

# Reminiscences of Ottoman vernacular in Galata

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the lost heritage of the vernacular architecture in Galata district in Istanbul that existed during the Ottoman period. It presents the Ottoman vernacular houses that once existed in the area that were lost throughout the centuries due to the big fires and rapid reconstructions. The paper presents this rich vernacular architecture by detecting its existence and analysis from gravures, sketches and images from the past.

After the Ottoman conquest, Galata as well as the city of Constantinople was affected by the process of Ottomanization. The transformations were very much predominant in the urban layout and the texture of the area was improved by more domestic and traditional architecture in wood, remarking Galata into a typical Ottoman environment. After the conquest, the former Genoese colony evolved, in architectural manner. This was achieved through the towns' growth marked with arrival of foreigners, the so called 'Frenks' or Levantines, who were attracted to those lands by the new possibilities to expand trades and commerce from the European and Mediterranean coasts towards the East. These populations settled in the Galata area, bringing their own cultural habits, customs, traditions as well as religion, "contaminating" the already existing and mixed local population, composed predominantly of Greeks, or better Rum, Armenians and Jews and later on of Moors, Arabs as well as Turks.

The Ottoman Galata was affected severely during the mid-nineteenth century and up until the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, when the rich vernacular built environment slowly disappeared leaving very little traces today, of what once used to be a typical example of an Ottoman vernacular in the capital. The paper traces this history and presents a glimpse into the ottoman vernacular in Galata.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Galata, vernacular architecture, Istanbul, Ottoman house, heritage.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the almost forgotten vernacular architecture of the Galata district in Istanbul and its relevance today, redefining some aspects of awareness related to the Ottoman heritage. The name Galata is used mainly to indicate the area within the Municipality of *Beyoğlu* known still today with this toponym in order to facilitate the comprehension of the text. However, during the Latin and Genoese period (1204-1453), the same area was better known as *Pera* and its citizens as *Periots*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a general overlook of the origins of the settlement and its history, see: Freely, B., Freely, J. (2016) *Galata, Pera, Beyoğlu: A Biography*. Istanbul: Yapı-Kredi Yayınları; Kuban, D. (2010) *Istanbul. An Urban History*. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları; Freely, J. (2000) *Galata, A Guide to Istanbul's Old Genoese Quarter*. Istanbul: Archaeology and Art Publications.

The material traces of this vernacular heritage in Galata today are almost completely lost and unfortunately very little can be said about the traditional and domestic architecture in this area of the Great Municipality of Istanbul. Even though Galata played an important role from the Byzantine period throughout all the Ottoman times and maintained a certain importance as a trade and business district in the new born Turkish Republic, vernacular architecture in Galata is often ignored in research. Mitler says, “yet until recent times, Galata continued to serve as the chief emporium and clearinghouse for foreign goods and was the Ottoman Empire’s principal window to the West. Despite its relative commercial importance, Galata did not cover a large area”.<sup>2</sup>

Almost nothing is left *in situ* to testify how widespread was the presence of the traditional timber houses or similar artifacts in Galata. Its past condition can be re-constructed through other sources to determine how this area was effected by the Ottoman rule in terms of architectural features and distinctive urban character after the conquest and until the beginnings of the Republican time (1453-1923). If we compare Galata with other districts of Istanbul, like the Historical Peninsula, the Golden Horn’s shores and its surroundings, the hilly coasts along the *Bosphorus* with all the small villages spread one after another, the Asian side of the city, including big areas such as Üsküdar and Kadıköy, or the Princes Islands’ settlements, it is easy to see how wooden structures belonging to the Ottoman vernacular architectural tradition—even in ruins or neglected state—still exist, showing their importance in the urban context and development of the entire city throughout the centuries.

Strolling through the alleys of Galata, along the shores and in the backstreets of *Karaköy* or climbing up the steep and narrow staircases and path walks towards *Pera*, at a first glimpse, it is clear that on the one hand the whole district still carries some traces and remains of the old Genoese heritage dated from the Middle age, like the famous tower and some portions of the city walls as well as some stone buildings, but on the other, it also shows the most eclectic Levantine and cosmopolitan built environment of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth Century. When it comes to visually analyzing and describing the characteristics of Galata concerning the vernacular architecture, it is almost impossible to even conceal the urban pattern layout of the previous centuries in which those structures were built. We can only try to imagine how such an environment might have looked. The architectural components that were built after the conquest and developed in the following centuries, making Galata a typical—but peculiar—Ottoman urban environment organized in districts or *mahalles*, simply do not exist anymore.

Even though the stone and bricks buildings left by the Ottomans in that area are quite consistent, especially the public structures, like mosques, *medreses*, Turkish baths and other buildings, it is well known that the traditional houses’ environment with its own inner specific characteristics and features, played an important role related to the re-population policy carried on by the Ottoman authorities. This was done by having Turks and other Muslims moved to the area from other areas in order to counterweigh the population of the Christian and Jewish minorities. The substantial architectural change process that occurred in Galata was due to a program of Ottomanization of the territory, followed by the conquest of Constantinople and the surrender of the *Genoese* colony. The stipulation of agreements, the so called ‘*ahd-name*’ between the Sultan Mehmet the Second and the *Genoese*, imposed new rulers to the former *Genoese* colony of Galata. In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest by Mehmet the Conquer, Galata maintained its neutrality in the conflict and after few days, the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1453, the Sultan signed with the representative of the Galata, now organized as ‘*The Magnifica Comunità di Pera*’, the concessions that granted the *Genoese* the possibility to continue the trades and to use the harbor for their activities. The new rulers imposed taxes

