

*A German Fountain in the Ottoman Capital*

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Abstract

The paper is focused on “Kaiser Wilhelm Fountain”, or the German Fountain as the public calls it, as an embodiment of the political landscape of the turn of the 20. century Ottoman-German relations. It aims to try and understand the Fountain as a German monument in an Ottoman city, away from its origins.

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The end of 19th century was a turbulent time for the Ottoman Empire. The economy had taken a big hit because of the Empire being not able to keep up with the rapid industrial progress in the world and the minorities were rising in the wake of the birth of widespread nationalistic ideals. There were also threats from outside. As a rich source of natural materials, the land of Ottoman Empire was being set as a goal for European countries and Russia alike.

At this crossroad Abdülhamid II, abandoned its ties, he maintained for years to the British Empire and formed a new friendship with the newly formed German Empire. The German presence in the Empire was already established. German military officers and academicians had been in the Ottoman lands to help with the revision of the army and the educational system since the 1830's, but now the relationship was taken to the next step and Germany was to become a strong and maybe the only ally in Europe.

It is important to know about Abdülhamid to understand his motivation in this choice, I believe. After the suspicious death of the 32, Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876, it is still not known for sure if he committed suicide or was killed, and the dethroning of Murad V., who succeeded him, because of mental issues, Abdülhamid II. ascended the throne on 31 August 1876. So, it is not really a surprise, that he is widely portrayed as a paranoid character. From his point of view, it most likely was a question of if he was paranoid enough. To calm the unrest in the Empire he enacted some reforms such as forming a parliament, which would rule with the Sultan and prepared and implemented a constitution, though the historians argue that this constitution reinforced his authority instead of limiting it. It was in his time that long standing and unsolvable political problem of Cyprus was created, when the islands control was given to the British in 1878, who were at that time Abdülhamid's defense against Russia. Also a lot of minority riots broke in his reign, which were stopped with violent crack-downs and countless fatalities, the number of which varies in different sources. One of which, the Armenian riots in 1894, almost killed the blossoming affair between Germany and Ottoman Empire, when Wilhelm II announced that 80000 Armenians were killed and criticized Abdülhamid with a strong language. Abdülhamid's Ottoman Empire, in contrast to his predecessors, was in the full view of the European nations. Almost all of the European nations had embassies in Istanbul and European journalists were reporting regularly from the Empire. So, he was one of the first Turkish rulers, but obviously would not be the last, who had to take account of his country's image abroad and chose to censure his own media and try to regulate the foreign media with telegraph censorship. He legitimized these decisions by blaming their biased reporting for his misfortunes and by describing them as pawns of "foreign powers", which were trying to destroy the Empire from within. If he was right or wrong is up for debate, but it is certain that he took part in creating a long-standing tradition in Turkish politics of throwing the blame around without trying to find a solution. Turbulence in Turkey today and governmental rhetoric prove Hegel right, "What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it." (Hür, 2012) (Kologlu, 2011)

At this atmosphere and with this Sultan the newly founded German Empire and its Emperor Wilhelm II formed a relationship, which both sides hoped would be lucrative for them. Between the years 1889 and 1917 the German Emperor Wilhelm II visited

the Ottoman Empire three times, in 1889, 1898 and 1917, near the end of the World War I, which would define the future existence of both Empires.

As said before, the natural sources of the Ottoman Empire were one of the most important reasons for Wilhelm's interest in this country. Germany had been too slow to acquire colonies to support its industry and sell his manufactured wares. Empires like British and French had seized control of Asia and Africa's resources and the traveling routes to these lands. So, when German and Ottoman officials came together one of the first plans was an ambitious railway project. This railway, which was named the Bagdad Railway, would connect Berlin with Bagdad and bypass the sea and land routes used till that time. No need to say that because of the opposition of international community, especially British, and start of the World War I, this highly expensive project could not be completed for a long time.

Abdülhamid was dethroned in 1909, after another riot this time by military personnel, but cooperation of two Empires continued and carried them together to World War I, which caused their fall and complete reformation.

### **The German Fountain**

After his second visit to the Ottoman Empire in 1898 inspired by the gift ceremonies of his trips the German Kaiser decided to build a fountain in Istanbul as a gift to its citizens. The fountain, which was named '*Kaiser Wilhelm Brunnen*' is known as the 'German Fountain' by the public. The correspondence about its construction starts in 1899 (İDH, 2010,174). In this first plans the Fountain is described as a fountain in Roman-Byzantine style which 'will not be used for ritual cleansing'. (Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, 2001, 247) Which suggests that although it was planned to be functional and to have an active role in the everyday life of the citizens of the Ottoman capital, its function might not have been wholly suitable for the Ottoman everyday life.

