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Bourgeois Wealth, Architecture, and Urbanization: The Azaryan Family in Late Ottoman Istanbul

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Abstract

Istanbul's urbanization in the late nineteenth century was highly influenced by private investors and land commodification practices. This article focuses on one of these investors, the Azaryan family, and particularly Bedros and Josef Azaryan, and explores how they participated in the capitalistic urbanization of Istanbul. Through an examination of their investments in Ayazpaşa (Gümüşsuyu) and in Büyükdere, the article unveils different complexities of urban modernization, land commodification, and building construction. Focusing on the Azaryan waterside mansion (*yalı*) in Büyükdere and the Azaryan Palas in Ayazpaşa, this article positions the Azaryan family as influential actors capable not only of representing their wealth through architecture but also of negotiating with the state to resolve construction disputes. It therefore sheds light on themes such as patronage, finance, visual power, land tenure, and architectural labor. Working through an array of sources such as tendering documents, embassy correspondences, private notebooks, maps, and survey drawings, the article portrays the polyvocal and fragmented dynamics of capitalistic urbanization in late Ottoman Istanbul.

Keywords: Azaryan family, urban modernization, Armenian bourgeoisie, Büyükdere, Ayazpaşa

Burjuva Sermayesi, Mimarlık ve Kentleşme: Geç Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Azaryan Ailesi

Özet

Geç on dokuzuncu yüzyılda İstanbul'un kentleşmesi özel yatırımcılardan ve toprağın metalaşması süreçlerinden büyük ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Bu makale, bu yatırımcılardan Azaryan ailesine, özellikle de Bedros ve Josef Azaryan'a odaklanarak İstanbul'un kapitalist kentleşmesine nasıl etki ettiklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ailenin Ayazpaşa (Gümüşsuyu) ve Büyükdere'deki iki yatırımını inceleyerek, kentsel modernleşme, toprağın metalaşması ve inşaat konularında farklı karmaşıklıkları ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma Büyükdere'deki Azaryan Yalısı ve Ayazpaşa'daki Azaryan Palas'a odaklanarak, Azaryan ailesini hem sermayelerini mimarlık yoluyla temsil edebilen, hem de yapı üretim süreçlerine dair anlaşmazlıklar konusunda devletle müzakere edebilecek güce sahip aktörler olarak tanımlar. Bu sayede makale hamilik, finans, görsel güç, arazi mülkiyeti ve emek gibi temalara odaklanmaktadır. İhale belgeleri, büyükelçilik yazışmaları, özel defterler, haritalar ve rölöve çizimleri gibi kaynakları kullanarak geç Osmanlı İstanbul'undaki çok sesli ve parçalı kapitalist kentleşme dinamikleri tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Azaryan ailesi, kent modernleşmesi, Ermeni Burjuvazisi, Büyükdere, Ayazpaşa

Bedros Azaryan, an Ottoman citizen of Catholic Armenian background, was among the prominent businessmen in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Istanbul. Azaryan held several notable positions, including his service as the head of the Chamber of Commerce in 1901, as a member of the Şirket-i Hayriye legislative council, and as the director of the Alliance Insurance Company.¹ His father, Arisdakes Azaryan, initiated the family's trade business, while his uncle, Istepannos Bedros Azaryan, a linguist and reverend, served as the archbishop of the Istanbul Armenian Catholic Church from 1881 to 1899.² Bedros and

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1 Kevork Pamukçyan, *Biyografileriyle Ermeniler*, Ermeni Kaynaklarından Tarihe Katkılar 4 (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2003), 64.

2 *Ibid.*, 65.

68 his brother Josef Azaryan owned the Azarian Père & Fils company located in Galata, at 22 Perşembe Pazarı Street.³ Azarian Père & Fils acted as the proxy for the London-based Alliance Assurance Company Ltd., a leading insurance company chaired by Lord Rothschild.