<sup>2</sup> See: Mitler, L. (1979) The Genoese in Galata: 1453-1682, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Cambridge University Press, p. 72.

to the non-Muslim population and the *Genoese* colony was subjected to pay tributes to the Sultan but basically they continued their own activities as it was in the centuries before during the Byzantine Empire.<sup>3</sup> One of the major effects at urban scale and architectural level was the slow transformation from a typical Western and mostly Christian enwalled town into a more organic and scattered Muslim settlement. In his article, Mitler points out this important aspect of the urban transformation of Galata: “the transition of Galata from a fortified Italian harbor town to merely another crowded quarter of the former Turkish capital was a process spanning some 800 years, some 480 years of this period being under *Genoese* preponderance”.<sup>4</sup>

This approach towards architecture is still visible in many cities conquered by the Ottomans during their domination in several parts of their huge empire: from the Balkan lands of *Rumelia*, to the Middle-East regions or around the Black Sea and on the Northern coasts of Africa. The Ottomans in general used a policy of overlapping and re-adapting their architecture to their needs reorganizing the previous settlements and very rare were the cases in which they established new settlements from zero. *Galata* was not an exception in this sense and followed exactly the same path like the other important Ottoman centers and towns. On the contrary, what happened in many minor centers of the Ottoman empire, in Galata—unfortunately—mostly due to neglect and abandonment, and probably effected by a rapid growth of harbor activities and increasing trades towards the end of the nineteenth century, was not possible to preserve such a unique built environment. Today, only the stone buildings and masonry structures left in Galata can witness the Ottoman presence.

### Review of Literature

Literature that deals with the Ottoman vernacular in Galata is very rare. Few are the authors who dealt with vernacular in *Galata* as a specific focus. Authors like Kuban and his publication “*Istanbul, an Urban History: Byzantium, Constantinopolis, Istanbul*” gives a general outlook on Galata settlement as part of the Constantinople; Arseven analyzed *Galata* marking the ancient Genoese buildings and walls, while presenting some interesting pictures in which vernacular houses can easily be detected and analyzed;<sup>5</sup> İnalçık “Ottoman Galata 1453-1553”, in *Premiere Rencontre Internationale sur l’Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne* deals mostly with the demographic composition of Ottoman Galata.<sup>6</sup> Cerasi points out how the contaminations between the local architecture and culture was amalgamated and mixed with the arrival of the Turkish elements and how the Ottoman civilization was able to incorporate and develop this extraordinary fusion of different cultures.<sup>7</sup>

### Methodology

Architectural history often draws methodologically on a diverse range of theories and fields to inform its methods; phenomenology, semiotics, critical theory, archeology, and human and political geography. The variety is important because architecture engages with all of human life, and much of the natural world. Qualitative methods such as case studies, discourse analysis, interviews, focus groups, and historical analysis methods are applicable to architectural history research, together with an overview of mixed methods (qualitative & quantitative).

<sup>3</sup> Marmara, R. (2011) *Galata. Quartiere Levantino*. Istanbul: Dörtbudak Yayınları.

<sup>4</sup> See: Mitler, L. (1979) The Genoese in Galata: 1453-1682, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Cambridge University Press, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Arseven, C. E. (1989) *Eski Galata ve Binaları*, Istanbul: İstanbul kütüphanesi.

<sup>6</sup> İnalçık, H. (1993) Ottoman Galata 1453-1553, in *Premiere Rencontre Internationale sur l’Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne*

<sup>7</sup> Cerasi, M. M. (1988) *La Città del Levante. Civiltà Urbana e Architettura sotto gli Ottomani nei Secoli XVIII-XIX*.

The quantitative method of research, that requires gathering as much as possible existing examples cannot be applicable to this work due to the fact that the settlement was severely affected by fires and urban transformations, that completely reshaped all the “*in situ*” structures of which today we have minor to no evidence at all.

The qualitative research method in vernacular/ traditional architecture includes use of geometry in morphology and typologies (styles) of a building (regardless of qualitative nature of the research). Morphology and typology for a building is like vocabulary and grammar in linguistic that are transferable across countries (regardless of tectonic of a building). These are the indication of parts and the wholeness of a building.<sup>8</sup>

The research method employed in this paper is based on qualitative sources. This method consists of gathering data from existing old gravures, paintings and images. From these materials, we did a thorough analysis not only of the built environment but also the housing program, its architectural layout, exterior and aesthetics. Further on these materials were analyzed in detail gathering as much information about the vernacular architecture in the settlement. These materials depicted the area in which we saw the existence of this rich vernacular. From this data, existing houses from the past were detected, located and architecturally analyzed with all their specifics and characteristics presented further in this paper. The architectural analysis is presented through building materials, building styles, house typologies, vertical distribution of space, façade organization and architectural façade details.

Traveler’s accounts were also important resource for this article. Many travelers who visited the settlement left their written accounts in which life as well as the vernacular was depicted, sometime in detail. These materials, as well brought forward the existence of the vernacular in Galata and its stylistic qualities which permitted in placing it among the vernacular styles in the Ottoman capital.

