

# The British Post Office in the Ottoman capital: A transition through a turbulent period

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## Abstract

Spurred by the Crimean War (1853-1856), Britain established a post office in Istanbul for the British army, to manage all its military correspondence. Once the war had finished, the British Army Post Office was converted into a civilian office. Because the old building was found to be inadequate for the increased business, the Postmaster General of the UK, George Campbell, directed that a new building should be erected. In 1859 the architect and civil engineer, Joseph Nadin designed and managed the construction of the new British Post Office in Galata. The building, which remains standing to this day, was used as the British Post Office until 1895, when it was closed, apparently for political reasons, during the Armenian riots. Afterwards it was converted, initially into a rental property, and from 1905 onwards used as the English High School for Boys. Meanwhile, the British Post Office moved into new addresses in the vicinity of the previous building and opened a new branch office in the Historical Peninsula. This article examines the historical background of the several relocations of the British Post Office in Istanbul and analyses these different office buildings in terms of their architectural designs.

## Keywords

Late Ottoman Architecture, Victorian Architecture, Anglo-Ottoman Relations, British Post Office.

## 1. Historical background

From the end of the 16th century the correspondence between the Ottoman Empire and other states was mostly carried out by foreign postal systems and post offices until the first quarter of the 20th century (Aslan, 2012). During this period the first foreign postal service within the Ottoman frontier was run by the Venetians (Tural, 2007). By the 18th century, Austria and Russia were entitled to establish postal organisations in the Ottoman Empire. Within a short period of time, this right was also claimed by other European states such as France in 1812, United Kingdom of Britain in 1832, Greece in 1834 and Germany in 1870 (Varlık, 1985; Eskin, 1942).

On finding the Ottoman postal service inadequate, western states initially opened post offices to serve their own embassies and consulates. Later, they began to carry the post of foreigners from other countries, along with that of their own citizens and merchants living in the Ottoman Empire. Since the Ottoman maritime transportation had not reached the same standards as Europe, particularly in the 19th century, the interest in foreign postal steamers increased among the Ottoman subjects (Aslan, 2012).

In order to compete with the foreign post offices, the Ottoman administration established specific commissions and worked to improve the Ottoman postal service. Until the 19th century, correspondence within the Ottoman Empire was commonly maintained through couriers and post stations called *menzilhane* in Turkish. These stations were located on the transportation routes at regular intervals and used by the couriers for rest, food, change of horse and other needs (Aslan, 2012). Due to the flaws in the courier-post station system, during the reign of Sultan Mahmut II (1808-1839) the first attempt was made to create a modern postal organisation by building new roads and commissioning postal carriages (Yazıcı, 1999).

However, a thorough organisation of a European-style, stable postal system was gradually established during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit (1839-1861) (Yazıcı, 1999). After the Ministry

of Post had been formed on 23 October 1840, the old postal system was reformed, designed to serve all Ottoman subjects (Tural, 2007). The Ministry of Post and the first Ottoman post office in Istanbul began service with the name of "Postane-i Amire" in a two storied wooden building located at the courtyard of the New Mosque in Eminönü (Eskin, 1942). The arrangement of the first post offices was prepared after examining European postal organisations. According to the first Ottoman postal regulation, enacted on 16 November 1840, post offices were to be opened in the central quarters of the city and to be made up of a single room with shelves, cupboards and niches. The regulation also defined that in this room, there must be a window or a door separating the officers' section from the visiting customers. At the entrance of the building there should be a sign, indicating that the building was a post office with a board showing the postal tariffs. Until 1863, in which the first Ottoman stamp was printed, approximately sixty post offices were put into service by virtue of this regulation (Aslan, 2012).

Despite all attempts, the Ottoman Empire failed to restructure and regulate its communication with foreign countries (Aslan, 2012). To be able to compete with the foreign post offices the Ottoman administration decided to use foreign specialists. After the Crimean War (1853-1856) a British postal specialist, Edward James Smith, was retained and temporarily employed by the Ottoman government (POST 30/147A, c. 1861). Initially Smith had been sent from the Inland Letter Office at London's General Post Office to Istanbul in 1854 as "Postmaster to British Forces" (POST 29/79A, c. 1857). The second British specialist, who worked for the Ottoman administration, was an official called Frank Ives Scudamore. On 15 September 1876 Scudamore established the International Ottoman Post Office called İttihat Postası, which for the first time allowed the Ottoman Ministry of Post to officially deliver international mail and fully integrate with the international postal services (Yazıcı, 1999; HL Deb, 1880). Scudamore was dismissed

in 1877 on the grounds that he was behaving as though he was the head of an independent foreign institution and had also created budget deficits (Aslan, 2012; Tan, 1967).

In 1832 Britain commenced its postal service in the Ottoman Empire initially to provide secure correspondence for its embassy (Aslan, 2012). The 1838 Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Treaty of Baltalimanı, which was a formal trade agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, was a turning point for both countries. Following this treaty British merchants gained full access to all Ottoman markets and were taxed the same as local merchants. In the same year the Ottoman Empire signed similar trade agreements with other European countries and gradually became an open market (Çelik, 1998; Issawi, 1966). As the interest of the British merchants grew in the Ottoman market, from 1840 onwards Britain began to construct many public buildings in the Near East. This was related to the rivalry between European powers, the rising European economic influence over the area, the liberalization of Ottoman laws and finally the establishment of influential British communities and missionary groups (Crimson, 1996).

