Islamic Spaces and Diplomacy in Constantinople (Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.)

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Abstract
This article focuses on the built spaces, often described as mosques, of two Muslim communities in Constantinople between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. These Islamic spaces in the Byzantine capital originated pragmatic solutions to the functional requirements of accommodating Muslim prisoners and merchants. During this period one of these built spaces acquired political status as “the mosque of Constantinople” in diplomatic negotiations, serving as a counterpart to Christian monuments in Islamic territories. By the end of the twelfth century the Muslim spaces of Constantinople had acquired social, economic and religious significance for an international Muslim community, becoming in effect Islamic monuments. The “mosques” of Constantinople thus illuminate a role for architecture within Byzantine-Islamic diplomatic exchange, and a process of medieval monument formation, based not on intrinsic artistic interest, but on meanings acquired through social processes.

Keywords
Constantinople, mosques, Muslims, diplomacy, monuments, gift exchange

Introduction
Constantinople’s status as a major Christian city and pilgrimage destination, and the tensions between the Byzantines and the various medieval Islamic dynasties, would seem to preclude the idea of Muslims living and worshipping in this medieval city. Yet, Byzantine and Islamic texts refer to buildings or complexes that Muslims in the Byzantine capital used as mosques.1 Unfortunately for the historian of medieval architecture and


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urbanism, there is no material evidence for the so-called mosques of Constantinople, and the primary sources that refer to the buildings are brief and dispersed in a variety of texts. Despite references to these “mosques” in secondary scholarship on Byzantine-Islamic relations, scholars have not focused on them, nor is there consistency in basic information such as the number and chronology of the “mosques”, or indeed whether they existed at all.

This article focuses on the so-called mosques of Constantinople from the perspective of the social history of architecture and material culture, to which they are of interest for three reasons. First, their existence illuminates one way in which a medieval state accommodated religious diversity within the urban realm. Second, the “mosques” of Constantinople operated within the framework of gift exchange in Byzantine-Islamic diplomacy.


providing an architectural parallel to the better-studied phenomenon of portable objects in such diplomatic relations. Finally, in the process by which the “mosques” evolved from pragmatic structures to buildings with a religious significance to Muslims inside and outside of Constantinople, we can discern the creation of a medieval monument as it occurred independently of artistic criteria. That is, the buildings used by the Muslim communities in Byzantine Constantinople were not purposely constructed as Islamic monuments (works of architecture with some intrinsic aesthetic, religious, or historic importance to Muslims specifically). The medieval equivalent of today’s “storefront” mosques, the structures used by the Muslims of Constantinople were buildings adapted for Muslim communities, in which they resided, worked and worshiped. But as a consequence of their role in Byzantine-Islamic diplomatic negotiation, by the twelfth century an international Muslim community perceived these Islamic spaces in Constantinople in a new light—not merely as pragmatic structures for the everyday use of their co-religionists within the Byzantine city, but as monuments imbued with religious meaning for the entire community of believers.\(^5\) This change in the function and significance of the Muslim spaces in Constantinople between the tenth and thirteenth centuries paved the way for the purpose-built mosques which were eventually constructed in Constantinople in subsequent centuries.

The Dar al-Balat, Tenth Century—1200 C.E.

The earliest reference to a building for the use of a Muslim community in Constantinople appears in the tenth-century *De administrando imperio*, attributed to the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (r. 913-959). The work is a collection of information about the foreign governments and lands with which the Byzantines came into contact.\(^6\) The reference appears in a section on the Abbasids, which in turn is part of a larger chapter on Islamic political history from the time of Muhammad:

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And Mauias’ [sic] grandson was Masalmas [sic], who made an expedition against Constantinople, and at whose request was built the mosque [magisdion] of the Saracens in the imperial Praetorium.7

The “Masalmas” of the Byzantine text was Maslamah b. 'Abd al-Malik, the brother of the eighth century Abbasid caliph Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik. Maslamah was the leader of the troops that repeatedly attacked Constantinople in the eighth century.8 Al-Muqaddasi, the late tenth-century Arab geographer, concurs with the De administrando that Maslamah was responsible for the presence of a building primarily associated with Muslims in Constantinople. While the term magisdion,9 a derivative of masjid (Ar. mosque), is used in the Greek text, al-Muqaddasi and authors of other Arabic texts refer to the structure not as masjid, but as Dar al-Balat:

...it is known that Maslamah b. Abd al-Malik, when warring with the Byzantines, [al-Rum] brought forth the condition to the Emperor that he build the Dar al-Balat near the Hippodrome [maydan]. Nobles and those of high rank entered the Dar al-Balat when they were made prisoners of war, so that they were under the Emperor's protection.10

The term dar, often translated as “palace”, connotes an official function, while balat (pl. ablita) as used in other medieval Arabic texts has imperial connotations. It is also used with specific reference to architecture to refer to an arcade or covered nave within a mosque.11 The name Dar al-Balat

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7 Porphyrogenitus, De administrando, 92, lines 111-113 of the Greek text. English translation, 93.
9 Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio, 92, line 114 of the Greek text. I am grateful to Kathleen Corrigan and Nancy Sevcenko for their help with the text.
11 Dozy defines the term as “palace or imperial tent, covered gallery, or covered nave, in a mosque”, deriving it from “palatium”. R. Dozy, Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes,(1967 ed.), 1:111. Lane indicates “balat” has connotations that include paved areas, stone, and palaces. E.W. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984
thus alludes to the structure’s location within the imperial precinct, and an aspect of the architectural character of the building, possibly but not necessarily related to its partial function as a mosque. In addition to emphasizing the Dar al-Balat’s political and pragmatic function, al-Muqaddasi’s description, like De administrando, situates it in the context of the royal precinct, near an area in which imperial textiles were produced. Al-Muqaddasi writes, “[the Emperor] built the Dar al-Balat behind the Hippodrome—the ruler’s silk brocade is made in it”.12 The reference to the Dar al-Balat’s spatial relationship to an imperial textile factory fits Greek texts that mention facilities for textile production in the area of the Great Palace.13 The low-status Muslim prisoners, al-Muqaddasi notes, were conscripted, possibly as workers in textile or other workshops: “the remainder of the Muslim prisoners are enslaved and work in manufacturing. [Therefore] the prudent among them, when asked their profession, do not respond”.14

