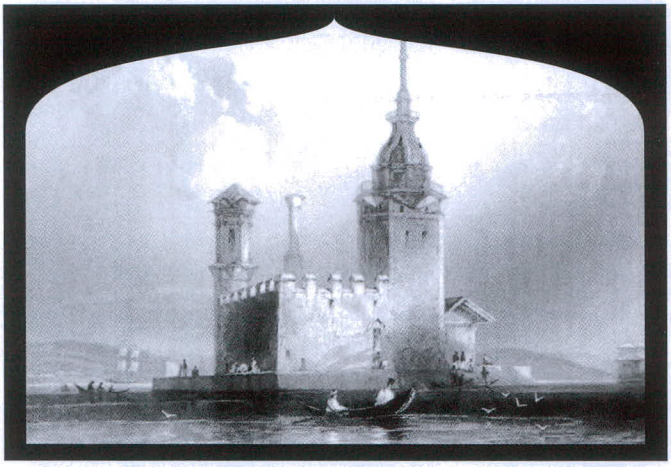
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Kiz Kulesi Deniz Feneri

Turkish Beacon of the Bosphorus

By Elinor DeWire

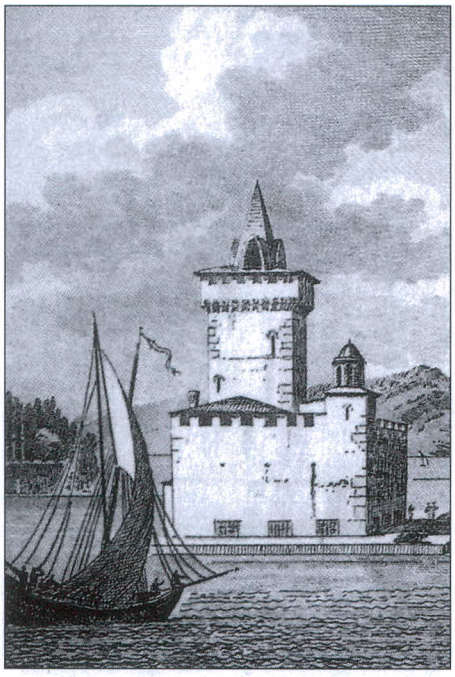


The Bosphorus is one of the world's most commercially and militarily strategic waterways. For centuries, every type of watercraft from canoes and caïques to mega-freighters, warships, and supertankers has plied this 20-mile long, twisting artery between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. Coupled with the Dardanelles, known in antiquity as the Hellespont, the Bosphorus provides crucial access from the Mediterranean region to ports in Eastern Europe and Asia. Control of it has spurred numerous hostilities, including the Crimean War of 1854, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and the offensive at Gallipoli in 1915.

This conduit between the continents is tricky to navigate, narrowing to as little as 240-feet wide and 20 fathoms deep at the Rumeli Hissar bottleneck. At Buyukdereh, it sprawls 2.2 miles across and plunges 66 fathoms below steep banks. Current in the Bosphorus flows north to south, sometimes as rapid as five knots, and produces treacherous eddies and a subsurface countercurrent. The terminus at the Sea of Marmara is prone to sudden storms and dense fog, "so dark as at once to obscure both sides," says modern-day Balkan historian Thomas Allom.

The Greeks named the Bosphorus in honor of their goddess Io, one of Zeus' many lovers. She took the form of a cow to disguise herself from Zeus' angry wife, Hera, but the queen of Mt. Olympus soon discovered the ruse and sent a swarm of flies to torment Io. The bovine goddess plunged into the cold water of the Bosphorus for relief from the biting cloud of insects. Hence, Bosphorus means "ford of the cow" or "passage of the ox." The Turks call it Bohaz, "the pass."

On a peninsula at its southern entrance, the fabulous Greek city of Byzantium arose in 667 BCE, later to become Constantinople—a port that straddled the waterway east and west and lavishly blended European and Asian cultures. It acted as a trading center and a way station for travelers and Medieval Crusaders headed in and out of Asia and the Holy Land. According to legend, an Athenian named Byzas founded the city after receiving advice from the Oracle at Delphi to establish a magnificent home in an exotic land. He sailed east through the Hellespont and ended up at the mouth of the Bosphorus. No expense was spared to appoint Byzantium with beautiful buildings, parks, gardens, even lighthouses.



