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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The urban process of an arcade street in late Ottoman Istanbul: demolitions, renovations and relocations in Direklerarası (1880–1911)

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Abstract

Direklerarası Street was a popular promenade and entertainment hub in late Ottoman Istanbul. It was constructed in the *arasta* form along the historical Divanyolu in the 1720s and largely retained its spatial configuration until the 1880s. This article examines the spatial transformation of Direklerarası Street from the 1880s to the 1910s, situating it within the broader dynamics of late Ottoman urban reform. It investigates urban interventions such as the demolition and reconstruction of arcade columns, street lighting, pavement reconfigurations and square design, not merely as outcomes of modern urban regulations but also as processes intricately linked to the various dynamics shaped by the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the late Ottoman capital.

Introduction

Direklerarası Street became a focal point for entertainment, performance, socialization and promenade in late Ottoman intramural Istanbul. The street derived its name from the colonnaded arcades in front of a row of shops constructed in the *arasta* form along the historical Divanyolu axis in the early eighteenth century. This article examines the spatial transformation of Direklerarası Street between the 1880s and 1910s, situating it within the broader dynamics of late Ottoman urban life. It investigates urban interventions such as the demolition and reconstruction of arcade columns, street lighting, pavement reconfigurations and the redesigning of the adjacent square, not merely as outcomes of modern urban regulations but also as processes shaped by the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the late Ottoman capital.

Recent scholarship has considered space not merely as a physical setting but as a social construct essential for understanding urban life and cultural production.[1]

[1]B. Warf and S. Arias, 'Introduction: the reinsertion of space into the social sciences and humanities', in B. Warf and S. Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspective* (New York, 2009), 1.

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The spatial turn has redefined spatiality, highlighting the dynamic interplay between space and experience.[2] Space is now recognized as central to the construction of social relations, embedded in lived realities, rather than a passive backdrop.[3] As Henri Lefebvre contends, space is not merely a neutral setting for social relations but is actively produced through a complex interplay of social, political and cultural forces.[4]

With the spatial turn in historical studies, the street has become an emblematic object of urban studies. It symbolizes the rediscovery of the value of dense historical centres – what urban planners call 'the return to the street'.[5] The distinctive qualities of a street emerge through a complex and multilayered combination of social, cultural, political, technical and artistic elements shaping the historical silhouette of the city. Streets are as mutable as life itself, constantly altered through design or use.[6] Jérôme Monnet argues that the representative character of the street as a local landmark emerges through portrayals that view it both as a setting and as a dynamic human landscape, a scene where the essence lies in the interactions between users.[7] Brice Gruet also views the street as a crucial space for social interaction, a lasting witness to life and a mirror of the city's identity.[8]

The spatial turn has influenced studies on the urban history of late Ottoman Istanbul, fostering space-oriented research and the use of new perspectives and sources. These works have addressed a wide range of issues, such as municipal institutions, urban regulations, European influences and local adaptations, the reconfiguration of urban spaces, *citadinité* (city life), surveillance, street lighting and transportation.[9] Nevertheless, the dominance of state-centred narratives of urban modernization has been a key issue in late Ottoman urban historiography. These narratives prioritize the monumental over the non-monumental, legal regulations as textual sources over their practical implementation and municipal-led transformations over those beyond institutional control.[10]

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the urban history of the late Ottoman cities is far more complex than state-centred narratives imply. Reforms implemented

[2]B. Kümin and C. Usborne, 'At home and in the workplace: a historical introduction to the spatial turn', *History & Theory*, 52 (2013), 305–18.

[3]Warf and Arias, 'Introduction', 4.

[4]H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991), 404; A. Yaşar, 'Mekânın tarihi', in A. Şimşek (ed.), *Tarih İçin Metodoloji* (Ankara, 2022), 309–16.

[5]E. Charmes and A. Sander, 'La rue entre réseaux et territoires: avant-propos', *Flux – Cahiers scientifiques internationaux Réseaux et territoires*, 66/67 (2006/2007), 4.

[6]Z. Çelik, D. Favro and R. Ingersoll, 'Streets and the urban process', in Z. Çelik, D. Favro and R. Ingersoll (eds.), *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994), 1.

[7]J. Monnet, 'La rue et la représentation de la ville: iconographie et lieux communs à Mexico et à Los Angeles', *Flux*, 66/67 (2006/2007), 16.

[8]B. Gruet, *La rue à Rome, miroir de la ville: entre l'émotion et la norme* (Paris, 2006).

[9]Z. Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1993); M. Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul: Transformation and Modernisation of a City* (New York, 2012); M. Erol, 'Surveillance, urban governance and legitimacy in late Ottoman Istanbul: spying on music and entertainment during the Hamidian regime (1876–1909)', *Urban History*, 40 (2013), 706–25; C.İ. Gençer and I. Çokuğraş, 'Regulation of urban space in the Ottoman state: the case of Istanbul (1820–1900)', *Megaron*, 11 (2016), 9–10; N. İleri, 'Allure of the light, fear of the dark: nighttime illumination, spectacle and order in fin-de-siécle Istanbul', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 37 (2017), 280–98; Ü.F. Açıkgöz, 'Capitalistic urbanization in late Ottoman Istanbul: Armenian agencies', *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, 5 (2023), 9–21.

[10]Açıkgöz, 'Capitalistic urbanization in late Ottoman Istanbul', 9.

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through state apparatus affect the everyday lives of urban dwellers, emphasizing the discrepancies between the state's intended objectives and the societal reflections of these reforms. Noémi Lévy-Aksu suggests analysing transformations in the urban fabric as part of a broader reconfiguration of power relations and social interactions in nineteenth-century Ottoman cities.[11] Particularly significant is the role of social actors in shaping spatial transformations, with an understanding that these actors play an indispensable part in the reconfiguration of space.[12]

Scholars began to criticize views of historical change seen through the lens of 'urban modernity' for representing late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European capitals as places where dynamic change occurred. As Stephen V. Ward emphasizes, European countries responded to rapid urbanization and population growth with reformist approaches, turning urban planning into an institutionalized and technical field concerned with public health, efficiency and social organization. Despite the exchange of ideas that resulted through improved transport and communication, national planning traditions developed differently and were shaped by cultural, administrative and political factors.[13]

The interaction between global influences and local dynamics highlights the complexity of Ottoman urban modernization processes. Recent works on the spatial transformation of streets underscore the interplay of political, social and local forces in redefining the urban and architectural fabric of the imperial capital. These studies have examined the diverse functions of streets in Istanbul by focusing on their architectural, social and ceremonial features. Divanyolu is represented as a central thoroughfare shaped by the patronage of the Ottoman pashas, Voyvoda Street as a financial nexus, İstiklal Street as a cosmopolitan symbol, Soğukçeşme Street as an emblem of urban conservation and Direklerarası Street as the porticoed commercial artery of eighteenth-century urban novelty.[14]

This article investigates the transformation of Direklerarası Street from the 1880s to the 1910s through the concept of 'urban process', as defined by Spiro Kostof. The term refers to physical changes in space over time, perceptible only through various acts over a period of time.[15] It examines the street's architectural and physical features, sociocultural dynamics and usage patterns. It utilizes a diverse body of

[11]N. Lévy-Aksu, 'The state and the city, the state in the city: another look at *citadinité*', in A. Dalachanis and V. Lemire (eds.), *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City* (Leiden, 2018), 147–8.

[12]N. Gürallar Yeşilkaya, 'From a courtyard to a square: transformation of Beyazıt Meydanı in the early nineteenth century Istanbul', *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 24 (2007), 71–92.

[13]S.V. Ward, 'Is there a European planning tradition?', in M.W. Querra, A. Abarkan, M.A. Castrillo Romón and M. Pekár (eds.), *European Planning History in the 20th Century: A Continent of Urban Planning* (New York, 2022), 199–206.

[14]E. Eldem, *Voyvoda Street from Ottoman Times to Today* (Istanbul, 1999); M. Cerasi, *The Istanbul Divanyolu: A Case Study in Ottoman Urbanity and Architecture* (Würzburg, 2016); A.N. Kartal, 'Changes, losses and challenges on transformation of the urban place: a narrative on Istiklal Street, Istanbul from the 1900s until today', *urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana*, 13 (2021), 1–17; and Z. Çelik, 'Urban preservation as theme park: the case of Soğukçeşme Street', in Çelik, Favro and Ingersoll (eds.), *Streets*, 83–94; A. Metin, 'New porticoed streets for ancient Istanbul: innovation and historicism in eighteenth-century Ottoman urban culture', *L'Architettura delle città – The Journal of Scientific Society Ludovico Quaroni*, 19 (2024), 117–46.

[15]S. Kostof, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History* (New York and Boston, 1991), 13.

