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Kentel, K.M.

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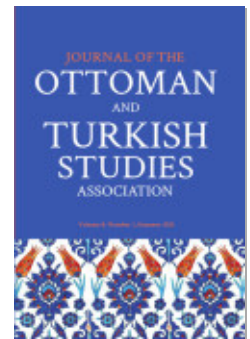
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K. Mehmet Kentel

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# Pera, Kasımpaşa, Sewers, and Maps: Representing Infrastructural Entanglements in the Nineteenth-Century Istanbul

K. Mehmet Kentel

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In the nineteenth century, the Pera (Beyoğlu) district of Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, became an internationally recognized center of commerce, finance, culture, art, and recreation, in the context of the empire's rapid integration into world capitalism. The district's built environment changed radically, manifested in newly erected apartment buildings, arcades, gardens, and monumental hotels and embassies. This change has been studied as an experiment in municipal governance, modernization in urban space, and cosmopolitan sociability. The critical study of infrastructures, on the other hand, reveals that it was first and foremost a material process, which remade a complex and extended geography within and beyond Pera's boundaries in fundamentally unequal ways.

In this piece, I first introduce Pera's nineteenth-century sewers as a gateway to exploring the district's interconnections with its surrounding geographies, which requires a close study of infrastructural plans. I then propose the methodological virtues of juxtaposing these with insurance maps, frequently utilized in the conventional histories of the district. I argue that a critical reflection on the way we use these visual sources is helpful to dissect the limited frames that structure our understanding of the district's history, geography, and layers of social topography.

## Terkos and Kasımpaşa as Loci of Pera's History

In the nineteenth century, rapid urbanization, growing population, changing mentalities and sanitary concerns, especially with respect to frequent cases of cholera outbreaks,<sup>1</sup> made the efficient circulation of water and sewage an

1. See Mesut Ayar, *Osmanlı Devletinde Kolera* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2008).



Figure 1: Paul Boutan and Hubner, *Carte topographique du lac de Derkos et des vallées d'Alibey et de Kiahathane*. Atatürk Kitaplığı (AK), Hrt. Gec. 1875, 1877, 1878, 1879.

essential necessity of public and individual life.<sup>2</sup> In Pera, this meant a growing dependence on, and intensified biopolitical connections with, other geographies of Istanbul. The rise of Pera was thus dependent on natural and urban resources beyond the district's borders, and this dependence, in turn, produced spaces and reconfigured human and nonhuman relations outside of the district.

The Terkos Waterworks, which was constructed by the *Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople* (*Dersaadet Su Şirketi*) and which began providing water to Pera in 1885 with an exclusive opening ceremony symbolically held in the *Jardin des Petits-Champs* in the heart of Pera, altered human and non-human geographies around the Terkos Lake and its connected waterways in the northern fringes of Istanbul (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> As interventions began into the flow of water in this area, villagers' access to their traditional water sources was hindered, the adverse effects of excess water on their lands increased, and their fishing activity was obstructed; the Ottoman army, hunters, and picnickers poured into the area, mapping the environs of Terkos as a geography of risk as well as of natural leisure.

The unequal entanglements created by this infrastructural intervention in Istanbul's countryside underlined and extended existing inequalities among the populations residing in and around Pera, most prominently in the adjacent working-class neighborhood of Kasımpaşa. The water network was concentrated in the wealthy parts of the municipal district, and almost com-

2. Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Hamburg; New York: Berg Publishers, 1986), 4; Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

3. K. Mehmet Kentel, "Nature's 'Cosmopolis': Villagers, Engineers, and Animals along Terkos Waterworks in Late Nineteenth-Century Istanbul," in *The Seeds of Power: Explorations in the Environmental History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Onur Inal and Yavuz Köse (Winwick: The White Horse Press, 2019), 155–183; İlhami Yurdakul, *Aziz Şehre Leziz Su: Dersaadet (İstanbul) Su Şirketi, 1873–1933* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2010).



Figure 2: Paul Boutan, Plan de la Canalisation générale de la Ville et de l'assainissement du quartier de Kassim-Pacha. BCA, 230.0.0 /68.2.1 (8 May 1884).

