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A COMPANION TO EARLY MODERN ISTANBUL



Edited by

SHIRINE HAMADEH
AND ÇIĞDEM KAFESCIOĞLU

BRILL

A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul

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Preface

The making of this volume has kept us blissful company through the past few years. The global pandemic, the human lives it took away, the lockdowns and confinements, the endless disfiguration of the city to which this book is dedicated, the savage explosion of another city by many hundred tons of ammonium nitrate, the continuous assaults on academic and intellectuals' freedom of expression and human dignity in these cities and their countries: each of them has touched millions of people and has touched us more than once, personally, and profoundly. We pondered over the city anew, living in Istanbul's present and contemplating its past—different and connected universes, each with its beauty and ugliness and wonder and horror—to imagine other ways of being a city; to traverse through the various chapters the early modern world of sufis, craftsmen, poets, janissaries, queen mothers, business women, merchants, migrants, and musicians, and Istanbul's produce gardens, its neighborhoods, its busy markets, its law courts, and its earlier episodes of epidemics and devastation. And to see that the city always outlives its oppressors.

Through these years we were lucky to have the friendship, encouragement, and support of many. We want to thank first those who helped bring the book about through their financial generosity: The College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Koç University, the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED), the Istanbul Research Institute (İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü) and, particularly, Aylin Kuntay, Chris Roosevelt, and Mehmet Kentel. We are most grateful to our anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, and to Engin Akarlı, Ahmet Ersoy, and Derin Terzioğlu, for the valuable suggestions and advice they offered at different times. Our thanks also go to Murat Tülek, who produced our maps and to Ezgi Dikici, who helped with copyediting and formatting at a crucial deadline.

We owe a lot to our editors at Brill, Kate Hammond and Alessandra Giliberto, who accompanied us through and through with their kindness and professionalism, to Matthew McHaffie, for his minutious copyediting and readiness to assist at any moment, and to Jorik Groen, who oversaw the volume's production with meticulous care.

Above all, we are indebted to the colleagues and friends whose contributions sustained the huge team effort that underlies this volume and who bore graciously with our numerous emails, questions, and comments throughout these years.

Dear Walter, how we wish you were with us today to see the final outcome.

Shirine Hamadeh and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu

Note on Transliteration

Terms in Ottoman Turkish rendered in the Arabic script have been transliterated according to the system adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, except for the letter kh that we transliterate as ḫ. Words that appear in English dictionaries such as Pasha, waqf, and Agha are anglicized, except when part of a place name, e.g. Kasım Paşa. Modern Turkish orthography is used in the text for people and place names. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of foreign-language texts are the authors' own.

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Abbreviations

AK	Istanbul Municipality Atatürk Library, Istanbul
BL	British Library, London
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
BOA	Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, currently, Office of the Presidency Ottoman Archives, Istanbul
İKS	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, <i>İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri</i> , Istanbul
iÜK	Istanbul University Rare Books Library, Istanbul
KR	Boğaziçi University Kandilli Observatory, Istanbul
SK	Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul
TSMK	Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul
T SMA	Topkapı Palace Museum Archive, Istanbul
<i>AHR</i>	<i>The American Historical Review</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Archivum Ottomanicum</i>
<i>AO-H</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
<i>ArsO</i>	<i>Ars Orientalis</i>
<i>ArtB</i>	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>DBIA</i>	<i>Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam 2nd ed.</i>
<i>EI3</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam 3rd ed.</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>İslâm Ansiklopedisi</i>
<i>IFM</i>	<i>İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>IJTS</i>	<i>International Journal of Turkish Studies</i>
<i>JEMH</i>	<i>Journal of Early Modern History</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JOS</i>	<i>Osmanlı Araştırmaları/Journal of Ottoman Studies</i>
<i>JOTSA</i>	<i>Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association</i>
<i>JSAH</i>	<i>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Turkish Studies/Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları</i>
<i>JWH</i>	<i>Journal of Women's History</i>

<i>MES</i>	<i>Middle Eastern Studies</i>
<i>REMMM</i>	<i>Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>TALID</i>	<i>Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi</i>
<i>TDVIA</i>	<i>Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi</i>
<i>TED</i>	<i>Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi</i>
<i>TSAB</i>	<i>The Turkish Studies Association Bulletin</i>
<i>TSAJ</i>	<i>Turkish Studies Association Journal</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>

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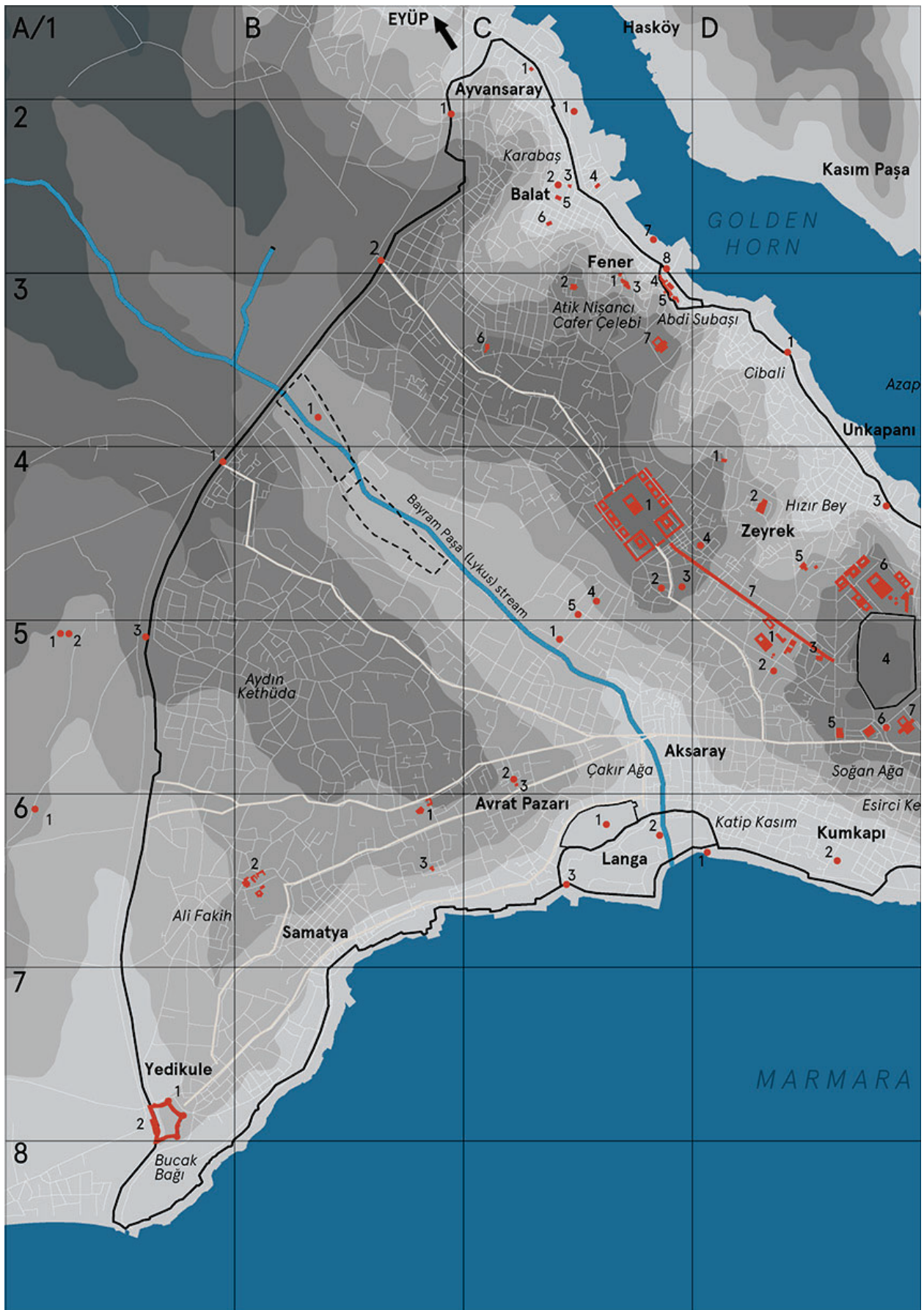


FIGURE 0.1 Istanbul *intra muros*, Galata and Üsküdar, 15th to early 19th centuries, including sites that are mentioned in the volume. Prepared by Murat Tülek



- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| A4/1 | Topkapı / Cannon gate | C4/3 | Saraçhane |
| A5/1 | Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge | C4/4 | Yeni Odalar (New Barracks) |
| A5/2 | Merkez Efendi Halveti lodge | C4/5 | Orta mosque, in New Barracks |
| A5/3 | Mevlanakapı (Mevlana gate) | C5/1 | Etmeydanı |
| A6/1 | Zoodochos Pigi holy spring and church | C5/2 | Forum Arcadius / Avrat Pazarı |
| A7/1 | Yedikule | C5/3 | Column of Arcadius |
| A7/2 | Golden Gate (Porta Aurea) | C6/1 | Small (Küçük) Langa garden |
| B2/1 | Eğrikapı (Eğri gate) | C6/2 | Langa (Vlanga) garden |
| B2/2 | Edirnekapı (Edirne gate) | C6/3 | Davud Paşa gate |
| B3/1 | Yeni Bağçe | D3/1 | Cibali gate |
| B6/1 | Davud Pasha mosque and kadi court | D4/1 | Eski İmaret / Christ Pantepoptes monastery |
| B6/2 | Koca Mustafa Pasha lodge and complex / Hagios Andreas en te Krisei | D4/2 | Zeyrek mosque and lodge / Pantokrator church and monastery |
| B6/3 | Shah Sultan mosque and lodge | D4/3 | Odunkapısı (Odun gate) |
| C1/1 | Atik Mustafa Pasha mosque | D4/4 | Atpazari lodge |
| C2/1 | Balat quay | D4/5 | Shaykh Vefa lodge and complex |
| C2/2 | Karaferye synagogue | D4/6 | Süleymaniye mosque complex |
| C2/3 | Yanbol synagogue | D4/7 | Bozdoğan (Valens) aqueduct |
| C2/4 | Aya Yani church | D5/1 | Şehzade Mehmed mosque complex |
| C2/5 | Ahrida synagogue | D5/2 | Eski Odalar (Old Barracks) |
| C2/6 | Aya Strati / Surp Hıreşdagabet Armenian church | D5/3 | Kalenderhane / Theotokos Kyriotissa church |
| C2/7 | Fener quay | D5/4 | Eski Saray (The Old Palace) |
| C2/8 | Fenerkapısı (Fener gate) | D5/5 | Bayezid II public bath |
| C3/1 | Theotokos Mouchliotissa church (Kanlı Kilise, St. Mary of the Mongols) | D5/6 | Forum Tauri |
| C3/2 | Fethiye mosque / Theotokos Pammakaristos church | D5/7 | Bayezid II mosque complex |
| C3/3 | Patriarchal Academy | D6/1 | Yenikapı (Yeni gate) |
| C3/4 | Greek Orthodox patriarchate | D6/2 | Surp Asdvadzadzin Armenian Patriarchal church |
| C3/5 | Abdi Subaşı mosque | E2/1 | Kasım Pasha Mevlevi lodge |
| C3/6 | Nureddin Mehmed Cerrahi lodge | E2/2 | Petit champs des morts |
| C3/7 | Selim I mosque complex | E2/3 | Galatasaray (Galata Palace) |
| C4/1 | Mehmed II (Fatih) mosque complex | E2/4 | Kasım Paşa docks |
| C4/2 | Can Alıcı church / Aya Marina monastery | E3/1 | Galata Mevlevi lodge |
| | | E3/2 | Galata tower |
| | | E4/1 | Ahi Çelebi mosque and kadi court |
| | | E4/2 | Baba Cafer prison |
| | | E4/3 | Küçük Çukur khan |

