THE DECORATIONS OF THE GOLDEN GATE AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE YEDIKULE FORTRESS

by

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CITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The eastern half of the Mediterranean was the world of 'polis'. In the region that Constantine knew best, between the northern shores of the Aegean and the lower Danube were cities such as Philippopolis, Traianopolis, Hadrianopolis and Diocletianopolis commemorating great rulers who founded or, by extensive building and a change of name, could be said have re-founded them. (McMullen, 1969)

"To make Constantinople the empire's capital was a different matter altogether. If Constantine meant to move about from one place to another, or if authority were to be divided on nearly equal terms among two or more rulers, several sites at once might claim the honor of being called an imperial residence and seat of government, with court and palace but without challenge to the age and preeminence of Rome." (McMullen, 1969)

All in all, Constantine achieved to create such imperial city that represents his power and control all over the Roman Empire. This imperial city called as "Constantinople" hosts many important monuments like the Hippodrome, St. Sophia, the Great Palace and Golden Gate. In this brochure, the decorations of the Golden Gate and the relationship between the Golden Gate and the Fortress of Yedikule will be explained. Here we can see caption: Map of City of Constantinople by G. F. Young.
GOLDEN GATE

The Golden Gate is the official entrance of Byzantine emperors returning from military expeditions. It is actually a Roman triumphal arch erected in about AD 390. When Theodosius II decided to extend the city walls two decades later, he incorporated the Golden Gate within his new land walls. It is located where Theodosius walls reach the Sea of Marmara. According to Harun who is the fifth and most famous Abbasid Caliph, to the west of Golden Horn, there are two doors through which eight horses and two golden chariots are led. Two men, dressed in clothes stitched with gold, ride on these chariots, passing through the gates three times. (El-Cheikh, 2004)

Here is the Golden Gate. At the end of the path is this large Byzantine wall, the center opening with the red brick was the original Golden Gate on the inner wall. The red brick dates from the 15th century, being a later closing of the gate.

If we look at the picture on the left, we can see the opening to the left of the Golden Gate. This is another Byzantine era opening through the wall, with a much newer generation steel gate across the entrance. The marble blocks, though, are original demonstrating the quality of the workmanship.
DECORATIONS OF THE GOLDEN GATE

Here on the left, we can see the gate here in its dual role of fortification and major entrance to the city. The sculptures that adorn it are known to have existed at the time of Michael III, who is Byzantine Emperor from 842 to 867, and consist of two Winged Victories, female figures representing the fortune of the city and four bronze elephants. (Milligen, 1899)

Caption: Golden Gate in the 9th century by Milligen

Around the Golden Gate are columns of granite and fragments of marble, still retaining much elegance of workmanship. (Milligen, 1899)

On the left we can see the Golden Gate, at the beginning of the 1900s. There is no surprise that those monuments do not exist today, like they do not exist in the 1900s.
YEDIKULE FORTRESS AND THE GOLDEN GATE

The best way of understanding the layout of the walls of Constantinople and the succession of construction phases is to take a hypothetical tour from one end to the other. We will begin at the southern extremity where the Theodosian walls reach the Sea of Marmara. Heading north we will pass the Golden Gate and the Yedikule fortress, taking in the major stretches of the best preserved wall.

Just to the north of the railway cuts through the circuit of the walls between the seventh and eighth towers of the inner wall. The eighth tower of the inner wall forms the south-western corner of Yedikule "the Ottoman Castle of the seven towers", while the ninth and tenth towers are the two marble towers flanking the famous Golden Gate. (Turnbull, 2004)

Here we can see the entrance way of Yedikule is also on the Golden Path, the road that led through the Golden Gate into the city. In Byzantine times, the new Emperor in triumphant procession would travel down this path. Although the road is later in dating - it is higher than the original openings of the Gate. It is likely that the ancient Byzantine road may have followed the same path.

Looking past that part of the gate along the Western Wall. This is the part of Yedikule that is built into the Theodosian City Walls, so the towers and walls are 1,500 years old.
Walking past the Tower of Ahmet III on to the old City Wall and looking over the side, into the courtyards of the walls and the outer Golden Gate. The towers of Yedikule fortress can be seen behind the line of inner wall, just north of the Golden Gate.

In order to relate Golden Gate with the Yedikule Fortress, we can mention about the “Golden Gate Garrison”. It is the Garrison where a group of Catalan mercenaries were given the job of defending Golden Gate fort on behalf of John Cantacuzenus in AD 1352. The function of the Golden Gate Garrison was twofold: To defend the city if the rival emperor John V Palaeologus attacked it and maintain John Cantacuzenus' control over the city. (Turnbull, 2004)
Works Cited


About the Author

Polat Utku Kayrak was born in 1987 in Istanbul. He has graduated from Besiktas Ataturk Anatolian High School in 2005 and after 1 year of a preparation class, he started studying in Koc University as an Electrical-Electronics Engineering student. He is expecting to graduate at the end of Spring 2010 and will move on with the Master of Business Administration in England. He is keen on any kind of sports, especially football and Krav Maga. He is also a huge fan of Galatasaray. His curiosity for the Roman Empire and ancient Greek civilizations developed in the first years of College. His reverence for Ceaser’s era led him to begin a deep examination about the Roman Empire. As a result he has taken three elective Roman History classes so far. After his graduation, he is thinking about studying Roman and Greek history as a second major.