



# 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 Büyükkada 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

Pacific Ocean to Japan, China, Singapore, and India. Later, on leaving Bombay, the tour reached Cairo through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. While many in the group returned to London from Cairo, Thomas Cook extended the tour to include Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and France. Over the next years, the company operated this tour regularly (Cook, 2014). However, the lack of modern hotels in İstanbul stood out.

One of the letters Thomas Cook sent from various destinations to *The Times* newspaper in England, which included his notes on the world tour, mentioned the dearth of modern hotels in İstanbul. In the April 17, 1873 letter posted from İstanbul, entitled 'Tours in Egypt and Palestine', and published in the May 27, 1873 issue of *The Times* Thomas Cook lamented the struggle for accommodations in İstanbul, a large central city which did not have even one hotel able to host 50 people comfortably. He also expressed his doubts that there were even a total of 250 beds available in all hotels, regardless of quality. His evaluation also emphasizes that the hotel considered one of the best in İstanbul

and well recognized by British travellers had a bad reputation because of its high prices.

Thomas Cook's complaint, in light of Europe's modern hotels, seems correct in terms of comfort and the number of beds. Although there seemed to be a sufficient number of hotels in service since 1841, they were of low standard and had at most 20–30 rooms, as compared to some in Europe. Among the hotels opened between 1841 and 1872, were the Hotel d'Angleterre (est. 1841), Hotel d'Europe (est. 1848), Hotel d'Orient (est. 1849), Hotel de Byzance (est. 1849), Hotel de Pera (est. 1849), Hotel de France (est. 1851), Hotel des Ambassadeurs (est. 1855), Hotel Rest Palais des Fleurs (est. 1855), Hotel Rest des Colonies (est. 1856), Hotel de la Grece (est. 1860), Hotel de Paris (est. 1862), Hotel de Vienne (est. 1864), Hotel d'Orient (est. 1864), Grand Hotel de Luxembourg (est. 1870), Hotel St. Petersbourg (est. 1870), and Hotel de Constantinople (est. 1872).

James Misserie, manager of the Hotel d'Angleterre, saw this letter and his June 9, 1873 reply, entitled 'Constantinople', was