By the 1840's, the number of British residents in Istanbul and therefore the number of British ships had increased rapidly. The British built a new embassy in 1842-1854, and in 1846 the Seamen's Hospital was established. In 1849 three other buildings were begun: a consulate, a consular prison and a new chapel in the grounds of the embassy. The consulate, the consular prison and the Seamen's Hospital together formed a consular compound in Galata. Galata was the historic town of business and commerce, whose role can be traced as far back as the Genoese occupation in the twelfth century. European banks and businesses were situated downhill from the Galata Tower, and it was here in the late 1840's, two miles away from the embassy in Pera, yet in the heart of the British community, that the British established many of the elements of what could be termed a consular compound (Crimson, 1996).

The Crimean War was a second

turning point for the British community and its construction activities in Istanbul. The alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Britain during the war reinforced the political relations between the two countries. The Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856, *Islahat Fermanı*, which was proclaimed at the end of the war, brought along, among many other reforms, a substantial freedom in terms of the construction facilities of non-Muslim subjects living in the Ottoman Empire and it accelerated the completion of the British consular compound in Galata. After the edict, Britain started to build more monumental buildings in the Ottoman Empire such as the Crimean Memorial Church in Pera in 1858. Within the following few years the compound in Galata had taken shape. Consular shipping offices and the British Post Office were added as the final elements of the complex (Crimson, 1996).

Although the right to establish a post office in the Ottoman Empire was given to Britain in 1832, until the Crimean War no British mail, except consular correspondence, was delivered through the British postal organisation. Just after the beginning of the Crimean War, Britain established a post office in Istanbul for the British army to manage their troops' correspondence (Aslan, 2012; Yurtsever, 1983). The Illustrated London News of 19th January 1856 reports in an article entitled "The British Army Post-Office at Constantinople" that the staff employed consisted of a post master, three assistant post masters, eight clerks, who had been selected from the General Post Office in London, and two natives of Istanbul, who acted chiefly as interpreters. Two of the post masters and three of the clerks were employed in the post office in the Crimea, assisted by two "intelligent non-commissioned officers". According to the article, each time the boat from Marseilles brought "twenty to twentyfive bags full of letters exceeding 12000 and papers about 8000". This vast number was sorted into regiments, brigades and divisions and dispatched to the Crimea and Scutari in the short space of two hours (The Illustrated London News, 1856).

The interior of the British Army Post



**Figure 1.** *The Interior of the British Army Post Office (The Illustrated London News, 1856).*

Office is depicted in detail on a drawing of the same article published in the Illustrated London News. The architectural features of the space match exactly the required physical conditions of a post office stated in the first Ottoman postal regulation of 16 November 1840 which was, in turn, derived from examining the European postal organisations (Figure 1). The office is divided into the mail delivery room and the officers' room. These two parts are connected through an opening with a segmental arch carried by two pilasters in the form of a classical column on both sides. There are cupboards and shelves on the walls of the officers room, where letter bags are piled up and letters are placed into the niches. The room is decorated in a classicist manner particularly with architectural elements such as the row of crosses on the cornice, doric pilasters and walls covered with vertical stripes. After the war came to an end, the British Army Post Office was converted into a civilian and public post office on 1 June 1857, which was initially established in a temporary premises hired by the Postmaster Edward James Smith (POST 29/79A, c. 1857).

## 2. Architectural features of the purpose-built office building in Galata

The Illustrated London News of 17 December 1859 notes the establishment of a new British post office in Galata detailed in another article entitled "New British Post Office at Constantinople" (The Illustrated London News, 1859). According to the article with a drawing of the new building (Figure 2), "the new British post office at Constantinople is deserving some-



**Figure 2.** *The British Post Office building in Galata (The Illustrated London News, 1859).*

thing more than a mere passing notice":

"Irrespective of its other advantages, it marks what we hope is the commencement of a new order of things in the Levant. Hitherto our Government buildings have been carried on in that quarter with a total disregard of anything like economy. It would startle the public to hear the total sum that has been expended on our Government buildings in Constantinople. The system of commencing works without fixing what they are to cost has led to the unnecessary expenditure of vast sums of money.

The postal communication with the Levant, in consequence of the absence of any arrangement on the part of the Ottoman Government, has to be carried on by the various Powers whose relations are extended over the empire. Prior to the war England had no post-office establishment in Turkey; but the great development of our relations with that country induced the Government to open an Office at Constantinople, to which Mr. James Ker was appointed as postmaster. Under this gentleman's steadily-improving management the service has been well carried out, and the convenience of the large British colony in Constantinople (upwards of 8000) has been in every respect properly attended to.