### **Urban transformations in Galata in Ottoman time**

Throughout the centuries, due to the constant presence of foreigners settling with their own habits, Galata passed several phases of continuously reassessment of its urban layout. This ‘foreign’ aspect of the former Genoese colony widely evolved, especially when the town started getting populated by more and more newcomers, the so called ‘Frenks’, later known as Levantines, attracted to these lands by new possibilities to expand trades and commerce from the European and Mediterranean coasts towards the East. Those populations settled themselves in this area, bringing their own culture, customs, traditions as well as religion. Starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Galata, the Frenks were living side by side with the people coming from several other countries, and not necessarily from Europe. There were Jewish communities coming from Spain, Portugal, the Caucasus and central Europe, Dutch, English, French, Arabs and Moors, influencing the already existing and mixed local population, composed predominantly of Greeks, or better Rum, Armenians and Jews.<sup>9</sup>

It can be asserted that after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Galata continued to maintain its independence and peculiar characteristic of a foreign city within the city, by bringing even more colorful and fresh culture, enriched at that point by the new

<sup>8</sup> Piaget, J., 2015. *Structuralism (Psychology Revivals)*. Psychology Press.

<sup>9</sup> For the multicultural and multi-confessional coexistence of several populations and the richness of that kaleidoscopic society still perceivable today in Galata, see a recent article concerning the importance of such heritage: Orlandi, L. – Ivkowska, V. (2018) Galata as a Multicultural Heritage Crossroad throughout the Ages, in *Borders in Architecture - CAUMME 2018 International Symposium Proceedings*, CAUMME abstracts/ PAUMME Projects Book includes CD with conference proceedings, edited by: Girginkaya Akdağ, S., Soygeniş, S., Vatan, M., Istanbul: Mentora Yayıncılık, pp. 111-120.

Muslim rules. The newcomers added new institutions and new religions, since the foreign community was enlarged by Jewish and Moorish population, mostly coming from the Hispanic peninsula, as well as by the Turks brought there from other provinces of the vast Empire and Arabs coming from the Holy Lands. Galata became an important part in the commercial life of the entire city of Istanbul, with its harbor and its almost natural predisposition for trade, defining a new 'Levantine' center in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>10</sup> Slowly, due to the consolidation of the Empire and the 'Ottomanization' of the capital city, in particular during the sixteenth century, these multiple cultural characteristics were absorbed into a more rigid system and the urban and architectural transformations of the following centuries were carrying the traces of the new rules. The town of Galata with its dense and compact urban structure was affected by all the transformations, but at the same time, was still able to keep inside its walled quarters a sort of an autonomy, visible in the multi-faceted architectural composition of this extraordinary melting pot.

As pointed out before, looking at the Ottoman architecture in Galata, many buildings show the strong presence of the new Muslim rulers and their will to transform that urban environment to a more convenient one. Churches like the Catholic Church of St. Paul and Dominic was converted into Arab Mosques. The Underground Mosque, built in 1757 by Köse Mustafa Pasha, formerly was part of the *Castello di Galata*, a defensive military structure built by the seaside by the Byzantines. The nearby church of St. Anthony was replaced by the Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha Mosque in 1624. The Church of St. Francis, replaced after it was destroyed by fire, was converted into the nowadays lost Gülnuş Emetullah Sultan Mosque in 1697. The Church of St. Michael was transformed into the Rüstem Pasha *han*, built during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. The construction of this inner-city caravanserai, or *han*, built by architect Sinan for the Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, was described just after the demolition of the Latin church of St. Michael, by Petrus Gyllius, who was in Istanbul in the years 1544-1550, following the diplomatic delegation of King Francis I of France.<sup>11</sup> Also many new mosques were built. Two masterpieces of architect Sinan, the Kılıç Ali Pasha Mosque, erected in 1580 just outside the gates of Galata and the Mehmet Pasha Mosque, along the shores of the Golden Horn, in proximity of the shipyards, were built in the years 1577-78. A covered market, or *bedesten*, was built by Mehmet the Conqueror right after the conquest and many *hans* for commercial activities were spread in the docks areas close to the harbor of Galata, all built around the middle of the eighteenth century. Other important structures were built in Galata as connotative elements to emphasize the new Muslim rules and their habits, like cemeteries and isolated tombs, *medreses* and schools, monumental and small fountains as well as Turkish baths. The famous Galata tower was also used by the Ottomans as prison, then as a fire lookout tower and was rebuilt different times by them; its final 'look' with its iconic conical cap, is the result of the restoration in 1964-67 that transformed the defensive tower into a main touristic attraction, a landmark in the skyline of Galata, from which to admire the view and the landscape of Istanbul.

All these changes at architectural and urban scale that took place in *Galata* were following an agenda to integrate better the 'Frenk town' into the new Ottoman system, and they effected the domestic and residential architecture as well, that slowly started to assume more and more the distinguishing features of the typical wooden vernacular houses integrated in the *mahalle* system.<sup>12</sup> Big fires devastated the town completely at least twice, in 1791 and

<sup>10</sup> Fleet, K. (1999) *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Petrus Gyllius, *De Topographia Constantinopoleos*, 1560, translated into English as: Gilles, P. (1988) *The antiquities of Constantinople*, New York: Ithaca Press, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> There are many extensive studies done in the past on the traditional Ottoman house. One that can summarize easily this aspect of the Ottoman culture and the contribution of the Turks in the domestic

in 1832, and after several and successive phases of reconstruction, demolitions and transformations, due perhaps to a deregulated modernization process, the timber buildings were gradually replaced by stone and bricks ones, (later even in concrete) more adapted to resist fires in such a dense and overpopulated area inside the walled perimeters.

