



Original Research

The Building Program of Kaiser Wilhelm II in Jerusalem: An Archival Analysis of the Ottoman Records

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Abstract

In 1871, Germany's completion of political unification changed the balance of power. From the point of view of the Ottoman Empire, it was seen as a balancing element against Germany, England, France, and Russia. In a short period of time, the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Germany increased. The most important indicator of this was that the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, made two visits to the Ottoman lands in 1889 and 1898. As a result of the relations established, the Germans built many buildings in Ottoman territory and in Jerusalem, especially churches. The article focuses on the zoning movements of the Germans in Jerusalem in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For this study, archival sources were consulted. The information and plans related to the structures were evaluated in light of the archival resources and the historical background of the period.

Keywords: Kaiser Wilhelm II, Sultan Abdulhamid, Ottoman, Germany, Augusta Victoria.

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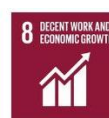
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1. Introduction

With the Peace of Westphalia (1648), many states have emerged in today's German territory. The language used by these states was similar, but they were divided by their religious affiliations, specifically Catholic and Protestant. As a result of the completion of the units of the new states and the laying of the foundations of the German Empire, the Customs Union was established between these states on 1 January 1834. In this process, Bismarck achieved significant diplomatic results, and Germany completed its political unity in 1871 (Güçyetmez, 2020, p. 3).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, it is seen that colonial activities have spread all over the world. States such as England, France, and Russia are the leaders in the colonial race. It is seen that England is ahead of the other two states due to its superiority in the seas (Şehitoğlu and Erdoğan, 2019, p. 143). From the 19th century onward, the Ottoman Empire began to implement reforms, particularly in the military. Experts from the West were brought in to implement these reforms. Especially in the army area, the French influence was seen. After the 1878 Berlin Congress, the Ottoman Empire was unable to find the support it had expected from England and France. With the completion of the political unity of the Germans in 1871, the current balance in Europe began to change. The Germans have found themselves among the great forces in Europe. As a result of this situation, the Ottomans began to get closer to the Germans in line with their common interests (Ballı and Toprak, 2024, p. 123).

With this match, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, who was the German Emperor, made two visits to Ottoman territories in 1889 and 1898. Germany's efforts, however, unsettled England, France, and Russia. Especially before his visit in 1898, Wilhelm II had wanted from Sultan Abdulhamid II the patronage of Catholics in addition to Protestants. Therefore, Catholic Europe, especially France, became uneasy. Under these circumstances, it was entirely normal for Germany to gain privileged status in Ottoman territories (Gelir Çelebi, 2023, p. 121). Therefore, Germany was granted permission to construct numerous churches in Jerusalem. As a result of its desire to protect Protestants as well as Catholics, Germany established numerous associations in Jerusalem. In this way, both Catholics and Protestants had the opportunity to establish many churches through their embassies (Demirkol, 2007, p. 79).

In this political context, the buildings constructed in Jerusalem during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, as identified in archival sources, will be analyzed under two separate headings: churches and hospitals.

2. Literature review

Germany, which completed its political union with the significant initiatives of Bismarck in 1871 (Güçyetmez, 2020), was involved in the colonial race (Şehitoğlu & Erdoğan, 2019) alongside France, England, and Russia, which fought fiercely. Following the 1878 Berlin Congress, Germany began to draw closer to the Ottoman Empire, aligning with their shared interests (Ballı & Toprak, 2024). As a result of this rapprochement, the German Emperor Wilhelm II's two visits to the Ottoman Empire both unsettled other European states and granted Germany a privileged position in Ottoman Jerusalem (Gelir Çelebi, 2023). Thanks to this privilege, Germany was granted permission to construct numerous buildings in Jerusalem. Especially through the churches, he sought to gain

