

San Michele Church of Genoese Galata (Pera): Historic records and material evidence on its chronology

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Abstract

Today a long lost monument; San Michele Church, which stood once as the cathedral church of the Genoese colony, has a significant place in the history of Galata. It was founded replacing the Byzantine church of Hagia Thekla as Galata transformed into a Genoese settlement in 13th century. Serving as a church, it was still intact when Galata went under Ottoman rule. It has lost its congregation and started to serve as a storage unit as part of state property. It must have survived for a hundred more years under the Ottoman rule until its ownership changed to private property, and eventually it was replaced by a monumental caravanserai for the grand vizier Rüstem Pasha, designed by Architect Sinan in mid 16th century, later named Kurşunlu Han. The first parts of this study focus on the Genoese and Ottoman archival documents referring to the church, to draw an outline of the history of the church, and the site, through Byzantine, Genoese and Ottoman periods. The second part presents the on-site observations and aims to merge these with the data acquired from historic documents questioning any possible traces on the 16th century Ottoman monument that may date back to the church. This study aims to bring to light the above mentioned chronology of the church, portray as much as possible its architecture, its functional transformations, its afterlife under Ottoman rule and physical evidence that might be tracing back to San Michele Church within the body of Kurşunlu Han, which replaced it.

Keywords

Galata (Pera), Genoese colony, Kurşunlu Han, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai, San Michele Church.

1. Introduction

Galata, situated on the northern shores of the Golden Horn, had been home to layers of settlements over the centuries, all with strong trade relations. Urban fabric of the site has been shaped accordingly. It was added within the borders of the Byzantine capital in 5th century as the 13th region of Constantinople. It started to house a settlement of the Genoese colony starting from 1267, which in short time, grew into a complex trade city. After going under Ottoman rule in 1453, although the Genoese urban layout was majorly preserved, the region also gained the appearance of an Ottoman settlement through waqf¹ investments. In this context, San Michele Church, past existence evident, appears as an outstanding monument, which represents the Byzantine past as a possibly converted church, the Genoese past since it was one of the prominent churches of the Genoese settlement, and contributes to the Ottoman past of Galata where it gained a new identity under the new rulers.

San Michele Church was situated on the same plot which is occupied by Kurşunlu Han today. Topographic map of Schneider and Nomidis (1946) includes the names of both monuments on the same site, although one replaced the other, and the former did not exist anymore (Figure 1). The church survived for a while more after Gala-

ta went under Ottoman rule, but it fell victim to processes of change of identity and ownership together with other Genoese buildings, causing shifts in its functional attributions. Eventually it was replaced by a *han*, an Ottoman commercial building.

Almost all the secondary sources only mention briefly that Kurşunlu Han replaced San Michele Church (Mamboury, 1951; Eyice, 1969; Güran, 1978; Cantay, 1994; Ağır, 2014 and Sağlam, 2018). Only Sağlam (2018) also handles this monument through Genoese notary records. There are huge gaps in the Ottoman history of this site and, details of the processes of replacements are not discussed at all. Ottoman archive documents concerning the monument are not handled, and no scientific survey examination on the architectural elements of the *han*, intending to chase traces of the previous phases, had been conducted. This study searches the traces of both Genoese and Ottoman layers of San Michele Church through archival documents and on-site examinations, trying to clarify its definition in today's topography.

2. Byzantine period

The settlement history of Galata and parcel history of San Michele Church can be traced all the way back to the Early Byzantine period. The first settlement activity in Galata is dated to the

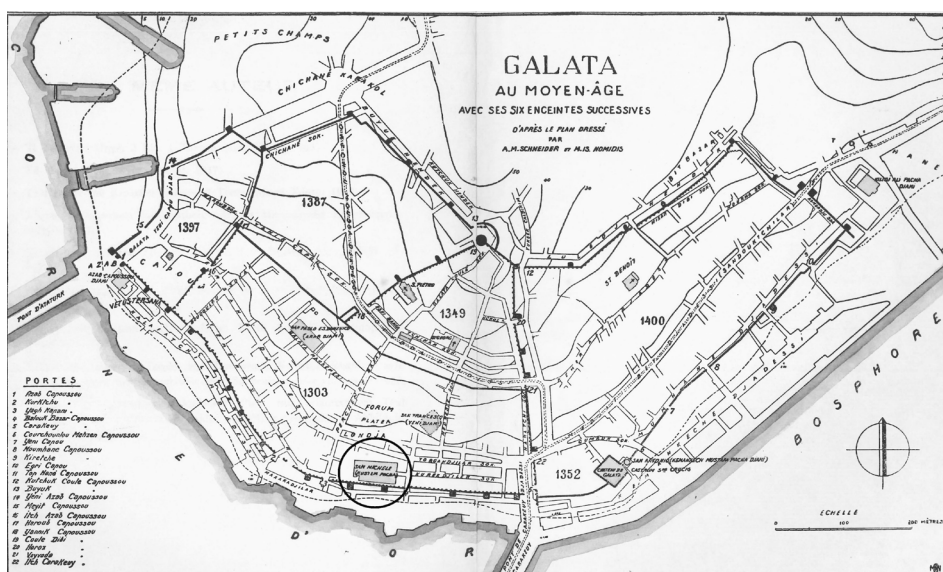


Figure 1. Kurşunlu Han (Rüstem Pasha) and San Michele Church seen on the same plot and other monumental churches on Topographic map of Schneider and Nomidis, 1946.

¹An endowment made by a Muslim to a religious, educational, or charitable cause.

era of Constantine I (r.324-337). An already existing ancient temple is recorded to be transformed into the Church of Hagia Eirene by Constantine I, which was later renewed during the reign of Justinian I (r.527-565) (Konstantios, 1868). Despite the existence of solitary temples, site did not include extensive building activity until the second half of 5th century during the reign of Theodosios II (r.408-450). According to Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitane, prepared under Theodosian rule, the settlement housed a sum of public buildings including Honorius Forum, Honorius Bath, five private baths, a theater, a shipyard, church and bakeries (Seeck, 1876).

