# THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS OF ISTANBUL

1826-1923

by

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"The Volunteer Firefighters of İstanbul, 1826-1923," a thesis prepared by Barış Taşyakan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree at the Ataturk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University.

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This study explains the various responses developed by the inhabitants of the Ottoman capital during the last hundred years of the empire to the frequent fires they experienced. Being a city comprised of a wooden and dense dwelling pattern and having inadequate water supply systems, İstanbul had been vulnerable to flames throughout the entire Ottoman reign. During the nineteenth century with a rapid population growth, the city witnessed an increase in both the frequency of fires and the attempts, in turn, to alleviate their destructive effects. This study focuses on these attempts displayed on one hand by the government through new administrative bodies constituted during the Tanzimat period, and on the other by the dwellers themselves through volunteer teams established in various İstanbul neighborhoods. The research follows the traces of these organizations mainly in the archival documents but also in contemporary accounts, novels, and travelers' books. The volunteer firefighter teams of neighborhoods appeared after 1826 when the Janissaries, the main institution responsible for containing fires in İstanbul, were abolished, and existed for more than a century along with firefighter teams of official departments and later the military fire brigade. These volunteer firefighters, using a manually operated firepump carried on shoulders all through these years, not only established a profession appealing to many neighborhood young men, but also became subjects of a very different story turning into popular heroic figures, sportsmen, and improvisers of folk literature, through practices having their essence in their fights against fires, yet not only being restricted to the fire scenes.

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Başlık: İstanbul'un Gönüllü Tulumbacıları, 1826-1923

Bu çalışma, imparatorluğun son yüzyılında Osmanlı başkentinin sakinlerinin sıklıkla yaşadıkları yangınlara karşı geliştirdikleri çeşitli tepkileri anlatmaktadır. Ahşap ve sık yerleşim modeli ve yetersiz su dağıtım sistemleriyle İstanbul tüm Osmanlı hakimiyeti süresince yangınlara karşı zayıf olmuştu. Ondokuzuncu yüzyılda hızlı nufüs artışı ile beraber kent hem yangınların sıklıklarında hem de bu yangınların yıkıcı etkilerini azaltma çabalarında artışlara tanıklık etti. Bu çalışma, bir yandan Tanzimat döneminde meydana getirilen yeni idari organlar yoluyla devlet eliyle, diğer yandan çeşitli İstanbul mahallelerinde oluşturulan gönüllü takımlar yoluyla kent sakinleri eliyle sürdürülen bu çabalara odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma esas olarak arşiv belgelerinde, ayrıca dönemin anlatılarında, romanlarda ve gezginlerin kitaplarında bu organizasyonların izlerini sürmektedir. Mahallelerdeki gönüllü tulumbacı takımları İstanbul'da yangınları söndürmekle sorumlu asıl kurum olan Yeniçeriliğin kaldırıldığı 1826 yılı sonrasında ortaya çıktı ve resmi devlet dairelerinin tulumba takımları ve daha sonra da askeri itfaiye ile yanyana bir yüzyıldan fazla bir süre yaşadı. Tüm bu yıllar boyunca, omuzda taşınan ve kol gücü ile çalışan bir tulumbayı kullanan bu tulumbacılar, sadece pek çok mahalle gencini kendine çeken bir meslek yaratmakla kalmadılar, aynı zamanda özünü yangınlarla yaptıkları mücadeleden alan ama sadece yangın alanlarıyla sınırlı olmayan pratikler yoluyla popüler kahraman karakterlere, sporculara, ve doğaçlama halk edebiyatı icracılarına dönüşerek çok farklı bir hikayenin özneleri haline geldiler.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

It is the popular history writers who introduce us to one of the now defunct institutions of the Ottoman era in İstanbul, to the volunteer firefighters called *tulumbacı*s.[1] These firepumpers had nearly disappeared from the city by the 1930s with their organizations gradually attenuating following the effective precautions of the republican municipality with respect to fires. This study follows their existence from the early nineteenth century to the early 1930s in some autobiographical works.[2] They had already become a demonstration object at celebratory ceremonies, as one could observe at the fourteenth anniversary of the establishment of the Municipal Fire Brigade in 1936.[3]

The popular history writers who left quite a sum of articles regarding the firepumpers, produced their works predominantly in the post-republican period. Through articles in magazines, columns in daily newspapers and novels they narrated their own reality regarding the Ottoman world. Magazines of popular history

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[1] For the term *tulumbacı* I will use the word "firepumper" in English as it is a literal translation meaning "a firepump operator." I prefer to use "fireman" and "fire brigade" in the case of the modern firefighting organization of the later nineteenth century. Last, I use the term "firefighter" for more general implications pointing to members of all these organizations taking part in the extinguishing of fires.

[2] See for example Eli Şaul, *Balat'tan Bat-yam'a*, ed. Rıfat N. Bali and Birsen Talay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), pp. 41-42. I am grateful to Mehmet Evren Dinçer for this reference.

[3] "İtfaiyenin Ondördüncü Yıldönümü Münasebetiyle Yapılan Tören," *İstanbul Belediye Mecmuası*, no. 143-144, July-August (1936).

published intensively in the 1940s and 50s are a distinguished source for their purposes. Among the most known were *Resimli Tarih Mecmuası* (Illustrated History Magazine), *Tarih Hazinesi* (Treasure of History), *Yeni Tarih* (New History), *Tarih Dünyası* (World of History), and *Tarih Coğrafya Dünyası* (World of History and Geography). Many of these magazines were illustrated and printed in color works.

Among the writers in these magazines were Reşad Ekrem Koçu, Sermet Muhtar Alus, Refi Cevad Ulunay, and Ercümend Ekrem Talu, writers who produced works specifically about the *tulumbacı*s. It should be emphasized that the locale of their stories is predominantly İstanbul. Life outside İstanbul was irrelevant to them. They told their readers about the daily life in the capital during the last years of the empire. It was a period to which they were eyewitnesses and this makes their observations more valuable.

Their stories have the mood of "those good old days" in them, but the interesting part is not their being subjective in their narration. There are times that they take an objective look and display the negative sides, maybe the parts of that then gone life the passing of which they clearly understand to have been normal. It's the anger and bitterness they feel about why no traces remain of the old life and why all has nearly been forgotten. It is a result of this reaction to the loose memory of the public that they attempted to draw a clear picture in a very colorful way of that old daily life.

A work of Ercümend Ekrem Talu called "*Dünden Hatıralar*" (Memories from Yesterday) is an example here that is quite typical of this colorful narration technique.[4] Every two pages of this folio edition is reserved for a legacy of the past;

[4] Ercüment Ekrem Talu, *Dünden Hatıralar* ([Turkey]: Yedigün Neşriyatı, between 1950 and 1956?).

one page for the narration, the other for the illustration. Whatever the institution, the social issue or the daily life component presented in those pages. It's done in a lively, vivid way in an attempt to freshen the moments and make them rise from their graves. The passage in the page dedicated to the *tulumbacı*s describing the alarm of a fire displays a language used certainly for the same purpose:

> The fire would be noticed by the guards inside the above-mentioned towers and they would announce it to the tower chief:
> - Chief! You have a child…And he would ask back:
> - Girl or a boy?...The girl would imply Beyoğlu and the boy, the İstanbul side.
> Thereupon towermen would rush into the streets, with jackets in the color of flames and pikes in their hands, and would first inform the offices related to the security of the city, i.e. the municipality, the office of public security, the police stations, and other official bureaus. They would let out a yell every now and then in the entrance of streets to make the public aware. If in the meantime anyone would ask them:
> - Where is the fire?...they would be answered back with a hard swearing. The ones who knew this would only make their form of address:
> - Good luck! and only then was he able to get the right answer.
> As soon as the towermen yelled fire, an uproar would begin inside the firepumper wards and shoulder-brother coffeehouses[5]

This description of this hectic environment is supported with illustrations and as readers we can not help but experience the moments for ourselves as in an exciting detective story. Other pages of this book are allocated to other social issues of the Ottoman era such as a women's public bath, a circumcision feast (*sünnet düğünü*), Kağıthane, a light comedy (*ortaoyunu*), a public storyteller (*meddah*), a shadow

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[5] (*Yangını yukarıda adları geçen kulelerdeki rasıtlar görür, kule ağasına: - Ağa! Bir çocuğun oldu!... diye haber verirlerdi. O da sorardı: - Kız mı, oğlan mı? Kız Beyoğlu'nu, oğlan İstanbul'u kastederdi. Müteakiben köşklüler dışarıya fırlar, sırtlarında alev rengi ceket, ellerinde kargı olduğu halde koşarak, önce şehrin asayişi ile ilgili makamları, Şehremanetini, Zaptiye kapısını, karakolları vesair resmi devairi haberdar eder, arada bir de sokak başlarında nara atarak halka malumat verirlerdi. Bu sırada köşklüye: - Yangın nerede? sualini soran olursa, en galiz bir küfürle mukabele görürdü. Bunu bilenler hitaplarını sadece: - Uğurola! şeklinde yapar ve ancak o vakit doğru dürüst cevap alabilirlerdi. Köşklü yangını haykırır haykırmaz, tulumbacı koğuşlarında ve omuzdaş kahvehanelerinde bir kaynaşma başgösterirdi*.) Ibid.

show (*karagöz*), etc. The firepumpers are seen as an item in such a list of parts of Ottoman social life that no longer existed. This style of narration is mainly analogous in the novels comprised exclusively of stories about the firepumpers: *Kodaman* (bigwig), *Onikiler* (the Twelves), and *Sayılı Fırtınalar* (of the few boisterous men) which belong to Talu, Alus, and Ulunay, respectively.[6]

In an endeavor to understand where this narration stems from one would have to analyze the sources used by these writers. As was emphasized above, the main source was their own first-hand experiences. They lived through the last years of the Ottoman Empire and saw the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid (r. 1876-1908) and its aftermath. A second source they utilized were the observations of third persons. For instance, in the only exclusive study regarding the firepumpers of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, Reşad Ekrem Koçu uses the memories of a former firepumper who had taken part on various neighborhood firepumper teams.[7] He built his narrative predominantly on this firepumper's stories. However, it should be noted that Koçu also used archival evidence to a certain degree. Another source was autobiographic works from the turn of the century. These provided invaluable information regarding the profession and the daily lives of the İstanbul firepumpers.[8]

One fundamental source providing a deeper look into the daily experiences within the firepumper environment is the fire and firepumper sagas (*yangın*

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[6] Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Onikiler* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999); Ercüment Ekrem Talu, *Kodaman* (İstanbul: Semih Lütfi Matbaa ve Kitap Evi, 1930); Refi Cevad Ulunay, *Sayılı Fırtınalar* (İstanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1994).

[7] Reşat Ekrem Koçu, *Yangın Var!-İstanbul Tulumbacıları: Teşkilâtları, Kıyafetleri, Yaşayışları, En Seçkin Sîmâlarının Portreleri, Türlü Türlü Cilveli Hayat Hikâyeleri ve Edebiyâtı ile İstanbul Yangınları, İstanbul İtfaiyesi* (İstanbul: Ana Yayınevi, 1981).

[8] Abdülaziz Bey *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri: Âdât ve Merâsim-i Kadîme, Tabîrât ve Muamelât-i Kavmiye-i Osmaniye*, ed. Kazım Arısan and Duygu Arısan Günay (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 2000); Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey *Eski Zamanlarda İstanbul Hayatı*, ed. Ali Şükrü Çoruk (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2001); Mehmet Tevfik *İstanbul'da Bir Sene* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991).

*destânları ve tulumbacı destânları*). They were products of oral literature, mostly produced after important events in the lives of firepumpers, again by some of the firepumpers who had directly taken part in the related events.[9] Being in the form of verse, most of them were published, too. Their subject matters include crimes resulting from rivalries and personal conflicts among themselves, firepumpers having been injured or killed during fires, praise of certain firepumper teams, and serious fires described from the time of their start to the time they were extinguished.

One last item to be added to this list of sources is the accounts of foreign travelers. Exactly as Talu reserves a page for firepumpers in a book like "Memories from Yesterday," many travelers visiting the Ottoman capital kept a special section for İstanbul's fires and firepumpers. The wild disorder of the firepumpers at times of a fire, running hither and thither in an unplanned manner and their colorful costumes which could not be taken as uniforms, were parts of a scene which was not difficult for them to identify with the image of the Orient. Most of them arrived in İstanbul from the sea, and when their ships docked at Sirkeci or Galata harbor, the scene with which they were faced with porters, boatmen, colors and turmoil was analogous to the firepumpers. With the frequent fires İstanbul experienced, fires and firepumpers also become items within a list of stories about their İstanbul adventures.[10]

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[9] M.Sabri Koz, "Tulumbacı Destanları," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993);, M.Sabri Koz, "Yangın Destanları," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993).

[10] Judy Acheson, *Judy in Constantinople* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1930), pp. 89-92; Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, *Kırım Harbi Sonrasında İstanbul* (İstanbul: Kervan Kitapçılık, 1977), pp. 126-128; Pierre Loti, *İstanbul 1890*, trans. Galip Baldıran (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 1999), p. 35; Dorina L. Neave, *Twenty-Six Years on the Bosphorus* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1933), pp. 22-23, 85-89; Mary A. Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery: with Excursions in Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1886), pp. 79-80, 95-98, 107-108.

Sometimes they would even describe fires and fire scenes without having seen the fire in person. Edmondo de Amicis's "*Constantinople*" is one such case. Amicis gives an account of the Great Fire of Pera, which had occurred in 1870, four years before he came to İstanbul, from what he had heard and read of this conflagration. He does not conceal this fact of course and informs the reader that he will tell the story of the fire as if he himself has witnessed it, drawing a colorful and dramatic picture of the disaster many pages long.[11]

Taking root from all these sources mentioned above, the narrative that the popular history writers produced regarding the firepumpers helps to constitute a distinct firepumper figure who was something more than a volunteer or part-time firefighter. An important aspect of this quasi-legendary figure opened to the world of street rowdies and roughs. However, the figure of the firepumper was not specific in this respect but a mixture of various elements including layabout crew called corner boys (*külhanbeyi*), called so because they slept over *külhan*s (i.e. boiler rooms under Turkish baths) at night to escape the cold, idle young men who stayed at night in bachelors' rooms (*bekar odaları*), roughneck İstanbul laddies (*bıçkın İstanbul delikanlıları*), and several other persons called such names as *kopuk*, or *küplü*, from the lower classes.

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, one of the leading literary figures of the early republican period describes this figure as follows:

> This dreadful disaster (fire) had generated this strange and refined corner boy figure peculiar to İstanbul, the absence of which we find strange because it reminds us the magic and color of things that will not return again; a figure called *tulumbacı*. How old İstanbul with some of

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[11] Edmondo De Amicis, *Constantinople*, trans. Stephen Parkin (London: Hesperus Classics, 2005), especially the section "Yangın Var" (there's a fire).

its aspects had been a Janissary, the post-*Tanzimat* İstanbul was more or less a corner boy.[12]

An important aspect of the *tulumbacı* figure is displayed in the clothing they were identified with both during the fires and in daily life. Although some of the teams wore uniform-like clothing and other teams belonging to government offices were provided with clothes every three years, by and large the volunteer *tulumbacı*s did not have uniforms with which to be defined. However, in the course of time the undershirts, knee-length pants, flat-heeled shoes, and the waistcoats (*atlet, dizlik, yemeni ve camedan denen yelek*) they wore and the various knives and daggers they carried in a peculiar way helped establish something like a *tulumbacı* look. Reşat Ekrem Koçu's special dictionary for Turkish clothing discloses many aspects of this distinct style.[13]

Another aspect of the *tulumbacı* figure was the special language that is attributed to them. It is again somewhat controversial whether such *tulumbacı* jargon existed, but again one may see this as a mixture of slang expressions used by the corner boys, street rowdies, and roughneck laddies from which the *tulumbacı* figure itself could not be isolated. Abdülaziz Bey, who left a distinguished work on Ottoman customs, manners, and expressions, gathered terms, idioms and sayings as used in the *tulumbacı* environs.[14] Some of these were slang words used today; nevertheless, they were again thought of being an aspect of this heroic figure.

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[12] (*Tulumbacı dediğimiz ve şimdi bize bir daha dönmeyecek şeylerin büyüsü ve rengi ile beraber geldiği için biraz da yokluğunu yadırgadığımız, yalnız İstanbul'a mahsus o çok acaip ve süzme külhanbeyi tipini de bu korkunç âfet [yangın] doğurmuştu. Eski İstanbul nasıl bir tarafı ile yeniçeri ise Tanzimat'tan sonraki İstanbul'un bütün bir tarafı da az çok külhanbey idi.* Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, "Tulumbacılar," in *Yurt Ansiklopedisi: Türkiye, İl İl: Dünü, Bugünü, Yarını* (İstanbul: Anadolu Yayıncılık, 1981), p. 4097.

[13] Reşat Ekrem Koçu, in *Türk Giyim, Kuşam ve Süslenme Sözlüğü* (Ankara: Sümerbank Kültür Yayınları, 1967).

[14] Abdülaziz Bey *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, pp. 442-444.

During the formation of such a quasi-legendary figure the coffeehouses belonging to the neighborhood firepumper teams, called *tulumbacı kahvesi*, and another specific type of coffeehouse called *semâî kahvesi* (i.e. *semâî* coffeehouse; *semâî* is a form special to vocal music) or *çalgılı kahveler* (i.e. coffeehouses offering musical entertainment) where mostly firepumpers gathered are noteworthy. The *tulumbacı kahvesi* was usually located in the neighborhood to which the firepumper team belonged. The chief of the team would sometimes be the owner-manager of the coffeehouse. It was the gathering place of the firepumpers, and the firepump of the team along with other necessary materials would remain there. In many instances there would be a bedroom at the back of the coffeehouse where the bachelor members of the team would sleep. The coffeehouse was the gathering place for the firepumpers before the team rushed to the scene of a fire after an alarm was given.

The *semâî kahvesi* was open temporarily during the month of Ramadan. An old firepumper or someone from the environs would hire a place (usually another coffeehouse) for 30 days and set it up as a coffeehouse with special decorations reminding the visitor that it was a place related to firefighters, where music was played at night and various entertainments were performed. The interesting point is that it became a place for the production of folk literature, where verse literary types such as *ayaklı mâni* (i.e. a type of folk poem with paragrams), and *koşma* (i.e. a type of folk poem written to be sung with musical instruments) were read aloud or produced for the first time by inspiration. Firepumpers who had the courage of their opinions or who had harmonic voices would perform these improvisations and also

the fire and firefighter sagas mentioned above were probably produced and reproduced during these evenings.[15]

As a last point on the *tulumbacı* figure, it has to be emphasized that volunteer firefighting was more or less the show business of the day. First, there were real athletics races held among firepumper teams, which gives evidence of a real and sportive competition between the teams.[16] In addition to these, the neighborhood firepumper teams were in competition with each other and their routine rush to the fire places was a sensational event with spectators lining on the roads watching passionately which team ran best and which would be the first to reach the fire. Probably because of these spectators or arising from former rivalries, brutal fights often broke out between the teams. The fighting habits displayed in these performances combined with the violence inherent in the figure attributed to them made the volunteer firepumpers participants in a criminal environment. So the ethos they shared did not exclude the image of criminal persons, which forced government officials into regular attempts to put volunteer firefighters under order.

The constitution of such a legendary figure has a great deal to do with our way of remembering the past, how we see the bygone days, and how our collective memory works. I have no doubt that a study concentrated on this aspect of the *tulumbacı* reality would reveal many other secrets to our understanding of the Ottoman heritage. But in the absence of or lack of sufficient empirical evidence it is not possible to make absolute comments with respect to the *tulumbacı* reality.

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[15] For the coffeehouses see Salah Birsel, *Kahveler Kitabı* (İstanbul: Nisan Yayınları, 1991); Burçak Evren, *Eski İstanbul'da Kahvehaneler* (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1996). For the folk literature produced in the coffeehouses see Tahir Alangu, *Çalgılı Kahvelerdeki Külhanbey Edebiyatı ve Numuneleri* (İstanbul: Istanbuler Schriften, 1943); Mehmet Halit Bayrı, *İstanbul Folkloru* (İstanbul: A Eser Yayınları, 1972); Osman Cemal Kaygılı, *İstanbul'da Semai Kahveleri ve Meydan Şairleri* (İstanbul: Bürhaneddin Basımevi, 1937).

[16] Emin Âli "Tulumbacılık İstanbul'un En Canlı Sporudur," *Resimli Ay*, no. 4, May (1924).

Hence in this study, I concentrated my research on archival documents in the hope of discovering valuable material that would bring me closer to the life of the firepumpers in the nineteenth century. I worked mainly on post-*Tanzimat* documents and thus the scope of this study is parallel to this periodization. When combined with the knowledge provided to us by the popular history writers and their sources mentioned above, I hope to have gathered a significant amount of information which draws a clearer picture of the firepumpers within a modernizing empire.

My research covers the period starting with the Auspicious Event (*Vaka-i Hayriye*) in 1826 and ending with the constitution of the republic in 1923. These dates are landmarks not only for the firefighting organizations in the Ottoman Empire, but also for the empire itself as a whole. The Auspicious Event is sometimes said to be more influential a date to symbolize the beginning of modernizing reforms than the promulgation of the Gülhane Edict in 1839, popularly known as the *Tanzimat*. Sultan Mahmud II was able to get rid of a strong opponent to his prospective reforms in 1826 and many of the institutional changes were initiated after this date.

It was the same for the firefighting organizations as fighting fires before 1826 was mainly the task of Janissaries and the special firepumper corps inside the Janissary army. With the abolition of the Janissaries, a new organization for firefighters was established and with many changes and new organizations –one of them being the modern military fire brigade established in 1874- until the republican period, the new firepumper teams were responsible for extinguishing the frequent İstanbul fires. In 1923, İstanbul municipality received the sole responsibility of fighting fires with the fire brigade handed over from the army.

In the course of these hundred years one can trace the development of the part-time profession of firefighting with its roots in the Janissary tradition and its doors open to the full-time firemen of the modern fire brigade. In this context, I argue in my study that firepumpers were neither heroes nor criminals, but only the subjects of a developing profession with its many difficulties, and in turn with some material and moral remunerations. They sought to become a part of a social group which would both supply them with direct reward and help them perform other basic professions. In the meantime they had to struggle for the advantages of this part-time profession, sometimes as a team, and would get into violent fights. However, most of the time they faced a difficult situation, attending fires frequently but, for example, getting uniforms supplied by the government only once in a three-yearly period. There were times when this three years routine could not be maintained by the government as the financial difficulties of the state were reflected in the smallest costs like this one.

In the second chapter, the framework of this study will be made more definite by following the firefighting units in the Ottoman capital in their organizational aspects. After the summer of 1826 the new firefighting units began to emerge. Here the distinction will be made between the firefighting teams of official departments, which were headed by state officers but the members of which were predominantly part-time firepumpers, and the neighborhood teams which were mainly established on a voluntary basis with their chiefs and members being inhabitants of the corresponding neighborhood. The former were official bodies comprised of part-time working employees mostly receiving rations rather than direct salaries, whereas the latter were voluntary units that had a closer dependence on and control of the responsible government bodies than one would think. The existence of this situation

with two different organizations continued until 1874, when a third was added to the picture: the military fire brigade formed as a regiment as part of the army, creating a new situation which would continue until the republican period.

The third chapter examines the reason for their existence, i.e. the fires of İstanbul. I will introduce the frequency of fires, the reason for the origin of the flames, how fires were discovered, and how they were announced, following an İstanbul fire from its beginning to its end, attempting to discover the events in-between. Firepumpers were the most important link in the chain, but there were other components, like towermen watching the city to discover fires, day and night guards, water carriers, axemen, porters, and boatmen, who fulfilled various tasks in the case of a fire and so they will be introduced into this story.

The fourth chapter delves deeper into their lives as firepumpers and their social statuses. The main professions they had along with firefighting and the struggles they faced will be discussed. As the establishment of the modern fire brigade made their position more questionable they were under constant pressure to renew and reform as "order" was the motto of the nineteenth century Ottoman empire. This struggle was given sometimes at the upper levels of the bureaucracy among the authorized government offices of different firefighting organizations. In addition the links between the *tulumbacı* figure and the real firepumpers of the day, how the figure originated and what factual links existed in its development will be examined.

Lastly, again I would argue that firepumpers corresponded to a considerable function in İstanbul life which did not disappear even after the foundation of the military fire brigade, which owned much more advanced equipments to fight fires. The ordinary firefighter team with only a single manual firepump was an

indispensable firefighting body for a city with narrow and rough streets, and with many wooden houses ready to catch fire at any careless moment.

# CHAPTER 2

# FIREFIGHTING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN CAPITAL: 1826 – 1923

> *In fact, tulumbacı was a creature that resembled the salamander of the mythology which was born from fire and which lived in fire*[17]
>
> *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar*

## The Developments Following the Auspicious Event

The summer of 1826 brought the beginning of major changes in the Ottoman Empire. The determined Sultan Mahmud II had been successful abolishing the age-old military establishment of the Janissaries and had without delay started the organization of the new corps. The imperial decree of June 16, 1826 which abolished the Janissaries also announced the establishment of the new army: *Mu'allem Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediyye* (the Trained Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad). The army, with the newly appointed *Serasker* (Commander-in-Chief), was soon located in the old imperial palace at Beyazıt, which would be known as *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* (office –or headquarters- of the *Serasker*). Meanwhile the old *Bostancı* Corps, who had been responsible for guarding the imperial palaces, were transformed into an elite imperial guard called *Mu'allem Bostânıyân-ı Hâssa* (the Trained Imperial Gardeners) and was located in the Topkapı Palace.[18]

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[17] (*Gerçekte tulumbacı mitolojinin ateşten doğan ve ateşte yaşayan semenderine benzeyen bir mahlûktu.*) Tanpınar, "Tulumbacılar," p. 4097.

[18] Stanford J. and E.K. Shaw Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 23.

The abolition of the Janissaries brought the disbanding of the *Tulumbacı Ocağı* (Firepumper corps) with the *Tulumbacıbaşı* (chief firepumper) being hanged. The firepumps were transferred to the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* along with the task of fighting fires. Before the establishment of specific firefighter units, captains as officers on duty were arranged for the control of firepumps and the soldiers of the new army were used for the task of firefighting. In addition to these firepumps in the center there were also some fire equipment in the Bosphorus castles and forts and in the *karakolhane*s (patrol stations) -which had formerly been Janissary *kolluk*s (police stations)- attached to the *Mansûre* army located in various quarters of the capital.

The introduction of specific units was planned in the meantime and by an imperial decree issued on September 2, 1827 an addendum was made to the code of the Mansûre army, according to which specific personnel were reserved for the maintenance of the fire equipment existing in the above-mentioned locations. According to this regulation, two old soldiers from among the Mansûre officers would be arranged for the management of the organization with monthly salaries of 150 piasters and daily bread and meat as rations[19] and subordinate to them would be two locksmiths (*çilingir*) and two hoseman (*hortumcu*) from among the non-Muslim subjects (*zimmîlerden*) each with monthly salaries of 20 piasters for the regular maintenance of equipment. Others would stay at the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* day and night and attend the fires whenever necessary.[20] It is not clear who these "others" were but as far as Ahmet Lütfi Efendi, the Ottoman court historian responsible for recording the events of the period, reports, following the establishment of firepumper teams

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[19] (*asâkir-i mansûre zâbitlerinden ihrâc olunan ihtiyarlarından iki nefer intihâb ve bilâ-mesned yüzellişer kuruş mâhiyye ve yevmiyye bir çift nân ve yarımşar vukıyye lâhm ta'yînâtı.*) Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, 9 vols. (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1995), vol. 3, p. 1124.

[20] Ibid.

within the Mansûre army the utilization of soldiers was not found proper and the conscription of men from the outside specific for the purpose of firefighting began to be used as a method.[21]

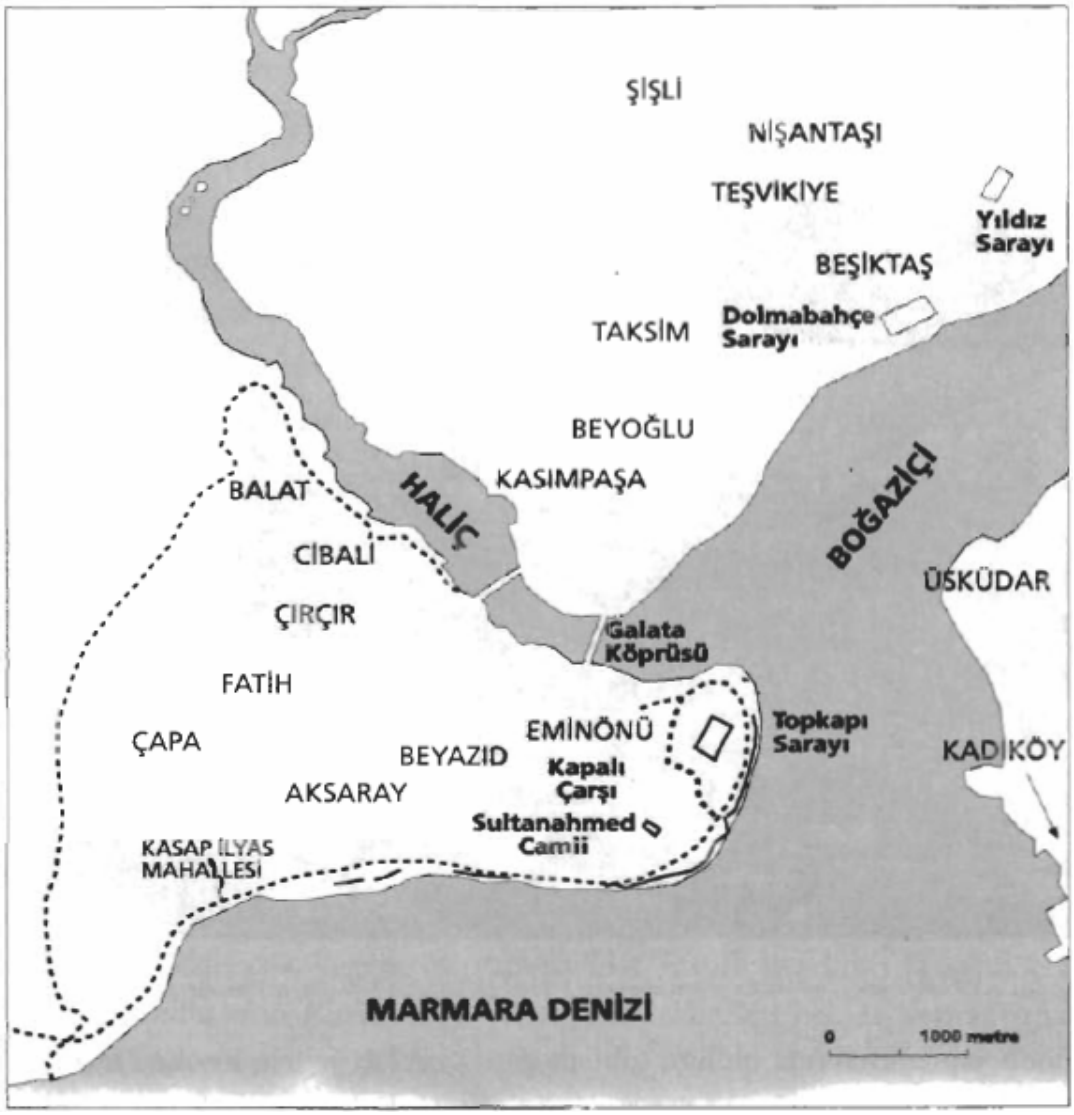



Figure 1: Map of İstanbul, around 1900[22]

[21] (*beher tulumbaya hâricten neferât tahrîrine mübâderet olundu.*) Ahmet Lütfi Efendi *Vakanüvis Ahmet Lütfi Efendi Tarihi*, 8 vols. (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı - Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), vol. 1, p. 185.

[22] Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1998), p. 39.

## Firepumper Units of Official Departments

Although more specific information is not available, about who these new conscripts of firemen were, knowledge exists about what kind of an organization this new unit in the army became in a few decades. From an archival document dating to October 1847 it is understood that there were attempts to regulate all the firepumper organizations of İstanbul. This document reveals that the firepumpers unit of the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* owned six pumps at the time and, according to the regulation planned, the number of personnel would reach 188. As this reorganization implied approximately a 50% increase in the figure, the actual number of personnel may be guessed to have been between 100 - 120. The unit was directed by the *tulumbacıbaşı* Abdi Bey, who held the rank of major and who earned 1350 piasters a month.[23]

This unit was far from adequate for the frequent fires of İstanbul but again it was not the sole fire extinguishing organization at the time. As it had been during the era of Janissaries, the method of holding distinct firefighting units in various army departments was preferred. The most critical issue in the art of firefighting was the speed of intervention in order to prevent the flames from spreading. So, government buildings of importance, special army units and barracks, and palaces had their own firepumps and so their own teams. The above-mentioned document provides invaluable information regarding these different official firefighter units. These teams in the later years began to be regarded as "firepumps of official departments" (*devâ'ir-i resmiyye harîk tulumbaları*). They comprised the firemen of the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî*, of which we have examined the establishment and other units attached to various army and navy departments and offices of the central government bureaucracy.

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[23] "BOA, İ.MSM., 8/151, 1263.Za.04," (14 October 1847).

The following table summarizes the basic knowledge about them. As one can guess from the names, the first eight of the units belonged to various departments of the army and navy. Saying a few words about these departments would have to start with the reforms in the military field starting with the later eighteenth century that culminated in the creation of the Mansûre Army of Mahmud II. Other corps of the army were also modernized from Selim III's times on. On May 8, 1827 Hüsrev Paşa was appointed *Serasker* in place of Ağa Hüseyin, a strong supporter of Mahmud II in the Janissary incident, and started to introduce reforms on the Mansûre army parallel to the French example.[24] The establishment and reformation of the army had to go along with crisis management as the Ottomans passed through the Russian War of 1828-29 and the Egyptian War of 1831-33. Husrev Paşa extended his powers as *Serasker* in the meantime and was named Commander-in-Chief of the Victorious Troops of Muhammad and Protector of İstanbul. His influence extended to other army units and by March 1838, the Mansûre army had covered all the fighting corps and the remaining support corps, factories and warehouses were organized in three groups under his control. First, the imperial guards, the imperial band (*mehter-i hümâyûn*), the army medical school (*tıbhâne-i âmire*), the school of the general staff (*mekteb-i harbiyye*); second, the ordinance department (*tophâne*), the army engineering school (*mühendishâne-i berrî-i hümâyûn*); and third, the department of war supplies. By and large the army was centralized, and its name was changed to *Asâkir-i Muntazama* (the ordered troops). Only the navy remained a separate organization under the command of the grand admiral (*kapudân-ı deryâ*).

[24] For military developments of the time, see Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2, pp. 41-45.

