

**I'll Take Two Please!**

Bartering and Commerce in the 16th Century Grand Bazaar of Istanbul | Class by THL Majda Anwar



*A march from Constantinople. Miniature from "Turkish Memorials" (codex Cicogna 1971 "Memorie Turchesche")  
Watercolor from the 17th century Venetian school.*

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*Spice Merchant. Miniature from "Turkish Memorials" (codex Cicogna 1971 "Memorie Turchesche")  
Watercolor from the 17th century Venetian school.*

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*Fruits and Vegetables. Miniature from "Turkish Memorials" (codex Cicogna 1971 "Memorie Turchesche")  
Watercolor from the 17th century Venetian school.*

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*The Bazaar. Miniature from "Turkish Memorials" (codex Cicogna 1971 "Memorie Turchesche")  
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### The Siege of Constantinople: 1453

- Ottomans conquered Constantinople led by Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror.
- The Byzantine empire was crumbling
- Mehmed seeks to stimulate the economy,
  - Attracted many artisans and craftspeople back into the city
  - Brought in from different parts of the empire
  - Influx of Jewish peoples from Spain fleeing the expulsion in 1492
  - Multiple religious practices in the city, no forced conversion to Islam
- Bring Constantinople back to its former glory...

### The Creation of the Grand Bazaar: 1455

- 1455 - Mehmed II orders the construction of two covered buildings to be a center for trade and commerce.
- This structure is called The Grand Bazaar and is also known as The Covered Bazaar or *Kapalıçarşı* in Turkish
- 1460-1461 completion of the two first **Bedestrens** - domed buildings with gates that served as a commercial center for the market and governance of merchants and guilds.
  - First Building: **Eski Bedesteni** (Old Bedestan) also called The Inner Bedesten, which hosted the trade of jewelry, crystal, and textiles.
  - Second Building: **Sandal Bedesteni** (named after the fabric made from silk and cotton) - Bedestren hosted yarn and fabric trade.
- The construction of the bazaar was funded through the vakıf system (pious foundation) and then the stalls and *hans* of the bazaar were rented out to merchants, tradesmen and artisans.

### What was shopping like in the Grand Bazaar?

*"The buyers and the sellers of the market of the world all come together" Kastamonulu Latifî Çelebi (1491–1582), Evsaf-ı İstanbul (Qualities of Istanbul) written in 1525*

- Inner stalls contained precious goods such as jewelry and silks, protected by merchant hired guards and the gates of the bedestren.
- Outer stalls sold more day-to-day goods - bakers, tanners, etc. Early period, women would be able to shop the outer walls, but it was considered *haram* to shop indoors as a woman in the bedestren. Later and beyond period, the Grand Bazaar became a "see and be seen" place for upper elite women.

How did you pay for items bought at the Grand Bazaar?

- Currency was not consistent across the Ottoman Empire, but in Istanbul you had two forms of currency:
  - Silver currency - akçe, not internationally recognized

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- Gold currency - sultânî, which was internationally recognized

### Who set the prices of goods?

- The Ottoman state set fixed pricing and quality standards for most products. These price ceilings were called *narh*. (Pamuk) If a merchant was found to be price gorging or underselling, punishment could be as severe as beatings or even hanging. This varied from Sultan to Sultan, and even within the Sultan's reign. (Boyar, Fleet)
- In the mid-1500's, guilds took more of a leadership role to further ensure quality standards. We have evidence of all sorts of guild craftsmanship: the 1582 manuscript that documented the festival for the circumcision of Prince Mehmed by Sultan Murad III.

Table 1- Officially fixed prices for certain foodstuffs in Istanbul (1525-1834)

(Akçe/Oka)								
Years	Flour	Bread	Mutton	Beef	Tallow	Olive Oil	Salt	Candle
1525	0.9	0.8	2	1		4.5	1.3	16
1558		0.7				4.8		
1600	3.3	2.3	8	5		18.5		

### What other activities took place in the Grand Bazaar?

- *Organization of guilds for artisans*
- *Hans stored raw materials for artisans and tradesmen in guilds*
- *Trading and selling of raw goods from merchants to tradesmen/artisans*
- *In the 1500's these same hans became a type of safety deposit box for the upper class and for the state.*
- *Performances*

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