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# Remodelling the Imperial Capital in the Early Republican Era: the Representation of History in Henri Prost's Planning of Istanbul<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

When the Ottoman Empire definitively ceased to exist with the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923, the imperial capital Istanbul was simultaneously deprived of its title. The determination of the founders of the Republic to break with the Ottoman past was effective in their decision to transfer the political capital from Istanbul to Ankara. It is even asserted by certain historians that Istanbul was intentionally neglected and deprived of public investments in the period that followed the foundation of the Republic. The present chapter focuses on the urban planning of Istanbul from mid 1930s to early 1950s. Here, the question of how the Republican authorities and the French planner Henri Prost, whom they finally addressed, approached the planning problem of Istanbul and its historical heritage in particular will be discussed.

At a period when the population of the city decreased, the main concern of planning in Istanbul was transforming the old Ottoman capital into a modern city. The setting of an effective transportation network and a number of public spaces designed for the representation of the Republican values illustrate this goal. Yet, at the same time, the way the architect-planner brought out the historical monuments of the ancient capital in his planning proposal, point to a renewed representation of history. Henri Prost's plan for the historical peninsula reclaimed the value of Istanbul as an urban geography dotted by the symbols of imperial power, both Byzantine and Ottoman. The modern setting of the Republican Istanbul was designed to highlight its "incomparable landscape" and the "glorious edifices" of the past. The way this approach was appropriated by the Republican authorities points to the ambivalent relation of the Republic with history.

*29 Ekim 1923 tarihinde Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilan edilmesi ile Osmanlı İmparatorluğu son bulurken, İstanbul'un bin beşyüz yıldan fazla süren imparatorluk başkentliği de sona ermekteydi. Cumhuriyet'in kurucularının Osmanlı geçmişinden bağımsız yeni bir yönetim biçimini hedeflemeleri, başkentin İstanbul'dan Ankara'ya taşınması kararında etkili olan nedenlerden biriydi. Kimi tarihçilere göre, İstanbul bu nedenle Cumhuriyet'in ilk*

yıllarında bilinçli bir biçimde ihmal edilmişti. Bu makale bu savı sorgularken, İstanbul'un Fransız şehirci-mimar Henri Prost tarafından 1936-1951 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilen planlama çalışmalarına ve özellikle İstanbul'un tarihi ve arkeolojik mirasının plancı tarafından nasıl ele alındığı sorunsalına odaklanmaktadır.

1930'lu yıllarda İstanbul henüz nüfus kaybetmekte olan bir kentti. Cumhuriyet yöneticilerinin diğer kentlerin olduğu gibi İstanbul'un da planlamasından beklentisi, kentin çağdaş şehircilik ilkelerine uygun olarak modernleştirilmesiydi. Bu amaçla 1932 yılında bir davetli şehircilik yarışması açılmış, ancak yarışma sonucunda seçilen Alman plancı Elgötz'ün planı uygulamaya konulmamıştı. Bunun yerine, 1936 yılında Fransız şehirci-mimar Henri Prost İstanbul'un planlamasını yönetmek üzere İç İşleri Bakanı ve İstanbul valisi tarafından davet edildi. O dönemde Prost Paris'in metropoliten planlamasını yürütmekteydi.

Henri Prost İstanbul'un planlamasının iki ana hedefini "kentin modernleştirilmesi" ve "eşsiz tarihi peyzajının korunması" olarak ortaya koymaktaydı. İstanbul'da kentin planlamasını yürüttüğü onbeş yıllık süre boyunca Bizans ve Osmanlı dönemlerine ait anıt yapıların belgelenmesi ve korunmaları için özel çaba harcadı. Tarihi Yarımada'nın planlamasında, tarihi anıtların kent görünümündeki etkisini ön plana çıkaran kentsel tasarım önerileri geliştirdi. Kentin yeniden tasarımında Bizans ve Osmanlı anıtlarının yan yana varoluşlarını vurgularken kentin kolektif belleğini yeniden inşa ediyordu. Ancak, Prost'un İstanbul planı tekil anıt yapıların korunmasına özel bir önem verirken, tarihi Osmanlı kentinin kentsel dokusuna karşı modernleşme adına son derece müdahaleci bir yaklaşım sergilemekteydi. Henri Prost'un İstanbul nazım planı yerel yetkililer tarafından, bekledikleri modern kent imgesini taşıdığı için büyük ölçüde olumlu karşılandı.

Fransız şehirci tarihi İstanbul'da kentsel arkeolojiyi planlama ile bütünleştirmeyi de amaçlamaktaydı. Bizans surlarının anıt olarak tescil edilmesi için çalıştı, Hipodrom – Ayasofya-Topkapı Sarayı'nı kapsayan alanda oluşturulmasını öngördüğü Arkeolojik Park önerisini geliştirdi. Prost'un bu önerileri Cumhuriyet yöneticilerince olanaklar ölçüsünde desteklendi. Arkeoloji araştırmalarına verdiği destekle Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ni insanlığın ortak tarihinin mirasına sahip çıktığını göstermekteydi.

Prost tarihi İstanbul'u, "imparatorluklar başkenti"nin "muhteşem" anıtlarını ve "eşsiz" silüetini vurgulayan bir anlayışla yeniden düzenlenmekteydi. Bir başka deyişle, İstanbul'un Bizans ve Osmanlı İmparatorlukları'nın erk simgelerinin taçlandığı bir kentsel coğrafya olma niteliğini ön plana çıkarmaktaydı. Fransız şehircinin bu yaklaşımı, Cumhuriyet'in Osmanlı geçmişi ile arasına koymak istediği mesafe ile çelişiyor görünmekle birlikte, gerçekte bir yönüyle Cumhuriyet'in ulusun tarihindeki "parlak" dönemleri yücelten tarihyazımı anlayışından çok da uzak değildi.