Harun Ibn Yahya, a Muslim visitor to the Great Palace around 911 C.E., describes a lavish feast held there for Muslim prisoners, suggesting that high-ranking Muslim captives were treated as aristocratic guests.15 Certainly, the Byzantines had received Muslim diplomats within the Great Palace since at least the ninth century. For example, the Andalusi poet al-Ghazal, who served as the ninth-century Cordoban Umayyad ruler ‘Abd al-Rahman II’s ambassador to Constantinople, was entertained within the Palace and reportedly held in high esteem by the Byzantine emperor Theophilus (r. 829-842 C.E.) and the Empress Theodora.16 Likewise, Nasr


12 Or perhaps—“it is built inside the ruler’s silk brocade factory”.

13 See Lopez, R. “Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire”. In Speculum 20 (1945), 1-42, esp. 7.


Ibn al-Azhar, the Abbasid ambassador to Constantinople in 860-861 wrote an account of his reception at the Byzantine court, noting that he was treated with honor and given lodgings very near to those of the Emperor. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a number of Seljuk rulers were similarly received at the Byzantine court.\textsuperscript{17} In this context the presence of the Dar al-Balat as a space for the use of Muslims is not unusual.\textsuperscript{18} And in fact, as Stephen W. Reinert has pointed out, even Muslim prisoners were conceptualized as quasi-imperial subjects within the Byzantine state.\textsuperscript{19} The Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos’ letter to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir, dated 922, clearly states the Byzantine policy of caring for [high-ranking] Muslim prisoners as subjects, to whom “spacious apartments, the enjoyment of the cleanest air, and other comforts . . . such as are at the disposal of their own coracials and coreligionists . . . [including] an oratory [which is] set apart for the use of members of your sect” were made available.\textsuperscript{20}

Ibn Hawqal, another tenth-century geographer, provides some elaboration on the Dar al-Balat’s location and character as a prison for certain Muslims, suggesting a spatial relationship between it and the other imperial prisons in the city. Ibn Hawqal writes:


\[\textsuperscript{18} \text{The topic of Christian–Muslim artistic interchange is also relevant to this point. Paul Magdalino has argued, in explaining the construction of the famously Islamicizing addition to the Great Palace known as the Mouchroutas Hall, that Muslim visitors to the Great Palace had to be “contained” so as to prevent their defiling the sacred space of the Great Palace. Magdalino posits the Mouchroutas Hall as the architectural solution to a perceived problem with such visitors. Magdalino’s interpretation is unlikely given the instances in which Muslim diplomats were received as guests within the Great Palace. Lucy-Anne Hunt’s discussion of the Mouchroutas Hall within the context of Seljuk-Byzantine political and artistic exchange and shared Byzantine-Islamic tastes in the sphere of court culture seems a more likely explanation. Paul Magdalino, “Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace”, \textit{Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies} 4 (1978), 101-114; Hunt, “Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration”, 138-156.}\]

\[\textsuperscript{19} \text{Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 128-129.}\]

...I have heard that the [Byzantine] king has four prisons near the Dar al-Balat in which his prisoners of war are kept. In order, the first of them is known by the name al-Tarqsis, and the other by al-Absiq, and the other by al-Bulqular [Gr. Balkuwara], and the other by al-Numara [Gr. Numera]. It is said that those imprisoned in al-Tarqsis and al-Absiq are made comfortable, for verily they are not chained, but those in al-Bulqular and al-Numara are chained. Whoever is imprisoned in the Dar al-Balat starts at the Numara prison, from which he is transferred, and it is a dark and confining prison...

Al-Muqaddasi’s description sketches out the prison’s immediate urban context: “The sea is on one side of the Hippodrome, and the Dar al-Balat and the Imperial Palace [Dar al-Mulk] are aligned with each other—the gates of the Hippodrome are near the middle, between the two palaces”. Based on these two tenth-century descriptions the Dar al-Balat’s general location seems to have been south of the Mese, the main road that led to the Great Palace, and facing the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors from the opposite side of the Hippodrome. Defining its location with greater precision is impossible, since only a fraction of the Great Palace east of the Hippodrome has been excavated.

Though historians have suggested possible plans for the Great Palace, based on textual evidence, a definitive plan of its celebrated conglomeration of halls and courts does not exist. The remains of the Baths of

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21 The Balkuwara (or Barkuwara) was one of the major Abbasid palaces of Samarra, built according to Yaqut by the caliph al-Mutawakkil between 854-859 CE, at a cost of twenty million dirhams. See Book of Gifts and Rarities, ed. and transl. Ghada al-Qaddumi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 136, paragraph 138. Herzfeld began excavations at the site in 1911; recent excavations have been led by Alistair Northedge. See Alistair Northedge, “An Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Samarra (Dar al-Khilafa or Jawsaq al-Khaqani)”, In Ars Orientalis 23 (1993), 143-170; ibid., “The Palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra”, In A medieval Islamic city reconsidered: an interdisciplinary approach to Samarra ed. Chase Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29-68. Why is the Byzantine prison named for this famous Abbasid palace? Byzantine ambassadors were received in the Abbasid court, though I do not know whether any receptions specifically took place at the Balkuwara. The most celebrated account of such a reception in Samarra which took place in 917 mentions several palaces by name, but the Balkuwara is not among them. See al-Qaddumi, Book of Gifts and Rarities, 148-155, paragraphs 161-164.


24 For a summary of the excavations see Jonathan Bardill, “Walker Trust Excavations at the Great Palace”. In Journal of Roman Archaeology, 12 (1999), 217-230. For the topography
Zeuxippus, converted at least in part into the Numera prison sometime in the eighth-century, were identified to the east of the Hippodrome on its north end during British excavations of the early 20th century. Ibn Hawqal’s comment that Muslim prisoners en route to the Praetorium passed through or by the Numera places the Dar al-Balat on the northern side of the west end of the Hippodrome. This site is in keeping with al-Muqaddasi’s location of the Dar al-Balat south of the Mese opposite the Great Palace. Excavations in this area have revealed the remains of extensive Late Antique aristocratic palaces whose enormous vestibules were used as the substructures and quarries for the construction of more modest palaces in the tenth-century. The Dar al-Balat may well have been one of these structures.