Where the Fountain should be placed was obviously very important and has caused some discussion. The German Government, putting emphasis on the idea that the Fountain was a gift for the people of Istanbul, insisted that it should be in the centre of the city than somewhere on the periphery, while the Sublime Porte suggested just that, the district of Nişantaşı. German Government repeated their preference to build the Fountain 'in the real İstanbul' and refused Nişantaşı. At the end both sides arrived at a consensus, or maybe more accurately, the German officials persuaded the Porte. (İDH, 2010, 174) Finally, the Fountain had found its place, where, as a German newspaper wrote, 'everyday numerous Muslims on their way will see the gift of the German Emperor'. (Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, 2001, 248) (Figur 1&2) With this placement it was also situated among other monuments of historical significance from different historical time periods. The Sultanahmed Square was the old Hippodrome of the Roman times and was and still is an important gathering place. With obelisks of Greek and Roman times, churches of Byzantine and mosques of Ottoman era it shows the history of Istanbul like a chronological catalogue of monuments. Muenzer, while explaining the idea of a monument puts emphasis on its placement by saying 'as an instrument of social organization and control' it undoubtedly is, it had to be where 'everyone would visit with pleasure and where one could everyday assemble a good part of citizens without hassle.' (Muenzer, 2001, 26) In this case the German Fountain definitely fulfills this pre-condition.



Figure 1&2: Sultanahmet Square and the Nisantasi District

The plans for the Fountain were first presented to Ahmet Tevfik Paşa, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the time, during a reception in Wilhelm's palace in Berlin on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1900. Ahmet Tevfik Paşa described the Fountain as being in the Byzantine style, which was used in Germany at the time, with traces of Arabian architecture. His detailed description is almost identical with the finished monument. He also notes that an inscription about the Fountain being a gift to commemorate Emperor's visit to Istanbul and a sura from Koran about water would be placed on the Fountain. Because all the building parts were going to be prepared in Germany, these inscriptions were supposed to be written in Istanbul and sent to Berlin to be engraved. (İDH, 2010, 176-178)

The inauguration was planned to be held on 1 September 1900, the anniversary of the Abdülhamid II.'s accession to the throne, but because preparations like building railings, rearranging the pavement, planting trees in the vicinity of the Fountain and establishing the water connection could not be completed due to time and budget constraints, the Inauguration was pushed to 27 January 1901, to the birthday of Wilhelm II. (İDH, 2010, 178) (Yavuz, 2002, 655)

The Inauguration Ceremony and the happenings of the days leading to it can be followed on the newspapers of the time, like *Oriental Advertiser*. At the planned date the Ceremony was carried out with the attendance of ‘the German Ambassador, the members of the special mission, the delegates of the Sultan, the staff of the Moltke, the warship which came from Germany for the occasion, the functionaries of the German Embassy, as well as all the German officers in the service of the Imperial Government in Istanbul’ and a battalion of the Imperial Army. At the ceremony Schelle who tended to the execution of Spitta’s design, German Ambassador, Tevfik Pasha and others gave speeches. Ambassador described the Fountain as ‘a monument erected in gratitude and friendship to perpetuate the cordial and brilliant hospitality of the Sultan, granted to his Master and his noble wife on their visit to this country.’ (O.A., 1901, January 28<sup>th</sup>) Although the festivities were dampened by Wilhelm II’s grandmother Queen Victoria’s death on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, still dinners, balls and receptions were held inside the German colony in Istanbul. (O.A., 1901, January 26<sup>th</sup>, January 28<sup>th</sup> & January 29<sup>th</sup>)

### **The Design of the German Fountain**

The Fountain has a simple octagonal plan. It consists of an elevated platform, which can be entered from the southern facade looking to the square. This entrance and the stairs leading to it defines structure’s front facade. (Figure 3) All the other sides have faucets cast in bronze and marble basins. It is mostly made out of white marble, except the columns, which are of green granite and the construction components made out of bronze casting. The column capitols and bases are also bronze cast and have floral engravings. These columns situated on the platform carry the ripped dome through circular arches. The dome itself is covered with copper with a bronze cast edging.