The earliest known image of Maiden's Tower, this simple design was part of a fortress to repel invading Normans and Turks. Possibly, this was the structure built by Emperor Alexius Comnenus in 1110. Drawing courtesy of Klassis Hotel, Istanbul.

The city's harbor was protected by a small peninsula called The Golden Horn on the European side of the strait. Here, the Byzantine navy anchored. Near the opposite shore was a tiny islet, barely more than a pile of rocks some 200 yards off Asia at Scutari. Ships approached their first critical turn in the strait as they passed the islet—the perfect place for a navigational aid.

No date confirms when the first light tower was built here, but the Roman poet Ovid recorded a legend about it. Hero, a virgin priestess serving the goddess Aphrodite, was hidden in a tower on the islet. But her lover, Leander, found her and swam to the tower nightly to be with her. He was guided by a lamp Hero placed in her window. As fate would have it, one night Aphrodite discovered the lovers' tryst and sent a gust of wind to blow out the light, just as Leander began his swim. He drowned, and the distraught Hero threw herself into the Bosphorus to join him.

Edwin Hodden, author of the 1882 book *Cities of the World*, disputed the tale's authenticity:

"A conspicuous object rising from the rock opposite Scutari is the Maiden's Tower, often called the Tower of Leander, although it has nothing whatever to do with Leander. That hero lived at Abydos, on the Hellespont, nearly two-hundred miles away, and his remarkable

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swim to see the fair priestess of Sestos was probably the limit of his travels."

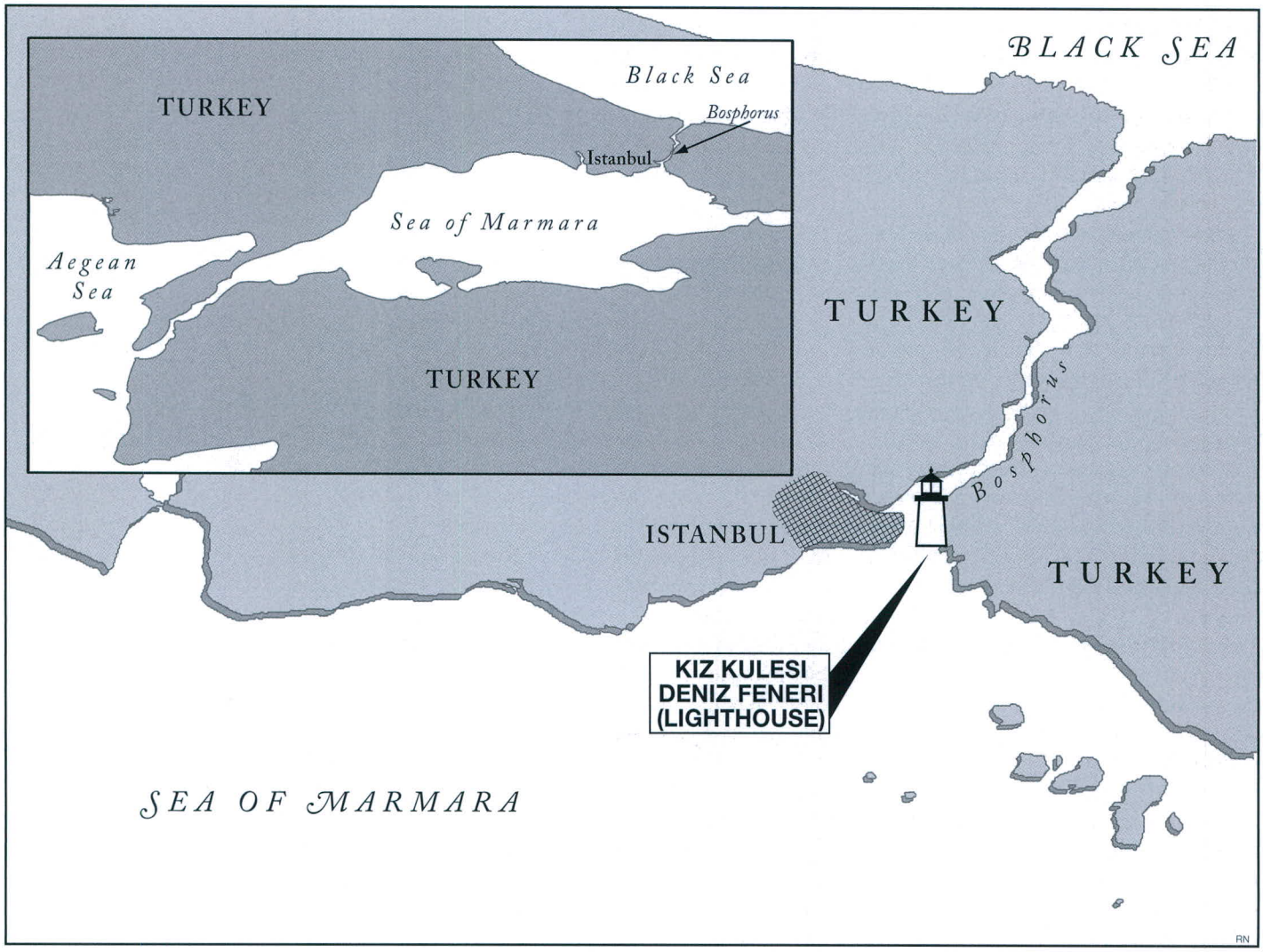
The name Kız Kulesi, or Maiden's Tower, has a more probable origin. Turkish lore tells of a sultan's daughter who was kept here in about the 7th century after an astrologer prophesied her death from snakebite. With no snakes on the islet, her father thought she would be safe. But a visitor bringing fruit in a basket accidentally transported an asp; the girl was bitten and died. Her father fashioned an iron coffin for her body and placed it at Hagia Sophia. Two small holes in the coffin symbolize the serpent's bite.

