

GALATA, PERA, BEYOĞLU; A BIOGRAPHY

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Galata, Pera, Beyođlu:
A Biography



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Preface

Books about Istanbul invariably focus on the historic peninsula known to ancients as Byzantium and the Greeks as Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire until its conquest by the Turks in 1453. But the present book concentrates on Beyoğlu, the district on the north side of the Golden Horn across from the Constantinopolitan peninsula. Beyoğlu today includes Galata, the old port quarter of Istanbul at the confluence of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, which is just as old as Constantinople and was once a district of the Byzantine capital. During the last two centuries of the Byzantine era, Galata was controlled by the Genoese, and even after the Turkish conquest it continued to be the Latin quarter of Istanbul, its inhabitants including Italians, French and Maltese as well as Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Levantine Europeans. The district on the hills above Galata, formerly known as Pera, was where the first European embassies and churches were built along Grand Rue de Pera, now Istiklal Caddesi, the main avenue of Beyoğlu. Thus Beyoğlu, though now predominately Turkish in its population, has churches of many different faiths, including Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Gregorian, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican, as well as a dissident sect known as Turkish Orthodox, along with synagogues of Sephardic, Ashkenazi and Karaite Jews, together with Ottoman Turkish mosques, *medreses*, and an ancient lodge of the Mevlevi, the famous whirling dervishes. Its historic monuments include several medieval Genoese churches, the oldest of which is now a mosque, as well *hamams* and fountains.

Galata was notorious for its bawdy night life, in the days when it was a port and sailors from around the Mediterranean thronged its taverns and bordellos. The night life has now moved up the hill to the part of Beyoğlu once known as Pera, which in late Ottoman times was the only district of Istanbul that had restaurants, cafés, cinemas and an opera house. During the past decade this part of

Beyoğlu has become one of the hottest spots in the world, with many hundreds of places to eat, drink and hear music, as well as two museums of modern art, scores of art galleries, several cultural centers, and an opera house. And yet there are byways of Beyoğlu that are still reminiscent of old quarters of Genoese Galata and Levantine Pera, in vine-shrouded squares and cobbled alleyways with names like the Street of the Lion's Bed [Aslan Yatağı], the Street of the Chicken that Cannot Fly [Tavuk Uçmaz], and the Street of the Bird of Night [Gecekuşu]. This book will take the reader down all of these streets and more, both by day and by night, evoking the life of the Latin quarter of Istanbul, past and present, which in this fascinating part of the city are intimately entwined.

The book begins with a general historical introduction, followed by a series of interconnected walking tours through the various parts of Beyoğlu, including the old Genoese quarter of Galata and the more modern downtown area known in times past as Pera. Beyoğlu's historic monument includes Muslim, Christian and Jewish places of worship as well as secular buildings of the Genoese, Ottoman and early Republican eras. These walks are interspersed with vignettes evoking the way of life of Istanbul's Latin quarter, past and present, day and night, introducing some of the writers, artists and eccentrics who made this a bohemian quarter rivaling the left bank of Paris in the twenties, setting the stage for the extraordinary resurgence of night life in Beyoğlu in recent years.

Since its earliest days, Pera has had a character and identity quite distinct from the city across the Golden Horn. In Roman times it was associated with Honorius, Emperor of the West rather than with Arcadius, Emperor of the East. The Byzantine despised the Catholic Perioti as *frangofouromeni*, or wearers of Western clothes, and the Ottoman despised them as infidels. For centuries it was governed as a separate city, and for centuries after that it was inhabited largely by Europeans (and local Christians under the protection of foreign embassies) who were not subject to Ottoman law, each embassy having its own court, its own postal service and sometimes even its own jail. Pera's ties were to Europe, and those who lived there did their best to make it resemble a European city.

Despite the suspicion and disdain with which the people of Constantinople and Istanbul regarded Pera, it also offered them a window to the West. In Pera they could encounter the latest trends in European fashion, art, literature, music, technology and political philosophy, as well as a wide range of entertainment, from the refined to the debauched, that was not available and often forbidden in their part of the city.