Figure 3: The Front Façade of the German Fountain

The most prominent adornments on the Fountain are mosaics. Inside the dome, there is one central circular medallion on golden background and Abdülhamid II’s tughra and Wilhelm II’s initials surround it. (Figure 4) Abdülhamid’s tughra was drawn on green backdrop, which is explained in some sources as green being the Prophets color, and Wilhelm’s initials were on Prussian blue backdrop. (Batur, 1993, 209) Outside of the Fountain there are small medallions on the keystones of the arches and

a line of star motives on the either side of these medallions. Adornment with mosaics is surely a complementary choice in a building of Byzantine style, as it can be seen in the German neo-Byzantine buildings of the time, but some sources explain this also as a choice born out of respect to the Islamic tradition of non-figurative drawings. (Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, 2001, 248)



Figure 4: The Mosaics inside the Dome

The floral motives on the Fountain, like the pine cone on the dome or the motives on the column capitals, are thought to be chosen as a metaphor of the coming together of two nations, with flowers or plants associated with these nations, like orchids, grapes, chestnut and pine cones being used together. (Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, 2001, 248)

Inside the structure, there are marble banks between the water reservoir and the column row. This is a unique arrangement. (Figure 5) Especially in this fountain, which considering the placement of the faucets, clearly supposed to be experienced from outside. This unique aspect of German Fountain's design can be one of the discussion points in determining if the baldachin plan used in the German monuments in the turn of the century was adapted to this Fountain, somewhat forcefully.



Figure 5: The Corridor

There are not many fountain designs similar to the German Fountain's design. One of the known examples with this kind of baldachin frame is in Musul and was opened in

1900, almost at the same time as the German Fountain. The design shows the characteristics of neither the open-air European square fountains nor Istanbul square fountains. This is why some researchers search its origins in the German monuments' designs of the time, like Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, who in her PhD dissertation named '*19. Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Alman Mimari Etkinliği*' (German Architectural Activity in the 19. Century Istanbul) compares the form of the Fountain to Wilhelm Monument in Porta Westfalica. (Fındıkgil-Doğuoğlu, 2001, 249)

## **19. Century German Monuments**

19. Century German Monuments are a well-researched area in German literature. This is rooted in the fact that a massive monument movement was seen in Germany in this time period, a 'Monument-epidemic' as some contemporary critics called it. (Dolgnier, 1993, 108-109) It started after the unification in 1871 and grew with the death of Wilhelm I, who was redesigned and presented as a national hero by his son Wilhelm II after his death. After the resignation and death of Bismarck, he became another such idol with many monuments erected in his name. (Bruchhausen, 1999, 179) Dolgnier explained this as the 'war fervor' born after the unification wars procreating 'mystically blazoned Person cults' and bringing the Emperors and Chancellors to an elevation of God like idolization, almost like the deification of the Roman Emperors. (Dolgnier, 1993, 108-109) F.L. Kroll also explains in his article 'Herrschaftslegitimierung durch Traditionsschöpfung' (Ruler Legitimation through Tradition Creation) how Wilhelm II. created a cult of his father Wilhelm I. as a successor of great German heroes through monuments. (Kroll, 2002, 79-83) Nipperdey on the other hand focuses on the fact that, what Wilhelm II was trying to do was to elevate the whole monarchy. These monuments of Wilhelm I. were not monuments of an individual, but monuments for the ruler profession and monarchy as a whole. They were simply 'objectified statements of the ideas'. They were 'an attempt to certify the national identity in a vivid, permanent symbol'. (Nipperdey, 1968, 530/533/543)

The national monuments basically aimed to recreate history in the future generations' eyes. As placement, places with important historical backgrounds were chosen, like battle fields. So, they would connect the rulers they immortalizing with these victories in the observers mind. A contemporary ruler would be associated with the glorious past event and so, an artificial ancestry would be created. Bruchhausen formulates this aspect of the monuments as their duty to 'steer the remembrance in a regulated path', 'Like this and in no other way should an event or a person be remembered.' (Bruchhausen, 1999, 176/180)

The monuments we will discuss in relation to the German Fountain are architectural monuments. Although these monuments were much more impressive and dominated their surroundings, figuratively they were not so much different from the figural ones. They consisted of elements from various monument types brought together, like obelisks and columns, inscription plates and memorial stones or sculptural monuments of rulers. Architecture was used as a basis, a pedestal and also, as framing.



Figure 6&7: The Wilhelm Monument in Porta-Westfalica & Hermann Monument in Teutoburg Forest

A good example of baldachin formed German monuments is the Monument in Porta-Westfalica, which was commissioned right after the death of Wilhelm I. in March 09<sup>th</sup> 1888. (Figure 6) The Monument shows clearly the idea of communicating with the past heroes and victories in its resemblance of Hermann Monument in Teutoburg Forest. Both monuments have a similar design with a base structure with a circular plan, a dome supported by round arches and strong pillars and their name sake rulers sculpture dominating their architecture. (Dolgener, 1993, 109-112)(Figure 7) This sculpture of Wilhelm I. also shows the sacralization of the Monument and Wilhelm I. himself in its form which shows Wilhelm raising his right hand as if giving his blessings. The baldachin form strengthens this sacralization with its resemblance to a tabernakel, a tomb.