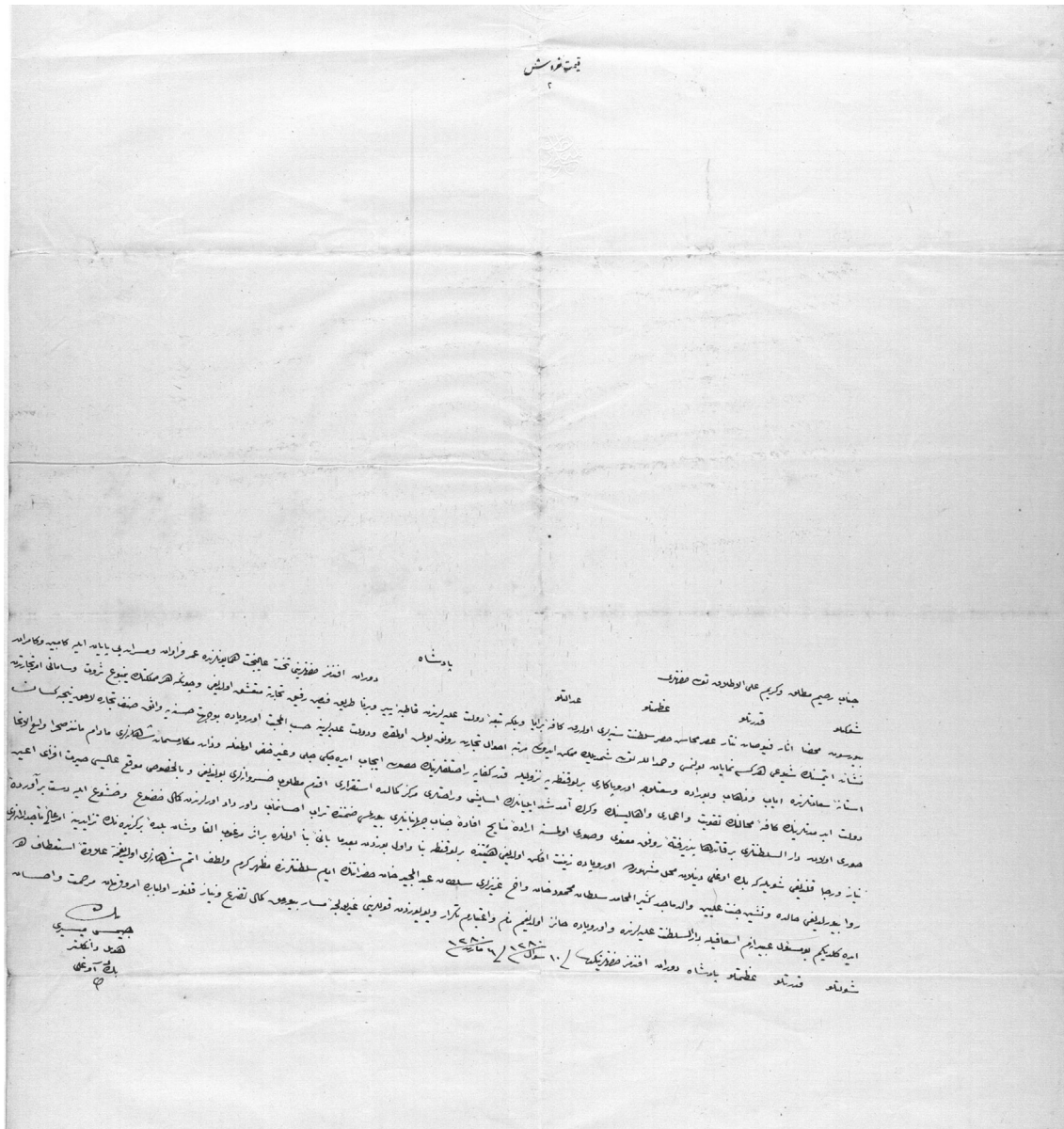


Fig. 1. James Misserie's application to Sultan Abdülaziz.

published in *The Times* on June 20. In his letter written from Hotel d'Angleterre in Pera, Misserie stated that he agreed with some complaints about hotel deficiencies and the absolute requirement for more hotels and increasing the number of beds, but also wanted to clarify some of Cook's misinterpretations by staking his own name upon the truth of his statements. Misserie pointed out that no city in Europe had improved so much in terms of transportation. Over the ten year period, arrivals grew from four regular weekly arrivals besides trade ships also transporting passengers, the rapidly growing number of ships arriving under every ensign, in addition to the large passenger ships from France, Austria, Russia, Italy, and Egypt to İstanbul to reach 35 every week. Additionally, thanks to rapid transportation provided to all sectors of Europe with the Varna and Odessa lines, arrivals had increased, thus the number of visitors from every class rightly wished to stay in the best hotel. Thus, tour operators like Cook arriving with large groups had not anticipated full hotels, and thus stayed in second class hotels where they were more likely to find empty rooms.

Miserie emphasized that this was unacceptable and hoped that he could fully meet the increasing demand in İstanbul in the shortest time. Since the direct railway connection between Europe and India would again significantly increase the number of international passengers, this was unavoidable. He also highlighted conditions from the viewpoint of a tourism manager, stating that the decline in the number of houses resulted from population density in the great Pera, and subsequent fires vastly increased house prices. Aside from an unbalanced increase in rent prices, land price overvaluations were the actual problem in the hotel industry.

