



Original paper



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## Hagia Sophia in the “New Relation on a Voyage to Constantinople” book by Guillaume Grelot, which he presented to Louis XIV<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The article tells the story of Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, a French artist and traveler of no renown who, inspired by the book of his compatriot Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, decided to accomplish what others before him had not dared — to enter and describe the Hagia Sophia Mosque. King Louis XIV himself had encouraged his courtiers to undertake such journeys to the East. Upon arriving in the Ottoman capital, Grelot devised a plan that enabled him to gain access to the main Sultan’s mosque, which was closed to non-Muslims. By bribing a mosque official, Grelot not only described Hagia Sophia in detail but also created a series of drawings, which he later published in Paris in his book *Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople* (1680). He presented this monumental work as a gift to the French king, and it soon became known throughout Europe through translations into other languages. Thus, Grelot became the first European non-Muslim to enter the Hagia Sophia Mosque and to fulfill the cherished wish of his monarch. His illustrations of Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia laid the foundation for the emergence and development of Byzantine and Ottoman studies.

<sup>1</sup> The article continues the topic raised in the previous issue of *Historical Reporter*. It tells the story behind the writing of Guillaume-Joseph Grelot’s *Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*, in which the author describes how he managed to enter the Hagia Sophia Mosque, forbidden to “infidels”.


### Keywords:

Hagia Sophia Basilica, Hagia Sophia Mosque, Sultan Mehmed IV, King Louis XIV, Guillaume Grelot

### For Citation:

*Yakushev M.I.* Hagia Sophia in the “New Relation on a Voyage to Constantinople” book by Guillaume Grelot, which he presented to Louis XIV // *The Historical Reporter*. 2025. Vol. LIII. P. 232–259. DOI:10.35549/ HR.2025.2025.53.005

“Words that reach the ears do not sound  
as convincing as what the eyes have seen”<sup>2</sup>.  
(author’s translation)  
— Guillaume Grelot

 In 1680, the Parisian publishing house *Veuve Damien Foucault/Pierre Rocolet* released a book by an unknown Frenchman with the striking title: *Relation nouvelle d’un voyage de Constantinople: enrichie de plans levez par l’auteur sur les lieux, et des figures de tout ce qu’il y a de plus remarquable dans cette ville. PRESENTÉE AU ROI* (“A New Relation of a Voyage to Constantinople. Supplemented with Plans Drawn by the Author on Site and Illustrations of All That Was Found Most Remarkable in This City. PRESENTED TO THE KING”). Such a “calling card” was a bold bid for success. The truth is, there is little information about the life of the author — traveler, and artist Guillaume-Joseph Grelot — both during his lifetime and after his death. Neither his exact date or year of birth

<sup>2</sup> *Grelot Guillaume-Joseph*. *Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l’Auteur sur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu’il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Présentée au Roy par Guillaume Grelot*. Paris, 1680. P. 126.

(aside from “ca. 1630”) nor the year of his death (marked only with a question mark) are known. Nevertheless, we shall attempt to reconstruct his biography from the extant fragmentary episodes of his life.

The American scholar Bronwen Wilson, in her work *The Itinerant Artist and the Islamic Urban Prospect: Guillaume-Joseph Grelot’s Self-Portraits in Ambrosio Bembo’s “Travel Journal”*, notes that almost nothing is known about Grelot’s life before 1670. Information about him can only be gleaned from Ambrosio Bembo’s manuscript and Grelot’s own *New Relation* (1680).

On May 12, 1670, Grelot was in Rome, from where he set sail with Jean Foy-Vaillant<sup>3</sup> to Smyrna (Izmir) and Constantinople (Istanbul). Foy-Vaillant does not name the draftsman in his papers but notes that this “young man” was originally from Melun. Foy-Vaillant’s mission, commissioned by the French king, was to collect coins, precious stones, and manuscripts for the Royal Chancery, as well as to gather intelligence on geography, customs, religious communities, and commerce for His Majesty’s government. The sensitive nature of this mission explains why Foy-Vaillant’s manuscripts were never published – and perhaps why this “young man” (Grelot) was not named in them. Artists, travelers, and merchants often served as intelligence agents, whether officially or unofficially. Grelot and Foy-Vaillant arrived in Constantinople on July 1 and departed on August 8, 1672, later returning to the Ottoman capital during their travels through the Aegean archipelago and Anatolia. Greek and Latin inscriptions they made were published in Jacob Spon’s<sup>4</sup> *Voyage d’Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce du Levant* (1678) and in Grelot’s *New Relation of a Journey to Constantinople*. Yet, according to Antoine Galland, secretary to the French ambassador in Constantinople, Grelot was in the city from January 17 to June 28, 1672, where he was to meet Jean Chardin, who had been tasked by

<sup>3</sup> *Jean-Foy Vaillant* – French numismatist (1632–1706). During his many years of travel through Italy, Sicily, England, the Netherlands, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia, he amassed one of the richest numismatic collections.

<sup>4</sup> *Jacob Spon* (Jacob or Jacques Spon; appears as *James* in English dictionaries; 1647–1685) – French physician and archaeologist. A pioneer in the study of Greek monuments and a scholar of international renown.

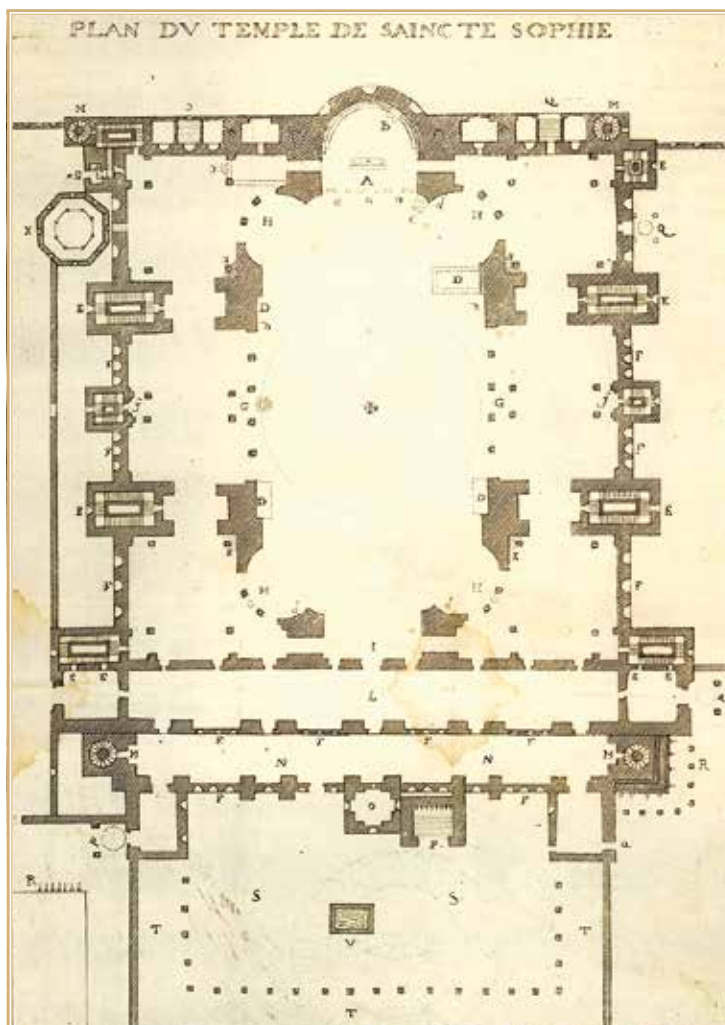


Fig. 1. Plan of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. 1672.

