

Continuity and Change in Turkish Bathing Culture in Istanbul: The Life Story of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*

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ABSTRACT *Using the biography of the Çemberlitaş Hamam as a vantage point, this study traces continuity and change in the historical context and meaning of bathing culture in Istanbul. The baths' social, economic and symbolic significance through the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is examined, and the effects of modernizing reforms of the late eighteenth century, the Tanzimat and the republican period are analyzed. Finally, a discussion of the perception of the hamam by foreign and Turkish visitors in an era of global tourism shows how baths continue to reflect larger historical forces and cultural debates.*

KEY WORDS: Bath, hamam, Ottoman-heritage, Istanbul tourism

Introduction

Walking on Istanbul's Divanyolu from Sultanahmet towards the Covered Bazaar, one passes the historical Çemberlitaş *Hamam*. The *hamam* is located on the corner between the Divanyolu, a main artery of traffic since Byzantine times, and the small plaza around the Çemberlitaş, the burnt remains of Constantine's Column, which was erected in 330 AD (see figure 1). Opposite the *hamam*, the minaret and the dome of the late-fifteenth-century Atik Ali Paşa mosque dominate the skyline of the plaza. Since its completion in 1584, the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* has almost continuously provided services to the public, both to residents of the quarter and to foreign visitors. It is one of the few remaining working baths of the approximately 150 original public *hamams* of the city of Istanbul.¹

The aim of this study is to trace the history of Turkish bathing culture in Istanbul with particular emphasis on developments during the twentieth century, using the life story of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* as a vantage point. The study of bathing culture may seem like an undue concentration on a small aspect of daily life. However, Turkish baths were, and to a certain extent still are, a social phenomenon, the study

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Figure 1. Exterior of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*. Source: Author's photograph.

of which allows us valuable insights into connections between everyday life and larger historical forces. One of the main questions dealt with here is how a pre-modern, Ottoman institution that was considered to be an integral part of traditional city life was treated in periods of modernization and reform. How could the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*, as a representative of this institution, survive urban planning schemes, derogatory and even hostile attitudes towards Ottoman cultural and architectural heritage, and waning numbers of customers? How did the role of the *hamam* and the place of bathing culture in daily life change with the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the accompanying reforms? And how is the *hamam* perceived by Turks and foreign visitors at the turn of the twenty-first century, in an era when local traditions take on new meanings in the light of such global phenomena as tourism, the investment of foreign capital and the widespread use of the internet?

In order to answer these questions, a discussion of the architectural and historical context of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* provides a necessary framework: without understanding the bathhouse's history from its establishment in the sixteenth century to today, it would be impossible to fully grasp the continuities and changes in the past and present conditions of this institution and the different meanings attached to it. In this sense, this essay presents a short biography of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*, highlighting the most significant transformations that also affected other *hamams*. This biographical approach has two distinct advantages: First, it allows us to see contextual shifts in the use of monuments over time, privileging neither the past nor the present to the exclusion of one or the other. And secondly, it permits us to see a local institution—be that a *hamam*, a mosque or a church—in a global context, that is,

within an economic, social and cultural network, such as an endowment, a newly emerging nation-state, or global tourism. And instead of seeing this local institution as an unchanging monolithic entity suspended in ahistorical time, a biography confirms the idea that Appadurai has captured so well in his book *Modernity at Large*: “locality is itself a historical product ... subject to the dynamics of the global.”² As we shall see in the course of this essay, the meanings attached to Turkish baths and bathing culture have changed significantly over time; at the same time, contextual changes in *hamams* as localities were never independent of global dynamics.

The Architecture of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* and the Bathing Procedure

The Çemberlitaş *Hamam* is a typical double bath, with a section each for men and women, organized parallel to each other in a symmetrical way and contained in an almost square building block topped by four larger and many smaller domes (see figure 2).³ While the entrance to the women’s section originally must have been a

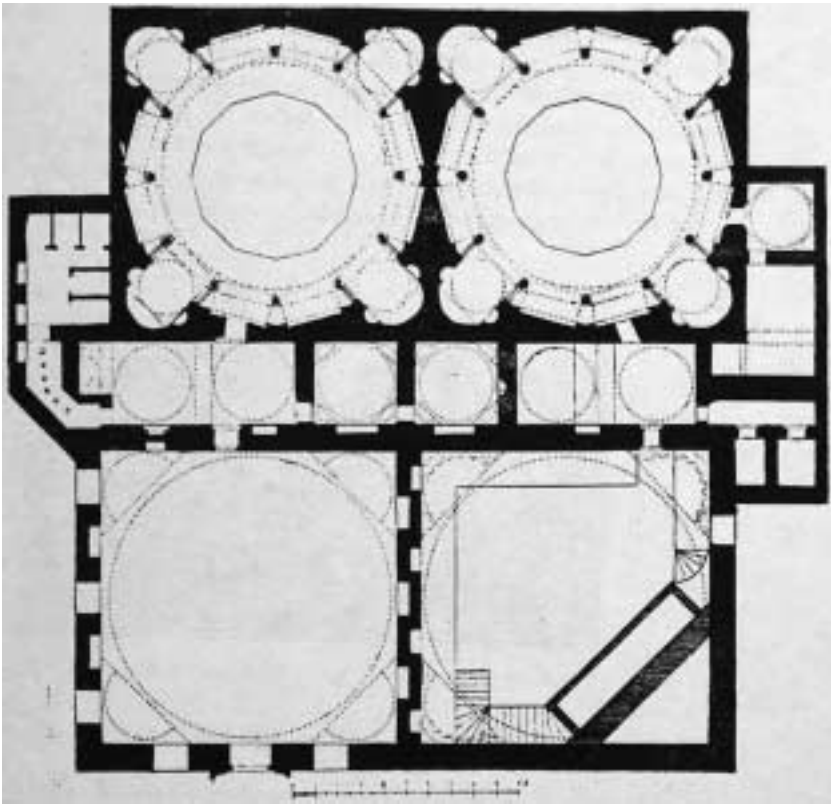


Figure 2. Ground plan of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*. Source: Heinrich Glück, *Probleme des Wölbungsbaues: Die Bäder Konstantinopels* (Vienna: Halm and Goldmann, 1921).



