

Urban regulations in 18th century Istanbul: Natural disasters and public dispute

Işıl ÇOKUĞRAŞ¹, C. İrem GENÇER²

¹ isilcokugras@yahoo.com • Department of Interior Design, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey

² iremyaylali@gmail.com • Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey

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Abstract

As a part of the Ottoman modernization process, new regulations and institutions for urban management started to be established in Istanbul. This paper handles the 18th century as an initial period for these urban reforms and studies how the built environment was regulated at the time. The regulations of 18th century which were based on the occasion of natural disasters and public dispute will be evaluated via official archive documents and narratives.

18th century Istanbul's general urban fabric was formed with organic narrow streets and small timber houses. With the ethno-religious diversity embedded to this picture, the city had a complex and fragile character. Numerous fires causing massive destructions raised a need for precautions. Several orders related to construction systems, building height, size of building elements like eaves and projections were issued. On the other hand, the fact that urban constituents like ownership were not defined clearly in the modern sense made public dispute very common. Apart from the complexity of the built environment, most of the conflicts arose from the social structure of Istanbul which was comprised of various ethno-religious groups. There was a clear distinction of Muslims and non-Muslims in the urban realm as they had different building regulations, until the issuing of the Tanzimat Firman.

The regulations of the 18th century was based on cases, rather than being comprehensive generalized rules for the urban fabric and thus had a more proscriptive nature rather than prescriptive.

Keywords

Construction systems, Istanbul history, Ottoman history, Urban history, Urban regulation.



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1. Introduction

Even though there had been many researches on urban history of Ottoman Istanbul, 18th century still seems to be an unexplored period. As contemporary urban historians started to pay attention to this era, it became clear that it was an important interval when the modernization process of the state was initiated. As a part of this process, new regulations and institutions for urban management started to be established in Istanbul. This paper handles the 18th century as an initial period for these urban reforms and studies how the built environment was regulated at the time, on the occasion of natural disasters and public dispute.

There are extensive studies on the 19th century urban transformation of Istanbul, which regard regulations of 18th century as the preparatory phase. The transition of Western urban elements into Ottoman urban realm by Tanyeli (1992, p. 345-363), the motives and roots of urban reforms in Tanzimat Period by Yerasimos (1999, p. 1-18), the transformation process of Istanbul metropolitan area by Tekeli (1999, p. 19-31), the early planning applications of 19th century by Özcan (2006, p.149-180), and the intellectual background of 19th century urban reforms by Gül and Lamb (2004, p. 420-436) provide important clues to explore and assess 18th century urban regulations and administrative issues.

18th century Istanbul was a scene for urban and architectural change. New building forms and spaces started to emerge in this period. The cityscape began to change as the social fabric of the city developed. The Bosphorus, developed with new constructions as new ways of patronage, was introduced to the system. (Figure 1) A demand for public spaces arose and a need to establish a control over them surfaced. Embassies and prestigious buildings began to rise in Pera-Galata district as the city became a hub for commerce with Europe. Istanbul was heading forward to being the famous cosmopolite metropolis with great amount of diversity in the urban elements.

The era was multi-layered and complex as traditional values and novelties introduced by approaching modern-

ism coincided and contradicted. This was a period when the authorities' first effort to define some urban regulations was visible, as well as their effort to preserve traditional regulations. The continuous struggle between these two entities could be seen in every field of life, thus nearly in every document produced at the period.

Unlike the 19th century, pre-modern mechanisms were more prevalent in urban management of 18th century Istanbul which resulted in undefined boundaries. According to official archives, the morphological structure of buildings and ownership issues were too intricate to be described. Natural disasters and public dispute became potential grounds to formulate certain urban rules. It is even possible to say that the building regulations of the 18th century Istanbul were based on daily events.

Unfortunately this complex period has limited resources. Most of the narratives of the period ignored the daily experiences of the public as well as a detailed description of the built environment. The only resources to be found are official correspondence between the central government and local authorities, judgment records (religious court registries) and the civil code (Mecelle). Through these documents and a few narratives (Ahmet Refik, D'Ohsson) we are aware of the communities' reactions to the built environment and existing traditional regulations, as well as authorities' effort to establish regulations.

