



ITALIANS AND SOME EUROPEAN ARTISTS IN THE SHADOW OF ABDULHAMID KHAN

ABDÜLHAMİD HAN'IN GÖLGESİNDE İTALYANLAR VE BAZI AVRUPALI SANATÇILAR

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Abstract

Shortly after Abdulhamid II had become padişah, a book that would prove to be highly influential would be published by the Milanese Treves publishing house: Constantinople by Edmondo De Amicis. This travel account that shows the influence of earlier French writing (Lamartine, Flaubert, Nerval and others) may be considered one of the Italian key texts on the formative years of Abdulhamid during the reign of Abdulaziz. Not only Italian travelers would be strongly influenced by his impressions and descriptions, but also many European tourists would look at the Ottoman court and capital through his eyes. It can be supposed that the sovereign himself showed a great interest in foreign travel accounts. He certainly did as far as the Italian presence in his state is concerned. He well knew that the Italian presence in Constantinople/Istanbul (Pera, Galata) preceded the city's Ottoman conquest, this making it the oldest ethnic group – if it is allowed to speak of Venetians, Genoese and many others as a nation, while in reality they had quite recently joined in a process of nation building – after the original Greek population. Not only that: the Italian states had been business partners from the Late Middle Ages (as well as military antagonists). The sympathetic Italian outlook on Constantinople/Istanbul will have contributed in a notable way to the Sultan's benevolence vis-à-vis the Italian culture. Orientalist tendencies in Italian art such as represented by some of Verdi's operas or Donizetti Pasha's musical creations, excellent painters such as Zonaro, architects as D'Aronco, tailors as Parma were much welcomed and supported by the Sultan whose keen interest in European culture and technical know-how would be unjustly overshadowed by his political conservatism and his struggle for autonomy as a world leader. Thanks to his efforts, contemporary Ottoman culture has found its place among the nations. In this article we will examine some prominent Italian artists and their creations for the Ottoman court.

Öz

II. Abdülhamid'in tahta geçmesinden kısa süre sonra Milanolu Treves Yayınevi çok önemli bir kitap yayınladı: Edmondo De Amicis'in İstanbul adlı eseri. Lamartine, Flaubert, Nerval ve başkalarının erken dönem Fransız yazın örneklerinin etkilerini gösteren bu seyahatnameyi, Sultan Abdülaziz tahttaiken II. Abdülhamid'in kültürel formasyon yıllarını oluşturan ana İtalyan metinlerinden addetmek, yanlış olmaz. Yalnızca İtalyan seyyahlar De Amicis'in izlenim ve tasvirlerinin etkisi altında kalmaz, pek çok Avrupalı turist de Osmanlı Sarayı'na De Amicis'in gözleriyle bakmaya başlar. Bizzat Padişah'ın seyyah raporlarına büyük ilgi duyduğu söylenebilir. Özellikle ülkesindeki İtalyan varlığı konusunda seyyahların kaleme aldıklarına ilgi ile yaklaşır. Padişah, Pera/Galata'daki İtalyan varlığının şehrin Osmanlı egemenliğine geçmesinden önceye dayandığının bilincindedir. Nitekim İstanbul'daki İtalyanlar - Venediklilerle Cenovalılar gibi farklı şehirlerin sakinleri tek bir millet olarak düşünülürse - Yunan nüfusun ardından şehirdeki en eski etnik topluluğu oluşturur. Gerçekte söz konusu dönemde İtalya daha yeni birliğine kavuşmuş olsa da İtalya Ortadasındaki pek çok şehir devletinin Geç Ortaçağ'dan beri gerek iş gerek askeri alanda beraber hareket ettikleri görülür. İstanbul'a İtalyanların olumlu bakışı kuşkusuz Padişah'ın İtalyan kültürüne olan yaklaşımını etkilemiştir. İtalyan sanatında Oryantalist yaklaşımlar, başka bir deyişle Verdi'nin operaları veya Donizetti Paşa'nın müziksel yaratıları, Zonaro gibi ressamların tabloları, D'Aronco gibi mimarların eserleri, Parma gibi ustaların icraatı bizzat Padişah tarafından desteklenmiştir. Aslına bakılırsa II. Abdülhamid'in Avrupa kültürüne ve teknik donanımına ilgisi siyasi muhafazakarlığı ile dünya lideri olarak bağımsızlık mücadelesi tarafından haksız biçimde gölgelenmiştir. Zira onun çabaları sayesinde çağın Osmanlı kültürü diğer milletlerin kültürleri arasında önemli bir yer edinmiştir. Bu yazıda İtalyan ve bazı yabancı sanatçıların Osmanlı Sarayı'na ilişkin yaptıkları icraatlar incelenecektir.

Introduction: Time For A Revision?

The general image of Abdülhamid II has been unjustly and negatively influenced by various factors: his conservative attitude, not very attractive looks – an element destined to become more and more important with the diffusion of photography, an unmerciful art that forced an unnatural pose on the figure –, the destitution of his brother whom he rarely visited in the Çırağan Palace, his way of dealing with the Constitution and its promoters, Europe’s tendency to see the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe”, and biographers such as Joan Haslip, who accentuated erroneously the portrait of an overly authoritarian ruler.

We hope as most of those present with us, that it is time for a thorough revision of this image. We will not analyze Abdülhamid II’s political choices and their impact, nor express preference for one type of behavior rather than another. But we may certainly state that Abdülhamid II never ignored the importance of relations between the enormous Empire entrusted to him and the Western world, its culture and its peoples dwelling in his presence. We will here mainly look at the Italians living and working in Istanbul and those writing about the Ottoman Empire and its capital. We are forced to limit ourselves to Istanbul, knowing though that also Selanik presents beautiful examples of buildings we can still admire, even though mostly on postcards.

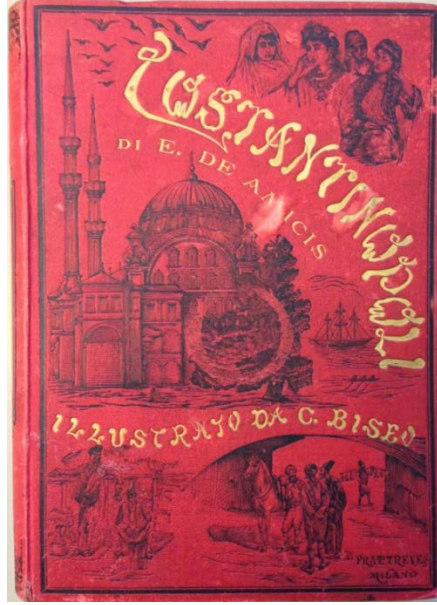
A point that is often ignored by Western critics is the traditional difference between private and public functions in Ottoman life. The Sultan and *Khalif* as head of State and Ruler of the Believers was a different person from the wealthy father of a royal family, the modern first citizen of the Empire who didn’t refuse the identity of a nobleman and who was also what we’d call an intellectual person, well educated, with a good knowledge of various languages and literature, art and music. For the West, it was seductive to recur to the stereotype at the expense of reality.