**3. The Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company**

James Misserie, an entrepreneur with credibility in both Europe and the Ottoman State, lived during the time of Sultan Mahmud II and Sultan Abdülmejid, was honoured with many compliments (BOA. I. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 3). This was the Tanzimat Period,

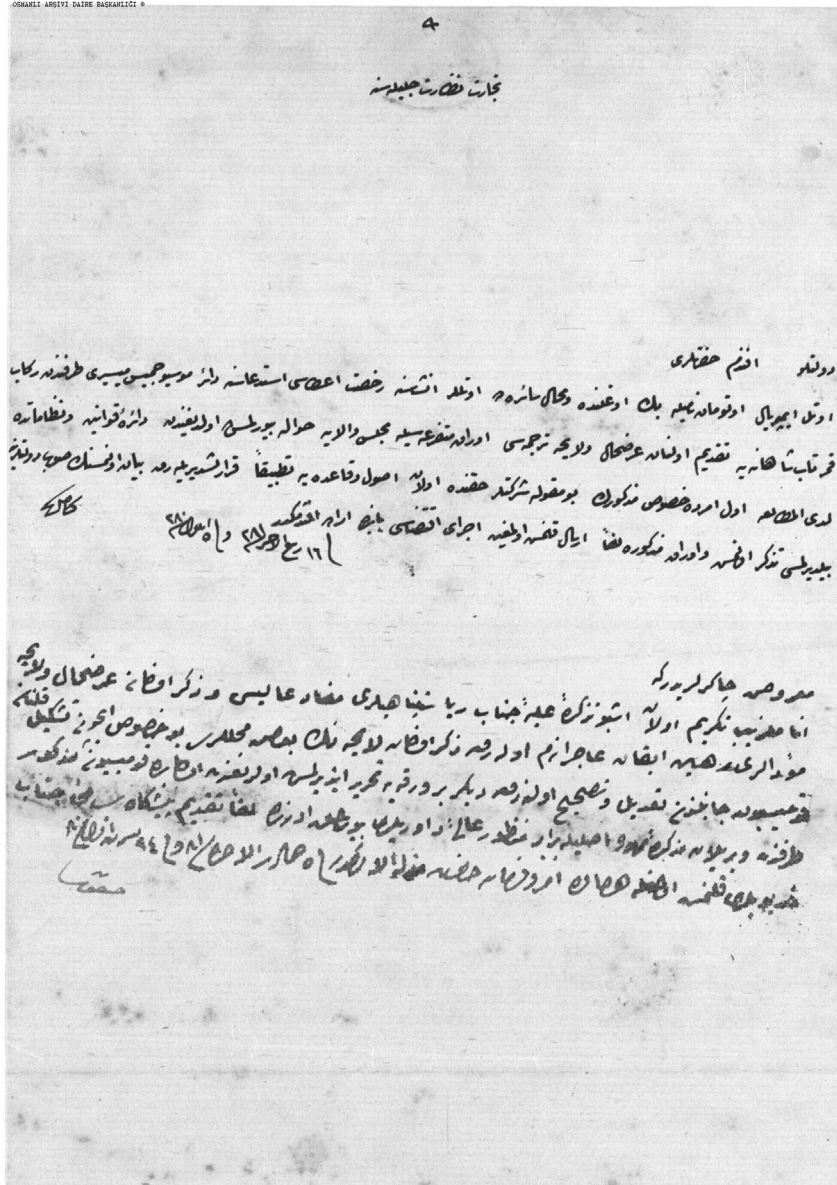


Fig. 2. The document sent to the Ministry of Commerce.

during which the Ottoman State tried to become more Western and adopted a liberal approach, and when European capitalists increased their commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire.

