The Medieval Harbour of Constantinople in 18th century Cartography

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The main objective of my address is to bring to your attention several examples of eighteenth century cartography whose subject is the city of Constantinople, and in second place to show how these documents can offer a significant contribution to the study of urban transformations in even earlier periods, through the Middle Ages. The most interesting document we will deal with is a plan of Constantinople drawn between 1776 and 1786, which constitutes the first scientific and systematic survey of the city: I would thus like to briefly introduce the map and its authors.

Only in recent years – I believe – have critics studied the work of François Kauffer (1751?-1801), an engineer at Ponts et Chaussées and cartographer. We do not have much information on his life: thanks to a handwritten note on the Carte géographique de la Plaine et des Environs d’Éphèse in 1776 we know that he had previously been a geographer at the Département de la Lorraine Allemande, but we can imagine that he left this position early or that he had acquired an additional role, that of secretary to Marie Gabriel Florent Auguste count of Choiseul Gouffier (1752-1817). Choiseul Gouffier was an erudite and a diplomat, nominated French ambassador to the Sublime Gate in 1784 (a position he would hold through 1793), probably thanks to his excellent understanding of Oriental reality: in fact he had traveled extensively through the Aegean and to Constantinople. During these travels Kauffer worked mainly on cartography and drew up a number of maps, such as the map of Constantinople we will be looking at, which would later be published in Voyage Pittoresque de la Grèce, printed in Paris in three volumes: the first in 1782 under the direction of the author, Choiseul Gouffier, the second before 1819 thus in part after his death, like the third which was not published until 1822. It is only in this third volume that the map of Constantinople by Kauffer appears though updated to the year 1821 (as written on the map) by Barbié du Bocage.

The map of Constantinople – which we see here in its manuscript form – as the title declares: Carte de la ville de Constantinople levée géométriquement en 1776 et vérifiée en 1786, was drawn in several phases. In 1776, during Choiseul Gouffier’s first travels to the East, Kauffer probably was able to make geometrically drawings of only a few elements, perhaps only the profile of the coasts, whereas during the second journey, in 1785, he executed a highly detailed survey. These operations lasted over six months – starting on December 6 1785 – and are described with precision in the book by J.B. Lechevalier, Voyage de la Propontide et du Pont Euxin, published in two
volumes in Paris between 1800-1802: Lechevalier, who presents himself as a scholar, “membre de la Société des Sciences et Arts e Paris, du Lycée de Caen, des Academies d’Edimbourg, de Gottingen, de Cassel et de Madrid” was also an engineer; he actively accompanied and collaborated with Kauffer in drawing up this plan.

On the contrary, the plan by Kauffer, which is usually believed to have been published for the first time in *Voyage pittoresque*, was actually published twenty years earlier in *Voyage de la Propontide* by Lechevalier under the title *Carte de Constantinople levée par F. Kauffer et J.B. Lechevalier l’an 1786*.

Though this was a period of close collaboration between France and Turkey, the role of French ambassador Choiseul Gouffier was clearly crucial for the introduction of the two engineers at court, which allowed them to execute such reserved operations as verifying the position of every element in the city, monumental but also functional and even military. This is confirmed by the fact that at the close of this experience, Kauffer’s continued to work directly at the service of the Sublime Gate: in 1799 he could be found at work on surveying Corfù for the Sultan and the Russian Emperor.

There is no need at this time to describe the various phases of the survey, however it is important to underline that the two engineers spent as much as three months identifying and recognizing the major buildings and civic monuments which they later located on the map.

"Le 6 décembre 1785 nous sommes entrés pour la première fois dans l’enceinte de Constantinople par la porte appelée Zindan Kapoussi. Notre premier travail a été de prendre le nom de chaque édifice remarquable d’en étudier les formes exterieures et d’y observer quelque signe distinctif afin de pouvoir le reconnaître de loin dans nos opérations topographiques."

