

ASSEMBLY TALK

March 11, 1964

American Academy for Girls...Üsküdar

Whenever I come to Üsküdar two sharp memories leap to my mind. I remember with nostalgia the happy years I spent here as student and teacher when it was still The American College for Girls. And secondly, I recall the many excursions I have made over the years to see the many beautiful mosques that adorn your town.

I wonder if you will be interested to know something of the life we led as students at the American College, forty or fifty years ago. It was very different from the life you lead today. If someone would return to Üsküdar now after many years, the changes would seem almost fantastic.

The college group then was much smaller and perhaps more firmly knitted. It was made up of Armenian, Greek, Bulgarian, a few American and one or two English girls. There were almost no Turkish girls, because of government restrictions, but some did manage to come. We lived an isolated life, making our own amusements; indeed we led very simple lives compared to the fortunate young persons today. There were no cinemas, no telephones, no trams, no buses, no taxis, no electricity. (We had gas at the college and the lights had to be lighted by a long taper carried by a servant every evening.) We travelled to town and on the Bosphorus by ferry boat, but before 1914 no ferry left the Bridge after sunset. We often used beautiful graceful caiques or sandals for our journeys. From the iskele we either walked up the hill or took an "araba", to college. We could choose



what kind of an "araba" to use..a tek with one horse, or a Paytan with two. You will smile when I tell you we paid seven and a half kuruş to drive from the iskele to the college, or if we came only as far as the big tree on the main road, five kuruş. *The tree is still there in the garden of an apt. house.*

During my years at Üsküdar, the political situation was tense. We passed many anxious moments. There was the Counter Revolution when Sultan Abdul Hamid was deposed, the War with Italy; the two Balkan Wars. These were tragic times for the students and their families. The president and the faculty were exceedingly worried at one point, when it seemed that the city of Istanbul might be invaded. But the worst was prevented and the college never closed its doors.

We were not allowed to go home for the weekend except once a month....for the other three weekends of the month we were expected to stay at the college and take part in various activities arranged for Saturday evening, Sunday and Monday. Our holiday was Monday instead of Saturday. We never left the grounds after dark. There was nowhere to go and no one dreamed of going out. But please do not pity us in retrospect. We were exceedingly lively and happy....we made friends, put on plays, we organised clubs, and went for charming walks in Üsküdar. We seemed to find new worlds opening around us all the time. I wonder if the lessons learned here now are as interesting and exciting as those we had in my youth. I remember long, happy hours in the little library, a single room with two windows looking on the garden. Here I discovered in-



estimable treasures of poetry and prose.

In those days girls were not as athletic-minded as they are today. We had a college nurse who drove us out into the fresh air of the garden after lessons and woe betide the maiden who refused to go. Many girls preferred to stay comfortably indoors, sewing, embroidering, or making lace. But there were always a few who enjoyed playing outdoors. On the site of this auditorium was our playground and here we used to play what we euphemistically called Baseball. It was far from that ...but a kind of rounders. We used tennis rackets and tennis balls and four bases around which we ran, once we had hit a good one. Much shouting and running ensued....very good for young lungs and young bodies. Our college nurse was right after all.

The one great disaster that overtook the college, long years ago, was a very bad fire. It was this event that made the president, Dr. Patrick, think first of moving to the opposite side of the Bosphorus. The fire began on the roof of Barton Hall at ten o'clock at night. The students were in bed in the dormitories but they were warned in time, and hastily putting on overcoats and carrying blankets, they marched out into the garden. Distracted teachers took a long line of them to the house of the college doctor, who lived not very far away. In those days the fire fighters were very poorly equipped..in great contrast to the modern fire-engines of today...and nothing could save Barton Hall. When the girls returned at dawn a sad sight met their eyes...the building was completely gutted, only

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the four walls were left standing. For many years, we heard the story of this disastrous night.

One of the very pleasant things I remember is the procession of distinguished guests who were entertained at the college....archeologists from Anatolia, professors from America, journalists from England visited us and often gave short talks, some of which I remember vividly to this day. We heard Wilfred Grenfell of the mission in Labrador, William Ramsey from his Roman explorations in Anatolia, George Edward Woodberry, a poet and professor from Columbia University, W.T. Stead an editor from London.

You see we had an interesting and colorful life. Of course there were drawbacks. When are there not? We would have liked more freedom to move about. We would have liked larger and more comfortable dormitories....a much larger library. After the Barton Hall fire the students were very cramped. There was no longer an Assembly Hall, so we had to meet in the Study Hall and even use that small space for our plays. Laboratories were makeshift and classrooms were crowded. We would have liked a calmer political atmosphere. Then, too, in those days there were few careers open to women, practically none for Turkish girls. You can choose from a dozen different professions when you leave this school, very different from the restrictions of life ordained for all girls fifty years ago.

I mentioned just now our walks in Üsküdar when I was a student. Very often their destination was a mosque, when a teacher would tell us its history. Do you realize what beautiful



old mosques there are in this town? To Americans, whose real history began in 1775, these buildings seem very old indeed, for many of them were built long before that. Üsküdar boasts many mosques, but I am going to speak of the four most beautiful. They were all built by or for women, the wives, daughters and mothers of sultans. This pleased me when I was a young feminist at college, hoping for a greater freedom for all women.