A special date was chosen for the inauguration ceremony of the Monument, just like the German Fountain, which was the date of the Völkerschlacht of Leipzig against

Napoleon and the Monument's vicinity was established as a tourist attraction with accommodations, gastronomical services and souvenir shops.

This Monument is in neo-romanesque style, just like many other German Monuments of the time. Nipperdey explains this choice as romanesque and subsequently neo-romanesque being 'an expression of typical German'. (Nipperdey, 1968, 545) The use of neo-Romanesque style in monuments, especially national monuments, had the same root idea as placing these monuments in the old victory sites or connecting them with old German heroes. Romanesque style carried the romantic ideals of the heroics of middle ages. Also, because of the structural necessities of their time Romanesque buildings had minimal openings and heavy, strong walls, which gives them a feeling of impenetrability. So, they were perfectly coherent to represent the image of indestructible sovereignty. F.L. Kroll gives the example of Romanesque castle ruins on Rhine being seen by the public as symbols of vaterland remembrances of supposedly well-fortified middle ages during the French conflicts in Germany. (Kroll, 2002, 68) Kroll affirms the use of the Prussian royal family Hohenzoller, to which Wilhelm II belonged, of the medieval images and styles with correlation to their rule. He adds that in William II's time this recall of Middle Ages became some kind of 'playfull staffage', 'a fantasyland, which has atmospheric pictures suitable to almost all situations'. (Kroll, 2002, 79-83)

### **The Style of the German Fountain**

The German Fountain itself is in neo-Byzantine style, not neo-romanesque. Still, the creation period of these source styles follow each other and the structural components like the round arch are present in both styles. They have one more thing in common. They are both spiritual styles, belonging periods and geography with strong Christian faith. Rosenthal writes 'Romanesque styles (including the Byzantine)' had tried to express the spirit of the Christianity. (Herrmann, 1992, 118) Although Byzantine Empire had obvious ties to the Roman Empire, its culture was formed by its drastic change of religion. Kroll supports this, when he explains Wilhelm II's ancestor Friedrich Wilhelm IV.'s (1840-1861) preference of neo-Byzantine style with this style being seen as symbolizing a strongly religious land shaped by Christianity and ruled by a monarch with divine privileges and sacral qualities. (Kroll, 2002, 70-71)

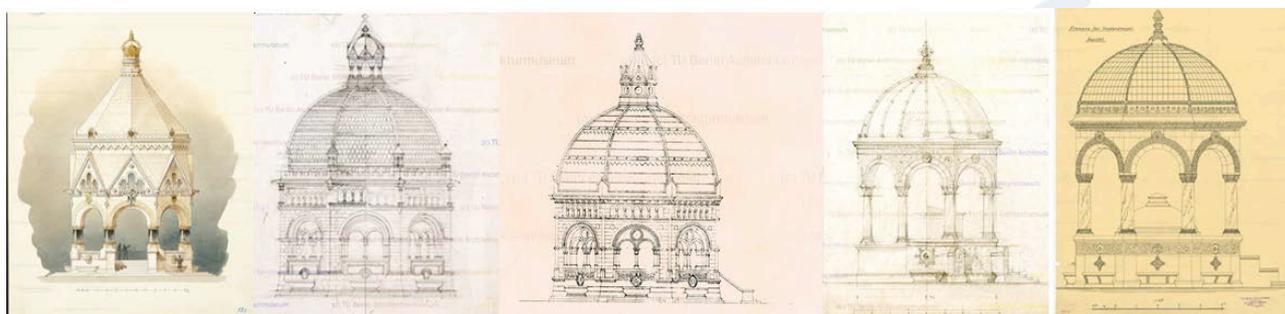


Figure 8: Max Spitta's Designs in Chronological Order

The first drawings of the German Fountain's architect Spitta show obvious neo-Romanesque influences. There are rumors that Wilhelm himself caused the changes to the design and steered it to its final state in neo-Byzantine style. (İDH, 2010, 192) (Figure 8) Still, those first designs strongly resemble the German monuments of the age. The final design of the German Fountain has also elements of Romanesque, and