E4/4	Rüstem Paşa khan	E5/18	Divan Yolu
E4/5	Rüstem Pasha mosque	E5/19	Binbirdirek cistern
E4/6	Balkapanı	E5/20	Milion
E4/7	Balık Pazarı gate	E5/21	Acem Ağa mosque
E4/8	Yeni Valide mosque complex	E5/22	Aydınoğlu lodge
E4/9	Sabuncu khan	E6/1	İbrahim Pasha palace
E4/10	Uzunçarşı	E6/2	Atmeydanı / Hippodrome
E4/11	Zindankapı khan	E6/3	Sultan Ahmed mosque and complex
E5/1	Kilit khan	E6/4	Haseki Hürrem public bath
E5/2	Büyük Valide (also, Valide Kösem) khan	E6/5	Kadırga Limanı (Kadırga Port)
E5/3	Büyük Yeni khan	E6/6	Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and İsmihan Sultan mosque and lodge
E5/4	Mahmud Pasha khan	E6/7	Güngörmez church
E5/5	Hoca khan	E6/8	Sipahiler market (Sultan Ahmed complex market street)
E5/6	Cebeci khan	E6/9	Küçük Ayasofya mosque / SS. Sergius and Bacchus church
E5/7	Bit Pazarı	F2/1	Cihangir mosque and lodge
E5/8	Grand Bazaar	F4/1	Sarayburnu
E5/9	Bedestan	F5/1	Topkapı Palace
E5/10	Sandal Bedestanı	F5/2	Ayasofya / Hagia Sophia
E5/11	Nuruosmaniye mosque complex	F5/3	Selim II mausoleum, at Hagia Sophia
E5/12	Atik Ali Pasha mosque	F6/1	Ahırkapı (Ahır gate)
E5/13	Çemberlitaş / Constantine's column	H4/1	Nasuhi lodge in Doğancılar
E5/14	Tavuk Pazarı	H5/1	Üsküdar Palace
E5/15	Tahta khan		
E5/16	Mahmud Pasha mosque complex		
E5/17	Vezir khan		

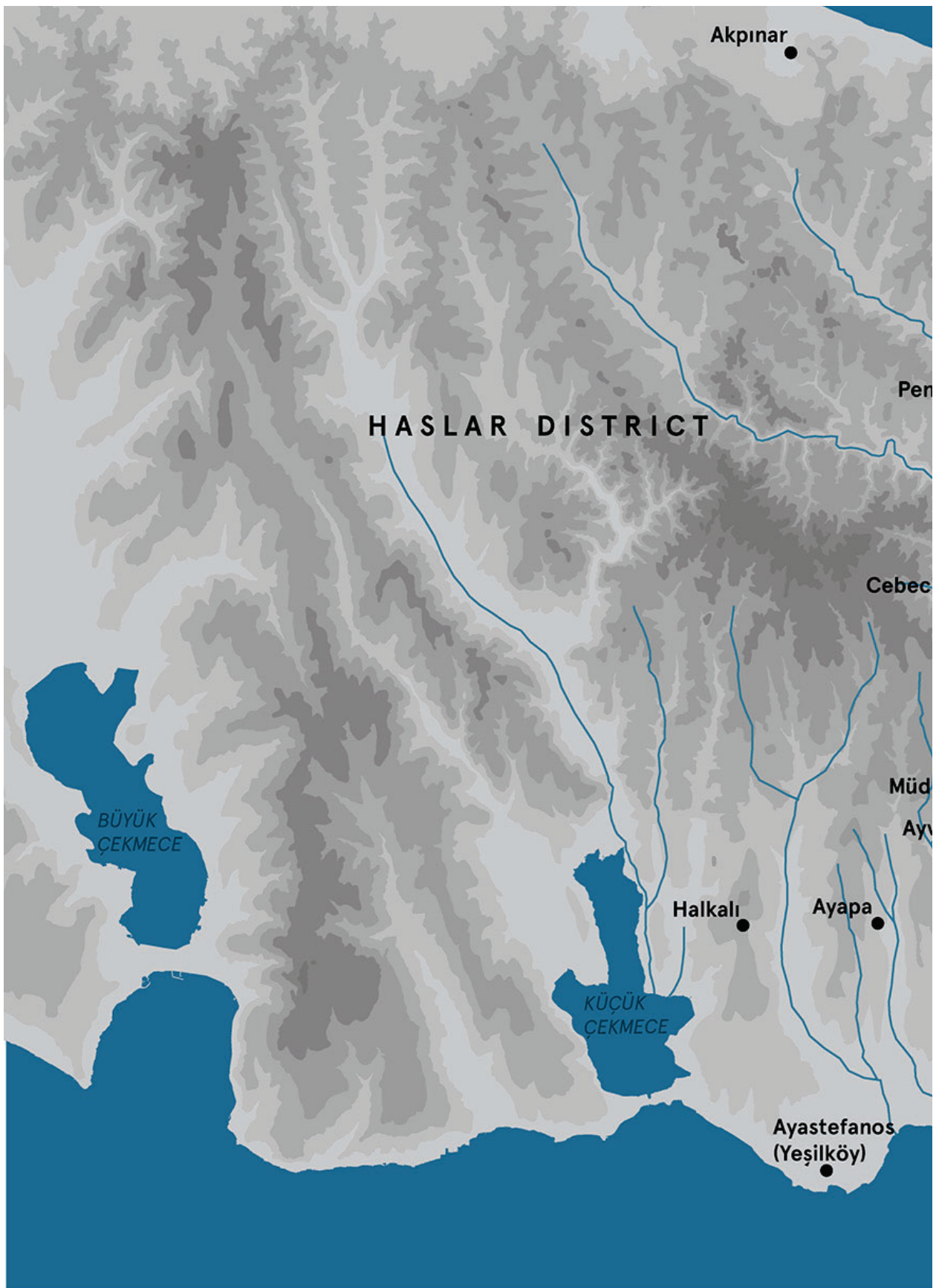


FIGURE 0.2 Istanbul's hinterland, 15th to early 19th centuries, including sites that are mentioned in the volume. Prepared by Murat Tülek



Volatile Urban Landscapes between Mythical Space and Time

Gülru Necipoğlu

Earthquakes and fires significantly affected early modern Istanbul's urban form, streetscapes, and vernacular architecture, particularly dwellings and shops.¹ Focusing on the intramural city, I examine the simultaneous impact of natural disasters on its physical fabric and its imaginaries, thereby connecting two dimensions that have hitherto been treated separately.² Foundation myths of the Byzantine and Ottoman capital informed how the apocalyptic city's pasts and future were imagined. With its perpetually destroyed and rebuilt volatile urban landscapes, the millennial cosmopolis became an embodiment of mythical space and time.

Although destruction provided an opportunity for urban renewal, vernacular Istanbul tended to resist risk-mitigating legislation imposed by the authoritarian state. Having evolved into a way of life, the city's residential architecture obeyed an intricate combination of factors ranging from local materials and skills to environmental, economic, and sociocultural considerations. Ulrich Beck's theorization of the "risk society", which to some extent is an opportunity society, emphasizes the combined agency of natural and human dynamics as a distinctively late modern phenomenon.³ However, in early modern Istanbul, too, there was no such thing as a purely natural disaster, since intertwined parameters made it impossible to separate neatly the realms of nature and culture.

1 Imaginary Istanbul as Apocalyptic Risk City

According to post-Byzantine Greek lore, Constantine's imperial capital, co-founded with Empress Helena, would be recovered in the Final Days from

1 A shorter version was presented at the Harvard Graduate School of Design workshop, "Risk and the City: The Case of Istanbul", 2009. I thank my research assistants Damla Özakay and Cecily Pollard.

2 Ürekli, "Afetlere İlişkin Literatür".

3 Beck, *Risk Society*, 24: "Risk Society is a catastrophic society: in it the exceptional condition threatens to become the norm."

the Ottomans by the Last Emperor, also named Constantine (d. 1453), whose mother happened to be another Helena. The “Immortal Emperor”, lying dormant inside a sealed cavity at the Golden Gate, was expected to awaken and repossess Constantinople, only to surrender his insignia of royalty to Christ in Jerusalem, thereby initiating the Apocalypse and Last Judgement.⁴ The city was destined to sink into the waters after its rescue from the Saracens in eschatological battles between Christians and Muslims. Perceived as an island anchored by seven hills, echoing those of Rome, Constantinople’s unstable mountainous terrain that hovered above the seas would be annihilated by divinely caused cataclysmic earthquakes, thunderstorms, and seismic waves. While crossing over to the Asian shore, on his way to Jerusalem, the Last Emperor would watch the city being submerged, as illustrated in a late 16th-century Venetian manuscript of Leo the Wise’s *Oracles* (Fig. 8.1).⁵

In addition to the Hagia Sophia, Byzantine apocalyptic narratives were obsessed with talismanic columns and statuary, including the nearby bronze equestrian statue of Justinian I and the antiquities of the Hippodrome (Fig. 8.2).

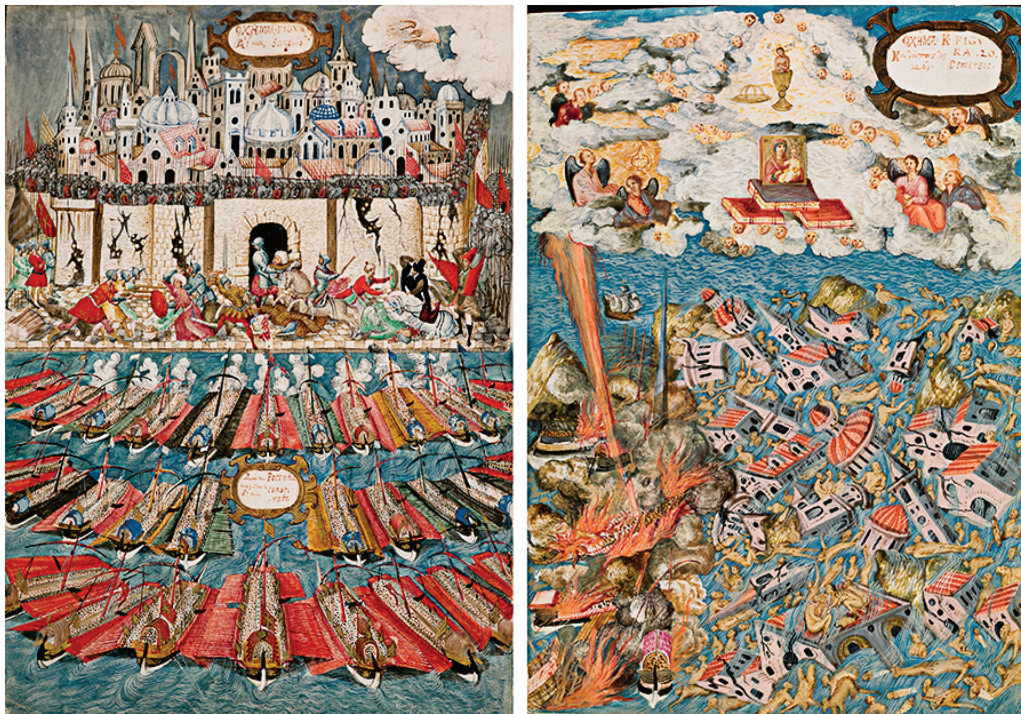


FIGURE 8.1 (a) Siege of Constantinople in the Last Days;
(b) Constantinople Sinking into the Sea in the Last Days, from Leo the Wise,
Oracula, Venice, 1577. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Barocci 170, fols. 11v, 23v

- 4 Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*; Berger “Magical Constantinople”, 24–25; Nestor-Iskandar, *Tale of Constantinople*, ed. Hannak and Philippides; Paliouras, *George Klontzas*, fols. 155r–163v.
5 Dagron, *Constantinople*, 283, 324–30; Berger (ed.), *Patria*, 209, 320.