Arabic texts mention more than a dozen Byzantine-Islamic prisoner exchanges taking place between 804 and 969 C.E. The tenth-century historian al-Tabari mentions, for instance, Muslim prisoners of war numbering in the thousands, though he does not indicate what percentage would have been considered high-ranking enough to have been placed in the Dar al-Balat to await ransom or exchange. In an exchange which took place between the ’Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) and the Byzantine Emperor Michael III (r. 842-867), according to the Muslim emissary representing al-Mutawakkil “all the prisoners who were in [Byzantine] hands came to more than two thousand, including twenty women, along with ten children”. Likewise, an exchange in 845-846 involved Muslim prisoners in the thousands:

‘Abu Qahtabah reported—he was the emissary of Khaqan al-Khadim to the Byzantine ruler whose task was to examine the number of prisoners and to ascertain the accuracy of what Michael, the Byzantine ruler, claimed—that the number of Muslims prior to

and archaeological remains of the city see W. Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul, Tübingen, 1977; Cyril Mango, The brazen house: a study of the vestibule of the imperial palace of Constantinople, (København: bi kommission hos Munksgaard, c. 1959), 41-43.


al-Tabari, Taʾrikhb, 1450; tr. al-Tabari, History, 34:169.
the exchange was 3000 men, 500 women, and children who were in Constantinople and elsewhere.28

Such events took place more or less regularly in the ninth and tenth centuries, often at the borders between Byzantine and Islamic territory. Prisoners of war were regularly paraded in triumphal processions in Constantinople before they were detained in the prisons to await ransom or exchange, and their treatment by the Byzantines ranged from the humane to instances of executions and mass blinding.29 The exchange of gifts between rulers, a topic to which we will return below, often occurred in conjunction with such ransoms.30 For instance, Constantine IX Monomachus (r. 1042-1055) included two hundred Muslim prisoners of war as part of a number of gifts sent in 1046 to the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir (r. 1036-1094).31 The prisoners included in the gift each led two hundred mules and horses bearing a variety of rich textiles.

The Syrian Mitaton (c. 1051-1204 C.E.)

The Dar al-Balat, with its connection to Muslim prisoners of war and diplomats from Islamic courts, operated within the realm of the court. The second Muslim space in Constantinople, whose lifespan overlapped that of the Dar al-Balat, operated predominantly in the realm of trade, particularly the silk trade.32 Syrian merchants, who specialized in silk and other luxury goods, were important participants in the Byzantine economy and had been since at

28 al-Tabari, Taʾrikh, 1352-1355; tr. al-Tabari, History, 39-42.
29 Encyclopedia of Byzantium, s.v. “prisoners-of-war”, “prisons”.
31 For description see Grabar, “The Shared Culture of Objects”, 115-129.
32 On the Muslim merchant community of Constantinople see Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 130-148; Remie Constable, Housing the Stranger, 147-150.
least the ninth century, at which time they are mentioned specifically in
the text on Byzantine market regulations known as the *Book of the Eparch*.33
The Syrians were one of the earliest foreign groups, along with Bulgarians
and Russians, allowed to establish a resident colony within Constantinople.34
Indeed, the tenth-century author Maṣʿūdi mentions a Syrian merchant
known for having supplied luxury goods to the Byzantine aristocracy
for a decade during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty.35 While the use
of the term “Syrian” in itself does not necessarily impart a Muslim identity
to the traders,36 by the end of the twelfth century the Byzantine chronicler
Niketas Choniates refers to the quarters (*mitaton*) of the Syrian trading
colony within the city as the “synagogue of the Agarenes”, indicating that
the merchants as a group were at least perceived to be Muslim.37 By the
tenth century the term *mitaton* had come to have a very specific meaning
within the Byzantine capital: the word signified “the inn in Constantinople
for Syrian merchants where they stored their goods after having paid a
rental fee. At the Mitaton the [Byzantine] textile merchants divided up the

33 *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen (Book of the Eparch)*, ed. Johannes Koder (Vienna:
Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991), 94-97; *Le livre du préfet /
the Prefect”, In *Journal of Economic and Business History* I (1929), 597-618; Remie Constable,
*Housing the Stranger*, 147-150; Lopez, “Silk Industry”, 30. Of the 19 guilds mentioned
in the *Book of the Eparch*, five are related to silk; *prandiopratai* were the dealers in
Century”, In *Byzantium: its internal history and relations with the Muslim World* (London:
Variorum Reprints, 1971), 297.


35 Maṣʿūdi [sic], *Les Prairies d’or*, ed. and transl. C. Barbier de Meynard (Paris, 1861-
77), 8:75-87, cited in Priscilla Soucek, “Byzantium and the Islamic East”, In *The Glory of
Byzantium: Art & Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans

36 *Vizantijskaja kniga eparkha, Pamjatniki srednevekovoj istorii narodov central’noj i
vostochnoj Evropy* (Moscow, 1962), 159-160, cited in Reinert, “Muslim Presence in
Constantinople”, 132 n. 24.

37 The term *Agarenes*, sometimes used by Niketas, refers to the Byzantine understanding
of the Biblical origins of the Muslims as the children of Hagar. Nicetas Choniates, *Nicetae
Choniatae Historia, orpus fontium historiae Byzantinae*, no. 11, 1-2, ed. Ioannes Aloysius
van Dieten (Berolini; Novi Eboraci: de Gruyter, 1975), 553; Niketas Choniates, *O city of
Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Detroit, MI: Wayne
State University Press, 1984), 303.
wares that they had purchased collectively from the Syrians”. Textiles, whether luxury or common goods, traveled freely throughout Christendom and Islamdom, making them a particularly rich source for analysis of interchange between medieval societies. Mas‘udi’s anecdote suggests the enthusiasm of Byzantine aristocrats for the goods offered by the Syrian merchants: the anecdote concerns a Byzantine aristocrat who was so determined to acquire a set of silk textiles and cushions that he apparently leaped from his waterfront palace into the merchant’s boat. Silk in particular was one of the most important components of the Byzantine imperial economy and persona. Its production, controlled sale, and its circulation in the form of diplomatic gifts were of such critical importance in Byzantine government policy that Robert Lopez compared their role in Byzantine politics to that of weapons of mass destruction in 20th-century foreign policy. This may partly explain why the Syrian silk merchants were favored with exclusive concessions from the imperial government; in addition to permission to live and worship within the city, they were assured a guaranteed market for their goods in Constantinople. However, even Syrian merchants who dealt in items other than silk were still granted the exclusive privilege of having all of their merchandise, regardless of quantity or quality, guaranteed for purchase in advance by the imperial government. Whatever was not purchased by the Byzantine guilds became the responsibility of the Prefect of Constantinople. Though Syrian merchants who were not involved in the silk trade were not permitted to reside in the Syrian mitaton, they were allowed to establish permanent residency in the city once they had traded in Constantinople for 10 years. Since all Syrian merchants had a guaranteed market for their goods in Constantinople, they

