

The Smyrna Quay: A Digital Reconstruction

[1 Title] In 2012, my friend Achilleas Chatziconstantinou and I decided to collaborate on a project about old Smyrna. After a little research, it appeared to us that a good subject would be the Smyrna Quay. The Quay was selected because of the wealth of information about it, and the almost unlimited photos and postcards depicting it.

Aided by postcard captions, we could recognize specific buildings, such as the «Theatre de Smyrne» and the «Grand Hotel Kraemer Palace». Alas, this approach didn't lead us very far, the main difficulty being the evolution of the Quay during the 50 years of its existence.

[2 Panoramas] For example, in these two panoramas of the central section, it is evident that very few buildings had remained unchanged between 1893 and 1920.

That's the main reason we decided to pursue a more systematic approach for our identifications.

[3 2000+ photos] For this, we would need as many photos of the Quay as we could find. We initially collected more than 2000 photos, and much more were being added as we proceeded with the project.

[4 Aerial photos] Photos taken from the air would be especially important. To the left, you can see a photo of the Smyrna harbor from ca. 1920, and to the right, two photos of the burned area, taken right after the 1922 fire.

[5 Maps and plans] In addition to that, we would need as many old maps and plans as possible, and from various time periods, including maps from before the construction of the Quay as well as from the years after the fire.

[6 Commercial guides] A variety of other sources should also be gathered, such as commercial guides, which provide information about the names, locations and owners of various commercial enterprises. Also, old Smyrna newspapers such as «Amalthea» and «Aydin» should be consulted, and of course books and memoirs that described Smyrna as it once was.

[7 Encoding] After gathering a lot of these sources, a first step was to create an index of the entire Quay by dividing it into blocks, and the blocks into plots. A unique label was then allocated to each plot, for example P11 for the building at the left of this picture. At the same time, we tried to assign provisional dates to the photos.

Next, we had to identify the buildings' use, the names of the businesses housed there, and the owners of each individual building. By combining data from photos, maps, commercial guides, newspapers, books and archives, we compiled an ID card for most of the more than 200 buildings on the Quay.

By the way, two of the buildings shown here, P12 and S1, marked in bold, still exist today, but they are almost unrecognizable. P12 is the former Hotel Constantinople, now a ruin a little north of Vali Kazım Dirik Caddesi, while S1 is the current Directorate of Culture and Tourism building.

[8 Panoramas] Our precise goal started to emerge at this point: What we actually wanted was to create something like these panoramas I have shown previously, but encompassing the entire Quay.

[9 Kraemer original] In order to do that we would need clear, front-view pictures of all the buildings' façades. This one of the «Hotel Kraemer» is one of the more usable photos, while others are much more oblique. By using advanced mathematical techniques we were able to transform the pictures to something more acceptable:

[10 Kraemer rectified] On second thought, this result wasn't satisfactory at all. First of all, we didn't have such high quality pictures for all buildings, and even the ones we did have were not all from the same period. Another problem was that of the protruding elements. For example, here the balconies at the left side of the hotel appear skewed, as a result of the picture not being taken from a location directly facing the building.

[11 Kraemer detail] Finally, by using just a single picture, it would be impossible to add details observed in other pictures taken from close up, such as the design of the iron railings visible in this photo. So we concluded that if we were to create a realistic and accurate panorama, we actually had to draw the buildings, by digitally tracing them on the adjusted images we had already generated.

Hotel La Grande Bretagne

[12 O14 1889] And now I would like to present one specific case, in order to illustrate the variety of sources and methods we used to reconstruct the past history of the buildings.

Let's move to the inner port, and examine a plot of land being assigned the code O14, which was located at the south corner of the block facing the Pasaport.

This plot was built over quite early, at a time when the whole block featured very few substantial buildings. The remainder of the block was full of small wooden shacks hosting a variety of cafés, taverns and bars.

In this photo, we can barely discern a label over the windows of the first floor of the building.

[13 O14 Jolly-Victora] In another picture from the same period, this label can easily be read, and we learn that the building housed the offices of «G.O. Joly – Victora & Company Limited».

This company was jointly owned by a Levantine of British nationality and a Greek, and it operated most of the barges used to load and unload cargo from larger ships anchored outside of the port. In the 1890's the company went downhill, and was liquidated shortly before 1900.

[14 O14 1905] Logically, the «Joly – Victora» company label is no longer visible in this postcard from the early 1900's. From the 1905 Goad plan at the left we learn the usage of the building at that time: It hosted a restaurant and a grocery store at the front, a wine depot in the middle and a bar at the back.

During the years from 1890 to 1910, this part of the quay was in a process of continuous change: The wooden shacks were being replaced by more permanent constructions, as seen here. In contrast, the building under examination remained unchanged.