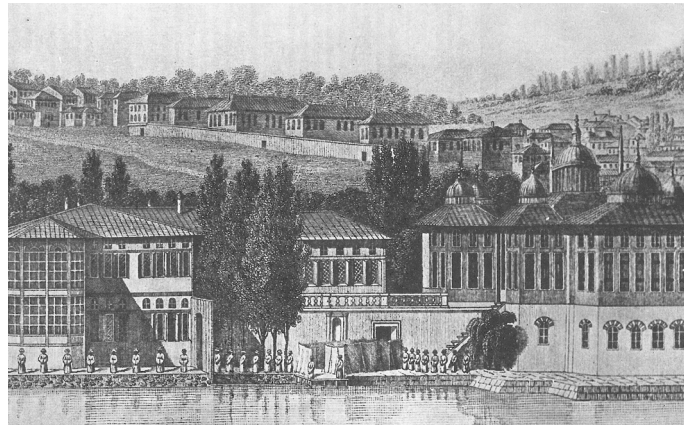


Figure 1. Beşiktaş Palace and the timber fabric behind. D'Ohsson, second half of the 18th century (Eldem, 1969, p. 128).

2. Regulations

Even though there is a tendency to view the engravings of the period with great envy of the traditional timber buildings, this construction system seems to be the main problem of the city. According to the official records and chronicles of this period, most of the houses (with exception of those belonging to the imperial family members) were timber framed buildings. (Figure 2) Timber allowed easy and fast reconstructions and was preferred by the public because of its affordability. According to D'Ohsson, who had visited Istanbul in the late 18th century, the houses were either one or two storeys high, and were rarely three storeys. He also stated that there was a striking simplicity in the construction of these houses: the interior spaces might be decorated; however outer façades were always plain. (D'Ohsson, 1788-1791, p. 198)

Although the urban fabric of 18th century Istanbul seems to be self-developed, there were some authorities in charge for buildings. All construction and public works was regulated by the Imperial Body of Architects until 1831. This institution was linked with *Şehremini*, the person responsible for finance, purchasing and administrative issues regarding constructions. There were some general rules, such as it was not possible to construct on every empty land within intramural Istanbul, since there were specific areas allocated by the central government for construction of buildings (Ergin, 1995, p. 986). In addition to that, a building

permit from the chief architect had to be obtained for new constructions (D'Ohsson, 1788-1791, p. 198). The chief architect also specified the building height, the street line on which the house would be positioned, as well as the distance of projection for the eaves and construction of projections (oriel) on the façades, according to the regulations defined by the central authorities. Another main rule was that it was not possible to make any perforations on the façades that faced a neighbor's house or land. (D'Ohsson, 1788-1791, p. 198-199)

Orders were issued at different times by the central government regarding the height, colors, construction types of buildings, as well as building elements like projections, roofs and eaves. These orders contained specific dimensions or general codes, which aimed to define, limit and standardize building regulations. From these orders, it is possible to derive that 18th century building regulations resulted from two main reasons: disasters (mostly fires) and social values. The timber structures, being the prevalent construction type, were frequently destroyed by fires. As for social values, Muslims were the predominant group in the social fabric; therefore regulations were adjusted according to them. The regulations aimed to maintain public order, especially to prevent disputes between neighbors.

The religious court registries also allow us to derive information about the urban structure of Istanbul. Although they do not always point to a specific regulation, these records enlighten measures taken against violation of ownership/property rights related to constructions. Property inheritance was also another important issue that can often be seen as related to building measures and construction types. Upon public petitions, authorities were appointed to make quantity surveys of the properties involved.

2.1. Regulations related to disasters

Fires were the most devastating incidents both for the citizens and the managers of Istanbul. The city was the scene for frequent fires that dispersed into vast areas in a short period of time.



Figure 2. Timber constructions on Atmeydanı. Melling, 18th century (Kuban, 1996, p. 385).

Therefore it is not surprising to see that most of the imperial orders, archive records and religious court registries were concerned with regulating the urban space for fire mitigation. First part of this section will focus on these regulations which provide an insight on the perspective of the central authorities and the physical impact of these measures.

