

Galata and Pera 1 A Short History, Urban Development Architecture and Today

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The coastal band stretching from the northern shores of the Golden Horn until Tophane and the slopes behind it have been known as Galata since the 8th century. Formerly this area was known as *Sycae* (*Sykai*), or as *peran en Sykais*, which essentially means ‘on opposite shore’.

It is thought that Galata’s foundation preceded that of Constantinople. The archaeological finds here indicate that it was an important settlement area in Antiquity. Although its borders can not be determined precisely, it is known that during the reign of Emperor Constantine (324 –337), it was a fortified settlement consisting of a forum, a theatre, a church, a harbor and bath buildings, as well as 431 large houses. The present fortification walls were constructed by Emperor Justinian in 528. The 2 meter wide land walls surrounded by a 15 meter deep moat were enclosing an area of 37 hectares. It is surmised that the renowned *Castellion* that used to control the entry into the Golden Horn was built by Emperor Tiberius I (578-582).

Among the trading colonies in the area, that had acquired the commercial harbor functions due to favorable topographical conditions, the Italian presence had begun

to be more prominent starting from 10th century onwards. The conditions that had created the Medieval Galata were being formed in these trading colonies. At first Amalfi, then the Venetians and later the Pisans had obtained special privileges from the Byzantines. The Genovese, who had established themselves on the southern shores of the Golden Horn as a result of their rights recognized by Emperor Manuel Comnenos I (1143-1186), were forced to move over to Pera on the opposite shore when the Venetians seized their territory during the Latin invasion of 1204.

When the Latins departed from Constantinople in 1261, the city was in complete ruins. And the economic relations of the Byzantine capital were now completely in the hands of the Venetians and the Genovese merchants. Emperor Michael Paleologos VIII (1261-1282), who was able to recapture Constantinople from the Latins, signed the Nymfaion Treaty with the Genovese and permitted them to rebuild their commercial *loggia*, their *palazzo comunale* and other buildings of theirs. And they received consulate rights, as well as free trade privileges. When rival Venetians attacked the Genovese colony in 1296, they wanted to renew their

demolished fortification walls, but could not secure the necessary permission from the Emperor, and had to be contented with a moat only. On the other hand, they were able to formalize their borders as a result of a decree dated 1303. As the Byzantine Empire grew weaker, however, the Genovese took advantage of this situation to strengthen their position, and started to build tower houses along this moat, connected them to each other with crenellated walls, thereby bringing the Galata region to a ready state of defence, and expanded their territory towards the environs of Azapkapı-Şişhane-Galata Tower-Tophane. The Galata Tower was constructed in 1349. According to an agreement, the colony came under the responsibility of an administrator called *podesta*. The Podesta was considered, at the same time, as the ambassador of Genoa at the court of the Byzantine Emperor. The Podesta, in turn, was responsible towards a city council of 24 elected members known as 'Magnifica Comunita di Pera'.

During the 14th century, Galata with its urban form and structures used to display its period's typical features as a Mediterranean city. It had become an important part of the city where commercial relations with the West were established and carried on, and this characteristic of the area had continued after the conquest, as well.

It is known that the Genovese had strengthened and elevated the height of the fortifications and increased the number of city gates in 1446, a few years prior to the siege of the city. However, following the conquest of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmet II had demanded the removal of the upper portion of the walls of Galata, and had signed an agreement with the Genovese recognizing their privileges which they had obtained during the period of the Byzantine

Empire, in return for their acceptance of the ownership of the region by the Ottoman State. The Podesta had been replaced by a new administrator called *Vaivode*. It is well known that a large number of Western merchants had settled at Galata following this conquest. The most important axis of the region was the Voyvoda Avenue (today's Bankalar Avenue), which extended parallel to the shore line and on which were lined the administrative structures of the colony.