FIGURE 8.2 (a) Hagia Sophia and Antiquities of the Hippodrome, anonymous Austrian Habsburg artist, c.1574, watercolor on paper, Freshfield Album. Oxford, Trinity College Library, O. 17. 2. (b) Abd al-Rahman al-Bistami, *Tercüme-i Miftâh-i Cifrü'l-Câmi*, c.1597–98, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. i.ÜK, T6624, fol. 92v

Built to withstand earthquakes, fires, and other calamities, the imperial columns were protective guardians of the city against enemies and natural disasters, marking Constantinople as a “God-protected, victorious, well-guarded city ruled by a succession of triumphant emperors”. These timeless columns recorded prophecies since the foundation of the pagan city until the end of time, listing the names of future emperors and the events of the Last Days.⁶

The Ottomans did not merely inherit Constantinople and its wondrous monuments, but also its foundation myths, which they refashioned with reference to contemporary events, sayings of the Prophet, and medieval Islamic lore. Some hadith (datable to 7th- and 8th-century Umayyad sieges) even proclaimed that Constantinople would be conquered by a great sultan who was to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque prior to eschatological wars between Christians and Muslims, which would culminate in the latter’s salvation. A version of this hadith is inscribed next to the foundation inscription of Mehmed II’s (r. 1451–81) mosque in Istanbul, built between 1463–70 after the conversion of Hagia Sophia in 1453.⁷

A painting in a late 16th-century Ottoman manuscript on eschatological wars and signs of the Apocalypse, entitled *Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon*, represents talismanic antiquities (*tılsım*) and “marvels” described by historical sources in the Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia itself, “which is a wonder of the age” (Fig. 8.2b). The text then turns to the Antichrist’s appearance in Khurasan (Persia) and the final obliteration of terrestrial cities, prior to which Constantinople is to be conquered by Christians and reconquered by “Imam Muhammad-Mahdi”.⁸

The reimagined Ottoman capital was partly interpreted through Byzantine accounts compiled in the 10th-century *Patria* of Constantinople, particularly the “Narrative Concerning Hagia Sophia” copied in 1474, likely for Mehmed II. This Greek text was adaptively translated into Turkish in 1479, and into Persian in 1480 (revised in 1489/90).⁹ It has not been previously noticed that both translations closely followed the completion of Mehmed II’s New Palace (Topkapı

6 James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 164, 167, 170–71. See also, Berger (ed.), *Patria*, 83, 85, 93, 101–03, 125, 161, 171; Berger, “Magical Constantinople”; Dagron, *Constantinople*, 328–30; Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 94–95.

7 Necipoğlu, “Visual Cosmopolitanism”; Necipoğlu, “Hagia Sophia”; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*. On the hadith, Yücesoy, “Cemaatten İmparatorluğa”.

8 The Turkish translation of Abd al-Rahman al-Bistami’s (d. c.1455) *Miftāḥ al-jifr al-jāmi‘* was done c.1597/98, on which see Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 169–70; Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom”, 232–36.

9 Yusuf b. Musa el-Balikesiri’s Turkish translation summarizes the Greek “Narrative” transcribed in 1474 by Michael Aichmalotes, which survives in the Topkapı Palace Library (TSMK, G1 6). Derviş Şemsüddin Karamani’s Persian translation of the “Narrative” was later revised

Palace) in November–December 1478. Replacing his Old Palace, the new one inaugurated a centralized imperial regime formalized by the sultan's Law Code (c.1477–81).¹⁰

The Persian translation was commissioned by Mehmed II himself from Derviş Şemsüddin Karamani, just before the end of his reign. It begins with the foundation by Byzas of a citadel on the “island of seven hills in the midst of two continents and two seas”. The sufi author specifies that Mehmed II built his own palace on the same site, surrounded by a castle called the “Imperial” (*Sultāniyya*). He then describes the “conquest” of Byzantium by Constantine, followed by Justinian I. The latter defeated the pagans and rebuilt Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya) as a “temple of the whole world”, which Mehmed II transformed into a mosque “without changing its name”. Thus, the Ayasofya mosque remained the “Temple of God”, symbolizing the divinely ordained universal power of empire. Şemsüddin links Mehmed's imperial project with the prestigious Roman (*Rūmī*) heritage of Constantinople by focusing on structures neighboring the New Palace, Hagia Sophia, and the Hippodrome area.¹¹

“Anti-imperial” versions of the city's foundation myths were subsequently inserted into anonymous Ottoman chronicles in Turkish, written under Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512). Not surprisingly, this sultan was supported by factions reacting against the radical reforms of his father, Mehmed II, who was “posing as the legitimate heir of Roman emperors”.¹² One such chronicle, dated AH 896/CE 1490/91, opens with a passage according to which Mehmed was so astonished by Constantinople's marvels upon conquering it, that he assembled priests, monks, patriarchs, and connoisseurs of Byzantium and of Frankish lands to question them about these edifices, their patrons, and former rulers of the city. Each group informed the sultan by recounting what they knew from their teachers and chronicles.¹³

According to this chronicle, when the city's foundations were dug at the time of its mythical pagan founder Yanko bin Madyan, a “diabolic dome” appeared forty cubits underground. It contained statues of seven groups of seven vultures, fashioned from magnet stones and studded with jewels. The statues of six of the groups had no heads, while in the seventh group, only one vulture

by Ahmed b. Ahmed al-Gilani: see Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 113–23, 210–14; Tauer, “Notice”; Tauer, “Versions”.

10 Necipoğlu, *Topkapı*, 3–30.

11 Tauer, “Versions”, 3, 7, 20; Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 111–23. Necipoğlu, “Visual Cosmopolitanism”; Kafadar, “A Rome of One's Own”.

12 İnalçık, *Survey of Istanbul 1455*, 584. Anonymous chronicles are classified as pro- and anti-imperial in Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 123–210.

13 Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 5. See *ibid.*, 5–48 for a French translation.

preserved its head. This revealed that God had created seven different peoples every millennium, each of which placed statues of vultures in that dome and cut off their heads to calculate the passage of time. The statues recorded the seven millennia since God's creation of the world, the last beginning with Adam and his progeny. The dome, then, was a "cosmic clock" presaging the end of the world upon the seventh millennium's conclusion. By implication, the "diabolic dome" demonstrated that the layered city conquered by Mehmed II was not "virgin territory".¹⁴ Its previous founders too were conquerors, who had no superior claims of ownership over the city than its Ottoman conqueror.

Although the AH 896/CE 1490/91 chronicle is well known, the subtle ways in which it mixes myth with reality to bring imaginary Istanbul in sync with its past, present, and future has yet to be fully grasped. Moreover, this anti-imperial Turkish chronicle coexisted with the pro-imperial Persian text (AH 885/CE 1480) dedicated to Mehmed II, which was amplified with literary embellishments in AH 895/CE 1489/90 during Bayezid II's reign. I would also like to emphasize that the anonymous chronicle was written when the Ottoman capital had just experienced a series of catastrophic earthquakes, fires, and thunderstorms. Two consecutive earthquakes, both of which toppled "many minarets", occurred in October 1488 (24 Zilhicce 893) and January 1489 (13 Safer 894). Evoking an apocalyptic tableau, in June 1490 (22 Şa'ban 895) a thunderbolt struck and led to the explosion of a converted church called Güngörmez near the Hippodrome, which Mehmed II had partly transformed into a gunpowder depot. People who woke up as the roofs of their houses collapsed thought the end of the world had suddenly arrived and that the skies had fallen upon them. Nearby neighborhoods were obliterated, with their inhabitants buried alive under houses, leaving some 2000 to 3000 dead.¹⁵

According to the 1490/91 chronicle, because the city's foundation was laid at an astrologically inauspicious time under its idol-worshipping founder Yanko bin Madyan, it was destined to be perpetually ruined by calamities. Also cursed by settlers uprooted by forced migration (as under Mehmed II), Yanko's impious city was annihilated by the wrath of God in a tornado, torrential rains, and a huge earthquake.¹⁶ When his son Byzas rebuilt the city, he ordered his grandees to construct masonry buildings by demolishing what was

14 Ibid., 11–12, 77–83. The end of the world in the 7th millennium was expected upon the downfall of the Roman-Byzantine empire and its capital Constantinople: see Berger, "Magical Constantinople", 14–16.

15 Boyar & Fleet, *Social History*, 73–74; Ruhi-i Edrenevi, *Tārīḫ*, fols. 157v–158v; Cezar, "Âfetler", 380–81.

16 On Yanko's inauspicious foundation, Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 12–13; see *ibid.*, 65–69 on this theme in the mid-15th-century *Dürr-i Mekkün*.

left aboveground. Atop renovated underground structures, they built robust edifices. And a fear of earthquakes meant that these constructions were provided with strong cellars. The author notes that the city in his own time, too, was built in the same manner with structures having two levels; and, wherever one dug, one found evidence of those “heavy” constructions.¹⁷ This fascinating passage captures the “antiquarian” curiosity of Constantinople’s Ottoman dwellers about local Byzantine preventive building techniques. There is a sense of shared destiny that arises from inhabiting the same millennial risk city, subject to similar environmental as well as human factors. The Ottoman capital awaiting the approaching Apocalypse of the seventh millennium thus preserved multilayered traces of its former calamities underground.¹⁸

The same anonymous chronicle explains that the city of Byzas was destroyed by plague, but then rebuilt “more beautifully than before” by Constantine, who invited sages to install protective talismans. The city was called Constantinople, but “since it had been founded earlier, this name was given to it subsequently”.¹⁹ The enduring consciousness of the cursed city’s dire fate is also captured by Evliya Çelebi’s mid-17th-century account, which attributes never-ending fires, plagues, and soldiers’ rebellions to its ill-omened foundation.²⁰ Although Ottoman foundation narratives largely date between the city’s fall and the late 16th century, they continued to circulate thereafter when apocalyptic expectations and issues of pro- or anti-imperial stances had lost their immediacy.

As is well known, Mehmed II left the city’s imperial columns and talismanic statues intact. Constituting *spolia in situ*, antiquities were preserved not only because they were “animated” by prophecies and protective magic spells, but also for their antiquarian prestige as sites of memory and for their aesthetic appeal. For instance, the historiated spiral column of Theodosius I at Forum Tauri, prophesying according to the *Patria* “the final days of the city and its conquest depicted as reliefs”, was safeguarded within the Old Palace’s outer garden. A similar column in Forum Arcadius, sculpted with spiraling figural narratives, and the “Goth’s Column” in the Topkapı Palace garden, were protected as well.²¹ Mehmed II also conserved the three-headed bronze “Serpent Column” at the Hippodrome as a beneficial spell against snakes (Fig. 8.2). Yet he had Justinian’s equestrian statue removed from its column upon being informed

17 Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 12–22.

