

Chapter 10: Reforms and the Conflict in Urban Conceptions

The axis underwent deep changes in the 19th century (see the appendix to this chapter). The ambiguous relationship of private property to public space in the Ottoman town, the inability of the vakıf institution (private and religious but intended to subvene to public and lay necessities) to assume a total municipal control, the suffocation of increasing traffic in the mesh of narrow streets had been long perceived. The demand for reforms was in the air since the last decades of the 18th century. The frequent fermans in this sense were applied gradually after the fourth decade of the 19th century, during the so-called Tanzimat period, and later as part of the grand design of modernisation or ‘Westernisation’ of Ottoman society and institutions.

I shall discuss briefly the effects of the emerging modern municipal order on the axis, its inability to adopt any but rigid Western concepts of spatial organisation.

‘Westernisation’ as an architectural, and up to a certain degree, as an urban project, was the conclusion of an almost two centuries-old process of trial and error. Initially it was a cultural success: Western Baroque and Rococo concepts filtered into the Ottoman discourse without disrupting it, and enhanced the spatial and plastic continuity of the connective elements. At the end, superimposing rigidly the Western avenue concept on the existing situation, it cancelled the values that had been crystallized from mid Seventeenth century to the first decades of the Nineteenth. But could not, and did not, substitute those values with a tangibly coherent asset. I believe that the failure and its causes—the incompatibility of the 19th-20th century ‘modern’ Western idea of town and of its aesthetics with the ideas and techniques that gave form and character to the Ottoman urban space—have not been fully measured.

Paradoxically, the functional questions put forward to justify the substantial transformation of the fabric and of the street system have not been resolved by the very drastic measures adopted in a century and a half. Street widening has only postponed by a few years the functional crisis of the central thoroughfare which after enlargement attracted a quantity of traffic it could not possibly bear. Nor have

commercial patterns and uses changed much: shopkeepers, peddlers and customers have happily grafted 'oriental' ways on new spaces. The deepest and most dramatic effects were not functional, but of an ideological and architectural stand, and they regard more volume articulation and form of the fabric, rather than style, the idea of urban form rather than functional assets.

The conceptions of urban form and functions of the two systems—Western and Ottoman—are fundamentally opposed: the concentration and introversion and homogeneity of the bazaar-*çarşı* structure and its pedestrian lanes versus the chain-like long commercial streets of the West and its dependence on vehicular traffic; the open and low-density residential fabric of the Ottoman town as opposed to the more compact and dense fabric of the West European model; the typical Ottoman fragmentation in form, volume and direction versus the serial regularity of the modern avenue and its alignments; the loss of meaning of the vital 'short linkages' (see Chapter 8) when geometrically disciplined by long layouts and perspectives. Nineteenth century West European urban composition calls up public monumentality through the imposition of symmetry, distant axial perspective, and alignment on the street or referred to the street. Ottoman monuments of large or medium scale have slight reference to street alignments; they are mediated to public space by accessorial elements; façades are not prominent in their complex volume composition; Mecca-orientation and greenery further complicate their link to public space.

It is significant that in other situations single Ottoman monuments had been captured within a Western urban space concept as outstanding exceptions: in the Divanyolu they were too many, too frequent and of minor size to fit in, but mostly large enough to avoid demolition. The 'discourse' of urban culture they utter when inserted in the new grid, though 'tamed' by cuts, is too loud to be overwhelmed by the new elements; it merely loses its clarity and power of expression. This, of course, is all the more true of 15th to 18th century buildings, but even later monuments submit to a change in accents. One example is the 1839 Mahmut II mausoleum ensemble, in which Western architectural post-classicism prevails, and yet was part of the episodic form of the Ottoman street.



Fig. 82: *The Mahmut II funerary complex (1839) before street widening and levelling.*

After street widening and regularization, with the street level lowered, the basement steps impose a deliberately monumental and rhetoric separation from street level, the whole composition shifts weight from the Ottoman narration of urban space (see previous chapters) to the current Beaux-Arts composition principles of unity and symmetry. Both undercurrents had been active in the design of the building, but now one overcomes the other.

During the last four decades of the 19th century, many monumental buildings along the Divanyolu were submitted to ugly cuts to enlarge the street (see Appendix). The *medrese* of Kara Mustafa lost its shops; part of the Atik Ali *medrese* was demolished and realigned on the widened street. Shockingly coarse was the chopping off of the corner of the Çemberlitaş Hamam and of a good slice of the Köprülü *medrese* with incongruous façades in Moresque pseudo-Usul-ü-Osmaniye stuck on the bleeding stumps by Barborini¹⁸³ along the street line at an impossible angle for the architectural organisms they are supposed to complete. A face-(façade)-saving operation which after a few decades proved insufficient to meet traffic requirements, and was not able, in over 130 years, to recreate the fine

¹⁸³ See Cengiz Can, art. “Barborini, Giovanni Battista” in *Dünden bugüne İstanbul*, II 54, on the Italian architect active in Istanbul in the second half of the 19th century.

architectural linkage of the Ottoman Divanyolu or to open the way for a coherent new language.



