



The Role of the state in the protection and Restoration of Heritage

Case study of: Great palace of Constantinople

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Abstract

The Great Palace of Constantinople, also known as the Sacred Palace was the large imperial Byzantine palace complex located in the south-eastern end of the peninsula now known as Old Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), in modern Turkey. It served as the main imperial residence of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine emperors until 1081 and was the center of imperial administration for over 690 years. Only a few remnants and fragments of its foundations have survived into the present day.

Keywords: protection – Restoration – Heritage – palace – construction - Islamic Heritage.

المخلص

قصر القسطنطينية الكبير هو القصر الإمبراطوري الذي استقر به الأباطرة البيزنطيين، بني من قبل الإمبراطور قسطنطين العظيم، واستضاف أباطرة الرومان والبيزنطيين لمدة 800 عام، كان يقع جنوب شرق المدينة على الساحل، يتواجد اليوم في منطقة الفاتح، هدم بعد دخول العثمانيين للمدينة، تم تحويله إلى متحف للموزاييك البيزنطي الفسيفساء المذهلة التي كانت تزين أرضية القصر معروضة الآن في هذا المتحف.

وصل قصر القسطنطينية الكبير إلى ذروته في عهد الإمبراطور جستنيان. في الصورة أعلاه يمكنك رؤية المبنى الأكثر تميزاً، ميدان سباق الخيل، وإلى الشرق منه القصر الكبير. كان القصر العظيم عبارة عن مبنى معقد يتكون من العديد من الأجنحة والحدائق والكنائس ومناطق الأنشطة. امتدت المباني الإضافية للقصر على طول الطريق إلى شاطئ البحر

تم إعادة بناء الهياكل داخل القصر الكبير وتغييرها في أوقات مختلفة. عندما كانت بيزنطة في ذروتها، كانت هناك تفاصيل أذهلت السفراء الذين جاءوا للزيارة. لهذا السبب، اشتهرت القسطنطينية البيزنطية بأنها المدينة الذهبية في العصور الوسطى.

الكلمات الدالة: حماية - ترميم - تراث - قصر - إعادة بناء - تراث إسلامي



History and Significance of the Palace

“In the time of the aforementioned consuls, Constantine the celebrated emperor departed from Rome and, while staying at Nicomedia metropolis of Bithynia, made visitations for a long time to Byzantium. He renewed the first wall of the city of Byzas, and after making considerable extensions also to the same wall he joined them to the ancient wall of the city and named it Constantinople...” (Chronicon Paschale)¹

Rome was the most significant city in the Roman Empire until the late 3rd century. However, this situation changed when Diocletian started to rule the empire (284-305 C. E). When emperor after the final battle of Chrysopolis (324 C.E), he began planning a new capital city for the Emperor Constantine eliminated the other ruling tetrarch, Licinius, and became the sole the empire.

Supposedly, before choosing Constantinople, Constantine considered different cities as a new capital, such as Naïssus and even a rebuilt Troy, but then he decided for Byzantium because of its incomparably advantageous strategical location. The construction of Byzantium,²

which later became Constantinople, started two months after the battle of Chrysopolis and continued for five years. The city officially became capital of the empire on May 11th, 330 C.E.

The Great Palace was just one part of this massive city construction. Eastern Roman Historian Zosimus mentioned this palace on his *Historia Nova*:

“And when in this way he had encompassed a city far larger than its predecessor he constructed a palace not much smaller than the one in Rome.” (*Historia Nova*, 2.31)³

¹ Chronicon Paschale 284-628 A.D, trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 15-16.

² Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization*, (London: Edward Arnold LTD., 1933), 13. ; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans., Joan Hussey (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 41.

³ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, trans. James J. Buchanan and Harold T. Davis, *Historia Nova (The Decline of Rome)*, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), 73.