18 *Ibid.*, 66.

19 *Ibid.*, 23–24.

20 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi* vol. 1, ed. Dankoff, Kahraman, Dağlı, 17.

21 Berger (ed.), *Patria*, 83; Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 106; Necipoğlu, *Topkapı*, 3–7, 198–200; Necipoğlu, “Visual Cosmopolitanism”, 26–28.

that he would otherwise fail to make the city his own; it was a Christian talisman created to ward off Persian (Asian) conquerors. Parts of the statue were melted and cast as cannon prior to Mehmed's siege of Belgrade (1455/56), indicating his selective reception of antiquities.²²

The city's ancient monuments continued to be interpreted in the Ottoman multi-confessional context as apocalyptic talismans, just as they were interpreted in early modern Europe and Russia. This intertextuality augmented the contested identity of Constantinople/Istanbul, but also of the Last Roman Empire of the seventh millennium. The association between apocalypticism, crusade, and the disputed ownership of the Ottoman capital is a leitmotif in 15th- through 17th-century European images of the city, which often depict natural disasters and miraculous apparitions foreshadowing the End of Days and the victory of Christendom.²³

An early example is a partial view of Constantinople in Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Chronicarum*, published in Nuremberg in 1493. The woodcut shows Justinian's iconic equestrian statue intact despite its removal, accompanied by a text claiming that the statue (misidentified as Constantine) was destroyed during a thunderstorm in 1490 upon being struck by a bolt of lightning. A domed building below the Hippodrome, labeled as "*destruct[i]o antiqua*", is the converted Byzantine church (Güngörmez) that exploded during the abovementioned thunderstorm during Bayezid II's reign.²⁴ The humanist author interprets this disaster as a portent of Hagia Sophia's reconversion into a church, with its minaret already bearing a cross. He also mentions a future crusade planned by the Habsburg emperor Maximilian I (r. 1493–1519), who, after expelling the Ottomans from Constantinople and conquering Jerusalem (presumably from the Mamluks), would be crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503) at St. Peter's in Rome, none of which materialized.²⁵ The catastrophe in Constantinople marks the end of the sixth millennium in Schedel's chronicle, where the seventh millennium begins with a woodcut depicting the Antichrist, who initiates the End of Days.²⁶

22 Raby, "Equestrian Statue"; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 152; Berger, *Patria*, 59.

23 Hess, "Himmels- und Naturserscheinungen", 6; Deresiewicz, "Earthquakes", 509–10; Ambrose & Finkel, *Seismicity of Turkey*, 48–51; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 164–77; Thomson, "New Babylon"; Debby, "Guidalotto's City View"; Debby, *Crusade Propaganda*.

24 Necipoğlu, *Topkapı*, 46, plate 24; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 164–67, fig. 119; Berger & Bardill, "Hartmann Schedel", 2–37.

25 Schedel, *Chronicle*, ed. Füßel, 662.

26 *Ibid.*, fols. 257r, 259r–262v.

2 Vernacular Istanbul: Anti-Seismic Dwellings and Shops

One of the most destructive earthquakes of Istanbul, that of 1509, was dubbed the “Small Doomsday” in Ottoman chronicles. Nevertheless, this did not deter Bayezid II from undertaking extensive urban rehabilitation projects in the apocalyptic city. The earthquake destroyed nearly all minaret hoods and between 1070 to 1500 houses, leaving not a single dwelling undamaged. Their chimneys toppled, walls cracked, and brick roof tiles fell, killing 4000 to 5000 people and injuring about 10,000. The city walls and nearby fortresses partially collapsed, along with water channels. Numerous public monuments were damaged, including the foremost mosque complexes of Mehmed II and Bayezid II, whose main domes fell or split open, along with their smaller domes and dependencies.²⁷

An aftershock in 1510 triggered a fire that burned down 800 to 1500 houses and shops. The affected Jewish houses were looted by “janissaries and Turks”, who set them alight for sacking, and did so with “no fear because the sultan was away” in Edirne during the renovation of the city and palace walls. The role of janissaries in starting, rather than helping extinguish fires, is a recurring phenomenon in later instances of arson discussed below, particularly targeting the houses of rich Jews.²⁸ When Bayezid returned to the Topkapı Palace, he settled in the (now-lost) newly built Çatma Saray, also called Çatma Evler (Timber or Timber-Framed Palace/Houses). Its name reveals an awareness of the greater resistance of timbered constructions to earthquake shocks than masonry, implying that risk-mitigation concerns complemented the need for rapid construction.²⁹

It is assumed that after the 1509 earthquake, most houses in Istanbul were rebuilt with two stories in the timber-and-infill technique (timber frame), none of which survive.³⁰ Benedetto Ramberti (1530s) confirms that this was the predominant construction method, stating that many houses were “made of clay and wood and only a few of stone”.³¹ The similarity of that technique

27 For Nicolò Zustignan’s report, written in Constantinople on 15 September 1509, see Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 9, 261; and *ibid.*, 338, 563–64 for other reports. Cezar, “Âfetler”, 382–83; Ambraseys & Finkel, *Seismicity*, 37–43; Ambraseys, “Earthquake of 1509”.

28 Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 11, 293–94. On janissaries pillaging and burning the houses of wealthy Jews in 1525 and 1589, see Kafadar, “When Coins Turned into Drops of Dew”, 59, 79–80.

29 Necipoğlu, “Waterworks”, 317, 320; Ruhi-i Edrenevi, *Tārîh*, fols. 191r–192v; Ménage, “Edirneli Rûhi”, 324–27; Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 9, 261.

30 For example, Arel, *Konut Geleneği*, 70–71.

31 Cited in Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 200.

to shipbuilding methods was observed by Pietro della Valle in his letter sent to Rome from Istanbul in 1614. It mentions alongside timber-framed houses the all-timber shops lining commercial streets, techniques that were prevalent prior to his description:

Most houses and shops are extremely ugly and made of humble materials, as the majority are of timber, particularly the shops and streets called bazaars where they sell goods. The better ones are of mud and timber, built in such a way that, they first make the timber skeleton precisely in the manner that ships are constructed. Having that completed, they make the roof before anything else to create shelter from the rain, so that the rest of the construction made of feeble materials does not suffer from water. Then between one timber and another of the skeleton they fill out in pieces the walls by mud, which likewise has very little durability.³²

Some early examples of Istanbul's dwellings are illustrated by members of 16th-century Austrian Habsburg embassies, including the Danish artist Melchior Lorck and the Catholic priest Salomon Schweigger. They show that the timber-framed walls of houses were not plastered over but left exposed (Fig. 8.3).³³ Most revealing is a pen-and-ink drawing by Lorck (c.1555–59) from the vantage point of the caravanserai known as Ambassadors' Khan (Elçi Hanı), near Constantine's Porphyry Column (Çemberlitaş), where he resided with the Habsburg ambassadorial delegation led by Busbecq for nearly four years during the reign of Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66). This drawing indicates that houses in the timber-framing technique were accompanied by humbler mud-brick dwellings, and sometimes featured projecting wooden screens across alleys to impede the gaze of neighbors (Fig. 8.3a). Yet privacy was not guaranteed, as on the lower left side one "can spot a couple out on the balcony, who, evidently excited by the afternoon's heat, are making love in the open air without (yet?) having taken any notice of the draftsman in the window".³⁴ Lorck's drawing captures the contrast between the organic informality of domestic architecture, featuring four-sloped pitched roofs with overhanging eaves covered by curved brick tiles, and the pristine geometry of the lead-covered

³² Della Valle, *Viaggi*, vol. 1, 24. Dernschwam (1553/55) saw all over the city many "shops or wooden huts" where the produce of the sultan's gardens was sold daily: see Dernschwam, *Tagebuch*, ed. Babinger, 54–55.

³³ Fischer, *Melchior Lorck*, vol. 1, 96–97; Schweigger, *Reyssbeschreibung*, ed. Neck, 105–07.

³⁴ Fischer, *Melchior Lorck*, vol. 1, 97.



FIGURE 8.3 (a) Melchior Lorck, View over Constantinople's Roofs from the Habsburg Embassy, pen and ink drawing, c.1555–59; (b, c) Salomon Schweigger, Houses and a Bathhouse in Constantinople, woodcuts, c.1578–81, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung*, Nuremberg, 1606

domical superstructure of a mosque complex seen in the far distance amidst trees and a glimpse of the Marmara seascape.

The relatively crude yet informative woodcuts in Schweigger's later travelogue (c.1578–81) depict timber-framed houses with the continuous walls of their upper and lower floors covered by four-sloped pitched roofs (Figs. 8.3b, c). He describes ordinary houses in the city as badly built and shoddy, and mostly

constructed without lime-mortar, instead only using mud and clay. These houses were low and dimly lit, their rooms featured “a small window like the airhole of our cellars or stables”, and their roofs were sometimes pierced by skylights. Not being familiar with stoves, the “Turks” heated their rooms by fireplaces with chimneys. They were generally content with small houses, possessing only a horse and minimal home furnishings: if one has a stable for his horse, then two small rooms sufficed for him. Outside the windows were bendable wooden shutters resembling an “upside-down rooftop” that was fixed below and allowed light to enter from above, thereby impeding neighbors from looking into each other’s homes (Fig. 8.3b). The spacious, palatial compounds of grandees were built of stone, but lacked magnificence and differed from examples in Germany or Italy. Their outer precinct walls were taller than the roofs of the low edifices contained therein (as seen in the c.1574 Freshfield album painting of a palace along the Hippodrome, Fig. 8.2a).³⁵

Schweigger reports that the shortage of construction materials was compounded by the absence of wheeled carriages in Istanbul. Stones, therefore, had to be carried on mules, and a hundred of them were barely able to bear what two carriages could easily transport; because of this, houses were extremely expensive. The inferior dwelling of an ordinary citizen cost 1000 ducats or more, which in Germany would only be worth two to three hundred gold coins. The Moroccan ambassador al-Tamgrouti, who experienced a major Istanbul fire in 1588, observed that fireplaces with chimneys called *al-odjāq* (i.e., *ocāḳ*) were “frequently the cause of conflagrations that consume the houses”, and he added:

The houses are not constructed solidly; the majority are of timber because of the abundance of this kind of material. That is why fire causes such great ravages there. Stone and brick are so scarce that few inhabitants, even if they are dignitaries and rich persons, employ these in their constructions.³⁶

George Sandys (1610/11) judged the best of Istanbul’s houses “inferior to the more contemptible sort of ours”. As in Byzantine times, the city was subject to “sundrie horrible combustions”, some of them purposely prolonged for booty by the janissaries, who frequently set on fire the houses of Jews that “are

³⁵ Schweigger, *Reyssbeschreibung*, ed. Neck, 105–13. On the lack of houses resembling those in Christendom, see Dernschwam, *Tagebuch*, ed. Babinger, 36–37.