Although French traveler Petrus Gyllius (1562) claims there was no trace left of the forum, bath and theater, he suggests that the forum should have been around the area later occupied by San Michele Church as a topographically suitable flat ground close to the harbor. In addition to this, he claims that the forum was “well supplied with water by an ancient subterranean aqueduct”. This observation suggests that San Michele Church could have been located on a site related to Honorius Bath. Today in the courtyard of Kurşunlu Han there is a water pump supplied by subterranean water and this water way goes on the direction of the Golden Horn from underground. It is possible that this water way is related to the underground water supply system mentioned by Gyllius. In short, the site San Michele Church occupied must have been the center where public buildings were gathered during Byzantine period.

The continuity of the Byzantine city layout and the reuse of Byzantine buildings in the following periods as a topographical extension is incontrovertible. There is evidence on these transformation processes. Churches that represent the Byzantine past of the city and the *insulae* that these churches occupied probably went under a conversion process into Genoese churches by the new users in 13th and 14th centuries and were reused or replaced again in Ottoman era by charitable foundations such as mosques or *hans*. Historical evidence suggests that Ha-

gia Eirene Church was replaced by San Domenico, Hagios Nicholaos by San Francesco and probably Hagia Thekla Church was replaced by San Michele (Sağlam, 2018).

Ioannis Malalas (1986), who transfers data from 6th century, records that Hagia Thekla Church did exist, and was situated on Galata shoreline, referred as Sykai at the time, during the sea war between Vitalian and Marinus in the reign of Anastasios I (r.491-518). The non-existence of any other church on the shoreline within this first concession zone, fortifies the possible relation of continuity between the two buildings. Eugenio Dalleggio d'Alessio (1926), on the other hand, quoting from Skarlatos Bizantinos, suggests that Hagia Thekla on Golden Horn shores was founded by Justinian I, was repaired by Justin II (r.565-574) and, refunctioned as a Catholic church under the rule of the Latins (1204-1261). Such conversions are familiar to the Byzantine building stock of Constantinople, finding its most famous example in Hagia Sophia. The transformation process would include the adaptation of the furniture and interior spaces and an addition of a bell tower, as in the case of Hagia Sophia (Swift, 1935; Berger, 2004). A plausible hypothesis appears as a pattern where Byzantine churches were either eventually transformed into Genoese churches or were replaced by them (Sağlam, 2018). In accordance with this perspective it is strongly probable that San Michele Church replaced the Byzantine church of Hagia Thekla and might have been using the body of this Early Byzantine church.

3. Genoese period

Galata, seems to have had its golden age after the foundation of the Genoese colony, as agreed by all sources. Genoese merchants started to hold a permit of settlement in Constantinople as early as 1155 (Sağlam, 2018). Together with the trade colonies of Venice, Amalfi and Pisa, there was an earlier settlement of the Genoese colony in Constantinople on the southern shores of Golden Horn in the historical peninsula (Ağır, 2013). The Genoese colony here has lost many of its privileges

after the foundation of the Latin Empire where Venetians took control over most of the land. In accordance with the Nymphaion Treatise, in 1261 before the re-conquest of Constantinople, the Byzantine emperor Michael Paleologos VIII (r.1259-1282) promised various privileges to the Genoese in return for their military support (Hür, 2010). However, as a result of their conflicts with other Italian city states and their standing as a threat to the governance they were first transferred to Herakleia in Thrace and later in 1267 they started to get settled in Galata (Marmara, 2005).

When Genoese trade colony moved to Galata, the land was already occupied by the Byzantine neighborhood. Galata's urban fabric have been reshaped gradually in a timespan that spread from 13th to 15th century with conversions and new constructions. At the center of the city, the administrative building *Palazzo del Commune*, meaning the Palace of the Commune, was located and just behind the sea walls was the *loggia*, which referred to a group of buildings or a site that served public and trade activities. In Ottoman period the *loggia* represented some part of the Lonca Quarter, the later name of the neighborhood. Although the word "lonca" is also a term related to trade, compatible with the functions in the area during Ottoman period, the similarity of pronunciation between *loggia* and the Turkish word *Lonca* is striking. Within today's topography it is probable that *loggia* occupied some of the area where Galata Bedesten stands. Along with San Michele Church numerous other churches were also included in the building program in Genoese period, some of which, with known locations, are shown in Figure 1 (Dalleggio d'Alessio, 1926, Marmara, 2005, Janin, 1969).

On the London copy of the atlas of *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* from 1422, prepared by Cristoforo Buondelmonti, there is a building that might be identified as San Michele Church right behind the walls, along with San Domenico Church and San Francesco Church (Figure 2). This constitutes the oldest possible pictorial description of the church, and none of the other

copies of Buondelmonti plan include a building that might possibly represent this church. Unfortunately, all churches are symbolized with simply a gable roofed rectangular body and a bell tower and the prototype images do not give clues about the appearance of the monuments.

Even though a number of churches were dedicated to a Saint Michael in Constantinople, San Michele Church in Galata must have had a certain primordial importance since he had been the Patron Saint of this Genoese colony (Belin, 1894). This suggestion is also supported by the explanations in the notary record dated to October 29th 1379 as "*et beati archangeli Michaelis Peyre protectoris et patroni*" (Belgrano, 1877a). Record refers to archangel Michael as the protector of Galata. In a similar way, the image of

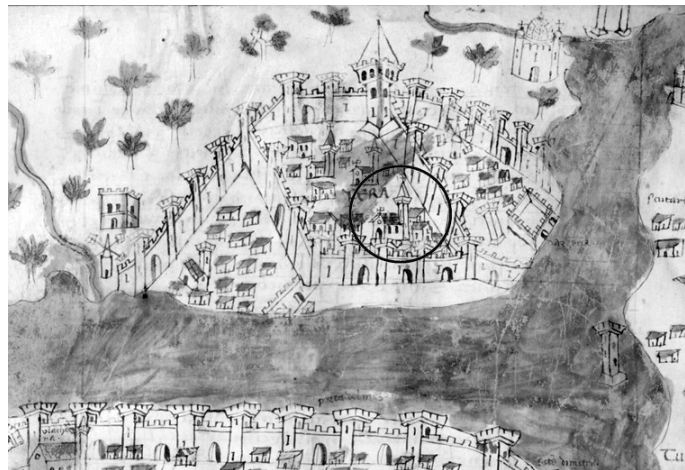


Figure 2. A structure, presumably representing San Michele Church, behind the walls on the plan of Buondelmonti, c. 1422.