Table 1: Firepumper Units of Official Departments as of October 1847[25]

| | **Name of the Unit** | **# of pumps** | **Planned # of personnel** | **Officer** | **Monthly salary of the officer** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Office of the Commander-in-Chief (*bâb-ı seraskerî*) | 6 | 188 | Abdi Bey | 1,350 piasters |
| **2** | Department of war supplies (*mühimmât-ı harbiyye*) | 4 | 124 | Ahmed Ağa | 400 piasters |
| **3** | Imperial guards (*asâkir-i hâssa-i şâhâne*) | 4 | 124 | Mehmed Ağa | 750 piasters |
| **4** | Selimiye barracks (*selimiye kışlası*) | 2 | 64 | ? | - |
| **5** | Imperial arsenal (*tophâne-i âmire*) | 6 | 188 | ? | - |
| **6** | Imperial mortar corps (*humbarahâne-i âmire*) | 4 | 124 | ? | - |
| **7** | Dockyards (*tersâne-i ma'mûre*) | 5 | 158 | ? | - |
| **8** | Eyüp (*eyyûb el-ensârî*) | 3 | 94 | Edhem Ağa | 400 piasters |
| **9** | Sublime Porte (*bâb-ı âlî*) | 3 | 94 | ? | - |
| **10** | Office of the Ministry of Public Security (*bâb-ı zabtiyye*) | 2 | 64 | ? | - |
| **11** | Superintendency of Market Regulation (*nezâret-i ihtisâb*) | 2 | 64 | ? | - |
| **12** | Office of the field marshal of Üsküdar (*bâb-ı müşîrî der-üsküdar*) | 2 | 64 | ? | - |
| **13** | Mansion of the Galata superintendent (*Galata nâzırı konağı*) | 3 | 98 | ? | - |
| | *Totals (13 different units)* | *46* | *1448 (actual number of total firemen was 971 so 477 new recruits was the plan)* | | |

These developments have been explained as they also imply some kind of central management among those eight firefighting units of the army, at least at the level of the *Serasker*. Because it is said in the document that the responsibility of bringing under order all of the firefighting teams in İstanbul was given to the

[25] This table has been prepared using the information acquired from the archival document "BOA, İ.MSM., 8/151, 1263.Za.04."

*Serasker* and this was a requirement of the sultanic decree.[26] This organizational pattern can also be seen in the appointments of officers for managerial positions in the firepumper units. The units were lead by different officers with military titles and who were called firepump officer (*tulumba me'mûru*), firepump director (*tulumba müdürü*) or chief firepumper (*tulumbacıbaşı*) interchangeably. In 1840, for example, a certain Hacı İbrahim Ağa was appointed to the administration of the firepumps of the barracks of the Imperial Armory (*cebehâne-i âmire*), and the Department of War Supplies and also of gun factories (*tüfenkhâne*), and gunpowder mills (*baruthâne*). His rank was senior captain (*kolağası*).[27] This position is most likely of the one in the second row of Table 1.

Sometimes these officers were transferred from one team to another. In 1840, the firepump officer of the imperial mortar corps, Ömer Ağa, was assigned to be the officer of Imperial Arsenal firepump. His former rank and rations were cut and he was given the rank of senior captain and the rations parallel to that rank.[28] This appointment strengthens my view of a certain level of centrality in administrative practices among these teams. In addition to this, it has to be mentioned that these officers were not only responsible for their teams, but also they had some kind of supervisory duties for other teams proximate to their locations of offices, including volunteer neighborhood firepumpers. For instance, in an appointment in 1841 the responsibilities of İbrahim Ağa, the firepump director of Eyüp, was extended to include the firepumps in the barracks of Rami and a hospital nearby. As his former

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[26] (*iktizâ'-yı irâde-i seniyyeden bulunduğu vechile tulumbacı neferâtının bir taht-ı nizâm ve zabtiyyeye idhâlleri husûsu devletlü serasker paşa hazretlerine havâle olunmuştu.*) "BOA, İ.DH., 22/1061, 1256.Ş.07," (4 October 1840).

[27] Ibid.

[28] "BOA, İ.DH., 17/804, 1256.Ca.14," (14 July 1840).

salary of 100 piasters would not be enough, he was given the rank of senior captain (and the remuneration in line with that). The point is that the scope of his former responsibility included the firepumps near Eyüp (*eyüp civarında olan harîk tulumbaları müdürü*) which probably implies the volunteer firepumper teams proximate to his office.[29]

The same is the case for the chief firepumper of the Imperial Dockyards unit, Raşid Bey, seated at Kasımpaşa, on the Golden Horn. While he had the rank of major, given to him by the grand admiral, in a petition presented in 1847, he demanded the upper rank of lieutenant colonel for the reason that the chief firepumper of the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* Abdi Bey, held that rank. Raşid Bey emphasizes that he had been at his current post for many years (*sinîn-i vâfireden beri*) and he was also responsible for the superintendency of the firepumps of other neighborhoods (*mahallât-ı sâ'ire tulumbalarının nezâretleri*).[30] So, like İbrahim Ağa of Eyüp unit, he was not only responsible for his own team, but also had to supervise nearby teams.

Raşid Bey's claim to an higher rank as possessed by a colleague in a different army unit (and the inquiry of the army as to the ranks and salaries of similar chief firepumpers following this petition) is also worth note as it shows that a *tulumbacıbaşı* position in the military bureaucracy was being created and its holders were more or less of similar proficiency that they could replace one another in different firefighter units.

The *tulumbacıbaşı*s of the non-military units were not in a similar position. A document dated 14 October 1847 shows that the *tulumbacıbaşı*s of the Ministry of

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[29] "BOA, İ.DH., 30/1438, 1256.Za.26," (19 January 1841).

[30] "BOA, İ.DH., 159/8237, 1263.Za.11," (21 October 1847).

Public Security and of the Superintendency of Market Regulation did not yet have salaries and the firepumper unit of the Sublime Porte did not yet have a *tulumbacıbaşı.* It was decided to deliver the former two monthly salaries of 250 piasters each and to assign a *tulumbacıbaşı* with a similar salary to the unit of the Sublime Porte.

As to the personnel of these units less information is available. First, as noted, following the first year of the Auspicious Event the personnel of the *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* unit began to be recruited from outside of the army. The state was determined to get rid of soldiers and firepumpers who had any relation to the Janissaries. Nevertheless, some of the *tulumbacı*s who had been sponsored by a guarantor would have different records (compared to the ones who were dismissed to their provinces) and they would be allowed to stay in the city. A sultanic decree of 1827 stated that until the time when the newly recruited personnel gained competency in firefighting, 30 of the *borucu*s (i.e. user of the pipe) who were decent -probably from among the ones who could provide guarantors- would be held in the teams.[31]

According to one argument, the new recruits were chosen from among the Armenians. Fatma Sel Turhan, who studied the abolition of the Janissaries, claims that "it took place on Thursday, June 22, 1826, two days after the first review of the Asakir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediye. All the former firemen were dismissed and the charging of the Armenians as firemen was decided. Four days later, on June 26, 1826, the Armenians were assembled for these services."[32] In a much later document

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[31] (*mevcûd olan tulumbacıların ehl-i ırz olanlarından otuz nefer borucu tevkîf ile mâ'adâsı tard ve def' kılınmak üzere.*) "BOA, HAT., 290/17358, 1242.Z.29," (24 July 1827).

[32] Fatma Sel Turhan, "The Abolition of the Janissary Army and its Reflections" (M.A., Boğaziçi University, 2001), p. 126, Her source is Journal Des Débats, 15 July 1826, quoted in Howard Reed, "The Destruction of the Janissaries by Mahmud II in June 1826" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1951), p. 296.

another reference to Armenian firemen is made: following the Armenian incidents in the early 1890s during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid, an imperial decree was issued to arrange the employment of Armenian firemen in the Sublime Porte team. It was no more seen as appropriate to employ them as firemen in the said team so they would be scattered to "here and there" and employed in other possible positions. What interests us here is that the Sublime Porte firepumper team had a firemen composition of Kurds and Armenians, each of whom made up half of the total number of 200 personnel. It is indicated that this was a long established practice.[33] It seems that the argument which supports the recruitment of Armenian firemen after 1826 is not a groundless one.

Whatever the case regarding the Armenians, it was a natural application of the nineteenth century Ottoman governments to employ non-Muslims in various services provided by the state. More evidence with respect to this, which gives considerable information as to the origins of firemen on the official department teams, reveals that approximately two-thirds of all the firemen appearing in Table 1 were non-Muslims. This is evident from the budget allocation with respect to the teams of the official departments: one of the items in this budget was the *cizye* tax provisions (i.e. poll tax: a tax specific for non-Muslims) for the firemen. It is understood that an approximate total of 18,000 piasters were reserved for the costs of *cizye* documents related to 616 firemen -30 piasters is indicated for each- who were employed in 13 of the units shown in Table 1. The largest portion was for *bâb-ı âlî*, *bâb-ı seraskerî,* and *mühimmât-ı harbiyye,* which had 320 such personnel.[34] It is

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[33] (*bâb-ı âlîde ikiyüz nefer tulumbacı müstahdem olup bunların mansıfı Kürd mansıfı Ermeni olması öteden beri ittihâz olunan te'âmül îcâbından bulunduğu.*) "BOA, İ.HUS., 42/1313 R-03, 1313.R.11," (1 October 1895).

[34] "BOA, İ.MSM., 8/151, 1263.Za.04."

understood that this was done as a privilege in return for the services of these men who did not receive any official salary.

This leads us to consider the remunerations that the firemen of the official departments in the early Tanzimat period received. First of all, they did not receive monthly salaries as some of the *tulumbacıbaşı*s did. Second, each unit received different rations; there was no coherent application of remunerations among the 13 departments. All of the personnel were provided with clothes. These were given once in three years. It is not clear if these clothes were anything like uniforms, but they were at least produced by way of a wholesale order and, unlike the neighborhood firepumpers who were deprived of this facility, the firemen of the official departments had similar clothes to wear. But again, one should keep in mind the characteristics of the service they provided which certainly would not allow a set of clothes to last for two consecutive fires. In addition to that, we know that some of the departments received daily rations, which corresponded to a list of items comprising the exigencies of daily life such as bread, onion, salt, and soup. For their third basic necessity, i.e. shelter, there were wards built inside military barracks where they could stay at nights. It is understood that these wards served as modern day fire stations where, in addition to staying overnight, they kept night watches and their equipment.

In brief, instead of being remunerated with cash salaries, the firepumpers were provided with periodic rations with respect to their basic necessities of living. In return for shelter, clothing and food facilities they were responsible for attending fires; not only fires related to buildings and the venues of their own departments, but all İstanbul fires. One last item of remuneration was the gratuities (*bahşiş*) they received during –and after- these fires. By these gratuities is not meant the tips from

the general public during the fires, which contemporary observers emphasized widely in their narratives. These gratuities were budgeted money that high officers were responsible for allocating during fires. This was apparently an old tradition from the times of the Janissary firemen. There are various archival material referring to these gratuities during the eighteenth century.[35] This tradition evidently continued after 1826 and was probably used as a motivational factor during difficult situations. A document of 1847 displays a yearly *bahşiş* amount of 9,850 piasters in the budget.

The total amount of the budget specifically reserved for the firepumper teams was a yearly amount of 202,938 piasters. This included the above-mentioned costs of clothing and daily rations, the monthly salaries of the *tulumbacıbaşı*s (who received one), *cizye* tax provisions of non-Muslim firemen, *bahşiş* sums and other separate costs (*masârif-i müteferrika*). Whether the technical maintenance costs of firepumps and other equipment was included in this total is not clear. In fact, we are not fully informed about the organizational aspects of the technical staff. There are some clues that maintenance work was administered centrally within a *Tulumba Kârhânesi* (i.e. firepump manufactory) in the Office of the Commander-in-Chief. Gönül Taşman, who wrote her thesis on firepumpers before the Tanzimat period, mentions a director called the *Tulumba Kârhânesi Müdürü* at the top of this manufactory with locksmiths and hosemen under him as technicians. She writes, "They were called firepump laborers (*harîk tulumbaları işçileri*)."[36]

The report of 1847 aimed to achieve coherence among the firepumper units of official departments. The missing positions for *tulumbacıbaşı*s would be filled and

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[35] See for example, "BOA, C.BLD., 111/5504, 1177.Ş.29," (3 March 1764); and "BOA, C.BLD., 56/2789, 1202.R.27," (5 February 1788).

[36] Gönül Taşman, "1719/1720-1839 Yılları Arasında İstanbul İtfaiye Teşkilatı" (Mezuniyet Tezi, İstanbul University, 1963), p. 38.

every one of them would be assigned monthly salaries. The number of personnel for the teams would be raised to projected levels. The report did not include any budgetary provisions for neighborhood firepumper teams, but they had already become a reality of İstanbul life. Their volunteer character saved the government from additional costs, but also produced confusion and disorder both inside fire venues and in daily life. In the report, the government talked about bringing all firefighting organizations under order.

## Neighborhood Firepumper Teams

Neighborhood firepumper teams were voluntary organizations established in various Muslim and non-Muslim quarters of İstanbul. The exact timing for the origins of their occurrence is not known. According to Mustafa Cezar, who presents a detailed chapter about İstanbul fires in his book, claims -without citing any specific source- that neighborhood firefighting teams emerged in the late eighteenth century. He writes that their numbers increased after 1826.[37] According to Ergin, neighborhood firemen sprang up after 1827 in imitation of the Janissary firepumpers and additionally each church began to compose a firefighting team.[38] Both of these arguments signify some connection between these firemen and the Janissaries. This connection, I believe, lies in the way the Janissaries were organized and later became a social institution (for some writers even a social class) which was something much more than a degenerated army.

From roughly the seventeenth century onwards the Janissaries began to lose their strict military character and the Sultan's slave army as they were began to

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[37] Mustafa Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul* (İstanbul: Erol Kerim Aksoy Kültür, Eğitim, Spor ve Sağlık Vakfı, 2002), p. 358.

[38] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1133.

interact with various social groups within a process one might call the *esnaf*ization (*esnaf* means tradesman and/or artisan) of Janissaries, in which the "soldiers" began to mix into the commercial and artisanal elements of Ottoman life.[39] The civilian character of the Janissary world increased until the early nineteenth century when they were abolished. The number holding *esame* (i.e. "slots in the Janissary payroll registers that were valuable convertible assets") also increased when the Janissary *orta*s (messes) began to be involved in various operations: one *orta* was collectively dealing with bread-making, the other *orta* members were butchers. Every *orta* had its own coffeehouse and some of the coffeehouses in İstanbul began to be known as being Janissary gathering places. These people were certainly not plain soldiers. What these former slave soldiers became in fact can be better understood by seeing them classified in three distinct groups: regular soldiers, *esame* holders not under any type of military service, and *taslakçı*s (pretenders) who were not at all paid but who defined themselves with the corps because of the honor, protection and solidarity it provided. This third group is said to have been mostly poor young men who were usually newcomers to İstanbul and who found protection in the Janissary way of living.[40]

It is highly likely that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries these young people around *esnaf* circles (who were living within a Janissary code of honor and configuration) made up some kind of volunteer pumper groups in the neighborhoods to put out fires and they were also called Janissary pumpers. This reality embedded into the social life of the city certainly could not be ended just by

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[39] Cemal Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, no. 1-2 (2007): pp. 113-134.

[40] Cem Behar wrote the story of a similar life in a Istanbul neighborhood in Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul: Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

the abolition of a military group or the banning of a notorious name. In short, the Janissary concept is understood in a broader sense, as having evolved into a social class after the seventeenth century, their legacy in Ottoman daily life can be seen in a more healthy fashion. I think one important aspect of their heritage made itself shown in volunteer firefighting in the nineteenth century.

The earliest archival evidence as to the existence of volunteer firepumpers goes back to 1834 when in a sultanic decree an Armenian was granted permission to become a firefighter on the patriarchate team. The document reveals that the Catholic Armenian Patriarchate, as was the case in other locations, had acquired a firepump and the decree was issued to indicate the conditions and registration related concerns these organizations would be subject to.[41] It is understood that some of the neighborhoods and patriarchates of other *millet*s (i.e. non-Muslim communities) had already acquired firepumps and formed firefighting teams. In this case, the Armenian Artin was assumed to be sponsored by his patriarch as guarantor and so he was allowed to perform the profession decently. This is not the only document regarding such permissions, hence it can be asserted that, at least at the beginning, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate team was formed by the sponsorship of the patriarch and permission of the sultan.[42]

Apparently the volunteer teams of non-Muslim neighborhoods were attached to their churches so each team was called by the name of the corresponding church. The sponsorship of the patriarchate allowed the Ottoman government to transfer the responsibility of control to a central institution. The government did not contribute to

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[41] (*mahall-i sâ'irede olduğu gibi Ermeni Katolik Patrikhânesinde dahî harîk tulumbası tedârik olunmakla tulumbacıların ne gibi şurût ve kayda tâb'i olacaklarına dâ'ir.*) "BOA, C.BLD., 2/92, 1250.M.17," (26 May 1834).

[42] See also "BOA, C.BLD., 106/5296, 1251.M.29," (27 May 1835).

the financing of these organizations. The expenses regarding the equipment, i.e. acquisition and maintenance of the pumps, would be handled by the community, as in the case of the Armenian firepump teams: in an imperial decree aiming to regulate the firepumper teams established by the Armenian community in their churches in their struggle against fires breaking out in Armenian neighborhoods situated in Der-sa'âdet, Üsküdar, and Galata. All of the expenses regarding the pumps would be met by the Armenian community.[43]

This decree also aims to authorize these volunteer teams as recognized and respected organizations which would be allowed to work freely inside fire venues. As the members of the teams were not dressed in uniforms, they were not behaved properly by officers during fires (*bir gûne 'alâmetleri olmadığından harîk mahallerinde me'mûrlar tarafından rencîde ve tekdîr olunmakta*). This time as a precaution two leading members of the teams who were responsible for supervising the team were to be allowed to put on fezzes that carried a mark indicating their authority as supervisors.

In spite of periodic measures as such, the problem of the recognition of volunteer firemen during fires would continue throughout the century. One considerable precaution would have been providing them with uniforms. The government made endeavors on this issue; nevertheless it was unable to go beyond recommendations. In the report of 1847, for example, the preparations for the order of dress suits composed of three pieces specifically designed for volunteers was made, but the cost of 58 piasters for each suit was not approved and it was

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[43] (*ve masârif-i vâkı'ası milletçe kendi taraflarından tesviye ve rü'yet olunmak üzere millet-i merkûme kiliselerinde tulumbalar tanzîm etmiş.*) "BOA, İ.DH., 5/232, 1255.Za.07," (12 January 1840).

recommended that the volunteer teams wear clothes designed as such by bearing the expense themselves.




Figure 2: A firepumper team from the early twentieth century.[44]

The government was perhaps not unfair in this as in a few years after their first establishments the volunteer neighborhood teams had increased in number and by around mid-century they had outnumbered the official teams in terms of personnel levels. As can be seen in Table 2, there were 31 Muslim and 16 non-Muslim quarters with firepumper teams in 1847, which operated with 54 pumps and approximately 1,100 members in total.[45]

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[44] Uğur Göktaş, "Tulumbacılık," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993), p. 303.

[45] The name patrikhane tulumbacıları (i.e. "patriarchate firepumpers) is used for pumps related to non-Muslim millets and mahallât tulumbacıları (i.e. firepumpers of neighborhoods) for the others. In fact teams in both of these categories were operating in corresponding neighborhoods but they were distinguished in this manner at the time. Each team was organized around a firepump hence a pump must be regarded as the basic element of a team. In the report the teams were planned to be composed of 26 members for each pump for both Muslim and non-Muslim units. The planned number of firemen to be reached was thus 1,404, which is 54 (total number of pumps) times 26. Although the actual number of volunteer firemen at that time is unknown to us, it may guessed by suggesting a likeness

Table 2: Volunteer Firepumper Teams as of October 1847[46]

| | **Name of the Neighborhood/church** | **# of pumps** | | **Name of the Neighborhood/church** | **# of pumps** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Koca Mustafa Paşa | 1 | 26 | Tekke Kapusu | 1 |
| 2 | Macuncu | 1 | 27 | Kanlıca Karyesi | 1 |
| 3 | Şehremini | 1 | 28 | Anadolu Hisarı | 1 |
| 4 | Eski Ali Paşa | 1 | 29 | Beykoz Karyesi | 1 |
| 5 | Lütfi Paşa | 1 | 30 | Rumelihisarı | 1 |
| 6 | Küçük Mustafa Paşa | 1 | 31 | Mirgûn | 1 |
| 7 | Cibali Kapusu | 1 | **31** | **Neighborhoods Total** | **32** |
| 8 | Balat | 1 | | | |
| 9 | Eğrikapu | 1 | 1 | Armenian Patriarchate | 2 |
| 10 | Kumkapu | 1 | 2 | Greek Patriarchate | 2 |
| 11 | Aksaray | 1 | 3 | Balat Church | 2 |
| 12 | Lalelide Çukurçeşme | 1 | 4 | Catholicate | 1 |
| 13 | Şehzadebaşı | 1 | 5 | Kumkapı Church | 1 |
| 14 | Horhor | 1 | 6 | Yenikapı Church | 1 |
| 15 | Hatab Kapusu | 1 | 7 | Sulu Monastery | 1 |
| 16 | Yedikule Harici | 1 | 8 | Mirahor Church | 2 |
| 17 | Davutpaşa İskelesi | 1 | 9 | Karagümrük Church | 1 |
| 18 | Silivri Kapusu | 1 | 10 | Selamsız Monastery | 1 |
| 19 | Mevlevihane Kapusu | 1 | 11 | Beşiktaş Monastery | 1 |
| 20 | Davutpaşa Mahkemesi | 1 | 12 | Ortaköy Monastery | 1 |
| 21 | Cerrahpaşa | 1 | 13 | Arnavutköy Monastery | 2 |
| 22 | Edirne Kapusu | 1 | 14 | Köybaşı Monastery | 1 |
| 23 | Küçük Pazar | 1 | 15 | Yeniköy Monastery | 2 |
| 24 | Topkapu | 1 | 16 | Tarabya Monastery | 1 |
| 25 | Kadı Karyesi | 2 | **16** | **Patriarchate total** | **22** |

to official teams which had 21 personnel (i.e. 971/46) per pump in average. This makes an estimated actual number of 1,134, which is 54 times 21.

[46] This table has been prepared using the information acquired from the archival document "BOA, İ.MSM., 8/151, 1263.Za.04."

The table also tells us much about the geographic distribution of the teams. Seventy percent of the teams -24 neighborhood and nine patriarchate teams- existed in old İstanbul, i.e. Der-sa'âdet, as it was widely called at the time. There were only three teams (6%) on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus, i.e. Üsküdar and Kadıköy. There was only one team on the Galata side and the remaining teams (21%) were in various villages along the Bosphorus. This distribution in fact reflects the population settlements of the time. In the first half of the nineteenth century İstanbul had not yet faced rapid population growth. Estimates give 359,000 for 1829,[47] 391,000 for 1844, and only 430,000 for 1856.[48] We know that major increases in population came about in the second half of the century, especially after the Crimean War. Increased foreigner settlements in newly opened quarters on the Galata (Pera) side, the immigration of Muslims intensifying after 1862 from the Balkans and Caucasian lands and the increased attraction of capital with new municipal services would more than double the population, exceeding one million towards the end of the century.

Yet for the period in question it was still in a relatively stable state, congestion mostly existing within the old city. Galata and Pera's population increase and the opening of new neighborhoods towards Şişli and Pangaltı was the story of the post-Crimean war period. But still, only one team might seem absurd at first sight as Galata itself had always been a densely populated area, especially near the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. Again, one should not forget the existence of the three firepumper units of official departments namely the Dockyards, the Arsenal, and the Mansion of the Galata superintendent teams, all located in and around the region. As for Üsküdar and Kadıköy, although they were old quarters, their

[47] Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914): Demografik ve Sosyal Özellikleri* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003), p. 141.

[48] Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p. 241.

population density never could compete with Der-sa'âdet and their percentage in the total İstanbul population was only 12% in 1897.[49] Then again, three teams would not have been enough for the fires occurring at that side and we will observe many volunteer teams of Der-sa'âdet passing the Bosphorus in boats and later in steamships during fires.

The internal organization for the volunteer teams was planned by regarding the firepump as the basic unit for the team. This firepump was the only technology for nearly 150 years of firefighting in the Ottoman Empire after Gerçek Davud Ağa, a French convert to Islam, first introduced it in the 1720s. It was an instrument with a central rectangular container for storing water with two long sticks at both sides for enabling it to be carried by four persons. This firepump, undergoing some improvement by being made lighter, stronger etc., was in use by both Janissaries and thereafter until the establishment of the fire brigade which began to use vehicle-pumps pulled by horses. The hand-firepump was carried to the fire venue by the team on the shoulders of four men, usually running to reach the place as quickly as possible. *Fenerci* (i.e. carrier of a hand-lantern), *borucu* (i.e. user of the pipe) and *hortumcu* (i.e. who deals with the hose) were other task holders on a firepumper team. It was formulated that a firepumper team would have two *reîs*es (i.e. chief) leading the team as first and second chiefs and would be composed of three sub-teams under them each with eight men. These eight men would be composed of one *fenerci*, one *borucu*, two *hortumcu*s and four carriers hence they would haste to the fire venue by taking turns. This would make in total 26 men for each team and the

[49] Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914)*, p. 142.

report recommended to complement the missing numbers, not indicating how this would be accomplished.[50]

Knowledge is scant regarding the results of this 1847 report. But certain changes began after the mid-1840s which affected the administrative status of firefighting organizations in İstanbul. These were mainly related to the creation of modern managerial units regarding the introduction of municipal services in the capital and western type ministries and provincial units regarding the civil management of the empire, replacing the older practices of city administration. A brief overview of these changes will be followed by an analysis of how they were reflected in firefighting.

## Administrative Changes after the Mid-1840s

City administration in the pre-Tanzimat Ottoman empire was mainly the task of *kadı*s (i.e. Muslim judge) operating with the help of a set of officers subordinate to them.[51] As the English translation of the word *kadı* implies, they were supreme judges responsible for judicial affairs. Yet they were much more than judges/prosecutors and had many responsibilities in the field of city administration. Just as implied by a sentence Osman Nuri Ergin used to define them, "*kadı* was the governor, the judge and the mayor all at the same time"[52], their responsibilities ranged from dealing with legal proceedings regarding criminal and civil law to market regulation, guild affairs, controlling construction facilities and providing

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[50] The same number thought of for teams of official departments was 34 as four sub-teams of eight men plus two *reîs*es were projected for them.

[51] For the following references regarding the changes in city administration I used Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, pp. 304-351.

[52] Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, 5 vols. (İstanbul: Arsak Garoyan Matbaası, 1914-22), vol. 1, p. 1327, cited in Zeynep Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti: Değişen İstanbul* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), p. 36.

security. The capital was divided into four *kadılık*s namely İstanbul, Eyüp, Üsküdar, and Galata, often referred to as *Der-sa'âdet ve Bilâd-ı Selâse* (Der-sa'âdet and the three towns.) These four divisions were further divided into quarters (*semt*) and neighborhoods (*mahalle*).[53]

Neighborhoods stood as the smallest unit as an administrative entity. Before the nineteenth century the kadı managed neighborhood affairs through the *imam* (prayer leader), who were not only religious leaders, but also had a say in local matters together with the leading inhabitants. During the reforms of Mahmud II a new position called *muhtar* (neighborhood headman) was constituted in the neighborhood. The first establishment of this institution in the provinces was in 1833, first being in Kastamonu.[54] It is not clear when İstanbul was included, but the chronicler Ahmed Lütfi Efendi, while explaining the events of 1835/1836, speaks of the establishment of the muhtar position: "two esteemed persons among the inhabitants were chosen, in the Muslim neighborhoods as first and second muhtars; and in the non-Muslim neighborhoods as muhtar and steward in Der-sa'âdet and the three towns."[55]

Kadıs also had various assistants in the security issues of the capital. Some were completely subordinate to the kadı, others were of a more autonomous kind. *Subaşı*s (policemen/police chief of the pre-Tanzimat period) were more or less like the municipal police (*belediye zâbıtası*) of the modern period, reporting directly to the kadı. They were in continuous patrolling, during day time responsible for

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[53] Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti*, p. 36.

[54] Musa Çadırcı, "Türkiye'de Muhtarlık Teşkilatının Kurulması Üzerine Bir İnceleme," *Belleten* 34, no. 135, July (1970): p. 412.

[55] (*Dersaâdet ve Bilâd-ı Selâse İslâm mahallâtından evvel ve sâni olarak muteberân-ı ahâlîden iki muhtar ve reâyâ mahallelerinden kâhya ve muhtar namıyla kezâlik ikişer kimse intihâb olunub.*) Ahmet Lütfi Efendi *Vakanüvis Ahmet Lütfi Efendi Tarihi*, vol. 5, p. 872.

superintending the markets, maintenance of the roads and during night time dealing specifically with security issues.[56] *Bostancıbaşı* (the chief gardener) was another security personnel whose main responsibility was to guard imperial palaces and residences, but had additional security tasks related to certain quarters of İstanbul especially outside the old city such as Üsküdar, Eyüp, Bosphorus coasts and the Princes' Islands. He also had duties related to fires where he had to be present with the head of the Janissary corps. Finally there was the *Topçubaşı* (chief cannoneer) engaged in the security of Galata and Pera. The existence of patrol stations in various quarters that were under the control of Mansûre army can be included in this divergent administration with respect to security.

The establishment of the Police Department in 1845 was a move towards a strict central organization. The patrol stations were handed over to this department and the police force was made subordinate to the Field Marshall of the Imperial Arsenal, a position which had been formed in place of *Topçubaşı* in 1832. Before long, in 1846, the Office of the Field Marshall of Public Security (*Zabtiyye Müşîrliği*: its name was changed to and fro between "ministry" and "office of the Field Marshall" in the following years) was established taking the Police Department under its control.

As far as the construction and planning facilities are concerned, the imperial chief architect (*hâssa başmimarı*) and an architect group of 15-70 were in office in the pre-reform period. They were charged with supervising the construction and repair of all government buildings and of all buildings in İstanbul. In 1831, the Department of Imperial Buildings (*Ebniye-i Hâssa Müdürlüğü*) was created in its place. After the establishment of the Ministry of Public Works in 1849, this

[56] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 859.

department, then turned into Deputyship of Buildings (*Ebniye Mu'âvinliği*), was attached to the new ministry.

Finally, the responsibility of the kadıs to supervise and control markets and regulate commerce was executed through *muhtesib*s (sometimes called *ihtisâb ağası*, superintendent of markets). There were four muhtesibs in İstanbul -as there were four kadıs- and under their command were *kul oğlanları* (slave youths) who patrolled the markets and collected the *ihtisâb* tax (market excise tax) in the name of the muhtesip. One might guess that muhtesibs were primarily concerned with the guilds of the period. In 1826, the Ministry of the Superintendency of Markets (*İhtisâb Nezâreti*) was created in their place.

All of these developments represent a transformation related to the administration of İstanbul which stands as a subset of a much larger reform program aimed to modernize the government through western type ministries, councils, commissions and various institutions. This new way of handling state affairs by means of new laws and regulations in every area was in a way the continuation of Sultan Mahmud's reforms by the Tanzimat bureaucratic elite, who had grabbed the administrative incentive after his death in 1839. Yet, not all of the changes could be continued successfully. Most new organizations had to have their names or fields of responsibilities changed or be merged with others within a few years following their establishment.

One considerable move of the Tanzimat bureaucrats towards effective civil administration in the Ottoman provinces was the promulgation of the Provincial Reform Law of 1864 and the revision of the same in 1871. The aim was to create an

"administrative machinery"[57] by defining new administrative units within a rational hierarchy composition and authority distribution. However, İstanbul was excluded in both of these regulations. The newly created Field Marshall of Public Security had assumed the responsibilities of a *vali* (governor) during the years 1846-1866, hence exercised authority related to the civil administration and security issues of the capital. This scope of authority was defined during the creation of the office and the assignment of its first Field Marshall, Hafız Paşa, the former governor of Niş, in 1846 in the official newspaper by the emphasis that "the title of protector of İstanbul (*İstanbul muhafızlığı*) which belonged to the Seraskerate heretofore […] was now given to him […] as the function is related to the affairs of civil administration in accordance with the regulations of governments (*kâ'ide-i düveliyye gereğince umûr-ı mülkiyyeden olduğundan*)."[58]

In 1866 an administrative council (*Meclis-i İdâre-i Livâ-i Zabtiyye*) was established to be engaged in the matters of İstanbul and its annexations. Four years later, a new law related to the "security, civil administration and secular courts of Der-sa'âdet and its annexations (*der-sa'âdet ve mülhakâtı idâre-i zâbıta ve mülkiyye ve mehâkim-i nizâmiyyesine dâ'ir*)" formalized that the Field Marshall of Public Security had gained the title and authority of İstanbul governor. The same law established, under the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, an administrative structure composed of four regional governorates (*mutasarrıflık*): Der-sa'âdet, Beyoğlu, Üsküdar, and Çekmece; eight district governorates (*kaymakamlık*): Fatih, Galata, Adalar, Kartal,

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[57] Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 153.

[58] Takvim-i Vekayi, 18 Safer 1262, no. 297 quoted in Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, pp. 887-888.The civilian character of the position was emphasized but it was still occupied by a field marshall. After some decisions back and forth in the following years the title would be changed for the last time to "ministry" in 1876 and after that time ministers from the ranks of civil administration would be assigned to the position.

Eyüp, Yeniköy, Beykoz, and Çatalca; and finally five directorates (*müdürlük*): Küçükçekmece, Suyolukurası, Terkos, Gebze, and Şile.[59] With all these regulations the Field Marshall of Public Security became the highest officer regarding matters of security and civil administration in the capital. This would be as it is until 1876, the period of the first constitution, and so the Field Marshall of Public Security would use the title of governor until that time.

What interests us here is that the task of dealing with fires and firefighter organizations, formerly a responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, was after its establishment in 1846 delegated to the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği.[60] Could it be regarded as a step towards a further civilizing of the world of firefighting? As far as the official teams are concerned, the personnel were already being recruited from outside of the army, but the officers were from the military ranks and the teams were based in army barracks. In addition, the Field Marshall of Public Security himself was an officer of military rank. Nevertheless, his responsibilities regarding the civil administrative affairs of the capital, at a time when the city municipality was newly established and not active, could imply a certain degree of a tendency to see affairs such as firefighting outside the realm of the military as they were performed in contemporary European cities by quasi-military organizations.

## Firepumper Units under the Control of *Zabtiyye Müşîrliği*

Given the responsibility of fighting fires as of the date of its establishment in 1846, the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği took initiative for the amelioration of firefighting units, regarding both official and volunteer teams. First of all, the report of 1847 mentioned

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[59] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 1500.

[60] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 1094, Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, p. 357.

above was prepared and the current situation of all units, with their personnel, managerial and budgetary issues were laid down. The lack of human resources with respect to each team and remuneration for the chiefs of these teams were emphasized and certain suggestions as to complement these deficiencies and improve the inner organization of the teams were provided.

Nevertheless very little was achieved as to the proposals of the said report. A decree of 1869, approximately a quarter century following the establishment of the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, reveals that efforts to raise the number of personnel had failed and the expenses regarding the units were still a matter of budgetary shortfalls.[61] However, this should not be regarded as something unexpected, although it certainly was a disappointment. One should definitely be aware of the declivity with respect to the empire's financial position when it comes to understanding the monetary inadequacies, especially of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The efforts of Sultan Mahmud II towards the centralization of the administrative power back in the capital and the attenuation of the provincial notables was achieved to a certain degree. But an anticipated consequence of this, the attempt to institute direct taxation in 1840 by means of salaried tax collectors (i.e. *muhassıl*s) appointed from the capital in place of the tax farming method, proved unsuccessful and within a short time tax farming was restored.[62] During Mahmud's time (1808-1839) the empire had not chosen foreign borrowing, but the Mint's continuous reductions of the silver content of the coinage instead reveal that the financial situation was not doing well. Foreign borrowing came during the Crimean War (1853-56) when the empire was unable to meet the war expenses by itself and

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[61] "BOA, İ.ŞD., 17/718, 1286.B.04," (10 October 1869).