the patronage of both Catholics and Protestants (Demirkol, 2007). As a result of this rapprochement, the German Emperor Wilhelm II's two visits to the Ottoman Empire made other European states uneasy. Kaiser Wilhelm II began by rebuilding the Protestant church built by his father, Friedrich III (Soy, 2008), which had fallen into ruin (BOA. İ.DH. 619/43075). The area where the church was located, known as Muristan, has a structure that provides important information about the medieval city of Jerusalem (Vieweger & Gibson, 2016). Soon after, Kaiser Wilhelm II built the Dormition Monastery within the old city walls (Krupiński et al., 2021). The Ottoman Empire requested the organization of the roads around this monastery, which was located near the tomb of King David (BOA. Y. A. RES. 111/30). In the 19th century, Shaare Zedek Hospital was built for the treatment of common epidemics (Ceylan Yiğit, 2019). It is understood that Jerusalem and many other cities suffered from the cholera epidemic during this period (İbşirli, 2016). It is also noted that a decision was made to renovate the Bikur Cholim Hospital, which was previously located within the old city walls, but was relocated outside the city walls (BOA. İ.HR. 418/5). The last building decided to be built during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II was the Augusta Victoria Guesthouse and Church. During his visit to Jerusalem in 1898, the Protestant community requested the construction of a guesthouse for Protestants. The Mount of Olives was chosen for the construction of the guesthouse (Gölpınar, 2024). Mount of Olives is one of the most favorable points in the topography of the city due to its easy visibility (Arad, 2005). The construction of the guesthouse, whose architect was Robert Leibnitz (Peled, 2016), was completed in 1910 (Isphording, 2009).

3. Churches

3.1 Protestant Church

The foundation of the German Protestant Church can be traced back to the meeting between the Prussian dauphin Friedrich Wilhelm (later Emperor Friedrich III of Germany, 1888) and Sultan Abdülaziz at the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. As a result of this meeting, Friedrich III was granted land in the western part of the area known as Muristan, located in the center of old Jerusalem (Soy, 2008, p. 79). Archival sources reveal that there are some problems regarding the land gifted to Friedrich III. It is seen that the Greek Patriarchate also had rights on the land in question. There is also information that there were 15 shops on the land. After the problems on the land where the church was to be built were resolved, the land was gifted to Friedrich III. The construction of the church begins. After a while, the church was inaugurated. However, during the reign of Wilhelm II, the church was requested to be rebuilt on the grounds that it was dilapidated. Wilhelm II informed the Ottoman Empire that he wished to be present at the opening of the church built by his father upon its completion (BOA. İ.DH¹. 619/43075). This church, rebuilt in 1898 by Wilhelm II, is called the Erlöserkirche, or The Church of the Redeemer.

The Church of the Redeemer was built on the site of the medieval Church of St. Mary. The architect of the building was Friedrich Adler from Berlin. The site of the church is an archaeological site that provides valuable information about the medieval city of Jerusalem, as it contains buildings such as Muristan, medieval churches, a nursing home, and a hospital (Vieweger & Gibson, 2016, pp. 19-20).



Figure 1: The Church of the Redeemer-1900 (Source: URL 1)

3.2 Abbey of the Dormition (St. Marien Church)

During a visit to Istanbul, Kaiser Wilhelm II requested a place for the worship of the German Catholic community from Sultan Abdulhamid. The area where the church was to be built is close to the tomb of David. This place, which had previously been requested by different Christian groups, was gifted to Kaiser Wilhelm II by Sultan Abdulhamid. When the German emperor visited Jerusalem, he was presented with the title deed of the land (Demirkol, 2007, p. 80).

Abbey of Dormition, built by Kaiser Wilhelm II, is located on a high hill south of the old city walls. This church is the fourth church built in the region. The first church was built by Theodosius (379-395) around 382. This church was converted into a five-nave basilica named Hagia Sion (St. Sion) around 415. The Hagia Sion Church was burned by the Persians in 614, rebuilt in 966, and destroyed again in 1009. Around 1110, the Crusaders built a church with three naves in this area called Sancta Maria. This church was also destroyed in 1219. After the third church was rebuilt by

the Franciscans in 1342, the church built by Kaiser Wilhelm II became the 4th church (Krupiński et al., 2021, p. 24).