³⁶ Schweigger, *Reyssbeschreibung*, 106–07. Al-Tamgrouti, *En-nafhat*, ed. de Castries, 54, 57, 59.

now furnished with arched vaults, for the safeguard of their goods". Moreover, Istanbul's houses frequently suffered from "terrible and long-lasting earthquakes" and tempests, whose consequences were exacerbated due to negligence in repairing them, and due to them being mostly built of sundried bricks. Sandys nevertheless mentions a wide variety of materials used in dwellings, which did not exceed two stories, "some of timber, some of sundried bricks, their roofs covered with tiles". He adds that the many rows of shops belonging to the sultan were rented out to tradesmen, while the narrow streets with raised sidewalks that often had steep ascents were "in many places bounded with long dead walls, belonging to great men's Serraglios; so negligent are they of exterior garnishings".³⁷

To return to Pietro della Valle's 1614 letter, he too judges the narrow and steep streets uncomfortable and describes them as unsuitable for wheeled carriages, due to which Constantinople's interior failed to correspond to its external beauty. He observes that the overly populous intramural city packed with houses lacked big gardens; it formed a homogenous urban tissue with Pera (Galata) and Üsküdar. By contrast, the verdant green belt of suburbs and the Bosphorus shores featured villas with garden estates. Della Valle deemed that the houses descending from hilltops of the walled city toward the sea, without blocking each other's view, contributed to the "exquisite" panoramic beauty of Constantinople and observed that their roofs were ornamented by "quite pretty overhanging eaves capriciously painted with various colors in a charming and peculiar manner". Under the roofs, projecting from the walls, were a "large number of spacious bay windows covered on all sides by blinds painted variously". The "whitewashing" (*bianchaggiar*) of dwellings confirms the predominance of the timber-frame mud brick infill technique, which created a "pleasing contrast" with the many tall dark-green cypresses. Complemented by numerous lead-sheathed minarets and domes of mosque complexes, the combination produced "such a beautiful vista" that he did not believe any other city possessed one like it.³⁸

Della Valle explains that the widespread use of timber in houses caused horrible fires that were often extinguished by tearing down nearby edifices and then rapidly rebuilding them. By contrast, the mostly Frankish and fewer Greek houses in Galata were well-built and made of masonry.³⁹ Later examples (unfortunately no longer extant) of these masonry houses with sawtooth roof

³⁷ Sandys, *Relation*, 117, 119.

³⁸ Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 20–24.

³⁹ Yerasimos, "Galata". On two-to-three-storied masonry Galata houses with underground cellars c.1520, see Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 202–04.



FIGURE 8.4 The Main Street of Phanar (Fener), “Anthology of Phanariot Architecture”, photograph by Achilles Samandji, c.1920

cornices have been photographed in Fener, the elite Greek neighborhood along the Golden Horn (Fig. 8.4). Della Valle judged urban and suburban kiosks commanding views of both land and sea, which were lavishly ornamented with ceramic tiles, calligraphy, and paintings, as the most “gallant edifices among modern habitations of the Turks today in Constantinople”. The Ottoman capital was “one of the most beautiful cities and one of the most charming sites of the world”, despite his more “particular affection” for his hometown of Naples.⁴⁰

This distinctively Ottoman cityscape had developed over the course of a century and a half. As I have shown elsewhere, by the late 16th century a classification scheme highlighting a socially stratified hierarchy was devised and applied to dwellings by the bureaucrat-historian Mustafa Âli (d. 1600), ranging from a single room to multi-courtyard palatial compounds. The latter featured an upper limit of three courtyards, besides gardens, thereby echoing in smaller scale the Topkapı Palace in terms of “inner” and “outer” courtyard spaces (*enderün/birün*; *dāhiliyye/hāriciyye*). Âli correlates residences with the gendered social status of predominantly male patrons. However, what I have termed “codes of decorum” also involved the relative prestige of sites in

40 Della Valle, *Viaggi*, 28–31, 42. On kiosks, see Necipoğlu, “Suburban Landscape”.

Istanbul and its suburbs, where the summer and winter palaces of male and female elites were distributed.⁴¹

Only some of these now-lost palatial residences have been studied.⁴² Most of the research on Istanbul's domestic architecture has focused on "ordinary" houses without considering the "big picture", namely overall norms of decorum to which modest dwellings had to conform. These studies are dominated by quantitative analyses of written primary sources and their terminology. Researchers have observed that 15th- and 16th-century dwellings were predominantly single- or double-storied separate units, often grouped in or around enclosures with gardens. Matrakçı Nasuh's topographic painting (c.1537) selectively depicts upper-scale residential compounds of masonry, mostly two-storied, with bay windows, pillared upper galleries overlooking streets, and belvedere towers. Studies suggest that mid-17th-century dwellings evolved toward the refined two-storied "monoblock" houses, which became more common in the following century. Their masonry ground floor that was adapted to the street front supported a projecting residential floor in lighter timber-frame construction. Thinner walls allowed multiple protruding volumes and larger bay windows, contributing to more spacious interiors with higher living standards.⁴³ This type of house responded to the shrinking size of land parcels that started with the late 16th-century population boom. Colorfully painted houses with wood paneling only appeared in mid-17th-century shore mansions, spreading to the walled city a century later and becoming common by the turn of the 19th century.⁴⁴

The growing density of the cityscape and its narrower streets and fewer open spaces boosted the risk of fires, especially given the preference for a timbered, generally two-storied residential fabric (raised to two-and-a-half stories by internally subdividing the ground floor). Official building codes analyzed

41 On decorum and palatial residences of Sinan's patrons, see Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 40–41, 115–17, 589 (index).

42 Artan, "The Kadirga Palace Shrouded"; idem, "Politics of Ottoman Imperial Palaces"; and idem, "The Making of the Sublime Porte".

43 Yerasimos, "Dwellings in Sixteenth-Century Istanbul"; Yılmaz, "Barınma Kültürü"; Tanyeli, "Klasik Dönem"; Tanyeli, "Norms of Domestic Comfort and Luxury"; Özkaya, "Houses of Istanbul"; Cerasi "Istanbul 1620–1750", 481. On residences in Matrakçı, see Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 202, 210.

44 On painted wood-board cladding and the lighter "Baghdadi" technique that replaced timber-framed mud brick infill, see Eldem, *Türk Evi*, vol. 1, 40, 135–36, 147, 162, 231. In 1830, Istanbul's houses were painted red, yellow, or blue, "colors of privilege" denied to non-Muslims whose gray or dark-brown houses matched the color of their shoes, though this rule was previously implemented more severely, see Michaud & Poujoulat, *Correspondance*, vol. 2, 206–09.

in the next section aimed to reduce the impact of fires and, to a lesser degree, of earthquakes that were not as frequent. In doing so, these codes gradually transformed Istanbul's urban landscapes that had initially featured more pre-Ottoman masonry residences, including some multistoried mansions. Nevertheless, fires in Byzantine Constantinople imply the prevalence of timber in ordinary housing. Due to internal transformations since late antiquity, along with sieges by Latin crusaders and Muslim armies, the sacked Byzantine capital inherited by the Ottomans hardly conformed to Roman norms of urbanism in its irregular streetscapes, interspersed with agricultural lands.

A survey of Istanbul made in December 1455, two-and-a-half years after the Ottoman takeover, reveals that houses were mostly "in ruins or on the way to ruination". Already dominated by one or two stories, only a handful of residences are defined as "sumptuous" (*mükellef*). Yet the intramural city must have encompassed additional monumental pre-Ottoman dwellings, not least since the *Survey's* section on the most developed districts (Perama, Neorion, Hagia Sophia) is lost.⁴⁵ Those pre-Ottoman dwellings likely disappeared with subsequent earthquakes and fires, as implied by a conflagration in 1633 that began in the shop of a ship caulker outside the Cibali Gate, along the Golden Horn. It consumed one-fifth of the city facing the port, including many palaces comprising four- to five-story tall "ancient buildings" (*kadîmî binâlar*).⁴⁶ Open to strong winds, this region was exposed to frequent fires, as discussed below.⁴⁷

3 Constantinople's Conflagrations: A Confluence of Contradictory Risks

In the Ottoman capital, storms and fires often coincided, and, at times, earthquakes amplified the calamity.⁴⁸ The walled city's anti-seismic timber-framed edifices proved more susceptible to fires than did the earthquake-prone

45 İnalçık, *Survey of Istanbul 1455*, ix, 7–8, 471. "Infidel" (*kāfirî*) houses in Mehmed II's waqf documents (1474 onwards) in these areas were mostly two-storied: Kafescioğlu, *Constantinople/Istanbul*, 198–200. But it is unlikely that all multistoried Byzantine and Frankish sumptuous dwellings were registered as *kāfirî*. Although these were first distributed as freeholds and then rented out, Mehmed II subsequently donated some properties with ownership deeds to privileged individuals. Some of these larger houses and palaces (of Sinan Pasha, Çandarlı İbrahim Pasha, and others) with Byzantine sections can be traced in these individuals' waqf documents; see *ibid.*, 200–02.

46 Cezar, "Âfetler", 335.

47 Tekin, "Istanbul in Flames".

48 The 1766 great earthquake was accompanied by fires caused by lightning, and rains led to drowning: Ambraseys & Finkel, *Seismicity of Turkey*, 143–44.

masonry constructions. The two techniques, then, canceled each other out in averting multiple hazards that were often simultaneous, as in Japan, where earthquake-resistant timber dwellings which became the norm gave rise to recurrent fires.⁴⁹ Besides human factors (including accidents, apathy, arson, and the absence of professional fire squads), the mountainous and peninsular ecology of Istanbul fueled uncontrollable fires with its irregular narrow streets and powerful winds that swiftly changed direction.

Imperial decrees announced building codes for the standardized width of streets, as well as the height, roofing, and façades of houses and shops. The “street vision” of these codes only concerned the public realm of streetscapes and the exteriors of buildings, without intervening in their inner spaces. I will cite some notable examples from the tenure of Sinan as chief court architect, between 1539 and 1588.⁵⁰ He and his colleagues mastered the construction of more durable public monuments made of stonemasonry, after having learned lessons from earthquakes in 1509 and later. However, Istanbul’s predominantly timber-framed residential architecture and all-timber shops followed a different trajectory, being more resistant to change and largely entrusted to masons or carpenters, unlike “architected monuments”. The urgency to speed up construction in the face of disasters was one of the reasons for preferring dwellings that used prefabricated and standardized timber components. These houses could be built within a few months, whereas their more expensive masonry counterparts required professional architects and longer periods for completion.⁵¹

Sinan’s attempts to improve the sense of order in Istanbul’s urban fabric can be deduced from construction codes recorded in imperial decrees that show his close collaboration with the city’s kadi and prefect (*şubaşı*), officers representing the judicial and police departments respectively.⁵² The repetition of the same or very similar decrees into the early 18th century, which are cited below, demonstrates a combination of resistance and indifference toward official regulations. One might even conclude that the insurmountable risks of the city tested the very limits of Ottoman imperial power.

The big fire in 1515, during Selim I’s reign (r. 1512–20), is the earliest instance known to me of a sultan visiting the site of a conflagration with his grand vizier and janissary agha. He remorsefully interpreted this fire as a divine punishment

49 Fuyuko, “Fires and Recoveries”.

50 On royal architects and construction codes, Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, chapters 3–5.

51 On other reasons, see Eldem, *Türk Evi*, vol. 1, 161. For Sinan’s supervision of prefabricated timber elements, standardized in cubit measurements: Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 165–66.