Figure 3. Marble slab depicting San Michele (Eyice, 1969).

San Michele is presented in the form of the archangel on a slab on the first tower west of Galata Tower, called the Tower of Christ earlier, dated to March 25th 1387 (Eyice, 1969) (Figure 3). On the slab, the coat-of-arms of Genoa is located on the right and the coat of-arms of Rafael de Auria, the Podesta of Peira/Galata, on the left side. In the middle archangel Michael is depicted wielding a sword.

The exact construction date of San Michele Church is unknown and the oldest known record related to the building is dated to 1281 (Bratianu, 1927). This record, found among the Genoese notary documents, bears the characteristics of a last will and testament. Based on our knowledge on the arrival of the Genoese at Galata in 1267, the church must have been founded within the first 14 years of Genoese existence. Belin (1894) indicates that the church was damaged and rebuilt due to the conflict between the Genoese and the Venetians, where the fleet, in command of Admiral Ruggiero Morrosini, set the city on fire in 1296. Since notary records include no descriptions on the 13th century architecture of the church the extent of this rebuilding is uncertain.

Genoese colony did not initially have the permit to construct city walls in Galata. Instead some tower houses were constructed along the borders of the city with some certain distance from each other and gradually, benefiting from weaker periods of Byzantine administration, city walls were

constructed between them in several phases. San Michele Church should have had a strong visual expression on the shores of Galata possibly with a monumental mass visible from the harbor in this pre-walled period. In this context, the construction of Galata Walls may have been a turning point about its perception and representational values. Although the exact beginning of construction dates for the walls is unknown, any type of fortification was still strictly prohibited with respect to the acts of May 1303 and March 1304 (Sağlam, 2018). Instead, a moat and strong civil constructions were permitted. Nowadays, a portion of the remained parts of the walls is preserved between Kurşunlu Han and the buildings located in Fermeneciler Street (Figure 4,8). The distance between the coastal walls and the *han* is approximately 2 m. These remains exhibit the proximity between the walls and the church, and brings to mind the loss of visual value behind this blockage.

14th and 15th century notary records include limited information about the place of the church within the urban fabric. A record from March 18th 1391 describes the location of a property being sold as “*posita in quarterio sancti Michaelis*” meaning San Michele quarter (Belgrano, 1877a). Another record from February 6th 1405 indicates the location where the document is signed as “*in domo habitationis dicti Quilici, posita in quarterio sancti Michaelis*” meaning “the house of Quilici in San Michele neighborhood”, presenting that the quarter the church was located, was referred by its name (Belgrano, 1877b).

Expense records given in the notary documents present some details on the architecture of the church. For example the notary record from May 27th 1405, bears these explanations; “*Actum Peyre, super turrim novam sitam prope loggiam communis, apud turrim magnam beati Michaelis de Peyra*”, indicating the place of signature was a new tower close to the loggia and describes the location of this tower as adjacent to the “grand” bell tower of San Michele Church (Belgrano, 1877b). Similarly, in another document from March 8th



Figure 4. Remains of coastal walls of Galata right in front of to Kurşunlu Han (Çınaryılmaz, 2019).

1453, the location of signature is indicated as “*platea Sancti Micahelis, prope logiam*”, meaning the small square of San Michele next to the loggia (Roccatagliata, 1982). Based on these clues we may conclude that the bell tower was located on the direction of the loggia and it faced a small square.

Notary records provide some information about the usages of the church too. Expense records regarding the ceremonies held here are as such; a record dated to December 25th 1390 tells that 1 *hyperpyron*² was spared for the church for Christmas, another from May 9th 1391, records 3 *hyperpyrons* were spared for a celebration at the church and one other document from October 2nd 1391 again refers to a, this time, grander celebration, given that 6 *hyperpyrons* were spared for it (Belgrano, 1877a).

Numerous among the Genoese notary records are last will and testament documents in relation with San Michele Church. While providing an insight to the usage of the church during 13th century, these records also present information about how social life and beliefs were defined in this period. The economic and political power obtained by the Catholic church has turned all segments of society dependent on religion. The desire of being buried in the church, which was the sacred space, was developed as a result of this (Çakır Atıl and Alp, 2017). A series of donations in return for being able to be buried in the church are recorded in the documents between 1281 and 1284, examples including Paxiolus, son of Guillelmi Batifolii and Obertus, son of Johannis de Monleone donating 6 *hyperpyrons*, Guillelmus de Vignali donating 150 *hyperpyrons*, and Balduinus (Baldwin) of the Court of Varagine donating 20 *hyperpyrons* (Bratianu, 1927). Latest document that refers to the burials in the church is dated to 1326. The document is about the superiority of San Michele church over San Francesco in terms of being the main church for funerals of the colony (Belgrano, 1877b). As it appears, social life was also shaped around beliefs in Genoese Galata just as it was in the contemporary Medieval Europe. Records after these dates do not bear

any information about the usage of the church as a burial ground. The reason for this could simply be that the records are not preserved, but it may also refer to the exclusion of burial grounds from settlement quarters. Such execution had its parallel in Europe in accordance with the Great Plague, which caused drastic rates of death between 1347-1351, where burial grounds were moved away from cities as a mandatory precaution to stop spreading of the disease. Genoese Galata obviously had an undeniable direct physical connection with the lands suffering Plague through trade and also administrative concerns.

