

Leiden University · Faculty of Humanities · Middle Eastern Studies

# Yangın var!<sup>1</sup>

*The Conflagrations of Ottoman Istanbul in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and Early 19<sup>th</sup>  
Centuries According to Ottoman and European Sources*

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts

Burak Fici

s1422294

Supervisor Dr H.P.A. Theunissen

1 July 2019 · Leiden

---

<sup>1</sup> There is fire!



## Table of Contents

<b>Introducing the Conflagrations of Istanbul .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Historical Context .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 The situation in Istanbul up to the 1750s .....	11
1.2 The period between 1750-1850.....	17
<b>Chapter 2: A Detailed Chronology of Istanbul’s Conflagrations (1750-1850).....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Conflagrations from the Ottoman and European Perspectives .....</b>	<b>56</b>
3.1 An analysis of the Ottoman sources.....	56
3.2 An analysis of the European sources.....	75
3.3 The comparison of the Ottoman and European perspectives.....	90
<b>Final Conclusions .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>106</b>



## Introducing the Conflagrations of Istanbul

“From the end of April to the beginning of August 1779, hardly a week passed without a fire: and that of July 29, which lasted no more than twenty hours, reduced one square mile to ashes in the middle of the city. The months of July and August of 1782 were no less fateful. During the first [month], the fire of 9 July consumed three thousand houses, and that of 24 [July] many more. During the second [month], from 3 to 4 [August], the city burned down in three parts, and in another three parts from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>; and on the 21<sup>st</sup> another fire started, which in sixty-one hours burned half of Constantinople. Some unhappy villains tried to burn down the neighbourhood of Galata on the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and Pera on the 24<sup>th</sup>. By shortening the list of these disasters, which we could continue to this day, it will not be out of the question to imply that Spaniards were not content to be mere witnesses of the first fire, which occurred from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1785, after their arrival in Constantinople. [...] several Turks arrived with their families and properties fleeing a fire, that in that part of the harbour consumed about eight thousand houses, all [people] were collected and fed, according to the cordial friendship that reigns between the both [Turkish and Spanish] courts.”<sup>2</sup>

With this passage, the Spanish traveller Jose Moreno illustrated the remarkable frequency of conflagrations and the devastation he experienced when he was visiting Istanbul at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Moreno stated, throughout history, the Ottoman capital suffered a lot from calamities such as earthquakes, diseases, famine and fires just like any other metropolis in the world. Its predominantly wooden architecture made the Ottoman capital more resilient to earthquakes, but due to the narrow streets, building density and lack of today’s modern fire prevention methods, Istanbul was more vulnerable to city fires. Throughout centuries, numerous city fires of all sizes have had dramatic impacts on Istanbul. A tiny spark from one of the bakeries could turn into a catastrophe. Some of these city fires were so powerful that most inhabitants could feel the effects.<sup>3</sup> For that reason, in this thesis, the term ‘conflagration’ will be used to define the devastating blazes. ‘Conflagration’, according to the dictionary, means “a large fire that causes a lot of damage” or “a large or violent event, such as war, involving a lot

---

<sup>2</sup> Desde fines de Abril hasta principios de Agosto de 1779 apenas pasó semana sin incendio : y el de 29 de Julio, que no duró mas de veinte horas, reduxo á cenizas una milla en quadro en medio del casco de la ciudad. Los meses de Julio y Agosto de 82 fueron no menos aciagos. En el primero, el fuego del 9 consumió tres mil casas, y el del 24 muchas mas. En el Segundo, del 3 al 4 se notó incendiada la ciudad por tres partes, y por otras tres del 6 al 7 ; y en el 21 empezó otro fuego que en sesenta y una horas abrasó la mitad de Constantinopla. No contentos algunos malvados intentáron incendiar el barrio de Gálata en la noche del 22, y en la del 24 el de Pera. Cortando la lista de estos desastres, que pudiéramos seguir hasta el dia, no será fuera de propósito insinuar que los Españoles no se contentáron con ser meros testigos del primer fuego, acaecido del 5 al 6 de Agosto de 85, despues de su arribo á Constantinopla. Mientras nuestro bergantin Infante componia su timon en aquel puerto, como varios Turcos llegasen con sus familias y bienes huyendo de un incendio que por aquella parte de la marina consumió cerca de ocho mil casas, todos fueron recogidos y alimentados, como pedia la cordial amistad que reyna entre ambas Cortes.”, Jose Moreno, *Viaje a Constantinopla en el Año de 1784* (Madrid : La Imprenta Real : 1790), 167-168.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. Schneider, “Brände in Konstantinopel,” in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 41 (1941): 382-403; Mustafa Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde İstanbul Yapılarında Tahribat Yapan Yangınlar ve Tabii Afetler,” in *Türk Sanatı Tarihi Araştırma ve İncelemeleri* (İstanbul: Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi, 1963).

of people”.<sup>4</sup> In all other cases, I will use the term ‘fire’ to point out the small incidents that have not been described extensively in the sources.

According to various primary and secondary sources, conflagrations took place mainly at two locations, Constantinople and Pera, simply because the history writing took place at these locations. In Constantinople *intra muros* the Ottoman court was settled. European envoys, on the other hand, have sent their reports from Galata/Pera, the district beyond the water (Golden Horn), around today’s Galata Tower and its northern suburbs. Although the geographic and demographic boundaries of today’s Istanbul differ from that of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the name Istanbul in this work will be used to indicate both Constantinople *intra muros* and Galata including Pera as can be seen in Appendix 1.<sup>5</sup>

Many conflagrations were powerful enough to swallow entire neighbourhoods, change the urban tissue and have impacts on the city’s architecture. Devastations could also disrupt the social, political and economic life in the city, affecting the daily life of the inhabitants and uprooting communities regardless of their religious or social backgrounds. From time to time, the frequency rates of fire incidents have become conspicuously high.<sup>6</sup> The first studies in this field were the chronological overviews of A.M. Schneider (1941)<sup>7</sup> and Mustafa Cezar (1963)<sup>8</sup> that presented an inventory of conflagrations, their dates, places and the material damage they caused. The studies of Schneider (1941) and Cezar (1963) are mostly based on Ottoman sources and do not discuss the details of the broader (social, political and economic) implications of fires. However, they are valuable sources that contain comprehensive lists of the major conflagrations and form the basis of this thesis.

In 1975, the Dutch scholar Ben Slot widened the focus with his research on the socio-political aspects of Istanbul’s conflagrations. Slot’s study analysed the conflagrations of 1782 and 1784 by looking into the descriptions and perspective of the Dutch ambassador Reinier van Haeften (d. 1800). Based on Van Haeften’s letters sent from Pera, Slot has demonstrated that arson sometimes in combination with plunder were mechanisms that were regularly used by groups and especially by the Janissaries to ventilate protest and put pressure on Ottoman authorities. Since the Janissaries were responsible for firefighting at that time, Slot’s study has introduced new and intriguing insights on their rebellious attitude and role in the occurrence of fire incidents. Unlike the earlier chronological studies of Schneider and Cezar that were mostly relying on official (Ottoman) court chronicles, Slot dealt with socio-political questions such as ‘rebellious Janissaries’, ‘criminal intents’ and threatened embassies. According to Dutch correspondence, conflagrations were sometimes so mighty that they could reshape not only

---

<sup>4</sup> “Conflagration,” in: Cambridge Dictionary, consulted online on 17 August 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflagration>.

<sup>5</sup> Plan de Constantinople Gravé par P.F. Tardieu, 1788, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, retrieved at 19 June 2018, from <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53100686r/f1.item.r=plan%20constantinople>.

<sup>6</sup> Schneider, “Brände,”. Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,”.

<sup>7</sup> Schneider, “Brände,”

<sup>8</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,”.

entire districts but had impacts on the broader political and social constellation of a particular period in time.<sup>9</sup> Although Slot's study was limited to only two of the many city fires, his study raised questions about the role of rebellious Janissaries in the occurrence of conflagrations. He also showed that more information about fire incidents can be found in the European source material. Slot's pioneering change of perspective, his use of the European source material and questions he raised about the Janissaries' role served as an inspiration for this thesis.

From the 2000s onwards, other scholars followed Ben Slot and introduced new discussions mainly on the economic impacts of city fires. In one of these studies, Kemalettin Kuzucu (2000) has analysed the economic effects of conflagrations that had hit the Sublime Porte between 1808-1911. Since the entire study was based on the Ottoman (archival) source material, impacts observed by Kuzucu were predominantly representing the observations and experiences of the Ottoman authorities. Moreover, Kuzucu's main focus lied on the conflagrations that had an impact on one location, the Sublime Porte, which also limits the scope.<sup>10</sup> Still, Kuzucu linked the Janissary uprising of 15-16 November 1808 to the conflagrations that took place during the same havoc, but this only reflects one specific case. It remains the question to what extent the Janissaries played a role in the occurrence of other conflagrations. The same references can be found in the study of Mehmet Demirtaş (2004) who has researched the effects of calamities, such as earthquakes, famine, floods and fires on the city during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> Although it was to a limited extent, Demirtaş referred to Western travellers such as Dernschwam and Busbecq. According to an example he used, Busbecq had reported that soldiers (Janissaries) who were responsible for firefighting had not carried out their duties in a proper way. Both Kuzucu's and Demirtaş's studies have not necessarily been focusing on the conflagrations and not coming up with ground-breaking novelties in this field, but they do contain interesting details about the role of the Janissaries in the occurrence of conflagrations. These details provoke new questions about the links between the role of the Janissaries, frequent fire incidents and the socio-political and economic impacts of these blazes.<sup>12</sup>

Another intriguing discussion among scholars arose on the connection between conflagrations and (re)shaping of space. In his study, Marc David Baer (2004) has concluded that before the great conflagration of 1660 Eminönü was a neighbourhood mainly populated by Jews, while the entire area has lost its character afterwards. Baer claimed that the Ottoman state had consciously made use of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ben Slot, "The Fires in Istanbul of 1782 and 1784 According to Maps and Reports by Dutch Diplomatic Representatives," *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4-5 (1975-1976): 47-66.

<sup>10</sup> Kemalettin Kuzucu, "Bâbiâli Yangınları ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Etkileri (1808-1911)," *Doctoral Thesis*, Erzurum University, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Demirtaş, "XVI. Yüzyılda Meydana Gelen Tabii Afetlerin İstanbul'un Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayatına Etkilerine Dair Bazı Misaller," *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* (2004): 37-50.

<sup>12</sup> Demirtaş, "XVI. Yüzyılda,".

devastation to redesign the non-Muslim space.<sup>13</sup> Scholars Minna Rozen and Benjamin Arbel, who have analysed the conflagration of 1569 have encountered a similar pattern. Based on an analysis of reports sent by the Venetian diplomat Marcantonio Barbaro, Rozen and Arbel (2006) have found connections between conflagrations and state politics. What makes both studies more interesting is that Baer, Arbel and Rozen did this by looking into European sources according to which it can be concluded that fire incidents, state politics and Ottoman policy-making were inseparably intertwined.<sup>14</sup> Researcher Kenan Yıldız (2012), however, has contradicted the ideas on the 'Islamization of space', basing his arguments on the Ottoman source material. According to Yıldız, it is "anachronistic and meaningless" to make a connection between the reshaping of Eminönü and Islamization.<sup>15</sup> He claimed that reorganisation in Eminönü was necessary because of dirtiness, disorder and the need for a proper mosque. He added that after the conflagration of 1660, the Ottoman state was able to easily confiscate churches and synagogues to expand the mosque and its complex (*külliye*), not because the state acted against Jews but because non-Muslims were tenants in Muslim properties. These properties were already belonging to Muslims-owners and could be easily confiscated.<sup>16</sup> Both arguments, dirtiness and confiscation of Muslim properties are disputable because dirtiness itself cannot be a simple reason to remove an entire community from a neighbourhood to subsequently erect an Islamic religious complex. Moreover, after the confiscation, the Jews apparently could not return to their properties, not even as tenants. The discussions on these social developments confirm that conflagrations cannot be seen as mere accidents. As the examples show, the Ottoman state has consciously been managing the situation in the aftermath of the conflagrations in 1569 and 1660. The abovementioned studies are clear examples of the complexity of the socio-political questions around the conflagrations of Istanbul, but they remain case studies that focus on just two of the many other cases. The insights introduced by these studies make further research even more interesting, to have answers on whether more was involved before, during and after other conflagrations.

Besides the abovementioned studies, works have been published on the interaction between conflagrations and architectural and demographic changes. In one of these works, Zeynep Çelik (1986) has put the focus on the structural changes in the context of modernisation that predominantly had taken place from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>17</sup> Another scholar, Cem Behar (2003), has looked at the urban transformation in Istanbul by focusing on the architectural and demographic

---

<sup>13</sup> Marc David Baer, "The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004): 159-181.

<sup>14</sup> Minna Rozen and Benjamin Arbel, "Great Fire in the Metropolis: The Case of the Istanbul Conflagration of 1569 and its Description by Marcantonio Barbaro," in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Kenan Yıldız, "1660 İstanbul Yangınıının Sosyo-Ekonomik Tahlili," *Doctoral Thesis*, Marmara University, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Yıldız, "1660 İstanbul Yangınıının,"

<sup>17</sup> Zeynep Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti: Değişen İstanbul* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016).



changes in the neighbourhood of Kasap İlyas.<sup>18</sup> The study of Ekin Deniz Özyurt (2007) has discussed the effects of conflagrations on the urban fabric.<sup>19</sup> Another scholar, Murat Gül (2017), has referred to the role of fires in his work on the modernisation of the Turkish architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>20</sup> Although conflagrations do not form the central themes of these studies, they are discussed as one of the factors that have had their part in the social, demographic and architectural changes in urban space.

Along with the discussions on architecture and urban space, works such as that of Fariba Zarinebaf (2010) have further emphasised the links between fire incidents, criminal activities and state policies. Zarinebaf, for instance, gave a clear overview of how the inhabitants of Istanbul had been dealing with calamities such as crimes and disasters in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> She explained how the Ottoman state tried to introduce regulations to deal with accidents and arson that both caused fires. Although conflagrations are not the principal object of her study and are being discussed together with plagues and earthquakes, Zarinebaf made connections between all kinds of fire incidents and social aspects such as migration, theft or the introduction of measures such as an alcohol ban.<sup>22</sup> Arson, then, came forward as one of the severe and frequently occurring crimes, which provokes a new question. To what extent did arson play a role in the occurrence of conflagrations?<sup>23</sup> In another work, too, conflagrations were linked to crises and rebellions. Aysel Yıldız (2017) analysed the social, political and historical reasons and implications of crises and revolutions, questioning the role of external and internal socio-political factors such as great power rivalry and Janissary uprisings. Although causes as irregular urbanisation and the increase of population were considered the most important reasons for the frequent occurrence of fire incidents, Yıldız highlighted the criminal aspects and urban violence. One of the examples she gave was that during the 1808 uprisings, rebellious Janissaries had tried to set the Sublime Porte on fire, to which Demirtaş was also referring.<sup>24</sup> Both Zarinebaf and Yıldız clearly show that fires were more than accidents, had connections with criminal attempts, that arson formed a severe problem and in times of crises, fire incidents bothered the Ottoman policymakers.<sup>25</sup> However, in both studies, fires or conflagrations again do not form the central theme, but relations between fire incidents and social crises can be seen clearly.

Fire incidents do also not form the main subject of other recently published works on calamities: natural disasters, plague and famine. In this vein, a work published by Nükhet Varlık (2015) treats the

---

<sup>18</sup> Cem Behar, *Bir Mahallenin Doğumu ve Ölümü (1494-2008): Osmanlı İstanbulunda Kasap İlyas Mahallesi* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Ekin Deniz Özyurt, "19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısı ve 20. Yüzyıl Başındaki Yangınlar Sonrası Galata'da Kentsel Dokunun Değişimi ve Korunmuşluk Durumunun İncelenmesi," (Master's Thesis, Istanbul Technical University, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Murat Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul: Transformation and Modernization of a City* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700-1800* (London: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 161-181.

<sup>24</sup> Aysel Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire: The Downfall of a Sultan in the Age of Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Aysel Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 42-43.

history of plague in the Ottoman Empire between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>26</sup>. While Varlık focusses on the plagues in Istanbul, she does not go further than noting that fires could also be as devastating and threatful as plagues. In the work of another scholar, Yaron Ayalon, who was interested in the natural disasters in the Ottoman Empire in general, a limited focus is put on fire incidents to emphasise their effects on the architecture and demography. However, Ayalon introduces a couple of interesting findings. He notes that firefighters (existing of Janissaries) were well-paid to extinguish fires, fire incidents were considered “the work of God” and after great fires, the Ottoman state made use of the situation to reshape neighbourhoods.<sup>27</sup> If firefighters were well-paid, how could conflagrations turn into devastations frequently? What is the relation between conflagrations and the Ottoman policy for reshaping neighbourhoods? To what extent has religion played a role in the assessment of conflagrations. As can be seen, there are many references to the socio-political implications of conflagrations, but to a limited extent and without a further focus on the context.

In the past couple of years, studies have been published that do come up with new insights, perspectives and discussions on the socio-political impacts of conflagrations. In one of these studies Kenan Yıldız (2014) reanalyses and reconstructs the series of conflagrations of 1782 by comparing various undervalued Ottoman sources such as court registers, and European reports. He notices that the 1782 conflagrations coincide with the Russo-Ottoman crisis and the loss of the Crimean peninsula. At the same time, an increase of arson attacks on some European embassies could be noticed.<sup>28</sup> Yıldız’s study verifies the earlier findings of Zarinebaf, who saw connections between conflagrations and socio-political changes in society. Also, the subsequent study of Aysel Yıldız referred to the increasing criminality and fire incidents in times of crises. The evaluation of these fire incidents and self-critique when it comes to the frequent occurrence of conflagrations is being criticised in another study published in 2016 by Suraiya Faroqhi. Faroqhi examined and criticised the Ottoman source material by questioning the position of Ottoman chroniclers. By looking at the chronicle published by Şânî-zâde Mehmed ‘Atâ’ullah Efendi, one of the Ottoman chroniclers who approached the fire issue from a critical point of view and with a “reformist agenda”, Faroqhi concluded that this critical approach was an exception rather than the rule.<sup>29</sup> Here we can ask the question whether the Ottoman authorities sufficiently criticised and analysed the frequent occurrence of conflagrations, with especially a focus on criminal activities and on periods of socio-political turmoil. Both studies encouragingly introduce new questions

---

<sup>26</sup> Nükhet Varlık, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Yaron Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine and Other Misfortunes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Kenan Yıldız, “1782 İstanbul Yangını: Kadı Sicillerinden Tespit, Çıkarım ve Yorumlar,” in *Osmanlı İstanbulu: II. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu, Bildiriler*, ed. Feridun M. Emecen, Ali Akyıldız and Emrah Safa Gürkan (Istanbul: 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi and İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi: 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, “Fear, Hatred, Suspicion, and Attempts to Protect the Legitimacy of the Sultan: Istanbul Fires as Reflected in Şânî-zâde’s Chronicle,” in *History from Below: A Tribute in Memory of Donald Quataert* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2016).

about the role of external and internal politics in the occurrence of conflagrations and their socio-political reasons and implications, but also about the missing presence of Ottoman self-critique. Still, the focusses and periods of these studies remain limited.

A preliminary analysis of the abovementioned literature shows that the chronological works of Schneider and Cezar are publications that provide overviews of significant fire incidents by referring to the place of occurrence, date and the damages they caused, without going too much into depth. Several other works have urban architecture, urban space, crime, policy-making and (natural) calamities as central themes, with only references to conflagrations. These works tend to focus on one major conflagration or a limited period as a case study. In only a few of the more recent studies references can be found to the broader socio-political context. The contexts of these works are usually limited to the period and the treated case. More comprehensive research on a broader context is missing. However, what these works have in common is that they do contain references to the socio-political implications of conflagrations that cannot be viewed separately from the socio-political context and events such as internal/external crises, uprisings and other criminal activities (arson). Some of the scholars such as Slot, Baer, Rozen, Arbel, K. Yıldız, A. Yıldız and Zarinebaf explicitly mention that there are plenty of Ottoman and European reports containing information about fire incidents but a comparative and connective study over a longer period is still lacking. Consequently, we only have a fragmented view of the conflagrations of Istanbul limited in time, space and scope and often based on a limited number of sources (often either Ottoman or European).

In this thesis, I aim to study the conflagrations of Istanbul over a more extended period (1750-1850) and from the perspective of both Ottoman and European source material. My main aim is to make an inventory of these conflagrations that I was able to find in both the Ottoman and European source material and analyse them to map the similarities and differences in views. After having reconstructed the historical context of the period during which frequent and devastating conflagrations took place, I first will make an inventory of all fire incidents I was able to find, then map the similarities and differences in views and experiences. My final aim is to contribute to a better understanding of not only the causes and consequences of conflagrations, but also their relation with the broader social, political and economic context. As many references in the secondary source material suggest, more was behind Istanbul's conflagrations. Socio-political factors such as the Janissary question, external and internal crises, criminal activities, Ottoman policy-making and religion have links with the occurrence of conflagrations. It becomes, then, relevant to have the following central question in this thesis: to what extent is it important to map the conflagrations of Istanbul to better understand the social, political, cultural and economic developments in the Ottoman society between 1750-1850 and what was the role of these conflagrations in socio-political changes?

The chronological overviews of A.M. Schneider and M. Cezar and the article of B. Slot based on the experiences of the Dutch envoy in Istanbul form the starting point in this thesis. The selection of the most remarkable conflagrations that took place in the period 1750-1850 is also based on the conflagrations marked in these works. The importance of these fire incidents is related to their material/immaterial damage and social/political impacts as they were experienced and described. However, as the research and archival fieldwork further progressed, I have encountered that far more references to other small fires and conflagrations can be found in both the Ottoman and European source material. To reflect a coherent comparison of both perspectives, I consulted several Ottoman chronicles and diaries and European correspondence sent from Istanbul. The analysis of the Ottoman attitude will be based on the available editions of Ottoman historical works existing of chronicles (*tevârih* written by official court historians and independent scholars) and court diaries (*Rûz-name*) that make reports of the most important events of the period between 1750-1850. Some of these works are transliterated and edited by scholars.

From 1753-1766, Mehmed Hâkim Efendi (d. 1770) was the court chronicler. Fahriye Ülker bundled his history as a doctoral thesis.<sup>30</sup> Çeşmî-zâde Mustafa Reşîd Efendi (d. 1770) reported the period between 1766-1768, which is edited by Bekir Kütükoğlu.<sup>31</sup> Court chronicler Sadullah Enverî Efendi (d. 1794) made work of the period between 1786-1792, of which the transliteration has been published as a doctoral thesis written by Ü. Filiz Bayram (2014).<sup>32</sup> Court chronicler Mütercim Âsım Efendi (d. 1820) covers the events of the period between 1804-1809 which is edited by Ziya Yılmaz in two volumes.<sup>33</sup> Ziya Yılmaz also published the works of court chronicler Şânî-zâde Mehmed 'Atâ'ullah Efendi who made reports of the events between 1808-1821 (d. 1826).<sup>34</sup> Yılmaz further edited the history of court chronicler Mehmed Es'ad Efendi (d. 1848) who covers the period between 1822-1826.<sup>35</sup> The history of Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, who was the court chronicler between 1825-1876, is republished in 1999.<sup>36</sup> In addition to these official court chroniclers, independent Ottoman scholars have published their chronicles. The events taking place between 1730-1777 are reported and analysed in the work of Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi (d. 1779), edited and published by Münir Aktepe.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Fahriye Ülker, "Üçüncü Mustafa Devrine Âit Vak'a Nüvis Hâkim Tarihi," *Doctoral Thesis*, Istanbul University, 1950-1951.

<sup>31</sup> Çeşmî-zâde Mustafa Reşîd Efendi, *Çeşmî-zâde Mustafa Reşîd: Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, ed. Bekir Kütükoğlu (Istanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti Yayınları, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Ü. Filiz., Bayram, "Enverî Târîhi: Üçüncü Cilt," *Doctoral Thesis*, Istanbul University, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Mütercim Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Efendi Tarihi (Osmanlı Tarihi 1218-1224/1804-1809) vol. I and II*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Yayınları, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Şânî-zâde Mehmed 'Atâ'ullah Efendi, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I (1223-1237/1808-1821)*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz, (Istanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Mehmed Es'ad Efendi, *Sahhâflar Şeyhi-zâde Mehmed Es'ad Efendi: Vak'a-Nüvis Es'ad Efendi Tarihi*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (Istanbul: OSAV, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, vol. 1-8 (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı-Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi, *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'i't-Tevârih I*, ed. Münir Aktepe (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1976); Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi, *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'i't-Tevârih II-A*, Münir Aktepe ed. (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1978); Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı

Derviş Efendi-zâde Derviş Mustafa Efendi (d. 1816/17) made a detailed description of the conflagrations of 1782, which is edited by Hüsametdin Aksu.<sup>38</sup> The events taking place between 1785-1789 are reported by Taylesani-zâde Hâfız Abdullah Efendi (d. 1794/95) in a work bundled by Feridun M. Emecen.<sup>39</sup> The period between 1790-1791 was also covered by the chronicle of Ahmed Câvid's *Hadîka-i Vekâyi*, edited by Adnan Baycar.<sup>40</sup> Another chronicle written by Câbî Ömer Efendi (d. 1814?), who reported the events of the period between February 1807-February 1814, was edited and published by Mehmet Ali Beyhan.<sup>41</sup> In addition to these official historical works, I will also make use of several court diaries (*Rûz-name*). The *Rûz-names* (literally meaning 'diary') are daily reports containing information about the activities of the sultan and of the events that took place at the Ottoman court. I will use the *Rûz-names* such as that of Mustafa III (*III. Mustafa Rûz-names*), covering the period between 1757-1763 and published by Yunus Irmak (1991) as a master thesis, to see how the sultan and his court have dealt with frequent fires.<sup>42</sup> One of the two other diaries edited by Süleyman Göksu reports on the events taking place between 1768-1781.<sup>43</sup> Göksu also edited the anonymous diary that includes the turbulent period of 1769-1774 during which one of the Russo-Ottoman Wars took place.<sup>44</sup> Necati Öndikmen edited another diary that covers a part of the reigning period of Abdülhamid.<sup>45</sup> The period of Selim III was recorded by Ahmed Efendi, which is published by V. Sema Arıkan.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these *tevârihs* and *Rûz-names*, in this thesis, other edicts, orders, correspondences and different reports will be used which are collected during archival research in the Ottoman State Archives (*T.C. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*).

Having the Dutch sources as the starting point, I will mainly focus on the reports sent by the envoys of the European countries who had residences in Istanbul. This selection is made based on countries that were active on Ottoman soil in the period between 1750-1850. Besides that, I have taken into account the languages I was able to manage. Other factors, such as lack of time and limitations of space in a master's thesis, have also been taken into account. The focus of the thesis will, therefore, lay on the reports regularly sent by the Dutch, British and French representatives living in Istanbul. These

---

Süleyman Efendi, *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih II-B*, Münir Aktepe ed. (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1980); Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi, *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih III*, Münir Aktepe ed. (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1981).

<sup>38</sup> Derviş Efendi-zâde Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *1782 Yılı Yangınları [Harik Risâlesi, 1196]*, Hüsametdin Aksu ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Taylesanizâde Hâfız Abdullah Efendi, *Taylesanizâde Hâfız Abdullah Efendi Tarihi: İstanbul'un Uzun Dört Yılı (1785-1789)*, Feridun M Emecen ed. (İstanbul: Tatav, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed Câvid, *Ahmed Câvid: Hadîka-i Vekâyi'*, Adnan Baycar, ed. Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi: Târîh-i Sultân Selîm-i Sâlis ve Mahmûd-i Sâni: Tahlîl ve Tenkidli Metin vol. I and II*, Mehmet Ali Beyhan ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Yunus, Irmak, ed. "III. Mustafa Rûz-namesi (1171-1177 / 1757-1763)," (Master's Thesis, Marmara University, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Süleyman Göksu, ed., "Mehmed Hasib Rûz-namesi (H.1182-1195/M.1768-1781)," (Master's Thesis, Marmara University, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> Süleyman, Göksu, ed. *Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Esnasında Bir Şahidin Kaleminden İstanbul (1769-1774)* (Istanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Necati, Öndikmen, ed. "Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name (1188: 1774/1775), Yazan: Mustafa Ağa." Unpublished Thesis, Istanbul University. 1761-1762

<sup>46</sup> V. Sema Arıkan, *III. Selim Sirkâtibi Ahmed Efendi Tarafından Tutulan Rûz-name* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu: 1993).

representatives have taken notes of the political and social activities and various other events that attracted their attention (among which the conflagrations) to report to their home countries. The reports resulted in bundles that can be consulted at the national archives in The Hague, London (Kew Gardens) and Paris (Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve). The reports contain a lot of information about daily life in Istanbul. As conflagrations were part of everyday life, notes were taken on these calamities too. During social disturbances, in times of conflicts or events concerning a significant part of the society such as celebrations or rebellions, European envoys made their observations or used informants of whom they received their data. In some instances, representatives themselves were directly involved in disturbances, conflicts or extraordinary situations including the conflagrations which appear in numerous records and letters. For this reason, I have conducted archival researches in three different European archives: the Dutch *Nationaal Archief* in The Hague, the *British National Archives* in London and the French *Archives Nationales* and *Archives Diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* in Paris to collect primary source material. It consists mainly of official correspondence, diplomatic letters, inventory lists and travelogues. In addition to these letters, I made use of other travelogues published by the French and Spanish travellers and diplomats who have been residing in Istanbul during certain conflagrations.<sup>47</sup> The primary source material will be handed in on a USB-stick.

To make an analysis of the sources and compare the Ottoman and European perspectives, I first will briefly summarise the history of Istanbul's fires up to the 1750s in the opening chapter. This historical summary will be followed by an overview of the significant socio-political events taking place in the period between 1750-1850. The second chapter will be a detailed chronology of all the fires that took place in the period 1750-1850 that I was able to find in the primary and secondary source material. In this chapter, I simultaneously will introduce my primary source material, combining it with the already existing information coming from chronologies and secondary sources. I aim to create a comprehensive chronology of all the conflagrations present both in secondary and primary sources I could find. This chronology will also form the basis for my comparison of the Ottoman and European perspectives in the third chapter. In this chapter three, I will reconstruct the Ottoman and European views and analyse how conflagrations were described in both sources, by looking at how both the Ottomans and Europeans dealt with five major points: fire prevention, firefighting, damage assessment, impact management and recovery. At the end of chapter three, I will compare these perspectives to see which similarities and differences can be demonstrated. The findings of this comparison will be summed in a concluding chapter with at the end, a list of appendices and references according to the Chicago Manual of Style.

---

<sup>47</sup> The Spanish traveller Jose Moreno, for instance, made a detailed description of the 1784 conflagrations.

## Chapter 1: The Historical Context

### 1.1 The situation in Istanbul up to the 1750s

Istanbul's conflagrations, some of the reasons behind them and their impacts on the city have been studied over the past years. Chronological overviews and academic literature, but also some editions of primary sources contain references to small fires and large-scale conflagrations and their impacts on the city. According to these sources, Istanbul has always been struggling with fires and their social and material impacts. Therefore, a summary of what is already researched and written will provide us not only with the historical evolution of conflagrations but will also offer reference material to make comparisons with new findings. By having a clear picture of the precautions, prevention methods and ways the Ottoman authorities fought Istanbul's conflagrations, we can have a clearer picture of what changed over time. Therefore, in this chapter, the historical background of conflagrations will be analysed with a focus on two different periods. In the first part of the chapter, I will summarise the period and Istanbul's most impactful conflagrations up to the 1750s based on the information coming from various primary and secondary sources. Special attention will be paid to the reasons behind conflagrations and precautions taken by the Ottoman state. In the second part of the chapter, I will make an analysis of the historical context of the period between 1750-1850, with a focus on the conditions in which these incidents happened.

According to the works of A.M. Schneider and M. Cezar that can be considered reference studies, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards the Ottomans regularly mentioned conflagrations. The only significant registered conflagration of the 15<sup>th</sup> century happened in 1489, as a result of an explosion in the arsenal.<sup>48</sup> From that year onwards, the frequency of conflagrations mentioned in Ottoman sources started to increase. In August 1515, another small-scale fire took place, that, a couple of years later, is followed by the great conflagration of 1539. That, according to Cezar, was the oldest large-scale conflagration that he was able to find in the Ottoman sources.<sup>49</sup> After other less meaningful fires in 1554, 1555 and 1560, another great conflagration hit the city in 1569, which would make the Ottoman government think about architectural lacks and measures. A decree was issued to oblige every inhabitant to have water barrels and ladders in their houses.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, less impactful conflagrations continued to happen in 1574, 1588, 1590, 1591 and 1592.<sup>51</sup>

The number of conflagrations mentioned in Ottoman sources further increased in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1606 a devastating conflagration hit the Jewish neighbourhood

---

<sup>48</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 328-329.

<sup>49</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 331.

<sup>50</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 332-333.

<sup>51</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 334.

near Hocapaşa.<sup>52</sup> Two other conflagrations followed in 1627 and 1633. The conflagration of 1633 had broken out from a caulker shop in Cibali, destroying a significant part of Istanbul *intra muros* with the aid of strong winds.<sup>53</sup> Several small-scale fires were noted respectively in 1640, 1645 and 1652. A devastating conflagration followed in 1660 which started in the Jewish neighbourhood in Eminönü. According to the Ottomans, few places were left in Istanbul where its inhabitants could breathe. More than a hundred palaces, hundreds of mosques, *tekkes* and churches burned down, while thousands of people lost their lives.<sup>54</sup> A significant increase in fire incidents followed in the years after. Many small and medium-scale fires took place in 1665, 1673, 1677, 1679, 1680, 1681 and 1683. During a devastating conflagration that started in 1687 in the old palace, the French ambassador Pierre de Girardin openly criticised the firefighting and claimed that the firefighters could not extinguish the fire because the eunuchs responsible for the sultan's harem did not allow them to enter the building. Special permission of the sultan was needed.<sup>55</sup> While in 1688, 1690 and 1691 relatively small fires continued to take place, in 1693 the Ottomans noticed even two fires in the same year. In 1695, 1696 and 1698 three small-scale fires hit the city.

An interesting detail is that from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards it becomes more frequent to report more than one fire or conflagration taking place in the same year. From 1700 to 1708 almost every fire was reported except 1704 and 1705. After two small incidents in 1716 and 1717, two devastating conflagrations hit the city in 1718 and 1719. That of 1718 had started near Cibali and spread throughout the rest of the peninsula backed by a strong wind.<sup>56</sup> Between the years 1720 and 1728, multiple fire incidents were reported that hit different parts of Istanbul. After a fire in 1720, two other incidents took place in 1721, four in 1722, two in 1723, four in 1724 and six in 1725. The fires of 1725 were the very last drop for the government to regulate the construction of buildings. However, devastations could still not be prevented or stopped. Fire incidents continued to happen in the years after: three in 1726, one in 1727 and another in 1728. In 1729, a great conflagration broke out in Balat and caused tremendous havoc in Istanbul *intra muros*. Interestingly, Janissaries, who were responsible for firefighting, decided to join robberies during this fire. After the flames could be extinguished, corruption was one of the reasons that caused an increase of lack of materials such as timber, brick and roof tiles.<sup>57</sup> Two other fires hit Istanbul in 1730, one in 1731, four in 1732, two in 1735 and one in 1739. In 1740, this time flames hit the Sublime Porte. No fewer than seven fires occurred in the following year, while in 1742 and 1744 other fires were reported. With two fires in 1745, three in 1746 and one in 1747,

---

<sup>52</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 334.

<sup>53</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 335.

<sup>54</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 338.

<sup>55</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 343.

<sup>56</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 347.

<sup>57</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 353.



the frequency of devastations further increased. As can be seen, small-scale fires and large-scale conflagrations have been continuously causing troubles in Istanbul. It remains here the question whether in the beginning fewer fire incidents took place or the Ottomans gradually started to report more frequent. The increasing frequency of devastating conflagrations having enormous impacts on the entire city may have led to more reports.

The inhabitants of Istanbul, on the other hand, were used to this frequent occurrence of fire incidents. Flames could spread easily due to the wooden architecture, narrow streets and the use of flammable materials such as timber. Especially the months June, July and August were called the '*patlıcan kızartma mevsimi*' by the Ottomans, meaning 'the season of frying aubergines'. During these months, heated oil was in most cases the culprit of fire risk which then automatically increased.<sup>58</sup> During the winter season, the use of '*mangal*', a brazier used as a heat source in the living room of a wooden structure full of flammable materials, could be fatal.<sup>59</sup> The '*kandil*', or the oil lamp, was also an asset that could turn dry wood or a piece of textile into a killing machine.<sup>60</sup> Flames usually got a bit of extra help from the strong winds that could easily worsen the situation and accelerate the fire's uncontrolled spread. Once started, flames could move into different directions, depending on the wind. Each of these branches was called '*kol*', literally meaning 'arm'<sup>61</sup> and some of these 'arms' could even become new, independently moving fires.<sup>62</sup>

Conflagrations were not only caused by the use of flammable materials but also due to dense urban tissue and overcrowdedness as a result of Istanbul's rapid population growth. Throughout history, a constant flood of migrants resulted in a fast increase in the city's population, resulting in overcrowding and poverty. Already in 1559, the Ottomans were very aware of the fact that certain neighbourhoods, especially the districts near and around the city walls, were overcrowded because of a concentration of shanty settlements. With edicts and regulations, the state tried to restrict migration to Istanbul and have control over settlements expanding near and towards the city walls.<sup>63</sup> Urban sprawl required attention also in the city centre. When describing the situation in the area around Eminönü in times of the great conflagration of 1569, Rozen and Arbel note that "the lower storeys and one-storey houses [...] were dark and unfit for human habitation. Since there was no drainage system, the residents of these buildings threw human waste onto lower stories." It became for the Ottomans necessary to intervene and restrict housing in such areas as around the mosques of Zeyrek and Ayasofya in 1573-

---

<sup>58</sup> Selim Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü: Sadreddinzade Telhisî Mustafa Efendi Günlüğü (1711-1735) Üstüne Bir İnceleme* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2013), 161.