52 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 111–15.

for having recently ordered the execution of an innocent statesman-poet, Tacizade Cafer. The conflagration that started at endowed shops of the Atik Ali Pasha mosque consumed the nearby royal Bedestan (multi-domed commercial core for precious goods in the Grand Bazaar), and destroyed about 1000 surrounding edifices. This fire caused inestimable loss to merchants, particularly the Florentines, and to others who had stored luxury goods in the Bedestan for safekeeping, out of worry that the sultan's recent measures to discipline the janissaries might give rise to unrest.⁵³

Just around the time Sinan was appointed chief architect, another major fire broke out at the Zindankapı city gate along the Golden Horn port, near the Jewish neighborhood, on 2 July 1539 (15 Safer 946). Sultan Süleyman's decree addressed to Istanbul's kadi and prefect on that occasion was reissued in 1559; an endnote orders it to be recorded in the judicial register for future kadis. The sultan warns the recipients of his edict to be diligent: "My concern about this matter is supreme, hence there is no possibility for accepting any apologetic excuse!"⁵⁴

The kadi and city prefect were instructed not to allow any houses or shops to abut the inner and outer surfaces of the city wall. Houses and bay windows (*şehnişin*) perched above the city wall were to be strictly forbidden, especially multistorey timber residences of the Jewish population that featured gazebos (*çārṭāk*). Shops adjacent to the outer face of the city wall, in front of which lumberjacks piled wood, were fire hazards causing harm to the Muslims and had to be demolished entirely. Along the outer and inner faces of the city wall, a public avenue (*ṭarīḳ-i ʿāmm*) with a width of 4 cubits was to be created. In currently burnt places, no further houses should be built; moreover, those houses with more than two stories must be forbidden elsewhere. The façades of new houses should feature no corbelled projections (*çukmalar*) over public avenues (implying that they were allowed in alleys), and both floors were to have continuous walls from top to bottom. Further, houses should not feature overhanging eaves (*şaçāk*), but must rather utilize brick sawtooth roof cornices (lit., brick hedgehog: *tuladan kirpi*) "according to custom" (*ʿādet üzre*). Hence, these houses were either masonry or timber-framed constructions. As for shops, their old boundaries had to be preserved, without allowing porches and overhangs (*şoffalar ve pişhünlar*).

53 It can even be speculated that the fire was started by the janissaries: see Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 21 (s. a. 1515), 161–62; Cezar, "Âfetler", 329; Tekindağ, "Yeni Kaynak", 79.

54 *Anonymous Chronicles*, TSMK, Revan 1100 and TSMK, Revan 1101/1, cited in Cezar, "Âfetler", 330. On the reissued 29 June 1559 order (23 Ramadan 966), see Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 58–59.

It is not specified when the “custom” concerning sawtooth cornices was established. While this rule may have been instated with the 1539 decree (reissued in 1559), it more likely seems to allude to earlier building codes formulated under Bayezid II. Charles White reports in 1844 that this sultan had “established a council of architects and placed at its head a *mimar agha*” (chief royal architect), or “President of the Board of Works”. That post was created to “preserve some degree of regularity in the construction of houses, and the laying out of new streets”. This corresponds with what we know of the organization of court architects under Bayezid II.⁵⁵ Moreover, two paved roads along the sea walls mentioned in a c.1486 document may refer to an earlier Byzantine legacy kept alive under Bayezid II and his father.⁵⁶ White adds:

No private abode can, therefore, be erected or rebuilt, without this officer’s sanction, and according to the plan laid down or approved by him—that is, as far as regards height, frontage, aspects, and disposition of *shah nishans* [i.e., *shāhniṣīn*] or other chambers liable to interfere with the privacy of neighbors. Restrictions are also placed on the projection of roofs, and that of water-pipes and gutters.

Unlike neglected police regulations relating to the cleaning and upkeep of public thoroughfares, laws concerning the construction of houses were “imperative and nicely defined”.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, regulations requiring houses “not to exceed thirty feet in height, or to be composed of more than two stories, nor to encroach upon the straight line” of public avenues were evaded. The “*mimar agha* [i.e., *mi’mār āḡā*]” and his subordinates derived “bribes and hush money, given in exchange for permits of departure from rules”. The only clause rigidly adhered to was that “respecting windows overlooking gardens and apartments of neighbours” (likely because this pertained to sharia law). White was fascinated by the architectural outcome of this legal constraint:

Great ingenuity and equal caution are displayed in the construction of *shah nishan*. Care must be taken that the lateral windows do not look into, or obstruct the view from, houses on each side. The schemes employed to avoid these difficulties, and yet to obtain the desired prospect, give rise to

55 White, *Three Years in Constantinople*, 171–72; Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 153–55.

56 Kafescioğlu, *Constantinople/Istanbul*, 32.

57 White, *Three Years in Constantinople*, 171–72.

that extreme irregularity and variety of architectural design observable in all Turkish houses.⁵⁸

Although he was reporting on current practices, White's account was probably based on an oral tradition that traced the origin of urban building codes to Bayezid II's reign.

To return to the 1539 fire during the reign of his grandson, Sultan Süleyman: this blaze erupted in some tar shops near the Baba Cafer prison (a tower of the Byzantine wall along the Golden Horn port). The grand vizier, chief gardener, and agha of janissaries, along with the janissaries, struggled all night long without being able to extinguish it. The conflagration killed numerous locked-up prisoners, and burned neighborhoods, endowed public monuments (including the bathhouse of Süleyman's wife, Hürrem Sultan, in the Jewish quarter), marketplaces, and warehouses outside the sea wall. Vulnerable to fires, warehouses persistently continued to line up the Golden Horn waterfront despite prohibitions against this, as seen in Melchior Lorck's panorama (c.1559–61) and in the *Hünernâme* manuscript's (1584/85) city map (Fig. 8.5).

While Sultan Süleyman was wintering in Edirne after the June 1539 fire, another fire broke out at the Old Palace of Istanbul on 5 February 1540. It destroyed nearly the whole palace, which was rebuilt "even better than before". According to an anonymous chronicle, until then, "whenever the house or shop of a person burned, its owner would be executed (*şalb olunurdi*)". However, "after his [Süleyman's] palace burned, they did not harm anyone, and he returned to Istanbul where he settled in the year 947 [CE 1540/41]".⁵⁹ Capital punishment was abolished, but the sultan continued to be acutely vigilant concerning fires. In December 1544, while he was again wintering in Edirne, Süleyman sent an order for the immediate investigation of a fire that destroyed a house in the Jewish quarter along the Golden Horn. He wanted to know without delay who had burnt the house, and, if anyone was found guilty, the culprit was to be imprisoned.⁶⁰

Judging by anonymous chronicles and travel accounts, fires increased during Süleyman's reign, as did a growing rate of arson.⁶¹ After a 1552 conflagration in Edirne, its kadi was ordered to enforce the construction of masonry shops, for which the royal architect Ali had been sent from Istanbul to teach shop owners how to rebuild their shops in the manner of "those now being

58 Ibid., 171–76.

59 Cited in Cezar, "Âfetler", 331.

60 Boyar & Fleet, *Social History*, 86.

61 Cezar, "Âfetler", 331–34. For arson in Istanbul and Amasya during 1555, see de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, trans. Forster, 57. On 17th-century examples: Cezar, "Âfetler", 335, 342–45.

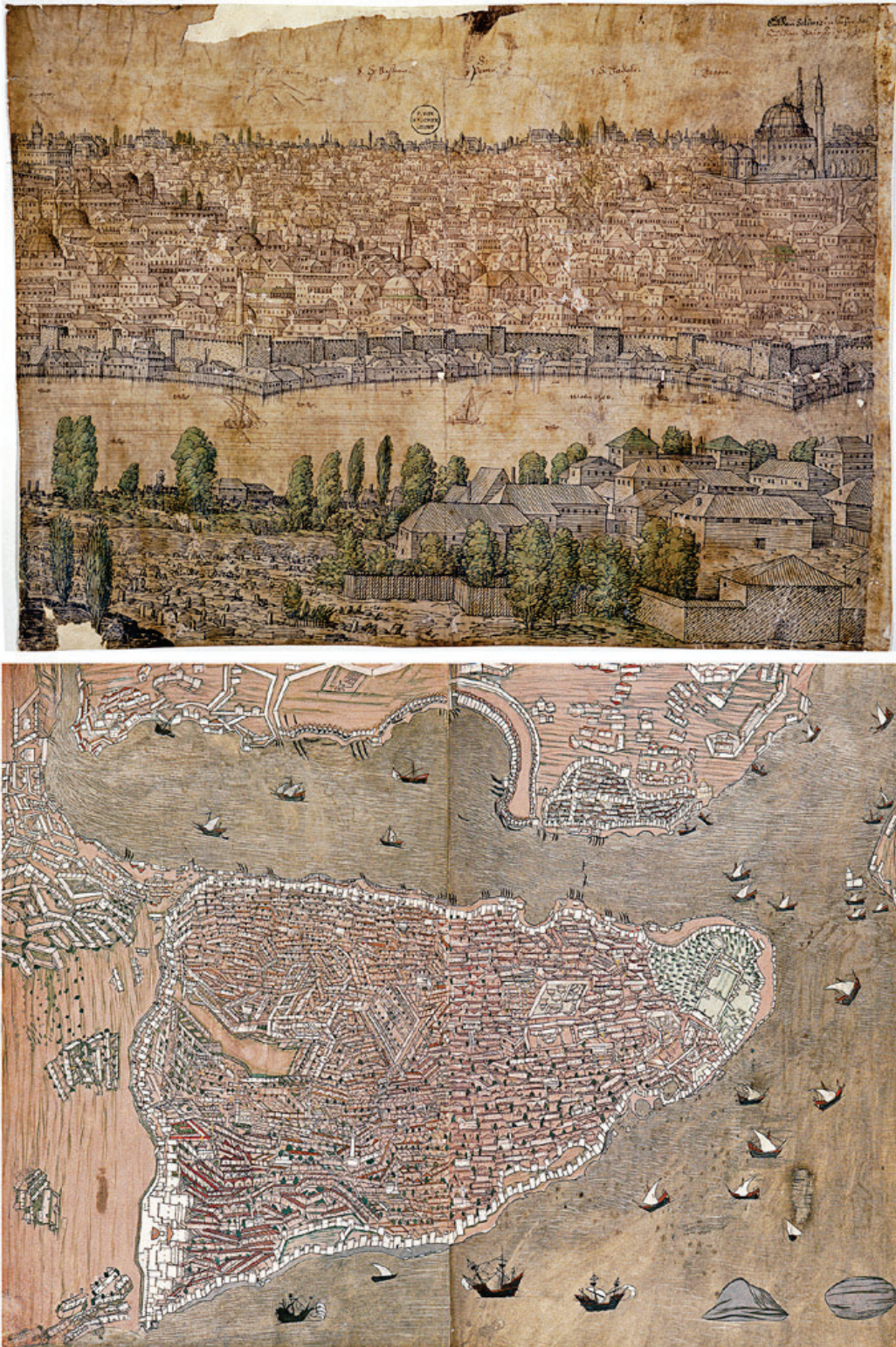


FIGURE 8.5 (a) Melchior Lorck, Constantinople Prospect, leaf 14 with mosque of Selim I, drawn c.1559, reworked c.1560–65, pen and ink with color on paper, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Leiden, Cod. 1758. (b) Anonymous Map of Istanbul, 1584–85, opaque watercolor on paper, Lokman bin Seyyid Hüseyin, *Hünernâme*, TSMK, H. 1523, fol. 158v–159r

built in Istanbul, with bricks and roof tiles (*tuğla ve kiremid*) having sawtooth roof cornices (*saçākları kirpi*). This is a remarkable early modern attempt at educating the public in architectural risk-management techniques.⁶² Another striking decree of Süleyman, addressed on 19 September 1564 (12 Safer 972) to the kadi of Istanbul and the Hagia Sophia waqf administrator, reveals that tenants of endowed wood-board and timber (*tahta ve ağāc*) shops around the city's Bedestan had requested to rebuild these in masonry (*kārgir*) with their own funds as a precaution against fires. However, they would do so only on condition that their sons and daughters should be allowed to inherit the leases of those shops: this stipulation was accepted by the sultan.⁶³ This hints that one of the reasons for ignoring official building codes was the status of endowed shops and houses as non-inheritable state property, for which a rent (*muḳāṭa'a*) was paid to the imperial treasury.⁶⁴