[62] Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p. 96.

within a short period several large loans were drawn from the European markets, at increasing interest rates. After many years of difficulties in debt payments the final financial chaos came in 1875, during a period when world markets were also undergoing a serious depression. It was exacerbated by various domestic crises in 1873-75 such as droughts, bad harvests, hard winters, and earthquakes and finally the Porte made an announcement of default on October 1875.[63] Hence, it should be no surprise that in the decree of 1869 the Porte was very careful in allocating its limited resources and the planned reforms for the firefighting units had not been fulfilled.

However, the fires of İstanbul continued and two huge conflagrations of the late 1860s made further improvements in the firefighting field compulsory. The first was the Hocapaşa fire of September 6, 1865, which burned down about 3,000 buildings on the Der-sa'âdet side. It affected such a large area that many new roads and construction projects around Babıali, Divanyolu and Gedikpaşa were made possible. According to Ergin, "the most prosperous and built-up area of İstanbul" were made possible by it. They were projects of a Street Reform Commission (*Islahât-ı Tarîk Komisyonu*) established after this fire. Ergin states that "the great fire of Hocapaşa has brought forth happiness instead of calamity to İstanbul (*İstanbul için felâketten ziyâde sa'âdeti tevlîd etmiştir*)," [64] giving credit to the achievements of this Commission over the empty fields provided by the conflagration. The second of these two huge conflagrations was the Great Fire of Pera (*Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebîri*) of June 5, 1870, which destroyed 65 streets, 163 neighborhoods and over 3,000 buildings (other unofficial estimates asserted differing numbers of destroyed

[63] Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, pp. 301-309.

[64] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1222.

buildings, ranging from 4,000 to 9,000.) 128 people were killed (again a conservative official number) and several were injured.

The social consequences of the fire was also great. There were many unclaimed children with about 30,000 people left homeless.[65] What distinguished this Pera conflagration from the Hocapaşa disaster of five years earlier was that Pera was a place that had a great number of Europeans. All of the European embassies were situated in the area and -together with Galata with its port- it was a venue of foreign commerce where many foreigners and non-Muslim commercial people lived. The press and foreigners pushed strongly for reform.

These two disasters can be regarded as landmarks in the history of fighting fires in İstanbul. Lasting 32 hours, the Hocapaşa fire destroyed a great portion of the İstanbul peninsula all the way from the Golden Horn to the Marmara Sea. This calamity forced the government to bring an effective solution to the fire problem. Above all, before firefighting techniques, materials, and trained personnel were taken care for, it was understood that fire was a consequence of building and road structures, especially in İstanbul. The closely spaced wooden houses and narrow roads were the main reasons for the origin and spread of huge conflagrations. Widening the roads and building stone houses would be the simplest solution, but this had not been possible for İstanbul for centuries. The Hocapaşa fire gave an opportunity to the government and a Street Reform Commission comprised of high government officials with extraordinary authority was established. Between 1866-69, this commission fulfilled a comprehensive program of construction and planning. According to Zeynep Çelik, “the projects completed by the Commission were on a

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[65] Mehmet Altun, "Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebîri: 1870 Büyük Beyoğlu Yangını," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 229, January (2003).

scale not even observed in the empire since the 16th century."[66] A road network of 3,420 meters in total length, wide roads classified under five different widths, a long drainage system and the promotion of building in brick and cement by price incentives were some of the basic achievements of the Commission.[67]

When it comes to the reforms in the organization of firefighting, the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, the main authority responsible for fighting fires, prepared a new structure for official firefighting units and new levels of supervisory personnel were constituted. By the imperial decree of October 10, 1869 mentioned above a Firepumper Commission (*tulumba meclisi*) was established under the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği.[68] A certain Hüseyin Bey, who had been in the profession of fighting fires for 25 years then was brought to the presidency of the Commission and all directors of official departments, with second directors (*müdîr-i sâni*) and newly instituted assistant directors (*müdîr mu'âvini*) under them, were made subordinate to this Commission. From that time on, the Commission was responsible for all matters regarding these units with additional authority over all the volunteer teams in İstanbul.

As can be seen in Table 3, there were more new official departments with firefighting units then compared to the 1847 organization and all the firepump directors of these units were given considerable raises in salaries now that they were being given a larger area of responsibility which included the neighborhoods –and the volunteer teams therein- proximate to their offices.

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[66] (*projelerin boyutları 16. yüzyıldan beri imparatorluk tarihinde görülmemiş çaptaydı*.) Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti*, p. 48.

[67] Ibid., pp. 47-52.

[68] "BOA, İ.ŞD., 17/718, 1286.B.04."

Table 3: New Organization of Official Firefighter Units as of October 1869

| **Firefighter units of official departments (amounts in piasters)** | **Officer** | **Former salary** | **Raise in salary** | **New amount** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The president of the Firepump Commission and directors | | | | |
| Firepump Commission president | Hüseyin Bey | 2,403 | 1,097 | 3,500 |
| Firepump director, Sublime Porte | İsmail Ağa | 326 | 674 | 1,000 |
| Firepump director, Office of the Grand Mufti (*Bâb-ı Fetvâ Penâhî*) | Mustafa Ağa | 166 | 134 | 300 |
| Firepump director, Office of the Commander-in-chief | - | - | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Firepump director, Office of the Treasury of the Sultan (*Hazîne-i Hâssa*) | Mehmed Ağa | 1,682 | 318 | 2,000 |
| Firepump director, Office of the Ministry of Commerce (*Ticârethâne*) | Ahmed Ağa | 333 | 417 | 750 |
| Firepump director, Office of the Ministry of Public Security (*Bâb-ı Zabtiyye*) | Hacı Osman Ağa | 287 | 713 | 1,000 |
| Firepump director, Eyüp | Ahmed Ağa | 559 | 191 | 750 |
| Firepump director, Beyoğlu | Edhem Ağa | 166 | 584 | 750 |
| Firepump director, Üsküdar | Osman Ağa | 450 | 300 | 750 |
| The second directors *(müdîr-i saniler)* | | | | |
| firepump second director, Sublime Porte (responsible for the unit in Department of War Supplies) | Osman Ağa | 553 | 197 | 750 |
| firepump second director, Office of the Commander-in-chief (responsible for the unit in School of the General Staff) | Nazif Ağa | 83 | 217 | 300 |
| firepump second director, Office of the Ministry of Public Security (responsible for Fatih) | Süleyman Ağa | 166 | 134 | 300 |
| firepump second director, Beyoğlu (responsible for Galata) | Hacı Ahmed Ağa | 166 | 134 | 300 |
| The assistant directors *(müdîr mu'âvinleri)* | | | | |
| firepump assistant director, Sublime Porte | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| firepump assistant director, Office of the Commander-in-chief | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| firepump assistant director, Office of the Ministry of Commerce | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| firepump assistant director, Office of the Ministry of Public Security | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| firepump assistant director, Üsküdar | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| firepump assistant director, Beyoğlu | - | - | 250 | 250 |
| TOTAL<br>1 commission president, 5 directors, 4 second directors, 6 assistant directors | | 7,340 | 7,510 | 14,850 |

The second directors under them would then be responsible for their own offices and/or regions, but would remain subordinate to the related director. For instance, the formerly independent unit of the Department of War Supplies and his director were attached to the Sublime Porte unit and the director was made a second director of that unit. Better coordination purposes seem to have been instrumental in these changes. In addition, a position as assistant director was now instituted for some of the official units in an aim to make these new officers go to fires in emergencies when the firepump directors were not available or to stay otherwise on duty in case a second fire broke out. It seems that the importance for immediate intervention had been clearly conceived and large conflagrations were now feared more then ever.

The main novelty in the new regulation was the establishment of the Firepump Commission with an experienced firefighter officer at its head. This institution would exist until the republican period, when all the responsibilities related to fires were given to the İstanbul municipality. Until that time the commission had handled matters relating to the personal rights of employees including, for example, the provision of uniforms for officers and personnel. A document dated March 1875 reveals that the commission approved the delivering of new clothing for the personnel of official units.[69]

The area of responsibility of the commission also reached the volunteer firepumper teams. First of all, if a neighborhood wished to establish a volunteer team in its area, inhabitants had to apply to the commission for permission. In a petition presented to the Beyoğlu regional governorate in 1890, the inhabitants of the four neighborhoods around Tophâne claimed that they had formed a firepumper team

[69] "BOA, ZB., 8/12, 1291.Ni.14," (26 April 1875).

about seven years earlier after applying to the Firepump Commission and obtaining the commission's consent.[70] Also in matters of conflict among different teams the opinion of the commission was of importance. Furthermore, whenever the government wished to convey orders or advice to the personnel of the teams, this would be done through the commission. Hence, the Firepump Commission became an institution of paramount importance in the years following its establishment.

The first president of the commission was an experienced firefighting officer named Hüseyin Bey, asserted to have been in the profession for 25 years. It is highly probable that he was the same Hüseyin assigned to the post of chief firepumper of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief in November 1850 (he had been called Hüseyin "*Ağa*" then) in place of an another Hüseyin Ağa. In the document revealing this information it is said that he was the former public security officer of Galata (*Galata zabtiyye me'mûru*).[71] This would mean that he had been in the profession for 19 years in 1869. But again he must have been quite an old man at that time because only two years later, in January 1872, efforts were made to fire him based on the fact that he was very old and incapable of holding the office (*müsinn ve ihtiyâr ve îfâ-yı me'mûriyete bî-iktidâr olduğundan*).[72] A retired soldier from the army, lieutenant colonel (*kaymakam*) Ali Bey was assigned in his place, but again before long, in November of the same year Hüseyin Bey was restored to office.[73] We can not know the kind of struggle that occurred during this firing and restoration, but it is quite certain that he was an officer of old age and had been formerly the chief firepumper of the office of the Commander-in-Chief unit. The latter is also obvious from the

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[70] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 5/118, 1308.M.26," (11 September 1890).

[71] "BOA, İ.MVL., 189/5703, 1267.M.07," (12 November 1850).

[72] "BOA, İ.DH., 644/44812, 1288.Za.06," (17 January 1872).

[73] "BOA, İ.DH., 659/45869, 1289.N.25," (26 November 1872).

table above as the position of the firepump director of the office of the Commander-in-Chief unit was not filled and that was probably because Hüseyin Bey was in that position beforehand.

A quick review regarding the names of the official departments in the table reveals that after 1847 some units were abolished and other new ones formed. The most outstanding difference is the presence of officers responsible for districts such as Beyoğlu, Eyüp, and Üsküdar. Here we must remember the before mentioned new organization of Zabtiyye Müşîrliği (hence of the city of İstanbul) in 1870 being divided into regional and district governorates and directorates. In that structure Beyoğlu and Üsküdar were formed into regional governorates and Galata, Fatih and Eyüp into district governorates. Thus we can conclude that the 1870 regulation was formed in gradation and the organization of firefighter units in 1869 already reflected some aspects of that structure. The Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, which already had a firepumper unit within its headquarters (*Bâb-ı Zabtiyye* unit), attempted to create local teams parallel to the administrative structure of İstanbul in order to intervene in fires as soon as possible.

The non-existence of the units of the imperial arsenal and of the imperial dockyards in this list is a surprise as they seemed to be two of the most crowded units in the 1847 organization. In the case of the imperial dockyards the unit belonging to that department surely existed in and after 1869. The reason for its absence in the list is most probably its financial independence from the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, as it was attached to an independent army unit which operated under the orders of the grand admiral. Their existence is evident from archival documents and the firefighting unit therein would become a conflicting issue between the grand admiralty and the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği, the details of which will be examined in the following chapters.

The case of the unit in the imperial dockyards was probably similar, but it is only speculation which lacks archival evidence.

The new salaries of the officers also reveal an attempt towards standardization. The increases in the monthly amounts were made intentionally to reach round figures and the three levels of managerial personnel were assigned analogous amounts. The mode of the salaries regarding the assistant directors was 250 piasters, that of the second directors 300, and of the directors 750 piasters, but 1,000 piasters was also a second common figure for the directors. The extraordinary amount of 2,000 piasters for Mehmed Ağa of the unit in the Office of the Treasury of the Sultan stemmed from the fact that he had been in that position for many years now as we see him in the organization of 1847, too, as the chief of the firefighting unit of the imperial guards.

The other high salary belonged to the president of the commission, Hüseyin Bey and his salary of 3,500 piasters also reflects the prominence of the position of presidency together with his own experience as an officer both in the field of firefighting and in the other bureaucratic positions explained above. The least earning director was that of the office of the grand mufti, with 300 piasters. This low salary was a consequence of his clearly stated job description: it is explicit in the document that all the personnel of firefighting units of official departments would attend general İstanbul fires, the only exception being the unit in the office of the grand mufti. That unit would not attend other fires and only kept watch in its own office. The reason for this regulation is not stated, but that office was deemed somehow more important, perhaps related to religious motivations, and the unit guarding it would not be sent to outside fires. Probably that's why the director's salary was lower in this case as he did not attend any fires.

The total yearly budget for the new organization was expected to be 461,900 piasters, including the new salaries of the officers, the rations of the rank and file, and the uniforms supplied on a basis of once every three years.[74] The additional burden in this budget was anticipated to be countervailed by the shoemakers' taxes (*papuşçuluk rüsumu*) which were collected by the Office of the Ministry of Public Security and the income from the grocery store of the penitentiary therein (*Bâb-ı Zabtiyye habshânesi*). But the treasury did not agree on this solution because the shoemakers' taxes were allocated in the central budget and after much correspondence the said taxes seem to have stayed in the central budget. How the additional costs were covered is not known. It is clear that the Zabtiyye Müşîrliği had to live with very tight budgets as to the affairs of the firefighting units.

This budgetary problem is also reflected in the personnel numbers of the units. Although the decree utilized thus far does not reveal any information related to the numbers of personnel on the teams, it is possible to estimate, thanks to the provision of clothing every three years to the firefighters. In March 1875, the uniforms allocated were 691 in number and adding to that number an approximate 150 for the imperial dockyards team and a speculative that much for the arsenal team would give us a figure almost equal to the 971 personnel of 1847.[75] It shows that the anticipated increases in the number of personnel were not achieved and it remained around the same levels for many years long.

Still the reforms attempted in 1869 in the firefighting organization implied an orientation towards a more effectively administered structure. Yet before the government could observe the results, another huge fire sent flames into the skies of

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[74] "BOA, İ.DH., 617/42952, 1287.Ca.15," (13 August 1870).

[75] "BOA, ZB., 8/12, 1291.Ni.14."

the capital. This time it occurred on the Galata side of the Golden Horn where predominantly many of the residences of foreign embassies, European inhabitants of many origins and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects lived. The degree of material losses regarding both human lives and economic life and the after-effects of the disaster in the social life of the region was beyond comparison. The press reported the incident closely and also tracked the developments regarding the facilities of the relief fund (*yardım sandığı*) established by the government, the aid committee formed to gather all the emergency benevolence activities, and the special commission founded to clear out the ruins of the fire and to start reparations.

But the voices raised highest were those of insurance companies. They blamed the firefighting teams which had been very ineffective in coping with the conflagration. They announced that they would increase the insurance premiums for İstanbul buildings by 50% and it was heard that the embassies would deliver a note to the Sublime Porte for the regulation of the firefighters.[76] The total payments of the insurance companies to insurers reached 300,000 liras and they are said to have presented these payment invoices to the Minister of the Interior and demanded amelioration in the firefighting organization.[77] The government could not let it go at rudimentary measures but had to go for a more radical solution. Accordingly, the endeavors for a modern fire brigade were begun.

## The Modern Military Fire Brigade and the Aftermath of the Mid-1870s

The unique character of the Ottoman capital as being vulnerable to fires for many centuries and the two devastating conflagrations of the late 1860s were

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[76] Altun, "Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebiri," p. 34.

[77] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1126.

considerable motivations in arousing a call for a European type fire brigade. However, in order to understand the context in which this serious need occurred we have to consider the developments of the early mid-century as regards the transformation of the Ottoman capital into a city more closely associated with the European world by way of increasing trade and closer political relations and hence the demands of the increasing population for modern municipal services.

This story is closely related to the European economic and political situation following the Vienna Congress of 1815. Having become the first country to industrialize, Britain was producing more goods and at lower costs. As a result of this vantage it was a willing seller but the European market had recently felt the threat of British trade and started to initiate protectionist policies against its industrial goods. That's why Britain began to promote the ideas of free trade around the world.[78] Ivan Berend observes that "free trade became a prerequisite for the country's economic expansion. No other country had such a vested interest in eliminating trade obstacles. Following early attempts in the eighteenth century, … Britain from the 1840s steadily advanced toward free trade."[79] In this context the Near East emerged as a big market for Britain and these lands were mainly within Ottoman territory.

Britain also had political interests in the region as it comprised the shortest routes to India, the Queen's most valuable colony. It could not let these routes be dominated by any strong European power, the first being Russia, as it had well known ambitions over the same region that were under weakening Ottoman

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[78] For Britain's free trade policy and its export-import figures, see Frank Edgar Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform Movement: a Study in Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1826-1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 70.

[79] Ivan T. Berend, *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 11.

sovereignty. Accordingly, Britain's political and economic interests resulted in a century-long policy opposing the partition of the Ottoman Empire and encouraging the Sultan for reforms on fiscal and military aspects. The 1838 Anglo-Ottoman Commercial convention stands as the first serious attempt in this respect and with it came free trade practices in Ottoman lands.

The trade conditions of the 1838 Convention did not remain exclusive for British merchants; in the same year a similar Treaty was made with France and other European states proceeded in the following years. The second half of the nineteenth century became a period in which the Ottoman Empire was transformed into an open economy integrated to the capitalist world system. The economy achieved significant increases in foreign trade with respect to both exports and imports. Şevket Pamuk provides comparative figures regarding Ottoman exports and imports:

Table 4: Comparative Export and Import Figures for the Ottoman Empire

| | 1840 | 1913 |
|---|---|---|
| Ottoman exports | £ 4.7 million | £ 28.4 million |
| Ottoman imports | £ 5.2 million | £ 39.4 million |

These numbers imply a five times increase with current prices in exports, and a six and a half times increase with current prices in imports. The Ottoman Empire in 1913 was realizing exports equal to 14% of its domestic product. The same figure for imports was 19% percent.[80]

The increase in trade with Europe had significant effects on the economic and social conditions of Ottoman cities, primarily the port cities such as İzmir, Beirut,

[80] Şevket Pamuk, "19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Dış Ticareti," in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985).

Salonica, Trabzon and others.[81] The capital was among them with its Galata quarter being one of the leading ports of the empire inhabited mainly by Europeans and non-Muslims. "It was these foreign and non-Muslim merchants and bankers of Galata who had the facilities and European contacts to obtain the bulk of the new commerce."[82] The Galata section of the city became more popular with the Sultan choosing to become a resident with his newly built palace in Dolmabahçe. Thus the opposite side of the Golden Horn, involving the Sultan's palace, foreign embassies and wealthy foreign trade merchants became a venue of prestige with political and cultural influence over the city life.

The developments in the economic field bringing European countries and the Ottoman Empire closer were followed by the tight political relations intensing towards the Crimean War where the Ottomans became allies with Britain, France and Sardinia against Russia. The wartime relations helped increase European settlement. All these boosting effects on the population were supported by the Muslim immigrants coming from the Balkans and Caucasian lands, especially after 1862. The demography of the capital changed significantly and from the end of the war in 1856 until the end of the century the population increased more than two fold, from 430,000 to over 1 million. In 1885, about 60% of the inhabitants of İstanbul had a place of birth outside the city.[83]

We have seen some of the new administrative bodies created to deal with the affairs of a city with such an increasing population. In addition to them, a major leap

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[81] For the effects of increasing trade on Ottoman port cities, see Ç. Keyder, E. Özveren and D. Quataert, "Port Cities in the Ottoman Empire," *Review - Fernand Braudel Center* (1993): pp. 519-558.

[82] Steven Rosenthal, "Foreigners and Municipal Reform in İstanbul: 1855-1865," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 2, April (1980): pp. 227-245.

[83] Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914)*, p. 143.

with respect to the management of the urban matters came with the creation of İstanbul Municipality (*Şehremaneti*) by a *nizâmnâme* (regulation) adopted in June 13, 1855. The model was analogous to the French example, "*préfecture de la ville*",[84] and the former Amasya regional governor Salih Paşa was assigned as the first *Şehremini* (*préfet de la ville*)[85]. With this new office the Ministry of the Superintendency of Markets (*İhtisâb Nezâreti*) was being abolished and a municipal council chosen by the Porte to assist the *Şehremini* was being created.[86]

It was the middle of the Crimean War and it is highly likely that the complaints of the Allies with respect to scarcities in foodstuff and the absence of municipal services in the city was effective motivation for the Ottoman government to institute a municipal body parallel to a European model. The municipality would be responsible for "the procuring of the necessary provisions for the people of Allah of İstanbul, guild and market supervision, the regulation of prices, the cleanliness and embellishment of the city, and the general assurance of the good condition of the streets and bazaars, as well as the collection of taxes and dues to be submitted to the general treasury."[87] This was a similar description of responsibilities as the European municipalities had, but soon this new body proved to be an organization created for the sake of appearances as the prefect and his municipal council was quite inactive.

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[84] Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti*, p. 37.

[85] In fact *Şehremini* was an old title in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Previously, between the years 1453-1831 there had been an officer with the same name but he was far from being a municipal authority. His responsibility was to deal with the buildings belonging to the palace and the government. In many respects he shared the responsibility of these buildings with the imperial chief architect (*hâssa başmimarı*). During the creation of the Department of Imperial Buildings (*Ebniye-i Hâssa Müdürlüğü*) in 1831, the title of *Şehremini* along with the imperial chief architect was abolished and their responsibilities were conveyed to this department.

[86] İlber Ortaylı, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Yerel Yönetim Geleneği* (İstanbul: Hil Yayın, 1985), pp. 119-128.

[87] Rosenthal, "Foreigners and Municipal Reform in İstanbul," pp. 230-231, quoted in Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, pp. 1374-1376.

To bypass this inactivity the government established an advisory body called the *İntizâm-ı Şehir Komisyonu* (Commission for the Regulation of the City) in May 9, 1856. This time the members of the Commission were mainly Europeans and Ottoman non-Muslims. The primary aim was to make use of the experiences of the Ottoman and foreign families of İstanbul who had knowledge of foreign ways of forming and maintaining a municipal commission. This commission and its membership structure directly reflects the rise of the "Europeanized merchant class"[88] as mentioned in analyzing above the result of economic and social changes especially in the Galata section of the city.

The commission fulfilled many projects in its ephemeral existence, but again it was not given the necessary authority (and funds) to maintain the planned projects, which resulted in the commission's presenting a memorandum to the government with advice on how municipal reform should be carried out. This advice was deemed invaluable and in accordance with them, by a legislative draft of the Council of Tanzimat (*meclis-i tanzimat mazbatası ile*) on November 30, 1857, the city of İstanbul was divided into 14 municipal districts and as a pilot organization the 6th district municipality was created in the region comprising Beyoğlu and Galata.[89] The district municipal council organized as a central body to create and lead municipal projects would be headed by the director of the municipality, who had to be a government bureaucrat residing inside the region owning property worth of at least 100,000 piasters. The other 10 members of the council were also large property owning inhabitants of the district and were predominantly non-Muslims and

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[88] Rosenthal, "Foreigners and Municipal Reform in İstanbul," p. 232.

[89] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1311.

foreigners, the latter being included in the council as advisers. These four foreign advisers were from a different nationality each.

The region chosen for the pilot application and the member composition of the district municipal council clearly display the Porte's aim to kill two birds with one stone. First, the government must have aimed to better their diplomatic relations in an environment of post-war cooperation as a member of the Concert of Europe and to transform the appearance of the capital into a European city with modern services initiated in a region that was so much under the observation of European eyes. The employment of non-Muslims in the council could reflect the government's real intentions as to the reforms promised by the Reform Decree of 1856 (i.e. *Islahât Fermanı*), which stated that non-Muslims could be employed in the Ottoman bureaucracy.[90] When it comes to the inclusion of foreigners, their impact was so high that for the correspondence of the council French was accepted as a second official language besides Turkish.

Second, the Porte was hoping to create know-how that could be transferred to other districts of İstanbul. This was achieved to a certain degree as the 6th district municipality carried out many projects like widening the streets, the maintenance of the streets, lighting and cleaning the roads, the collection of rubbish, building water and drainage systems, and the construction of gardens. Nevertheless the dissemination of these services to the whole city needed time and money. Two other municipalities created around the same time were that of Tarabya, created in March 1865, and of Adalar (i.e. Princes' Islands).[91] The characteristic of those districts is their resemblance to Galata as they also were predominantly inhabited by foreigners

[90] Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 195.

[91] Ortaylı, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Yerel Yönetim Geleneği*, pp. 143-155.

and non-Muslims, both being summer residential areas. The regulation of 1868 regarding the municipal administration emphasized the 14 districts and issued the propagation of services to the entire city, but had no practicality again. In addition, the 6th district municipality started to operate not under *Şehremaneti,* but was responsible directly to the grand vizierate. It was not until the Municipal Law (*Der-sa'âdet Belediyye Kanûnu*) of September 25, 1877 that the 6th district lost its privilege, as the city was then reorganized under 20 municipal districts (which would be reduced to 10 in three years time).

All in all, the 6th district municipality operated autonomously for more than 20 years and implemented the initial municipal activities in İstanbul. Its foreign character displays the aim of the government to better adopt to European ways of municipal administration. Efforts were made to repeat its achievements in other districts and hence municipal improvements in İstanbul followed the European models after the Municipal Law of 1877.

The creation of municipal administrations introduced another actor responsible for preventing and fighting fires in İstanbul. For instance, according to the regulation of the 6th district municipality of January 27, 1858, it had the obligation to establish a fire brigade.[92] It was the same for the other districts in the coming years and municipality firepumper teams began to occur. But they also resembled the existing firepumper teams which employed part-time working personnel and only owned manual firepumps as main devices. Frequent İstanbul fires and the two huge conflagrations of Hocapaşa and Pera obliged the government to investigate European examples more closely.

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[92] Ibid., pp. 129-142.

## The Military Fire Brigade

The establishment of the military fire brigade in İstanbul is usually said to have occurred during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1908),[93] who ruled the country for more than 30 years during a relatively stable period politically. The dates of his accession to and deposition from the throne represent considerable landmarks for the history of the empire; the former being the initiation of the first constitutional period in 1876 (yet only an ephemeral situation) and the latter being the Young Turk revolution in 1908 taking the empire into the waters of harsher reforms and later to its end. The period between these two events has been the subject of endless historiographical debates with little widely agreed upon arguments. One could perhaps claim with a hope of coming across fewer objections that his reign was a continuation of the Tanzimat reforms, but now organized by a much more strengthened palace bureaucracy with the sultan exerting a personal impact on every policy compared with the strong Porte bureaucracy of the previous period by which the Tanzimat statesmen had carried out their projects.

The military fire brigade's life span roughly coincided with his time and the culmination of this contemporary institution occurred during his reign. Probably that is why some popular history writers accredit its first establishment to him. Yet as the few booklets on the history of the İstanbul fire brigade[94] and books and articles

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[93] A. Ragıp Akyavaş, *Asitane: Evvel Zaman İçinde İstanbul*, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2004), v. 2, p. 117; Sermet Muhtar Alus, "Eski Yangınlar," *Yeni Tarih Dergisi*, no. 18, June (1958): p. 454; and Talu, *Dünden Hatıralar*.

[94] *İtfaiye Tarihçesi*, (As.Tbb. Matbaası, 1935), p. 4; *İtfaiye (1868-1936)*, (İstanbul: Belediye Basımevi, 1936), p. 6; *İtfaiye Tarihçesi ve İstatistiği (1714-1946)*, (İstanbul: İtfaiye Müdürlüğü, 1946), p. 3.

written by some of the administrators in the fire brigade of the republican period[95] indicate, the foundation of the fire brigade went a few years back to the time of Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) who should be credited for this institution.

Osman Nuri Ergin gives the exact time of the establishment, indicating the *nizâmnâme* regarding the fire brigade dated October 8, 1874 (26 September 1290 of Julian (*Rumi*) calendar). In fact, the first efforts had been initiated immediately after the Great Fire of Pera four years earlier. From the legislative draft of the Council of Ministers regarding this *nizâmnâme*, presented in Ergin's *Mecelle*, it is understood that a special commission organized after the Pera conflagration had already evaluated the necessity of a modern fire brigade and proposed a *nizâmnâme;* however, because for budgetary reasons, the government had sought for less expensive ways, but without any result.[96]

The start was given in 1874. The plan was to set up a fire brigade regiment composed of four battalions, each battalion being placed in one of the four districts that İstanbul was being divided into for this purpose. The first battalion was to be the one in Beşiktaş. The existing firepumper teams would be taken under order and united to form the corps of the regiment under the orders of a colonel. Every battalion would have 32 firepumps (and hence 32 teams) with enough *tulumbacı*s and *baltacı*s (axeman, who uses an axe to bring down buildings to prepare a space to prevent the blaze from further spreading to nearby houses). The total variable expenses was estimated to be 11,818 *kese*s (i.e. purse: one purse was 500 piasters) yearly.

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[95] İhsan, "İstanbul İtfaiyesi: Bidayeti Tesisinden Bugüne Kadar Geçirdiği Safahat," *İstanbul Belediye Mecmuası*, no. 87/15, Teşrinisani (1931): p. 84; Tarık Özavcı, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde İtfaiye* (İstanbul: Belediye Matbaası, 1973).

[96] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1126-1130.

The actual developments regarding the establishment of the corps remain unclear. One document related to the supplying of uniforms to the *tulumbacı*s of official firepumper teams reveals that the formation of the fire brigade was still an ongoing project and it would take more time for it to come into being (*tulumba alayının vücûda gelmesi daha çok vakte muhtâc olub*), hence the teams of the official departments were still in operation and the uniforms were to be distributed to their personnel.[97]

As this happened in April 1875, one may conclude that the regiment had not yet started to operate at that time. According to one assertion the "first battalion began its duties on January 3, 1876 and in the course of its first year extinguished 77 fires, some very serious. It had a staff of 580 men, two large horse-drawn pumps, eight small pumps, a first aid wagon, a water-wagon (with 16 buckets) and a wagon for the engines."[98] No other information to support this, but the timing just fits. The earliest incident we know of the new fire brigade showing up in public was the ceremonial girding of Abdülhamid, which took place on September 7, 1876, a week after his accession. Davison portrays a beautiful ceremony: "The pageantry on September 7 was colorful, as Abdülhamid II on his white charger moved in procession up from the Golden Horn to the mosque of Eyüb between files of guards and of Count Szechenyi's model fire brigade."[99] Taken together, these references imply that 1876 had been a year of duty for the fire brigade with at least one of its battalions having been active.

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[97] "BOA, ZB., 8/12, 1291.Ni.14."

[98] J. Deny, "Tulumbadji," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples* (Leyden: E. J. Brill Ltd., 1934), p. 833.

[99] Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, p. 355.

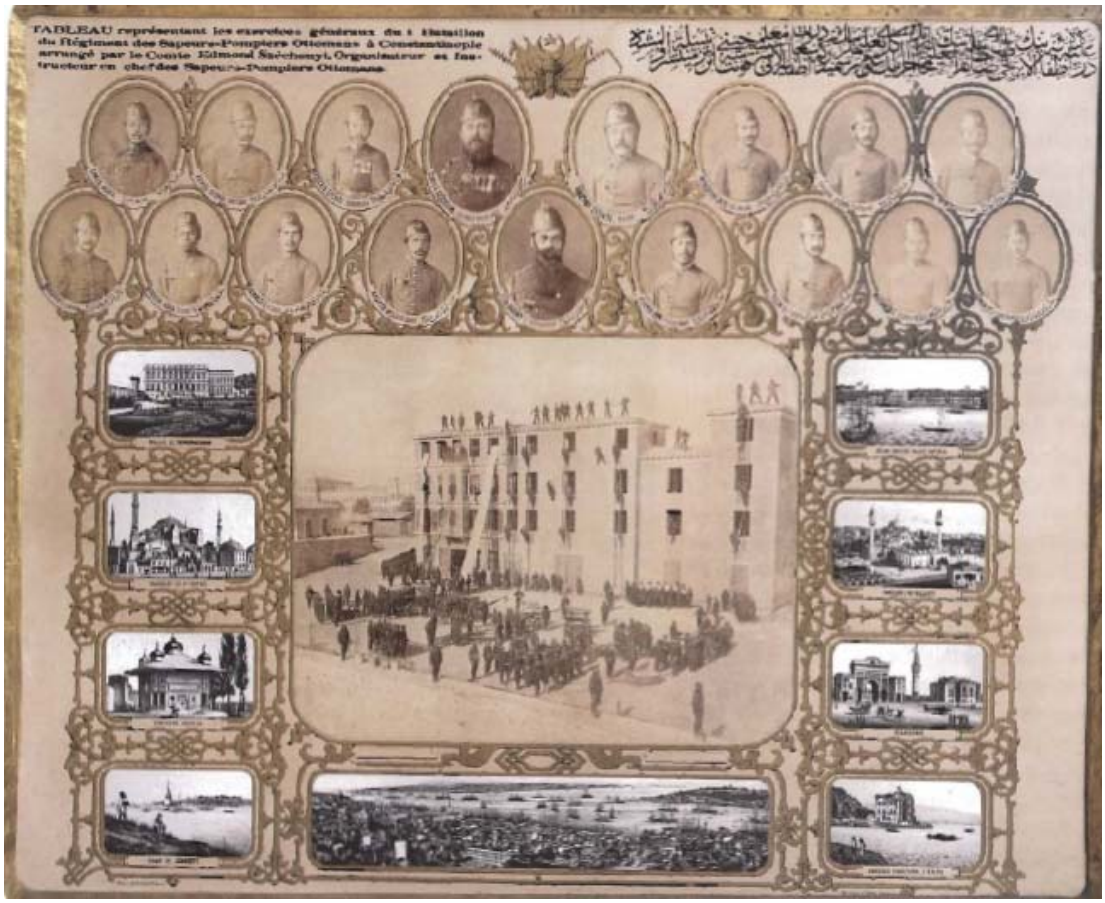



Figure 3: The Military Fire Brigade in Training under the Command of Count Edmond Szechenyi. The portraits on the upper side are those of the fire brigade officers, with Szechenyi fourth from the left on the upper row..[100]

Davison's mention of the Hungarian count brings us to the founder of the corps, Count Edmond Szechenyi, or Ziçini (sometimes Seçeni) Paşa as he was called by the Ottomans, who served as the commander of the regiment until his death in 1922. The Ottomans' utilization of foreign military advisors dates back to the beginning of reforms in the eighteenth century. Hungarian military officers had taken army posts after the incidents of 1849 when they fled from the unsuccessful revolution and took refuge in Ottoman lands. So the Hungarian count neither was the first nor would be the last to be in military service in the Ottoman army. Edmond Szechenyi was born in Bratislava (Pozsony, Hungary) in 1839, the son of Istvan

[100] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, p. 358.

Szechenyi.[101] He came from a leading Hungarian family, many members of which were prominent figures in political or social life. The count is said to have been previously in command of the Budapest Fire Brigade.[102] After he was given the task of organizing a military fire brigade in İstanbul as an instructor officer (*mu'allim*) he was given the rank of *ferik* (general of division) in the Ottoman army.[103] Later in Abdulhamid's reign he had the title of "*aide de camp* to sultan and commander of the general regiment of fire brigades (*yâverân-ı hazret-i şehriyârîlerinden umûm itfâ'iyye alayları kumandanı*)."[104] In an article of *The NewYork Times* in 1908 introducing the Szechenyi family, he is described as the head of the İstanbul branch of the family and it is stated that "his sons and daughters are married into the Turkish families of high rank."[105]

A prominent figure in his family and his profession, the Hungarian count maintained his notability in the Ottoman capital and became a prescriptive element of İstanbul fire scenes. It is usually asserted that the government, after investigating the contemporary fire brigades of European states, found the Hungarian case superior to the others and Szechenyi was invited to İstanbul to organize the corps.[106] It seems that, in the beginning, the regiment Szechenyi founded was attached to the Imperial

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[101] "Szécsenyi, Ödön," in *Türk Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Maarif Matbaası, 1981), vol. 30, p. 176.