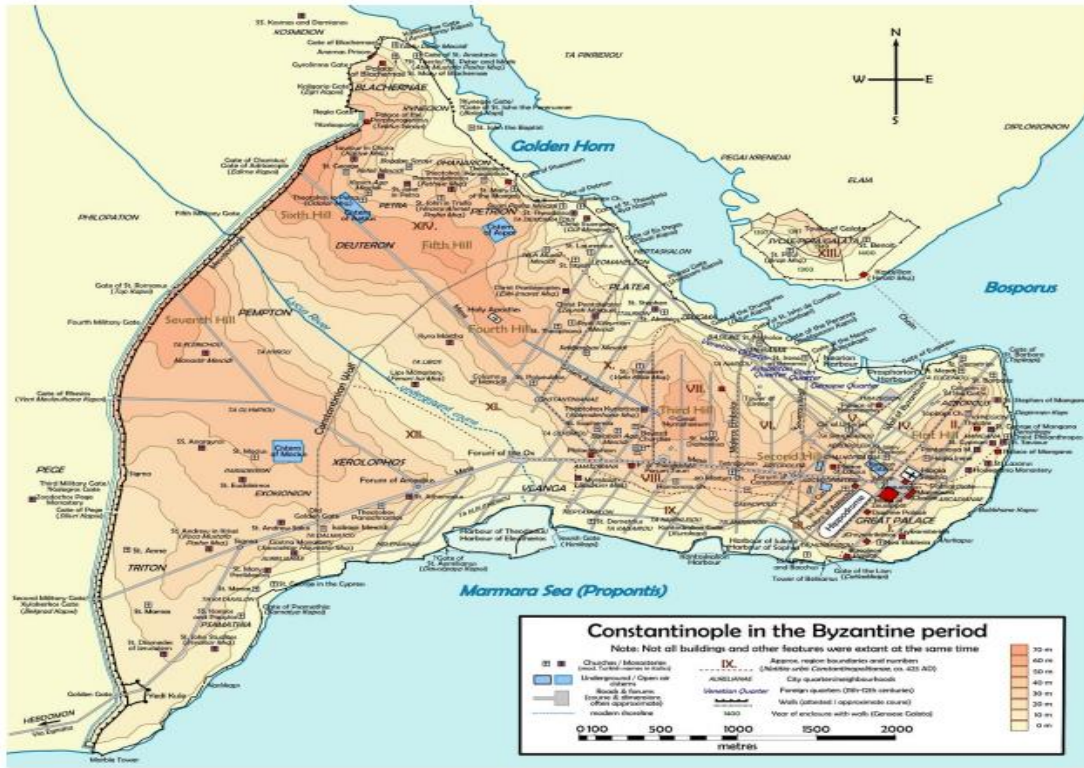


Figure 1. The city of the Constantinople

(From Ancient History Encyclopedia: <http://www.ancient.eu/image/564/>)

The Great Palace, located in the southeastern part of Constantinople, was connected to the hippodrome by a spiral staircases in the west, and bordered on the Hagia Sophia Church, in the north of the palace and on the Propontis (Marmara Sea) in the southeast⁴. When Constantine decided to make Byzantium a capital city, he saw the need for building a palace that could live up to the enormous task of an administrative center for the whole empire. Many emperors.

followed Constantine’s example by adding different types of buildings to the Palace. The Palace consisted of many different buildings, such as churches, throne rooms, and reception halls, isolated from public. The most important parts of the building are given below: The Chalke Gate of the Great Palace was built in late fifth century

⁴ Chronicon Paschale, 16.

The Chrysotriklinos was built during the reign of Justin II. It has an octagonal shape, similar to St. Vitale Church at Ravenna. The imperial throne was included in the building which served for meetings of emperors with foreign ambassadors.

