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Skarlatos Byzantios, *Constantinople: A Topographical, Archaeological & Historical Description... Vol. 1: Constantinople intra and circa Muros.* Translation and Commentary by Haris Theodorelis-Rigas with a Foreword by Stephanos Pesmazoglou. Istanbul: İstos, 2019 [1851]. xviii+ 856 pages. ISBN: 9786054640652

> [...] while repaying my debt to the Queen of cities, as someone who was born, raised and educated there, I also satisfied my own desire and so "pleased both the Muses and myself..."

Skarlatos D. Byzantios' "repaying [his] debt to the Queen of cities" consists of more than 1800 pages, replete with every piece of information on his native city he could lay his hands on.* His material is organized into three volumes, written over a period of more than thirty years, and published in 1851, 1862, and 1869. The resulting monograph is Skarlatos' own *magnum opus* and one of the most comprehensive accounts of Istanbul from the nineteenth century. Together with the works of Patriarch Konstantios and Alexander G. Paspates, this account constitutes the backbone of Ottoman Greek literature on the history, topography, and sociology of the imperial city. Given its monumental scale and all-inclusive outlook, *Constantinople* has had a lasting and profound impact on Istanbul scholarship. Its avid readership has included the likes of Sir Richard Francis Burton, Alexander Paspates, Alexander Van Millingen, and F. W. Hasluck.[1] Despite the seminal importance of the work, both Skarlatos and his work has remained surprisingly understudied and untranslated until now.

The Author

Information on Skarlatos Byzantios' life is fragmentary at best. Even though in the literature he is thought to have been born in Jassy, Moldova in 1797 and died in Athens in 1878, in his book he explicitly states that he was born in Istanbul (p. 1).[2] Skarlatos' residence in these centers of Greek learning had a profound impact on his intellectual formation as did his firsthand experience of momentous historical processes and events from the heyday of the Modern Greek Enlightenment to the 1821 War of Independence. Pesmazoglou rightly notes that Skarlatos lived through a pivotal period of transformation for Europe, starting with the French Revolution in 1789, continuing with the 1848 revolutions, and including the great transformation of the Ottoman Empire throughout the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries.[3]

He spent his youth in Constantinople, most probably on the Princes Islands, and studied in the Great School of the Nation (Μεγάλη του Γένους Σχολή), which had for a time relocated to Kuruçeşme. In the immediate aftermath of the 1821 Revolution and the ensuing Ottoman reprisals, Skarlatos, at the age of twenty-four, fled with his family first to Asia Minor and then in 1830, in his early thirties, to the nascent Greek Kingdom. From there, he moved to Paris to study as a researcher by virtue of generous financial support from the influential Phanariot family of Kallimaches.[4]

Upon his return from Paris to Athens, he held various administrative positions. He served the Archaeological Society of Athens as the vice secretary (1848–1851), a member of the Scientific Committee (1848–1851), and the secretary (1851–1852). He then became the director of primary education around 1855, a post he held for a total of twenty-three years until his death. There are explicit references in his works to his periodic returns to Constantinople at an old age and even to his taking notes as he strolled around the city's monuments, though the precise nature, frequency, and duration of these visits remain unknown.[5] In addition to his work on Constantinople, he also published various lexicons of the Greek language, both ancient and modern, as well as one from Greek to French. Nevertheless, unpublished research by Pesmazoglou suggests that Skarlatos explicitly defined himself as a "historian of Constantinople" rather than a lexicographer.

Constantinople

Constantinople may be best described as a kind of 'Encyclopedia of Constantinople,' given its sheer size and the scope of information it provided on the city's past and present, copiously harvested from a vast number of classical, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Western European works and masterfully combined with the author's own *in situ* observations. Technically speaking, Skarlatos' work does not comply with the standard format of an encyclopedia. Nevertheless, his insistence on establishing the "truthfulness" or not of the material he obtained; his empirical methods of compiling, categorizing, systematizing, and complementing with images and maps; and at times popularizing all available information on his subject matter, are highly evocative of the spirit of encylopedism, which emerged within the context of European Enlightenment circles.[6] At the same time, *Constantinople* poses and attempts to respond to fundamental questions about the topography and urban context of Istanbul and thus provides the necessary ground for a wider discussion revolving around the urban material context.

