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IN THE TRACKS OF A LOST PALACE

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This study attempts to present the evidence for a double discovery. An Ottoman palace at Kadirga Limanı in İstanbul, long known as "Esmâ Sultan's palace" and hence loosely attributed to one or the other of the two 18th century princesses by that name, actually dates back to the 16th century: it was a much earlier Esmâhan Sultan, a daughter of Selim II and wife to Sokollu Mehmed Paşa, who was behind the conception and realisation of this monumental project. Moreover, the architect was none other than Mimar Sinan - and if I am proven correct, this makes it the first one of Sinan's numerous palaces the layout of which has been concretely identified. In the limited time I have here, I shall try to give you a brief summary of a jigsaw puzzle of evidence.

The extensive palace at the Kadirga Limanı, the only Ottoman royal palace that overlooked the Marmara Sea, is known to us from two plans in the Topkapı Palace Archive.¹ One of them, showing a complex with three successive courtyards arranged hierarchically in terms of progression from public to semi-public and private buildings, has previously been identified as "the palace of Esmâ Sultan," for the earliest Ottoman archival sources that refer to the palace at Kadirga Limanı all date from the time when it belonged to Esmâ Sultan the elder (1726-1788), a daughter of Sultan Ahmed III. The second small plan showing one single building, a large audience hall and rooms where the paşa (obviously princess's husband) held his court, is for the

men's quarters of the same palace. To explain why the palace continued to be known as the "Esma Sultan's Palace" even after the death of Esma Sultan the elder, a hasty association could have been made to suggest that it was later passed to Esma Sultan the younger (1778-1848), daughter of Sultan Abdülhamid I, a successive heir to the properties of the elder and an influential palace woman in the following century. However, by the help of an inventory register also preserved at the Topkapı Palace Archive, to which the plans were originally attached,² and several other account books,³ this study has uncovered that both plans were prepared in 1803 prior to the wedding of another princess, Hibetullah Sultan, who was the niece of the first Esma and the half-sister of the second. In the light of re-reading the 19th century plans and the register together with several sources from 16th to 19th centuries it will be suggested here that the original conception of the Kadirga Palace can not be attributed *tout de suite* to either one of the two prominent Esma Sultans of the late Ottoman imperial family. Another Esmahan (İsmihan) Sultan (1545-1585), a daughter of Selim II and her husband Sokollu Mehmed Paşa (who became the Grand Vizier in 1565) conceived this grandiose palace together with another palace at Ayasofya, overlooking the Hippodrome, the most popular site of the imperial ceremonies.

In 1571 Sinan, the master architect of the 16th century, finished also the construction of the Kadirga complex for Sokollu at a location in close proximity to these two residences; the mosque bearing the Grand Vizier's name was built for him by his wife Esmahan while he commissioned the medrese and the dervish hostel associated with it. It is therefore promising to raise the possibility that the Grand Vizier's choice in the area was deliberate and that he aimed to show off his patronage by gathering together his private

and public establishments together and by employing the architectural master of the day for the design of all constructions.

Surprisingly very few European and Ottoman sources refer to this monumental palace that remained unmatched in the civil architecture of the capital. Nevertheless, the earliest views of the harbour and the arsenal in use at this location since the Byzantine times until 1515 date from the 15th century. Likewise, a map published by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore (1520) on the basis of a 15th century drawing and its several 16th century variants, and Ottoman cartographic miniatures all show the harbour and the walled-in arsenal between the Fifth and Sixth Gates of the city walls. Pierre Gilles, who visited İstanbul in 1544 and wrote "The Four Books of the Antiquities of Constantinople" (published posthumously in 1561), talks on the history of the area and mentions Port of Julian, the portico called Sigma, used by the merchants arriving to the Byzantine Harbour, and the Palace of Sophia. Cartographic miniatures of İstanbul from the later 16th century, such as those in Lokman Çelebi's Şehinşahname (1581-2) and Hünername (1584), made by the prominent court artist Nakkaş Osman, show the harbour and the walled-in arsenal, but do not help to identify neither the Sokollu complex nor the palace in question. Likewise, we are so far unable to plot the palace on the maps of İstanbul in the 16th and 17th century copies of Piri Reis's Kitab-ı Bahriye.

