This paper deals with the change in architecture and urban culture, before the reference to Western models had yet become explicit and dominant. We might define that period also as that which followed the Sultan Ahmet Mosque, during which the last drops of classical Ottoman culture and urban mentality were squeezed out of the spirit and techniques of the period of Soliman the Magnificent and his son and of their architect Sinan, and which ended before the planning of the Baroque Nuruosmaniye, or again, as that which includes the mid-seventeenth century urban events and achievements described by the historian Naima and the chronicler Evliya. It was before architects like Mehmed Tahir and Simyon Kalfa, though continuing the Ottoman typological tradition, gave a wholly new turn to façades, volumes, and urban space. In the period I am examining, the classical manner was still sought and change came subtly, setting gradually the stage for the Baroque or Rococo Istanbul of the second half of the eighteenth century.¹

¹ I have widely used the following reference works: Ahmet Refik Altnay, Hicri Onüçüncü asırda İstanbul Hayatı (İstanbul, 1930); Ahmet Refik Altnay, Hicri Oniçincü asırda İstanbul Hayatı (İstanbul, 1932); Oktay Aslanapa, Osmanlı Devri Mimarisi (İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1986); Dünden bugüne İstanbul ansiklopedisi (İstanbul: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı, 1993–); Eminönü camileri (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Fatih Müftülüğü, 1991); Evliya Celebi, Narrative of travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the seventeenth century, translated from the Turkish by the Ritter Joseph von Hammer (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. 1834–50); Fatih camileri ve diğer tarihi eserler (İstanbul: T.C. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığ, 1991); The Garden of the Mosques: Hafiz Hüseyin al-Ayvansarayi’s Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul, ed. Howard Crane (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Godfrey Goodwin, A History of Ottoman Architecture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971); Cornelius Gurlitt, Der Baukunst von Konstantinopel (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1912); Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, Constantinopolis und der Bosporos/Ortlich und geschichtlich beschrieben von Jos. von Hammer; mit... dem Plane der Stadt Constantinopel und einer Karte des Bosporos ([Budapest]Pesth: Hartleben’s Verlag, 1822); Halil İnalcık, s.v. “İstanbul,” in Encyclopédie de l’Islam (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Doğan Kuban, İstanbul, an Urban History: Byzantine, Constantinopolitan, Istanbul (İstanbul: Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey, 1996); Robert Mantran, Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle (Paris: Adr. Maisonneuve, 1962); Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul (Tubingen: Wasmuth, 1977); Mustafa Naima, Annals of the Turkish Empire from 1391 to
Was that a period of transition? Istanbul, like all great world cities, had no specific and limited periods of transition. After all, its story was, throughout its evolution, one of continuous transition. It did have some periods in which indecision seemed to reign and the coming new ages were not easy to perceive, and yet, if some sectors of its making stagnated, others were preparing a subdued change which would reveal itself explosive a few decades later. The changes and developments of the 1620–1750 period have had much less weight on Istanbul than the very strong Ottoman basis laid in the preceding century and a half, but it would be impossible to understand Baroque Istanbul without the gradual break which preceded it.

The Making of the Ottoman City

The decadence of Byzantine Constantinople had been a two centuries long process. Its once very large population had dwindled to fifty, sixty thousand, and its vast walled-in area contained what looked like a series of semi-rural villages, interspersed by convents, churches, palaces, many in ruin. Across the Golden Horn, Italian Galata was almost a city apart.

When Mehmed II conquered the decrepit and under-populated Constantinople in 1453, it took him almost two decades to decide, if and how to make of it a brilliant and ambitiously universal capital. Then followed two decades of frenetic building consolidated by his heirs who handed over to Süleyman the Magnificent a city totally Islamic-Ottoman in its form and culture, if not in its population. The Sultan moved his court a few years later from Edirne (Adrianople), some two hundred and fifty kilometres northwest. In the following twenty-five years he established the Ottoman and Islamic basis of the