For this operation they relied on many erudite writings on Constantinople diffused in the west, almost certainly at the suggestion of the cultured ambassador: two of the most important were the description of the ancient city by Pierre Gylles and the account of the journey by Grelot ("Après trois mois de recherches et d’observations réitérées ... nous etions parvenus à retrouver tout ce qui reste des monuments anciens décrits par Pierre Gilles").

Nevertheless, the map is not at all a reproduction of the ancient city, but an exact survey of the eighteenth-century situation of the capital in which on the contrary, it is possible to appreciate the phenomenon of the city’s "mercantilization" which constitutes the century’s most significant element of transformation. Our only regret, which could however be confirmed or cancelled by further investigation, is that the on-site and partial measured drawings have been lost: what remains, this hand drawn map at the BNF is certainly a reduced and abbreviated preparatory version of the engraving.
To get an idea of the giant step forward this map takes, it is sufficient to look at the maps that immediately precede it:

In 1752 John Rocque published a map that is part of a portfolio of various images of Istanbul: it shows the streets, and this is one of the first time that this occurs in the cartographic tradition of the city, but they are almost totally invented: not even the streets that look like the main axes, the one that leads from the Serraglio to the Edirne Gate and the one that goes to the Ieni Kapi (New Gate) are actually that straight and that recognizable in the daedalus of streets of the ancient city.

Rocque’s plan puts great emphasis on the port of Constantinople, an area crowded with boats that occupies the entire Golden Horn both on the shores of the peninsula as well as the opposite coast where the western “Latin” city of Galata-Pera is located.

There is in fact little information on the situation of the port structures on the Golden Horn. One wonders whether this situation is realistic, that is if

1) the port of Constantinople was located on a wide and substantially continuous area along the coast or whether there existed more specialized zones

2) what structures was the port composed of and where the main docks were located

3) how these docks were connected to the trading and storage areas, and where they were located.

This Turkish map from the late eighteenth century provides a clear description of the situation on the Golden Horn: at the top the Punta del Serraglio, in front the city of Galata-Pera, with its walls and its port and to the west the arsenal of Qasim Pasha (vizir ca. 1530) built by Mehmet II on the former site of the Genoese boatyards and the important harbour at Azala Kapi.

The coast of the peninsula is also characterized by the maritime walls of the city which in part date back to the era of Constantine, walls that did not have great defensive value and do not seem to have been radically modified over the course of the centuries. This is how they are described in the mid-sixteenth century by Pierre Gilles: “the walls along the sea are lower than the ones on land but very thick and well guarded by towers. On the side towards the Golden Horn they are about 50 steps from the shore. Along the Bosphorus and the Propontide (however) they are right on the shore except that they are interrupted in proximity to a port or dock.” The port structures are located along this exiguous portion of the city outside of the walls, and are connected to the city itself by a number of city gates that allow easy yet controlled access to the harbors on the sea.

The number of these gates fluctuates between 12 and 20 depending on the sources and the period. The reconstruction of the topography in the Medieval and modern age, despite attempts by several scholars including Brown (1935), Schneider (1950), Dirimtekin (1956), Janin (1964), and Muller Wiener (1977), appears very difficult, because of the inconsistencies.
between the various sources, and because it is likely that each gate had more than one name, and finally because of the inevitable transformations over time.

According to what is shown on the Turkish map at the BNF these terrains outside the walls are not distributed equally along the entire coast: in the innermost stretch of the Golden Horn the map shows a continuity of houses and perhaps even religious building up to the Blacherne, starting at Un Kapan where there is a mosque and a large building which we recognize as the same building represented in some of the sixteenth and seventeenth century views as a large warehouse, a storehouse (for example, see the extremely faithful view by Nicolas Poulet, Paris Bibliothèque de l’Institut, ms. 1900 cfr. Byz. Ret. tav. XI)
Whereas from Ayasma Kapi towards the Serraglio it shows only a strip of land free of buildings and at times very narrow: it almost seems as if the map deliberately cancels the area most pertinent to port activities, representing only a simple residential area.