<sup>59</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, "Istanbul Fires and the Sultan's Legitimacy: Coping with Catastrophe both Materially and Mentally," (Unpublished article), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 161.

<sup>61</sup> Faroqhi, "Istanbul Fires," 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ayalon, *Natural Disasters*, 89-90.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrî'de İstanbul Hayatı (1495-1591)* (Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988), 58-59; Rozen & Arbel, "Great Fire," 142.

1574 to limit the quick spread of fire. Zeyrek was one of the neighbourhoods which had been frequently hit by conflagrations, and urban sprawl around Ayasofya has become a never-ending discussion over centuries.<sup>64</sup> The Ottomans, therefore, considered uncontrolled migration from the periphery to the capital a major cause of the frequent occurrence of conflagrations.<sup>65</sup> The increasing losses of territory the Ottoman Empire faced in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century resulted in more migration flows, which caused frictions between the old inhabitants of Istanbul and the newcomers.<sup>66</sup> The state regularly tried to block, limit or regulate these migration flows. Restraints on migration resulted in 1740 and 1748 in upheavals during which thousands of people lost their lives. Despite the state intervention, all kinds of precautions could not solve the issue around uncontrolled migration to the capital.<sup>67</sup>

The Ottomans were aware of the dangers of frequent conflagrations and how much damage they could cause. Therefore, the policymakers were continuously looking for solutions to prevent them and reduce the damage. Various proclamations issued during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries prove that measures were taken to deal with architectural deficiencies that facilitated the quick spread of fires in the narrow streets of Istanbul. In 1559 an edict requested the inhabitants of Galata to rebuild their houses without eaves once they were destroyed by a conflagration.<sup>68</sup> Similar discussions arose in 1567 when the inhabitants of Istanbul were asked to construct buildings without oriels and arbours hanging over streets.<sup>69</sup> The discussions on how buildings should be (re)constructed continued to be one of the major concerns throughout the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century. An edict from 1696 asked the governor (*kaymakam*) of Istanbul to only grant licenses to people who were willing to build stone buildings like in Aleppo, Damascus and cities in Anatolia.<sup>70</sup> These edicts demonstrate that Ottoman governments tried to regulate the way buildings should be (re)constructed by implementing bans and limitations such as the use of wood for private houses. Scholars note that the frequent violation of these laws remained to be problematic.<sup>71</sup> Public buildings were already being constructed of stone, but banning the use of wood and encouraging a new form of architecture among the inhabitants of Istanbul failed in the period before 1750.<sup>72</sup> The Ottoman state not only targeted the use of wood but also endeavoured to have control over other buildings that were seen as potentially risky. Bachelor's houses or public buildings such as coffee and wine houses, for instance, were considered more fire-sensitive because they were attracting 'God's punishments'. The state paid extra attention to these buildings by inspecting,

---

<sup>64</sup> Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 20-24.

<sup>65</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Caroline Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa Osmanlı: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Öyküsü 1300-1923* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), 312.

<sup>67</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 324.

<sup>68</sup> Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 59-60.

<sup>69</sup> Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 59-60.

<sup>70</sup> Refik, *On İkinci Asr-ı Hicrîde İstanbul Hayatı (1689-1785)* (Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988), 21.

<sup>71</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 32.

<sup>72</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 32.

restricting and even forbidding them. Householders were asked to avoid renting their houses to bachelors.<sup>73</sup> The state also banned distilling 'raki'<sup>74</sup> and smoking in coffeehouses in the context of fire prevention after certain conflagrations such as that of 1606 and 1633.<sup>75</sup>

Even though many conflagrations might have been caused by the use of flammable materials accidents and overcrowding, scholarly literature also speaks of intentionally set fires. The Ottoman state always considered arson a severe crime, but even with heavy punishments, it could not be prevented.<sup>76</sup> One study claims that arson was a major reason of conflagrations that had not been emphasised so much by the Ottomans, but it should be questioned whether the majority of Istanbul's conflagrations were results of accidents or arson.<sup>77</sup> Whether conflagrations occurred as a result of accidents or were caused by intentionally set fires, despite the measures, the conflagrations of Istanbul could not always be prevented. Once the fires started to rage, the Ottomans tried to limit their damage by implementing a couple of regulations for extinguishing. In the 1570s, in times that Istanbul lacked an organised fire brigade and hosed fire extinguishers had not been invented yet, every inhabitant was obliged to have a ladder to reach the rooftop, store a barrel of water and not to leave their positions before the fire was extinguished.<sup>78</sup> During such a calamity, the entire neighbourhood was expected to contribute collectively and form a bucket brigade to carry water from the wells and cisterns.<sup>79</sup> A measure dating from 1575 aimed to deal with people who were misusing the water network of the city. One of them was (probably the famous) architect Sinan who had built hammams and taps in his house. As a result, the surrounding buildings lacked water. An order was issued to examine the situation.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to the use of materials and water, as the tiniest administrative unit, the *mahalle* (neighbourhood) was expected to be self-sustainable in solving issues related to fires and preventing the spread. Within these small units, the inhabitants were expected to create their local fire brigades by hiring extinguishers.<sup>81</sup> 'Mahalle bekçileri', neighbourhood watchers, were responsible for maintaining the public order, detect fires and when needed, gather people to help extinguish the fire. Corruption and abuse of authority, especially among this type of local officials, were widespread.<sup>82</sup> The inhabitants of Istanbul were expected to be self-sustainable also because the first organised fire brigade of Istanbul was founded in 1720, by order of the Grand Vizier Damat İbrahim Paşa.<sup>83</sup> A converted Frenchman (whose French name was David and became Davud) was assigned to form a small unit within the

---

<sup>73</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 103.

<sup>75</sup> Ayalon, *Natural Disasters*, 90.

<sup>76</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 158.

<sup>78</sup> Ahmed Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 60-61.

<sup>79</sup> Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2016), 20-21.

<sup>80</sup> Ahmed Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2002), 311-312.

<sup>83</sup> Caroline Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 311.

Janissary corps existing of converted rookies (*acemi ođlanı*).<sup>84</sup> ‘Gerçek Davud Ađa’ also introduced the first water pump which was not able to suck water but would be used until the introduction of another fire hose. In this version, water needed to be carried, for instance, in bowls to the pump. Based on the information provided by Küçükçelebizâde İsmail Âsım Efendi, Koçu reports that at a later stage hosed water pumps were invented that were able to suck the water from the wells.<sup>85</sup> Ottoman chronicler Şem’dânîzâde reports that this ‘waterless pump’ was invented by Bostancılar Tulumbacısı Mehmed Ađa in 1753 and was able to swallow and nozzle water through a hose.<sup>86</sup> These pumps were carried and operated by firefighters called *tulumbacı* (pumper) while carrying water was the task of *saka* (watermen), locals who were hired to help the fire brigade for small amounts of money.<sup>87</sup>

Conflagrations caused a lot of material devastation but affected the inhabitants of Istanbul also socially and economically. Rozen and Arbel note that physical destruction “... constituted the main damage of great fires”, which can also be the reason for the preference to report material damage, rather than the social and political impacts of conflagrations.<sup>88</sup> However, the fact that the reconstruction of the entire city needed to be (re)organised in a relatively short period and the ways the state coped with the concerns of the inhabitants of Istanbul (property holders and tenants) hint at the presence of socio-political frictions. Studies such as that of Rozen and Arbel and Baer on the effects of the great conflagrations of 1569 and 1660, in that respect, question these socio-political issues. Besides the severe impact of the 1569 conflagration on the daily life such as losing “precious and priceless” books and having difficulties with protecting family members, there is an interesting discussion ongoing on the performance of the Janissaries who might have had a hand in the spread of fire.<sup>89</sup> What is even more intriguing is how the Ottoman state (in the aftermath) deported the Jewish communities from the area that was hit to the periphery, the village of Hasköy. This forced migration and displacements is said to have affected the ‘Romaniote characteristics’ of the Judeo-Spanish community of Istanbul.<sup>90</sup> A similar attitude can be seen during and after the great conflagration of 1660, which hit Eminönü, the area (between the Galata and Atatürk bridges in today’s Istanbul) where Jews used to live. Baer notes that during this conflagration “two-thirds” of the city burned down, while “40.000 people lost their lives”.<sup>91</sup> Baer’s study shows that in addition to the material damage, the Islamization policies of the Ottoman state were involved in the reconstruction process of Eminönü, resulting in disturbances and the removal of the non-Muslims living in this area. Islamic notions such as a prominent mosque have replaced the

---

<sup>84</sup> Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, 25.

<sup>85</sup> Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> Şem’dânî-zâde, *Şem’dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 175.

<sup>87</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet*, 311-312.

<sup>88</sup> Rozen & Arbel, “Great Fire,” 136.

<sup>89</sup> Rozen & Arbel, “Great Fire,” 149.

<sup>90</sup> Rozen & Arbel, “Great Fire,” 147.

<sup>91</sup> Baer, “The Great Fire,” 159-181.

non-Muslim character of the district, which changed its entire character.<sup>92</sup> Cem Behar, who researched the historical evolution of the neighbourhood of Kasap İlyas, also, notes that significant cadastral changes took place repeatedly after that conflagrations hit the neighbourhood. In such cases, houses and estates passed into other hands, which affected the entire tissue of the neighbourhood.<sup>93</sup>

This brief history of Istanbul's conflagrations in the period before 1750 shows that the Ottoman state did make efforts to understand, prevent and fight conflagrations. However, the state tried to limit them and their impacts by dealing with issues such as architectural deficiencies, uncontrolled migration, or dealing with 'morally improper' buildings. Furthermore, arson was considered a severe crime and has been punished. However, even though measures were taken to prevent and fight them, the number of conflagration reports gradually increased over time. The fact that conflagrations remained one of the main concerns of Istanbul raises questions. Did the Ottoman state (in)sufficiently prevent these conflagrations, were efficient methods used to analyse the causes, was a systematic effort made to extinguish the conflagrations before they could spread? Were the conflagrations, not just mere accidents, but could be beaten by better dealing with criminal activities such as arson? Furthermore, the fact that the Ottoman state consciously redesigned certain districts according to Islamic norms and implemented ambiguous bans on alcohol and smoking in coffeehouses are heating the debate.<sup>94</sup> It becomes, in that respect, interesting and relevant to analyse the socio-political character of conflagrations that took place in the period between 1750-1850, a turbulent period characterised by political discussions, reform and modernisation attempts, coups and power shifts but also a frequent occurrence of uprisings and wars. The main question

## 1.2 The period between 1750-1850

The period between 1750-1850 is, in many aspects, an intriguing one as it is characterized by a sequence of historical events which might have had a share in the frequent occurrence of conflagrations. The weakening position of the Ottoman Empire in military, economic and political terms became visible on the battlefield and drove the Ottomans to question the effectiveness of their military and governmental institutions. From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, attempts are made to reform and reorganise the military and bureaucratic institutions, centralise and reinforce the state's power and revive the glory of the Ottoman Empire. Not surprisingly, these events coincided with internal and external conflicts such as Janissary revolts and wars with other countries. It is, in that respect, necessary to describe, analyse and understand the main historical events that took place in this period, in order to understand the bigger picture in which devastating conflagrations have devastated Istanbul. It is also

---

<sup>92</sup> Baer, "The Great Fire," 159-181.

<sup>93</sup> Behar, *Bir Mahallenin*, 107-108.

<sup>94</sup> Ayalon, *Natural Disasters*, 90.

essential to see to what extent these historical events impacted social life in the city. In this second part of the chapter, I will summarise these historical events and give an overview of the context.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ottoman Empire has been dealing with an increasing great-power rivalry and conflicts with the neighbouring empires. Territorial losses, economic crises and internal disturbances often coincided with periods of external crises.<sup>95</sup> The second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was mainly characterised by a Russo-Ottoman rivalry that resulted in long-lasting military conflicts. After a period of clashes in 1768-1774, the Ottomans were forced to accept the consequences of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca that confirmed the Ottoman defeat against the Russians with all its implications.<sup>96</sup> The treaty gave the Russians a broad range of rights to become the dominant power in the Black Sea region, but also to have a say over the Greek-Orthodox church, severely damaging the Ottoman sovereignty. Another significant result of the treaty was the loss of Ottoman control over the Crimea. In 1779 the Ottomans were forced to withdraw from the peninsula that was annexed by the Russians in 1783.<sup>97</sup> The annexation of the Crimea was for the Ottomans hard to digest and formed the basis of a new war against the Russians that started in 1787. During this war, the Russians occupied even more Ottoman territories before the peace could be reestablished with the treaties of Sistova (1791) and Jassy (1792).<sup>98</sup> During the same period, the number of fire reports showed an increase both in Ottoman and European sources, especially in the years 1782, 1785-1786 and 1788 and reaching a peak in the years 1791 and 1792 (Appendix 2).<sup>99</sup> Another increase of fire reports can be seen from 1796 onwards until 1800, with a peak in 1797 (Appendix 2).<sup>100</sup> While the Ottomans were recovering from the losses of the long-lasting wars with Russia, this time they faced another conflict after Napoleon's France attacked Egypt in 1798, resulting in a crisis and disrupting the relationship between the countries until 1802.<sup>101</sup> The Ottoman loss of control over Egypt was one of the consequences of this annexation.<sup>102</sup> Egypt continued occupying Istanbul's agenda in the second half of the 1820s because of its powerful governor Mehmed Ali, this time backed by the French. Mehmed Ali's expansionist policies would result in a military campaign towards Istanbul after which his army could reach the city of Konya and form a severe threat to Istanbul in December 1832.<sup>103</sup> In addition to these external crises, the Ottomans lost more territory as a result of internal conflicts caused by the nationalist uprisings of their Christian

---

<sup>95</sup> Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 1-42.

<sup>96</sup> Caroline Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 333-335.

<sup>97</sup> Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Turkije: Een Moderne Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 25.

<sup>98</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 341-344.

<sup>99</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>101</sup> Zürcher, *Turkije*, 32-33; Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 353-385.

<sup>102</sup> Zürcher, *Turkije*, 39.

<sup>103</sup> Zürcher, *Turkije*, 43.

minorities such as the Greek (1821-1830), Serbians (1815-1835) and the religiously inspired uprising of the Wahhabi's (1811-1818).<sup>104</sup>

The Ottoman Empire, as a pre-capitalist state, was struggling with the invention of the capitalist trading system which was being accompanied by aggressive European expansionism.<sup>105</sup> Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire had been a much less centralised state compared to its contemporaries such as the French, Austrian and Russian empires.<sup>106</sup> After many territorial losses and due to the increasing power of its semi-autonomous districts (for instance in Albania and Egypt) with local families in charge, tax revenues and incomes of the Ottoman Empire further decreased.<sup>107</sup> Also due to other reasons such as war compensations that the Ottomans were enforced to pay further worsened the financial situation. Especially during the Russo-Ottoman conflict in 1768-1774, the state was not able to meet the needs of its army financially and asked the local governors to help.<sup>108</sup> The constant increase of taxes and depreciation of the currency reached a peak in the period between 1780-1784. The economically and military weakened position of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for a constant interference of European great-powers.<sup>109</sup> In 1784, the Ottomans started to consider borrowing foreign money for the first time, because the local players (such as the upper class) were not able to sustain the financial system.<sup>110</sup> One of the most destructive series of conflagrations in Ottoman history took place in these years (1782 and 1784). It was a period with successive fires accompanied by social disturbances. Between 1782-1784, the social, political and economic life in Istanbul was seriously disturbed, while consecutive fires and Janissary riots have followed one another.<sup>111</sup>

Ottoman deficiency in military and financial terms triggered new (internal) discussions on the reformation of the empire's outdated administrative system and its financial, bureaucratic and military institutions. According to Aysel Yıldız, "from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century there were approximately nineteen uprisings in Istanbul, six of which ended with the sultan being deposed".<sup>112</sup> The tension was partly due to the attempts to centralise the state's power and reform the bureaucratic, economic and military institutions. Over time, the Janissary corps had grown into an ineffective medieval legion that started to move autonomously. The army was seen as one the main culprits of why the Ottomans felt behind their contemporaries.<sup>113</sup> During the war against Russia (1768-1774), the underdisciplined attitude of the Janissary corps had become under fire.<sup>114</sup> However, the first concrete

---

<sup>104</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 353-385.

<sup>105</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 20-21.

<sup>106</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 20-21.

<sup>108</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 345.

<sup>109</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 45-46.

<sup>110</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 345.

<sup>111</sup> Slot, "The Fires,"; Yıldız, "1782 İstanbul Yangını,"; Behar, *Bir Mahallenin*, 104; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>112</sup> Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 19-24.

<sup>114</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 348.

actions to replace the Janissary corps by a New Order (*Nizâm-ı Cedid*) army could be realised in 1789 and completed in 1794, after the war against Russia (1787-1792).<sup>115</sup> The sidelined Janissaries have not given up the fight for a long time. Radical changes introduced by the Selimian regime faced a lot of opposition from conservative circles. In the meantime, a simultaneous increase in fire incidents was seen, especially after 1790 and in the years 1792, 1793 and 1794, with a peak in 1792.<sup>116</sup> The period 1789-1826, therefore, is characterised by heavy clashes between the Ottoman state and its army. In May 1807, the Janissaries (backed by conservatives) retaliated in Istanbul to re-establish the old order which resulted in the deposition, imprisonment and replacement of Selim III by his nephew Mustafa IV. In July 1808, Alemdar Mustafa Paşa, one of the prominent figures of the Selimian regime, recaptured the capital city to dispose of Mustafa IV which cost Selim III his life. Mustafa IV was replaced by Mahmud II, one of Selim's nephews and an admirer of his reformist agenda, while Alemdar himself became the Grand Vizier.<sup>117</sup> In November 1808, rebellious conservative Janissaries organised another uprising and a coup attempt. Clashes on 15 and 16 November and attacks on the Sublime Porte went hand in hand with arson attempts and fires. To block the rebels, Alemdar blew himself up in the powder magazine.<sup>118</sup> This series of events is also reflected in an increased number of fires in the years 1807 and 1808 (Appendix 2).<sup>119</sup> After his enthronement, Mahmud II decided to set forward the reforms that had cost Selim III his life. The power struggle between the state and the Janissaries still occupied the agenda of Mahmud II, who was afraid of facing the same fate as his uncle Selim III. Therefore, he quelled the Janissary threat by ordering an attack on the military barracks in 1826, also known as *Vaka-i Hayriye* (Auspicious Incident).<sup>120</sup> Interestingly, another peak of fires was seen in that same year (Appendix 2).<sup>121</sup>

The abolishment of the Janissary corps in 1826 paved the way for more substantial reforms which soon were followed by reorganisations on military, administrative and civil levels. Selim III (r. 1789-1807) was an admirer of the French modernisation, and his nephew Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) was determined to pursue this (Western) Europe-oriented agenda.<sup>122</sup> The reorganisation of the bureaucratic institutions and officers' tasks, the introduction of new advisory bodies (such as ministries) and the introduction of the first newspaper (1831) were some of these novelties.<sup>123</sup> Other methods were copied from European countries in the field of education and acquisition of knowledge.<sup>124</sup> More novelties regarding the provincial and municipal administration, educational and judicial systems and

---

<sup>115</sup> Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 17; Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 28; Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 348-350.

<sup>116</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>117</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 34-35; Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 17.

<sup>118</sup> Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion*, 21-23.

<sup>119</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>120</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 387.

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>122</sup> Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa*, 346-347.

<sup>123</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 48-51.

<sup>124</sup> Zürcher, *Turkiye*, 51-52.



redefinition of equal citizenship followed during the reign of Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-1876). These changes, also known as *Tanzimât* (lit. Reorganization), were a bundle of novelties such as a modern tax system and compulsory military service, but also the local administrative units (municipalities) were redesigned. Reforms increasingly changed the urban tissue in Istanbul in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with regards to city planning and construction of buildings.<sup>125</sup> Especially after the 1820s, significantly fewer fire reports can be found in the sources, except for the year 1826 and 1831. After 1833, almost no fire reports were made in both Ottoman and European reports (Appendix 2).<sup>126</sup>

The period (1750-1850) was characterized by internal economic and political crises, external conflicts and reform attempts, during which the Janissary problem came forward as one of the major concerns. In the same period, some devastating conflagrations and even a series of conflagrations have taken place. In 1767, Pera was hit by a conflagration that caused severe damage to the embassy buildings of European countries. In 1782, perhaps the most destructive series of conflagrations in the city's history destroyed half of the intramural part of Istanbul. Two years later, another series of conflagrations were destructive enough to cause a lot of damage in the city. In 1826 a fire that started in the neighbourhood of Hocapaşa quickly spread and again caused severe damage. Besides these conflagrations, tens of other small fires affected the life of the citizens of Istanbul.<sup>127</sup> Fire reports showed an increase and decrease parallel to the number and severity of the socio-political events such as wars, revolts and financial crises. What is more striking is that the fire brigade formed in the 1720s as part of the Janissary corps stayed in charge for more than a century including during this turbulent period. Janissaries and locals have taken care of the conflagrations until the fire brigade was abolished in 1826 (together with the Janissary corps).<sup>128</sup> The fact that the fire brigade was part of the army raises plenty of questions since scholarly publications are widely questioning the Janissaries' attitude during fire incidents. Also, the position of the fire brigade (Janissaries) in the periods of turmoil and upheavals remains vague. In works such as that of Slot, Başaran, Zarinebaf, Ayalon and Faroqhi, it has widely been discussed whether the army neglected to fulfil its side of the bargain or used fires as a trump card.<sup>129</sup>

The period between 1750-1850 is a crucial period in late Ottoman history as it has witnessed increasing external and internal problems that threatened the mere existence of the empire and first reform attempts to resolve the problems. It is against this background that I will analyse Istanbul's conflagrations in the period 1750-1850. In the following chapter, I will give a detailed chronology of the

---

<sup>125</sup> Zürcher, *Türkiye*, 59-60; Zeynep Çelik, *19. Yüzyılda*, 51-61; Ayşe Derin Öncel, *Apartman: Galata'da Yeni Bir Konut Tipi* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2014), 9-24.

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix 2: The Frequency of Conflagrations.

<sup>127</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde,"

<sup>128</sup> Koçu, *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 85.

conflagrations that took place in this same period to showcase the frequency of Istanbul's conflagrations and to see to what extent they occupied a place in the socio-political constellation.

## Chapter 2: A Detailed Chronology of Istanbul's Conflagrations (1750-1850)

A.M. Schneider and M. Cezar composed the two most important chronologies of Istanbul's conflagrations. These reference works base their information both on Ottoman and European primary sources in which references to Istanbul's conflagrations can be found frequently. These calamities that can be found in daily life correspondence vary from small fires with limited impact to large-scale conflagrations with severe effects on the entire city. Writers of the Ottoman and European sources, most of the time, seem not to be surprised by the frequent occurrence of conflagrations. In an environment in which small and large-scale fires were affecting Istanbul constantly. These calamities appear in both Ottoman and European texts between the lines or at the very end of the texts unless they have caused extreme damages to the city or their neighbourhoods and can be overlooked very easily. Depending on the priorities of the reporter, references to conflagrations almost always contain the name of the place where the fire started, with an indication of the magnitude of the damage. In case that a conflagration affected a larger area, the names of the affected neighbourhoods are too explicitly mentioned. From time to time, other information such as the exact number of the damaged buildings, economic loss and costs of reparations and materials are added. The effects of a conflagration on the daily life such as famine and lack of building materials but also the connection of the conflagration with the present socio-political context (whether it was arson or not) can also be found in these sources.

However, in addition to these technical details, both in Ottoman and European sources there is an apparent effort to stress specific calamities. For instance, while the Ottomans make notes of almost every spark, Europeans are mostly interested in conflagrations that bothered the general socio-political life in Istanbul. In the Ottoman *Rûz-name's*, on the other hand, fires were reported that concerned the sultan and his household. All these factors have affected the choice of conflagrations and specific cases. Therefore, in this chapter, a detailed chronological overview of the conflagrations of Istanbul will be composed. Conflagrations mentioned in secondary sources such as the chronological overviews of A.M. Schneider and M. Cezar will be compared with the information coming from primary source material existing of Ottoman court chronicles, *Rûz-names* and European reports from Istanbul. This comparison aims to provide a comprehensive chronological overview and show whether and to what extent the information differs. Another aim is to see whether the sources correspond and complement each other concerning the locations, dates, numbers of damaged buildings. With this chronology, I aim to see which specific details were provided and whether secondary sources overlooked information.

In 1750, the Dutch reported a fire that took place on 4 February that raged for two days and burned down 6000 homes and shops.<sup>130</sup> According to Schneider, this fire had started on 3 February and

---

<sup>130</sup> 5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

burned down 6670 houses. As a result, a lot of Janissaries, and other people lost their lives.<sup>131</sup> Cezar, who uses the history of Ottoman chronicler İzzî Süleyman Efendi (d. 1755) reports the same fire which started in Küçükpazar and worsened due to the strong wind, but he does not provide the exact number of the buildings damaged.<sup>132</sup> In the same period, the Dutch reported yet another fire, without giving a date, that only caused damage to the 'palace of the Mufti'.<sup>133</sup> Schneider mentions this fire that took place on 21 February and informs that it demolished the residence of the mufti.<sup>134</sup> Both Schneider and Cezar make reports of three more fires in 1750. The first one broke out on 27 March at the arms market.<sup>135</sup> The second one started on 27 April 1750 in the shopping area (*çarşı*), and the third one took place on 19 July 1750 in Üsküdar.<sup>136</sup> It is interesting that various reporters notice different fires, give different dates for the same fires and the exact numbers of the buildings that were destroyed vary in different reports.

In 1751 the British referred to four different fires taking place on 9, 11, 16 and 18 July. The first fire was the biggest one and started 'near Sultan Mahmud', "burned from 20 to 21 hours, with a violent North East Wind". No less than nine districts burned down with damage to 700 houses and 98 chambers of the Janissaries. It is reported that the other three fires were less important, causing only damage to some palaces 'of the great men'.<sup>137</sup> Not only the Ottoman chronicler Şemdânîzâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi but also Schneider and Cezar mentioned a fire that demolished the barracks on 20 July 1751. According to Şemdânîzâde this fire started in a bread bakery, was backed by a strong wind and destroyed a lot of Janissary barracks.<sup>138</sup> Contrary to the information given by the British, Schneider comes up with the information that not 700 but 7000 houses, 3000 shops and a significant part of the barracks were destroyed.<sup>139</sup> Cezar, whose report is based on chronicler İzzî Efendi, points to the marketplace of Büyük Karaman near the Fatih Mosque as the starting point of this great fire on 20 July and underlines that a significant part of the Janissary barracks was, indeed, destroyed.<sup>140</sup> It is worth noting here that the date of the fire and numbers of the damaged buildings vary per reporter.

In the year 1752 various reports were made on fires of which the first took place on 30 March 1752 in Langa. Cezar notes that the fire destroyed 1500 houses and shops.<sup>141</sup> The Dutch reported another fire in April 1752, which started in the neighbourhood of Pera and damaged the embassy building of the Netherlands. It was partly due to favourable weather conditions that the fire could be

---

<sup>131</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 396-397.

<sup>132</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 358.

<sup>133</sup> 5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>134</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 397.

<sup>135</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 397.

<sup>136</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 359.

<sup>137</sup> 23 July 1751, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>138</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 158.

<sup>139</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 397.

<sup>140</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 359.

<sup>141</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 359.

extinguished before further expansion. The fire only ruined 40-50 houses and is not mentioned in the secondary sources.<sup>142</sup> Instead, Cezar mentions another fire that broke out on 4 April and destroyed only one mansion in Kandilli without further expansion.<sup>143</sup> Just a couple of months after this accident the Dutch reported a fire on 3 June (of which the location is not mentioned) that was strong enough to destroy 3600 houses.<sup>144</sup> The concerns and anxiety of the ambassador and the poverty followed by the fire are clearly explained in the report of 1 July 1752.<sup>145</sup> Also, Şemdânîzâde refers to a fire that took place in June 1752, which started in the neighbourhood of Gedikpaşa. While Şemdânîzâde does not give details about the damage, he names the neighbourhoods affected by this conflagration and adds that every night three or five fires were reported in this period.<sup>146</sup> Cezar also mentions that this fire broke out near the hammam of Gedikpaşa on 19 June 1752 and raged for twenty-six hours.<sup>147</sup> In the times that the Dutch made no reports of fires, it seems that the British have taken over their tasks. According to the reports of the British embassy, “9 or 10 successive fires” happened “since the 5<sup>th</sup> (of June 1752)”, whereas one of them (unclear which one) has been successful in burning down 2500 Armenian, 1000 Turkish and Greek and 500 various other houses and *serrails* (palaces) in just 20 hours.<sup>148</sup>

In June 1753, the British reported another three fires “in the space of ten days” (without providing the exact dates) which have done no considerable damage.<sup>149</sup> The British associated the ‘relatively small amount of fires’ with the attempts of the Ottoman government to prevent interior disorders and the ‘great’ vigilance it continually exerted.<sup>150</sup> Also, Cezar mentioned small fires on 7, 14 and 23 December in the neighbourhood of Kulaksız near Galata and other places.<sup>151</sup> Here again, we can see that fires that are reported by the British are not being mentioned in Cezar’s chronology and vice versa.

Several other detailed reports were made in 1754. First of them was a fire in Kandilli that broke out on 4 March without having any considerable consequences. However, a fire that broke out five days later in Yenikapı consumed 1500 houses.<sup>152</sup> A British letter refers to a fire that consumed the “wholly Armenian quarter” in six hours on 10 and 11 March, probably referring to Yenikapı.<sup>153</sup> Cezar mentions another fire that took place one month after, this time in Cibali. The impact of this fire was not that great as that of Yenikapı.<sup>154</sup> Other small fires happened on 22 June in Şehzadebaşı, on 28 June in Aksaray

---

<sup>142</sup> 1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>143</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 359.

<sup>144</sup> 1 July 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>145</sup> 1 July 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>146</sup> Şem’dânî-zâde, *Şem’dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 162.

<sup>147</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 359.

<sup>148</sup> 20 June 1752, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>149</sup> 2 June 1753, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>150</sup> 16 June 1753, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>151</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 359.

<sup>152</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 359-360.

<sup>153</sup> 16 March 1754, SP97, Box 37, State Papers.

<sup>154</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 360.

and on 1 July in Üsküdar without great impact.<sup>155</sup> Then, Şem'dânîzâde reported another fire that broke out on 3 September 1754 at three o'clock in the night, after an earthquake that destructed the minarets of the mosques of 'Fatih Sultan Mehmed' and 'Sultan Bayezid'. The fire hit the mansion (*yali*) of Yusuf Efendizade Efendi (a member of the ulema) and burned all his books in his private library.<sup>156</sup> On 21 October, this time the Dutch reported a fire that consumed a thousand houses in just ten hours and caused more than 'a million Leeuwendalers (thalers or dollars)' damage.<sup>157</sup> This fire was also verified by the British authorities who noticed a fire in the night between 21 and 22 October that "burned from between 12 & 1 of the clock in the morning to 10, the next".<sup>158</sup> Cezar also notes that this fire took place on 22 October and started in a house in Uzunçarşı.<sup>159</sup> The British reported another fire that happened in the night between 20 and 21 December 1754, which "consumed a vast number of houses".<sup>160</sup> Şem'dânîzâde also refers to a fire in November-December 1754 (Safer 1168) that started in Fındıklı. As Fındıklı is a neighbourhood close to the embassy buildings in Pera, these two reports are likely to refer to the same fire. However, Cezar claims that on 22 December another great fire raged in Sultanhamam for eighteen hours.<sup>161</sup> It is interesting here that European reports are mainly focused on fires in the neighbourhoods near the embassy buildings, while more reports on fires in Istanbul *intra muros* can be found in Cezar's chronology which is mainly based on Ottoman historical sources.

According to the Dutch, somewhere in January or February 1755 (the exact date of the fire is not provided), a less significant fire burned down seven houses.<sup>162</sup> A couple of months later, somewhere in March or April 1755 (the exact date of the fire is again not provided), the Dutch reported another fire in the neighbourhoods of Galata and Tophane. Due to favourable weather conditions, the fire was unable to reach Pera and the residences of European representatives.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the Dutch also reported that yet another fire on 17 May 1755 succeeded to damage 250 houses.<sup>164</sup> Cezar mentions a fire that happened on 19 May in Istanbul *intra muros*. It is unclear whether these two fires were the same. According to Şem'dânîzâde, on 9 June 1755, another fire started in the neighbourhood of Kadırgalimanı and raged for twenty hours.<sup>165</sup> Cezar mentions that yet another fire hit the same neighbourhood of Kadırgalimanı on 12 July and raged for sixteen hours causing lots of damage.<sup>166</sup> The British, however, reported a fire that happened in the night between 10 and 11 July 1755 also in Istanbul

---

<sup>155</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 360.

<sup>156</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 176.

<sup>157</sup> 21 October 1754, 1.02.20, Box 166, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>158</sup> 2 November 1754, SP97, Box 37, State Papers.

<sup>159</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 360.

<sup>160</sup> 3 January 1755, SP97, Box 38, State Papers.

<sup>161</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 360.

<sup>162</sup> 1 February 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>163</sup> 15 April 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>164</sup> 2 June 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>165</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 181.

<sup>166</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 360.

*intra muros* but near the palace of the sultan, at the same time the first night of the ‘*bayram*’, “burned for thirteen hours successively and did incredible damage”.<sup>167</sup> Schneider also mentioned this fire on 10 and 11 July. Given the fact that Kadırgalimanı was situated not far from the palace, these fires could be the same.<sup>168</sup> On 17 July the Dutch reported another fire which caused severe damage not only to 400-500 houses but also many people lost their lives among which 115 Janissaries.<sup>169</sup> The same letter reports that “many considerable ‘*serraglios*’ burned down”.<sup>170</sup> Before the end of the year, there were another three fires of which the last one with devastating consequences. The fire started in the night of 27 and 28 September and was still not extinguished on the 29<sup>th</sup>. As a consequence, the city walls, the walls of the sultan’s palace, bathhouses, caravanserais and 8000 to 9000 houses around ‘St. Sophia’ up to the area of ‘the mosque of Sultan Mahmud (*de moskee van Sultan Mahmout*)’ wholly burned down.<sup>171</sup> The same fire is reported by Şemdânîzâde who claims that the fire started on 29 September 1755 (22 Zilhicce) in the neighbourhood of Hocapaşa. From there it continued to damage many other neighbourhoods raging for thirty-six hours. When the flames could reach and damage the Mahmudpaşa Mosque, people saw the sultan (Osman III) crying.<sup>172</sup> Schneider mentions another fire that happened on 4 October at the Sublime Porte.<sup>173</sup> It is also mentioned by Cezar that as a result of a fire in Hocapaşa the Sublime Porte completely burned down, but on 29 October.<sup>174</sup> It is not clear whether the fires of Hocapaşa of 29 September and 29 October were two distinct fires.

One of the two small fires that happened in 1756 is mentioned by Cezar and took place in Samatya on 1 January 1756.<sup>175</sup> Schneider notes the other fire that broke out on 24 May without giving any further detail.<sup>176</sup> However, a couple of months later, a devastating conflagration was noted by several sources. Şemdânîzâde tells that a conflagration started on 6 July 1756 at two o’clock in the night in Cibali, divided into ten wings (*kol*) and continued to rage for forty-eight hours. 130 *medreses*, 335 mills, 150 mosques and masjids, 77.400 big houses (*menzil*), 34.200 shops and 36 hammams were destroyed.<sup>177</sup> Şemdânîzâde further notes that such destruction was not seen since the reign of Selim II. He also criticises the attitude of the Grand Vizier and Sultan who dined and feasted right after the conflagration, while the city was in ruins.<sup>178</sup> According to the British, the conflagration started on Sunday 4 July at ten o’clock in the evening in Cibali, which continued until six o’clock in the morning. In the

---

<sup>167</sup> 17 July 1755, SP97, Box 38, State Papers.

<sup>168</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 397.

<sup>169</sup> 17 July 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>170</sup> 17 July 1755, SP97, Box 38, State Papers.

<sup>171</sup> 1 October 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>172</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târihi I*, 182.

<sup>173</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 397.

<sup>174</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 360.

<sup>175</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 361.

<sup>176</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 397.

<sup>177</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târihi II-A*, 9.

<sup>178</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târihi II-A*, 10.

letter, the exact locations of the destroyed neighbourhoods are given together with a summary of the socio-economic implications of the fire, such as the destruction of corn mills.<sup>179</sup> Schneider and Cezar also mention the same fire. Schneider refers to the night between 10 and 11 July and talks about 8.000 houses destroyed in the areas Süleymaniye, Vefa, Zeyrek, Saraçhane and Yenikapı.<sup>180</sup> Cezar, on the other hand, tells that it was a devastating conflagration that started on 6 July and went into several directions among which Langa, Unkapanı, Yenikapı, Vefa, Saraçhane and Aksaray.<sup>181</sup> In a letter sent by the Dutch representative on 1 August 1756 from Belgrade, however, 'a horrible fire' is being reported that took place in Constantinople on 17 July.<sup>182</sup> In another two letters sent on 2 and 16 October, the Dutch representative was still evaluating on the repercussions of the 17 July fire.<sup>183</sup> It is not clear whether these fires were the same.

No fires were reported in the year 1757.