Some Italian painters played an important role in the artistic life of Istanbul in the middle of the XIXth century. They should be seen as followers of the French Orientalists that had been pioneers in the field and would still, thanks to their political role in the Maghreb, pursue this tradition till far in the XXth century (Matisse and others in Morocco). Italy had practically no colonies of its own before the conquest of Libia (1910), but had always had a keen interest in the Near East. Venetians considered themselves as heirs to various Byzantine traditions and territories. Naples and other states as well had been involved in long-standing contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean, as some of famous XIVth century Italian

writer Boccaccio's stories illustrate. The category of artists who would be most sensible to these influences prove to be painters and writers. Not a few of their works are still present in the Dolmabahçe Palace, the place they had been made for.

Influential Literary Texts: De Amicis and his “Costantinopoli”

Soon after Abdulhamid II had become *padişah*, a book that would prove to be highly influential would be published by the Milanese Treves publishing house: *Costantinopoli* by Edmondo De Amicis (1877).



Costantinopoli by Edmondo De Amicis

It may be considered one of the Italian key texts on the formative years of Abdülhamid II during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz. De Amicis was a prolific author of travel accounts: having been sent for a reportage to Paris, he also traveled to London, Holland and Morocco, all in the same period. The length and season of his travels are not always clearly stated and in some works even exaggerated. It may be deduced, though, that the voyage took place in 1874. The book was prepared in the years following his stay in Istanbul and the original title proposed to the publisher was *Un mese a Costantinopoli* (“A Month in Constantinople”). This travel account shows the strong influence of earlier French writing (Lamartine, Flaubert, Gauthier, Nerval and others. In the years to come on the same topic will also write in French Claude Farrère; Anna De Noaielles, a Levantine poet of Greek-Romanian origin, whose grandfather was linked to the Ottoman Court; Marie Lera also known as Marc Hélys, a feminist writer). As for De Amicis, he revisited Istanbul in 1877. In his previous voyage to the Islam world the writer had been accompanied by the young

painter Enrico Junck, who died in 1878. Probably this was the reason why the publisher Treves asked the Roman painter Cesare Biseo to take his place and visit Istanbul with the printed book and draw some sketches for the second edition of the travel account (Fusco, 1996, p. 140) that was to appear a year later (1878) (De Amicis, 1996, p. CV)¹.



Photo of a woman painted by Cesare Biseo for *Costantinopoli* by De Amicis, in *Uno sguardo ad Oriente*, intr. by Rossanna Bossaglia, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Istanbul, 1996, p.192.

Not only Italian travelers would be strongly influenced by the impressions and descriptions of De Amicis, but many European tourists would look at the Ottoman Court and capital through his eyes and impressions. There are, of course, many other descriptions of the Ottoman capital. From the same years as De Amicis' book is Antonio Stoppani's much less known but equally interesting *Da Milano a Damasco*.

Antonio Stoppani (1824-1891) was a progressive catholic priest who became a well-known geologist, palaeontologist, as well as a travel writer. His book on the Near East *Da Milano a Damasco* (first edition: Milan, Cogliati, 1888) is entirely dedicated to the Ottoman Empire (Turkey, Siria, Lebanon) and contains several chapters on Constantinople/Istanbul. It may not surprise us that much of the information provided, such as descriptions of the Bosphorus, the Grand Bazar and the whirling Dervishes had been already given in other travel accounts. Besides, the author is

¹ See also Yücesan, B. (2017). Edmondo De Amicis'in Gözüyle İstanbul. In *Batı Kültür ve Edebiyatlarında Yüzyıl Dönümü* (pp. 469-483) Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi.

conscious of the force of commonplaces, that may be regarded as a warning against looking for too much originality in books on the Ottoman capital:

If you like it or not, risking to become conventional, baroque or kitschy, who talks about the first impression produced by Constantinople/Istanbul from the sea feels impelled to use an imaginative and poetic language. (...) The blame for it should be entirely put on that famous queen of the East, this great rival of Rome, whose sight is so charming and attractive that one should be insensitive not to be bewitched by her (Stoppani, 1989, p. 133).

Still, there are some interesting chapters we would like to mention. The chapter titled “Primi passi verso una Giovane Turchia” (First Steps Towards a Young Turkey) is dedicated to the reforms that have been introduced during the *Tanzimat* period, and especially to the appearance and clothing of women. Another chapter, “Le Meduse” (The Jellyfish) expresses Stoppani’s interest in natural sciences and is certainly original. But also the Bosphorus is seen with the eyes of a scientist:

The Bosphorus is evidently, in the language of geology, a ‘chiusa’, a word which indicates valleys and ravines that sink to a very deep level with nearly vertical cliffs in a mountain system. The origin of such a sluice is always that of a rift: and the Bosphorus seemed to me a great rift in the plateau between the Dead Sea and the Marmara Sea, that may be the origin of the conjunction of the Black Sea with the Mediterranean (Stoppani, 1989, pp. 189-190).

In the same way, Stoppani pays attention to toponomastics: the village of Arnautkenti in Greek is called “Megarena, that is Big flow. Here I saw, nearly touching the coast, when the sea was perfectly calm, long rows of waves rolling one after each other on the surface, and the sea becoming a stream that descended, with the impetus of a torrent, towards the Sea of Marmara.” (Stoppani, 1989, p. 193).

The major success of De Amicis’ book compared to Stoppani’s is maybe due to the fact that De Amicis was already well known to the Italian public and would later become even more famous thanks to his novel *Cuore*, a “classic” of juvenile literature that, by the way, is the Italian book most translated in Turkish (at least seven translations have been made of it until now). His descriptions of Istanbul are indeed striking and have influenced many writers and painters also because of his ability to depict the city’s beauty with artistic connotations:

And before anything else, the light! One of my biggest joys in Istanbul was to watch the sunrise and the sunset from the Valide Sultan Bridge. [...] In a few minutes, from hill to hill, from mosque to mosque, until the end of the Golden Horn all minarets, one by one, become red, all cupolas, one after the other, take a silvery colour [...] and Istanbul appears pinkish and bright on the hills, bluish and purplish on the shores, [...] fresh, as if it has just emerged from water (De Amicis, 1997, pp. 87-88).

Two general remarks should be made on travel literature: firstly, the accounts often include Greece as well, being the country or region through which the capital was accessed and secondly, the descriptions are rarely limited to the author's actual experience, including instead information from hearsay and from the past. An example is Stoppani's account of the consultation of an Italian physician, Mongeri, at Abdülmecit's last days (Stoppani, 1989, pp. 204-206). He is asked to come to the palace with other doctors but is not introduced to His Majesty. After several days, he learns that the sultan is actually dying. This event dates from 1861, long before Stoppani's journey. It also provides an excellent proof of the changes that had taken place in the later decades of the XIXth century in relation to the promotion of Western science in the Age of Abdülhamid II who awarded Pasteur in 1886 for his invention of the anti-rabies vaccine with the Order of Medjidie (1st class) and 10.000 Ottoman liras. Travel literature is much more concerned about the general atmosphere: landscape, ongoing traffic on the water, market places, graveyards, men and women on the streets or in their houses, food, trade and culture clashes between East and West. The actual information on politics and government is much limited. Whatever is narrated is mostly linked to first-hand experience. The sauce with which this dish is served is not rarely exotic and sensual. In a certain way, many descriptions try to rival with visual arts, describing light and colours just as a photograph or painting would do. Or postcards, that became popular just in this period, presenting the city from a variety of viewpoints through the lenses of Abdullah frères, Kargopulo, the Armenian Phebus *Efendi*, Pascal Sébah who took over the Abdullah Atelier (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 73) in 1899 and others (Pinguet and Gigord, 2014). Abdülhamid II had a keen interest in the new medium, had his picture taken and allowed an atelier of photography to be opened in the Palace. He also had *Topçu* Miralay Ali Sami *Bey* teach his son Burhaneddin photography. A similar remark can be made for cinema: in 1896, just one year after the Lumière brothers' invention, the Sultan invited their apostle Alexandre Promio to the *Saray* to make registrations

(Pinguet and Gigord, 2014, p. 142). The instrument called “cinematograph” esteemed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as “scientifically useful to humanity” became quite popular and Pierre-Victor Continsouza was awarded for his idea and invention with money and an order (the medal of *Sanayi-i Nefise*) (Yüksel, 2017, pp. 287-288).