40 Cited in Soucek, “Byzantium and the Islamic East”, 404.
42 Though Lopez also speculated that this might have been prompted by Byzantine hopes of garnering support in Syria for an invasion. See Lopez, “Silk Industry”, 30; Remie Constable, Housing the Stranger, 148.
provided the Byzantine market with a whole range of luxury items imported from Syria, as well as from ports as distant as China.43

What might we discern about the architectural and urban qualities of the Syrian mitaton based on textual and material evidence? Niketas Choniates specifies that the Syrian mitaton was located in the “northern section of the City sloping toward the sea next to the church built in the name of Hagia Eirene”.44 Thomas Madden has interpreted this to mean that the Mitaton and the church of Hagia Eirene by the Sea were both located on the shore of the Golden Horn, perhaps at the juncture of the medieval Perama district and the twelfth-century Pisan quarter,45 one of the busiest and most functionally varied areas of the city, crowded with shops, residences, monasteries, and aristocratic palaces, in addition to the shipping infrastructure associated with the harbor of the Golden Horn.46 The Syrian mitaton, if located in the commercial area of the city near the Golden Horn, may have been a predecessor of the Italian trading colonies that were established in the same area.47

The need to provide residential and commercial storage space for the Syrian silk merchants may have been met by adapting existing building stock (as was likely the case with the Dar al-Balat), from among the residences, monasteries, palaces, and other non-commercial structures located in the trading quarters.48 The Syrian mitaton was either a building, then, or one of the residential complexes [oikos] that formed the underpinnings of

44 Nicetae Choniatae, 553-554; Magoulias, O City, 302-303.
47 Muslim merchants were present in Constantinople before all the western European trading colonies, except Venice. See Remie Constable, Housing the Stranger, 149 and Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 130-150. Certainly, the Syrian mitaton was well established by August, 1203, when Niketas Choniates describes its destruction. In describing the event Niketas Choniates clearly differentiates between the Syrian mitaton and the Dar al-Balat, evidence that these two spaces’ life spans overlapped, but that they were located in different areas of the city and served two distinct populations.
48 Magdalino, The Empire of Manuel I, 122-123: “The non-commercial premises included not only ordinary houses, neighborhood churches and small monasteries, but also a hospital and a large princely palace. The properties adjoining the Italian enclaves all belonged to churches and monasteries, among them some very old foundations. Few other parts of the city can have been as busy or as densely varied”.

The Genoese colony, for example, was given a palace complex in 1203 (incidentally, the year in which the Syrian mitaton was destroyed), described as “a sprawling, walled complex that included gatehouses, two churches, courtyards, reception halls, dining halls, residential units, terraces, pavilions, stables, a granary, vaulted substructures, cisterns, a bath complex, and rental properties.” Such a concession to the Italian colonies in the early thirteenth-century provides a scenario for the earlier accommodation of the Syrian silk merchants in Constantinople, though Remie Constable distinguishes between the two ways of accommodating foreign traders within the Byzantine capital. She notes that the territorial enclaves (embolos) which the Byzantines allotted to the Venetians, Genoese, Pisans and other Christian merchant communities were less circumscribed and regulated than the mitaton, though the Syrian mitaton may also have encompassed a residential quarter. If the Syrian mitaton was housed in just such an aristocratic residential complex facing the Golden Horn, where virtually all merchants and goods entered Constantinople, Niketas Choniates’ assertion that the Crusaders saw the complex from across the Golden Horn and attacked it on the eve of the Fourth Crusade, believing it to be “a treasure trove of riches”, makes sense.

Creation of a Medieval Islamic Monument

As is clear from this discussion of the Muslim spaces in the Byzantine capital, conceptualizing the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton primarily as mosques is inaccurate. Though they included space for prayer for the convenience of the Muslim communities they served, as built spaces within the Byzantine city they are more accurately defined by their specific political and economic functions. Though De administrando imperio refers to the Dar al-Balat as magisdion, the Arabic authors do not refer to the space as masjid, but rather dar, a designation with official or governmental, rather than religious, overtones. Even the use of the phrase “synagogue of the

51 Remie Constable, Housing the Stranger, 149-152.
Saracens” or “synagogue of the Agarenes” in Niketas’ text need not necessarily carry religious overtones, given *synagogē*’s basic sense of “gathering place”; a perfectly sensible meaning given that both the Dar al-Balat and Syrian *mitaton* were precisely spaces for the Muslim communities in Constantinople.52

However, beginning in the middle of the tenth century references to “the mosque of Constantinople” (*masjid-i Qustantiniyya*) in Byzantine-Islamic diplomatic exchanges indicate that either the Dar al-Balat or the Syrian *mitaton* was now given a specifically religious designation. In effect we see at this point one of these spaces acquiring a role in Byzantine-Islamic treaties, especially those involving key Christian buildings and/or communities in Islamic territories, notably the Holy Sepulchre and Orthodox Christian communities in Egypt. In such negotiations “the mosque of Constantinople” is specified as the object of restoration and as the recipient of luxury gifts that normally accompanied peace treaties and ransom agreements forged between the Byzantines and the Abbasids, Seljuks, Fatimids, and the Mamluk rulers of Cairo.53

It is not clear from the sources which of the two spaces, the Dar al-Balat or the Syrian *mitaton*, took on this new role as the congregational mosque of Constantinople. Given its court context, however, the Dar al-Balat seems the logical choice between the two. If this assumption is correct, in addition to its existing function as a prison for aristocratic Muslim prisoners of war, the Dar al-Balat acquired a new role in Byzantine-Islamic diplomatic negotiations, beginning in the tenth century when “the” mosque in Constantinople is explicitly mentioned in treaties such as that of 987 C.E. between Basil II and the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAziz, which specified that the *khutba* was to be pronounced in the mosque at Constantinople in the name of al-ʿAziz.54 We can therefore posit that by this time the Dar al-Balat would have functioned as a congregational mosque for the broader Muslim population present in the city, especially the Muslim merchants of the Syrian *mitaton*; it would not have replaced prayer space

52 See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “synagogue”.
54 See Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 136-140.
within the confines of the mitaton itself. The reference to the khutba, the oath by which the male Muslim population of a city swore fidelity to the caliph during the important Friday ceremony, underscores the new status of the Dar al-Balat, as a building with a new and specific role as the congregational mosque of Constantinople, to both parties involved in the negotiation.