Throughout its long career, Kız Kulesi was built and rebuilt and served a variety of functions, usually with a light somewhere on or in it. Always, it was beautiful—variously described by visitors as "a fairy fortress girdled by the sea" and "the pearl of Constantinople." In her 1836 book, *The City of the Sultan & Domestic Manners of the Turks*, Julia Pardoe wrote that Maiden's Tower was situated: "...upon a rock so small that its foundations cover the whole surface...an object in itself so picturesque that it would arrest the eye!"

The first official record of a tower on the islet dates to 408 BCE when the Athenian general, Alcibiades, sought to control Persian ships entering the Bosphorus. It most likely began as a wooden structure, then was rebuilt of stone in typical Greek grandeur—a feast for the eyes. Alcibiades' light might have functioned in three ways—guiding Greek vessels safely into the harbor, yet also luring Persian ships into the estuary only to extinguish and leave them drifting blindly toward the dark shore. It also was used in conjunction with another tower at Sarayburnu on The Golden Horn to secure a long, sturdy chain across the strait, a distance of about a mile, to snare enemy ships. (Historian Edwin Pears noted in his 1886 *Fall of Constantinople* that the harbor was barred by chains throughout its long history and was still chained as late as the 1600s.)

Around 350 BCE, a general named Chares was sent to help the Byzantines fight against Philip of Macedonia. While in Byzantium, Chares converted Maiden's Tower to a mausoleum for his wife, Damalis, who died of a fever farther north on the Bosphorus at Chrysopolis. Ironically, Damalis' name meant "heifer," and Chares had the image of a cow added to the tower. The honor was obvious, but it also called to mind the myth of Io and the meaning of the name Bosphorus.

Damalis' light took on the dual role of memorial flame and navigational aid, but upkeep for it was expensive. Chares levied tolls on passing ships, lighting the beacon only for those who paid. This practice continued long after Chares's initiated it and was not revoked until the Convention of Montreux in 1936. Those who controlled the strait not only funded new lighthouses but also derived great wealth from charging a tax on vessels passing through their domain. By the 19th century,



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A series of reconstructions of Kız Kulesi took place between 1453 and 1763. A fire and several earthquakes destroyed parts of the structure, and it was altered according to the whims of Constantinople's rulers. The tower's minaret began to resemble an onion dome in about 1500, suggesting Russian influence. Drawing courtesy of Klassis Hotel, Istanbul.

however, the "tariff of dues" on ships was a pittance and only used for the upkeep of the lights. *Merchants Magazine and Commercial Review* reported in 1857 that ships using the Bosphorus were required to pay "ten paras per ton (less than one-third of a cent) on their tonnage for the support of lighthouses."