## THE REPUBLICAN REVOLUTION AND THE RELOCATION OF THE CAPITAL

The foundation of the Republic of Turkey on the 29 October 1923 marks the culmination of a political revolution which brought six hundred years of Ottoman sovereignty

to an end. The proclamation of Ankara as the capital of the new Nation-State dates to 13 October, i.e. two weeks before the foundation of the Republic. Not only the Ottoman dynasty but also Istanbul, which had been the imperial capital for nearly one thousand six hundred years since Constantine the Great, was being dethroned by this radical decision.

There were several reasons behind the relocation of the capital. First, it was a symbolic act having historic reasons: Following the defeat of the Ottomans at the end of the WWI, the Treaty of Sèvres signed with the Allied Forces anticipated the division of Turkey into zones to be occupied. Istanbul was occupied by the British, the French and the Italian troops; the Greek Army embarked in Izmir and occupied Western Anatolia. Local resistances which spontaneously started against the occupation were finally organised and united around the National Assembly held in Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal against the will of the Ottoman government. The Turkish War of Liberation was directed by the National Assembly from Ankara from 1919 to 1922 while Istanbul was under occupation. The same National Assembly would decide the abolishment of the Sultanate in November 1922 and proclaim the foundation of the Republic as the expression of the sovereignty of the Nation in October 1923. The declaration of Ankara, the headquarters of the revolution as the new capital symbolizes both the end of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Republic of Turkey. Practical reasons such as keeping distance from the conservative circles of the old capital that were loyal to the Ottoman rule were also effective in the new regime's decision of relocating the capital to Ankara. In short, it reveals the republicans' determination to break with the Ottoman imperial past with which Istanbul was strongly associated.

The relocation of the capital to Ankara, situated at the centre of the national territory, was part of a strategy for the overall development of the country<sup>2</sup>. The reform movement towards westernization generated from the Ottoman capital since the beginning of the 19th century could not infuse into the remote parts of the country. Istanbul, with its westernised elite, remained isolated from the rest. Ankara, located at the heart of Anatolia, was to become a motor for the progress and development of the whole country.

The period that followed the foundation of the Republic is marked by the implementation of a comprehensive programme of reforms, not only at institutional level but also in the social and cultural domains. The construction of Ankara as the capital city had both a symbolic and strategic importance for the modernity project of the Republic. The new capital was to be constructed as a city that symbolised the modernity of the Republic. It would constitute a model for other urban centres, with not only its physical constructions but also its social and cultural institutions and the modern way of life of its inhabitants<sup>3</sup>.

However, how this model city was to be created was a considerable problem, especially when the overall economic condition of the country, the financial difficulties, the lack of experience and of technological means are considered.

When it comes to the old capital, historians seem to agree that Istanbul was intentionally neglected by the Republican government<sup>4</sup>. The reason for the negligence can be searched in the government's policy of canalizing all the public investments to the construction of its new capital simply in order to make the project of relocation real. The reluctance of certain Western countries to transfer their embassies from Istanbul to Ankara in the early years of the Republic testifies indeed the difficulty of the task.

## TOWN PLANNING AS A TOOL TO CONSTRUCT THE "MODERN CITY" OF THE REPUBLIC

Town planning had emerged at the turn of the 20th century as a civic initiative animated by social reformist movements as the "new science of town building" in Western countries in search for healing the ills caused by the uncontrolled growth of cities due to industrialisation. In early Republican Turkey, it was perceived as a means of constructing modern cities that would represent the identity of the young Nation-State. It was seen as a technical/scientific knowledge for the creation of a physical urban environment, the setting of public spaces and equipment that would support the societal modernisation that was aimed at by the reform movement.

From the very beginning, the Republican authorities opted for a planned urban development in conformity with the modern principles of town building. European architects and planners, most of whom are renowned as distinguished experts in this field, were invited to develop plans for the Turkish cities. The preparation of the reconstruction plan for Izmir by the French planners Prost and Danger<sup>5</sup> and the first planning scheme for Ankara by the German planner Lörcher<sup>6</sup> date back to 1924-1925. The competition organized for the planning of Ankara in 1927, by an invitation made to three experts of urbanism from Germany and France, is generally highlighted as the beginning of the planning history in Turkey<sup>7</sup>.

The first planning attempts of the Republic for Istanbul were, indeed, belated when compared to Ankara and Izmir. Yet, it is certain that planning the historical capital was a critical task, not less important than the construction of the new capital city. The Municipality of Istanbul organised a planning competition in 1932. Three renowned architect-planners were invited by the government to contribute with their planning proposals. These were Henri Prost, the chief planner of metropolitan Paris; Donat Alfred Agache, the planner of Buenos Aires, both French architect-urbanists, and a German planner Elgötz. Henri Prost, who declined the invitation, was replaced by Jacques Lambert. The jury, which was composed of Turkish officials, selected Elgötz's entry in the end, for being "more realistic" than others<sup>8</sup>. However, Elgötz's planning proposal was finally put aside and not implemented.

Interestingly enough, Henri Prost was invited a second time by the governor-mayor of Istanbul in 1936. The apparent object of this invitation was the preparation of a settlement plan for Yalova thermal station including the presidential residence and its

surroundings. Soon after his meeting with the governor-mayor Üstündağ, Henri Prost was delegated by the Minister of the Interior Ali Çetinkaya with the task of preparing a master plan for the city of Istanbul, and directing its urban development in collaboration with the *İmar Müdürlüğü* [the planning directorate] of the Municipality. Certain sources mention that he was directly invited by the president Atatürk for this task<sup>9</sup>. However, no written document has been found in the archives to verify this information. Yet, the fact that Prost was assigned to prepare the settlement plans of two presidential residences, Yalova followed by Florya, attests at least to the president's approval. Prost's contract will be regularly renewed after Atatürk's death.