The building hitherto occupied as the Post Office having been found inadequate to the increasing business, the Postmaster-General determined on



*having a building erected. Tenders were invited, and the plan of Joseph Nadin, Esq., C.E. and architect, was selected as the most suitable in every respect. He is also the contractor for the works. Mr. E. C. Baines, clerk of the works from the Post Office Department, was sent from England to superintend the progress of the building, the whole cost of which will not exceed 4500 Pounds.*

*The most remarkable feature in connection with the building is the rapidity of its construction. The foundation was laid on 22nd of June, and the building was so far completed by the 15th of October that the first delivery of letters took place on that date. The Supreme Consular Court, which is contiguous to the new Post, occupied upwards of two years in erecting, although the work is neither larger nor superior to the new Post Office.*

*The architect (Mr. Nadin) has felicitously adapted his plans to the circumstances of the country.*

*A complete money-order office is annexed to the general office, and a fire-proof office for the safety of the department is attached, and the whole of the departments are complete in every sense of the word. A large and convenient residence for the Postmaster and assistants is erected over the Post Office, which has an uninterrupted view of the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus, and the Sea of Marmora.*

*The fronts of the building present an appearance of great taste and solidity - a colonnade, with massive Doric granite columns on two faces, between which handsome iron railings are placed, the height of the Post Offices twenty feet, and two stories over, of twelve feet each. On top of the whole is a look-out tower, with signal-post, commanding a perfect view of approaches to the Golden Horn, so as to enable the arrival of the mail-steamers to be signalled. A ventilating light shaft, ten feet diameter, rises up through the whole building, terminating with a rich dome on the roof."*

From what can be understood from the article and the drawing, the building is a masonry building consisting of five floors in total, including the basement and a terrace. The ground floor was designed for the offices, whereas the first and second floors were de-

signed for the accommodation of the postal officers. The building, located on the acute angled corner of a building block, was shaped in accordance with the form of the construction area. By comparison with the adjacent wooden houses and the architectural texture of the neighbourhood it has a different character in terms of scale, material and architectural style.

The corner between the two street facing facades was beveled by the architect in order to form a corner facade just on the centre. This arrangement had been applied in Victorian architecture often and one of the first celebrated examples was the Sun Assurance Building in London Threadneedle Street, which was designed by C. R. Cockerell in 1841. The main entrance of the post office was placed on this narrow central facade behind the colonnade on the ground floor consisting of four columns on each street-facing facade. The gaps between the columns were closed with iron railings except for the entrance. On the first and second floors there were three windows on two main facades and one window on the narrow central facade, all framed by rectangular stone jambs. On the facades, each floor was separated from each other with a horizontal molding. On top of the building there was a terrace with a ventilating light shaft, look-out tower and a signal post immediately above the hipped roof covered with tiles. The facade of the building was kept unplastered so that the load bearing stones could be seen from the outside.

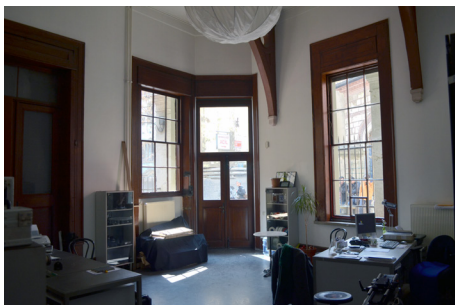
Today the British post office building in Galata still stands on the same corner further down from the Galata Tower where Camedan Street and Hacı Ali Street intersect each other (Figure 3). In comparison to the drawing in the Illustrated London News, it is evident that the original design of the building has been substantially conserved. The terrace was enlarged by removing the hipped roof and two windows facing the Camedan Street were filled in. For the rest of the building, all of the components of the architectural design reflect their original state, such as the rectangular stone jambs, horizontal moldings, woodwork of the main entrance door and ground floor windows



**Figure 3.** The British Post Office Building (Photo: M. Kaan Sağ, 2014).

with special compartments for mail delivery (Figure 4).

Similarly inside, most of the structural and decorative components have been substantially conserved in their original state. Typical British construction techniques from the 19th century are visible; in the entrance hall, the exposed beams with curvilinear braces are placed on stone consoles (Figure 5), and on the upper floor, cast iron beams are left exposed and riveted (Figure 6). The use of iron was transformed in Britain in the early period of the Industrial Revolution from a material produced on a relatively small scale serving local needs to a leading national industry. Iron was then used to make all kinds of utensils, machinery and even entire buildings. As it became a low priced construction material, in the 19th century the constructive use of cast iron in architecture and engineering proliferated in almost every building type in



**Figure 4.** The Interior of the British Post Office Building (Photo: M. Kaan Sağ, 2014).

Britain (Dobraszczyk, 2014; Bridgewater & Gloag, 1948). Similarly, the classicist details of the stone fireplaces in the upper halls match British fireplace design of the period.

### 3. The closure and subsequent use of the purpose-built office building in Galata

According to the information found in the Oriental Directories, the British Post Office in Galata closed in 1895. In the first yearbook, the *Indicateur Constantinopolitain*, published in 1868, the address of the British Post Office is specified as “Galata, Medrese Street”. W. Jew is the director, Charles Ker and E. Algernon Hoyland are the assistant clerks of the office. In the following yearbooks until 1895 the address of the British Post Office remains the same and the number of officers more or less remain constant (*L'indicateur Constantinopolitain Guide Commercial*, 1868; *Annuaire Oriental*, 1894).