Figure 3. Inscription over the entrance to the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*. Source: Author's photograph.

rather inconspicuous door on the side of the building in order to safeguard the modesty and invisibility of the visiting womenfolk, the entrance to the men's section—which today is the only entrance for both men and women—faces the Burnt Column and the Atik Ali Paşa mosque. Far from inconspicuous, the entrance to the men's section sports an inscription in verse, written by the sixteenth-century poet Sa'i-i Da'i (see figure 3), praising the building and its patron.

Upon entering the building through this entrance, visitors find themselves in the dressing room of the men's section (*soğukluk*).⁴ This room is built over a square of 13 meters length, its walls lined with wooden cabins, and topped by a dome with a diameter of 13 meters. Its traditional function is not only that of a place for the bath visitors to undress and store their belongings, but also that of a lounge, for taking refreshments and entertaining after the actual bath. After undressing and wrapping oneself into a flat-woven towel (*peştemal*), male visitors proceed through a door opposite the entrance into the warm room (*ılıklik*), where they can slowly accustom themselves to the higher temperature of the bath.⁵ This room leads through another door into the heart of the bathhouse, the *sıcaklık*.

The hot room (*sıcaklık*) consists of a large domed space over a square ground plan (see figure 4).⁶ In the center of the room, an elevated marble slab (*göbektaşı*) gives the bathers a place to lie down after pouring several bowls of water over themselves from one of the marble basins lined up along the outer walls and the niches. On the *göbektaşı*, the bathers work up a sweat in the humid air. About half an hour later, the bathers are ready for a scrub and a massage, which also can be given by the *hamam* attendant (*tellak*). The women's section of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* originally encompassed the same units in the same order and with the same functions as the men's



Figure 4. Interior of the men's hot room of the Çemberlitaş Hamam. Source: Author's photograph.

section: *soğukluk*, *ılıklik* and *sıcaklık*. Yet, as a result of nineteenth-century events described below, the women's section was closed for several decades and its *soğukluk* used for other purposes. Today, the *soğukluk* still has not been reverted to its original use, although such plans exist. As of December 2003, it was housing a restaurant serving traditional Anatolian food to tourists. In order to enable female bathers to still make use of the *ılıklik* and *sıcaklık*, an entryway was broken diagonally from the men's *soğukluk* to the women's *ılıklik* (see figure 2) and a narrow section of the men's *soğukluk* was partitioned off to serve the bath's female visitors as a dressing room.

The overall impression of the original architecture is one of fine understatement, as so often affected by Sinan's most successful architectural creations. The *hamam*'s exterior has lost much of the grandeur that it must have possessed in earlier centuries: the street level has risen so high that the entrance can only be reached down a flight of stairs, and shops and lean-to buildings envelope the main façade towards the Burnt Column. Nevertheless, the domes, which are the most distinguishing characteristic of any Ottoman bathhouse, still dominate the street corner, and the eight-sided lantern with its crown-like decoration on top of the dome of the women's *soğukluk* enhances their height.

The furnace of the Çemberlitaş Hamam as a typical example of a Turkish bathhouse's heating system deserves particular mention here. Located behind the hot rooms in the back of the building block, the furnace heats the air within the bath, the water and, indirectly, the bath's floors, by means of an ingenious system, the

hypocausts, which are derived from the *hamam*'s ancestor, the Roman bath. The floor is suspended on pillars, which create a hollow space through which the hot gases and smoke generated by the fire circulate. Flues in the walls and chimneys on the roof allow the gas and smoke to escape. Today, as in the centuries before, a stoker (*külhancı*) still looks after the entire heating system and fuels the fire with wood.

The *Hamam* and its Functions before the Nineteenth Century

Like so many baths in Istanbul, the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* was established within the framework of a charitable endowment (*vakıf*). It provided income for the upkeep of the Atik Valide Külliyesi, a large mosque complex in Üsküdar. The founder of the bath and the mosque complex was Nurbanu Sultan (c.1530–83), wife to Selim II (r.1566–74) and mother to Sultan Murat III (r.1574–95). A colorful personality of Greek or Venetian origin, Nurbanu continued the tradition of Ottoman royal women participating indirectly in government affairs by patronizing mosques, caravanse-rais, hospitals, baths and other buildings that served the public good.⁷ The mosque complex, built between 1571 and 1583 under the supervision of the court architect Sinan, and the related endowed businesses, farms and houses of Nurbanu Sultan served the inhabitants of Üsküdar on many levels: the mosque provided a place of prayer; the primary school (*mekteb*), the secondary school (*medrese*), the school for studying the traditions of the Prophet (*dariülhadis*), the school for Koran readers (*dariülkurra*) and the convent (*tekke*), as educational institutions, ensured the spread of religious knowledge and doctrine in a state-controlled manner; the hospital (*dariüşşifa*) provided free treatment for the benefit of the subjects' physical well-being; the kitchen (*imaret*) provisioned the more than 300 employees and the poor of the neighborhood with two meals on a daily basis; and the inn (*han*) accommodated travelers from throughout the Ottoman Empire and beyond.⁸ By constructing such buildings, which often formed the economic basis of an entire neighborhood, the female members of the sultanic household demonstrated that the imperial family cared about the well-being of their subjects, a strategy to project royal legitimacy.