The period between 1936 and 1951 during which Henri Prost directed the planning of Istanbul is critical in the history of Republican Turkey. The first two years of Prost's presence in Istanbul corresponds to the last years of Atatürk's presidency. From 1930 to 1950 the country was governed by the single party, i.e. the Republican People's Party founded by Atatürk. 1930s are characterised by the top-down implementation of reforms under single party regime for an overall institutional and societal modernisation in the country. The following years constitute a critical period due to the international conjuncture determined by the explosion of the Second World War. Turkey did not participate in the war, but she was highly affected by its economic consequences. Although it is a period of economic stagnation, Henri Prost worked as the chief planner of Istanbul in close collaboration in these years with a particularly active governor-mayor of the Republican People's Party, Dr. Lütfi Kırdar; who stayed at this post till the 1950 elections. The French planner would leave Istanbul a few months after the elections, i.e. after the Democrat Party came into power. Prost is the foreign architect who stayed longest as a planner of a major city in Turkey, and he mainly worked in harmony with the local authority under the single party regime. Once the political conjuncture changed, he preferred to leave in the face of the growing criticism especially coming from the professional circles in Istanbul.

The fifteen years of planning activity of Henri Prost in Istanbul covers a wide range of studies, including the Master Plan for the European side of Istanbul (1937), Master Plan of the Asian side (1939), the planning of the two coasts of the Bosphorus (1936-1948) and numerous detailed urban design projects for plazas, squares, construction of new avenues, parks and promenades in the historic city.

## HENRI PROST, THE "ARCHITECT-URBANIST"

Henri Prost was one of the leading figures of the generation of French architects that contributed to the creation of the new discipline, which they baptised as "*urbanisme*". We see him first among the graduates of the *École des Beaux-Arts* who won the *Prix de Rome* together with Tony Garnier, Léon Jausseley, Ernest Hébrard who all would become pioneering figures of the French urbanism<sup>10</sup>.

Henri Prost's acquaintance with Turkey and the city of Istanbul dates back to 1904, when he first came to the capital of the Ottoman Empire to study the archaeological

vestiges of the Ancient Constantinopolis within the framework of the *Prix de Rome* programme. He stayed in Istanbul in 1904-1905 and 1906-1907 and returned to Paris with impressive drawings of Hagia Sophia and restitutions of the Imperial Palace of Constantine<sup>11</sup>.

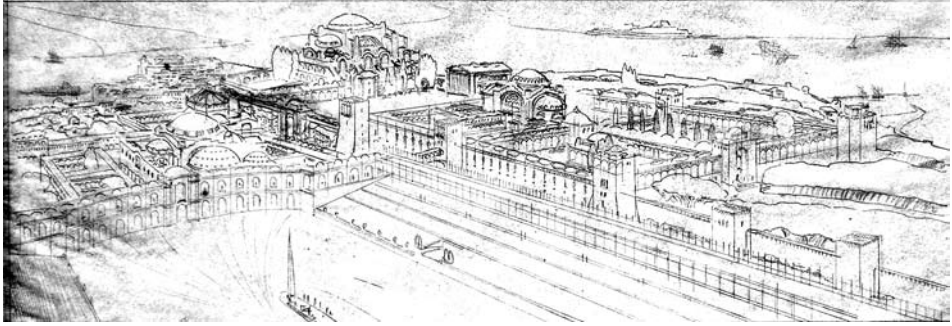


Fig. 1

Restitution drawing of the Imperial Palace of Constantine, the Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia by Henri Prost, 1911.

Source: Institut Français d'Architecture (IFA) / Académie d'Architecture (AA), Fonds Prost.

Prost's career as urbanist began with his winning entry for the extension of the city of Antwerp in 1902. He participated in the activities of the Sixth Section of the *Musée Social*, working on "Urban and Rural Hygiene"<sup>12</sup>. In 1913, he was invited by Marechal Lyautey, the military governor of the French protectorate in Morocco, to found the *Service des Plans* [the town planning office] under the French military government in this country. From 1914 to 1920 he realised a comprehensive planning work for several cities including Fez, Marrakesh, Meknes, Rabat and Casablanca<sup>13</sup>. Finally, starting in 1932, he directed the planning of the metropolitan area of Paris. The *Plan d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne* would be approved in 1939<sup>14</sup>, thus three years after he began to work on the planning of Istanbul. The objective of planning adopted by Prost is to direct the metropolitan development and to control the urban extension around Paris through constructing a system of motorways while preserving historical and natural sites.

Henri Prost was contacted by the Republican government of Turkey first in 1924 for the preparation of the reconstruction plan of Izmir, destroyed by the fire in 1922 at the end of the Greco-Turkish war<sup>15</sup>. Although he delegated this task to his colleague René Danger, he worked actively as consultant in the planning of Izmir. This plan, which was approved by the Municipality of Izmir in 1925, constitutes the first comprehensive plan – *plan d'ensemble* – prepared to direct the future development of a city in Turkey.

## ISTANBUL IN THE 1930S

The relocation of the political capital to Ankara had immediate impacts on Istanbul. The population of the city decreased considerably – from around one-million inhabitants before WWI to 700,000 inhabitants in 1927<sup>16</sup>. The limited funds of the young Republic were canalised to the construction of the new capital city, and the old capital was neglected at least in the early years of the Republic.