While compiling his work, Skarlatos utilized an immense number of sources. As stated in the preface to the first volume, he tried to integrate into his work virtually all earlier literature on the subject: texts by ancient and Byzantine authors, inscriptions, European travelogues, histories, and previous urban/antiquarian literature on Constantinople, including one of his major influences, the *Constantiniad* of Patriarch Konstantios I (1740–1859).[7] Although Skarlatos never provided a systematic bibliography for his work, most of the time he referred to his sources with relative clarity, either within his main text or as part of a footnote, making it possible to trace the material he had had at his disposal. The three volumes of *Constantinople* were published successively at decade-long intervals.[8] The first volume—under review here—includes a history

of the city from its foundation to Skarlatos' own times. The scope and material are indeed vast, from topographical details to monument descriptions and from stories on the city's foundation to its famed products, regions, climate, population, economy, and agricultural capacity. There is a clear focus, however, on key aspects of the urban space such as public buildings of monumental size and significant districts within the intramural city, such as palaces, main squares, cisterns, and places of worship. The volume thus provides us with detailed, first-hand information on the physical texture of the "old" walled city, the historic Byzantine and Ottoman city center, in Skarlatos' own times.

A close reading of *Constantinople* suggests that Skarlatos placed a paramount importance on the material aspects of the structures that he investigated. When possible, he provides their dimensions, structural and spatial characteristics, including the number and type of columns, domes, half domes, as well as their materials and original context. It seems that it is precisely this sound knowledge of the material aspects of these monuments that provided him with the necessary perspective for their stylistic evaluation and dating. In some cases, he provides detailed and—for the most part—accurate information on the patronage of the structures: the emperors, sultans, sultanas, and secular and religious officials who had left their mark on the urban landscape. In doing so, Skarlatos demonstrates his awareness of the mnemonic capacity of the constructed environment. Accordingly, he often utilizes spatial discussions as articulate reminders of major historic events, such as the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict of 1839 while describing the Topkapı Palace grounds, or his reference to particular Byzantine ceremonies described in Porphyrogenitus' *De Ceremoniis* while discussing the physical attributes of the long-lost Byzantine Great Palace. What is perhaps most remarkable about Skarlatos' narrative, however, is his keen observation of sociological details, as those imbue and emanate from the monuments and locales under examination. From Byzantium's elaborate relic culture to the famous storytellers (*meddah*) in the coffeehouses of Yenikapı and from the Jewish glaziers inhabiting Tekfur Saray in the nineteenth century to the Greek rowers entertaining themselves on the shores of the Bosporus, Skarlatos offers a depiction of Istanbul's social geography in all its depth and glory.

The second volume—currently under translation—was published a decade after the first and contains descriptions of the neighborhoods lying outside the historical peninsula, including the villages around the Bosporus and the Princes Islands. Like the first volume, it also offers the reader a district-by-district guide to the city. Typically starting with the etymology or meaning of each toponym, these sections contain detailed descriptions of urban aspects, such as main roads and squares, and buildings, such as mosques, churches, schools, and baths.

The third and final volume of *Constantinople* is organized around a broader theme, which moves beyond urban history in a general sense to describe Constantinople/Istanbul specifically as an imperial capital city. In it the researcher may find valuable information on the Ottoman governmental system, the sultans and their families, the religions, laws and languages of the city as well as its inhabitants and their habits, customs, and characters. An interesting feature of the volume, which at the time raised vociferous criticisms, is Skarlatos' emphasis on observable continuities in the city's history and his presentation of its history as an uninterrupted one from the Roman up to the Ottoman eras. As in the rest of the book, he embraces all historical periods and cultural strata as conducive to the character of the city he knew so well. After all, the second volume contains an appendix with a list of "Rulers of Constantinople," both Byzantine and Ottoman, while in the third volume he draws interesting parallels between particular Ottoman sultans and their Roman and Byzantine predecessors.