The Baths of Zeuxippus were constructed before Constantine`s reign; during his reign, Constantine added some parts to the building. During the revolts of Nika, it was highly damaged but when Justinian got the rebellion under control, he had the building restored. The Boukoleon Palace was reputedly built during the reign of Theodosius II. Until the Emperor Justinian's period this palace was known as Hormisdas Palace, a Sassanid Prince who was in exile at Constantinople. When Justinian restored it after the Nika Revolt in 532, the palace came to be called the House of Justinian or the Boukoleon Palace. Later in the 9th century the palace fell into disrepair, and another restoration was carried out by Theophilos at and, in the second half of the tenth century, Nikephoros Phokas had a wall built on the western side of the palace. The new wall, starting at the Hippodrome Sphendone Wall and crossing part of the palace until the Sea of Marmara, changed the palace`s limits, making it smaller on the western side⁶



Figure 3. Mosaics (Great Palace)

⁶ Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, "The Great Palace as Reflected in the De Cerimoniis," *Byzas* 5 (2006):



The Emperor Constantine ordered necessary materials from different places in the empire; for example, porphyry from Egypt and greenstone from Carthage. The palace's courtyards were decorated with unique mosaics; of which some can be seen in the Arasta Bazaar Mosaic Museum in Istanbul today.

The Great Palace hosted the emperors themselves and their entourage. In addition, foreign ambassadors were entertained in the palace. Until the Late Byzantine period, the palace was the administration center of the empire, however, during the late 11th century Alexios Komnenos moved to the Blachernae Palace. Located on the northwestern part of Constantinople

next to the Golden Horn, the new palace had a strategically defensive location against riots and was closer to the hunting areas. Despite this change the Great Palace kept its symbolic,⁷ significance until the 4th Crusade.⁸

“How shall I begin to tell deeds wrought by these nefarious men! Alas, the images, which ought to have been adored, were trodden under foot! Alas, the relics of the holy martyrs were thrown into unclean places! Then was seen what one shudders to hear, namely, the divine body and blood of Christ was spilled upon the ground or thrown about. They snatched the precious reliquaries, thrust into their bosoms the ornaments which these contained, and used the broken remnants for pans and drinking cups, - precursors of Anti-Christ, authors and heralds of his nefarious deeds which we momentarily expect.” (Niketas Choniates. 573)⁹

As Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates mentioned, during the 4th Crusade, Latins plundered Constantinople for approximately 60 years. Moreover, Constantinople was managed by Latins in this time span. Although Alexios Komnenos moved the administration center to Blachernae Palace more than a hundred years earlier, Latin Emperors decided to use Boukoleon Palace as an administration center. During this period, many relics and other precious goods

Empire or other kingdoms who joined the 4th Crusade

When the Emperor Michael VIII., Palaiologos' general Alexios Strategopoulos,

⁷ Kübra Yaşar, "Blakhernai Dün ve Bugün," *Toplumsal Tarih* 278 (2017): 16. ; Henry Maguire, *Bizans Saray Kültürü 829-1204*, trans., Müfit Günay (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017), 8.

⁸ Alexander P. Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Volume 2), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 869

⁹ Niketas Choniates, *O city of Byzantium Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 314-135.



recaptured the city in 1261, the great palace was mostly ruined. Therefore, the last dynasty of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Palaiologos dynasty, used the Blachernae Palace until the second and last sack of Constantinople in 1453. At this time, Ottoman Turks plundered the city as well as the Crusaders and then converted churches and other buildings, starting with Hagia Sophia.

After the Ottomans captured the city, they found the great palace mostly destroyed because of the 4th Crusade. Consequently, they turned it into a regular public area. During the early 17th century, they constructed one of the biggest mosques, Sultan Ahmet or Blue Mosque, on the ruins of Daphne. They constructed the first university of the Ottoman Empire (Darülfünun) on the ruins of the Justinian Senate during the mid-19th Century. Another building from the same area, Boukoleon Palace, as well as the former Polo field were partly demolished through the construction of the Sirkeci railroad in 1873. Nowadays, the palace area is mostly covered by regular residential areas. However, there are still some ruins like Boukoleon Palace. Chrysotriklinos, Magnaura to be discovered in addition to its historical importance, the fact that many late antique and Renaissance monuments in Western Europe were inspired by the Great Palace and other architectural

masterpieces illustrate the significance of the ancient capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. For instance, the former Holy Apostles Church in Constantinople inspired the structure of Church of the Holy Apostles in Milan, St. Mark's Basilica in Venice and the Cathedrale Saint-Front in Perigueux. Also Chrysotriklinos, the octagonal throne room of the Great Palace inspired the structure of St. Vitale Basilica in Ravenna.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more information: Robert De Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, trans. Edgar Holmes McNEAL, (New York: Octagon Books, INC., 1966), 102-103.