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sources, which enable a comprehensive understanding of both the regulatory framework and lived experiences of Direklerarası Street. It draws upon official archival documents, urban regulations, building laws and waqf registers to trace the administrative mechanisms shaping the built environment, with journalistic descriptions offering 'insider' accounts of those who experienced and navigated urban space in varying ways. It situates the street's transformation within a broader context of urbanization and modernization, highlighting not only the impact of political interventions and urban reforms but also its distinctive architectural-aesthetic features and the interactions of its diverse community. It focuses on the urban practices, perceptions and spatial experiences of shopkeepers, waqf trustees, café regulars and strollers on the street as users of the space who actively participate in and influence the process of change. The article scrutinizes the implementation of urban reforms, the resistance and responses of the public and the negotiations between political authorities and local dynamics.

Direklerarası: a street in an arcade *arasta* design

Direklerarası was constructed in 1728–29[16] as an arcade *arasta*, a commercial structure with shops facing each other in two rows,[17] on the historical Divanyolu which starts at Topkapı Palace and extends to Beyazıt, then branches towards Aksaray and Edirnekapı (Figure 1).[18] It was built by the innovative grand vizier İbrahim Pasha (r. 1718–30) to generate income for his nearby madrasah complex.[19] The arcade *arasta* was named Direklerarası, meaning 'between the columns' in Turkish, on account of the porticoed columns in front of the shops.[20] It included 82 shops, with 37 located to the north, adjacent to the madrasah, and 45 to the south, neighbouring the Old Barracks (Eski Odalar) of the Janissaries.[21] Beginning at Acemoğlu Square and aligned with the boundary walls of the Şehzade Mehmed Complex (*külliye*), the length of the street is about 200 metres (m.) in a straight line with a constant width uncommon in the Divanyolu.[22] The width of the street was 11.25 m. from wall to wall, including the pavements,[23] and 9 m. from column to column.[24] A 1910 drawing indicates that the width of the street at its entrance towards Osman Baba Tomb is 12.75 m. (Figure 2).[25]

The construction of an *arasta* street with porticoed pavements, which would become renowned for its aesthetic appeal and role as a pleasure ground along the historical Divanyolu, reflects the growing consciousness of public spaces in the early eighteenth century. Following the return of the Ottoman court to the capital after a

[16]A. Gölpınarlı, *Nedîm Divanı* (Istanbul, 1951), 198–9.
[17]V. Kelley, 'The streets for the people: London's street markets 1850–1939', *Urban History*, 43 (2016), 410.
[18]Cerasi, *The Istanbul Divanyolu*, 15–43.
[19]Ü. Araç, *İktidar ve Sanat: Damad İbrahim Paşa'nın Hamiliği (1718–1739)* (Istanbul, 2022), 102–8.
[20]F. Tunç Yaşar and A. Yaşar, 'From an *arasta* bazaar to a *piyasa* street: the transformation of Direklerarası in Ottoman Istanbul from the 1720s to the 1920s', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 61 (2025), 165–7.
[21]Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Precidency's Ottoman Archives, BOA), Yıldız Esas Evrakı (Y.EE.) 91/55, 24 Dec. 1878.
[22]Cerasi, *The Istanbul Divanyolu*, 41.
[23]BOA/İrade – Şura-yı Devlet (İ.ŞD.) 81/4809, 22 May 1886.
[24]BOA/Şura-yı Devlet (ŞD.) 708/3, 4 May 1888.
[25]Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 007088, 1910.

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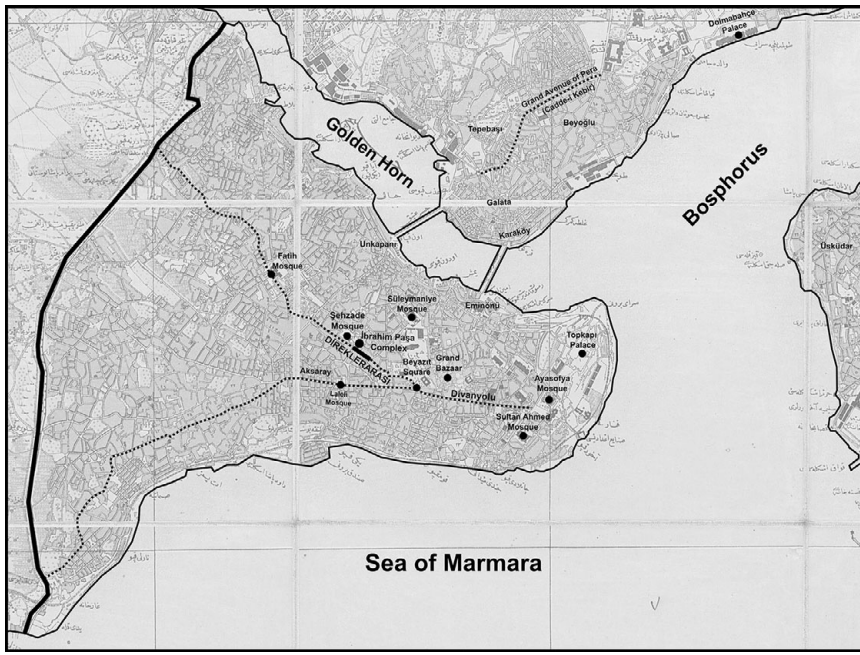


Figure 1. The location of Direklerarası on the city's main artery, the historical Divanyolu. Produced from the map of Bilad-ı Selase by Erkan-ı Harbiye in 1911.

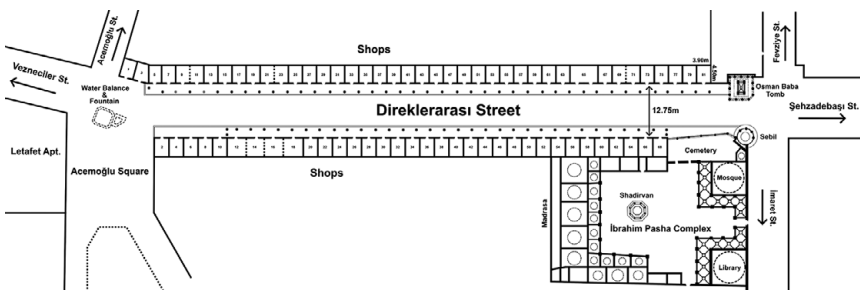


Figure 2. The physical layout of Direklerarası Street at the beginning of the twentieth century. Produced from the maps of Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT [*harita*; map] 007088, 1910; and Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 007340, 1911.

long absence, Istanbul became subject to construction, renovation and urban expansion.[26] Divanyolu, the ceremonial route of the court, was transformed into an arena where Ottoman pashas displayed their power through the construction of mausoleums, madrasahs and complexes from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.[27] As a tool of urban design, the street shaped residents' experiences while

[26]S. Hamadeh, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle, 2008), 283; A. Yaşar, 'The construction of commercial space in eighteenth-century Istanbul: the case of Büyük Yeni Han', *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 35 (2018), 183–200.

[27]Cerasi, *The Istanbul Divanyolu*, 69.

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Figure 3. Direklerarası Street at the end of the nineteenth century. Pascal Sébah, 'Bazar de Diréeklér-Alti à Gahah-Zadé', http://hdl.handle.net/10020/96r14_ref16651_4ua.

also serving as a stage where rulers asserted their power.[28] It seems both symbolically and practically significant that İbrahim Pasha, the grand vizier of Ahmed III (r. 1703–30) who ascended the throne following the janissary revolt in 1703, reorganized the street by constructing an arcade *arasta* adjacent to the Old Barracks.

Semavi Eyice argues that the architectural style of the *arasta* revived the ancient typology of colonnaded streets (Figure 3).[29] In contrast, Uğur Tanyeli highlights the street's novelty value; it was the first consciously planned artery of Ottoman Istanbul, shaped by baroque influences newly appropriated by Ottoman architects.[30] Alper Metin complements these readings by emphasizing the unprecedented addition of porticoes, previously confined to enclosed religious precincts, to a linear, open thoroughfare. He further suggests that while the porticoes evoke the city's Byzantine heritage, the street's overall layout recalls a medieval Venetian commercial axis. For Metin, Direklerarası embodies a fusion of local and foreign elements, particularly from Italian and Aegean contexts, revealing its experimental and hybrid character within eighteenth-century Ottoman urbanism.[31]

In a late eighteenth-century Kauffer map, Direklerarası is called 'Belle Rue' (Beautiful Street).[32] A late nineteenth-century anonymous author describes the beauty of the city of Bern, with its colonnaded streets, by recalling Direklerarası Street.[33] It was often referred to as the 'pleasant street' in Ottoman periodicals.[34]

[28]Charmes and Sander, 'La rue entre réseaux et territoires', 5.