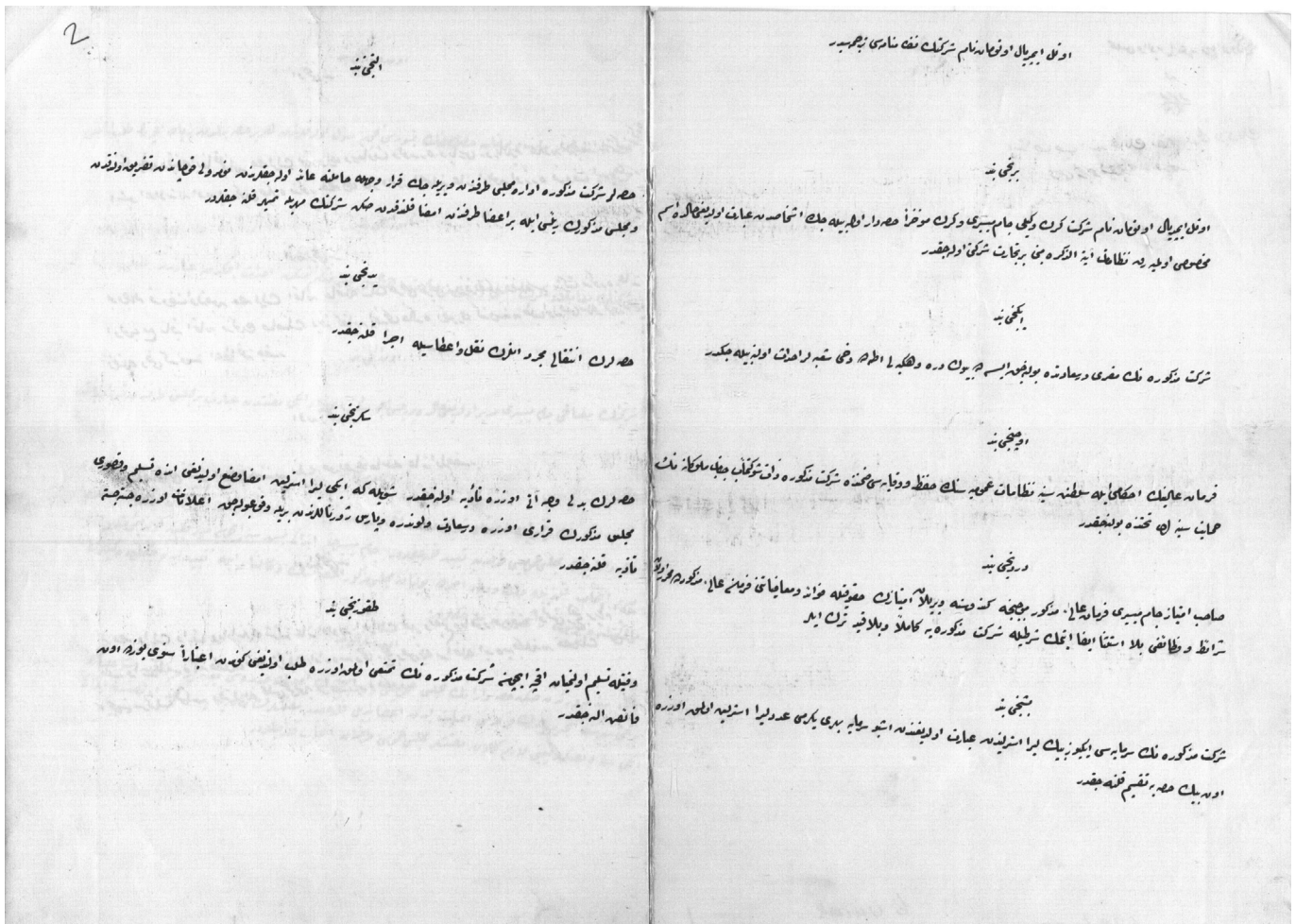
Given this context, Misserie mentioned the importance of trade in the enrichment of countries in his proposal to Sultan Abdülaziz requesting to open accommodation and hosting services, and perhaps a restaurant, especially to serve European tradesmen and travellers (BOA. İ. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 3-Pic. 1). He requested permission to build hotels compatible to those at the time in places such as Beyoğlu, Büyükdere, Üsküdar, and Büyükdada, among others and to establish the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company, with the goal of helping İstanbul to develop into a modern city in terms of accommodations (BOA. İ. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 5-Pic. 2; BOA. İ. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 8).