Figure 4. Boukoleon Palace (Today)

History of Research

Three major fires happened in the Imperial Palace area, in 1912, 1913 and 1933. As a result of these fires, part of the buildings was torn down, letting the area clear and making it possible for researchers to see the foundations of the Imperial Palace. The first survey and small scale excavations were made by the French Archaeology Institute under allied occupied Istanbul right after the First World War. This French excavation took place on the upper palace where the Chalke Gate, Justinian's Senate and the Imperial Bodyguard Palace were standing. After the 1933 fire, St. Andrews University started surveys and excavations under J.H. Baxler. The team made surveys on Boukoleon Palace and started digging on Torun Street, where they were expecting to find Justinian's underground Manuscript Library. However, instead of finding Justinian's Manuscript Library, they accidentally discovered a great number of mosaics from the Imperial Palace. Their excavations lasted between 1935 and 1938 and the report could not be made due to the start of the Second World War.¹¹

¹¹ "A Works of Atatürk's Period Archaeology: Excavation of Sultanahmet," T.C. Başbakanlık Atatürk



After the war, between 1951-1954, the British Archaeology Institute in Ankara started surveys and excavation on the Imperial Palace. During the first two years they mostly worked on Torun Street in order to find more mosaics, as well as on the restoration and conservation of 16 those already uncovered.

During the last year of excavation, the focus was the Boukoleon Palace ruins and it resulted in the finding of the palace's symbol, the "stone lion" as well as, other fragments and coins. After the team examined the materials found on the Boukoleon Palace

excavations, a plan of the palace's construction phases was made, indicating all the materials that were used and their different respective phases. The common construction materials found 17 were dressed stone, brick and mortared rubble. Grey stone, a local stone of the region, green stone and red stone were also used during the construction of the Palace.¹² Many mosaics and 18 fifth century Eastern Roman lamps from Arasta Bazar, Torun Street area, were also covered.

During their excavations the British Archaeological Institute in Ankara they could not get any financial help from the Turkish Government, and were instead asked to pay 5000 Turkish Lira as a deposit in case of any possible destruction of the area during their excavations¹³ Thanks to their research and excavations, Istanbul has the Great Palace Mosaic Museum since 1983 in the area. The main problem for both the 1935-38 and, 1951-54 excavation projects was that the Turkish authorities did not stop local people from inhabiting the Imperial Palace area

after the major fires occurred during early twentieth century. Therefore, surveys and excavations had to stop at some point due to further inhibition of the Imperial Palace area.

Kültür- Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, accessed January 8, 2017,

<http://www.atam.gov.tr/dergi/sayi-62/aturk-donemi-arkeoloji-calismalarindan-biri-sultanahmet-kazisi>.

¹² David Talbot Rice (ed.), *The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), 52-63.

¹³ Alessandra Ricci, "Interpreting Heritage: Byzantine-Period Archaeological Areas and Parks in Istanbul," *Miras* 2, (2014): 358.