Plans and information about the church to be built are contained in an archive document from 1900. The documents indicate that Heinrich Renard was the architect of the building. The Catholic Church was to be 66 meters by 60 meters and 38 meters high. It was also planned to build a clock tower 47 meters high and a guesthouse measuring 100 meters by 93 meters and 12 meters high. The request not to open any doors on the side where David's tomb is located is another notable point found in the archive documents. Assurances from the German Embassy were obtained beforehand. It is understood that the roads to be opened around the church should be at least 3 meters wide (determined by considering the width of the surrounding roads) and that the road on the side of David's tomb should be more expansive. (BOA. Y. A. RES². 111/30).

Built by Wilhelm II, the church's foundation stone was laid on October 7, 1900, and it was completed ten years later. The monastery, built in the neo-Romanesque style that became the national style of the new German Empire, was consecrated to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem on 10 April 1910 (URL 2).

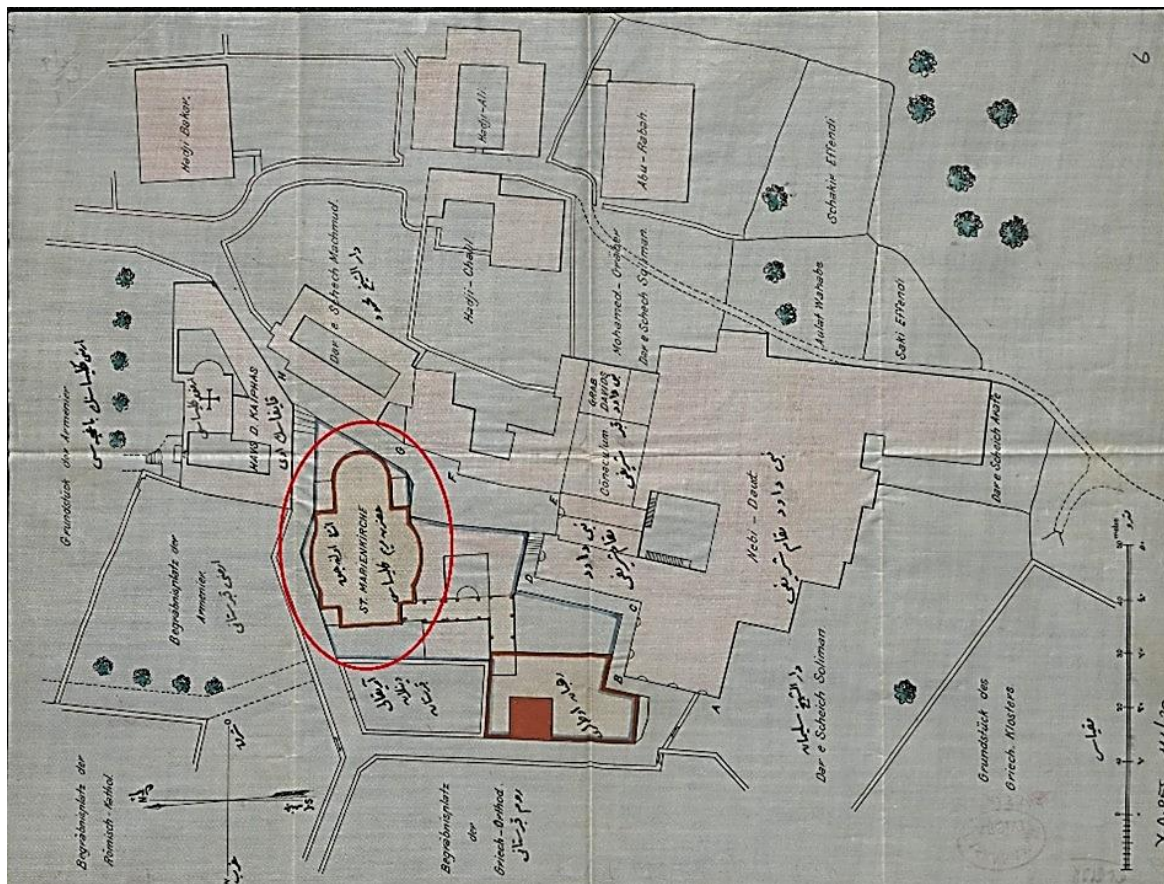


Figure 2: Plan of the church 1 (Source: BOA. Y. A. RES. 111/30)