One can imagine that the Dar al-Balat’s new status was all the more important following the partial destruction of the Holy Sepulcher at the command of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim bi-ʿAmr Allah in 1009 C.E. After minor restorations to the Holy Sepulcher in 1012, tensions between the Byzantines and Fatimids after 1016 may have resulted in the temporary revocation of congregational mosque status, in conjunction with the ban on Fatimid merchants in Constantinople. This ban was lifted in 1027 when a new treaty was negotiated between Constantine VIII and al-Hakim’s son. Given that, as Reinert observes, other Muslims were free to travel and trade in the capital and the Byzantine territories, there is no reason to suppose that the Dar al-Balat was shut down, but simply that it reverted to its prior functions as a space for Muslim prisoners of war but lost its diplomatic role as the congregational mosque of the capital, due to its recent specifically Fatimid association in that capacity. The 1027 treaty thus witnessed the restoration of the Dar al-Balat’s diplomatic status as congregational mosque, along with the requisite stipulations for refurbish-

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55 Reinert comes to the same conclusion, though he does not name the mosque the Dar al-Balat. As he notes, this contradicts Canard’s assertion that the mosque was “only for the use of prisoners”. Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 137 n. 45; M. Canard, “Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century”, Cambridge Medieval History vol. 4, ed. J. Hussey et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 733.


58 Reinert, “Muslim Presence in Constantinople”, 138-139.
ment to be carried out at Byzantine expense, the appointment of a muezzin, and the pronouncement of the *khutba* in the name of the Fatimid caliph once again.\(^{59}\) Despite the return to normalcy between the Byzantines and Fatimids after 1027, the significance of maintaining a mosque, officially recognized as a congregational mosque, in the Byzantine capital reared its head once again in 1049, when the Byzantine Empress Theodora broke with the Fatimids by treating with the Seljuk ruler Tughril Beg. The resulting negotiations underscore the weight attached to the Dar al-Balat as a political monument:

\[\ldots\] Tughril Beg sent in return many different kinds of gifts [*al-hadaya*]. They restored the mosque of Constantinople [*masjid al-Qustantiniyya*] and prayer was performed there, and the *khutba* was said for Tughril Beg.\(^{60}\)

We can see by now the conventions of refurbishment or restoration, provision of luxury objects, and the pronouncement of the *khutba*, which were attached to the congregational mosque in such diplomatic negotiations. The arrival of the Seljuks as players in what by now seems to have been a standard process between the Byzantines and Fatimids, reflects the ascendance of the Seljuks in international politics, as the opponents of the Fatimids, and a threat which the Byzantine state was trying to defuse. Certainly, having the *khutba* pronounced in the name of the Seljuk, rather than the Fatimid, ruler in “the” mosque of Constantinople was as much a coup for the Seljuks as it was a blow to the Fatimids, and the symbolic weight of that fact is clear in the retaliatory act of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir, who confiscated the treasury of the Holy Sepulchre.\(^{61}\) The decisive Seljuk victory over the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert was still some twenty years in the future; the Byzantines would likely have expected the alliance with the Seljuks, who saw themselves as the champions of Sunni orthodoxy in opposition to Fatimid heterodoxy, to offer a strategic advantage over the Fatimids.


Not that the Byzantines ceased to treat with the Fatimids. In 1053 the Byzantine Emperor sent the caliph al-Mustansir diplomatic gifts that included slaves, animals, various boxes and chests filled with gifts, rich textiles, and objects of precious metals, stones and rock crystal. The connection between diplomatic gifting and monuments is clear here as well; many of the gifts were specifically intended for the Holy Sepulcher. The Byzantine messenger, accompanied by Fatimid sailors, personally delivered the objects to the church. Likewise, in 1057, eight years after the khutba was made in the name of Tughril Beg at the mosque of Constantinople, the Seljuk ruler sent gifts to Emperor Michael VII that included silver candlesticks, candles, textiles, and leather-lined baskets filled with camphor and aloe wood. This litany of luxury items is representative of the kinds of gifts that Islamic rulers sent for the Constantinople mosque. There is silence regarding a congregational mosque in Constantinople for more than a century after Tughril Beg’s gesture, indicating there was no pressing political reason for the Dar al-Balat’s role as congregational mosque to once again come to the fore.

In the late twelfth century, however, the need to recognize a congregational mosque in the Byzantine capital emerged once again, in relation to negotiations for a peace treaty between Salah al-Din and the Byzantine Emperor Isaac. The negotiations were marked by each side’s concerns over religious communities in the other’s territory. Mirroring Isaac’s desire for the establishment of the Greek rite in the Islamic eastern Mediterranean, Salah al-Din requested that the khutba be recited in the Constantinople mosque in the name of the Abbasid caliph. To mark the success of the treaty, Salah al-Din’s biographer, Ibn Shaddad, noted Salah al-Din sent the staff and liturgical furnishings appropriate for a congregational mosque to Constantinople:

There was diplomatic contact and correspondence between the sultan and the emperor of Constantinople. An envoy from the latter came to the sultan at Marj ‘Uyun during Rajab 585 [August–September 1189] in reply to an envoy that the sultan had sent to him after the conclusion of a mutual understanding and an agreement to institute Muslim prayers in the mosque of Constantinople. This envoy had gone there and established

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65 Emphasis added.
the khutba, being met with great respect and much honor. The sultan had sent with him, in the one ship, the preacher, the minbar and a number of muezzins and Koran reciters.66