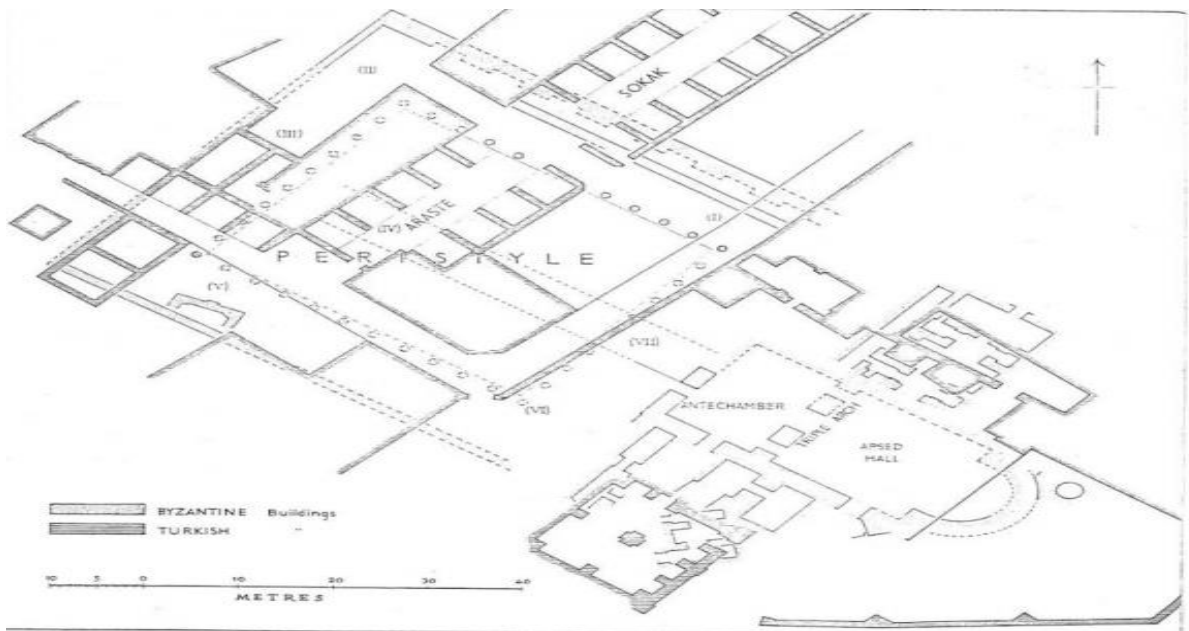


Figure 5. For the plan of digging area
 (The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors) David Talbot Rice

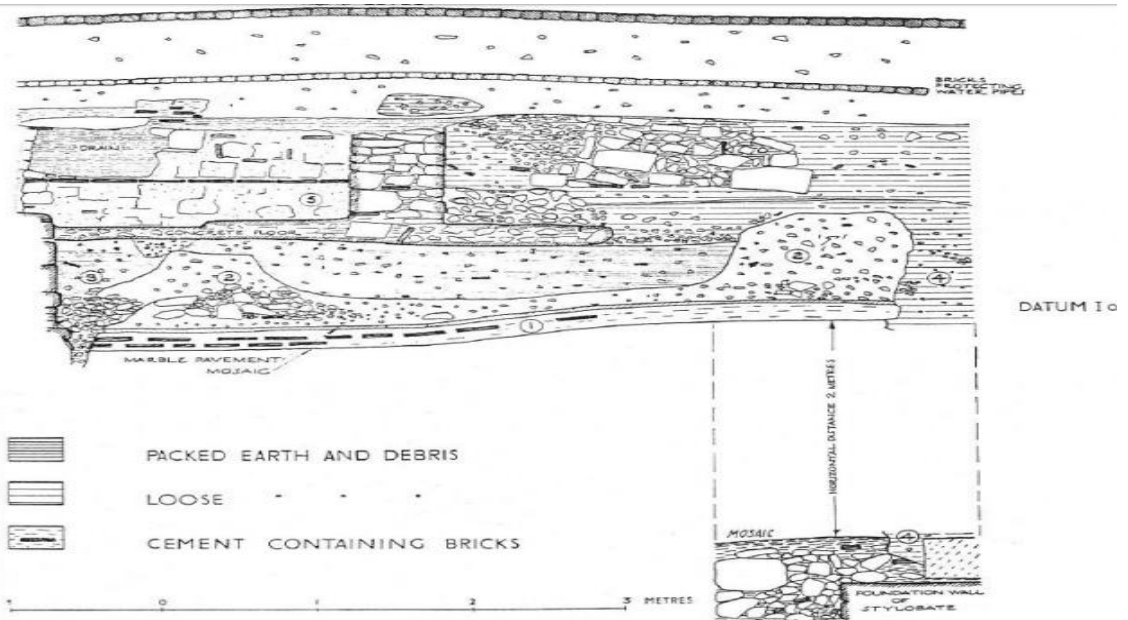


Figure 6. Phases of Boukoleon Palace
 (The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors) David Talbot Rice