Although contemporary European and Ottoman sources do not allow the possible connection of an Ottoman palace with the Byzantine palace(s) mentioned in the area in several accounts, earliest historical information about a 16th century palace, identifying its patron and architect, comes from

the outstanding source of Ottoman architecture in the Classical Age. *Tezkiret'ül-Ebniye*, which tells about Sinan's vita, his achievements and the buildings he had completed, lists Sokollu's two palaces; one at Kadirga Limanı and the other at Ayasofya.

Like the visual sources, chronicles, too, fail to provide us with information regarding the construction or the use of the palace in the 16th century. Only in *Tarih-i Selaniki* there are some clues regarding the use of the Kadirga Palace after the assassination of Sokollu in 1579. *Selaniki* records that, after the departure in 1584 of the Persian ambassador İbrahim Han who had stayed in the palace for two and a half years, it was allocated for the Governor of Rumelia (Kalaylıkoz) Ali Paşa. Although *Selaniki* does not mention, that very same year Kalaylıkoz was asked to the capital to marry the widow of Sokollu. This naturally suggests that the Kadirga Palace had thus returned to its original patron, Esmahan Sultan.

After Esmahan Sultan's death in 1585, and her second husband's in 1587, Sokollu's and her descendants might have hold the palace for some time. Interestingly, however, in 1593 *Selaniki* once again refers to the Kadirga Palace, this time in relation to the circumcision ceremony of the Persian prince Haydar Mirza. The allocation of the palace to the Persian envoys is a curious practice which needs explanation if it was not simply for the fact that the Kadirga Palace was worthy of quasi-imperial ceremonies and was vacant at that time. A 17th century chronicler, Eremya Çelebi Kömürcüyan, provides us with more information about the prestigious status of the neighbourhood, identifies some of the buildings around the palace and introduces a valuable piece of information which may eventually lead to trace Sokollu's and

Esmahan's descendants in relation with the palace. Eremya Çelebi draws the boundaries of the neighbourhood between the Fifth Gate (Kumkapı) and the Sixth Gate (Çatladıkapı). Close to the Fifth Gate, he records pubs and taverns more numerous and gayeous than those of Samatya. Furthermore, he mentions a large mansion, known as the *konak* of İbrahim Han *ocağı* (family line), the elder son of Sokollu and Esmahan. Likewise other 17th century historians, Silahdar Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, Mehmed Halife, Evliya Çelebi and Naimâ, too, provides us with piecemeal information about the palace but help to tie it with Esmâ Sultan the elder's palace in the 18th century.

Since none of the 18th century court historians record any event, ceremony or personage in relation to the Kadirga Palace (other than the fire of 1755 after which the palace at Kadirga Limanı was assigned as the Palace of the Grand Vizier for "Bab-ı Ali/ Paşa Kapsu" was burned down), one might assume that it might have been disappeared in one of the devastating 17th century fires. Even if it might have actually been partially or totally destroyed, P.Ğ. İnciyan (1758-1833) who provides us with the vivid and detailed delineation of the 18th century city, brings the palace which stood just next to the Fifth Gate (Kumkapı) back to the agenda, and attributes it once again to the descendants of Sultan Süleyman I and Sokollu Mehmed Paşa, to the sons of İbrahim Han. That the 17th and 18th century sources which record the Kadirga Limanı as a prestigious neighbourhood preferred by the Ottoman elite do not record this palace in particular may only be explained by its private status. That it belonged to İbrahim Han and his descendants must have hindered the official historians' access to it. All the European visitors to

the Ottoman capital in this period, too, did not have admission to the palace for it did not have an official status and was hidden behind high walls.