For almost four centuries and until the Crimean war (1853-65), Galata—and later its extension towards north renamed as *Pera*, had not yet developed the westernized and iconic representation as a ‘cosmopolitan’ and Levantine center that it is normally ascribed to these neighborhoods. In fact, in an imaginary vision of Galata persists a vague idea of an urban settlement as it was established by the Genoese in the thirteenth century, with fortified wall structures, stone houses, taverns and shops and maritime activities, or remind to the images of a modern and dynamic European town, as many travelers also used to describe it in their accounts towards the end of the Ottoman era. But beside the persistency of those images, the introduction of Muslim cultural and material elements due to the new settlements developed by Turks or Arabs, the aspect of the town of Galata drastically changed, at least in the period between the fifteenth and middle nineteenth century, giving the district an alluring ‘orientalist’ atmosphere. In the same article quoted before, Mitler describes this transformation of the town of Galata into another ‘Muslim district’ of the capital:

From this time onward, Galata was fated to become assimilated into the Muslim mainstream as just another quarter of the Ottoman capital. Yet the physic appearance of Galata before the conquest and for several centuries after remained that of a typical, fortified, north Italian medieval town with cast walls, narrow circuitous streets, Gothic churches and convents, stepped alle and solid masonry houses. For unlike the half-timber homes of the Turkish examples of which still abound, the Galatan houses were stone and were with projecting eaves because of the specter of fire.<sup>13</sup>

### Ottoman Vernacular in Galata

Since there are not any remains of this type of architecture in the district, secondary resources besides material ones were utilized to understand how the urban and architectural environment of Galata was probably developed in that period. Traveler’s accounts and detailed descriptions, sketches, etchings or engravings, as well as paintings and in more recent time pictures and cartographies, can give clues to re-construct the vernacular built environment of Galata, not dissimilar from the architectural features of other parts of the Ottoman capital. In several engravings and etchings, we see how the life inside the old Genoese walled town up to the middle of the nineteenth century was and how complex and diversified was the architecture in the Ottoman time.

A number of old engravings—chosen here as examples and dated from that period—show how the Ottomanized environment of the Capital of the Empire took place unexpectedly in the area of Galata too. In one engraving by the traveler Eugène Flandin dated from 1853,<sup>14</sup> a paved street in Galata leading to the homonymous tower is well depicted, in which the urban environment is everything but Genoese or Frenks [Fig. 1]. In the image, we can see a stairway leading towards the tower crowded by people in oriental dresses and clothes, and the monumental and ornamental fountain of Bereketzade in its original position. The marble fountain of Bereketzade, a beautiful example of Baroque style architecture dated from 1732 during the period of Mahmud the First was built along one of the main streets of Galata, close to the homonymous mosque, in honor of one of the first important Ottoman governors of Galata, Bereketzade Hacı Ali Bin Hasan. The fountain was relocated in 1950’s near the tower,

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house can be found in a quite recent publication by Kuban, D. (2017) *Türk ahşap konut mimarisi: 17.-19. Yüzyıllar*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.

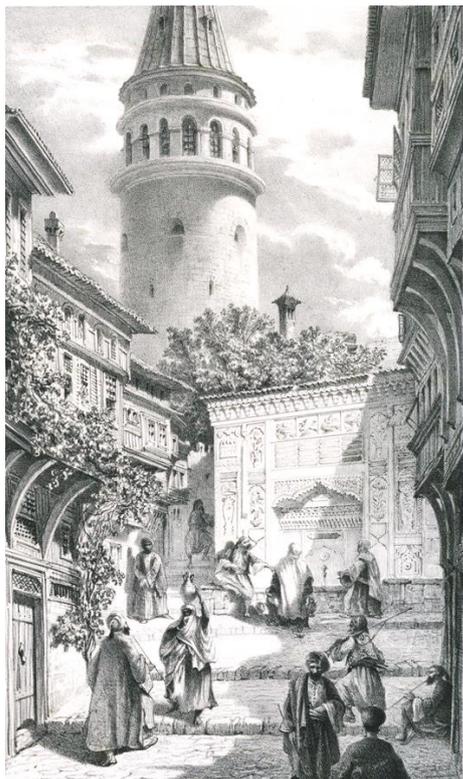
<sup>13</sup> Mitler, L. (1979) The Genoese in Galata: 1453-1682, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Cambridge University Press, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Flandin, E. (1853) *L’Orient par Eugène Flandin...*, Paris: Gide et J. Baudry.