After the Turkish Republic was established, Pera lost its privileged status and saw frequent and deliberate assaults on its character and identity. The embassies moved to Ankara, Turkish replaced French as the language of commerce, the names of streets, businesses and institutions were changed and most of the Christian and Jewish population either left voluntarily, were deported or were intimidated into leaving.

In spite of this, Pera, now Beyoğlu, managed to retain much of its character and identity. In recent years it has experienced a boom, becoming once again a center of fashion, art, literature and music, as well as a wide range of entertainment, and has perhaps as large a foreign population as it ever had.

This book follows the development and social history of the district street by street from the earliest settlements on the Golden Horn to the most recent settlements beyond and around Taksim, examining not just the buildings and those who built them, but those who lived in them as well, from murderers, gangsters and prostitutes to bankers, diplomats and socialites.

CHAPTER 1

Galata – Pera - Beyoğlu

A description of Constantinople written ca. 447, *Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae*, records that the city was divided into fourteen regions, the same as in Old Rome. Thirteen of these regions were within the Theodosian walls, while one was across the Golden Horn in Sycae, the present Galata, corresponding to the region across the Tiber in Rome known today as Trastevere.

According to *Notitia*, the Regio Sycaena, as it was called, had 431 houses, along with a church, a forum, public baths, a theater, and a harbor, all surrounded by a defense wall. In 528 the Emperor Justinian restored the theater and the church and renamed the region Justiniana, a name which was soon forgotten after the emperor's death in 565. The Emperor Tiberius II (r. 578-82) built a fortress on the shore in Sycae, from which a chain could be stretched across the Golden Horn to close the port in the event that an enemy fleet approached the city. The substructure of this fortress, which came to be known as the Castle of Galata, can still be seen in Yeraltı Camii, the Underground Mosque, across from the passenger terminal of the Turkish Maritime Lines.

The name Sycae continued to be in use until, in the ninth century, the name Galata began to supplant it, at first for a small district only, then for the whole region. The derivation of the name Galata is unknown, though that of the other toponym, Pera, is quite straightforward. In Greek *pera* means 'the other side', at first in the general sense of 'across the Golden Horn', later restricted to medieval Galata, and still later to the heights above. During the past century these old Greek names have been supplanted by Turkish ones, so that the whole district north of the Golden Horn is now called Beyoğlu, including the downtown area once known as Pera, while the maritime area at the confluence of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus is now Karaköy. Nevertheless the name Galata is

still used in referring to the quarter along the shore between the Galata and Atatürk bridges, the two spans that cross the Golden Horn to the old city.

Constantinople was captured in April 1204 by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade and the Venetian navy, who established the so-called Kingdom of Roumania from the fragment of the Byzantine Empire they had conquered. Greeks who had fled Constantinople established small empires in exile with their capitals at Nicaea in northwestern Anatolia and at Trebizond in Pontus. The emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, who usurped the throne at Nicaea in 1259, recaptured Constantinople from the Latins in August 15, 1261, restoring the Byzantine Empire in its ancient capital.

The Genoese had established an alliance with the Byzantines of Nicaea in the spring of 1261, when they signed the Treaty of Nymphaion, in which Galata 'was given over to the glorious community of Genoa on the order of the great and holy Emperor.' The Genoese governed Galata as a semi-independent colony, with its own *podesta*, or governor, appointed annually by the Genoese Senate. The *podesta* and his council met in a building called the Podestat, popularly called Palazzo del Commune. Although the Genoese were expressly forbidden to fortify Galata, they began to do so early in the following century and went on expanding its area and fortifications until the mid-fifteenth century.