As merchants and participants in a global network of traders involved in the insurance industry, as well as members of the affluent bourgeoisie, the Azaryans made significant investments in the built environment. They commissioned various civic buildings, including *hans*, in the Galata-Pera axis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and named them after their family, Azaryan. They also invested in residential buildings, two of which I focus on in this paper: the Azaryan waterside mansion in Büyükdere and the Azaryan Palas on Ayazpaşa Boulevard (now İnönü Boulevard in Gümüşsuyu).⁴ As the introduction to this special dossier discusses, private investors played a significant role in shaping urban Istanbul during the nineteenth century.⁵ Land commodification influenced the city's growth both horizontally and vertically. While the Azaryan family's investments in various neighborhoods of Istanbul resonate with this form of commodification, this article further aims to accentuate the concepts of capitalist growth by examining the negotiations between the private stakeholders, architects, and the state. It is, therefore, my aim to position the Azaryan family as influential actors of urban modernization in late Ottoman Istanbul through commissioning and negotiating construction projects.

Bedros and Josef Azaryan undertook various projects, most notably the construction of several residential buildings in various districts of Istanbul, which continue to dominate the city's urban skyline. Archival documents pertaining to the Azaryans' properties reveal manifold complexities and disputes between the family and the state. These documents position the Azaryans as powerful actors who exerted their influence on various state institutions such as municipalities. The case of the Azaryans offers valuable insights into power dynamics, the construction industry, the commodification of land and skyline, and capitalist urbanization in late Ottoman Istanbul. While their investment in land and property reveals their influence on land commodification, their disputes with the state on building heights explain their power in the commodification of skyline in urban Istanbul. By focusing on the two abovementioned buildings, I discuss the architectural and aesthetic representation of wealth and finance, the concepts of authorship and ownership, and the commodification of land and skyline. In other words, while I offer an architectural analysis of the Azaryan properties, I also move beyond the realm of architectural style to incorporate patronage and finance as factors that influenced this rapid urbanization. The discussion also includes the late Ottoman architects and *kalfas*, specifically Andon Kalfa and Leon Gurekian, who navigated the agendas of their affluent commissioners, emphasizing the unique positions of these bourgeois actors as agents of architectural production.