[29]S. Eyice, 'Damad İbrâhim Paşa Külliyesi', *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 8 (1993), 443.

[30]U. Tanyeli, 'Transfer of Western urban planning concepts and techniques to Turkey (1718–1840)', in E. İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Transfer of Modern Science & Technology to the Muslim World* (Istanbul, 1992), 349.

[31]Metin, 'New porticoed streets for ancient Istanbul', 119–20.

[32]M. Pedley, 'Enlightenment cartography at the Sublime Porte: François Kauffer and the survey of Constantinople', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 39 (2012), 28–53.

[33]'Bern şehri', *Musavver Cihan*, 17 (23 Dec. 1891), 1.

[34]*İkdam*, 559 (11 Feb. 1896), 1.

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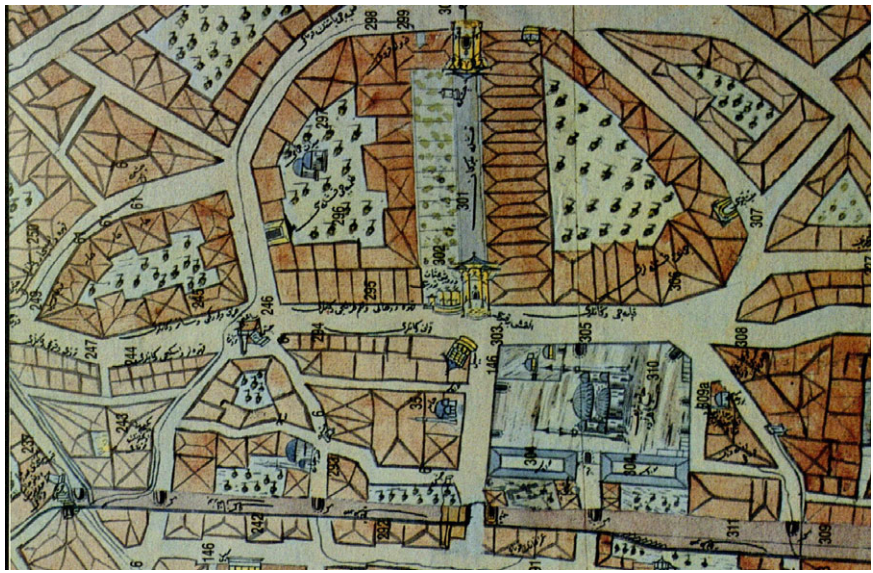


Figure 4. Direklerarası in the Bayezid Waterway Map in 1812/13. M.K. Çeçen, *II. Bayezid Suyolu Haritaları* (Istanbul, 1997).

The 1812/13 Map of Bayezid Waterway (Beyazıt Su Yolu Haritası) illustrates Direklerarası's landmarks and surroundings (Figure 4). In the direction of Vezneciler, Direklerarası's border is defined by the water balance and the fountain in Acemoğlu Square, and in the direction of Şehzadebaşı by the İbrahim Pasha Fountain (*sebil*), Altmışbir Kapısı and the Tomb of Dervish Osman (d. 1782–83).[35] Altmışbir Kapısı was one of the important stopover points for the sultan's sword procession from Eyüp to Topkapı Palace, a procession which was added to the Ottoman accession ceremonies in the early seventeenth century.[36] The Osman Baba Tomb next to Altmışbir Kapısı, the spiritual symbol of Direklerarası, stands as a gateway to Direklerarası,[37] and to the south, it is adjacent to the Old Barracks.

The rise of Direklerarası Street and its reorganization as a public passageway

Widening roads, opening squares, constructing pedestrian paths, lighting streets and regulating buildings were key features of Ottoman urban modernization. These reforms, intended to create healthier and safer cities, were a response to recurrent urban challenges such as fires, epidemics and riots, and reflected the bureaucratic elite's engagement with a broader contemporary urban imagination informed by

[35]*Altmışbir Kapısı*, one of the four gates of the Old Barracks, was renovated in 1807. BOA/Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, Evrak (TS.MA.e.) 785/59, 29 May 1807.

[36]C. Kafadar, 'Eyüp'te kılıç kuşanma törenleri', in T. Artan (ed.), *Eyüp: Dün/Bugün Sempozyum* (Istanbul, 1994), 50–61.

[37]Kethüdazade el-Hac Mehmed Arif Efendi, *Osmanlı Hayatından Kesitler: Menakıb-ı Kethüdazade* (Istanbul, 2007), 165.

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European models.[38] The 1839 Development Policy, introduced shortly before the Imperial Edict (Tanzimat Fermanı), was the first major attempt to redesign Istanbul along Western planning lines.[39] It set out principles for street layout, including width classifications and the inclusion of pedestrian pathways.

The Commission for the Regulation of the City (İntizam-ı Şehir Komisyonu) was founded in 1856 to control infrastructure, public hygiene, road expansion and lighting.[40] Subsequent regulations, such as those issued in 1848, 1858 and 1863, categorized streets to ensure communication, spatial order and urban coherence.[41] The 1863 regulation, for example, classified roads into five categories and designated Divanyolu as the principal artery of the historical peninsula. First-class thoroughfares were required to maintain a minimum width of 15 *arşın* (11.25 m) and streets already meeting this standard were to remain unaltered, so that their boundaries were legally fixed.[42] These standards remained in force during the late 1870s and early 1880s, precisely when the destruction of arcaded columns became a subject of debate because of congestion.

As a colonnaded street that retained its aesthetic and architectural features from the 1720s to the 1880s, Direklerarası underwent a series of spatial and functional reconfigurations, among which the demolition of the Janissary barracks to its south after 1826 played a pivotal role. Formerly a Janissary hub, the street was opened to the public, and its role in the urban fabric intensified with the military reconfiguration of nearby Seraskerat Square.[43] By the 1850s, Direklerarası had become part of a wider entertainment zone centred around Beyazıt Square, with its Ramadan festivities drawing public attention.[44] As teahouses and literary cafés (modern versions of traditional coffeehouses) began to offer performances, such as theatre, canto, cinematograph and Karagöz, Direklerarası evolved into a promenade with venues for socializing, entertainment and spectacle.[45] The increasing number of teahouses on the street also led to its designation as the 'Teahouse Coast'.[46] Despite restrictions on coffeehouses following the abolition of the Janissary Corps on account of their alleged involvement in political unrest, the number of coffeehouses, teahouses and literary cafés increased significantly on the street towards the late nineteenth century. In 1793, one-quarter of the street's shops were coffeehouses, rising to one-third by the early twentieth century.[47] The 1901 *Annuaire Oriental* registers indicate that out of 63 shops, 23 were categorized as cafés.[48]

[38]Lévy-Aksu, 'The state and the city, the state in the city', 148.

[39]M. Gül and R. Lamb, 'Mapping, regularizing and modernizing Ottoman Istanbul: aspects of the genesis of the 1839 development policy', *Urban History*, 31 (2004), 423–5.

[40]Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul*, 44; O. N. Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediye*, vol. 3 (Istanbul, 1995), 1278.

[41]Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 51.

[42]Ergin, *Mecelle*, vol. 4, 1673–4.

[43]M. Cerasi, 'The urban and architectural evolution of the Istanbul Divanyolu: urban aesthetics and ideology in Ottoman town building', *Muqarnas*, 22 (2005), 197.

[44]Gürallar Yeşilkaya, 'From a courtyard to a square', 71–92.

[45]F. Tunç Yaşar, 'Direklerarası as the stage of entertainment and sociability in late Ottoman Istanbul', in N. Özlü and S. Kula (eds.), *Spectacle, Entertainment, and Recreation in Late Ottoman and Early Turkish Republican Cities* (Bristol and Chicago, 2023), 123–46.

[46]'Cevelan', *Sabah*, 4015 (14 Jan. 1901), 3–4.

[47]BOA/Bab-ı Asafi Divan-ı Hümayun Kalemi Defterleri (ADVN.d.) 837, 24 Jul. 1793–11 Aug. 1793.

[48]R.C. Cervati, 'Adresses des Rues de Stamboul: Direkler arassi(rue)', *Annuaire Oriental (ancien indicateur oriental) du Commerce de l'industrie, de l'Administration et de la Magistrature* (1901), 1064–5.