It has been suggested that Isaac constructed a new mosque as part of this negotiation, based on a text dated 1210, and which is identified with the Syrian mitaton in the secondary literature.67 However, Ibn Shaddad’s text alludes to a mosque that existed already in 1189; furthermore there would not have been a need to construct a new building if the Dar al-Balat was once again designated the congregational mosque of the city, as we are arguing. In providing the staff and furnishings for the congregational mosque, Salah al-Din would be following the precedent that had been established in the aforementioned negotiations with the Fatimids and the Seljuks. The reference to the merchants who were staying in the city need not indicate that the congregational mosque was the Syrian mitaton, given the indications that by the eleventh-century the Dar al-Balat was used by a free Muslim community as well as by the prisoners of war and other court Muslims who constituted its original users.68 And in fact, al-Harawi’s (d. 1215) reference, in a section on Constantinople in the Kitab al-Ziyarat, a Muslim pilgrimage guide, to “the Great Mosque which was built by Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik”, indicates that in the late twelfth century the congregational mosque in question was indeed the Dar al-Balat.69

Al-Harawi also refers, in the same section, to two tombs in Constantinople


of interest to medieval Muslim pilgrims: the grave of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, a Companion of the Prophet, and that of an unnamed descendent of Husayn. Clearly, an international Muslim community associated the Dar al-Balat with the aforementioned tombs, suggesting that by the end of the twelfth century the Dar al-Balat was invested by Muslims with a new religious significance beyond its diplomatic status as the congregational mosque in political negotiations—a significant shift in its perceived meaning.

Destruction

The dawn of the thirteenth century, the eve of the Fourth Crusade, was one of the most turbulent and destructive periods in Constantinople’s history, and it was at this point that both the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton were destroyed. In 1201, some years after the treaty of alliance between Isaac and Salah al-Din and the recitation of the *khutba* in the Constantinople mosque, Niketas Choniates describes the destruction of the Dar al-Balat, at the hands of Byzantine citizens. Angered by corrupt practices sanctioned by the director of the imperial Praetorium, he writes, a crowd of enraged Byzantines stormed the imperial prison complex, pelted the corrupt official and his bodyguard with stones, and then “gave the prisoners license to loot the Christian church located there, after which they destroyed the synagogue of the Saracens to its very foundations”.  

Significantly, Niketas’ explanation does not ascribe the destruction of the building due to anti-Muslim sentiment. Rather, his description of the events paints its destruction as largely incidental to what he believes is the main issue: Byzantine anger over administrative corruption.

However, the status of relations between the Byzantines and the Ayyubids may indeed have created significant Christian-Muslim tension in Constantinople. To return to the connection between the Byzantines and Salah al-Din, after noting the successful arrival of Salah al-Din’s envoy in Constantinople, Ibn Shaddad went on to note the urgent message from the Emperor Isaac Angelus to the Islamic ruler, a message which followed on the heels of the celebration of the *khutba* in the Constantinople mosque:

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70 *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, 525; Magoulias, O City, 288; Reinert, “Muslim Presence”, 142.
From Isaac the Emperor, believer in the divine Messiah, etc... to his brother, the Sultan of Egypt Saladin... you must take care to send an envoy to us in order that he may inform us of the matter concerning which I communicated with you... The Germans have crossed our territory and it is not a surprise that our enemies spread lying rumors to suit their own aims... After all this it is surprising how you have forgotten what is between us... Your Excellency, as you wrote in your letter which you sent us, must send an envoy to inform us of all the matters about which we have corresponded with you in the past. Let that be done as quickly as possible...71

The letter’s urgent plea for aid from Salah al-Din reflects the Byzantines’ expectation that their Islamic allies would assist them in deflecting the growing pressure that came from the Crusader forces.72 Although Choniates does not ascribe the destruction of the Islamic building specifically to anti-Muslim sentiment, might the crowd’s frustration with the administration have also encompassed anger over the lack of support from the Ayyubids, with whom Isaac and his predecessors had allied themselves hoping to rid themselves of the Crusader threat? With the threat of the Fourth Crusade looming, might the shadow of such Byzantine-Ayyubid tensions have informed the crowd’s attitude toward a building so thoroughly associated with not only the Muslim community in Constantinople, but by this point, the greater Dar al-Islam?

In 1203, just two years after the destruction of the Dar al-Balat, the Syrian mitaton was also destroyed, though not by Byzantines but in the turmoil preceding the Fourth Crusade. Choniates relates:

On the nineteenth day of the month of August of the year 6711 [1203] Certain Frenchmen, Pisans, and Venetians sailed with a company of men across the straits, confident that the monies of the Saracens were a windfall and treasure trove waiting to be taken. This evil battalion put into the City on fishing boats (for there was no one whatsoever to resist their sailing in and out of the City) and without warning fell upon the synagogue of the Agarenes called Mitaton in popular speech; with drawn swords they plundered its possessions.73

The author ends his account of the Mitaton’s destruction by describing how, roused by the commotion of the Crusader attack, Byzantines rushed to aid the Muslims against the invaders. “Not as many arrived as should

71 Ibn Shaddad, Rare and Excellent, 121-122.
73 Nicetae Choniatae Historia, 553-554, Magoulias, O City, 302-303.
have”, Choniates complains of the Byzantine response, but eventually the combined defensive force routed the Crusaders, who then set fire to the Mitaton to cover their retreat. Niketas’ assertion that the Crusaders had preconceived notions of Muslim wealth that led them to purposefully attack the Syrian quarters may imply that the Mitaton’s appearance was that of a wealthy complex worth looting. Other Crusader accounts of the Sack of Constantinople make no mention at all of Muslims or the Mitaton, suggesting that there was nothing about the appearance of the Syrian merchants’ complex that would have marked it as a Muslim community, separate from the surrounding Byzantine city.