The request to establish the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company was evaluated by the Ministry of Commerce and Supreme Assembly (Meclis-i Valâ), which informed him that there was no harm in building hotels, so they granted their permission while stating that this could never be a monopoly or a concession. The company's profit and output were not committed to the government, so the profit and loss belonged to the company (BOA. C. BLD, 141/7012; BOA. İ. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 7; BOA. İ. MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 8). Thus the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company was established in 1865. The 1871 edition of John Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Constantinople*, reported that 'taking as an example the projects successfully realized in London and Paris, for building the modern

hotels in İstanbul, the works were started to establish a company called *Grand Hotel Company*'. The Grand Hotel Company mentioned here is likely the same project as the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company, and according to the travel guides, the Sultan himself commanded that the land and garden of the Swedish Embassy with views of the Bosphorus, Haliç (Golden Horn), and Marmara landscapes was chosen as a building site.

According to the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company regulations, it was to be a commercial company consisting of James Misserie, proxy of company, and others who will later join as shareholders (Item 1). Headquartered in İstanbul, it could still open branches in Heybeliada (Item 2). The company was to act in accordance with the Sultan's command and fulfil its duties given without exception, and receive protection from the Sultan (Items 3–4). The company objective was to build a hotel for both foreigners and those from İstanbul (Item 15).

James Misserie was appointed director for a five year term and could be assigned this post indefinitely (Item 17). The company was to be managed by an assembly consisting of one president, eight members, and two inspectors (Items 16 and 18) serving for two years, after which these members would be assigned by the *General Assembly of Shareholders* (General Assembly) (Item 21). One-third of the members of the board of directors were to be replaced annually. General Assembly members must prove that they have at least 50 shares, and inspectors at least 20 shares (Item 20). If the President is absent, then the board of directors meeting was to be led by the



Pic. 3. The first two pages of the regulation.

oldest member present (Item 22), the meeting to be held at least monthly to assess the state of company. Decisions were to be made by a majority vote, though more than two-thirds of the members had to be present to make a decision (Item 23). The company director was responsible for executing these decisions, in addition to completing all task assignments and taking responsibility for any lawsuits and law court representation on behalf of board of directors (Item 26). Any General Assembly members should have at least 3 shares, and voting was conducted according to the number of shares: 10 shares are in the value of 1 vote; 20 shares 2 votes, 40 shares 3 votes, 60 shares 4 votes, 80 shares 5 votes, 100 shares 6 votes, 150 shares 7 votes, 200 shares 8 votes, 250 shares 9 votes, and 300 shares 10 votes, to a maximum of 10 votes per shareholder, regardless of the number of shares held. Shareholders could also use proxies, based on the decision of board of directors, who could vote for both him/herself and the other shareholder they represent (Item 28). Members of the General Assembly were to apply for membership by submitting their shares to the company

headquarters or to officials in Paris and London to receive a receipt and an admission document (Item 30). The General Assembly decisions were made in accordance with a contract that included all shareholders (Item 31). Meetings would record the members (and their shares) present, to be signed later by all members (Item 32), and eventually the President and Secretary. Any decisions or task assignments from the board of directors and inspectors, and General Assembly decisions were printed and published (Item 33).

These Regulations also outlined the fiscal relationships between the capital and shareholders: the company will have 200,000 lira sterling of capital, divided into 10,000 shares, each to be purchased at 20 lira sterling (Item 5). Shares could not be divided, and the last disposition will belong to its holder (Item 12), based on the authority of the board directors, and were to be signed by the President of the board of directors plus one member, and then stamped with the company stamp (Item 6). Shares were purchased on a payment plan: an initial payment (two lira sterling) was paid as soon as it is signed, and the remainder upon an announcement