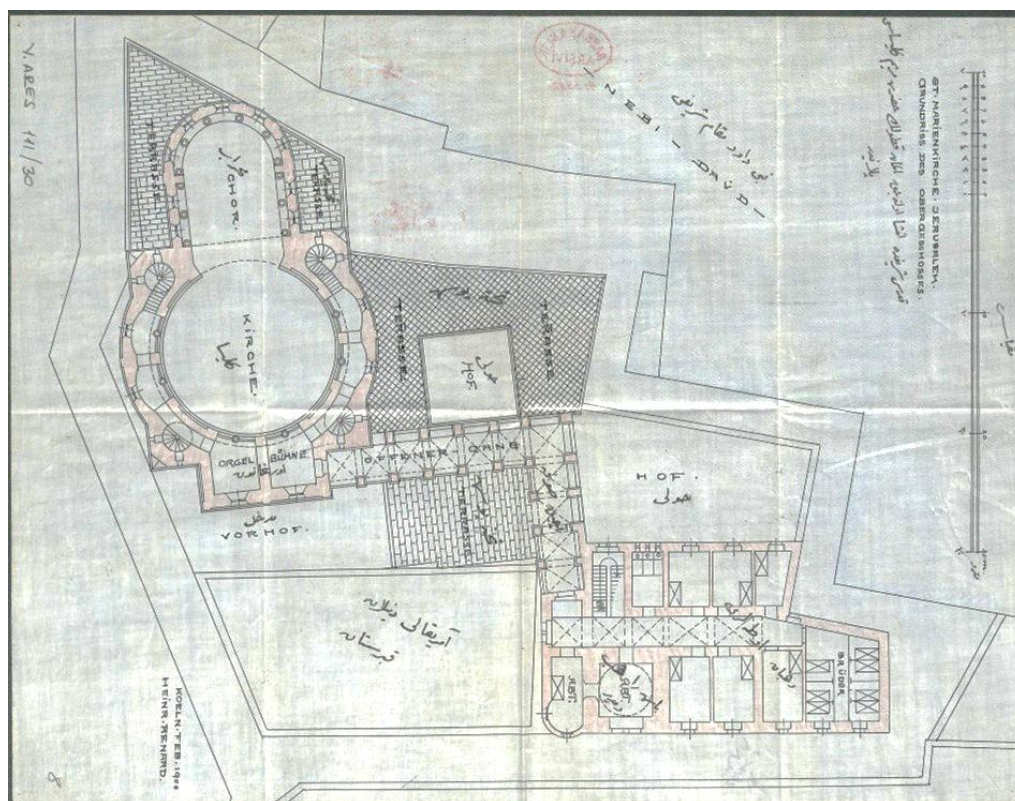


Figure 3: Plan of the church 2 (Source: BOA. Y. A. RES. 111/30)



Figure 4: Abbey of the Dormition-1934 (Source: URL 3)

4. Hospitals

4.1 Hospital for Infectious Diseases (Shaare Zedek Hospital)

It is evident that during the 18th and 19th centuries, epidemic diseases were prevalent in Jerusalem and its environs. Jaffa, in particular, functioned as a significant hub for the dissemination of epidemics due to its role as a major port city, its strategic position in relation to Jerusalem, and its connectivity with Eastern Mediterranean ports (Ceylan Yiğit, 2019, p. 337). In the second half of the 19th century, Jerusalem and many other cities were known to have suffered from a serious cholera epidemic. As many people died from the epidemic, local administrators tried to take strict measures. Methods such as isolation, school holidays, and cordoning off were used, and people were given food and water (İbşirli, 2016, p. 83-84).