pletely avoided poorer areas like Kasımpaşa. The concentration of water infrastructure in the uphill areas of Pera placed a further burden on Kasımpaşa's residents as the increased downhill flow strained the capabilities of the neighborhood's sewers and cesspools. The relocation or complete erasure of cemeteries between Pera and Kasımpaşa, which had done a lot to absorb the rain and wastewater coming from the uphill neighborhoods, only increased the latter area's problems, as it had to carry the burden of Pera's increasing urban water consumption.<sup>4</sup> The sewage crisis of Kasımpaşa was experienced at the intersection of hygienic, sanitary, and aesthetic concerns, and further marked the region as a hotbed of disease and social deprivation: associations which still resonate in contemporary Istanbul. Just as the ambition to provide Pera with the empire's first centralized water system remade Terkos, the sewage of Pera reshaped Kasımpaşa's spaces in myriad ways. Following Marco Armiero, Pera's sewage connection to Kasımpaşa can be framed as a "wasting:" that is, "socio-ecological relations creating wasted people and wasted places."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, it was the Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople, the company that was mainly responsible for transforming Terkos' environs, which tried hardest to benefit from Kasımpaşa's sewage problems. During the 1880s, it proposed different schemes to undertake the planned large-scale works. What

4. See also Sait Türkhan, "19. ve 20. Yüzyılda Haliç'te Çevre Sorunları ve Deniz Kirliliği," *Toplumsal Tarih* 169 (January 2008): 60–66; Emel Soyer, "18. ve 19. Yüzyılda Kasımpaşa Deresi Islah Çalışmaları," *Toplumsal Tarih* 169 (January 2008): 66–80.

5. Marco Armiero, *Wastocene: Stories from the Global Dump* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 10.

it demanded in return varied: an extension of its concession to operate the Terkos waterworks, an exemption from the 2.5% share they were required to pay to the Şehremaneti (Istanbul Municipality) out of their annual revenues; a monopoly over the city's entire water distribution systems; and the supply of coal from the mines of Ereğli in the Black Sea region. According to the plans submitted by the *Compagnie des Eaux*, the two rivers of Kasımpaşa, Dolapdere and Baruthane, which served as open sewers, had to be covered from the area of Kasımpaşa Akarcası where the two merged; the sides of the rivers were to be bleached with lime; vaults were to be installed; and the sewer conduits were to be extended into the Golden Horn, which would keep the shoreline as clean as possible (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup>

These plans constituted the basis of another proposal that came ten years later, this time by a German engineer, August Jasmund, a professor at the Imperial School of Fine Arts.<sup>7</sup> Jasmund repeated the observations of his predecessors: that the Kasımpaşa valley was wretched due to the lack of a regular sewage infrastructure, mostly caused by the uncontrolled flow of waste and rainwater into the district's rivers. The Baruthane River was relatively clean, according to Jasmund, but its waters lost their purity as they merged with Dolapdere, which carried the wastewaters of Feriköy, Pangaltı, and Pera. The diagnosis was once again geographically informed: "We see, therefore, that these districts, by leaving their fecal material in Dolapdere, turn Kasımpaşa into a foul place and a source of mephitic miasmas." The situation became so dire, according to Jasmund, that Kasımpaşa's sanitary question became an issue concerning the entire Ottoman capital. According to Jasmund's plan (Fig. 3–4), Dolapdere and Baruthane were to be equipped with collecting sewers, whereas their convergence was to be completely covered and replaced by a new avenue, under which the main sewage would flow. Houses built on two sides were to be expropriated to open the ground for the new avenue, and the lands that stood in between Baruthane and Dolapdere were to be reclaimed in order to create a "flower garden." Alas, none of these projects were realized, and it was only in the twentieth century that the open sewers of Kasımpaşa were closed, creating new lands for development and road infrastructure.

### New Sources for Entangled Urban Histories

Two visual sources have been particularly fertile for historians working on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Pera: the d'Ostoya Map of 1858–1860 (Fig. 5), based on the initial findings of the Sixth District Municipality's (Altıncı Daire-i Belediye) cadastral survey, and the Goad Insurance Plan of

6. BCA, 230.0.0/68.2.1 (May 8, 1884).

7. BOA, Y.A.HUS 275/120 (28 Zilkade 1310 [June 13, 1893]).



Figure 3:A. Jasmund, Assainissement du ravin de Kassim Pacha, plate I. BOA, Y.A.HUS 275/120 (28 Zilkade 1310/13 June 1893).



Figure 4:A. Jasmund, Assainissement du ravin de Kassim Pacha, plate 2. BOA, Y.A.HUS 275/120 (28 Zilkade 1310/13 June 1893).





Figure 5: Count G. D'Ostoya, Plan général de Galata, Pera et Pancaldi, 1858–1860 (Istanbul, 1860), AK, Hrt. 5692.