In a certain sense, De Amicis’ *Costantinopoli* substituted the Italian public leading texts in French and would reclaim an important role for Italian, the language a long time used in diplomatic accounts, trade and banking, the postal services and many other sectors of public life. That French had gradually prevailed on Italian was due to the greater importance given to France and the international position of the language (everyone will remember its role, for instance, in Russian literature, *War and Peace*). In the latter XIXth century, many Italian protagonists of local culture were known and mentioned by a French version of their names, e.g. Philippe Bello for Filippo Bello (the same could be easily said for Ottoman citizens of Greek origin). But the ‘Levantine’ Italians were there, conscious of a long-standing relationship with the hosting country, active in many fields such as construction, music and art, and not too much inclined to emigrate to the young Kingdom of Italy which would grant them citizenship. Indeed, till this day the Italian community in Istanbul is florid and active, with elementary and secondary schools, churches, a hospital and social organizations such as the *Società operaia di mutuo soccorso*, an association many Italians joined, as did the famous architect D’Aronco in 1903. In this respect, the presence of the Italian Embassy in the mentioned years should also be remembered.



Società operaia in Istanbul

We will examine Sultan Abdülhamid's relationship with some Italian residents and others – Levantines, permanent or temporary immigrants. The reason why the Sultan seems to have preferred Italians to other Europeans could be attributed to more than one issue. The principal motive might have been the fact that France and Great Britain were strong colonial powers, whose interests did not concur with the Ottomans' interests and sometimes were straightly opposed to them. As mentioned before, Italy just like Germany was a young country without colonies and was less dangerous as a competitor. Germaner and İnankur (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 39) suggest that the French orientalist artists' discourse, at least in the first half of the century, often had an ideological (and colonialist) background. British artists perhaps preferred their 'own' and more exotic Orient, the Subcontinent. The Dutch formed a small group and almost the same observation could be made for Dutch East India (now Indonesia), even though the well-known artist Marius Bauer stayed in Istanbul and wrote about this interesting city which appears in his meticulously made sketches. A secondary advantage of Italian painters was the Ottoman preference for battle scenes, which by chance were a favourite subject in the young Italian state, the reason why many painters had to work in this genre.

Istanbul and Anatolia in Literature: Some Examples

Constantinople/Istanbul has always been a city strongly connected with Italy and especially with Venice. It was from here, where they had established their firm, that Marco Polo's father and uncle set forth on their travels to the reign of Berke Khan and later to Kubilai Khan's China. The Italian, formerly Venetian colony of Pera is extant to this day. There is a long tradition of Italian travelogues and other activities in the Ottoman capital and Anatolia. We would like to mention some of them. It should be remembered that it was through the eyes of the Venetian diplomats that Western Europe saw the Ottoman world. The famous accounts of Ambassadors and "baylos" often were translated and spread within educated circles in Europe (Clerici, 2008, CVI). It would take us too far to give an extensive overview of these texts.

The Roman nobleman Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652) after a disappointment in love, left his fatherland on a long voyage to the Ottoman Empire and subsequently to the Persian Empire. He wrote on the places where he sojourned or which he visited in a long series of letters to his Napolitan friend Mario Schipano, the first part of which deals with Constantinople/Istanbul, a city he described in detail paying much attention to the life of ordinary people as well as to the court, the army, etc. The *Viaggi* of Pietro Della Valle appeared after his return in Italy from 1650 onward and was an

enormous success in England, France and the Dutch Republic. Della Valle also wrote a grammar book of the Turkish language presently in course of publication by the Accademia della Crusca in Florence. Much of the information we have on Ottoman culture around 1620 is based on Della Valle, such as the coffee and *şerbet* he first mentioned, and the Turkish cats. Della Valle used to learn local languages and dress as local gentlemen did in order not to strike the attention of local authorities. He married a Christian lady from Bagdad, Sitti Maani, who followed him to Persia and passed away when the couple was on the point of leaving the country. Henceforward, Della Valle carried the mummified body of his beloved wife with him until his definite arrival in Italy where she could be buried in the family chapel in S. Maria in Aracoeli in Rome.

A text written by a person travelling with the newly appointed baylo Foscarini on his way to Constantinople/Istanbul in 1788, is Giambattista Casti's *Relazione del mio viaggio fatto da Venezia a Constantinopoli nel 1788* (Account of my voyage from Venice to Constantinople in 1788), published in Milan in 1802. Casti was a productive writer of poems, short stories and travelogues and would eventually become poet laureate at the Austrian Imperial Court. Casti's descriptions are lively, full of admiration for the natural harbours of Constantinople/Istanbul but not blind for the dingy streets of a city stricken by fires and epidemics. Lots of information are given on the *Saray* and its inhabitants during the reign of Selim III.

The Milanese princess Cristina Trivulzio di Belgioioso (1808-1871) joined in the Carbonari conspiracy and in the anti-Austrian as well as anti-Papal revolts in 1849 and had to leave the country when the Roman Republic came to an end. She found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, where she was given a farm in the Kastamonu region by the *padişah*. On the occasion of her daughter Maria's coming of age she took her to Jerusalem for her religious confirmation in a journey over land she extensively covered in her Jerusalem travelogue written – as most of her works - in French (*Asie Mineure et Syrie*, Paris, 1858), and translated in 1862 in English. Belgioioso's viewpoint is clearly a proto-feministic one. Just as she did in a narrative trilogy written in the same period (*Scènes de la vie turque*, Paris, 1858), Cristina focuses on the life and position of women both Muslim and Christian, of all ethnic groups in Anatolia and Syria. She does so with great power of analysis and even greater empathy. Her descriptions are the more precious since as a woman she had access where men had not: in the world of the *Harem*.

“I may perhaps have to destroy some illusions”, Cristina warns (Belgioioso, 1862, p. 27). In fact, it is much of the Romantic myth of the *Harem* as an erotic *topos* that she demolishes in her journal. The delightful bower familiar to readers of Orientalist books in reality is a shabby, dirty place where there is a lack of window panes and mirrors and the women are unable to take proper care of their appearance. They make large use of paint as make-up and the result is horrible, as Cristina describes with much sense of humour (Belgioioso, 1862, pp. 28-30). Daylight mostly comes in through the large chimney, not through the windows, that are generally covered with paper.

