



Urban Transformation in Nineteenth-Century Süleymaniye Mahalle, Istanbul

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Urban historians generally date the establishment of the first municipality in Istanbul to 1857 with the creation of the Altıncı Daire-i Belediye (Municipality of the Sixth District) operating the predominantly non-Muslim merchant district of Beyoğlu on the Northern side of the Golden Horn. Claiming that a municipality for intra-mural Istanbul was ipso facto only founded in 1868, it is generally agreed that urban administration and planning in Istanbul were instituted comparatively late, worked inefficiently and left the city in its chaotic state. While it is true that urban administration in Istanbul until the middle of the nineteenth century cannot be understood in the present-day sense as a body designed to complete tasks directly pertaining the city or the neighborhood having a defined level of autonomy or dependencies towards a centralized bureaucracy, this perspective nevertheless neglects the fact that Istanbul was of course in some way administered and that these administrative interventions had some effect. Instead of searching for a body called 'municipality' including on top of it procedures of collective decision-making, this paper tries to focus on municipal functions such as planning, construction works, security or municipal services fulfilled by a variety of bodies throughout the nineteenth century.

This paper approaches the topic not as usual via changes in the institutions, but tries to understand how institutional change affected a specific neighborhood, Süleymaniye mahalle. Süleymaniye mahalle is interesting in many ways: Mythicised as the quintessential example of an Ottoman neighborhood, Süleymaniye was during the nineteenth century a mainly residential area despite its eponymous mosque at its centre. Yet it is located between areas that changed and were transformed rapidly during the nineteenth century: Moltke's enlargement of the Divanyolu 1838, the development of a new entertainment area in Direklerarası, the market area increasingly affected by the opening of Istanbul's markets to the world economy and the redevelopment of the quays in 1836 and 1872. Since none of the devastating fires touched upon Süleymaniye mahalle however, it was not subjected to direct urban transformations as was the case in other neighborhoods, that had had been burnt down. Thus, the story of Süleymaniye is the story of a neighborhood in the backwaters of new construction projects and therefore gives us an opportunity to observe which effect institutional changes ordinarily had on the built environment and its social make-up. In a period extending from 1815 to 1885 - and thus long before academia dates the institutionalization of a municipality in Istanbul - this paper observes changes in the built environment and social change in the neighborhood and how these developments interacted with institutional change. It provides some evidence that indeed the institutionalization of a municipality in the 1860s, by contrast to other institutional changes, for Süleymaniye was only of minor importance.