because in the meantime the mosque—the first built in Galata after the conquest—had been abandoned and then destroyed. In the recent years, 2007, the mosque of Bereketzade Ali Efendi was rebuilt from zero in stones and bricks as a mere ‘copia’ of the fifteenth century original building.<sup>15</sup> Looking more close to some details in the engraving, we can notice some greenery and trees behind the fountain and of course typical wooden houses, three or four story buildings with pitched roofs covered by tiles, wooden frame door structures adorned by gentle decorations, the use of windows with lattice to filter the light inside and the so called *cumba*, or bay window that floats out on the first or subsequent floors on the ground floor, to allow more space inside the house. From this source, we get a clear picture of the construction materials that were used in these structures. The ground floor, as in many other Ottoman vernacular examples seen especially throughout the Balkans and the North-West parts of the Empire,<sup>16</sup> was built in masonry, in massive solid walls that had only one opening for the entrance door and small or no windows at all. If there were windows, they were very small and were positioned at a very high parapet probably used to provide air but no light at all. Right above this ground floor, the upper floors were distributed where they were all cantilevered above the streets with its extrusions supported by wooden braces that were either straight or semi-arched, and later in time we notice decorative curves added on these braces, probably inspired by the arrival of the new baroque influenced architectural styles in the capital. The upper floors had wider window openings providing both air and light but also view towards the neighborhood and of course the Bosphorus and the sea in the distance. These windows were mostly rectangular and covered with wooden lattices. While the ground floors could have irregular plans due to the topography and the dispersion of the land plots in the neighborhood, the upper floors had more regular floor plans achieved with the help of the cantilevers and the bay windows (*cumba*). Sometimes the bay windows were placed at a different spot at the plan and different floors and sometimes they looked like caged extrusions enclosed with lattices and presented like *mashrabiya* or *shanshūl*; typical architectural elements for the vernacular of the Arab world that was domesticated and implemented in the Ottoman vernacular too. *Mashrabiya* also either *shanshūl* or *rūshān*, is an architectural element which is characteristic of Arab residences. It is a type of projecting oriel window enclosed with carved wood latticework located on the second story of a building or higher, often lined with stained glass.

<sup>15</sup> Freely, B., Freely, J. (2016) *Galata, Pera, Beyoğlu: A Biography*. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Ivkowska, V. (2018) Ottoman Vernacular Architecture in The Town of Kastoria (Kesriye), Greece, in *15th International Congress of Turkish Art. Proceedings*, edited by Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei. T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Università di Napoli “l’Orientale”, Istituto per l’Oriente C. A. Nallino, 2018: pp. 365-381.; Ivkowska, V. (2018) Typology and Constructive Analysis of the Traditional Ottoman House – The Cases of Kavala and Ohrid, in *Proceedings of the Inter-ISC’18 ICOMOS Inter-ISC Meeting & Colloquium. ICOMOS ISCARSAH Turkey*. p.37; Ivkowska, V. (2016) Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the “Macedonian Village”, in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 71-83.



**Fig. 1.** Jean-Baptiste Eugène Flandin, *Rue de Galata (Constantinople)*. Source: Flandin, 1853.

**Fig. 2.** Lemaitre and Thienson, *Galata Tower, Istanbul, Turkey*. Source: Jouannin, Gaver, 1840.

In the other engraving dated almost fifteen years before Flandin's, peculiar aspects of the daily life in the Ottoman Galata are presented<sup>17</sup> [Fig. 2]. Lemaitre and Thienson in fact show the Galata tower from another side, seen from what apparently was a big Muslim cemetery near the tower. The tower itself presents some differences compared to the other engraving, showing a space, below the conical cup, where there are some architectural elements like bay windows projecting outside and forming four corners, giving a completely different shape to the top of the tower. In the picture, one figure is passing by along a dirt road while another one is kneeling down to pray close to a big and decorated tomb. Both men are wearing typical oriental clothes with turbans covering their heads and long beards. The perspective view shows us a dense grove of cypress trees, a characteristic of the Muslim cemeteries, mosques, domes and slender minarets. A vernacular example of a dwelling is presented in this engraving too. An elegant Ottoman house is in the foreground, a *konak* or mansion, a single standing dwelling with a broad ground floor and even broader upper floors with window openings covered with opened lattices. In the represented house, there are three or four floors, with the ground floor presumably built in stone masonry and the upper floors built in wood. The whole structure is surmounted by pitched roofs covered with tiles, while façades that present irregular projecting parts filled with openings and half-opened tends above lattice shutters. In this case, the image tells us about a more 'oriental' district rather than a European town, but it is not the product of the fantasy of the two draughtsmen, since the real existence of such Oriental Galata appeal is confirmed by several historical maps, sketches, paintings and late nineteenth century pictures as well as by accurate descriptions left by travelers. In some historical maps or bird's eye view representations of the town of Galata/Pera, like the Buondelmonti's map of Constantinople (1422), the panorama of Istanbul by G. A. Vavassore (1520), the city of Constantinople by Sebastian Munster (1550) or the

<sup>17</sup> Galata Tower, Istanbul, Turkey, engraving by Lemaitre and Thienson, from *Turquie* by Joseph Marie Jouannin (1783-1844) and Jules Van Gaver, *L'Univers pittoresque, Europe*, published by Firmin Didot Freres, Paris, 1840.

Ottoman miniature of Istanbul by Matrakçı Nasuh (1534-36), the town with all its overlapped layout is well depicted both at the apex of the Genoese domination and in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest.

Evliya Chelebi, one of the greatest Ottoman travelers of the eighteenth century, left an accurate description of the town of Galata and its inhabitants and their customs and traditions, including the neighborhood or quarters in which the Muslim presence was considerable.

There are eighteen quarters of Moslim, seventy of Greeks, three of Franks, one of Jews, and two of Armenians. In the interior castle are no Infidels at all, indeed there are none till you come to the mosque of the Arabs. The Inhabitants of the interior castle have in their hands a *Khatti-sherif*<sup>18</sup> of Sultan Mohammed II, by which they are allowed to suffer no Infidel among them, and to kill those whom they apprehend in arms. These inhabitants are for the greatest part Moors, who were driven out of Spain and settled at Galata; the rest of the town is full of Infidels, the number of whom amount to two hundred thousand according to the conscription of Murad IV, and that of the Moslims to sixty-four thousand. [...] From the sea-shore up to the tower of Galata are the houses of the Genoese, all built of stone, and the streets regularly cut.<sup>19</sup>

Evliya Chelebi tells us about some areas inside the enwalled town entirely populated by Muslims, especially in the surroundings of Arab mosques, whereas getting close to the center of Galata, between the tower and the harbor, the stone buildings belonging to the Genoese were a majority. It is an important consideration because it allows us to think that the Muslims, Moors, Arabs or Turks, were not necessarily settled in those stone houses but most probably in wooden ones, fitting their needs and different ways of life. The fact that they had an Imperial edict seems to mean that even if they lived close to each other, they wanted to keep distances from their Christian and Jewish neighbors.