From 1758 onwards, both European reports and secondary literature contain fewer fire reports while according to the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III fires continued to happen frequently. On 7 February 1758, a fire is reported in Üsküdar and another on the 14 March in Avretpazarı.<sup>184</sup> On 19 June 1758, the Sultan attended the firefighting taking place in Fener, near Kanlıkilise.<sup>185</sup> On 16 September 1758, he attended another fire in the same Fener district.<sup>186</sup> In November 1758, a fire started in the neighbourhood of Nakilbent which damaged the Sultanahmed Mosque.<sup>187</sup> The fire is also reported by chronicler Hâkim who notes that the sultan and all his officers did their best to reduce the damage.<sup>188</sup> The *Rûz-name* reports another fire on 23 December 1758 in Nakilbent.<sup>189</sup> This last fire can also be found in Cezar's overview, which is the only reported fire of the year 1758 by this author.<sup>190</sup>

In the year 1759, both European reports and secondary literature do not mention any fire, while chronicler Hâkim Efendi refers to several fires. The first of these fires took place at the end of August in Balat and burned down two houses. Another fire started on 5 September 1759 in the house of a certain Reiszâde, in Paşakapısı.<sup>191</sup> In September-October 1759 a fire could be extinguished on time which was to happen at the palace of the sultan.<sup>192</sup> Then on 10 December 1759, another fire demolished five to

---

<sup>179</sup> 17 July 1756, SP97, Box 39, State Papers.

<sup>180</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 397.

<sup>181</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 361.

<sup>182</sup> 1 August 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>183</sup> 2 October 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije; 16 October 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>184</sup> Yunus Irmak, "III. Mustafa Rûz-namesi (1171-1177 / 1757-1763)" (Master's Thesis, Marmara University, 1991), 13-15.

<sup>185</sup> Irmak, "III. Mustafa," 23.

<sup>186</sup> Irmak, "III. Mustafa," 29.

<sup>187</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 20.

<sup>188</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,"

<sup>189</sup> Irmak, "III. Mustafa," 36.

<sup>190</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 361.

<sup>191</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,"

<sup>192</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 35.



ten houses in a place called Sarigez (probably Sarigazi).<sup>193</sup> According to the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III in 1759 fires broke out on 2 February near the Sultan Selim Mosque, on 9 February in Üsküdar, on 22 February in Hasköy.<sup>194</sup> The same *Rûz-name* reports fires that happened on 5 June in Eyüp, on 23 September in Balat, on 17 October near Kadırgalimanı and on 1 December again in Sarigazi.<sup>195</sup> All of these fires are not mentioned in European reports and secondary literature and are only found in this *Rûz-name*.

The same silence continues in the year 1760 in which a lot of fires are being reported by the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III and the chronicle of Hâkim Efendi, but not by European reports and secondary sources. On 3 January of 1760, Avretpazarı (slave market for female slaves) and its surroundings were hit by the flames. A house of Çavuşzâde (a worker of the treasury) and several other houses were reduced to ashes.<sup>196</sup> On 23 January another fire hit the neighbourhood of Piyalepaşa in the Kasımpaşa district, during which only one or two houses were damaged.<sup>197</sup> Then on 13 February 1760, another small fire is reported in Kumkapı.<sup>198</sup> The next month, a fire happened in a place called Nallımescid that broke out in the house of the head doctor's son-in-law, while another fire took place on 19 March, which started in the house of Hâşim Ali Bey, a high ranked official.<sup>199</sup> On 21 April, a fire started in the house of someone called Hacı Kethüda, not far from the arsenal.<sup>200</sup> In the middle of August 1760, one or two houses in Karagümrük burned down.<sup>201</sup> On 18 September, another fire hit Ayvansaray, with as a result four or five houses were reduced to ashes.<sup>202</sup> In December 1760 another small fire caused damages to one or two shops in Kocamustafapaşa.<sup>203</sup> In addition to these fires, the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III refers to fires on 7 January near the Davudpaşa pier (*iskele*), on 11 March near Paşakapısı, on 18 March in Terlikciler (slipper shops), on 4 April in Kasımpaşa, on 21 April in the neighbourhood of Sultan Sarayı, on 15 August near Galatasaray, on 18 September in Ayansaray and on 12 December in Kocamustafapaşa.<sup>204</sup> These fires too are not mentioned in European reports and secondary literature, but only in the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III and the chronicle of Hâkim Efendi.

At the beginning of February 1761, it is reported by Hâkim Efendi that the officials did an excellent job while extinguishing a fire in Üsküdar.<sup>205</sup> In May 1761, Şemdânîzâde reported that buildings

---

<sup>193</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>194</sup> İrmak, "III. Mustafa," 36-39.

<sup>195</sup> İrmak, "III. Mustafa," 46-56.

<sup>196</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>197</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>198</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>199</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>200</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>201</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>202</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>203</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>204</sup> İrmak, "III. Mustafa Rûz-namesi," 58-74.

<sup>205</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

burned down as a result of a fire in Ortaköy.<sup>206</sup> On June 14 a couple of houses were hit in Çukurbostan near Edirnekapı, while on 27 June another a fire was extinguished before causing extensive damage in the same neighbourhood.<sup>207</sup> Hâkim reported on 8 July a destructive fire that took place in Ortaköy.<sup>208</sup> The same chronicle reports that on 17 December a small fire started in the house of a non-Muslim in Fener and several mansions burned down in less than seven hours.<sup>209</sup> The *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III reports even more fires in 1761 which all are not mentioned in both European sources and secondary literature. Fires happened on 18 January in Eyüp, 4 February in Üsküdar, 22 March in Çukurbostan, on 8 July in Ortaköy, on 3 September in Beşiktaş, on 20 September in Kitabcılar (book shops), on 24 September in Atpazarı, on 6 October in Kocamustafa, on 28 November in Kasımpaşa and on 29 December again in Kasımpaşa.<sup>210</sup> It is interesting to note here that no fire reports were made by Europeans and Ottoman chroniclers between 1758 and 1762, while fires continued to happen and the sultan visited these places according to the *Rûz-name*.

Cezar mentions a fire that happened in Odunkapısı on 17 March 1762.<sup>211</sup> However, in the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III, it is mentioned that fire hit Odunkapısı on 16 March.<sup>212</sup> According to Hâkim, on 24 March there was another fire in Kabataş, in the house of the head chief of police officers (*bostancıbaşı*), while simultaneously another fire was raging not far from the Ali Paşa Mosque.<sup>213</sup> The *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III mentions a fire on the same day, not in Kabataş, but Kuruçeşme.<sup>214</sup> As these places are not far from each other, we can assume that the sources were probably reporting the same fire. At the end of April, another fire is reported in Çardaklı, which burned down one or two buildings.<sup>215</sup> In May 1762 a fire that started in Testereciler (saw shops) and raged for thirty-six hours.<sup>216</sup> Cezar mentions that another fire broke out on 20 June 1762 from a house in Bayezid.<sup>217</sup> In September 1762 a fire destroyed the houses of French merchants, shops and houses in Tophane and Beyoğlu.<sup>218</sup> According to the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III, other fires happened on 20 May near a place called Macuncu, on 22 May near Buğdaycılar Kapısı, on 20 September in Galata, on 9 November in the Imperial Shipyards (Tersane), on 5 December in Fener and on 30 December in Tophane. All these fires reported by the *Rûz-name* are not mentioned by European reports and chronological overviews Schneider and Cezar.<sup>219</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 38.

<sup>207</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>208</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>209</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>210</sup> Irmak, "III. Mustafa," 74-87.

<sup>211</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 361.

<sup>212</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>213</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>214</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>215</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>216</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 48.

<sup>217</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 361.

<sup>218</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 50.

<sup>219</sup> Irmak, "III. Mustafa," 87-100.

Schneider mentioned that a fire that took place on 25 May 1763, without providing any further detail.<sup>220</sup> However, Cezar notes that on 21 May 1763 a fire broke out in Karaman (in Fatih) and raged for thirty hours. He also notes that in July 1763 two other small fires took place.<sup>221</sup> According to the Dutch, on 9 August 1763, a fire is started in Pera in a drug store of, probably, a Dutch merchant whose name was Cobben.<sup>222</sup> However, Schneider refers to a fire that took place on 10 August based the information coming from European sources, which makes this fire probably the same fire as reported by the Dutch.<sup>223</sup> Cezar mentions another fire on 2 September 1763 in Üsküdar which spread into five directions and raged for eighteen hours, which is not mentioned in any European primary source.<sup>224</sup> While no other fires can be found in European reports and secondary sources, the *Rûz-name* of Mustafa III reports in 1763 lots of other fires. Fires took place on 16 January in Taşçılar, on 13 February in Üsküdar, on 13 March in Kabataş, on 22 March in Galata, on 25 March in Çatladıkapı, on 11 April in Tüfenkhane and between 23-25 April in Kumkapı. On 30 April a fire happened in Çakalbahçesi, between 20-22 May another one broke out not far from the ‘Sultân Mehemed Mosque’ (and a place called Çürükçü Kapısı), another fire raged between 9-11 June in Yenibağçe, one on 19-20 June in Mahmudpaşa and on 1 August in Avretpazarı. More fires took place on 10 August (two fires) in Eyüp and Balat, on 11 August in Topçular and on 31 August in Üsküdar.<sup>225</sup>

In the year 1764, no fires were reported, and in the following two years, fire reports are also scarce.

Cezar mentions that on 9 April 1765 a fire started in Tophane.<sup>226</sup> According to Şem’dânîzâde, this fire broke out in a neighbourhood called Boğazkesen and also destroyed the neighbourhood of Firuzâğa.<sup>227</sup> The British reported another fire in Tophane, which took place on 31 August 1765, lasted twelve hours and endangered ‘several Foreign Ministers’ palaces’ (by which the houses of European representatives are meant).<sup>228</sup> Although this fire is not mentioned in secondary sources, Schneider mentions another fire that happened in the autumn of 1765 which also cannot be found in any other report.<sup>229</sup>

In 1766 when fewer fire reports were made, the Dutch reported a fire that happened in the night between Thursday 14 August and Friday 15 August, which destroyed ten to twelve houses in the district of Tophane in three hours.<sup>230</sup> The same fire is mentioned by Şem’dânîzâde, who points to the

---

<sup>220</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 398.

<sup>221</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 361-362.

<sup>222</sup> 9 August 1763, 1.02.20, Box 601, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>223</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 398.

<sup>224</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 362.

<sup>225</sup> Irmak, “III. Mustafa,” 100-121.

<sup>226</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 362.

<sup>227</sup> Şem’dânî-zâde, *Şem’dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 76.

<sup>228</sup> 17 September 1765, SP97, Box 42, State Papers.

<sup>229</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 398.

<sup>230</sup> 16 August 1766, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

Çöpçülimanı district as the starting point.<sup>231</sup> The Dutch made a report of another fire that happened in November 1766, referring to the start of the winter as the beginning of the fire season and mentioning that some nights ago a fire in Constantinople had burned the palace of Tahir Ağa for more than four hours.<sup>232</sup> It is worthy to note here that the Dutch refer to the start of the winter as the beginning of the fire season, while according to secondary literature based on Ottoman sources summer was considered the fire season.

1767 was a year in which a lot of fire reports can be found in various primary and secondary sources. According to the British, a fire broke out on 7 January 1767 from a ship lying in the harbour near Tophane after a “pan of coals [...] was put in a room by some of the people to warm them, who fell asleep”. It is reported that “some of the vessels [...] set fire to a kiosk of the Grand Signior’s”. The spread was in such a destructive way that the Sultan, his Grand Vizier and all the officers of the Porte attended the place to give their orders.<sup>233</sup> Şemdânîzâde reports probably the same fire on 8 January which started in the Imperial Shipyards on a ship that was departing to the Mediterranean Sea. The fire first affected the region between Bahçekapısı and Galata. With the help of southwest wind, the ship drifted towards Cibali and the Jewish neighbourhood and brought the flames to the marketplace of Cibali.<sup>234</sup> Çeşmîzâde Mustafa Reşid reports that the fire quickly hit the Jewish houses between Cibali and Tüfenkhane.<sup>235</sup> It is interesting to note here that this fire cannot be found in the overviews of Cezar and Schneider but is mentioned by various primary sources. In a report sent on 20 March 1767, the British write about a fire “near Grand Vizier’s Palace” with a note that the fire happened on the ‘22<sup>nd</sup> past (February), about eight o’clock at night’. It is reported that this fire destroyed hundred houses and shops and it was “not put under, till it arrived at the gate of the Vizier’s Palace”.<sup>236</sup> The same fire is also reported by the Dutch on 3 February<sup>237</sup>, is mentioned in Şemdânîzâde’s chronicle<sup>238</sup> and can also be found in the chronicles of Çeşmîzâde Mustafa Reşid who claims that the fire started on 23 January 1767 in the house belonged to Bostancıbaşızade, between the marketplace of Hocapaşa and the Grand Vizier’s palace.<sup>239</sup> Schneider, however, gives 22 January 1767 as the starting date of this fire.<sup>240</sup> Cezar mentions a fire that broke out on 23 January from a house in Hocapaşa. It is not clear which date is the correct one and whether all these sources are reporting the same fire. Shortly after this fire, Şemdânîzâde notices other small fires

---

<sup>231</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 88.

<sup>232</sup> “*Met de winter is de bezoeking van brand ook al wederom aengevange, en over eenige nagten ontsont in Constantinoplen eene, welke meer dan vier uren duurde,*” 15 November 1766, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>233</sup> “The human Mind cannot conceive a Spectacle more striking and horrid, than to see at the same time nine large floating Fires illuminating this vast city in the middle of the night, with two great Fires on each side the Water, which threatened Destruction to the whole city,” in 15 January 1767, SP97, Box 43, State Papers.

<sup>234</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 94.

<sup>235</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 11.

<sup>236</sup> 20 March 1767, SP97, Box 43, State Papers.

<sup>237</sup> 3 February 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>238</sup> Şem’ dâni-zâde, *Şem’ dâni-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 96

<sup>239</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 14.

<sup>240</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 398.

in Langa, Mahmudpaşa and Sultanahmed somewhere in March 1767 which cannot be found in secondary sources.<sup>241</sup> According to Çeşmîzâde and Şem'dânîzâde but also Cezar, on 11 May 1767, a fire hit the residence of the former treasurer İbrahim Sârim (or Şârim) Efendi in the Simkeşhane district. His workers plundered his belongings.<sup>242</sup> On 18 June 1767, the residence of one of the head chiefs (*kethüda*) burned down, which is only mentioned by Çeşmîzâde.<sup>243</sup> A week later, on 25 June, another fire started in the house of Mudurnulu Osman Efendi, the *kadı* of Baghdad, and a couple of houses were reduced to ashes. This is also a fire that cannot be found in other source material.<sup>244</sup> Cezar reports another fire which broke out on 25 July near a place called Hoca Hanı.<sup>245</sup> On 27 September 1767, the Dutch were shocked by another fire that destroyed their palace, which is also mentioned by Çeşmîzâde. The fire started in a Frankish (European) tailor shop.<sup>246</sup> Cezar, who bases his information on Çeşmîzâde, mentions this fire too.<sup>247</sup> In November 1767, the residences of a certain Tahir Ağa and a house of İbrahim Sârim Efendi were hit by another fire.<sup>248</sup> Çeşmîzâde makes a report of a small-scale fire on 8 November 1767.<sup>249</sup> It is unclear whether this fire is the same which is noticed by the Dutch. On 10 December, again, a small-scale fire was noticed in the Kasımpaşa district and in the neighbourhood of Zincirlikuyu, which damaged some houses and one or two shops.<sup>250</sup> Cezar mentions that other small-scale fires happened in Fatih, Kasımpaşa, Yenikapı, Sultanahmed and near the hammam of Mahmudpaşa in September-October 1767.<sup>251</sup>

According to Cezar, from 1768 onwards less priority was given to fire reports in Ottoman sources, due conflicts with other countries. However, even when fire reports were less frequent, a report can be found in the Dutch sources. In August fire was reported which started in the harem section of the Grand Vizier's residence only causing material damage. The fire could be extinguished without having human victims.<sup>252</sup>

In January 1769 a small fire destroyed 18 houses.<sup>253</sup> Two weeks after that another small fire in Tophane could be extinguished before causing serious damage.<sup>254</sup> In July, however, the inhabitants of Constantinople were not that lucky. A devastating fire started near the Hippodrome, of which the exact

<sup>241</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 100.

<sup>242</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 29; Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 102.

<sup>243</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 40; Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 104.

<sup>244</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 44.

<sup>245</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 362.

<sup>246</sup> 1 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije; Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 44.

<sup>247</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 362.

<sup>248</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 104.

<sup>249</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 62.

<sup>250</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 62.

<sup>251</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 362.

<sup>252</sup> "s nagts tusschen den 6 u 7 dezer is er in het Veziraet een felle brand ontstaen, in 't Harem, of appartement der vrouwen. De Sultane Zuster van den Grooten Heer en [Semaeline?] van den eersten Vezir, is ter nauwer nood gered," 17 August 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>253</sup> 16 January 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>254</sup> 3 February 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

date and place is not told, consumed 500 houses including 28 palaces. Even the work office of the Grand Vizier was seriously threatened. A few days later another small fire was extinguished very quickly.<sup>255</sup> On 10 July 1769, another fire started near the Valide Hamamı district and destroyed houses and shops in the districts of Atmeydanı, Mehterhane, Defterdar Kapısı, Şengül Hamamı and Ciğalazade Sarayı.<sup>256</sup> Then in November 1769, a small fire took place in Cibali.<sup>257</sup> In addition to these fires, according to an anonymous diary published by Süleyman Göksu, fires happened on 31 July in Cibali, 7 August in Kasımpaşa and 17 August in Üsküdar and 15 October 1769 in Beşiktaş.<sup>258</sup> Interestingly, these fires in this diary are not mentioned by European reports and secondary sources.

In 1770 fires happened on 17 February in (Büyük) Karaman, on 2 April in Yenibahçe, on 14 April in Salıpazarı, Fındıklı and near the Cihangir Mosque, on 3 September 1770 in Saraçhane-i Amire and Tüfenkhane and on 8 September in Tatavla according to the diary of Göksu.<sup>259</sup> Şemdânîzâde also makes reports of fires that took place on 13 January 1770, in (Büyük) Karaman.<sup>260</sup> Şemdânîzâde reports that on 13 April 1770 another fire lasted five hours and caused great devastation in the area between Tophane and Fındıklı.<sup>261</sup>

On 7 January 1771, Şemdânîzâde reported a fire in Yeniköy of which no further details are provided.<sup>262</sup> Cezar mentions another fire which broke out on 8 February 1771 in Galata and raged for sixteen hours, causing a lot of damage to the area near Galata and burning down approximately 'five thousand buildings'.<sup>263</sup> In the diary published by Göksu, more fires are reported on 7 February near Yusuf Paşa Çeşmesi in Aksaray, on 20 February in Galata and on 3 March near a place called Halıcılar Köşkü. In addition to that, fires happened on 1 May in the mansion of a certain İmrahor Latif Bey, on 23 May in Kumkapı, on 30 May in Balat, on 4 June near the lodge (*türbe*) of Emir Buhari and on 7 June in Fındıklı.<sup>264</sup> The diary also reports a fire on 21 October 1771 opposite the old palace called Saray-ı Atik and on 24 October in the Ağakapısı, the head office of the Janissary Ağa, which is also mentioned by Şemdânîzâde.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, the diary reports fires happened on 7 November near Ketenciler (linen shops)<sup>266</sup> and on 25 November opposite the Mehmed Ağa Mosque which burned down the mansion of the head of the military band (*mehterbaşı*).<sup>267</sup>

---

<sup>255</sup> 17 July 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>256</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 23.

<sup>257</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 24.

<sup>258</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus Harbi*, 5-6.

<sup>259</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 6-16.

<sup>260</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 24.

<sup>261</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 26.

<sup>262</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 38.

<sup>263</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 363.

<sup>264</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 15-20.

<sup>265</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 20-23; Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-B*, 87.

<sup>266</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 23.

<sup>267</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 25.

According to the anonymous diary of Süleyman Göksu fires continued to happen in 1772. These fires took place on 12 February in Samatya (from an Armenian church called Sulu Manastır), on 30 March at the marketplace of Topkapı and on 28 April near Baruthane Yokuşu. More fires happened on 5 May in a neighbourhood called Kadı Çeşmesi, on 30 May opposite a masjid called Kumrulu Mescid, on 30 July near a place called Altı Ay Çeşmesi, on 5 September in Gedikpaşa and on 24 September at the marketplace of Fındıklı in Beşiktaş.<sup>268</sup> Since Cezar noticed that fewer fire reports were mentioned in Ottoman chronicles between 1769 and 1774, it is worth noting that court chroniclers rather decided to give preference to mentioning other political and military topics than these fires that continued to take place.<sup>269</sup>

The year 1773, too, witnessed fires, of which a devastating one hit the barracks of the Janissaries and was reported by the Dutch.<sup>270</sup> This fire is also reported in the anonymous diary. According to the same diary, another fire took place near the Basilica Cistern on 30 March 1773<sup>271</sup> and on 22 November 1773 in a neighbourhood called Fatih Sultan Mehmed Han.<sup>272</sup> A much more important fire to European envoys started on 12 December 1773 at 5 o'clock in the morning in Pera. The Dutch reported that the fire could only be extinguished after it damaged the French palace.<sup>273</sup>

According to the anonymous diary published by Göksu, on 24 January 1774, another fire happened near a place called the Defterdar pier (*iskele*), while on 16 February the house of a certain Şeker Ahmed Ağa in Şehremîni burned down.<sup>274</sup> The diary also reports a fire on 18 March 1774, which was a small one and broke out from the house of the *müezzin* of the Molla Hüsvrev Mosque in Vefa.<sup>275</sup> According to same the diary, a great fire hit the area between the Jewish neighbourhood of Alacahamam and the hammam of Mahmudpaşa on 24 June, while fires happened on 24 July in Hasköy, on 30 July in Tavşantaşı and on 13 August in Galata.<sup>276</sup> A few months later, in October 1774, the Dutch reported that a fire caused by arson could be extinguished very quickly.<sup>277</sup> On 12 November another small fire caused almost no damage according to the anonymous diary.<sup>278</sup> As can be seen, while in the period between 1770-1774 a limited number of fires were reported in European reports and secondary source material, fires continued to take place according to the anonymous diary published by Göksu.

In the period between 1774 and 1777, no fire reports can be found. Şemdânîzâde reports a fire on 19 January 1777 in Kıztaşı which destroyed three-four houses (*menzil*), while it continued to burn

---

<sup>268</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 27-34.

<sup>269</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 362.

<sup>270</sup> 17 February 1773, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>271</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 39.

<sup>272</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 44.

<sup>273</sup> 3 January 1774, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>274</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 47 & 53.

<sup>275</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 56.

<sup>276</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 63 & 68-71.

<sup>277</sup> 17 October 1774, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>278</sup> Göksu, *Osmanlı-Rus*, 75.

down five or ten more buildings in Tavşantaşı.<sup>279</sup> Then a small-scale fire happened on 2 November 1777 in Ayazmakapı, again, reported by Şem'dânîzâde.<sup>280</sup>

In 1778 several other fires happened, of which the first was reported by the British and took place on 3 April 1778. The fire destroyed “about three hundred houses” in eight hours.<sup>281</sup> Two weeks later the British reported that since then “several fires [...] broke out [...], two of which in the neighbourhood of Cebehane, but were immediately extinguished, and did no damage”.<sup>282</sup> On 4 September 1778, another harmful fire “raged with great violence [...] in the centre of Constantinople” which consumed a thousand houses.<sup>283</sup> Cezar also reports a fire in 1778 without providing any date and notes that this it damaged the area between Nişancı and Langa, destroying four thousand houses.<sup>284</sup> The fires mentioned by the British and Cezar could be the same.

The danger continued in 1779. Cezar mentions a fire that broke out on 30 June 1779 in Testereciler, raged for twenty hours and destroyed numerous buildings.<sup>285</sup> Schneider mentions another fire (without providing any other information) which took place on 28 July 1779.<sup>286</sup> According to the Dutch, another fire on 4 August 1779 destroyed 80 to 100 houses. The Dutch also report that several other fires that happened in Pera and Galata could be extinguished on time. The Dutch letter (of 17 August) contain complaints about growing social unrest, harmful accidents of fire, fuels stored at mosques (*brandstoffen die men in de moskéen gevonden heeft*) and threats towards the sultan (*sterke dreigementen tegen den grooten heer*). The government took measures to prevent miserable events that were ‘no accidents’.<sup>287</sup> Cezar also claims that on 15 August 1779 important fires happened in various neighbourhoods of Istanbul.<sup>288</sup>

In the week of 26-31 March 1780, the house of the former Grand Vizier Abdürrezzak Efendi was set on fire according to the Dutch. Seventeen members of his family lost their lives under which his eldest son, his wife and four other children.<sup>289</sup> The Dutch also reported that Grand Vizier Karavezir Seyyid Mehmed took measures to prevent these kinds of events.<sup>290</sup> However, after a short period of tranquillity, three new fires put an end to his efforts. On 10 October 1780, a fire reduced 400 houses to ashes. Shortly after, a second fire burned down 1000 houses, while a third one damaged 60 houses and shops.<sup>291</sup> Cezar claims that various fires took place in the night between 8 and 9 October in Nişancı and

---

<sup>279</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi III*, 45-46.

<sup>280</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi III*, 50.

<sup>281</sup> 3 April 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

<sup>282</sup> 17 April 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

<sup>283</sup> 17 September 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

<sup>284</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>285</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>286</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 399.

<sup>287</sup> 17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>288</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>289</sup> 4 April 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>290</sup> 2 August 1780, 1.02.20, 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>291</sup> 17 October 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.



Cibali and the night between 9 and 10 October at the Janissary barracks, which could be the same fires mentioned in the Dutch reports.<sup>292</sup>

A much more detrimental series of fires with serious consequences took place two years later. According to Schneider, in May 1782 a fire broke out in Çatladıkapı.<sup>293</sup> The Dutch reported that from July 1782 onwards more fires started to have serious impacts on the city. They (but also Schneider) note that a fire that broke out on 9 July, not far from the Castle of the Seven Towers (Yedikule), burned down 3000 houses and shops and three Greek churches.<sup>294</sup> Cezar claims that the fire started on 10 July 1782 in a timber shop in Samatya and destroyed more than 1000 houses and two Greek churches.<sup>295</sup> Slot, another scholar who has studied the fires of 1782, states that “there had been a period of considerable unrest and discontent among the people just before the fires [...] caused by a furor over the Russian actions in the Crimea and was stimulated by religious leaders”. According to this study based on Dutch reports, he explains that although it is reported that this fire started on 9 July near the Yedikule, the area affected by this fire was between Fener and Balat, which is far away from the Yedikule. As a result, 10.000 houses were destroyed after a quarter of the city burned down.<sup>296</sup> On 23 and 24 July, another devastating fire was reported by various sources. A British letter claims that this fire, too, started in Balat on 23 July. “It is impossible, Sir, to paint the horrid scene exhibited by this alarming Conflagration,” the British reporter wrote, “which raged with the same violence for about fifteen hours and proceeded on an extensive front three of the most inhabited parts of the town.”<sup>297</sup> While Schneider only mentions that two churches were destroyed without providing any other information,<sup>298</sup> Cezar claims that the fire broke out from the house of an Armenian in Dibek, the area between Balat and Fener, basing his chronology on the detailed explanations of Derviş Mustafa Efendi (d. 1816/17). He also adds that Abdülhamid I himself attended the fight against the fire and tried to visit places that were hit by the various branches of this fire.<sup>299</sup> In addition to Cezar, the Derviş Mustafa’s *Harik Risâlesi* provides the information that the fire of 24 July started at 11:15 in the morning, was driven by a strong wind and destroyed 7000 houses.<sup>300</sup> The British reported on 1 August 1782 that the number of the destroyed houses was said to be 20.000, but this might be exaggerated. 9000 would be a much more realistic number.<sup>301</sup> Further, the British report that on 6 August 1782 other new fires took place in Hasköy, Fındıklı and Beşiktaş and that these fires were intentionally set. Arsonists were successful only in Fındıklı

---

<sup>292</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>293</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 399.

<sup>294</sup> 24 July 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>295</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>296</sup> Slot, “The Fires,”.

<sup>297</sup> 24 July 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>298</sup> Schneider, “Brände,” 399.

<sup>299</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 363.

<sup>300</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 53-54.

<sup>301</sup> 1 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

and Beşiktaş.<sup>302</sup> According to the British, on 9 August a great fire was still raging in the capital city.<sup>303</sup> The third great fire in Istanbul took place around 21-22 August 1782, which was also mentioned by secondary sources and various primary, among which the Dutch.<sup>304</sup> Slot claims that this fire started in a mosque near the Greek Patriarchate was much more devastating than the one on 9 July.<sup>305</sup> He further explains the situation as follows:

“The disasters were followed by a serious disturbance of public life. A famine loomed, and the Janissaries were roofless, both would certainly lead to a serious rebellion when no quick remedy was applied. There were threats that new fires would be lighted, and the sultan, fearing that his position would be in danger when he did not appease the Janissaries, deposed İzzet Mehmed Paşa and made Grand Vizier the pacha of Roumelia, Yegen Hacı Mehmed Paşa, a former Janissary Ağa who had the confidence of the troops.”<sup>306</sup>

The British confirm that this fire indeed broke out in the night of 21 and 22 August in Cibali and raged for sixty-two hours. A British letter speaks of “inadequate measures” that were “taken to prevent the cruel effects of the public discontent” and “numberless attempts to burn the Suburbs of Pera and Galata, the Residence of the Foreign Ministers, and the Frank Merchants”.<sup>307</sup> Not only the Dutch and British, but the French also made an extensive report of the 22 August fire, stating that this fire started in the house of a Turkish woman in Cibali at ten o’clock in the evening, accompanied by a map of the affected area.<sup>308</sup> Cezar who confirms that the fire indeed started in the night 22 August, raged for sixty-five hours and destroyed 20.000 houses basing his information on Derviş Mustafa Efendi.<sup>309</sup> The works of Yıldız and Behar, who researched this series of fires and its effects on the city, show that the fires were accompanied by other social disturbances. Yıldız, therefore, notes that the fires of 1782 resulted in a serious disturbance of the social, political and economic life in Istanbul, while new fires as a result of (Janissary) riots threatened the inhabitants of the city.<sup>310</sup> Behar is another scholar who speaks of three successive fires (May, July and August) and notes that not the first two, but the third fire was the most destructive.<sup>311</sup> As can be seen, various reports provide information that differs from each other. What

---

<sup>302</sup> “This inconvenience, it is alleged, might with greater attention and activity, be a great measure remedied; and probably owing to these causes, the dissatisfaction manifested by the frequent fires, which appear since some days in different parts of Constantinople, and it’s suburbs, visible set on purpose. On the evening of the 6.<sup>th</sup> instant no less than four fires broke out in the suburb of Hasqui, mostly inhabited by Jews [...] extinguished in three Places with the loss only one house, and of two uninhabited Houses in the fourth. But the same night the Incendiaries had more success at the village of Funducly, nigh the Imperial Residence of Beshiktasy, where upwards of fifty houses were consumed before the fire could be extinguished.” 9 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>303</sup> 17 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>304</sup> 26 August 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>305</sup> Slot, “The Fires,”.

<sup>306</sup> Slot, “The Fires,”.

<sup>307</sup> 26 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>308</sup> 22 August 1782, 13CP168, Microfilm 168, Archives Diplomatiques.

<sup>309</sup> Cezar, “Osmanlı Devrinde,” 364.

<sup>310</sup> Slot, “The Fires,”. Yıldız, “1782 İstanbul Yangını,”.

<sup>311</sup> Behar, *Bir Mahallenin*, 104.

comes forward is that in 1782 a lot of disturbances accompanied the fires that coincide with other historical events such as the Russo-Ottoman War and Janissary dissatisfaction. In addition, fires and socio-political disturbances may have triggered each other.

In 1783 no fires were reported, but Taylesanizâde reports that in June 1784 a new fire broke out from a tobacco shop in Kanlıfırın. Flames destroyed the houses in the surrounding area.<sup>312</sup> According to the Dutch and British, another fire started on 5 August 1784 in the neighbourhood of Kiremit in Fener and consumed the neighbourhoods of Karagümrük and Yenibahçe in sixty-two hours.<sup>313</sup> The same fire is also mentioned in Taylesanizâde's chronicle. According to this author, the fire took place in August 1784, close to the Fethiye Mosque. In addition to *medreses*, mosques, hammams and shops, residences of high ranked officials such as the *Şeyhülislam* were destroyed.<sup>314</sup> Cezar mentions that 5000 houses burned down in twenty-seven hours.<sup>315</sup> The British reported that in December that year a fire in a warehouse opposite the British palace was quickly extinguished.<sup>316</sup>

According to Taylesanizâde, fires continued to take place in 1785. On 13 July 1785, in the Holy Month of Ramadan, a small fire hit in the neighbourhood of Kulaksız in Kasımpaşa and was extinguished after it burned down a couple of houses.<sup>317</sup> Then on 28 August, the same neighbourhood was hit once again by a fire that destroyed a mill and fifteen houses.<sup>318</sup> On 1 September, another fire started in Üsküdar in the mansions of a certain Hurşid Ağa and former *Şeyhülislam* Arabzâde Ahmed Atâ Efendi. Seven big mansions and some small houses were demolished.<sup>319</sup> At the beginning of the month September, probably the 4<sup>th</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup>, another fire raged in the neighbourhood of Küçükpazar from the house of a garden keeper called Ömer Ağa.<sup>320</sup> Then another fire started in a place called Tahtahan in the neighbourhood of Parmakkapı. A lot of houses, mansions and shops were destroyed before it could be extinguished. That same day ten to fifteen neighbourhoods and the day before arson attempts threatened twenty-five neighbourhoods.<sup>321</sup> On 1 October, this time in Kasımpaşa, a small-scale fire burned down some houses.<sup>322</sup> In addition to Taylesanizâde, the Dutch also report that on 9 October a fire could be extinguished without causing severe damage in Constantinople (the exact place is not provided).<sup>323</sup> The Dutch continue to report that on 17 and 18 November three other fires broke out in Tophane, Galata and a Greek quarter of which the first one destroyed twenty, the second one several

---

<sup>312</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 73.

<sup>313</sup> 9 August 1784, 1.02.20, Box 786, Legatie Turkije; 9 August 1784, FO78, Box 5, Foreign Office.

<sup>314</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 193.

<sup>315</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>316</sup> 24 December 1784, FO78, Box 5, Foreign Office.

<sup>317</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 91.

<sup>318</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 91.

<sup>319</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 92.

<sup>320</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 93.

<sup>321</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 98.

<sup>322</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 103.

<sup>323</sup> 10 October 1785, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

and the third one thirty houses.<sup>324</sup> According to Taylesanizâde, on 29 November another fire broke out from a bakery in Üsküdar (Toptaşı) that raged for six hours, divided into branches and reduced a lot of houses, shops and mills to ashes.<sup>325</sup> On 20 December 1785 in Tophane Hendekbaşı, the mansion of the artillery chief (*topçubaşı*) burned down. On the same night, another fire demolished a couple of houses in Ayvansaray, while an arson attempt was blocked in Aksaray.<sup>326</sup> Then another fire broke out in the Eyüp Sultan Mosque Complex on 30 December 1785 as a result of smoking.<sup>327</sup> An interesting detail here is that Taylesanizâde is more focused on neighbourhoods such as Kasımpaşa, Küçükpazar, Ayvansaray and Üsküdar or fires taking place in mosques and houses of figures such as the *Şeyhülislam*. The Dutch and British, on the other hand, put the focus on their immediate vicinity and neighbourhoods such as Galata.

Both chronological overviews of Schneider and Cezar do not mention any fires between 1786 and 1790; however, European sources and Ottoman chronicles do report fires. According to the Dutch, a fire in Üsküdar was quickly extinguished on 8-9 January 1786.<sup>328</sup> The same fire was also reported by Taylesanizâde who notes that the fire started in the neighbourhood of Ayazma in the house of one of the imams of Sultan Selim.<sup>329</sup> Taylesanizâde continues to report another fire that broke out 7 May 1786 in the residence of the head doctor (*hekimbaşı*) in Bahçekapı and burned down five mansions, several houses and a grocery shop in the surrounding area. He also notes that on 8 May 1786 another fire destroyed five to ten houses nearby the Arab Mosque in Galata, while the Grand Vizier Yusuf Paşa himself attended the firefight to disburse money to Janissaries and injured himself.<sup>330</sup> At the end of July or at the beginning of August 1786 (the exact date is not provided) Taylesanizâde claims that bandits have set the village of Kartal, near Pendik, on fire. The entire village with 500 houses, greengrocers and 'sherbet' stores was seriously damaged.<sup>331</sup> On 3 August 1786, a fire broke out close to the ironmonger shops (*Nalburlar*) near the Rüstem Paşa Mosque and burned down several stone buildings. Two days later, on 5 August, another fire that started in the neighbourhood of Kirazlı Mescid destroyed the house of Mehmed Bey, the head chief of the Imperial Shipyards (*Tersane-i Amire Emini*).<sup>332</sup> According to the Dutch, the inhabitants of Pera were shocked by another fire that broke out on 6 August and destroyed 120-130 houses behind the Dutch palace, not far from the French and Venetian embassies.<sup>333</sup> Taylesanizâde reports that on 8 August, a Muslim neighbourhood called Çukurcuma in Tophane was hit

---

<sup>324</sup> 26 November 1785, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>325</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 106.

<sup>326</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 118.

<sup>327</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 121.

<sup>328</sup> 10 January 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije

<sup>329</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 121.

<sup>330</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 147-148.

<sup>331</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 156.

<sup>332</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 159-160.