World Heritage

In 1983 Turkey ratified the UNESCO “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”, two years later the Historical Areas of Istanbul were inscribed on the World Heritage List. The protected area includes the Sultanahmet Archaeological Park, the Süleymaniye Mosque and its associated conservation area, Zeyrek Mosque (Pantocrator Church) and its associated conservation area and the Theodosian Land Walls of Istanbul¹⁴. The remains of the Great Palace of Constantinople are located within the 22 Archaeological Park area, however they are mostly situated beneath its surface and underneath buildings such as the Blue Mosque.

The Historical Areas of Istanbul were inscribed according to criterion (i) for its monuments considered architectural masterpieces of Eastern Roman and Ottoman periods, criterion (ii) due to the influence it had on the development of architecture, monumental arts and the organization of space through the history, criterion (iii) for carrying the testimony of the Byzantine and Ottoman civilizations and providing exceptional examples of their buildings and criterion (iv) as being the representation of distinguished phases in human history¹⁵.

The Istanbul Historic Peninsula Management Plan takes into consideration the Fatih District Urban Conservation Site Plan to define the conservations areas within the Peninsula. The plan defines the area where the Imperial Palace remains are located, as well as other historical sites, as “Archeological Exhibition-Park Areas”. Although it states that the remains found during archeological excavations will be arranged in order to be exhibited or used as parks and green areas¹⁶, none of these interventions have been made yet.

¹⁴

“Historic Areas of Istanbul,” World Heritage Convention, accessed January 10, 2017, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/356/multiple=1&unique_number=409. & Please see Appendix Figure 7. For protected area.

¹⁵ “Historic Areas of Istanbul,” World Heritage Convention, accessed January 10, 2017

¹⁶ Oylum Bülbül (ed.), *Istanbul Tarihi Yarımada Yönetim Planı* (Istanbul: Istanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 2011), 169-174



Tourism

Although most parts of the Imperial Palace are either destroyed or under colossal buildings such as the Blue Mosque, there are still some ruins to be seen. The Museum of Great Palace Mosaics is one way to experience how the former palace floors once appeared. This museum, however, has not been widely publicized. Even though it is located within the to lead tourists to the museum. Moreover, the museum does not have its own website: instead it is mentioned under the Hagia Sophia Museum website with only a small amount of information available. Besides that, the museum does not provide orientation for reaching the remains

location neither encourage the tourist to visit them, keeping the awareness of the palace remains very¹⁷.

Some remains of the Palace, such as the Boukoleon Palace, have been long forgotten by the government and are currently in disrepair. Since the site has no fences or control, the remains can easily be entered and damaged. The lack of conservation and management programs for this specific site is not only a threat to the building's existence, but also to the security and welfare of the public that uses the area. Incidents have been reported in which people have been injured inside the building and in its surroundings. The local population also claims the remains' neighborhood is not safe and that, most of the time, it serves as shelter for homeless people¹⁸.

¹⁷ "The Museum of Great Palace Mosaics," Republic of Turkey Ministry, Culture and Tourism- Hagia Sophia Museum, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://ayasofyamuzesi.gov.tr/en/museum-great-palace-mosaics>

¹⁸ "Historic Areas of Istanbul," World Heritage Convention, accessed January 10, 2017