The following passage describing young girls may give an idea of Belgioioso’s style:

I had scarcely reached this spring, when a procession of young girls, issuing from the neighboring houses, approached it with their water-jars. They wore wide blue trowsers², gathered at the ankle, and a small red petticoat, open on the sides and long behind, but raised and tied up with cords of various colors; a red scarf, wound several times around the figure, separated the red petticoat from a jacket of similar color, with close sleeves descending to the elbow, and open on the breast, a chemise of fine material alone protecting the latter. (...) When the girls reached the fountain, there immediately arose a charming concert of laughter, singing, and the merriest talk. My presence at first restrained their glee, but it finally served to excite it. Some timidly approached me, and examined the manner in which my hair was fastened, breaking out into exclamations of astonishment at the sight of my comb, while others more bold ventured near enough to place their fingers on the cloth of my cloak, and then ran off laughing, as if they had done something very brave (Belgioioso, 1862, pp. 60-62).

During Sultan Abdülaziz’s reign, many French writers visited the Ottoman capital. This would not change when his nephew Abdülhamid II took over. He became ruler of a great empire where Western influence did not limit itself to economics and finance but – especially in the capital – was present in art and gave Istanbul an important role in literature. Until today, works by Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Flaubert, Nerval, Loti and Le Corbusier on Constantinople/Istanbul are read as classics and have been translated in other languages. The same can be said for De Amicis and a wide range of Italian travelers and authors in the Early Modern and

² In these citations we follow the original spelling.

subsequent periods, such as the well-known Roman traveler Pietro Della Valle (Özkan, Speelman and Çiçekler, 2011)³. One could also suggest that the XXth and XXIth century imagery on the Ottoman capital is still under this influence to a certain extent.

Lamartine, wondering why the beauty of Istanbul hasn't been rightly expressed - in literature or in painting - by previous authors and artists, concludes that perhaps it is due to the fact that words would not be sufficient in front of such a magnificent sight. As for him, he describes his entrance to the Bosphorus and the view of Galata and Pera as follows:

This is where God and humans, nature and art have placed or created the most spectacular view upon which man can set his eyes in this world. I uttered an involuntary cry, I forgot for good the Gulf of Naples and all its enchantments; to compare anything to this magnificent and gracious view would mean to offend creation. [...] The hills of Galata, of Pera and three or four other hills stretch out towards the sea from my feet, covered with differently coloured towns; some have houses painted in strong red, others in black with blue cupolas [...] in between there are green spaces of sycamore trees, fig trees and cypresses forming little gardens belonging to each house (De Lamartine, 1869, p. 159 and p. 187).

Pierre Loti who had a rather visceral and thus unusual relation with Istanbul gives a more accurate but not less picturesque description of the city in his poetic and elegiac writings, focusing also on social life:

[...] And this is a typical practice in Turkey, these very democratic mixtures: *paşas*, *beys* seated at café's among poor people, talking with them or explaining them the news - and the dignity is not at risk at all, since between Muslims, one never tries to force his influence on the other (Loti, 1985, p. 579).

Loti who felt himself perfectly at home in Istanbul, furthermore notices that the number of tourists increased in the last two years thanks to the newly-built railways connecting the capital to the West, mentioning, of course, the Orient Express (Loti, 1985, p. 9) Emblematic in this context is the construction of the Pera Palas Hotel in the years around 1892, destined to receive travelers and celebrities from all over the

³See also Ayyıldız, B., Yücesan, B. (2020). Osmanlı Topraklarında Bir Poliglot: Pietro Della Valle. *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 53, pp. 33-45.

world, which indicates a major opening of the minds towards foreign countries and cultures.

The Sultan and the Arts

It can be supposed that the sovereign showed a strong interest in foreign travel accounts or residents' writings such as Loti's. He certainly did, as far as the Italian presence in his state is concerned. He well knew that their presence in Istanbul (Pera and Galata) preceded the city's Ottoman conquest, this making the Italians the oldest ethnic group after the original Greek population - if it would be right to speak of Venetians, Genoese and many others as a real nation, keeping in mind that Italy is founded only from 1860 onwards.

Abdülhamid II, a man of fine literary and artistic taste, had a distinct knowledge of Italian literature and opera. He advocated to Arturo Stravolo, an Italian composer who started to work at the Yıldız Palace's theatres (to be precise, there were two of them: one for the winter and one for the summer), the production of operas based on Italian tales, for instance of Boccaccio, and even engaged in the translation of operas and arias he loved. Italian actors and artists were often invited to perform at the Palace (Yüksel, 2017, p. 286).

The sympathetic Italian outlook on Istanbul will have contributed in a notable way to the Sultan's benevolence vis-à-vis the Italian culture. Indeed, it is easy to see that a country like Italy, where architectonical or pictorial traditions are heterogeneous (Naples being different from Milan and Veneto from Tuscany), would be less dogmatic in its approach to other countries:

This tendency started very early in the Ottoman Empire: from the period of Mehmet II, whose portrait has been made by Gentile Bellini⁴. The tradition of having a Sultan's portrait made is characteristic for the separation of the secular and religious

⁴ "The painting in the National Gallery has all the characteristics of an imperial portrait. It is a work full of symbols which may have a precise place in a program of glorification and deification of Mehmed II. It may be considered the visual representation of that imperial idea expressed by laws and ceremonies in the *kanunname*, by the architecture of the Topkapı and in the new urbanistic plan of Istanbul, by epic tradition in the legends of Oğuz's sons and Osman's dream of universal glory." Maria Pia Pedani, *The Portrait of Mehmet II: Gentile Bellini, The Making of an Imperial Image*, in *Art Turc/Turkish Art*, 10 th International Congress of Turkish Art/ 10 e Congrès international d'art turc, Genève-Geneva, 17-23 September 1995/ 17-23 Septembre 1995, Actes-Proceedings, Fondation Max van Berchem, Genève, 1999, p. 558. See also T. Parlak, Özge. (2019). *Traces of an Italian Artist in the Ottoman Palace: Gentile Bellini*. AICMSE-AICSSH University of OXFORD Conference Series/August 2019 Conference Proceedings, FLE Learning, ISBN: 978-1-913016-44-9 (12th-14th August, 2019): 136-145.

functions of the sovereign, and so, contributed to a more European identity of the *padişahs*. In his monumental paintings now in the Accademia Museum in Venice, Gentile Bellini represented Ottoman subjects, recognizable from their *türebans*, amongst the Venetian personages as normal witnesses to holy scenes and ceremonial events. The moment of Gentile's presenting the portrait to Mehmet II became the subject of a painting by the famous romantic and Orientalist Venetian painter Francesco Hayez (1834) (Bossaglia, 1998, p. 73).

Vice versa, other European nations displayed these Sultan's portraits as well, as can be seen in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Indirectly, this prepared the way for the future *Tanzimat* attitude vis-à-vis painting. It is indeed well documented that Sultan Abdülhamid II encouraged his children to take lessons and was involved in the new phenomenon of the "Salons", major exhibition activities (also known as *Istanbul Sergileri* or "Expositions Universelles") that started in France and afterwards were organized in Istanbul too. During Abdülhamid II's reign, three of these exhibitions were organized: in 1901 (with important Ottoman and Italian artists participating in a prevalently Orientalist atmosphere; number of paintings unspecified), in 1902 (with 325 works) and in 1903 (with 283 works).