Alongside its religious functions San Michele Church also housed administrative and judicial activities. For example, in accordance with a notary record dated to July 7th 1281, a contract was signed inside the church, in which Manuel Baxacani and Borborino of Gavi were giving pledge to an Armenian about a payment of 200 *hyperpyrons* in return for the rescue of 120 pounds of silver from a ship wreck, sank in the port of Constantinople (Bratianu, 1927). As it appears, the church was used as one of the spaces where such contracts between merchants were arranged. Another document dated to October 25th 1416 records that the inspectors sent by the Genoese governor Marshal Boucicaut, had listened to the testimonies against the local authorities again here in this church (Belgrano, 1877b). Such records give evidence that San Michele Church also held an identity as a legal and administrative center for the Genoese colony.

4. Ottoman period

Galata went through a slower urban transformation process than the historical peninsula under Ottoman rule. Monuments preserved their original identities for a while more. One major reason behind this was *ahidname*; which secured the ownership of houses, city walls and churches. Despite this rule, the ongoing tradition of the conversion of a prominent religious building of a conquered city into the first Friday Mosque, as a repeated pattern of the Turco-Islamic city, has also been

²The *hyperpyron*, literally meaning highly refined, was the gold coin of Byzantine Empire (Hilsdale, 2014).

applied here by the conversion of San Domenico Church into today's Arap Cami (Ayvansarâyî, 1987).

Genoese notary records concerning San Michele Church diminish with the Ottoman period. However, a record from August 8th 1453 bears these words; "*Actum Pere, in vico retro ecclesiam Sancti Micaellis*" which refer to San Michele Church while describing the location of signature (Roccatagliata, 1982). Belin (1894), indicating that there is no mention of the church among the records of Magnifica Comunità di Pera as well, explains this silence by the loss of importance of Saint Michael as protector and his church in relation with the fall of the colony, and the rise of Saint Giorgio who is the protector of Genoa.

Continuation of San Michele Church during the Ottoman period is proven through Ottoman archive documents. Despite the rights given by *ahidname*, since some Genoese were captured during the siege of Constantinople, the sultan changed his attitude, and treated Galata as "free (i.e. abandoned) land". This meant that the land belonged to the State Treasury and thus, could be rented to the inhabitants (Kuban, 2010). *Vakfiye* of Fatih³ from 1472 (877 h.) lists 286 houses in Galata as part of state property (Ergin, 1945). Here, the church is mentioned while describing the location of a shop with three floors

³Foundation records (*Vakfiye*) of the period of Mehmed II.

⁴Both İnalçık (1998) and Janin (1969) refer to San Michele as the cathedral church of the settlement, but their source for this indication is uncertain.

⁵Although the map of Matrakçı Nasuh includes a building of different shape at the center of Lonca neighborhood, it is unclear whether it represents the San Michele church, or the former loggia (Sağlam, 2018). Former proposition might out rule the possibility of a domed upper structure, but if the latter is true the church might be hidden behind the city walls and not represented here.

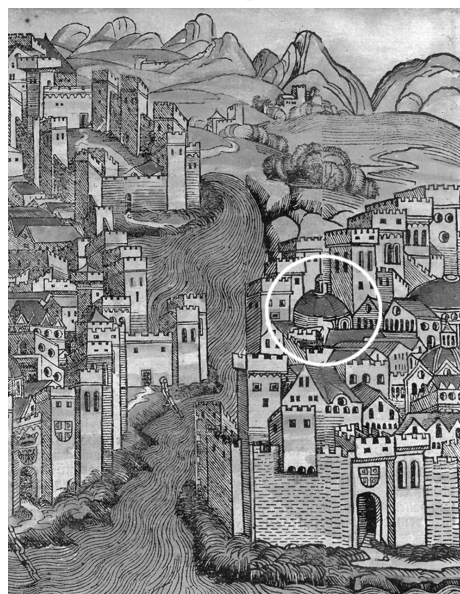


Figure 5. The domed structure behind the walls on the plan of Hartmann Schedel, 1493.

(VGMA, no: 575). San Michele Church is mentioned as "*kilisâ al-Efrendjinîn*" which basically refers to the building as the church of the Latins (İnalçık, 1998)⁴. This record is a clear indication that the building has maintained its function as a church for a few more decades after Galata went under Ottoman rule.

Despite the quantity of written documents such as notary and waqf records, visual descriptions of San Michele Church are limited and controversial. According to İnalçık (1998) a domed structure, right behind the city walls appears in the Vavassore map from 1490 that could be interpreted as San Michele Church. Similarly, a building situated behind the walls in the wood print from Liber Chronicarum of Hartmann Schedel in 1493, seems to represent the same building (Figure 5). This domed building is surrounded by city walls, towers and buildings with tiled roofs. The evidence from the above mentioned document and these visual descriptions of Galata; support a conclusion that San Michele Church kept its function as a building of Christian worship, while preserving its architectural integrity as a presumably domed church building throughout 15th century⁵.

Genoese churches freshly built under the Genoese rule of Galata might have been stylistically related to mainland Genoa with features of Gothic architecture as in the case of partially preserved San Domenico Church, although there aren't other examples from Pera to fully confirm this stereotype. Frankish buildings in former Byzantine lands are generally built as long rectangular structures with dimensions in sharp contrast to that of Byzantine churches, and they hold features such as the pointed arch, the rib vault, and the bell tower (Mango, 1985). A presumable Genoese domed church here sounds quite irregular. A construction from scratch possibly could have had its influence from its contemporary Byzantine architecture. Such examples of a Byzanto-Latin style in architecture are not unheard of, solid in the well-known case of San Marco Church in Venice following stylistic features of the Constantinopolitan

Church of Holy Apostles. However, such tribute contradicts with ideals of the construction of Genoese identity through architecture in the colonies. Instead, the most plausible explanation is that, San Michele Church was reusing the body of a Byzantine building, as supported by the researches of Dalleggio d'Alessio (1926) quoted above. The strong possibility that this building was Hagia Thekla Church founded by Justinianos I, and the prevalence of domed structures within imperial churches in 6th century, is also fortifying this proposition. This conversion would be made even easier considering the Latin conversion of the church after the Fourth Crusade, possibly providing a bell tower already integrated to the complex, even before Genoese rule.