In order to acquire the financial resources for the building and upkeep of her mosque complex, Nurbanu Sultan relied on sizeable endowed lands in Eastern Anatolia and Rumelia, head tax (*cizye*) on the non-Muslim residents of Üsküdar, income from tanneries and other businesses as well as rent income from houses, workshops and four baths in the city of Istanbul.⁹ The Çemberlitaş *Hamam* was one of these four baths, the others being the Atik Valide *Hamam* in close proximity to the mosque complex, the Büyük *Hamam* in the general market area of Üsküdar, and the Havuzlu *Hamam* on the southern shore of the Golden Horn in a warehouse and shipyard district. That the baths were successful commercial establishments of significance to the entire endowment—if not economically, at least symbolically—can be gathered from the prominent place they take in the original accounting books of the endowment (*muhasabe defterleri*), usually mentioned first, followed by other establishments such as shops, fields, gardens and houses.¹⁰

When Nurbanu Sultan had the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* built in 1583–84, it was mostly with profit in mind; however, baths fulfilled functions other than mere financial gains. On a most basic and physical level, baths enabled the Ottoman city dwellers to perform the necessities of bodily hygiene. In the case of workers in public kitchens (*imarets*), who handled large quantities of food to be distributed to hundreds of people, scrupulous body hygiene was of particular importance to prevent food poisoning and the spread of contagious diseases. On a religious level, *hamams* allowed Muslims to perform the full-body ablution (*gusül*) which is necessary to restore ritual purity (*taharet*) after defilement through sexual activity, menstruation, childbirth or touching a dead body. Traditionally, Thursday nights and Friday mornings were the busiest times for baths, bustling with customers who washed away ritual impurities before the communal noon prayer. In the social context of Ottoman city life, *hamams* served as a public forum where news were exchanged and sometimes discontent vented to the point of causing unrest.¹¹ Particularly for those women who lived in seclusion, a *hamam* visit was one of the few legitimate pretenses to leave the house to socialize with other women from outside their immediate social circle; thus, they learned of news and gossip that would not have reached them otherwise. The bathhouse was also a location for certain rites of passage marking significant events in the life cycle of Ottoman Muslims. Forty days after the birth, the baby was taken out of the house for the first time and into the bath for the *kirk hamamu*. Conversion to Islam, circumcision, marriage, recruitment into the army, recovery from illness, the wearing of new clothes, and release from prison were all occasions either preceded or followed by a visit to the bath, sometimes in the context of a lively party with music, dance and food.

In the urban context, baths provided focal points for the residential neighborhood districts, the *mahalles*. Physically, the neighborhoods usually encompassed about 150 residences of wooden houses in different sizes, connected by small, inward-turned streets that terminated in cul-de-sacs.¹² Amidst this sea of wooden houses, stone buildings appeared rather prominently—a fitting appearance, since social life was indeed centered on the mosque, church or synagogue, on a small plaza, the school, the public fountain and the bath. Often, these stone buildings were the only ones to survive the frequent conflagrations that razed entire neighborhoods, representing continuity and permanence and the spirit of the neighborhood *vis-à-vis* the attritional forces of time. In fact, sometimes entire neighborhoods were named after their bath.¹³ In commercial districts, where there was a much higher concentration of monuments built under imperial or sub-imperial patronage, baths nevertheless had an important presence. A typical example of these market-district baths, the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* was of a rather large size to accommodate the high number of customers to be expected from among the men working in the market and the shops. Its size and splendor were also meant to demonstrate the sultan's and his family's grandeur and generosity to their subjects as well as to the out-of-town merchants and travelers housed in the inns and caravanserais in the market-district. Thus, the *hamams* in their monumentality constituted an emblem of sultanic rule

both for the population and for visiting foreigners, adding a political dimension to their functions.¹⁴

While the significance and function of *hamams* certainly saw some changes from the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century—for example, due to a tightening or relaxing of the application of religious law concerning the mobility of women customers, or due to their increasing number to the point of collapse of fuel and water provisioning¹⁵—it makes sense to treat these three and a half centuries as a fairly coherent unit within the history of bathing culture in Istanbul. This becomes all the more obvious when we contrast this earlier period with the changes that occurred with the advent of modernizing reforms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, which had important consequences for the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* in particular.

Early Modernization and its Effects

The Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth century was an empire weakened by military defeats and territorial losses; these failures led to an increased cultural exchange between Europe and the Ottomans, who felt the need to reform military technology and state organization. In the second half of the eighteenth century, administration was transformed into a more centralized apparatus, supported by a growing bureaucracy. Symptomatic of the state's financial problems, fiscal policy and increasing attempts at centralization was the treatment of *vakıf* properties during that time. It was Abdülhamid I (r.1774–89) who founded the Ministry Office of Supervision of Imperial Endowments (*Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti*), to which he annexed the endowments of the imperial harem, including the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* as part of the Atik Valide Vakfı.¹⁶ The Ministry was founded in order to create a framework to channel *vakıf* revenue into the near-empty state coffers instead of into the endowments. And in order to attract renters willing to invest capital into endowed property, the Ministry made the practice of Double Rent (*icareteyn*) the norm rather than the exception.¹⁷

The practice of *icareteyn* had existed since the sixteenth century as a legal loophole to get around the conditions laid down in the endowment deed and to rent out property in the long term rather than in the customary one-year periods. The double rent consisted of two payments: a lump sum paid initially when the renter signed the lease for a period of 200–300 years (*icare-i muaccele*); and the monthly or yearly rent payments which usually were a negligible amount (*icare-i müeccele*). The monthly or yearly rent served as a reminder that the ultimate ownership of the property still belonged to the endowment—despite its tenancy being transferred to the renter's heirs upon his or her death—and that the property would return to the endowment if the renter defaulted on the payments or died without heirs.¹⁸ This practice paved the way for private ownership of former endowed property in the twentieth century: with a 1936 law ending the practice of *icareteyn* completely, some imperial monuments—including numerous *hamams*—became private possessions of previous individual renters or the descendants of those renters, rather than

reverting to the state. The Çemberlitaş *Hamam* is a prime example of this development: It was rented out under the conditions of the *icareteyn* at a date before Safer 1201/November 1786, as is testified by a document on repairs.¹⁹ This document mentions the tenant, a Fatma Kadın, as “renter by way of double rent” (*bi'l-icareteyn müstaceresi*). While the exact transfer of ownership at a later date is shrouded in mystery, the developments of the late eighteenth century in the long run led to the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*'s status as private property today.

The nineteenth century brought even greater efforts to transform the Ottoman Empire into a Europeanized state. As the 1839 *Hatt-ı Hümayun* can be considered an Ottoman response to the declaration of human rights of the French Revolution, so the urban modernization policies applied to Istanbul were an Ottoman version of French urban design philosophy, aiming to bring western amenities to the subjects-turned-citizens. Slowly, new public spaces and sites of sociability emerged, such as theaters (c.1840), public parks (1860s) and cinemas (after 1897), where elite men and women broke the hitherto prevailing norm of gender separation and socialized as couples.²⁰ While these new public spaces were mostly frequented by the elite and, therefore, did not immediately detract from the entertainment value of *hamams*, their existence meant that the bathhouses were not the most chic places any more. Also, the slow adoption of western-style bathrooms in elite households of the nineteenth century did not bode well for the status of *hamams* in the long run.