During the 16th century, Galata had become a triangular area opposite the Historic Peninsula and surrounded by land and sea walls. At the highest point was situated the Galata Tower, while houses with religious buildings around them used to rise towards this center. Furthermore, there were walls within the area dividing it into three sections. The environs of Galata were covered with vineyards and orchards. The well known engraving by Buondelmonte (Figure 1) describes the general lines of this urban structure. The miniature painting of 16th century by the engraver Nasuh el Matraki, which describes Galata within its total environment, confirms this settlement pattern (Figure 2).

During this period, there were taverns, shops and food stores along the shore, in addition to the piers. It is recorded that the population profile of Galata during the 16th century was composed of 35 % Turks, 39 % Greeks, 22 % Europeans, and 4 % Armenians.

In the 17th century Galata continued to develop within the walls, while the area outside the fortifications had the countryside appearance. Some of the neighborhoods of the region, which was systematically Turkified between the 16th and the 18th centuries, were composed of Turks only during the 17th century and,



Figure 1. Engraving of Istanbul by Buondelmonte

consequently, those areas gave the impression of a Turkish city (Figure 3, 4 and 5). This situation had continued until the middle of the 19th century.

Beyond the Galata walls, the Pera region, which was composed of vineyards-orchards and called as 'Pera Vineyards', had started to be built up gradually from the middle of the 18th century onwards. During the 19th century, on the other hand, an inclination had begun in Galata to extend towards the open areas beyond the walls. While the vacant areas had begun to be redeveloped by splendid structures led by the embassy buildings which lined around the main axis called Rue de Pera (today's İstiklal Avenue), Galata had transformed into an area where increasingly the French, the English and the Italian Industrialists and merchants begun to settle and all types of merchandise from these countries were unloaded, stored and sold.



Figure 2. The miniature painting of Galata by Nasuh el Matraki in 16th century

Whether at Galata, or at Pera, a settlement pattern consists of a main axis and of streets opening into it was established. In the second half of the 19th century, three or four storey solid looking stone masonry mansions had started to replace the earlier timber structures, after many fires in succession. In spite of this, first photographs dated to the middle of the 19th century show that Galata still preserved a particularly dense fabric of timber buildings. In Pera, on the other hand, the majority of the population was European. The masonry embassy buildings were contributing to the region's European image.

In spite of the resemblances in the settlement pattern, a different trend was observed from the point of view of social, cultural and architectural development. The urban pattern of 19th century Galata was different from Pera. In the illustrations, the luxurious way of life, as well as the splendid physical and social environment of Pera was contrasted with the various human groups of every nationality frequenting the narrow streets full of tavern and cabarets in Galata. Here resided a cosmopolitan society least worried about its future. On the contrary, Pera was an 'aristocratic' settlement. During the 19th century, the foreigners, led by the notables of the embassies, the Levantens and the minorities



Figure 3. A view of the region in 1830



Figure 4. The view of Galata Tower in 1830



Figure 5. General view of Beyoglu in 1830

in Pera region had led to the birth of an elitist way of life, and particularly contributed to its development during the following century. The magnificent and grand hotels of the region had hosted numerous travelers each day. There was a post and telegraph office branch here. The French and the Italian theatres were located in the central area. It was possible to find many a splendid coffee house and pastry shop here. Besides these, there were

department stores especially with French names and shopping centers like Bon Marche, where rich varieties of goods at the same quality as in European cities were on sale. What is more, several of these stores were branch outlets of parent stores in Europe. At the same time printing houses, offices of professionals like bankers and lawyers, consulting rooms of doctors, and pharmacies were situated at Galata and Pera, as well. The magnificent mansions

exhibiting the full luxuries of the wealthy Levantens and Greeks, Armenians and Jews that traditionally defined this environment were lined along the Rue de Pera, as well as on the streets leading from it, contributing to the said environment.