<sup>333</sup> 9 August 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.

by a fire that burned down 500 houses, while another arson attempt was reported in a house in Hasköy and several other neighbourhoods.<sup>334</sup> He also notes that on 24 August 1786 another fire broke out from a muffin bakery (*çörekçi*) in Küçükpazar and destroyed shops and houses, among them one hammam, a muffin bakery (*çörekçi*), a bagel bakery (*simitçi*), a grocery (*bakkal*) and several other shops and houses.<sup>335</sup> The Dutch claim that on 25 August an arson attempt was prevented after 4-5 arsonists were arrested and sentenced to death. Although the exact place of this attempt is not provided, the Dutch claim that the actions were against the Grand Vizier.<sup>336</sup> The Dutch report that on 20 September another fire was able to consume a hundred houses, expressing their hope that it was accidental.<sup>337</sup> On 23 November a fire could be extinguished without causing any trouble.<sup>338</sup> However, then, on 9 December 1786 Taylesanizâde reports that a fire broke out in the Eyüp Sultan Mosque Complex, which propagated to the neighbourhood of Kurukavak. Three houses were reduced to ashes.<sup>339</sup>

Also, in 1787, fires were reported in primary sources. The year 1787 started with a fire report made by Taylesanizâde on 20 January in a neighbourhood called İstavroz as a result of an accident in the mansion of a certain Osman Paşazade İzzet Bey.<sup>340</sup> The Dutch reported that on 8 February another fire broke out in Galata and destroyed the area between Galata and Tophane. The fire started after quarrels in front of the bakery (*fırançılı fırını*), near a coffeehouse called *yirmi beş bölük yoldaşları*. This fire consumed 200 hundred buildings, of which most were shops and storages.<sup>341</sup> Also Taylesanizâde reports that the flames first hit the surrounding area, then continued to the Muslim neighbourhood raging for more than fourteen hours, destroying the mosque of this neighbourhood, hammams, shoemakers' stores, timber seller's stores, two churches, taverns, houses of non-Muslims and a couple of thousand other houses and shops.<sup>342</sup> While no other fire report can be found in primary and secondary sources, Taylesanizâde continues to report that on 14 March 1787, five or ten houses burned down as a result of a fire in the same district not far from a place called Hendek. On 23 March another fire broke out in the coffeehouse of the policemen (*bostancı kahvesi*), in the Tabutcular district in Üsküdar and destroyed forty to fifty houses and the dervish lodge (*tekke*) of Saçlı Hüseyin Efendi.<sup>343</sup>

Taylesanizâde continues to report that on 26 January 1788 a fire broke out in the mansion of El-Hâc Kâsım Efendi but could be extinguished before spreading to other houses.<sup>344</sup> On 20 February another fire started the house of Şeyh Osman Efendi, not far from a hammam called Tehtâb in the

---

<sup>334</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 160-161.

<sup>335</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 169.

<sup>336</sup> 25 August 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>337</sup> 25 September 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije

<sup>338</sup> 24 February 1787, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije

<sup>339</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 179.

<sup>340</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 185.

<sup>341</sup> 10 February 1787, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije

<sup>342</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 189.

<sup>343</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 193.

<sup>344</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 252.

Fethiye district. One house burned down, while two other houses were brought down.<sup>345</sup> On 13 March another small fire in the neighbourhood of El-Hac Evhad was extinguished before causing much damage; in the end, five houses burned down.<sup>346</sup> On 2 April a fire took place in a neighbourhood called Lalezar in the Silivri area, which destroyed one house, while another fire started at the very same moment in the neighbourhood of Kılıç Ali in Beşiktaş. A house of a neighbourhood watcher burned down.<sup>347</sup> Then another fire happened on 1 May 1788 in Yatağançeşmesi in the house of the gatekeeper of the Holy Shrine of Eyüp Sultan. A couple of houses and a grocery were reduced to ashes.<sup>348</sup> Chronicler Enverî reports that somewhere between 6-17 May 1788, five or ten houses burned down as a result of a fire near Yeni Hamam.<sup>349</sup> According to Taylesanizâde, a week later a fire broke out from the sailor's residences (*kalyoncu odaları*) in Galata, which caused damage to three caravanserais, two mills, one bakery, compass shops, calpac shops, houses and several other shops.<sup>350</sup> Then on 9 May 1788, a fire was extinguished in Cağaloğlu.<sup>351</sup> On 2 November fire destroyed several mansions (*yalı*) in Arnavutköy, before it was extinguished, while on the 27<sup>th</sup> of that same month another fire destroyed three houses not far from Hırka-i Şerif.<sup>352</sup> Fires were also reported on 18 December, in the neighbourhood of Müzevvir in Eyüp which reduced three houses to ashes.<sup>353</sup>

Also in the year, 1789 fires continued to happen according to Taylesanizâde. The year started with a fire in Galata that broke out on 8 January in an 'halva' shop and spread to various shops among which sail and ropemakers, coffeehouses and bachelor's houses.<sup>354</sup> It is interesting here that for Taylesanizâde these specific buildings are important to report. Taylesanizâde further reported a fire taking place on 4 February somewhere in Kadıköy and burning down a mansion and several other houses, while another fire hit the next day (5 February) houses opposite the hammam of Şengül.<sup>355</sup> On 5 July 37 houses were reduced to ashes in Anadolu Hisarı.<sup>356</sup> Another followed this fire on 13 July which broke out in a bread bakery in the neighbourhood of Küçükpazar and was strong enough to destroy many shops and houses. According to Enverî this same fire affected the area between Odunkapısı and Unkapanı and a lot of payment was needed to get the firefighters to work.<sup>357</sup> Then Taylesanizâde

---

<sup>345</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 258.

<sup>346</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 270.

<sup>347</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 285.

<sup>348</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 291.

<sup>349</sup> Bayram, "Enverî Târîhi," 433.

<sup>350</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 293.

<sup>351</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 294.

<sup>352</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 320-323.

<sup>353</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 326.

<sup>354</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 333.

<sup>355</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 339.

<sup>356</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 399.

<sup>357</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 400; Bayram, "Enverî Târîhi," 578-579.

reported another fire that happened on 18 August 1789 in Sultantepesi, which demolished the dervish lodge of the Uzbeks called the *Hâcı Hoca Tekyesi*.<sup>358</sup>

In 1790 the Dutch reported another fire that broke out on 30 March and burned down 300 houses and shops together with several important palaces in Constantinople without mentioning the exact places.<sup>359</sup> Cezar, too, reports a fire in 1790 (without providing a date) that raged for ten hours in Uzunçarşı. It is not clear whether these two fires, reported by the Dutch and Cezar, are the same.<sup>360</sup>

Most of the fires that took place in 1791 and reported by primary sources are not included in the overviews of Schneider and Cezar. However, according to both European reports and the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, fires continued to take place regularly. The only Dutch report of 1791 refers to a heavy fire that broke out on 22 March 1791 as a result of arson, caused by people who were appointed to take care of the night watch, while according to the same report three other small fires happened between 22 March and 8 April.<sup>361</sup> Cezar also mentions that the fire of 21 March 1791 hit the central market place.<sup>362</sup> However, the chronicler Enverî refers to a fire on 22 February 1791 that destroyed many shops at the central market place.<sup>363</sup> According to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, the Sultan attended a fire on 21 March 1791, which broke out in a barber shop in Kebeciler Hanı, at the market place.<sup>364</sup> It is not clear whether Enverî made a mistake with the date or that another fire happened in February. On 3 April 1791, another fire took place in the neighbourhood of Karabaş in Balat.<sup>365</sup> Furthermore, the *Rûz-name* of Selim III reports another fire on 10 April 1791 in the neighbourhood of Yahya Kethüda in Kasımpaşa, which broke out in the house of a certain Ahmed Paşa, an assistant of the Head Chief of the Imperial Shipyards (*Tersane-i Amire Kethüdası*).<sup>366</sup> In October 1791 a small fire was extinguished in the gunpowder magazine (*baruthane*).<sup>367</sup> In the night of 7 July, a fire started in the house of a certain Yahyazade Efendi, the *kadı* of Aleppo, in the neighbourhood of Kebce in the Doğanlılar district in Üsküdar.<sup>368</sup> Then on 26 November 1791, the Sultan attended another fire in Unkapanı.<sup>369</sup> On 11 December a fire broke out in the court building in Mahmudpaşa (*mahkemesi*).<sup>370</sup>

Although from 1791 and 1792 onwards fire reports again start to decrease in secondary sources, fires continue to be mentioned in primary sources. On 20 February 1792, a fire broke out in a carpenter's shop at the beginning of a street where book shops were situated (*kitabcılar başında doğramacı*

---

<sup>358</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 405.

<sup>359</sup> 8 April 1790, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>360</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>361</sup> 8 April 1791, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>362</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>363</sup> Bayram, "Enverî Târîhi," 798.

<sup>364</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 2.

<sup>365</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 3.

<sup>366</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 6.

<sup>367</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>368</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 25.

<sup>369</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 52-53.

<sup>370</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 54.

*dükkanından*), while on 29 February another fire broke out in Kabataş.<sup>371</sup> On 22 March another fire broke out in the residence of a certain Reşîd Mustafa Efendi.<sup>372</sup> More fires were reported on 25 March in Kasımpaşa, on 2 April in Kapı Ağası, on 19 April in Kazgâncılar in Sultan Bayezid, on 14 May in Koska, on 31 May in the Old Palace (Eski Saray), on 28 June in Beşiktaş, on 7 July in the gardens of the Imperial Shipyards, on 15 July in Saraçhane and on 17 August in the barracks of the sailors in the shipyard.<sup>373</sup> Cezar notes that, during a fire that broke out on 13 September 1792, the Uzunçarşı district destroyed by a fire that broke out in Odunkapısı.<sup>374</sup> However, the *Rûz-name* of Selim III gives 14 September (26 Muharrem) as the date of this fire.<sup>375</sup> Also, on 15 and 16 September, fires continued to happen respectively in the house of Osman Ağa, the tax collector of Bursa (*Bursa cizyedarı*) in Çakmakçılar and the residence of Şatır Hasan Ağa in Yeni Hamam.<sup>376</sup> On 25 and 26 October, small fires happened in Balat and near the Ağa Mosque in Galata.<sup>377</sup>

In 1793, reports were only found in the *Rûz-name* of Selim III. On 10 January 1793, two small fires took place, of which the first broke out in a house of a kebab maker in Topkapı, the second in the mansion of a certain Kerim Beyzade.<sup>378</sup> On 10 February a fire started in the neighbourhood of Firuzağa in Tophane without causing any severe damage.<sup>379</sup> On 24 April another fire was reported in the neighbourhood of İbrahim Paşa in Kumkapı, which destroyed some houses.<sup>380</sup> On 23 November 1793, a short fire hit the building of the Imperial Mint (*Darphane-i Amire*) but was extinguished quickly.<sup>381</sup> On 10 December another fire broke out in the Old Palace (Eski Saray).<sup>382</sup> Schneider also mentioned the same and notes the fire that broke out opposite the Old Palace destroyed 100 houses.<sup>383</sup> According to Cezar, who states that this fire was the only fire of 1793 without providing the exact date, several hundred houses burned down.<sup>384</sup>

The *Rûz-name* of Selim III reports that twenty shops were destroyed in Sultan Bayezid as a result of a fire on 15 January 1794.<sup>385</sup> The *Rûz-name* continues to report that on 26 January another small fire happened in Üsküdar. Furthermore, a fire hit the neighbourhood of Sultan Mehmed on 1 February 1794.<sup>386</sup> On 15 February a fire broke out in Kürkçü Kapısı in Galata which raged for three hours, while

---

<sup>371</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 61-63.

<sup>372</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 64.

<sup>373</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 64; 65; 66; 67; 70; 74; 76; 79; 81; 83; 89.

<sup>374</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 365.

<sup>375</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 95.

<sup>376</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 96-97.

<sup>377</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 102-103.

<sup>378</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 110.

<sup>379</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 114.

<sup>380</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 123.

<sup>381</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 150.

<sup>382</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 152.

<sup>383</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 400.

<sup>384</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>385</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 155.

<sup>386</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*", 156.



on 22 February another one hit the district called Meyyit İskelesi. The next day, the same neighbourhood was hit once again.<sup>387</sup> On 11 June another fire started in Tahtakale.<sup>388</sup> Although most of the fires taking place in 1794 are reported by the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, the Dutch also report that in the night of 25 and 26 July 1794 the sultan was present while a fire was being extinguished in Pera.<sup>389</sup> According to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, on 3 October 1794, another fire started at the marketplace of Piri Paşa in Hasköy,<sup>390</sup> while on 3 November 1794 a fire broke out in the mansion of Çil Emin Ağa in Vefa.<sup>391</sup>

The *Rûz-name* of Selim III continues to report that on 8 July 1795 Hasır İskelesi was hit by a fire, which is also mentioned by Cezar.<sup>392</sup> It is reported by the Dutch that on 7 July there was another fire in Constantinople (without providing an exact place) which raged for fifteen hours and destroyed storages and a great number of shops and houses.<sup>393</sup> On 10 August 1795, it is again reported by the Dutch that fires happen frequently.<sup>394</sup> However, the Dutch reports are not as keen as the *Rûz-name* to give the exact locations of these fires.

The *Rûz-name* of Selim III reports that fires broke out on 1 February 1796 in the Süfiler Hamamı<sup>395</sup>, on 9 March in a whitesmith's shop near the Lodge of Aydınoğlu (*Aydınoğlu Tekyesi* or *Tekkesi*) and on 12 May from a stone building in Karaköy.<sup>396</sup> The only two fires reported by the Dutch in that year happen on 10 June 1796 in Pera and Kuruçeşme. The fire hit a couple of houses in Pera and three 'palaces' in Kuruçeşme that 'belonged to Greek princes.'<sup>397</sup> According to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, fires continued to happen on 19 August in Üsküdar, on 18 September near a place called Divoğlu Çeşmesi and on 8 November in the residences of the fishermen near Aya Kapısı which are all not mentioned by both the European reports and secondary sources.<sup>398</sup>

According to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, fires continued to happen on 2 January 1797 in the Karababa Street in a place called Sedefciler, on 18 February in a neighbourhood called Yolcuzade in Azapkapı in the Galata district and on 13 April in Fındıklı from the residence of a certain Cafer Bey.<sup>399</sup> The Dutch were interested in two arson attempts that aimed to set the Dutch palace on fire in April 1797. It is reported that both attempts could be prevented on time.<sup>400</sup> Cezar also reports that on 18

---

<sup>387</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 158-159.

<sup>388</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 169.

<sup>389</sup> 9 August 1794, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije

<sup>390</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 177.

<sup>391</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 180.

<sup>392</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 194; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>393</sup> 10 July 1795, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>394</sup> 10 August 1795, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>395</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 209.

<sup>396</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 209; 212; 218.

<sup>397</sup> 25 June 1796, 1.02.20, Box 865, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>398</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 227; 230; 234.

<sup>399</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 238; 242; 246.

<sup>400</sup> 10 April 1797, 1.02.20, Box 865, Legatie Turkije.

April a fire took place in Azapkapı in Galata that burned for seven hours.<sup>401</sup> The *Rûz-name*, however, reports that a fire happened on 18 April in Laleli.<sup>402</sup> Cezar mentions that in June 1797, another fire in the neighbourhood of Açıktürbe in Üsküdar was very devastating.<sup>403</sup> The *Rûz-name* of Selim III reports that the fire in Açıktürbe broke out on 25 June and the Sultan visited the residence of a certain Zihni Efendi in that same area.<sup>404</sup> More fires continued to happen on 30 June in the Treasurer's Office (*Hazinedar Odası*) within the Royal Gardens (*Has Bahçe*), on 7 August in Çavuş Deresi in Üsküdar, on 31 August 1797 in the neighbourhood of Hoca Ali in Balat, on 8 October in the shipyard (*Tersane*), on 24 October at Wednesday's Market (*Çahâr-ı Şenbih or Çarşamba Pazarı*) and on 22 December in the Jewish neighbourhood in Hasköy (*Hasköy'de Yahudilerden*).<sup>405</sup> These fires are not reported by European reports and the overviews of Schneider and Cezar.

In 1798 several fires happened on 27 January in Küçükpazar on 16 April in a bakery in the neighbourhood called Alacahamam and on 27 May in a wine house (*meyhâne*) in Arnavutköy. Another fire on 19 August in one of the newly built mansions in Arnavutköy, while another broke out on 29 August at the horse market and one on 30 August in Testereciler (saw shops) in front of the Sinekli Medrese and on 2 September in Fener Kapısı.<sup>406</sup> Both European reports and the overviews of Schneider and Cezar do not mention these fires.

In 1799, a report written by the Dutch referred to a destructive fire that broke out on 13 March in a bakery shop and destroyed Pera. In the same Dutch report also references to arson can be found.<sup>407</sup> The *Rûz-name* of Selim III confirms this fire in the bread bakery near Galatasaray.<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, the *Rûz-name* reports another that fire broke out on 6 May in a 'non-Muslim' neighbourhood in Salmatomruk near a place called Draman.<sup>409</sup> Also on 27 June 1799, a fire hit the neighbourhood called Sülüklüçeşme in Aksaray.<sup>410</sup> On 19 August another small fire took place in Üsküdar near Şemsipaşa.<sup>411</sup> Fires continued to take place on 22 September in Çırçır in front of the Haydar Hamamı, on 9 November in Beyoğlu and on 27 December in a bazaar called Malta Çarşısı near the Sultan Mehmed Mosque.<sup>412</sup> Another fire was reported by the Ottoman archival sources on 31 December 1799 at the Janissary barracks.<sup>413</sup>

---

<sup>401</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>402</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 247.

<sup>403</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>404</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 253.

<sup>405</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 253; 255; 257; 260; 262; 267.

<sup>406</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 268; 274; 278; 285; 286.

<sup>407</sup> 27 March 1799, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>408</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 300.

<sup>409</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 304.

<sup>410</sup> Ahmed Câvid, *Hadîka-i Vekâyi'*, 37.

<sup>411</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 312.

<sup>412</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 314; 316; 319.

<sup>413</sup> 3 Ş 1214 (28 February 1800), TS.MA.e, 694/4.

Both European reports and the chronologies of Schneider and Cezar do not report any fire in 1800 and 1801; however, according to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III, the Sultan visited several fires. A fire broke out on 20 January 1800 in a hammam of one of the chamberlains, while another hit the marketplace of Kulaksız in Kasımpaşa on 25 August. On 29 August a small fire broke out in the boathouse of the Head Gardener Ali Bey (*Bostancıbaşı*; head of the police) in Üsküdar and another on 12 November in Aksaray. On 23 November another fire hit Cibali, while on 29 December a fire happened near Otluk Kapısı.<sup>414</sup>

On 28 June 1801 fires broke out near the Emir Katib Mosque in Aksaray, on 25 July in sailors' residences near Sebil Kapısı in Kasımpaşa and on 6 November in the Kızıl Minare Mosque in Aksaray.<sup>415</sup>

According to the *Rûz-name* of Selim III fires were reported in 1802 on 11 February in the İvaz Efendi Mosque in Eğrikapı, on 21 March in the mansion of a certain Emin-i Şair Sehil Efendi, on 25 May in Sultanhamam near Edirnekapı, on 30 August near the Hüseyin Ağa Mosque in the surroundings of Irgad Pazarı and on 7 November in the neighbourhood of Alacahamam.<sup>416</sup> The only fire mentioned in the overviews of Cezar took place in the Sultanahmed area, without any further information about the date.<sup>417</sup>

Cezar mentions that in July 1803, a fire damaged 30 to 40 shops in Parmakkapı. A couple of days later he notes that another fire hit the area between Hocapaşa and the Sublime Porte.<sup>418</sup> On 26 August 1803, it is reported by the Dutch that two heavy fires burned down 1000 houses.<sup>419</sup>

Two Dutch fire reports claim that on 4 September 1804 the Janissaries rebelled and at the same time fires happened in Tophane that reduced a part of the military barracks to ashes. Another fire in Hasköy was detected on time without causing any serious damage.<sup>420</sup> Both fires are being confirmed by Cezar's overview, which states that the fire in Hasköy damaged 650 houses.<sup>421</sup>

On 8 April 1805, a fire ravaged the military barracks near Etmeydanı. As a result, seven barracks burned down.<sup>422</sup> On 31 October 1805 a Greek neighbourhood (probably Fener) was hit by another fire occurred after a hurricane, but this fire was quickly extinguished.<sup>423</sup> Two days later on 2 November 1805, another fire was reported in Cibali, but no damage is mentioned.<sup>424</sup> A Dutch report indicates that

---

<sup>414</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 320-321; 335; 336; 340-341; 343.

<sup>415</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 352; 354-355; 363.

<sup>416</sup> Arıkan, *III. Selim*, 370-371; 375; 382; 387.

<sup>417</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>418</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 366.

<sup>419</sup> 26 August 1803, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>420</sup> 10 September 1804, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>421</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 367.

<sup>422</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi I*, 112.

<sup>423</sup> 9 November 1805, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>424</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi I*, 147.

another fire happened on 14 November in the 'French neighbourhood', but only two houses burned down.<sup>425</sup>

On 6 and 7 of November 1806, a fire hit Balat, during which a head Janissary tried to save a pregnant woman. Ottoman chronicler Âsım Efendi who treats the period between 1791 and 1808 reports a fire that took place on the same day (6 November 1806) in the Salmatomruk district, near the Molla Aşkî Mosque. This fire started in the house of someone called Şeyhzade and destroyed two big houses and a lot of small houses.<sup>426</sup>

On 11 July 1807, the Dutch reported a fire of which the exact date is unknown, but we can presume that the date was not far from the date of the report. A thousand houses and several mosques burned down during that fire that hit the Muslim neighbourhood in Galata, not far from the Dominican church.<sup>427</sup> Cezar, on the other hand, mentions a fire that hit Galata on 20 July 1807 that raged for sixteen hours in the neighbourhoods near the Arap Mosque in Galata and the Sokullu Mosque in Azapkapı, which were damaged during this fire.<sup>428</sup> Cezar also mentions that a fire that started on 18 August 1807 in Balkapanı and another fire on 20 August in Şehzadebaşı destroyed many buildings.<sup>429</sup> Besides these fires, the Dutch reported on 24 August 1807 that there had been several fires recently, however, without any significant impact. It is also reported that the Janissaries had complaints about the government.<sup>430</sup>

At the beginning of January 1808, the Dutch reported that a destructive fire in Galata lasted twelve hours and wiped out the entire Tophane district. At the same time, another fire started in Kadıköy and the third one of little significance in a place called 'harbour' without any further detail about the exact place.<sup>431</sup> On 24 August 1808, it is reported by chronicler Âsım Efendi that earlier in August the Cebehane (arsenal) district was set on fire, destroying the surrounding houses and shops.<sup>432</sup> During the Janissary uprisings of 15-16 November 1808, the Sublime Porte was besieged, and fires were reported.<sup>433</sup> On 18 November 1808 fires broke out in Cebehane which ended with damage to the neighbourhoods of İshakpaşa, Kabasakal, Akbıyık, around the buildings Arslanhane and the Sultanahmed Mosque and the marketplace of Ayasofya. Then during another fire as a result of arson in Üsküdar, several shops were reduced to ashes and plundered.<sup>434</sup> The Janissary uprisings that took place in November 1808 are also reported in the European reports. The Dutch noticed a 'bloody revolution',

---

<sup>425</sup> 26 November 1805, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>426</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi I*, 387.

<sup>427</sup> 11 July 1807, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>428</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 367.

<sup>429</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 367.

<sup>430</sup> 24 August 1807, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>431</sup> 25 January 1808, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>432</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1267.

<sup>433</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1385.

<sup>434</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1402.

during which the military barracks were set on fire. It is described how a fire took place after an explosion under the harem section of the residence of Alemdar Mustafa Pasha.<sup>435</sup> A British report claims that on 15 November a fire broke out near the Seven Towers (Yedikule).<sup>436</sup> Mütercim Âsım Efendi reported that in November 1808 fires broke out as a result of arson.<sup>437</sup> Around 25 November 1808 new arson attempts were reported that, according to the Dutch, threatened the inhabitants of Üsküdar, Eyüp and Kasımpaşa, who guarded their properties.<sup>438</sup>

On 21 April 1810, it is reported by the Dutch that another catastrophic conflagration took place to the north of Pera, which lasted twenty hours ruining 4000 houses and killing many people.<sup>439</sup> The British also claim that Pera was destroyed on 22 April 1810, while the British palace remained intact.<sup>440</sup>

On 18 June 1811, a fire is reported by chronicler Şânîzâde in Pera/Beyoğlu that destroyed a number of houses and shops, which is also mentioned in the overview of Cezar.<sup>441</sup> Chronicler Câbî reports that on 29 July 1811 another conflagration broke out near Basmahaneler in the Yenikapı district in the house of a goldsmith and brought damage to Alaca Mescid and two hammams called Mimar Hamamı and Havuzlu Hamam.<sup>442</sup> Cezar also remarks that this fire in Yenikapı and Langa raged for sixteen hours.<sup>443</sup> Then on 30 August 1811, another fire caused problems in Istanbul. It is reported by Câbî that 'Muslim and non-Muslim houses', masjids and shops were hit.<sup>444</sup> Câbî reported another fire that started on 1 October in Balat, in the Kiremit neighbourhood. This one raged for eight and a half hours and caused a lot of damage.<sup>445</sup> On 1 December 1811, he further noticed that firefighters were not able to extinguish a fire that started in Ortaköy, in a neighbourhood called Dereağzı. Due to a strong wind, the location of the incident could only be reached overland through Galata, Tophane and Beşiktaş. The damage was limited to several mansions and their gardens. According to Şânîzâde, this fire broke out in the mansion of an Armenian near the Ortaköy Mosque.<sup>446</sup> During another incident on 25 December, the right minaret of the Valide-i Atik Mosque in Üsküdar was hit by lightning that caused a fire. Extra help was requested, again, from Tophane to extinguish the fire.<sup>447</sup>

Although in the period between 1812-1831 both Schneider and Cezar and other primary sources did not report or mention fires, Ottoman chroniclers such as Câbî, Şânîzâde and Es'ad did regularly make reports. One of those, according to Câbî, took place on 28 September 1812, in

---

<sup>435</sup> 25 November 1808, 1.02.20, Box 951, Legatie Turkije,

<sup>436</sup> 18 November 1808, FO78, Box 60, Foreign Office.

<sup>437</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1384.

<sup>438</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi I*, 314.

<sup>439</sup> 26 April 1810, 1.02.20, Box 979, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>440</sup> 22 April 1810, FO78, Box 68, Foreign Office.

<sup>441</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 473; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 368.

<sup>442</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 766; Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 483.

<sup>443</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 368.

<sup>444</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 774.

<sup>445</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 790.

<sup>446</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 817; Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 511.

<sup>447</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 822.

Dörtüylağzı in Balat. When the conflagration worsened, Sultan Mahmud II came to the area to lead the firefighting. Flames backed by a strong wind, caused great devastation, while Jews residing in the area were affected most. People jumped into the sea to flee from the flames, but those who were too weak to flee burned alive.<sup>448</sup> Then another relatively small fire broke out on 8 October 1812 in a bakery (*francalacı furunu*) in Galata.<sup>449</sup>

Of all the sources retrieved, Câbî Ömer Efendi is the only reporter of fires in 1813, while both other primary and secondary sources do not mention them. Câbî notes that a conflagration that broke out in the old palace in Süleymaniye on 3 March of 1813 was still not extinguished after five hours, despite the presence of a large number of firefighters and the sultan himself.<sup>450</sup> Two weeks after that, another fire in Hocapaşa burned down eight to nine houses.<sup>451</sup> On 31 July 1813, there was another fire in Irgatpazarı district, which broke out in the coffeehouse of Tahta Hân and damaged several houses. Five days later, this time in Eğrikapı a couple of houses burned down as a result of a small fire.<sup>452</sup> On 1 October 1813, the Karaköy district witnessed a fire that destroyed houses and shops of Jews.<sup>453</sup>

After a period without fire reports, Şânîzâde reports the only fire of 1816 on 24 September, in a room belonging to the favourite concubine (*haseki*) of the sultan in the Beşiktaş Palace. This was extinguished before causing considerable damage.<sup>454</sup>

Between 9 January and 4 August 1818, three fires were reported by Şânîzâde. One was spotted on 9 January near the lodge of the dervishes in Galata in the residence of the Swedish ambassador, the second on 16 April in Tarabya (in the residence of Ypsilanti; the Voivode of Walachia) and the third on 19 July in a painter's shop in Odunkapısı.<sup>455</sup> On 14 August 1818 another fire, which was also reported by Şânîzâde, destroyed the district of Kadırgalimanı, in the neighbourhoods of Kumkapı and the surroundings of the Sultan Bayezid Mosque.<sup>456</sup> On 17 August 1818 Şânîzâde reported that a lot of other fires were taking place in the same period.<sup>457</sup>

After a period without reports, on 23 April 1821, a fire is reported by Şânîzâde in the Imperial Shipyards (*Tersane*), who also noted that the Grand Admiral attended the operations.<sup>458</sup>

In the year 1822, no fire reports can be found, but on 1 March 1823, chronicler Es'ad reported a conflagration taking place in Tophane, not far from the Firuzağa Mosque. Backed by a strong wind, it

---

<sup>448</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 900.

<sup>449</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 905.

<sup>450</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 949.

<sup>451</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 956.

<sup>452</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 1002.

<sup>453</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 1016.

<sup>454</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 756.

<sup>455</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 848-849.

<sup>456</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 850-851.

<sup>457</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 855.

<sup>458</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 1128.

raged for seventeen hours, causing severe devastation to the neighbouring districts.<sup>459</sup> Three days later, on 4 March, another conflagration lasted five hours and caused a lot of problems in the area near the New Mosque (*Yeni Cami*) and Sultan Hamamı.<sup>460</sup> On 14 July, this time in Kasımpaşa, in a neighbourhood called Zindanardı, a conflagration raged for seven hours and burned down a lot of houses and shops, including galleons anchored in the harbour.<sup>461</sup>

Chronicler Es'ad reported a fire on 26 January 1824 in the cereal silos of the harbour, which caused material damage.<sup>462</sup> On 5 August another fire broke out in Cibali and burned down a lot of houses and shops.<sup>463</sup>

In the year 1825, several fires were reported by Es'ad Efendi, while other sources do not mention any fire. The year started with a fire that broke out on 1 January near the Horhor district in Akarçeşme, in the house of a certain Beylikci Hadi Efendi. Its spread could be prevented on time.<sup>464</sup> On 9 September, a fire in Küçük Karaman lasted five-six hours and burned down a lot of shops among which bakeries (*etmekci* and *börekci*), while at the end of the same month another fire destroyed several houses and shops in three-four hours.<sup>465</sup>

Also in the year 1826, several fires were reported by Es'ad Efendi with references to disturbances related to the abolishment of the Janissary corps. On 19 January 1826, a fire is reported near a mansion called Kaliceciler Köşkü in the Topkapı district. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of the same month, another fire happened in Kantarcılar, in a place called Şerbetçi Street (*Şerbetçi Sokağı*). On 4 February 1826, a fire started in Kazancılarbaşı (boilermakers) in a house belonging to someone named Kazancı Hacı Mustafa.<sup>466</sup> On 22 February 1826, another fire broke out in the residence of the Customs Chief named Hidayet Ağa, without causing damage to the surrounding area. On that same night, some other buildings burned down in Yeniköy.<sup>467</sup> On 3 April 1826, a small fire took place in Selimiye.<sup>468</sup> More fires were noticed on 12 April in a bakery in the Davudpaşa Palace (*Dâvud Paşa Sarayı*), on 28 April in Kumkapı and on 30 April near the Firuzaga Mosque.<sup>469</sup> In addition to these fires, somewhere in the middle of May 1826 another blaze started in a bakery in Balat and destroyed 500 houses and shops.<sup>470</sup> On 15-16 June, several other fires were reported related to the Janissary uprisings that resulted in the abolishment of the corps, also known as The Auspicious Incident (*Vaka-i Hayriye*).<sup>471</sup> The Dutch wrote an extensive

---

<sup>459</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 189; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 369.

<sup>460</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 190.

<sup>461</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 225.

<sup>462</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 282.

<sup>463</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 337.

<sup>464</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 380.

<sup>465</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 454.

<sup>466</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 499.

<sup>467</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 502.

<sup>468</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 530.

<sup>469</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 561-562.

<sup>470</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 562.

<sup>471</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 608-612.

report on 21 June 1826, explaining how the Janissaries were planning and preparing an uprising at the Etmeydanı when their caserns were set on fire.<sup>472</sup> Also in a report dating from 15 June 1826, a conflagration is being reported which started at the Etmeydanı near the Janissary caserns.<sup>473</sup> Another fire was reported on 24 June 1826 in a non-Muslim neighbourhood in Balta Limanı, this time reducing two houses to ashes that belonged to non-Muslims.<sup>474</sup>

From the second half of the 1820s onwards, fire reports significantly decrease. On 20 July 1828, an explosion in the gunpowder magazine near Azadlı caused trouble. As a result, 400 workers lost their lives.<sup>475</sup> On 7 November 1828 another place called Ağa Konağı in Ahırkapı burned down due to a fire.<sup>476</sup>

On 22 July 1829, a fire broke out near the mansion of Kuruçeşmeli Hasan Bey in Arnavutköy but was detected and extinguished on time.<sup>477</sup>

On 19 February 1830, a conflagration started in the stables near Atpazarı (horse market) and raged until the next day, burning down all the stables, causing widespread destruction to the district of Fatih. Two masjids, a lot of houses and other buildings were destroyed.<sup>478</sup>

On 2 August 1831, another conflagration started in the neighbourhood of Çukur in Beyoğlu and quickly spread towards Taksim, Tatavla and Aynalıçeşme according to Lûtfî Efendi.<sup>479</sup> This destruction it caused is extensively reported by various European envoys. A French letter explains that after the conflagration the neighbourhood of Pera did not exist anymore.<sup>480</sup> According to a Dutch letter, the blaze started somewhere 'on the foot of' the village of St. Dimitri (Tatavla) and wiped out the entire suburb of Pera. The Dutch also reported that the embassy building of Great Britain was consumed first, in just a couple of minutes. The area between Tepebaşı and Kasımpaşa, but also Galatasaray and Yeni Çarşı were hit by the flames. The embassies of Russia, Prussia and Denmark were destroyed<sup>481</sup> along with many houses and other buildings.<sup>482</sup> The Dutch and British embassies completely burned down,<sup>483</sup> while the embassies of Austria and France were damaged.<sup>484</sup> A considerable number of arrests were carried out on suspicion of arson.<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>472</sup> 21 June 1826, 2.05.12, Box 13, Gezantschap Turkije.

<sup>473</sup> 15 June 1826, 2.05.12, Box 19, Gezantschap Turkije.

<sup>474</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 620.

<sup>475</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 414.

<sup>476</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 415.

<sup>477</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 438.

<sup>478</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 447.

<sup>479</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 656.

<sup>480</sup> 4 August 1831, 13CP262, Microfilm 262, Archives Diplomatiques.

<sup>481</sup> 2 August 1831, 2.05.12, Box 248, Gezantschap Turkije.

<sup>482</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 656.

<sup>483</sup> 11 August 1831, FO78, Box 199, Foreign Office; 11 August 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office; 9 September 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office.

<sup>484</sup> 4 August 1831, 13CP262, Microfilm 262, Archives Diplomatiques.

<sup>485</sup> 11 August 1831, FO78, Box 199, Foreign Office; 11 August 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office; 9 September 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office.



In January 1832 a small fire hit a biscuits depot in Bebek. Although the exact date is not provided, the fire was reported on the 26<sup>th</sup> of that month.<sup>486</sup> Then on 8 September 1832, a conflagration destroyed thousands of houses in St. Dimitri (Tatavla).<sup>487</sup>

On 30 August 1833, it is reported that on the 29<sup>th</sup> a conflagration took place in the Tüfenkhane neighbourhood in Cibali. According to the British, it was the work of arsonists. Many shops surrounding the Şehzade Mosque and buildings in the neighbourhoods of Aşıkpaşa, Devehanı, Horhor, Kıztaşı and Vefa were damaged.<sup>488</sup> Cezar also mentions that this conflagration was devastating and affected a large area.<sup>489</sup>

In the middle of January 1836, a fire was reported in the bullet depot (*fışenkane*) which could not be extinguished on time and cost the personnel their lives.<sup>490</sup> On 18 August 1836, another fire broke out near Sultan Bayezid, in Kağıtçılar where the paper shops were settled.<sup>491</sup>

It is reported on 22 January 1839 that the Sublime Porte completely burned down on the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>492</sup> This fire was also noticed by the French.<sup>493</sup> On 30 June 1839, another fire in Constantinople caused damage to buildings.<sup>494</sup>

After the second half of the 1830s both in Ottoman chronicles and European reports, fires are rarely reported.

In 1847, it was reported by the British that fire consumed the residence of one of the dragomans of the British embassy on 26 January 1847.<sup>495</sup>

Based on Ottoman report dating from 4 July 1848 about the need of timber<sup>496</sup> and one dating from on 12 September 1848 about the lack of food (*erzak kıtlığı*), both as a result of fires, we can assume that devastating fires continued to happen. However, they seem not to have been reported as frequently as in the period before.<sup>497</sup>

Although both secondary and primary sources do almost not contain any fire reports in this period, several fires were reported on 14 February 1849 in Edirnekapı by an Ottoman document.<sup>498</sup> Another Ottoman report claimed that on 10 July 1849 arson was seen in Gedikpaşa.<sup>499</sup>

---

<sup>486</sup> 26 January 1832, FO78, Box 212, Foreign Office

<sup>487</sup> 11 September 1832, FO78, Box 212, Foreign Office

<sup>488</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 780-781; 7 September 1833, FO78, Box 224, Foreign Office.

<sup>489</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 371-372.

<sup>490</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*; 871.

<sup>491</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 885.

<sup>492</sup> 7 Za 1254 (22 January 1839), HAT, 753/35538.

<sup>493</sup> 24 January 1839, 13CP277, Microfilm 277, Archives Diplomatiques.

<sup>494</sup> 17 R 1255 (30 June 1839), TS.MA.e, 1193/59.

<sup>495</sup> 27 January 1847, FO78, Box 3206, Foreign Office.

<sup>496</sup> 2 Ş 1264 (4 July 1848), A.} MKT, 137/39.

<sup>497</sup> 13 L 1264 (12 September 1848), A.} MKT, 147/351.

<sup>498</sup> 21 Ra 1265 (14 February 1849), A.} MKT, 174/82.

<sup>499</sup> 19 Ş 1265 (10 July 1849), MVL, 194/54.