In this period of intense epidemics, we see that the Germans received permission (1895) to build a hospital outside the walls of Jerusalem, on the road to Jaffa. According to the information in the archive document, this hospital was to be built on land owned by German Jews. This health institution, which was to serve the poor, was to consist of a hospital building and two buildings for infectious diseases. The dimensions of the buildings to be constructed are specified in the archive document as follows: The dimensions of the hospital are 79 meters by 28.5 meters, with a height of 15 meters; for two apartments, the dimensions are 15.2 meters by 10.6 meters and 12 meters in height, as well as an orderly's room measuring 5 meters by 12 meters and a stable measuring 5 meters by 22 meters. It is evident from the documentation that the architect of the hospital is Theodor Sandel (BOA. İ.DH. 1327/38).



Figure 5: Hospital for Infectious Diseases circa 1901 (Source: URL 4)

The architectural plan of the building, as documented in the archive, reveals a rectangular and symmetrical plan scheme oriented in an east-west direction, with lateral protrusions extending from the north and south. The building comprises a basement level, a ground floor, and a first floor. The north-facing façade of the hospital exhibits a symmetrical layout, subdivided into five sections. The main entrance of the building is arranged with three arches and is located in the middle of the facade. This entrance is raised by seven steps. The key portion of the facade is being raised and projecting outward to accentuate the entrance. The protruding spaces on both sides are also raised, thereby affording mobility to the facade. The ground-floor windows are characterized by their flattened arched design and stone jambs, while the first-floor windows exhibit a semicircular arch and stone jambs.