[15 O14 1914] In the next picture from the period 1914-22, we can see dramatic changes: The wooden shacks are entirely gone, replaced by a series of hotels. In fact, the next four buildings to the left of our building were at that time hotels, and the same was true for the first three buildings of the block to the right. Even our old building at the corner had been replaced by a new, higher structure, presumably also a hotel, as deduced from the two labels at the first and second floor. The word at the first row of the top label looks like the word «HOTEL», and if we assume that the top label is in French and the

bottom one in Greek, then the first row of the bottom label should read «ΞΕΝΟΔΟΧΕΙΟΝ», that is «hotel» in Greek. Unfortunately, the name of the hotel cannot be read.

[16 O14 Commercial guide] To discover the hotel's name required a bit of detective work. Initially, we consulted a 1920 Commercial Guide, published in Greek. If we cross out in red all hotels not at the waterfront, and check in green those of the remainder we already knew their location, only four possible candidates remain, marked in yellow.

Let us now examine the unreadable hotel labels, shown here at bottom. We first tried to fit the word «HOTEL» on the first row of the top label. Using the same letter size, we overlaid the Greek word for «hotel» on the word in the first row of the bottom label, seeing that there is a close fit. We then added the Greek hotel names determined earlier, one at a time, to the next row of the Greek label, always using the same letter size, and we observed that only the name «Η ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΒΡΕΤΤΑΝΙΑ», meaning «La Grande Bretagne», fitted. All others were too long. In this way, we obtained a provisional name for our hotel.

[17 O14 Amalthea] Research in the press of this period revealed another clue. In the June 16th, 1922 edition of the Greek newspaper «Amalthea», in an advertisement of a steamship company, we read:

«For more information, contact our central agency at Rue d'Alexandrie No. 8, opposite the "Grande Bretagne" hotel».

The hotel at the other side of the road was named «Hotel d'Alexandrie». It is logical, then, that the narrow street between the two hotels had the same name, namely «Rue d'Alexandrie». The central agency of the steamship company should be then at the left side of «Hotel d'Alexandrie», facing our hotel, which thus could be none other than «Hotel La Grande Bretagne».

I presented this case as an example of using clues from old photos, annual commercial guides and the press, in order to arrive at identification. But ironically, our efforts proved to be completely unnecessary in the end.

[18 O14 Greek landing] Some time later, we came upon this photo, where the Greek version of the hotel's name is very easily readable!

[19 O14 Front-view] The next step was to collect many photos of the hotel and transform them to seem as having been taken from directly opposite, using a mathematical technique called orthogonal rectification.

This photo was taken from nearly opposite, therefore it was easy to transform.

[20 O14 Oblique] The next one though was taken from an angle, and the transformation had to be more radical.

[21 O14 Details] Other photos were required to provide architectural details, such as the design of the balcony railings and decorative plaster.

[22 O14 Height-width] A final step before actually drawing the building was determining its relative height and width. This was done by using old and new maps, and, specifically for the height, by comparing it to adjacent buildings.

[23 O14 Drawing 1] Finally, the building was traced over the picture, using appropriate software.

Notice the use of another photo at the upper right corner of the middle picture to add some architectural details.

[24 O14 Drawing 2] The various elements were drawn at separate levels and in the end the walls were painted over.

[25 O14 In place] This is the hotel «La Grande Bretagne» in place, amid adjacent buildings.

[26 O14 3D] The completed façade can be used as a starting point for a 3D drawing. This was accomplished by a group here in İzmir using our drawings, and is viewable at a web site named «İzmir Time Machine».

[27 O14 Location] Where was «La Grande Bretagne» located? If it still existed, the building would be standing here.

[28 Y3] When we had high quality pictures of the buildings, especially from those still existing today, the drawings achieved a high degree of fidelity.

For example, look here at the bell on the top of the Clock Tower, used to signal the hours, and at the Ottoman-type clock to the right.

[29 Book cover] In 2018, after 6 years of research, drawing and writing, the Smyrna Quay book was finally published.

[30 Academy award] Our efforts were recognized the following year, when we got an award from the Athens Academy.

Unfortunately, despite many efforts both in Greece and in Turkey, we have not been able to find sponsors for a Turkish or English edition. Let's hope this will change in the future.

[31 Turkish properties at the port] And now, since this is a symposium about the İzmir port, here are two maps depicting properties belonging to Turks, at the port and the nearby entertainment section of the quay.

We can see that at the beginning there was not much interest by the Turks to acquire properties here, but this changed in the following years.

Three prominent Turks who owned buildings on the quay were Sadık bey Uşakzade, a rich merchant and grandfather of Latife hanım; another one was Naim bey Mulaviç, owner of two of the largest hotels, including Grand Hotel Kraemer Palace; and finally there was Nişli Hacı Ali Süleymanoviç, who was the founder of the İzmir Commodity Exchange.

[32 Smirna Seyahat Rehberi 1922] The maps you saw in the previous slide were prepared in parallel with the Quay book and include the whole of Smyrna as it was before 1922. I have published them, together with much information about old Smyrna, in another book titled «Smyrna Traveler's Guide 1922». This has been recently translated into Turkish.

I hope you found my speech interesting. Let's bring it into conclusion with a short video created for the presentation of the Smyrna Quay book. Enjoy, and thank you for your attention!