Although the exact reason behind this closure is unknown, the British Post Office in Galata was apparently closed for political reasons during the Armenian riots in the 1890's (Aykara, 1985). Some Armenian groups, demanding reforms in the Eastern provinces and the establishment of an independent Armenia, rebelled from the beginning of the 1890's onwards in various parts of Anatolia and Istanbul (Ayverdi, 2005). 1895 was the most intense year of the Armenian riots and in that year alone 27 different riots and brutal incidents occurred all over Anatolia, mostly in the Eastern part (Halaçoğlu,



**Figure 5.** The Exposed Beams in the British Post Office Building Ground Floor (Photo: M. Kaan Sağ, 2014).

2005). In the same year in September a crowded Armenian group organised a protest march in Istanbul from Kumkapı towards the Sublime Porte and clashed with the local security officers, which caused the unrest to spread all over the city. This was followed by another riot in August 1896, which again spread all over Istanbul, after another Armenian group broke into the Ottoman Bank in Galata. Britain supported an Armenian protectorate in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire and demanded reforms in the region, Sultan Abdülhamit (1876-1909) therefore accused Britain of encouraging and protecting the Armenians during the riots (Salt, 1990). By the year 1895 Sultan Abdülhamit, with the support of Germany, opposed the reform ideas on the Armenian sovereignty in spite of the successive riots (Halaçoğlu, 2005).

The close relationship and alliance with Britain during the reigns of Sultan Abdulmecit (1839-1861) and Sultan Abdulaziz (1861-1876) deteriorated during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit (1876-1909) due to the changing political balance in Europe. Following the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, which was signed after the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), Britain primarily protected the unity of the defeated Ottoman Empire against Russia, and in return captured Cyprus in 1878 and Egypt in 1882. Russo-Turkish War was also a turning point for Armenian sovereignty and following this war an independent Armenia began to be mentioned, especially after the 16th article of the Peace Treaty of San Stefano on Armenian re-

forms had been accepted as the 61st article of the Treaty of Berlin, under the pressure of Britain and France (Şimşir, 1989; Karacakaya, 2002; Şaşmaz, 2000).

During the Armenian riots in the 1890's, the Ottoman administration detected the distribution of banned publications by the foreign post offices located in Istanbul. Thereupon British, French and German post officers were taken into custody, but were later released however, through the intervention of their ambassadors (Aslan, 2012; Semerci, 1991). According to a document in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives from 29 November 1893, the banned journals and leaflets were smuggled into the Ottoman Empire and distributed daily by the foreign post offices, especially by the British Post Office, therefore Ottoman administration decreed to inhibit it (BOA., DH. MKT, 1893). The Ottoman administration first served a notice to the British Embassy due to the "harmful papers, which encourage people to the uprising", as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sait Halim Pasha called them (BOA., Y. A. HUS, 1893). Next, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sait Halim Pasha decreed to send an officer to the British Post Office to confiscate all the banned publications. According to another document in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, some Greek and Armenian subjects living in Istanbul smuggled not only banned publications, but also equipment used to make explosives from London through the British Post Office.

Following the closure of the British Post Office in Galata, the building was used over time for different purposes. According to an official document from 11<sup>th</sup> November 1900 written by the Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha and introduced to Sultan Abdülhamit, the building was registered formerly on behalf of the British Embassy in exchange for a regular land tax (BOA, İ. ML, 1901). The document is mainly about the submission of the British Embassy of a formal request to acquit the debt on the accumulated estate tax of the British Post Office. According to the same document the building was initially converted in 1895 into a rental property.

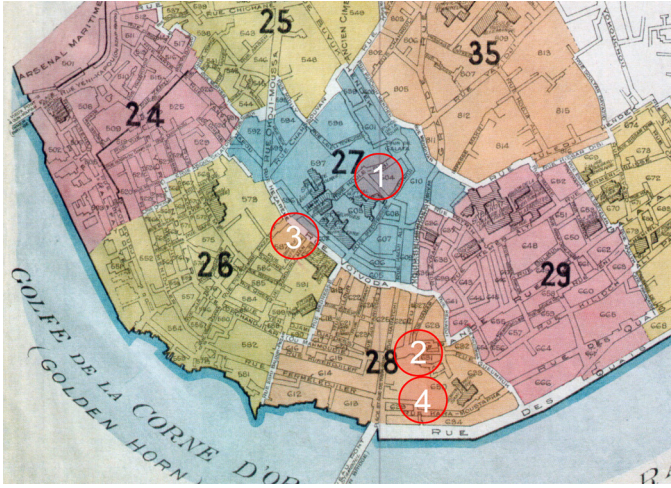


**Figure 6.** Cast iron beams in the British Post Office Building first floor (Photo: M. Kaan Sağ, 2014).









**Figure 8.** 1. British Post Office in Galata 2. Karaköy Yeni Han 3. Voyvoda Han 4. Ömer Abed Han (Dağdelen, 2007).

After the British Post Office moved into Karaköy Yeni Han, the circulation of the banned papers continued and the Ottoman government maintained its close surveillance (BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 1896; BOA, ZB, 1907).