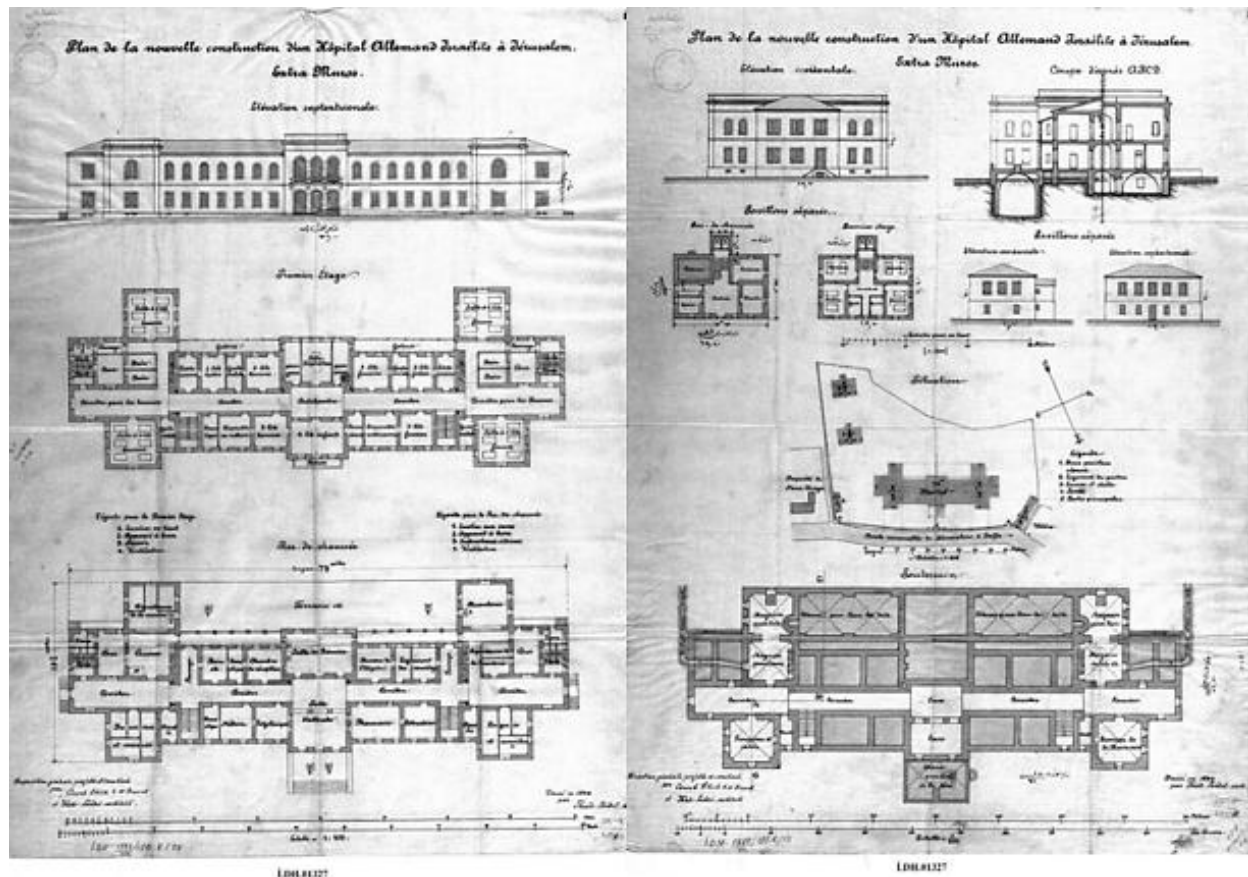


Figure 6: Hospital plan (Source: BOA. i.DH. 1327/38)

4.2 German Hospital-1909 (Bikur Cholim Hospital):

A 1909 archival document reveals that the hospital, previously registered under the same name within the city walls and exempt from taxation, was permitted to be rebuilt outside the city walls. The land on which the hospital was to be built was 4,500 Zira³, of which 2,085 Zira was used for the hospital building. The hospital will comprise fifteen rooms on the ground floor, sixteen rooms on the middle floor, seventeen rooms on the upper floor, and a total of forty-eight rooms, excluding outbuildings. The area outside the hospital building will be utilized as a garden, thereby becoming part of the hospital grounds (BOA. i.HR⁴. 418/5).

The building's plan scheme is in the form of an H, with a total of four floors—basement, ground floor, first floor, and second floor. The hospital was built on a sloping parcel, which is why it appears as two stories to the north and as four stories to the south. The front facade of the building faces east. The entrance is situated on the ground floor and is accessed via a pointed arched doorway. The rear façade features arms that extend towards the west, adjacent to the side parcel. Due to the shape of the parcel, the northern arm is shorter than the southern one. Above the entrance, on the same axis, is a large window with a flat arched top. The windows are generally narrow and rectangular in shape, with flat arches, while the second-floor windows on both sides of the entrance and on the side arms have pointed arches, distinguishing them from the others. A single window with a wide semicircular arch on the ground floor is notable on the south arm. The arches above the windows are constructed from stone and are unplastered, and the upper cover is a hipped roof, covered with tiles.

Construction of the building was initiated in 1912 but suspended due to the outbreak of World War I. Located in the immediate vicinity of Jaffa Road, the building was completed on Strauss Street in 1925. Until then, the old hospital building within the city walls continued to serve. The architect of the building is J. Barsky. Joseph Barsky (1876-1943) designed the Bikur Cholim Hospital in a neoclassical style with modernist elements (URL 5).



Figure 7: Bikur Cholim Hospital 1939 (Source: URL 6)