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In *İstanbul Rehberi* (Istanbul Guide), Mustafa Suad described Direklerarası as a vibrant and crowded street in Istanbul on winter nights, especially during Ramadan.[49] Ercüment Ekrem portrayed Direklerarası as Istanbul's main promenade, comparing it to Paris' Champs-Élysées, Berlin's Unter den Linden and Vienna's Prater.[50] The rise of Direklerarası as an entertainment hub coincided with the period known as La Belle Époque, which lasted from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of World War I. This era, characterized by social, cultural and economic stability, witnessed the emergence of prominent entertainment districts in several cities, including Montmartre in Paris, the West End in London and Asakusa-Rokku in Tokyo.[51]

Although the spatial boundaries of Direklerarası Street are clearly defined on maps as lying between Vezneciler and Şehzadebaşı streets, its cultural boundaries appear more permeable. The theatrical area extended towards Vezneciler, the promenade reached the police station (*karakolhane*) across from Şehzade Mehmed Mosque and the music scene expanded towards Beyazıt and Çukurçeşme.[52] The Letafet Apartment,[53] built by Serasker Rıza Pasha for his wife on the corner of Acemoğlu Square at the beginning of the twentieth century, was recognized as one of the cultural symbols of Direklerarası in Ottoman documents.[54]

Public spaces such as squares, streets or porticoes functioned as 'sounding boards' or 'resonating boxes' for political communication, integrating politics into the daily life of the urban community. These spaces were social areas where political news was heard and amplified by the public.[55] By the late nineteenth century, Direklerarası had been transformed into an arena where political authorities, particularly within intramural Istanbul, both experienced and demonstrated urban modernization practices. From the 1880s onwards, there was a greater concentration of urban interventions such as lighting, pavement design, road widening and square arrangements compared to the rest of intramural Istanbul, signifying the street's prominence in the city's layout and its aesthetic, architectural and sociocultural dynamics.

In addition to its advantageous location on Divanyolu, the association of the street with popularity, conviviality and entertainment during the reign of Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) led to the implementation of urban regulations and increased political surveillance as a result of concerns about morality, order, crime and gender norms. It could be argued that the censorship policies of the era enabled the rise of Direklerarası. Halit F. Ozansoy describes the month of Ramadan during the reign of Abdülhamid II as a period of relative relaxation.[56] The controlled freedoms granted during this month, in contrast to the restrictions during the other 11 months of the year, concentrated entertainment and festivities into this period, which boosted the

[49]Mustafa Suad, *Haritalı İstanbul Rehberi*, unpublished manuscript, H 1315 / 1897–8, 68.

[50]Ercüment Ekrem and Münif Fehim, *Dünden Hatıralar* (Istanbul, 1941), 16.

[51]Y. Nagata and H. Egawa, *Bir Kentin Toplumsal Tarihi Açısından Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminde İstanbul'da Tiyatro ve Çevresi* (Istanbul, 2021), 68.

[52]O.G. Ayas, 'Socio-musical convergence and interaction in Direklerarası: commercialization of music in late Ottoman Istanbul', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 61 (2025), 632–47.

[53]BOA/Maliye Nezareti Emlak-i Emiriyye Müdüriyeti (ML.EEM.) 424/84, 1 Dec. 1902.

[54]M. Aksel, *İstanbul'un Ortası* (Istanbul, 2019), 81.

[55]M. Rospocher and E. Valseriati, 'The power of space: street politics in early modern Europe (and beyond): an introduction', *European History Quarterly*, 55 (2025), 3.

[56]H.F. Ozansoy, *Eski İstanbul Ramazanları* (Istanbul, 1968), 19.

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popularity of Direklerarası. However, the Abdülhamid regime, always vigilant about large public gatherings, kept a close eye on the street. In her memoirs, Samiha Ayverdi mentions a special branch of Fehim Pasha's intelligence organization that was specifically tasked with monitoring Direklerarası.[57]

As it functioned increasingly as an entertainment hub after the 1880s, Direklerarası began to face overcrowding and related urban planning challenges. An Ottoman archival document from 1859 defined Direklerarası Street as a public passageway (*memerr-i nas*), where pedestrians were given priority.[58] Urban planning emphasized pedestrian-friendly pavements with appropriate widths. However, as Colin Pooley stated in relation to Britain, by the late nineteenth century urban regulations that normalized the presence of transportation vehicles on the streets reshaped cities, making walking harder and riskier.[59] The use of public pathways on Direklerarası Street as extensions of teahouses, literary cafés and coffeehouses was one of the significant urban issues encountered as early as the 1860s. While urban regulations required that pavements were designated for pedestrian use, the authorities' efforts to prohibit café clientele from sitting on stools and chairs placed along these walkways were closely tied to broader concerns about visibility and propriety, especially regarding the presence of Muslim women in public. The restrictive measures of the Abdülhamid II regime, which included limitations on women promenading, reflected the political anxieties of the era. Thus, the regulations defining pavement usage not only sought to reinforce the intended function of these spaces within the evolving urban fabric but also mirrored the prevailing social norms shaped by the political ideology of the period.

During the reign of Abdülhamid II, projects aimed at modernizing urban spaces were also seen as a means of maintaining public order and strengthening mechanisms of social control. Lit-up public spaces not only encouraged night-time socializing and entertainment but also facilitated surveillance and control by political authorities.[60] The first street within Istanbul's walls to be illuminated, Direklerarası was brightly lit by gas lamps, which turned night into day and meant that the festivities lasted well into the early hours, particularly during Ramadan nights. The section of the Divanyolu from Vezneciler to Şehzadebaşı Police Station was permanently illuminated by gas lamps in 1880.[61] As *Malumat* reported, while Beyazıt and Vezneciler remained in darkness, Direklerarası Street was like a bright tunnel.[62]

Porticoes in question: urban reform, public pressure and imperial will

The deterioration of the porticoed columns became a significant concern, prompting calls for structural intervention. In 1866, the shopkeepers petitioned to repair

[57]S. Ayverdi, *İstanbul Geceleri* (Istanbul, 1971), 22.

[58]BOA/Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi Nezaret ve Devair Yazışmaları Evrakı (A.}MKT.NZD.) 295/69, 16 Nov. 1859.

[59]C. Pooley, 'Walking spaces: changing pedestrian practices in Britain since c. 1850', *The Journal of Transport History*, 42 (2021), 230; C. Pooley, 'On the street in nineteenth-century London', *Urban History*, 48 (2021), 211–26.

[60]İleri, 'Allure of the light, fear of the dark', 281; A. Wishnitzer, 'Shedding new light: outdoor illumination in late Ottoman Istanbul', in J. Meier, U. Hasenöhrl, K. Krause and M. Pottharst (eds.), *Urban Lighting, Light Pollution and Society* (London, 2014), 66–88.

[61]*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 540 (23 Mar. 1880), 1.

[62]*Malumat*, 236 (24 Jan. 1898), 3.

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collapsed sections that blocked their entrances.[63] As reported by Basiretçi Ali Efendi, the deteriorating state of the columns in Direklerarası was evident not only to municipal engineers but also to all passersby. In 1876, Ottoman officials inspected the porticoes of Direklerarası in preparation for Sultan Murad V's girding sword procession, scheduled to pass along the route. Two days later, a few of the porticoes collapsed. Given the narrowness of the street and the risk of further collapse, Basiretçi Ali Efendi proposed demolishing the colonnaded porticoes. He argued that these structures lacked historical value, narrowed the street and diminished its aesthetics. Their removal, he suggested, would widen the street and enhance the value of the adjacent shops.[64] In addressing legal and financial concerns, Basiretçi Ali Efendi suggested that since only the shop interiors were privately owned, the porticoes might legally be removed by the Istanbul Municipality (Şehremaneti). Considering the significant cost of demolition, he proposed selling the stones and charging the shopkeepers who benefitted.[65] After an inspection, the municipality initially decided to demolish the porticoes but eventually opted for partial repairs.[66] The newspaper *Hayal* criticized the partial repair and the repainting of the arcades in a variety of colours.[67]

Following the harsh winter of 1880, newspapers renewed their focus on the need to demolish the colonnaded porticoes.[68] On 7 April, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* reported that demolition work had begun on the columns along Direklerarası, following a state decision to remove hazardous structures. Instead of columns, trees would be planted along the sidewalks to create a more organized street layout.[69] The formal decision on the demolitions was announced in the *Vakit* and *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* newspapers on 12 April. The announcement stated that the severe winter had rendered old buildings unsafe, necessitating the removal of deteriorating and collapsing structures within Dersaadet (the walled city) and the Bilad-ı Selase (the districts of Eyüp, Galata and Üsküdar). According to the Building Regulation,[70] property owners and relevant municipalities were to be informed of this requirement. If the property owners failed to undertake the demolitions, the government would intervene, carry them out and levy the associated costs on the property owners.[71] Subsequently, on 17 April, the colonnaded porticoes on the madrasah side of the street were entirely demolished, while those adjacent to the Osman Baba Tomb remained intact, with the exception of those in front of Mehmed Efendi's literary café, which had been previously dismantled.[72]

The process of demolishing the porticoed columns revealed a notable administrative issue. The northern side of the street was under the jurisdiction of the First Department of Municipality (Birinci Daire-i Belediye), while the southern side was

[63]BOA/Meclis-i Vala (MVL.) 497/91, 19 Jun. 1866.
[64]'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1843 (26 Jun. 1876), 2.
[65]'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1854 (3 Jul. 1876), 2–3.
[66]'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1897 (4 Sep. 1876), 2.
[67]*Hayal*, 285 (30 Aug. 1876), 2.
[68]*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 532 (24 Mar. 1880), 1.
[69]'İstanbul havadisi', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 545 (7 Apr. 1880), 1.
[70]Article 34 of the 1863 Street and Building Regulation (*Turuk ve Ebniye Nizamnamesi*, 1863); see Ergin, *Mecelle*, vol. 4, 1680–1.
[71]'İlan-ı resmi', *Vakit*, 1609 (11 Apr. 1880), 1; 'İlan-ı mahsusa', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 548 (12 Apr. 1880), 1.
[72]'İstanbul havadisi', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 553 (17 Apr. 1880), 1.