Grelot G.-J. *Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l'Auteursur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Presentee au Roy par Guillaume Grelot.*

Paris, 1680

the King with acquiring books for the French Royal Library<sup>5</sup>. Although Grelot was contractually bound to accompany Chardin to Persia as a draftsman, he instead traveled to the Levant, first to the Lebanese and then to the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson Bronwen. *The Itinerant Artist and the Islamic Urban Prospect: Guillaume-Joseph Grélot's Self-portraits in Ambrosio Bembo's *Travel Journal Artibus et Historiae*. Vol. 38. No. 76. Studies in Renaissance Art and Culture in Honour of Debra Pincus (2017). P. 157–180.*

When Grelot arrived in Aleppo, he was robbed of all his belongings, including his drawings, forcing him to write to Galland, pleading to continue his work under the contract with Chardin. Meeting in Tabriz, they proceeded to Isfahan, arriving on June 24, 1673.

Further information about Grelot comes from the diary of the Venetian aristocrat Ambrosio Bembo, a nineteen-year-old who, though he visited Aleppo while Grelot was still there recovering from the robbery, did not meet him. Their acquaintance would occur three years later, in 1674, at the Carmelite mission in Isfahan. There, Grelot had worked for Chardin for a year before deciding to part ways with his employer.

However, he lacked the means to break the strict contract, which stipulated that the artist would receive no payment unless he returned to Paris with Chardin. Bembo, arriving in Isfahan, offered Grelot employment, which the artist gladly accepted, forfeiting his wages and the drawings he had made for Chardin. The result was Chardin's *Travels of Sir Chardin into Persia and Other Parts of the Orient, 1673–1677*, published in 1686 as a four-volume work with a separate book of illustrations, none crediting Grelot, though sixteen engravings of Isfahan in the 1711 Amsterdam edition<sup>6</sup> are his.

Bembo's diary records his arrival in Aleppo from Venice in 1671, where he stayed for fifteen months before departing for India. He writes that in 1674, from Goa he traveled to Persia, where he met Grelot.

The diary reveals that in Isfahan, the Venetian aristocrat hired this “brilliant Frenchman” to illustrate his journal of Oriental travels<sup>7</sup>.

From Isfahan, Bembo and Grelot traveled by caravan through Bisitun, and Baghdad to Aleppo, where they met Marco Bembo, Am-

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<sup>6</sup> *Chardin Jean*. Voyage de monsieur le chevalier Chardin, en Perse, et autres lieux de l'Orient. Amsterdam, 1711.

<sup>7</sup> However, A. Bembo never dared to publish his manuscript journal, perhaps due to doubts about its literary quality. From Venice, the journal found its way to France and then to England, where it was likely published. Since 1964, it has been kept at the James Ford Bell Library at the University of Minnesota. Grelot created 51 drawings for Bembo's manuscript, including 4 self-portraits of the artist.



Fig. 2. View of Hagia Sophia from the northwest side, in the form of an allegorical dialogue between the “artist” and the “reader.” *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l’Auteur sur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu’il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Presentee au Roy par Guillaume Grelot. Paris, 1680*

brosio’s uncle<sup>8</sup>. The three then sailed to Venice, arriving on April 15, 1675, after a brief stop in Crete. Grelot apparently stayed at Bembo’s villa, as Ambrosio would later place a drawing of the villa by Grelot on the diary’s cover. The grateful artist expressed his appreciation to the Bembos in his *New Relation*. The next mention of Grelot in

<sup>8</sup> Ambrosio had two uncles who served as consuls: Orazio in Cairo and Marco, a military attaché, in Aleppo.

Bembo's diary dates to February 27, 1677, when the artist, then in Paris, received a royal privilege to publish his work<sup>9</sup>.

In composing his book, Grelot took note of the success of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's *New Relation of the Inner Part of The Grand Seignor's Seraglio*<sup>10</sup>,

presented to King Louis XIV<sup>11</sup> in 1675. He decided to emulate Tavernier, capitalizing on the "Most Christian King's" keen interest in the history of the Eastern Roman and Ottoman empires.

While still in Constantinople in the summer of 1672, Grelot learned from two compatriots that the "Sun King", in sending them to the East, had expressed a fervent desire for reliable information on the state of the former Basilica of Hagia Sophia, the Divine Wisdom. The monarch had asked them to attempt entry into Hagia Sophia and, if their lives were not endangered, to sketch its interior. However, Grelot knew that the king's envoys had left Istanbul without daring to fulfill this royal wish. This circumstance moved him to demonstrate his loyalty to the king.

According to Bembo, during his seven years of travel in the Levant, Grelot became fluent in Turkish and also spoke Latin, Spanish, vernacular Greek, Arabic, and Persian, moving comfortably in both Christian and Islamic environments. During his travels, he deliberately assimilated into local life, observing events and adopting the dress of the inhabitants: in the Ottoman capital, he dressed as an Ottoman subject (*Osmanli*); in Persia, as a Persian; in the Levant, as a local Arab. This was prudent for reasons of safety first of all, as European attire often aroused suspicion or hostility. Experienced Europeans preferred local dress to avoid unwanted attention.

Thanks to the publication of Grelot's *New Relation*, readers gained their first glimpse of the exterior and interior of Hagia So-

<sup>9</sup> Wilson B. Op. cit. P. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Tavernier Jean-Baptiste. *Nouvelle Relation de l'Interieur du Serrail du Grand Seigneur*. Paris, 1675.

<sup>11</sup> Louis XIV of Bourbon, named Louis-Dieudonné ("God-given") at birth, also known as the "Sun King" (*Louis XIV Le Roi Soleil*) and Louis the Great (*Louis le Grand*).

phia and the means by which a European traveler might enter it. His proposed method was a simple bribe (*rishve*), presented as a gift (*baksheesh*), and it remained effective well into the 18th and 19th centuries.