Galata and Pera regions which resembled Western European cities with their physical and social structures, nevertheless, lacked an organized municipal administration by the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. During the Crimean War (1855-56), modern urban organization was initiated with the encouragements of the diplomats and the military delegations of the European States. In this connection the first municipality was established in 1857 on the model of *6^e arrondissement* of Paris under the name of 'The Sixth Department of Municipality of Beyoğlu and Galata'. Through this municipality new decisions have been taken in the region until the end of the 19th century which became a model for the rest of Istanbul on issues such as street lighting, street naming, road widening and surfacing, provision of public transport, taking measures for the security of the streets, resolving the water shortage problem that had been a major suffering in the region from the beginning, and the realization of the maintenance and the beautification of the area. The most important decision among these has been the demolition of Galata's (Figure 6) fortifications by the Sixth Department of municipality. Re-establishment of Galata's urban structure and determination of its axes have been realized by this radical decision. Presently a very small extend of these walls are standing.

Between 1850 and 1900, Galata and Pera have gone through important scale of urban and structural transformations. These

changes have resulted mainly from rebuilding activities brought in under new order and planning directives on vacant plots created by frequent fires during these 50 years.



Figure 6. The demolition of Galata's fortifications by the Sixth Department of Municipality in the 19th century

Galata has continued to illustrate the characteristics of a Mediterranean port city that it had possessed from the beginning (Figure 7). Galata Tower and a portion of its monumental structures, although many others have been destroyed, have survived till our day. On the other hand, the French, the Italian, the Russian, the Swedish, the British and the US embassies (Figure 8) and their gardens, as well as some splendid structures designed by leading architects of the period who have played an important role in the development of Pera region are still in their original conditions. Although some have suffered in fires and restored later, the majority of the religious monuments are also in their original state.

However, the street fabric and the structural features have undergone changes as a result of planning activities of the Sixth Department of Municipality.



Figure 7. Karakoy Square in the 19th Century



Figure 8. US Embassy's Building

In the middle of the 19th century, the original fabric of Galata and Pera, which was essentially of timber, had been gradually replaced by masonry structure, however, this change over to masonry has progressed rather slowly in spite of the fire disasters and its mandatory planning rules.

Pera lived through one of its largest fire disasters in 1870. Starting around Taksim area, the fire destroyed a lot of timber and masonry houses, and from this date onwards, wide vacant plots of land were created ready for important physical transformations in the area between Taksim and Galatasaray. After the 1870 fire, many masonry apartment blocks which are still standing have been constructed in Pera, and



Figure 9. Current view from Hendek Street through Galata Tower

along the two sides of Rue de Pera which connects Tünel to Taksim as a major axis, rich apartment and business blocks, as well as department stores have been erected.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new social and architectural landscape has been formed in Galata consisting of mainly banks, particularly the Ottoman Bank building designed by Alexander Vallauri, offices placed in tall masonry hans along especially Voyvoda Avenue and Kemeraltı Avenue and their environs. From Voyvoda Avenue towards Galata Tower, many grand structures such as churches, schools and hospitals have been lined up.

In Pera, especially along the main avenues, buildings with ground floor shops and department stores are present. The famous shopping arcades of Rue de Pera, such as European Passage, Hacopulo

Passage, Elhamra Passage, etc. should be mentioned in this connection. Theatres and music halls, as well as famous fashion houses are also located here. During these years, when the rapid inflow of foreign capital had been indirectly transferred to the construction sector, an activism of design and construction effectiveness by architects of Istanbul and of European origin can be observed. Many a magnificent and monumental structure displaying a rich stylistic variety ranging from Classical to Neo-Gothic, from Neo-Ottoman to Art Nouveau have risen along Rue de Pera and its side streets. Following the mini-subway constructed and opened to service in 1875 and known as Tünel, horse-trams have started to run to Galata in 1896, while electric trams have come into service in 1914, thereby making the region one of Istanbul's most advantageous section of the city from the point of view of public transport for many years.