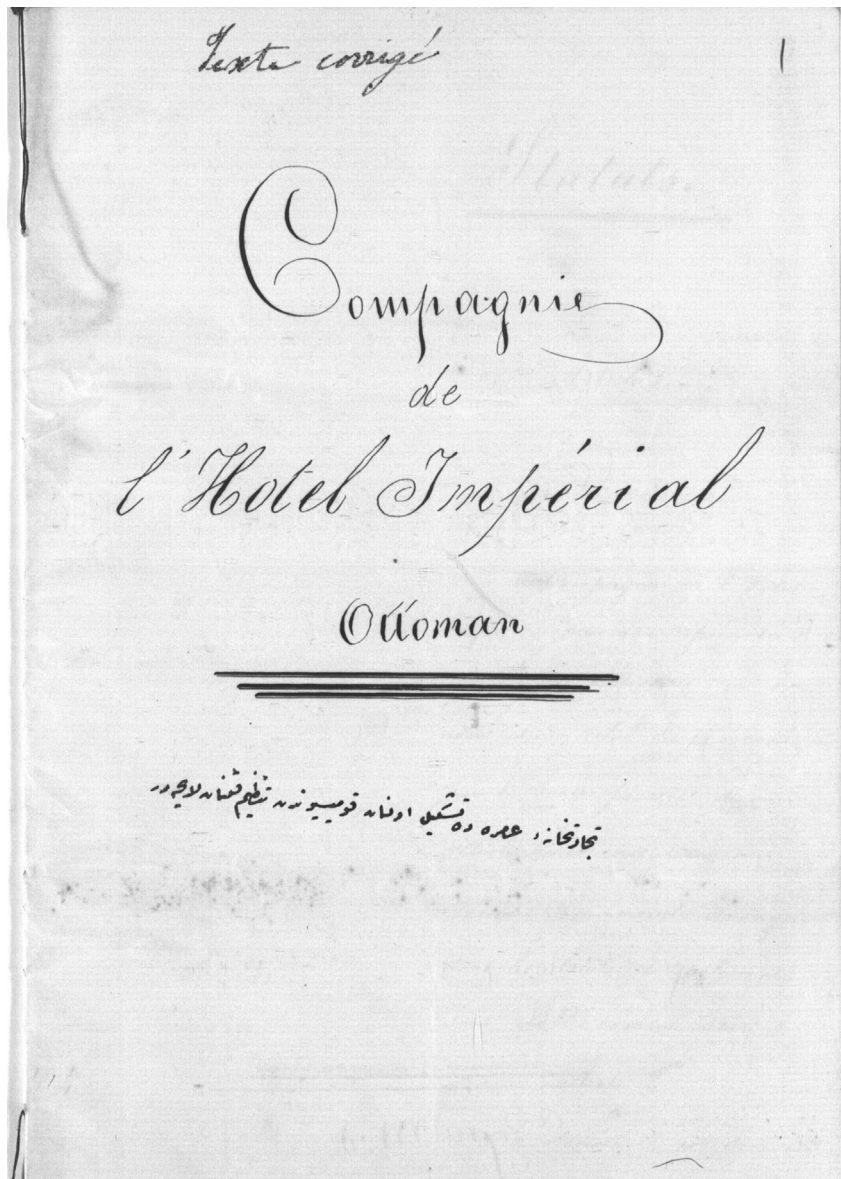


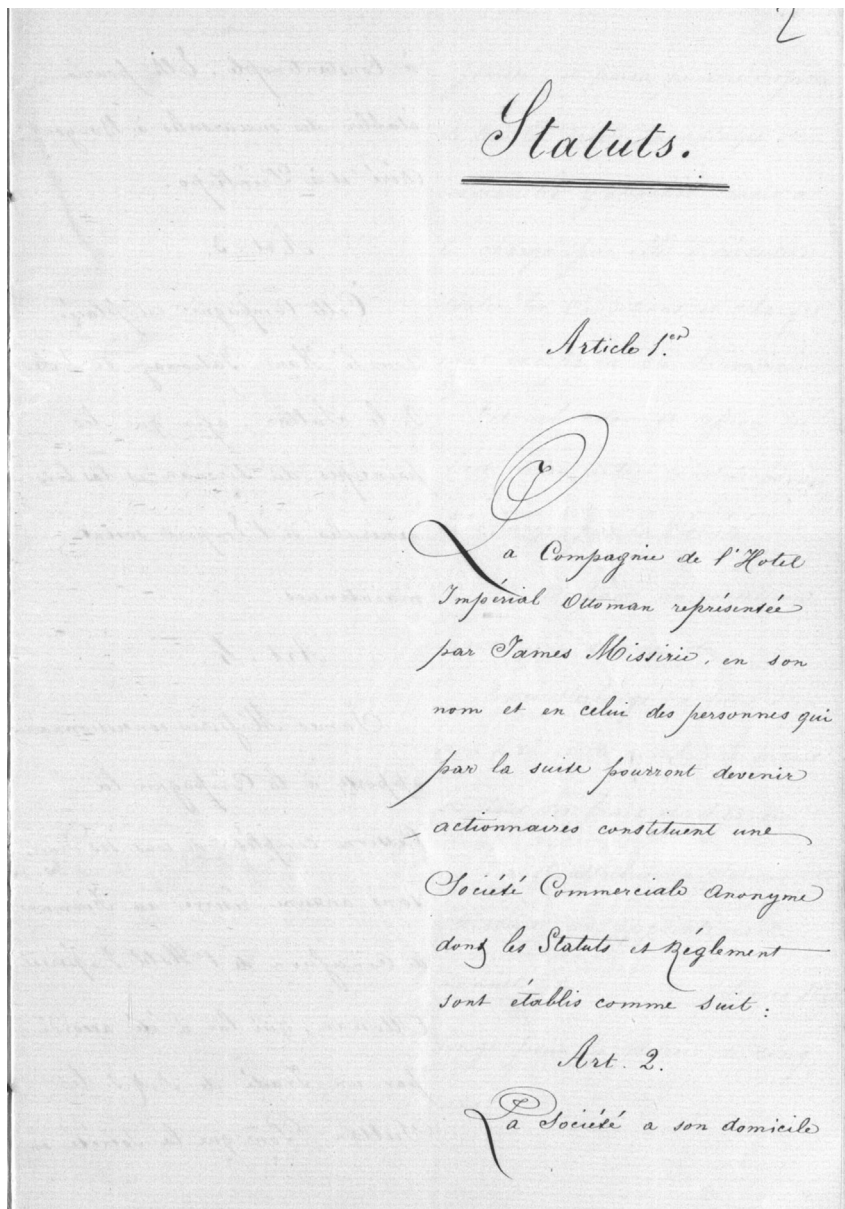
Fig. 4. The cover of the regulation.

published in one of the newspapers of İstanbul, Paris, and London (Item 8). Shareholders had to pay an annual interest of 10% on the outstanding payment for the share, with public announcements of those not paying their instalments on time in the newspapers of İstanbul, Paris, and London. In case the original owner did not purchase the remaining share within 15 days after announcement, it would be sold and its profit and loss would belong to its owner (Items 9–10). Successors and creditors of a shareholder could not demand any goods belonging to the company to be stamped, sold, and shared for payment, nor intervene in company management. However, to collect their debt, they could refer to ledger of the company and General Assembly (Item 13). Shareholders could not demand a higher price than its value for their own shares (Item 14).

The company focused on transparency and added a regulation to have its activities audited via auditors to examine its transactions and the stocks issued in exchange of receipt. In addition, they would control the accounting and cost journals (Item 27). Books

were to be balanced every six months and submitted to auditors for two periods, February and August. The auditors would receive this within 15 days. In the first six months, shareholders were to receive some amount of profit as determined by the General Assembly (Item 34) by charging it to the account. The board of directors would also arrange a book indicating the state of the company at the end of every year to be evaluated and either approved or rejected by the General Assembly. The company profits were the remainder after subtracting its expenditures from income. Five percent of the profit was to be set aside in reserve (Item 35). After subtracting the reserve fund and the 10% belonging to the assembly from the company profits, the remainder was to be distributed to the shareholders (Item 36). (BOA, İ.MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 1-Pic. 3; for the French text of the regulation, see BOA, İ.MVL. 529/23721, Lef: 4-Pic. 4–5).

The Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company began operations in 1865 under Misserie's leadership, though failed after several



**Pic. 5.** The first page of the regulation in French.

attempts. Thomas Cook's letter, discussed above, hinted at this situation while mentioning the scarcity of accommodation facilities in İstanbul, and stated that this situation would be corrected only with a public-spirited effort to build a good and independent hotel, indicating that there had been little effort in this regard. His letter also refers to a new project that received a lot of attention in 1870 through a reference to a very powerful banker of that period with the understanding that this banker communicated that 'perhaps, something may be done in ten years'. Yet another person he spoke with indicated that 'everything here is upside down and we are never sure of the completion of any projects.' Cook's final judgement was summarized in one statement: 'Round the world I have not found a larger place so wretchedly provided with hotels as Constantinople; and I shall be glad when, on the Sea of Marmara, homeward bound, we turn our backs on the Golden Horn.'

Cook's letter makes clear that he, and those he spoke with about the issue, did not hold an optimistic view of whether or not a hotel could be constructed. The political conditions had an impact. The Ottoman authorities were attempting reforms during this period to address the problematic political, economic, and social conditions of the Empire.

James Misserie replied, as noted above, as the director of The Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company, and reported that the Sultan had turned his attention to the issue of opening modern hotels and granted Misserie a special dispensation to erect a grand hotel with the support of some London capital. However, they were unable to finish this construction for a number of reasons. In addition, he reported that the most recent attempt, by a French group, failed, and so again the company had turned to London for support, and expressed his belief that this attempt had every prospect of success.

In reproaching Cook, Misserie stated that these attempts should not be seen as vain efforts because the most important capitalists of London and Paris were working on the project. The final part of his reply included his criticisms of 'Eastern' capital, stating that there was a lack of some 'Chicago spirit' in İstanbul, and further revealing that local capital was far more engaged in profiting from governmental business, so hotel building was not on their agenda.

Capital controlled by Eastern interests had little concern for hotel building, believing that modern hotel management was more of a Western need. All of the hotels mentioned in various travel guides had foreign names, indicating that these were marketed to Europeans rather than Anatolians, and Eastern capital did not show a sufficient interest in this situation.

#### 4. Conclusion

The development of tourism is generally evaluated in two different periods: before and after the industrial revolution. While the contemporary components of the tourism sector, such as tour operators, transportation, and accommodations appeared depending on developments during the industrial revolution, travel from Europe to the East increased in the 19th century, especially to İstanbul. This was driven mainly by the desire to see Anatolia, and to experience and understand the daily life, clothing, food, entertainment, and traditions of the Ottoman Empire, other travellers, including soldiers, diplomats, tradesmen, and scholars were shaped according to their own interests. The first hotels of İstanbul should have opened in the 1830s in the Pera-Galata region that housed a dense population of non-Muslims to meet the increasing number of visitors. The Hotel d'Angleterre, opened in Pera in 1841 and operated by James Misserie, was the first modern hotel in İstanbul. Towards the late 19th century, the number of

accommodation businesses in Beyoğlu dramatically increased to 50, and the first countryside hotels on the Bosphorus coasts and Adalar were built. However, though it seems that there were enough of them, the family businesses operated from private houses lagged in terms of quality compared to those in Europe. Particularly in the third quarter of the 19th century, there was a shortage of beds in İstanbul, a situation which many travellers noticed.

To address this shortfall, James Misserie obtained from the Sultan in 1864 permission to build large luxury hotels to accommodate tradesmen and tourists in Büyükdere, Üsküdar, and Büyükdada. Thus, the Ottoman Imperial Hotels Company, supported by the Ottoman Empire itself, was the first attempt to build European style hotels, though it ultimately failed despite the requirement as highlighted in Thomas Cook's letter to *The Times* newspaper in 1873.

After the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Ottoman Empire's finances deteriorated, leading to a dependency on overseas loans and occasional difficulties in paying government salaries. This was also an era of reformation, known as the Tanzimat, characterized by various attempts to modernize the Ottoman Empire. While this should have generated positive results, local riots broke out against the new Tanzimat regulations, creating social and political unrest. Additionally, the company's ownership of its own profit and loss, as stated in its charter, as opposed to any government commitment, may have discouraged potential investors. However, this did not end attempts to open hotels, but rather provided a source of inspiration for attempts to emerge in the forthcoming periods.

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