In the period after 1850, small fires and conflagrations continued to be one of the most important concerns of Istanbul. Both Schneider and Cezar mention three conflagrations in 1852 of which the first took place on 28 July, the second on 2 August and the last one on 4 August. The fire on 2 August destroyed 600 mansions (*konak*), while that of 4 August burned down 4000 houses in Samatya and its surroundings.<sup>500</sup> More fires happened in 1855 in Koska, in 1865 in Hocapaşa, in 1870 Beyoğlu, in 1908 in Çirçir, in 1911 at the Sublime Porte and in 1912 in İshakpaşa and Cankurtaran.<sup>501</sup> Cezar makes a list of fires taking place between 1854-1919 and claims that per year at least one or two fires used to take place. Peaks were seen in 1862 (7 fires), 1863 (7 fires), 1864 (8 fires), 1873 (10 fires), 1876/1877 (8 fires), 1897 (7 fires), 1899 (8 fires), 1908/1909 (10 fires), 1910/1911 (10 fires) and 1916 (10 fires). The highest number of building damage was seen in the years 1864 (3334), 1870 (3024), 1908/1909 (4644) and 1915/1916 (8480).<sup>502</sup>

When comparing different sources, it can be noticed that in most cases different choices are made regarding the information provided about the causes, places and magnitude of buildings. Fires that can be found in the primary source material are in some cases not mentioned in secondary sources and chronological overviews. Also, various primary sources differ from each other. European sources, for instance, tend to report fires that took place in their neighbourhood and affected their properties such as the embassy buildings and churches, unless the fire damaged a much larger area in the city. Ottoman court chronicles and chronicles published by independent historians, however, focus more on neighbourhoods with a Muslim population and properties such as mosques, dervish lodges and holy shrines. The *Rûz-names*, on the other hand, provide information which is often not being mentioned in any other source. In the *Rûz-names*, information can be found about fires that affected certain districts and buildings, for instance, houses and residences of the members of the ruling class and about fires the sultan himself has visited.

Another difference is in the content and language of various sources. Europeans are more interested in the political reasons behind and social disturbances around the occurrence of fires. Europeans, therefore, are more inclined to mention arson as a prominent reason behind fires, compared to Ottoman sources. While Europeans extensively describe these political events, they provide less information about the location, neighbourhoods, damage and people affected by the fire, unless the fire affected their own neighbourhood. Ottoman chronicles, however, are more reluctant when it comes to reporting political events and arson, except some chroniclers who are critical in certain periods. Most Ottoman chronicles focus on the exact location where the incident started and which neighbourhoods were hit. Here too, the information provided by the *Rûz-names* differentiates itself by

---

<sup>500</sup> Schneider, "Brände," 400; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 373.

<sup>501</sup> Schneider, "Brände,"; Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde,".

<sup>502</sup> Cezar, "Osmanlı Devrinde," 374.

being brief and to the point. These sources, in most cases, do not present any substantive information than the place, date of a fire and to whom the damaged properties belonged.

Complementary use of different source material provides us with this unique material that helps to analyse the conflagrations of Istanbul from different perspectives, to map their frequency and better understand the reasons behind. As it is evident from what is already concluded by secondary sources, primary sources also confirm that fires increased and decreased in specific periods, due to historical events such as wars, economic crises and uprisings. The detailed chronology gives us a clear overview of the moments when these dips and peaks have taken place. The years 1752, between 1760-1763, 1767, 1771, 1782, between 1785-1786, between 1791-1792, 1797, 1808 and 1826 were characterised by the increase of fires. Also, some important events as the Russo-Ottoman Wars (1768-1774 and 1787-1792), annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia (1783-1787), annexation of Egypt by France (1798), Janissary rebellion (followed by the dispositioning, imprisoning and killing of Selim III in 1807-1808), reform attempts of Mahmud II (1808-1839) and the abolishment and replacement of the Janissary corps (1826) have all taken place in this timespan of hundred years. Historical events coinciding with one of these peaks were associated with internal or external unrest.

The fact that conflagrations peaked in periods of unrest raises questions about the reasons behind their frequent occurrence and how both Ottoman and European sources described and discussed. How various sources discuss the reasons behind conflagrations becomes even more interesting because different sources focus on distinct aspects of conflagrations. The next chapter, therefore, will be an analysis of how Ottoman and European sources interpreted the conflagrations. I aim to clarify to what extent there were similarities and differences between the two perspectives and to what extent socio-political disturbances have played a role in the occurrence of conflagrations by comparing the Ottoman and European analyses and methods they used to deal with conflagrations.

## Chapter 3: Conflagrations from the Ottoman and European Perspectives

### Introduction

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I have demonstrated that different perceptions and perspectives could affect the nature of the information given about conflagrations. Also, when taking the historical context and detailed chronological analysis into consideration, it can be seen that at certain moments in history conflagration reports increased and decreased depending on the shift of focus in the source material. The content and frequency in different secondary and primary sources showed variations per source. This chapter, therefore, will delve deeper into these variations and analyse in detail the information provided by the Ottoman and European source material about the conflagrations, to map which details are provided. The first part of this chapter will focus on the Ottoman source material, while in the second part an analysis will be made of the European source material. I aim to see to what extent the information they provided correspond and differ. The findings will be compared by dividing the information into four subcategories: causes of conflagrations, methods used to prevent them, how firefighting functioned and how damage assessment and recovery took place. These findings will be compared and concluded in the third part of the chapter.

### 3.1 An analysis of the Ottoman sources

In the Ottoman sources, records are kept of conflagrations of all magnitude, from small to destructive ones. Conflagrations were thus one of the important daily concerns of the ruling elite (court historians and diary writers). In certain periods, even two or three references per day can be found. In this chapter, I will analyse this information by dividing it into four subcategories: causes of conflagrations, methods used to prevent them, how firefighting functioned and how damage assessment and recovery took place.

Except for some sources such as Derviş Mustafa Efendi who made a very detailed and prolonged report on the 1782 fires, in most Ottoman sources repetitive patterns are used to describe the conflagrations. These descriptions are very brief and to the point, explaining what happened with only one or two sentences, including the location where the conflagration started, which directions it spread and what damage it caused. Most of the time, Ottoman chroniclers use certain terminology to describe the magnitude of a conflagration. They make use of specific word combinations such as *ihrâk* (fires in general) or *hârik-i cüzî* (small fire) or *hârik-i kebir* (large fire).<sup>503</sup> What is intriguing about this terminology is that the criteria of a small or great fire are not clearly defined. When reading the description, the

---

<sup>503</sup> *Hârik-i cüzî* (small fire) is used for insignificant fires and *hârik-i kebir* (large fire) is used for important conflagrations in various sources such as *Çeşmî-zâde*, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 10; 40; 69; Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 157.

reader cannot find out how destructive the fire was at first glance. Providing the exact number of buildings that were damaged is also not usual. In other words, the quantity in most cases is not or roughly expressed by using approximate quantifications. Although quantifications such as *beş on mikdâr* (five to 10), *yirmi mikdâr* (20), *kırk-elli mikdârı* (40 to 50), *yüz elli kadar* (some 150) are used to indicate the number of houses, in most cases more abstract quantifications such as *bir kaç büyût ve dekâkîn* (a number of houses and shops), *bir kaç aded menazil* (a number of houses) or even *hayli* (a lot) and *nısfından ziyâdesi* (more than half) are popular. When quantifications such as *külliyen* (entirely), *tamamen* (completely), or *bi-'l-külliyeye* (all of them) are used, it is not clear whether the entire district was damaged or not.<sup>504</sup> However, in some cases, further descriptions are provided about where the conflagration started, whether it had branches and which directions these branches followed. This allows us to find out which districts were hit and whether important buildings were destroyed. Especially in the *Rûz-names* there is also a tendency to give the exact location of the building where the fire started with even the name of the person to which the house belonged, mainly if the house belonged to an important person or a state official.

This use of a standard language can also be seen in other descriptions. Specific terminology, for instance, is used to differentiate to which religious community the demolished houses and neighbourhoods belonged. The use of references such as *İslâm hâneleri ve kefere evleri* (houses belonging to Muslims and unbelievers) or only *kefere sahilhânesi* (a waterfront villa belonging to non-Muslims) and *kefere mahallesi* (a non-Muslim neighbourhood) is common. The exact background of the community is then mentioned with references such as *Yehûd hâneleri* (Jewish houses).<sup>505</sup> It is intriguing to see how the *millet* system, the subcategorisation of the population according to religion functioned in case of conflagrations.<sup>506</sup>

What makes the descriptions of conflagrations even more problematic, is the use of the concept of *kazâ*. One of the meanings of this word in modern Turkish is 'accident'. However, *kazâ* can be an ambiguous term since it also refers to the Islamic concept of or *qadâ'* (القضاء) that originally has the meaning of 'God's decision'. Its meaning in religious terminology is that something is predestined or determined to happen by God and cannot be stopped or reversed.<sup>507</sup> When referring to conflagrations, the Ottomans were frequently making use of religious expressions such as '*bi-lutfi 'llahi ta'alâ*' (God's

<sup>504</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 9.

<sup>505</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 1016.

<sup>506</sup> In one of the cases, for instance, there is critique on how the Jews were sticking to their properties during the conflagration: "*adâ-yı mezbûrda olan yehûd tâifesi, gecesi ve ertesi cum'aertesi olmağla, deryâda dahi telâtum olup ve bir eşyâlarına dahi yapışmak, âyin-i bâtıllarında günâh-ı kebâirden olmağla ve ekser hasta olanları ihrâk olup, bir firâr edecek mahall olmamağla, deryâya kendülerini ilkâ ile bir mikdârı dahi deryâda helâk ve zu'm-ı bâtıllarında, [...] tulunbacıların birkaçını Bostancıbaşı Ağâ ahz, vakt ü hâle nazaran yedindeki nesnelere alup; "varın âdemler işinize gidin, Mevlâ-yı mute'âl murâd-ı aliyyesi üzre yaksın. Sizin imdâdınız lâzım değil" deyü [...]"* in Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi I*, 900.

<sup>507</sup> The uses of the Turkish word *kaza* is explained in: "Kazâ," in: *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, consulted on 28 September 2018, <http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info/dia/ayrmetin.php?idno=250110&idno2=#1>.

grace), '*bi-emri 'llahi ta'alâ'* (God's order) and *bi-kazâ-i 'llahi ta'alâ'* (God's decision) in order to mention that the fire was a result of God's decision as a punishment.<sup>508</sup> Also, the majority of Ottoman reports on fires starts with mentioning the concept of *kazâ* whereby (again) fixed structures such as *nâr-ı kazâ* (accidental fire) or *âteş-i kazâ* (accidental fire) are used. That the concept of *kazâ* is being used to point out both an accident and God's destiny, makes it for the reader difficult to distinguish whether it was a real accident or not, if no further context is provided. Besides that, texts can also end with these structures such as *bi-keremihî te'âlâ* (God's grace) to indicate that the conflagration could be extinguished thanks to God's mercifulness.<sup>509</sup>

Another indication that religion was involved in interpreting and describing conflagrations is the use of other religiously important concepts such as public morality (in a negative way) and martyrdom (in a positive way).<sup>510</sup> Independent chronicler Derviş Mustafa Efendi, who made an extensive report of the devastating series of fires in 1782, openly criticises the way how men and women were dressed exaggeratedly, adored vanity and built high-rise buildings which all made God angry. He also notes that Istanbul ignored the misery of the people in Anatolia and Roumelia, as a factor that affected the misery the capital goes through.<sup>511</sup> Eremya Çelebi Kômürçiyân (d. 1695), an Ottoman chronicler of Armenian descent, criticises this point of view by referring to the Ottoman reasoning that if a place was (frequently) hit by fires, it is because of the presence of sinners. If a fire started in a building of sinners, such as a tavern, then the people inside had bad luck and burned alive because entering these buildings was considered a sin too.<sup>512</sup> Besides public morality, martyrdom was another aspect that played a role, but this time in a positive way. During a conflagration on 6 November 1806, for instance, it was explained how a chief of the Janissaries became a martyr when he entered a house to save the residents.<sup>513</sup> In another chronicle, it was referred to the prophet's sayings to justify that people who died during firefighting could be called martyrs according to Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>514</sup> The religious worldview and use of a religious language, thus, dominate the Ottoman perspective and reports on conflagrations. Consequently, when describing the situation, the Ottomans take into consideration 'God's eternal decision', 'sinners that are being punished' or 'firefighters becoming martyrs'.

---

<sup>508</sup> Káldy-Nagy, Gy., "Kađâ", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianguis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 28 September 2018, [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_3751](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3751).

<sup>509</sup> Meaning: 'because of the mercifulness of the almighty' in Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 282.

<sup>510</sup> *Hakk te'âlâ hazretleri cümleye ecirler ihsân eyleye, âmîn* (May God let us do good deeds) in Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 62.

<sup>511</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 50.

<sup>512</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 156.

<sup>513</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi I*, 387-388.

<sup>514</sup> "Ânifen zikr olunan iki Hadîs-i şerîfin evvelkinde harik u garik kelimeleri ketif vezninde sıfatlardır; sâñide fethateynle isimlerdir. Pes bu hadîseyn-i sahîhayn mantûklarınca, harik-ı nâr ve garik-ı mâ' ve boğazına durmuş gussa sebebiyle helâk olan ehl-i İslâm, şühedây-ı kiram zümresinden olur," in Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi I*, 387-389.

Considering this standard use of language in official histories, the reports of chroniclers such as Şemdânîzâde and Şânîzâde that diverge from the official ideology become more valuable. According to these chroniclers, the Ottomans were not always describing the conflagrations as God's eternal decision and from time to time, criticising language raised towards the decisions and actions. Independent chroniclers such as Eremya Çelebi, Şemdânîzâde and Derviş Mustafa did this openly by targeting state policies, while court historians such as Âsim and Şânîzâde criticised the attitude of the Janissaries in a certain period in history, in a period during which the conflict between the state and its army reached a peak (1808 and 1826). Bearing these differences in Ottoman descriptions and analyses in mind, it is in this chapter my aim to analyse the conflagrations from the perspective of this source material. I will make a study based on the information provided by different *Tevârih*, both chronicles published by the historians of the Ottoman court and by independent chroniclers, and *Rûz-names*.

### ***Causes of the conflagrations: accidental or intentional?***

The Ottomans make use of the word *kazâ* to describe almost every fire, which makes it hard to distinguish whether a fire broke out as a result of a real accident or not. Without any further detail, it is not possible to find out. Although most reporters do not provide these details, some texts do contain additional information which suggests that fires indeed did start as a result of real accidents. Various references to stuffy chimneys and neglectful attitudes at shops (especially bakeries) such as inexperienced apprentices causing fire or people falling asleep with tobacco pipes show that accidents were there.<sup>515</sup> For instance, on 2 November 1759, a conflagration started first in a bakery (*etmekci fırını*)<sup>516</sup>, while the one on 22 September 1786 broke out because the wood dust (*talaş*) used by another bakery (*çörekci fırını*) caught fire.<sup>517</sup> On 13 July 1789 again a conflagration started in a bread bakery (*etmekci fırını*) and destroyed the entire market place.<sup>518</sup> On 14 May 1826, another one broke out from a bagel bakery (*simidci furunu*).<sup>519</sup> In these cases that further information is provided about the accident, references to specified bakeries show that these buildings were utmost inflammable places. Not only baking bread but also smoking could be the culprit of a devastating conflagration. On 30 December 1785, the Eyüp Sultan Mosque complex was severely damaged because the warden was smoking in the building and flames spread from his tobacco pipe.<sup>520</sup> Only a few of Ottoman descriptions of accidental fires called '*kâza*' are described as real accidents, for instance, caused by hazardous materials, shops with potential risks or neglectful attitude of people. Even then, it is hard to find out how the conflagration technically started as a matter of fact.

---

<sup>515</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 160.

<sup>516</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>517</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 169.

<sup>518</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 400.

<sup>519</sup> Âsim Efendi, *Âsim Tarihi I*, 562.

<sup>520</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 120.

Arson, on the other hand, is a more concretely reported phenomenon compared to accidents. Already in the early 1720s, it was noticed that some bakers aimed to eliminate their competitor by setting his shop on fire.<sup>521</sup> The same source questions the coincidence that during frequent conflagrations especially high ranked people were targeted and that many incidents started in certain neighbourhoods such as Cibali and Hocapaşa where state officials used to reside.<sup>522</sup> Depending on the reporter, period and historical context, the number of arson reports and who were seen responsible for arson show variations. Independent chronicler Şemdanîzâde, for instance, was someone who was very critical about arson and discussed the lousy attitude of certain Janissary chiefs. He noted that between 17 and 30 June 1752 every night three to five fires broke out in Sultan Selim, Sultan Bayezid and Koska and that the inhabitants of Istanbul had sleepless nights because of patrolling on the streets. It was rumoured that these fires broke out as a result of arson. Şemdanîzâde evaluated how arson was institutionalised. It could be ordered by requesting artificial fires from the Jannisary Ağa to put pressure on, in this case, the Grand Vizier. If someone were evil, he stated, then he could order arson from the Janissary Ağa. If the Ağa were a 'god-fearing person' he would refuse; otherwise, he would cooperate. The goal was scaring or threatening people by causing small fires, burning a couple of houses, but things often got out of hand.<sup>523</sup> However, compared to Şemdanîzâde official court chroniclers Mehmed Hâkim (1753-1766) and Çeşmîzâde Mustafa Reşid (1766-1767) have almost nothing to report on such information about arson. Instead, these chroniclers refer to accidents (or destiny) without providing any deeper context, even though reports on conflagrations increased between the years 1767 and 1769 (See Appendix 2).<sup>524</sup> This increase took place shortly before and during the first years of the Russo-Ottoman War (1768/1774).

In contrast to court chroniclers Hâkim and Çeşmîzâde, independent chronicler Derviş Mustafa Efendi does contain references to arson. Derviş Efendi describes in detail the series of conflagrations that took place in 1782. At some point, he reports that one of the fires that started in the house of a so-called Mehmed Emin Ağa in Langa was not an accident, but something else was involved.<sup>525</sup> Another chronicler who refers to arson is Taylesanizâde Hâfız Abdullah Efendi, again an independent chronicle writer. On 8 September 1785, he reports that some fires were not accidents. Taylesanizâde notes that in just one day twenty-five cases of arson have been noticed. On 20 December 1785, some locations in Aksaray were attacked by arsonists.<sup>526</sup> More incidental reports on arson were reported in the same chronicle in August 1786, when thieves attacked Kartal to set fire and plunder the village. During the

---

<sup>521</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 158.

<sup>522</sup> Karahasanoğlu, *Kadı ve Günlüğü*, 160.

<sup>523</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 162-164.

<sup>524</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*; Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

<sup>525</sup> "kaza olmadığını [...] muhbir oldukda..." in Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 33-34.

<sup>526</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 118.



same incident, arsonists also attacked an ironware dealer.<sup>527</sup> In that same month, another arson attack was reported in Hasköy.<sup>528</sup> Along with the references to arson the number of fire reports, in general, show an increase in the years 1782, 1785-1786 and 1788, with peaks in 1791 and 1792 (See Appendix 2). During these years, the Ottomans were at war with Russia and were losing essential territory such as the Crimean Peninsula. At the same time, the economic situation further deteriorated and the depreciation of the Ottoman currency peaked between 1780-1784. In the same period (1782-1784), Istanbul experienced one of the most destructive series of conflagrations in its history. Although official court chroniclers do not come up with satisfying answers on how and why these frequent conflagrations could have happened, independent chroniclers are more inclined to report arson. Arson and plunder were not necessarily linked to politics only, but also to personal profits and perhaps to economic decline. Although arson seem to have increased simultaneously as more conflagrations were reported, in Ottoman reports it remains an elusive cause of fires.

In later periods and especially in the works of Mütercim Âsım Efendi (d. 1819) and Şânîzâde Mehmed Atâullah Efendi (d.1826), a critique towards Janissaries' behaviour intensifies gradually. Then some expressions start to hint to the increase of arson. Both Şânîzâde and Atâullah experienced and observed the peaking Janissary-conflict at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chronicler Âsım (reports between 1804-1809), for instance, starts at some point to criticise how unlawful and fire-spreading the Janissaries (he uses *Bektâşiyân* here) have become. When he refers to the period 2-11 October 1808, he states that the Janissaries aimed to destruct the state order.<sup>529</sup> In continuation, he suddenly starts to give more details about how the spread of fire could happen and argues that this group of *Bektâşiyye* have set fires in unexpected neighbourhoods as a trap to murder the Grand Vizier.<sup>530</sup> The Grand Vizier who took his precautions said: "those whores are going to burn down entire Istanbul".<sup>531</sup> Then Âsım explains how the Janissaries (uses '*tâ'ife-i Bektâşiyye*' here) occasionally set fires during nights between 30 October-4 November 1808 and how the Grand Vizier interfered.<sup>532</sup> When the tension reached a peak after the Janissaries attacked the Sublime Porte on 16 November 1808, Âsım discusses in detail how the building was set on fire and how the Janissaries attended 'fire-spreading activities'.<sup>533</sup>

The tension between the state and Janissaries is also visible in the reports of Şânîzâde, another court chronicler who too focuses on the turbulent period of 1808-1821. Şânîzâde's assumption is that arson was incidental as a result of disobedience and misbehaviour of 'faithless looters'. One of the

---

<sup>527</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 156.

<sup>528</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 159.

<sup>529</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1163.

<sup>530</sup> "Ve tâ'ife-i Bektâşiyye'nin cümle-i tedbîrlerinden olmak üzere aralık aralık gecelerde ba' zı ba'îd mahallere kundaklar ilkâsiyle harîkler peyda edüp, elbette hasbe'l-kâ'ide Sadria'zam harîklere 'âzim olmağla, ihtilâs-i fırsatla şeb-i târ içre çifte kurşuna âmâc ve ol vechile bî-gâ'ile vü tekellüf raht-ı hayâtını târâc eylemek kasdında olmuşlar," in Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1384.

<sup>531</sup> "Be bu kahbeler gâlibâ İstanbul'u yakacaklar," in Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1385-1386.

<sup>532</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1384.

<sup>533</sup> Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Tarihi II*, 1254-1256.

examples he gives is the behaviour of the men of a certain Hacı Sa'îd Ağa, which resulted in arson. Şânîzâde reports that arson attempts were spotted in March 1816 in Tophane and its neighbourhoods such as Salı Pazarı and Fındıklı. Hacı Sa'îd Ağa and problems in his household were seen responsible for these arson attempts, after which this Ağa was exiled to Tekfûr Dağı.<sup>534</sup> Besides these incidental arson attempts, Şânîzâde refers to a decree dating from 17 August 1818. The decree was issued by the Jannisary Ağa who noted that 'although there is no doubt that frequent fires of the last period happened as God's decision (he uses *kazâ-i Rabbânî* here), there are rumours spread by impertinent people who make work of spreading these whisperings (about arson)'. It is claimed that 'these rumours have always been there and if some faithless looters dare to set places on fire, the protectors of the law should do what is necessary'.<sup>535</sup> We see that 'God's decision (*kazâ-i Rabbânî*)' in fact should be the natural explanation for a conflagration and is considered the main cause at first place. However, if there were arsonists, then these are 'unbelieving looters and vagrants (*dîn ü îmândan bî-behre serserî yağmâci*). It seems here that according to Şânîzâde's reports, it is not acceptable that those who believe in God are involved in arson. All arsonists, thus, are nothing else than unbelievers. This ideology can also be seen in the works Mehmed Es'ad Efendi (d. 1814) and Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi (d. 1907), both court chroniclers calling the conflagrations of Istanbul accidents (or destiny). Almost all fires reported by Es'ad Efendi broke out as a result of accidents<sup>536</sup> except the fire of 24 June 1822. Es'ad reports that a 'hostile non-Muslim' tried to set the harbour and the royal navy on fire.<sup>537</sup> Arson, in these cases, then automatically considered a work of 'unbelievers'.

A different framework arises when at the end of the 1820s, the Janissary conflict starts to aggravate. Court chroniclers Es'ad and Lûtfî start to accuse the members of the army of misbehaviour when the power struggle between the state and its Janissaries reaches a peak. On 15 and 16 June 1826, the Janissaries organise an uprising, while Mahmud II orders the bombing of the military barracks, also known as *Vaka-i Hayriye* (Auspicious Incident). In that same year, the number of fire reports reaches a peak. On 15 June 1826, Es'ad reports that some Janissaries tried to attack the mansion of a certain Necîb Efendi.<sup>538</sup> After this year, reports containing conflagrations and arson significantly decrease. After Es'ad, court chronicler Ahmed Lûtfî, who treated the years 1825-1879, continues to describe the conflagrations of Istanbul as mere accidents without any reference to arson.<sup>539</sup>

---

<sup>534</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 731.

<sup>535</sup> "Bu esnada birbirini müte'âkib vukû' bulan harîkler mutlaka kazâ'-i Rabbânî iktizâsından olarak bunda kimesnenin medhali olmadığı âşikâr ise de, bir alay kendüyi bilmez âdemler kundak bırakmışlar havâdisini kendülere iş güc edüp aslı var yok niçe erâcîf neşrine ictisâr eyledikleri ve öteden berü birbirini müte'âkib harîkler zuhûrunda elsine-i nâsda bu makûle havâdisler olağeldiği [...] ahzına gayret eylemeleri tarafınızdan çorbacı ağalara ve anların taraflarından dahi 'alemdârân ve neferâta gereği gibi muhkem tenbîh ü te'kîde mübâderet olunması, irâde-i seniyye muktezâsından olduğu ma'lûmunuz oldukda, icrây-ı muktezây-ı münîfine himmet eyleyesin," in Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 855.

<sup>536</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 189-190; 225; 282; 337; 380; 454; 499; 502; 530; 550; 562; 620.

<sup>537</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 104.

<sup>538</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 608.

<sup>539</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 414-415; 438; 447; 656; 780-781; 871-872; 881.

The Ottoman source material is full of patterns regarding the use of language. The Islamic concept of '*kâza*' (accident), God's eternal decision, therefore, dominates the reports. Destiny or accident is almost always seen as the main 'cause' of Istanbul's conflagrations. Just a limited number of these reports on '*kâza*' are provided with more details that imply that 'real accidents' were the cause of a fire. However, the content of what is being reported shows variations depending on the writer (official or non-official chronicle and diary), his ideology and the socio-political context in which he experiences the conflagrations. Arson, for that reason, is a rarely reported phenomenon that only gains importance in times of conflicts and periods of disorder, especially to refer to misconducting 'faithless' groups (such as non-muslims or Janissaries—in these cases referred to as Bektashi's). While official court writers such as Âsım and Şânîzâde are less focused on arson and rather criticise the attitude of the Janissaries only in times of uprisings against the state (1808 and 1826), independent chroniclers such as Şemdânîzâde and Taylesanîzâde are more inclined to report arson and express their critique towards the behaviour of Janissaries in general. Only in a few sources references to arson can be found to emphasise the bad intentions of hostile groups, without providing any further context. Consequently, Ottoman sources do not allow to see a pattern in arson attacks. With a few exceptions Ottoman sources in general stick to the 'religious paradigm'. Consequently, they often do not enlighten the real causes of the frequent fires, be it an accident or arson.

### ***Fire prevention***

The Ottoman state made use of various methods to prevent the conflagrations and limit their damage. Material damage seems to have been a considerable reason to introduce certain regulations. Therefore, the Ottomans frequently tried to regulate the construction of high-risk buildings which is the most discussed prevention method in the Ottoman sources. What was considered high-risk changed from time to time and depended on the context? In the early 1760s, wooden structures such as oriels/bay windows, pergolas and terraces, made of wood, were classified as dangerous. By issuing the same edicts over and over again, the Ottoman state tried to guide the inhabitants of Istanbul and stimulate them to build according to the rules.<sup>540</sup> In 1770, for instance, the height and oriel of the buildings were regulated through an order that included punishment for architects not following the rules.<sup>541</sup> Another solution was separating buildings with a potential risk of fire (such as shops) from the rest of the settlement. It was, from time to time, restricted to build above shops. Architectures who did not follow the rules could face punishments, which was the case on 15 November 1785. The head architect was fired because he

---

<sup>540</sup> The edict of 30 May 1762 restricted these types of buildings (Refik, *On İkinci Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 185-186). On 25 January 1811 it was ordered to take down the bachelor's houses in neighbourhoods where fires used to happen (29 Z 1225 (25 January 1811), HAT, 525/25726).

<sup>541</sup> 19 M 1184 (15 May 1770), C..BLD, 3/138.

permitted to build houses above shops.<sup>542</sup> Ten years later, in 1795, another edict restricted building oriels, terraces and pergolas next to the city walls of Istanbul *intra muros*. This regulation was accompanied by a special warning for the Janissary Ağa to punish those who do not obey.<sup>543</sup> The Ottomans continued to introduce these kinds of building restrictions in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The implementation of these regulations, however, has not been an easy task. On 28 August 1818, they were still aiming to restrict the inhabitants of Istanbul to build wide overhanging eaves.<sup>544</sup>

At some point, the restrictions for the construction of buildings started to pave the way for discussions on the use of stone instead of wood. Already on 2 October 1792, it was ordered to rebuild the neighbourhood near the Grand Bazaar of stone.<sup>545</sup> In 1795 another regulation was issued to control the height of these newly constructed stone buildings.<sup>546</sup> However, also at this point, there were problems. After a conflagration at the harbour in 1818, court chronicler Şânîzâde openly criticised the Ottoman methods by giving examples from European metropolises such as Rome, Paris and London.<sup>547</sup> Şânîzâde stressed that ‘roads in these cities were perfectly straight with houses and mansions aligned on both sides having almost no oriels. These buildings and even the shops were built of stone. In case of fire, the damage would be limited to one or two houses, not burning down half of the city like in Istanbul’. Şânîzâde also discussed the presence of water taps on European streets specially built for extinguishing fires.<sup>548</sup> These game-changing ideas have not been important until the *Tanzimât* (1839) until the Ottoman modernisation started to change Istanbul’s urban tissue. Before the *Tanzimât* we can see the discussion on stone intensifying. Court chronicler Lûtfî, who reported on the period after Şânîzâde (after 1825), refers to a report that stresses the beneficence of stone buildings. It is also noted that people cannot get used to stone, nor can they afford the costs.

As a consequence, the state was not successful in encouraging this type of construction. The same report also argues that the strength of stone as building material is incontestable, but wood’s (wooden building) charm and benefits for human health is evident.<sup>549</sup> Even in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottomans tried to implement the construction of stone, but the inhabitants of Istanbul could not afford it. It remains the question to what extent the Ottoman state carried out this implementation seriously and effectively or whether it was just advice to avoid the construction of wooden buildings. Later on, the state continued did take additional measures in the context of

---

<sup>542</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 24.

<sup>543</sup> Ahmed Refik, *On Üçüncü Asr-ı Hicrîde İstanbul Hayatı (1786-1822)* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988), 10.

<sup>544</sup> 25 L 1233 (28 August 1818), HAT, 489/24002A.

<sup>545</sup> 15 S 1207 (2 October 1792), C..BLD, 87/4307.

<sup>546</sup> Ahmed Refik, *On Üçüncü Asr-ı Hicrîde*, 9.

<sup>547</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 854.

<sup>548</sup> “...harîk için yapılmış demür kapaklı kebîr musluklardan,” in Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 854.

<sup>549</sup> Lûtfî refers to a report dating from 1846: “Kârgîrin metâneti münker değil ise de ahşab binânın letâfeti ve hıfz-ı sıhhate hidmeti meydândadır,” in Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 1223-1224.

modernisation. On 8 July 1845, it was issued to build stone walls between wooden houses<sup>550</sup>, while on 18 August 1848 the state decided to widen the streets of Istanbul.<sup>551</sup> On 18 August 1848, it was again ordered to build of stone instead of wood, because of the magnitudes of damages caused by conflagrations.<sup>552</sup> More edicts were issued on 29 August and 9 September 1848 that underlined the importance of constructing stone buildings, because of fire hazard. The implementation of these regulations, however, continued to be troublesome.<sup>553</sup> Despite the numerous regulations issued to regulate the (re)construction of buildings, conflagrations could not be prevented.

Apart from the discussions on the (re)construction of buildings, the Ottomans also discussed the content of buildings. From time to time, they saw the necessity of dealing with certain materials such as tobacco and wood dust (*talaş*). Forbidding the use of tobacco became one of the solutions to prevent fire.<sup>554</sup> The wood dust was commonly used to heat the bakery ovens. Examples show that the Ottoman state tried to control the fire problem by issuing decrees to discourage the use of wood dust, which for instance, was the case on 20 September 1789.<sup>555</sup> The discussion included cleaning shops (especially the bakeries) more carefully because of the potential risks of ovens. On 7 October 1820, a decree was issued for the inhabitants of Istanbul to clean their ovens and report suspicious activity. In that case, the qadi of Istanbul was appointed as the person responsible for this operation, while the Janissaries were asked to patrol in neighbourhoods.<sup>556</sup> In later stages, it was even advised to separate the 'wood (dust) storages' from the main building and not to keep these kinds of materials close to the main buildings, which was the case on 26 July 1849.<sup>557</sup>

Not only the material content but also the moral aspects of conflagrations were considered important. Bachelor's houses but also buildings such as inns (*han*) and coffee shops (*kahvehane*) were seen as potential threats. The Ottoman state tried to control these types of buildings by, for instance, issuing edicts to take down the bachelor's houses if necessary.<sup>558</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi was someone who openly criticised the disregard of moral aspects and linked the devastating conflagrations of 1782 to this attitude. Derviş Efendi referred to 'the people of Anatolia and Roumelia who suffered a lot from plunders and neglected by Istanbul'. He also criticised the corrupted attitude of the inhabitants of

---

<sup>550</sup> 3 B 1261 (8 July 1845), C.BLD., 38/1854.

<sup>551</sup> 18 N 1264 (18 August 1848), MB.İ..., 2/109.

<sup>552</sup> 18 N 1264 (18 August 1848), MB.İ..., 2/109.

<sup>553</sup> 29 N 1264 (29 August 1848), HAT, 1658/19; 10 L 1264 (9 September 1848), HAT, 1658/21.

<sup>554</sup> Dated: 30 December 1785 in Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 120.

<sup>555</sup> 25 Z 1203 (16 September 1789), AE.SABH.I..., 366/25554.

<sup>556</sup> 29 Z 1235 (7 October 1820), HAT, 525/25705.

<sup>557</sup> 6 N 1265 (26 July 1849), A.)MKT.MVL., 17/35.

<sup>558</sup> It is reported that the edict of 30 May 1762 restricted these types of buildings (Ahmed Refik, *Hicri On İkinci Asırda*, 185-186); 29 Z 1225 (25 January 1811), HAT, 525/25726 orders to take down the bachelor's houses in neighbourhoods where fires used to happen.

Istanbul who were overdressing and paying too much attention to their looks. Derviş Mustafa also blamed the soothsayers who draw exaggerated meanings of every astronomic movement.<sup>559</sup>

When it comes to fire prevention, regulations dealing with architectural aspects and contents of buildings are dominating the Ottoman source material. There is an ongoing discussion on constructions such as wooden oriels, eaves and balconies. Later, new discussions were introduced such as replacing the wood by stone and improving the infrastructure by widening the roads. Besides these architectural issues, the Ottomans also discussed the moral deficiencies of buildings which were considered potential high-risk. However, it is evident from the source material that problems linked to architectural deficiencies, use of specific materials or moral aspects could not be helped by methods such as introducing regulations, issuing decrees and carrying out controls. More than that, the problems seem even to have become chronic in this period of a hundred years.

### ***Firefighting***

In the Ottoman sources, almost no details are provided about how firefighting functioned. Although the Ottoman archives are full of payment instructions for reparations and replacements of materials such as pickaxes, hooks and shovels, individual Ottoman sources do not deal in detail with firefighting. Consequently, it is difficult to get a coherent picture of how the Ottomans organised firefighting in a specific period from the sources of that period. Still, individual sources do provide bits and pieces of information which, when put together, create a general picture of firefighting over a longer period (in this case, 1750-1850). The sources demonstrate that the accurate detection of the starting point of conflagrations and reaching the location could be problematic and have effects on the rest of firefighting.<sup>560</sup> If the conflagration could be detected correctly and on time, the firefighters (*tulumbacı*) were expected to carry the fire pumps (*tulumba*) as quick as possible to the location where the fire had started, which due to logistical issues not always happened effortlessly.<sup>561</sup> Carrying the fire pump from one place to another and reaching the location where the fire started could be a challenging task. The sources show that firefighters, and thus the fire pump, often could not reach the location on time, which could have been an important reason why most conflagrations could quickly spread. An intriguing issue seems to be the lack of fire pumps on the Asian side. Backup coming from the European side could not reach the Asian villages, which was the case in 1761 when the fire brigade could not reach Üsküdar due to a strong wind.<sup>562</sup> On 1 September 1785, the fire brigade could again not reach Üsküdar from the

---

<sup>559</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 50.

<sup>560</sup> During a conflagration on 12 April 1826, for instance, the warden who was appointed to detect fires, have steered the workers to a wrong place. At the end of the day, he was reprimanded (Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 550).

<sup>561</sup> Several chroniclers among which Hakim, Taylesanizâde and Câbî made reports of problems that the firefighters encountered with infrastructure when reaching the place: Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,"; Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 92; Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 822.