belongs to the middle ages, but because of its Byzantine influence the structure and ornaments are much more lighter, more open. It is elegant and much less concerned about being impenetrable. Surely, what it tries to do is the opposite of that. It is supposed to be inviting and welcoming to have an effect on the people of the country he was gifted and to show a friendly visage to influence them. Maybe the Fountain's evolution to the Byzantine style was a way of becoming less threatening, more familiar to the people of the city it would belong and communicating with the history of that city without losing its essence. After all Byzantine culture is an inseparable part of Istanbul and Byzantine architecture, with architectural monuments like Hagia Sophia had an undeniable influence on Ottoman architecture after the conquest of the city. Rudolph Wiegmann wrote about the revival of Byzantine architecture, 'Those who seek to revive the Byzantine style on the grounds that it was a native style should bear in mind that it originated in foreign lands and flourished there as much as it did with us'. (Herrmann, 1992, 109) What he saw as a negative the designers of the German Fountain must have seen as an advantage and the neo-Byzantine must have seemed like the perfect middle ground to bring the Empires together.

## **Conclusion**

What is so interesting about the German Fountain is that it is obviously politically motivated. Although its benefactor calls it a gift to the people of Istanbul, it was still a monument that carried his name and was built in a foreign country with almost no interference by that country's people to assert himself to their everyday life. The aim of this paper was to focus on the German Fountain's political aspect and try to examine it, its design, and its style to try to establish it as a monument, a German monument more precisely, and so try to understand it from this new point of view.

If we compare the characteristics of German monuments with the German fountain, we see sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious similarities. Firstly, the placements of German monuments were very important and were chosen carefully to emphasize the ideas behind the monuments. The German Fountain was placed in a historical square, which was the stage for many important events which defined the history of Istanbul, amongst monuments narrating this history step by step. It was taking its place amongst them as a sign post of the next chapter. Secondly, the architectural style chosen for these monuments were also connected to the history and gave signals to a past which best symbolized the message of the monument. Such was also the style of the fountain which not only embodied the German past, but also communicated with the history of Istanbul. Thirdly, it was opened with a stately inauguration ceremony on a date celebrating its benefactor, just like the national monuments in Germany. One can imagine that if the Fountain had been built in Germany, it would host annual celebrations on the date of Wilhelm II's birthday.

But even the Fountain was intended as a monument that would 'steer the remembrance in a regulated path'. Can we say that it was successful? Bruchhausen writes that what makes a building a monument is the public dialog it causes and there lies the problem with the German Fountain. (Bruchhausen, 1999, 182)

Muenzer and Bruchhausen point strongly on the fact that the intended meaning of a monument can not stay the same through time as the observers themselves change with dynamic political conflicts and configurations. (Muenzer, 2001, 6-7/20)

(Bruchhausen, 1999, 180) After a while the monuments message becomes undecipherable. This gap between the observer and the monument is not only created by time, but different nations with different cultures might have the same kind of communication problem when it comes to sending messages through monuments. After all, this kind of communication calls for both sides to have the same dictionary to decipher the content of the message.

The problem with the Fountain was the difference of the perception of the idea of a monument between German and Ottoman Empires. The monument cult in German culture was different from the Ottoman idea of a monument, which as I stated before barely existed at that moment. The German monuments were travel destinations; festivals would be organized around them; they were simply a part of the everyday life of the people. Although Abdülhamid was trying to create a culture that would accommodate such festivities, like organizing celebrations on the anniversary of his ascension to the throne, he was the first Ottoman Sultan ever have done this and it was still a new concept to the Ottoman people. (Erkmen, 2010, 81)

In just a few years after its opening there were reports of damaged mosaics and stolen metal parts in the newspapers. Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger argued that these behaviors were directly against the Turkish-German Friendship. (Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 1906, July 30<sup>th</sup>) (İDH; 2010, 184-185) I do not think that the people of Istanbul would agree to this assessment. It was most likely the fact that the Fountain was never accepted as a monument, national or otherwise, in the German sense.

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### Figures:

Figur 6:

[Wilhelm Monument in Porta Westfalica] n.d. [image online] Available at: <<http://www.geolocation.ws/v/P/45916946/kaiser-wilhelm-denkmal/en>> [Accessed 30 June 2013].

Figur 7:

[Hermann Monument in Teutoburg Forest] n.d. [image online] Available at: <<http://commondatastorage.googleapis.com/static.panoramio.com/photos/original/41793705.jpg>> [Accessed 30 June 2013].

Figur 8:

[Spitta's designs for the German Fountain (TU Berlin Architekturmuseum, Inv. Nr. 16886-16888-16889-16890-16891)] n.d. [image online] Available at: <<http://architekturmuseum.ub.tu-berlin.de/index.php?set=1&p=51&sid=133266645&z=1>> [Accessed 22 March 2013].