The natural disasters Istanbul had faced were not only fires of course, the city also suffered from earthquakes. The timber-framed construction that was vulnerable for fire had actually outlived such shocks. However the one in 1766 had caused a massive destruction. After this disaster, it is known that public buildings were restored and many decrees were issued on these buildings. (Mazlum, 2011) However, we have too scarce information about the condition of civil buildings and their reconstruction process.

Timber construction was preferred by the public for its low cost compared to stone masonry buildings, and the timber was seen as the main reason for fires. (Figure 3) Starting from the period of Suleiman I (1520-1566) the authorities complained about this situation and tried to take precautions on the subject. An early order dating to 1696 suggested that all new constructions (including houses and shops) must be made of stone, lime and mud, according to the owner's wealth and the eaves would be made of dogtooth courses (Ergin, 1995, p. 991). Dog-

tooth eaves continuously come up in further documents. The reason for this persistency is because these eaves would not extend as wide as timber eaves. Considering the narrowness of the streets, this precaution aimed to prevent the spreading of fire. In order to provide materials for masonry construction, a new order was issued in 1702 to revitalize the lime kilns and brick kilns (Altınay, 1988b, p. 35).

Another order dating to 1718 gave similar recommendations to that of 1696's and indicated that when buildings caught fire and needed a thorough repair or reconstruction, they should be constructed from stone masonry with dogtooth eaves that did not project forward. Also, in areas close to city walls, no timber constructions should be allowed (Ergin, 1995, p.991). These general concerns were repeated in an order regarding the architectural and construction style of Istanbul houses issued in 1719. This order mentioned some regulations on projections on façades (oriel) as well. The oriel should not exceed 18 *parmak*s (fingers) and should not face each other; they should be constructed on alternating levels (one on top, one on bottom level) for corresponding houses. (Altınay, 1988b, p. 66-67)

Another important issue was the wooden terraces. A firman issued in 1726 banned the construction of such terraces on roofs, since these allowed fire to jump from one house to the other easily, especially on narrow streets



Figure 3. Timber urban fabric. Melling, 18th century (Kuban, 1996, p. 364).

Table 1. Fire prevention measures for houses.

Date issued	Type	Summary	Content
1696	Imperial order	All new constructions -including houses and shops- must be made of stone, lime and mud, according to the owner's wealth. Eaves should be made of dogtooth courses.	Mandatory masonry construction
1718	Imperial order	Buildings destroyed in fire should be reconstructed with stone masonry and dogtooth eaves. Construction of timber buildings close to city walls was banned.	Mandatory masonry construction Prohibition of timber structures close to city walls
1719	Imperial order	Projections on façades (oriels) should not exceed 18 fingers in İstanbul and should not face each other; instead they should be constructed on alternating levels for corresponding houses.	Limitation of façade projections
1726	Firman	Construction of wooden terraces was banned.	Prohibition of wooden terraces
1743		Construction of wooden terraces was banned.	Prohibition of wooden terraces
1795		No buildings should be allowed to be constructed next to the city walls, a distance of 3 m from one side of the walls should be allocated for the road	Prohibition of any structure next to city walls
1796	Order of chief architect	No buildings should be allowed to be constructed next to the city walls	Prohibition of any structure next to city walls

(Şeriyye Registers, ISTANBUL, Vol. 21, page 519, registry no: 307). However prohibition of wooden terraces came up again in an order in 1743, as some owners wanted to construct such terraces when renewing their homes after the fire in 1742 in Sultanahmet (Altınay, 1988b, p. 158). These reiterating orders suggest that it was not possible to implement these suggestions. The rules had to be repeated after every devastating case.