The poster made by Fausto Zonaro for the Istanbul exposition in 1902 in *Uno Sguardo ad Oriente*, intr. by Rossanna Bossaglia, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Istanbul, 1996, p. 251.

The exhibitions in these “Salons” were not limited to paintings but included architectural sketches and handicrafts as well. On these occasions, Ottoman artists such as Osman Hamdi Bey, perhaps the greatest painter of his time, worked together with Western artists. To put things clearly, Ottoman artists were not only of Turkish origin, but frequently of various ethnic background and as a matter of fact, many of them had taken lessons from European artists (Renda, 1988, p. 88). The artistic fusion created with their collaboration would lead to styles where local influences would be seen in European art and, on the other hand, Western approaches and elements as the celebration of female beauty (virtually absent in previous Oriental art) as well as irony (as in the “Turtle trainer”) would enter in Ottoman painting. It might be observed here that Osman Hamdi Bey was in the habit of painting his works twice: one work was destined for local collections and the other for the Paris “salons” (Lemaire, 2000, p. 267).

Italian Painters in Istanbul and their Impact

As can be seen, an important aspect of Sultan Abdülhamid’s relationship with Italian culture is painting. In the slow but steady revolution that turned Ottoman outlook away from the prohibition of figurative painting, Italian artists cannot be ignored. Germaner and İnankur distinguish between artists invited by the authorities (the Palace and the embassies), artists travelling with their own means who opened ateliers in the city, preferably in Pera, and ‘real artists’ (the renowned ones) passing by the capital. By consequence, the fortune of Orientalist painting provoked in a way its downfall due to overproduction (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 63). In also happened that artists started giving lessons in their ateliers, like the case of Mr. Guillemet, who like many colleagues worked also in the *Saray* (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 68).

G.-G. Lemaire writes in *Orientalismus*:

In the beginning of the 19th century the *nakaş*, who were the Court painters at that time, disappeared and together with them the typical miniature painting. The Ottoman Empire was ready to welcome influences from European countries. Painting was no exception (Lemaire, 2000, p. 266).

This characterizes the revolution in painting as typical for *Tanzimat*. Abdülhamid II would prove to be instrumental in speeding up this process. We might call it emblematic that many artists of Turkish origin chose the gardens of Yıldız

Palace as the subject for their paintings, as if to pay homage to the great man that created them (Renda, 1988, p. 89-100)⁵.

The Sultan also founded a museum in Yıldız Palace, where portraits of *padişahs* and panoramas – one of his favourite genres – were exhibited. Besides, manuscripts, coins, medals, weapons, models and gifts were displayed in this museum (Yüksel, 2017, p. 280), described in detail by Renda (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 107).

Genua born Luigi Acquarone (1800-1896) settled in the Ottoman capital in 1841 and would have three different ateliers in the city, painting portraits, still lifes and landscapes in an academic style in addition to teaching and receiving many official honours and medals. He was named Senior Court painter (with the title of *Serressam-ı hazret-i şehriyarı*) in 1881 - he had already delivered several portraits to the Court - and would hold this title until his death in 1896. We might presume that the function of the old maestro was rather honorary.⁶ After his death, the Sultan generously had his wife given a salary.

Amadeo Preziosi came from Malta to Istanbul in 1842 and in 1880-1881 was named Court painter by Abdülhamid II. He cruised the streets of the city making sketches of which two folders of lithographies still remain. In his works the idyllic aspects of family life, the activities in the city and landscapes are stressed (Lemaire, 2000, p. 196). He would remain in the city until his death and occasionally serve as a guide for distinguished visitors (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 68).

In the above-mentioned years Salvatore Valeri, another Italian artist, arrived in the Ottoman capital. In 1883 he joined the newly founded local Academy of Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise*) where he worked until 1913. The Academy, based on the model of the Paris schools, had three programs: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, reflecting Vasari's classic division of the arts. He was appealed both by landscape and people's daily life. As a medium, differently from most colleagues, he preferred water colour with which "he reflects the physiognomy of the spirit and the sentiment" (Thalasso, 1907, p. 51). Valeri, who rather than group pictures preferred painting

⁵ Turan Erol gives examples of Şevki, Ahmed Ragıp, Mustafa, Salih Molla Aşkı and other painters.

⁶ A Court painter at the Ottoman court from Adbülmecit's time, he is also described as a kind of secretary or adjutant (*yaver*) to the Sultan, an important position as far as the protocol and the relations with foreign dignitaries were concerned. The function was given to both Ottoman (Şeker Ahmed Paşa and after him Hüseyin Zekai Paşa) and European artists, but gradually decreased in importance due to budget cuts and the popularity of photography. Cf. Germaner and İnankur, op. cit., p. 107. Similarly in Western Europe, since the Renaissance, there had been so-called *Hofkünstler* in the palaces.

portraits, was appointed teacher to the Imperial princes (*Şehzades*) beside teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Moreover, in the same period (1883) Istanbul welcomed the Barletta born Leonardo De Mango after his visit to Egypt, Syria and Libia. He specialized in city and street views without being able to get away from a certain Levantine provincialism (Fusco, 1998, p. 36). He lived in the city until 1930, participating in four “Salons”. It is his merit to have played an essential role in founding the oil painting department of the Academy of Fine Arts where he also gave lessons. His preferential techniques were crayon and feather pen. His painting “Night at Fener” was bought by one of the Princes. De Mango also made group paintings.

The Venetian Pietro Bellò arrived in Istanbul in 1831. He worked in the field of theater decoration (set design) and at the above-mentioned Academy of Art as assistant professor of architecture until 1909, also specializing in water colour. He worked together with Vallauray and should perhaps mainly be considered an architect. Bellò joined the “Salon” twice (1901 and 1903). Both men were involved in the creation of the Imperial museum (today the Archeology Museum of Istanbul). Both were to work under the same director, the famous Osman Hamdi Bey, who had an excellent reputation as a painter (Barillari and Godori, 1996, p. 20).



The self portrait of Fausto Zonaro, in *Osmanlı Sarayı Ressamı Fausto Zonaro*, Osman Öndeş – Erol Makzume, Yapı ve Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002. p. 290.

After Preziosi, the Paduan artist Fausto Zonaro, who settled in Istanbul in 1891 probably inspired by reading De Amicis’ book with his young wife, received in 1896 – after Acquarone’s death - the position and honours of a Court Artist. As such, he enjoyed the firm protection of the Grand Visier *Avlonyalı Ferid Paşa*. In an interview for the review “Caffaro”, Zonaro stated that he would like to make the Sultan’s portrait. The ruler instantly liked the idea and posed three times for him. Abdülhamid

II enabled him to open an atelier on the Bosphorus, which meant that he could work for other clients as well. The Sultan permitted him to paint the inmates of the *Harem*, by allowing Zonaro's wife Elisa, who had studied the technique of photography in Paris, to make photos of them: these photos would later be elaborated into painted portraits. This was not only unusual for the *Saray*, but matched perfectly the latest European ways of working. For instance, Hendrik Breitner became famous in the Netherlands for using preparatory photography in order to enhance the lively characters of his paintings.



Şehzade Abdürrahim (1891-1910), in *Osmanlı Sarayı Ressamı Fausto Zonaro*, Osman Öndeş – Erol Makzume, Yapı ve Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002. p. 300.