Grelot recounts that while working on the sketches of Hagia Sophia's interior, he was consuming pork and wine, an act of blasphemy that put his life in mortal danger. He felt this peril acutely when an unfamiliar mosque attendant approached him. After a moment's hesitation, the artist hid the wine and food among his papers and pulled out Pierre Gilles' *The Antiquities of Constantinople*, pretending it was his *Qur'an* of sorts. He wanted to pass off as a Christian pilgrim completing his prayers, terrified that he would be exposed and executed. The unfamiliar Turk, seeing the foreigner's utter horror, burst into laughter. He turned out to be one of the three mosque attendants Grelot had bribed for his "illegal" visit of Hagia Sophia. The incident ended on a light note for our protagonist.

One of Grelot's illustrations in the *New Relation* presents a variation on Hagia Sophia's exterior, depicting it from the same angle as Melchior Lorichs' 16th-century panorama. Grelot sought to convince readers that his drawing exactly matched the original. To this end, he rendered the cathedral in a somewhat allegorical manner, placing two figures in the foreground, with one seen from behind, with an open book on his lap. Their elevated position serves as a metaphor for a silent dialogue between the artist and the reader. The standing figure points to the mosque with his left hand, while the seated one indicates that what he sees on the page corresponds exactly to what Grelot observed in 1672 (Fig. 2).

Anticipating his work's success, Grelot carefully considered its title. Noting the acclaim of Tavernier's *New Relation* at Versailles, France and across Europe, Grelot employed a clever strategy that fully paid off. His title begins identically to Tavernier's, implicitly linking the two works while emphasizing what Tavernier's (a wealthy courtier traveler) book lacked: "plans drawn by the author on site and illustrations of all that was found most remarkable

in this city”<sup>12</sup>. This idea is artistically encapsulated in the epigraph of this article.

Grelot’s field sketches of his Oriental travels were primarily valued for their documentary accuracy. They deeply impressed one of the era’s greatest librarians, Jacopo Morelli (1745–1819), who wrote that the quill drawings had been “executed with great skill and exceptional diligence”<sup>13</sup>.

Grelot depicted the exterior of Hagia Sophia from various angles, drawing the surrounding fence and people standing in front of it. He also marked a number of buildings included in the mosque complex, including the tombs of Ottoman sultans. On the western façade of Hagia Sophia, under the letter “H”, he drew a small structure reaching the height of the gynaeceum<sup>14</sup>, identifying it as “a tower which was once a bell tower and which now stands without bells, after the Turks took them to melt down for cannons”<sup>15</sup>. This bell tower may have appeared at Hagia Sophia during the Latin period of Constantinople’s history (1204–1261)<sup>16</sup>. The Russian historian of Byzantine art, Nikodim Kondakov, does not rule out the possibility that the bell tower was erected at a later time by the Turks themselves, serving a purely alarm-sounding function, such as alerting the city to fires<sup>17</sup>. Be that as it may, by the 19th century, the tower had completely disappeared<sup>18</sup>, including from travelers’ drawings.

<sup>12</sup> *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. ... (titre).*

<sup>13</sup> *Morelli Jacopo. Ambrogio Bembo in Dissertazione intorno ad alcuni viaggiatori eruditi veneziani poco noti pubblicata nelle faustissime nozze del nobile uomo il Signore Conte Leonardo Manino con la nobile conta Signora Contessa Foscarina Giovanelli da Don Iacopo Morelli. In Venezia nella stamperia di Antonio Zatta, 1803. P. 50.*

<sup>14</sup> *Кондаков Н.П. Византийские церкви и памятники Константинополя. Одесса: 1886. С. 120.*

<sup>15</sup> *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 124, 128, 143.*

<sup>16</sup> *Виноградов А.И., Захарова А.В., Черноглазов Д.А. Храм Святой Софии Константинопольской в свете византийских источников. СПб., 2020. С. 20.*

<sup>17</sup> *Кондаков Н.П. Византийские церкви и памятники Константинополя. С. 120.*

<sup>18</sup> Ottoman authorities initially forbade church bells from ringing in the empire to prevent potential uprisings among the Christian population. By the late 18th century, they became more tolerant of bell ringing, which gradually became part of the festive traditions in the Orthodox millet, which received bells as gifts from the Russian Empire.



Fig. 3. View of Hagia Sophia from the south side.

*Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l'Auteur sur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Presentee au Roy par Guillaume Grelot. Paris, 1680*

Among Grelot's illustrations are a floor plan of Hagia Sophia, its interior, and depictions of its wall and ceiling decorations<sup>19</sup>. In his annotations, he marks the apex of the great dome with a cross, noting that it "is still covered in figurative mosaics, as shown in the drawing"<sup>20</sup>.

He labels the former altar apse (with the capital "A"), where, he writes, the Byzantine emperor and patriarch once sat during services (the lower-case "a")<sup>21</sup>. After the basilica's conversion into a mosque, the Ottomans installed a *mihrab* ("B") in the apse wall, which Grelot calls the "Muhammadan altar", holding a Quran<sup>22</sup>. Flanking the mihrab are two massive candlesticks, each with a huge candle. To

<sup>19</sup> *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 107–109.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid. P. 109, 147.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid. P. 109–110, 147.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid. P. 109, 117, 146–147.*

the left stands the *minbar* (“C”), or preacher’s pulpit. The engraving also shows windows of the mosque and one of the four *muezzin mahfils* (platforms for the muezzin)<sup>23</sup>, built by Sultan Murad III in the late 16th century. Grelot also notes the location of the *gynaeceum* (women’s gallery)<sup>24</sup>, where (according to Grelot) Christian women had once prayed separately during services<sup>25</sup>.

In the nave’s central northern side, Grelot depicts a giant “chair” (*la chaise*), used as the mosque preacher’s pulpit (“E”). The preacher ascended the high seat via small ladders, leaving his shoes below. Seated cross-legged, he addressed the congregation while remaining motionless<sup>26</sup>. Grelot notes that sermons were typically delivered “on Wednesdays and Fridays”<sup>27</sup>, in Arabic. This elevated pulpit had once served as the marble throne of Sultan Murad IV<sup>28</sup>.

On his plan – the ichnography – of Hagia Sophia, Grelot marks with a small symbol the concealed sultan’s loge (prayer box), where the “Grand Sultan would sit during visits” (Fig.1)<sup>29</sup>. This space, once a passage for clergy to the altar, was, after the conversion, fitted with a latticed “closet” (*la chambrette*), its walls adorned with intricate woodcarving with a panoramic view, allowing the sultan to pray and observe worshippers unseen<sup>30</sup>.