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governed by the Second Department of Municipality (İkinci Daire-i Belediye).[73] The porticoed columns on both sides were demolished on different dates in 1880, with each municipality employing distinct approaches to demolition, debris removal and subsequent renovation. The First Department of Municipality delayed the removal of the debris for several days, nearly resulting in the closure of the street. It appears that the Second Department of Municipality waited for these matters to be resolved before starting to demolish the porticoes. *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* drew attention to this administrative discrepancy through a tragicomic incident involving a street vendor who sold oranges on both sides of the street. Each time the vendor crossed from one side to the other, municipal officers placed a stamp on his basket, charging him a fee for boundary violations (*tecavüz-i hudud*). On 29 May 1880, Istanbul was divided into ten municipalities, the boundaries of the municipalities were redrawn and Direklerarası remained within the administration of the First Department of Municipality.[74]

Then on 15 May *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* announced that the colonnaded pillars, demolished because they were at risk of collapse in accordance with the existing regulation and not intended to be rebuilt, would soon be reconstructed under the order of Abdülhamid II. It was reported that 'when the demolition of Direklerarası was brought to the attention of the Sultan, the street was ordered to be promptly reconstructed'.[75] On 2 June 1880, Şehremaneti started the reconstruction of the colonnaded porticoes in their original form.[76] The reconstruction process of the arcade columns once again revealed administrative ambiguities. Although the columns were initially demolished under the urban regulation by two separate local municipalities, each employing distinct procedures, the decision to reconstruct them was taken under the authority of the Sultan and carried out by a different urban authority, Şehremaneti. This example underscores the complexities and potential inconsistencies in the implementation of urban projects.

Abdülhamid II's decision to rebuild the columns of the Direklerarası arcade can be evaluated within the broader framework of urban and monumental conservation policies in late Ottoman Istanbul. The 1866 initiative to restore the Column of Constantine in its original form[77] and the restoration of the city walls after 1894, despite earlier proposals to demolish them,[78] reflect the modernizing capital's engagement with its pre-Ottoman heritage. By the nineteenth century, Divanyolu had a palimpsestic urban landscape,[79] where architectural layers from various periods were deliberately showcased.[80] This indicates that preservation extended to

[73]'İstanbul havadisi', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 565 (1 May 1880), 3.

[74]BOA/İrade Dosya Usulü (İ.DUİT.) 56/43, 29 May 1880; 'Mütenevvia', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 99 (11 Jun. 1880), 3.

[75]*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 576 (15 May 1880), 1.

[76]'İstanbul havadisi', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 591 (2 Jun. 1880), 1.

[77]G. Akyürek, 'New history for old Istanbul: late Ottoman encounters with Constantinople in the urban landscape', in E.K. Fowden, S. Çağaptay, E. Zychowicz-Coghill and L. Blanke (eds.), *Cities as Palimpsests? Responses to Antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism* (Oxford, 2022), 307–28.

[78]E. Acar Bilgin and F. Kıvılcım Çorakbaş, 'Between demolition and (un)intended conservation: the approach of the Ottoman state to the Istanbul city walls in the light of the nineteenth-century archival documents', *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 29 (2023), 131.

[79]N. Avcıoğlu, 'Istanbul: the palimpsest city in search of its architext', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 53–54 (2008), 188–208.

[80]Akyürek, 'New history for old Istanbul', 312.

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multiple Ottoman layers, including Direklerarası, reinforcing its place in the city's cultural heritage. Despite the initiatives for preserving historical structures, Zeynep Çelik has argued that no formal regulations existed in this regard until 1917, since the Antiquities (Asar-ı Atika) laws of 1869, 1874 and 1884 focused only on archaeological artefacts.[81]

The renovation of the porticoes lining both sides of the street was largely completed by 1881, except for those Mehmed Efendi had previously removed without permission to allow more light into his café.[82] On 27 May 1881, the trustee of the İbrahim Pasha Foundation submitted a complaint, asserting that Mehmed Efendi had unilaterally removed the colonnaded porticoes and now intended to rebuild them in a design differing from the uniform plan applied to the other 75 shops in the *arasta*.[83] The complaint emphasized that his proposed reconstruction posed a structural risk to the vaults of the arcade and could compromise its architectural cohesion and historical significance. Additionally, the petition highlighted the antique value of the porticoes, referencing the imperial decree of 1880 that had mandated their reconstruction in their original form.[84] The state authorities, in considering the demands of both the waqf trustee and Mehmed Efendi, rejected his request to construct a single portico but granted permission to rebuild two porticoes in harmony with the existing architectural style, albeit without a column.[85]

In the following years, some newspapers continued to raise the issue of demolishing the columns to widen the street because of increasing traffic congestion. Although periodicals linked the demolition of the columns in 1880 to widening the street, the columns were demolished because of their deterioration and the potential danger identified by the relevant regulations. In 1886, an official document proposed standardizing the width of Şehzadebaşı, Direklerarası and Vezneciler streets, emphasizing that Direklerarası Street already measured 15 *arşın* (11.25 m.) wide.[86] Another document dated 1888 proposed adjusting the width of Vezneciler Street to match the 12 *arşın* (9 m.) width of Direklerarası Street, measured from one column to the next. The document also indicates that the plan to expand the road to 17 *arşın* (12.75 m.) was postponed to a future date because there were insufficient funds to expropriate all the shops needed for the project.[87] This suggests that road widening projects were financially burdensome and even though plans were developed on paper, their realization was often delayed over time.

Opening the square: the removal of the water balance and the fountain from Acemoğlu Square

Public squares, as key elements of urban planning, perform many functions such as regulating traffic, promoting social interaction and hosting cultural events. Urban

[81]Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 168.

[82]'Tevcihat', *Vakit*, 1959 (2 Apr. 1881), 1.

[83]According to the waqf documents, there are 82 shops in the arcade. However, there are 75 shop numbers in Direklerarası Street in the *Annuaire Oriental* address registers of 1900s. Some of these shops were combined into a single shop and given one door number. Cervati, *Annuaire Oriental* (1900), 1058–9.

[84]BOA/Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi (DH.MKT.) 1336/59–1, 27 May 1881.

[85]BOA/DH.MKT. 1336/59–2, 15 Jun. 1881.

[86]BOA/İ.ŞD. 81/4809, 22 May 1886.

[87]BOA/ŞD. 708/3, 4 May 1888.

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reforms in late Ottoman Istanbul proposed creating new squares and reorganizing existing ones. However, many of these projects remained only partially implemented, reflecting the period's broader aspirations. The 1882 Building Law sought to develop and enhance the aesthetic appeal of Istanbul, a city renowned for its natural beauty and strategic location, by creating organized main roads, avenues and public squares, thereby placing it alongside the contemporary capital cities and other advanced urban centres of Europe.[88] The reorganization of Acemoğlu Square can be analysed through Ward's concept of 'selective borrowing', which refers to the process of adapting planning models to local needs and conditions.[89] It reveals how modern urban planning concepts in Ottoman Istanbul were not merely imported but reconfigured through the existing urban fabric and local reform initiatives. Furthermore, it offers a lens through which to understand the mediating role of local authorities in this process.