One century later, this idea of a different architectural typology and built environment set specifically for the Muslims communities in Galata seemed to be confirmed by a map prepared around 1858-60 by the engineer George D'Ostoya for the newborn Municipality of Beyoğlu as the 6<sup>th</sup> district of Istanbul. This accurate map shows the axis Galata, Pera and Pangalti and a detailed representation of the present state of the buildings that is very well documented. Dwellings and other buildings are colored in a different manner in order to indicate the construction materials, the conditions of the buildings themselves and their relation with the green or the empty spaces. Looking at the map in details and the area of Galata [Fig. 3], the different colors used for the wooden and stone houses, respectively brown and pink, confirm the comments made by Evliya Chelebi one hundred years before about the inhabitant's composition of Galata and their quarters. The map presents a denser area with regular texture around the Galata Tower and down towards the harbor, and toward the Bosphorus, with almost all the buildings colored in pink while the brown, scattered buildings are clearly built in the areas close to the Arab mosque and toward the Golden Horn area, showing a different approach more close to the rules of the Islamic cities, with several *cul-de-sac*, or dead-end streets, small alleys and irregular street patterns.

<sup>18</sup> The *Khatti-sherif* mentioned in the quoted text referred to an Imperial edict promulgated by the Sultan Mehmet II to guarantee the rights of the Muslim to live in Galata separated from the Christians.

<sup>19</sup> Evliya Çelebi (1610-1684) traveled inside the boundaries of the big empire and visited western countries as well. In *Seyahatnâme*, or 'the Book of Travels', he describes the experiences of his life's travels. For the quoted passage herewith see: Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, in Hammer-Purgstall, J. (1846) *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the Seventeenth Century by Evliya Efendi*, Vol. I, Part II, London: Printed by J. L. Cox and Son, 75, Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields, pp. 49-54.



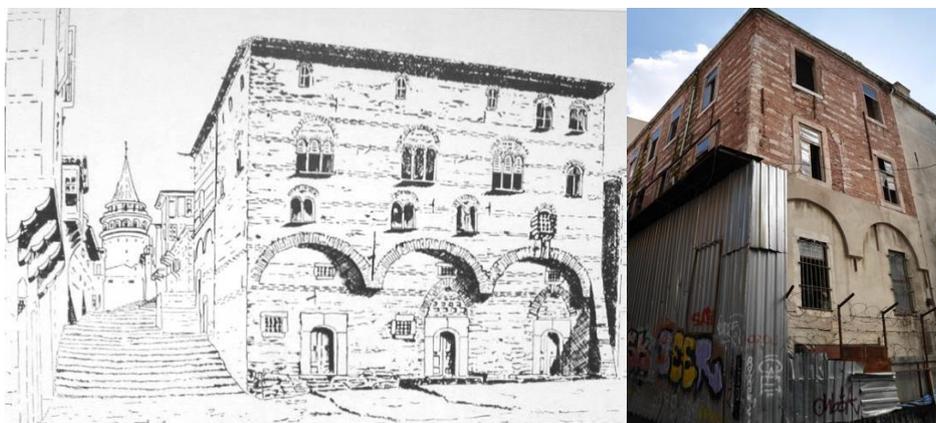
**Fig. 3.** Detailed map of Galata, from: *Plan general de Galata, Pera et Pancaldi. 6mo cercle de Constantinople.*

Source: D'Ostoya, 1858-1860.

In the areas colored in pink, the population was mostly composed of Catholics (Latins) or Frenks, Orthodox Christians (mostly Greeks), Armenians and Jews, while the other part of Galata was mostly inhabited by Muslims. The color was probably picked on purpose since the remains of the Genovese vernacular structures in the area were built with combination of stones and bricks [Fig.4] that gave the pink-like look to the dwellings, whereas the brown was selected as a color representing the material wood from which all of the Ottoman vernacular dwellings were built.

The large green area above, just outside the walls precinct, corresponds to the Muslim cemetery, and the small green areas scattered around the Muslim *mahalles* are fitting perfectly the needs of the local communities, even though in the previous century, Evliya Chelebi does not mention gardens inside the walled town of Galata. Even from this map, it is possible to consider how different the life in this part of the city was, according to the different beliefs and habits of the inhabitants.

In conclusion, through this map, we can see the incredible large number of vernacular dwellings in the settlement as well as the precise area of their concentration. The map clearly presents the division of the two social and religious groups in the enwalled settlement and the area of their interrelating.