[102] Deny, "Tulumbadji," p. 833.

[103] In the early years he uses in his signature the title "muallim ferik". See for instance, "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 25/19, 1302.R.01," (18 January 1885).

[104] For the use of this title see for instance, "BOA, Y.MTV., 190/17, 1317.M.03," (14 May 1899).

[105] Stephen Bonsal, "The Family of Szechenyi: One of the Most Ancient and Illustrious in Hungary," *The NewYork Times*, 26 January 1908.

[106] Bünyamin Çelebi, "İtfaiye," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993); Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1126.

Arsenal.[107] Three battalions (of the four planned by the government) each being composed of eight squads (*bölük*) and each squad comprising a hundred men had been established as of 1877 under the administration of the Arsenal.

By that time the empire was at war with Russia and was facing serious losses in the battlefield.[108] This situation had an impact on the fire brigade regiment as it was now a fully developed military unit and the government had decided to use certain of its squads in the war. A decree dated December 9, 1877 states that the fire brigade regiment excelled in training and six squads of each battalion would be dispatched to the battle. The remaining two squads in each battalion would be complemented to eight again with the men from new conscripts, reserve soldiers, and home guards (*neferât-ı kur'a-ı cedîde ve efrâd-ı redîfe ve müstahfazdan*) and hence a new fire brigade regiment would be formed.[109] No information exists as to whether the firemen were actually sent to the battlefield, but even if they were it would not last long as the Ottomans were forced into an armistice concluded at Edirne about two months later, on January 31, 1878.[110]

This three-battalion fire brigade regiment continued to exist until December 23, 1884 when a naval specimen battalion (*bahriyye nümûne taburu*) stationed at the

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[107] "BOA, C.AS., 1000/43750, 1294.Z.29," (4 January 1878).

[108] The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. See Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, pp. 182-189.

[109] "BOA, İ.DH., 760/62007, 1294.Z.03," (9 December 1877).

[110] The credit given to Abdülhamid II by many writers for establishing the fire brigade may be related to a re-establishment of the regiment after a probable dispatching of most of its units to the battle. In a novel published in 1890 Mehmed Murad (also known as Mizancı Murad) emphasizes the establishment of a military fire brigade referring to the post-war period: Mehmed Murad *Turfanda mı Yoksa Turfa mı?* (İstanbul: Bordo Siyah Klasik Yayınlar, 2004), p. 375. Even Tahsin Paşa, who served fourteen years as first secretary of the palace secretariat (*mabeyn başkatibi*) to Sultan Abdülhamid (though in later years from 1894 onwards), states in his memoirs that Sultan Hamid had brought Kont Ziçini and founded the fire brigade regiment: *Sultan Abdülhamid: Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları*, (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1990), p. 235.

dockyards was attached to the fire brigade. A contemporary journal wrote about Ziçini Paşa's inspection of the unit at the dockyards on that day after which it was converted into a naval fire brigade battalion with a certain major (*binbaşı*) Mehmed Bey at its head. [111] The regiment was further strengthened by the addition of a fourth land battalion located at the Selimiye barracks in Üsküdar. A decree dated December 24, 1890 states the assignment of a certain senior captain Nazmi Bey promoted to the rank of major and made commander of this new battalion.[112] Finally, there was the fire brigade squad located inside Orhaniye barracks in Yıldız proximate to Abdülhamid's celebrated palace.[113]

So before the turn of the century the fire brigade was being improved, at least in number of distinct corps, and its locations diversified. It was now part of the Imperial Army (i.e. *hâssa ordusu*) and no longer of the Arsenal as it had originally been organized. The regiment was then composed of four land battalions, a naval battalion and a separate squad attached to different units of the army. Ziçini Paşa was in command of all these corps as aide de camp to Sultan Abdülhamid. We can perhaps summarize the organization of the regiment in a simple table.

The firemen of the military fire brigade were superior to the firepumper teams in many respects. First of all, the equipment they used was quite different from those of the firepumper teams. They used not only manual pumps carried on foot to

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[111] "BOA, Y.PRK.TKM., 8/13, 1302.Ra.05," (23 December 1884).

[112] "BOA, İ.DH., 1207/94504, 1308.Ca.12," (24 December 1890).

[113] We become aware of this squad by a decree related to the supplying of material for the corps asked by Ziçini Paşa. Needless to say it must have been formed before that time, i.e. before September 1892. But was it a separate squad or was it a part of one of the existing battalions just located for its proximity to the palace is unknown to us. One can be sure that it was seen as an important unit and therefore was shown separately with other battalions in lists. "BOA, İ.HUS., 3/1310 S-072, 1310.S.13," (6 September 1892).

the fire field. For example, each battalion had horse driven wagons able to carry 12 firemen to the fire place with additional horse driven firepumps.[114]

Table 5: The Sub-units of the Fire Brigade Regiment

| | Superordinate unit | Date active duty started | Location | District |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st battalion | Imperial army / 2nd division (*firka*) | January 1876 | Beyoğlu barracks | Taksim |
| 2nd battalion | Imperial army / 2nd division | Before December 1877 | Beyoğlu barracks | Taksim |
| 3rd battalion | Imperial army / 1st division | Before December 1877 | *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* | Bayezit |
| 4th battalion | Imperial army / 2nd division | December 1890 | Selimiye barracks | Üsküdar |
| The naval battalion | Ministry of the navy | December 1884 | Dockyards | Kasımpaşa |
| The separate squad | ? | Before September 1892 | Orhaniye barracks | Yıldız |

So when the alarm was given a certain number of firemen were carried by the wagons and the remainders merely ran. The first to arrive were responsible for intervening in the blazes immediately. This was the most critical point in preventing the fire from spreading. In the later years the pumps were diversified and hydrophore firepumps and steam fire engines were added to the equipment of the fire brigade. In addition to this basic equipment the fire brigade used other imported materials such as fire ladder, life-saving sheet, and life-saving pipe with a moving propeller (*yangın merdiveni, tahlîs-i can çarşafı, müteharrik pervâneli tahlîs-i can borusu*) which were utilized probably for the first time in fires.[115]

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[114] "BOA, Y.MTV., 220/57, 1319.Ca.07," (22 August 1901).

[115] "BOA, Y.MTV., 51/43, 1308.Za.15," (22 June 1891).

Second, the firemen of the military brigade were in regular training with Ziçini Paşa coordinating the drills. The Talimhane near Beyoğlu barracks was one place where the brigade undertook various trainings and moves. It also served as a station for two of the squads from the battalions in Beyoğlu. Because of monetary shortfalls it could not undergo repairs for a long time and had already turned to ruins by 1908. Emphasizing the contribution of trainings to the adequacy of the corps Ziçini Paşa demanded an urgent renewal of Talimhane.[116] The fire brigade commander also asserted that the voluntary firepumper teams should undergo training, too, and thus he offered to arrange a program in which the officers of the fire brigade would teach firefighting methods to the chiefs of the voluntary teams. His main point in offering this was his belief that fighting and extinguishing fires had become a scientific activity by then and its methods had to be practiced for success.[117]

In fact, one of the main difficulties Ziçini Paşa faced in performing his profession was the existence of the irregular firepumper teams and their disorganized -but unfortunately necessary- contribution during the fires. He had the title of *umûm itfâ'iyye alayları kumandanı* (the commander of the general regiment of fire brigades), implying his authority over different units of the brigade that were attached to various army corps, but again this authority could not comprise the supervision of the firepumper teams of official departments and neighborhood teams. The existence of a multi-authority situation related to firefighting, and during fires and around fire places, for which the military fire brigade commandership, Zabtiyye

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[116] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 253/55, 1325.Z.16," (20 January 1908).

[117] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 93/27, 1310.00.2," (1892/1893).

Müşîrliği, and the Municipality were responsible players, would stay as a fact until the republican period.

## Concluding Remarks

The last hundred years of the Ottoman empire was an extraordinary time with efforts of the government at change to cope with the superior European states in a world made much smaller by the new technological developments following the industrial revolution. In many fields this change was achieved by the help of older practices along with the importing of the "new" straightaway.

In the area of firefighting which was an activity of İstanbul inhabitants made routine by endless blazes, the developments in the nineteenth century displayed a similar pattern. The military firepumper organization which had a tradition of a century before the Auspicious Event continued its existence in a different fashion now within the corps of the new army established by the reforming sultan of the pre-Tanzimat period. This organization was supported by the irregular teams, the roots of which could be found among the quasi-military character of the later Janissaries. However, their irregularity would become a threat to the efficiency of firefighting demanded by the capital with a rapidly increasing population.

The changes related to the administration of İstanbul affected directly the field of firefighting and from the time of its establishment in 1846 the Ministry of Public Security which was responsible for the civil administration and security issues of the capital, was made the superior office of firefighting organizations. A parallel change was observed in the area of trade and hence increasing reciprocal relations with Europe, the agents of which were settled in the Galata and Pera quarters, places that had long been identified with foreign existence. Municipal services as supplied

in contemporary European cities were initiated in this quarter and the concept of public service was seen as a duty of the newly founded municipal bodies.

Firefighting after this period emerged as an inevitable public service mainly aimed at protecting property, which was made clear by the two disastrous conflagrations of the late 1860s, both in Der-sa'âdet and Galata areas of the Golden Horn. Hence came in 1874 the modern fire brigade organized after a European example by a Hungarian officer. The period between its establishment and the foundation of the Turkish republic, when all the responsibility of firefighting along with the fire brigade would be handed to the İstanbul municipality, witnessed the existence of a multi-authority system where the commandership of the fire brigade, the Ministry of Public Security and the İstanbul Municipality had similar responsibilities relating to fires and firefighting organizations.

In the next chapter, how these scattered responsibilities affected the practice of firefighting will be demonstrated through the narration of an İstanbul fire right from the beginning together with its causes to its very end and its effects in the aftermath. As a popular saying in Turkish, which goes as "[there are] the epidemics of Anatolia and the fires of İstanbul" (*Anadolu'nun salgını, İstanbul'un yangını*) implies, fires were frequent in the predominantly wooden dwellings of the capital. With its fire towers, night guards, axemen and water carriers, extinguishing İstanbul fires was not the work of only *tulumbacı*s or fire brigade privates.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE FIRES OF İSTANBUL

*Yârabbi zelzele olmasın, yangınlar bize kâfi felâket*[118]

*İzzet Molla*

At the beginning of an article published in 1864 in a science magazine of the time, Münif Paşa, one of the leading statesmen of the late nineteenth century, claimed that İstanbul, with its beautiful nature and location, had had two defects for a long time: plague and fire.[119] In the continuing lines of the article, which focused on the fires of İstanbul, he gave the latest statistics in detail regarding the fires and the damage they had caused. In the last five years and four months period (with respect to the Muslim calendar), approximately between August 1858 and September 1864, 160 fires had occurred in the capital, destroying 4,114 buildings, including one imperial palace. This meant one fire every eleven days and twenty four buildings destroyed per each fire.[120]

These figures may not seem catastrophic thanks to the timing of his article. If it were written less than a year later, they would have included the data from one of the largest conflagrations of the nineteenth century, the Hocapaşa fire of 1865. Yet

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[118] (O Lord, let there not be an earthquake, to us fires are sufficient as disasters.) cited in Kemalettin Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri," in *Osmanlı* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), p. 689.

[119] Münif Paşa "Harîk-i İstanbul," *Mecmûa-i Fünûn* 3 (1864/1865 (1281)), cited in Necdet Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993), p. 427.

[120] Münif Paşa "Harîk-i İstanbul."

again the loss assessments he presented were quite dramatic. He calculated that the material damage was approximately 275,220 purses, to which he added the 130,000 purses appraised loss that Topkapı Palace faced as a result of the fire, reaching a total of 405,210 purses, which implied a daily loss of 240 purses for the period. He was probably making these refined and detailed calculations to provoke his readers, who he undoubtedly thought of being not sensitive enough to the detriments of this calamity.

A Tanzimat bureaucrat raised with European education and ideas, Münif Paşa endeavored to convey his experiences related to fire as he had observed in European cities. He said that European cities had been successful in reducing the effects of this disaster to acceptable levels. He mentioned the construction of buildings from stone or brick as the most effective precaution, supported by the existence of able firefighting organizations. By this a European householder was free from panic when a fire started even if it was on another floor in the same building. He had been eyewitness to one such situation in Paris, which he contrasted to the panic in the whole city quarters in the case of a fire in İstanbul.

He commented that above these two basic issues, i.e. cities built predominantly with stone or brick protected by capable firefighters, stood one important institutional contribution against fire that made the lives of the European urban inhabitants easier: insurance companies. By paying reasonable yearly premiums people were able to feel relatively relaxed against the losses incurred by fires. He expressed that a householder would not bother to fight a fire in his house, a task which he would leave to the insurer's specialists.

By choosing his examples from Europe he aimed to persuade his readers by utilizing a reference that should have been taken for granted as Europe was the center

of progress and technological superiority. He perceived İstanbul's desperation with respect to fires as a shame. This almost general attitude of Tanzimat statesmen, describing phenomena with reference to European examples and how Europeans conceived it, was displayed in the evaluations of Mustafa Reşid Paşa, one of the leading men of the Tanzimat, regarding fires when he complained: "after these frequent fires in Der-sa'âdet and other places, European newspapers handle the issue and ask us if we spent money on building these timber houses just to burn them down and if stone and brick does not exist in our country."[121]

Such complaints from leading Ottoman statesmen stemmed from the huge losses the empire faced as a consequence of this disastrous event as well as the diminished prestige in the eyes of European governments. It had become obvious that the Ottoman Empire was hopeless to attenuate the effects of the incident as is apparent from the fact that the Sublime Porte, formerly the headquarters (and the residence) of the grand vizier -from the second half of the nineteenth century the building of the central bureaucracy- burned down six times, entirely in 1755, 1808, 1826, and 1839; and partly in 1878 and 1911.[122] The building had to be rebuilt from zero each time, for the first time in stone in 1844. Many valuable documents were lost in these incidents and the bureaucrats must have been first hand witnesses of the helplessness this generated. One can refer to the article of Abdurrahman Şeref, the last official chronicler, cited above, to see such a desperation for the invaluable archival documents he lost during the last of these conflagrations.

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[121] From a report by M.Reşid Paşa in Cavid Baysun, "M. Reşid Paşa'nın Siyasi Yazıları," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 111, no. 15, September (1960): p. 124, cited in Ortaylı, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Yerel Yönetim Geleneği*, p. 118.

[122] Abdurrahman Şeref "Bâb-ı Âlî Harîkleri," *Tarih-i Osmânî Encümeni Mecmûası*, no. cüz 7, April (1911 (1327)).

From the presumptively best protected government mansions to the sacred mosques and the wooden two-storey dwellings of the lower classes, fire would destroy every building in the Empire's capital and it would exert itself as one of the habitual incurrences of Ottoman urban daily life. It left many traces in the Turkish language as idioms and phrases, a few examples are *yangından mal kaçırmak* (to carry off property from the fire, i.e. to be in an unnecessarily hurried situation), *yangına körükle gitmek* (to go near a fire with bellows in hand, i.e. to make things worse), *ateş bacayı sardıktan sonra* (after the fire surrounded the chimney, i.e. the situation has become irreversibly bad), and *suratı yangın yerine dönmüş* (his face has turned to a fire area, i.e. he has been badly beaten in fight).[123] To demonstrate the degree of its influence in nineteenth century daily life would be a task of analyzing both its historical background and its occurrence in a period of increasing population.

## Fires in the Daily Life of İstanbulites

Many western travelers who visited the Ottoman capital in the nineteenth century emphasized the frequency of fires in the city. The German traveler Ernst Christoph Döbel, who stayed in İstanbul for two weeks in 1832, notes that there was not one single night without cries of a "fire" making him jump in his bed, though most of them were not large conflagrations. He himself witnessed two fires that had started at two opposite ends of the city, again probably minor incidents as he returned to his residence within a short time.[124]

A later visitor of the city, Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, who was a relative of the French ambassador Thouvenel, made the same observation, that she did not

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[123] I have taken these from Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri."The translations are mine.

[124] İlhan Pınar, "Arabacı Döbel ve İstanbul (1832)," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. December (1995).

remember a night passing without fire calls. Having stayed in the city for relatively a long period, for two years between 1856 and 58, she was still upset not to have been able to see a fire scene! She remarked romantically what a beautiful scene it would be to watch the red light of flames shining on mosques and reflecting on water, "a wonderful and heavenly waterfall of light."[125] In a period when nocturnal illumination for entertainment purposes was not familiar, she was probably right in longing for such a spectacle, ignoring for a moment the detrimental aspects of a likely incident.

This was the same reaction that Edmondo de Amicis, who visited İstanbul in 1874, four years after the Great Fire of Pera, gave when one night he witnessed the start of a fire near the Galata Tower. It happened to be a small one easily contained in a few hours and the famous writer regretted that he had missed the chance of experiencing a picturesque incident. Right after seeing the first flames he described his feelings: "Suddenly we thought of the great fires of Constantinople in the past, and especially the terrifying conflagration which had occurred four years ago, and our first reaction was one of terror and compassion. But immediately afterwards -I am ashamed to confess it- a crueler, more egoistical feeling arose in me, the curiosity of the painter and the writer…"[126]

When it comes to the frequency of fires during Amicis' stay, it seems to have been near to the average of "one fire every eleven days" that Münif Paşa gave in his article. Although Amicis does not state anything explicitly related to this aspect, we are aware that his visit to Constantinople lasted for "a little more than a week"[127] and

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[125] Fontmagne, *Kırım Harbi Sonrasında İstanbul*, p. 126-128.

[126] Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 183.

[127] In the introduction to the book's 2005 edition Stephen Parkin makes this assumption. Ibid., p. xii.

that during this interval at least one incident of a fire, albeit a small one, had occurred.

Ubicini's opinion is similar on the issue. Describing Turkey of the mid-century, of some twenty years before Amicis' visit, he states that Pera inhabitants could never be sure of finding their houses after returning from a trip to a summer resort for a week's holiday. According to him the house had only a one percent chance of being saved from a fire. Exaggerating more, he claims that if the vacation had been for a year or more, they probably would not be able to find their street or even their neighborhood, let alone their house.[128]

It would be useless to cite more references as statistics together with the accounts of these first-hand observations seem enough to give one the impression that the city was under continual threat of flames. Münif Paşa emphasizes in his article how this threat affected the psychology of the inhabitants. According to him, many İstanbul people, being aware of frequent fires, refrained from garnishing and decorating their houses. They would keep valuable books and furniture in other places, and some would, in exaggeration, keep important documents and belongings in handy places so as to carry them away easily in case of a fire. Actually most people were deprived of comfortable sleep.[129]

Such an overwhelmingly troublesome fact had a long past in the history of the city. In order to trace the occurrence of fires in the Byzantine Constantinople an understanding of the basic causes for the incident is needed in addition to seeing if they existed before as they did during the Ottoman period. Osman Nuri Ergin states three pivotal issues for the existence of fires in İstanbul: first, the wooden

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[128] J.H.A. Ubicini, *1855'te Türkiye*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Tercüman Gazetesi, 1977), pp. 137-138.
[129] Münif Paşa "Harîk-i İstanbul."

architecture in houses spaced close together in narrow streets; second, the scarcity of water, and last the inadequacy or deficiency of the means for extinguishing fires.[130]

These basic factors which were the main producers of conflagrations in normal situations seem to have been somewhat different in Byzantine Constantinople. As for the use of timber as building material, Mustafa Cezar sees the tradition of wooden dwellings in Ottoman İstanbul having a root in the Byzantine period.[131] However, contrary to this, Murat Belge states that Constantinople before the conquest had been built along an urban conception depending less on the use of wooden materials.[132] Another researcher goes for the same opinion, that generally stone and brick were used as building materials and, in addition to that, houses in the city had to be at least 12 feet distanced from each other.[133] And surely one does not expect to see in those times a densely constructed environment as the population is known to have been around fifty or sixty thousand,[134] residing in an area inside the city walls.

When it comes to the scarcity of water, as a matter of fact the city never felt a shortage of salt water, being near the Marmara Sea and enclosed by the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn.[135] There was even one stream inside old İstanbul called *Lykos* (*Bayrampaşa deresi* in Turkish), flowing into the sea near Yenikapı, into an harbor named after Theodosius, which it filled with alluvium. It dried up during the

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[130] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1077.

[131] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, p. 355.

[132] Murat Belge, "Ateş ve İstanbul," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 92, August (1991): p. 32.

[133] Ayşe Hür, "Yangınlar-Bizans Dönemi," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993), p. 426.

[134] Osman Nuri Ergin, "İstanbul Yangınları," in *Aylık Ansiklopedi* (İstanbul: İbrahim Horoz Matbaası, 1944).

[135] For this issue I have mainly used Murat Belge, "İstanbul'da Su," *Tarih ve Toplum* 10, no. 56, August (1988); and Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1155-1182.

Ottoman period. On the other hand, fresh water had always been a problem for the city dwellers and the Byzantines had taken the case seriously to bring water from the surroundings by building dams, waterways, aqueducts and had stored it inside the city by way of cisterns, reservoirs, and fountains. Much of this infrastructure is still viewable inside the city. The Valens aqueduct (known as *Bozdoğan Kemeri*), and the Basilica and Philoxenos cisterns (*Yerebatan* and *Binbirdirek* respectively) are leading examples. Most of these structures are seen also as precautions to blockades the city had faced many times during the Byzantine period.

As far as the firefighting organizations are concerned it is known that neighborhood administrators in Constantinople employed their own fire brigades called *collegiati*.[136] And when one thinks of the heritage of the Roman Empire in which a sophisticated firefighting structure as *The Vigiles* had been operating as early as A.D. 6, it seems Constantinople had a good example to emulate.[137] Whatever the circumstances were, Byzantine Constantinople was not free from destructive fires. In addition to fires of natural origin were many instances of rebellions, conquests, and plunders followed by large conflagrations. Today's Hagia Sofia, for instance, is the third church built on the same area, the first two of which were burnt down by protesters and insurgents against the Emperor.[138]

Nonetheless, it would not be right to draw conclusions following the same line related to a period lasting more than thousand years in a few paragraphs. One thing for sure is that the city was not as populated as it had been during the later

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[136] Hür, "Yangınlar-Bizans Dönemi."

[137] P.K. Baillie Reynolds, *The Vigiles of Imperial Rome* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1996).

[138] Belge, "Ateş ve İstanbul," p. 32.

years of the Ottoman sovereignty and fire was not an object of daily fear for the Byzantines.

During Ottoman sovereignty İstanbul was continually threatened by fire. A proverb in Turkish says "if it were not for the fires in Constantinople, the thresholds of the houses would be of gold (i.e. *İstambolun yangını olmasa evlerin eşiği altından olurdu*)."[139] This claim seems to have some truth in it as in some cases there are accounts depicting the destruction of nearly two-thirds of the city by fire continuing for as long as three days. One may guess that these are only rough estimations involving some degree of exaggeration, but similar accounts are not rare and they belong to different periods written down by different observers. When we summarize the greatest fires of the capital until 1826 we have a quite dreadful picture, as seen in the following table:

This summary provides us with a lot of clues as to the common patterns by the phenomenon of fire in the Ottoman capital. One could easily say that nearly all of the great fires occurred in the summer. Kemalettin Kuzucu points that fires were more common in the winter but they could turn to great conflagrations only in the summer as a result of the heating of the outer wooden materials of the buildings which were easily swallowed by the flames and perhaps more important than that the strong northeast wind (*Poyraz*) which dominated İstanbul during summertime.[140] Many accounts emphasize the impact of the wind and, in fact, most of these disasters ended only after the slowing of the wind or simply after reaching a geographical barrier like the sea.

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[139] Deny, "Tulumbadji," p. 831.

[140] Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri," p. 688.

Table 6: Major Fires of İstanbul until 1826[141]

| | Date | Reigning Sultan | Main Quarter | Duration | Destruction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1633, September 2 | Murad IV | Cibali | 3 days | one fifth of the city |
| 2 | 1660, July 24 | Mehmed IV | Ayazmakapısı | 3 days | two thirds of the city (with approximately 2,700-4,000 deaths) |
| 3 | 1688, March 18 | Süleyman II | Balıkpazarı | - | 1,500 houses, 5,000 shops |
| 4 | 1693, September 31 | Ahmed II | Ayazmakapısı | - | 2,547 houses, 1,146 shops with many other buildings |
| 5 | 1718, July 17 | Ahmed III | Cibali | 27 hours | 51,000 houses, 2,283 shops, with many mosques, palaces etc. |
| 6 | 1729, July 27 | Ahmed III | Balat | 24 hours | One eight of the city |
| 7 | 1755, October 29 | Osman III | Hocapaşa | 36 hours | many official buildings including the Sublime Porte |
| 8 | 1756, July 6 | Osman III | Cibali | 48 hours | 77,400 houses, 34,200 shops |
| 9 | 1782, July 24 | Abdülhamid I | Balat | 24 hours | 7,000 buildings |
| 10 | 1782, August 22 | Abdülhamid I | Cibali | 65 hours | 20,000 buildings |
| 11 | 1784, August 6 | Abdülhamid I | Kiremit neighborhood | 27 hours | 5,000 houses |

The occurrence of destructive fires in summertime has developed the common opinion that many fires were the consequence of the inattention of people who were frying aubergine (*patlıcan*) in olive oil. In the times when there was no commercial growing of hothouse vegetables, aubergines would begin to be consumed by the end of the May continuing all summer long and this period would be called the aubergine season. So it was also the season for frying aubergines and aubergine season fires are very famous and referred to in many accounts. The famous essayist and journalist of the late Ottoman period, Ahmet Rasim, has a beautiful

[141] In preparing this table I used Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri."; Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi."; Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*.

passage depicting this event.[142] Osman Nuri Ergin is indifferent between summer and winter as the common season for the occurrence of fires and claims that İstanbul does not lack fires in any season. Although referring to the aubergine season himself, he emphasizes that in winter, the careless use of cooking devices like brazier (*mangal*) and tandoor (*tandır*) and the congestion of chimneys and pipes of the heating stoves were the cause of many fires.[143]

When it comes to the inattention of the people, one remembers inevitably the strict rule ordering to hang the person who owned the house from which the flames flared up at first. Such was the law until February 5, 1540 when the old palace at Beyazıt burned down. As the Sultan himself owned the place, the law was not followed and from that time on it was abolished.[144] Assuming that it stayed in effect, it would probably transform the pattern of aubergine consumption in the city!

Many of the conflagrations shown in the table were located (fires were usually named after the quarter/neighborhood they first started) on the Golden Horn shores such as Cibali, Hocapaşa, and Balat. Osman Nuri Ergin notes, for example, six Hocapaşa and seven Cibali fires until 1826. Being a location for manufacturing facilities and containing many residences built for bachelors (*bekar odaları*) who had immigrated to the city to work, the quarters of the Golden Horn shore were risky places for fire. Hence, many of the large conflagrations started there and with the help of the northeast wind swallowed everything on the way before being contained many hours later.

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[142] Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektupları*, vol. 1-2 (İstanbul: Arba, 1992), pp. 243-45, cited in Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi," p. 432.

[143] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1080.

[144] Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri," p. 690; Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi," p. 429.

One last pattern that is visible from this table is that effective fires increased from the middle of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth century. If this is true despite the fact that a special firefighting unit was established in 1718 within the Janissary corps which started to use the first firepump in Ottoman lands, then it could be claimed that the increase of population without changes in the use of construction materials was the main cause of the rise of destructive fires. The scarcity of historic chronicles before the seventeenth century could be mentioned for such a picture to occur, but then it would not be a logical supposition for fires of such great enormity to be bypassed and only more routine incidents could have been missed.

We are lucky to have some accounts -conveyed by the researcher B.J.Slot in a journal article- belonging to the representatives of the Dutch diplomatic mission which was established in 1611. Ernst Brinck, who was the secretary to the first Dutch ambassador, recorded his observations related to fires between May 1613 and February 1614. The timing corresponds to some twenty years before the first entry in the table above and gives a rough idea with respect to the frequency of fires at that time. Brinck referred to seven fires, most of which were small in that nine month period.[145]

Compared to figures of the early nineteenth century this number seems moderate. If a sensational year had to be chosen for instance, 1818 would be a perfect option. Necdet Sakaoğlu mentions 73 fires in that year, according to the information given in *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Cevdet's History.) It horrified the inhabitants of the city to such a degree that people began to organize night watches among

[145] B.J. Slot, "The Fires in İstanbul of 1782 and 1784 According to Maps and Reports by Dutch Diplomatic Representatives," *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 4-5 (1976): p. 47.

themselves.[146] It may be claimed that an exceptional year would not serve as a fair benchmark, but again Cevdet Paşa emphasized, in depicting the events of the year 1802-1803 (1217), that fires had already become natural phenomena in the daily lives of İstanbulites and he declined to give more detail.[147] If we remember once again Münif Paşa's account of some fifty years later, stating that fires broke out in İstanbul every eleven days, Cevdet Paşa's interpretations make sense.

When the consequences of the fires in Table 5, destroying great portions of the inhabited areas again and again, is remembered, one can not help wondering how these huge losses in material wealth of the country affected the long time growth of the economy. Economic historian E.L. Jones' book *The European Miracle* presents an attempt on this issue. Trying to answer the question of why economic growth and development began in Europe, the author, in one of the chapters, views disasters (including fires) as being something more than economic negative shocks resulting in a fall of aggregate income.[148] In this regard, taking Münif Paşa's statistics to further detailed analyses and investigating İstanbul fires in order to understand the degree of their negative impacts on Ottoman economy would certainly be worth while.

Why these disastrous events could not be attenuated, and why the frequency and the destructiveness of the incidents increased over the decades are challenging questions. I believe the preference for wooden dwellings deserves deeper investigation. Many observers have mentioned that throughout the entire Ottoman reign İstanbul predominantly consisted of buildings constructed of timber. According

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[146] Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi," pp. 434-435.

[147] Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri," p. 694.

[148] Eric L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environment, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).(original publication 1981) Specific pages regarding fires are on 33-4 and 143-44

to Eremya Çelebi, a seventeenth century Armenian historian, who wrote a study specifically focused on İstanbul fires, unlike in Amed, Aleppo, Damascus, and Jerusalem the Ottomans did not choose stone as the building material in İstanbul. He states that, as of 1648 when he started to write his history, nearly all İstanbul buildings were made of timber.[149] This was no different in the nineteenth century. Helmuth von Moltke, a Prussian military officer in Ottoman service in the 1830s, wrote that, "All İstanbul houses are wooden. Even the sultanic palaces are nothing more than big huts constructed of timber."[150] Alan Duben and Cem Behar, who have made a comprehensive study of İstanbul households in the late nineteenth century, state that houses typically could be divided into three types: low quality homes generally consisting of a single floor called "*süflî*", two-storey homes called "*fevkanî*", and luxury homes called "*mükellef*".[151] They agree with the popular Ottoman author Halide Edip one of whose novels portraying an Ottoman neighborhood around the turn of the century starts with a sentence specifying that "houses are invariably wooden and two storey."[152] *Fevkanî* type homes, according to Duben and Behar, were most prevalent in the city.

Apart from a few houses of the Phanariots and some Galata and Pera structures, stone and brick architecture was peculiar to monumental buildings such as mosques, fountains, public baths, and inns. Even many of the leading statesmen lived in large wooden mansion houses called *konak*s. This tendency is usually attributed to the exercise of confiscation by the state regarding the properties of the administrators

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[149] H.D. Andreasyan, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, no. 27 (1973): p. 59.

[150] Cited in Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1183.

[151] Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, p. 45.

[152] Halide Edip Adıvar, *Sinekli Bakkal* (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Kitabevi, 1936), cited in Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, pp. 45.

who had fallen into disfavor. Many Ottoman notables refrained from living in outstanding houses that would spark envy among their political rivals. Either this explanation is not sufficient or it left such a great tradition that even after the abolition of the confiscation principle during the reign of Mahmud II, few viziers had stone mansions; Âli and Fuat Paşa, the leading men of the *Tanzimat,* being two of the exceptions.[153]




Figure 4: Wooden dwelling structure in a Golden Horn outlook, around 1900[154]

Some writers have suggested that religious motives were influential in this abstention. Stone was a lasting material and it would be appropriate for buildings that were supposed to be permanent such as mosques, and other institutions of charity. It

[153] Belge, "Ateş ve İstanbul," p. 33.

[154] Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, p. 40.

would be pretentious for ordinary people and ordinary buildings. In fact a more reasonable explanation would be the state's discomfort with solid constructions because of the fear that they could be used as strongholds by insurgents in times of uprisings. Ergin claims that the Ottoman government was against the construction of stone commercial inns as most of the artisans were also Janissary and they would be able to defend themselves in stone and brick khans in a rebellion.[155]

The government itself was aware of people's fears about constructing stone and brick buildings. In a resolution of the Supreme Council (*Meclis-i Vâlâ*) in 1846 promoting the use of stone and brick in construction, it was stated that people were afraid of it in the idea that "if you build a stone and brick house it is forbidden and they would ban it or they would mark you and make investigations about you" [156] but this was declared that this was not true. The uses of stone and brick buildings were explained thereafter. Such a need for explanation felt by the government supports the argument that there was a fear in people which led them to avoid stone buildings.

Ordinary people probably had more simple and straightforward motivations for favoring wooden dwellings. According to Ragıp Akyavaş, who expressed his observations of İstanbul regarding the late Ottoman period, family elders used to put forward earthquake and rheumatism for reasons to choose timber.[157] As is known today, İstanbul is located on a dangerous fault line and during the Ottoman period the city experienced consequential earthquakes in 1509 (also called little apocalypse [*kıyâmet-i suğrâ*]), in 1648, 1719, 1754, 1766, and for the last time in 1894 with

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[155] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, pp. 993-994.

[156] (*böyle kârgîr binâlar yaptırırsan şâyed memnû'dur ve men' olunur veyâhûd beni bellerler de sonra her tarafa sorarlar.*) cited in Ibid., vol. 2, pp.1023-1025.

[157] Akyavaş, *Asitane*, p. 116.

many small incidents in between.[158] In most of these cases, people witnessed that stone and brick structures such as mosques, old city walls, and others were greatly damaged. Wooden houses, on the contrary, were less affected and gave less harm to human life. This fact was known among İstanbulites and the fear of quakes led them to choose timber rather than stone.



Figure 5: A typical İstanbul street[159]

When it comes to rheumatism, the climate of İstanbul was moist, which caused the interior of stone houses to be quite damp or either the stone building

[158] Kemalettin Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Depremleri," in *Osmanlı* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999).

[159] Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti*, p. 65.

techniques of the time were to blame. This caused discomfort among many people and wooden dwellings were believed to have an untroubled atmosphere. Münif Paşa disagrees with this, though accepting the common belief among people, claiming that if built by skilled builders stone houses would not be damp. He said that many people already dwelled in such stone houses who had no complaints.[160] According to Akyavaş, rheumatism was widespread. He did not know of any old lady living in wooden houses without complaints of rheumatism.[161]



Figure 6: Another İstanbul street with *fevkâni* type dwellings[162]

Although these excuses are quite reasonable one looks for more material causes with respect to the long tradition of wooden construction. On first thought the cheapness and availability of timber comes to mind. Describing seventeenth century events, Eremya Çelebi specifies that all of the construction materials for the wooden

[160] Münif Paşa "Harîk-i İstanbul."