Acemoğlu Square, located at the end of Direklerarası Street near Vezneciler, was not a geometrically planned square, as illustrated in the early nineteenth-century Bayezid Waterways map. The square derived its name from its proximity to the Janissary Barracks and was located at the intersection of four roads. An archival document about the levelling and enlargement of Vezneciler, Direklerarası and İbrahim Pasha streets stated that such streets would naturally end at the square.[90] A water balance[91] and a fountain were situated in the square, not precisely in its centre, but closer to the northern side of Direklerarası Street (Figure 5). Over time, the presence of these structures came to be seen as an obstruction to pedestrian movement. Basiretçi Ali Efendi recommended their removal in 1873, drawing a parallel with the lion statues in Aksaray, which had been removed for similar reasons.[92] He argued that the fountain no longer supplied water and suggested relocating the water balance to the edge of the square if necessary, adding that there was no doubt the square would open up beautifully if both the water balance and fountain were removed (Figure 6).[93]

In 1880, shortly after the columns were demolished, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* announced that the water balance and fountain in the square, which obstructed the middle of the road, would be moved to another location, a decision made by the Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet).[94] However, after the columns were rebuilt by the Sultan's order, no attempts were made to demolish the water balance and fountain. Even after the 1888 fire in Acemoğlu Square, which destroyed several shops and houses and intensified discussions about expanding the square, no further action was taken regarding their removal.[95]

The demolition of the water balance and the fountain became a matter for the Ottoman political authorities in 1894. An archival document indicated that removing

[88]Ergin, *Mecelle*, vol. 4, 1715–31.

[89]S.V. Ward, 'Re-examining the international diffusion of planning', in R. Freestone (ed.), *Urban Planning in a Changing World* (New York, 2000), 47–8.

[90]BOA/DH.MKT. 1511/120, 9 Jun. 1888.

[91]BOA/ŞD. 00761/00029/001, 2 Aug. 1892; and J. Strzygowski, *Byzantinische Denkmäler*, vol. 1 (Wien, 1893), 26–7.

[92]'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 929 (17 May 1873), 2.

[93]'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1823 (28 May 1876), 2; 'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1843 (25 Jun. 1876), 2; 'Şehir mektubu', *Basiret*, 1854 (3 Jul. 1876), 2–3.

[94]'İstanbul havadisi', *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 556 (21 Apr. 1880), 1.

[95]BOA/DH.MKT. 01495/00031, 20 Mar. 1888.

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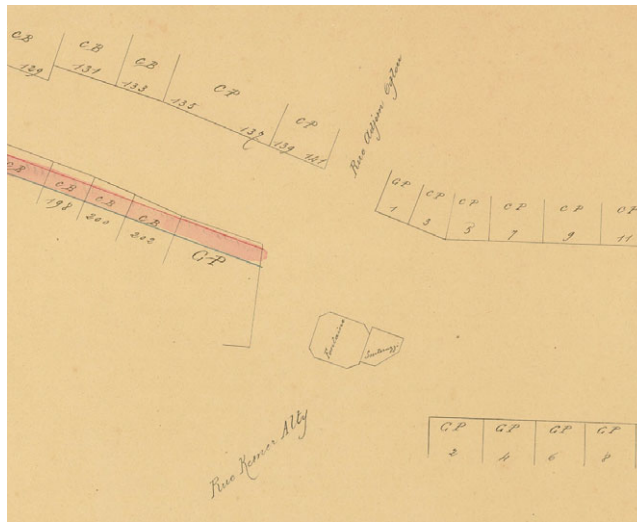


Figure 5. The location of the water balance and the fountain in Acemoğlu Square. 'Projet d'etablissement d'une ligne de Tramway allant de la place du Sultan Bayazid a Ederne Kapou. Plan des élargissements', Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 005159.



Figure 6. The water balance and the fountain in Acemoğlu Square. J. Strzygowski, *Byzantinische Denkmäler*, vol. 1 (Wien, 1893), 26–7.

the water balance and the inactive fountain from the square would enhance the street's prestige.[96] These structures, already scheduled for demolition, were

[96]BOA/DH.MKT. 00232/00025, 3 May 1894.

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Figure 7. The porticoes of Direklerarası damaged in the 10 July 1894 earthquake. Atatürk Kitaplığı, Alb_000184–C. 2, 17.

significantly damaged in the earthquake on 10 July 1894[97] and were demolished immediately afterward by *Şehremaneti* (Figure 7).[98]

Between 1900 and 1903, correspondence between the Şehremaneti, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti (the Ministry of Waqfs), Dahiliye Nezareti (the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and Şura-yı Devlet revealed that the removal of the fountain and water balance led to a complex administrative problem. Following the earthquake, the local municipality removed the water balance from Acemoğlu Square to facilitate pedestrian flow. However, it cut off water from the Nuruosmaniye Complex, ultimately causing a water shortage for the mosque. Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti raised the issue, requesting either the reconstruction of the water balance or the installation of iron pipes to restore the water supply.[99] In response, Şura-yı Devlet acknowledged the problem caused by the removal of the water balance and noted that the Nuruosmaniye waterways had been temporarily supplemented by the Halkalı water routes of the Süleymaniye Waqf and the water balance near Atik Ali Paşa Mosque on Divanyolu. Nevertheless, Şura-yı Devlet declared that the permanent transfer of water between waqfs was not in accordance with Sharia law and therefore decided to install iron pipes.[100]

This case illustrates the contradictions within the late Ottoman reform process, particularly with the existing waqf system, which had played a central role in Ottoman religious, social and urban life for centuries. Waqfs were autonomous under Sharia law in both administration and finance.[101] With the rise of modern

[97]'Dahiliye', *Saadet*, 3020 (12 Jul. 1894), 1–2.

[98]*Sabah*, 1767 (12 Jul. 1894).

[99]BOA/Babıali Evrak Odası Evrakı (BEO.) 1596/119652/1318, 13 Dec. 1900; BOA/DH.MKT. 02447/00051, 30 Jan. 1901; BOA/ŞD. 00813/00009/005, 13 Jan. 1903; BOA/DH.MKT. 638/36, 23 Jan. 1903.

[100]BOA/BEO. 001978/148298/002/001, 18 Jan. 1903.

[101]Ş. Eroğlu Memiş, 'Between Ottomanization and local networks: appointment registers as archival sources for waqf studies: the case of Jerusalem's Maghariba neighborhood', in A. Dalachanis and V. Lemire (eds.), *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City* (Leiden, 2018), 75.

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urban governance focused on the welfare of the public, tensions emerged between the principles of waqf administration and the state's new focus on public benefit. The Ottoman state's efforts to reconcile these conflicting demands and to preserve public benefit in an Islamic and a modern state led to the development of pragmatic solutions and negotiations.[102]

The transport-oriented city layout: 'sacrificing' the arcade for the tramway

During the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18), Direklerarası remained a popular entertainment hub but attracted criticism for its disorderly appearance. A. Mazhar condemned its dilapidated columns and muddy pavements, noting that they had persisted for 15 years, despite the rise of wider, cleaner and more modern venues in Istanbul.[103] Similarly, in 1909, R. N. described Direklerarası as 'narrow and uncivilized', portraying its congestion as chaotic and incompatible with the modern age. He argued that a nation with a constitutional monarchy should observe Ramadan nights with greater seriousness, avoiding frivolity and idle pursuits.[104]

In the early twentieth century, as an aspect of modern urban planning, streets were organized to accommodate transportation vehicles, with pedestrians confined to pavements.[105] In 1907, Société des tramways de Constantinople proposed the expansion of the tram network throughout Istanbul and the extension of tramlines running from Eminönü to Fatih via Beyazıt Square (Figure 8).[106] The proposal included removing the colonnaded porticoes in Direklerarası along with demolishing shops to widen the street (Figure 9),[107] but the plan was not implemented.

The main obstacle to the construction of the tramline was the Osman Baba Tomb extending towards the street (Figure 10).[108] Çelik has highlighted the divisions caused by relocating cemeteries dispersed throughout the city to accommodate road expansion. The initiative was met with opposition from the Muslim community on account of religious sensitivities.[109] One article, which seems to have been written to address these reservations and legitimize the transfer of Osman Baba Tomb in the eyes of the public, argued that Muslim societies do not leave the graves of their ancestors underfoot and do transfer them to appropriate places, and claimed that there was no religious prohibition regarding the relocation of the graves.[110] For some, the extension of Osman Baba Tomb towards the street was highly peculiar. The renowned poet Mehmet Akif Ersoy used the well-known case of Osman Baba Tomb in Direklerarası to illustrate the absurdity of placing Midhat Pasha's statue in Basra.[111]

[102]N. Moumtaz, 'The "waqf's benefit" and public benefit', in N. Moumtaz (ed.), *God's Property: Islam, Charity, and the Modern State* (California, 2021), 195.

[103]A. Mazhar, 'Ramazan mektubu', *Geveze*, 52 (5 Oct. 1908), 2–4.

[104]R. N, 'Ramazan ve Direklerarası', *Ramazan Dergisi*, 8 (23 Sep. 1909), 2.

[105]Pooley, 'Walking spaces', 232.