Under the Ottoman rule, existing building stock was eventually subject to function transformations. While some of these buildings were reorganized as churches⁶, mosques and masjids, others were used for storage of goods as a part of the trade circle of the harbor city. San Michele Church has also obtained new functions during this process. The *Cibayet*⁷ Notebook in Waqf of Hagia Sophia dated to 1519 (926 h.) give evidence of the refunctioning of the church as a storage unit belonging to the state. In accordance with the quote

المحزن السلطاني المعروف بالكنيسة المنقشة المتصل بالجامع

transliterated as “al-mahzen al-sultaniye al-maaruf bel-keniset al-münakaşet al-mutasıl bel-camî” taken from the *Cibayet*, there is a church used as a depot situated close to Arap Cami (İnalçık, 1998; Sağlam, 2018). This church is also described as an ornamented church, referred with the words “bel-keniset al-münakaşet”. Another document from a year later includes this expression;

المحزن السلطاني الذي كان كنيسة النصر سابقا

transliterated as “al-mahzen al-sultaniye al-lazî ken kenise-i el-nasari sabeka” (İnalçık, 1998; Sağlam, 2018). According to these expressions, both documents agree there is a building in Arap Cami neighborhood that used to be a “münakkaş”, meaning ornamented, Christian church whose ownership was taken by the state and was transformed into a depot belonging to state

treasury.

By the date *Cibayet* was prepared besides San Michele Church, there were also San Francesco Church⁸, Sant'Anna and San Sebastiano Churches from the Genoese past of Galata within the neighborhood of Arap Cami. Records written by Pietro Demarchis, who visited the city as a representative of Pope in 1622, prove that these other churches continued to be used with their original functions (Marmara, 2005). With this information, the *Cibayet* may only refer to San Michele Church as for its ownership and function transformation.

Despite the granted privileges, city continuously lost population and the quarters occupied by Genoese settlers got smaller after the conquest (Arseven, 1989). The shrinking of the size of the congregation of San Michele Church might have had an effect on its conversion. The representatives from Benedictine, Dominican and Franciscan orders did not abandon Galata, so their churches such as San Benedetto, Sant'Antonio and San Francesco continued to function. San Michele Church did not serve a specific order. There are other religious institutions documented with a similar situation such as Santa Caterina Monastery which ceased function (Marmara, 2005). The proximity of San Michele Church to the harbor and Yağkapanı Gate and its location in the Lonca neighborhood at the very center of trade activities must have also played a major role in the decision of its conversion.

The change of ownership and function change into a trade building of San Michele Church is not unique for Ottoman Galata. Numerous other Genoese monuments have been refunctioned or rebuilt as mosques or storage units by the viziers and women of court, many after being damaged by a fire or an earthquake. Yeni Cami, replacing San Francesco Church paid by the patron Gülnuş Emetullah Sultan⁹ and Kemankuş Kara Mustafa Paşa Cami, replacing Sant'Antonio are good examples of these cases. Similarly, Kurşunlu Mahzen also known as Kastellion ton Galatou was defined as a storage unit of the state.

The latest archival document refer-

⁶There are also conversions between Catholic and Orthodox churches.

⁷*Cibayet*, which is an Arabic word, indicates the records for collection of money such as from rent and taxes, that belongs to waqfs or treasury (Pakalın, 1951).

⁸San Francesco Church is also referred as “münakkaş” or ornamented church (Eyice, 1996). However, it can't be the church mentioned in the document due to its function at the time.

⁹For more information about this patron and transformation process see: Özgüleş, 2017.

¹⁰Temlik may literally be translated as ‘to be given as property’. As a term, it refers to the allocation of the property, bound to the sultan, to the people who served the state along with tax exemption (İpşirli, 2011).

¹¹Zira is defined as a measurement unit based on the distance between the tip of middle finger and elbow, changing between 0.75 to 0.90 m. In this research 1 zira is accepted as 0.75 m.

¹² At the beginning and the ending of the document there is a note saying “property document of the han/caravanserai”, but the content of the document refers to the building as mahzen as it was called before the replacement by a han, and the building dimensions given in the document are not compatible with the later constructed Kurşunlu Han building. Therefore, either these notes are added to the document at a later date, or this document must be a copy of the original one. It can not be ignored that the original document might belong to an earlier date.

ring to San Michele Church is dated to June 11th 1550 (25 Cemaziyelevvel 957 h.). Document records the change of its status from state property into private ownership, when it was given to Mihrimah Sultan, daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent, through the procedure called *temlik*¹⁰ and it was later bought by her husband Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha (VGMA, 648, no: 39) (Figure 6). The location of the building is described in proximity to a prison in Lonca neighborhood. Its three sides that belong to public streets are defined as “*tarik-i âm*” and the fourth side is indicated to be adjacent to the city walls. Record refers to the building as *üstübî* depot, implying the church was made out of stone. Record also gives the dimensions for San Michele Church: Its length (*tûl*) is 60 *zira*¹¹, which is about 45 m and its width (*arz*) is 50 *zira*, which would be 37.5 m.¹² Therefore, if we accept these measurements to be correct, unlike the other churches of Galata, San Michele Church seems to have had a plan scheme closer to a square.¹³ These dimensions propose a centralized plan rather than a basilical development to our presumably domed structure, which brings to mind perhaps a similarity to the 6th century examples of this type, such as Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Istanbul and San Vitale in Ravenna.

Changing the status of San Michele Church into private property, may be due to the necessity of a repair or rebuilding project of a damaged building,

but it might also be part of a grander urban decision aiming to revive the construction activities in Galata following an incentive large scale rebuilding and refunctioning project.