A decree requested by Sinan himself from the next sultan, Selim II (r. 1566–74), commands the kadi of Istanbul to demolish (with the chief architect's help) the dwellings and shops of individuals who created bay windows and gazebos that extended over public avenues. Given to Sinan on 17 May 1568 (20 Zilka'de 975), the decree affirms the validity of a previous order sent to the kadi.⁶⁵ Several months later, a devastating fire broke out on 28 September 1569, extending from the outer wall of the Topkapı Palace to the Rüstem Pasha mosque underneath the Süleymaniye, namely the commercial core of the port along the Golden Horn, called Tahtakale (Taht al-ḳal'a). It was in the same region that the abovementioned 1539 fire began (close to the Baba Cafer prison), as did the 1633 fire. The Venetian Republic's *bailo*, Marcantonio Barbaro (1569–74), sent two dispatches describing this “dreadful spectacle”, which he watched from a window of his residence on a hilltop of Galata (Pera).⁶⁶

The conflagration that began in the Jewish quarter swiftly stretched over an area, which Barbaro marked on a map, now lost, that he sent to Venice. He reports that 20 mosques, 15 synagogues, 12 bathhouses, and an “infinite number” of large palatial residences were destroyed (according to another source,

62 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 114.

63 BOA, MD 6, no. 163, 80.

64 İnalçık, *Survey of Istanbul 1455*, 581–86.

65 The key passage is as follows: *ṭarīḳ-i 'amm üzrine şehnişin ve çārtāk çıkarub ve dükkān yapub yola muzāyāḳa virenler*; see BOA, MD 7, no. 1417, 491; note also Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 114; and Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 59–60.

66 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 114–15. Independently discovered and published in the same year, with full English translation in Rozen & Arbel, “Great Fire in the Metropolis”. The two letters are dated 1 October and 15 October 1569.

the figure was 36,000).⁶⁷ The fire spread rapidly with the fierce wind because “nearly all of the city had been built of timber”, with some walls combining timber and mudbrick mixed with straw (i.e., timber-frame construction), except for mosques, baths, and some palaces of viziers that were built of masonry. Barbaro reckons that the Ottoman capital, which had reached its peak as a great and “most famous” metropolis, now more fully built, populated, and enriched than ever before, would need a long time to recover: “Many years will pass before a place comparable to the one existing before the fire will arise”.

In his second dispatch written after personally examining the burnt area, Barbaro notes that although rebuilding had started in many areas, the fire was not entirely extinguished. Since the affected region, which formed a circle of about 4 miles in circumference, constituted “the most densely populated and richest part of the city, one can say that in truth more than half of Constantinople has burnt down”, and that in the section completely consumed by flames, “a new city is being rebuilt” in accordance with building codes, as ordered by the sultan. Shop owners were made to remove the wooden roofs that covered the exterior of houses and shops and extended across the streets, thereby causing the conflagration to spread (a covered street with such an overhanging roof supported by struts is seen in Lorck’s c.1555–59 drawing, Fig. 8.3a). Another order required that while rebuilding the destroyed area, the streets should be widened by half a cubit (*brazza*) on each side. No house higher than two stories was allowed, and each house should not be taller than 8 feet (*piedi*) because janissaries said that “they cannot demolish higher houses while trying to extinguish fires” (presumably ladders did not reach above that height).⁶⁸

A document I discovered in the Genoa state archive, sent from Pera by Battista Ferraro on 29 October 1569, describes these two-story residences: “The Grand Signor has commanded no house to be erected more than 4 cubits tall in the ground floor and 4 cubits in the upper floor, in total 8 cubits”.⁶⁹ The codes that Barbaro and Ferraro mention must have been established by Sinan. A new double standard, encouraging sawtooth roof cornices, appears in a decree sent to Istanbul’s kadi on 28 March 1570 (20 Şevval 977): “Houses that are going to be built at previously burnt places must be 10-cubits-high if they are constructed with sawtooth roof cornices [lit. hedgehog, *kirpi*], and 8-cubits-high if they lack sawtooth roof cornices.”⁷⁰

67 Cezar, “Âfetler”, 332–33.

68 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 115; Rozen & Arbel, “Great Fire in the Metropolis”, 158.

69 Genoa, Archivio di Stato 2170, no. 301: “El Gran S. a comando che non se alzi le chasa de cetero piu che 4 braza da basso et 4 in solar tutti 8 braza”. In no. 300, dated 15 October 1569, Battista Ferraro reports the 4-mile circuit of the fire with other details.

70 BOA, MD 9, no. 201, 75; Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 115.

Barbaro says the fire grew because Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who was present at the site with all grandees, refused to increase the pay of the janissaries. Since the enraged janissaries could not petition their agha, who was lying sick in bed, they refused to extinguish the fire. The janissary agha who was Sokollu's son-in-law was deposed by the sultan, Sokollu's royal father-in-law.⁷¹ According to the historian Selaniki, the janissaries rejected serving as firefighters in order to fill their pockets, and even the masonry (*kārgīr*) houses of the Jewish population could not withstand the fire.⁷² Among destroyed residences was a monumental stone mansion rented by Venice for its ambassadors, the property of Süleyman's Jewish chief physician Moses Hamon (d. 1567).⁷³ The sultan had allowed him to build this three- to four-story mansion that exceeded the bounds of decorum.⁷⁴

A decree addressed to Sinan on 19 June 1572 (7 Safer 980) shows that the chief architect had complained to Selim II about low-quality houses erected during the flurry of post-conflagration rebuilding by unqualified immigrant builders. The sultan's response reads as follows:

You have sent a petition to my threshold of felicity reporting that some individuals have been coming from Rumelia (Thrace) and other places, and without knowledge of carpentry (*neccāriyye*) and the science of construction (*binā 'ilmi*) have been taking the yardstick into their hands and practicing architecture (*mi'mārlık*) without your information. Since you have reported that the fireplaces (*ocāklar*) of the houses built by these unqualified persons often catch fire and burn, when my decree arrives, I order you to be diligent in this matter ... and forbid such unqualified persons from practicing architecture without your approval.⁷⁵

Less than a month earlier, on 26 May 1572 (13 Muharrem 980), the kadi of Istanbul received an imperial decree outlining new fire precautions: "I have ordered that in the city everyone should keep ready a ladder capable of reaching the top of their house and a large barrel (*fuçl*) filled with water".⁷⁶ The kadi is enjoined to inform city dwellers that "when my janissary servants and other

71 Rozen & Arbel, "Great Fire in the Metropolis", 148–49, 156–58. Cezar, "Âfetler", 332–33; Selaniki, *Tarih*, ed. İpşirli, vol. 1, 76–77.

72 Selaniki, *Tarih*, ed. İpşirli, vol. 1, 76–77.

73 Rozen & Arbel, "Great Fire in the Metropolis", 141–42.

74 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 117.

75 Sent to Sinan on 17 Safer (29 June): Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 115; Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 61; Cezar, "Âfetler", 333.

76 Cezar, "Âfetler", 332–33; Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 60–61.

folk arrive”, they should position their ladders and with their own water supply take great care to ward off the fire, rather than flee.⁷⁷ The kadi must inspect every two to three months the fire-damaged neighborhoods and places near the markets, and arrest those without ladders and barrels and make them pay penalties to the city prefect; then the kadi must write to the sultan explaining how he punished disobedient subjects. Neighborhood communities were thus compelled to engage in fighting fires as a civic duty. A week later, another decree instructed the kadi to appoint a strong chief for the water carriers (*sāka*) and to tell porters to extinguish fires with hooks (*kanca*) and buckets (*gerdel*).⁷⁸

Shortly after, on 25 March 1573 (21 Zilka‘de 980), the kadi and Sinan were commanded to inspect three converted churches belonging to the Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia) endowment: Eski İmaret (Pantepoptes), Kalenderhane (Theotokos Kyriotissa), and Zeyrek (Pantokrator). This was triggered by complaints at the kadi court brought by neighborhood residents. They had requested the removal of the houses that abutted those monuments; the houses had been built on previously empty plots rented out by the endowment. An inspection by the kadi’s regent and the royal architect Mustafa revealed that the Zeyrek mosque’s two windows were blocked by single- and two-story houses built by a woman, who had also transformed the mosque’s three subsidiary domes into a chicken coop and two stables. Likewise, the Eski İmaret’s formerly open space had been rented to a man, who built single- and two-story houses blocking the masjid’s two northern windows, as well as a stable that jammed one of its doors. Another man had constructed houses whose eaves and gutters encroached upon the masjid. The sultan ordered the demolition of those dwellings according to the sharia, and mandated the creation of spaces measuring 5 cubits in width around those monuments.⁷⁹

In all three cases, encroaching structures were removed not only to save threatened monuments as an “antiquarian” enterprise, but also as an urbanistic measure to increase their architectural visibility, improve circulation around them, and eliminate potential fire hazards. These measures would also prove useful during earthquakes, when narrow alleys quickly filled with debris, thus preventing aid and escape. The renovation of the Ayasofya mosque as the future site of Selim II’s mausoleum in 1573 is another example of such urbanistic reasoning. Clusters of abutting houses that had contiguous roofs with overhanging eaves and were fronted by upper galleries featuring wooden pillars, which are seen in the Freshfield album painting (c.1574), posed fire hazards

77 Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 60–61.

78 19 Muharrem 980 [1 June 1572], BOA, MD 19, no. 395, 191.

79 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 113; Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 20.