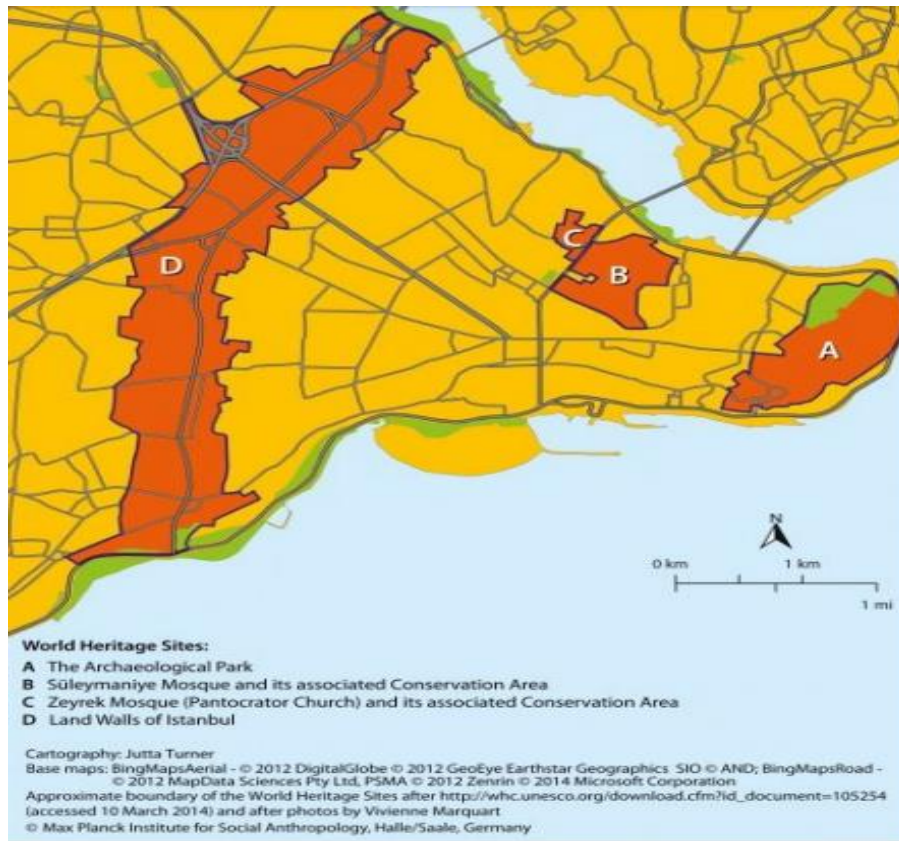


Figure 7. Protected Area

(*European Journal of Turkish Studies*) <https://ejts.revues.org/5044>.

Legislation:

The first heritage protection movement started with Sultan Abdülmecit in the Ottoman Empire. When he was visiting Yolava he ordered Ahmet Fethi Pasa to take Eastern Roman Scriptoria with them back to Istanbul. Later Ahmet Fethi Pasa used the former Hagia Irene Church as the first museum of the Ottoman Empire and named the museum Mecma-ı Asar-ı Atika Müzesi at 1846. However, this museum was not open to the public and people who wanted to visit it needed a special permit because the museum was part of Topkapi Palace. Before 1869

legal excavators could take whatever they wanted from archaeological sites to their country in Ottoman Empire. Starting with the 1869 Asar-ı Atika Code, Ottomans started protecting heritage sites in their borders. With the 1869 code they basically explained that all of the ancient sites are important for learning their history that intellectual people from the west in the empire care about them and they have more



heritage sites in their borders and other western nations. They also mention that they want to let excavations on these sites by giving if there is two same founding

to the excavators. They also mentioned the necessity of constructing a museum for the finds from the site instead of using Hagia Irene Church¹⁹.