The first fortified area, walled in as early as 1304, was a long and narrow rectangle along the Golden Horn between the two present bridges. Then, in order to defend themselves more adequately on the heights above the Golden Horn, the Genoese added a triangular wedge above the rectangular area, erecting at its apex a powerful fortress known as the Tower of Christ, which came to be known as the Galata Tower, completed in 1348. Subsequently, in 1352 and 1387-97, they fortified two areas to the northwest of the tower, and finally in 1446 they walled in the eastern slope of the hill leading down to the Bosphorus. The final defense system thus consisted of five walled enclosures, with the outer wall bordered by a deep moat. Only three of these enceintes can be seen in the earliest extant map of the city—the view by Buondelmonti in 1422—whereas all five are apparent in the Vavasore engraving of 1530. Both of these views show the Galata Tower dominating the defense system from the



The Galata Tower.

highest point in the circuit, with the outer wall extending from the tower down to the Golden Horn on one side and to the Bosphorus on the other. Sections of the Genoese walls with a few towers and one postern are still in existence and will be seen on the itineraries in Galata.

During the latter Byzantine period Genoese Galata became one of the principal ports in the Levant, handling three times as much trade as Greek Constantinople. The importance of the Genoese port is noted by the Muslim traveler Ibn-i Battûta, who visited Galata in

1334; he says that its population was predominately Latin, though there were Greeks living there as well:

Galata is reserved for the Frankish [European] Christians who dwell there. They are of different kinds, including the Genoese, Venetians, Romans [Byzantines, i. e., Greeks] and Franks; they are subject to the king of Constantinople. They are all men of commerce and their harbor is one of the largest in the world; I saw there about a hundred galleys and other large ships, and the small ships were too many to be counted. The bazaars in this part of the town are good but filthy, and a small and very dirty river runs through them. The churches too are very filthy and mean.

Another very interesting description is that of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, Spanish ambassador to the court of Tamerlane, who visited Galata at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Clavijo refers to the town as Pera, noting that the Greeks called it Galata.

The city of Pera is a small township, but very populous. It is surrounded by a strong wall and has excellent houses, all well-built. It is occupied by the Genoese, and is of the lordship of Genoa, being inhabited by Greeks as well as Genoese. The houses of the town stand on the seashore and lie so close to the sea that between its waters and the town there is barely the width of a carrack's deck... The wall here runs along the strand for some length, but then mounts up the shore of the hill, to where on the summit stands a very tall tower [the Galata Tower]... The Genoese call their town 'Pera', but the Greeks name it 'Galata'.

During the final Turkish siege of Constantinople in 1453 by Sultan Mehmed II, known to the Turks as Fatih, the Genoese in Galata were officially neutral, though many of them fought in the defense of the city under Giovanni Giustiniani Longo. The Genoese in Galata surrendered to Fatih without a struggle two days before his conquest of Constantinople on May 29, 1453. Fatih forced the Genoese to pull down sections of their fortifications, sparing the Galata Tower, which he garrisoned with a detachment of janissaries. Galata lost its independence, but as long as the Genoese obeyed the Ottoman law and paid their taxes Fatih allowed them some local autonomy, as well as the right to worship as they pleased and to retain their Roman Catholic churches. According to the Turkish historian Halil İnalcık, Fatih's imperial decree of June 1, 1453

stated the conditions under which the Genoese of Galata would be governed in his reign:

...their money, provisions, property, storehouses, vineyards, mills, shops and boats, in short all their possessions, as well as their wives, sons, daughters and slaves of both sexes, be left in their hands as before and that nothing be done contrary to their livelihood, as in other parts of their dominions, and travel by land and by sea in freedom without any hindrance or molestation by anyone and be exempt from extraordinary impositions; that I impose upon them the Islamic poll-tax [*haraç*] which they pay each year as other non-Muslims do, and in return I will give my attention (and protection) as I do in other parts of my dominion; that they keep their churches and perform their customary rights in them with the exception of ringing their church bells and rattles; that I do not take from them their present churches and turn them into mosques, but they also do not attempt to build new churches; that the Genoese come and go by land and sea for trade; pay the customs deeds as required under the established rule and be free from molestation by anyone.

Fatih appointed an official known as a *voivode* to govern Galata. Beside the *voivode*, who was changed each year in March, legal management was carried out by a *kadi*, who was paid 500 gold pieces annually. There was also a military governor, who commanded the garrison that occupied the Galata Tower and the little citadel within its barbican.