FIGURE 8.6 The Great Fire of 1660, album painting, mid-17th century, *Memorie Turchesche*, Venice, Biblioteca Museo Civico Correr, Cicogna 1971, fol. 4r (MCCCXLVIII)

and harmed the mosque's leaning structure that was facing imminent collapse (Fig. 8.2a). Following an on-site inspection attended by Selim II, who was joined by a committee of experts and legal scholars headed by Sinan, a report prepared on 22 June 1573 (21 Safer 981) recommended the following: demolishing the houses built of "mud and timber" (*toprakdan ve ağaçdan*) that were carved into the walls, arches, and vaults of Ayasofya; clearing a space 35 cubits in width along both sides of the mosque for constructing buttresses and water channels; and opening a street 3 cubits in width around its madrasa.⁸⁰

The 1569 fire created an opportunity throughout the 1570s to refashion Istanbul's urban fabric, which was accordingly made to conform to a single statute for housing and streets in burnt areas (Fig. 8.5b). In the following century, the number of fires increased exponentially while the imperial court resided in Edirne, an absence that lasted from Mehmed IV's reign (r. 1648–87) until his son Ahmed III was forced by a rebellion to return to the capital in 1703. An album painting depicting the 1660 Istanbul megafire shows townspeople and officers pulling down buildings with hooks (Fig. 8.6). The masonry courtyards of public monuments, including the four-minareted Süleymaniye mosque depicted in the painting, became places of shelter for Muslims and

80 Necipoğlu, *Age of Sinan*, 111–13; Necipoğlu, "Hagia Sophia"; Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda*, 21–24.

non-Muslims alike. But those who gathered with their packed goods inside the Süleymaniye's courtyard perished because its burning minarets "melted away like candles". Fueled by the strong wind, the fire marched like an "invading army", penetrating stone buildings and killing those who sought protection in them; the estimated total number of dead was between 3000 and 5000 people. Ottoman sources interpreted this fire as divine punishment, comparing it to the Last Judgement. The 49-hour blaze during the deadly heat of July felt like doomsday, and those left naked and barefoot suffered from thirst and hunger due to the destruction of bakeries, windmills, and water channels. About two-thirds of the city was ravaged, including its commercial center around the Grand Bazaar.⁸¹

4 Materiality Matters: Masonry versus Timber

The 1660 great fire transformed the city's demographic, social, and spatial fabric.⁸² New decrees banned defective fireplaces and chimneys, and ordered the appointment of nightguards to each neighborhood whose imams and muezzins were to inspect the cleaning of chimneys. Yet no attempt was made to forbid the unsustainable timbered constructions until the innumerable late 17th-century fires decimated Istanbul.⁸³ This is why no pre-18th-century house remains inside the walled city, and even those that survive from the eighteenth century are very few in number. According to the Armenian-Ottoman chronicler Eremya Çelebi Kömürçüyan (d. 1695), who began to write a history of Istanbul's fires in 1648, nearly all the city's buildings were constructed with timber because of its abundance in the nearby forests of İzmit and the southern Black Sea coast, called the "Sea of Trees".⁸⁴ When Eremya asked Muslims unapprovingly why they did not rebuild their burnt houses in masonry (*kārgīr*), his interlocutors replied, "that is not the custom and it would reduce the size of our residence" (i.e., either because of thicker walls or the higher expense involved). He even met people who took pleasure in the burning of their house, saying "this way I will be able to build it according to my taste". Burnt residences were rebuilt again in the same manner according to the latest fashions; they were decorated with novel paintings, and provided with projecting

81 Çabuk, "Kâtipzâde"; Cezar, "Âfetler", 337–42; Eremya Çelebi, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi", trans. Andreasyan 71–73; Yıldız, *1660 İstanbul Yangını*, 21–41.

82 On differing interpretations: Yıldız, *1660 İstanbul Yangını*; Baer, "Great Fire of 1660".

83 On those fires: Cezar, "Âfetler", 342–45; Eremya Çelebi, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi", trans. Andreasyan.

84 Eremya Çelebi, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi", trans. Andreasyan, 60.

bay windows, freestanding kiosks commanding sea views, and grapevine trellises. This pleasure-oriented aesthetics of domestic architecture was limited to the rich, while the poor were unable to rebuild their homes. Due to the rising costs of materials after each fire, some were even forced to emigrate elsewhere. After losing three family residences to rampant fires, and being forced to rent a house for three years in another neighborhood, Eremya was one of those victims.⁸⁵

By the end of the 17th century, decrees enforced firesafe masonry residences and shops. This trend was initiated by the Topkapı Palace's harem which was rebuilt between 1665–1668/69 after a fire perpetrated by a female arsonist destroyed it, and by the Grand Bazaar that had formerly been surrounded with streets featuring timber overhangs or pergolas.⁸⁶ Dated 1696, a decree of Mustafa II (r. 1695–1703) forbade construction using timber on empty plots caused by fires in Galata, as well as in all future buildings of Istanbul. This implies that undamaged buildings with timber components would remain untouched. To be immune from repetitive fires triggered by “houses, shops, and other buildings constructed with planks, wood, and shingles”, new edifices had to be built “like buildings in Aleppo, Damascus, and elsewhere in Anatolia, with stone, lime-mortar, and mud”. This oft-cited edict specifies that “everyone according to their own means” should use these materials in buildings featuring “sawtooth roof cornices, in consultation with construction experts”. The resulting shortage of materials necessitated the increased production of bricks, rooftiles, and lime mortar in 1702.⁸⁷

Ahmed III (r. 1703–30) proved especially vigilant in attempting to compel the construction of stone masonry houses in Istanbul. In 1719 he ordered the kadi and chief royal architect to have burnt-down structures rebuilt in stone masonry (*tāşdan kārğır*), “by no means giving license to” timber shops, bachelors' rooms, and to houses with overhanging eaves and bay windows facing one another. Masonry buildings had to have brick sawtooth roof cornices, they should not exceed two stories, and their bay windows could only project outwards by 18 fingers. The chief architect was to inform carpenters and laborers of these rules, but also to pay his utmost attention to implement them personally. The sultan even threatened him with capital punishment, warning that he will be “executed” (*katl*) if he is negligent, for “no excuse shall be accepted!” The

85 Ibid., 59–60, 73.

86 Kocaaslan, *Harem*, 201–07; Cerasi, “Istanbul 1620–1750”, 481–82.

87 Beginning of Zilka'de 1107: Ahmet Refik, *Hicrî On İkinci Asırda*, 21, 35–36; Cezar, “Âfetler”, 344–45.

building materials of disobedient homeowners, in turn, would be confiscated by the state.⁸⁸

This menacing edict strikingly recalls that of Sultan Süleyman discussed above. Although Ahmed's decree followed one of Istanbul's major earthquakes, it overlooks the seismic resilience of timbered houses, thereby prioritizing the greater danger posed by conflagrations. Later that year, he vehemently ordered Istanbul's kadi, prefect, and chief architect to forbid constructions that abutted city walls. They also had to prohibit the demolition of palaces with vast courtyards and gardens that formerly acted as firebreaks (*harika sedd*), which had been bought by master carpenters and dismantled to build contiguous wooden rental rooms: a practice the sultan banned as "a matter of state and religion".⁸⁹ Ahmed personally oversaw firefighting efforts in 1703, 1706, 1719, and 1721/22.⁹⁰ By then it was "required that the sultan appear at a conflagration regardless of the hour to spur on the firemen's efforts".⁹¹ Initiated in the early 16th century, this tradition became more common after the 1640s.⁹² The practice that endured until the end of the empire gave people a chance to communicate their complaints to their ruler.

Ahmed III informed his chief architect Mehmed in 1725 that Muslims were permitted to build houses up to 12 cubits in height, while the houses of non-Muslims should not exceed 9 cubits.⁹³ Preserving their two-story elevation, the maximum height for houses (12 cubits) had increased since the days of Sinan (10 cubits for those with sawtooth roof cornices, and 8 cubits for those without). Absent from decrees in the age of Sinan, it is unclear when exactly the lower height requirement for non-Muslim dwellings emerged, a rule that was later followed by the discriminatory restriction on the use of bright colors.⁹⁴ The latter rule probably arose when painted timber paneling became fashionable in houses, making the city even more vulnerable to fires, whose frequency increased drastically during the late 18th century.⁹⁵

88 Mid-Şa'ban 1131 [CE 29 June 1719]: Ahmet Refik, *Hicrî On İkinci Asırda*, 66–67.

89 Dated end of Şa'ban 1131 [CE 9 July 1719]: Ahmet Refik, *Hicrî On İkinci Asırda*, 67–68.

90 Cezar, "Âfetler", 344–45, 348–49.

91 Ünver, *Ottoman Baroque*, 134.

92 Eremya Çelebi, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi", trans. Andreasyan, 63–65, 77–78.

93 Dated beginning of Zilka'de 1137: Ahmet Refik, *Hicrî On İkinci Asırda*, 83.

94 See n. 44 above. I thank Ünver Rüstem for the following references. Black or brown houses required for non-Muslim subjects: d'Ohsson, *Tableau général*, 234, writing in 1791. The color restriction rule implied in an Armenian letter dated 1759: Rüstem, *Ottoman Baroque*, 148. Selim III's (r. 1789–1807) decree forbidding Muslims in Bursa from painting their houses blackish-blue because they resembled black-painted houses of non-Muslims: Karataş, "Bursa'daki Uygulamalar", 145.

95 Tekin, "Istanbul in Flames", 90–91.

According to Helmuth von Moltke, the Prussian cartographer-*cum*-military expert who prepared a survey map of Istanbul (1835–37), one-fifth of the intramural city comprised burnt areas. He admits that the perilous timber houses of Istanbul were more comfortable than their damp and chilly masonry counterparts, which were never as sunny, bright, and cheerful. This strongly contrasts with Schweigger's late 16th-century description above, and indicates the subsequent emergence of a taste for more and larger fenestration that was "only feasible in timber construction". But the nearly contiguous and irregularly distributed thousands of unsustainable timber houses within the walled city were ready to "burn like matches".⁹⁶

5 Concluding Remarks

The Great Fire of London in 1666 encouraged the substitution of timber by masonry and "the adoption of strict norms concerning the width of streets and the height of buildings, while the city was rebuilt by private enterprise".⁹⁷ Such urban codes were proposed much earlier in Istanbul, at least since the early 16th century, and they were repeated with considerable conceptual consistency; nevertheless, their actual implementation lagged behind. The passion for timber and timber-frame vernacular architecture reigned supreme, defying the imperial edicts that prohibited it. It has been noted that "the wooden houses of the capital brought death, as well as the pleasures of nature, close to daily life".⁹⁸ Just as important as aesthetic sensibilities and domestic living habits was the preservation of ancient customs (*'ādet-i ḳadīm*) through imperial decrees, and legal practices that protected privacy, property rights, and pious endowments.⁹⁹ Houses were generally rebuilt according to their "previous manner" (*vaz'-i ḳadīm, üslūb-i sābıḳ*): a habitus that resisted radical transformations, without impeding individualized inventiveness.

During the aftermath of major fires, Istanbul's precarious vernacular fabric reconfigured itself around the more permanent foci of socio-religious complexes built of masonry, reborn each time from the ashes like a phoenix. The limited efficacy of the Ottoman administration in implementing its authoritarian municipal interventions became apparent not only in the case of fires, but also of the earthquakes that lay ticking like a time bomb beneath the soil and

96 Moltke, *Türkiye'deki Durum*, trans. Örs, 37, 76–78, 81, 134.

97 Folin & Preti, *Wounded Cities*, 27.

98 Mansel, *Constantinople*, 224 and 166–68 on aesthetic pleasures.

99 Yıldız, *1660 İstanbul Yangını*, 60–63, 236.

seabed. It was as if reconfigurations of the cityscape after each disaster reenacted the ancient prophecy that the imperial metropolis would be doomed to suffer periodic destructions and reconstructions until its final obliteration. These persistent architectural reenactments displayed an evident disregard for the vulnerable city's volatile urban landscapes, thereby bringing myth closer to reality. During cyclical calamities, imaginary and vernacular Istanbul thus became almost interchangeable: one and the same.

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