Salvatore Valeri also made portraits of *harem* ladies, but we do not know if he worked from photographs as well. Other subjects Zonaro loved were dervishes and letter writers (*katipler*) in an interesting outlook on Turkish society (Lemaire, 2000, p. 196). He also had three personal exhibitions in the city: in 1894, 1895 and 1905. On the occasion of the Sultan's 31st year of reign, Zonaro participated with 8 paintings to the celebrations. Starting from 1896, he presented the Sultan yearly with one painting, mostly with historic subjects like Fatih Sultan Mehmed's victorious entrance to Istanbul and other scenes of the Conquest. Ömer Faruk Şerifoğlu, according to the memoirs conserved at the Maritime Museum Collection of Hüsnü Tengüz which bear the title of *My Art Life*, claims that the paintings of this cycle have been originally made by Hasan Rıza Bey (who studied art in Italy for 12 years) and were afterwards copied by Fausto Zonaro.



“Fatih Sultan Mehmed’s Entrance to Istanbul” (1903) by Fausto Zonaro in *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro*, O. Öndeş-E. Makzume, YKY, Istanbul, 2002, p. 255.

The relation with the Sultan didn’t prevent the Zonaro couple from nourishing friendly relationships with the upcoming *Jöntürkler* and from painting Enver Paşa’s portrait. Probably, Zonaro was not much interested in politics and would have probably naively welcomed any effort of social and political renewal. He was very versatile, painting not only portraits, but landscapes, city views, and people, often in boats.

Other Italian artists in Istanbul include Luigi Querena, author of a nice painting of Dolmabahçe (1875); Terenzio Consoli, who painted a battle scene reflecting the war between the Ottomans and the Venetians in the XVIIth century - as mentioned, a typical genre that the Sultan loved and promoted and preferably committed to Western artists that thus made this kind of painting known to local artists (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 109); Giovanni Brindesi and Philippe Bello, among others.

Italians in Architecture in the Ottoman Capital during Abdülhamid II’s Reign

It is a fact that also in the building sector, the Ottoman government preferred Italian architects to their European colleagues: in Istanbul in the period that interests us here and the decade before, no nation matched the Italians for their contribution

to the building sector. Laurence Ammour writes that Italians, in the first place, helped reshaping the city after the great fires of the '50s and '60s, constructing administrative buildings like ministries, commercial buildings and banks (Ammour, 1995, pp. 3-7). Initially, the Western influence was notable in neo-baroque and similar styles that were sometimes criticized by Western specialists (e.g. the Dolmabahçe Palace) (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 44)⁷, but this tendency would soon give way to more modernly constructed buildings.

Of the Italian architects, Fossati and Barborini were even entrusted with responsible functions in public administration in Pera, which allowed them to play a direct role in construction works in the city and an indirect one as counselors. It is strongly possible that they might have exercised their influence to let the Ottoman Empire join the prestigious exhibition in Chicago in 1893 and the one in Paris in 1900 and thus participate in the international industrial world. Montani and Rigotti, Valeri, Semprini, Seminati, Caivano, Agertter and others were active as architects of both private and public buildings in Istanbul; Nervi and Astengo should not be forgotten either. From Ammour's article we can conclude that more than 140 Italian architects were working for the Ottomans in the first decade of Abdülhamid II's reign. Montani compiled an important work: *Usûl-i mimârî-i Osmanî (Architecture ottomane)* which, being prepared for the 1873 Vienna "exposition universelle" in three languages, developed theoretical concepts of contemporary architecture. Among Montani's works should be mentioned Valide Sultan's mosque at Aksaray, built in 1871, still an important landmark on the central axis of the city. Montani achieved this work together with Cociffi, who was given an official project by the Ottoman governor and had an office in Pera. A silver model of the mosque was exposed in Vienna in the above-mentioned exposition. Montani's work, which does not lack neo-gothic elements (typical for the XIXth century), enabled him to put together Western elements with Oriental ones (mostly Ottoman and Indian), thus preparing in a certain way the road for D'Aronco. Other Italians were well-know decorators, for instance Calligari, Passega, and Davanzo. Some of the Italians in the Ottoman Empire worked together in contractor firms, e.g. Beccherelli, Mantero Bros., Semprini and Mongeri. Ercole Michellini specialized in wooden construction.

⁷ Viconte Renais Vigier (1885) can be taken as an example regarding this matter.

In the end, the Sultan chose D'Aronco, whom he invited in 1893, to prepare designs for the Istanbul Exhibition of Agriculture and Industry to be held in 1896. The project had been completed, but was never realized due to an earthquake in 1894. Abdülhamid II appointed him later as his personal and Court architect as well as “general inspector” for the restoration works in the city. This was not a decision without consequences: after the great fires in the Ottoman capital many parts of the city had to be rebuilt and not a few buildings restored. It was in the first place as a restoration specialist that D'Aronco was employed. Restoration was a work that Abdülhamid II took seriously, we dare say, in a symbolic way as well. The Sultan was seriously concerned for the restoration of his authority and the prestige of the Empire that was plagued by the problems of the national debt and foreign interference. Not rarely, the Friuli born architect worked together with French or Ottoman colleagues, such as Alexandre Vallaury, e.g. in the Public Debt building (*Düyûn-u Umûmiye*). He was tempted by a variety of styles and could therefore be called eclectic. For instance, in the Haydarpaşa Military Imperial Medicine School (1894-1903, again with Vallaury, whose contribution is discussed by Batur and by Can, the latter remarking that Vallaury educated young builders for 25 years) and the slightly later constructed Tophane Fountain (1896-1901) he made use of Islamic Baroque combined with Indian elements, as he would later do in the Hamidiye Etfal Hospital at Şişli (1906-1907). D'Aronco worked also on the renovation and extension of the damaged Imperial Porcelain Factory at Yıldız (1894) and doubled the pavilion of the Şale Kiosk for the second visit of Wilhelm II to Istanbul (1898).



“Dolmabahçe rıhtımında Kaiser Wilhelm II” (1891-1910) in *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Zonaro*, Osman Öndeş – Erol Makzume, *Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro*, Yapı ve Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002. p. 277.

Models were fused by D'Aronco into creations that were coherent and universally Islamic rather than only Turkish. They display Central Asian, Egyptian and Indian elements but also incorporate some other Oriental sources, being

transformed in “phantastic products” (Alfieri, 1987, pp. 142-153) which refuse the “idolatry of the Ancients”.

In a later phase, D’Aronco created many buildings he is today justly famous for: for instance, the “new” Italian Embassy building in Terapia and the Şeyh Zafir *Türbesi* (1905-6) in the Yıldız Palace neighbourhood. As the Sultan had a great interest for architecture, he personally supervised the plans of the Şeyh Zafir *Türbesi* and followed the phases of its construction (Yüksel, 2017, p. 278).



“The *Türbe* of Şeyh Zafir” (1903-1904) in *Istanbul 1900. Art Nouveau Architecture and Interiors*, Diana Barillari & Ezio Godoli, Rizzoli, New York, 1996, p. 95.