Beyond the adoption of new building types such as theaters and apartment buildings, Ottoman reformers imported urban design principles on a larger scale as well as laws and regulations about issues of urban planning. An influential personage in this matter was Mustafa Reşit Paşa, one of the masterminds behind the *Hatt-ı Hümayun*; he had seen Paris, Vienna and London during diplomatic missions, greatly admired the European cities and wished for Istanbul to meet European standards.²¹ As a member of the Commission for Road Improvement (*İslahat-ı Turuk Komisyonu*), he took part in a decision that would leave its physical marks on the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* and that showed the prevailing attitude towards such Ottoman institutions as bathhouses in general.

The Commission for Road Improvement was established on May 10, 1866 and dissolved again in 1868; its purpose was to see to the repair of roads after the 1865 Hocapaşa fire, which devastated an enormous area from the Golden Horn to the Sea of Marmara.²² Comprised of men educated in the best Tanzimat manner, such as Server Efendi and Mustafa Reşit Paşa, the commission completed an astonishing amount of work within a short time.²³ On a practical level, the commission built sewers and sufficiently wide streets and repaired sidewalks. On a symbolical level, however, the commission strove to create an urban space, conforming to the planning principles exhibited in Baron Haussmann's design of Paris: wide and straight boulevards with sidewalks cut through the urban fabric in order to lead the gaze towards grand historic monuments preserved in splendid isolation. In Istanbul, the decision as to which historic monuments were worthy of preserving and presenting in the grand manner of Haussmann privileged the Classical Ancient and Byzantine periods over the Ottoman period. This can be

observed in the commission's activities around the Divanyolu, which was itself widened from an average of 3.8 meters to 19 meters.²⁴

In order to ensure its regularized appearance, the commission planners interfered with many historic monuments in the neighborhood of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*: they demolished the school of the Atik Ali Paşa mosque complex and the former inn for ambassadors, the Elçi Han to the north of the bath,²⁵ and dismantled and took back the mausoleum of Köprülü Mehmet Paşa (built in 1659) opposite the *hamam*, so that it neatly lined the street. The Çemberlitaş *Hamam* itself was partly demolished: the commission cut off a corner, including part of the dome, which then was bricked up again (see figure 5), and as a result, the women's section was closed for several decades. The wooden huts and shacks around Constantine's Column were removed in order to create a triangular plaza emphasizing the ancient monument. From this plaza, the Divanyolu lead to the former entrance of the Byzantine Hippodrome, passing the zero-point mile-marker of the Byzantine Empire (*milion*), and to the newly created square around the Hagia Sophia. Thus, the commission clearly chose Classical Ancient and Byzantine monuments—perceived as heritage linking the Ottoman Empire to Greek, and therefore European, civilization—as focal points on which to hinge their Haussmannization scheme.²⁶ Had the aim of creating long straight streets been less urgent, an angled version of the Divanyolu could have preserved the Atik Ali Paşa mosque complex, the Köprülü Mehmet Paşa complex and the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* entirely and in its original location and presented them as an ensemble of Ottoman monuments. However, the Commission for Road Improvement envisioned straight and uniformly wide streets lining square or rectangular blocks composed of stone or brick buildings as the road to European-style progress. Bathhouses—such as the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*, which symbolized a non-Classical, Islamic heritage and traditional city life—would in the long run only stand in its way.

Atatürk's Reforms and their Effects on Bathhouses in the Twentieth Century

The six principles of Kemalist reform (secularism, nationalism, populism, étatism, republicanism and reformism)—as they were codified later in ideological and history writing—meant to ideally change the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish nation state and Ottoman subjects into Turkish citizens who in their daily life would act like their European contemporaries. Naturally, institutions of daily life, such as the bathhouses, experienced the impact of these principles. The following section will concentrate on the effects of secularism and nationalism on *hamams* in particular.

Secularism led to the reorganization of Istanbul's urban structure and social life, which at least in the *mahalles* not populated by the elite still had worked along religious lines, with mosques, *medreses*, *tekkes* and bathhouses as public spaces. Instead of these religion-based public spaces, now secular focal spaces—cinemas, theaters, cafés, restaurants, public parks, later in the twentieth century centered around busts or statues of Atatürk, and plazas in front of schools or other state-sponsored buildings—occupied the nodes in an urban fabric that quickly became “de-orientalized”



Figure 5. View of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* in the year H 1307/1890 CE. *Source:* From June 6, 1890 issue of *Servet-i Fünun*.

and regulated, with concrete apartment blocks mushrooming throughout the city. The most modern apartment blocks included bathrooms with washing facilities that made a visit to the *hamam* for hygienic reasons redundant. Also, instead of having to visit the bathhouse for the ritual purification before Friday prayer, believers could now perform the big ablution easily in their homes. The abandonment of the religious norm of gender segregation, which the elite had already broken in the nineteenth century, also made segregated sites of sociability like the *hamam* less attractive to secularized customers.

In addition to secularizing daily life, the principle of *laiklık* also changed the administrative context of those *hamams* which had still worked as income-generating rental property for a pious endowment. While the charitable components of endowment property, such as mosques, *medreses* and *imarets*, came under the administration of an office directly under the Prime Ministry (*Vakıflar Umum Müdürlüğü*), income-generating components—and particularly *hamams*—were treated with less consideration. They were sold off either to long-term renters following a 1936 law abolishing the practice of the Double Rent, as in the case of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* (see above), or to other individuals who answered newspaper advertisements announcing their sale.²⁷ In many cases, they were demolished under different pretenses in order to make room for apartment buildings and streets.²⁸