It is quite plausible that after his marriage to the grand daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent in 1562, as reward of his role in securing the Ottoman throne to Şehzade Selim, and after becoming the Grand Vizier in 1565, Sokollu envisioned a grandiose project with his ambitious wife. In addition to 15,000 florins granted to Sokollu by the palace to cover the huge expenses necessary for an appropriately lavish marriage ceremony and suitable gifts, the Grand Vizier was granted an extra 100,000 florins to built himself a palace. The Chief of the Protocol Teşrifatçı Ali Seydi Bey records that "presenting this money to his wife, Sokollu constructed the palace with his own money. His residence known as the "palace" had 37 rooms only for the tasters."

This palace, also built by Sinan, must have been the one distinguished as the Ayasofya Palace, which once partially occupied the site of the present Sultanahmed Mosque; it is noted in the Tezkiret'ül-Ebniye, in the chronicles and decribed in a 1609 document unearthed and published (but unidentified) by S.H. Eldem. This document, which may be a court record, registers the sale of the palace to Sultan Ahmed I; it describes the interior arrangement of Sokollu's second palace in detail and does not specifically indicate a harem quarter. It is possible that while the Ayasofya Palace served as the "Paşa Kapusu", that is, as the official residence where the grand vizier held audience to conduct private and some state affairs in close proximity to the Topkapı Palace (just like the İbrahim Paşa Palace across the Hippodrome), because his crowded retinue occupied such an extensive space that his *harem* eventually had to move to another palace. If the Ayasofya Palace was not

suitable to house the quasi-imperial family of the Grand Vizier, one may suggest that Sokullu's private apartments were located in his palace at Kadirga Limanı.

To connect 18th century Esmâ Sultan's palace with the one that Sinan built for Sokollu and his royal bride soon after their marriage in 1562, and the 1803 plans with Sinan's planning, first group of evidence --which indeed identifies the harem quarters-- comes from European sources. One of the watercolours prepared for Auguste, Elector of Saxony, prepared by the artist Zacharias Wehme in 1582, and a series of views put together by the Austrian humanist Johannes Löwenklau at the time he was in İstanbul in 1584-1585, five years after Sokollu was assassinated, shows the palace of the Grand Vizier. These views, both of which might have descended from originals prepared for David Ungnad, the ambassador of the Holy Empire to the Ottoman capital between 1572-1578, may have indeed been the only contemporary records that would help to identify the palaces of Sokollu.

Three of the multicoloured paintings collected in the 1586 Album from the National Bibliotek in Vienna show the "house" of the Grand Vizier Mehmed Paşa. Two of the remaining views which show the Grand Vizier's "palace" depict its audience hall; it is noted that the Grand Vizier held audience to conduct private and some state affairs here twice a week. One of those labelled as the "house" of the Grand Vizier shows the entrance gate to the palace. One of the other two paintings that are also labelled as the Grand Vizier's "house" shows the interior courtyard, the flight of stairs climbing upstairs and the women's chamber to the left; the other shows the stairs on the passage way to the attendant's quarters.

The Palace of the Grand Vizier depicted in the Dresden watercolors show the arrangement of the men's quarters in its entirety: To the left is the apartments of his attendants which is reached from the staircase upon entrance; to the right is the left of the house in which women's quarter is located. At the center is the facade of the Audience Hall with flights of stairs that climb from both sides of the door and reach the Grand Hall on the second story. This scheme directly reflects on the 1803 plan and the description in the reconstruction surveys.

It is understood from the Dresden and Vienna paintings that the palace where the ambassador of the Holy Empire was received, included the Harem of the Grand Vizier. Since his other palace close to the Sublime Porte did not housed the harem, it is quite conceivable that this reception did take place at the Kadirga Palace. In order to verify whether the house/palace depicted in this album belonged to the palace at Kadirga Limanı some of the details of the Vienna paintings need further investigation.