The next address of the British Post Office was the ground floor of the “Voyvoda Han” on Banks Street (*Annuaire Oriental*, 1909). The British Post Office served here until 1912. This four storied masonry han with iron beams and an eclectic design was built in 1903-1904 by an unknown architect and remains standing to this day (Gülenaz, 1998). Beside the British Post Office it was used mostly by small scale companies and agencies (Eldem, 2006).

The final address of the British Post Office was the ground floor of the “Ömer Abed Han”, situated in Karaköy on Kara Mustafa Street (*Annuaire Oriental*, 1912). The office served here between 1912 and 1914 (*Annuaire Oriental*, 1913; 1914). According to the original inscription on its facade wall, the five storied han, which also remains standing, was built in 1905-1906 and designed by the architect Alexandre Vallauray again in a classicist manner with facade elements such as pediments, ionic half columns, corinthian pilasters and cartouches.

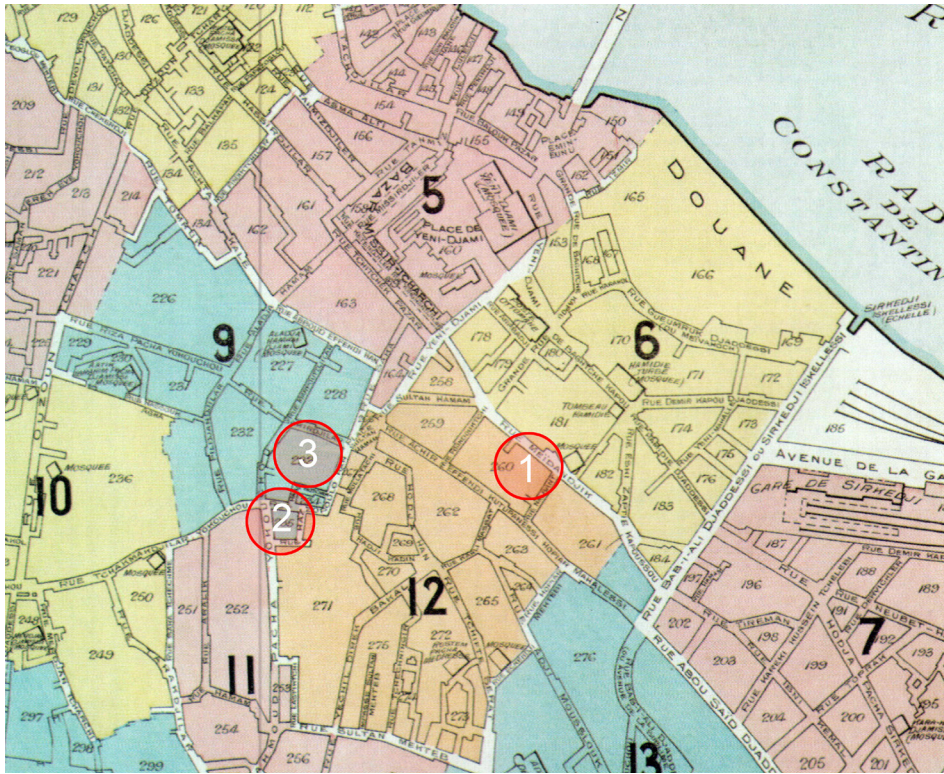
### 5. Branch office buildings

Beside the central office, the British Post Office had also opened a branch office in the Istanbul Historical Peninsula just opposite to Galata, which

moved to different addresses several times as did the central office (Figure 9). The Orient Express, which began a service in 1883, appears to have influenced the opening of the branch office. The oldest address of this office was “Whittall Han, Meydancık Street”, which was mentioned first in the 1892 yearbook of the *Oriental Directories* (*Annuaire Oriental*, 1892-93). According to the British Postal Archive documents, the branch office was opened in Whittall Han in April 1885 (POST 29/393A, c. 1885). According to the documents in the Ottoman Archive (BOA, ŞD, 1886; BOA, HR. TO, 1886), this office started to compete unfairly with the Ottoman Post Office and for this reason the Ottoman government served a notice on the British Embassy for the closure of the branch. Whittall Han, which stands partially on Büyük Han, was built by the notable Levantine British family Whittall. The han’s architect is unknown and only the main facade of the building was preserved on its latest restoration.

The second address of the branch office was the “Camondo Han” again located in the Historical Peninsula. In the same year as the closure of the central office in 1895, the branch office moved from Whittall Han to the Camondo Han and stayed here for a short time until 1896 (*Annuaire Oriental*, 1895; 1896-1897). Camondo Han was built at the beginning of 1880’s by the notable Ottoman Jewish banking family Camondo (Tugay & Tugay, 2007). The han, which was designed by an unknown architect, stands on the Mahmut Paşa Street with the name of Kefeli Han, which partially reflects the original design.