[161] Akyavaş, *Asitane*, p. 116.

[162] Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, p. 66.

dwellings was brought from the forests of the southern shores of the Black Sea and İzmit by ships and wagons. All of İstanbul's timber demand was provided from these woodlands, called *deryâ-i dirahtistân* (i.e sea of trees) which he, himself, had toured and at the denseness of which he had been amazed.[163] Akyavaş also states that "Alemdağı on one side and Istranca mountains on the other and the remaining brought from Black Sea shores cheaply by ship,"[164] İstanbul had a vast supply of timber.

Apart from its cheapness, timber also had the advantage of not demanding complex workmanship, which made it possible to finish a wooden dwelling within a short time. This ease was specifically of much value during post-conflagration periods when a significant number of homeless families demanded new dwellings in which to settle themselves within the shortest possible time. Münif Paşa also underlines the cheapness and easiness of wooden construction (*sühûlet ve ehveniyyeti*) but adds that wooden buildings required much repairing in the aftermath, because of which he found stone and brick buildings superior.[165]

All of these make a long list regarding the city inhabitants' tendency for wooden dwellings. In addition, the Ottomans had a long custom of living in closed neighborhoods, with many dead ends inside the neighborhood, the roads of which were narrow and the wooden houses in both sides of the road spaced closely, together with cantilevered features such as window seats (*cumba*), balconies (*şâhnişîn*), and eaves (*saçak*). These were customary parts of the house architecture

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[163] Andreasyan, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi," pp. 59-60.

[164] (*bir tarafta Alemdağı, öte tarafta Istranca dağları, eksik kalanı da Karadeniz kıyılarından yelken gemileri ucuz ucuz, kolay kolay, tınazlar gibi keresteleri yükleyip getirirlerdi.*) Akyavaş, *Asitane*, p. 117.

[165] Münif Paşa "Harîk-i İstanbul."

that also restricted the space. With the large population increases both before but especially after the 1850s, causing new neighborhoods to form and eradicating gardens and green fields which could serve as retarding agents against fire the city's vulnerability against flames increased.

In the previous chapter, how the government reacted throughout the nineteenth century to this growing impact of fires by ameliorations in the field of firefighting organizations was examined. Nevertheless, fighting fires was not solely the task of firefighters and from the first view of smoke in the fire towers by the watchmen to the containment of the last blazes and the clearing of the fire area in the aftermath, the process involved many actors and actions, all of which deserve to be included in the story. By following an imaginary fire from its start to its very end, the responses of the government and İstanbulites to this disaster will be illustrated.

## Caught on Fire

Certain fires were not caused by ordinary carelessness. Many fires in history were started intentionally by arsonists who had a spectrum of purposes ranging from political motives to personal vengeance, all of which had a common point: to create disorder. Many contemporary observers and chroniclers have blamed the ill-disciplined Janissaries, the all-time scapegoats for rebellion and chaos. In fact, in a city with such weakness against fires when one could easily impose great harm to the stability of the regime with the help of the right wind, anyone could be on the shortlist of offenders. Incendiarism or accusations of incendiarism continued after 1826, too. According to an archival document dated 1877 a *jurnal* (i.e. memorandum or report by a spy) had been received stating that as some troublemakers were

planning to start a fire, all possible precautions were to be taken.[166] In another somewhat different criminal activity, it had been understood as a result of investigation that somebody named Sove had killed a certain Nicola and attempted to cover up the murder by the sophistry of fire.[167] In a more interesting and sophisticated case of fraud, a criminal organization made up of twenty people in which there was a chemist, a pharmacist, men from the municipality and the police, neighborhood watchman, some firepumpers, and some employees from the insurance firm, had been uncovered. This cabal was a special organization that profited money from burned down houses which they had insured beforehand. A certain woman called Katina had helped the officers catch them *in flagrante delicto* and had been rewarded by Sultan Abdülhamid.[168]

Conspiracy by fires was not only the business of criminals, but also of the government, or so was the belief among certain inhabitants. It was sometimes believed that the government was not being able to perform its plans regarding new roads or certain urban projects and hence chose the option of simply burning down whatever area they needed. Narrating his memories of the late nineteenth century İstanbul, Yorgo Zarifi claims there was a belief among people that most fires were the work of the municipality. Deciding that the cheapest way to widen roads and fulfill its urban program would be by way of fires, the municipality, in his opinion, was committing the incidents: “Whenever we came across a building that seemed to be a barrier against widening a road or aligning it, we would smile and say that its

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[166] "BOA, Y.A.HUS., 159/13, 1294.B.27," (7 August 1877).

[167] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 5/62, 1307.L.24," (13 June 1890).

[168] *Sultan Abdülhamid: Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları*.

turn would come. I don't remember that we were wrong once."[169] Amicis claims that there was a widespread belief that the government was responsible for starting fires and, according to him the facts seem to support this suspicion, that the fires were encouraged by those who profited from them. Again however, he does not find it sensible as he thinks of the damage being too high a price to pay for any improvements the disaster would bring.[170] Maybe they did not start fires but municipality officers at least found some of the consequences of fires useful, as we see in Ergin, when he commented on the Hocapaşa fire of 1865 that "[it] has brought forth happiness instead of calamity to İstanbul (*İstanbul için felâketten ziyâde sa'âdeti tevlîd etmiştir*)," [171] admiring the achievements of the Street Reform Commission established in the aftermath of the fire.

Conspiracy theories will always be there as long as societies experience devastating events and no respected institutions exist to undertake the necessary investigations and issue persuasive declarations as to the causes and consequences of such incidents. One intriguing comment as to the causes of fires is in Eremya Çelebi's history of fires in which he expresses his own experience that whenever the Turks occupied a Christian country, a fire broke out in Constantinople.[172] So if a fire broke out in the city during a siege, Eremya Çelebi would make the guess that the city under siege would be invaded in a short time, of which, he notes that, his acquaintances would make fun. He asserts that his prediction were true most of the

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[169] (*Bir yolun ya da meydanın genişletilmesine veya hizaya getirilmesine engel teşkil eden bir ev gördüğümüzde gülerek onun da sırasının geleceğini söylerdik. Yanıldığımızı hiç hatırlamıyorum*.) Yorgo L. Zarifi, *Hatıralarım: Kaybolan Bir Dünya İstanbul 1800-1920* (İstanbul: Literatür Yayınları, 2006), p. 126. I am grateful again to Mehmet Evren Dinçer for this reference.

[170] Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 195.

[171] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1222.

[172] Andreasyan, "Eremya Çelebi'nin Yangınlar Tarihi," pp. 60-61.

time. As an example he cites the 1645 fire after the capture of Hanya in Crete, the capture of Varad by Köprülü (the grand vizier) on the day of which most of İstanbul was ablaze, and a certain fire in Üsküdar when the news that Kamaniçe had been invaded. It is not clear what he had in mind by making such a comment as he makes no further explanations. One wonders if he could be implying God's vengeance against Muslims for the holy war against Christians or that it was the vengeance of Christian inhabitants of İstanbul who started such fires. In fact, those fires could probably have been the consequence of the army being away from the capital, as the parties responsible for putting out fires were the Janissaries and security personnel.

Actually fires were, most of the time, caused by inattention in places where inflammable materials existed. In a regulation of 1891 to prevent fires (*Men'-i Harîk Nizâmnâmesi* ),[173] it is stated in Article Two that the officers of the municipality would continuously take care and supervise the location of inflammable objects such as meal (or flour), sawdust, and straw (*un, talaş ve saman*) and prevent their being kept in undesired places. Also they would make sure that kitchen and fireplace chimneys and the pipes of heating stoves were cleared. Article Eight claimed a money penalty from one to five *mecidiye*s (a silver coin equal to twenty piasters) for household owners who did not make these necessary precautions.

In addition to the careless use of heating devices like braziers (*mangal*) and tandoors (*tandır*) or carelessness with chandeliers and tobacco pipes, new causes for fires had emerged by the end of nineteenth century with the introduction of new heating and lighting systems. Braziers were replaced by stoves[174] and petroleum, gas,

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[173] *Mütemmim (addendum to Düstûr)*, p. 155.

[174] According to Ergin stoves generally existed in foreigners' homes, the locals were still using braziers and tandoors which was why there were still frequent fires. Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1184.

and electricity, one by one, entered the lives of the locals though with restricted usage at the beginning.[175] Article Seven of the *Men'-i Harîk Nizâmnâmesi* stated that anyone who kept gas and other inflammable materials in excess amounts or without the necessary safeguards that caused a fire would be legally liable.

The situation in shops and small factories was more dangerous as there was no rule we know of as to the location of these workplaces where the probability of fire was high. Caulking shops (*kalâfatçı*), wax shops (*mumhâne*), powder magazines (*baruthâne*), coffeehouses, and others had spread throughout the city in areas in which no specific area and serious safety regulations existed. All in all, as many contemporaries noted, there was hardly a day without fire alarms.

## The Alarm

Watchmen in three towers observed the city day and night for the first signs of smoke or flames. They were called *köşklü* (named after the first tower or probably a high lodge within the headquarters of the *Yeniçeri Ağası,* i.e. chief of Janissary corps), and were actually Janissaries and after the abolition of the latter they continued their profession until the Constitutional Revolution in 1908. According to Ergin, there were twenty in Bayezid tower, eighteen in Galata tower, three in İcadiye tower, six in the Üsküdar patrol station, and five in Eyüp; hence, a total of 52 *köşklü*s working at that time.[176] Their responsibility was to keep watch in the above-mentioned towers, announce from the tower any flames they had noticed in accordance with the rules, and rush to the neighborhoods and required government offices to make the city aware. In the absence of fast communication systems like

[175] Gas had started to be used after 1853, and electricity only after 1914. Ergin, "İstanbul Yangınları," p. 115.

[176] About köşklüs see Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol.3, pp. 1140-1147.

telephones, which were introduced in the capital after 1908, their task was of cardinal importance.

The quotation I made from Ercüment Ekrem Talu in the introduction, which describes the first moments of a fire, demonstrate the aura around the watchmen's profession with all the cryptic talk and procedural announcements, an occurrence which probably had evolved through the years and must be seen as a normalcy within an old institution in an Ottoman city with more than 400 years experience with fires. This had a certain relation with the Janissary way of doing things, as Ergin comments that "although the corps had been abolished *köşklü*s had long preserved the Janissary characteristics (*yeniçerilik evsâfını uzun müddet muhâfaza etmişlerdir*)."[177]

Like the *tulumbacı*s of the official departments they were employed in other professions, only in the case of a fire they would leave their jobs and rush to the towers or the preset destinations. If engaged in any craftsmanship, they were exempt from the license tax (*tezkire resmi*). They received rations and clothes, formerly from the office of the *Serasker*, then from the office of the ministry of public security, which shows that their organizational relationship shifted parallel to that of the *tulumbacı*s.[178] In a document related to the distribution of uniforms to the firefighting personnel of the official department teams which mentioned that for six years then no uniforms had been distributed, the fire tower watchmen (*yangın köşkü nöbetçileri*) were among the receivers together with the *tulumbacı*s.[179] Also a ward below the

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[177] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1140.

[178] Their organizational position as being under the order of the Ministry of public security is apparent in a document ordering the insertion of symbols on their uniforms which would make their positions as tower officers visibly understood. See "BOA, Y.MTV., 175/257, 1315.Za.19," (11 April 1898).

[179] "BOA, Y.A.RES., 17/32, 1299.L.29," (13 September 1882).

central commandership (*merkez kumandanlığı*) had been allocated to them and the ones who did not own a house stayed there.

*Köşklü*s used to be chosen predominantly from among tall and strong men who came from Alanya and Bozkır, with well shaped bodies. They informed the watchmen in the neighborhoods (*mahalle bekçisi*), who in turn announced the incident to the dwellers and collected contributions in the name of *âidât* (allowance) from the departments, and high officials or interested persons whom they had notified. In an article about the fire towers in İstanbul, historian Süheyl Ünver noted that the watchmen in the towers who observed the smoke and flames (original *köşklü*s) and the runners who rushed to the neighborhoods and various offices for notification were not the same although later on both came to be called *köşklü*s.[180]

*Köşklü*s were located in the three towers used as observation places. Galata tower was the first fire tower of İstanbul. Built by the Geneose in 1349, it began to be used as a fire observation point from 1717 onwards. The tower was burnt down partly in 1794 and 1824 and the last extensive maintenance was undertaken in 1878.[181] Bayezid tower of today, built by Ağa Hüseyin Paşa in 1829, was located inside the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, its outer structure being stone and brick. Before that time there was another fire tower or a lodge (called *kasr-ı harîk* or *yangın köşkü*) where fire observations were made and as mentioned before from which the title *köşklü* was derived. Though this *yangın köşkü,* which is said to have been built in the late eighteenth century[182] was in a different place located at the

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[180] A. Süheyl Ünver, "İstanbul'un İlk Yangın Kulesi," in *Cumhuriyet Devrinde İtfaiye* (İstanbul: Belediye Matbaası, 1973), pp. 33-35. (It is indicated in the book that this article had been extracted from the ninth issue, October 1971 of the *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*)

[181] Ibid., pp. 35-37.

[182] Ibid., p. 31.

headquarters of the *Yeniçeri Ağası* (or *Ağakapısı*) which after the abolition in 1826 became the office of the grand mufti. The third tower, called İcadiye, was an auxiliary building of a lodge, constructed during Sultan Mahmud II's reign, on the ridges over Vaniköy, in a place called Kenan Hill. Ergin says that a certain Kenan Efendi had built the lodge and had presented it as a gift to the Sultan. After the Constitutional Revolution, the tower and the hill were turned into an observatory (*rasadhâne*).[183]

These three towers complemented each other with respect to the observation capacities in a city with many hills, divided by valleys, and the Bosphorus. The places which could be viewed from one tower could not be as such from the others and they used to communicate the news of fires to each other and to the public by complicated systems using indicators like flags, baskets, sparklers, and lanterns with different combinations and colors to make the original location of flames understandable to everyone. Baskets and flags were used in daytime, their numbers and colors indicating if the fire was in Üsküdar, Beyoğlu, Der-sa'âdet or Rumeli and Anatolian shores of the Bosphorus. Lanterns and sparklers, also used in different numbers and colors served the same purpose at night. There were also specific combinations if a second fire broke out somewhere before the first place was still ablaze. Ergin states how the latest alarm system pointed to the specific combinations of these indicators which really makes a long and complicated list.[184]

These constituted only images of course, which people could only see if they purposefully looked at them. So to serve as a real alarm, previously drums and a large kettle-drum called *kös,* and later cannon fire were used. It is said that the use of

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[183] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1143-1144.

[184] Ibid., vol.3, pp. 1144-1147.

cannon fire started during the office of Halil Paşa when he was the Field Marshall of the Imperial Arsenal.[185] Indeed, a decree dating to April 13, 1840 states that two big lanterns (*iki kebîr fener*) would be arranged in Bayezid tower and that some officers from the imperial arsenal would be assigned to the İcadiye tower, to make it possible for the former tower notify the latter with blue-lights (*çanak mâhtâbı iş'âl olunub*) in the lanterns on the occurrence of a fire. The officers in charge in the latter would fire five cannon shots on the hearing of which five shots would follow from the cannon in Rumeli Hisarı.[186] These five shots were increased to seven at a later date.[187]

The cannon fire issue is presented somewhat differently in contemporary accounts. Amicis, in depicting the Great Fire of Pera, states that the watchmen in Galata and Seraskerat (i.e. Bayezid) towers hung great red baskets and the "Arsenal cannon announced the danger with three tremendous explosions." In any case, he was not there himself and was just narrating what he had heard and read about the incident. Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, a mid-century visitor to the city, specifies that the location of fire was communicated by the number of explosions. According to her knowledge, İstanbul was divided into seven regions and cannon fire was used accordingly to point to the related region. She was stunned by the complex system of fire alarms and could not help but wonder if there was a similarly organized city in Europe.[188] Seven explosions seem to have been the standard however, and the fire area was identified, as mentioned above, by the visual indicators in the towers.

There were also times when the cannon fire could be used only after quite bureaucratic steps. During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, authorization had to be

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[185] *İtfaiye Tarihçesi ve İstatistiği (1714-1946)*, p. 5.

[186] "BOA, İ.DH., 12/546, 1256.S.10," (13 April 1840).

[187] Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey *Eski Zamanlarda İstanbul Hayatı*, p. 47.

[188] Fontmagne, *Kırım Harbi Sonrasında İstanbul*, pp. 126-128.

obtained from the palace secretariat to fire cannon. He would not allow the firing of cannons without permission (because of his delusionary character, as he is generally described!?). The palace secretariat would be informed by telegraph from Bayezid tower, and after the authorization was given, Bayezid would inform the İcadiye tower to fire. A document from the Yıldız archive reveals a newspaper column about this incident. A translation of a press item from an issue dated May 11, 1887 (probably the translation was made for the Sultan at that time), stated that during a recent fire in Arnavutköy, the cannon fire could only be used belatedly for the Sultan was asleep and the secretariat officers could not find a way to wake him up, by which time the blazes had grown and spread such that the late coming fire brigade and the *tulumbacı*s could only be spectators for a time.[189] The name of the newspaper is not readable in the document but it was not a one printed in İstanbul for sure! Of course it could have been a fabricated account, but at least evidence of a permission process during Abdülhamid's reign is confirmed by Osman Nuri Ergin.[190]

After the telephone entered the capital in 1908, the old fire alarm system with köşklüs lost its importance. "What is the need for a runner to notify people half an hour later if it is possible to reach the remotest quarter of İstanbul in seconds?" asks Ergin, though not forgetting to note that the system after 1908 in which police stations were informed by phone and they in turn informed the neighborhood watchmen and other interested parties was hobbling, as the stations did not have the necessary means to convey the alarm news which, according to Ergin, made people miss the old fashion ways.[191]

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[189] "BOA, Y.PRK.TKM., 10/50, 1304.N.09," (1 June 1887).

[190] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

[191] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1146.

Let's assume in our case that there was nothing wrong in the announcement of the fire that broke out one hot June day, in the middle of aubergine season, at the turn of the century, within the wooden dwellings in Kasımpaşa where the young migrant dock workers stayed. The wind was blowing in the southwest direction, which implies luckily that the fire could have ended up at the Golden Horn before long, but then who knows how it will spread and what buildings it will turn to ashes before that time. The city was awaked for the second time by the cannon fire and everyone's eyes were fixed on the towers. The baskets implied the Beyoğlu side and many İstanbulites relaxed, scaring others who had already began running hither and yon.

## Attending the Fire

The main component at the top of a probable list of attendees to the fire was Ziçini Paşa's fire brigade regiment, from 1876 onwards. Whenever the news of alarm reached the barracks of the nearest battalion, a horse driven wagon able to carry twelve men and other special wagons carrying the firepump would depart for the fire area, while other firemen of the battalion followed on foot. Because of the necessity for immediate intervention the wagons carrying the initial team were extremely important. Ziçini Paşa emphasized this point in one of his many reports presented to the Sultan. He demanded two more of these wagons for carrying firemen be bought for each battalion. This would make it possible to deliver 36 firemen of the battalion to the fire area in the first group.[192]

The number of firemen attending a fire can only be guessed through speculation. Each battalion consisted of eight squads of a hundred men each,

[192] "BOA, Y.MTV., 220/57, 1319.Ca.07."

commanding officers and support personnel such as scribes and doctors included. This makes a theoretical total of 800 men for each battalion. Though the last established battalion chronologically, the fourth battalion located in Üsküdar, probably consisted of about 500 firemen, at least at the beginning of its foundation. A document revealing the providing of weapons to the corps states that 500 martini-henri rifles with bayonets and 14 american revolvers had been delivered to that battalion.[193] The battalions were located centrally in the barracks mentioned in the previous chapter. But with time, the need for proximity to the fires made it necessary to set up separate teams or to move some of the existing squads to different locations. The squad centered in Yıldız, probably to better guard the Sultan's palace and the surroundings, is one example of this. The fourth battalion on the Anatolian side also had made a similar arrangement and first in 1891 some of its firemen had been located at the Üsküdar and Kadıköy patrol stations[194] and then later one of its squads had been located at the Kadıköy patrol station.[195] The use of patrol stations was repeated in Teşvikiye station in Nişantaşı. Some firemen were placed there, turning it into a fire brigade branch office. Still, these were not enough for a dissemination project, and Ziçini offered to set up similar branch offices like the one in Teşvikiye, where some officers from the regiment would be assigned and would teach personnel of the station selected specially for this purpose the necessary aspects of firefighting. Together with the acquisition of some firefighting materials by the patrol station would turn it to a fire brigade branch ready to intervene in fires in the shortest

[193] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 71/57, 1308.N.27," (6 May 1891).

[194] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 8/93, 1308.Z.13," (20 July 1891).

[195] "BOA, Y.MTV., 220/57, 1319.Ca.07."

possible time.[196] It is unknown if this project was executed, but Ergin says that after the Revolution in 1908, the firemen of the regiment were distributed to various patrol stations in İstanbul,[197] which implies perhaps a late fulfillment of Ziçini's recommendation.



Figure 7: The fire brigade on the way to a fire with its horse-driven wagon[198]

Hence, whichever battalion was nearest to a fire would rush to the place with horse driven wagons followed by other infantry firemen, probably leaving a certain number of the corps at the barracks in case a second fire broke out. Before the

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[196] "BOA, Y.MTV., 220/47, 1319.Ca.06," (21 August 1901). The twenty locations Ziçini offered were the patrol stations of Feriköy, Hasköy, Şişhane, Galata kapıiçi, Kabataş, Eyüp, Fatih, Aksaray, Yedikule, Sultanahmed, Üsküdar İskelesi, Selamsız, Beylerbeyi, Kandilli, Beykoz, Kuruçeşme, Arnavutköy, Yeniköy, Tarabya, and Büyükdere. Most of these probably represent the places where the fire brigade had difficulties of reaching.

[197] (*ba'de'l-inkılâb efrâdı Der-sa'âdet ve bilâd-ı selâsenin bazı nikâtındaki karakolhânelere bi't-taksîm daha fâ'ideli bir hale getirilmiş.*) Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1130.

[198] Niyazi Ahmet Banoğlu, *İstanbul Cehennemi: Tarihte Büyük Yangınlar* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2008), p. 184.

establishment of the fourth battalion on the Anatolian side at Üsküdar, the battalions in Beyoğlu must have attended the fires there. There is a special article in the specifications of the Bosphorus boat company (*Şirket-i Hayriye Şartnâmesi*) dated October 29, 1888, which states that whenever a fire broke out the ferry boats of the company would carry the fire brigade's wagons and horses and other materials from Kabataş to Üsküdar without taking any fee. In addition, a boat would be kept ready at the pier day and night to take the firepumpers and their pumps across free of charge. Şirket-i Hayriye had been established in 1851 and the *nizâmnâme* prepared during its establishment cited in a book by Eser Tutel, a specialist on Bosphorus boats, who thinks that a similar article might have existed from the beginning.[199]

But again why would the regiment need the assistance of the boat company if there was a naval battalion attached to it located at the dockyards in Kasımpaşa? Whether this battalion had the means to attend fires by using the sea lanes with any boats is not known. But we know that they used to attend land fires as, for instance, according to their good service in the Ayaspaşa-Tepebaşı (a quarter near Taksim) fire in 1892 the battalion's commander Mehmed Paşa and some of the his firemen were rewarded with pride medals (*iftihâr madalyası*).[200] Some eight years later, Mehmed Paşa informed the palace secretariat by telegraph that a fire in Fatih, a quarter across the Golden Horn from the naval battalion's location, had been contained after two wooden houses had burned down.[201] Similar rewards were given to the commanders and personnel of the first battalion (located in Bayezid) and the naval battalion after their service in the Yedikule (a quarter in Der-sa'âdet side near the Marmara sea) fire

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[199] Eser Tutel, *Şirket-i Hayriye* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994), p. 31.

[200] "BOA, İ.DH., 1260/98955, 1309.C.12," (13 January 1892).

[201] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 161/54, 1318.M.30," (30 May 1900).

in 1901 which the two battalions had attended together.[202] These show that the naval battalion attended fires both in Beyoğlu and Der-sa'âdet sides.

Whatever the capacity of the naval battalion with respect to mobility in the sea was, it seems that dispatching firemen and materials to fires along the Bosphorus shores was quite a problem. A press item from 1907 reveals that because of the remoteness of the place, the fire brigade regiment had not been able to attend a fire on Köybaşı street in Yeniköy, a village on the European shore of the Bosphorus. The three firepumps existing in the village had been very instrumental in containing the fire.[203] Ziçini Paşa mentioned this problem many times in his reports and at last a commission was set up of officers of the municipality with Ziçini Paşa in charge and they decided to check the patrol stations of police and gendarmerie along the Bosphorus shores regarding the conditions of the firefighting materials therein.[204] Probably the commission was unable to make much progress, but Ziçini Paşa would be making his broader proposal two years later regarding the transformation of the patrol stations into fire brigade branches mentioned previously.

There were some other negative issues that prevented or slowed down the mobility of the fire brigade. The wagons carrying men and the pumps needed roads with smooth surfaces. A document dated 1892 reveals that the state of the streets in Beyoğlu and Der-sa'âdet was not encouraging in this respect. The paved roads were highly decomposed and were not suitable for driving through which made it

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[202] "BOA, Y.MTV., 214/91, 1319.M.10," (29 April 1901).

[203] , *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 166, October (2007): p. 5. The original item is said to be in the October 27, 1907 issue of Tercüman-ı Hakikat.

[204] See the following three documents: "BOA, Y.MTV., 190/17, 1317.M.03," (14 May 1899); "BOA, Y.MTV., 184/7, 1316.B.01," (15 November 1898); "BOA, İ.HUS., 67/1316 R-106, 1316.R.27," (14 September 1898).

impossible for the fire brigade to reach the fires easily and on time.[205] Furthermore, İstanbul had a very hilly topography which, together with the narrowness of roads in some quarters, made it difficult to get close to the flames with the wagon firepumps. In Kasımpaşa, for example, a volunteer firepumper team had been disbanded with the formation of fire brigade battalions around the quarter. But as the quarter had many narrow and disorderly roads which the fire brigade pumps could not enter, a new volunteer firepumper team was planned to be formed again.[206]

This leads us to the second group of attendees to the fires: the firepumper teams of the official departments and irregular neighborhood firepumper teams. Both remained operative many years after the foundation of the military fire brigade. It seems that the frequent fires and narrow roads of the capital secured their continuation. All the teams of official departments –except the team of the office of the grand mufti, as was mentioned before- had to attend the fires. However, the participation of all of the official teams probably created confusion and was deemed unnecessary; hence, the ministry of public security needed to take some action against this. In a directive issued on April 28, 1869,[207] prior to the establishment of the military fire brigade, it was stated that İstanbul had been divided into seven regions which made clear the permanent stations for the teams of official departments. A special notebook had been prepared and distributed to the chief firepumpers according to which they would arrange which fires to attend. New teams would be called depending on the course of the fire. Also each chief firepumper

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[205] (*şose yolların fenâ halde bozuk ve mürûr ve ubûra mâni' bir halde bulunduğu.*) "BOA, İ.DH., 1264/99291, 1309.B.18," (17 February 1892).

[206] "BOA, DH.MKT., 1901/6, 1309.Ca.12," (14 December 1891).

[207] "Harîk Vukû'unda Zâbıtaca İttihâz Olunacak Usûl ve Mu'âmelâta Dâ'ir Ta'lîmât," in *Düstur* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1872).

would take at most twenty five firemen with him to the fire spot, a precaution aimed at reducing the crowd.

As far as the neighborhood teams are concerned, members would naturally be employed in other professions, so after hearing the cannon fire and detecting the place of the blazes they would rush to the team's gathering place where the firepump and other necessary materials stayed. This would usually be a separate room inside the *tulumbacı* coffeehouse in the neighborhood. After the collection of enough men to move and getting dressed properly to fight fires, the chief would order the elevation of the firepump and the team's sprint to the fire would begin. Their aim would be to be one of the first teams to reach the venue. This would be important for the prestige of the team as it would show the team's success in reacting quickly to the alarm and probably it would mean some material benefits as the owners of wealthy households could hire them to protect their houses for a good fee. So they would run all the distance as they had learned from their elders with the refined directions of the *fenerci* regarding the conditions of the surface of the road and under strict orders of the chief, who would change the quartets carrying the firepump whenever he deemed necessary. They had to be perfect during the run as people would be watching them wherever they passed and would form an idea about their team, which would effect their team recognition. Of course, they would not miss the opportunity to make their team known by regularly giving out loud cries revealing the team's name, also discouraging rival teams that could be on the way while not forgetting to be all ears against the approach of other teams that could pass them.

According to Amicis, this scene of a running team was horrible. It reminded him of old savage days during battles or invasions of cities. His illustration of such a moment during his stay in İstanbul when he witnessed a team of *tulumbacı*s crossing

the Galata bridge is worth quoting verbatim because of his beautiful use of language which is very successful in taking the reader to the liveliness of the moment:

> We leant upon the parapet of the bridge, contemplating the marvelous scene and forgetting the fire, when from beyond the Golden Horn came first a faint confused sound, like the voices of people in distress, and then a burst of screams, shrill and piercing: 'Allah! Allah! Allah!' which suddenly filled the immense and silent emptiness of the road stead with its clamor. At the same moment a yelling and sinister-looking mob of people appeared upon the opposite shore and onto the bridge in our direction. […] A horde of half naked savages, with bare heads and hairy chests, dripping with sweat, old and young, blacks, dwarfs, and giants, hirsute or shaven-headed, looking like murderers and thieves, four of whom were carrying on their shoulders a small pump that looked like a child's bier. Armed with long hooked poles, coils of rope, axes and picks, they rushed by us, shrieking and yelling, with dilated eyes, flying hair and trailing rags, pressed close together, impetuous and grim, and leaving a stench of wild beasts in their wake, until they disappeared into Galata, from where their last faint cry of 'Allah' reached our ears, at which point a deep silence fell again.[208]

Amicis admitted in his book that he was shocked by the primitiveness of these so-called firefighters and he wondered if this "had taken place in the same city and on the same bridge which European ambassadors made their way along with ladies dressed in the latest Parisian fashions and paper boys selling French newspapers."[209] But that city needed the *tulumbacı*s even several years after Amicis' visit, though with a diminishing desire, as the long tradition of fighting fires with manual pumps in the hands of *tulumbacı*s was proving more ineffective day by day and the existence of these brutal rowdies in the streets difficult to put under order made the government increasingly anxious.

Many decrees from the middle of the century onwards were related to the ordering of *tulumbacı*s, as presented in the previous chapter, and Ziçini Paşa's reports called attention to the same subject. Their attendance to fires were meant to

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[208] Amicis, *Constantinople*, pp. 184-185.

[209] Ibid., p. 185.

be restricted and Ziçini Paşa emphasized in a report that only firepumper teams of the proximate neighborhoods should have the permission to go to the fires of a certain quarter. He wrote that the fire brigade commission would prepare maps to indicate the quarters of which each irregular team would have permission to attend the fires.[210]

We do not have any knowledge if this plan was applied and it is not clear according to what principal, if there was any, the irregular teams attended the fires. To a fire on the Anatolian side in Haydarpaşa on August 8, 1896, for example, four teams are reported to have attended: Kocamustafapaşa, Kapan-ı dakîk, sixth district municipality, and the imperial dockyards teams.[211] The first two were apparently neighborhood teams while the third was a district municipality team, and the last was one of the official department teams. There were instances when many more teams were present around fire venues, of course. Kemal Reis, who was the chief of the Merdivenköy neighborhood team, remembers that in an Üsküdar fire in the early 1920s there were seventy-five firepumper teams in front of the Üsküdar patrol station after the fire was contained.[212] In a document prepared by the Ministry of Public Security, it was stated that the municipal district teams should only attend fires in their own districts.[213] All of these show that irregular teams were seen as being responsible for increasing the disorder during fires more than being useful.

Apart from the military firemen and irregular firepumpers there were other attendants to fires who were quite operative and should be classified under a third

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[210] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 93/27, 1310.00.2."

[211] "BOA, ZB., 16/1, 1317.H.23."

[212] Reşat Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 2005), p. 102.

[213] See "BOA, ZB., 373/16, 1322.My.17," (30 March 1906); and "BOA, ZB., 372/145, 1321.Ks.11," (24 January 1906).

category. They were the *neccâr*s (i.e. carpenter), also called *dülger* (i.e. carpenter or builder), who were responsible for demolishing houses during fires in order to prevent the fire from further spreading. They had been established as a special group under the chief architect (*mimar başı*) towards the end of the eighteenth century to help Janissary firepumpers during fires. According to Gönül Taşman, their number were around 200 in 1786 and 300 in 1803. In a regulation prepared in 1803 they were taken under a more precise order which would ensure their attendance to fires with regularity. After this date, 200 of them were located in the *han*s of Çukurçeşme, the remaining being distributed to Üsküdar, Galata, Hasköy, and along the Bosphorus shores. They were made exempt from the *cizye* tax in 1852, which implies that most of them were non-Muslims.[214] We see that in the late nineteenth century they were also called *baltacı*s (literally axeman) or *harîke me'mûr amele* (laborers employed in fires) interchangeably -or there was a group called *baltacı*s and *amele*s within them- and had the responsibility of attending every fire in the city. Their organizational position is not clear, but Ergin states they were obliged to pull down the houses indicated by fire brigade and to remove the remains as quickly as possible.[215] They were experts on this issue and knew how to dismantle a wooden house most easily be by cutting down the necessary pillars.

An archival document dating to December 1847 reveals that carpenter laborers employed in fires (*harîke me'mûr neccâr amelesi*) were to be given 100 pieces of special clothes every three years.[216] Another decree issued three years later states that a group previously made up of 300 axemen from among the carpenter

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[214] Taşman, "1719/1720-1839 Yılları Arasında İstanbul İtfaiye Teşkilatı", pp. 31-35.

[215] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1095.

[216] "BOA, İ.DH., 163/8532, 1264.M.14," (22 December 1847).

laborers (*neccârât amelesinden mukaddemce tertîb olunan üçyüz nefer baltacılara*) would be given uniforms in periods of one every three years and for that time they were to be provided with 300 pieces of uniforms and 200 axes of the latest technology.[217] The number of uniforms given to laborers employed in fires in the years 1896 and 1899 were 150 and 191, respectively.[218] The provision of these uniforms was made with that of the firepumpers, which implies that they were also subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security. In addition, according to Ergin, in return for their service in fires, the *baltacı*s were also exempt from the craftsman license tax (*esnaf tezkiresi*) which the municipality collected.

We might conclude that a special group of laborers existed in İstanbul who were employed during fires for the tasks of pulling down buildings and carrying away the remains under the orders of the fire brigade commander. This special group were generally called *baltacı*s, though they were also referred to as *neccâr*, *dülger* or simply *harîk amelesi* (fire laborer). They had a tradition dating longer than a century. They also pursued their own professions. They were given some privileges, like tax exemptions and rations in kind, in return for their services during fires. The fire brigade commander Ziçini Paşa demanded in one of his reports that these carpenters be exclusively made responsible for this task and be subordinate to the fire brigade regiment.[219] It seems their part-time service in fires had some drawbacks, which must have forced the Paşa to require a position for exerting better control on them.

A fourth group with specific assignments during fires were *saka*s (water carrier) and *suyolcu*s (something like "water main watchmen," the men who made

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[217] "BOA, İ.MVL., 201/6377, 1267.R.25," (27 February 1851).

[218] "BOA, İ.DH., 1331/1313 Ş-13, 1313.Ş.13," (29 January 1896); and "BOA, İ.DH., 1365/1317 S-31, 1317.S.23," (3 July 1899).