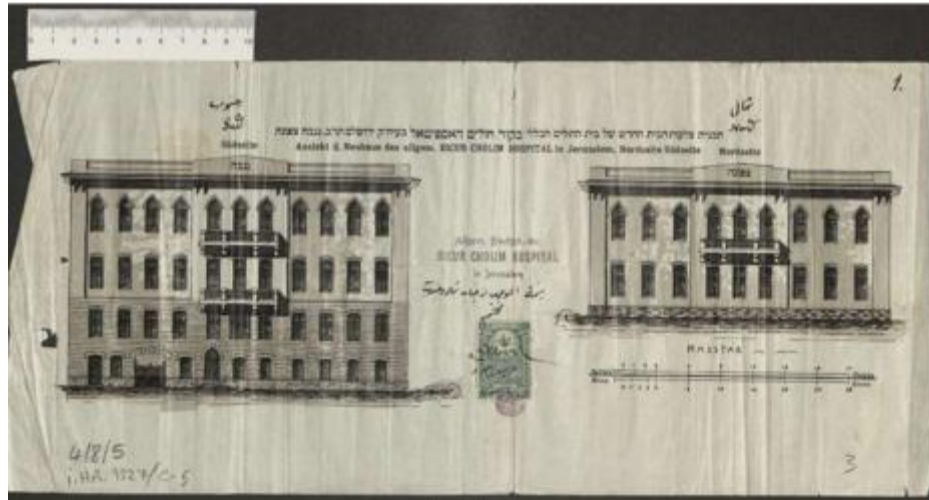


Figure 8: North and south facade of the hospital (Source: BOA. i.HR. 418/5)



Figure 9: West facade of the hospital (Source: BOA. i.HR. 418/5)



Figure 10: East facade of the hospital (Source: BOA. i.HR. 418/5)

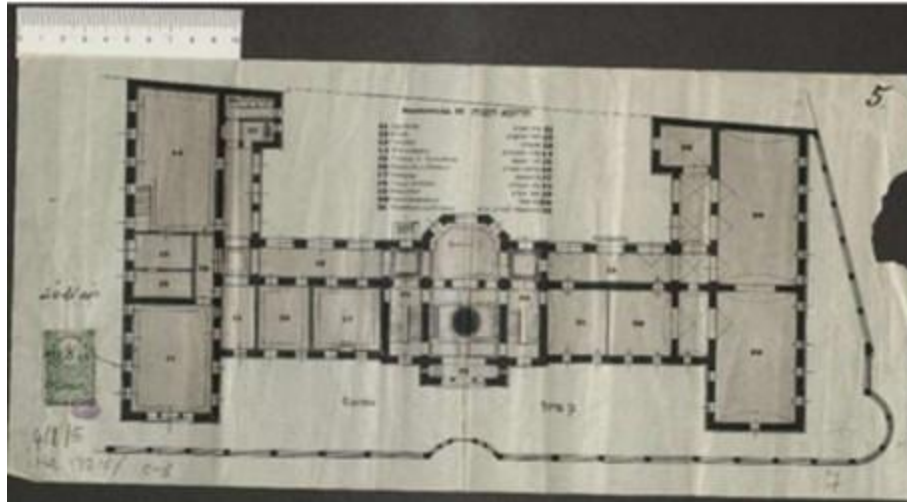


Figure 11: 1st floor plan of the hospital (Source: BOA. İ.HR. 418/5)

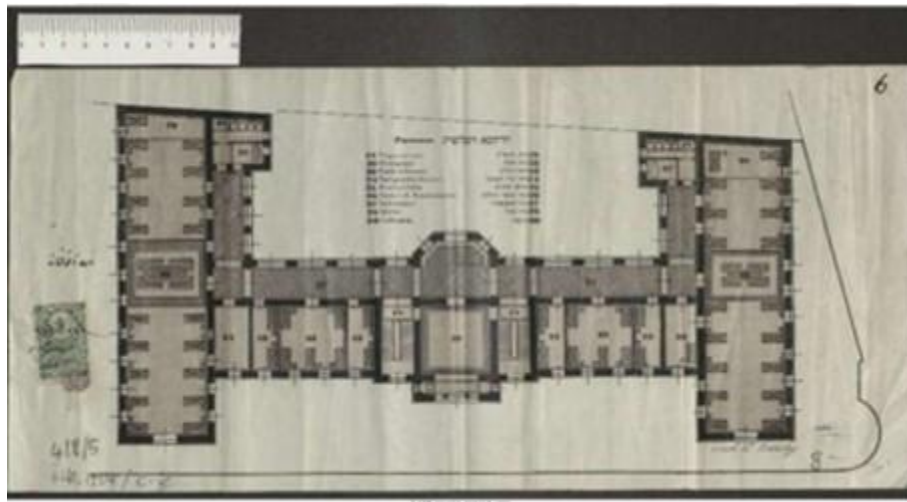


Figure 12: 2nd floor plan of the hospital (Source: BOA. İ.HR. 418/5)