City walls were an urban concern for the managers of Istanbul since people were building on these structures even though it was not allowed. In addition, making extensions from the houses close to the walls was also prohibited. In several orders, this rule was reminded. Although it may seem to be a modern historic preservation approach, the real reason for this was again fire prevention, since fires outside the city walls could easily spread to the inner parts due to the attached or extended houses (Altınay, 1988b, p. 67-68). For example an imperial order stated that in 1796 fire outside the city walls had

spread out and caused damage in the intramural region in Zindankapı due to the timber buildings higher than the city walls. The order emphasized that no buildings should be allowed to be constructed next to the city walls. (BOA, HAT.1414/57761, 1796) (For summary of fire prevention measures for houses: see Table 1)

Commercial buildings, like khans and shops that were covering nearly the half of the built environment of Istanbul, were a major concern for the government. According to an order, in a fire in 1717, 25 khans with timber construction and “filled” walls easily caught fire. (In filled construction, the wall is constructed with vertical, horizontal and diagonal timber posts and the space in between them is filled with materials like mud brick or rubble stone.) The orders stated that khans and shops were not allowed to be built from timber and all such buildings should be constructed of stone. One year later, a new order was issued repeating the prohibition on construction of timber shops, unless the own-

Table 2. Building regulations for commercial buildings.

Date issued	Type	Content	Content
1717	Imperial order	The khans and shops were not allowed to be built from timber and all such buildings should be constructed of stone.	Mandatory masonry construction
1718	Imperial order	The khans and shops were not allowed to be built from timber, unless the owners were not wealthy enough to build a stone masonry building.	Mandatory masonry construction for wealthy shop owners
1731	Imperial order	The construction of masonry khans was banned.	Prohibition of masonry construction
1746	Imperial order	With the condition that only the shopkeepers kept their belongings (commodities) and no other stranger was allowed to enter, masonry rooms were allowed to be built above the bakeries and some shops.	Allowance for masonry construction
1766	Imperial order	The construction of timber khans was banned. If the owner was not wealthy, at least he was obliged to construct the outer walls in masonry and the rest of the structure could be built from timber.	Mandatory masonry construction for all shop owners

ers were not wealthy enough to cover the costs of a stone masonry building (Ergin, 1995, p. 992).

There was a major contradiction on the subject of khans as well. Even though the fire precautions demanded masonry construction, the government issued an order in 1731 that banned the construction of masonry khans. This was due to the fact that the shopkeepers sometimes joined Janissaries at public revolts, gathering in masonry khans in large groups and defending themselves (Ergin, 1995, p. 993). The fear for masses coming together at these commercial buildings came up in an order issued in 1746, which stated that under the condition that no other person other than the owner was allowed to enter, masonry rooms were permitted to be built above the bakeries and some shops (Ergin, 1995, p. 995). Later, in 1766, construction of timber khans was banned this time and according to the order if the owner was able to cover the costs, he was obliged to build a masonry khan, if not, he would at least construct the outer walls in masonry and the rest of the structure could be built from timber (Ergin, 1995, p. 996). As we can see in this brief summary, the inconsistency on constructional system of commercial buildings reflected the government's

mentality to establish rules on daily basis. Even though the government's reaction to public discontent and fire contradicted, they still issued these orders that out rule the previous one, inhibiting to establish a general rule. (For summary of building regulations for commercial buildings: see Table 2)

Regularizing building heights were a part of the fire prevention. The residential quarters of the 18th century Istanbul were covered with buildings with various heights, but not too high in general. For shops, the standard height was 4 *arşın*s (1 *arşın* = approx. 75 cm), although this could change according to the type of craft being practiced (Ergin, 1995, p. 998). There were also some orders which specified the heights of buildings according to their function. For example, after the fire in the Hippodrome, it was decided that horse stables and other commercial buildings in the zone should be reconstructed. According to the order on the subject issued in 1761, the heights of horse stables would be 6 *ziras* (1 *zira* = approx. 75 cm); the shops of haircloth sellers 5 *ziras*; bakeries 8 *ziras*; bakeries with mills 10 *ziras*; groceries, vegetable sellers and tinsmiths 6 *ziras*; greengroceries and attars 4 *ziras* (Ergin, 1995, p. 998). Another example of such an order was issued in 1795, reminding

Table 3. Regulations on heights of shops.