<sup>562</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

European side in two hours.<sup>563</sup> Same logistical issues are evident from another example which shows that when a lightning hit the Vâlîde-i Atîk Mosque in Üsküdar on 25 December 1811, firefighters in Istanbul were asked to provide assistance who then travelled the entire way through the Tophane district and several other neighbourhoods to cross the water.<sup>564</sup> Given the fact that it was very well known by the Ottomans what kind of devastations conflagrations could cause and that travelling from the European continent to the Asian side was not easy, it is intriguing why this problem occurred so often without any measures being taken. Another example shows that during a conflagration on 3 December 1811 the fire brigade could not reach a fire in the neighbourhood called Dereâğzı, Koyun İskelesi (in Ortaköy) from the sea, due to a strong wind. The fire extinguishers should be carried by land, through Galata, Tophane and Beşiktaş.<sup>565</sup> A visible change of mentality took place after the *Tanzimât* (1839), which resulted in decrees (1846) ordering wider roads to improve the infrastructure and make it easier to reach the fires.<sup>566</sup> In this same context, the construction of new fire pools was also ordered (1848) to quell the shortages of water during fires.<sup>567</sup> Other decrees, issued in August and September 1848, targeted the insufficiency of the existing extinguishers, which was another problem until that moment.<sup>568</sup> Another modernisation took place when the renovation of fire wells and waterways of Istanbul was ordered on 21 August 1850.<sup>569</sup>

Besides the lack of fire pumps and logistical problems, bureaucratic obstacles also seemed to have delayed the firefighting. Derviş Mustafa openly criticised one of these bureaucratic issues by referring to the neglectful attitude of the decision makers who hesitated to interfere during the conflagrations of 1782, because of the personnel costs that were expected to be high.<sup>570</sup> Another example is that it was strictly forbidden for certain officials to leave their posts and attend fires, in this case outside Istanbul *intra muros*. Those officials were obliged to get special permissions, for example, during the conflagration that started in Galata (Kürkçü Kapısı) in October 1807 at the same time as one of the congratulation ceremonies at the Ottoman court. Although it was not a rule to attend this fire outside the city walls ('*Kethûda-yı Rikâb-ı humâyûn, hâric-i surda olan harîka gitmek kânûn değil iken*') some important court members were permitted to go and help to extinguish the conflagration ('*Bostancıbaşı Abdullah Ağa ve Kapudan-ı deryâ Mehmed Hüsrev Paşa [...] izin ve hârîka me'mûr olunup ve sâir ocakluya izin [...]'*).<sup>571</sup>

---

<sup>563</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 92.

<sup>564</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 822.

<sup>565</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 817.

<sup>566</sup> 29 Z 1262 (18 December 1846), A.}DVN., 20/91.

<sup>567</sup> 8 Ca 1263 (24 April 1847), İ..MSM, 25/673.

<sup>568</sup> 29 N 1264 (29 August 1848), HAT, 1658/19; 10 L 1264 (9 September 1848), HAT, 1658/21.

<sup>569</sup> 12 L 1266 (21 August 1850), C..BLD., 115/5719.

<sup>570</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 50.

<sup>571</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 904.

Once the firefighters and other officials reached the conflagration, the question was whether and to what extent a spread had taken place. One of the reports dating from 1812 and reported by chronicler Câbî provides information about how firefighters functioned. When a great conflagration reached the Church of Balat, the priests of that neighbourhood promised the head of firefighters (*Tulunbacıbaşı Ağa*) 15,000 *guruş* to immediately get his men at work, while the fire had already spread into five directions.<sup>572</sup> Also, other Ottoman sources contain critiques about people not doing their jobs properly during firefighting. One source dating from 3 March 1813 notes that people always used to accuse each other of not acting properly. In one case it was the wardens who shouted the beginning of a fire without saying the location<sup>573</sup>, while in another case it was the Cavaliers and workers who refused to attend firefighting operations. On 1 March 1818, it was even ordered to punish these kinds of behaviour.<sup>574</sup> The success of such a regulation is doubtful, given the fact that numerous conflagrations kept causing great devastations. The fact that most conflagrations spread very fast shows that there often was no time, nor the ability and material to stop them. The feeling of desperation is visible in Ottoman sources in which it is being referred to cases during which nothing else could be done instead of praying and watching the flames.<sup>575</sup> The devastation could only be limited if the fire was detected on time before the spread (*sirâyet*) had started.<sup>576</sup> However, less is told about how this spread could take place. On the other hand, reports do contain information that fires could turn into devastations even in ten minutes.<sup>577</sup> It is also reported that while some people were working hard to extinguish the fire, some other people just watched and prayed.<sup>578</sup> We need to keep into account here that firefighting was a dangerous and deadly task. Many workers and firefighters regularly lost their lives during these operations.<sup>579</sup>

The lack of organisation and order was perhaps the most important reason why firefighting needed to be monitored constantly. Monitoring operations, stimulating workers and distributing money, for that reason, had become important customs throughout centuries.<sup>580</sup> Certain amounts and gifts were distributed, in the expectation that officials and workers made the necessary efforts to extinguish a conflagration.<sup>581</sup> It is often reported that money was handed to officials called *Ağa Karakulağı* and *Vezîr-i Âzâm Karakulağı*.<sup>582</sup> These henchmen of the Janissary Ağa or the Grand Vizier

---

<sup>572</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 899.

<sup>573</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 949.

<sup>574</sup> 23 L 1233 (26 August 1818), C..BLD., 25/1202.

<sup>575</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 189.

<sup>576</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 282.

<sup>577</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 499.

<sup>578</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 189.

<sup>579</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 147-148.

<sup>580</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 147-148.

<sup>581</sup> During a fire that took place between 27-29 July 1774, gold was distributed to get the fire extinguished: in Necati Öndikmen, "Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name (1188: 1174/1175), Yazan: Mustafa Ağa," *Unpublished Thesis*, Istanbul University.

<sup>582</sup> In the Rûz-name of Abdulhamit I several reports are made on the sultan visiting the location of the fire and giving money to this so-called *Ağa Karakulağı* after the fire was extinguished (Öndikmen, "Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name,")



were responsible for monitoring and reporting fires.<sup>583</sup> However, distributing money may also have created its own business. During the 1812 conflagration in Balat, extra workers were sent to the Governor (*Kāimmakām/Kaymakam Paşa*), Admiral (*Kapudan Paşa*) and Janissary Ağa (*Segbânbaşı Ağa*), who were asked to make an effort to extinguish the fire with ten fire pumps (*on mikdârı tulumba*).<sup>584</sup> In addition to that, money was also given to other helpers (*miçolara ve sâirlere ihsân ile*). From a certain moment onwards, the Ottomans decided to keep records of these distributions. A decision from 26 October 1821 orders the regulation of the distribution of gifts during firefighting.<sup>585</sup>

Once the firefighters arrived at the location, together with local crowds, they started to extinguish the conflagration. The water pump (*tulumba*) was one of the essential elements of fire extinguishing.<sup>586</sup> The Ottoman stored these pumps at important places such as military barracks in Beyoğlu. From time to time it is reported that these fire pumps were repaired<sup>587</sup>, or replaced by new ones.<sup>588</sup> In other cases, fire extinguishers were carried in case of fire or for precautionary reasons. In one of these cases, a fire pump was ordered when ‘gunpowder’ was being transported which was coming from the storehouse of the navy.<sup>589</sup> The work was not done with the transport of the fire pump. Finding enough water was another issue the firefighters had to tackle. The sources indicate that already in the early 1750s the Ottomans were experimenting with a new fire extinguisher invented by Bostancılar Tulumbacısı Mehmed Ağa. This ‘waterless water pump (*susuz tulumba*)’, as it was called. This hosed pump could suck and pump water from a distance.<sup>590</sup> Carrying water in bowls, which normally happened, would not be needed. However, finding enough water remained a serious problem for some reason. Despite the introduction of the ‘waterless water pump’, in 1768 (17 July) locals in Üsküdar were still standing next to the pumps forming a human chain to carry water.<sup>591</sup> Even when the Sultan himself kept watch over the firefighting, firefighters (Janissaries) got paid extra and were put under pressure, carrying water in earthenware jars was not that simple and sufficient to extinguish devastating conflagrations.<sup>592</sup> In case that a conflagration raged in the vicinity of the coast, then the sea water could rush to help, as it was the case on 3 December 1811 in Ortaköy.<sup>593</sup> Since it is reported that a ‘waterless water pump’ was invented in the 1750s, it provokes the question of why carrying water remained

---

<sup>583</sup> Öndikmen, “Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name,”

<sup>584</sup> “...harıkda olan kâimmakâm Paşa’ya ve Kapudan Paşa ve Segbânbaşı Ağa’ya ve gayrılara hasekiler irsâl ile, gayret etmelerini tenbîh edüp” in Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 900.

<sup>585</sup> 29 M 1237 (26 October 1821), D..BŞM.d..., 8845/1237.

<sup>586</sup> “[...] tulumbar ile hareket ü sür’at eylediler ise dahi,” in Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 117.

<sup>587</sup> It was the case for the ‘tulumba’ in Azapkapısı in March 1783: 15 R 1197 (20 March 1783), C..AS., 1194/533387.

<sup>588</sup> For instance, two big fire extinguishers were ordered on 27 August 1819 for the barracks in Beyoğlu: 6 Za 1234 (27 August 1819), C..AS., 348/14399.

<sup>589</sup> 29 R 1249 (15 September 1833), C..BH.,118/5736.

<sup>590</sup> “[...] kuyudan su çıkarmaya hortum sarkıtup, iyi cerreder ya’nî tulumbayı tahrîk ettikde bir hortum ile kuyudan tulumbanın havzuna su çıkarır, âher hortum ile havzdan matlûb olan mahâlle su erişdirur” in Şem’dânî-Zâde, *Şem’dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 175.

<sup>591</sup> 2 Ra 1182 (17 July 1768), AE.SMST.III, 120/9244.

<sup>592</sup> Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *Harik Risâlesi*, 58-60.

<sup>593</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 817.

important, years after this invention. It is also genuine to question the effectiveness of the existing methods the Ottomans used, such as using water wells and pools to pump water. A significant change of mentality did take place from the 1840s onwards when the Ottoman state started to take new measures such as renewing the infrastructure (1846)<sup>594</sup>, ordering new pumps (1848)<sup>595</sup> and repairing the wells and waterways (1850).<sup>596</sup> However, it seems that methods used to extinguish conflagrations and find water in the period between 1750 and 1850 were not effective.

In cases that extinguishing a fire was unsuccessful, methods were used to prevent the spread and protect properties. One of these methods was tearing buildings down to create space between the flames and the rest of the city. It became a custom that the chief architect was obliged to be present during fire extinguishing, to decide which buildings should be taken down. He was expected not to leave the place before the fire was extinguished.<sup>597</sup> To save as much property as possible, (re)location of properties took place by the locals taking care of their goods and that even carriers were employed to realise that. On 22 September 1755, for instance, Osman III attended the firefighting and ordered to help the weak and transport their goods to the *Ağa Bahçesi* and Mahmudpaşa Mosque. When the flames reached the mosque, he started to cry.<sup>598</sup> In one other case, on 26 June of 1757, people in one of the neighbouring districts heard that a fire was raging in Cibali. The warden of that neighbouring district of Cibali has not taken this seriously and slept further. When the situation worsened, and fire in Cibali started to spread towards their neighbourhood, people and carriers have desperately been moving their goods.<sup>599</sup> On 8 January 1767, when another conflagration reached the *Kafesli Harem Köşkü*, it was advised to move all the properties from the pavilion building, because it was too late to fight the flames.<sup>600</sup>

Plunder was only relevant to mention if the identity of the looters were relevant too. During a conflagration on 11 May 1767, for instance, the newly-built mansion of a treasurer was plundered by his gardeners and other workers who were mentioned explicitly.<sup>601</sup> Plunder was also reported when Janissaries attacked the Sublime Porte on 16 November 1808. Plunder during firefighting, therefore, seems to have been an occasional problem in the Ottoman sources.

The Ottomans struggled with problems such as logistical problems, lack of material, bureaucratic obstacles, organisational issues and corruption that have become chronic over time. Although a significant change of mentality with regards to the renovation of infrastructure and renewing

---

<sup>594</sup> 29 Z 1262 (18 December 1846), A.}DVN., 20/91.

<sup>595</sup> 29 N 1264 (29 August 1848), HAT, 1658/19; 10 L 1264 (9 September 1848), HAT, 1658/21.

<sup>596</sup> 12 L 1266 (21 August 1850), C..BLD., 115/5719,.

<sup>597</sup> 29 Z 1255 (4 March 1840), C..BLD., 16/768.

<sup>598</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 182.

<sup>599</sup> "eşya çıkaranlar bir kaç mahalle ba'id mu'emmen mulahazası ile eşyasını naklettiği mahalle bir kac sa'at sonra ateş geldi..." in Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 9.

<sup>600</sup> "çünkü itfâsı vakti geçmiş, bâri eşyâsı nakl olunsun buyurup...", in Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 94.

<sup>601</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 29.

material can be seen from the 1840s onwards, the majority of examples show that the Ottomans have not been successful in preventing the spread of flames, conflagrations could not be extinguished on time and fought effectively.

### ***Damage assessment and recovery***

According to Ottoman sources, many conflagrations could not be prevented and extinguished on time. Fires could spread very quickly, cause significant damage to parts of the city with at the end complete havoc. Most Ottoman reports contain information about the starting point of conflagrations, how it spread and in which neighbourhoods it raged. Special attention is paid to buildings of particular importance. Especially the *Rûz-names* frequently report which neighbourhood and houses the Sultan visited during or after an incident. In some cases, even more information is provided such as the (family) name(s) of these household(s) and whether the building was recently built. Not only diary writers but also court chroniclers were keen on giving details about the names and locations of neighbourhoods if the conflagration was considered 'big' and the devastation was 'great'. The extent of the conflagration was defined according to the importance of the damaged buildings. Therefore, more details can be found, in case that public buildings were damaged such as the marketplace or harbour. The properties belonging to the ruling elite or buildings of the foreign embassies are explicitly mentioned. For instance, on 23 January 1767, when a conflagration broke out from the houses between the marketplace of Hocapaşa and the sultan's palace, chronicler Çeşmîzâde explicitly mentioned buildings such as the dervish lodge of Aydınzâde (*Tekyesi*), the *medrese* of the chief white eunuch (*Kapıağası Medresesi*) and houses belonging to the personnel of the palace (*ağalara mahsus olan mahallin ebniye ve sukûfu*).<sup>602</sup> Examples of similar references to the households of certain families are the Mandaloğlu mansion<sup>603</sup>, a newly built house of the treasurer İbrahim Şârim Efendi<sup>604</sup>, the building of Ahmed Çavuş in Ayazma<sup>605</sup>, the household of the qadi of Baghdad Mudurnulu Osman Efendi<sup>606</sup> or the mansion of the Şeyhülislam Nakîb İbrahim Efendi.<sup>607</sup>

When the buildings of the Dutch, Sicilian and Russian embassies burned down as a result of a conflagration in Galata on 27 September 1767, the damage was reported explicitly.<sup>608</sup> In some cases, the exact information about the building where the incident started is provided, which was the case on 6 August 1784. Chronicler Taylesanizâde reports an incident starting in the house of a certain Mustafa Efendi next to a grocery store called Yalnız Bakkal, near the Fethiye Mosque in Balat. This very specific

---

<sup>602</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 14.

<sup>603</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 177.

<sup>604</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 29.

<sup>605</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 121.

<sup>606</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 44.

<sup>607</sup> Câbî Ömer Efendi, *Câbî Tarihi II*, 790.

<sup>608</sup> Çeşmî-zâde, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, 58.

information is being followed by more details about the spread towards Fener Kapısı, Kuyudibi and the Kuyudibi Mosque. The mansions of Paşazâde, Hoca Esseyid Abdülhalîm Efendi, Salim Efendi, Şeyhülislâm Esseyid İbrahim Efendi and Murâd Efendi (*Konakları*) were also hit. The conflagration continued to the neighbourhoods of Kiremid and Çukur, damaging the Diragoman, Nişâncı and Kovacı Dede Mosques and houses around these buildings.<sup>609</sup> Another court chronicler Es'ad Efendi refers to particular buildings such as storehouses<sup>610</sup>, mosques, hammams and bakeries when he reports a devastating conflagration.<sup>611</sup> From time to time the damage can also be tracked in various archival sources that inform about building materials such as lime and roof tiles, ordered after conflagrations, to start the reconstruction.<sup>612</sup> The Ottomans gave attention to detecting the buildings belonging to certain persons and institutions. Damage assessment in these sources, therefore, remains limited to these buildings. Although court chroniclers regularly give detailed information about these kinds of buildings, the Ottoman source material does not contain information about how the damage to other buildings (such as regular houses) was assessed. However, this does not automatically mean that the Ottomans did not assess this damage.

Conflagrations could cause serious damages to great parts of the city. According to one of Şemdânîzâde's reports, in the early 1750s, these devastations were worsened due to strong winds. As a result, thousands of houses (he says 'five to ten') used to burn to the ground. It was not only houses that burned down, but also properties and belongings that a person could accumulate in his entire life from his childhood. In addition to properties, thousands of animals and inhabitants used to burn alive. A considerable number of people regularly lost their lives during firefighting, and many of them got injured.<sup>613</sup> Places hit by great conflagrations became deserted. Şemdânîzâde reports that after such conflagrations people could not walk safely on the streets even in pairs.<sup>614</sup> The picture Şemdânîzâde draws, shows how enormous the destruction and desolation after conflagrations have been and how the inhabitants of Istanbul were hit socially and immaterially. Not only the loss of their properties but also their belongings such as (personal) libraries and sacred spaces of emotional value could be hit.<sup>615</sup>

---

<sup>609</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 62.

<sup>610</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 282.

<sup>611</sup> Es'ad Efendi, *Es'ad Tarihi*, 380.

<sup>612</sup> 29 B 1170 (19 April 1757), C..BLD., 54/2684; 29 Ş 1196 (7 October 1782), C..BLD., 140/6966; 14 Ş 1207 (25 May 1793), C..BLD., 17/829.

<sup>613</sup> "...rüzgârına musâdife etmekle beş on bin ev yanar nicelerin hem hânesi yanar, hem küçük yaşından beru hâsıl-ı ömrü olan mameleki yanar, elleri böğründe kalır bir evde sâhibinden başka sâ'irinin dahi asâleten ve emâneten mal ve eşyası yanar ve nîce bin hayvanat yanar; ba'zen nîce nüfûs-ı insan yanar ve itfâsma sa'î edenler de gâh ölür; çok kimesne mecrûh olur ve ba'zısı helâk olur..." in Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 164.

<sup>614</sup> The conflagration of 26 June 1757: "...bu def'a olan zarar evvelki hasârete gâlibdir. Harîk yerleri sahralar ve beller olup, bir iki adam yalnız geçemez oldu." In Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi II-A*, 10.

<sup>615</sup> On 3 September 1754 the personal library of one of the state officials named Yusuf Efendizâde Efendi in Beşiktaş was hit by a fire. It is reported that he shortly after this fire died of sorrow, which is reported in Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 176. During another fire occurred on 22 September 1755 Osman III attended the firefighting and ordered to help the weak and transport their goods to the Mahmudpaşa Mosque. After this mosque burned down, the sultan started to cry desperately, which is reported in Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târihi I*, 182.

Also, many people became injured or disabled during firefighting (he calls *azîm sakatlık*).<sup>616</sup> In one of the other descriptions providing details, Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi explains that after the conflagration in Cibali on 31 August 1833, many people were crying and shouting around mosques. The qadi of Istanbul was appointed to move these people to appropriate neighbourhoods, while on the other hand it was ordered to buy tents for those who preferred not to move.<sup>617</sup>

The Ottoman state was actively involved in crisis management and tranquillising the tense atmosphere. Sources tell that they did this by distributing gifts and money to the injured personnel<sup>618</sup>, remitting prisoners' debts after a conflagration<sup>619</sup> and moving shops to temporary locations.<sup>620</sup> From another source, we understand that money was also given to people whose houses were hit by a conflagration.<sup>621</sup> The state was also involved in regulating and (re)pricing the workforce and materials to limit the emergence of the black market.<sup>622</sup> The state did this by issuing decrees, making an effort to help the shortages of food, housing and building materials.<sup>623</sup> To solve the food problem, especially when a considerable number of mills and bakeries were damaged, it was necessary to pursue production. In case of shortage in Istanbul, raw materials such as flour and cereals were quickly ordered from the neighbouring regions.<sup>624</sup> Also, spare parts such as that of millstones were ordered.<sup>625</sup> Housing could also become a severe problem after conflagrations. An example dating from 19 May 1833 shows that the Greek patriarch expressed his appreciation for a specific decree that was issued to move those who lost their houses to appropriate neighbourhoods with affordable rent.<sup>626</sup>

Tens of other reports were made on the mobilisation and reconstruction of the city, which shows that a quick replacement of the destroyed buildings was something to which the Ottomans attached importance. Various regulations point to the quick recovery of buildings, not specifically the ones that produced food, but also buildings that were considered important for the state, such as military barracks or armouries.<sup>627</sup> In some cases, reparations were ordered even for the same day immediately after the conflagration took place.<sup>628</sup> Recovery from the shortage of building materials was made possible by ordering artisans from different other cities to produce materials such as lime

---

<sup>616</sup> Taylesanizâde reports that many people lost their lives during the conflagrations of 6 January and 13 July 1789 in Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 339 & 400.

<sup>617</sup> "Pek çok halk bî-mekân câmi' hâvîlerinde nâlân u giryân oldular. Bunları münâsib mahallere yerleşdirmek ve istek edenlere çadır almak üzere İstanbul kadısına olunan buyuruldu...", Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 900.

<sup>618</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi II-A*, 48.

<sup>619</sup> Taylesanizâde, *Taylesanizâde Tarihi*, 400.

<sup>620</sup> 29 Z 1230 (2 December 1815), HAT, 488/23952.

<sup>621</sup> Öndikmen, "Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name,".

<sup>622</sup> Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Lûtfî Tarihi*, 900; 5 M 1173 (29 August 1759), C..BLD., 14/663.

<sup>623</sup> 13 L 1264 (15 July 1848), A.} MKT, 147/351.

<sup>624</sup> 4 N 1196 (13 August 1782), C..IKTS., 341692; 29 N 1196 (7 September 1782), C..BLD., 138/6874.

<sup>625</sup> 14 Ş 1207, (27 March 1793), C..BLD., 17/829.

<sup>626</sup> 29 Z 1248 (19 May 1833), HAT, 780/36531A.

<sup>627</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde, *Şem'dânî-zâde Târîhi I*, 158; 29 Z 1198 (13 November 1784), HAT, 31/1450; 10 Ra 1224 (25 April 1809) D..BŞM.d..., 7464; 2 Ş 1264 (4 July 1848), A.} MKT, 137/39.

<sup>628</sup> Ülker, "Hâkim Tarihi,".

(*kireç*)<sup>629</sup>, but also to quickly build new ovens to produce roof tiles (*kiremit*) for Istanbul.<sup>630</sup> The state-controlled the trade in these kinds of materials to make sure that Istanbul had enough to quickly build new houses. It became, for instance, restricted to export roof tiles to foreign traders in periods of shortages.<sup>631</sup> By regulating the internal market, the state forced local traders not to raise the prices.<sup>632</sup> Only in August 1799, it was reported that after a conflagration a certain insured amount was paid to some British traders.<sup>633</sup> Nearly two decades after this report (somewhere in the 1810s) Şânîzâde referred to the significance of such an insurance system. According to the system that was already in use in London, buildings were being refurbished based on a certain inventory made before the conflagration. When explaining the advantages of this system, Şânîzâde adds that during a conflagration there would be no need for a rush and the property holder can do his job without any hurry. The furniture of the building would be replaced as if nothing happened. Şânîzâde here criticises that such a system is not even being discussed on Islamic soil.<sup>634</sup> As the examples show, according to Ottoman sources, the state seems to have played an important role in detecting the location of the fire, assessing the damage to buildings of a certain value, helping the inhabitants, reconstructing the city as quickly as possible, providing extra building material when needed and controlling the black market. However, the state seems to have been focused more on buildings that were considered important.

The analysis of the Ottoman primary source material demonstrates that the historical context and period in which conflagration have taken place were highly determinant for what was reported and what kind of language was used. Independent chroniclers as Şemdânîzâde used a more critical language towards the Janissaries and their link with conflagrations. Court historians such as Çeşmîzâde and Taylesanîzâde did not report about arson. In later stages, this attitude slightly changed when the conflict between the Ottoman state and its Janissary corps reached a peak. Court historian Şânîzâde then did use a criticising language towards the Janissaries, when he blamed them of setting fires. In that period, Şânîzâde also expressed critique towards the Ottoman style of building and lack of an insurance system. The fact that chroniclers such as Şemdânîzâde and Şânîzâde saw the necessity to analyse further and criticise the occurrence of conflagrations and policies behind them, seem to have been a way to express dissatisfaction about certain socio-political events within a certain historical context. While independent chroniclers as Şemdânîzâde expressed their critique based on their vision, court chroniclers as Şânîzâde seem to have done this within the frameworks of the Ottoman state. Conflagrations, thus, were not only considered accidents and were part of the socio-political life. However, the necessity to report

---

<sup>629</sup> 29 Ş 1196 (9 August 1782), C..BLD., 140/6966.

<sup>630</sup> 5 R 1197 (10 March 1783), C..IKTS., 37/1848.

<sup>631</sup> 10 M 1210 (27 July 1795), C..BLD., 130/6468.

<sup>632</sup> 5 M 1173 (29 August 1759), C..BLD., 14/663..

<sup>633</sup> 29 S 1214 (2 August 1799), HAT, 257/14779.

<sup>634</sup> Şânî-zâde, *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II*, 853-854.

everything and criticise the reasons behind the occurrence of conflagrations were not always there. Therefore, the information provided in the Ottoman source material remains very limited and selective. A lot of information is being left entirely out of the picture. As a result, in the Ottoman source material, the image of conflagration, their causes, impacts and assessment of damage remain fragmentary. In order to complete this image, I will consult European source material and analyse the information given in these sources about the conflagrations in the next part of this chapter.

### 3.2 An analysis of the European sources

The material of the second part of this chapter comes from the Dutch, British and French diplomats who resided in Istanbul and sent reports to their home countries. The analysis will be subdivided into the same categories as in the previous part of the chapter: the causes of conflagrations, methods used to prevent them, how firefighting functioned and how damage assessment and recovery took place. Before the analysis, it is necessary to understand the social and political position of these diplomats by looking at how and under which circumstances they have written their observations.

The representatives of the British, French and Dutch governments were settled in Pera (Beyoğlu). With its large non-Muslim population, the neighbourhood outside the city walls of Galata to the north of Istanbul *intra muros* maintained close commercial ties with Europe.<sup>635</sup> The trade-oriented and economic character of Galata/Pera attracted the Dutch, British and French in times that the Ottoman Empire emerged as a market. The French acquired special trade concessions called capitulations already in 1569. In 1580, the British followed them.<sup>636</sup> On 14 March 1612, the first Dutch ambassador Cornelis Haga (1578-1654) arrived in Istanbul.<sup>637</sup> Although the primary goal of the Western-European states was trading on Ottoman soil without restrictions, the diplomats did not only deal with commercial issues but also noted their daily observations. They reported these observations to their home countries in detail. Along with events such as celebrations, enthronements, wars, conflicts, political disturbances, calamities and (unexpected) incidents, conflagrations were frequently mentioned in ambassadors' reports.

From the perspective of a European envoy, conflagrations had in almost all cases to do with other social, political or economic issues. It is, therefore, essential to map the geographical, ideological and political factors that influenced the Europeans and their reports. For instance, during periods of war or when an envoy was forced to leave the city due to a conflict, there are no (conflagration) reports.

---

<sup>635</sup> E. Nathalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 04 (2009): 771.

<sup>636</sup> Halil İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar-I: Klasik Dönem (1302-1606) Siyasal Kurumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişim* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), 315.

<sup>637</sup> Marlies Hoenkamp-Mazgon, *Het Ambassadegebouw en Zijn Bewoners sinds 1612* (İstanbul: Ofset Yapımevi, 2009), 22.

Especially during longer periods of wars that took place between the Ottomans and another state, in European reports, preference was given to military issues. Consequently, fewer fire incidents were reported. In periods of widespread dissatisfaction, internal or external conflicts or an increase of the political tension, thus, could affect the content. In cases that the envoys did not feel safe or were targeted by certain groups, the number of arson attempts and conflagrations, they reported an increase. Devastating conflagrations such as that of 1782 and 1784, for instance, had much more impact on the citizens than other small fires. Thus, more extensive reports on these conflagrations can be found.

Apart from their diplomatic and political position, the religious backgrounds and personal worldviews of these envoys also played a vital role in the forming of their stories. The location where they were stationed too was important. In cases that a conflagration less impacted their neighbourhood and social life, the incident is only shortly mentioned at the very end of the text, with one or two references. If the effects touched the representatives and their families, communities or properties, then often a more extensive story is written at the very beginning of the report with a potential continuation in the following report(s). In cases that the representatives and their community were hit physically, economically and directly, even a list of the damaged properties with all the costs can be found, being accompanied by an extensive story. Examples of this last category are the situations that conflagrations damaged the embassy buildings. In a report sent on 3 February 1767, right after their embassy building completely burned down, the Dutch reported the damage extensively and added an inventory of the property.<sup>638</sup> A similar report was written by the British after a conflagration destroyed their building on 21 April 1810. The British made a complete list of all the sums paid to the Ottoman fire brigade, officials and locals who helped to extinguish the fire.<sup>639</sup> For that reason, the frequency and impact of the conflagrations, especially on their neighbourhood and daily life have influenced the diplomats and the way they described conflagrations. European envoys included details about socio-political life in Ottoman Istanbul as well. With their reports, correspondents tried to convince and encourage the policy-makers in their home countries to fund (re)constructions and replacement of properties. European reports become more relevant to study not only because of their link with the conflagrations of Istanbul but also because of the power relations with the Ottomans. The socio-political events of the era and social aspects of daily life in the city are described very detailedly.

Keeping these factors in mind, I first will look at how conflagrations are defined in European reports, what was considered the major cause of conflagrations, how they were prevented, how firefighting functioned and recovery was realised. My analysis will be based on the Dutch and British correspondence between Istanbul and The Hague/London and be supported by some French and

---

<sup>638</sup> 3 February 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>639</sup> 16 May 1810, FO 78, Box 70, Foreign Office.



Spanish correspondence and travelogues. It should be taken into account that because there were no diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire between 1799 and 1802, the Dutch ambassador stayed in Bucharest and sent his reports from there. Also, in the period between 1827 and 1832, there were diplomatic tensions between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, which affected the contents of British reports.

### ***Causes of the conflagrations: accidental or intentional?***

“The materials forming the construction of private houses are the principal cause of fire accidents; almost all of these houses are constructed of wood and lean on each other. The use of *tandours* to supplement the chimneys gives rise to a large number of these accidents. But the most fatal ravages were caused by the Janissaries, who, in cases they want to show signs of discontent or foment sedition, set various places of the capital on fire.”<sup>640</sup>

The observations of the French diplomat Antoine-François Andréossy, who resided in Istanbul in the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, adequately summarises the main causes of devastating conflagrations in Istanbul: accidents and arson.<sup>641</sup> In European correspondence, conflagrations are described as commonly seen calamities that are part of daily life. The conclusion can be drawn from the frequency of references and use of language when conflagrations are described.<sup>642</sup> Especially if a conflagration did not have any major effect on the life in Constantinople (Istanbul *intra muros*) or Pera, to say only destroyed a couple of houses, then it is described as just one of the many incidents that happened again.<sup>643</sup> Just a small number of these incidents were explicitly mentioned as accidents. When looking at this small fraction of accidents, only in a limited number of cases, the details of the exact reason for the accident is given. In many cases, less or no details are provided of why such an accident could happen. To give examples, a British report dating from 15 January 1767 contains an anecdote about “a pan of coals being put in a room by some of the people to warm them, who fell asleep”.<sup>644</sup> Another report, written by the Dutch on 25 February 1792, claims that the Prussian ambassador and his family had forgotten to put out a stove that burned for two days and a serious fire could only be prevented at the very last moment.<sup>645</sup> However, such examples are scarce to find. In other cases, the emphasis is

---

<sup>640</sup> “*Les matières qui entrent dans la construction des maisons des particuliers sont la cause première des accidens [sic] du feu; ces maisons sont presque toutes en bois, et tiennent les unes aux autres. L’usage des tandours, pour suppléer aux cheminées, fait naître un grand nombre de ces accidens [sic]. Mais les ravages les plus funestes étaient causés par les Janissaires, qui, lorsqu’ils voulaient donner des signes de mécontentement, ou qu’ils fomentaient une sédition, mettaient le feu dans divers endroits de la capitale,*” in Antoine-François Andréossy, *Constantinople et le Bosphore de Thrace Pendant les Années 1812, 1813, 1814 et Pendant l’Année 1826-1828*, Bibliothèque National de France, p 176.

<sup>641</sup> 16 March 1754, SP 97, Box 37, State Papers; 1 September 1763, SP 97, Box 42, State Papers.

<sup>642</sup> “...brand die hier so frequent syn (fires that are so frequent here)...” in 1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>643</sup> “*Sedert is er wederom brand in deese capitaale geweest dog daar syn maar seven huysen door de vlamme verteert* (Since then, again there has been a fire in this capital, but only seven houses have been consumed by the flames)” in 1 February 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>644</sup> 15 January 1767, SP 97, Box 43, State Papers.

<sup>645</sup> 25 February 1792, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

rather put on the frequency of these accidents. Whether the number of these accidents increased or decreased seems to have been more important than its exact cause. Therefore, when analysing these reports, periods can be tracked when strikingly more accidents took place, and the frequency significantly increased. Moreover, when looking at the use of language and connections made between the frequency of fires and the current political situation, it can be concluded that for Europeans, there was more behind these series of accidents. In one of the reports dating from 17 April 1778, the frequency of conflagrations formed the main reason for discontent among the inhabitants.<sup>646</sup> Another report dating from 24 July 1782 refers to a period during which fire accidents were so frequent that this “endangered the Grand Vizier’s position” because he was considered responsible for ‘every single event’.<sup>647</sup> It is worth noting that, if there were no accidents for a while, this was also something important for the diplomats to note.<sup>648</sup>

Like the French diplomat Andréossy, the Spanish traveller Jose Moreno referred to “neglect” and “other unforeseen causes” as the major causes of conflagrations. Moreno also notes that “arsonists [...], under the pretext of helping, enter[ed] the houses; to manifest by this means their discontent about the government in times of famine or misfortune.”<sup>649</sup> Both Andréossy’s and Moreno’s descriptions are characteristic of European reports that contain explicit references to arson as the main culprit of Istanbul’s conflagrations. As arson increases, European reports become more detailed. Especially in cases that arson starts to threaten the diplomats and their environments, special attention is being paid to conflagrations in general. The first important reason for the increase of arson, according to the European source material, was popular discontent, more specifically, discontent among the Janissaries. As early as in the 1750s references can be found referring to the Janissary conflict. A report dating from 4 July 1752 states that the Ottoman government should maintain good relations with its army to prevent arson.<sup>650</sup> In another report sent during the same period, the Etmeydanı (literally: Meat Square), which is not far from the Janissary barracks, is called the square where the Janissary rebellions usually started.<sup>651</sup> These two examples indicate that frequent Janissary rebellions were not surprising, and if the

---

<sup>646</sup> “The frequency of these accidents has always been looked upon here as a symptom of discontent,” in 17 April 1778, SP 97, Box 54, State Papers.

<sup>647</sup> “These accidents of Fire become very frequent, and are ominous for the Grand Visir, who is made responsible for every event,” in 24 July 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>648</sup> “No more accidents of the Plague, or of Fire, have been heard of since my last, in this Capital, which continues to enjoy tranquillity,” in 25 November 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>649</sup> “*En cuanto á los incendios no siempre provienen allí de un descuido, ó de otras causas imprevistas: teiene tambien no poca parte la malicia de los incendiarios que, socolor de ayudar, entran á sacó las casas; ó manifiestan por este medio su descontento del Gobierno en tiempo de hambres ó infortunios,*” in Jose Moreno, *Viaje a Constantinopla*, 165-168.

<sup>650</sup> “The day after, the new Vizir having assum’d the power, the people to shew, that their intention was not fulfill’d for they were perfectly content with the former, about four in the afternoon, set fire to another part of the [torise?] but by his activity, and destroying some houses it was soon extinguish’d,” in 4 July 1752, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>651</sup> “...about 20,000 in this extremily [sic], encamp’d on the great place call’d the Eidhmeidan (Etmeydani), their usual resort, when they intend a Rebellion, they remain’d there three days, with great tranquillity,” in 23 July 1752, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

army was unhappy with the government's actions, rebellions and arson could potentially increase. The Janissary issue, however, started to dominate the political and social life from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and not surprisingly, references in European reports in this period show an increase. A report from 17 August 1779 describes in detail how unhappy masses misbehaved until 'the reversal of the ministry' was carried out. As a result, a lot of Janissaries were accused of disobedience and strangled.<sup>652</sup> These groups of arsonists targeted not only governmental institutions but public buildings as well. From time to time groups of angry arsonists attacked the public space and government offices such as the harbour or admiralty.<sup>653</sup> Even (high ranked) state officials and their residences became targeted. A report from 4 April 1780 claims that arsonists attacked the residence of the former Grand Vizier Abdürrezzak Efendi and that the flames perished seventeen persons of his household including his elderly son, his wife and four other children.<sup>654</sup> According to another British report from 9 August 1782, fires in different parts of Constantinople were set on purpose.<sup>655</sup> In another case, some groups were unhappy with the Grand Vizier who was considered the culprit of all malpractices and would, therefore, like to see the entire city going up in flames.<sup>656</sup> The examples show how important arson was according to European observers and how frequent it was used by groups to threaten the state and the society to get things their way. Especially the period between 1782 and 1784, when the Ottomans lost control over the Crimean Peninsula after a long-lasting conflict with the Russians, and they internally were struggling with economic relapse, devastating conflagrations destroyed great parts of Istanbul. A significant increase in fires and a simultaneous increase of arson are reflected in European reports. In these turbulent years, several reports were made, for instance by the Dutch, of arson threatening the residences of the Europeans in Pera, which made the envoys take extra precautions.<sup>657</sup> It means that arson, according to the Europeans, was a method used to threaten certain communities in certain situations. However, it is also possible that in such periods of conflicts, Europeans became more alert and paid more attention to fire incidents which might have been linked to arson more easily.

