

## The Smyrna Quay

[1] Dear colleagues and friends, I am here today to present a two-volume book titled “I Prokymaia tis Smyrnis” (=“The Smyrna Quay”), “Tracing a symbol of progress and splendour”, co-written by George Poulimenos and me, published by Kapon Editions. It is the outcome of our six-year research and as you may have guessed, aims to present in an original but also comprehensive manner all the buildings that in 1922 were situated on the legendary 3,25 km-long coastal strip of land of Smyrna, while also treating them as an architectural, topographic and historical unit. [2] 1922 may be a pivotal point in time for this study but the period under research is actually far greater, spanning from the era before the construction of the quay, up to the present-day.

[3] Modern Izmir bears almost no resemblance to the Ottoman port city that Smyrna once was and neither does its waterfront [4]. In fact, less than 15% of the pre 1922 era buildings still exist. The key factors for this dramatic change were:

[5] 1. The catastrophic fire that in September 1922 ravaged the city and razed huge areas to the ground. The fire took its toll on the quay as well, sparing only the residencies of the northern part [6].

[7] 2. The rapid urbanization that followed between the 50’s and 70’s, along with the waterfront shaping of the 90’s, actually defined what we see today [8].

It soon became obvious that our ambitious plan to reconstruct the entire quay required looking for evidence of the past in every possible direction and source, in Greece and abroad: from census charts, memoires, newspapers, commercial and travel guides, to maps, cadastres and of course images. Hundreds of postcards and city panoramas depicting houses and grand mansions, theatres, cafés, consulates, clubs and hotels, as well as the bustling port, administrative buildings, depots and agencies have been closely examined, dated and deciphered.

[9] So, how does one begin to study the more than 200 Smyrna quay buildings? We had to start by creating an ‘id’ for each one of them. In other words, a serial number combining a letter of the English alphabet for the block and a number for the plot. This led to a line of structures which started with A1 at the tip of the Punta (modern-day Alsancak) and ended with Z2 in the south end, at the Imperial Barracks. Each plot’s identity was further enriched with all sorts of chronologically ordered information that we came across, such as ownership, architect, successive structures built, families, businesses, etc. All these were placed on our own version of a 1922 Smyrna map that had to be created as well [10].

In order to restore the Smyrna Quay to its former glory, a certain methodology was applied, mainly due to the fact that topographic limitations forced most of the photographs and postcards to be quite oblique [11]. So, digital ortho-rectification techniques had to be used on a combination of visual data gathered for each of the quay structures, dated as closely to 1922 as possible. Once a geometrically correct façade was achieved, digital tracing of the structure’s main morphological aspects in order to create a scaled drawing came next. Then it was painted with a rich gray tone palette that allowed for different depth and surface types to be defined.

However, the research objectives were not limited to what I have just described but also included the quay construction process from the engineer's point of view, and the changes that the vivid port city of Smyrna went through because of it, in terms of urban topography, infrastructure and commerce, factors that reflected its importance and the entrepreneurial spirit of its inhabitants. This approach provided answers to many questions regarding the particular shape of the residences, land use patterns, the existence of twin harbors and the overall urban evolution process.

Let me now continue by focusing on the zones of the Smyrna quay, one of its most characteristic aspects, and how it has affected our research. On a north to south direction, there are four distinct, almost pure sections that we can split the quay into: residential, recreational, commercial and administrative.

### [12] Residential section

This is the northernmost part of the quay, spanning 1.3 km from the Punta promontory to the Theater of Smyrna. The distance separating the residential area from the port and the markets was the main reason that determined its particular land use while excluding all others. This process took less than 20 years to be completed, after which the image seems to have "frozen" in time.

[13] With the exception of a few cafés, a couple of short-lived theaters and two cinemas, as well as a tramway depot, all of its structures were typical Smyranean two-storey, narrow-façade houses, with a closed type of balcony, a basement and an attic. Their plan usually followed the shape of the plot, extending from the Kordon to the Parallel street at the back. Built in neoclassical and eclectic style, there was little room for variations or innovations, which were rather rare. Their owners were mostly middle and upper class merchants, entrepreneurs, doctors, consuls, ottoman officers, lawyers and engineers, all prominent members of Smyrna's Greek, Armenian, Levantine and Muslim communities. The richest among them could afford to build mansions that were far greater than the rest, in terms of height, luxury and decoration or even totally different, as if they were transplanted here from London or Paris.