I shall begin with the first mosque you see as you arrive at the iskele. It is one of the oldest, built in 1547 and the architect was the famous Sinan. *I saw it just now - was struck again by its beautiful proportions* It is called Mihrimah Cami for it was built by the daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent (called the Law-Giver in Turkish). She was as well the wife of Rustem Paşa, who himself built a mosque in Stambul, embellished with beautiful tiles. The Mihrimah mosque is rather severe inside, but has several very interesting features..one is a delightful courtyard, in the middle of which is a fine marble fountain. Also the view over the Bosphorus is extensive as you stand on the raised platform. On one of the <sup>OUTSIDE</sup> walls of the mosque is an old sun dial, telling the hours of the day by the shadow cast by the sun. How many sunbeams have fallen on that dial, since it was built more than four hundred years ago.

The next mosque to mention is near the market place and was built much later in 1710. It is called the Yeni Valideh Cami and was built for the mother of Achmet III. Do you recall the fine large fountain he also built behind Aya Sofia near Top Kapu Serai?) *in Üsküdar* His mother is buried in a charming tomb flush with the



street, under a skeleton bronze dome with fine iron work around it. <sup>next to the mosque</sup> She lies under the open sky: This mosque, because it was constructed in the eighteenth century, shows French influence, quite different from the Mihrimah. Inside there is splendid stencilling around the dome and walls and a beautiful carved marble balustrade and rather fine stained glass windows. An amusing feature is a quaint fountain just outside the entrance of the mosque courtyard. As decorations on this fountain, there are representations of fruit on plates, an orange, a lemon, a melon with a knife in it, ready to cut! I mustn't forget to tell you that on the north side of the outer courtyard there are two tiny bird houses, one in the shape of a miniature mosque. I like to think that the builders, making a house of prayer, did not forget the birds, but made for them, too, little houses in which they could <sup>build</sup> ~~make~~ their nests.

In all these imperial mosques, there was always a corner of the gallery set aside for the royal lady, where she could pray unobserved. These corners were usually covered with gilded lattices of an intricate pattern.

The next mosque I will tell you about is perhaps the most famous and one of the largest, <sup>with many adjoining buildings</sup> It is at the top of the hill and was, at one time, the <sup>h</sup>center of a medressé and an imaret, though those features are no longer kept up. This mosque is called the Eski Valideh, or Valideh Atik. It was built by the wife of Selim II in 1583. She had a charming name, Nur Banu, Lady of Light. She was not only the wife of a sultan but the mother of another,



Murad III. The inside of this building is famous for its very beautiful tiles around the mihrab. They are some of the best in the city and were made by the old craftsmen of Iznik with an art that is almost lost today. Round about the building is a very old cemetery with hoary cypresses. The open courtyard is extensive and must have been an oasis of quiet and peace in long ago days. The lovely royal lady who built the Valideh Atik Cami, Nur Banu, is buried in a turbe next her husband, <sup>Selim II</sup> in the courtyard of Aya Sofia.

The last of the four mosques I shall mention is the Çinili Cami, a tiny country mosque not far from the Valideh Atik. It has all the marks of being a simple, intimate place for it is not much bigger than a large room. It is called the Çinili Cami because the whole of the interior is covered with pretty blue tiles. These tiles are not as fine as those of the Valideh Atik, partly because they were made some years later. A famous sultana, the wife of <sup>B</sup> Mehmet I built this mosque in 1643. She was called Kyössem, leader of the flock and she was not only the wife of a sultan but the mother of two sultans and the grandmother of a third. She had a stormy life, but must have been very energetic, for not only did she construct this Üsküdar building but she began the very large and famous Yeni Valideh Cami in Stambul that you see at the end of the Galata Bridge. She didn't finish it however. It was finished by her daughter-in-law and that is why it is called the mosque of the Yeni Valideh.

But to return to the Çinili Cami. It has several quaint features. The fountain, for instance, has a wooden roof, like the



hat of a Chinese mandarin. And on an elevation above are little stone cells, for students and modest priests, now falling into ruin. I have a special affection for this tiny mosque with its single minaret, the little courtyard is so remote and peaceful. Once when a group of friends and I were sitting on the steps beyond the entrance, we heard and saw the imam call to prayer from the short, slim minaret. It was a lovely note in the quiet countryside.

Don't think that these are all the mosques in your town of Üsküdar. There are many more...the Ayasma Cami, Selimieh, ~~Ah~~medieh, and Rum Mehmed Paşa Cami. This last is very interesting because it was built very early, while Mehmed the Conqueror was still ruling..in 1470, hence it is one of the oldest mosques in the city.

I am sure you have often noticed as you approach Üsküdar, a group of small buildings on the right hand edge of the bay: This is the remains of a theological seminary and was built in the late 16th century. It was a medressé and the builder was a poet ~~xxx~~ called Şemsi Paşa, who was also a master of Ceremonies under Selim II. I think it is one of the finest groups of buildings in the town. The founder is buried in a small turbe off the tiny mosque behind a fine iron grill. In recent years this building has been turned into a Halk Ketaphane and no better use could have been found for it in these modern days. The water laps along its walls, fishermen launch their <sup>a</sup>boats near by, and from behind the outer colonnade can be see at eye level; the great expanse of the blue Bosphorus.

So I go ~~back~~ to my memories. The American College



for Girls moved to the European side fifty years ago and your campus had changed for the <sup>E</sup>better and has greatly expanded since the days when I was a student. The town, too, has been altered, the market place is different, more houses have been built, trams and buses and taxis run up and down your hills. But the beautiful mosques remain in their ancient glory. They are your heritage and ~~one of which you can justly take great pride~~ and one of which you can be justly proud.

Eveline T. Scott



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**Arşiv ve Dokümantasyon Merkezi**

Kişisel Arşivlerle İstanbul'da Bilim, Kültür ve Eğitim Tanıtı

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SCTETS0500301