The principle of nationalism affected bathhouses by way of heritage politics. While a nation-state needs a shared cultural heritage to build upon, the nature of this cultural heritage is not often agreed upon readily, engendering dispute and ambiguous sentiments. This was—and still is—particularly true for Turkey, where the relationship to an Ottoman-Islamic past remains laden with tension. In the early republican period, those parts of Turkey's past which were safely dead and could not potentially threaten the new order—that is, prehistoric Anatolian civilizations and ancient and Byzantine monuments—were magnified for the new nation-state's aggrandizement. The closing of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque on December 8, 1934, and its re-opening as a museum on February 1, 1935, provides an example of this attitude: needing national monuments and heritage sites to legitimize Turkey's claim to being a modern nation state, the government chose to emphasize Hagia Sophia's more distant past as Byzantine church to display in a museum context, rather than to acknowledge its uncomfortably recent past as Istanbul's largest sultanic mosque. Considering this discomfort, it is no surprise that the Islamic-Ottoman nature of Istanbul's architectural heritage was downplayed, despite its being seen as expressing a national artistic genius: in a study of the treatment of the Ottoman architectural heritage in the press, Binan notes that, in the period of consolidation of the new republican government (1923–38), “the term ‘Ottoman’ rarely appears in the press, being replaced by phrases such as ‘the legacy of our forefathers’ and ‘our ancient monument.’”²⁹

Hamams were hit particularly hard by the early republican nationalist attitude toward Ottoman monuments. Their fate was more or less sealed due to three different factors. First, as symbols of traditional Muslim life in imperial Istanbul, bathhouses were establishments deemed unsuitable for modern city life. The new republican discourse of science according to western/modern standards claimed that communal bathhouses were not hygienic.³⁰ Secondly, being small inconspicuous buildings even in the case of imperial foundations, they could never attain the same status as the more magnificent mosques codified as national heritage, and, therefore, were not considered worthy of preservation. Lastly, economic difficulties meant that even for the preservation of putatively more significant monuments there was little money to spare, let alone for bathhouses.

The fate of Istanbul's *hamams* was one of the favorite topics of the prominent surgeon and amateur art historian Ahmet Süheyl Ünver (1898–1986), who decried the general derogatory view of the Ottoman cultural heritage—without using the epithet “Ottoman.”³¹ He published numerous short essays on this subject in newspapers and popular magazines, of which particularly a piece published in a 1939 issue of the *Yeni Türk Mecmuası* and entitled “The Future of Istanbul's *Hamams*” is of relevancy. As Ünver gives a good overview over the state of and the threats to Istanbul bathhouses and uncovers the general derogatory attitude towards Ottoman monuments with his critique, he shall be quoted here at length:

There is no account of the *hamams* that were demolished in Istanbul over the last 25 years. Every year, on average ... at least three or four *hamams* are being torn down ... There are many *hamams* that were destroyed under the pretext of being in the way of road construction ... [Many] *hamams* were destroyed because of tax debts. The ones that were pulled down because of disagreements among inheritors add up to a large sum, too. As can be seen, the future of many other *hamams* is in danger. Istanbul is becoming more and more disconnected from its most basic needs. In new construction systems, instead of the *hamams* used during the old times, there are now bathrooms. In fact, poor people who do not have baths in their homes go more frequently to *hamams*. This is a basic need and a necessary institution for a city. Perhaps most of the *hamams* lack modern and hygienic arrangements. However, people have very well been able to wash themselves there without threatening public health. Unfortunately, a sufficient number of modern public baths could not be built, although so many *hamams* were demolished. Now, Istanbul is more in need of this type of hygienic institutions.

In order to protect the future of our *hamams*, this type of social institution should be prevented from falling into ordinary people's hands. Most of the *hamams* that are closed today could be brought into perfect condition with only small repairs and new [building] methods. A law must prevent the destruction of *hamams* at all costs. In the last 20 years, half of the *hamams* were pulled down without the intention of rebuilding them. The probability of losing the rest, with the exception of just a few, in the next 25 years is not far-fetched.

In fact, only 20 to 25 extant *hamams* function right now, according to public and private statistics. More than this number are closed and in ruins. Among the closed ones, the Tahtakale *Hamamı* and the Beyazıt *Hamamı*, which are very necessary for the inhabitants of the neighborhood are being used as warehouses.³²

In the face of disinterest, neglect and deliberate destruction that even afflicted the other three *hamams* endowed to the Atik Valide Vakfı, how could the Çemberlitaş *Hamamı* survive?³³ Despite fairly rapid modernization of the urban fabric, not everybody could afford to move into apartment houses with bathrooms. It was

particularly in the area of the historic peninsula that the less well-to-do Istanbulites were concentrated, and where houses without bathrooms were still widely spread, while the moneyed classes moved to neighborhoods like Şişli and Nişantaşı.³⁴ For the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* this meant that a large clientele still came out of necessity. Furthermore, a caveat should be added to the claim that secularism led to the total reorganization of Istanbul's urban structure and social life within the first decades after the Republic's establishment: Until recently, historians relied mostly on sources produced by the elite, with the result of exaggerating the impact of Kemalist reforms on daily life. This skewed view is now slowly amended with the help of such contributions as Kemal Karpat's *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, which asserts that deeper societal changes occurred only in the 1950s.³⁵ Therefore, for some levels of society, the bathhouse continued to constitute not only a basic necessity, but also a site of sociability and entertainment. And finally, in the second half of the twentieth century, the advent of tourists in search of the exotic and erotic provided the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* and other well-known bathhouses with a new source of income.

Tourism and Perceptions of Bathing Culture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Tourism as one of the major sources of revenue for the Turkish economy has greatly affected attitudes towards Ottoman cultural heritage, which constitutes a treasure to be mined for tourist attractions.³⁶ It also plays a significant role in the history of the bathhouses of Istanbul: with decreasing numbers of Turkish visitors, the larger *hamams* are now almost entirely dependent on foreign visitors' money, and many *hamam* employees claim that without the tourists' interest, bathing culture in Istanbul would have died out in the twentieth century.³⁷ The question then is: why do bathhouses attract so many tourists?