European envoys carefully followed the developments around conflagrations and political disturbances they linked to fire incidents. Although accidents formed an important cause, the envoys

---

<sup>652</sup> Passages from a Dutch report: "...dit laaste desaster maakt de veslagentheid nog grooter, dewyl het een klaarblykelyk bewys schynt út te leveren, dat de party der misnoegden deszelfs verfoeyelyk voorneemen tragt te vervolgen en niet rústen zal voordat er een geheele omkeering van Ministerie plaats heeft, het is diervalven te wenschen (this last desaster makes the defeat even greater, while it appears to be proving that the displeasured party will continue to have their abhorrent intention and will not stop before a complete reversal of the Ministry has taken place..." and "...men heeft veel Janitsers weggeligt en in stilte verdrongen (a lot of Janissaries are abandoned and drowned in silence..." in 17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>653</sup> 17 October 1774, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije. The attack on the Admiralty is mentioned in a later stage in another report (9 September 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office).

<sup>654</sup> 4 April 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>655</sup> "This inconvenience, it is alleged, might with greater attention and activity, be a great measure remedied; and probably owing to these causes, the dissatisfaction manifested by the frequent fires, which appear since some days in different parts of Constantinople, and its suburbs, visible set on purpose," in 9 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>656</sup> 9 August 1784, 1.02.20, Box 786, Legatie Turkije

<sup>657</sup> 26 August 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

were more interested in the reasons behind the frequency of conflagrations. In case that conflagrations were taking place frequently, either it was accompanied by political unrest or the suspicion of arson was then there. Many European reports explicitly refer to unhappy masses, internal and external conflicts leading to arson as the major cause of many conflagrations.

### ***Fire prevention***

Diplomatic correspondence between the ambassadors in Istanbul and their home countries provides us not only with insights on how the Europeans experienced and described the conflagrations but also with details about how they managed the situation. According to European sources, fire prevention was one of the important topics. The embassy personnel was constantly concerned about keeping the flames outside the walls. Buildings had their own materials and wells to prevent and fight fires.<sup>658</sup> Special attention was paid to the technical reinforcement of the buildings. A Dutch correspondence between 1750-1752 explicitly refers to 'fire-free storage under the staircase of the kiosk'. The residents of the embassy building saw the necessity to create a particular space under the main building that would not be affected by flames so that valuable properties such as the furniture could be saved.<sup>659</sup> In later stages, especially after the great conflagration of 1767 that burned the embassy building to the ground, the (re)construction of an improved 'fire-free storage' became even more important. During the reconstruction of the embassy building, the decision-makers in The Hague and architect of the building were asked to pay attention to issues related to fire incidents. There should be enough space between the main building and other neighbouring buildings. Separation walls were needed in order to block the quick spread of flames, and none of the wings of the building should be physically in contact with the street.<sup>660</sup> The main building would be relocated, with its walls heightened to keep people (and fires) out. The façade of the main building would also be separated from the main street and a more functional fire free storage would be built.<sup>661</sup> Besides, it was asked to build a reasonably large forecourt so that there would be enough space between the main building and the rest. There should also be enough space between the stalls and kitchen to prevent flames from jumping to the main building in case an incident would start in one of these annexe buildings.<sup>662</sup> Although The Hague was not willing to pay the

---

<sup>658</sup> *"Wij hebben voor eenige daagen de Brand spuyt hier in het Paleys doen probeeren, en naderhand in deselve in een brandvrijeplaats gebragt die [...] voorleeden naejaar expres hier toe in gemaakt geworden hebben deselve seer accuraat en wel bevonde sonder het minste defect bespeurt te hebben, als allenig dat de suygers die het waater moeste ophaalen te kort syn, alsoo de putten zeer diep, en also nog een suyger of twee nodig sal syn* (Since a few days we have tested the fire extinguisher here in the palace and afterwards put it in a fire-free place which [...] was constructed in the last autumn purposefully, (we) have found it very accurate and well-proven without the slightest defect, only except that the hoses that suck up water were too short, also the wells very deep, and yet a hose or two will be needed ...)" in 5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>659</sup> 1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>660</sup> 3 November 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>661</sup> 3 November 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>662</sup> 17 August 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije

enormous amounts of money requested by the embassy, the diplomats saw the need of these structural adjustments, merely because they were aware of how devastating the fires could be in Istanbul.

While Europeans were consciously working on solutions to make their buildings fire-proof, they were also criticising the Ottomans and their measures, especially concerning the architectural adjustments. Several diplomatic reports and a Spanish travelogue are emphasising the construction of buildings with wood instead of stone. In 1766, the British noted that Turks did not prefer to build with stone but were surprised by how quickly they could construct wooden buildings.<sup>663</sup> This efficiency was, thus, one of the reasons why the Ottomans preferred wood. The Dutch, on the other hand, published a report in 1810 in which they expressed their hopes for the necessary change of mentality needed for the construction of buildings with stone.<sup>664</sup> The Europeans further stated that the Ottoman government attempted to implement and encourage this type of architecture. However, the implementation of such a new mindset was quite complex according to the traveller Jose Moreno who has been travelling through Istanbul in the 1780s. “Thirty-five years ago,” he stated, “Osman III wanted to widen the streets of Constantinople, open new communications, and establish better constructions (buildings)” but the property holders did not feel such a necessity, nor did they see the risks of conflagrations. Moreno criticised the fact that the streets remained narrow and the Ottomans did not work on their attitude of using wood for their constructions and lavender oil to paint their houses.<sup>665</sup>

European diplomats also dealt with other policies that were introduced by the Ottoman state in order to prevent fires, because conflagrations were directly affecting their social life. In periods of political and social upheavals, Ottoman authorities often tended to implement curfews to prevent arson.<sup>666</sup> Curfew sometimes went hand in hand with a crackdown on crime to deal with people who were considered responsible for arson. A Dutch report from 2 August 1780 claims that the Grand Vizier decided to investigate all the crimes related to arson more carefully when those reached a peak in the same period. The report claims that due to this strict approach for some time, no fires occurred.<sup>667</sup> Another report, written by the British on 6 September 1782, explains that people walking on the streets after 8 o’clock could risk the death penalty. “This severity was become necessary to prevent conflagrations [...] and to disperse troops of thieves, and murderers, who swarmed the ruins of the

---

<sup>663</sup> 1 September 1766, SP97, Box 43, State Papers.

<sup>664</sup> 10 May 1810, 1.02.20, Box 979, Legatie Turkije

<sup>665</sup> Jose Moreno, *Viaje a Constantinopla*, 167.

<sup>666</sup> A report dating from 17 August 1779 states that some arson attempts were the reason behind implementing a curfew (17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>667</sup> It is here referred to the Grand Vizier Karavezir Seyyid Mehmed (2 August 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije).

city”.<sup>668</sup> This strict approach with crackdowns and curfews seems to have been common since references to more curfews and crackdowns can be found in European reports.<sup>669</sup>

As the examples show, according to the European reports, envoys residing in Istanbul were already in the beginnings of the 1750s preoccupied with damages caused by fires. They, therefore, invented different methods to keep the flames away. The main idea was to block or extinguish the fire before it could reach the main embassy building. The personnel of these buildings continually worked on solutions and invented these methods internally and in consultation with their home countries from whom they needed to receive funding to realise constructions. However, in many cases, the blazes could not be stopped. Europeans, then, tried to protect themselves against the impacts. They not only acted against blazes and incorporated fire prevention in the (re)construction process of their buildings; they have also taken notes of the Ottoman methods from a critical point of view.

### **Firefighting**

In European reports, it is entirely unclear which actions were taken during a conflagration. Almost no information can be found on the procedures of firefighting. It is also not clear which steps have been followed to extinguish a fire. However, already in the beginnings of the 1750s, there are indications that embassy buildings possessed means to extinguish fires. In correspondence sent on 5 March 1750 the Dutch explain in detail how a new fire extinguisher was comprehensively tested but was lacking hoses that were long enough to suck up water from the wells of the embassy.<sup>670</sup> Another material prevention that was explicitly mentioned in one of the reports was the ‘fire-sail’. According to the report, the ‘fire sail’ is something that can be spread over the roof of the building to, somehow, spread water.<sup>671</sup> Although information about the origins and exact use of these materials lacks, correspondence shows that materials belonging to the embassy were replaced and modernised from time to time. In 1795, for instance, the Dutch decided to purchase a revised fire pump and hose.<sup>672</sup>

---

<sup>668</sup> 6 September 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>669</sup> In 1826, 1831 and 1847 curfews were implemented to restrict the inhabitants of Istanbul to go on the streets after dark: 14 August 1826, FO78, Box 144, Foreign Office; 9 September 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office; 26 October 1847, FO78, Box 691, Foreign Office. It is worth to mention that on the same dates the British embassy was threatened by conflagrations.

<sup>670</sup> “*Wij hebben voor eenige daagen de Brand spuyt hier in het Paleys doen probeeren, en naderhand in deselve in een brandvrijeplaats gebragt die [...] voorleeden naejaar expres hier toe in gemaakt geworden hebben deselve seer accuraat en wel bevonde sonder het minste defect bespeurt te hebben, als allenig dat de suygers die het waater moeste ophaalen te kort syn, alsoo de putten zeer diep, en alsoo nog een suyger of twee nodig sal syn* (Since a few days we have tested the fire extinguisher here in the palace and afterwards put it in a fire-free place which [...] was constructed in the last autumn purposefully, (we) have found it very accurate and well-proven without the slightest defect, only except that the hoses that suck up water were too short, also the wells very deep, and yet a hose or two will be needed ...)” in 5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>671</sup> “*...versoek van mijn met de eerste occasie een brand zeyl toe te senden dat men over het Dak van het Paleys dat seer groot is soude kunnen uyt breyden, ter wyl sulks met waater besproeyt synde naast god het eenigste middel tot behoud van het Engels Paleys... (..request from me to send a fire-sail that can be spread over the roof of the Palace which is very large and besides God the only medium that preserved the English Palace...)*”, 1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>672</sup> 10 September 1795, 1.02.20, Box 836, Legatie Turkije.

The most detailed information about firefighting can be found in a British “statement of disbursements”, published on 16 May 1810. The document includes some information about how the procedure (firefighting) functioned. The report contains all the sums paid in each stage of firefighting when the British embassy building was being extinguished. According to the British, saving the building was more expensive than rebuilding it.<sup>673</sup> Rather than giving an overview of the firefighting process itself, the ‘statement of disbursements’ refers a lot to ‘corruption’ and ‘issues related to money’ that were seen as the main culprit of high costs.<sup>674</sup> After their embassy building burned down, the British also made a list of payments. In this list, it can be seen that payments were made for “fire-equipments to block the flames reaching the palace”, “water-carriers called ‘sacaas (*saka*)’ to fetch water” and “Turkish officers, and their people for their exertions under the orders of the Caimakam (*kaymakam*) who was personally present”. Further, costs were made for the reconstruction of the damaged building, including the reparation of the roof and windows of the palace. The British also noted the sums paid to get the officers and Janissaries to work, complaining about the “exorbitant price” of the water and that “public firefighters were all to be bought for the same rate.”<sup>675</sup> Thanks to this structure of payments, we have a glimpse of how the firefighting in 1810 took place from the perspective of the British, but detailed information about the technical part of the process still lacks. It should also be taken into account that it was the embassy building that burned down. The embassy personnel, therefore, could be exaggerating the amounts to receive more money from London. On the contrary, Ottoman officials and locals could also have been benefitting from the situation by asking for more money, because it was the embassy building.

More details are provided about the actions taken by the Europeans during the conflagrations. If a conflagration was unavoidable and the European neighbourhood was threatened, saving vulnerable and valuable items was one of the first actions on the emergency list. As said before, a special ‘fire-free’ storage room was used to store the most valuable items, such as furniture or paperwork.<sup>676</sup> According to a Dutch plan, all items should be carried from the embassy building into the garden in case that the ‘fire free storage’ was full.<sup>677</sup> In a series of letters between the embassy and the government in The Hague, the Dutch ambassador continuously emphasises the importance of such a ‘fire free storage’ for the embassy, simply because of the frequency of fires and vulnerability of the city’s wooden buildings. The costs of this storage, according to the ambassador, should not be a problem at all compared to the value of the items that need to be stored. Although the decision-makers in The Hague initially do not

---

<sup>673</sup> 16 May 1810, FO78, Box 70, Foreign Office.

<sup>674</sup> 16 May 1810, FO78, Box 70, Foreign Office.

<sup>675</sup> 16 May 1810, FO78, Box 70, Foreign Office.

<sup>676</sup> 5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>677</sup> 1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

accept his proposals, the ambassador persists with arguments that the 'fire free storage' was not only needed to store furniture but also to save the valuable paperwork of the embassy.<sup>678</sup>

During conflagrations, storing items went hand in hand with inter-communal solidarity between various communities that lived in the area and shared the same interests. Whenever an incident occurred a multicultural neighbourhood such as Pera, members of various communities, who were called Franks or Europeans, assisted each other to extinguish the conflagration. They also used to exchange financial support after. A clear example is that during the conflagration of 1767, which in this case demolished several European embassies, help offered by the sultan made a minor difference because of the magnitude damage. The Dutch received help from the French who made available thirty sailors to extinguish the flames and carry their goods.<sup>679</sup> In March 1794, the Dutch praised the good behaviour of French frigates who immediately interfered with their pumps to extinguish an extensive conflagration that started in the 'European neighbourhood'.<sup>680</sup> This intercommunal solidarity occurred not only between the Europeans themselves but also between the Europeans and other non-Muslims of Pera. After a conflagration destroyed the French embassy building in 1810, the Greeks and Armenians of Pera assisted 'the European community'.<sup>681</sup> This intercommunal solidarity, however, was not always self-evident and could also lead to frictions between communities. During another conflagration in 1763 that started in a pharmacy of a man called Cobben, the Dutch of Pera complained about the Franks (probably referring to other Europeans or Levantines), who did not help to extinguish the fire.<sup>682</sup> The expectation, thus, was to get help from each other.

Europeans have also taken notes about the attitude of the Ottoman authorities during conflagrations. It was the normal practice that high ranked Ottoman officials attended the firefighting in order to inspect the operations. The Grand Vizier, in some cases, carried out these checks and made sure that everyone performed his task correctly. By distributing money, The Ottomans aimed to prevent corruption and stimulate workers. According to the Spanish traveller Jose Moreno, when a conflagration was 'big' enough, it was the Sultan himself who attended to lead the firefighting operation and distributed money among the Janissaries and workers.<sup>683</sup> Moreno claims that conflagrations for the sultan were rather an occasion to showcase his concerns about the people, than showing his authority. The sultan attended the firefighting to ensure that everyone performed his job well by giving money to

---

<sup>678</sup> 1 February 1753, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije; 1 June 1753, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>679</sup> 1 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>680</sup> 10 March 1794, 1.02.20, Box 836, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>681</sup> 10 May 1810, 1.02.20, Box 979, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>682</sup> 9 August 1763, 1.02.20, Box 601, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>683</sup> According to the travelogue of Jose Moreno, the Great Lord assisted when a fire was massive: "*El Gran Señor, que asiste también cuando el fuego es grande...* (The Great Lord, who assists also when the fire is massive...)" in Jose Moreno, *Viaje a Constantinopla*, 165-168.



Janissaries and other workers.<sup>684</sup> Also the French diplomat Antoine-François Andréossi refers to the custom that the Sultan was expected to attend the operation when the situation became “alarming”.<sup>685</sup> However, the Sultan’s attendance and distribution of money have not always functioned as expected and not necessarily improved the effectiveness of the fire brigade. In many reports, Europeans criticise the behaviour of firefighters (part of Janissaries). Also, other local workers who helped to extinguish the conflagrations are described as corrupt and benefitting from the situation. There are situations that members of the fire brigade were even amused by the chaos<sup>686</sup>, refused to extinguish a conflagration<sup>687</sup> and used oil instead of water to worsen the situation so that they could share the yields of thieves with whom they cooperated. Even high ranked officials such as the *qadi* are accused of abusing their power.<sup>688</sup> When the conflagrations were unstoppable, the Ottomans then used to take down some buildings to create space between the blazes and the threatened area. Therefore, it was necessary to pay the local authority, for instance, the judge (*qadi*), to get permission to tear down buildings. In a report dating from in 1763, the Dutch complained about the system and criticised the attitude of the local judge who was paid a substantial amount of money. He first permitted to take down some houses to stop the spread, but shortly after changed his mind. The reason, according to the Dutch, was that the judge received more money from somebody else. He subsequently withdrew his permission. According to the Dutch, other people were unhappy with the decision and intervened.<sup>689</sup> In another situation in 1767, the Sultan himself ordered to take down a prison with all the buildings surrounding. These

---

<sup>684</sup> “*El Gran Señor, que asiste tambien cuando el fuego es grande, á todas horas tiene de prevencion caballos ensillados, y barcos prontos; pero confiando menos de su autoridad que de la fuerza del interés, lleva consigo muchos talegos de dinero que reparte francamente entre Genízaros y trabajadores. El Gran Visir, y todos los principales individuos del Gobierno asisten igualmente de oficio* (The Great Lord, who assists when the fire is great, at all hours has get horses and boats ready; but having faith less in his authority than the strength of showing his concerns, he carries with him many bags of money that he frankly distributes among the Janissaries and workers. The Grand Vizier, and all the leading individuals of the government attend as well,” in Jose Moreno, *Viaje a Constantinopla en el Año de 1784*, 165-168.

<sup>685</sup> “*Sa Hautesse est avertie à chaque instant par des messagers de la marche de l'incendie; et l'usage est qu'elle se rende sur les lieux lorsque ses progrès sont devenus* (His Highness is warned every moment by messengers of the march of the fire; and the common practice is that he goes to the scene when the progress has become alarming),” in Antoine-François Andréossi, *Constantinople et le Bosphore*, 174.

<sup>686</sup> In September 1755, flames reached the outer walls of the palace before they could be stopped. While panic gripped most citizens, some malicious people were amused by the chaos (1 October 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>687</sup> A Dutch report claims that in 1779 firefighters who refused to extinguish conflagration fire were exiled to the archipelago (17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije). Another Dutch report dating from 1799 notes that, “Turks” (referring to firefighters) were not eager to extinguish the conflagration. They instead preferred watching in a quite relaxed way and with a smile on their faces how people in a hurry tried to save their properties (18 March 1799, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>688</sup> “*Des pompiers subissent le même sort, lorsqu'on reconnaît qu'ils ont mis, au lieu d'eau, de l'huile dans leurs pompes. Le but de cette coupable manoeuvre est, en augmentant la violence du feu, d'accroître la confusion et le désordre, et de favoriser ainsi l'audace des voleurs, avec lesquels ils partagent ensuite le fruit de leurs larcins* (Firefighters underwent the same fate when it is was found out that they have put oil in their pumps instead of water. The object of this guilty manoeuvre is, increasing the violence of the fire, to increase confusion and disorder, and thus to favour the boldness of the thieves, with whom they then share the fruit of their theft.),” in Antoine-François Andréossi (1761-1828), *Constantinople et le Bosphore de Thrace Pendant les Années 1812, 1813, 1814 et Pendant l'Année 1826*. 1828, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. p.174.

<sup>689</sup> 9 August 1763, 1.02.20, Box 601, Legatie Turkije.

buildings belonged to leading governmental figures. The decision itself was taken in order to protect the Grand Vizier's and sultan's palaces.<sup>690</sup>

Although in the source material there are no detailed and technical descriptions of the firefighting process, it can be concluded that the Europeans made use of practical methods to be as self-sufficient as possible. At first place, they used own materials and water wells to keep the flames away from their buildings. In case that they could not prevent the spread, they tried to save their valuable items. Firefighting and saving materials went hand in hand with communal solidarity. Various European and Christian groups helped each other or expected financial, material and social aid from each other to a certain level. Requesting help from the officials of the Ottoman state, on the other hand, could cost the Europeans enormous amounts of money according to a British source. This could be one of the reasons why in the European source, a critique can be found towards the effectiveness of the Ottoman firefighting system. The main concerns were the not-functioning fire brigade, corruption and abuse of power among the officials.

### ***Damage assessment and recovery***

When it comes to damage assessment, in the European source material special attention is paid to material damage. Most embassy reports refer to the number of damaged buildings at the end of the letter. A specification of the damage is indicated by mentioning the affected area and total material loss. The amount and scope of the information depend on the size of the area. Also, the number and function of the damaged buildings and victims are considered important. The commonly listed properties are houses, shops, storages and religious buildings and their interiors (furniture and other valuable items). The focus of the reports, however, lies in the destruction of shops and churches. If the buildings belonged to someone from the ruling class, for instance, if it was the palace of the mufti<sup>691</sup>, residence of a high ranked official<sup>692</sup> or if the military barracks that burned down<sup>693</sup>, then a more detailed description of the economic loss and eventually the political consequences follow. If the buildings were properties belonging to one of the embassies, then several reports can be found on the loss. These reports contain more detailed information about how the conflagration happened. These letters are meant to convince the policymakers in the home country to receive money. There are also cases where the correspondent gives the exact costs of the damaged property.<sup>694</sup> The importance of a building is

---

<sup>690</sup> 3 February 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>691</sup> A conflagration that took place on 4 February 1750 destroyed 6000 houses and shops, but the destruction of the mufti's palace was important enough to mention explicitly (5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>692</sup> The residence of the former Grand Vizier Abdoulezak was intentionally set on fire after which it burned down to its foundations and many people from his household lost their lives: 4 April 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>693</sup> 23 July 1751, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

<sup>694</sup> An example is the Dutch letter sent on 21 October 1754 contains the precise amount of material damage (one million Dutch *Leeuwendaelders*), which was caused by a conflagration that lasted more than ten hours and burned down 1000 houses (21 October 1754, 1.02.20, Box 166, Legatie Turkije).

used as an indication to show the magnitude of a conflagration. For instance, when a conflagration was strong enough to burn down the palace of the Grand Vizier or even the Sultan and his government buildings before it could be extinguished, it showed the importance of that conflagration.<sup>695</sup> Such distinctions were also used to show the magnitude when certain European communities suffered from conflagrations.<sup>696</sup> Also the differences between small and large houses (palaces)<sup>697</sup>, between churches belonging to specific religious communities such as the Greeks and Armenians<sup>698</sup> and between regular and 'rich shops' could be important indicators when reporting about the damage.<sup>699</sup> Although the most commonly mentioned properties are houses, shops, storages and religious buildings, their interior (furniture and other assets) also seems to have played a vital role. There have been cases that thieves have stolen the furniture from the embassies during firefighting.<sup>700</sup> Another reference explicitly mentions the damage to palaces belonging to leading figures, destroyed 'with all their furniture'.<sup>701</sup> To whom the palace belonged and what kind of furniture was damaged, thus, seemed to have been an important topic. After the conflagration, an immediate discussion followed about how the furniture could rapidly be replaced, which could be an expensive task. In European reports, furniture lists can be found that were added to detailed damage reports to get sufficient money from the home country.<sup>702</sup>

Besides material damage, European sources contain references to the impacts of conflagrations on social life in Istanbul. Compared to relatively smaller incidents, more devastating conflagrations had serious effects on larger groups of people in the city. The reflections are seen, for instance, in the political decisions taken by policymakers. When, for instance, between 1782 and 1784 a series of conflagrations had destructed almost half of Istanbul *intra muros*, it resulted in a widespread civil disturbance. One disaster triggered another, causing new unrests and arson attempts.<sup>703</sup> Thousands of people died, some burned alive, and some of them died by drowning after they jumped into the sea when they were avoiding the flames. A shortage of housing and bread followed. The Ottoman state even considered suspending one of the two most important religious holidays (*bayram*) because of the

---

<sup>695</sup> 1 October 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>696</sup> On 13 July 1755 a conflagration in Galata destroyed the furniture and assets of 'French merchants' (1 September 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>697</sup> 3 February 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>698</sup> "...omtrent drie duizend huizen en winkels benevens drie Griekse kerken in de assche gelegd zyn geworden, welk laatste desaster des te ongelukkiger is, dewyl het de Rajas of Christen onderdanen zeer moeylyk en kostbaar valt om de herstelling hunner kerken te verkrygen (around three thousand houses and shops and three Greek churches were reduced to ashes. The loss of the churches is very unfortunate because it is very hard and expensive to recover them..." (24 July 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>699</sup> 8 April 1790, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>700</sup> On 1 December 1767 the Dutch ambassador complained about thieves who during a fire had stolen the furniture and assets of one of their dragomans (1 December 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije).

<sup>701</sup> 25 June 1796, 1.02.20, Box 865, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>702</sup> "I am now preparing a list of my furniture, books to be sent home through Land [Cowley?] by the courier," in 26 October 1847, FO78, Box 691, Foreign Office.

<sup>703</sup> 26 August 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

losses.<sup>704</sup> One of the other social impacts of these conflagrations was the reduction of population, which was accompanied by a scarcity of habitable zones (and housing). Although the Ottoman policymakers quickly issued decrees to solve the problems around housing, it took months to recover from the damage and rebuild the residential areas.<sup>705</sup> Still, limited information has been delivered about what happened to the inhabitants of Istanbul suffering in the aftermath of conflagrations. According to the British, who explicitly refer to the reduction of population, orders were issued to attract people from all over the country to come back to Istanbul. Another report containing similar information claims that in 1782 'hundred thousand' inhabitants of Istanbul have emigrated in consequence of conflagrations.<sup>706</sup>

Europeans not only give information about how they dealt with damage but also clarify how the Ottoman methods functioned. According to this information, the Ottomans paid special attention to the reconstruction of buildings and housing. According to a British report dating from 26 August 1782, every man who was able to work was allowed to suspend the fast of the Ramadan. The reconstruction of houses, thus, could be considered more important than exercising one of the most important Islamic practices. The same report claims that after the conflagration money was distributed among the people without providing additional information about which people got this aid.<sup>707</sup> From other European reports that refer to how the Ottomans managed the situation in the aftermath of devastating conflagrations, we understand that not only housing but also the scarcity of food and (construction) materials could be problematic. Cities around Istanbul were frequently asked to send supplies in order to build quick and efficient. The British reported that at a certain moment, the reconstruction of the city slowed down because the entire region around Istanbul ran out of timber and bricks.<sup>708</sup> This variety of actions show that the Ottomans were making efforts to ensure quick recovery after conflagrations. However, there are also references to functionaries being suspected of not carrying out their jobs properly. These functionaries could be punished severely at the end of the day. According to a report written in 1779, after a conflagration in that year, several high ranked officials were deposed, and some of the Janissaries were strangled because there were threats against the sultan. Firefighters who refused to extinguish were exiled to the archipelago.<sup>709</sup> Three years later, in 1782, this time the members of the Greek and Armenian churches were advised by their leaders to not to 'mix in public affairs' or 'converse on matters of a public nature', because of the turbulent period and frequent occurrence of fire

---

<sup>704</sup> 10 September 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>705</sup> 17 July 1756, SP97, Box 39, State Papers.

<sup>706</sup> "This event, joined to the visible diminution in the Population of this Capital, occasioned some murmurs, to prevent which his Imperial Majesty returned to the Seraglio, and issued orders for all the great Folks to leave the country, and come back to this Residence; which has had the desired effect", in 17 September 1778, SP 97, Box 54, State Papers; "...hundred thousand who have emigrated in consequence of the late conflagrations..." in 10 October 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>707</sup> "an Order was published by the Mufty on the 22. to suspend the fast of the Ramazan, that People might recruit their strength, and be more able to work. The Grand Signior, and all the Ministers of the Porte, as usual, attended, on this awful occasion, and distributed money to the people," in 26 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>708</sup> 25 November 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>709</sup> 17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.

incidents.<sup>710</sup> On both European and Ottoman fronts, politics seem to have played a role during the recovery process.

After a damage assessment was made, decisions needed to be taken to realise the recovery quickly. However, the recovery process was mainly a financial concern. Considerable amounts of money were needed to rebuild buildings or replace materials. When in 1756 the interior of the 'palace' of the Ottoman Grand Vizier was damaged, all European representatives were asked to contribute, even if they would only be able to donate sheets.<sup>711</sup> Linen sheets could be scarce and expensive in that period, but it is interesting that Europeans were expected to support the recovery of the Grand Vizier's palace. The European ambassadors, on the other hand, have been doing their utmost best to convince the decision-makers in their home countries to receive money. In case of substantial material damage, they extensively explained in their letters why upgrades to their embassy buildings were needed. After the 1767 conflagration, the Dutch ambassador included examples from how other countries dealt with damage to convince The Hague. He told that the Russian empress had paid the renovation costs of the Russian embassy.<sup>712</sup> Besides, the Russian envoy had also been trying to receive aid from the Ottoman government based on capitulations. The Russian envoy had requested at least a temporary '*konak*'<sup>713</sup> without any rent until the Russian palace was rebuilt.<sup>714</sup> The furniture of another embassy, that of Naples, was paid by insurance.<sup>715</sup> Replacing a building or its interior was, thus, complicated and costly but finding new or temporary accommodation was also a major problem in the aftermath of a conflagration. In 1767, immediately after his embassy building burned down, the Dutch ambassador went to find a rental house with a list of criteria because of his awareness of the pest and conflagrations. Once he was staying in a rental house with beneath a shop, a conflagration could, fortunately, be extinguished very quickly and he could escape on time.<sup>716</sup> A rental house, therefore, was an emergency solution before the embassies such as the Dutch and British could move to their summer residences in Tarabya. This was quite inefficient because of the distance to the city centre and lack of facility. However, it could take months or even years to rebuild the main residence.

---

<sup>710</sup> "His Highness's Attention seems principa[lly?] directed to the most urgent Concerns of this Capital. Already he has taken measures, which it is hoped will prove effectual, for procuring Plenty, and Safety to the remaining Inhabitants, diminished by upwards one of hundred thousand who have emigrated in consequence of the late Conflagrations. Orders have been published in the Greek, and Armenian churches prohibiting those people from mixing in publick affairs, or even conversing on matters of a publick nature. This ordinance was become highly necessary to curb the spirit of Intrigue, so natural to the Greeks, now exalted to the greatest pitch by the corrupt administration of Chelebi Efendi. It also seems well calculated to quiet the late fanatical disputes, and violent quarrels, amongst the Armenians of the ancient, and of the Latin rites," in 10 October 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

<sup>711</sup> 2 October 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>712</sup> 1 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>713</sup> Meaning 'mansion'.

<sup>714</sup> 17 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

<sup>715</sup> '*Assurantie*' in Dutch.

<sup>716</sup> 2 March 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.

European envoys in Istanbul seem to have been highly concerned about fire incidents and their links with the socio-political context. Letters sent from Istanbul, therefore, contain a lot of valuable information about the possible causes and impacts of conflagrations. Because of their political position, European envoys were more focused on the socio-political events around conflagrations, rather than their technical aspects. However, especially the fact that conflagrations frequently hit the district (Galata/Pera) where they lived, destroyed the embassies and damaged their properties did make the Europeans think about the technical aspects. The personnel of the embassies regularly took precautions and tried to be self-sufficient in preventing fire incidents. Embassy buildings used to have their own materials and water wells. When the flames were unstoppable, the Europeans invented methods to reduce the damage and save their properties. Asking assistance from the officials could cost enormous amounts of money. Europeans, therefore, in coordination with their home countries brainstormed about new methods to protect their buildings from the spread of flames. If it was not possible, they made use of methods such as building a 'fire free storage' to move and protect their valuable items. When requesting Ottoman assistance could not be avoided, it becomes evident from the critique, that there was a general dissatisfaction about how the Ottoman prevention and firefighting functioned. Many reports on arson, corruption and other irregularities support this dissatisfaction. However, in most cases, the Europeans had to cooperate with the Ottomans during and after the conflagrations. Also, in the aftermath of conflagrations, they needed the Ottoman permission to get their buildings repaired or replaced. Diplomacy and politics, therefore, have always been a part of the processes before, during and after conflagrations.

### **3.3 The comparison of the Ottoman and European perspectives**

A detailed analysis of both the Ottoman and European sources has shed light on how conflagrations were described from different angles, in order to create a more comprehensive and more precise picture of the period. We also have a more detailed understanding of the precautions and actions taken to prevent and fight the blazes and what happened after conflagrations. Based on these descriptions, differences can be identified, especially when it comes to the level of criticism about institutional deficiencies that had become chronic over time within the Ottoman bureaucracy. However, there are also similarities between how both the Ottomans and Europeans struggled with the problems caused by conflagrations. In this third part of the chapter, I will clarify the major differences and similarities between the Ottoman and European perspectives, to see whether there were different understandings of conflagrations and their impact on society.

### ***Causes of the conflagrations: accidental or intentional?***

The Ottomans use patterns to describe conflagrations, dominated by a religious worldview. Most conflagrations are linked to the religious concept of 'kâza', which also means 'accident' in modern Turkish. As a result of this dichotomy, without a further context, we cannot know whether conflagrations were caused by accidents or the Ottomans just considered them God's punishment due to a morally improper lifestyle. Ottoman sources, on the other hand, seldom refer to arson. Arson becomes only relevant to report when the state conflicts with a certain group, such as the Janissaries. In that case, arson is being reported explicitly to mention the background of the arsonists explicitly. Besides that, there is a difference between the descriptions and content of different Ottoman sources when it comes to arson. Official chronicles published by the chroniclers of the Ottoman court are more inclined to stick to the official ideology and tell the story according to the political conjuncture of that day. If, for example, a religious mindset was dominant in a certain period, the arsonists were called unbelievers. If in another period the Ottoman government conflicted with Janissaries, the arsonists then were described as state enemies. Chronicles published by independent historians, however, contain more critique on how the state and fire brigade, existing of Janissaries, malfunctioned. This leads to the conclusion that, according to the Ottoman sources, arson has not formed a significant problem except during the conflict periods with the Janissaries, which creates a one-sided and limited overview of the reasons behind conflagrations.

Unlike the Ottomans, European sources used a more critical language when describing the conflagrations. The European focus lies on the political, economic and social events that have been in interaction with the frequency of fire incidents. The envoys of the West-European states strategically and carefully followed the political situations such as wars and conflicts that could easily affect their positions and damage properties. They felt the necessity to monitor every threat affecting their presence, also to come up with satisfying and convincing reports for the policymakers in their home countries. Europeans, therefore, critically assessed the developments around conflagrations and questioned their occurrence when the frequency of these conflagrations increased. The reason behind the increase, according to these sources, was that arson was used to manifest discontent. Arson was also a method to target the state, its officials and buildings in times of turmoil, famine or misfortune. Although many conflagrations occurred as a result of carelessness and accidents, Europeans mostly complained during periods of conflict and about arson attacks that were used to target the state, its officials and important buildings such as the embassies. It is also reported that fire incidents increased if the masses were unhappy. It can be tracked in both the Ottoman and European source material that accidents played a significant role. However, the Ottomans did not always report arson, while the Europeans tended to do so.

### ***Fire prevention***

Both the Ottomans and Europeans were preoccupied about preventing fires before they could spread and cause severe damages. In the Ottoman, as well as the European, source material, special attention is paid to architecture. The Ottomans did this by introducing regulations to restrict the construction of wooden structures such as oriels and balconies hanging over the streets. These regulations have not only targeted the building materials used for the construction of buildings but also for the choice of locations to build. The Ottomans targeted the forming of slums, especially next to the city walls. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, discussions started around constructing buildings with stone instead of wood. These discussions were mainly about whether preference should be given to building with stone instead of wood. However, the implementation of regulations has not been successful, and problems have become chronic over time. Apart from the materials, the Ottomans have also been concerned about the content of buildings. They discussed the question of flammable materials such as wood dust. In addition to material content, some buildings (such as bachelor's houses and taverns) were considered morally improper, and thus hazardous. Regulations were reintroduced repeatedly to regulate the architecture and control the content, usually unsuccessful.

The European source material also emphasised the importance of structural improvements but criticised the ineffectiveness of Ottoman implementation of regulations. Some reports refer to the never-ending Ottoman attempts to introduce solutions such as widening the roads without any success. At that point, the Europeans tried to be as self-sufficient as possible by introducing practical solutions such as using their own equipment and wells to resolve their daily life problems. They tried to prevent the quick spread of fires by adjusting their buildings. They build protective walls and left space between the different parts of the embassy building. By constructing fire-free storages constructed of stone and by making use of 'fire-sails', they tried to protect their properties. However, the Europeans could not always resolve problems on their own. For external threats such as arson attempts, they had to stay in touch with the authorities. At this second point, the European source material differs from that of the Ottomans. The Europeans discuss the arson attacks that targeted their embassy buildings. They also report that they carefully monitored the intruders and communicated them to the authorities. The Ottoman sources, however, do not explicitly discuss these kinds of arson attacks although they do report on the need of curfews that were frequently introduced to prevent conflagrations.

### ***Firefighting***

According to the Ottoman source material, the Ottomans struggled with logistical problems. They could not reach the location of the incident due to bureaucratic regulations, lack of organisation and shortage of materials. These logistical problems have delayed the firefighting process, which resulted in the quick spread of blazes. In some cases, people even discontinued fighting because they accepted their fate.



This powerlessness was accompanied by corrupt workers and officials who needed to be continuously stimulated. The Ottomans found the solution in encouraging and rewarding the officials during firefighting. Those who refused to work could be punished severely. High-ranked officials and even the Sultan himself regularly attended firefighting to control the works and encourage his workers. The Sultan was there not only for the workers but also for the inhabitants who needed his consolation. However, human mistakes were not always the only reason behind the quick spread of conflagrations. Insufficiency of material facilities such as pumps, restricted access to water and use of flammable materials were also regularly reported. When the spread could not be stopped, then the Ottomans tried to stop the devastation by taking down some buildings to create space between the conflagration and the rest of the city.

Similar complaints about a malfunctioning firefighting system can also be tracked in the European source material. Attention is paid to workers who refused to extinguish, on corruption among high ranked officials and thieves who were in action during firefighting. Partly because of the extreme high sums that were asked by the fire brigade, the Europeans tried to be as self-sufficient as possible during firefighting. They made use of their own water wells and fire pumps which they repaired and replaced from time to time. They regularly requested their home countries to finance these materials. If a conflagration was strong enough to reach their property, the Europeans were highly motivated to preserve their neighbourhood and (valuable) items by, for instance, storing them in fire-free storages. During such a conflagration, solidarity could be seen between various groups, churches and communities that helped each other. A comparison between the Ottoman and European source material on this issue (firefighting) point to similarities in terms of a malfunctioning fire brigade. In both source material, there is dissatisfaction about the Ottoman *modus operandi* and corruption.

