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ISTANBUL FIRES IN THE 19TH CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS ON ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PATTERN

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Introduction

In 19th century, the advent of industrial technology and imperialism played an important role in economic and sociopolitical changes in Europe **[1]**. Ottoman Empire had executed many social and institutional reforms (Tanzimat Charter) to adapt the Empire to the Western-inspired modernization. Rapid growth in population and urbanization in the 19th century the Ottoman Empire and its capital Istanbul almost paralleled with European capitals. The motives were not the massive industrialization of the city, rather, Istanbul has experienced migration from the Anatolia and Thrace. Increase in the population triggered the density of wooden buildings in residential fabric and Istanbul came across with the fire threat as it never did before **[2].**

Fires became an important phenomenon in Ottoman urban life. Especially in the second half of the 19th century, Istanbul has been struggling with fires rather than social, economical and political events. The main reasons of the ignition of fires were intentional fires, candle, brazier and ignition of chimney soot fires. Istanbul's fires spread rate depended on traditional wooden construction with bay windows (cumba) and large eaves in architecture on a smaller scale, attached buildings with narrow and blind streets in the urban fabric on a larger scale. In addition to the main reasons, deficiency in development of fire departments and extinguishment methods, lack of fire engine and city problems in quantity and distribution of water were caused difficulty in keep of fire under control. On the average of the each year, every district in Istanbul experienced fires. At the end of the 19th century, as a result of the fires; approximately 1/50 part of Istanbul was burnt and it was observed that Istanbul's silhouette and settlement were changed in every 50 years **[3]**.

Research Method

This paper will analyze the 19th century fires effects on Istanbul especially in the "Westernizing" Pera and "obsolete" Suriçi **(Fig. 1)** in terms of urban fabric and built form depended on demographic structure, institutional reforms, and fire and insurance maps. Two fires are selected as case studies since crucial decisions, both in administrative and urban patterns, were made afterwards: Hocapaşa Fire in 1865 in Aksaray, and Pera Fire in 1870.
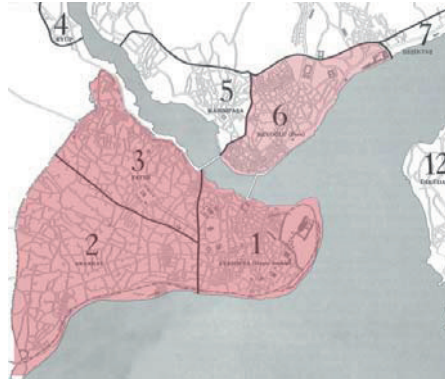
Fig. 1: The map of Istanbul in 1857 (Çelik, 1993)

Discussion

The research will focus on understanding how the aftermath of the fires were handled in these two counter-districts. The demographic overview of Pera in the nineteenth century presents us a noteworthy remark on how Pera and the neighbor quarters such as Galata and Tophane differentiate from the other parts of Istanbul.**(Fig. 2)** It should be noted that there had been a division among nations as such: the Ottoman people (*tebaa*) – including Orthodox Greeks, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Armenians, Latins and Bulgarians- and the foreigners – whether they are Muslims or not. According to the census in 1885, the percentage of the population distribution in Istanbul in general was this way: Muslim 44,06%, non-Muslim Ottoman 41,56%, and the foreigners 14,74%. On the other hand, this situation turns upside down in the total of Pera, Galata and Tophane in the very same census: the foreigners 47%, non-Muslim Ottoman 32%, and Muslim 21% **[2].** Though, there was a significant settling of Muslims nearby Galata and Pera after the removal of the palace from Topkapı to Dolmabahçe. However, "the other side" Galata had always been the district of non-Muslims and foreigners since the conquest of Istanbul by Ottomans. Suriçi, on the other hand, is the area inside the fortification walls of Byzantine Empire and consists of three districts: Ayasofya, Fatih, and Aksaray. **(Fig. 3)** According to the same census in 1885, the population of Suriçi was dominated by Muslims, followed by Greeks, Armenians, and Jews.

The modernization attempts of the urban structure were first materialized in the municipal model declared in 1857; the city was divided into fourteen districts and the only municipalities that had been established were the 6th (Pera), the 9th (Büyükdere), and the 14th (Princes' Islands). The common characteristics of these three districts were that they were mostly settled by non-Muslim Ottomans and foreigners. One of the concerns of this study is to look for the differing attitudes towards the cultivation of the destructed are areas and precautions for fires in Suriçi and Pera.

Fig.2: Grand Rue de Pera, Beyoğlu (Atatürk Library)　　　Fig. 3: A street from Suriçi

(http://www.azizistanbul.com/birsemt1.jpg)

Conclusion

After the second half of the 19th century, the significant fires caused changes in Pera and Suriçi districts' urban planning and architecture depending on regulations and laws. This research will continue by comparing decisions and regulations on architectural and urban planning through insurance and fire maps. For final remarks, the changes in architecture and in the urban pattern will be observed the degree of the overall modernization and reformation attempts achieved.

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