Nevertheless, Galata had for a time some limited degree of autonomy over its internal affairs. The Catholic churches of Galata as well as their religious and fraternal organizations remained under the control of a Christian body known as the Magnifica Communita di Pera until 1682. Otherwise all the non-Muslims of Galata were under the jurisdiction of various *milletts*, or 'nations', established by Fatih, the Greeks and Armenians headed by their patriarchs and the Jews by the chief rabbi.

Although Galata was for centuries governed by the Genoese, it was never an exclusively Italian town. There was a substantial Greek population before the conquest, and in the century afterwards it was repopulated by Turks, Greeks, and Armenians from the provinces. A document of 1477 records that in Galata, besides 260 shops,

there were the following numbers of houses owned by the various ethnic groups: 535 Muslims, 592 Greeks, 62 Armenians, and 332 Europeans, the latter predominately Italian. Then in the last decade of the fifteenth century large numbers of Moors and Sephardic Jews were welcomed to the Ottoman Empire by Bayezid II, Fatih's son and successor, after they were evicted from Spain in 1492 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

By the seventeenth century some of the European powers had built palatial embassies in Pera on the heights above Galata. Each embassy formed a separate 'nation' which had under its protection various churches in both Pera and Galata. The various ethnic and religious groups tended to live in their own quarters, each practicing certain trades or commercial activities, as the Turkish architectural historian Doğan Kuban points out in his magisterial work, *Istanbul, an Urban History*.

Kuban writes that the Greeks were the most numerous ethnic group in Ottoman Galata and lived in several quarters, where they were further divided into rich and poor. The rich Greeks were merchants and the others tended to be artisans, tailors, weavers, bakers, porters, tavern-keepers, or owners of *bozahanes*, places selling *boza*, a drink made from millet. Armenians, many of whom were from Kaffa in Crimea, had much the same trades as Greeks and often lived in the same quarters. The Orthodox Jews for the most part dwelt in two different quarters, while the schismatic Karaite Jews dwelt farther up the Golden Horn in the village of Hasköy, where they were resettled in the mid-seventeenth century after being evicted from Eminönü in the old city to make way for Yeni Cami, the New Mosque of Valide Sultan, erected by Turhan Hatice, mother of Mehmed IV. Many of the Jews of Galata became prosperous merchants, and a number of them were physicians, some of whom served the sultan in Topkapı Sarayı [Topkapı Palace].

Kuban notes that in 1455 there were only twenty Turks living in Galata, their chief being the *subaşı*, the commanding officer of the garrison, who had two houses. According to Kuban: 'Turks living in Galata had either Greek or Armenian wives... One could find a Muslim child living with his Christian mother. Hacı Mehmed from Ankara had a Christian wife and owned a bath in the Jewish quarter. His wife owned a house in another quarter.'

The Turkish quarter was known as Hacı Hamza, as Kuban notes, referring to a deed of foundation dated 1472. He observes that Muslim merchants of Galata were involved in trade between the Ottoman Empire and Italy, and that the Turkish inhabitants included sea captains, painters and scribes. He also refers to the register of *vakıfs*, or deeds of foundation, in Haghia Sophia, dating to 1519, to show that many of the Muslims in Galata at that time were converts to Islam.

The most complete description of early Ottoman Galata is that of Petrus Gyllius, who made a detailed study of the topography and Byzantine antiquities of Istanbul in the years 1544-50. His description refers to the regions as they are defined in *Notitia*, which he calls *Ancient Description of the City*. The last part of his section on Galata seems to be a description of the highroad on the ridge above the old Genoese quarter that later came to be known as Grand Rue de Pera.

The Sycaean ward [region], which is commonly called Galata, or Pera, should be more properly called the Peraean Ward... The shore around the town is full of havens. Between the walls and the bay there is a stretch of shore where there is an abundance of taverns, shops and victual houses, besides several wharfs where they unload their shipping. It has six gates, at three of which they have stairs [landings] from which you sail over to Constantinople... Where Galata rises highest there stands a lofty tower [the Galata Tower]. Here there is an ascent of about three hundred paces, full of buildings, and around that is the ridge of the hill, which is level, about two hundred paces broad and two thousand paces long. Through its middle runs a broad way full of houses, gardens and vineyards. This is the most pleasant part of town.