[219] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 93/27, 1310.00.2."

the maintenance of water tubes in the streets and who dealt with the provision of water from the pipes) who were the individuals responsible for providing one of the most critical materials used in the firefighting of the day.

*Saka*s were a group of artisans organized in the guild system as an *ocak* (association) with a *kethüdâ* (steward) at the top. As Ergin describes, they were located in a place across from one of the gates called Şekerci Kapısı of Ayasofya mosque, in the corner near the tomb of Mehmed III.[220] They had the privilege of selling water in the city and were exempt from any kind of taxes in return for which they were obliged to attend all fires and carry water by horse or *kırba*s (a leather bag used specially by *saka*s for carrying water) to the firepumps of *tulumbacı*s. In the 1869 directive mentioned earlier,[221] it was ordered that twenty *saka*s, five of them horseman, fifteen infantry, would stay on duty in rotation in the following offices: Sublime Porte, the office of the Commander-in-Chief, the office of the Ministry of Public Security, and the office of the Ministry of Commerce. Each office would assign a supervisor for them and after a fire alarm was given they would take off after the firepumpers. The *saka*s who were not on duty at the time would join them at the fire scene as soon as possible.

It seems after the municipality became active in the city and began to collect the license tax from which the *saka*s were exempt, *saka*s came to be associated with that office. Following the constitutional revolution in 1908, the collection of the craftsman license tax was transferred from the Municipality to the Ministry of Finance and was transformed into a profits tax (*temettu' resmi*), of which both the *saka*s and *baltacı*s were no longer exempt. According to Ergin, this reduced the

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[220] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1094.

[221] "Harîk Vukû'unda Zâbıtaca İttihâz Olunacak Usûl ve Mu'âmelâta Dâ'ir Ta'lîmât."

capacity of the Municipality to force them to undertake various tasks during fires so they no longer provided their services during fires.[222]

*Suyolcu*s were another group dealing with water who had responsibilities in the systems bringing and distributing water into the city. They made sure that water was being used continuously without problems and also dealt with the maintenance of drainage systems. We understand from Ergin that they were also a privileged artisan group who had *berât*s (a certificate) in their hands to perform their profession and these *berât*s could pass to their sons. There was also a *Su Nezâreti* (superintendency of water)[223] to which they were attached, but most of their allowances came from especially *han*s and public baths in addition to other places using water which they used to get monthly fees. In a directive dating to 1861, which had the long title, as follows "A Directive Issued for All the Officers of Gendarmerie Stationed in the Center and the Public Security Officials Regarding the Points That Are to Be Prohibited (*Zâbıtaca Men'i Lâzım Gelen Mevâdd Hakkında Zâbıta Me'mûrları ile Merkezde Bulunan Bi'l-cümle Zâbitân-ı Asâkir-i Zabtiyye'ye Verilen Ta'lîmât*), there are specific articles regarding the *suyolcu*s and *lağımcı*s (i.e. sewerman) and their tasks regarding the drainage system. It seems they used to fulfill maintenance duties similar to today's municipal services regarding the supply of water regularly to houses and shops.[224]

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[222] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1095.

[223] This formerly autonomous *Su Nezâreti* had been attached to the Ministry of Religious Foundations (*Evkâf Nezâreti*) after the latter's establishment in 1837. In 1877 it had been attached to the Municipality but from 1910 onwards it was returned back to *Evkâf Nezâreti* with its name later being changed to *Miyâh-ı Vakfiyye Müdîriyyeti* (literally: Department of Waters of Pious Foundations). See Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1158, 1160.

[224] Fahri Çoker, "134 Yıl Önce Kent Düzeninde Daha mı Uygardık?," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 26, February (1996): pp. 7-8.

One of the groups whose services Ziçini Paşa aimed to improve was the *saka*s and *suyolcu*s. He emphasized in his report that they should be counseled and warned by Municipality officers about the importance of their tasks during fires which was to fulfill the means to feed the firepumps with water as fast as possible.[225]

These were the groups that officially had to attend the fires. But as İstanbul was the capital of the empire with a sultan residing in the city, many high officers attended fire venues especially in serious cases. Before 1826, the grand vizier, the grand admiral (*kapudân paşa*), the chief of Janissaries (*yeniçeri ağası*), the chief gardener (*bostancıbaşı*), and the chief armorer (*cebecibaşı*) went to fire venues and, according to some accounts, each higher officer used to levy a fine against his subordinate if he reached the venue earlier.[226] Sometimes the sultan himself would show up and the said administrators looked bad arriving later than him.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, depending on the transformations in the firefighting organization, there were different visitors from high cadres. The field marshal/minister of Public Security (*zabtiyye müşîri/nâzırı*), the central commander (*merkez kumandanı*), the mayor (*şehremini*), and the commander of the general regiment of fire brigades (*umûm itfâ'iyye alayları kumandanı*) had to attend the fires day and night. At the beginning of a report presented to the Yıldız palace on December 14, 1890, the minister of Public Security apologetically stated that he had not been able to go to the Kabataş fire of the previous night as he had been very sick.[227] It does not appear to have been a serious fire, but the minister's behavior shows us that the attendance of the above-mentioned officers to every fire was

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[225] "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 93/27, 1310.00.2."

[226] Deny, "Tulumbadji," p. 832.

[227] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 7/2, 1308.Ca.02," (14 December 1890).

imperative. Ergin declares that this top level attendance at fires totally changed in 1908, after which no officials paid attention to small scale fires.[228]

Some middle or low level officers also had specific duties during fires; hence, their attendance was mandatory. Inspection officers from the ministry of public security are one example. The directive of 1869 states that an inspection director (*teftîş müdîri*), an associate director (*teftîş müdîr mu'âvini*), one inspector (*müfettiş*) for each of the two and ten inspection officers (*teftîş me'mûrları*) under these inspectors, the latter staying on duty in rotation day and night, would be responsible for attending fires and would direct the work of *saka*s in the fire spot.[229] Ergin also emphasizes the existence of an inspector from the *Su Nezâreti* responsible for regulating the work of *saka*s and *suyolcu*s.[230]

Apart from officers and groups whose participation was mandatory fire scenes had other regular attendees. Porters are one example. As many fires tended to spread with the help of the wind, people who owned houses on roads and neighborhoods near fires used to carry their property out to more secure places. There used to be a lot of carrying going on which made porters' service invaluable. In fact, according to an arrangement made with the steward of the porters –known to us in the directive of 1869-, the steward made a commitment to provide enough porters at each fire, carrying marks to make them be known as porters on duty, and to make sure that no harm would be done to the property carried.[231] The aim was to prevent people from giving their goods to strangers pretending to be porters. We are not sure whether this regulation was being duly applied but a year after the issuing of

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[228] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1094.

[229] "Harîk Vukû'unda Zâbıtaca İttihâz Olunacak Usûl ve Mu'âmelâta Dâ'ir Ta'lîmât."

[230] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1094.

[231] "Harîk Vukû'unda Zâbıtaca İttihâz Olunacak Usûl ve Mu'âmelâta Dâ'ir Ta'lîmât."

this directive the Great Fire of Pera occurred and if Amicis' claim is true there were almost no porters around that day as most of them had gone to celebrate an Armenian national holiday at Beykoz.[232]

Lastly, the inhabitants of the houses, people concerned about relatives and friends, curious strangers, children longing for seeing an interesting event, and thieves and sordids looking for an opportunity would all gather in front of the flames, making a huge and chaotic crowd.

In our exemplary fire in Kasımpaşa, the wagons of the fire brigade from the Beyoğlu battalion faced a lot of difficulties approaching the flames, probably leaving the situation to manual pumps. Perhaps the naval battalion situated in the dockyards would find a way of entering the streets because of their proximity and by the help of the irregular team of the imperial dockyards still operative at that time. Other firepumper teams of official departments which were close to the region were the team of Beyoğlu regional governorate (*Beyoğlu mutasarrıflığı*), also called the Galatasaray firepumper team, and the imperial arsenal team. Neighborhood teams coming first would probably be the Tatavla team of the Greek neighborhood, and Firuzağa and Boğazkesen teams near Beyoğlu. The fire would probably tend to grow because of the wind towards the Golden Horn and as all of the houses were wooden and roads very narrow they would not be able to stand long.[233]

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[232] Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 187.

[233] In a legislative draft of Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet mazbatası*) prior to a regulation for the hindrance of fires, it was stated that the inhabitants of Kasımpaşa and Tatavla did not have monetary strength to build their houses of stone and brick. Probably Kasımpaşa and its surroundings were entirely full of wooden houses on narrow and neglected streets. See Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1053.

## The Fire Venue

In Amicis' story of the Great Fire of Pera the principal blame is put on the official who held the keys to the fountains, but declared at the very beginning of the fire that he could not open them without the permission of the authorities. He is said to have been a guard from the municipality who paused to take the initiative and watched the flames progress. Before the crowd could persuade him to give them the keys, the entire house where the fire had first broken out was ablaze.[234]

Considering the firefighting techniques of the day, all the firepumps, either the manual ones used by the *tulumbacı* teams or the wagon firepumps of the fire brigade, needed continuous feeding of water in the very spot they were operating, implying that they had slightly been improved compared to the bucket brigades of the previous centuries. Hence, water was the principal firefighting material and it was exactly what İstanbul had always felt a shortage of.

The Byzantine efforts of bringing water into the city were noted above. The Ottomans generally continued these efforts and towards the end of the nineteenth century the capital had two main waterway systems covering the need for fresh water on the European side.[235] The first was *Kırkçeşme Suları* (literally: forty fountain waters), which was mainly a system built during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, taking water from Ortadere, Bakraç, and Belgraddere waters and distributing it into the city through forty fountains (from which the name *Kırkçeşme* was derived) through many conveyance structures originally built by the Byzantines and later expanded and ameliorated by the Ottomans. The second was *Halkalı Suları*

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[234] Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 186.

[235] I have mainly used Ergin's account of İstanbul waters here. See Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1155-1182.

(Halkalı waters), which was a system bringing water from Levend Çiftliği, Halkalı, and the surroundings.[236] The Anatolian side, contrarily, did not have a water system and there were only spring waters brought into Üsküdar, Kadıköy, and other Bosphorus villages by benevolent persons and institutions. With the increase of population in the second half of the nineteenth century the need for new water sources was felt and two licenses were provided to private enterprise to build new water systems one on the European, the other on the Anatolian side. Hence, first the Terkos Water Company, an enterprise owned by foreign capital, established a system that became operative as of 1890, for bringing the waters of the Terkos lake into Der-sa'âdet, Beyoğlu, and European shores of the Bosphorus. Then Üsküdar-Kadıköy Water Company established a system that became operative as of 1892-1893 for bringing Elmalı waters into the Anatolian side settlements. After their establishments, these two private enterprises became the subject of many controversies in fire venues as they began to be seen as the parties primarily responsible for the shortage of water during fires.

At the time of the signing of beneficial contracts with these companies, the government had inserted articles related to the supply of enough water for firefighting purposes, the building of fire hydrants and fountains throughout the streets and similar other points. According to the third article of the contract of Terkos Water Company dated September 11, 1887, the company agreed to build 173 fire hydrants in line with the requests of the Ministry of Public Works, in addition to the 60 fire hydrants it had built before.[237] Again, the contract with the Elmalı Water

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[236] Another was added to these by the turn of the century. It was *Hamidiye Suyu*, a system taking the waters of sixty three springs existing in Kağıthane village and the surroundings of Bergos village.

[237] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, p. 2893.

Company contained a seventh article stating that the company would point to the places of the fire hydrants by putting up a special plaque to the nearest building.[238] These fire hydrants would have special keys to be used by officers whenever needed.

It seems that the companies neither supplied enough water during fires, nor built the necessary hydrants promised in the first place, and even the spots and the keys of the hydrants built were always points under consideration. As late as 1911, in the aftermath of the Aksaray fire, the fire brigade commandership declared many fallacies regarding the water supply. The fire hydrants were rare and had been constructed by the companies in a number only for the sake of appearances. The companies had not brought water to the many neighborhoods with wooden and contiguous buildings, and when they had brought the capacity of pipes would let water just enough for the use of the households. The report also counseled that the keys of the hydrants should be given to municipality officers, and police and gendarmerie stations in order to make their usage possible for the irregular firepumper teams who reached the spot before the fire brigade.[239]

Ergin himself complains about such companies – especially owned by foreigners- acting in the interests of not the public but their shareholders and officers and he defends the municipality -of which he was an officer- that in the supply of water the municipality had little effect because only one of the five water systems, the Hamidiye system, was in its control, the other four being administered either by private enterprises as in Terkos and Elmalı waters, or by the ministry of religious foundations (*Evkâf Nezâreti*) as in Kırkçeşme and Halkalı waters.[240]

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[238] Ibid., p. 2901.

[239] The fire brigade report after the Aksaray fire of July 23, 1911 cited in Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 1101-1104

[240] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1182.

In addition to the hydrants and fountains there were cisterns and reservoirs used as fire pools but these also seem to be insufficient in number, which is why the report of the fire brigade emphasized the need for building large tanks in areas where the water companies were not operating and where public baths or mosques that are able to supply water in emergencies did not exist. The existence of fire pools is evident from a directive issued to the public security officers and the gendarmerie mentioned before, one of the articles of which stated that none of the fire pools that existed sporadically in quarters would be left waterless and would be reported to the *Bâb-ı Zabtiyye*.[241]

The first interventions to the fire would be made by the owner of the building where the fire broke out and the neighbors, using simple buckets to throw water onto the flames. The owners of the adjacent houses would attempt to save their own buildings and properties. The spreading of fires used to occur not only with the help of wind but also by the blowing off of burning wood pieces and the giant nails used in the construction of wooden buildings. These nails, burned and glowed with the immense heat would detach rapidly and blow off towards distant buildings causing them to ignite. So people who had houses in the surroundings would endeavor to keep the outer surface of the building wet. Baronne Durand de Fontmagne mentions a rich Armenian who had saved his house in a fire using wet carpets he had laid out around it.[242]

To prevent the flames from spreading to adjacent buildings –along with the fact that people did not quit building wooden dwellings- one of the precautions considered was to put up a stone wall, called a fire wall, between two houses. This

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[241] (*yangın için semt semt mevcut olan havuzlardan hiçbirisinin susuz bırakılmaması.*) Çoker, "134 Yıl Önce Kent Düzeninde Daha mı Uygardık?," p. 11.

[242] Fontmagne, *Kırım Harbi Sonrasında İstanbul*, pp. 126-128.

precaution was first thought of in 1817/1818 as displayed in a firman stating that "either from Muslims or from non-Muslims, people who had the capacity should construct a stone wall between two buildings exceeding the roof by one cubit"[243] After this date this fire wall issue was brought up in several regulations, especially after the 1880s when the municipality began to operate more actively but it is not clear if it was made totally mandatory.

The next intervention was probably made by the neighborhood firepumpers of the same or surrounding neighborhoods who had come early. They would try to find suitable fountains, pools, or other water sources to extinguish the flames. But as they would also look after material compensation for their services they would be ready to be hired by wealthy householders to keep a certain building from catching flames. Many accounts deliver stories about how irregular teams were used by the people who had been able to save their houses. According to Mary Walker's account of the Great Fire of Pera, £ 1.000 had been paid to *tulumbacı*s to keep the flames away from a certain building:

> In this ghostly furnace, in which whole companies of the brave but ill-organized 'touloumbadjis', or native firemen, perished, no fire brigade could have worked with success; but on the edges of the burning stream the touloumbadjis exerted themselves effectually. Not, however, without previously driving terrible bargains with the distracted owners of the house and property. Nearly £ 1.000 was paid down in gold to save a large wooden building standing near a corner of the High Street, of little value in itself, but which, by its position, forms the apex of a vast triangle of crowded dwellings covering the slope towards Galata, which must have been entirely destroyed if that one building had caught the flames.[244]

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[243] (*ehl-i islâmdan olsun re'âyâdan olsun zî-kudret olanlar iki hâne beyninde çatıdan bir zirâ' mikdârı terfî' olunarak kârgîr duvar yapmak.*.) Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1091.

[244] Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery*, vol. 1, pp. 96-97.

Again an incident during the Pera conflagration displays the working rules of the irregular teams. As is popularly known, during that conflagration the British embassy building, which was a stone construction thought to be very secure against flames, was burned to ashes. A letter from a reader printed in *The Levant Herald* in the following days after the incident blamed the officers on duty in the embassy and their clumsiness in being unable to use the *tulumbacı*s effectively and gave the example of the saving of a small house near the embassy by payment to the *tulumbacı*s of 25 *lira*s.[245]

Distributing money to the *tulumbacı*s had saved the French embassy building many years earlier. Narrating the complete destruction of the summer residence of the French embassy in Tarabya by a fire on August 11-12, 1913, the journal *L'Illustration* stated that the building had experienced many fires in the past. According to the article in the journal, it had nearly been burned down in April 1818, but as the ambassador of the time wrote, it had been saved by the efforts of the doorkeeper and his cleverly distributing money to the *tulumbacı*s.[246]

This kind of fee was taken from not only inhabitants but also the government distributed rewards during fires to make men work more efficiently. According to Osman Nuri Ergin, a cash clerk from the Ministry of Public Security would be ready at the spot with fractional coins and allocated them to the *saka*s for encouragement.[247] However, it seems it was not only the *saka*s who received this incentive but the *tulumbacı*s as well. In a document dating to November 1853,

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[245] Altun, "Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebiri," pp. 26-27.

[246] Edhem Eldem, "Tarabya'daki Fransız Sefareti Yangını," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 132, December (2004): pp. 12-13.

[247] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 2, p. 1095.

addressed to the Serasker Paşa, it was asked how the gratuities given to *tulumbacı*s and other laborers employed in fires would be settled.[248]

It was probably the teams of the official departments who would get the lion's share. There were instances when the *tulumbacı*s would stop working and leave the fire spot under the pretext of not having been rewarded. As when the Minister of Public Security reported to the Yıldız Palace in December 1890 that the ordinary *tulumbacı*s had left their firepumps and retreated to coffeehouses because of not getting gratuities (*âdî tulumbacıların bahşiş alamadıklarından dolayı tulumbalarını bırakıp kahvehânelere çekilmeleri*) and the *saka*s had refrained from attending the fire considering that there were the keys of Terkos water in that place (*sakaların terkos suyu miftâhı vardır diyerek yangına gitmekten imtinâ' eyledikleri.*)[249]

However, the people whose houses were about to catch fire would have nowhere to go. So they would be busy taking their valuable properties to safer places, an act described in a Turkish proverb as "*yangından mal kaçırmak"* (literally: to carry off properties from fire) which, in all fairness, is not clear to me whether it implied the panic of the householders to save their assets or the stealthiness of the thieves to escape without notice. Generally large squares, mosque courtyards, graveyards, and hence any open space would do for it. There are many post-fire photographs regarding turn of the century conflagrations showing Sultanahmet square or other areas full of furniture and other properties of the fire victims. Some would, as a last resort, carry their belongings down to stone cellars built under

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[248] (*harîklerde müstahdem tulumbacı neferâtıyla hademe-i sâ'ireye cânib-i hazîne-i celîleden i'tâ' olunmakta olan bahşiş akçesinin tesviyesine dâ'ir.*) "BOA, A.MKT.NZD., 98/7, 1270.M.29," (1 November 1853).

[249] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 7/2, 1308.Ca.02."

wooden houses, usually damp places which could stay unburned. Even they would themselves hide in these cellars in emergency situations but this proved fatal in many incidents. During the Pera conflagration, for instance, many dead bodies were found in such basements with people having escaped the flames, but suffocated from smoke.[250]

After all the confusion and panic, the flames would at last fade and die down within hours, sometimes days, either by the slowing down of the wind or the performance of the firefighters. Some of the firepumper teams and laborers would be given the task of watching the last ashes alive to extinguish, leaving nothing to chance. The fire brigade commander would send a telegraph message to the Yıldız palace to inform the Sultan that the situation was under control and the very next day reports declaring the success of the corps or the complaints as to the capacity of various institutions, investigations regarding the causes of the incident, commissions to coordinate aid facilities, rewards and punishments, in brief, a whole routine of post-fire activities would begin.

## In the Aftermath of Fire

One of the social consequences genuine to İstanbul fires was the fact expressed by the phrase "*kül fukaralığı*" (could be translated as 'poverty in the ashes'), which implied the transformation within hours of haves into have-nots. It is generally agreed that in Ottoman society and İstanbul that people from the upper classes, more specifically high government officers, used to live in the same neighborhood with ordinary families. Alan Duben and Cem Behar convey some witnessing regarding people from middle classes who lived in the same

[250] Altun, "Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebiri," p. 28.

neighborhood with pashas and ministers. They also quote Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who remembers as a child that people in old İstanbul used to entertain themselves with the rich and poor altogether.[251] Hence the large wooden mansions (called *konak)* of these wealthy neighbors could also burn down in fires which in fact was the case several times.

We have much evidence as to the aid facilities of the government after fires in the nineteenth century. Most of the time aid funds (*yardım sandığı*) used to be set up and famous statesmen and the propertied, pioneered by the Sultan, would make donations to the fund usually administered by a commission allocating the money to the needy. Facilities supplied from the government budget by the municipalities were usually not enough and these funds used to make up the deficiency. The foreign countries led by the embassies usually saw these times as opportunities to improve public relations, hence they also established separate funds or made contributions to existing funds. The Pera conflagration, being a popular incident followed closely by the press in the aftermath, displayed many aspects regarding aid issues. The collected amounts each day were printed in the newspapers, the efficiency of the allocation of funds was investigated, many applications were criticized and the whole process was kept under close control.[252]

Probably not all incidents created the same interest as the Pera conflagration, but we have other examples such as the Hasköy fire in 1883, in which a commission with the Sultan as president had decided to provide, coal and gas to the victims (as it was winter) in addition to bread.[253] The aid activities were not specific to İstanbul or

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[251] Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, p. 41.

[252] Altun, "Beyoğlu Harîk-i Kebiri," pp. 29-31.

[253] Rıfat N. Bali, "5 Aralık 1883 Hasköy Yangını," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 205, January (2001).

the fires, either. Regarding the İzmir fire of 1845, the donations list comprised the aid of many central and provincial officers amounting to a total of 290,000 piasters.[254] Likewise, following the earthquake in İstanbul in 1894 the government officers all but made a competition out of making donations.[255] With the press printing the aid information in its columns, these facilities seem to have become public relation activities not only for foreign institutions, but also for the Sultan and his leading officers.



Figure 8: A photo of Sultanahmet Square following the İshak Paşa Fire of 1912 showing the sufferers with their saved property[256]

Destroying huge areas within the urban settlements, fires sometimes generated positive consequences, though not comparable with the damage incurred. Before the Hocapaşa fire of 1865, İstanbul was undergoing a desperate cholera epidemic. Quoting from Atâ Bey, the translator of Hammer, Osman Nuri Ergin states

[254] Kemalettin Kuzucu, "1845 İzmir Yangını," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. February (1999): p. 23.

[255] Mehmet Ö. Alkan, "Toplumsal ve Siyasal Açıdan 1894 İstanbul Depremi Üzerine," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. October (1999): p. 13.

[256] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, p. 412.

that shortly before the fire daily death tolls had reached thousands. Immediately after the fire these figures diminished to one tenth and in a week or so the epidemic disappeared totally.[257] This had eased the suffering fire victims, besides engendering some superstitions towards the occurrence of the fire.

Another positive consequence of the Hocapaşa fire, in fact of most fires in general, was the rebuilding with wider streets and the creation of a prosperous area by planned construction activities. Ergin highlights the drawing up of maps which emphasized a planned urban settlement with wider roads and buildings in conformity with the law.[258] However, not all maps were successfully implemented like the applications after the Hocapaşa fire and many vanished in the corridors of the bureaucracy. The actual case was most of the time letting people build their houses with timber according to the settlements in the pre-fire order.

Throughout the nineteenth century long, fires also triggered the issuance of laws regarding buildings (*ebniye nizâm ve kanûnları*) which had specifically been prepared as a reaction to and a precaution against fires. Starting with the one in 1796, more than ten *Ebniye Nizâmnâmesi* were issued comprising articles proposing the construction of stone and brick buildings, the erection of fire walls between wooden structures, the construction of fire pools, and other necessary measures but the implementation seems to have not been successful enough.[259]

The result was a city continuously under flames giving way to a saying which goes as "*Edirne sudan İstanbul ateşten batacak*" (literally: Edirne will be ruined by water, while İstanbul by blaze) pointing to the floods by which another major city

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[257] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1222-1223.

[258] Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 1239-1254.

[259] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, pp. 304-351.

was continuously threatened. In addition to the major fires listed in the following table there were many smaller scale fires of which Osman Nuri Ergin makes a complete list of including the total number of buildings destroyed. Considering that list, it can be stated that the frequency and the destructiveness of incidents did not decrease and probably gained momentum after 1910s, when the empire entered into a period of battles which would take it to its end in a few years time.

Table 7: Major Fires of İstanbul between 1826-1923[260]

| | Date | Reigning Sultan | Main Quarter | Duration | Destruction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1826, August 2 | Mahmud II | Hocapaşa | 36 hours | Destruction is expressed as thousands of buildings |
| 2 | 1833, August 31 | Mahmud II | Cibali | 1 day | - |
| 3 | 1865, September 6 | Abdülaziz | Hocapaşa | 19 hours | About 3,000 buildings |
| 4 | 1870, June 5 | Abdülaziz | Beyoğlu | - | 3,000 buildings (official estimates) |
| 5 | 1911, July 23 | Mehmed V | Aksaray | - | 2,400 buildings |
| 6 | 1918, May 31 | Mehmed V | Cibali | - | 7.500 buildings |

## Concluding Remarks

Considering the vulnerability of the Ottoman capital to fires, the state and the inhabitants developed many methods to fight flames. They tried to build water supply systems for better firefighting, established special organizations within the army to fight fires, and developed many methods to control fire starting from the detection until the containment. However, the main reason for the destructive fires, the wooden building and dense housing patterns remained a major problem in the way to preventing the calamity. The frequency of fires reached a degree that one

[260] In preparing this table I mainly depended on Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, pp. 1183-1238; but also used Kuzucu, "Osmanlı Başkentinde Büyük Yangınlar ve Toplumsal Etkileri."; and Sakaoğlu, "Yangınlar-Osmanlı Dönemi."

official chronicler in the nineteenth century even gave up recording the incidents regarding them as commonplace issues. A fire incident every eleven days and twenty-four buildings burned down per each incident was a simple statistic dating to the early years of the second half of the century.

In the later years of the nineteenth century one observes quite a complicated structure with respect to the firefighting organization. The firepumper teams of the official departments, the military fire brigade, and the voluntary neighborhood firepumpers were the main components of this structure. In addition, there were the tower officials observing the city day and night and the special couriers scattering into the city quarters in the occurrence of a fire, who constituted an old institution from the earlier centuries. Other laborers were also utilized during fires such as water carriers, carpenters, and axemen, each performing a special task to contain the flames within the shortest possible time.

The city made use of many of its human resources, but this also brought confusion and intersections of authority, which turned fire scenes into an unsolvable mess. The ministry of Public Security, the army and the military fire brigade commanders, and later the municipality, all had responsibilities but the administration of the emergency situation around the fire spot was far from perfect. When these organizational problems overlapped with the city's other disadvantages against fires, the leading one being the huge population increase in the second half of the nineteenth century, many destructive conflagrations occurred leaving several accounts of western travelers containing fire chapters and many phrases in the Turkish language behind as a legacy.

# CHAPTER 4

# VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTING

*I used to run barefoot in the streets, but how happy were those days of mine*[261]

*Kabalak Mehmed*

## Volunteers of a Part-time Profession

### The *Sandıks*

To tell the story of volunteer firefighting in İstanbul is to tell the story of the firepump. The simplicity of the technology used by volunteer firefighting teams in İstanbul can not be represented in any better way than the expression *tulumba sandığı* (pump box) does. The word *sandık* (box) was a popular usage implying the irregular teams, both of official departments and of neighborhoods. The teams were named after their neighborhoods and/or quarters with the word *sandık* added to the end such as *Üsküdar Bülbülderesi Sandığı*, *Galata Hendek Sandığı*, *Galatasaray Sandığı* etc. So the word *sandık* implied both the team itself and the main apparatus used by the team.[262]

In fact, the pump was everything to these teams and the firepumpers were merely users of the pump, first taking it to the fire spot on their shoulders and then

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[261] (*sokaklarda yalınayak koşardım ama meğer ne mesut günlerim, yıllarımmış* […]) from the remarks of a firepumper in his older days cited in Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 299.

[262] One wonders here if another meaning of the word *sandık,* being "a cash box, cash department (of a government or business)", has anything to do with the firepump. Could it be implying that *tulumbacı*s earned their lives through it?

pumping water into the flames using the pump-brakes. Nineteenth century firemen, before the introduction of modern techniques, used to fight fires by pumping water into a burning building trapped by flames without entering the building itself.



Figure 9: A firepumper team carrying the *sandık*[263]

Illustrating the characteristics of volunteer firefighting in antebellum America, Mark Tebeau writes that "volunteers typically attacked blazes from outside of structures, rarely venturing into building interiors to face fire at close range." He emphasizes this as a contrast to the "lifesaving narratives of heroism" with respect to volunteer fire brigades. Very few in hundreds of images showing the working of

[263] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul*, p. 357.

firemen in American fire venues showed them saving lives; rather, the images were concentrated on pulling the engines and pumping water. Needless to say, it was not that the firemen of the period were less brave compared to their contemporary colleagues, but it was more a consequence directly related to the character of the built structures not exceeding three or four floors and to the capacity issues of their fire apparatus. Tebeau finds the volunteers' emphasis on "pumping engines and dragging apparatus as key work activities" a likely outcome.[264] As a result, few of these volunteers died in the line of duty[265] though they suffered from excessive fatigue after an activity of hard muscle work.

The same could be asserted for İstanbul *tulumbacı*s, whose main task was to reach the blazes in the shortest possible time with their pumps and to stream as much water as they could. Considering the two and three storey wooden houses of the city which was the predominant structure of the built landscape, applying water to the fire from the exterior of buildings was probably the basic strategy used by the *tulumbacı*s. This resulted in few losses in lives of the volunteers. The most tragic incident I came across in my sources was the death of three *tulumbacı*s of the *Galata Mengene Sandığı* as a result of the collapse of a high wall in Aksaray in 1898.[266]

As the main activity of *tulumbacı*s gathered around the firepump we should perhaps make brief explanations regarding the historical development of the apparatus. It seems that the first use of a device for streaming water into flames dates back to 2nd century B.C. Some writers, without pointing to any sources, have shown

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[264] Mark Tebeau, *Eating Smoke: Fire in Urban America, 1800-1950* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 28.

[265] Ibid., p. 14.

[266] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 366.

Germany as the invention place of fire engines,[267] but still in 1666, during the Great Fire of London, it was only the hand-operated type pump used as a fire engine.[268] We know of a fire engine that Bostonians imported from England in 1679, apparently the first in America, though only a "rustic affair -a rectangular wooden tub surmounted by a pump and a nozzle-" but which gave the city an ally against fire disasters that Paris in Europe still lacked.[269] Later other innovations introduced more developed types, involving pump handles that could be used by plentiful firemen, wheels to carry the pump faster, and suction hoses to enable the pump to use water from exterior sources. A leap in technology came with the steam engine and the first steam fire engine was constructed in London in 1829.

From the mid-century on, steam power started to dominate American firefighting realm which also signaled the expiration of the volunteer firemen age. Horses, although used with the very introduction of steam engines, became integral parts of fire brigades with 1870s on, for heavier steam fire engines were too inconvenient for manual dragging.

The first manual firepump was introduced into İstanbul by the French convert Gerçek Davud Ağa, who later became the founding *tulumbacıbaşı* of the special corps established as a unit under the Janissary corps. One of the first fires in which his engine was used was the fire in *Topkârhanesi* in 1719/1720, when the effectiveness of the device was accepted and led to the formation of the *Tulumbacı*

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[267] Robert S. Holzman, *The Romance of Firefighting* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 15, cited in Taşman, "1719/1720-1839 Yılları Arasında İstanbul İtfaiye Teşkilatı", p. 1.

[268] "Fire Protection," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1970), p. 304.

[269] Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert M. Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame: The Role of Fire in American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 121.

Corps the same year.[270] Davud Ağa's pump was quite heavy, weighing more than 120 kg., with a main component called a *çardak* (trellis) and could only pump the water but had no suction function. The name given to the pump was "*didon*" (probably after the French phrase 'dis donc' used by Ottomans to refer to things of French origin) and later versions of that pump were called "*didon bozması*" (which could be translated as "adopted from *didon*".)[271]

Many improvements were introduced to the first version of the fire engine, the most considerable change being the installment of a suction function in 1753/1754 that allowed the pump to use exterior sources of water.[272] The firepumps used by nineteenth century neighborhood teams were mainly similar manual pumps with a rectangular container in which the pumping device was installed and with four long wooden sticks at the corners enabling four men to carry it on foot. Also there was a crestlike figure called *tepelik* on top of the device, which was put for ornamental purposes and was more like an emblem representing the team. After the 1880s, lighter versions were introduced which weighed around 40 kg, probably two times lighter than the previous ones that are said to weigh up to 80 kg.[273] That's why there seems to be a periodization in popular usage as "the period of heavy boxes (*ağır sandıklılar devri*)" compared to the "period of light boxes (*hafif sandıklılar*

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[270] There are other dates offered as the formation date but many contemporary writers have depended on 1719/1720 (1132 muslim calendar), a date asserted by Küçük Çelebizâde Asım in his history. See Taşman, "1719/1720-1839 Yılları Arasında İstanbul İtfaiye Teşkilatı", pp. 3-5.

[271] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1123.

[272] Taşman, "1719/1720-1839 Yılları Arasında İstanbul İtfaiye Teşkilatı", p. 26.Especially, improvements in the firepump in the eighteenth century and various names used for them are given in pages 24-29.

[273] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 82. According to the statement of a certain Kemal Reis from the *Merdivenköy Sandığı*, their *sandık* was the lightest which weighed 36 kg. See Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 104.

*devri*)" used in describing the teams before and after the 1880s. Nonetheless, the teams generally owned two firepumps, a heavy one with a larger container for proximate places and a lighter one for more remote locations in order to be faster to reach the spot in time.[274]

As four men were to carry the *sandık*, they were usually regarded as a *takım* (squad.)[275] A squad was an important component of the team and it had to have a high level of harmony in itself. Firepumpers having been in the same squad would be each other's *omuzdaş* (could be translated as shoulder to shoulder, meaning companion.) Members of the squad had to be runners with similar capacity and generally the front and rear two carriers would have equal heights. If there was a perfect harmony in a certain squad's run then this situation would be regarded as "their feet had made love (*ayakları sevişmiş*)." Sometimes the chief would choose to place two relatively short carriers to front and back positions on one side of the pump which would cause the pump to be carried in a position inclined to that side forming a squad regarded as *balıksırtı* (fish ridge). Or he might choose all of the four carriers from short men forming a squad named as *yavrumküçük* (difficult to translate but a phrase such as "short babe" would not be wrong.)

The squads were normally regarded as first, second, and so forth, the first being composed of the most outstanding members of the team. They were also called by special names, such as *muşlu*, *beygirci* (horseman), *karakaçan* (donkey), and *zeybek* (hector) which in the pace of time became common for all the teams in

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[274] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 102.

[275] I prefer to translate "*takım"* as "squad" and not as "team" which could seem to be more appropriate, in order to prevent a confusion with the word "team" which I have chosen to regard the whole of the firepumper crew of a certain neighborhood.