Istanbul with the declaration of Republic, which lost its capital city status, lived certain restrictions in terms of urban functions. In the beginning Galata area was not affected by this situation. The area could sustain its aspect as a trading and business center. However the start of re-modernization attempts with insufficient planning projects after the World War II, gave rise to serious changes. The application studies during the 1955-60s not only changed the urban architectural pattern of the city but also serious changes occurred in the social and cultural structure of the city. The varied population structure of the area started to become homogeneous slowly in the beginning and rapidly after the 6-7 September events. The trading activities shifted towards the new developed northern areas and banking sector that was based towards the north side of Maslak were

important decreases for the city. The amplification process of the historical Kemeraltı Street and the adjustments in Karaköy Square caused the loss of many historical monuments.

The area today despite the losses, together with the preserved historical pattern, monuments with the business centers belonging to the middle upper wealth level, and the trading side made of traditional producers and sellers covers an important historical area of Istanbul. Voyvoda /Bankalar Street is present with all its majestic architecture. The coastal side is one of the vivid axles of sea and road transportation.

In Pera until the last quarter of the 20th century there were not sudden remarkable changes. However the varied population structure of İstiklal Street area was changed after the collective pillage acts in 6-7 September toward the Greek orthodox population in Pera, explained by the actions against the Turkish population in Cyprus.

In the years when İstiklal Street was not under protection it is seen that the singular buildings were demolished and renewed. The radical change was limited with the construction of Odakule made by the Industrial Chamber of İstanbul, destroying the architectural pattern of the street. To this situation the multy storey business center built in the building land of the burnt İstanbul City Theatre is also added.

The amplification of Tarlabası Street, which connects Taksim/historical peninsula extended in the west border of Galata –Pera region turned into a boulevard was a radical action. The mention change affected very much the architectural and cultural dimension of the area.

The area after many attempts in 1993 was declared to be a preserved urban area and İstiklal Street became a pedestrian mall

area. Today this place is considered to be the center of culture and entertainment. The similar preservation status is applied for Galata Tower and for its surround.

The wrong restoration applications and the expected earthquake are among the dangers that could change / destroy the historical structure of the area.

Galata and Pera 2 Earthquakes: Short Notes

Istanbul is within the area of influence of the 175 km long fault line stretching along the Bay of İzmit from Adapazarı to Çatalca, forming an extension of the Northern Anatolian Fault (NAF). The city has been affected more or less continually from innumerable earthquakes adding up to a long list throughout the history. The scientific investigations indicate that there is a 60 % chance within the next 30 years for this fault line to produce a high magnitude earthquake, although it is not yet known whether the fault will break at one time, or in two sequences.

Within Istanbul's geography, which is composed of three peninsulas, the earthquakes have different areas of influence. It could roughly be said that the southern shores of the Historic Peninsula and the Asian side (Kadıköy) fall within the epicentre of the earthquakes, while the other regions are affected by them less severely. The most sensitive areas are the ancient axis within the Historic Peninsula called '*via triumphali*' that extends today from Hagia Sophia to Beyazit (or *Forum Tauri*), and the coastal strip that begins from kumkapı.

The Peninsula of Galata has the most fortunate geographic location from the point of view of earthquakes, probably due to its geological formation. Its name is generally not given within the earthquake damage records. In addition to its later occupation,

it is affected by earthquakes only at the level of the collapse of its low quality buildings and by small cracks occurring in some of its buildings.

It is known that from among the high magnitude earthquakes, the region had only been affected by the one that occurred in 1509. During this one, the Galata Tower had been damaged and it has been recorded that the upper portion of the Tower built at the time of the Genovese rule had collapsed. Consequently, the Galata Tower has an Ottoman Period addition on top of its existing three floors.

The earthquake of 10 July, 1894, had been experienced almost without any damage at Galata-Beyoğlu region. There were only minor damages such as breakages of window glass, failing of plaster and gypsum, and slippages of cornice stones.