What had been hidden during the Ottoman Empire’s zenith became a prominent feature by the 1730s. The closet (*maqsu-*

<sup>23</sup> These balconies, or tribunes, will be discussed later.

<sup>24</sup> Gynaeceum (Greek: “of a female”) – the galleries of the second tier intended for women, from which the term used here originates. In Byzantine churches, men and women prayed separately: men below, women above, in the galleries or *catechumena*. Different authors transcribed this Greek word in various ways: Grelot – *le Gynaikion*, *le Gynaitikion*; Muravyov – *gynaikion*; Begleri – *gynekonit* or *catechumen*; Kondakov – *gynaeceum*. To avoid inconsistency, we will use the unified form *gynaeceum* throughout the text.

<sup>25</sup> Grelot G.-J. *Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 155–156.

<sup>26</sup> Grelot G.-J., *William Joseph, Monsieur*. A late Voyage to Constantinople. Published by Command of the French King. Made English by J. Philips. London, 1683. P. 122.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* P. 147. Traditionally, the mosque’s sheikh preached in Arabic.

<sup>28</sup> Murad IV “*The Bloodthirsty*” (1623–1640) – 17th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The most powerful and cruel Ottoman padishah.

<sup>29</sup> Grelot G.-J. *Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 109, 147.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

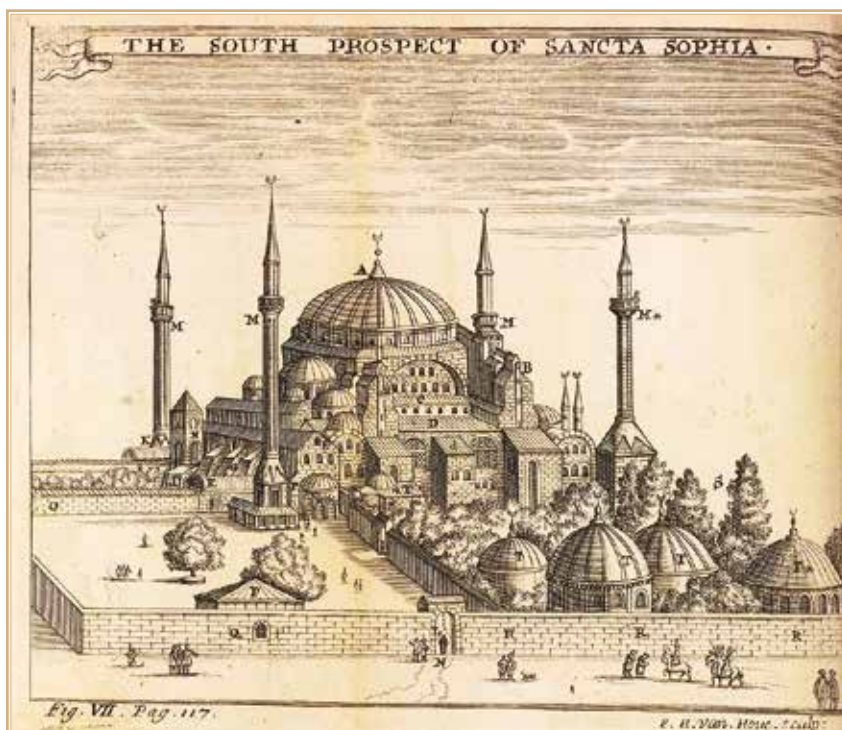


Fig. 4. View of Hagia Sophia from the south side. An engraving based on Grelot's drawing from another 18th-century edition, executed with higher quality than the 17th-century original.

*From open sources*

*ra* or *hünkâr mahfil*), originally a protective enclosure for Islamic rulers, had a defensive rather than religious purpose. The necessity of this secure space for an Islamic ruler had become evident after eight assassination attempts on the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the villainous murders of most of his successors, the Rightly Guided Caliphs: Umar, Uthman, Ali, and Ali's two sons, Hasan and Husayn, the Prophet's grandsons. Only the Prophet Muhammad and Caliph Abu Bakr died a natural death, escaping violent ends.

The tradition of building a bayt al-maqsurâ in mosques was passed from the Arabs to the Seljuks, and later to the Ottoman Turks, who gave the sultanic prayer boxes Ottoman and Turkish names — *mahfil-i hümayun* or *hünkâr mahfil*<sup>31</sup>. Europeans referred to them

<sup>31</sup> These balconies also had other names: *Mahfil-i Hümayun*, *Hünkâr Ma'bedhanesi*, *Hünkâr Mahfil*, *Mahfil-i Hazret-i Hüdavendigar*. Architects and engineers understood *mahfil-i hümayun* or *hünkâr mahfil* as the safest place in a mosque. In modern Turkish, they are known as "sultan" or "hünkâr" boxes.

as either “pavilions” or “tribunes”. The sultans of the Ottoman Empire would pray on Fridays and religious holidays in their “historic capitals”: Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul. For this reason, imperial prayer boxes (*maqsura*, *mahfil-i hümayun*, *hünkâr mahfili*) became an essential feature of sultanic mosques in these cities. The presence of these architectural elements in a mosque symbolized the highest level of security for the “imperial pavilion”, access to which was strictly forbidden to outsiders and granted only by special invitation from the padishah<sup>32</sup>. The prayer boxes of the padishahs were often enclosed with railings and elevated above other parts of the mosque, built on special supports or even marble columns<sup>33</sup>. Mosques also contained special mahfils — some for muezzins, others for women<sup>34</sup>. Turkish historian Mustafa Çetinaslan writes that no information has been found in Ottoman or Turkish sources about who first built the *mahfil-i hümayun* for the padishah in Hagia Sophia,<sup>35</sup>

Continuing his description of the altar part of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Grelot draws attention to the bema<sup>36</sup>, at the very center of which, beneath a cylindrical barrel vault, the face of Jesus Christ is visible<sup>37</sup>. According to the artist’s description, this is a mosaic image of the Mandylyon, the “Image Not Made by Hands” of Christ “impressed on the cloth (veil) of Saint Veronica”<sup>38</sup>. Below, on the same vault of the bema, on either side of the face of the Savior, he depicts mosaic figurative images of the archangels with wings reaching the ground: Archangels Michael and Gabriel, marked with

<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, neither Ottoman nor Turkish sources preserved the name(s) of the craftsman (men) who made the latticed chamber for the sultan, which Grelot described but did not depict. It is also unknown under which sultan it was constructed and installed near the altar and mihrab.

<sup>33</sup> Çetinaslan Mustafa. Hünkâr Mahfillerinin Ortaya Çıkışı, Gelişimi ve Osmanlı Dönemi Örnekleri (The Emergence, Development of Hünkâr Mahfils and its Samples in Ottoman Empire). Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi 29 / 2013. Sayfa 63.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. P. 62

<sup>35</sup> Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 109, 147.