Date issued	Content
1761	Building heights defined for shops: horse stables: 4,5 m haircloth sellers: 3,75 m bakeries 6 m bakeries with mills 7,5 m groceries, vegetable sellers 4,5 m tinsmiths 4,5 m greengroceries and attars 3 m
1795	Construction of timber terraces or roofs was prohibited for shops; all shops must be masonry. Height of shops close to the city walls, molasses, olive oil and legumes sellers: 4,5 m tobacco sellers: 4,9 m ironsmiths, boilersmiths, producers of arsenal equipments, groceries: 4,1 m clothsellers, fruitsellers, fish sellers, stone masons, attars, barbers, coffee sellers: 3 m

the rule that it was forbidden to build on and next to the city walls, while a distance of 4 *ziras* from one side of the wall should be allocated for the road and the shops should not exceed the height of 4 *ziras* if they were attached to the city wall. The order also reminded that no timber terraces or roofs could be constructed and all shops, whether on/in/out of city walls, should be constructed of stone masonry (Ergin, 1995, p. 1000). (For summary of regulations on heights of shops: see Table 3)

2.2. Regulations based on public dispute

Generally, Istanbul's neighborhoods' residential patterns were determined by ethnicity and religion, however there were also mixed neighborhoods. We might say that these patterns defined the borders of neighborhoods rather than urban elements like streets. Main roads would define some borders, but otherwise organically formed streets and narrow alleys would run in the neighborhoods. Within this context, keeping in mind that Ottoman State was an Islamic state and nearly half of the population of Istanbul was non-Muslims, neighborhood conflicts especially caused by religion was inevitable.

Besides, the fact that urban constituents like ownership were not defined clearly in the modern sense in this peri-

od made public dispute very common. Most of the public petitions on neighborhood conflicts referred to land or property conflicts. There are numerous cases where the conflicts were caused by ethno-religious diversity and Muslims' power over the non-Muslims. Solutions offered to the petitions give us hints about the built environment and regulations of the period.

The fires did not only cause problems about constructions, but they were a major security issue for the city due to the uncontrolled burnt areas. According to a religious court registry dating from 1666, citizens of Koca Mustafa Paşa district complained that vagabonds were using the places that were burnt during the fire. They demanded a permission to build gates (*parmak kapı*) at entrances of the district. These would be closed at nights and keep strangers outside the neighborhood. (Şeriiye Registers, BAB03, vol.15, page 68, registry no: 88) We know that *parmak kapı* were one of the most common safety precautions for neighborhoods. The significance of this document is that, it points out to the active role of the residents in urban interventions to their neighborhoods.

Complexity of the civil architecture is another issue that appears behind the documents. The houses did not have integrity, one room would be over another house and since there were no

regulations to control this, there would be a lot of conflicts on the subject. For example a 17th century religious court registry handled a case where İbrahim Çelebi built a room on top of Hasan Çelebi's house. An architect sent by the authorities inspected the houses and observed that İbrahim Çelebi's room was built 7 *ziras* on Hasan Çelebi's property. Hasan Çelebi declared that it had been constructed by his permission. (Şeriyye Registers, EYÜB 90, Vol. 31, page 439, registry no: 530) The fact that although none of the companies denounced each other, the authorities had issued an inspection hints that there was a concern to establish an urban order. It seems that these sorts of constructions were regarded as problematic even though they were very common. These unclear boundaries of the properties not only caused a lot of problems in the aftermaths of fires, but also they challenge the traditional Turkish house historiography.

Apart from the complexity of the built environment, most of the conflicts arose from the social structure of Istanbul which was comprised of various ethno-religious groups. Although the number of petitions informs us that these regulations were broken frequently, there was a clear distinction of Muslims and non-Muslims in the urban context. It was forbidden for non-Muslims to settle in Islamic sacred regions, like Eyüp Sultan Mausoleum (Bozkurt, 1989, p.18) and they would usually live in groups in certain neighborhoods like Fener, Balat, Samatya and Kumkapı. Although it was not forbidden for non-Muslims to live in Muslim neighborhoods, through complaints we are aware that it was not welcomed. In various documents the non-Muslims settled in Muslim neighborhoods were asked to sell their properties to Muslims.