Figs. 83, 84: *The central tract of the Divanyolu before and after street cuts in the second half of the 19th century. Above around 1848; below around 1880 (compare with present situation, plate V below).*



Figs. 85, 86: *The Divanyolu near Çemberlitaş after street widening. Above: the Barborini arrangement of the amputated façade of the Valide Hamam at the end of the 19th century. Below: in 2002; to the left can be seen the Barborini redesign of the Köprülülü medrese façade on the street.*

Exceptional trees and single groves had been part of the glories of Ottoman Istanbul. But how could trees be planted and taken care of individually, with an eye to single botanic and visual situations, when all the European texts and manuals promoted the ‘new’ vision of boulevards and avenues with mile-long lines of trees, all of the same type and growth? The subtle rhythm of the hazire walls, the trees here and there in nooks and gardens, the small ornamental elements of varying size and profile of the previous Ottoman scene, all lost

their formal privilege, their ‘short linkages’, and hence their significance, when hidden by avenue-like tree lines. Ever miserly rows of trees (standing there since a century and a half, over and over replanted in a sort of caricature of the European avenue concept) muffle the perception of the once splendidly emergent single trees within the hazire and courtyards.¹⁸⁴

The traditional Ottoman structure and town-keeping could be shocking for 19th century Ottoman technicians and intellectuals formed on a Western-oriented vision of urban values. The querulous tone of many reports concerning the disorder of the Divanyolu in the Mecelle-i-Umumiye,¹⁸⁵ prove that they saw in it above all lack of propriety. The struggle of the elite to modernise the country and to absorb universally progressive qualities, certainly a vital necessity, was too great to allow finesse and gradualness.¹⁸⁶ The partisans of municipal reform simply did not have the cultural instrumentation (technological and aesthetic) necessary to cope with the subtlety and the individualism of situations prominent in the traditional town fabric.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Magnificent tree-lined boulevards had been formed in the void spaces of Dolmabahçe and Yıldız in the 19th century, but not here, in the throbbing heart of the city, where the contextual conditions would not consent an aesthetic and ideological *tabula rasa*.

¹⁸⁵ Ergin *Mecelle*, VII 3896, 3902: reports and complaints against huts and provisional structures in the “honourable and select places [*mûtenâ ve şerefli mahaller*]” of the Divanyolu and Grand Bazaar surroundings.

¹⁸⁶ Günkut Akın, “Tanzimat ve bir Aydınlanma Simgesi”, in *Osman Hamdi Bey ve Dönemi*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı 1993, 129, draws a striking contrast between the symbolic reference to Illuminism in the globe of the Mahmut II fountain and the unsensitive cut of the corner of the Çemberlitaş Hamam (see note above), just a few meters away, in the same period. The author also calls attention to the relation between the Divanyolu’s being a residential area for the 19th century elite and the presence of such a symbol.

¹⁸⁷ The urban reform commission reports, from 1839 on, reflect the faith of Ottoman reformists in European town planning and street-enlargement. See: Çelik *Remaking*, 50-51. Ergin *Mecelle*, II 938-58, II 1003 (1839 report establishing a minimum of 20 zirâ/12 meters), II 1007 (a compromise is reached on 10 zirâ for

The process of change and reform has not been able to weld together past and present, nor to underline their distinction. One grammar and one ideology petered out, but they were not substituted by a coherent new grammar and ideology. The formal values put forward by each of the still standing elements, the idea of a town it implied, were contradicted and blurred by its neighbours, old but de-contextualised, or new and conceived for a totally different context. It is not a matter of aesthetic judgment or of urban and architectural restoration techniques. It is a matter of unresolved conflicts in the idea of town (its life, symbols, cultural interpretation) and formal logic (the linguistic origin and potential of each constitutive element, the relations to the context it implies).