Two centuries after Chares, Emperor Justinian (527-565) included Kız Kulesi on the list of buildings improved during his massive revitalization of Constantinople after severe earthquakes ruined much of it in the 530s. During horrendous battles against the Arabs, Avars, and Bulgarians, the tower no doubt sustained damage. Emperor Leo the Isaurian used a new military tool to fight enemy ships invading Constantinople in a 717 siege—a kind of ancient napalm called "Greek Fire" that burned on contact with water. What war left standing at Kız Kulesi, earthquakes and the elements ravaged.

Emperor Alexius Comnenus rebuilt the lighthouse again in 1110 as part of a fortress against the Norman Crusaders and the advancing Ottoman Turks. The tower now had artillery emplacements, most likely catapults. Its beacon may have been used only to aid Comnenus' navy, either as a navigational light or a signal light. Possibly the emperor hid his family fortune in the tower as well, for only a few years later a Venetian invasion sacked Kız Kulesi and absconded with a great store of jewels and money.

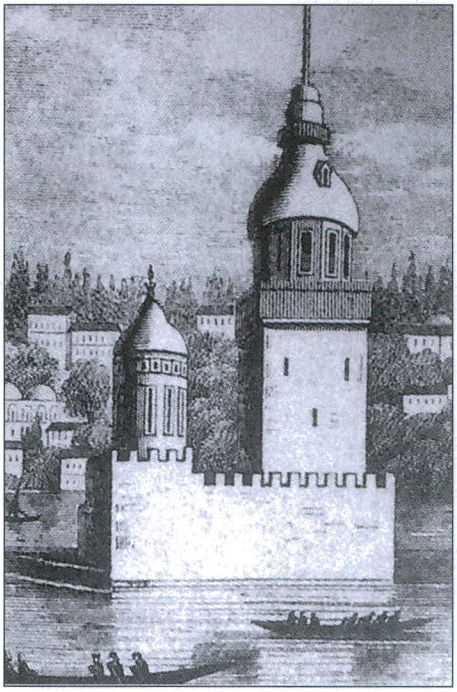
In 1453, twenty-one-year-old Mehmed the Conqueror led the Ottoman Turks in a successful attack on Constantinople. Much of the fortress Comnenus had built was destroyed. The victorious Mehmed assumed the title of emperor and declared the city the new Ottoman capital. He restored Maiden's Tower, adorning it with a handsome minaret. During this period, the tower doubled as a lighthouse, customs house, and prison and was the icon of the largest city of its day.

It was repaired several times thereafter and completely rebuilt it in 1509 after an earthquake crumbled it. A massive fire in 1726 brought another reconstruction, and a further evolution in Kız Kulesi's appearance came in 1763 when Ottoman emperor Mustafa III revamped it to his liking. Throughout these years, the tower sporadically showed a light for mariners, but also served as an imperial showplace, complete with cannons that were fired on special occasions and the latest entertainment from China—fireworks. The present-day 75-foot tall Kız Kulesi retains its 18th century style, much of it repaired in 1832 by Mehmut II.

In 1836, with an outbreak of the plague in Constantinople, the lighthouse became a hospital where caïques brought the sick to sequester them. It's unclear if the tower was lighted at this time, but if it was the beacon symbolized all loss of hope. Almost everyone who came to it died. Julia Pardoe, visiting the city that same year, likened the quarantine trip to Maiden's Tower to "crossing the River Styx on the way to death...Their next journey is to the Turkish cemetery where on the anniversaries of their deaths their graves shoot sparks."

The beacon surely was functioning full-time by 1860 when it appeared in a light list. By this time, the Turks had contracted the French Ottoman Lighthouse Company to upgrade their network of beacons, and Kız Kulesi had its first Fresnel lens, probably a fourth order. In 1920 it was automated. By the 1980s Kız Kulesi was retired and its navigational light had moved to a nearby 36-foot square pyramidal concrete tower with a red band across its upper portion. The new beacon flashes red or white every three seconds, depending on the direction from which it's viewed. A radar tower tracks ship movements in the Bosphorus, with the Turkish Coastal Safety Directorate managing all operations.