Reception

Constantinople was an instant hit. Shortly after its publication, Halil Bey, the Ottoman ambassador to Athens, petitioned the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid with a letter of recommendation for Skarlatos' book. In his letter, Halil Bey describes Skarlatos as a praiseworthy scholar who "unlike other Greek authors, has praised the Islamic nation." We may assume that Halil Bey's petition was successful, for a fifth-degree decoration (*nişan*) was awarded to Skarlatos shortly thereafter.[9]

Still, rather surprisingly, *Constantinople* did not enjoy any reprints or translations, with the exception of a second edition of the first volume in Athens in 1890. While the financial and technical difficulties of reprinting a work of this scale may have played a role in the absence of further editions, the definitive factor seems to have been the harsh criticism he received at the hands of the Greek intellectual elite, to whose nationalist sensitivities, a thesis of continuity between the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, was rather repugnant. Leading Greek academics like Stefanos Komanoudis violently attacked Skarlatos as "a defender of Turkish barbarism" while Istanbulite Georgios Chrysovergis would speak of "Skarlatanism," a slanderous coinage, combining Skarlatos' first name with the word "charlatan."[10] Less biased voices such as Alexander Paspates or Irish medievalist J. B. Bury would still criticize Skarlatos' work as "unscientific" and methodologically faulted.[11] German Byzantinist A. Mordtmann went so far as to compare Skarlatos to Aladdin in *One Thousand and One Nights*, claiming that Constantinople reads like a fairy tale rather than a piece of modern scholarship.[12] Still, even the likes of Paspates and Mordtmann would readily acknowledge that Skarlatos was "the first Greek author to specialize in *patridography* [...], paving the way for and inspiring many of his compatriots who subsequently studied their native history and topography."[13]

Firuzan Melike Sümertaş
Boğaziçi University
Kadir Has University
melike.sumertas@gmail.com

For all the controversy it inspired, Skarlatos and his work were well known, much discussed, and often utilized in the intellectual circles of Athens and Constantinople throughout the nineteenth century. While the ideologically loaded hostility to his ideas by the nineteenth-century Greek academic establishments may account for the lack of subsequent editions, one cannot help but wonder what other concrete reasons have delayed its translation to a European language until as late as 2019. One possible factor may reside in the linguistic peculiarities of Skarlatos' text, originally penned in a peculiar form of *Logia Katharevousa* Greek. This linguistic choice constitutes a puzzle in itself. *Katharevousa* (lit. cleansed) Greek was invented by classicizing scholars of the Greek Enlightenment in an effort to purify the language from foreign loanwords and firmly reconnect modern Greeks with their ancient ancestors. In this form, *Katharevousa* constituted the intellectual vernacular for Greek and other Balkan intellectuals. But while ostensibly abiding to its grammatical and syntactical rules, Skarlatos seemed to be making a conscious choice of incorporating words and expressions belonging to different substrata and registers of Greek, including Byzantine and Phanariot, slang and idioms in vogue in Istanbul at the time, as well as a plethora of Ottoman and Italian words presented in their Hellenized form. What is more, unlike the vast majority of Greek intellectuals at the time, Skarlatos expressed his appreciation of the poet Athanasios Christopoulos (d. 1847), one of the earliest supporters of Demotic Greek as a literary medium (p. 462).