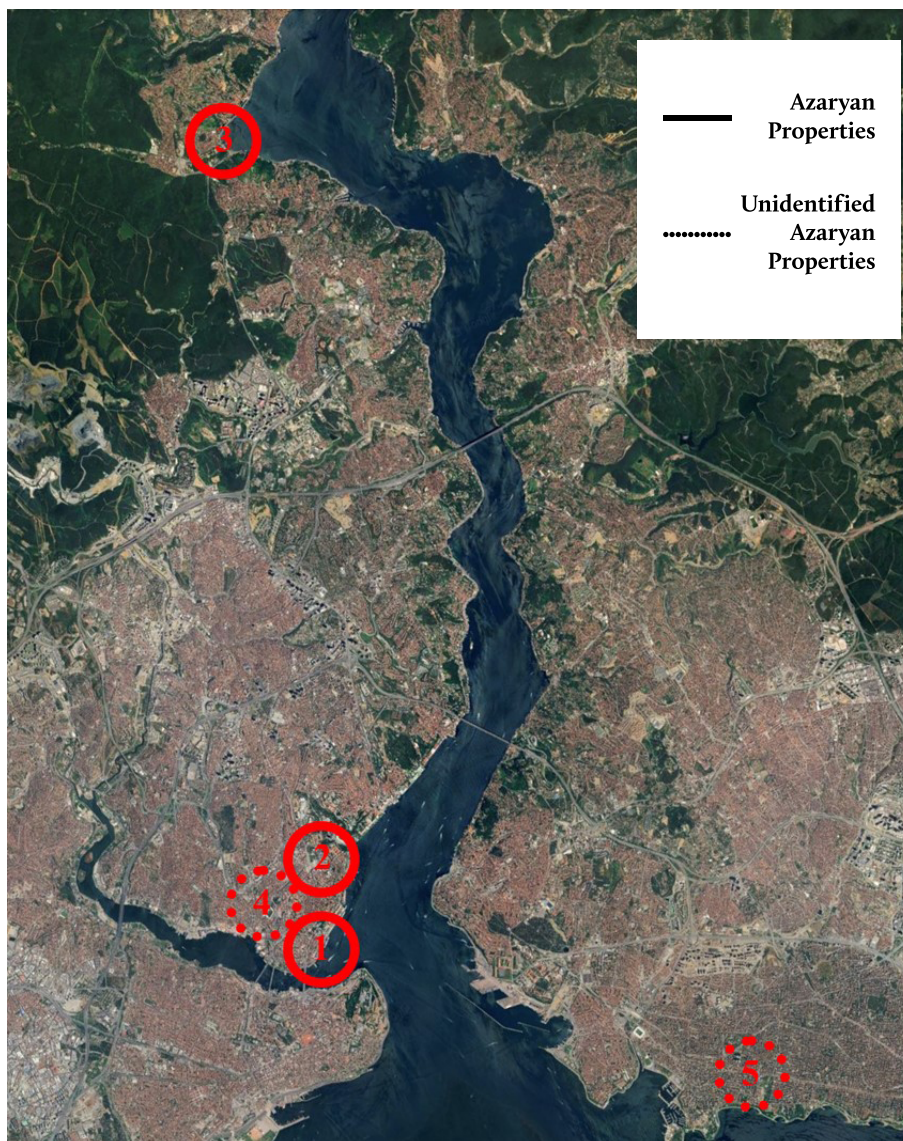
After introducing Bedros and Josef Azaryan as the two protagonists of the article and investors in Istanbul's urban land and skyline, I examine their properties chronologically. Following a brief discussion of their *han* in Galata, I turn to the family's two major investments: their *yalı* in Büyükdere and their apartment building in Gümüşsuyu. In this article, I draw on documents and correspondences from the Presidential Ottoman Archives to understand the disputes and the negotiations between these bourgeois actors and the state. Additionally, insurance maps, photographs, and postcards serve as visual sources to trace urban growth and document the location and timing of specific constructions. I utilize survey drawings as the primary architectural documents since the original drawings of the examined buildings have been lost. Finally, I incorporate into the article first-person narratives of Leon Gurekian, the architect who constructed the Azaryan Palas in Gümüşsuyu, and the autobiographic writings of Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyani, the late Istanbulite author who produced the only written evidence of Andon Kalfa's authorship in the Azaryan Mansion in Büyükdere. While Gurekian's notebooks are unpublished, Çizmeciyani's book

3 Raphael C. Cervati, *Annuaire Oriental* (Istanbul, 1903), 2340.

4 Currently, only these two buildings remain that are identified as former Azaryan family houses.

5 The introduction of this special dossier contextualizes the capitalistic urbanization and land commodification in nineteenth-century Istanbul. Ümit Firat Açıkgöz, "Capitalistic Urbanization in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Armenian Agencies," *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies* 5 (2023): 9–21.

Figure 1: Azaryan Properties in Istanbul. The map illustrates (1) Azaryan Han in Galata, (2) Azaryan Palas in Gümüşsuyu, and (3) Azaryan Mansion in Büyükdere. There are also (4) several Azaryan apartments listed in the *Annuaire Oriental* and (5) a house on Bagdat Street that is listed in the Ottoman Archives. Google Earth Image. Emphasis and notes by the author.



is also used as architectural evidence for the first time.⁶ In sum, the article draws from a combination of archival and visual sources, as well as oral history accounts, to offer a nuanced perspective on the architectural and urban legacy of the Azaryans.

Azaryans, Investments, and Properties

The Azaryans, prominent members of the influential elite and investors in urban land, owned and commissioned several significant, some even iconic buildings in Istanbul. This section aims to provide an overview of these investments, including both commercial structures like *hans* and residential structures like apartments, in order to contextualize them within their urban geography and the architectural dynamics of late Ottoman Istanbul (fig. 1).

According to the 1903 and 1904 volumes of *Annuaire Oriental*, both Bedros and Josef were residing in their family house in Büyükdere while their business, Azarian Père & Fils, an

⁶ Armen Gurekian, Leon Gurekian's grandson, sent pages from his grandfather's personal notebook during our correspondence in June 2020.