There are no records on the demolition of San Michele Church and the construction books of Kurşunlu Han cannot be found in the archives. Nevertheless, Gyllius tells that a *han* replaced the church in 1550. Gyllius wrote his book *De Bosporo Thracio libri III* after spending three years between 1544-1547 in the city; and completed his work titled *De topographia Constantinopoleos de e illius antiquitatibus libri quatuor* after his second visit in 1550. He presents his observations on the church in his second book as such (Gyllius, 1562);

“*Forum verò in planitie vicina portui, vbi nunc Xenodochium ædificatum est in fundamentis templis diui Michaëlis, quod integrum extabat, cùm venissem Byzantium, eoque aquævberiores addu Etæ funt inuentis cuniculis antiqui aquaductus fubterranei*”

According to the quote, during Gyllius's first visit to the city San Michele Church is “*quod integrum extabat*”, meaning it was standing intact, but “*nunc*”, meaning “now” referring to the second visit, *Xenodochium*¹⁴ is constructed replacing the church. Since Gyllius confirms that a *han* replaced the church in 1550, San Michele Church must have been sold to Rüstem Pasha soon after it became private property and hastily the *han* should have been constructed in its place, and if the date of the *temlik* document referred above is correct, this change must have happened within the same year. It is also possible that San Michele Church, may have had collapsed due to damages in time. Damage by 1509 earthquake, also referred as *Kiyamet-i sugra* (Little Dooms Day), seems probable (Turan, 1992). Pamukciyan (2002) tells that the waters of Golden Horn have breached the walls of Galata, damaged many buildings of the city and Beyazid II (r. 1481-1512) gave orders for the repairs of Galata walls and Galata tower. Within this context, it is possible that the church might have also been damaged

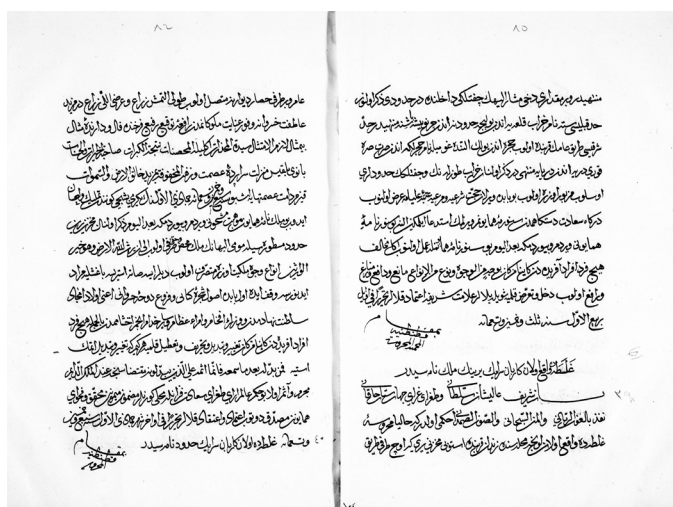


Figure 6. Archival document referring to San Michele building, dated to 1550 (VGMA, 648, no: 39).

in 1509 earthquake eventually leading to its replacement.

The above mentioned measurements of San Michele Church are not compatible with the dimensions of Kurşunlu Han, measuring 29.28 m on the east, 28.95 m on the west, 67.25 m on the south and 65.06 m on the north façades.¹⁵ The width of San Michele Church appears to be slightly wider and its length measures much less than that of the *han*. Therefore, it seems probable that some neighboring parcels were added for the new construction. This idea is also supported by the irregular plan scheme of the *han* and the waqf notebook of Rüstem Pasha. The notebook dated to 1557 (965 h.) records that Rüstem Pasha had 3 shops and 7 more storage units at the same quarter, thus other parcels could have been just as well purchased for this project (VGMA, d. 635, 2, no: 13).

5. On-site observation and evidence

Both archive documents and travelers' notes support that Kurşunlu Han replaced San Michele Church. However, the architecture of San Michele Church and the reflections of its borders over contemporary topography is yet unclear. Some researchers claim the presence of architectural traces of San Michele Church within the body of Kurşunlu Han. For example, the difference between the arches of the ground floor as round and of the first as pointed is offered for further research by Ağır (2014) as a possibility that the lower floor construction might constitute the traces of San Michele Church. Similarly, Cantay (1994) and Güran (1978) claim that Kurşunlu Han was constructed over the ruins of San Michele Church and that the ground floor might have been just repaired and the first floor might have been added over it. Yüksel (2003), on the other hand, does not agree that the han is sharing the ruins of the church, and claims that both floors were built within the same construction phase. Despite the controversial proposals of different researchers, these arguments have not been studied in detail. The usage of different forms of arches in separate floors of the same building is not uncommon, including well known examples such as

Koza Han in Bursa from late 15th century and Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai in Edirne, also designed by Architect Sinan for the same patron in 1560-61 (Figure 7). In addition to this, the dominant masonry technique is similar in both floors using bricks of same size, av. 3x29x29/30 cm, supporting the argument that both floors were constructed in the same phase. Similarly, the argument claiming the orderly pillars to belong to the church doesn't seem possible, since the distances are not compatible with the dimensions of the church, as *han* lays on a much longer parcel.

Still, some other possible hints of continuity of the church in Kurşunlu

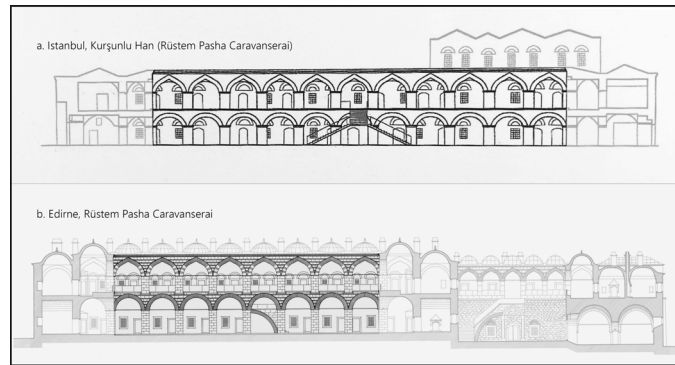


Figure 7. Pointed and round arches on the archades: Kurşunlu Han (after Yüksel, 2004); 7b Edirne, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (after SALT, Ali Saim Ülgen archive, TASUDOCM0258).