The question has of course arisen how D’Aronco could introduce Secession buildings, buildings seemingly European, in an Islamic environment. Here we should face the fact that Art Nouveau (also known as *secese*, *liberty*, *nieuwe kunst* or *stile floreale*) in many cases was completely new, not based on other movements (and certainly not on so-called ‘neo-styles’) and its decoration was often abstract, geometrical or floral, not always using human forms. Especially the Austrian school, that D’Aronco knew very well, did not serve itself frequently of this kind of ornament.



“Design for the extension and reshaping of the Cemil Bey House” (1904) in *Istanbul 1900. Art Nouveau Architecture and Interiors*, Diana Barillari & Ezio Godoli, Rizzoli, New York, 1996, p.112.

And this was much welcome to the taste of the Sultan who had a religious and a modern identity at the same time. But D’Aronco did more: it has been demonstrated by Barillari (1995, p. 21) that he used the element of the Ottoman central hall (*sofa*) as an essential feature of his architecture, uniting the Islamic, Vitruvian and Palladian traditions of a central space serving as the principal room of a house. In could be suggested that in this respect the Italian architect managed to eliminate the difference between East and West in an elegant way that did justice to both. This was what Abdülhamid II needed. And it was not essentially different from his own shift (almost six months after he ascended the throne) from the heavy Dolmabahçe architecture to the elegant surroundings of Yıldız, that we can still admire. By the by, we should maybe reconsider the mythical Sultan’s walk in the garden where he enjoyed his coffee paying for it, in a different light: a symbolic lesson to his contemporaries. The sultan was introvert, he could trust few people and his cultural statements should not be ignored. If we accept to see the relationship with D’Aronco both as a willingly political act and as a manifestation of aesthetic taste, we might well understand his personality better. We consider it as a sort of commitment to European culture but from a different position. D’Aronco can be regarded as *Khalif* Abdülhamid’s ideal choice, creator of the style that incarnates his Panislamist ideals of union between the great cultures of Islam: the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, the Subcontinent and others.

On the occasion of the XXth year of Abdülhamid’s reign, splendid feasts were organized to which D’Aronco contributed among other works with fountains and water supply systems (*Hamidiye*). We shouldn’t forget to mention that gardens play an important role in D’Aronco’s architecture: he creates a fusion of Ottoman gardens

with Italian and British garden and landscape architecture. In this respect Yıldız Palace, of course, is his most important achievement and can be admired even today.

Another (Levantine) Italian architect who has to be mentioned is Giulio Mongeri, (son to the afore-mentioned physician Luigi), who taught at the Academy of Fine Arts. He contributed to the formation of various Ottoman architects and became architect to the Italian Embassy in 1907. In 1903 he had been present at the third edition of the *Istanbul sergileri* with various projects, among which a church in the Lombardic style, a house in Renaissance style, a mausoleum in ancient Greek style and a *han* in modern style (Çinici, 2015, p. 23). Later, Mongeri would be much more known as the architect of important Ankara buildings of the Republican Era.

Bianca Maria Alfieri (1987, pp. 142-153) compares the two major Italian architects, observing differences of style but also of clients: D'Aronco's were wealthy bourgeois and the court, whereas Mongeri's mainly consisted of the political bodies linked to the New Ottomans (*Yeni Osmanlılar*) and later to the Young Turks (*Jöntürkler*).

Another Italian architect active in Istanbul during Abdülhamid's reign was the Turinese Annibale Rigotti, who followed D'Aronco in Turkey in 1894 to collaborate with him on the already mentioned project of the exhibition that was never realized. He worked on the restoration of Yıldız Palace after the earthquake (Wikipedia, 2018).

A Music Lover's Choice: Italian Composers and Operas

Orientalist tendencies are furthermore to be seen in other forms of Italian art such as represented by some of Verdi's operas (first of all, in *Aida*) or Donizetti *Paşa's* musical creations. Donizetti's successor, the Parmesan composer Callisto Guatelli, was appointed as conductor to the Music Academy (*Muzika-i Hümayûn*) by Abdülhamid II and worked for the Court both as a composer and a musician, adapting the *makams* of Turkish music to the ceremonial use made of it (Fesch, 1999, p. 139). Guatelli, also known as Guatelli *Paşa*, trained many Turkish composers, such as Mehmed Zati and Mehmed Emin and composed marches, one of which being the *Aziziye* March.

Joan Haslip notes that approximately until 1909 the orchestra of the Palace had more than three hundred musicians and that the Sultan liked them to play *Madame Angot* and *La belle Hélène* frequently. Even Sultan Abdülhamid's stepmother Peresto used to play on the piano motives by Offenbach and Meyerbeer to the sultan

who was kind, gentle, premurous and affectionate in the *Harem* towards his women and children (Haslip, 1958, p. 306, p. 124, p. 110).

Let us indulge now, even if shortly, in the accounts of some eye witnesses of Sultan Abdülhamid's times: Paul Fesch, who was a member of the French Embassy group assisting at a Friday ceremony on 25 October 1906, informs us that the Sultan liked the *Viennoise* March of the Hungarian composer Johann N. Král, and that his horses were trained with this music. When the Sultan came out of the Mosque, the *Hamidiye* march would be performed (Fesch, 1999, p. 137).



Elisa Zonaro, "Sultan Abdülhamid on a Friday Prayer Procession", in "Osmanlı Saray Ressamı Fausto Zonaro, Osman Öndeş - Erol Makzume, Yapı ve Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, p. 40.

At this point we would like to quote some interesting fragments from Marc Hélys' description of a public appearance at a *Bayram* evening in the years 1901-1903:

Cannon shots announced the beginning of the *bayram*, the solemn end of the Ramazan. [...] Bayram night is a great feast when people do scarcely sleep in Istanbul (Hélys, 2001, p. 388).

Though except for the diplomatic community, the Western public is not admitted in the Yıldız Palace, Hélys is admitted and describes the ceremony into some detail. This is how she beholds the Sultan and what kind of music is being played:

There followed a long, immobile silence. Then the palace band started playing the *Hamidiye* march, and in the middle of this feast of sound and splendor appeared a man with a sad look, wearing a simple soldier's coat. It was the Sultan. All heads bowed.

The sovereign halted. The *kadı* of Istanbul came forward to receive him and invited him to a short prayer that both men performed with raised hands. Then the Sultan walked to his throne and the ceremony of hand-kissing began. [...]

Suddenly, the orchestra started playing passionately Chopin's Grand Polonaise. Simultaneously, a triumphal sunray fell through a high window, touching the uncovered scimitar that the Sultan clutched in his fist. [...] This glittering blade was Islam and conquest. The Polonaise, that resounded furiously, immersed the gilded crowd in all memories Chopin had gathered in the solitude of the steppes. [...]

I admired the evocative art of these Turks, when the Tannhäuser March broke this harmony of impressions. Suddenly a heavy silence fell upon this hall where thousands of hearts were beating, where thousands of souls perhaps were thinking and remembering. Then a loud cry resounded, produced by mighty voices: "O my Sultan, do not forget that you are nothing before the greatness of Allah!" (Hély, 2001, pp. 38-390).

We find this quote very interesting. From our viewpoint, it shows Abdülhamid II in his difficult and often not well understood situation both as Emperor and *Khalif*, standing between East and West, son of both and to both loyal in his own way.