### ***Damage assessment and recovery***

Both in the Ottoman and European sources, material damage is the primary concern after devastating conflagrations. Damage assessment, therefore, is mainly about the analysis of certain buildings that were considered important and valuable. The Ottomans, as well as the Europeans, regularly reported damages to the public and religious buildings among which mosques and churches, hammams, bakeries and houses of the members of the ruling class. Many of the sources contain information about material losses, financial crises and lack of housing. Few examples can be found reporting on the immaterial and emotional impacts of conflagrations. These sources only note that after great conflagrations, lots of people used to lose their lives, while injury and disability were commonly seen. Both sources do not provide further information about the social impacts of conflagrations. However, the little information which is provided about material loss hint at a slight difference between the Ottoman and European understandings.

According to the Ottoman source material, the Ottoman state was actively involved in ensuring the tranquillity and public order, mostly related to the scarcity of food and building materials. The state tried to exercise control over the black market and reduce shortages. The Ottomans paid attention to the scarcity of food, issues around housing and around (un)controlled migration to prevent discontent among masses. With decrees, they ordered the quick reconstruction of ovens, mills and houses.

The Ottoman attempts to quickly reconstruct buildings and supply the capital city also attracted the attention of the Europeans who seemed to be amazed. However, while the Ottomans predominantly assess the shortages of food and construction materials, Europeans also noted civil disturbances and reduction of Istanbul's population in the aftermath of conflagrations. In order to balance this population, the Ottoman state relocated people from the peripheries to the capital city. Another point that differs is that the Europeans were concerned about their properties, especially their furniture. It was for the Europeans a costly task to convince their home countries to receive funding to replace these valuable items. Even if they received funding, it could take years before their buildings and furniture were rebuilt. On short notice, they were on their own and needed to improvise (self-sufficiently), for instance, to find new accommodation as quickly as possible after their buildings were damaged. The Europeans in Istanbul, therefore, needed to make use of their equity and diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman state.

### ***Conclusion***

The comparison of the Ottoman and European sources sheds light on differences in approach and entails new challenges. While the Ottomans explain the occurrence of frequent conflagrations by using a religious language and sticking to accidents, the Europeans report more on discontent among unhappy masses and arson attacks. The different approaches can also be seen in the prevention of conflagrations. According to both sources, most conflagrations could be prevented by making adjustments to the construction style, taking material precautions and preventing arson. However, while the Ottomans struggled with structural and organisational problems that became chronic, the Europeans were preoccupied with the effects of conflagrations on their buildings, properties and valuable items. This preoccupation affected the way how Europeans operated and defended themselves by becoming self-sufficient. Logistical problems, insufficiency of materials and corruption slowed down the extinguishing of conflagrations. Therefore, the Ottoman modus operandi was constantly criticised by the Europeans.

## Final Conclusions

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Istanbul has frequently been hit by devastating conflagrations. These conflagrations had enormous impacts on the city and its inhabitants. The most important causes for these conflagrations were the city's wooden architecture, lack of a structured fire brigade and the absence of modern tools. However, research has shown that there was more behind conflagrations.

Firstly, the period between 1750-1850 was in many respects an important epoch in Ottoman history. Within a hundred years, the Ottoman Empire, its society and political constellations underwent drastic changes. Perpetual wars with European great powers and territorial losses went hand in hand with economic crises and internal disturbances. With reforms and social, political and demographic transformations, the Ottoman governments sought remedy for the economic and military decline. Of all the disturbances, the most significant was the Janissary question that has dominated the Ottoman political sphere and social life until the abolishment of the corps in 1826. The same Janissary corps was for more than a century responsible for preventing and extinguishing fires. Since its foundation in the 1720s, the fire brigade (*Tulumacı Ocağı*) has made an integral part of this military unit. However, in the same period (1750-1850), the inhabitants of Istanbul have faced numerous devastating conflagrations. That the Janissaries regularly rebelled in the same period and the fire brigade was making part of this rebellious corps evoked questions in secondary sources. Could the conflagrations of Istanbul be mere accidents? To what extent did arson and other criminal activities play a role? Which methods were used to analyse the causes and find solutions to solve the fire problem? Did the Ottoman state and Janissaries sufficiently and effectively prevent and fight the conflagrations? Was an effort made to quickly extinguish fires before they could spread? How was the situation in the aftermath?

A preliminary analysis of the secondary sources has shown that studies until today often tended to focus on one major conflagration or a certain limited period as a case study. In a few of these studies, a broader (political and social) context of conflagrations forms the main object of study. These studies made use of a limited number of sources, and their contexts often remained limited to the period and treated case. This thesis has proved that expanding the scope of research by looking at a more extended period in time and using varied sources helps to broaden the perspective, enhances the possibilities and offers unique material. The information provided by different sources can vary depending on the reporter's perspective and priorities, which means that various sources can complement each other. Extensive research on the primary source material can yield even more information about smaller fire incidents and their effects on the socio-political constellation. When analysing the Ottoman source material, I made use of three groups of sources. The first group existing of chronicles published by the official chroniclers of the Ottoman court tend to represent the state ideology within the historical conjuncture they were published. If, for example, religious rhetoric was dominant and arson was

considered an act prohibited by the religion, then in this type of sources, the arsonists are called the enemies of Islam or unbelievers. Within another political context, when the Janissaries rebelled against the state and the state blamed them of setting fires, then arsonists have automatically become the enemies of the state. These sources only criticise the state's institutes (Janissaries and fire brigade) and their methods if these institutes conflicted the state ideology. Such a difference can also be seen in the second group of sources. Chronicles that were written and published by independent chroniclers are more inclined to criticise how the Ottoman bureaucracy functioned. However, like in the first group, in these sources, similar patterns are used when reporting the conflagrations, while arson is only reported if it serves a goal. The third group, *Rûz-names* or diaries reporting the daily activity of the Sultan, on the contrary, contain numerous conflagrations that, in some cases, are not mentioned in other sources. These diaries are mainly concerned about the visits of the Sultan to the location of fire incidents. The research has shown that, according to the *Rûz-names*, far more conflagrations have taken place than reported in the secondary and other primary sources. A similar attitude, on the other hand, can be tracked in European sources that prioritise some conflagrations. Research shows that different types of sources make use of different language and report on events they consider important. Chronologies or studies based on one or some of these sources, as it is clarified in the second chapter, may create a limited and one-sided image of conflagrations, their reasons and impacts. Using a particular type of source material can create a fragmented or incomplete image.

Research showed that frequent occurrence of devastating conflagrations cannot only be explained with accidents. By looking at only one type of source it is also not possible to say whether most conflagrations did break out as a result of accidents. The reason for that is that most Ottoman sources stick to religious rhetoric and explain the frequent occurrence of fire incidents with the Islamic notion of *kazâ*, which can mean both 'God's will' and 'accident'. Without any further context, it is not possible to inventory which conflagrations, in reality, were real accidents. Although accidents may have played an important role in the occurrence of many conflagrations, in both Ottoman and European sources, indications can be found that arson and corruption were commonly seen phenomena. The European source material links the frequent increases in fires incidents more often to unhappy masses. According to these sources, increases took place, especially in times of internal or external conflicts. When we look at the total picture, we indeed see that during periods of wars, conflicts or economic crises, the number of conflagrations automatically increased. In both the Ottoman and European source material but especially in the European sources, explicit references to criminal activities can be found, that especially during periods of crisis had a significant part in the occurrence of fire incidents.

Despite the awareness of the technical reasons behind their occurrence, the prevention of frequent conflagrations was not only a technical concern but also a security issue. However, the effectiveness of the Ottoman methods used to prevent conflagrations can be questioned. The Ottomans

mainly focused on the architectural aspects and deficiencies of buildings. Particular attention was paid to buildings that contained flammable materials and that were considered morally improper (such as wine houses or bachelor's houses). The Europeans, too, emphasised the importance of this architectural reinforcement and took measures to prevent flames reaching their own buildings. However, in European reports, there is a critique of the Ottoman prevention methods and implementation of regulations which have failed repeatedly. This (self)critique lacks in the Ottoman source material. European reporters complain about the unsuccessful implementation of structural changes such as building with stone or widening the roads. In addition to that, despite the frequent establishment of curfews, crime could not always be prevented effectively. While it is, even by the Ottomans, reported that fires could be ordered by bribing the Janissary Ağa, the Ottoman state seems to have paid attention to criminality and corruption only occasionally, depending on the Sultan's and Grand Vizier's personal attitude. Instead of fighting criminal activities structurally, the Ottomans tackled criminality only when, for instance, the Janissary question has become disturbing for the authorities.

Because the fire brigade made part of the Janissary corps, criminal activities, disobedience and corruption during firefighting should be questioned. The conventional methods to detect and fight fires have not critically been evaluated and revised effectively by the Ottomans until the introduction of bureaucratic reforms in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. with the *Tanzimât* reforms after 1839). Therefore, shortcomings can be seen in the methods used to fight conflagrations. First, due to the lack of systematic working and deficiency of material equipment, the starting point of fire incidents could not be detected and reached on time, while some locations lacked fire pumps. Second, due to a lack of organisation, ordinary citizens were very often asked to help to extinguish these fires. Most of the times, the quick spread of flames could not be stopped on time. As a result, small fires could easily get out of control. Third, the fire brigade, as part of the Janissary corps, needed to be motivated continuously, to carry out the firefighting properly. Distribution of money became a method widely used by the officials such as the Grand Vizier and Sultan to motivate the firemen. Still, corruption rates among workers and high-ranked officials remained significantly high and high ranked officials such as the Janissary Ağa or the local *kadı* could be bribed, for instance, to order arson. The Janissaries could also worsen the situation instead of extinguishing the fire.

The quick spread of conflagrations could cause severe material and social damages. During and after fire incidents, many people used to lose their lives horrifically, while numerous inhabitants of Istanbul became injured. However, in the primary source material, an emphasis is put on material damage, shortages of food, famine and the emergence of the black market. The fact that Istanbul lacked inhabitants after great conflagrations, (forced) migration was used as a method to refill the city, which could trigger the forming of new slums. On the other hand, the lack of building materials during the architectural recovery of the city preoccupied the Ottomans for whom the reconstruction of buildings

such as mills and ovens was essential. In both the Ottoman and European sources, it is reported that the Ottomans were focused on the effective and quick replacement of these kinds of buildings to provide people with food. Solving the issues around housing and food was also needed to tranquilise the masses and prevent new incidents.

The disorganised fire brigade making part of the rebellious Janissary corps, high corruption rates among (high-ranked) officials, the use of arson as a trump card, long-lasting internal and external disturbances, thus, were the factors that contributed to the frequent occurrence of conflagrations. In this thesis, I researched whether it is important to map the conflagrations of Istanbul to understand better the social, political, cultural and economic developments in the Ottoman society between 1750-1850. I also analysed the role of these conflagrations in socio-political changes. First, Istanbul's conflagrations can be used as a case study to understand the broader socio-political dynamics of the Ottoman society within a certain period in history. It is, therefore, important to map the conflagrations in a more comprehensive way and from different perspectives which, until now, lacked in secondary sources. The multi-faceted use of primary source material provides new information about conflagrations and makes a better analysis of these cases study possible. Second, by analysing the conflagrations, we also get a multi-faceted picture of how certain dynamics within the Ottoman society, for instance, the economy, state politics and social relations have functioned. Conflagrations serve as a mirror and allow us to analyse and understand the role of such events as turmoils, wars, Janissary rebellions on socio-political life. On the other hand, it becomes possible to research the effects of the lack of certain knowledge, failed implementation of regulations and the presence of corruption in a more coherent way. More extensive research of the primary source material might help us understand even better the socio-political implications of Istanbul's conflagrations and their impacts on different groups within the society.

## References

### 1. Archival sources

#### **British Archival Sources, retrieved from the British Archive, State Papers (SP97) & Foreign Office (FO78)**

23 July 1751, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

20 June 1752, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

4 July 1752, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

23 July 1752, SP 97, Box 35, State Papers.

2 June 1753, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

16 June 1753, SP97, Box 35, State Papers.

16 March 1754, SP97, Box 37, State Papers.

2 November 1754, SP97, Box 37, State Papers.

3 January 1755, SP97, Box 38, State Papers.

17 July 1755, SP97, Box 38, State Papers.

17 July 1756, SP97, Box 39, State Papers.

1 September 1763, SP 97, Box 42, State Papers.

17 September 1765, SP97, Box 42, State Papers.

1 September 1766, SP 97, Box 43, State Papers.

15 January 1767, SP97, Box 43, State Papers.

20 March 1767, SP97, Box 43, State Papers.

3 April 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

17 April 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

17 September 1778, SP97, Box 54, State Papers.

24 July 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

1 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

9 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

17 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

26 August 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

6 September 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

10 October 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

25 November 1782, FO78, Box 3, Foreign Office.

9 August 1784, FO78, Box 5, Foreign Office.

24 December 1784, FO78, Box 5, Foreign Office.

18 November 1808, FO78, Box 60, Foreign Office.

22 April 1810, FO78, Box 68, Foreign Office.

16 May 1810, FO78, Box 70, Foreign Office.

14 August 1826, FO78, Box 144, Foreign Office.

11 August 1831, FO78, Box 199, Foreign Office.

9 September 1831, FO78, Box 200, Foreign Office.

26 January 1832, FO78, Box 212, Foreign Office.

11 September 1832, FO78, Box 212, Foreign Office

7 September 1833, FO78, Box 224, Foreign Office.

27 January 1847, FO78, Box 3206, Foreign Office

26 October 1847, FO78, Box 691, Foreign Office.

#### **Sources retrieved from the Dutch Archive (*Legatie Turkije* (1.02.20) and *Gezantschap Turkije* (2.05.12))**

5 March 1750, 1.02.20, Box 165, Legatie Turkije.

1 April 1752, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
1 February 1753, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
1 June 1753, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
21 October 1754, 1.02.20, Box 166, Legatie Turkije.  
1 February 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
15 April 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
2 June 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
17 July 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
1 October 1755, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
1 August 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
2 October 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
16 October 1756, 1.02.20, Box 166/168, Legatie Turkije.  
9 August 1763, 1.02.20, Box 601, Legatie Turkije.  
16 August 1766, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
15 November 1766, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
3 February 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
1 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
17 October 1767, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
3 November 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
1 December 1767, 1.02.20, Box 629, Legatie Turkije.  
2 March 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
17 August 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
1 September 1768, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
16 January 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
3 February 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
17 July 1769, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
17 February 1773, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
3 January 1774, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
17 October 1774, 1.02.20, Box 630, Legatie Turkije.  
17 August 1779, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
4 April 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
2 August 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
17 October 1780, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
24 July 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
26 August 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
10 September 1782, 1.02.20, Box 746, Legatie Turkije.  
9 August 1784, 1.02.20, Box 786, Legatie Turkije.  
10 October 1785, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.  
26 November 1785, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.  
10 January 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.  
9 August 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.  
25 August 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.  
25 September 1786, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.  
10 February 1787, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.  
24 February 1787, 1.02.20, Box 806, Legatie Turkije.



8 April 1790, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.  
8 April 1791, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.  
25 February 1792, 1.02.20, Box 804, Legatie Turkije.  
10 March 1794, 1.02.20, Box 836, Legatie Turkije.  
9 August 1794, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije.  
10 July 1795, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije.  
10 August 1795, 1.02.20, Box 831, Legatie Turkije.  
10 September 1795, 1.02.20, Box 836, Legatie Turkije.  
25 June 1796, 1.02.20, Box 865, Legatie Turkije.  
10 April 1797, 1.02.20, Box 865, Legatie Turkije.  
18 March 1799, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije.  
27 March 1799, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije.  
26 August 1803, 1.02.20, Box 864, Legatie Turkije.  
10 September 1804, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.  
9 November 1805, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.  
26 November 1805, 1.02.20, Box 923, Legatie Turkije.  
11 July 1807, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.  
24 August 1807, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.  
25 January 1808, 1.02.20, Box 950, Legatie Turkije.  
25 November 1808, 1.02.20, Box 951, Legatie Turkije.  
26 April 1810, 1.02.20, Box 979, Legatie Turkije.  
10 May 1810, 1.02.20, Box 979, Legatie Turkije.  
6 February 1822, 2.05.12, Box 10, Gezantschap Turkije.  
25 November 1822, 2.05.12, Box 10, Gezantschap Turkije.  
21 June 1826, 2.05.12, Box 13, Gezantschap Turkije.  
10 August 1826, 2.05.12, Box 14, Gezantschap Turkije.  
2 August 1831, 2.05.12, Box 248, Gezantschap Turkije.

**Sources retrieved from the French Diplomatic Archives (*Archives Diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*)**

16 January 1767, 13CP143, Microfilm 143, Archives Diplomatiques.  
1 September 1767, 13CP143, Microfilm 143, Archives Diplomatiques.  
29 September 1767, 13CP143, Microfilm 143, Archives Diplomatiques.  
5 October 1767, 13CP143, Microfilm 143, Archives Diplomatiques.  
22 August 1782, 13CP168, Microfilm 168, Archives Diplomatiques.  
4 August 1831, 13CP262, Microfilm 262, Archives Diplomatiques.

**Sources retrieved from the Ottoman Archive (*T.C. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri*)**

29 B 1170 (19 April 1757), C..BLD., 54/2684.  
5 M 1173 (29 August 1759), C..BLD., 14/663.  
2 Ra 1182 (17 July 1768), AE.SMST.III, 120/9244.  
19 M 1184 (15 May 1770), C..BLD, 3/138.  
29 Ş 1196 (9 August 1782), C..BLD., 140/6966.  
4 N 1196 (13 August 1782), C..IKTS., 341692.  
29 N 1196 (7 September 1782), C..BLD., 138/6874.

29 Ş 1196, (7 October 1782), C..BLD., 140/6966.  
5 R 1197 (10 March 1783), C..IKTS., 37/1848.  
15 R 1197 (20 March 1783), C..AS., 1194/533387.  
29 Z 1198 (13 November 1784), HAT, 31/1450.  
25 Z 1203 (16 September 1789), AE.SABH.I., 366/25554.  
15 S 1207 (2 October 1792), C..BLD., 87/4307.  
14 Ş 1207 (27 March 1793), C..BLD., 17/829.  
10 M 1210 (27 July 1795), C..BLD., 130/6468.  
29 S 1214 (2 August 1799), HAT, 257/14779.  
3 Ş 1214 (31 December 1799), TS.MA.e, 694/4.  
29 Z 1225 (25 January 1811), HAT, 525/25726.  
29 Z 1230 (2 December 1815), HAT, 488/23952.  
23 L 1233 (26 August 1818), C..BLD., 25/1202.  
25 L 1233 (28 August 1818), HAT, 489/24002A.  
6 Za 1234 (27 August 1819), C..AS., 348/14399.  
29 Z 1235 (7 October 1820), HAT, 525/25705.  
29 M 1237 (26 October 1821), D..BŞM.d..., 8845/1237.  
29 Z 1248 (19 May 1833), HAT, 780/36531A.  
29 R 1249 (15 September 1833), C..BH.,118/5736.  
7 Za 1254 (22 January 1839), HAT, 753/35538.  
17 R 1255 (30 June 1839), TS.MA.e, 1193/59.  
29 Z 1255 (4 March 1840), C..BLD., 16/768.  
3 B 1261 (8 July 1845), C.BLD., 38/1854.  
29 Z 1262 (18 December 1846), A.}DVN., 20/91.  
8 Ca 1263 (24 April 1847), İ..MSM, 25/673.  
2 Ş 1264 (4 July 1848), A.} MKT, 137/39.  
13 L 1264 (15 July 1848), A.} MKT, 147/351.  
18 N 1264 (18 August 1848), MB.İ..., 2/109.  
29 N 1264 (29 August 1848), HAT, 1658/19.  
10 L 1264 (9 September 1848) HAT, 1658/21.  
13 L 1264 (12 September 1848), A.} MKT, 147/351.  
21 Ra 1265 (14 February 1849), A.} MKT, 174/82.  
19 Ş 1265 (10 July 1849), MVL, 194/54.  
6 N 1265 (26 July 1849), A.}MKT.MVL., 17/35.  
12 L 1266 (19 August 1850), C..BLD.,115/5719.

## 2. Primary sources and editions

**Abdülaziz Bey.** *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2002.

**Andréossy, Antoine-François.** *Constantinople et le Bosphore de Thrace Pendant les Années 1812, 1813, 1814 et Pendant l'Année 1826-1828*. Bibliotheque National de France. Accessed June 19, 2018. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

**Âsım Efendi.** *Âsım Efendi Tarihi (Osmanlı Tarihi 1218-1224/1804-1809) I*, Ziya Yılmaz ed. Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Yayınları, 2015.

---- *Âsım Efendi Tarihi (Osmanlı Tarihi 1218-1224/1804-1809) II*, Ziya Yılmaz ed. Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Yayınları, 2015.

- Bayram, Ü. Filiz.** “Enverî Târîhi: Üçüncü Cilt.” Doctoral Thesis, Istanbul University, 2014.
- Câbî, Ömer Efendi.** *Câbî Tarihi: Târih-i Sultân Selîm-i Sâlis ve Mahmûd-i Sâni: Tahlîl ve Tenkidli Metin I*, Mehmet Ali, Beyhan ed. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003.
- *Câbî Tarihi: Târih-i Sultân Selîm-i Sâlis ve Mahmûd-i Sâni: Tahlîl ve Tenkidli Metin II*, Mehmet Ali, Beyhan ed. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003.
- Câvid, Ahmed.** *Ahmed Câvid: Hadîka-i Vekâyi'*, Adnan Baycar, ed. Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1998.
- Çeşmî-Zâde, Mustafa Reşîd Efendi.** *Çeşmî-zâde Mustafa Reşîd: Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, Bekir Kütükoğlu ed. Istanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti Yayınları, 1993.
- Dervîş Efendi-zâde Dervîş Mustafa Efendi.** *1782 Yılı Yangınları [Harik Risâlesi, 1196]*, Hüsamettin Aksu ed. Istanbul: İletişim, 1994.
- Es'ad Efendi, Mehmed.** *Sahhâflar Şeyhi-zâde Mehmed Es'ad Efendi: Vak'a-Nüvîs Es'ad Efendi Tarihi*, Ziya Yılmaz ed. Istanbul: OSAV, 2000.
- Göksu, Süleyman**, ed., “Mehmed Hasib Rûz-namesi (H.1182-1195/M.1768-1781).” Master's Thesis, Marmara University, 1993.
- Göksu, Süleyman**, ed. *Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Esnasında Bir Şahidin Kaleminden İstanbul (1769-1774)*. Istanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2007.
- Irmak, Yunus**, ed. “III. Mustafa Rûz-namesi (1171-1177 / 1757-1763).” Master's Thesis, Marmara University, 1991.
- Karahasanoğlu, Selim**, ed. *Kadı ve Günlüğü: Sadreddinzade Telhisî Mustafa Efendi Günlüğü (1711-1735) Üstüne Bir İnceleme*. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2013.
- Lûtfî Efendi, Ahmed.** *Lûtfî Tarihi*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı-Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999.
- Moreno, Jose.** *Viaje a Constantinopla en el Año de 1784*. Madrid: La Imprenta Real, 1790.
- Öndikmen, Necati**, ed. “Abdülhamid I. Hakkında 8 Aylık Rûz-name (1188: 1174/1175), Yazan: Mustafa Ağa.” Unpublished Thesis, Istanbul University.
- Plan de Constantinople Gravé par P.F. Tardieu, 1788.** Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Accessed June 19, 2018. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53100686r/f1.item.r=plan%20constantinople>.
- Şânî-zâde Mehmed 'Atâ'ullah Efendi.** *Şânî-zâde Târîhi I (1223-1237 /1808-1821)*, Ziya Yılmaz ed. İstanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2008.
- *Şânî-zâde Târîhi II (1223-1237 /1808-1821)*, Ziya Yılmaz ed. İstanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2008.
- Şem'dânî-zâde, Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi.** *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih I*, Münir Aktepe ed. Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1976.
- *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih II-A*, Münir Aktepe ed. Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1978.
- *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih II-B*, Münir Aktepe ed. Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1980.
- *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih III*, Münir Aktepe ed. Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1981.
- Taylesanizâde, Hâfız Abdullah Efendi.** *Taylesanizâde Hâfız Abdullah Efendi Tarihi: İstanbul'un Uzun Dört Yılı (1785-1789)*, Feridun M Emecen ed. İstanbul: Tatav, 2003.

### 3. Secondary Sources

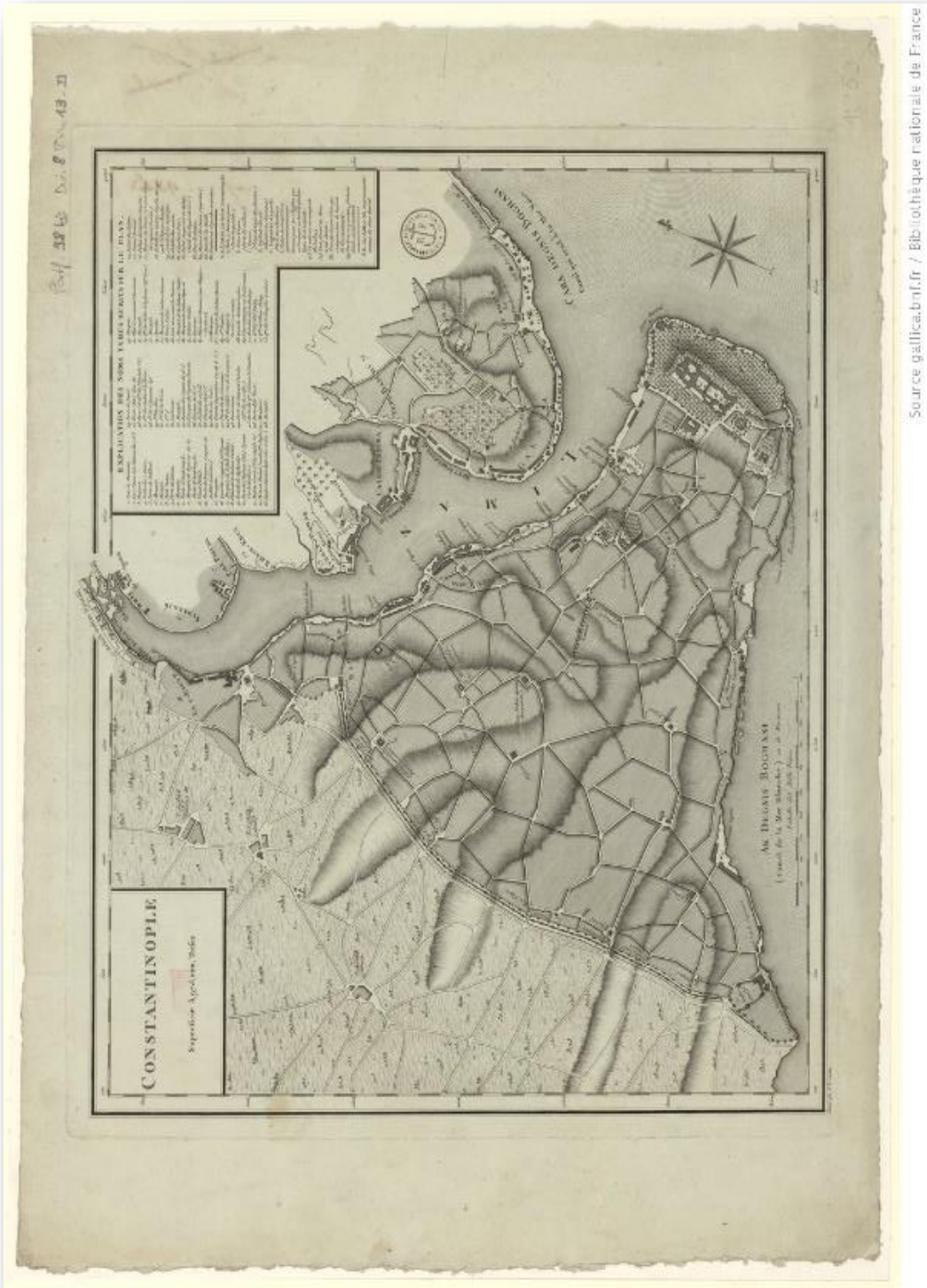
- Arıkan, Sema V. III.** *Selim Sirkâtibi Ahmed Efendi Tarafından Tutulan Rûz-name*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu: 1993.
- Ayalon, Yaron.** *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

- Baer, Marc David.** "The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004): 159-181.
- Başaran, Betül.** *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Bayram, Ü. Filiz.** "Enverî Târîhi: Üçüncü Cilt." Doctoral Thesis, Istanbul University, 2014.
- Behar, Cem.** *Bir Mahallenin Doğumu ve Ölümü (1494-2008): Osmanlı İstanbulunda Kasap İlyas Mahallesi*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014.
- Cambridge English Dictionary Online.** "Meaning of Conflagration." Accessed August 17, 2018 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflagration>.
- Cezar, Mustafa.** "Osmanlı Devrinde İstanbul Yapılarında Tahribat Yapan Yangınlar ve Tabii Afetler," in *Türk Sanatı Tarihi Araştırma ve İncelemeleri* (İstanbul: Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi, 1963).
- Çelik, Zeynep.** *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Başkenti: Değişen İstanbul*. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016.
- Demirtaş, Mehmet.** "XVI. Yüzyılda Meydana Gelen Tabii Afetlerin İstanbul'un Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayatına Etkilerine Dair Bazı Misaller." *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* (2004): 37-50.
- Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.** "Meaning of Kaḏā." Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianguis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Accessed September 28, 2018, [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_3751](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3751).
- Faroqhi, Suraiya.** "Fear, Hatred, Suspicion, and Attempts to Protect the Legitimacy of the Sultan: Istanbul Fires as Reflected in Şânî-zâde's Chronicle." In *History from Below: A Tribute in Memory of Donald Quataert*. İstanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2016.
- Faroqhi, Suraiya.** "Istanbul Fires and the Sultan's Legitimacy: Coping with Catastrophe both Materially and Mentally." Unpublished article.
- Finkel, Caroline.** *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa Osmanlı: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Öyküsü 1300-1923*. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012.
- Gül, Murat.** *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul: Transformation and Modernization of a City*. London. I.B. Tauris, 2017.
- Gürses Söğüt, Sibel.** "Osmanlı'nın Modernleşme Sürecinde İstanbul'un Yangın Söndürme Araçları." *Toplumsal Tarih* 265 (2016): 52-58.
- Hoenkamp-Mazgon, Marlies.** *Het Ambassadegebouw en Zijn Bewoners sinds 1612*. İstanbul: Ofset Yapımevi, 2009.
- İnalçık, Halil.** *Devlet-i 'Aliyye: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar – IV, Ayanlar, Tanzimat, Meşrutiyet*. İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016.
- İnalçık, Halil.** *Devlet-i 'Aliyye: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar – I: Klasik Dönem (1302-1606) Siyasal Kurumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişim*. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017.
- Koçu, Reşad Ekrem.** *İstanbul Tulumbacıları*. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2016.
- Kuzucu, Kemalettin.** "Bâbiâlî Yangınları ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Etkileri (1808-1911)." Doctoral Thesis, Erzurum University, 2000.
- Öncel, Ayşe Derin.** *Apartman: Galata'da Yeni Bir Konut Tipi*. İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2014.
- Özyurt, Ekin Deniz.** "19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarı ve 20. Yüzyıl Başındaki Yangınlar Sonrası Galata'da Kentsel Dokunun Değişimi ve Korunmuşluk Durumunun İncelenmesi." Master Thesis, Istanbul Technical University, 2007.
- Refik, Ahmed.** *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrîde İstanbul Hayatı (1495-1591)*. İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988.
- Refik, Ahmed.** *On İkinci Asr-ı Hicrîde İstanbul Hayatı (1689-1785)* İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988.

- Refik, Ahmed.** *On Üçüncü Asr-ı Hicrîde İstanbul Hayatı (1786-1822)*. İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1988.
- Rothman, E. Nathalie.** "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 771.
- Rozen, Minna & Benjamin Arbel.** "Great Fire in the Metropolis: The Case of the Istanbul Conflagration of 1569 and its Description by Marcantonio Barbaro." In *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David J. Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Schneider, A.M.** "Brände in Konstantinopel." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 41 (1941): 382-403.
- Slot, Ben.** "The Fires in Istanbul of 1782 and 1784 According to Maps and Reports by Dutch Diplomatic Representatives." *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4-5 (1975-1976): 47-66.
- TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi**, "Meaning of Kazâ." Accessed online September 28, 2018, <http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info/dia/ayrmetin.php?idno=250110&idno2=#1>.
- Ülker, Fahriye.** "Üçüncü Mustafa Devrine Âit Vak'a Nüvis Hâkim Tarihi." Doctoral Thesis, İstanbul University, 1950-1951.
- Varlık, Nükhet.** *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Yıldız, Aysel.** *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire: The Downfall of a Sultan in the Age of Revolution*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.
- Yıldız, Kenan.** "1660 İstanbul Yangınının Sosyo-Ekonomik Tahlili." Doctoral Thesis, Marmara University, 2012.
- Yıldız, Kenan.** "1782 İstanbul Yangını: Kadı Sicillerinden Tespit, Çıkarım ve Yorumlar." In *Osmanlı İstanbulu: II. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu, Bildiriler*, edited by Feridun M. Emecen, Ali Akyıldız and Emrah Safa Gürkan. İstanbul: 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi and İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2014.
- Zarinebaf, Fariba.** *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700-1800*. London: University of California Press, 2010.
- Zürcher, Erik Jan.** *Turkije, Een Moderne Geschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

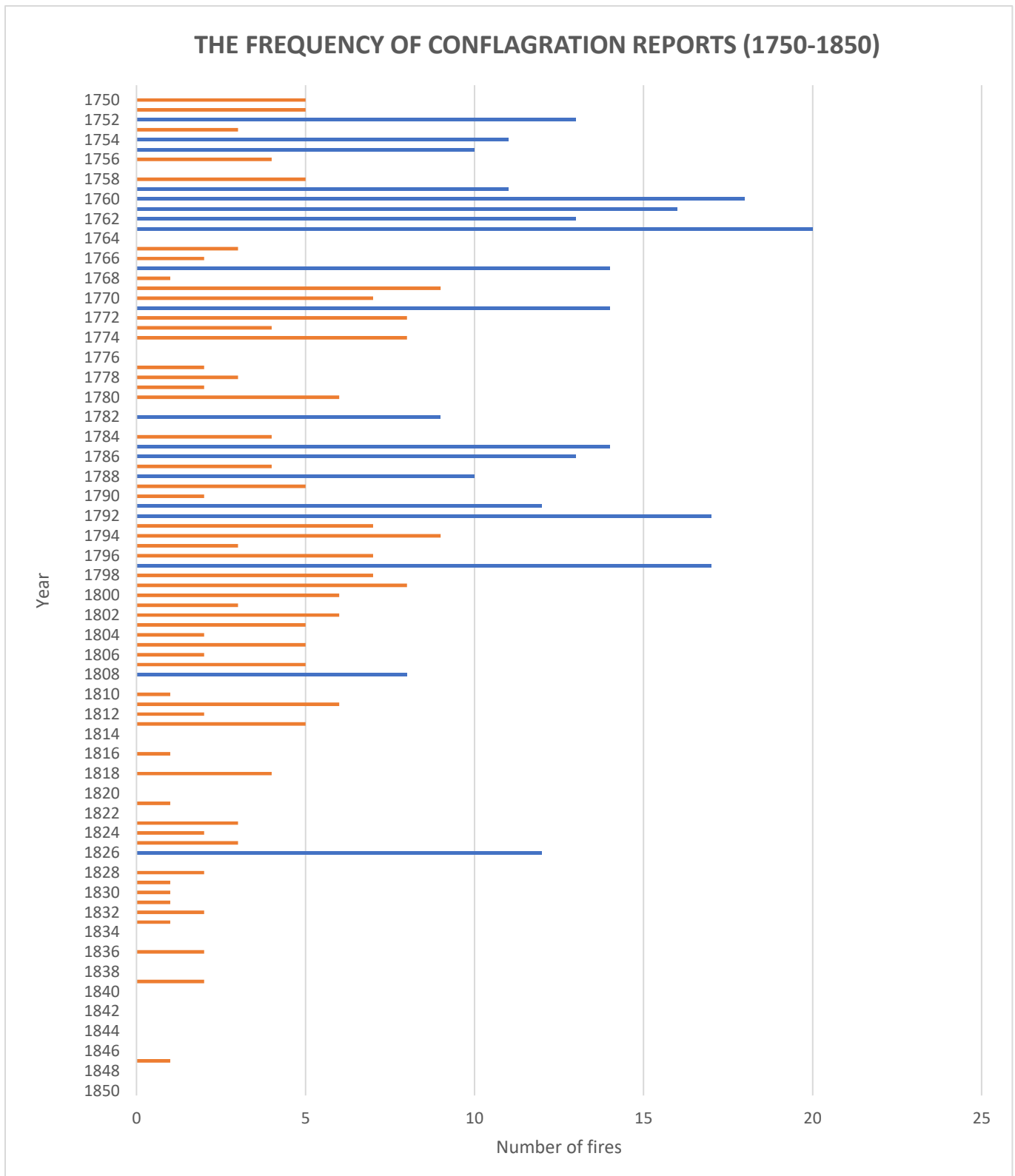
## Appendices

Appendix 1



Istanbul in 1788 with Constantinople in the southwest and Pera in the northeast. Engraved by P.F. Tardieu.

Appendix 2 (Blue colour shows the peaks in conflagration reports)





Appendix 3