[14] The only known sources of information about their residents, apart from family archives and testimonies, are the 1889 Société de Quais topographic plan, conducted by engineer Polycarpe Vitalis and the Izmir cadastral plan of 1936-37. These two documents data hardly match, given the 47 years' lapse, the property transactions and above all the mandatory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey after 1922. However, they do provide us with two valuable snapshots of history, taken under totally different circumstances. In fact, one must admit that the quay houses have lived multiple lives. Until now, our research has firmly identified only half of the persons owning a residence on the quay in the year 1922, while we also tracked down ownerships in the following decades and found strong evidence regarding others too, waiting to be confirmed.

### [15] Recreational section

Reserved mainly for the joy of living or “joie de vivre” as the French would put it, here was the most famous part of the entire city. By walking a distance of just 530 meters, one could admire some of the finest edifices of the quay, such as [16] the Theater of Smyrna, brasseries, the Sporting and the [17] Hunters’ Clubs as well as the three top hotels of Smyrna [18]: de la Ville, Kraemer and Huck. In fact, here was the very center of the public life, where people gathered outside lavishly decorated buildings to celebrate, meet popular idols, attend sea-sport events, welcome European royalty or even demonstrate, as it often happened. Unlike the scarcity of information regarding the properties in the residential section of the quay, in this one it was the plethora of names of open-air theaters, cinemas, cafés and brasseries that our research recorded, which had to be assigned to buildings. That was not an easy task, due to changes of ownership that occurred as often as annually [19]. Keeping track of these changes revealed the trends in entertainment, the evolution of show business in Smyrna over the course of decades and the men behind it.

Only the French consulate and the Italian girl’s school survived from the 1922 fire, but unfortunately the latter was demolished immediately after World War II. Although the new city masterplan has dramatically altered the quay topography of this section [20], it also reserved space for the creation in 1932 of Cumhuriyet (=Republic) square, which soon became one of the most popular places for public gatherings in Izmir, reminiscent of its cosmopolitan past.

#### [21] The commercial and administrative sections

These were the parts of the Smyrna quay that encompassed all the functions related to commercial activity and to the city authorities respectively. [22] The most striking topographical feature were the twin ports, inner and outer, defined by the two jetties on top of which Pasaport and Customs were built, along with a breakwater protecting them from the northwest wind. The keywords for this section’s understanding are trade and “evolution” [23]. Several construction phases were recorded, changing the face of the quay again and again. As the city grew into a regional hub for import and export trade, the initial shanty cafés were soon replaced by hotels, warehouses, banks and agencies of all kinds [24]. Furthermore, the lack of empty plots forced owners to built higher structures, while copying popular European architectural styles and frequently moving their business from one place to another, as the in-depth analysis of commercial guides revealed. [25] In fact some buildings were even competing each other, engaged in an undeclared war of national propaganda. [26] Strolling down the quay, especially from May to October, amidst piles of packaged figs and raisins, sacks with cotton and tobacco, caravans and porters, one could not help but notice just how strong the influence of the Greek world was, [27] since literally hundreds of Greek names and toponyms appeared on hotel and café labels, hinting at the identity and origins of the city’s undeniably dominant community.

The crucial role of the state control was reflected upon structures built to host the Port Authorities [28], the Customs [29], and institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration. [30] At the very end of the quay, towards the south, lied the administrative center of the city [31], consisting of

the Konak [32], the Imperial Barracks [33], Yali mosque [34] and the clock tower. These structures adorned a rectangular monumental square, the only one existing in Smyrna during the Ottoman period.

Many of our observations regarding the Smyrna quay, occurred to us only when this project was over and we could finally see the big picture. We certainly hope that the readers will draw many more conclusions themselves.

I would like to finish this presentation by thanking all of you who assisted our research in every way, especially by sharing with us valuable bits of information such as pictures, family archives, oral testimonies and so on. It is true that this book could have never been written without you.

[35] Thank you!