On the other hand, the earthquake of 1894, about which maximum amount of information is available, provides interesting observations on social psychology and post-earthquake behavioral symptoms. Surprising details are recorded in daily newspapers and official reports following the earthquake.

The earthquake had caused a panic in the city difficult to imagine. It is, of course, natural that all earthquakes of high magnitude may cause panic. Although the earthquake of 10 July, 1894, had affected

various regions of İstanbul in a different manner, mass panic had been experienced at the same level of intensity everywhere. A matter of fact, the hysteria was louder at low damaged areas, such as Beyoğlu, according to the observations of the journalists. It is doubtless very understandable that the residents of the Historic Peninsula, or Yeşilköy, and even the Princes' Islands, where the damage was very high, to spend the night in the street, however, the fact that the residents of Pera or Şişli regions had chosen to live out in the open for days, and to occupy the Municipal Parks and seven cemeteries at Taksim and Tepebaşı, or by building shanty structures and sheds away from their sound buildings, causing Beyoğlu, for example, to turn into a deserted town, was a phenomenon of social psychology of pathological dimensions. As the incident had begun to threaten the public health, the authorities had to issue restricting orders for the people to return to their homes.

The earthquake of 1894 is at the same time an interesting case study from the point of view of post-disaster activities.

The lack of serious damage at the Palace of the Grand Vizier, at the Prefecture of the City, and of course, at the Royal Palace had made it possible to carry out these activities. An Official Decree which was immediately issued had ordered public servants to be on duty to carry out mitigation works at all structures in accordance with expert reports. All government offices would be kept open. The day after the earthquake a coordination council was established under the chairmanship of the Prefect Rıdvan Paşa, which immediately had embarked on damage assessment studies, provision of bread and drinking water, etc. The wounded were going to be treated at the Municipal hospitals in accordance with the system

applied to cholera patients, in other words, a state of extraordinary disaster measures were put into effect. There were a large number of patients in the gardens of the Military Medical Faculty, and the famous medical professors of the day, together with their senior students, had started to provide the necessary medical interventions.

The newspapers had been assisted to start their normal publishing schedules on 13 July.

Many documents relating to these post-earthquake activities exist at the Prime Ministry Archives, for example:

“Y.MTV 99.56” registration numbered and “6 Muharrem Hicri 1312/10 July 1894” dated report by the Prefecture of the City informs us about the open areas where the public from Galata-Beyoğlu region had taken refuge, as well as the first aid activities providing bread, drinking water and illumination facilities to them. This is a most critical document underlying the importance of identifying open areas of refuge for victims on the first day of the earthquake.

Galata-Beyoğlu region had experienced the earthquake of 17 August 1999 with its epicentre at İzmit without any damage. The panic border had narrowed down due to the fact that the southern and coastal areas were in large scale are business districts and the earthquake occurred at 3:00 a.m. at night. The inhabitants of the northern section of the Peninsula, in this instance, took refuge at the Taksim Gezi Park.

It could be assumed that Galata shall overcome the probable next earthquake with minor damages once again.

There are a lot of buildings in the region that qualify as cultural assets. Besides the religious and the official edifices, the region possesses a large stock of civil architecture, as well as monumental examples of

economic history. Majority of these buildings are assumed to possess the advanced construction techniques of the 19th century. Therefore, significant losses should not be expected in the monumental buildings as long as the magnitude of the earthquake would not be too high.

Nevertheless, the likelihood of an earthquake panic need not be ruled out. Especially, during the working hours of the day, the panic risk is higher. Furthermore, Galata's open areas for first hand refuge purposes are seriously insufficient. Narrow street fabric, dense building and undulating topography are among the known risk factors. The open courtyards of the mosques and the churches in the region are also very limited.

The existing car park area of historic Tophane and the coastal strip of Perşembe Bazaar, as well as the courtyards of mosques and churches, in spite of their insufficiency, could be considered as the likely refuge and first aid centers.

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