When interviewing foreign visitors to the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* and asking for the reason for visiting a *hamam*, the answer given most frequently was: "Well, if you are in Turkey, you just *have to* visit a Turkish bath." Such a claim very much confirms MacCannell's argument about tourism practices: "Modern international sightseeing possesses its own moral structure, a collective sense that certain sights must be seen."³⁸ For foreign tourists, a *hamam* visit is part of a codified visiting routine, which has been produced by travel writers' descriptions dating back as far as the sixteenth century and cumulating in the ubiquitously quoted passages of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu's embassy letters of 1717, in which a visit to the bathhouse forms a literary set-piece.³⁹ Despite the discrepancy of the travel writers' origins and their changing historical context through the centuries, a *hamam* visit was always *de rigeur*. One common theme emerges from the many different bathhouse descriptions: they offer a "vision of synaesthetic and sensual indulgence."⁴⁰ This codified vision has been reinforced by Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century, more recent travel books, travel magazines, coffee table books, television programs and such films as the award-

winning Italian-Turkish production *Steam*.⁴¹ In this way, the *hamam* has come to symbolize the epitome of the sensual Orient that many tourists wish to experience and has thus entered the codified visiting routine, or moral structure, of sightseeing in Istanbul.

More than just being a symbol for the sensual Orient, *hamams* promise to offer tourists an authentic experience of Turkish culture. It is here that they can come into—literally—the most intimate contact with Turks and can participate in what they perceive as authentic cultural practice. As Jonathan Culler puts it:

The tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself, an instance of a cultural practice: ... All over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs; and, deaf to the natives' explanations that thruways are the most efficient way to go from one place to another, or that pubs are just convenient places to meet your friends and have a drink, or that gondolas are the natural way to get around in a city full of canals, tourists persist in regarding these objects and practices as cultural signs.⁴²

Similarly, tourists see Turkish baths not as a place where one would simply bathe in the absence of proper facilities at home and socialize during the bathing procedure, but as authentic signs of Turkishness, regardless of the fact that most Turks today have never set foot into one—a fact that shows the socially constructed nature and tenuous meaning of authenticity.

Partially in response to tourists' interest in bathhouses, modernizing Turks who have previously shunned these Ottoman institutions are also rediscovering *hamams*, but they do it as a result of what Pratt has called "auto-ethnography" and in a manner that can be called internal tourism.⁴³ Auto-ethnography means the engagement of the colonized with their own culture through the eyes of the colonizer, producing ethnographic texts in a western mode of representation. Although Turkey was never colonized, the concept is applicable because Turks themselves contribute to an Orientalist view of their heritage by, for example, selecting nineteenth-century Orientalist mentalities as the basis for twentieth-century urban preservation. In other words, in several cases it was not the historical appearance of an Ottoman monument that mattered for urban preservation, but the western idea of what an Oriental monument is supposed to look like. One example of such an auto-ethnographic imposition on Istanbul's urban text is the reconstruction of Soğukçeşme Street in Istanbul in the 1980s, where houses painted in pastel colors along a cobblestone street present the fictional authenticity of "Old Istanbul."⁴⁴ An interesting example of auto-ethnographic, Orientalizing writing on *hamams* by a Turkish author is Ahmet Refik Altınay's 1936 essay, "İstanbul Hamamları," in the newspaper *Akşam Gazetesi*. Subtitled "İstanbul in the time of the *Kafes* [protruding window bay covered with grilles to permit women in seclusion to watch the street without being seen] and the *Ferace* [women's veil]," the piece presents the popular audience with

interesting snippets of facts—Evliya Çelebi’s accounts of the baths, inscription texts, a poem, the translation of an Ottoman document on the building of a hamam, and so forth—in the Orientalist tone of a travel magazine aimed to whet the readers’ appetite to visit such an exotic place.⁴⁵ The Turkish response to such an invitation would then be internal tourism: the otherized Ottoman past becomes a foreign country—within their own home country—where Turks like to travel as tourists, follow tips given by guide books and visit such sites as the *hamams*.

The revival of the bathhouse is of course only one aspect of a general revival of the Ottoman past which started in the 1980s. Since then, urban renewal projects have made Istanbul a city designed for cultural consumption; a growing demand for publications on Ottoman history and interest in the study of history as well as the establishment of the History Foundation (*Tarih Vakfı*) on the academic side have been complemented by the publication of glossy magazines, the broadcasting of television programs with an Ottoman theme and the collecting of Ottoman antiques on the popular side. Interestingly enough, visiting bathhouses in order to feel connected to one’s cultural heritage is not unique to Turkey: in Japan, traditional inns with hot springs (*onsen*) appeal to harried white-collar workers who visit these sites as “nostalgic repositories of ‘pure’ Japaneseness.”⁴⁶

Turkish perceptions of the *hamam* can of course not be reduced to the position of an internal tourist only. In the order of frequency of visits ranked from never to weekly, five different groups of Turkish visitors emerged from the interviews conducted during the research for this project.⁴⁷ The first group shuns bathhouses completely, the reasons for their avoidance dividing them into two sub-groups: one group claims that *hamams* are dirty, unhygienic places where one could catch all kinds of diseases;⁴⁸ the other has objections to nudity in public, even in an environment segregated according to gender. The second group also has never visited a *hamam*, but feels embarrassed by that fact, since bathhouses constitute a cultural heritage that by now tourists are better acquainted with than they themselves. The third group consists of individuals who have visited bathhouses once or several times during childhood together with their grandparents, but who have not returned since because they cannot find the appropriate social framework for a visit. Internal tourists make up the fourth group of bathers: visiting for pleasure at least several times per year, they claim that the *hamam* visit makes them feel connected to the historical past and to their cultural heritage. The fifth and last group of visitors visits very frequently for reasons of physical well-being, as they hold the opinion that one is only properly clean after a good rub-down in a *hamam*.

Within the context of tourism and a very diverse Turkish clientele coming for different reasons, the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* constitutes a particular fascinating case to examine how global realities interact with local institutions and local traditions. As one of the three bathhouses most frequented by tourists,⁴⁹ particularly due to its location on the Divanyolu, the axis between the Sultanahmet neighborhood, with all the major tourist attractions, and the Covered Bazaar, the Çemberlitaş *Hamam* has become enmeshed in a market for which it never was intended, to the point that it is economically dependent on it. Run by a partnership of four managers who rent the

Çemberlitaş *Hamam* from its private owner, the bath is currently being renovated with the help of foreign loans.⁵⁰ Marketing strategies target a global market with the help of the *hamam*'s own website;⁵¹ printed brochures available in tourist offices, hotels and the *hamam*'s entrance draw the attention of tourists on site. However, the management focuses not only on foreign visitors. In order to ensure that bathing fees are affordable for Turkish visitors, a sliding scale of fees is applied, and in February 2003 a database of regular customers was created to provide these with discount cards. While the strong presence of tourists potentially means for the *hamam* to turn into a locality, or into the commodity of cultural difference, to be marketed for and consumed by a western audience, it also has allowed for a local tradition to survive and to redefine itself according to contemporary conditions.