The long period of wars, which had started with the Balkan Wars followed by the First World War and the occupation of the city, had destructive effects on Istanbul, economically, socially and physically. Fires, which had always been frequent in Istanbul devastated numerous neighbourhoods that remained as empty grounds within the historic city. Zeynep Çelik, who is the author of *Remaking Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the nineteenth century*, points out that the historic city confined within the Byzantine fortifications had already been “run-down and neglected” in the late 19th century, many neighbourhoods being left unrebuilt after the destruction of fires. She explains this situation with the shift of the building activity to the new districts to the north and the abandonment of the “grand old city to the working classes”<sup>17</sup>.

In fact, the reconstruction of the old districts of Istanbul had been undertaken several times since mid 19th century by the Ottoman governments. The reorganisation of the urban space in conformity with the image of the contemporary European cities, by the opening of wide avenues, plazas and squares but especially by the regularization of the urban fabric according to the “rules of geometry”<sup>18</sup>, was part of the Ottoman reform movement that started with the declaration of the *Tanzimat* [the reorganization movement] in 1839. The urban programme of the *Tanzimat* was put into implementation through a series of urban regulations, and a considerable number of reconstruction plans which were applied in the neighbourhoods destroyed by fires<sup>19</sup>. At the end of the century, the urban fabric of the historic peninsula (the old city confined within the Byzantine walls) was already transformed to a great extent, yet through the juxtaposition of piecemeal operations and not as a result of a total urban design project.

The early years of the Republic were characterised by an atmosphere of enthusiasm and an overall mobilisation for modernization, animated by the comprehensive reform programme of the Republic. In continuity with the Ottoman reform movement, the Republican reforms were, however, based on a criticism of the former as being incremental. As the overall reform programme, the urban programme of the Republic had to be more comprehensive and much more radical than that of the Ottoman reformers as well.

One can argue, however, that both institutional and societal modernisation had destructive effects on the historical city of Istanbul. Secularism was one of the keystones of the Republican modernisation programme that envisaged not only the secularisation of the state affairs, but of the whole societal sphere. Along with the secularisation of the national education, the religious schools (*medreses*), centres of religious orders (*tekkes* and *zaviyes*) were closed down by law in 1925, and the properties of the religious



foundations (*vakıfs*) were taken under state control. The edifices belonging to these establishments, numerous in the historical city of Istanbul, were deserted and in time fell into decay.

People's aspiration for modern life styles resulted in a progressive desertion of the historical peninsula. Although individual building activities were observed in the old neighbourhoods, higher income groups were leaving the old city for the newly developing settlement areas on the north of the European side, or on the Asian coast of Marmara, as Henri Prost would later state in his reports. This process gained momentum in parallel with the development of means of public transportation – tramway and maritime transportation. In the speech he made at the *Institut de France* in 1947, Prost<sup>20</sup> explains this continuing mobility from the old city towards new settlement areas with the people's adoption of modern life-styles and the emancipation of women in particular. The emigration of higher income groups resulted in the continuous extension of the city towards its peripheries, in spite of the fact that the city's population was still decreasing in the 1930s.

While the urban area was being extended, the central business districts continued to develop within the historical peninsula as well as Galata – the old European quarter on the north of Golden Horn; the Grand Bazaar and its environs still served as the commercial centre *par excellence* for the entire city<sup>21</sup>. This resulted in an increase of everyday mobility, causing considerable problems in urban transportations.

Briefly, when Prost became head of the planning office, Istanbul was a city with a receding economy and population; but paradoxically, it was geographically extending, which in turn caused difficulties in the urban circulation system. The historical city of Istanbul confined within the Byzantine walls had been largely devastated by fires and partly abandoned by its inhabitants. The majority of the Ottoman public buildings – e.g. religious centres and school buildings, public baths and fountains – were falling into ruin.

## PLANNING ISTANBUL: SETTING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A MODERN CITY

Within the revolutionary socio-political context of the 1930s in Turkey, the principal objective of planning the cities in general and in Istanbul in particular, was 'modernisation'. This was what the local authority expected to achieve by elaborating and implementing a comprehensive plan. What was meant by the modernisation of the city was also the arrangement of settlement areas conducive to modern life-styles and hygiene, and the creation of open public spaces that would contribute to the flourishing of a civic public realm. Henri Prost also defined the principal goal of the planning of Istanbul as the modernisation of the city. According to him, this was inevitable for a city in the process of a "complete social change"<sup>22</sup>.

Prost completed his Master Plan (*plan directeur*) for the European side of Istanbul in 1937. The master plan consisted mainly of a transportation plan, supported by detailed



Fig. 2  
Istanbul in 1940s.  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.



Fig. 3  
Madrasa of Selimiye in ruins in 1940s.  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.

urban design proposals for strategic nodes of the plan. He proposed to reinforce the maritime transportation between the two sides of the Bosphorus<sup>23</sup>. The urban circulation network that Prost studied in detail was organized around a spine that crossed the city from north to south connecting the newly developing settlement areas on the north to the old city<sup>24</sup>. This road, which started at Taksim Square – the Square of the Republic – on the north, went through the old quarters on the west of Pera, crossed the Golden Horn by Atatürk Bridge and continued directly following the valley between the two of the seven hills of the historic peninsula. It crossed the old city from north to south to end up at the proposed central station at Yenikapı<sup>25</sup>. A second connection, in the north-south direction, started again from Taksim Square, crossed Pera and Galata through tunnels and viaducts before passing the Golden Horn by the Galata Bridge<sup>26</sup>. On the historic peninsula, it continued through the central business district of Eminönü to reach Beyazıt Square where the University of Istanbul was to be located.



Fig. 4  
The Master Plan of the European Side of Istanbul by Henri Prost (1936-1943).  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.