The branch office was closed on 3 September 1896 in consequence of the “violent disturbances” in the Historical Peninsula during the Armenian riots. The catalyst was the murder of two Armenian officials of the British Post Office on 26 August 1896 (POST 29/667A, c. 1899). Although repeated requests by the members of the British community in Istanbul had been made for the office to be reopened, no action was taken because the foreign offices considered the political conditions



**Figure 9.** 1. Whittall Han 2. Camondo Han 3. Hazzopulo Han (Dağdelen, 2007).

in Ottoman Empire “unfavourable” (POST 29/896C, c. 1906).

The branch office remained closed between 1896-1908. It was reopened on 7 February 1908 on the ground floor of the Hazzopulo Han, situated in the vicinity of the Camondo Han and served here until the beginning of the First World War in 1914 (Annuaire Oriental, 1909; 1912; 1913; 1914; POST 29/896C, c. 1906). The han, which is also known as Hacopulo Han, remains one of the few bureau hans in Eminönü containing an arcade. It was built by an Ottoman Greek merchant called Hazzopulos. The fact that the han's name was mentioned in the oldest yearbook of the Oriental Directories, indicates that the han was built before 1868, although its exact date is unknown (Gülenaz, 1998).

The central and branch office of the British Post were closed on 20 November 1914 along with all other foreign post offices in Istanbul with the “İmtiyazat-ı Ecnebiyyenin Lağvı” law, enacted on 1 October 1914, as the Ottoman Empire entered into World War I (Varlık, 1985; ). The main factor behind the enactment of this law was the abrogation of the commercial and judicial privileges, known as capitulations, on

18th September 1914 by the Ottoman government. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the foreign post offices were opened once again. They were finally and completely removed after the Turkish War of Independence with the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923 (Aslan, 2012; Eskin, 1942).

## 6. Conclusion

The capitulations, which were granted to the foreign countries initially in Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's reign (1520-1566), started to restrict the legislative and executive power of the Ottoman Empire in its period of decline. Along with the 19<sup>th</sup> century reforms of the Ottoman Empire, the foreign post began to be organized on a large scale in the provinces and started to be seen to be objectionable by the Ottoman authorities in terms of public security and their rivalry with the state post (Aslan, 2012). In order to abolish the foreign post offices in the Ottoman Empire, a commission was established by the members of the state council in 1881 (BOA, ŞD, 1881). Several attempts to abolish these offices were mentioned in postal union congresses of Vienna in 1891, Washington in 1897 and Rome



in 1906, however it generally did not succeed (Aslan, 2012).

In the beginning of the 1900's the fact, that the Young Turks periodicals published especially in Britain and France were sent daily to Istanbul, compelled Sultan Abdülhamit to find different ways to control the foreign post offices (Varlık, 1985). To prevent the foreign post offices delivering these publications, it was decided, first to warn them, to place a couple of policeman on the doors of these offices and then to start criminal proceedings on the involved postal officers (BOA, İ. HUS, 1901). In 1905, Sultan Abdülhamit decreed to close down all the foreign post offices in the Ottoman Empire, but in practice it had not been possible to convince the European states on the issue (BOA, İ. HUS, 1905). Thereupon the related commission resolved to use force to this end if necessary (BOA, Y. A. RES, 1905).

Even though the British Post Office and the branch office were obliged to relocate repeatedly, the central office stayed around Galata and the branch office stayed in the Historical Peninsula of Istanbul in spite of all the negative conditions. The prestigious hans, that the central post office moved into, after leaving the purpose-built office in Galata, are an indication that the British Post Office was not concerned with maintaining a low profile in the city. Two of the three central offices were located in the buildings designed by Alexandre Vallaury, the celebrated architect of the era, who also designed many other great projects in Istanbul. Although the architect of the Voyvoda Han is not known, the eclectic design and central location of the building seems to have had a substantial influence over the positioning of the following British Post Office. Similarly the hans, which contained the branch offices were built by the prominent and wealthy families of Istanbul. In the end, although the first British Post Office in Galata was closed down in 1895, The British Post Office continued its existence in Istanbul until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and continued to compete with the post offices of the other states in the city.

## Abbreviations

BOA Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri [The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office]

A. MKT. MHM. Sadaret Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı

BEO. Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası

DH. MKT. Dahiliye Mektubi Kalemi

HR. TO. Hariciye Tercüme Odası

İ. HUS. İradeler Hususi

İ. ML. İradeler Maliye

MF. MKT. Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi

ŞD. Şura-i Devlet

Y. A. HUS. Yıldız Hususi Maruzat

Y. A. RES. Yıldız Resmi Maruzat

ZB. Zabtiye

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BOA. DH. MKT. 175/11 .

BOA. A. MKT. MHM. 626/62 .

BOA. İ. ML. 41/62 .

BOA. İ. HUS. 86/34 .

BOA. İ. HUS. 130/33 .

BOA. Y. A. RES. 132/8 .

BOA. MF MKT. 894/14 .