Figure 8. Plan of Kurşunlu Han and surroundings. Developed by Mustafa Sayan after Yüksel (2003), with corrections based on the survey plan from 1st Regional Cultural Preservation Board of Istanbul.

Han could be obtained through the observations on site. These include some masonry techniques foreign to the rest of the building and the ground level differences in a number of ground floor workshops.

First of these spaces registered to parcel no 60, door no 8 is marked “A” on the plan (Figure 8). Space “A” is 20.70 m², with a barrel vault 411 cm high and ground level at -0.16 m, slightly lower with respect to the level of the courtyard if we accept it as +0.00 m. It has a square plan scheme and two blocked windows on its north and south façades. The ground is covered by PVC veneer and underneath this, original ground can be observed of stone covered by wood plaques. It has masonry walls of brick and stone alternating courses as observed in many other interiors of the *han*. A wooden tie beam is detected within the western wall. Façades and arcades surrounding the courtyard, are majorly composed of same size bricks (3x29x29/30 cm) in both floors. Thickness of joints are approximately 3 cm. However, this is not the case for space “A”. Especially on the northern wall facing the courtyard, a foreign masonry technique is requiring attention. Despite later repairs with cement, northern wall holds large rubble stones and irregularly placed thicker bricks with 5x29 cm on surface dimensions. Height of joints differ between 3 to 3.5 cm. Tunay (1984) gives the thickness of bricks in Late Byzantine period differing between 4 and 4.5 cm and an average of 4 cm for Ottoman buildings, however with a difference in 16th century, which he names the era of Architect Sinan, where they become thinner;

a description compatible with the dominant brick size of the *han*. It comes to mind that this difference may occur if the *han* was constructed over the still existing ruins of the church. Less likely, it could also refer to the reuse of construction material from the ruins of the church. Observations on these unordered aspects of less visible spaces might provide more information on the continuity of the church. However, without physical interventions such as removal of plaster, it is not possible to come to an inclusive argument since the masonry is covered in most other interiors (Figure 9).

Another suspicious space is registered to parcel no 57, door no 6 and is marked “B” on the plan (Figure 8). Space “B” is 44.20 m², currently used as a store for bolts, including an 8.00 m² office space on northwestern corner. Except for the office, all walls are covered with shelves. Space is accessed by a door on the south wall. Another door on the same wall is obtained by the adjustment of a preexisting window, leading to an annex floor within the same parcel. Walls are thickly plastered and the floor is covered with a concrete layer, making it impossible to observe the masonry. The most differentiative aspect of the space is its ground level which is deeper than the courtyard and the rest of the neighboring spaces, measuring -0.76 m, whereas the ground level where this space meets the arcade is +0.01 m. Could this difference be communicating with the ground level of the church? A definitive relation might only be proven when observation of the masonry techniques in all these rooms is made possible.

¹³It is striking that these measurements and the dimensions of Kurşunlu Mahzen are quite similar. Kurşunlu Mahzen is 34-35/43-44 m from the interior and 38-38.5/49-50 m from outside (Erkal, 2011). The possibility of a mistake in the document cannot be ignored since both buildings were used as storage units belonging to the state. However, the exact description of the location, and the fact that Kurşunlu Mahzen was not a private property at this period supports the opposite.

¹⁴Xenodochium, derived from the Greek word ξενοδοχίον defines a building where travelers are housed and fed, literally referring to a *han* or caravanserai (Sarre, 1998). For medieval period it also refers to the houses founded to care for the poor, the pilgrims and the sick.

¹⁵In addition, there is a building approach distance of more than two meters on the north and south sides, which also belong to the building.

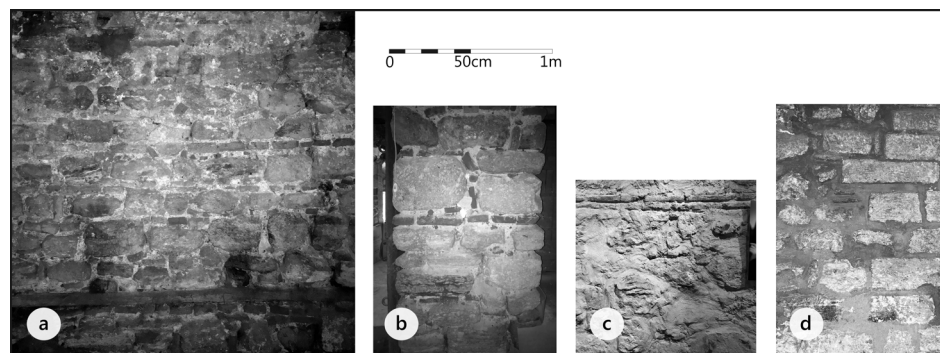


Figure 9. 9a and 9b. Masonry techniques of Space “A”; 9c. Masonry techniques from first floor rooms, eg. door no 7, with stone and bricks; 9d. Masonry from first floor north arcade (Çinaryılmaz, 2019).

Space located in the adjacent parcel, no 58, door no 7, is marked “C” on the plan (Figure 8). This 43.00 m² space is also used as bolt storage and shop, but despite the shelves alongside the walls, partially the masonry techniques of the walls and the vault is observable. It has a brick barrel vault and mosaic tile as floor veneer. The ground is divided in two levels measuring -0.53 m and -0.84 m inside, whereas it is -0.04 m where it meets the arcade. It is partially sharing the same ground level with space “B”.

Another space located in the southern wing of the building, with excessive depth of ground level is registered to parcel no 59, door no 7 is marked “D” on plan (Figure 8). Space “D” is 39.55 m² with a vault height of 524 cm. It has a rectangular plan in north-south alignment and is currently used as a depot. The space is accessed from a shallow arched opening on the northern wall. There are two windows on the south and one on the north façade, all of which are blocked today. Its walls are plastered and ground is covered with a concrete layer, avoiding the observation of masonry techniques. The ground level at -1.45 m is much lower than the courtyard at +0.18 m in this location. The threshold is at -0.18 m. From the entrance a staircase with five steps leads to the ground level. An annex floor dividing the space into two floors is accessed by a metal staircase.