<sup>36</sup> Bema (Greek: *bēma*) or *hieration* – the space between the central dome area and the apse in cross-in-square type churches.

<sup>37</sup> In the 18th century, the mosaic image of Christ the Savior disappeared.

<sup>38</sup> Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 146–148.

the letter “M”. Behind the Mandylion, on the altar apse conch<sup>39</sup>, which the French illustrator repeatedly refers to as the “Sanctum Sanctorum” (the Holy of Holies) of Hagia Sophia, Grelot notes a mosaic image of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child enthroned (marked with “N”) in the depth of the church, in the center of a semi-dome fully covered with golden mosaic and illuminated by sunlight streaming through five small windows<sup>40</sup>.

Between the Mother of God with the Child and the mihrab, six windows are drawn, between which small round medallions are hanging. These medallions bear, written in Arabic from right to left, the first eight names in Islam: Allah<sup>41</sup>, His Prophet Muhammad, the four Rightly Guided Caliphs — Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali — and Ali’s two martyred sons, Hasan and Husayn, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad. These medallions are barely visible in Grelot’s engraving, yet he mentions them in the drawing’s explanation, mistakenly calling them “the eight great prophets of the Turkish law”<sup>42</sup>. Mistakenly, as, although in Islamic tradition, the first four caliphs are revered as “righteous” for being the direct and undisputed successors of Muhammad, none of them claimed the status of prophet, since in Islam only Muhammad is recognized and venerated as the Messenger of Allah. Medallions and panels with these eight names were traditionally placed on the walls of mosques.

As Turkish historian Semavi Eyice notes, Sultan Mehmed IV<sup>43</sup> in 1651 invited the renowned calligrapher Teknecizade Ibrahim Efendi, who, in addition to the eight small medallions above the mihrab, also inscribed large square and rectangular panels bearing the principal names in Islam, written in Arabic calligraphy,

<sup>39</sup> Conch (Greek for “shell”) — the vault of the altar part of a church, a semi-dome covering the semi-cylindrical portions of a building, such as an apse or a niche.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. P. 152.

<sup>41</sup> Allah, the Almighty and All-Great (Arabic) — typically used after mentioning Allah’s name to glorify Him.

<sup>42</sup> *Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 148.

<sup>43</sup> *Mehmed IV* (1648–1687) — the 19th Ottoman padishah. Deposed in 1687. Died in 1693.

and installed them on the load-bearing piers around the central nave<sup>44</sup>. However, in the black-and-white engravings of the French traveler, these larger panels are barely discernible and not described, while he does record the faintly visible small medallions between the windows above the mihrab, mentioning them in his account<sup>45</sup>.

Continuing the visual survey of Hagia Sophia's interior through Grelot's eyes, the viewer encounters the massive (eleven-meter-tall-*author*) mosaic figures of a pair of six-winged seraphim on the eastern pendentives<sup>46</sup> (Fig. 5), and on another one of his engravings – their two counterparts on the western pendentives, which in fact were no longer visible at that time<sup>47</sup>. J. Phillips, while translating Grelot's book from French into English, made a serious error by relying solely on the drawing where all four seraphim are depicted beneath the dome (Fig. 6)<sup>48</sup>. Basing his interpretation on this image and ignoring the author's own textual description, Phillips even "corrected" Grelot, stating in his translation that there were "four large six-winged seraphim" on the pendentives<sup>49</sup> (marked "K"). However, in the original French edition, the author clearly notes that only two seraphim on the eastern pendentives had survived, and that he drew in the missing "mirrored" pair of these highest-ranking angels, closest to God, to complete the scene. In doing so, the French illustrator exercised his artistic freedom, allowing his imagination to run free. Nearly 169 years later, these artistic dreams would be realized by Gaspare Fossati, the architect of the Russian diplomatic mission in the Bosphorus, during the major restoration of Hagia Sophia, when he

<sup>44</sup> *Semavi Eyice*. Ayasofya. TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi'nin 1991 yılında İstanbul'da basılan 4. cildinde, 208 (Исламская энциклопедия /TDV/, Стамбул, 1991, P. 208 <[www.islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ayasofya?ysclid=19714ge6z3618721162](http://www.islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ayasofya?ysclid=19714ge6z3618721162)>.

<sup>45</sup> The square panels by Teknecizade Ibrahim Efendi are not seen in the works of other European artists until 1710.

<sup>46</sup> Pendentive (also called *sail*) – an architectural element that transfers the weight of the dome to the supporting arches and piers beneath it.

<sup>47</sup> *Grelot G-J*. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 146–155.

<sup>48</sup> *Grelot G-J*. A Late Voyage to Constantinople. P. 122.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 5. View from the Imperial Gate toward the central nave and the altar apse of Hagia Sophia with the mihrab. *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l'Auteur sur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Presentee au Roy par Guillaume Grelot. Paris, 1680*

Painted the missing pair of seraphim on the western pendentives in the form of frescoes<sup>50</sup>.

In the center of the eastern cylindrical vault, which supports the pendentives with the seraphim, Grelot depicted a mosaic image of the Mother of God; below it on both sides, mosaic figures of

<sup>50</sup> *Fossati Gaspard. Aya Sofia, Constantinople, as recently restored by order of H.M. the sultan Abdul Medjid / from the original drawings by Chevalier Gaspard Fossati; lithographed by Louis Haghe, esq. Description Historique de Planches de Ste. Sophie by Adalbert de Beaumont. London. 1852. P. 6.*

two Christian saints on the right and two saints on the left<sup>51</sup> can be discerned. On the western cylindrical vault of the central nave, no figurative mosaics have survived. On the borders of all the vaults, ornamental patterns in the form of various geometric shapes resembling plants or small crosses, are noticeable.

Once, the entire upper section was covered with mosaic figures, which are still visible in a few places where they intertwine. However, most of them no longer exist, since the Turks had destroyed them, knocking them down — as they still did in Grelot’s time — with large poles, or covering them under several layers of lime and whitewash. In doing so, they attempted to conceal the still emerging figurative images. Many of these figures had survived, both in the upper galleries and in the church proper. According to Grelot, this circumstance might serve as a good omen for Christians, since by Divine Providence, the images revealing the Sanctuary (Sanctuarium) of the church had been preserved in their entirety, despite being in a fairly accessible and crowded area. God grant (says Grelot) that these holy images be reunited and someday help revive Christian piety and sacrificial devotion. Beneath this image lies a balcony or upper balustrade, marked with the letter “O”, while the lower part ends below the two large angels, in an opening that serves as a doorway<sup>52</sup>.