5. Guesthouse

5.1 Augusta Victoria Guesthouse and Church

During his visit to Jerusalem in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II met with the German Protestant community. The Protestant community showed the German emperor the example of the guesthouses of other communities in Jerusalem and requested the construction of a guesthouse for Protestants. On his return to Germany, the Kaiser began preparations for the construction of the guesthouse. The Mount of Olives was chosen as the most suitable place for the guesthouse (Gölpınar, 2024, p. 172). The decision to construct the Augusta Victoria Guesthouse on Mount of Olives was not a matter of chance. The topography of the city meant that the site was easily visible from Jerusalem and its surroundings. In other words, it meant that everyone could see this German monument and that the Germans were politically visible (Arad, 2005, p. 127).

A site was identified for the buildings to be erected in honor of Augusta Victoria. The application from the Germans considered the distance of this site from other important religious buildings; it was seen that it would not be a problem, and the building was approved (Demirkol, 2007, p. 83). Berlin architect Robert Leibnitz was commissioned to build a guesthouse and church for Augusta Victoria. The foundations were laid in 1907, and the buildings were completed within three years and opened in 1910 (Peled, 2016, p. 73).



Figure 13: Augusta Viktoria Guesthouse (Source: URL 7)

In 1910, a joint opening ceremony was held for the Augusta Victorian Guesthouse and the Dormition Abbey. Emperor William II and Empress Augusta Victoria were represented at the opening by their son, Prince Eitel Friedrich, and his wife (Isphording, 2009, p. 52).

6. Conclusion

The completion of Germany's political unity in 1871 led to a change in the existing political unity in Europe. The leading states in the colonial race, England, France, and Russia, were uneasy about the Germans finding a place for themselves among the great powers. The Ottomans, who could not find what they expected from England and France at the Berlin Congress of 1878, hoped to see the support they sought from Germany. The current situation of both Germany and the Ottomans brought the two countries closer together in line with their common interests. With the two visits of Kaiser Wilhelm II to the Ottoman Empire, nine years apart, it is seen that relations between the two countries developed positively. As a result of this bilateral relationship, the Germans gained a more privileged position in the Ottoman lands compared to other states. This made it easier for the Germans to get permission to build many structures in Jerusalem. The churches that were built were not just for the Christian people to worship in. The desire to

undertake the patronage of the Protestant people was a principal factor in the construction of the Protestant Church. Kaiser Wilhelm II's desire to take on the patronage of Catholics as well as Protestants was also a result of the Germans' desire to consolidate their place among the great powers.

It was certainly no coincidence that Kaiser Wilhelm II asked Sultan Abdulhamid to build the Abbey of the Dormition for the Catholic community. The fact that this land had previously been requested by other Christian groups, its proximity to the Tomb of David, and its visibility due to its topographical structure were the main criteria for the choice of this land. Similarly, the site chosen for the construction of the Augusta Victoria Guest House (Mount of Olives) was one of the most beautiful in Jerusalem and its environs. The fact that these German buildings were visible from all over the city meant, in short, that the German image was in the limelight. The Romanesque style, especially prevalent in German buildings, played a significant role in shaping the perception of German identity and influence.

Notes

¹ Muristan or Maristan means hospital. It is the name of the area consisting of bazaars in the old city of Jerusalem, in the neighborhood where Christians lived.

² BOA.İ.DH: State archives (Ottoman archives)- internal affairs.

³BOA.Y.A.RES: State archives (Ottoman archives)-Yıldız Grand Vizier Official Execution Document

⁴ zira is a unit of measurement equivalent to 75.8 cm.

⁵BOA. İ.HR: State archives (Ottoman archives)-external affairs.

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