In addition to these two north-south arteries that would connect the northern districts to the central activity areas located in the old city, Prost proposed a new circulation network to be created within the historic city. Partly making partly use of the existing street network, the new circulation system necessitated the opening of several new avenues and streets within the historic urban fabric. These were listed as “operations to be realized in priority” in the program of Prost’s master plan<sup>27</sup>.

## AN URBAN DESIGN TO GLORIFY THE HISTORICAL TOWNSCAPE OF ISTANBUL

In his conference at the *Institut de France* in 1947, Henri Prost clarifies his approach to the planning of Istanbul particularly vis-à-vis the planning of the historic city:

The modernisation of Istanbul can be compared to a chirurgical operation of the most delicate nature. It is not about creating a New City on a virgin land, but directing an Ancient Capital, in the process of complete social change, towards a Future, through which the mechanism and probably the redistribution of wealth will transform the conditions of existence. This City lives with an incredible activity. To realize the main axes of circulation without harming the commercial and industrial development, without stopping the construction of new settlements is an imperious economic and social necessity; however to conserve and PROTECT the INCOMPARABLE LANDSCAPE, dominated by glorious EDIFICES, is another necessity as imperious as the former<sup>28</sup>.

Prost's words summarize his attitude as a planner *vis-à-vis* the transformation of Istanbul: the objective of planning was to modernise the historical city, a goal which was mainly determined by the socio-political circumstances and the revolutionary atmosphere of the period in Turkey. Yet, for him, special attention had to be paid to the historical heritage of the city. In this perspective, he put forward a plan of urbanism which aimed to combine modernisation and conservation. As he expressed in these words, the protection of both the "incomparable" landscape and townscape of Istanbul was of primary importance – as important as the modernisation and economic development of the city.



Fig. 5  
The silhouette of the Historical Peninsula from Sarayburnu.  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.

Yet, in the planning of the old city, Prost adopted a highly interventionist attitude towards the historic urban fabric. The reorganisation of the road network that he proposed for the historic peninsula reminds, in fact, of Napoléon III's and Baron Haussman's operations in 19th-century Paris. The grand avenues that crossed the historic city and multiple secondary roads transformed the introverted neighbourhoods of the old Ottoman city into an open structure.

One can argue that as fires had already destroyed large areas in the city, such operations were inevitable. In addition, the regularisation of the neighbourhoods destroyed by fire had become a tradition in Istanbul since mid 19th century, i.e. the beginning of the Ottoman reform movement<sup>29</sup>. However, the operations foreseen by Prost were not limited to the areas destroyed by fire, but brought forth an overall reorganisation of the urban fabric. Prost's plan was realising in a way an age-old project of modernisation in Istanbul<sup>30</sup> that had already been put into implementation through piecemeal operations in the late Ottoman period.

His observations on the societal change in 1930s Istanbul and particularly the determination of the Republican authorities who undertook a comprehensive socio-cultural revolution must have been influential in Prost's interventionist planning approach. The revolutionary political context, but also the dynamics of social change in the Turkey of the 1930s, forced the architect-planner to intervene radically on the urban historical fabric of Istanbul.

While adopting an interventionist attitude towards the urban fabric, Prost paid particular attention to the historical monuments of Istanbul. He listed numerous monuments that date from both Byzantine and Ottoman periods, and spent particular effort for their conservation. He collaborated with the Turkish Association of the Friends of Istanbul<sup>31</sup> as well as with the French, German and American institutes of archaeology. His call to the *Institut de France* for financial support for the conservation of archaeological vestiges of the city is worth mentioning in this context<sup>32</sup>.

He put much emphasis on preserving a great number of Ottoman structures, which were out of use, by giving them new functions. He integrated these to pedestrian promenades, as "picturesque" monuments to be contemplated together with the monumental trees that complete the composition<sup>33</sup>. In Prost's plan of 1937, significant monuments of the city such as the grand mosques constituted the landmarks, on which perspective axes opened in conformity with the Beaux-Arts tradition.

Urban aesthetics was pivotal for Prost's planning, which reflects both a picturesque and classical understanding of urban design. While completely remodelling its urban fabric, Prost conceived the historical peninsula as a glorious landscape – "*l'incomparable paysage dominé par des édifices glorieux*" in his own words – to be preserved in its totality. It was the total effect of the townscape that was important for Prost. The historical silhouette of the peninsula would effectively be preserved by the building regulations and particularly by the height restrictions that were imposed by the planner.

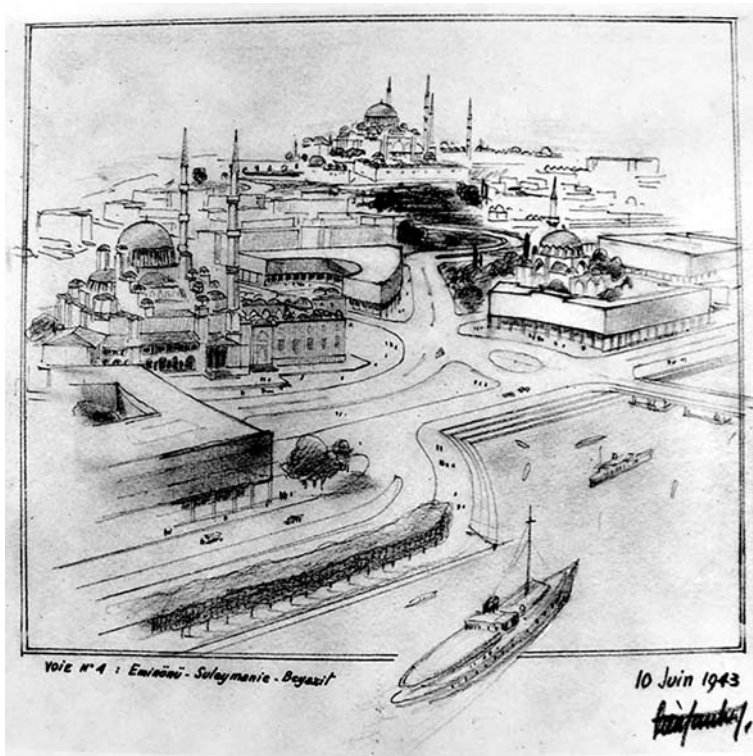


Fig. 6  
 Urban Design Sketch for Eminönü Square, made by Jaubert, Prost's assistant in 1943.  
 Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.

## URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE THREE EPOCHS OF ISTANBUL

Revealing the memory of the ancient Constantinopolis buried under the Ottoman Istanbul was one of the goals of Prost's planning of the historical peninsula. Prost's interest in the Roman-Byzantine history of the city is obvious in his plan proposal and his reports. He attributed particular importance to archaeology as a means of bringing to light the memory of the past ages of the city. He combined "urban archaeology", which is a modern idea, with the modernisation of urban spaces.

Prost's particular interest in the East Roman vestiges of the city can be traced back to the studies that he had made in Istanbul as a young architect of the Prix de Rome. In his master plan of 1937, he proposed to create a park of archaeology on the eastern tip of the historic peninsula, at the site of the imperial palace of Constantine – the restitution of which he had worked on thirty years before. He continued to work for the realisation of this project until he left in 1951. The Park of Archaeology extends from



Grand Mosque of the Ottoman imperial capital into a museum was certainly a powerful symbolic act. It was an expression of the determination of the Republic to break away from the Ottoman history by attacking one of its symbols of power. In his speech, Prost quotes Atatürk who declared that the edifice did not belong to one religion or another, but to all humanity<sup>36</sup>. The architect extends this idea to the history of Istanbul, stating that it belonged to all humanity, rather than to one nation or another. The question whether this idea was shared by the Republican authorities can hardly be answered. Yet, we know that a number of archaeological excavations were started in several places in Anatolia in the early years of the Republic. The Temple of Augustus in Ankara was cleared of the constructions that surround it and restored with the initiative of Atatürk in the 1930s on the occasion of the celebrations of the 2000th anniversary of Augustus<sup>37</sup>. The aim was to link the history of the Republic of Turkey to the universal history of humanity. Hence, Prost's proposal for creating an archaeological park at the heart of Istanbul was well received by the Republican authorities and by Atatürk in particular. Although the Park of Archaeology could not be realized in its integrity, parts of the Byzantine imperial palace were excavated and a new museum was built to display the mosaics of the palace *in situ*.

In Prost's plan, the Park of Archaeology was not the only reference to the East Roman history of the city. In his master plan of 1937, he proposed to rearrange the square – *At Meydanı* – in front of the Sultan Ahmet Mosque, which had been the hippodrome of



Fig. 8  
Sultan Ahmet Mosque and the Square – *At Meydanı* – the Hippodrome of Ancient Constantinopolis.  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.



Byzantine Constantinopolis, into a plaza crowned with a grandiose monument dedicated to the Republic. Hence, three eras in the history of Istanbul – the Byzantine, Ottoman and Republican – could be symbolized at one place<sup>38</sup>.

He proposed to remove the buildings dating from the late Ottoman period, which are located on the southern edge of the hippodrome, in order to open the perspective from the plaza onto the Marmara Sea, and to make this grandiose monument, located on top of the colossal retaining walls of the Byzantine hippodrome, visible from the sea.

Prost's proposal for Beyazıt Square was again founded on the same idea of simultaneous representation of the three epochs of the city<sup>39</sup>. This square where the Beyazıt Mosque – erected in the late 15th century – stands, and onto which the gate of the University of Istanbul opens, is located next to the Ancient Forum Tauri of the Byzantine city. Prost suggested enlarging the Beyazıt Square in the direction of the ancient forum, and reconstructing the triumphal arch that used to stand there, the remains of which certainly could be found, if excavations were made.

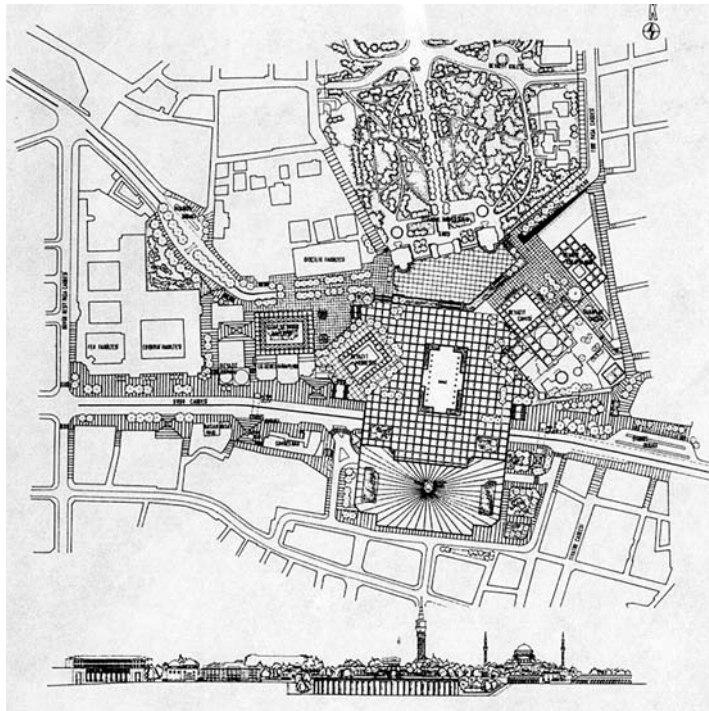


Fig. 9

The arrangement proposed for Beyazıt Square with the triumphal arch of the ancient Forum Tauri reconstituted, drawing by Aron Angel.