Above this upper balustrade, under the large dome (marked “G”), there were once seven open arches, which formed the gynaeceum, or women’s upper galleries. These seven arches had been walled up and only their outlines and former locations remained visible. The Turks did not permit women in their mosques to prevent joint prayer. Having no further use for this once female-only section, it came to be used only by men. Above the sealed arches (marked “F”), windows are located on two of the church’s facades. However, these windows are depicted but carelessly. The lowest ones are very small, but five larger ones are found above. The glazing throughout the church, except for the six windows in the Sanctum Sanctorum, consists of round glass panes set in simple wooden frames. As a result,

<sup>51</sup> *Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople. P. 146–148.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid. P. 152.*

the entire church appears dark and gloomy, despite the large number of windows. All the windows are low, letting in little light, and resembling ventilation holes in a cave<sup>53</sup> rather than windows of a sanctuary.

Grelot also marked on his plan of Hagia Sophia, with detailed notes accompanying the drawing, the second-story galleries, which had once housed the “imperial gynecium”, where the empresses and female members of the royal family<sup>54</sup> had prayed. He reports that the arcades of this gallery were blocked off. Above the catechumena are the balustrades of the third tier, encircling the church around its entire interior perimeter.

The French artist equally thoroughly sketched and described the western part of Hagia Sophia’s nave (Fig. 6). On the western wall of the central nave, above the Imperial Doors, there is not a single attribute that reminds one of Christianity. He depicted the Imperial Doors (“A”) and two smaller doors on either side (“B”). In the annotations to his drawing, Grelot states that upon exiting the central nave through the main doors, one enters the inner narthex, where, in the lunette above the Imperial Doors, one can see images of the Savior, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John the Baptist<sup>55</sup>, at whose feet the emperor is shown prostrate<sup>56</sup>.

Along the western wall of the cathedral and further along the entire inner perimeter, run high and low balustrades to which numerous oil lamps were attached. These were lit at night during major celebrations, such as the holy month of Ramadan or other Islamic holidays (Fig. 6)<sup>57</sup>.

The French artist reports that the marble floor of the cathedral was covered with small mats interspersed with many large Turkish carpets, although these are not visible in his engraving<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. P. 153.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. P. 130.

<sup>55</sup> There is no mosaic image of John the Baptist in the lunette above the Imperial Gates.

<sup>56</sup> *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople.* P. 155.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. P. 146–147.

His drawing includes both large and small interior details, visible from the perspective of standing with one's back to the altar and mihrab. He also drew visitors wearing turbans and traditional long Ottoman garments.

In the corners of the central nave, in each of the four exedras of the first tier, stand pairs of porphyry columns from Thebes, arranged in semi-circles and topped with gilded capitals. Each pair of these dark-red columns supports a second-tier exedra, composed of six columns of dark green Thessalian porphyry (lat. *verde antico*), thus challenging the norms of traditional architecture.

The Theban porphyry columns ("D"), Grelot notes, are wrapped in several places with thick bronze rods, which prevent their ongoing deterioration<sup>59</sup>.

Grelot also depicted the first-tier exedras. In front of both the southwestern and the northwestern exedras, each of which has a pair of porphyry columns, one large white Proconnesian marble urn stands, about seven feet in height<sup>60</sup>. Both vessels are the same size, of a beautiful shape resembling a pumpkin. They appear to emerge from the center of polygonal basins, with water flowing from bronze spouts. It is believed that these urns were brought to Istanbul from Pergamon<sup>61</sup> by order of Sultan Murad III<sup>62</sup>.

The carving on their tops, resembling turbans, Grelot writes, was done by Ottoman craftsmen, but the vessels themselves likely have a Byzantine shape and origin (Fig. 6)<sup>63</sup>.

The first mention of these giant vases in Hagia Sophia comes from English traveler Fynes Moryson<sup>64</sup>, who visited Constantinople

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. P. 155.

<sup>60</sup> Each urn holds about 1,200 – 1,250 liters (Essad. *Constantinople*, p. 111).

<sup>61</sup> According to another version, they were brought from a region near the Sea of Marmara.

<sup>62</sup> *Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 144.

<sup>63</sup> *Lethaby and Swainson. The church of Sancta Sophia, Constantinople: A Study of Byzantine Building*. P. 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Fynes Moryson (1566–1630) — English traveler and writer, author of the four-volume memoir *An Itinerary*, describing his travels in Europe and the Ottoman Empire.*

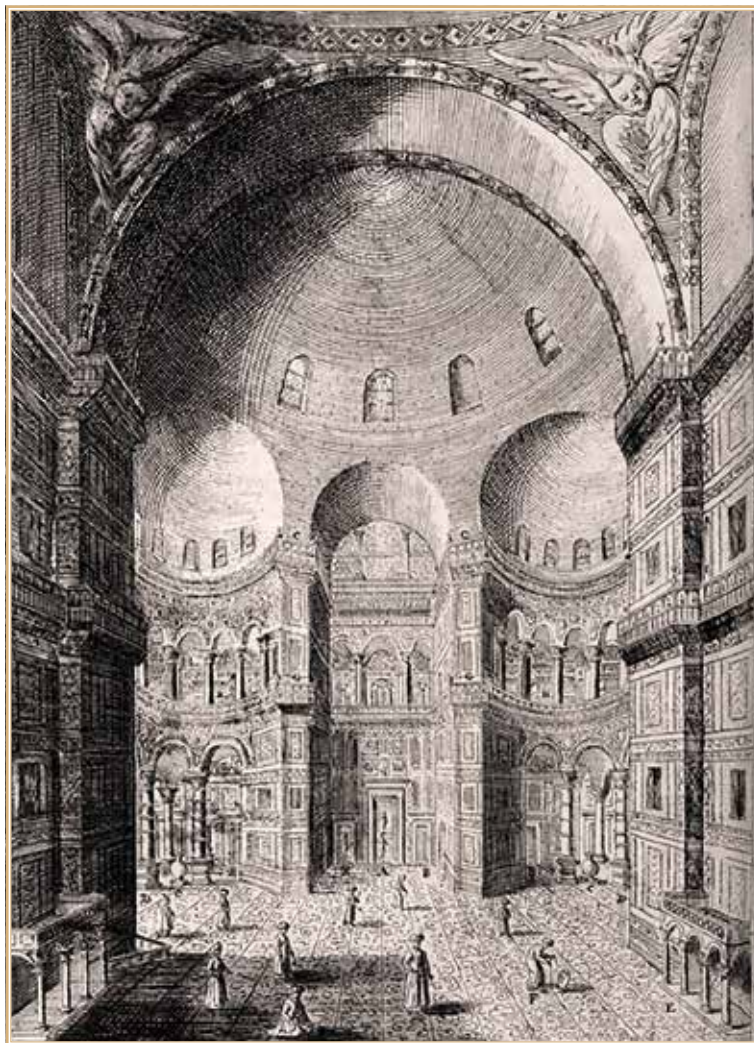


Fig. 6. View from the western balustrade of the altar apse toward the western side of the central nave and the Imperial Gate. *Grelot G.-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople. Enrichie de Plans levez par l'Auteur sur les lieux et des Figures de tout ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans cette Ville. Presentee au Roy par Guillaume Grelot. Paris, 1680*

in 1595 and wrote: “I did indeed see two marble nuts of enormous size and extraordinary beauty”<sup>65</sup>.