In the views of the audience hall, on the other hand, labeled as the "palace", it is also striking to note how the exterior view of this free-standing two-storey building relates to the 1803 plan of the audience hall at the Kadirga Palace. The facade is dominated in both cases by a stairway; in 1803 the two straight runs of the former facade (Sinan's facade) were probably already replaced with the latter's three flights with a central preliminary run during an earlier restoration in the 18th century. At a central position on this porticoed hallway was the audience hall. This lofty hall is shown in the other illustration. It was dominated by a protruding window in the middle in front of which the

grand vizier was seated. The dazzling ceiling, pavement and upper window decorations display the 16th century taste. The two wooden columns with decorated capitals that are mentioned also in the 1803 survey register regarding the new structure to be built (*bir kıt'a sağır resim mucebince kadim divanhane mahalline iki direk müştemilatıyla paşa dairesi inşa olunması*) strongly suggest the possible connection between the structures illustrated in the Album and the small plan attached to the register. An 18th century miniature from a copy of Hamse-i Atayi at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore is almost a replica of this Audience Hall and reflects on the prevalence of this type.

A second group of evidence is suggested by the general layout of the 16th century palaces. The type of typological continuity revealed by the Audience Hall can be found elsewhere in the palace by the help of the 1803 registers. Another continuity can be observed in that the Kadirga Palace, consisting of an inner core of three successive courtyards like the Topkapı Palace, reflected the hierarchical system of the royal household organized in terms of outer (*birun*) and inner (*enderun*) service organs, and as such it became representative of the general palace planning. In other words, the organization of Esma Sultan's Palace suggests that, like the Topkapı Palace, it was a reflection of a hierarchical structure which became almost identical with the Ottoman rule. This implies that although its buildings could have been remodelled time and again to accommodate modish change, its structural skeleton probably remained relatively constant and as the history of the palace can be traced back to pre-18th century, its plan layout can also be tracked down to the time of Sinan.

The last group of evidence comes from assembling and comparing biographical data for the individuals belonging to the Sokollu's family. Sokollu's and Esmahan Sultan's son İbrahim Han held important offices in the administration of the capital between 1594-1605. After this date he took important positions elsewhere and left İstanbul. This date corresponds to the sale of Ayasofya Palace in 1609. Secondary sources tell that İbrahim Han, although he was away from İstanbul since 1602 as the Governor of Diyarbakır and Bosna, was quite influential in the politics of the capital. After his death in 1622, his descendants, too, maintained this influence for some time in Ottoman politics. There are a number of secondary sources which mention a legend about the family that the İbrahim Han's sons would succeed to the throne in case the Ottoman dynasty should die out, and for that reason the sultans were bound to respect the lives of all members of this family. If the Kadirga Palace was not confiscated until 1743 and allocated Esmahan Sultan the elder, it must have been due to this privileged status of the family. It is quite plausible that prior to the marriage of Esmahan Sultan the elder the palace had acquired the Kadirga Palace in some obscure way which have obstructed the tracking of its history until today.

While this privileged status of an Ottoman royal family may have remained a constant over time the status of the princesses' changed considerably. What was formerly known as Sokollu's Palace, in the course of two centuries, came to be recognized as Esmahan Sultan's Palace. Whereas the 16th century Esmahan Sultan enjoyed status and privileges by virtue of her husband, her 18th century namesake acquired an independent standing by way of the changes that occurred in the royal household.

That the Ottoman royal women were active in politics and that their art and architectural patronage may shed light on their participation in the political system has already been noted both by historians and architectural historians. However, while there exists almost no comprehensive study of their role, status or patronage, few studies that deal marginally with Ottoman royal women fail to observe how they achieved and exercised power and resources in different forms at different times. Moreover, while their power and influence are apparent in their patronage of religious institutions and, to a lesser extent, secular buildings, what royal women built in the way of residential structures is not recorded.

The monumental Kadirga Palace not only reflects the grandeur of princesses' households, but the combination of account book of expenses, survey inventory and plans it represents a unique case. The continuity displayed at the Kadirga Palace has given us the chance to identify one of Sinan's numerous palaces the layout of which has been concretely identified.

¹Topkapı Palace Archives, E.9437/1, E.9437/2

²Topkapı Palace Archives, D.2223

³Topkapı Palace Archives, D.10718/3, D.10718/4, E.9103
Başbakanlık