Source: A. Angel, *Henri Prost ve İstanbul'un ilk Nazım Planı*, "Mimarlık", n. 222, pp. 34-37.

Prost's proposals for the two main squares of the historical city, the description of which we found in his report of the master plan, were not implemented. The operation to restore the Forum Tauri by the enlargement of Beyazıt square necessitated the demolition of old Ottoman structures including the *Simkeş Han*. It provoked the reaction of a number of Turkish intellectuals including architects.

It is possible to observe that, in Prost's plan, the main arteries that cross the historical city from east to west follow the hypothetical trajectory of the main arteries of the Byzantine city. These radiated and branched off from the *Mese* – the first principal axis of the ancient city – towards the gates on the terrestrial walls on the west, following the crests of the seven hills of the city. In the 1950s, during the construction of these avenues, the Roman porticoes along these axes came to light. With the new arteries he proposed to open through the urban fabric, Prost referred to the remote history of Constantinopolis. He aimed at revealing the memory of the ancient city buried under the Ottoman Istanbul, while modernizing the urban infrastructure.

One of the consistent efforts of Prost in Istanbul was for the preservation of the Byzantine fortifications that surround the historical city. Besides labelling them as monuments, he defined, in his plan, a zone of *non-aedificandi* covering an area of 500 m. outside and 50 m. inside the terrestrial walls, in order to conserve the walls in their integrity, and also to emphasise their monumental total effect.

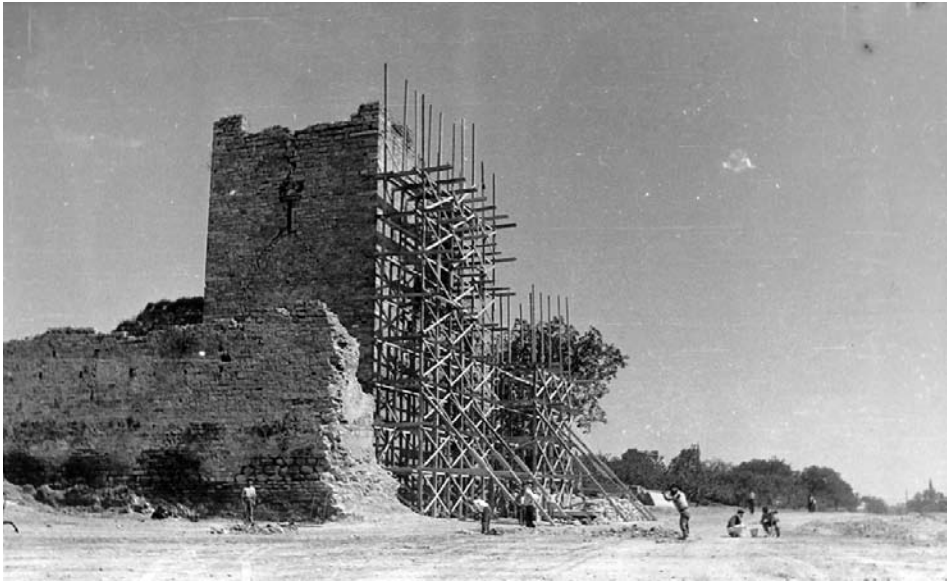


Fig. 10  
Restoration of the Byzantine fortifications, the Topkapı Gate in 1940s.  
Source: IFA / AA, Fonds Prost.

## CONCLUSION

The expectation of the Republican authorities from the planning of Istanbul was the modernisation of the city in conformity with the contemporary principles of urbanism. The French architect-urbanist Henri Prost, whom they addressed, set the two principal goals of the task as the modernisation of the urban infrastructure and the conservation of the city's historical landscape. In his planning proposal, he put emphasis on the preservation and display of the monuments of the city from both the Byzantine and Ottoman periods. Hence, he attempted to reconstruct the collective memory of the city through the co-existence of these monuments in the cityscape. However, while he paid particular attention to the individual monuments and historical structures, he opted for a highly interventionist attitude towards the Ottoman urban fabric in the name of modernisation with the new circulation network that he superposed on the historical urban fabric in particular. Prost's master plan was received positively by the local authorities as it brought the modern urban image that they expected to achieve. Yet, especially certain operations that brought the demolition of certain Ottoman structures were confronted with the reaction of some circles of intellectuals.

Henri Prost redesigned the old city in a way to bring out its "glorious" monuments and silhouette, reminiscent of its imperial history. In other words, his plan for the historical peninsula reclaimed the value of Istanbul as an urban geography dotted by the symbols of imperial power, both Byzantine and Ottoman in the Republican era. Indeed, the emphasis put on the Ottoman imperial monuments within the cityscape of Istanbul corresponded to the glorification of the "brilliant" moments in the Nation's history in the Republican historiography. By supporting archaeological studies, the Republic of Turkey also claimed to be the inheritor of the common history of human civilisation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The present chapter is based on the research "Preparation of an Inventory on the Planning work of Henri Prost in Istanbul (1936-1951)" conducted by S. Yerasimos, C. Bilsel, İ. Akpınar, P. Pinon, within the framework of the Bosphorus programme conjointly financed by the Turkish Institute of Science and Technology [TÜBİTAK] and EGIDE, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and on the archival research that I conducted at the *Institut Français d'Architecture* [IFA] with the financial support of the Turkish Academy of Sciences [TÜBA].
- <sup>2</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, was highly inspired by Enlightenment thought. His conviction on the merits of the republic, founded on the idea of a nation-state, was nurtured by the political philosophy of Enlightenment: the idea of a nation mainly depended on the definition of the national territory, unitary and undividable; and the capital of the nation-state had to be ideally situated at the geometric centre of this territory. This ideal was justified by being at equal distance from the most farthest parts of the national territory, as well as the ease of governing the country. Ankara was located almost at the geometric centre of the national territory of Turkey, as finally defined by the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923.
- <sup>3</sup> İ. Tekeli, *Türkiye'de Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kentsel Gelişme ve Kent Planlaması*, in Y. Sey (ed.), *75 Yılda Değişen Kent ve Mimarlık*, Istanbul 1998, pp. 4-11; G. Tankut, *Bir Başkent'in İmarı, Ankara: 1929-1939*, Ankara 1990.