Here is what Grelot writes about these remarkable vessels: “Between two bronze-clad columns (“D”) (and their twins on the opposite side of the nave. –*Author*), there stands a pair of large marble

<sup>65</sup> *Lethaby and Swainson. The church of Sancta Sophia, Constantinople: A Study of Byzantine Building. P. 85.*

pitchers, vases, or jars<sup>66</sup>, equipped with spouts. Every morning, the vases are filled with water from a cistern, which, according to local attendants, lies beneath the mosque and feeds water through a small opening in the floor, marked with the letter “F”, covered by a bronze well lid. Even if these two enormous vases do not appear entirely antique, it can at least be assumed that they were placed in the same spot as those that once stood here during the times of the Greek emperors and served as reservoirs for *hagiasma* (holy water) for Christians who came to this church. A legend states that once there was a vast vase in the church filled with water, which the faithful would wash their faces with, or at least rinse their eyes, to demonstrate their exceptional purity before presenting themselves before the majesty of God, whom even angels dare not gaze upon<sup>67</sup>. These vases resemble holy the water vessels in Catholic churches, and at the top, one can even discern an inscription in a beautiful retrograde gilded Greek script: “Wash my sins, not only my face.”

However, today these vases are used only for drinking<sup>68</sup>. The most devout Turks stay in the mosque for extended periods and often fall into a trance during prayer, either from frequent kneeling and prostrations or from the constant strain of repeating the name of God or invoking his many epithets<sup>69</sup>. They become so enflamed with religious ecstasy that they “can barely breathe while quenching their thirst with cold water from the giant urns, which they either draw themselves or receive from a dervish or some other mosque attendant, who stands ready with the *tuluk* (leather water bags) and clean glasses to serve those in need. But this only happens during major religious festivals when the mosque is so full that no one can rise to fetch water themselves”<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> These vases, referred to by G.-J. Grelot alternately as “urns” or “pitchers”, were constantly filled with water “to quench the thirst of those overheated during prayer” (*Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 148, 161, 162).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* P. 160–161.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* P. 162.

<sup>69</sup> Allah has 99 names, which a Muslim repeats while fingering prayer beads.

<sup>70</sup> *Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d’un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 162.

Around the perimeter of the central nave — on both its northern and southern sides — stand four small marble tribunes of identical shape and size, facing each other. Grelot reports: “Turkish craftsmen built them as platforms on four pillars, resembling the balconies used by Italian musicians; only the railings are placed much lower so that the worshipers can observe the gestures of those standing on them” (Fig. 6)<sup>71</sup>. These platforms are called *teblig* or *mahfil-i müezzîn* and are intended for muezzins, who act as “conductors” or “heralds” of the collective prayer (*namaz*)<sup>72</sup>. Grelot refers to them as “bellighlers”. Such balcony-like lodges — and the “bellighlers” on them — are found only in large congregational mosques, as they are unnecessary in smaller ones. In ordinary mosques, it is sufficient to have one preacher (*khatib*) or imam and his assistant. The functions of the khatib largely coincide with those of a parish priest (*curé*), and in rural mosques, a single imam often performs the duties of imam, muezzin, lamp-lighter (*muhtar*), and even janitor (*kapici*). But in large and busy mosques like Hagia Sophia, these balconies are essential. The interior of Hagia Sophia resembles a vast ship filled with Muslims, many of whom are too far from the imam praying in front of the mihrab to hear or understand his words, and thus do not know when to exclaim or kneel. This often leads to discord and confusion, or even embarrassing mishaps, such as when a *bostancı*<sup>73</sup> or other worshipers kiss the floor and, upon rising, hook the sharp tip of their conical caps into the garments of their fellow believers just beginning to kneel performing the rak‘ah<sup>74</sup>, thereby disrupting the sacred order and peace of worship<sup>75</sup>. The muezzins on these tribunes watch the imam or khatib and shout out to the crowd whatever he quietly utters, signaling when to exclaim “Al-

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Their role somewhat resembled that of theatrical prompters.

<sup>73</sup> *Bostancı* (from Turkish *bostancı*, “gardener”) – the Sultan’s imperial guard, protecting the padishah and the palace. They wore a special headdress with a tall, pointed conical cap (*külâb*), which changed shape in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

<sup>74</sup> Grelot G.-J. A late Voyage to Constantinople. P. 134.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. P. 135.

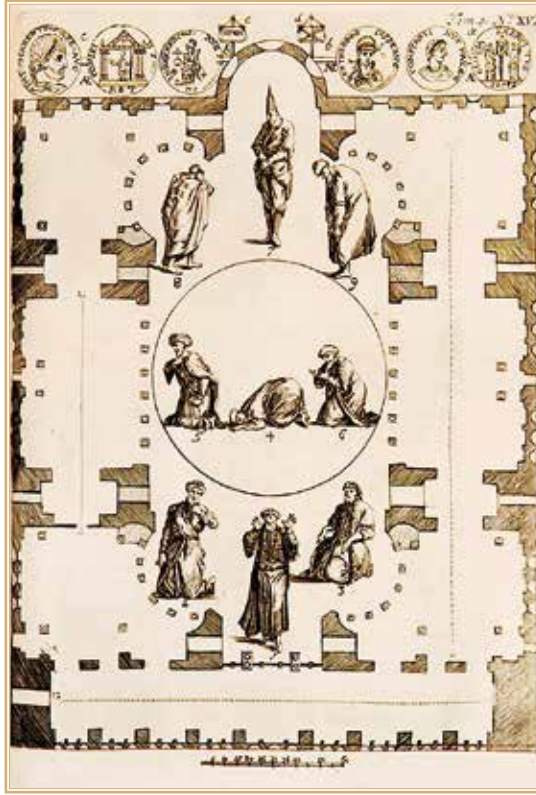


Fig. 7. Plan of the upper gallery of Hagia Sophia. Illustration showing the sequence of stages of a Muslim's prayer (namaz), with depictions of Byzantine coins at the top. Aubry de La Mottraye, 1727.