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### **Osmanlı başkentinde İngiliz Postanesi: Çalkantılı bir dönemde yaşanan değişim**

İngiltere'ye Osmanlı Devleti içerisinde postane açma hakkı 1832 yılında verilmişse de Kırım Savaşı'na kadar (1853-1856) elçilik yazışmaları dışında hiçbir mektubun bu kanalla nakli yapılmamıştır. İngilizler, Kırım Savaşı'nın başlamasıyla birliklerinden gelen mektupları düzenlemek için İstanbul'da öncelikle bir askeri postane kurmuştur. Savaşın ardından bahsedilen postane sivil bir ofise döndürülmüş, ancak postane işlerinin artması sebebiyle Britanya Posta Bakanlığı, İstanbul'daki İngiliz Postanesi için Galata'da yeni bir binanın inşa edilmesine karar vermiştir.

Bakanlığın açtığı ihale sonucunda inşaat mühendisi-müteahhit-mimar Joseph Nadin'in projesi seçilmiştir. Bu projenin 1859'da tamamlanmasıyla beraber yeni İngiliz Postanesi aynı sene içerisinde hizmet vermeye başlamıştır. Bugün de ayakta olan yapı, Galata Kulesi'nden Bankalar Caddesi'ne doğru inen Camekan Sokak ile Hacı Ali Sokak'ın kesiştiği köşede, büyük oranda

özgün tasarımını korumaktadır. Orijinal tasarımında yapının zemin katı posta ofislerine, birinci ve ikinci katı ise postane memurlarının konaklamasına ayrılmıştır. İki sokağın birbirini dar açıyla kestiği bir yapı adası köşesinde yükselen bina, mimar tarafından arazinin sınırlarına bağlı olarak şekillendirilmiştir. 19. yüzyılın ortasında etrafını saran ahşap evlerle kıyaslandığında, ölçü, malzeme ve klasisist mimari stili ile içinde yer aldığı mimari dokudan farklılaşmaktadır.

Galata İngiliz Postanesi, şark ticaret yıllıklarından edinilen bilgiye göre 1895'e kadar hizmet vermeye devam etmiş ve 1894-95 sezonunda kapanmıştır. Postanenin kapanmasında 1890'larda yaşanan Ermeni olaylarının etkili olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. 1894-95 yılı İstanbul ve Anadolu'da Ermeni isyanlarının en yoğunlaştığı dönemdir. Sadece 1895'de Doğu Anadolu yoğunluklu olmak üzere 27 farklı isyan ve olay yaşanmıştır. Aynı sene Eylül ayında Kumkapı'dan Bab-Ali'ye doğru yürüyüş gösterisi düzenleyen büyük bir Ermeni grubu ve güvenlik görevlileri

arasında çatışma yaşanmış, olaylar bü-yüyerek şehrin birçok farklı noktasına sıçramıştır. Bunu 1896 Ağustos'unda bir grup Ermeni'nin Osmanlı Bankası'nı basması sonucu İstanbul'un yine farklı noktalarına sıçrayan ölümlü olaylar takip etmiştir. İngiltere, Osmanlı Devleti'nin doğu vilayetlerinde reformlar gerçekleştirmesini talep etmekte ve bölgede bir Ermeni protektorasının oluşmasını desteklemekteyken, Sultan Abdülhamit yaşanan isyanlar sonucunda İngiltere'yi Ermenileri cesaretlendirmek ve korumak ile suçlamıştır.

Osmanlı yönetimi, yaşanan bu Ermeni olayları sırasında İstanbul'daki yabancı postalarca yasaklı yayınların dağıtıldığını tespit etmiş, bunun üzerine İngiliz, Fransız ve Alman acenteleri nezaret altına aldırılmış, ancak sefirlerin müdahalesiyle serbest bırakılmışlardır. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi'nde yer alan 29 Kasım 1893 tarihli belgeye göre ülkeye sokulması yasaklanan gazete ve risaleler, yabancı postalarca ve özellikle de İngiliz postasınca her gün dağıtılmaktadır ve bunun engellenmesi gerekmektedir. Aynı seneye ait bir başka belgede İngiliz postanesinin dağıttığı ve Hariciye Nazırı'nın deyişyle "halkı ihtilale teşvik eden muzır evraktan" dolayı İngiltere Sefareti'ne tebligatta bulunulduğu görülmektedir. Hariciye Nazırı'nın 6 Eylül 1893 tarihli yazısına göre İngiliz postanesine bir memur gönderilerek yasaklı olan yayınlar toplatılacaktır. Bir diğer belgede ise postane aracılığıyla sadece muzır evrak değil, patlayıcı madde getirildiği de iddia edilmektedir. Belgeye göre İstanbul'daki bazı Rum ve Ermeniler İngiliz postanesi aracılığıyla Londra'dan boş fişek getirtmektedirler.

1894-95 senesinde öncelikle akar haline getirilen Galata İngiliz Postanesi binası, 1905'te bir İngiliz okuluna dönüştürülmüştür. Bu okul, 1905 tarihli GOAD haritasında "British School for Girls" (İngiliz Kız Okulu) olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ancak bahsedilen okul Osmanlı Arşivi belgelerine göre 1. Dünya Savaşı'nın başlangıcına dek İstanbul'da yaşayan Britanyalı erkek öğrencilere yönelik eğitim vermiştir.