1905–1906 (Fig. 6), which was an outcome of the 1870 Fire, as well as the rapid growth of the district—both of which had laid the grounds for the development of the insurance sector in Istanbul.<sup>8</sup> The former has been especially helpful for visualizing the district's spatial order before the radical interventions into the built environment which resulted in following decades, as well as the devastation of the 1870 Fire. The latter, on the other hand, is a detailed representation of the outcome of a fifty-year process of modernization, under the aegis of novel practices of local governance, the impact of foreign companies, and the Tanzimat principles of order and reorganization, right before the empire went into its final decade of war and disintegration.<sup>9</sup> In a sense, these two maps roughly mark the temporal borders of the most popular period for the study of Pera, its *belle-époque*. I argue that they draw the contours of its spatial borders, too.

On the d'Ostoya Map, Pera's borders are extended into Kasımpaşa thanks to the almost uninterrupted presence of the Petits-Champs des Morts cemetery, from the hills stretching towards the Golden Horn. Yet Kasımpaşa is not visualized, and Galata, Pera, and Pangaltı [Pancaldi] are instead presented as if in a vacuum. In the Goad Plan, the picture is more drastic. During the roughly thirty-five years after the drawing of the d'Ostoya Map, the Petits-Champs cemetery had almost completely disappeared, and now the Jardin des Petits-Champs constituted, on the map, one of the easternmost border points of Pera. Without the presence of the fluid passageway granted by the cemetery, all trace of Kasımpaşa is completely removed from the representation. On the other side, Tophane is represented as if it is a *terra incognita* — marked as “Quar-

8. Murat Güvenç, “The Pervitich Maps: An Unfinished Research Project for Istanbul,” in *Istanbul in the Insurance Maps of Jacques Pervitich*, ed. Seden Ersoy, Anadol Çağtay, and Müsemma Sabancıoğlu (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2000), 12.

9. See Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).



Figure 6: Charles E. Goad, Plan d'assurance de Constantinople, vol. 2: Pera & Galata. Index (London, 1906). SALT Research, Map Archive, APLGDPEGANDX. Image courtesy of IFEA.

tier Turc” —even if it was part of the same administrative unit of the Sixth District.<sup>10</sup> In these maps and plans Pera is abstracted from its hinterland and demarcated in accordance with social and class contours.

This abstraction is especially arresting if one compares them to the plans prepared for the failed proposals to cover the rivers and install a sewage network in the Kasımpaşa valley. While the city’s nineteenth-century (or earlier) sewers left very few traces (and unlike other infrastructural projects, were rarely photographed), these plans are important manifestations of the city’s environmental and infrastructural connections. Especially striking is the Jasmund Plan of 1893, which represents the region holistically, extended from the Golden Horn to the northern hills of the city, in an interconnected geography composed along the drainage lines. Here, unlike the d’Ostoya and Goad plans, the topography dictates the representation. The drainage zone of Kasımpaşa stretches from the middle of Grand Rue de Péra to the Golden Horn. A wider and interconnected geography is represented, made possible by the environmental and infrastructural connections of rivers and sewers, of hills and drains, and of springs and estuaries. Sewage and its visual representation follow, but also disrupt, the borders created by the built environment and class manifestations in the urban space.

Of course, this more inclusive representation did not translate into the disappearance of the unequal power relations that were inherent in the making of this geography. What was literally, as well as symbolically, true in this sense was the notice of location, put right under the map’s scale in the lower right corner: “Pera.” This little note was not only an indication of where this one particular map was created: it reminds us that these maps were created in Pera, by the expertise hosted and financed in Pera, largely to serve the interests of the elites of Pera. They not only represented, but also served as agents for, the “wasting relations” between Pera and Kasımpaşa. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize the historiographical value of incorporating them into our studies. They not only provide valuable historical information regarding the district’s environment and infrastructure; their utilization also manifests a shift in our approach to urban history.

## Conclusion

The infrastructural maps provide a critical perspective into the ways in which Pera’s hinterlands were illustrated, both real and envisaged, environmental and

10. See Noémi Lévy-Aksu, *Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Asayiş, 1879–1909* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017), 363–398, for a close study of the social composition of Tophane and the Ottoman state’s attempts to give order to the neighborhood. For the control of the border between Pera and Tophane, see especially page 393.

material, and open the way for a more complex, nuanced understanding of how its material world and connected geographies were built in the late nineteenth century. But of course, not all studies can make justified use of such visual sources. What is more crucial is to open the historiography of Pera and other Ottoman urban centers to other forms of representations, frames, and archival reconstructions, in order to break the discursive and material contours within which their histories have hitherto been narrated.

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K. MEHMET KENTEL, Ph.D. (University of Washington, 2018), is the Research Projects Manager at the Istanbul Research Institute a Postdoctoral Fellow at Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, and the Managing Editor of *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*. (mehmet.kentel@iae.org.tr)