Besides the various ethnic and religious groups in Galata there was a floating population of seamen, itinerant traders and merchant adventurers who came sailing into the port from all over the Mediterranean and around the Black Sea. Evliyâ Çelebi, the seventeenth-century Turkish chronicler, gives a vivid description of the rich ethnic mixture in Galata in his *Seyahatnâme*, or *Narrative of Travels*, written ca. 1660:

In Galata there are eighteen wards inhabited by Muslims, seventy by Greeks, three by Franks, one by Jews and two by Armenians.

In the citadel there are no infidels at all, indeed there are none till you come to the Mosque of the Arabs... From the sea shore up to the Galata Tower there are houses of the Genoese, all built of stone, and the streets regularly laid out... the most frequented are the great road by the sea shore, that of the Mosque of the Arabs, and that of the Galata Tower. The different wards of the town are patrolled day and night by watchmen to prevent disorders of the population, who are of a rebellious disposition, on account of which they have from time to time been chastised by the sword. The inhabitants are either sailors, merchants or craftsmen such as joiners and caulkers. They dress for the most part in Algerine fashion, for a great number of them are Arabs or Moors. The Greeks keep the taverns; most of the Armenians are merchants or money-changers; the Jews are the go-betweens in amorous intrigues and their youths are the worst of all the devotees of debauchery.

The port quarter in Galata was noted for the number and liveliness of its taverns, of which Evliyâ gives a particularly colorful description, reassuring his readers that he frequented these disreputable places only as an observer and not as a habitu :

In Galata there are two hundred taverns and wine-shops where the infidels divert themselves with music and drinking. The taverns are celebrated for the wines of Ancona, Saragossa, Mudanya, Smyrna and Tenedos. The word *g naha* [temptation] is most particularly to be applied to the taverns of Galata because there all kinds of dancing boys, mimics and fools, flock together and delight themselves day and night. When I passed through this district I saw many bare-headed and barefooted lying drunk on the streets; some confessed aloud the state they were in by singing such couplets as these:

*'I drank the ruby wine, how drunk, how drunk am I!
A prisoner of the locks. How mad, how mad am I!'*

Another sang,

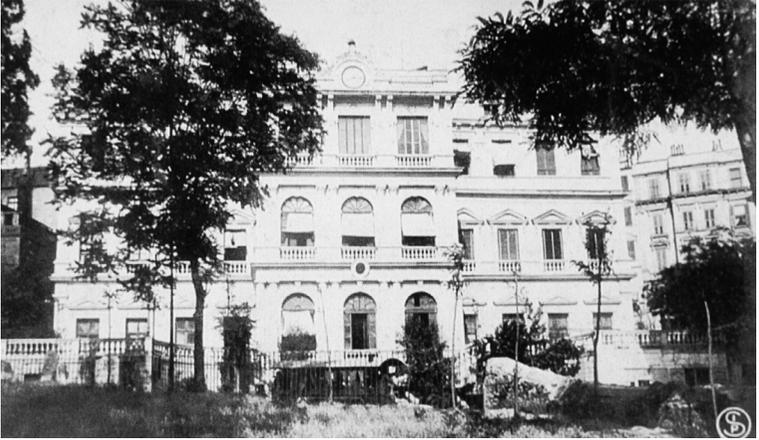
*'My foot goes to the tavern, nowhere else.
My hand grasps tight the cup and nothing else.'*

*Cut short your sermon, for no ears have I,
But for the bottle's murmur, nothing else.'*