İngiliz Postanesi, Galata binasından taşınmasının ardından 1. Dünya Savaşı'na kadar Karaköy'de üç farklı han

içerisinde Galata İngiliz Postanesi'ne kıyasla çok daha küçük postane ofisleri açarak hizmet vermeye devam etmiştir. 1895 şark ticaret yıllığında İngiliz Postanesi'nin ilk olarak Karaköy Yeni Han'a taşınmış olduğu görülmektedir. İngiliz Postanesi burada 1900'lü yılların ortalarına dek kalmıştır. Günümüzde Kemeraltı Caddesi ve Tersane Caddesi'nin kesiştiği köşede halen ayakta duran dört katlı kagir yapı 1893'te inşa edilmiş ve Mimar Alexandre Vallauray tarafından tasarlanmıştır. Yapı, cephesinde yer alan üçgen alınlık ve kompozit başlıklı kolosal pilaster gibi mimari öğelerle klasisist bir üsluba sahiptir.

İngiliz Postanesi'nin bir sonraki adresi Bankalar Caddesi'ndeki Voyvoda Hanı olmuştur. 1904 senesi şark ticaret yıllığında İngiliz Postanesi adresi Karaköy Yeni Han'ken 1909 senesi yıllığında adresin "Voyvoda Caddesi (Bankalar Caddesi) Voyvoda Han zemin katı" olarak değiştiği görülmektedir. Günümüzde halen ayakta duran ve 1903-1904 senelerinde inşa edilen dört katlı han, İngiliz postanesi dışında daha çok küçük ölçekli şirketler, mümesillikler ve bürolar tarafından kullanılmıştır.

İngiliz Postanesi Voyvoda Han'ın ardından 1912'de yine Karaköy'de bulunan Ömer Abed Han'a taşınmış ve 1914'e dek bu adreste hizmet vermiştir. Hanın inşaat tarihi girişindeki kitabeye göre Rumi 1321 (Miladi 1905-1906) senesidir ve mimarı Alexandre Vallury'dir. Günümüzde yeni adıyla Kemankes Caddesi üzerinde halen ayakta olan beş katlı yapının cepheleri iyon sütun başlıklı yarım sütun, korint sütun başlıklı pilaster, paladyen korkuluk, kartuş ve kırık alınlık gibi mimari elemanların kullanıldığı eklektik bir tasarıma sahiptir.

İngiliz Postanesi, merkez ofisinin yanı sıra Tarihi Yarımada'da bir de şube ofisi açmış ve bu ofis de merkez ofis gibi sık sık adres değiştirmiştir. Şube ofisi ilk olarak Whittal Han'da hizmet vermiş, daha sonra Camondo Han ve en son olarak Hacopulo Han'a taşınmıştır. Bu hanların ortak özelliği İstanbul'un zengin levanten aileleri tarafından inşa edilmiş olmalarıdır.

İngiliz Postanesi merkez ofisi ve şube ofisi, Osmanlı Devleti'nin 1. Dünya Savaşı'na girmesi sonucu 1 Ekim 1914'te çıkarılan "İmtiyazat-ı Ecnebiy-



yenin Lağvı” kanunuyla, tüm yabancı posta örgütleriyle beraber kesin olarak kapatılmıştır. İttihat ve Terakki yönetiminin 18 Eylül 1914’te kapitülasyonları kaldırması, bu kanunun çıkışını sağlayan ana etken olmuştur. Osmanlı Devleti’nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda mağlup sayılmasından sonra yabancı postaneler tekrar açılmaya başlamış, tamamen ortadan kalkmaları ancak Kurtuluş Savaşı sonrasında 24 Temmuz 1923 tarihli Lozan Antlaşması’yla mümkün olmuştur.

İstanbul’daki İngiliz Postanesi ve Tarihi Yarımada şubesi Osmanlı döneminde sık sık yer değiştirmek zorunda kalmışsa da tüm olumsuz koşullara rağmen merkez ofis Galata’dan, şube ofisi ise Eminönü Hanlar bölgesinden ayrılmamış, her seferinde yakın adreslere taşınmışlardır. Özellikle merkez ofislerde Galata İngiliz Postanesi’nin

ardından taşınılan üç hanın da prestijli ve batılı mimariye sahip yapılar olmasına dikkat edilmiştir. Bunlardan ikisi Osmanlı başkentinde büyük projelere imza atan dönemin ünlü mimarı Alexandre Vallauray’nin tasarlamış olduğu hanlardır. Voyvoda Han’ın mimarı bilinmese de tasarımı ve Voyvoda Caddesi’ndeki konumu, postane için yeni bir adres seçiminde etkili olmuş görünmektedir. Şube ofisinin taşındığı hanlar, benzer şekilde İstanbul’un önde gelen varlıklı tüccar aileleri tarafından yaptırılmış binalardır. Sonuçta İngiltere tarafından postane olarak inşa edilen Galata İngiliz Postanesi politik sebeplerle kapatılmışsa da, İngiliz Postanesi Osmanlı Devleti’nin yıkılışına dek başkent İstanbul’daki varlığını sürdürmüş ve diğer devletlere ait postalarla rekabet etmeye devam etmiştir.