[106]'Administrations Publiques: Lés Tramways de Constantinople', *Stamboul*, 35 (9 Feb. 1907), 2.

[107]'Eminönü – Beyazıd – Saraçhanebaşı'na giden cadde istikameti haritası', İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 007340 (31 May 1911).

[108]S. Ünver, *Fatih'in Oğlu Bayezid'in Su Yolu Haritası Dolayısıyla 140 Sene Önceki İstanbul* (Istanbul, 1945), 10–11.

[109]Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 62.

[110]'İstanbul'da olan ziyaretgahların isimleriyle mevkileri: Osman Baba', *Muhibban Dergisi*, 12 (5 Sep. 1909), 100–2.

[111]M.A. Ersoy, 'Hasbihal', *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, 102 (18 Aug. 1910), 290.

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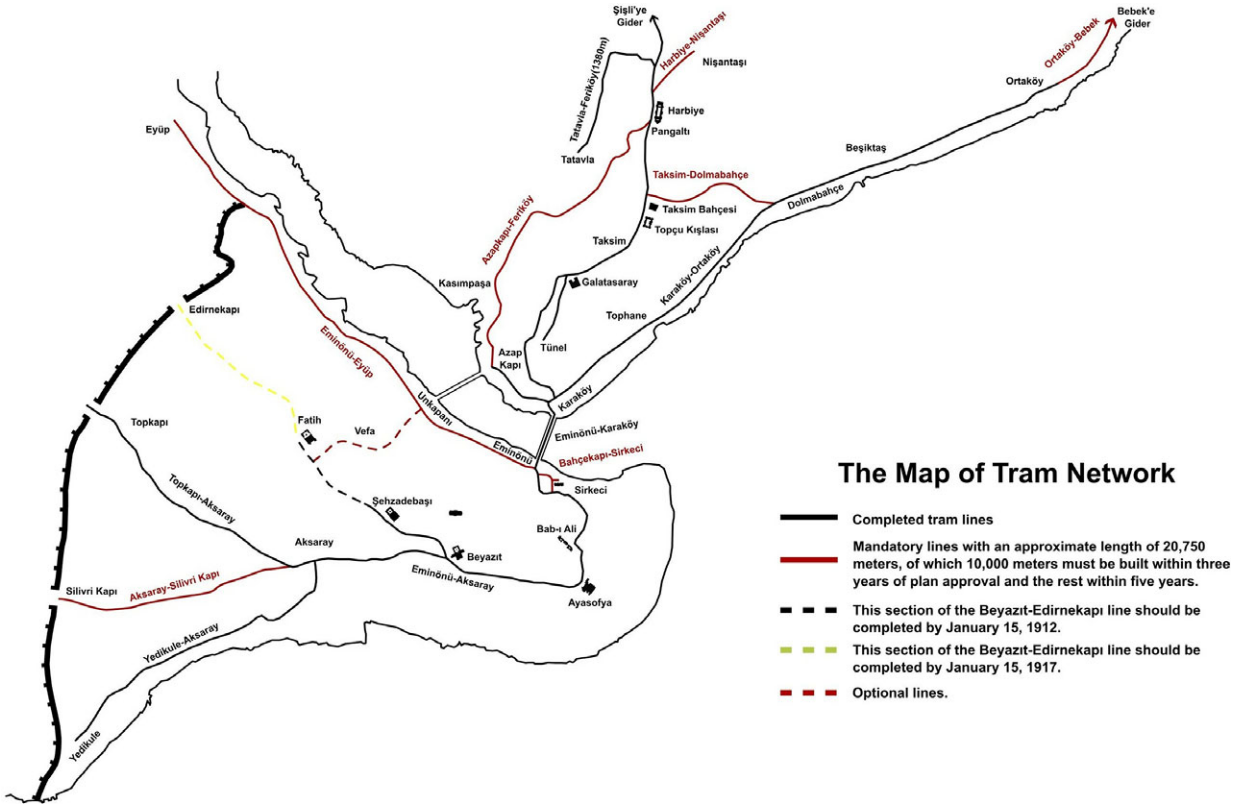


Figure 8. Map of the tramway network in Istanbul at the beginning of the twentieth century. Produced using the map from BOA/Plan, Proje ve Krokiler (PLK.p.) 4272, 26 Mar. 1913.

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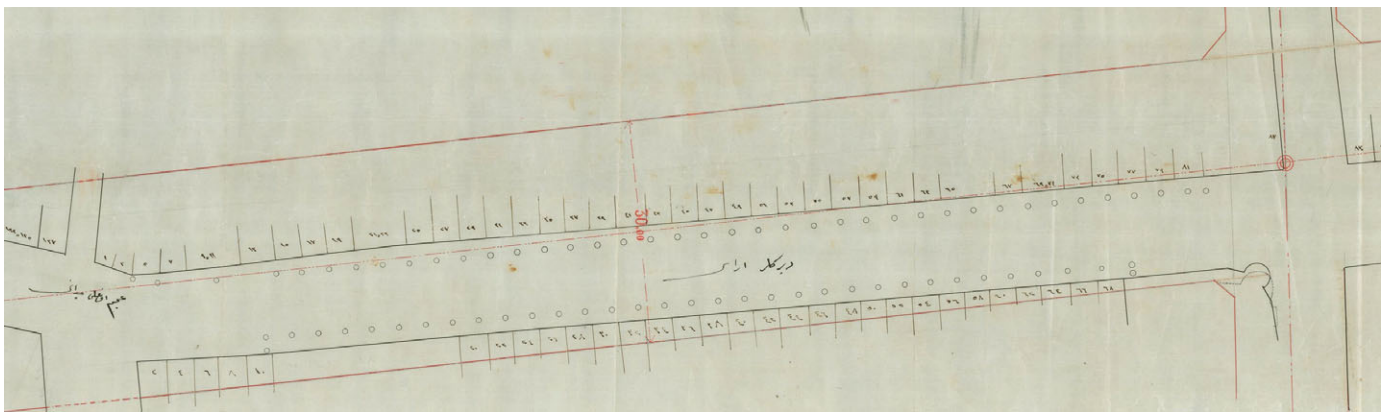


Figure 9. Draft plan for the widening of the street from Bayezid Square to Saraçhanebaşı. 'Eminönü – Beyazıd – Saraçhanebaşı'na giden cadde istikameti haritası', İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 007340 (31 May 1911).



Figure 10. The entrance to Direklerarası Street in the direction of Şehzade Mosque, with the Osman Baba Tomb on the right and the fountain on the left (Abdullah Frères). İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi, http://nek.istanbul.edu.tr:4444/ekos/FOTOGRAF/904-76–0034.jpg.

On 1 November 1910, the newspaper *Stanboul* announced that Suphi Bey, Istanbul's mayor, had relocated the Osman Baba Tomb within a few hours without causing any disruption to traffic.[112] The tomb was transferred to the garden of the Şehzade Mosque, located directly opposite its previous location, at the corner of the pillar that Evliya Çelebi described as the centre of Istanbul. Malik Aksel claimed that the public did not welcome this relocation, explaining that while the theatre had been closed because of the presence of a saint in earlier years, the Osman Baba Tomb was removed from the side of the Fevziye Literary Café, a musical entertainment venue, under the pretext of widening the street. The tomb, which once marked the beginning of Direklerarası Street, now remained behind a wall and existed only in people's memories (Figure 11).[113]

In May 1911, *Servet-i Fünun* announced that new tramlines were being introduced and one tramline was being extended to Şehzadebaşı.[114] The Aksaray Fire of 23 July 1911,[115] which also affected Direklerarası and its surroundings, accelerated the road widening works in Direklerarası. The newspaper *Tanin* announced on 12 August that the First Department of Municipality would start demolishing the colonnaded porticoes of Direklerarası Street within a week,[116] and on 22 August *Stanboul* reported that the columns that gave Direklerarası its name had been demolished (Figure 12).[117] The porticoes, earlier rebuilt by sultanic decree, were now permanently removed to make way for the construction of the tramline. Periodicals in the

[112]'La Ville: La Vole Publique', *Stamboul*, 260 (1 Nov. 1910), 4.
[113]Aksel, *İstanbul'un Ortası*, 5.
[114]'İstanbul'da asar-ı umran', *Servet-i Fünun*, 1042 (25 May 1911), 32.
[115]S. Gürses Söğüt, '1911 Aksaray yangın yerinin imarı ve eski eser kaybı', *Mimarist*, 72 (2021), 105.
[116]'Direklerin yıkılması', *Tanin*, 1058 (12 Aug. 1911), 3.
[117]'La Ville-Dans les Municipalités', *Stamboul*, 198 (22 Aug. 1911), 2.