Haris Theodorelis-Rigas' translation of the first volume of *Constantinople*, published in April 2019 by the Istanbul-based Istos publishing house has been a long-awaited edition. The sheer size of the volume, consisting of a total of 856 pages and copious number of annotations that accompany the main text, testifies to the amount of energy and time invested and offers a clear indication of why it took so long for someone to undertake this formidable scholarly undertaking. The range, content, and quality of the notes are also indicative of the translator's devotion to the subject. The English edition of *Constantinople*, vol. 1, has successfully revitalized the text making it accessible to a wider, non-specialist audience, which, even in Greece, would have been deterred by Skarlatos' linguistic peculiarities. Besides the language, Skarlatos' original text was characterized by a somewhat erratic and inconsistent approach to referencing, at times heavily paraphrasing or inaccurately quoting from his memory of the original primary source in question, a point often taken up by his contemporary critics. This methodological weakness has been largely remedied in this annotated translation, which has corrected or completed nearly all the references and quotations featuring in some form or another in Skarlatos' original text. The notes, which constitute a significant body compared to the main text (besides the bibliographical details and missing quotations), briefly explain some basic chronology, key authors, prosopographies, toponyms, major events, and political and intellectual movements. Accordingly, the establishment of the missing link between Skarlatos and his sources not only enables the reader to grasp the wide scope of his research but also makes it easier to comprehend, paving the ground for future studies for those who are interested in the history of Constantinople. In this light, the English edition is not simply a translation, but also a guide for the reader to better understand and stroll through Skarlatos' own intellectual horizons.

The superb translation by Rigas opens up Skarlatos' monumental work to a larger audience of students of Constantinople/Istanbul, offering unique insights into nineteenth-century perceptions of the city and allowing us to trace the intellectual genealogy of a fascinating literary genre, rooted in the works of Skarlatos' predecessors and going all the way back to Petrus Gyllius (d. 1555). Let us only hope that this valuable edition will soon be followed by the translations of the second and third volumes.

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* This review draws on my forthcoming PhD dissertation: "From Antiquarianism to Urban Archaeology: Transformation of Research on 'Old' Istanbul throughout the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2020).

1 See indicatively, Alexander G. Paspates, *Hypomnēma peri tou Graikikou Nosokomeiou tōn Hepta Pyrgōn,* [A Note on the Greek Hospital of the Seven Towers] (Athens: Lazaros Vilaras Publishers, 1862), 41-42; Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Madinah and Meccah, vol. 1* (London: Longman, Brown and Green and Longmans, 1893), 12; Alexander Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople, the Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London: J. Murray, 1899), 199, 254; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000), 96.

2 See Stephanos Pesmazoglou, "Skarlatos Vyzantios's Konstantinoupolis: Difference and Fusion," in *Economy and Society on Both Sides of the Aegean*, ed. Lorans Tanatar Baruh and Vangelis Kechriotis (Athens: Alpha Bank Historical Archives, 2010), 25. Pesmazoglou is currently preparing a comprehensive monograph on Skarlatos Byzantios in Greek, which aspires to elucidate the details of Skarlatos' life through extensive archival work, especially the dates of his residency in Constantinople, Paris, and Athens.

3 Pesmazoglou, "Foreword," in *Constantinople*, ix.

4 Ibid., viii.

5 Pesmazoglou, "Skarlatos Vyzantios's Konstantinoupolis," 26.

6 Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979), 520.

7 Patriarch Konstantios, *Konstantinias, Palaia kai Neōtera* [*Constantiniad: Ancient and Modern Constantinople*] (Venice: 1820). The book was published in French, English, Ottoman Turkish, and Karamanlidika within a scope of fifty years. An Ottoman Turkish manuscript, dated to 1860–1861, is in the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation Collection.

8 In his preface to volume two, Skarlatos claimed that the belated arrival of the second volume was due to reasons beyond his control, such as the Crimean War (1853–1856). He adds however that this delay was a blessing in disguise, since it allowed for significant improvement and revision of his manuscript (p. α).

9 BOA, A.}AMD 75/44 (1273 [1856/1857]) and BOA, A.}DVN 125/42 (18 Zilhicce 1273 [9 Ağustos 1857]).

10 Pesmazoglou, "Foreword," xvi.

11 J. B. Bury, "Appendix," in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* Vol. 3, ed. J. B. Bury (New York: Fred de Fau & Co, 1906), 421.

12 Andreas Mordtman, *Bios Alexandrou Paspate* (Istanbul: Ellēnikos Philologikos Syllogos, 1893), 13-18.

13 Ibid., 15.