Kız Kulesi itself underwent a complete historic renovation in 2000 and has been converted to a charming museum and restaurant serving traditional Turkish cuisine. Its exterior is colorfully spotlighted after dark and moonlit meals are offered late into the night. Ferries depart for the islet several times daily from



Mehmed the Conqueror added a minaret to Kız Kulesi after he subjugated Constantinople in 1453. The tower did triple duty in these years as a lighthouse, customs house, and prison. Ironically, the word minaret comes from the Arabic manara, meaning lighthouse. Drawing courtesy of Klassis Hotel, Istanbul.

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both shores of the Bosphorus. The magnificent metropolis surrounding Maiden's Tower today is called Istanbul. The name was adopted in 1930 and is a variant of the Greek istim'bolin, meaning "in the city" or "downtown." More than ten million people live, work, and play at the hem of Kız Kulesi's dress. Along with thirty-six other sentries in Istanbul and sixteen more along the Bosphorus, she's still the matriarch of Turkish lighthouses.

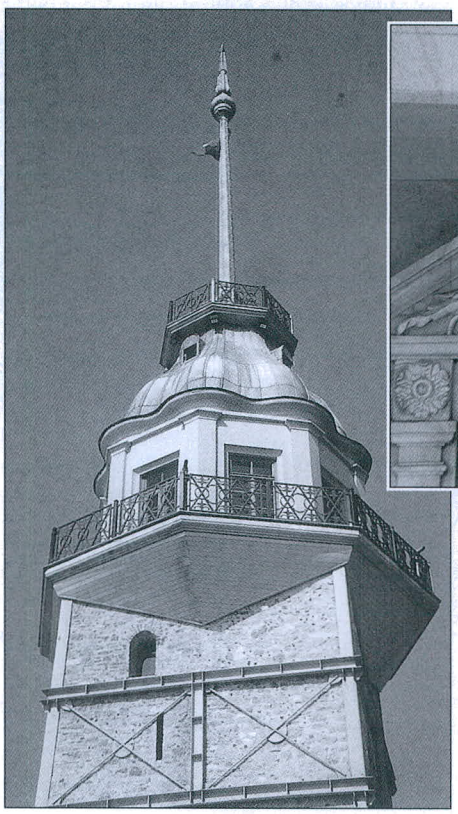
Ask the Turks to describe her and you're likely to hear affectionate appellations like "The Jewel of the Bosphorus" or "The Pearl of Istanbul." At the very least, the Maiden's Tower is the symbol of Byzantine opulence, influence, and longevity.



Above – Kız Kulesi underwent a massive restoration in 2000 and is now open as a restaurant and museum. At dusk, floodlights transform it into an opulent jewel in Istanbul Harbor. Photo courtesy of Klassis Hotel, Istanbul.



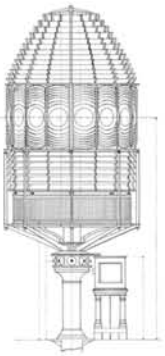
The beacon of Kız Kulesi was moved to a pyramidal concrete tower (at left center) by the 1980s. Dwarfed by its predecessor and far less ostentatious, the little sentinel flashes red or white every three seconds, depending on the direction from which it's viewed. Photo courtesy of Charles Nicklin.





Above and left – Maiden's Tower today wears a distinct amalgamated style, combining elements of the diverse cultures it has served. Greek influence is evident in the Doric columns that flank the entry door, while lavish Italian ornaments adorn the pediment. The mosque-like appearance of the tower has remained virtually unchanged since the 1400s. Photo courtesy of Charles Nicklin.

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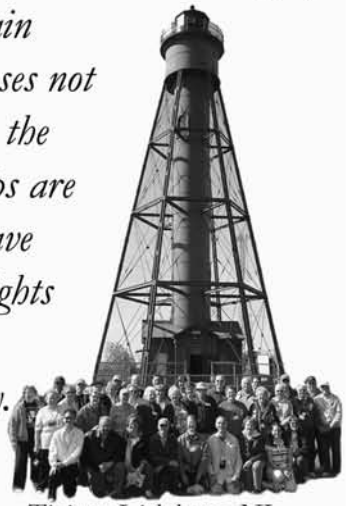
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