**Fig. 4.** Genoese vernacular dwelling, the Podestà palace in an old sketch and today  
source: Belgrano, 1877; Orlandi, 2017

Beside the observations done by Evliya Chelebi, many other travelers, especially coming from Western lands, describe the harbor, the streets, the trades and the daily life in Galata, always pointing out the original and extravagant town of Galata with all the colorful mess and dense urban structure, generated by such a mixture of different people, religions as well as architecture.<sup>20</sup>

The Muslim factor in Galata seems to be fundamental to understand the presence of Ottoman vernacular architecture in this area. In one of his essays, İnalçık explains how the increase of the Muslim population in Galata among the Christian and the Jewish communities was accelerated by the arrival of the Moors and other Arabs towards the end of the fifteenth century, due to the persecutions in Spain and towards the end of the following century, when Suleiman established and consolidated the power of the Ottomans in the Mediterranean, especially considering the Holy Lands and the North African coasts. In fact, there were already some Muslims living in Galata at the moment of the conquest, as İnalçık points out, according to the survey of the population in 1455, but they were not so consistent to change the urban morphology of the town.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the Muslims who arrived in waves between fifteenth and sixteenth century, drastically modified the already heterogeneous population of Galata, and physically changed the urban and architectural environment as well, as the D'Ostoya map seems to confirm. According to the data collected by İnalçık from some tax registers dated from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it seems that by the end of the sixteenth century, the non-Muslim population of Galata was reduced to just more than two thirds, compared to the Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

In an important book written in 1911, towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, on Galata district and the old buildings,<sup>23</sup> Celad Esad Arseven analyzed Galata in the present and past time, showing the ancient Genoese buildings and walls still existing, with several maps and drawings related to them, but also he presented some interesting pictures in which vernacular houses are clearly shown. In particular, in two images, one related to the Gate of Horozlu,<sup>24</sup> or Harup Gate according to other sources, and the other one showing the street and the buildings facing the Arab Mosque,<sup>25</sup> it is very clear how the Ottoman domestic architecture was integrated in the old Genoese town.

The first picture, related to one of the important gates leading to the core of Galata, the Harup Gate, shows the street passing through the gate that is still carrying above the arch and inserted in a marble plate, the symbols and the coat of arms of some important Genoese families. The stone plate represented by the cross shield of St. George, and the coat of arms of two noble Genoese families of the time: Doria and De Marude. It is the only coat of arms visible *in situ*, yet written in the old city walls, because the others that were present along the

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<sup>20</sup> There is a huge amount of literature that is dealing with this subject, but for the centuries that had been taken into consideration in this paper, see: Yerasimos, S. (1993) Galata à travers le récit de voyage 1453-1600, in *Première Rencontre Internationale sur l'Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne*, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 18-22 janvier 1985 / ouvrage édité par Eldem, E., Istanbul, Paris: Editions Isis, pp. 117-130.

<sup>21</sup> İnalçık, H. (1993) Ottoman Galata 1453-1553, in *Première Rencontre Internationale sur l'Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne*, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 18-22 janvier 1985 / ouvrage édité par Eldem, E., Istanbul, Paris: Editions Isis, pp. 67-70. An extended version of this article was later republished in: İnalçık, H. (1998) Ottoman Galata, in *Essays on Ottoman History*, Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 276-376.

<sup>22</sup> İnalçık, H. (1998) Ottoman Galata, in *Essays on Ottoman History*, Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 362-364.

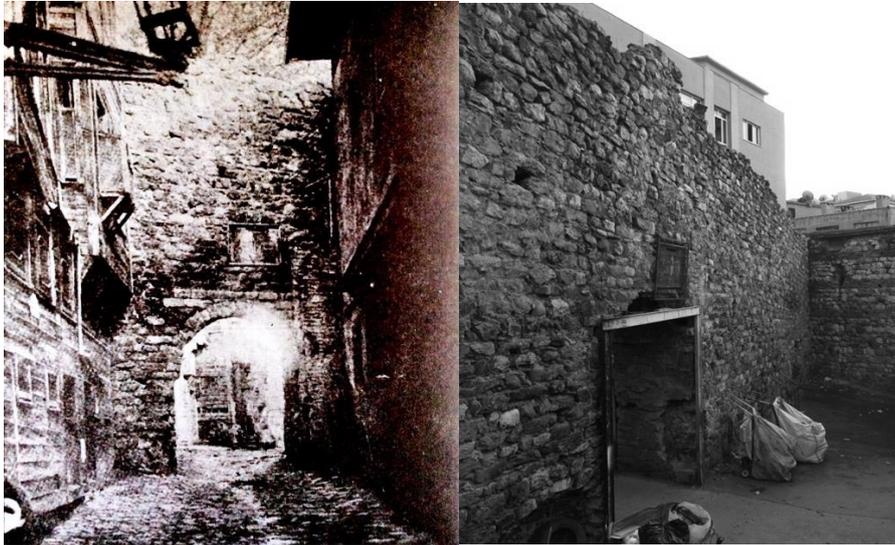
<sup>23</sup> Arseven, C. E. (1989). *Eski Galata ve Binaları*, Istanbul: İstanbul kütüphanesi.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

walls, especially near the gates, either have completely disappeared or were transferred—after the demolition of walls in 1864—in the premises of the Archaeological Museum.

The paved street in cobblestones crossing the gate is flanked on both sides by traditional wooden houses, attached from one side to the walls' structure. [Fig. 5]



**Fig. 5.** The Harup Gate, or Horozlu Gate, in an old picture

Source: Arseven, C. E. (1989)

**Fig. 6.** The Harup Gate today

Source: Luca Orlandi, 2018

The picture shows three (or four) story wooden house on the left side of the street and a two-story house on the right, which height corresponds more or less to the top of the wall, with a projecting roof. Behind the gate, it is possible to see other wooden structures belonging probably to some other vernacular buildings.

