

Armenians at the Quay of Smyrna – George Poulimenos

- Armenian presence in Smyrna is recorded from the 12th century onwards.
- In the following centuries up to 1922, subsequent waves of migration to Smyrna increased the Armenian population of the city.
- The Armenians came to Smyrna from Cilicia, Persia, Western Armenia and Ankara, as a consequence of war and persecution in their homeland, but also as merchants in later years.
- Armenians lived mainly in the Armenian quarter, wedged between the Greek and Turkish quarters.
- They represented only 5% of the Smyrna population (about 15,000 out of a total of 300,000), but among them there was a large number of wealthy merchants.
- Recognizing the value of the new quay completed in 1875, wealthy Armenians invested in it early on, buying plots of land and building houses and buildings for commercial use.
- This is evident in the cadastral maps drawn by the French Quay company of Smyrna in 1889 and 1914. For example, notice here the name Spartali, owner of a building that still exists and currently houses the Atatürk Museum.
- In 1889, out of the 102 houses in the residential part of the quay of Smyrna, 15 belonged to Armenians, and their number increased to 16 by 1914. Respectively, for all the buildings of the quay, 30 out of 204 plots belonged to Armenians in 1889, to decrease imperceptibly to 27 by 1914. That is, the percentage of Armenian properties on the waterfront was about 15%, well above the 5% which was their share of the population of Smyrna.
- In fact, some of the largest and most beautiful buildings on the quay belonged to Armenians. Subsequently, I will show you some of them and I will talk about their owners.

- The participation of the Armenians in the economic activities that took place in the port was also great, as evidenced by the 6 Armenian presidents of the Smyrna Chamber of Commerce, in a total of 12 presidents between 1885-1922.
- 100 years and one day have passed since the start of the Great Fire that completely destroyed the Christian quarters of Smyrna, so I feel obliged to briefly speak about that too.
- This is the Armenian quarter in a picture taken in 1893.
- Individual fires began to appear in the Armenian quarter around 1 AM of the 13th of September 1922, but these first fires could be extinguished by the fire brigade.
- Just after noon on the same day, another fire started at the south-east corner of the Armenian quarter. This could not be extinguished, and many more fires kept appearing after that in many places of the quarter.
- In this map you can see how the fire advanced during the first day, the 13th of September, up to around 11 PM in the night.
- These are some pictures of the devastation in the Armenian quarter.
- The Armenian presence in Smyrna ended after the destruction of the city by the Great Fire and the subsequent exodus of the Christian population.
- This is the 2-volume book “The Smyrna Quay”, the source of most of the information I have presented .
- The book got an award by the Athens Academy in 2019.
- And this is another book of mine, a Smyrna Travelers Guide complete with extensive maps of the city, to be used by travelers who would visit Smyrna in 1922, just before the Catastrophe. It was recently translated into Turkish.
- I have now reached the end of my presentation, and I hope you have enjoyed it. Thank you for listening.