According to the Islamic Law, the house of a non-Muslim should differ from the Muslims' both in height and color. However, the number of imperial orders reminding the citizens of this regulation implies that this regulation was often disobeyed. At certain periods when the authorities were concerned with establishing the public order, number of imperial orders about this

regulation had increased. For example during his reign, Selim III ordered non-Muslims to paint their houses to black and Muslims not to paint their houses to black so that the non-Muslim houses could be spotted immediately. The order also stated that the non-Muslims' houses should not have windows facing the houses of Muslims. (Bozkurt, 1989, p.19) D'Ohsson, who had visited Istanbul in late 18th century, mentioned these rules in his depiction of Istanbul (D'Ohsson, 1788-1791: 198).

The height of the buildings was another distinctive pattern for religious distinction. A *fetwa* stated that if a non-Muslim constructed a building higher than the Muslims', it would be demolished to the level of the Muslims' building (Kayra, 2008, p. 81). According to an imperial order dating to 1719, in intramural and extramural İstanbul, the Jews and Christians should not build their building higher than two floors and they would not be allowed to construct three storeys (Altınay, 1988b, p.67). An imperial order sent to the chief architect in 1726 also stated that while Muslims were allowed to build 12 *ziras* high buildings; non-Muslims were not allowed to build higher than 9 *ziras*. (Altınay, 1988b, p.83) These limits were increased a century later to 14 *ziras* for Muslims and 12 *ziras* for non-Muslims, as stated in a firman issued in 1817 (Ergin, 1995, p. 997). This practice was abandoned after the issuing of the Tanzimat Firman, which is one of the reasons why the high non-Muslim buildings we see today belong to late 19th and early 20th century.

In the urban context, religious identity also caused conflicts on ownership since it was a problem for a non-Muslim to buy a property in a Muslim neighborhood. In an imperial order issued in 1636, it was stated that some of the houses in the Muslim neighborhood in Langa were bought by non-Muslims, thus the mescid and the school was surrounded with them. It was also noted that the non-Muslims' ceremonies were disturbing the Muslims. The citizens of the neighborhood had written a complaint to Shaykh al-Islam about this, who replied to

them with a fetwa. The fetwa suggested that these non-Muslims should convert into Islam or they should sell their properties to Muslims. The imperial order demanded this fetwa to be applied. (Altınay, 1988a, p.53-54)

In many documents on Muslim-non-Muslim conflicts, the Muslims complain about being disturbed by non-Muslims ceremonies. Keeping in mind that non-Muslims were not allowed to perform their ceremonies outside determined locations, it seems that this was used as an excuse to move out non-Muslims from the neighbourhood. Once a Muslim complained about being disturbed by non-Muslims ceremonies, he would immediately get attention of Shaykh al-Islam.

In one petition issued in 1700, it was stated that some buildings and rooms located near a mosque, were rented to some non-Muslims. According to the Muslim tradition, if a non-Muslim settled in a Muslim neighborhood or rented rooms near a mosque, the owner of the room was asked to rent it to a Muslim. (Altınay, 1988b, p.30) Similarly, in a case that took place in 1817, a Jew bought a land that belonged to a Muslim. However, because it was against the regulation, he was asked to sell the land to a Muslim and his right to ownership was transferred to a Jewish neighborhood. (Aykut, 2006, p.20) Examples of such cases can be multiplied and reveal that in pre-Tanzimat Istanbul, the non-Muslims had quite a lot of difficulties in settling wherever they want and keeping their properties.

Although single cases were mentioned here, we know that Istanbul's 19th century ethno-religious distribution was shaped before Tanzimat through massive movements. The construction of Yeni Valide Mosque in Eminönü is the most significant case. Starting from the 17th century, the area that was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood was given to Muslims. (Baer, 2004) According to an imperial order sent to İstanbul Qadi, Janissary Agha and chief officer in 1726, outside the Balıkpazarı Gate there were many Jewish houses that were located near Yeni Valide Mosque. The order stated that those houses should be occupied by Muslims instead; therefore the Jews

should be moved to some Jewish district. (Altınay, 1988b, p.88-89) A series of 19th century archival documents state that some Armenians were moved to intramural Istanbul and Üsküdar, and they were asked to sell their properties in Galata, Beyoğlu and Bosphorus coast to Muslims. (BOA C.DH.127/6306, C.DH.243/12126, C.DH.25/1219, C.DH.293/14603, C.DH.86/4266, 1828) As seen in these cases, most of the time the construction of an Islamic religious building resulted in transfer of non-Muslims to another district. We might definitely say that the urban regulations favored the Muslims and supported Islamization of certain areas.