*From open sources*

lahu Akbar”<sup>76</sup> at the end of each *rak'ah*<sup>77</sup>, and when to prostrate, leading by example<sup>78</sup>.

Another traveler of French origin, **Aubry de La Mottrey**<sup>79</sup>, who was well acquainted with Grelot's book, arrived in Constantinople in 1699. In his book he writes:

<sup>76</sup> Praise of God with the exclamation: “Allah is the Greatest!” (Turkish: *Allah Ekber*, Arabic: *Allahu Akbar*).

<sup>77</sup> *Rak'ah* (Arabic: *rak'āt*) – the sequence of words and actions that make up Islamic prayer.

<sup>78</sup> *Grelot G-J. Relation Nouvelle d'un Voyage de Constantinople*. P. 161–163; *Grelot G-J. A late Voyage to Constantinople*. P. 135.

<sup>79</sup> Mottraye, Aubry de La (1674–1743), a French traveler, writer, and diplomat of noble birth, a Huguenot. From 1699, he lived in the Ottoman Empire, then served as an agent of the Swedish King Charles XII, and after the king's death (1718), he worked for the British crown.

“The description of Hagia Sophia given by Mr. Grelot is so accurate that I will add nothing to what he has said, except for the plan of the **gynaecium**, which is presented in engraving No. XV in the French edition of Aubry de La Mottraye’s book (1727), where the sequential positions of praying Muslims during **namaz** are depicted, both in Hagia Sophia and in other mosques. In illustration No. 8 of this engraving, a Muslim of African origin approaching the prayer is shown with his two thumbs pressed to his ears and his eyes closed. This indicates that the worshipper’s senses are closed to all worldly matters. Following this position is another illustration, No. 7, showing a figure in the attire of an *alvâcî*, or palace confectioner (jam-maker). Next are figures No. 9, 4, 5, 6, and 2, dressed in traditional Turkish costumes; in illustration No. 3, a **bostanci** gardener, or *baseki* (personal bodyguard of the Sultan) of the Seraglio, is depicted (the long and pointed cap of which caused no small trouble to a fellow believer praying in front of him), as well as of other palaces and gardens of the Grand Seigneur. In illustration No. 1 is the *Kapudan Pasha* (admiral commanding the naval fleet), closing the circle of nine successive positions of praying Muslims during **namaz**. Each praying Muslim is to perform the described bodily movements in the order indicated in the engraving” (Fig. 7)<sup>80</sup>.

Although Grelot allows himself some historical inaccuracies, misinterpretations and even artistic liberties, such as inventing the non-existing seraphim on the western pendentives, his book nevertheless marked a revelation of Hagia Sophia for not only the French court but all of Europe. In his dedication to King Louis XIV, Grelot, using the customary lofty language of such addresses, apologizes for offering neither pearls nor diamonds, as wealthy travelers often did upon returning from the East<sup>81</sup>, but instead presenting his illustrat-

<sup>80</sup> *Mottraye Aubry de La* (1674–1743). *Voyages du Sr. A. de Mottraye en Europe, Asie et Afrique en deux volumes*, vol. I, La Haye, T. Johnson & J. Van Duren, M DCC XXII (1727). P. 210, 210a.

<sup>81</sup> G.-J. Grelot is referring to his predecessor, J.-B. Tavernier, who, upon returning from India in 1668, brought with him a large uncut blue diamond of triangular shape (with an original weight of 112–115 carats), which the merchant [sic] sold to King Louis XIV along with other large diamonds and smaller gemstones. As a reward for these unprecedented Indian treasures,

ed book, a humble subject's tribute to the King. In the end, this illustrated volume proved far more valuable than any Oriental treasure, becoming the most precious and truly royal gift not only for Louis XIV but for every reader of Grelot's work.

King Louis XIV became acquainted with the content of the work before its publication, for which the author was granted a special royal privilege in 1677. This privilege was officially registered by His Majesty's Council three years before the book's release. The author received the exclusive right to print, sell, and send the book to anyone he saw fit throughout the entire Kingdom of France. Grelot's rights were securely protected from any attempts by engravers, booksellers, or printers to reproduce, sell, or distribute the book's materials without the author's or his representatives' consent under threat of confiscation of counterfeit copies and additional penalties.

Due to financial hardship, Grelot was forced to transfer this privilege to the widow of the late printer and bookseller Damien Foucault, who provided printing services to the royal family. This

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Tavernier received a noble title and a substantial sum of money from the king. In 1673, the court jeweler Sieur Pitau recut the diamond, giving it a symmetrical shape and reducing its weight to 67.125 carats. The stone became known as the "Blue Diamond of the Crown" (French: *Diamant Bleu de la Couronne*) or the "French Blue." Louis XIV wore the diamond as a pendant on a gold ribbon during ceremonial occasions. Later, the king set the diamond into the ceremonial decoration of the Order of the Golden Fleece. In 1792, during the French Revolution, the stone was stolen from the royal treasury along with other jewels. By 1812, the diamond resurfaced in London in a recut form, weighing approximately 47 carats. Thanks to the discovery of a lead model of the original in the Paris Museum of Natural History, modern research (2005) confirmed that it was indeed part of the "French Blue." Legend has it that the stone was stolen from a temple of the goddess Sita in India, supposedly placing a curse upon it. However, Tavernier's own fate contradicts this: he lived to the age of 83 and died in Moscow in July 1689, rather than being torn apart by dogs, as myths claim. A fragment of the original diamond made its way to Russia — a ring containing it belonged to Empress Maria Feodorovna (wife of Paul I) and is now preserved in the Kremlin Diamond Fund. A descendant of the "French Blue" — the Hope Diamond (45.52 carats) — has been held since 1958 at the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C., USA) as a gift from jeweler Harry Winston. .

was done as a compensation for the expenses that the publishing house had borne, including the financing of Grelot's sea voyage. This agreement had been a condition of the contract concluded between the illustrator and the publishing house. Without it, Grelot would not have been able to make his only maritime journey, from Rome to Constantinople, during which he acted not as a commissioned draftsman, but as an independent artist, unlike during the other stages of his Eastern journey. The transfer of the privilege for the remaining seventeen years was duly recorded in the register of the Community of Printers and Booksellers.

Grelot's book gained widespread recognition and popularity, not only in France but also in many other European countries, especially at royal courts, where it sparked a genuine interest in the East, in the Ottoman Empire, its capital, and above all, in its spiritual heart: Hagia Sophia of Constantinople. Its author left a unique historical document for posterity – a literary, artistic, and visual description of Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia Mosque in the 1670s, representing an important source for Byzantinists and Ottomanists.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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