gouffier had been requisitioned by the Ottomans in 1797 and given to the British representatives, in recognition of their nation's active role against the French threat in Egypt. After the final defeat of the French army, Ottoman gratefulness toward Britain raised to the point that Sultan Selim III donated to his ally the property near Galatasaray, where Elgin decided to demolish the old, ruined residence, and implant a new neo-classical palace modelled after his own Scottish estate. The gift also included funds for the construction of the palace. In the correspondence between Elgin and Lusieri, the Italian artist – engaged in Athens with Sebastiano Ittar, Balestra and others on the survey and partial pillaging of the Acropolis – is asked to provide ideas and sketches (not project drawings) for the interior decoration of the new embassy³³. Two cross-sections by Balestra also show niches in the central rotunda with classical statues or casts, supposedly from the Acropolis. The palace commissioned, and never inhabited, by Elgin (it was still under construction when he left Turkey in 1803), was entirely lost in the 1831 fire of Pera. The site is still occupied by the present British Consulate General, designed as embassy in 1843-47 by W. J. Smith³⁴.

The fire of 1831 erased not only Elgin's palace, but the entire ensemble of the embassies of Pera, with the exclusion of the former Venetian (at the time Austrian) and Swedish seats. After some hesitation, and a period of uncertainty for the future of the Ottoman Empire, during which most European powers used the summer residences on the northern shore of the Bosphorus as diplomatic seats³⁵, reconstruction began with Gaspare Fossati's project for a new Russian palace, overwhelming in size, monumentality and visibility all preceding buildings of European diplomacy in the city. It was in fact mistaken for the Ottoman imperial palace by travellers arriving from the Sea of Marmara, and it forever altered the landscape of Pera, as well as the standards of diplomatic architecture in Constantinople. After

33 Letter from Elgin to Lusieri, dated Constantinople, 23 Dec 1801, in Gallo 2009, 209-210. The standard work on the Elgin marbles is St. Clair 1998. For a recent reassessment of Ottoman attitudes toward archeology, see Bahrani 2011.

34 Crinson 1996.

35 Girardelli 2014.