(MC)

the main streets). Ibid., III 1222, VII 3896, 3902, for 19th and early 20th century deliberations and reports in which the almost petulant references to the decorum of the select and ‘proud’ quarters of the city contaminated by tumble-down sheds and popular activities. Ergin *Mecelle*, III 1245, quotes a Mimar Mazhar Bey who accuses the Tanzimat reform practice as being *hypocritical and un-national* (“*riyâkâr ve milliyetsiz*”). Parisian boulevards are the model. Measures regarding conservation of monuments, and not of urban fabric, also seem to have been taken from European practice and theory. The modality of urban reform denotes a total incomprehension of the Ottoman urban syntax, curiously specular to the incomprehension of urban classicism that the Ottomans had shown (see Chapter 3).

Appendix to Chapter 10: Change and Reform in the 19th Century

In the 19th century a vast reformatory movement absorbed Ottoman society. In the city of Istanbul, this led to a season of changes, drawn out over a century, eroding a fair share of the historical city. The combination of causes and the reasons that determined this historical period, the urban planning operations that were implemented and the consequences that they had on the form of the city, have been dealt with and analysed in several studies.¹⁸⁸ In this appendix we intend to examine the changes and actions that modified the historical routes and the monuments of the Divan axis, mainly in the 19th century and subsequently in the 20th century.

¹⁸⁸ See Stéphane Yerasimos, “A propos des réformes urbaines des Tanzimat”; İlhan Tekeli, “Nineteenth century transformation of Istanbul metropolitan area” in: *Villes Ottomanes a la fin de l'Empire*, Paris: Ed. l'Harmattan 1992, 1-32 and 33-45; Çelik *Remaking*; Alain Borie, Pierre Pinon, Stéphane Yerasimos, *L'occidentalisation d'Istanbul au XIX siècle*, Paris-La Défense: BRA-E.A 1991; Pierre Pinon, “Trasformazioni urbane tra il XVIII e il XIX secolo”, *Rassegna di architettura* 72 (1986), 53-61; Eldem “Istanbul”.



Fig. 87: *The principal areas submitted to deep modification of the urban fabric in the 19th century along the Divan axis (grey grid).*

In the 19th century there was no overall transformation plan, despite the many new building regulations. The procedure was quite haphazard, resolving case by case the urban situations that needed change or for which existed the will to modify. The main transformations that affected the Divan axis in the 19th century were: the widening of pre-existing streets, the replacement of timber houses with other types and techniques, and the subsequent introduction of a new “rational” layout of the urban blocks, and lastly, the creation of urban squares resulting from the demolition of the city blocks near important monuments.

Widening of the streets and regularisation of the city blocks in the 19th century. The 1839 Tanzimat reform introduced regulations relating to urban form, mainly regarding the minimum width of existing streets. After the large fires of 1848 and 1863, which involved extensive areas of the city, new building regulations progressively increased the minimum street widths, and regulations on the replacement of fire-damaged timber houses with new stone and brick buildings were introduced. The basic regulation concerning plot subdivision and

layout after the fires was of 1863. It included norms on the geometrically regular layout of the new blocks. The technical problems of street orientation in the new blocks were dealt with in an official communiqué in 1867 concerning the great Hoca Pasha fire of 1865.¹⁸⁹

Following this fire, which affected the eastern part of the Divan axis, the section between the Firuz Ağa mosque and the Koca Sinan Pasha *medrese* was widened. The width of the street was doubled overall¹⁹⁰, leading to the partial demolition of monumental buildings aligned with the previous street width. Some parts of the Köprülü Mehmet Pasha *medrese*, the Atik Ali Pasha *medrese* and the Çemberlitaş *hamam* were amputated of certain building portions facing the street, while the precinct wall of the Atik Ali Pasha mosque was moved back to adapt to the new alignment. Furthermore, the neighbourhoods to the north and south of the route were regularised, eliminating blind alleys and twisting streets, widening the roads and introducing a more or less orthogonal network of blocks.

During the second half of the 19th century, some parts of Direkler Arası *arasta* were progressively demolished to widen the street. First of all, the portico arcades to the north were demolished.¹⁹¹ Later the south arcades were eliminated, and, gradually, some shops were demolished or converted. Between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, only two bodies of shop buildings of the original building of the *arasta* had remained. In the building to the north, the shops were progressively replaced with theatres and cinemas. The width of the street was more or less doubled, allowing a dual tramway line to be laid.

¹⁸⁹ See Pinon “Trasformazioni”, 55.

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix to Chapter 2.

¹⁹¹ The plan of the *arasta* in the Pervititch insurance map (*Perv mp 1904-40*) and the 1880 map (*Ist 1880 mp*) suggest that the northern porticoes were already demolished in 1880.