İstanbul. The teams of Üsküdar used to call their first squad as *beygirci* while teams of old İstanbul chose the name *muşlu* for their first squad.[276]

Other positions in the team were *reîs* (chief; usually there were two as first and second chiefs), *fenerci* (i.e. carrier of a hand-lantern), *borucu* (i.e. user of the pipe) and *hortumcu* (i.e. who deals with the hose; this position was also called *kökenci* derived from *köken* which was a yellow metallic hilt on the hose.) These positions although corresponding to the related functions also implied a line of hierarchy. Hence, the *fenerci* in a team was not only the man carrying the lantern in darkness, but also the man in charge after the chiefs who would lead the team in their absence. This line of hierarchy was displayed in the badges sewn as straps to the arms of their upper clothing. Some teams are said to have included members who did not attend fires, such as a retired *tulumbacı* who stayed back in the ward and looked after various things, probably acting as a support staff, and a young boy or boys from the neighborhood who were mascots of the team.

The number of squads usually determined the quality of the team. A pretentious team would have five or more squads which, with the other positions described above, would make a team of about 25-30 personnel. In fact, as also close to the number calculated in the first chapter, 16 can be taken as the average number of personnel for a team. Ziçini Paşa's report of 1892/1893 and some other archival documents related to fund raising activities of firepumpers -which will be mentioned later- show that this figure is an average upon which everybody agreed. Turn of the century photographs of various teams posing around a firepump also indicate such an average.

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[276] Reşat Ekrem Koçu, "Tulumbacılar," in *Aylık Ansiklopedi* (İstanbul: Ibrahim Horoz Matbaasĭ, 1949), p. 1680.

When it comes to the total number of irregular teams in İstanbul there is no record to conclude a specific number. The report prepared by the Office of the Ministry of Public Security in 1846 indicated in Chapter 1 cited 13 teams for official departments with 971 actual personnel and 47 teams for the neighborhoods (including Muslim and non-Muslim neighborhoods) with an estimated 1,134 personnel. The former figure did not change much as later archival evidence showed, but the figure for the neighborhoods must have increased significantly.

I have collected all the names of neighborhoods that I have come across in all of my sources including the popular accounts and the list of the neighborhoods that are said to have a firepumper team (at one date or another) implies a total number of teams exceeding 130. Also we know that district municipalities, having been activated after the Municipal Law of 1877, had begun to set up their own teams and 10 new teams must be added to this list.[277] These district teams were usually called by ordinal numbers such as first district team and second district team, or sometimes the main quarter of the district could be used for their popular names, such as the Beyoğlu district team and the Fatih district team.

The primary source of Reşad Ekrem Koçu in writing his book about İstanbul firepumpers, Üsküdarlı Vâsıf Hoca, who had not been a firepumper himself but had been in their environment for over forty years, claims that the number of firepumper teams of İstanbul had reached hundreds (*sayısı yüzlere varan sandıklar*).[278] It seems this rough guess from a contemporary witness is quite fair and we could extrapolate

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[277] The number of districts had been determined to be 20 with the 1877 law but three years later it would be modified to 10 districts. Some of the district teams were the best irregular teams in İstanbul.

[278] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 90.

the total number of *tulumbacı*s around the turn of the century to be about 3,400,[279] which is much more moderate compared to the exaggerated 20,000 claimed by Deny without reference in his article in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.[280]

## The *Tulumbacıs*

The members of a neighborhood firepumper team other than the chief were called *uşak*s (i.e. a youth; sometimes meaning shop assistant or apprentice, also used for a male servant.) This term includes many connotations regarding the characteristics of the firepumpers serving in the irregular teams. These connotations give us clues about their actual professions, ages, and sex.

First of all, they were young persons -usually bachelors- being either from İstanbul or immigrants from the provinces. The physical toughness of the work performed as firepumpers, i.e. long distance running, carrying a heavy device during the run, pumping water for long hours required young and strong bodies. Vâsıf Hoca describes the severity of the task being even too much for strong young men: "even if the body of the *tulumbacı* had been made of steel, to plough the way through the ice-cold mud barefoot, running sometimes on snow and ice, would make the feet to be worn off by friction and would cause the mighty, rough daredevil youth to wail with

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[279] This figure must be accepted as a very round sum calculated in the aim of getting a simple idea on the quantitative aspects of the *tulumbacı* world as no arguments of substance have been hitherto made. It has been calculated by multiplying the number of neighborhood teams (taken to be 150) and the average number of team personnel (taken to be 16), and to the product total of which 1,000, as the number of personnel in the teams of the official departments, has been added.

[280] Deny, "Tulumbadji," p. 833.

pain"[281] So to think that a *tulumbacı* used to retire in the early thirties similar to the professional sportsmen of today would not be incorrect.

Most of them were also unmarried which is clear from the existence of firepumper wards in the case of the teams of official departments and special rooms serving as dormitory in the upper story or the backside of *tulumbacı* coffeehouses in the case of neighborhood teams. Many firepumper wards were built in various places in İstanbul for the accommodation of members of the official department teams. Many archival documents reveal, for instance, the government's expenses spent for the construction, enlargement, and maintenance of the wards.[282] We know from Duben and Behar's research that the age of marriage for men in late Ottoman İstanbul, contrary to general belief, was quite high, being around 30.[283] Such an average marriage age could imply that many of the *tulumbacı*s, being predominantly youngsters, would naturally be bachelors.

Beyond doubt, all of the firepumpers were male. Apart from the masculine characteristics of the environment, physical requirements of the profession itself described above could be matched only by red blooded youths. Any female who would be allowed survive in this profession and environment would have a mannish character. In fact, there was one such woman, called *Tulumbacı Bahriye*, at the turn of the century. Having lost her mother in her early childhood she is said to have grown up in the streets with boys under the careless control of a drunkard father. She had gained the nickname *tulumbacı* by her attendance to fires as a child of nine-ten

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[281] (*yalınayak buz gibi çamurlara bata çıka , bazan de kar ve buz üstünde koşmak tulumbacının vücudu pulattan bile yapılmış olsa , ayakları yalama yapar, o tuvana, şahbaz delikanlılar acılar içinde kıvranırlardı*.) Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 90.

[282] See for example, "BOA, İ.DH., 181/9991, 1264.Za.24," (22 October 1848); "BOA, İ.ŞE., 2/1311 R-2, 1311.R.21," (1 November 1893); and "BOA, ZB., 55/31, 1317.T.11," (24 July 1901).

[283] Duben and Behar, *İstanbul Haneleri: Evlilik, Aile ve Doğurganlık 1880-1940*, p. 141.

years old but she had also served in fires in later years. Later in her years she led a tragic life with an unhappy marriage and sorrowful days after losing only son in the Balkan war. After committing suicide her already popular image became a legendary story and the firepumpers of İstanbul composed for her a grandiose funeral. There is a firepumper saga (*tulumbacı destânı*) written for her depicting her younger days as an audacious firepumper and a beautiful girl but having manners of a rowdy.[284]



Figure 10: The firepumpers' run[285]

*Tulumbacı*s were more homogeneous in terms of age, sex, and marital status compared to their actual occupations. From time to time they are portrayed as idle layabouts in accounts depicting *tulumbacı*s as part of a bully environment, yet most of them had occupations, though sometimes of temporary fashion or apt for lower classes. Starting a career in the second half of the nineteenth century İstanbul for boys and young men who were not subject to modern higher education were more or

[284] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, pp. 369-377.

[285] Göktaş, "Tulumbacılık," p. 302.

less through being given as an apprentice into the hands of a crafts master. Most of the stories told by Koçu related to the biographies of known *tulumbacı*s of the turn of the nineteenth century involve young men starting their careers as apprentices to coffeehouse owners (*kahveci*), makers of quilt (*yorgancı*), makers of sweat-cloth (*terlikçi*), and various other craftsmen. Probably some of them continued these professions and some others became self-employed doing many kinds of activities such as street peddling -selling according to the season mulberry, fig, or fish in their trays-, line fishing (*olta balıkçılığı*), coach driving (*fayton sürücülüğü*), farmhandship in orchards (*bostan yanaşmalığı*), and the like.[286] But most of the firepumper teams involved members carrying out more institutional careers being part of a guild and/or owning a *gedik* (license) for a certain occupation.

Starting with the reforms of Selim III, the guild system and the monopolies provided to the guilds began to weaken, a process which is said to have reached its peak with the abolition of the Janissaries, who were themselves highly blended to the craftsmen of the city and generally seen as the protector of guilds. The attenuation of the guilds were mainly discerned in the textile sector[287] and many other guilds have survived and determined the rules of Ottoman artisanal life until the early twentieth century when they were totally transformed into trade chambers (*esnaf odaları*) in 1908.

One of the most common professions among *tulumbacı*s seems to have been porterage. In fact, from a set of archival documents dating to 1890, exposing an incident of competition between two neighborhood teams, we get the impression that firefighting on a neighborhood team gave the members of that team the right to the

[286] Ibid., p. 307.

[287] Mustafa İnce, "The İstanbul Textile Guilds in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" (M.A., Boğaziçi University, 2003), pp. 26-79.

porterage business inside the borders of the said neighborhood.[288] The incident I have mentioned occurred between the firepumper team of four neighborhoods near Tophâne and the Galatasaray firepumper team, one of the teams among those of the official departments. It is understood from the petition of the inhabitants dwelling in those four neighborhoods that about seven years before they had come together to form a firepumper team because of the building structure in their locations which was predominantly wooden and dense. Their application by a petition to the Firepump Commission had been approved and a team with Emin Ağa, the coffeehouse owner in their neighborhood, as chief had been established. The problem was that the members of the team were unable to perform porterage because members of the Galatasaray team (which is a proximate place to Tophâne) were actually doing the same business there. The inhabitants claimed that the special location for the Galatasaray team was the upper side of *Gazhane Yokuşu* and Bostanbaşı locality should be left to their team[289] for the privilege of porterage business. According to the argument of the opponent side, expressed by Ali Bey, being the responsible officer of the team as Beyoğlu firepump director, there was no need of a firepumper team in those four neighborhoods due to the existence of many firefighting units, such as the teams of the Arsenal and Galatasaray, the fire brigade battalions located in the Dockyards and Beyoğlu, and the neighborhood team of Firuzağa, proximate to the locality. He accused the majority of the opponent team's

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[288] "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 5/118, 1308.M.26."

[289] (*mezkûr Galatasarayı tulumbacılarının mahall-i mahsûsu ise Gazhâne yokuşunun yukarısı olduğu cihetle merkûmların kendilerine mahsûs olan mahallerde çalıştırılarak mahallâtımız dâhilinde bulunan Bostanbaşı mevki'inin mezkûr dört mahalle harîk tulumbası efrâdına terk olunması.*) Ibid.

members of being looters and disgraced and harmful individuals[290] and demanded their team be abolished. The Firepump Commission in investigating the matter asked the opinion of general stewardship of porterage (*umûm hammâllar kethüdâlığı*) which declared in response, taking the side of the team of four neighborhoods, that only a resolution from the municipality could make it possible to oust the old business owners by bringing persons from outside[291] as the Galatasaray team members attempted in this case.

The argument of the Beyoğlu firepump director is striking here, as he did not claim that it was his team's right to carry on porterage business there but only requested the dissolving of the opponent team. This he did, probably on knowing that if a firepumper team existed there then it would be that team's right to perform porterage. There are many other documents revealing similar incidents of competition between firepumper teams whose members were porters. Thus we could easily suggest that porterage was a widespread profession among *tulumbacı*s. Additionally, similar professions that could be deemed as other kinds of porterage such as *beygircilik* (hiring out workhorses), and *arabacılık* (driving a cart), could be seen among firepumpers.

Another occupation related to the firepumpers that is worth mentioning is boatmanship (*kayıkçılık*), which was a popular career in İstanbul, especially at times when ships and ferries did not exist or were only rare. Reşat Ekrem Koçu gives the biography of a certain Kahya İsmail, who was the chief of the Defterdar firepumper team and was also the steward of the boatmen of Defterdar wharf, a locality near the

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[290] (*efrâd-ı merkûmenin ekserîsi bir takım çapulcu ve bir takım efrâd-ı matrûdeden […] ve eşhâs-ı rezîle ve muzırradan bulundukları.*) Ibid.

[291] (*bu misillû hâricden adem getirmek ve orada kadîm […] esnafı kaldırmak başlıca şehremânetinin bir kararına muhtâc bulunduğu.*) Ibid.

Golden Horn. He ran a coffeehouse in the locality which was a gathering place for firepumpers and boatmen, some of whom were probably involved in both of the activities.[292]

Of course most of the time the characteristics of the neighborhood also determined the original occupations of the team members. As the team proximate to a wharf mainly consisted of boatmen, as was the case of the Defterdar firepumper team, the Merdivenköy team members, for instance, were farmers. Merdivenköy was a neighborhood near the further side of Kadıköy in the Anatolian part of İstanbul and the chief of their team, Kemal Reis, remembers that they were made fun of by Kadıköy district municipality team members, who said: "*domatesçiden tulumbacı olmaz* (tomato producer/seller won't make a firepumper)."[293]

When it comes to the community connections of firepumpers it is not clear whether certain teams were composed of members of a definite religious community or ethnic group or not. The distinction between neighborhood teams and patriarchate teams is evident from the beginning as the latter were established by the guarantee of their religious leaders and in connection with certain churches, though it seems this distinction was only a reality arising from the settlement characteristics of these communities where non-Muslims generally had their own neighborhoods. There are examples showing both Muslim firepumpers in non-Muslim teams and the opposite. One catching example could be the team of the Armenian church in Bakırköy whose chief was Mehmed from Kastamonu, apparently a Muslim, who was also the watchman of the neighborhood.[294] The members of that team were again porters in

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[292] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 157.

[293] Ibid., p. 103.

[294] (*kilise tulumba reîsi ve mahalle bekçisi Kastamonulu Mehmed.*) "BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK., 49/66, 1314.Ş.11," (15 January 1897).

that neighborhood and they had a fight with the Kurdish firepumpers of the Bakırköy district municipality who worked as porters on the boat pier upon a conflict on who would carry a few wagons of flour for a bakery managed by a Greek baker. [295] The result was two injured from the Kurd firepumpers and three from the church team, including the chief of the team Kastamonulu Mehmed who had bodily injuries.

Kurds usually appear as an ethnic group making up the firepumpers of many teams as seen in the previous example. They were usually also porters in many cases an example being the members of the *Üsküdar Paşakapısı Sandığı*. This team was composed Kurdish porters of the Üsküdar wharf and one of the members of this team, a certain Kürt Davud, knifed a firepumper, named Toygarlı Rıza, of another Üsküdar team in an incident upon the encounter of the two teams on the way to a fire in 1908. These encounters usually ended with fights, that time being more serious. Rıza was dead due to the knife injury.[296] According to Sermet Muhtar Alus, the district municipality teams, the team of the Office of the Ministry of Public Security and the team of the Customs House were made up of Kurdish firepumpers.[297] And Refi Cevad, in his memoir-like novel, *Sayılı Fırtınalar*, portrays the sixth district municipality team as consisting of Kurdish firepumpers.[298]

All these professional and community links had a degree of importance in the acquisition of a young man by a firepumper team. In the first establishment phase of a team, as we have seen in one example regarding the four neighborhoods around Tophâne, the opinion of the neighborhood inhabitants stated by a petition was the

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[295] (*çend araba dakîklerin fırına nakl hammâllığından dolayı vukû' bulan münâza'a.*) Ibid.

[296] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, pp. 145-146.

[297] Sermet Muhtar Alus, "Kırk Yıl Evvelkiler: Tulumba Reisleri ve Omuzdaşlar," *Akşam*, 25 May 1939.

[298] Ulunay, *Sayılı Fırtınalar*, p. 19.

determining factor. They had identified their need for a firefighter team to protect their dwellings and had presented this will to the Firepump Commission after which they were able to set up their firepumper team. It is understood that the Firepump Commission, originally attached to the Ministry of Public Security, was some time after 1908 transferred to the Municipality. In explaining the mechanism of the foundation of a voluntary neighborhood team, Osman Nuri Ergin mentions this Commission under the Municipality and informs that initially the board of aldermen in the neighborhood (*mahalle heyet-i ihtiyâriyyesi*) would assign a chief and provide him a certificate (*ilmühaber*) by which he would apply to the nearest patrol station and after their acknowledgement the application would be presented to the Commission for the last consent. A special record book was kept for each team by this Commission in the Municipality.[299]

The acquisition of firepumpers thereafter seems to have been under the control of the chief and there is no further information whether the individual firepumpers' records were kept either by the Commission or the patrol stations. The team chiefs were usually influential persons in the neighborhood either through guild activities or community relations. Being coffeehouse owners, stewards of guilds' local branches, watchmen, and subjects of other renown statuses in the neighborhood, the chiefs were the first authority to acquire members to the team. A young apprentice in a coffeehouse would ask his master if he would be let join the neighborhood team and by the master's consent, and probably good relations with the neighborhood notables and the team chief, he would make a candidate to join the team. Kazdağlı Ahmed Durud, who was a firepumper between 1893 and 1900 in the Gedikpaşa Sandığı, had a story similar to this one. He was a boy of about sixteen

[299] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1139.

years-old when he reached İstanbul and made his step into the coffeehouse of a certain Çamiç Ağa, after escaping from a tragic past in his hometown back in the Aegean. Çamiç Ağa, a coffeehouse owner for three quarters of a century employing in total about thirty apprentices when later he told this story to Koçu, accepted the boy to serve in his shop and some years later Ahmed Durud entered the neighborhood firepumper team by the master's consent. He later married a girl from Üsküdar, whom his master had found for him, and left the firepumper team, opening his own coffeehouse in Üsküdar with the inn coffeehouse license (*han kahveciliği gediği*) his master acquired for him.[300]

Leaving the firepumper team to set up a new life after marriage was not a problem but changing teams was usually not seen as ethical behavior because of the competition between the teams. The story of Çiroz Ali, one of the much admired firepumpers of the Defterdar Sandığı, not only because of his flying speed, but also the beauty of his voice in reading poems and improvisations in firepumper coffeehouses, could be an example of descent after leaving his team. The chief of the team, Kahya İsmail, mentioned before as the steward of the boatmen of the Defterdar wharf, took Ali under his wings in 1886. Ali began to stay at the bachelors' room at the upper storey of the chief's coffeehouse and became a member of the firepumper team. He also became a boatman as many of the other members were. But four years later he escaped from the place, leaving his boat and membership of the team, and joined to the Köyiçi Sandığı in Beşiktaş. This was seen by his teammates as ungratefulness to the team and the chief and they never came after or looked for him afterwards. Apparently, Çiroz Ali fell into undesirable environs and bad habits having lost his mentor. Added to these were treacheries of Ali's family members

[300] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, pp. 149-154.

against him, which led, together, to his tragic death from tuberculosis four years later.[301]

It was not always the firepumpers who left teams. Teams also expelled members who exhibited undesirable behavior. In the 1880s, Hopalı Çakır Mustafa was one such admired *uşak* in terms of his success in the profession but having low ethical qualities. He had been caught with women three times, in the aftermath being taken to the patrol stations in disgrace after which he lost his position in the team. He was dismissed and his license as a boatman at Cibali wharf was also taken from him.[302]

## The Financial Conditions of the Teams

As far as the teams of the official departments are concerned, the government budget was the main provider of financial means. They were all founded by various departments of the army and navy and other official departments and were administered by firepumper directors who were employees of the state. Of course, the materials needed for the work of firefighting and their maintenance were supplied by the government. The directors were paid monthly wages albeit some of them only were able to get one after reforms introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century. The firepumpers on those teams, however, were devoid of cash benefits and were supplied with daily rations consisting of bread and some other exigencies of daily life. Yet these rations were not identical and differed according to various teams. Some of their other needs for survival were also compensated, as their shelter need was supplied by building wards for the bachelor firepumpers to stay overnight

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[301] Ibid., pp. 154-163.

[302] Ibid., pp. 313-314.

and clothing needed for the profession was provided periodically, though only once in a three-yearly period. Some other benefits as exemption from certain taxes, such as head tax for the non-Muslim firepumpers and the license tax for the ones engaged in any craftsmanship, were also operative.

Neighborhood teams, both Muslim and non-Muslim, could not enjoy most of these remunerations. It is not clear whether, in the initial establishment of a neighborhood team, the firefighting material including the firepump was obtained by the state. In one archival document dating to 1840, during the first founding of the patriarchate teams it is said that "firepumps [teams], the actual costs of which are to be provided by the communities themselves, have been organized in the churches of the said communities."[303]

From Osman Nuri Ergin's narration, where he depicted the set up process of a neighborhood team, apparently after 1908 when the firepump commission was active in the municipality, it might be understood that the materials in the first place were being debited to the chief of the team and a deed showing that he had taken the delivery were kept in the records. When the chief chose to leave the service he had to return all he had taken to the board of aldermen in the neighborhood, having to compensate any losses. It is not clearly stated in his expression if the materials belonged to the municipality or the neighborhood.[304] It seems more probable that the neighborhood in union financed the first purchase of the team's necessary materials.

The variable costs of the team in the time that followed, such as buying new equipment or the maintenance of existing ones were financed by the inhabitants themselves, though there was no constant flow of money such as fees or the like. It

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[303] (*masârif-i vâkı'ası milletçe kendi taraflarından tesviye ve rü'yet olunmak üzere millet-i merkûme kiliselerinde tulumbalar tanzîm etmiş.*) "BOA, İ.DH., 5/232, 1255.Za.07."

[304] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol.3, p. 1139.

was the firepumpers that used to raise money from the inhabitants by accepting donations whenever a need occurred. This activity had to be permitted each time by related government offices and had to be under the superintendence of security officials, probably in the aim to avoid misuse. A document from 1906 reveals that the neighborhood team in Kadıköy Yeldeğirmeni presented a petition to the Üsküdar patrol station for the permission of raising funds from the dwellers to gather 2,300 piasters, which was needed for the maintenance of the firepump, the purchase of two new hoses and sixteen pairs of uniforms for the firepumpers. This request was forwarded to the Firepump Commission and they in turn gave their consent, on the condition that a local police commissar would oversee the money raising activity in order to avoid any abuses.[305]

A similar request came from the team of the Kanlıca village, this time the chief Vehbi presenting the petition to the district governor (*kaymakam*), for the need of 2,000 piasters, in order to achieve the maintenance of the pump and buy uniforms (again sixteen pairs) for the firepumpers. There was quite a bureaucracy in the meantime, the district governor asking to the Municipality and the municipality in turn sending the request to the Ministry of Public Security. The permission was provided on the same condition as before.[306] The same process was also followed for a non-Muslim team, of the Aya Kostanski church in Beyoğlu Tepebaşı.[307]

Any other kind of direct fund raising was not allowed. A few years later, the police headquarters was warning the patrol stations against some greek firepumpers who were seen in groups of two and three raising money from the drinking houses

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[305] "BOA, ZB., 394/80, 1322.Ke.13," (26 December 1906).

[306] "BOA, ZB., 56/20, 1323.E.02," (15 September 1907).

[307] "BOA, ZB., 391/72, 1323.Ts.17," (30 November 1907).

(*meyhâne*) and outdoor cafes (*gazino*) around Langa in a manner threatening the owners. This was classified as being contrary to the current procedure of gathering donations (*cem'-i i'ânât-ı usûl-i mevcûda hilâfet.*)

The teams invented other ways of fundraising, too. One interesting activity was the organizing of circumcision feasts for poor boys. Vasıf Hoca witnessed feasts of this kind which he states that firepumpers of Üsküdar used to organize in many quarters. During the feast coaches were hired and the boys to be circumcised were seated in them two by two, next to whom an old firepumper would take seat with a young firepumper sitting next to the coach driver. In front of the coaches a music band with drum and horn and two male dancers used to provide entertainment. This parade was leaded by four firepumpers dressed in their newest clothes for feasts carrying an embellished firepump with the *fenerci* at the forefront. The parade wandered different quarters with their music and dancing gathering gratuities from the crowd or rich houses. It used to continue for some days and one day would be reserved for a sea route in which the paraders would use boats to go along the Bosphorus shores and hope to get gratuities from the dwellers of waterside houses. Vasıf Hoca writes that to make the feast more enjoyable and increase the gratuities usually a old Kurdish porter who had not been circumcised before would be found and included in the feast with an old firepumper accompanying him putting on a feast boy's costume and pretending to be circumcised.[308]

According to one witness, a young Englishman staying in İstanbul in the 1900s, who loved the firepumper environs and had many friends among them, was circumcised in a similar feast organized by Çeşmemeydanı firepumpers in Okmeydanı. He was the son of an English acrobat family performing in İstanbul

[308] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, pp. 93-95.

theaters at the time. Although he did not join any team officially, he attended many fires with his firepumper costume he carried for years and had taken the nickname *İngiliz* Hidayet. It seems that *İngiliz* Hidayet ended up in poverty and misery staying in firepumper wards after too much drinking and getting into bad company.[309]

Parades seem to not have been unique to İstanbul firepumpers. Many American antebellum volunteers used to organize similar parades or take the opportunity to attend certain celebration days by their own parades. Robert Holzman provides much visual material regarding these festivities of which "great events such as the opening of the Erie Canal or of a new reservoir, the anniversary of events such as the withdrawal of the British army in 1783, or celebrations such as military victories were the occasions."[310] He does not mention any fund raising facilities regarding these events, but Hazen and Hazen speak of "money-making balls and other events sponsored by the [voluntary fire] companies."[311]

The firepumpers of İstanbul also made use of the religious festivals to gather tips (*bayram bahşişi*) from the public by wandering door to door with a music band. The coins given by the contributors would be put in a lantern or the pipe. Pierre Loti, the famous orientalist and adorer of İstanbul, once gave a festival tip to the firepumpers of the Fethiye team and they are said to have kept that gold as a souvenir by fixing it on their firepump.[312] These facilities, i.e. circumcision feasts for poor boys and religious festival tips, are still seen in Turkish social life, the former being done by local administrations to help the poor and the latter by the drummers

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[309] Ibid., pp. 275-278.

[310] Holzman, *The Romance of Firefighting*, pp. 126-136.

[311] Hazen and Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame*, p.126.

[312] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 91.

themselves who perform the wakening of people at nights by their music for the fast in Ramadan.

Other than these, the firepumpers would finance some of their costs by the gratuities taken from the homeowners whose houses they had saved from flames. As has been mentioned, in the previous chapter, some occasions during fires regarding the utilization of teams by the homeowners in order to protect their buildings with special care. It shows that probably there were many pre-arranged deals during fires where wealthier property owners hired the teams to protect their own property.

In addition to these random tips there was an institutional gratuity provision by the state in order to make the firefighting organizations work more ambitiously. It was an application surviving from the time of the Janissaries which continued into the nineteenth century. There had been a need to give an order to this practice and the related government offices made some correspondence on the matter in 1854 on how the whole process would be handled. It was decided to give gratuities to the firepumpers, water carriers, and other laborers who had reached the fire spot earlier and who had been seen working in the containing of the flames. The latecomers who reached the spot after the containment would not get any. In every fire the chief accountant would give 200 piasters to the road laborers but the other firefighting groups would only get gratuities in serious conflagrations. [313] The gratuities to other firefighters would be given by the consent of the Commander in Chief through promissory notes sealed by the firepump director of the Office of the Commander in Chief. *Tulumbacı*s, *saka*s, and *neccâr*s, each would get their share of the gratuity by these notes. But the process was not satisfactory for the firefighters at times and, as

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[313] (*vukû' bulan harîklerin her def'asında veznedârbaşı ma'rifetiyle yol hademesine 200 kuruş verilüb kusûr neferât ve me'mûrine her harîkte olmayarak hüdâ hıfz buyursun külliyetli harîklerin her def'asında.*) "BOA, İ.MVL., 305/12555, 1270.Ş.05," (3 May 1854).

happened at the Kabataş fire in 1890, they left their firepumps at the fire spot and protested on the pretext that they had not been given gratuities.[314]

Being a firepumper was not wholly a voluntary activity. It provided the members of the teams with some material benefits let alone the social benefits they enjoyed from membership to a team which sometimes brought them the advantage to be part of a guild and perform a profession such as being a porter or a boatman. One can see similar aspects of volunteerism in American nineteenth century firefighting, where the volunteers received money collected from hearth taxes and chimney fines. They also had the opportunity to be exempt from jury duty and militia service.[315] Amy Greenberg sees the firefighters being not truly volunteers as according to her they, "generally working without a salary, received valuable payment for their services. They received fine firehouses and machinery, freedom from jury duty, and a public tribute that elevated their status in a republican-liberalist political culture, whose heroic deeds largely determined a man's worth as a citizen."[316]

### *Tulumbacıs* as Everything Other than Firefighters

It is common for the firefighters to be called salamanders, "in honor of that creature's mythical ability to endure fire."[317] Many firefighter sagas existing in Reşad Ekrem Koçu's study also include the phrase "*semender*" (salamander) in referring to the *tulumbacı* in question. This form of address highlights the courage of the firemen as "keepers of the flame" or "eaters of the smoke." Nevertheless, as

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[314] See footnote 233.

[315] Hazen and Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame*, pp. 126-127.

[316] Amy Sophia Greenberg, *Cause for Alarm: The Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth Century City* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 9.

[317] Hazen and Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame*, p. 41.

mentioned previously in this chapter, it was quite rare for the volunteer firefighters to attend fires from inside the buildings, on the contrary they were merely pumpers of water into the blazes from the outside of burning structures. This was probably more a fact for İstanbul *tulumbacı*s who generally faced fires in two or three storey wooden houses. Their task was much of a race against time, to reach the firespot in the shortest possible time and to apply water on the flames with continuous pumping, both of which required strength and stamina. In fact, firefighting was an arena for them to show the power of the muscles in their arms and legs, which was important to prove themselves as a true man.

Insisting that the "romance of firefighting" was not limited to the virtues of volunteerism in an age of technological imperfections, Holzmann preferred to see the "romantic aura [arising] from the nature of the age-old struggle between Man and Fire." He claimed that "the adoption of spray nozzles, smoke ejectors, and foam chemicals [did] not change the true nature of this heroic battle."[318] I would rather underline the world of firefighting outside the fires which also consisted of running to fire spots with ambition, not caring whether the fire alarm was true or not. A century of volunteer firefighting activities in İstanbul established a tradition full of rituals in performing the tasks of the profession but which went beyond the profession itself.

## Belonging

First of all, the feeling of belonging in a limited sense to the *tulumbacı* team, and in a wider sense to the *tulumbacı* world affected the young candidates and this, in turn, strengthened the cohesion of the members in the team and community levels.

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[318] Holzman, *The Romance of Firefighting*, p. 9.

Their uniforms both in and outside the working hours, their special jargon, and the habit of solving problems inside the organization both distinguished the teams from each other and the *tulumbacı*s from the outside world.

The clothing they wore had no resemblance to a modern fireman's uniform. Before the 1890s the neighborhood firepumpers did not put on monotype uniforms during fires. They used to wear colorful shirts, stiff shirts called *frenk gömleği* (European shirt), or lisle flanels (*fildikos fanila*) and various kinds of pants, baggy trousers, with every kind of headwear such as fez, felt cap, or being simply bareheaded. This disorder in the appearance of the teams which Amicis had described as "a horde of half-naked savages, with bare heads and hairy chests," made the control of the fire spot by the officials a very hard task. Ziçini Paşa, the commander of the fire brigade, touched on this point in his already quoted report, demanding that "special uniforms carrying logos should be arranged for firepumpers in order to recognize them at first glance and the transgressing of the cordon in every fire by the children trying to imitate firepumping or persons wandering here and there should be prevented."[319]

According to Koçu, a change in the *tulumbacı* clothing began to occur from the mid-1880s onwards and the teams began to adopt team uniforms, wearing monotype shirts (*mintan*) distinguishing them from other teams, knee-length pants (*dizlik*), felt cap or a light shawl (encircled around the head) as headdress, and being barefoot. Some teams put ideographs on their knee-length pants, for instance, "a knife inside a heart shape" was the figure the Kazlıçeşme team knitted on the front

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[319] (*tulumbacı efrâdından oldukları yek nazarda bilinmek için [...] herbir yerlerine alâmet-i fârika yapılıp kıyâfet-i mahsûsalarının ta'yîn olunması ve tulumbacılığa özenen çoluk ve çocuk makûlesinin ve bir takım eşhâs-ı mücâvelenin her harîkde kordonu tecâvüz edip tulumbacı efrâdına karışmalarının.*) "BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 93/27, 1310.00.2."

side of their pants.[320] It is difficult to check if this regularity was adopted by the majority of the teams. There are photographs and postcards in some articles showing some of the teams in monotype uniforms though mixed wearing is also seen in some of them.[321] As they have no dates, we can only be sure that at least some of the teams adopted uniforms to the end of the nineteenth century.



Figure 11: Greek firepumpers of Tatavla neighborhood.[322]

Many writers speak of a firepumper clothes, though there are differences in their descriptions, existing in later times towards the turn of the century which gives the impression that a *tulumbacı* type of dressing that *tulumbacı*s used outside their work hours, something like a fashion, occurred. Ergin states that *tulumbacı*s wore a stout coarse woolen cloth (*aba*) they called *mintan*, full gathered knee-breeches worn

[320] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 77.

[321] For photos of firepumper teams, see Uğur Göktaş, "Kartpostallarda Tulumbacılar," *İlgi*, no. 51, Autumn (1987); Koçu, "Tulumbacılar," p. 1678; Göktaş, "Tulumbacılık."; Halit Bayrı, "İstanbul Yangınları," *İstanbul Belediye Mecmuası*, no. 143-144, July-August (1936): pp. 352-353; Emin Âli "Tulumbacılık İstanbul'un En Canlı Sporudur," p. 37; Özavcı, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde İtfaiye*, p. 29; Kuzucu, "1845 İzmir Yangını," p. 25; Belge, "Ateş ve İstanbul," p. 32.

[322] Göktaş, "Tulumbacılık," p. 302.

with tight leggings called *potur*, a fez molded with zero scale (*sıfır numara kalıplı fes*) encircled with a band or a silk handkerchief, and a Cretan cummerbund around the waist (*Girit kuşağı*).[323] Koçu says that a photograph showing the famous *tulumbacı* Çiroz Ali (whose story I have quoted), his mentor and chief Kahya İsmail, and another *tulumbacı* of the same team Asaf Bey, taken in the 1890s, examples the typical dress firepumpers used to wear outside.[324]

Uniforms identifying firepumpers in general or the team itself helped to increase the feeling of belonging to the realm of firepumping. Friendship in the teams were close expressed in the word *omuzdaş* and another phrase, *enseye tokat arkadaşlık* (friendship as clapping the nape), which implies close friendship, had its origin in the changing of squads during the run to the fire, where the new squad of four would take their places behind the carrying squad and slightly hit the back of their necks with a clap to inform about the position change.

The teams had a mechanism called *divan* (court) or *suffe* (hall), which resembled the *divan-ı hümâyûn* (imperial council) of former times where state affairs had been conducted. The problems of the team were declared in this court in front of the chief, being the chairman, and two types of punishment were applied. One was called *tomruk* (trunk) executed by shackling the guilty and forcing them to stay in the ward for the punishment period, whereas the other was called *kırbaç* (whip), probably executed by the whip carried by the chief as a symbol of his authority.[325]

Their life was not always that strict, of course, especially when they returned from a fire and went together to a public bath to rest their exhausted bodies. If it was

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[323] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol.3, p. 1137.

[324] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 76, this photograph can be found in Özavcı, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde İtfaiye*, p. 30.

[325] Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, vol. 3, p. 1134.

daytime they would enter as ordinary customers, but the owner of the bath would not expect any money from them. At nights, they would reserve the place for themselves and stay until daylight, singing, playing music, and dancing.