Significantly, there are no references to mosques in Constantinople dating from the period of Latin rule that followed the events of 1204, indicating that the Crusaders did not follow the Byzantine precedent of using an official mosque within the city for diplomatic purposes. Yet almost immediately following the restoration of Byzantine rule in the city in 1261, a reference to a mosque appears once more. It is no surprise, then, that the reference to this, the third Muslim space in Constantinople, occurs in the context of diplomatic exchange between the Byzantine ruler

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74 The fire set by the Crusaders is mentioned in every other medieval chronicle of the Fourth Crusade, but only Niketas Choniates’ chronicle mentions Muslims. For example, the Crusader commander Geoffroi de Villehardouin’s (d. ca. 1212 C.E.) well-known account explains the fire as the unfortunate result of a conflict between the Greek and Latin residents of the city: “...certain people—who they were I know not—out of malice, set fire to the city; and the fire waxed so great and horrible that no man could put it out or abate it”. This silence indicates that there was no visible difference between the Syrian mitaton complex and its surrounding urban context that would have been obvious to outsiders as a specifically Muslim space, though Reinert argues that the Crusader forces were motivated by perceptions of Muslim wealth and treasures to be found in their mosque. See Reinert, “Muslim Presence”, 143. On the fire also see Alfred J. Andrea, “The Devastatio Constantinopolitana, A Special Perspective on the Fourth Crusade: An Analysis, New Edition, and Translation”, In Historical Reflections/ Réflexions Historiques 19 (1993), 107-149; Thomas F. Madden, “The fires of the Fourth Crusade in Constantinople, 1203-1204: A Damage Assessment”, Byzantinische Zeitschrift 84-85 (1991-1992), 72-93.

75 Significantly, what Villehardouin does emphasize is the wealthy appearance of the affected quarter: “…and when the barons of the host, who were quartered on the other side of the port, saw this [the fire], they were sore grieved and filled with pity, seeing the great churches and the rich palaces melting and falling in, and the great streets filled with merchandise burning in the flames…” Villehardouin, Memoirs of the Crusades (London: Dent, 1951), 51 (emphasis added).
Michael VIII Palaiologos and the Mamluk Sultan Baybars I of Egypt.\textsuperscript{76} Maqrizi (d. 1442 C.E.) relates how in 1262 the Mamluk sultan Baybars I (d. 1277 C.E.) sent an envoy to the Byzantine Emperor, who showed him a mosque which had recently been constructed at an unspecified location in the western section of Constantinople, and to which Baybars, following established diplomatic practice, subsequently sent gifts, including carpets, golden chandeliers, censers, prayer rugs, aloe-wood incense, amber, and rosewater. The Palaiologan mosque was therefore the first purpose-built mosque of Constantinople, and its founding marks a clear break from its predecessors, the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian \textit{mitaton}. One wonders if, as a new construction, the Palaiologan mosque was a recognizably Islamic addition to the urban fabric of Constantinople. In 1293 the traveler al-Jazari described a walled building or complex that had replaced the Syrian \textit{mitaton} and which he explicitly compares with Syrian \textit{funduq} or \textit{khan}: “a place (\textit{makan}) which is large like [the one with] two floors in Damascus [and] is surrounded by a wall with a gate which may be shut and opened…”\textsuperscript{77} The importation of foreign architectural and urban qualities into Constantinople is attested for the fourteenth century or perhaps earlier, in the case of the Italian trading colonies, so it is not out of the realm of possibility. As Mango notes,

we should not rule out the possibility that… in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the various Italian colonies that were established along the Golden Horn—those of the Amalfitans, Venetians, and Pisans—could have put up buildings in their native style. There can be no doubt… that when Galata was ceded to the Genoese in 1303, there sprang up opposite Constantinople a Western town with its palazzi and churches…\textsuperscript{78}

\textbf{Implications}

Three built spaces, either single buildings or complexes, associated with Muslim communities existed in Constantinople between the ninth and


\textsuperscript{77} Al-Jazari, \textit{Jawahir al-suluk fi hulafa wa al-muluk"}, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris MS Arabe 6739, fol. 91V. Cited in Remie Constable, \textit{Housing the Stranger}, 150.

\textsuperscript{78} Cyril Mango, \textit{Byzantine architecture} (Milan; New York, NY: Electa Editrice; Rizzoli, 1985), 276.
thirteenth centuries. The Dar al-Balat initially served as a prison for aristocratic Muslim prisoners of war but acquired a new political status in diplomatic exchanges between the Byzantines and the Fatimid dynasty, a status that was maintained in treaties with the Seljuks and Mamluks as well. The Syrian mitaton, residence of the Syrian silk merchant community in Constantinople, was the second complex associated with Muslims in the Byzantine capital. Both the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton were likely examples of the adaptive use of existing Byzantine buildings—the medieval equivalent of the “storefront” mosques of today. Following the destruction of both the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton in the opening years of the thirteenth century, and the possible absence of Muslims from Latin Constantinople, the newly-restored Palaiologan state constructed a new mosque within the capital soon after 1261. This, the first purpose-built mosque of Constantinople, combined the functions and intended populations of the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton, officially linking the realms of court and commerce and filling the political, economic, and social void left by the destruction of the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton. These Islamic spaces paved the way for the settlements of Ottoman Turks in Constantinople, with their own quarter and mosque, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.79

This discussion of Islamic spaces in Byzantine Constantinople brings up two implications relevant to the history of architecture and medieval cultural interchange. The first implication has to do with the presence of different religious communities in the urban context. The existence of Muslim spaces in Constantinople provides an intriguing snapshot of how ethnic-religious diversity was accommodated architecturally, both through adaptive use of existing buildings and through the construction of new buildings, in a major Christian city of the medieval period. The existence of the Dar al-Balat, the Syrian mitaton, and the Palaiologan mosque reflect the Byzantine state’s accommodation of Muslims within the very heart of the empire—an unexpected and interesting parallel, though a more circumscribed one, to the ubiquitous presence of non-Muslims in medieval Islamic cities of the same period. The provision of space for Muslims in medieval Christian cities was not unique to Constantinople, but the archi-

tectural and urban implications of this seemingly paradoxical accommodation of the religious “other” in the medieval Christian context deserve further exploration.80

The second point of interest has to do with the way in which the perceptions of the Dar al-Balat and/or Syrian mitaton shifted over time with changes in social use—from the ninth and tenth century, when they were perceived not as buildings with meaning for the international Muslim community, but as pragmatic solutions to specific local political and economic needs. Eventually the Dar al-Balat achieved the status of a medieval monument, not through architectural significance, but through the attachment to it of specific socially-constructed political and religious meanings by the Byzantine and Islamic states, and by Muslims—not only those in Constantinople but eventually by those in the wider Dar al-Islam. As architectural historian Stanford Anderson, in his influential essay on architecture and memory, has argued, the formal properties of a work of architecture (meaning in architecture) serve as but one way in which monuments are created. An alternate means of creating monuments, useful to this discussion, is Anderson’s notion of meaning through architecture, by which monuments evolve from the myriad social meanings attached to buildings by people, social meanings which shift and change over time and circumstance, and through which social memory is created. The Dar al-Balat, if it was an appropriated Byzantine palace, may very well have been a work of architecture with intrinsic artistic merit, but it is the layers of social use, culminating in the shift from an original pragmatic use to an overtly political and eventually a religious one, which elevated a prison to the status of “the mosque of Constantinople” and a monument of interest to Muslim pilgrims by the thirteenth century.81

A third implication has to do with the role of monuments in the material aspects of Byzantine-Islamic diplomacy, a role which has been somewhat overshadowed by the phenomenon of imperial gift exchange.82 That

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80 See, for example, Julie Taylor, Muslims in Medieval Italy: The colony at Lucera (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2003).