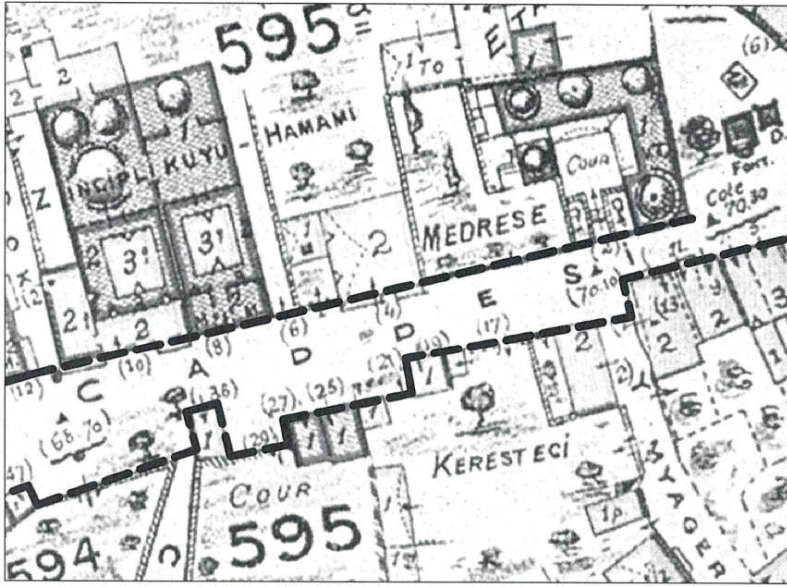


Fig. 88: Occasional street widening along the Divan axis in the Fatih-Karağömrük section. Extract from the 1929 Pervititch map with the street margins underlined.

It can be assumed that in various sections of the Divan axis, in the period between 1839 and 1880, some of the street widening that took place did not affect the monumental buildings, but minor buildings such as houses and shacks. An example of this can be found in the north-western part of the Divan axis lanes, and in particular in the Zincirlikuyu street. Before the introduction of the 19th century regulations on street widths, we can presume that the average width was 5 metres at the most.¹⁹² Conversely, in the Pervititch insurance maps¹⁹³ regarding this section, which represent the 1933 situation, but that was probably not much different from that at the end of the 19th century, considerable diversities in width along the route, even within short sections can be observed. In the vicinities of the Atik Ali Pasha mosque the street width varies from 5 metres to 10 metres (fig. 88). This casual discontinuity of the street margins probably derives from the progressive demolition of small buildings, in most cases

¹⁹² This width can be found at the Nişancı Mehmet Paşa mosque and the cemetery facing it which presumably is still in its original position.

¹⁹³ See *Perv mp* 1904-40.

very common shacks, which narrowed the street, as well as from an episodic application of 19th century building regulations. In the 1860s, part of the historical layout was regularised around the Edirne gate (Edirnekapı), in the quarters formerly Greek or Christian (or as such indicated in the Stolpe maps).

Demolition of blocks near Ayasofya and the Beyazıt mosque in the 19th century. Towards the end of the 19th century a policy to clear the areas around some important monuments was implemented in a way similar to that of early 19th century Europe. In some cases it was considered inappropriate to have minor buildings near important monuments.

The official communiqué of 1867 relating to the great Hoca Pasha fire, apart from indications on building reconstruction, also included the creation of free spaces around Ayasofya by demolishing some of the city blocks adjoining it, even if not affected by fire. Large sections of the residential fabric were demolished, in particular a housing block facing the sultan mausoleums, thus forming rise rectangular square on the southern side of the monument.

Similarly, the buildings set up for trade that delimited the area between the mosque, the Beyazıt *medrese* and the wall enclosure of the Eski Saray were demolished, freeing the space around the mosque and delineating the present Beyazıt Meydan.¹⁹⁴

In the 20th century, new urban planning operations, accomplished in two stages, in the twenties and thirties, and in the fifties and sixties, led to the progressive disappearance of entire sections of the historical Divan axis. The dissolution of the historical routes took place mainly after the existing building structure was completely torn down, generating new urban axes made up of large, straight avenues. Adaptation of the city blocks to the new margins and the construction of new fabric traced perpendicularly to the new orientation, followed.

¹⁹⁴ The area surrounding the Beyazıt mosque and the zone of the Hippodrome were both redesigned by Bouvard at the end of the 19th century as monumental squares. However, these projects were never executed, although the two squares were extended and remodelled in the 1950s.