The brotherhood of the team would sometimes extend to other teams by a probable friendship between the chiefs or after good relations between the members of two teams. This was known as *soba birliği* (the union of stoves; stove is also used in slang for the meeting place of rowdies) activated by a contract in word, after which two teams did not chase each other in runs or helped each other against other teams. This relationship was sometimes taken to higher levels, to a situation called *çifte kardeşlik* (double brotherhood), in which the teams went to fires together carrying one pump.

## Demonstration

All of these rituals forming a close environment were supported and strengthened by the show business aspects of the profession. Hazen and Hazen speak of the frequency of fires in New York in the first half of the nineteenth century which made the fire departments quite popular: "fires were so commonplace during the antebellum years that the city's firefighters became widely celebrated as tourist attractions." Their mention of an extract from a British naval captain's diary displays the disappointment the man felt after a false alarm, reminding us of Amicis' feelings:

> So much had been said to me of the activity and skill of the New York firemen that I was so anxious to see them in actual operation; and accordingly, having dressed myself quickly, I ran down stairs. Before I reached the outer-door, however, the noise had wellnigh ceased; the engines were trundling slowly back again, and the people grumbling, not without reason, at having been dragged out of bed to no purpose. Of

> this number I certainly was one, but more from what I had lost seeing than from any other cause.[326]

It was not only tourists that were attracted by the firefighters but also the locals. Hazen and Hazen portray many fire scenes where "spectators congregated simply to cheer on their favorite companies."[327]

Firepumpers in İstanbul mainly cared about the run to the fire spot. This was when they would make themselves known to the public by demonstrating a perfect run, which not only meant the rate of their speed, but also had to do with the regularity and the beauty of the harmony displayed by the carrying squad and other team members. This was generally measured by the position of the *tepelik* (ornamental crest) existing on top of the pump, which had to stay motionless during the run. The spectators usually gathered at pre-determined places to have a good vantage point. As this was known, by the proximity to the locations the team would begin making its run with greater care. In Sermet Muhtar Alus' novel *Onikiler* (the Twelves), there is a section where a fire alarm is given at night and two friends try to find a place where they can both continue with their drinking and watch the passing firepumpers. In the meantime they quarrel over which teams are the best and try to guess what their favorite teams' routes might be.[328]

During the passing of the team near these crowd gathering places, one of the team members who was specially assigned for the task, would cry out, the aim of which was to make the team known to the spectators. These cries comprised the team's name and a short phrase which the team used to define itself. Some of the yells mentioned by Vasıf Hoca quoted in Koçu's study go as: "*Er meydanı*

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[326] Hazen and Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame*, pp. 71-72.

[327] Ibid., p. 36.

[328] Alus, *Onikiler*, pp. 63-71.

*Çeşmemeydanı* (field of contest, Çeşmemeydanı)", for the Çeşmemeydanı team; "*Her yerde metin Cibalıkapılı* (unshakeable everywhere, member of Cibalıkapı)," for the Cibalikapı team, etc.[329]

This public show especially affected kids who were amazed by the players of the leading role in this extraordinary situation. Hazen and Hazen mention the eagerness of children to take some part in the fire activities. In Boston boys were sometimes allowed to drag the fire engine or work the brakes. Even "if such pleasures were denied, as they generally were to the smaller boys, there remained the less important but very real satisfaction of attending a conflagration and shouting 'Fire!'."[330] Sermet Muhtar Alus, in a newspaper article explaining children's games in the late Ottoman period, notes firepumping among a list of games. They used to utilize a gas or candle box and two bean sticks from a garden nearby to make up their toy firepump. They would run here and there yelling cries in imitation of the teams and old men sitting in a corner would be watching and counseling the kids for how to do it better.[331] There is also a section in a novel by Osman Cemal Kaygılı where he depicts his male protagonist Hasan, in his childhood, playing firepumping with his friends in the neighborhood.[332]

But above all, it was the various coffeehouses where this demonstration and show business reached its peak, where the firepumpers showed their talents as improvisers of poetry for which they were admired most. There were two types of coffeehouses which are mentioned in conjunction with firepumpers. The first was the

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[329] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 89.

[330] Hazen and Hazen, *Keepers of the Flame*, p. 36.

[331] Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Günlerde* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), pp. 71-75.

[332] Osman Cemal Kaygılı, *Aygır Fatma* (İstanbul: Sühulet Kitabevi, 1938), p. 30. Also quoted in Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 391.

*tulumbacı kahvesi* existing in the neighborhood and acting as a gathering place for the team which also contained a room where the team equipment stayed and where bachelors of the team were able to sleep at nights. The second was the *semâî kahvesi* (also called *çalgılı kahve*) opened only during the month of Ramadan by an elder firepumper or another person from the firepumper environs.

A normal coffeehouse was hired for the month of Ramadan by the organizer of this *çalgılı kahve*. He would make his preparations beforehand embellishing the place with firepumper articles. The ceiling would be decorated with colorful objects like flowers, chains, and other ornaments making it unable to see the ceiling itself. The walls also would be covered with popular pictures, mirrors, paper roses, and without fail, a photograph of the neighborhood team. A corner was arranged for a band to play music. And the party usually began after the *teravih namazı*, a special prayer people used to attend at mosques on Ramadan nights.

All night long, until the *sahur* (pre-dawn meal during Ramadan), there were entertaining activities in the coffeehouse. The most important part was the attendance of well-known firepumpers, who were good at reading various materials of folk literature. Having beautiful voices admired by the spectators and an additional talent to improvise, they would make contests among themselves until one would fail in creating a poem with the required rhyme, like the *aşık*s (i.e. troubadours) used to do. Fire and firepumper sagas would also be read and stories of remembered conflagrations or interesting incidents were told.[333]

The sagas were long poems written by popular poets after great conflagrations, successful performances by firefighters, considerable incidents in firepumper environs, or in commemoration of lost friends. They were sometimes

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[333] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, pp. 115-126.

ordered from poets against payment, and were usually printed and sold in the market. Vasıf Hoca was also a writer of sagas and he remembers one instance when he had one of his works printed in 5,000 copies and sold each for five *para*s (40 para = 1 piaster), making him quite a gain. Also he had heard that pirate copies had been printed reaching two or three thousand in number. These show that firepumper sagas were quite popular at the time and were widely read by the public.[334] They made the firepumper world known in details to the public which enhanced the cohesion of the firepumpers into the community. They also helped idealize the firepumper environment and the firepumper in person, as generally the subjects of the sagas were portrayed as heroes, brave and strong, handsome with beautiful voices, and with many other positive qualities.

## Competition

It was not only the sense of belonging to a particular environment or the joy of demonstration in and outside fire venues that defined volunteer firepumpers and their teams but also the competition that continuously existed among teams. Sportive competition was one of the aspects of the relationship between teams. Firepumping was regarded as a popular sports activity in a time when there were few sports contests with masses as spectators. It is portrayed as the "most colorful and lively sport of İstanbul" in an article published in the 1920s.[335]

Athletics races were arranged among firepumper teams, the most famous of which, according to Reşad Ekrem Koçu, was the one between Üsküdar Daire team and the Firuzağa team ran in 1887 in Okmeydanı resulting with the victory of the

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[334] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[335] Emin Âli "Tulumbacılık İstanbul'un En Canlı Sporudur."

former. After the Constitutional Revolution in 1908 firepumper races were organized together with horse races. Pîripaşa team ran 1,000 meters in 8.53 minutes with full equipment carrying the firepump and other loads and came out on top in a race in Veliefendi in 1913.[336]

The fires themselves were usually seen as opportunities for contest. The next day following the fire there would be discussions and chats among the public over which team had performed best or which had been beaten in the run to the fire venue. To catch and pass another team which was ahead on the way to or back from a fire was regarded as a victory for the team. It was called *sandık kovmak* or *sandık tutmak* (to drive out a box or to catch a box) and was seen extremely humiliating for the beaten team. The team which defeated the other would leave a message to a coffeehouse on the way for the beaten party which was called *selam bırakmak* (to send one's kindest regards) and the news of this incident would spread in the surroundings the next day.

Because of the consequences of being beaten by a rival team there were usually serious fights when two teams encountered on the way for the slower team would not let the other pass by without interference. The encounter of two teams on a junction was called *koç boynuzu* (ram's horn) which usually ended up with a violent fight. Some of the teams are said to keep special individuals called *hırcı* (squabbler) for these incidents in order to fight better.[337] The authorities were well aware of the situation and in one incident after a fight between the firemen of the imperial arsenal and office of the commander-in-chief teams (these were teams of the official departments) in which five of the firepumpers were injured it was suggested that able

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[336] Koçu, "Tulumbacılar," p. 1681.

[337] Ulunay, *Sayılı Fırtınalar*, pp. 363-364.

officers accompany the teams on the way to fires in order to prevent such undesired events.[338]

Quarrels between firepumpers were not only consequences of competition during fires but they also occurred because of conflicting interests regarding the teams' rights to perform certain professions, most of the time porterage, in their neighborhoods. One such event occurred during the construction of the pier in Karaköy in 1906 between the Tophane firepumper team and the porters of the Galata fish-market wharf. Because of the construction both groups were obliged by a resolution of the Municipality to continue their professions together at the said wharf. The firepumpers were not happy with this decision and their chief attempted to prevent the other group from continuing their business after which a serious fight broke up resulting in four firemen being injured.[339] These kind of conflicts were not rare and whenever such a problem occurred the firepumpers always attempted to handle it in their own way.

Getting involved in frequent quarrels and handling problems in their own way was specific to the bullies (*kabadayı*) of the time and firepumpers were usually regarded as such. Telling the stories of the İstanbul bullies during the late Ottoman period, Refi Cevad Ulunay defines three kinds of boisterous men: corner boys (*külhanbeyleri*), firepumper bullies (*tulumbacı kabadayıları*), and decent bullies

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[338] "BOA, DH.MKT., 1648/80, 1306.Z.18," (15 August 1889).

[339] (*Tophâne tulumba efrâdıyla Galata Balıkpazarı iskelesi hammâlları rıhtımın inşâsından beri şehremânet-i celîlesinin kararıyla mezkûr iskelede müştereken eşyâ nakl etmekteler iken mezkûr tulumba reîsi İnce Ali nâmında biri zikr olunan hammâlları eşyâ naklinden men' ve yerlerine diğer eşhâsı ikâme etmek istemesinden dolayı tarafeynin evvelce vâki' olan mürâca'tları üzerine dünkü gün emânet-i müşârünileyhâca kemâkân birlikte çalışmaları tarafeyne tefhîm edilmiş olduğu halde merkûm İnce Ali bu sûreti adem-i kabûl ile bugün mezkûr tulumbacılar ma'rifetiyle hammâlları ifâ-yı hidmetten men' ettirmeğe kıyâm etmesi üzerine aralarında münâza'a ve muzârebe vukû' bularak bu esnâda dört kişi mecrûh olmasıyla tarafeynden ileri gelenler derdestle*) "BOA, Y.PRK.ZB., 36/106, 1324.S.29," (24 April 1906).

(*efendi kabadayılar*).[340] Firepumpers had made a name to be classified separately in rowdy environments.

It seems that firepumpers had become one of the leading subjects of criminal activities in İstanbul. Having studied lower-class criminal practices in late nineteenth century İstanbul, mainly through the accounts of *Cerîde-i Mehâkim* (Journal of the Courts; i.e. publication of the Ministry of Justice), İlker Cörüt found many incidents in which firepumpers were involved. But he does not regard criminals as a specific class and asserts that "most of the criminal practices were an integral feature of lower class life."[341]

The state was always cautious against firepumpers and their environments. After an incident in 1847 in which three firepumpers beat a Jewish physician, also a professor of the *Mekteb-i Tıbbiyye-i Şâhâne* (Imperial School of Medicine), apparently only for splashing them when he was passing by riding his horse, the firepumpers were prisoned after trial and serious regulations for taking the firepumpers and their organizations under order had been discussed.[342] We have already seen many of the regulations regarding firepumper organizations in the second chapter, many of which were ineffective and the firepumper teams continued to be disorderly but also useful visitors of fire venues. However, the government closely monitored military school students, for example, and did not let them join

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[340] Ulunay, *Sayılı Fırtınalar*, p. 327.

[341] İlker Cörüt, "Social Rationality of Lower Class Criminal Practices in the Late Nineteenth Century İstanbul" (M.A., Bosphorus University, 2005), p. iii.

[342] "BOA, İ.MVL., 88/1795, 1263.S.9," (27 January 1847). I am grateful to Ebru Aykut for reminding me this reference and providing me with the original document and its transcription.

firepumper teams or hang around firepumper circles. Attitudes contrary to this used to be punished.[343]

Writing on the American volunteers, Amy Greenberg points to the violent environment firemen were in, through the leading rowdy fireman figure Mose Humphreys, who became popular being the protagonist of an 1848 melodrama, *A Glance at New York*, by Benjamin Baker. A fireman who liked to fight, Mose became representative of the violent masculine culture of the nineteenth century American volunteer firemen. But the developing municipal order did not let this masculine firefighter culture continue and during 1853-1871 almost all of the volunteer firefighting organizations were either transformed or replaced by paid departments. Greenberg sees this as a consequence of "changing demands for order and respectability in the larger society."[344] She also criticizes the romantic accounts of the local history writers of the later period who did not reflect the volunteers' culture objectively: "The ugly side of fire department activities, the racist incidents, the arson, the incompetence at fires, the fighting, all are glossed over in these histories."[345]

## Concluding Remarks

One of the responses İstanbul inhabitants gave to the endless flames they experienced was to institute voluntary firefighting organizations. It was not anything unique to İstanbul. Many pre-modern cities mobilized all the inhabitants of the city through bucket brigades during fires; it was everybody's task to contain fires. This

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[343] Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, p. 108.

[344] Amy Sophia Greenberg, "Fights/Fires: Violent Firemen in the Nineteenth-century American City," in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg ([Columbus]: Ohio State University Press, 1998), p. 172.

[345] Greenberg, *Cause For Alarm*, p. 5.

solidarity was transformed into voluntary organizations in later centuries when it became a more efficient solution to assign a smaller group to fight fires by using fire engines. For example, North American cities were places where this voluntary associations were quite active.

İstanbul's voluntary firepumpers are usually said to have arisen in the nineteenth century after the abolition of the Janissary army, which contained a special unit for fighting fires. From that time on until the early republican era firepumpers in İstanbul achieved a tradition of voluntary struggle against the flames by a technology that slightly developed through the years: carrying firepumps on shoulders to the fire spot and applying water on the blazes by pumping the brakes.

Their institutions went beyond the performers of a profession however, turning firepumpers into sportsmen, tellers of stories and poems, and usually heroes, who became popular especially by the help of fire and firepumper sagas produced by people within their environments. Their activities turned into a public show and firepumpers turned into publicly known figures. However, disorder, violence, and crime were not absent from this picture which made the government and the public to be cautious against them.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

İstanbul was vulnerable to fires during the Ottoman era. Three major factors were always a disadvantage in this respect: the wooden and dense dwelling pattern, the scarcity of water, and the inefficiency of firefighting organizations. If you had asked an inhabitant of the city what the reason for the preference of wooden houses was, he or she would probably point to the earthquakes and moist weather which were believed to cause more harm in the case of stone and brick buildings. The Ottoman administrators, at least until the late nineteenth century, also seems to have been against stone and brick dwellings, which they thought were detrimental in times of rebellions, for stone buildings could serve as strongholds for rebels. Also the common application of the confiscation method by the state discouraged the wealthy to build grandiose houses for themselves. Many high state officials lived in neighborhoods side by side with the ordinary people in relatively humble wooden mansions. However, the main reason for the preference of timber seems to be the cheapness of the material and the fastness of the wooden construction process.

Fresh water has been a scarce resource for the city since Byzantine era. The Byzantines built many systems to bring water into the city from the environs and the Ottomans enhanced them and added new ones. But the nineteenth century population demanded modern systems of water supply, which were only made possible around the turn of the nineteenth century by foreign enterprises. These systems also enabled

a water supply for firefighting purposes, but not without many problems and deficiencies.

As far as the firefighting organizations are concerned, the city inhabitants and the state developed many methods for the entire process of preventing frequent fires, from the detection of a fire to the containing of the final blazes. The establishment of a special firefighting unit within the Janissary army in 1719/1720 was a significant turning point. Though apparently not effective in reducing huge conflagrations, the utilization of the firepump for the first time made it possible to apply water much more efficiently. The abolition of the unit together with the said army in 1826 introduced a new complication which was solved by the government's attempts to establish new units in various army and navy offices.

Until the introduction of a new government office in 1846, namely the Ministry of Public Security, the minister of which in fact acted as the governor of İstanbul, the firefighting activities were performed under the responsibility of the Commander-in-chief of the army. In these first twenty years more than ten official departments set up special units the personnel of which were mainly performers of a part-time profession, having other occupations for themselves but also attending fires when one occurred. These men were not paid wages in cash, but remunerated with other benefits, bread and other food, daily supplies, shelter, uniforms and exemptions from some taxes, too.

In this early period neighborhood dwellers also organized their own units, voluntary institutions which had their roots in the Janissary tradition. The organized neighborhoods acquired firepumps and set up their teams under the leadership of a chief. They began to attend fires and although creating confusions around the fire spot they became useful in many respects, such as protecting certain houses, and

reaching the fire venue earlier because of their proximity. They did not enjoy the benefits which their colleagues in the teams of official departments did, but again they found different ways of financing their activity such as taking their share from the gratuities distributed during fires by the government, taking tips from homeowners the houses of whom they protected, and also organizing other tip collection activities like the circumcision feasts and door to door music performances in religious festivals. They also collected donations from neighborhood dwellers, probably from the wealthier, and after permissions from government authorities, when there was a need for the maintenance of their equipment or the purchase of new articles.

During 1846 and 1874 the Ministry of Public Security was the body responsible for the protection of İstanbul against fires, to which the teams of the official departments and their officers reported. This turned out to be a period when İstanbulites' encounters with westerners increased and İstanbul became a city closely connected to European centers through increased two-way trade. The Crimean War seems to have been a turning point by which the Ottomans became allies with major western powers and İstanbul found itself hosting European military personnel in huge numbers. Also, the population increase accelerated in this period which carried the capital's population to more than one million in turn of the century implying a two-fold increase in fifty years.

The increased westerner presence, arising of a commercial bourgeoisie, and the dense population forced the city to adopt modern public service practices, which implied the establishment of municipalities. The municipalities in turn began to take part in the prevention of the city against fires though in a low profile at the beginning. But İstanbul needed an effective firefighting organization as was seriously

understood in the huge conflagrations of Hocapaşa and Beyoğlu, occurring in 1865 and 1870, respectively. The government was almost forced to introduce a central firefighting organization, which culminated in the establishment of a military fire brigade in 1874.

After this date the realm of firefighting was governed by various authorities; the army through the fire brigade, the Ministry of Public Security through the teams of the official departments and its defined role to provide security at the fire scene, and the Municipality through its accepted job definition to supply modern public services to urban inhabitants supported by laws and regulations. For the twenty-five years before and after the turn of the twentieth century, the old and the new, the ancient and the modern, struggled together against a threat, surviving from the ancient into the modern times, to the lives and properties of the city inhabitants. The horse-driven wagons, steam fire engines, helmet wearing trained professional firemen of the fire brigade pose in the same photograph with tower watchmen, couriers of fire, water carriers, carpenters, axemen, and barefoot neighborhood firepumpers.

These were all subjects of responses a city developed against an enemy and they developed their own traditions, which sometimes went beyond the practices of their profession. The neighborhood firepumpers, for example, evolved in the pace of time into brotherhood associations which, of course, dealt primarily with fires but also created a world of their own implying other things than firefighting. They became sportsmen, improvisers of folk literature, and popular heroic figures through practices having their essence in their fights against fires, yet not only being restricted to the fire scenes.

Their runs to the fires became an evening sport which they enjoyed whether there was a fire or not. The competition among teams continued in contest fields where various teams raced with each other like the athletes of today. The incidents around fire venues were turned into attractive stories and sentimental poems transforming firepumpers into story tellers and improvisers of poetry being celebrated for their smooth voices. Their loyalty to brotherhood and their fatal fights with each other turned them into heroes being followers of a code of honor created through the long years. There was a time when it was not clear what characteristics a good firepumper should possess: speedy legs, an unflagging body, a beautiful voice, or courage in fights? These seem to be all mixed in its figure, and probably one was not more important than the other.

All through the thesis two questions disturbed my mind and I am not sure if I have found the answers to them: How could the voluntary neighborhood firepumping survive so long after the establishment of the modern fire brigade although they were most of the time regarded by the observers as irregular, disorderly, ineffective organizations and why was voluntary firepumping not able to survive into later republican years or perhaps today when some countries having the same experience had turned their irregulars into modern voluntary fire departments such as the American experience in which around 90% of American firemen were volunteers in the 1970s.

Of course, I am able to provide some explanations after all the hours I have spent on the subject. The first question seems easier to answer. Simply put, the function of the neighborhood firepumper teams stood as important even after the introduction of modern methods into the profession. They had many advantages in İstanbul. Carrying manual firepumps on foot was more suitable in many İstanbul

streets because of the hilly structure, narrow and rough roads, and dense settlements. The horse-driven wagons of the fire brigade needed smooth and wide streets that was why new irregular units had been offered for Kasımpaşa quarter, for example. There were always some neighborhood teams who were closest to the fire spot and usually they were the first to intervene as the fire brigade could not yet enjoy the advantages of widespread telephone communication to ameliorate the fire alarm system. The technology they used, the manual firepump, was not totally inferior to that of the fire brigade, as the latter faced the consequences of weak government finances, because of which it could not acquire the necessary modern equipment as its counterparts enjoyed in wealthy western cities. The government was, to a certain extent, content from the existence of volunteers because it did not have to allocate money for their services. And for the last thing good firefighting, at the time, required widespread water supply systems with fire hydrants in every corner, which İstanbul still lacked. The fire brigade could not exert its advantages, it was after the fountain keys and fire hydrants, too, which most of the time, at least in some quarters, were absent. İstanbul still needed time and money to transform its wooden dwellings, to invest in infrastructure and to furnish its fire brigade.

The second question is more complicated, however. The nonexistence of transformation in voluntary organizations seems to depend, to a certain extent, on financial issues. When the voluntary teams needed money to renovate their equipment and attempted to raise it by donations, they could only do it under strict control of local police stations. Perhaps local municipalities could have given them more support to finance themselves. Or else could they institutionalize the ways of raising money by organizing various activities like they did in circumcision feasts? Also their member profile was restricted to enthusiastic young men who usually

came from lower classes. The state was always suspicious about their disorder and they were sometimes seen as subjects of criminality both in and outside the fire scenes.

Still, neighborhood firepumping was an experience of İstanbulites which needs to be remembered and told. The frequent destructive fires burned down many of the city's material values which we are unable to assess the damage of today. But those fires left a legacy which, in my opinion, exceeded these losses in the positive direction, a story which goes beyond the flames and runs fast towards the wards, public baths, and coffeehouses.

# APPENDIX

## Examples of Archival Documents with Their Transcriptions

Document 1: BOA. İ.DH,.1234/96604, 1308.Za.09



Document 1: Transcription

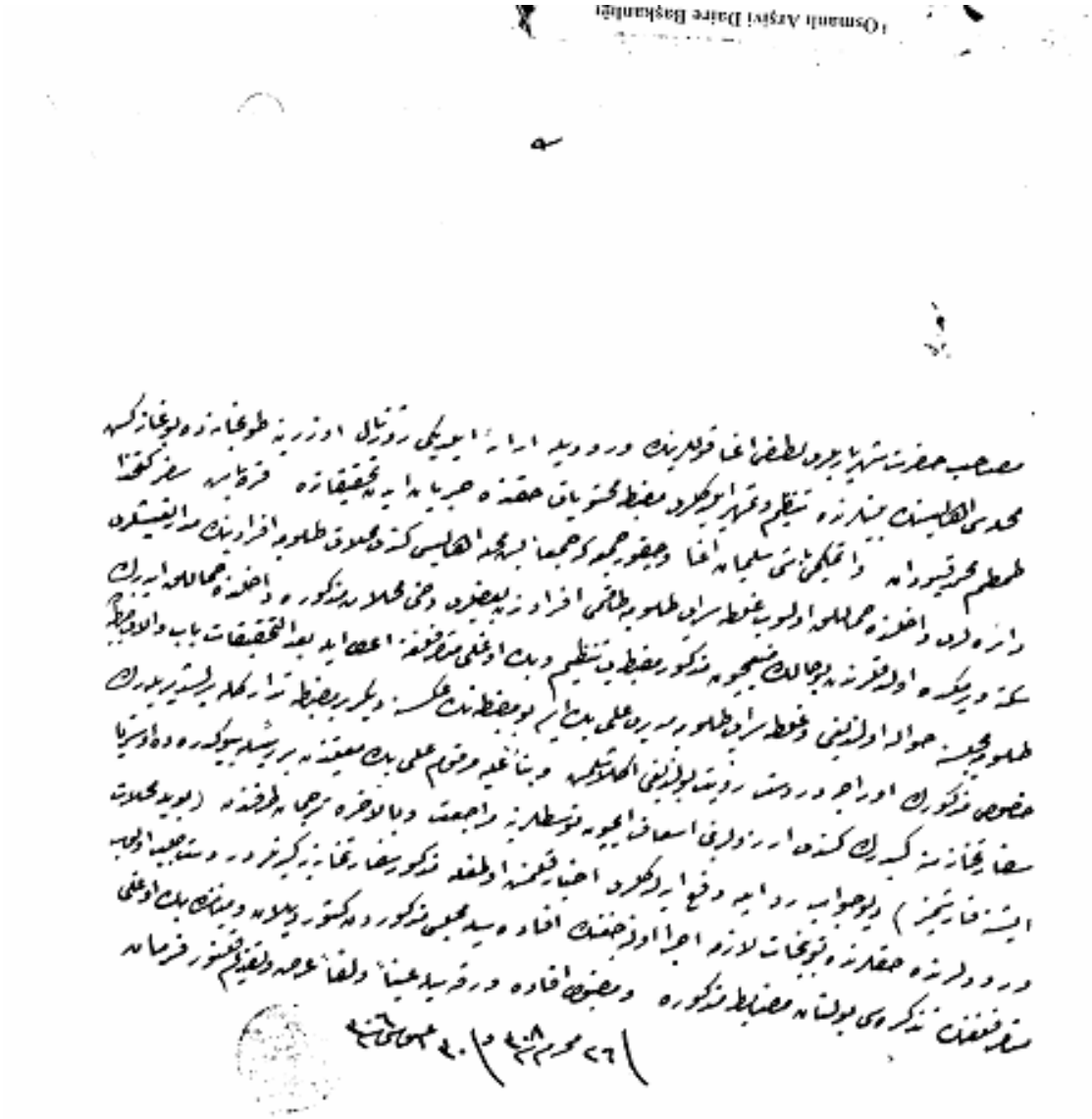
Özet: devair ve mahallât tulumbacılarının intizam altına alınması

Devâ'ir ve mahallât tulumbacılarının taht-ı intizâma alınması için iktizâ' eden tedâbiri müzâkere eylemek üzere dâhiliyye nezâret-i celîlesinin iş'ârına binâen bâb-ı zabtiyyede bir komisyon teşkîl kılınacağı mesmu'-ı âlî buyurulması üzerine bu gibi komisyonların teşkîli irâde-i seniyye-i mülûkâneye müstenid olmak lâzım geleceğinden bunun nasıl karar üzerine kimlerden mürekkeb olarak teşkîl edileceği ber-mantûk-ı emr ü fermân-ı hümayûn nezâret-i müşârünileyhâdan lede'l-istifsâr cevâben vürûd etmesiyle bi't-takdîm manzûr-ı âlî buyurulan Fi 9 Zilkade sene 308 tarihli tezkirede gönüllü tulumbacıları bulunan devâ'irden birer me'mûr celbiyle zabtiyye nezâreti dâ'iresinde bir komisyon teşkîl olunarak tulumbacıların taht-ı inzibât ve intizâma alınmaları zımnında lâzım gelen tedâbiri müzâkere ve ta'yîn ile netîcesinin istizânı ve taşralarca da bu bâbda mu'âmele-i lâzımenin icrâsı bâ-buyuruldu-i âli tebliğ olunan şûrâ-yı devlet kararı iktizâsından olmasıyla icrâ'-yı icâbının teblîğ edilmiş olduğu anlaşıldığı gibi işbu komisyonun ikinci dâ'ire-i belediyye müdîri Mustafa Bey'in taht-ı riyâsetinde olarak jandarma kumandanı Mehmed Paşa ve beşinci dâ'ire müdîri […] ve birinci dâ'ire müdîri mu'âvini Cevdet ve tulumba meclisi reîs-i sânisi İsmail efendilerden mürekkeb olarak teşkîl kılınmış olduğu lede's-su'âl zabtiyye nezâretinden ifâde olunduğu arz ve beyân kılınmış olub vâkı'a harîklerin men'-i zuhûr ve tevessü'ü hakkında ittihâzı lâzım gelen tedâbire dâ'ir bazı mütâla'âtı hâvî mabeyn-i hümâyûn-ı mülûkâne mütercimlerinden Hakkı ve Said Beyler tarafından arz-ı atebe-i ulyâ kılınan lâyiha üzerine teftîş-i askerî komisyon-ı âlîsinden kaleme alınıb ber-mantûk-ı irâde-i seniyye-i mülûkâne bâb-ı âlîye irsâl kılınan mazbatanın bir fıkrasında gönüllü tulumbacıların hâl-i intizâm ve inzibâta idhâl edilmesi lüzûmu gösterilmiş olmasıyla esas-ı madde taht-ı irâde-i seniyye-i mülûkânede ise de işin her ciheti şûrâ-yı devletçe tedkîk ve müzâkere olunduktan sonra tanzîm olunacak mazbatanın meclis-i vükelâ-yı fihâmca dahî muvakka' tezkire vaz'ıyla icâb-ı maslahatın ve bir komisyon teşkîline lüzûm görüldüğü halde hangi dâ'irede kimlerden mürekkeb olarak teşkîli münâsib ve ne gibi şeyleri müzâkereye me'mûr olacağının arz ve istizânı lâzımeden olduğu halde bu husûs hakkındaki mu'âmele o yolda cereyân etmemiş ve ma'a-hazâ böyle bir komisyonda bulunacak zevâtın bu gibi işlere vukûf ve ma'lûmât-ı tâmme ashâbından bulunması muktezî bulunmuş idüğünden ona göre icâbının icrâsı şeref-sâdır olan irâde-i seniyye-i hazret-i hilâfetpenâhî iktizâ-yı celîlinden olarak nezâret-i müşârünileyhâya dahî teblîğ-i madde edilmiş olmağla ol bâbda emr ü fermân hazret-i veliyyü'l-emrindir.

Fi 9 Zilkade sene 308 fi 4 Haziran sene 307

Serkâtib-i hazret-i şehriyârî

Document 2: BOA. Y.PRK.ZB., 5/118, 1308.M.26



Document 2: Transcription

Özet: istanbulun bazı mahallerinde tulumbacılar arasında çıkan anlaşmazlık neticesi yapılan tahkikat

Musâhib-i hazret-i şehriyârîleri Lütfi Ağa kullarının vürûduyla irâe eylediği jurnal üzerine Tophane'de Boğazkesen Mahallesi ahalisinin beynlerinde tanzîm ve temhîr eyledikleri mazbata muhteviyâtı hakkında cereyân eden tahkikatta Karabaş Sefer Kethüda Tomtom Mehmed Kaptan ve Ekmekçibaşı Süleyman Ağa ve Çukurcuma ki cem'an beş mahalle ahalisi kendi mahallâtı tulumba efrâdının medâr-ı maişetleri daireleri dahilinde hammallık olup Galatasarayı tulumba takım efrâdının bazıları dahî mahallât-ı mezkûre dahilinde hammallık ederek sekte vermekte olduklarından bu halin men'i için mezkûr mazbatayı tanzim ve Beyoğlu mutasarrıflığına ita ile ba'de't-tahkikat bâb-ı vâlâ-yı zabtiyyede tulumba meclisine havale olunduğu ve Galatasarayı tulumba müdürü Ali Bey ise bu mazbatanın aksine diğer bir mazbata tedarükle birleştirilerek husus-ı mezkûrun oraca derdest-i rü'yet bulunduğu anlaşılmış ve binâen'aleyh merkum Ali Bey maiyetinden bir reisle Büyükdere'de Avusturya sefârethanesine giderek kendi arzularını is'âf için tavassutlarına mürâca'at ve bilâhire tercüman tarafından "böyle mahallât işine karışmaz" diye cevâb-ı red ile def' edildikleri ihbâr kılınmış olmağla mezkûr sefârethaneye gidenler derdest-i celb olup vürûdlarında haklarında tevbihât-ı lâzime icrâ olunacağının ifadesiyle meclis-i mezkûrdan getirtilen ve meyânında Beyoğlu mutasarrıflığının tezkiresi bulunan mazâbıt-ı mezkûre ve mazbût ifâde varakasıyla aynen ve leffen arz ve takdim kılınır fermân

26 Muharrem 308 ve 30 Ağustos 306

Document 3: BOA.Y.PRK.ZB., 7/2, 1308.Ca.0



Document 3: Transcription

Özet: kabataş'da çıkan yangında itfaiye memurlarının iyi çalıştıkları halde tulumbacıların ve sakaların bahşiş alamadıklarından iştirak etmedikleri

Bugün itfâ'iyye alayı kumandanı Kont Ziçini Paşa nezd-i çâkerâneme gelerek geçen gece fenâ' halde rahatsızlıktan dolayı bi'z-zarûre gidememiş olduğum Kabataş harîkinde itfâ'iyye taburları efrâdının tâb ü tüvândan kesilinceye kadar ibrâz eyledikleri mesâ'î-i cansipârâneye mukâbil âdî tulumbacıların bahşiş alamadıklarından dolayı tulumbalarını bırakıp kahvehânelere çekilmek gibi hüdânegerde ittisâ'-i harîke sebeb olabilecek bazı hâlât-ı mü'essifeyi nakl ve hikâye ile beraber inde'l-hâce su alınmak üzere bazı mahallerde terkos borularının miftâhları mevcûd ise de ekser mahallerde su bulunmadığının ve halbuki yangınlara gitmeğe mecbur olan sakaların terkos suyu miftâhı vardır diyerek yangına gitmekten imtinâ' eylediklerinden bahisle bu halin derkâr olan mehâzîrini ilaveten ifâde eylemesine ve bu haller cidden dâ'i-i envâ'-i mehâzîr bulunmasına mebnî ba'demâ ne kadar hasta olsam yangına gitmekte kusûr etmeyerek bu türlü ahvâl-i mü'essifenin vukû'una meydan bırakılmayacağı derkâr olmağla beraber bahşiş alamamaktan dolayı tulumbasını terk eden tulumbacıların tulumbacı silkinden çıkarılarak şedîden cezalandırılmaları mukarrer olduğunun kendilerine yegân yegân tebliği zımnında tulumba meclisine tenbîhât-ı kaviyye icrâ' olunduğu gibi silk-i esnafa dâhil ve binâen'aleyh bir kethüdâlığa merbût olan sakalardan mahall-i harîke şitâb etmeyenler haklarında mu'ayyen olan mücâzâtın icrâ' ve şimdilik kendilerine tenbîhât ifâ olunması lüzûmu da şehremânet-i aliyyesine iş'âr kılındığı berâ-yı ma'lûmât arz olunur ol babda emr ü fermân hazret-i men lehü'l-emrindir

2 kanun-ı evvel sene 306

Nâzır-ı umûr-ı zabtiyye

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