Conclusion

While bathhouses have continued to provide basic services to their visitors over centuries, with little modification in the actual bathing procedure, the context and, therefore, the significance of these institutions experienced numerous changes. During the earlier Ottoman centuries, concerns about imperial legitimacy and the creation of economic networks accounted for the building of and the manner of administration of bathhouses. Early modernization in the eighteenth century, in its quest for a centralized fiscal policy, had the paradoxical effect of decentralizing *hamam* administration by allowing semi-private ownership for financial gains. The reformers of the Tanzimat period, in their zeal for westernizing society, lifestyle and the urban fabric of Istanbul, relegated bathhouses to a status insignificant in comparison with that of wide boulevards connecting plazas around Byzantine monuments. With the establishment of the Republic, *hamams* as emblems of an old, non-western lifestyle were even deliberately destroyed and could survive only by finding new functions over time. Tourism, however, has turned baths not only into a locality to be marketed and sold to foreign visitors on a global market, but also into a repository of cultural identity for some Turkish visitors. Thus, rather than possessing intrinsic, unchanging qualities and meanings, Turkish baths and bathing culture have assumed different and new identities with every larger cultural transformation, as is exemplified in the history of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*.

Notes

1. This number is based on the survey of Turkish baths in Istanbul by Mehmet Nermi Haskan, *İstanbul Hamamları* (Istanbul: TTOK, 1995). According to the seventeenth-century travel writer Evliya Çelebi, there were 4,536 public and private baths in the city during his lifetime. Evliya Çelebi, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1846), p.103. However, as usual with Evliya's statistical claims, these numbers have to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, his claims demonstrate that baths were a strong presence in the city itself and in the life of its inhabitants.

2. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.18.
3. The largest *hamams* are usually double baths of the architectural arrangement described here; however, smaller *hamams* are usually single baths with only one section, either with alternating visiting times for men and women, or reserved for only one gender.
4. The terminology of the different components of Turkish baths differs greatly from region to region and from author to author. Other names for the dressing room are *camekan* and *soyunmalık*.
5. The *ılıklik* is also sometimes called *soğukluk* (cold room) in juxtaposition to the *sıcaklık* (hot room) it precedes, or *aralık* (mediating room).
6. The *sıcaklık* is also sometimes termed *hararet*, a word of Arabic origin.
7. For biographical information on Nurbanu Sultan, see Benjamin Arbel, "Nur Banu (c.1530–1583): A Venetian Sultana?," *Turcica*, Vol.24 (1992), pp.241–59; Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Susan Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nur Banu and Her Kira to Venice," in Aldo Gallotta and Ugo Marazzi (eds.), *Studia Turcologica Memoriae Alexii Bombaci Dicata* (Naples: Herder, 1982), pp.515–36.
8. For information on the functions of the different components of the Atik Valide Külliyesi and on its employees, the author relied on a copy of the endowment deed (*vakıfname*) found in the Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü in Ankara (D. 1766) and on an accounting book (*muhasebe defteri*) in the Topkapı Palace Library (E.H. 3064).
9. *Ibid.*
10. The accounting books referred to are preserved in the Prime Ministry's Archives (Maliyeden Müdevver [thereafter MM] 5827, MM 3002, MM 987, MM 7434, MM 15247, MM 5247, MM 5886, MM 5273, MM 1672, MM 2263, MM 2105, and EV.HMH.VLSA 6/102) and in the Topkapı Palace Archives (D. 9912, D. 1901, D. 1781, E. 246/61 and E. 246/62).
11. The Patrona Halil Revolt in 1730, named after the Albanian bathhouse attendant of the Bayezit *Hamam* who led the rebellion, is the most famous example of an unrest originating in a *hamam*.
12. Doğan Kuban, *Istanbul: An Urban History: Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul* (Istanbul: The Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey, 1996), p.227.
13. The significance of *hamams* as urban focal points for the Ottoman city dweller can also be gleaned from an eighteenth-century description of Istanbul's mosques by Al-Ayvansarayi, *The Garden of the Mosques: Hafız Hüseyin Ayvansarayi's Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul*, ed. and trans. Howard Crane (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000). Al-Ayvansarayi mentions baths 66 times in his entire work; 19 times he uses baths as points of reference when describing the location of a mosque. In six instances, the mentioned *hamams* have acted as name-patron to either a mosque or an entire neighborhood.
14. Kafesçioğlu goes so far as to argue that after the conquest of Istanbul, Mehmet the Conqueror and his viziers built baths on a much larger scale than mosques in their quest to create monuments for the heterogeneously populated city, since *hamams* as non-confessional urban foci extended charity to all and provided a public space in which all religious groups could partake. Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, "The Ottoman Capital in the Making: The Reconstruction of Constantinople in the Fifteenth Century," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1996.
15. In 1768, Mustafa III (r.1757–74) issued a decree forbidding the further building of baths in Istanbul, as the already high number of *hamams* siphoned off too much water from the water supply system and consumed huge amounts of firewood. The text of the decree has been published by Ahmed Refik, *Onikinci Asr-ı Hicri'de İstanbul Hayatı (1689–1785)* (Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988), p.217.
16. R.J. Barnes, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), pp.69–70. In spite of its new name, the administration of endowments still remained under the supervision of the chief eunuch of the harem (*darüssaade ağası*) until 1826, when Mahmud II (r.1826–39) undertook a reorganization of the ministry.
17. *Ibid.*, p.55.