Gift exchange was a significant aspect of medieval Islamic court society, reflected in the existence of an Arabic literary genre devoted exclusively to descriptions and anecdotes related to the subject. Seven works, dating from between the ninth and eleventh centuries, were written exclusively on gifts, while an additional four works (also dating between the ninth and eleventh centuries) contained at least one chapter on gifts and rare objects (tuhaf). The term used in reference to diplomatic gifts, hadiyya, generally implies “an effort on the part of one to get into the good graces of another”; it is the term used in the aforementioned texts. Hadiyya is distinct from another term related to gifts, hiba, which denoted gifts from a giver of higher standing to a recipient of lower standing (and which was therefore used to refer to divine gifts). Neither term explicitly requires the recipient of a gift to reciprocate. That this is the case is indicated by the existence of two roots (m-n-n and gh-z-r) the former which implies “an objectionable insistence by the giver upon the obligations created for the recipient as a result of gifts received”, while the latter (in the third and tenth forms) provides the verbs used to describe such an exchange.

The sociologist Marcel Mauss’s landmark Essai sur le don of 1925 marked the beginning of the sociological and anthropological study of gifts and gift exchange. Working mainly from practices observable in archaic or contemporary societies, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and literary theorists inspired by Mauss’s observations have since elaborated philosophical or theoretical critiques, utilizing contemporary practices and concerns as departures for analysis. Since the 1950s historians have

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84 Of the works devoted exclusively to gifts only three have survived. See Al-Qaddumi, Book of Gifts and Rarities, 21-23.
85 Arabic authors differed as to whether “hadiyya” implied some difference in social status between the participants in an exchange (with the lower-status actor using the gift as a means to get into the good graces of the higher-status participant). See F. Rosenthal and G.S. Colin, Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. “hiba”.
sought to test the Maussian model against medieval case studies. While much of the resulting discourse was initially rooted in anthropological debates about pre-modern economies and the development of market exchange, historians have since underscored the social complexities of pre-modern gift practices in various medieval societies, and the necessity of treating them as phenomena distinct from purely economic concerns.

Can we interpret the gift exchanges mentioned above in connection with the mosque of Constantinople, as a means by which human beings and material goods and services (prisoners of war, luxury objects and monument restoration) were converted into meaningful political and diplomatic gestures (peace treaties, truces, trading concessions)? Not that the outcomes of such exchanges were necessarily clear and pre-determined—the fact that uncertainty was part of this process of state negotiation and exchange is suggested by the aforementioned negotiation between the Seljuk ruler Tughril Beg and Constantine Monomachus in 1049, in which the mosque of Constantinople was brought in to play a role in the proceedings. In that year Constantine Monomachus requested a peace treaty and the ransom of a Georgian Prince. Risk was part and parcel of the diplomatic negotiation—there was no guarantee that the truce would be accepted, or that the ransom would be recognized. Unexpectedly, another Islamic ruler, Nasr al-Din Ibn Marwan, interceded with Tughril Beg on behalf of the Byzantines, and as a result Tughril Beg released the Georgian Prince, but without claiming a ransom for him. The Byzantine ruler subsequently responded to this unexpected display of generosity by sending additional gifts to Tughril Beg and making provision for the restoration of


the mosque in Constantinople. In this case, Constantine Monomachus, the “actor” on the Byzantine side, begins with a traditional move: the request for a treaty, which would also include an act of political ransom. The Seljuk ruler responds unexpectedly by freeing the captive prince without accepting a ransom, thus instigating a chain of moves and counter-moves ending in monument restoration. The framework for this interchange is that of diplomacy and gift giving, but there is no reciprocity in an easily calculated, economic sense. Rather, there are gestures both expected and unexpected, and risks as well as rewards for each side.

To return to the Dar al-Balat and the Syrian mitaton then, the role of these buildings-turned-monuments (in Stanford Anderson’s sense) in Byzantine-Islamic diplomacy and gift exchange goes beyond the notion of mere reciprocity, an unsatisfactory notion that minimizes the real risks and uncertainties inherent in such exchanges. The “mosques” of Constantinople shows how buildings, along with portable objects, were utilized in diplomatic exchanges to modify the risk which operated even within the framework of Byzantine-Islamic commonalities in court culture, taste, or behavior for which Grabar and others have argued. Beyond their interest as evidence for the accommodation of Muslims within a major Christian city in the medieval period, the persistent presence of “the mosque of Constantinople” in Byzantine-Islamic diplomacy provides an architectural dimension to the object-centered phenomenon of imperial gift exchange. The role of buildings, or architectural complexes, in Byzantine-Islamic negotiations may therefore illuminate the processes by which medieval monuments were created. In the tenth century, the Dar al-Balat was simply a holding space for Muslim prisoners of war, an expression of political pragmatism and common norms of behavior between the Byzantine and Islamic courts. Especially after the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre and the resulting need for political leverage to protect Christian communities and monuments, such as the Holy Sepulcher, in the Islamic lands, the Dar al-Balat acquires a new importance. By the thirteenth century, if the Dar

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al-Balat is indeed the mosque of Constantinople to which texts refer, as we have argued here, its appearance in al-Harawi’s pilgrimage guide indicates the Dar al-Balat’s significance had grown to encompass a religious dimension as well as a diplomatic one, a reflection of the way projected social memories added an entirely new layer of meanings and memories to the building, creating a medieval Islamic monument in the Byzantine capital.

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