The 1874 Asar-ı Atıka Code was basically a copy of the 1869 version. The 1884 Asar-ı Atıka Code is the code written by Osman Hamdi Bey and Edhem Bey with this code they wanted to stop theft from archaeological sites by excavators. This code says that all structures and art 27 objects belong to the site and therefore cannot be taken away by excavators. Moreover, with the 1884 code they decided to construct an Archaeology Museum in Istanbul which was finished on 13 June 1891. With the 1884 code, the Ottoman Empire tried to stop the looting of other ancient cities within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Also this code provided the of archaeological monuments such as had happened before at Pergamon, Halicarnassus and many Ottoman Empire and later the Republic of Turkey with the legal right to take back artifacts stolen from the country²¹

The 1906 Asar-ı Atıka Code was very similar to the 1884 one except it mentions that Turkish and Islamic artifacts also belong to the government. Therefore, they cannot be legally taken or sold. It also mentioned that any trade of ancient artifacts must be permitted by the Bab-i Ali (Ottoman Government)²²

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the 1906 Asar-ı Atıka Code was used as the only protection legislation by the Republic of Turkey until 1973. Between 1906-1973 in the Ottoman Empire after 1922 Republic of Turkey government was the only institution which can open a museum. However, with the 1973 Eski Eserleri Koruma Code, the government gave permission to non-governmental organizations, natural person and legal identity.

With the current 1973 code, the Turkish government tries to protect every site by

¹⁹ Halit Çal, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Eski Eserler Kanunları", in Prof. Dr. Kazım Yaşar Koprıman'a Armağan, (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 236.

²⁰ "Osman Hamdi Bey'den Günümüze Türkiye'de Koruma Anlayışı," Osman Hamdi Bey, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.osmanhamdibey.gov.tr/TR,50976/osman-hamdi-beyden-gunumuze-turkiyede-koruma-anlayisi.html>

²¹ Çal, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Eski Eserler Kanunları," 236.

²² Çal, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Eski Eserler Kanunları" p.239



sending representatives from the closest Archaeological Museum who gives them a day to day report after the excavation period ends.²³

Conclusion and Recommendations:

➤ Main Stakeholders and Future Perspectives.

There are three main stakeholders in the Imperial Palace area namely the Ministry of the Culture and Tourism, the Istanbul Archaeology Museum, and the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board. Turkey has had a Ministry of Culture and Tourism since 2003. Its duties include the protection of culture and archaeological sites and their advertisement. Which they have been doing very well in Istanbul since its foundation. However, they have no current project for the Imperial Palace area which is still under the protection of its 1985 Unesco World Heritage Nomination. There is no protection especially for the Boukoleon Palace area nor is

there a sign which mentions its name for information or touristic purposes.

Istanbul Archaeology Museum has a duty to protect the old city area in Istanbul since 1891. They have to send an archaeologist to every new construction site in the old city area as a result of the 1973 Eski Eserleri Koruma code and they have been trying to do this duty desperately without enough personal or enough financial help from the government. There are around 4000 Archaeology and Art History students graduating every year in Turkey, but only twenty of them can find a job in museums to protect Turkey's heritage²⁴. Therefore, for the protection of the heritage sites of Turkey and also the Imperial Palace area, the government should hire more archaeologists or art historians to stop further destruction.

The Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board has six branches for Istanbul. One is working on the protection of Istanbul's old city area. They are responsible for giving permission for new construction projects in this area. Since 2003 there have been many cities. Turkey should have better laws to protect its heritage from bribery.²⁵

²³ Çal, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Eski Eserler Kanunarı.p. 240.

²⁴ "Yılda 4000 Sanat Tarihçisi ve Arkeolog Mezun Oluyor, Ancak 20'si İş Buluyor," ZETE, accessed January 17, 2017,

<https://zete.com/yilda-4000-sanat-tarihçisi-ve-arkeolog-mezun-oluyor-ancak-20si-is-buluyor/>.

²⁵

"4 Bakan'a Büyük Rüşvet Suçlaması," Demokrat Haber, accessed January 17, 2017,

<http://www.demokrathaber.org/siyaset/4-bakana-buyuk-rusvet-suçlamasi-h26062.html>.



The Historic Areas of Istanbul has a management plan since October 2011 for the protection of the UNESCO World Heritage nominated areas. The plan aimed to turn all four protected areas of Istanbul into archaeological parks, starting with the Sultanahmet district. However, this plan was stopped by the Turkish High Court in 2008 due to illegal hotel construction in the area. Since then, the Sultanahmet Archaeological Park has been left to its fate.

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