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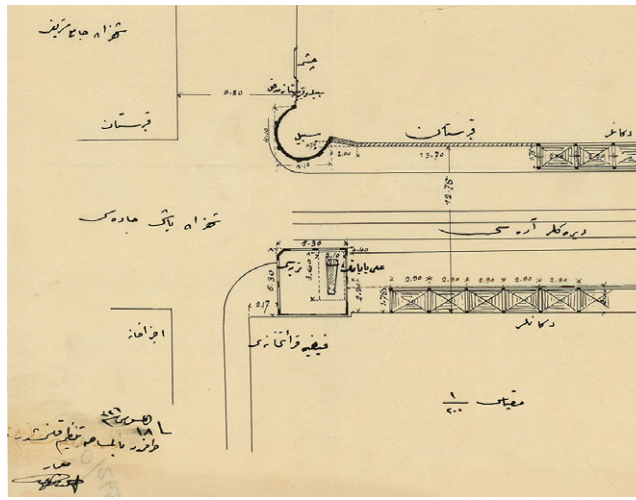


Figure 11. Part of the preparations for the tramway route, this document shows the measurements of the Osman Baba Tomb and Sebil side of Direklerarası Street. İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı, HRT 007088, 1910.



Figure 12. Direklerarası after the demolition of the porticoed columns in 1911. *Birinci Daire-i Belediye* (Istanbul, H. 1328 / 1912–1913), 165.

Ramadan month of 1911 discussed the demolished colonnaded porticoes of Direklerarası. *Afacan* welcomed the demolition of the porticoes but asked what the street would now be called, referring to it as 'former Direklerarası'.[118] The humorous magazine *Karagöz* suggested the name '*kazıklararası*' meaning 'overly expensive' on account of the increasing tea prices being charged in Direklerarası teahouses.[119]

[118]'Direklerarası', *Afacan*, 41 (27 Aug. 1911), 3.
[119]'Muhavere', *Karagöz*, 331 (29 Aug. 1911), 2.

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The demolition of the colonnaded porticoes because of the tramway aroused significant criticism, particularly during the early Republican period. Ercüment Ekrem argued that Direklerarası, once an *arasta* built on sturdy columns and equipped with elegant domes, had been dismantled and transformed into a district conforming to Western standards.[120] The newspaper *Dersaadet* accused Şehremaneti of forgetting its duty, which was not only to make Istanbul a clean and civilized city but also to protect its historical beauties.[121] According to Ahmed Rasim, the destruction of the porticoes, which had offered a refreshing view of the street, turned the *arasta* into a 'bald street'.[122] About 15 years after the demolition of the porticoed columns of Direklerarası Street, harsh criticism came from Ahmed Muhtar:

> For instance, it is highly likely that he [Cemil Pasha] failed to recognize and appreciate the era of Nevşehirli Damad İbrahim Pasha, a period akin to a Renaissance in our country. Upon returning after seven years abroad, I witnessed the destruction of the colonnaded porticoes of Direklerarası. This architectural masterpiece, built by İbrahim Pasha and inspired by Rivoli Street in Paris, as vaguely described by Yirmisekiz Mehmed Efendi, could have been restored with minimal effort. Unfortunately, the historical and arguably the only original street of our city was destroyed, leaving it in its current dismal and unattractive state, which profoundly distressed me.[123]

In the passage addressed to Cemil Pasha, Ahmed Muhtar criticized the destruction of an innovative and aesthetically pleasing street for the sake of widening it, especially since it was constructed during the period that he regarded as the Renaissance of the Ottoman Empire. Ahmed Muhtar's perception of the early eighteenth century aligns closely with Ahmed Refik's views on the Tulip Period (1718–30) as 'a period of brilliant awakening for the Ottomans, marking the initial phase of the widespread influence of European civilization in the Orient'.[124] Ahmed Muhtar's claims about the street run into obvious problems in terms of historical chronology; Cemil Pasha was not the mayor at the time the columns were demolished and the Rivoli Street in Paris, which he claimed was the inspiration for Direklerarası Street, was built for the commemoration of Napoleon Bonaparte's victory at Rivoli in 1797. Ahmed Muhtar's description of Direklerarası as 'the city's historic and perhaps the only original street' also suggests that he was probably unaware of the total demolition and reconstruction of the porticoes in 1880.

Conclusion

In light of the spatial turn in urban historiography, this article has approached Direklerarası not merely as a site of physical interventions but as a socially produced space, shaped by regulatory decisions, cultural practices and public negotiations. As Lefebvre theorized, space is not a neutral container but a dynamic product of social relations and historical processes. The transformation of Direklerarası unfolded

[120]Ercüment Ekrem, *Evliya-ı Cedid* (Şehzadebaşı, 1920), 48.
[121]'Şehrimizin güzelliğine hürmet edelim', *Dersaadet*, 74 (27 Sep. 1920), 1.
[122]Ahmed Rasim, *Ramazan Karşılaşması* (Istanbul, 1990), 72.
[123]Ahmed Muhtar, *İntak-ı Hak* (Istanbul, 1930), 137.
[124]A.R. Altınay, *Lale Devri* (Istanbul, 2021).

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through such a dialectic: between state-led regulations and public use, between symbolic representation and everyday practice and between efforts to modernize and desire to preserve. Thus, the case of Direklerarası illustrates how spatial change in the late Ottoman capital was not only imposed from above, but also actively experienced, reinterpreted and negotiated by diverse urban actors.

The colonnaded porticoes of Direklerarası were first destroyed after a harsh winter in 1880, the water balance and the fountain were removed from Acemoğlu Square following the 1894 earthquake and the porticoed columns were demolished after the Aksaray Fire of 1911. At first glance, it seems that natural disasters brought about the decline of Direklerarası Street. However, these disasters merely accelerated the need for political authorities to address long-standing urban challenges. Contemporary periodicals had already framed these issues as urban problems before state action was taken. This suggests that it was most likely public discourse that influenced the spatial transformation of Direklerarası Street. Furthermore, while Ottoman official records lack documentation on the demolition and reconstruction of the porticoes, newspapers extensively chronicled the process, capturing public opinion and reactions and providing detailed discussions of potential solutions. Indeed, evidence from these periodicals reveals that the porticoes, later praised as original, had in fact been reconstructed in around 1880.

Each attempt to reorganize Direklerarası Street was shaped by a range of contexts and concerns beyond urbanism alone. Despite calls in periodicals in the 1880s to remove the columns to expand the street, they were reconstructed by imperial decree, indicating the precedence of central authority over emerging visions of urban reform. Similarly, Ottoman periodicals viewed the removal of the water balance and fountain in Acemoğlu Square as an urban issue focused on functionality and public benefit. However, later correspondence between state institutions revealed that the removal of the water balance was a more complex matter, involving different state agencies and highlighting a conflict between the modernizing state's new urban responsibilities and the principles governing the traditional waqf system. While both the state and the waqf sought to promote public benefit, the autonomous administration of waqfs, based on Sharia law, prevented the water supply of one mosque from being supported by the water routes of another mosque's waqf. In the same way, the efforts by political authorities to prohibit sitting on the chairs placed on the pavement not only reflected the modern urban belief that 'pavements are for pedestrians' but also echoed a traditional vision preventing the observation of passers-by, particularly women.

The decline in the popularity of Direklerarası Street coincides with the loss of its spatial and architectural characteristics. However, it remains difficult to determine whether the street's decline was a result of the loss of its architectural attributes, or whether its deterioration led to the neglect of its aesthetic components. Political, social and cultural shifts during the Second Constitutional Era redefined its image. Increasingly regarded as a spatial remnant of the Abdülhamid II regime, Direklerarası came to be perceived as incompatible with the ideals of the constitutional period and its vision of modern urban identity. Factors such as the proliferation of theatrical performances and entertainment across the city, a perspective that increasingly sanctified Ramadan, evolving standards of civility and a new urban order prioritizing public transportation contributed to the transformation of Direklerarası from a centre of attraction to a less prominent area.

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The priority in the city layout was given to public transportation and the distinctive features and aesthetic values of the street were secondary to its function as public passageway. Direklerarası lost its character as an arcade with the demolition of its porticoed columns and one of its hallmarks with the relocation of Osman Baba Tomb. While the nostalgic literature of the early Republican period described Direklerarası as endowed with cultural heritage, with the emphasis on its antique and historical value, contemporary periodicals reflected little public reaction to the destruction of colonnaded porticoes. The street, which had largely retained its spatial configuration from the 1720s to the 1880s, underwent a series of significant transformations beginning in the 1880s, as it developed into a lively promenade and entertainment hub and ultimately lost its architectural integrity and spatial coherence by 1911. As this article has demonstrated, this transformation was shaped by a complex interplay of urban reforms, public reactions and the spatial practices of those who engaged with the street.

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