God is my witness that not a drop did I drink at the invitation of these drunkards, but mingling amongst them I could not but become aware of their condition.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century Galata was gradually renovated in an attempt to make it a more Western town. Signs with street names were put up in 1854-5 and the streets were illuminated by gas lamps in 1857. The municipal organization was established in 1855 its aim being to renovate and modernize the city, with municipal services for police, post, fire, communications and sewage. That year Altıncı Daire-i Belediye [Sixth Municipal Division], which comprised Galata and Beyoğlu (Galata later became part of greater Beyoğlu) was established by Server Efendi (later pasha), whose first project was the demolition of the Genoese defense walls. Tramways were introduced in 1869, with one line crossing Galata Köprüsü [Galata Bridge] and proceeding along the shore of the Bosphorus as far as Ortaköy. Then in 1876 the underground funicular known as Tünel was opened, carrying passengers from Karaköy to the lower end of Grand Rue de Pera and sparing them the long climb uphill on the ancient step street known as Yüksek Kaldırım.

Hotels and boarding houses in the European style were first opened in the second quarter of the nineteenth century; they were listed in *Murray's Guide* of 1845. All of these were in Pera, as noted



Altıncı Daire-i Belediye [Sixth Municipal Division].



Beyoğlu exit of Tünel.

in the 1893 edition of *Murray's Guide*: 'All the hotels frequented by European travelers are in Pera and most of them are on Grand Rue.' The guide writes of Galata that its 'innumerable alleys, passages and lanes... in dirt and wretchedness surpass the worst parts of Stamboul [the Old City]. It goes on to write of the districts along the waterfront in Galata: 'Here, in the adjoining side-streets, are warehouses, small shops, cafés, and filthy lodging houses, in which one of the most depraved populations of Europe find a home.'

The first bridge across the Golden Horn opened in 1836 between Azapkapı in Galata and Unkapanı in the old city, on the site of the present Atatürk Köprüsü. The present Galata Köprüsü between Karaköy in Galata and Eminönü in Istanbul is the fifth bridge to have been built between these two points; the first one, a floating wooden structure, was erected in 1845 and the first metal span opened in 1878.

Galata Köprüsü has always been the best place to view the passing parade of Istanbul life, but the clothing reforms of the early Turkish Republic has eliminated the colorful clothing and national costumes that one would have seen there in Ottoman times, as Edmondo de Amicis describes it in his *Constantinople* (1896):

Standing there you can see all of Constantinople pass in an hour... advancing among a mixed crowd of Greeks, Turks and Armenians may be seen a gigantic eunuch on horseback, shouting 'Vardah!' (Make way!), and closely following him a Turkish carriage decorated with flowers and birds filled with the ladies of a harem... A Mussulman woman on foot, a veiled female slave, a Greek with her long flowing hair surmounted by a little red cap, a Maltese hidden in her black faletta, a Jewess in the ancient costume of her nation, a Negress in a many-tinted Cairo shawl, an Armenian from Trebizond, all veiled in black – a funereal apparition; these and many more follow in line as though it were a procession gotten up to display the dress of the various nations of the world... No two persons are dressed alike. Some heads are enveloped in shawls, other covered with rags, decked out like savages – shirts and undervests striped or particolored like a harlequin's dress; belts bristling with weapon, some of them reaching from the waist to the armpits; Mameluke trousers, knee breaches, tunics, togas,



Galata Köprüsü [Galata Bridge].



Galata Köprüsü [Galata Bridge].

long cloaks which sweep the ground, capes trimmed with ermine, waistcoats encrusted with gold, short sleeves and balloon-shaped trousers, monastic garb and theater costumes; men dressed like women, women who seem to be men, and peasants with the air of princes.

Galata and Pera today –subsumed within modern Beyoğlu– have changed beyond recognition from the town of Genoese and Ottoman times, although the labyrinthine street patterns remain to remind us of its medieval origins. The population now is predominately Turkish, with much diminished percentages of Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Levantines, along with the rare family of Genoese origins, for the Magnificent Community of Pera has now all but vanished. But monuments of the Genoese era remain, as do those of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, and we will see these juxtaposed in our strolls through greater Beyoğlu, which in its exuberant night life has revived the spirit of Istanbul’s old Latin quarter.