In general, since this gate is located in proximity of the Golden Horn mid-way between the shore and the cemetery areas in the North direction, we are definitely inside the Turkish-Muslim quarter of Galata and the architectural style of the buildings reflect very well the inhabitants' character. Many of those houses cannot be dated back to the seventeenth or eighteenth century, since many fires destroyed the entire Galata several times (and the fact that most of the houses were built in wood facilitated the propagation of the fire as well) but probably were redone following the traditional construction methods in the early twentieth century, still maintaining the same features like the external walls, the lattice windows, the *cumba* and projection elements. Today unfortunately we have nothing left from these houses around the Harup Gate, [Fig. 6] and the few that still existed from the past, abandoned and in poor conditions, were torn down in recent years in order to clean the entire area and to build a new metro bridge connecting Galata with the Historical Peninsula. [Fig. 7]



**Fig. 7.** The poor conditions of an abandoned traditional wooden house outside the Harup Gate  
Source: Luca Orlandi, 2004

The other picture presented in Arseven's book is a clear evidence of some traditional wooden houses with typological differences compared to the previous one. [Fig. 8]



**Fig. 8.** Row houses in stone masonry and wood, from:  
Source: Arseven, C. E., 1989

In this case, instead of an isolated and self-standing wooden house, we can see an example of a combined structure in wood and bricks, or stone masonry where the houses built in rows are supported by stone masonry structures below that are part of the ground floor of the buildings. Each house has two or three floors and presents an internal patio or inner garden behind a tall wall. The houses are built in part on the top of this wall and the upper floor shows the projecting bay windows supported by straight or curved wooden braces. The street, in which the buildings were located, today completely unrecognizable, is next to the Arab Mosque and undoubtedly the atmosphere of the whole area reminds of the Turkish-Muslim *mahalle*, not of the old Genoese en-walled town.

It is possible to argue that perhaps in this case, the use of stone masonry at the street level can be considered as a reuse of previous structures belonging to the Genoese or Byzantines.

This area, as explained before, was literally confiscated by the Ottoman Turks towards the end of the fifteenth century to allow the Moorish and Turkish population to settle and live in Galata. Since the mosque itself was the result of a conversion of a Latin church, we can say that most probably the alignment of those houses along a regular street and their formal composition was more dictated by a rational reuse and readaption of the space to the newcomers.

## Conclusion

The area of Galata between the Golden Horn and the Arab Mosque, with narrow alleys and labyrinth like pathways where some of the traditional wooden houses were located, was a pure indication of an Ottoman urban environment related to the Muslim inhabitants. The buildings followed a pattern in the use of the construction material visible in the dispersion of the floors in height. The ground floors were always built in masonry whereas the upper floors were always built in lighter wooden framed structure with window openings that were sometimes closed by wooden lattices. The upper floors were always projecting over the street giving the upper floor plans more space that was also achieved with the use of the bay windows.

These vernacular examples compared to the vernacular of the Genoese community that was only built in solid masonry with small window openings and rarely had more than a ground and one or two upper floors, shows distinctive features and confirms that these dwellings were typical Ottoman examples of a vernacular of the capital, where, besides single standing and row houses also mansion sized vernacular structures existed that were wider in their floor plans presenting vernacular styles of the two most present and influential social and religious groups in Galata. Some of the buildings still existed during a survey conducted on the architectural heritage in Galata. In around a decade, unfortunately, due to some infrastructure works related to the construction of a new bridge for the subway, the entire area outside the Harup Gate was leveled to ground, with very little attention to the tangible heritage still existing in that area. The evidences of this drastic operation, today shows exactly how the loss of this kind of heritage is irreversible, provoked by a sort of collective amnesia on the historical traces that overlapped in the area for centuries.

The problem with the Ottoman vernacular in Galata is not only that it was lost due to the big fires or to the increasing urbanization in late Ottoman or in the early republican period but because of the lack of acknowledgment and appreciation of this architectural heritage in Galata today. In past years, demolitions and transformation happened to de-congest Galata. Around 1950's and 1980's and even in recent years, many interventions conducted by the local government or by the Municipality of Beyoğlu, for the 'apparent' requalification of some areas have instead induced heavy demolitions and inappropriate transformations without taking into consideration the urban layout or the historical phases of this important and unique cultural heritage. Even though the Galata district does not carry the tangible traces of the Ottoman vernacular architecture anymore, the area was subjected to the urban and architectural transformations that occurred in other parts of Istanbul, after the Ottoman conquest and was absolutely assimilated to the typical Turkish *mahalle* system with the typical vernacular architecture presented through the examples of the Ottoman houses in the capital. The town of Galata in modern times became a district inside the big metropolis of Istanbul, losing its own characteristic and urban features and very important few were the traces left inside this traditional urban texture to understand and appreciate how the Ottomans were transforming the architectural environment according to their needs.

Due to the rapid and uncontrolled transformations of the last fifty-seventy years, the area suffers a lot of these ‘traumatic’ changes and today—regrettably—only written texts or images are giving back the complexity of Galata and its millennial history and witness of its once lost vernacular richness. Only materials from which we can analyze and derive conclusions on this vernacular are the old gravures, historical maps, images and postcards combined with the travelogues. They can help in restoring the outlook of this architecture, its style and its stylistic expressions seen in the amalgamation of the local Ottoman traditions of buildings with the Arabic architectural and decorative elements. This paper demonstrates that this vernacular style existed and blossomed once in past primarily as a result of the multi-ethnic face of the settlement.

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