



The Ottoman Empire's first attempt to establish hotels in İstanbul: The Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company



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HIGHLIGHTS

- 19th century İstanbul lacked facilities for its influx of European visitors.
- The Sultan granted James Masserie a charter to establish a company to build hotels.
- Despite several attempts, The Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company was unsuccessful.
- Examines the archival company charter, travel guides, and public letters.
- Despite reforms, Eastern capital focused on profit from government business.

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ABSTRACT

The number of travellers from Europe to Turkey, and especially İstanbul, increased dramatically as travel conditions improved pursuant to the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. However, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire was not equipped with adequate accommodations to host these visitors. Therefore, they had to take some measures to deal with this problem. This study gives an account of the Ottoman Imperial Court's first attempt to establish modern hotels to meet the needs to accommodate the growing number of visitors to İstanbul. This study provides the first examination of the imperial edict authorizing the establishment of the *Ottoman Imperial Hotel Company* and the construction of a hotel, the earliest documents related to this issue.

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1. Introduction

With the developments of railway and marine transportation after the industrial revolution, travel conditions improved. Consequently, individual travel from Europe to the East increasingly took the form of organised tours (Guillot, 2007, p. 97). To the commercial travel to Istanbul carried out by the ships belonging to British, French, and Austro-Hungarian-originated businesses were added the recreational travellers taking advantage of regular, frequent, and economic transport services (Germaner & İnankur, 2002, p. 57). While the first British steamship to enter Istanbul port did so in 1827, some 50 years later, companies such as Danube and P&O (Peninsular & Oriental) provided regular direct trips to Istanbul.

While *Danube Steamship Company* in 1829, starting from Galati, reached Trabzon and İstanbul through the Black Sea, via İzmir and Thessalonica, P&O Company also commenced regular scheduled trips in 1845 between Liverpool and İstanbul. The Austro-Hungarian *Lloyd* between Trieste–İstanbul and the French *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* between Marseille–İstanbul began to operate in 1837 (Müller-Wiener, 2003, p. 95). Thomas Cook, still surviving today in the tourism sector, organized the first world tour including İstanbul, which lasted 8 months, in 1872/73 (Cook, 2014).

Interests of Western people in the East resulted from the institutionalization of scientific branches such as history, geography, archaeology, ethnography, and philology, furthered by the development of Orientalism as a scientific branch in the leading universities of Europe until 1850. The development of orientalism made the East a career area for academicians (Said, 1978, p. 191). In addition, the intensity of the commercial, diplomatic, and military relationships between Europe and the Ottoman State also increased

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the number of foreigners arriving in İstanbul. All these developments necessitated the building of hotels in İstanbul with accommodations compatible with European standards (Kayın, 2000, p. 15).

There just were not enough hotels to accommodate this influx of visitors, especially after the mid-19th century. However, in addition to the shortage of hotels, the poor quality of existing facilities required immediate remediation. James Misserie, who had been running a well-known hotel, Hotel d'Angleterre in İstanbul for more than 20 years was confident that he could fix this problem. After outlining the 19th century accommodation facilities in İstanbul, this paper examines James Misserie's application to the Sultan for permission to establish a company to build hotels, the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company, a special authorization granted to him, and the company's charter using unpublished documents from the Ottoman archives. The study also draws on public sources, such as Thomas Cook's letter published in *The Times* about accommodation problems in İstanbul, and James Misserie's reproachful reply in the same newspaper. The study concludes by elaborating on why the project could not proceed, despite support from the Imperial Court.

2. 19th century accommodation in İstanbul

Hotels as they emerged in 18th century Europe began to appear in the Ottoman Empire from the first half of the 19th century. A hotel culture emerged with Hotel *des Quatre Nations* established in 1840 at Kuledibi in the Galata-Pera district (Üsdiken, 1992, p. 28).

However, Hotel d'Angleterre, established in 1841 at Pera and operated by Levantine James Misserie, was the first accommodation offering standard features at a level comparable to those in Europe, with its reception, restaurant, and lobby, in addition to luxurious rooms. It was thus the first modern hotel in the Ottoman Empire (Gülersoy, 1999, p. 5). Since they were operated by the Levantines, the first hotels in İstanbul were generally located in Pera, a locale favoured by non-Muslims and with many embassies (Dökmeci & Çıracı, 1990, p. 37).

Some information about İstanbul's accommodation is available from newspapers, travel books, and travel guides of that period. A set of travel guides about Turkey by John Murray Publishing House in the 19th century were published almost simultaneously with those on Europe, and included brief information about accommodation facilities.