First stage of transformations and urban dismantling in the 20th century. In the early decades of the 20th century, a wide avenue was formed from Edirnekapı up to near the Beyazıt square. It was more than three kilometres long and took on the role of infrastructure first of all for tram traffic, then automobile. In its northernmost tract, the new avenue overlapped the historical route that had united Edirnekapı with the reservoir of Aetios (Çukurbostan). The construction of this avenue led to the demolition of a number of monumental buildings situated along the Divan axis and to the definitive disappearance of great parts of its course. The external row of *medrese* on the southwestern side of the Fatih complex was demolished, and the lane within the double row of *medrese* on completely lost. It ensued that the importance of the entries on the western side of the complex diminished. The new axis was tangent to the Fatih complex. The quarters around the mosque were regularised on an orthogonal layout set by the direction of the complex, and some minor monumental buildings not aligned in the same way demolished. South of the aqueduct of Valens, the historical layout of the Divan axis, a sizeable portion of which disappeared with the new axis, and the monumental buildings that were lined up with it were demolished. The long line of shops on the southern side of the Direkler Arası *arasta*, which had survived without porticoes up to the early decades of the 20th century, though in line with the new avenue, were finally demolished during the first half of the century.

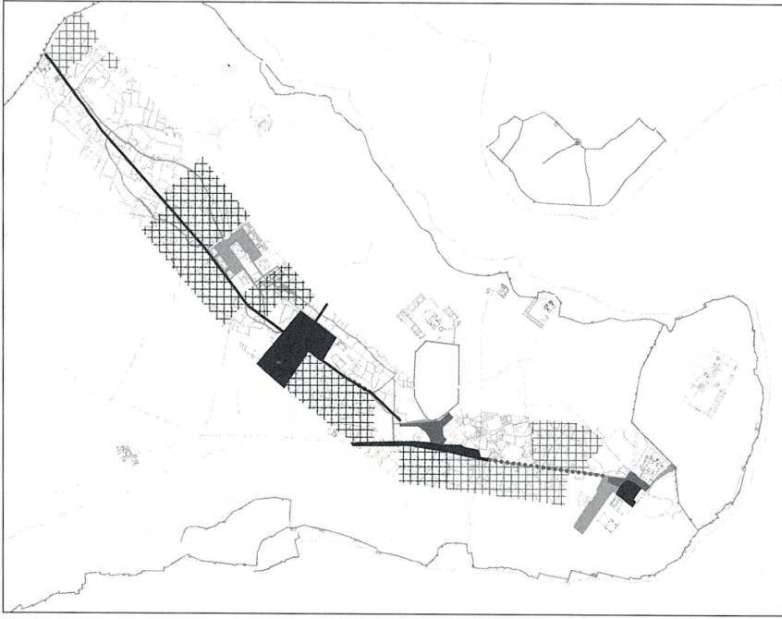


Fig. 89: The principal areas submitted to deep modification of the urban fabric (grey grid) and new large open space (in black) in the 20th century along the Divan axis.

Second stage of transformations and dismantling of the historical system in the 20th century. Around mid-century, the extensive urban planning operations aiming at the creation of large road network infrastructures from the historical town towards the suburbs outside the Theodosian city walls, acquired further momentum. The second stage of operations was carried out as delineated in the early forties of the 20th century by the Henri Prost city plan, which had proposed the creation of new large thoroughfare through the historic city out to the suburbs towards the quarters of Galata and Pera, across the Golden Horn.¹⁹⁵

After the Edirnekapı-Beyazıt Meydanı roadway was constructed between the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-fifties, more demolitions took place in the area between the Fatih complex, the aqueduct of Valens and the Şehzade complex. This razing delineated, towards the Golden Horn, the Atatürk Bulvarı roadway, perpendicular to the aqueduct, progressively removing portions of the existing fabric.

¹⁹⁵ See Pinon “Trasformazioni”, 58.

In the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties Atatürk Bulvarı became a very wide avenue, as it is now. Consequently, once the remaining buildings demolished, the large urban gap, a sizeable part of which is presently taken up by a traffic interchange area, led to the definitive break in the continuity of the historical Divan axis. In particular, the historic route north of the aqueduct was split by the new Atatürk avenue, while the lane south of the aqueduct, already compromised by the first stage operations, disappeared completely.

In the Beyazıt area, whole city blocks south of the mosque were demolished to widen the street to Aksaray,¹⁹⁶ increasing the empty space around the complex, already formed through 19th century demolitions. As far as the new street alignment was concerned, two important 18th century *han*, the Hasan Pasha Ham and the Simkeşhane, were cut through losing half their surface. Moreover, the Kemankeş Mustafa Pasha *medrese* was totally demolished, some architectonic elements of the Kara Mustafa Pasha *medrese* complex—precinct walls, *sebil* and cemetery—were moved back to allow the passage of the new tram line, and its shops on the north façade of the complex were eliminated.

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¹⁹⁶ This operation too can be traced back to the Prost plan.