One other example is the space registered to parcel no 81, door no 28 and marked “E” on the plan, where the ground level is so deep that it had to be divided and used as a basement floor (Figure 8). The walls and vault of rectangular space “E” are plastered, floor is covered by mosaic tiles and three walls are hidden behind shelves. An annex floor of simple steel structure covered with wood, is constructed for storage purposes. Space functions as a paper box atelier. The ground level of its basement is at -1.81 m, while ground level of the room is at +0.03 m. Access to the basement is through a square opening on the southwestern corner of the room with a portable ladder. The storage area it occupies is 21.18 m², which is smaller than the upper floor. Its ceiling is a reinforced concrete platform and the ground is covered by a layer of

concrete. Masonry technique information is hidden behind the plaster.

In addition to the above defined spaces, space marked “F” on parcel no 54 and “G” on parcel no 62 present slightly irregular depths of ground level (Figure 8). Space “F” is at -0.62 m and “G” is at -0.70 m. All the other spaces around the courtyard are homogenously leveled between -0.43 m to +0.16 m. Rooms located on the northern wing are higher and the average height of ground level for those on the south is -0.36 m.

Although the reuse of bricks and stone blocks for the walls is not as easily detected, many spolia material is identified in the courtyard of the *han*, some of which, such as the Corinthian late antique column capital reused as a water pump might have been brought from surroundings. Naturally, some of these might have belonged to the previous construction on site. Western part of the courtyard has been altered more and partially covered with concrete. On the eastern part several stone



Figure 10. Stone and marble pavement slabs on the eastern part of the courtyard (Çınaryılmaz, 2019).

and marble plaques are located (Figure 10). Most distinguishable among these are a 70x60 cm marble plate with a hole at its center, a 92x18 cm marble piece possibly part of a cornice molding profile and a round stone 148 cm in diameter. Spolia pieces add up to the Byzantine and Genoese past of the site and though a precise attribution is not possible, some of them probably come from San Michele Church as well.

6. Final evaluations

In many cases of reused historic sites where older structures are replaced by others, portions of walls and substructures of previous settlement layers are found to be reused for new constructions. The replaced structures may re-appear in the new architecture through spolia as well. Historic buildings of multi layered cities often show irregularities between their basement plans and the plans of upper floors, and substructures may give reference to previous lives. In multi layered historic settlements such as Galata, survey of substructures has become a prominent method into the understanding of the site. Method has been applied in cities like Rome and also a partial case study has been conducted by Ağır (2013) for the Venetian settlement in Istanbul in Eminönü, Tahtakale, which represents many similarities in both usages and stratigraphy to Galata. Such observation may also be conducted in the building scale, exposing the internal palimpsests of single monuments. For example, Ağır's (2013) study focusing on Balkapanı Han both provided clues on the Byzantine layer of the building, and on the urban fabric and organization of medieval street system in relation with the plan of the basement layer. Kürkcü Han in Mahmutpaşa had also been approached with a similar method, where Güran (1987) proposed a service function as stables, for the vaulted basement spaces under the courtyard, approached by a staircase. In both cases ruins of preexisting monuments are used as substructures for the Ottoman commercial buildings that replace them.

The observations on spolia, masonry techniques, ground level differences combined with archival documents are

essential in the understanding of the topographic counterparts of San Michele Church too. Spaces sharing a lower ground level might be giving clues about the original ground level of San Michele Church. Probable archaeological evidence appears in parcels that are not necessarily directly connected, but all of them are located in the western wing of the *han* on the direction of Kuyumcu Tahir Street. The alterations on the western part of the courtyard might also be the result of an artificial raising of the ground. If the given dimensions of the church from 1550 document are true, the smaller mass of the church must have been located on western part of the *han* today. Its relation with loggia, presumably replaced by Galata Bedesten, as described in the documents, is also compatible with this location. The eastern edge of the church would have been terminating somewhere around the center of the courtyard today, thus the road system must have been differed in this area. Perhaps the church was located within the grid system of the city and a street in between was removed with the addition of neighboring parcels to the construction site.

This study has aimed to portray the chronological history of San Michele Church starting from the Byzantine history of its site and the probable Byzantine church of Hagia Thekla it has replaced. The oldest known date of its Genoese existence is marked 1281, before the construction of Galata city walls. Besides its religious function, church was used for administrative and juridical purposes as well, during its Genoese period. Documents on the burial practices concerning the church, shed light to some aspects of the social life shaped around beliefs in the colony, and that the history of Genoese Galata showed direct parallelisms with contemporary Medieval Europe. Its architectural description could only be partially completed due to lack of visual material. Descriptions in archival documents, provided its location in relation with its neighbors, the location of its bell tower on the direction of the loggia, and defined that it was facing a small square. As a prominent landmark, its neighborhood was referred by the

name of the church as well. Documents also provided probable dimensions for the church, defining a plan scheme close to a square, smaller than Kurşunlu Han. Very few and controversial visual evidence refer to the church, and they suggest a domed structure. Unlike the other Genoese built churches of the colonies, which are stylistically bound to mainland Genoa, this central planned domed church appears irregular and, as discussed above, one plausible explanation is that it was a converted Byzantine church; which, in this case, is the 6th century church of Hagia Thekla. Based on historical references Hagia Thekla Church had previously been converted into a Catholic church after the Fourth Crusade during the Latin Empire. It might even have had a previous bell tower, which should have provided an easier basis for its Genoese conversion at the very early years of the Genoese domination over Galata. Situated at the harbor and blocked by the later constructed city walls, San Michele Church must have lost its visual representational value, and that explains the lack of its visual descriptions in historical maps. Church building evidently survived for a hundred more years with a commercial function under Ottoman rule and eventually was replaced by Kurşunlu Han, which still bears witness to the existence of San Michele Church, through physical traces, internalized in its construction.

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