The first of these is a travel guide called *A Hand-book for Travellers in the Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, and Constantinople*, published in 1840 that noted that 'There is no place where a good hotel is more required', drawing attention to the poor facilities in İstanbul. Among the major hotels of Pera, the Locanda di Europa, City of London, and London hotels were mentioned, though there is no information about the hotels' features, they are significant as they predate the establishment of the Hotel d'Angleterre. Guiseppina Pension and lodgings, called Roboly, Balbiani, and Eccles, were in fact mansions in which rooms were rented. The travel guide indicates that up to the second half of the 19th century, lodging owners' fears of plague epidemics in many regions in the Ottoman territory, including İstanbul, led to some odd preventive measures. According to visitors, they were obliged to pass through the smoke-box before they were permitted to enter each time they went out.

Most of these lodgings charged a daily fee of \$1–2, including food (Murray, 1840, p. 150). According to the 1845 edition of this travel guide, the best hotel in Pera was Hotel d'Angleterre, opened by James Misserie in 1841. The guide emphasizes that this hotel provided excellent facilities at a rate of \$2.50 per day. The guide also mentions Hotel Bellevue, and estates belong to Madam Giuseppina

Vitale and Paul Robby in Pera district, located on the popular Petits Champs des Morts (small cemetery) promenade. Daily accommodation fees were not less than \$1 and rarely exceeded \$2 in the estates (Murray, 1845, p. 171).

Another source of information about accommodation is a travel guide called '*Hand-book for Travellers in Turkey*' printed in 1854, which also states that Hotel d'Angleterre was the best hotel. Additionally, Madam Giuseppina Vitale's estate operated under the name of Hotel de Byzance. Hotel d'Europe, situated in the street leading from the landing place at Tophane to Pera, was listed as the third best, as it was a new enterprise. While noting that these two hotels were less expensive than Hotel d'Angleterre, at a daily fee of about \$1.5, they were less comfortable, though the guide also mentions Hotel de Pera in the same price range. In all these establishments English, French, Italian, Greek, and Turkish were spoken (Murray, 1854, p. 55).

The *Handbook for Travellers in Constantinople*, printed in 1871, is significant as it focuses on İstanbul. This particular travel guide provided more information about accommodation depending on the hotel. The number of hotels in İstanbul had increased over the previous years, and travellers were informed of a project called the Grand Hotel Company. This guide also rated Hotel d'Angleterre, as the best in Pera, noting that this business benefitted from some renown in Europe, was well recognized by travellers, and highly recommended with its central location and cleanliness. Other notable hotels mentioned were the Hotel de Byzance and Hotel de Luxembourg in Grand Rue de Pera (İstiklal Street), Hotel d'Orient in the street overlooking Petits Champs des Morts (Small Cemetery), Hotel de Paris in Yeni Çarşı Street, and Hotel de Pesth in Venice Street. Among these, the Hotel de Byzance with its cleanliness and that it was well-kept, and Hotel de Luxembourg with its restaurant, stood out. While indicating that Greek cuisine was served in the Hotel Orient and French cuisine in the Hotel de Paris, it stated that these had poor accommodations and especially the latter was not a family hotel (Murray, 1871, pp. 67–68).

According to Coufopoulos (1910) fourth edition of *A Guide to Constantinople*, the best hotel was Pera Palas, built in the last years of that period, with its Bosphorus and Haliç (Golden Horn) view. Other notable hotels were Tokatlıyan (est. 1897), Hotel de Londres (est. 1891), and Hotel Bristol (est. 1892) (Coufopoulos, 1910, p. 35).

Towards the end of the 19th century, one of the most important companies of that period, *Wagons Lits*, which provided railway transportation between the East and West, established the *Compagnie Internationale des Grands Hôtels* in the early 1890 to open hotels, each called the Palace Hotel on their express routes, opened the famous Pera Palace Hotel in İstanbul (Üsdiken, 1991).

Some city hotels in İstanbul had branches in countryside regions such as the Adalar and Bosphorus coasts. For example, Summer Palace Hotel of the Pera Palace Hotel in Tarabya (est. 1893), a second Tokatlıyan Hotel in Tarabya (est. 1900), and Giacomo Hotel of Hotel d'Orient in Büyükaada were resorts opened by their parent companies to operate in the summer season (Durudoğan, 1998, pp. 89–90).

Besides agreements recognizing free trade rights with Britain in 1838 and with other European countries in the following years, foreigners gained the right to buy property during the Tanzimat Period (1839–1876). These conditions significantly increased the number of tradesmen coming to İstanbul (Kayın, 2000, p. 14). Throughout the Crimea War (1853–1856), diplomats, military authorities, journalists, health-care providers, and even British and French spies allied with the Ottoman State against Russia often visited İstanbul (Gülersoy, 1999, p. 9). Thomas Cook, in September of 1872, arranged a world tour departing from Leicester, then on to the US through the Atlantic Ocean by ship, proceeding through the

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