It is maybe less known that the Sultan played the piano and had a big collection of musical scores. According to princess Ayşe, her father not rarely preferred Western music to Turkish music, saying: "Turkish music is beautiful, but nevertheless, causes sorrow. Western music is different: it gives joy" (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 170). When Western musicians came to Istanbul, embassies could recommend them to the *Saray* and they would often perform for the Sultan. Furthermore, foreign musicians would perform operas and operettes at the *Muzika-i hümayûn*. According to the documents, Abdülhamid II wasn't very fond of *alaturka* music; in his time *orta oyunu* was not much welcome in the Palace anymore and was only performed during the *bayram* (Germaner and İnankur, 2002, p. 107).

But there are also other fields of arts, where Italians are seen at the service of the Sultan: tailors such as Paolo Parma were much welcomed and supported by the Sultan whose keen interest in European culture and technical know-how has been unjustly overshadowed by his political conservatism and his struggle for autonomy as a world leader. Parma was given the award of the rosette "Grand Officer of the Order of Osmanie" for his good service and merits.

Conclusion

All these facts allow us to state that the Italian – and French - contribution to the artistic existence of the city throughout the Age of Abdülhamid II has been impressive. This contribution was undoubtedly very important to the Sultan and his policy of opening to Western culture, technique and science without renouncing at his responsibility of ruler of a huge empire and *Khalif* of the Believers. Unfortunately his sending art students with scholarships abroad, the promotion of archeological excavations during his reign and the protection of the findings which represent the rich cultural heritage of the country by a special law (*Âsâr-ı Âtîka Nizamnamesi*) (Yüksel, 2017, p. 278) are not always listed among his achievements. An artist and an art collector himself, he may be called a true maecenas of arts and science, not only because he encouraged painters, actors and photographers all around the country by donating them medals and orders, but also because he recompensed them generously sometimes even by means of his own treasury (*hazîne-i hâssa*), acting as a “sponsor” and giving a good example of how art should be promoted. This quality of the Sultan was enhanced by his frequent use of paintings as a gift, a habit that helped the diffusion of Western-style painting even more. The Sultan’s daughter Ayşe (Osmanoglu) writes that her father was an amateur painter and draughtsman, and made a pencil drawing of her mother (Yüksel, 2017, p. 104). This written remark and many others such as may be found in Stravolo’s still unpublished papers might throw a new light on the solitary Emperor who embraced Western culture while being wisely and prudently reluctant to change in other fields. The intimate relationship with Italian culture and artists will probably emerge still stronger from further study of the long downplayed aspects of this fascinating Sultan.

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Summary

The image of Abdülhamid II has been negatively influenced by his conservative and authoritarian attitude, his severe appearance, the destitution of his brother Murat V, his way of dealing with the Constitution and its promoters, and not in the last place, by Europe's prejudicial view of the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man of Europe", an image unjustly confirmed by biographers such as Joan Haslip.

We think it is time for a thorough revision of this image. To this purpose, we will analyze Abdülhamid II's cultural policy of opening to contemporary Western culture that he successfully tried to integrate in the giant Empire he ruled.

Among our literary sources and testimonials, the travel account "Costantinopoli" by Edmondo De Amicis (1877) has been highly influential. This work, influenced by earlier French writing (Lamartine, Flaubert, Nerval and others) may be considered the Italian key text on the formative years of Abdulhamid.

The most famous French author, who considered Istanbul as his second fatherland and was a great friend of the Ottomans, would be Pierre Loti. Abdulhamid II seems to have shown interest in foreign travel accounts.

The sympathetic Italian and French outlook on Constantinople will have contributed to the Sultan's benevolence towards Italian culture. Orientalist tendencies in Italian art and music were much welcomed and supported by the Sultan. Thanks to his efforts, contemporary Ottoman culture as a mixture of local, Western and Eastern culture found its place among the nations. We must not forget in this context that the sultan was *Khalif* as well and his sincere piety and desire not to forget the Muslim populations living outside his Empire made him open for Indian and African influences in addition to the prevailing Near Eastern and European culture, especially in the fields of architecture and decoration.

But we should not forget either that the authoritarian Sultan was a cultured man and a loving family father keen on educating his wives and many children, encouraging them to take drawing and painting lessons. And he was a promotor of science. It was Abdülhamid II who awarded Pasteur in 1886 for his invention of the anti-rabies vaccine with the Order of Medjidie and a considerable amount of money. Whoever visits the Saray Koleksiyonları Müzesi in Istanbul may be surprised by the state-of-art medical equipment, the dentist chair and telephone equipment in the Imperial Palaces. Besides, the Sultan introduced cinema in the Saray in 1896 and had a well-known photographer to teach his son Burhaneddin photography.

Our article examines Sultan Abdülhamid's relationship with some Italian residents and others – Levantines, permanent or temporary immigrants. The reason why Abdulhamid seems to have preferred Italians to other Europeans may be attributed to various circumstances, but the principal motive might have been the fact that France and Great Britain were strong colonial powers, whose ambitions rarely concurred with the Ottomans' interests. Italy, however, just like Germany, was a young country without colonies and was less dangerous as a competitor.

As a patron of arts, the Sultan was involved in the new phenomenon of the "Salons", major exhibition activities based on the French model. During his reign, three of these exhibitions were organized, in 1901, 1902 and 1903. These exhibitions were not limited to paintings, but included architectural sketches and handicrafts as well. Ottoman artists such as Osman Hamdi Bey, perhaps the greatest local painter, collaborated in this context with Western artists. Ottoman artists were not only of Turkish origin, but frequently of various ethnic backgrounds such as Armenians or Greeks, and had often taken lessons from European artists. The Sultan also founded a museum in Yıldız Palace, where portraits of padişahs and panoramas – among his favourite genres – were exhibited.

Many Italian painters worked both for the Court and as independent artists, often teaching as well. They were rewarded with official honours like the function of Court Painter. Luigi Acquarone settled in the Ottoman capital in 1841 and would have three different ateliers there, painting portraits, still lifes and landscapes in an academic style in addition to teaching and receiving many medals. Amadeo Preziosi came from Malta to Istanbul in 1842. In his works the idyllic aspects of family life, the activities in the city and landscapes are stressed. Salvatore Valeri joined the newly founded local Academy of Fine Arts in 1883 where he worked until 1913. The Academy, based on the model of the Paris schools, had three programs: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Valeri was attracted to painting both landscape and humble people's daily life. As a medium, he preferred watercolour. In 1883 Istanbul welcomed Leonardo De Mango, who specialized in city scapes and street views. Pietro Bellò arrived in Istanbul in 1831. He worked in the field of theatre decoration and at the above mentioned Academy of Art as assistant professor of architecture until 1909, also specializing in watercolour, and should perhaps mainly be considered an architect. Bellò joined the 'Salon' twice (1901 and 1903). Together with Alexandre Vallauray, he was involved in the creation of the Imperial museum (today's Archeology Museum of Istanbul). Maybe the most acclaimed painter was Fausto Zonaro. The sultan allowed his wife Elisa to make photos in the Harem. A similar overview can be given of Italian architects, the most famous among them being probably Raimondo D'Aronco, who was invited to Istanbul by Abdulhamid II for restoration purposes and eventually created an astonishing fusion of liberty with Eastern influences.

Istanbul continues to host many of the above mentioned artists' works, presented in various museums and palaces.