Besides these, repairing their religious buildings was not easy for the non-Muslims. There are a few cases before Tanzimat allowing such repair works. For example in 1693, we see some permission to repair churches and synagogues. Jews were allowed to repair their synagogues and Armenians were allowed to repair their Aya Sirati Church burnt in fire (Altınay, 1988b, p.10). However, in most cases these renovation works were not permitted. For instance, in an imperial order sent to Istanbul Qadi and the chief architect in 1738, it was stated that the Greek Patriarchate in Fener was damaged in a fire and the demand to repair the building was met with opposition. In the order, it was pointed out clearly that the repair works would not be allowed. (Altınay, 1988b, p.139-140) Only after the Tanzimat we start seeing permissions for repairing churches and synagogues. The earliest order we came across dated to 1842 and it stated that religious buildings and schools belonging to Greeks, Armenians and Jews in Istanbul and other villages were to be repaired (BOA HAT 177/7805, 1258/1842). Numerous orders and documents related to repair works of churches in Istanbul followed this order.

3. Discussion

18th century Istanbul's general urban fabric was formed with organic narrow streets and small timber houses. With the ethno-religious diversity embedded to this picture, the city had a complex and fragile character. Numerous fires

causing massive destructions raised a need for precautions. Several orders related to construction systems, building height, size of building elements like eaves and projections were issued. Those precautions aiming to mitigate the spreading of fire in a neighborhood and mainly demanding masonry construction did not turn out as a building code. Rather, they were spontaneous reactions to current events, generally to great fires and most of the times were issued according to social conditions. For example, strict prohibition of timber structures was followed by an order that allowed people with low income to build timber houses or shops because of social order issues especially regarding the shop owners. The role of commercial buildings in public revolts resulted in an indecision on their construction type. The attitude of the government towards the built environment was ambiguous at certain times.

Apart from the fact that the government out ruled its own decisions on urban order sometimes, there was a lack of an authority to implement these regulations. For example, in his study, Özcan (2006, p. 150-151) states that although the Imperial Architects' Guild had a great authority on the urban context, it was not possible to establish an institutionalized urban order. Until Tanzimat, all the regulations related to the city were organized according to the Islamic Law and Qadis were in charge of the establishing the urban order. Although certain orders for urban regulations had been issued by the sultans starting from the 16th century (Yerasimos, 1999, p. 6-7), the implementation and monitoring of the urban regulations became possible only after the issuing of Tanzimat Firman in 1839. While the regulations were transformed into more specific urban codes, the administrative bodies were established to govern and control these codes.

The ambiguity was not only in government's decisions and administration, it was also a part of the built environment as issues of ownership and borders of buildings were not clear. These indeterminacies and contradictions caused by them were actually the main character of the 18th century.

However in the urban context, the issues had to be solved and social order had to be maintained. Public disputes related to the buildings were resolved by instant interventions, yet there were general rules about the distinction of non-Muslims' urban elements from the Muslims'. By issuing restrictions regarding the properties of buildings of non-Muslims (such as color, size, etc.) the government aimed to prevent the conflicts within different social groups and re-affirm Muslims' power over the non-Muslims. Even though the number of petitions on this subject informs us that these regulations were broken frequently, there was a clear distinction of Muslims and non-Muslims in the urban realm. Only after the issuing of the Tanzimat Firman, the situation had started to change and non-Muslims began to own and repair their properties more freely. Until then, regulation of urban form was an important factor in maintaining social order.

We can conclude that before the Tanzimat Period, the building codes and regulations of the Ottoman State relied on two main themes: natural disasters and social values. The regulations of the 18th century was based on cases, rather than being comprehensive generalized rules for the urban fabric and thus had a more proscriptive nature rather than prescriptive.

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