In fact, the situation in this zone seems to be a bit different: Kauffer’s map shows a road running parallel to the walls which begins at the door of the Valide mosque and continues uninterruptedly at least up to the Fener.
There are more openings and passages through the wall than the ones that have a proper name and they are concentrated in two sectors: the eastern sector between Oun Kapan and Bahçe Kapi and the western sector around the Petrion fortress. These are evidently zones which more frequently required rapid access to the port.

The land outside the maritime walls is particularly wide in the stretch between the Balouk Bazar and Bahçe Kapi, where various buildings are shown, including structures on the water which might be interpreted as docks. This is precisely the zone in which the panoramic views of Istanbul in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show a concentration of boats; and it is no coincidence that this is also the ancient port zone where both the Neorion and the Prosphorion were located. We also note that further west, other different buildings and port structures are shown in correspondence with the Aiasma and Oun Kapan gates.

In the eighteenth century this was still the heart of the port on the Golden Horn. The area was radically modified by the construction of the Valide mosque, begun in 1597 by the mother of Mehmet III and completed only in 1663 (because construction was interrupted for a long time), which reflected the mercantile vocation of the area in its annexes. The complex of the Valide used part of the city walls as its own enclosure: it was located between the gate of Bahçe and Balouk Bazar; in addition there were two other access gates to the mosque, one on each side. According to Lechavelier in his *Voyage de la Propontide*, in correspondence to the enclosure of the mosque where customs is now located (shown accurately on the map), in ancient times there was the gate of Neorion, also known as Oraia or, in Turkish, Tchifout Kapi
(the Peasant Gate) whom others (Meletius) believe to be the same as Balouk Bazar; there are no further passages until the Zidan gate which again according to Lechevalier is the gate of Boats, that is the gate for the ferry to Galata which the Turks call the Gate of Fruit (Ghemi Iskelé).

This is the area in which the Venetian district was located until the fall of the Byzantine Empire; it was established here on the basis of the chrysobull by Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118) in 1082. (Property and borders remained the same from 1082 to 1147). The borders of this settlement are still under discussion.

Generally it is set between the Odoun to the west and Balouk Bazar to the east, but recently Aigul Agir hypothesizes that Venetian interests extended into an area further west near the Aisma (fountain?) gate because several documents refer to a watercourse that flowed near one of the city gates (doc. 1148: including the watercourse that ran from the Vigla down to the Canavuci gate and the large open land located in the same position) and “a large quantity” of water is mentioned near this gate in several eighteenth century Turkish documents.

Kauffer’s map highlights the presence of water in several places: slightly further west, in direct correspondence with the Oun Kapan gate, a Rue des Mouins which probably has something to do with a watercourse. This is where, in the zone east of Zuegma during the Imperial age, the main harbor for food supply and large scale commerce was indicated as early as the seventh-eighth centuries: and this is where the Turkish map locates the large warehouse we mentioned earlier.

Another Aisma was located however near the Zidan gate and further up from the same gate there was a reservoir.

Again, in relation to the Venetian district and its borders, we may note that the Tahtal Hané, the Byzantine building which gives its name to the Tahtakale area, where according to some scholars, the Venetian bailo lived, in this case is located farther away from the shore of the Bosphorus than the actual zone.

The stretch of shore of the Golden Horn between Bahçe and Oun Kapan was closely related to the main commercial area of the city in the Ottoman era, whose center was the covered Bazar begun by Mohammed II. The reciprocal position of the buildings on the plan is correct despite the fact that the general orientation of the zone is clearly misrepresented (for a correct orientation it should be rotated almost 90 degrees to the right!). During the eighteenth century, new mosques and han (markets and warehouses together) continued to be built and accurately registered by the map, and it is not difficult to believe that there was a close relationship with the nearby port system. The following are some examples:

1) the mosque of Nur Osmanie, built between 1748 and 1755, which represents one of the most innovative buildings of the century.
2) The Valide Han
3) The “Ieni Hanē” which may be easily identified with the Kurkçu Hani, destroyed several times by fires in this part of the city, and named Ieni, 'New', on this map perhaps because it was damaged by the 1782 fire (verify the map of the fire)
4) The large isolated han towards the Valide has no name and is currently difficult to identify.