18. Ibid., p.53.
19. Prime Ministry's Archives, D.HMH.VLSA 282/27.
20. Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.151, 160.
21. Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.49.
22. Mustafa Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul* (Istanbul: Erol Kerim Aksoy Kültür, Eğitim, Spor ve Sağlık Vakfı, 2002), p.317.
23. In the first year, the commission built 3,500 *arşın* of sewers, 100,000 *arşın* of streets with sidewalks and repaired 60,000 *arşın* of sidewalks. Cezar (2002), p.321.
24. Çelik (1986), p.57.
25. Cezar (2002), p.321.
26. The argument that Ottoman interest in Hellenic artifacts was mostly motivated by their desire to claim the same Classical heritage as European nations and to be a part of western civilization has been brought forth by Wendy Shaw, *Possessor and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
27. Can Binan, "The Treatment of the Ottoman Architectural Legacy in the Early Republican Press," in Nur Akın, Afife Batur and Selçuk Batur (eds.), *Seven Centuries of Ottoman Architecture: A Supra-National Heritage* (Istanbul: Yem Yayın, n.d.), p.380.
28. On the destruction of *hamams* in the twentieth century, see Semavi Eyice, "İstanbul'un Ortadan Kalkan Bazı Tarihi Eserleri," *Tarih Dergisi*, 27 (1973), pp.133–78; Semavi Eyice, "Hamam," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1997), Vol.15, p.426; and the essays by Ahmet Süheyl Ünver discussed below (note 31).
29. Binan (n.d.), p.380.
30. This paradoxical attitude is still widely held today. About half of all Turkish interviewees who had never visited a *hamam* gave this explanation as a reason; the follow-up question on whether they would visit a swimming pool was always answered positively. As communal soaking in chlorinated water can hardly be more hygienic than washing in the *hamam*, the author suspects that it is not so much fact but fiction that supports such an attitude.
31. Born in 1898 in Istanbul, Ahmet Süheyl Ünver graduated in 1920 with the degree of a medical doctor. Besides his medical studies, Ünver learned calligraphy, miniature painting and paper marbling. He was a prolific painter, wrote many books on these topics as well as uncountable contributions to newspapers and popular magazines, and organized exhibitions. Between 1936 and 1955, he taught painting in the Department of Art at Istanbul University. He died in 1986.
32. Ahmet Ünver, "İstanbul Hamamlarının İstikbali," *Yeni Türk Mecmuası*, 84 (1939), pp.537–8 (author's translation) Select further essays in newspapers and popular magazines are: "Hamamlarımız en Sıhhi Yıkama Vasıtasıdır," *Kurum Gazetesi*, February 10, 1938; "Türk Hamamları," *Tarih Dünyası*, 5 (1950), pp.198–203; "İstanbul Hamamları," *Milliyet*, September 11, 1952, p.2; "İstanbul Hamamları, Hali ve İstikbali," *Yeni İstanbul*, July 29, 1972, p.2; "Tarihi bir Hamam Halka Açıldı: Çemberlitaş Hamamı," *Hayat Mecmuası* 20 (May 1973), p.23.
33. The Atik Valide Hamam in Üsküdar was used as a carpenter's workshop and slowly fell into disrepair until restored to a functioning *hamam* in 1985. The Büyük Hamam, also in Üsküdar, was rented out as a tobacco warehouse and in 1929 stood as a complete ruin. After its passing into state ownership in 1959, it was remodeled into a shopping center and is still standing as Mimar Sinan Çarşısı today. The Havuzlu Hamam closed down in the 1920s and subsequently served as a warehouse for timber. Today it continues to do so although in a very diminished capacity after the roof of the hot room collapsed in 1944. In 2000, the owner attempted to sell the building for an extremely high price.
34. Çağlar Keyder gives a description of a typical apartment block in the neighborhood of Laleli, on the historic peninsula, where he lived as a child in the 1950s: "A typical building had five stories, with two apartments on each floor. Facing the street would be the entrance, an unassuming lobby, a stairwell in the middle to the upper floors. Apartments were designed around a central hall where the

- stove would be located (unlike the new part of the city, these buildings had no central heating): toward the street side would be the living room and a ‘good’ guest-receiving room, and towards the back, with a balcony overlooking the garden, the bedrooms. The kitchen and the bathroom were rudimentary, in the mode of prewar Europe before American plumbing set the standard.” Çağlar Keyder, “A Tale of Two Neighborhoods,” in Çağlar Keyder (ed.), *Istanbul Between the Global and the Local* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp.173–4. The rudimentary washing facilities must have made an occasional *hamam* visit indispensable for physical well-being.
35. Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).
 36. The term tourism is used here in the sense of cultural tourism: a temporarily leisured person visiting a place with the expectation of experiencing novelty and change, taking in “local color” and exotic scenes with emphasis on material objects such as clothing, buildings, food, etc.
 37. Author’s interviews and personal conversations with employees of the Çemberlitaş *Hamam*, November 2001–February 2003.
 38. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p.42.
 39. Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (London: Virago Press, 1994).
 40. Patrick Conner, “On the Bath: Western Experience of the Hammam,” *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, Vol.31 (1987), p.34.
 41. *Steam: The Turkish Bath*, directed by Ferzan Özpetek (1997).
 42. Jonathan Culler, “Semiotics of Tourism,” *American Journal of Semiotics*, Vol.1 (1981), pp.127–8.
 43. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
 44. For more information on this fascinating case of preservation and heritage politics, see Zeynep Çelik, “Urban Preservation as Theme Park: The Case of Soğukçeşme Street,” in Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro and Richard Ingersoll (eds.), *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp.83–94.
 45. Ahmet Refik Altınay, “İstanbul Hamamları,” *Akşam Gazetesi*, July 29, 1936.
 46. Nelson Graburn, “The Past in the Present in Japan: Nostalgia and Neo-Traditionalism in Contemporary Japanese Domestic Tourism,” in Richard Butler and Douglas Pearce (eds.), *Change in Tourism: People, Places, Processes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.31–70.
 47. See note 37.
 48. See note 29.
 49. The other two *hamams* are the Cağaloğlu *Hamam*, also fairly close to Sultanahmet, and the Galatasaray *Hamam* in Beyoğlu. English, French and German guidebooks usually recommend these three bathhouses to visitors.
 50. The mortgage financing a large-scale renovation, after which the women’s section will be fully functional again, was granted by an Austrian bank. Interview with Ruşen Baltacı, February 2003.
 51. <http://www.cemberlitashamami.com.tr/>.

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