- <sup>4</sup> Tekeli, *Türkiye’de*, cit.
- <sup>5</sup> C. Bilsel, *Ideology and Urbanism during the Early Republican Period: Two Master Plans for Izmir and Scenarios of Modernization*, in “Journal of the Faculty of Architecture”, 1996, 16, 1-2, pp. 13-30.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Cengizkan, *Ankara’nın İlk Planı 1924-25 Lörcher Planı*, Ankara 2004
- <sup>7</sup> Tankut, *Bir Başkent’in* cit.
- <sup>8</sup> İ. Tekeli, *Development of Urban Administration and Planning in the Formation of Istanbul Metropolitan Area*, in *Development of Istanbul Metropolitan Area and Low Cost Housing*, Istanbul 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> Th. Leveau, *Istanbul*, in L’Académie d’Architecture, *L’Œuvre de Henri Prost, Architecture et Urbanisme*, Paris 1960, pp. 183-208.
- <sup>10</sup> G. Wright, P. Rabinow, *L’Emergence d’un Urbanisme Moderne*, in J.-P. Epron (ed.), *Architecture une Anthologie*, Tome I: *La Culture Architecturale*, Liège 1992, pp. 163-164.
- <sup>11</sup> L. Hauteceur, *Henri Prost à la Villa Medici*, in *L’Académie d’Architecture*, cit. pp. 11-30.
- <sup>12</sup> J.-L. Cohen, *Henri Prost*, in J. P. Midant (ed.), *Dictionnaire de l’Architecture du XXe siècle*, Paris, 1996, p. 731.
- <sup>13</sup> N. Toucheff, *Henri Prost (1874-1959). Anvers, Casablanca, Paris*, in J. Dethier, A. Guilheux (eds.), *La Ville, Art et Architecture en Europe, 1870-1993*, Paris 1994, pp. 172-173; J.-L. Cohen, M. Eleb, *Casablanca: Mythes et Figures d’une Aventure Urbaine*, Paris 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> J.-P. Gaudin, *Desseins de Villes, ‘Art Urbain’ et Urbanisme, Anthologie*, Paris 1991, p. 169.
- <sup>15</sup> Bilsel, *Ideology* cit.
- <sup>16</sup> Z. Toprak, *Nüfus, Fetihten 1950’ye*, in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 6, Istanbul, 1994, p. 110.
- <sup>17</sup> Z. Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1993, p. 155.
- <sup>18</sup> The term belongs to Mustafa Reşit Paşa, one of the leading figures of *Tanzimat* reforms, who had written a letter to the Sultan Abdülmecit from London where he had been the ambassador. In the letter, he was explaining the reasons of the necessity of reconstructing the Ottoman capital. He was dwelling upon different Western models of settlement, comparing the British to the French in particular.
- <sup>19</sup> Z. Çelik, *Remaking* cit.; S. Yerasimos, *A propos des réformes urbaines de Tanzimat*, in P. Dumont, F. Georgeon (eds.), *Villes Ottomanes à la fin de l’Empire*, Paris 1992, pp. 17-32; S. Yerasimos, *Istanbul ou l’urbanisme par le feu*, in S. Yerasimos, F. Friès, “La Ville en Feu, µ Recherche Cahiers”, 1993, 6-7, pp. 26-36.
- <sup>20</sup> H. Prost, *Communication de Henri Prost, 17 Septembre 1947 à l’Institut de France*, in *Les Transformations d’Istanbul*, unpublished reports, 1947, pp. 15-16.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>23</sup> H. Prost, *Mémoire Descriptif du Plan Directeur de la Rive Européenne d’Istanbul*, in *Les Transformations d’Istanbul, Plans Directeurs*, vol. 3, unpublished reports, 1937.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; Prost, *Communication* cit.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.
- <sup>26</sup> Prost, *Mémoire* cit. pp. 12-13; Id., *Communication* cit. p. 21.
- <sup>27</sup> Id., *Mémoire* cit. pp. 19-23.
- <sup>28</sup> Id., *Communication* cit. p. 18 (Author’s translation from French).
- <sup>29</sup> Yerasimos, *Istanbul* cit.
- <sup>30</sup> Z. Çelik, *Remaking* cit.; Yerasimos, *A propos* cit.

- <sup>31</sup> This association, which was founded by Ottoman intellectuals in 1911, was active until the 1940s.
- <sup>32</sup> Prost, *Communication*, cit. pp. 27-30.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>34</sup> Prost, *Mémoire*, cit. p. 4; Prost, *Communication*, cit. pp. 28-29.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- <sup>37</sup> S. Güven, *Bir Roma Eyaletinin Evrim Sürecinde Galatia ve Ancyra*, in Y. Yavuz (ed.), *Tarih İçinde Ankara*, Ankara 2001, pp. 109-122.
- <sup>38</sup> H. Prost, *Mémoire*, cit. p. 5.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

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