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AZAR JOSEPH

DEPOTS DE TITRES

Nom *Joseph A. Azarian*

Fonctions

Adresse *Perchembi Bazar*
n°22 Galata

Spécimen de signature ou cachet.

1901

Joseph Azarian

Mrs Verbal de Arist. Azarian
du 10/11/10. Joseph Azarian aurait
égare les Certificats de Dépôts
n° 4885 - 11.447 - 11.381 - 4910
13.294 - 13.344 -

Figure 2: Josef Azaryan (Joseph Azarian) Ottoman Bank deposit card. Salt Research, Letter A Collection, OFTA0568.

insurance company, was located in Galata on Perşembe Pazarı (fig. 2).⁷ The same volumes indicate that the Azaryan Han,⁸ located at 17 and 19 Voyvoda Sreet (presently Bankalar Street) in Galata, housed the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce.⁹ Despite commissioning a newer *han* in close proximity, the registries reveal that they continued to conduct their

7 Insurance plan by Charles Edward Goad (no. 26) demonstrates the position of the Alliance Insurance Company run by the Azaryans at 22 Perşembe Pazarı. Goad, "Plan d'assurance de Constantinople. Vol. II - Péra & Galata. No: 26," colored plan, 63 x 59 cm, Pera and Galata Collection, APLGDPEGA26, Salt Research, <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/113065>.

8 The name of the Azaryan family is spelled in French transliteration as "Azarian" in *Annuaire Oriental*. Similarly, for Voivoda (Goad)/Voivode (*Annuaire Oriental*), I use the modern Turkish Orthography Voyvoda.

9 Insurance plan by Charles Edward Goad (no. 28) demonstrates the position of the Azaryan Han at 17 Voyvoda Sreet. Goad, "Plan d'assurance de Constantinople. Vol. II - Péra & Galata. No: 28," colored plan, 63 x 59 cm, Pera and Galata Collection, APLGDPEGA28, Salt Research, <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/110010>.

business in their old property on Perşembe Pazarı. The Azaryan Han on Voyvoda Sreet, which accommodated the Chamber of Commerce office, was a more recent investment than their property on Perşembe Pazarı.¹⁰ In 1903, the *han* on Voyvoda Sreet solely housed the Chamber of Commerce, while in 1904, it also hosted Banque de Crédit Industriel de Grece (Branch Manager of Greece Industrial Credit Bank) and A. Hurmuz, branch director of Rossia Insurance Company. Through the construction of the new Azaryan Han, the family solidified their presence on Voyvoda Sreet among the *hans* owned by prominent finance magnates such as the neighboring Kavafyan Han and the Noradunkyan Han, both belonging to wealthy Armenian families.

An advertisement from 1903 promoting Azarian Père & Fils stated: “This company presents to a very high degree all the advantages that people could desire, who would like to insure against fire.”¹¹ Running a fire insurance company in late Ottoman Istanbul must have been a lucrative business due to the recurring fires that frequently devastated the city. Indeed, Azarian Père & Fils functioned as both a major bank and a commercial company.¹² Moreover, Josef and Bedros’s father, Aristakes Azaryan, had served as the inaugural president of the Chamber of Commerce of Constantinople from 1882 until 1897. The Azaryans’ position at the intersection of banking, commerce, insurance, and bureaucracy played a pivotal role in their prominence in late Ottoman Istanbul. Bedros Azaryan’s role as the president of the Chamber of Commerce—like his father—situated in the Azaryan Han in Galata, along with the family’s involvement in urban modernization through their insurance, finance, and construction businesses, positioned them as leading figures in the capitalistic urbanization of Istanbul. Although their insurance business most likely influenced the post-hazard reconstructions in the city, the Azaryans’ elevated status in bureaucratic and religious circles likely motivated them to invest their wealth in real estate and represent it through architecture.

In 1909, Bedros and Joseph relocated their residence from Büyükdere to Ayazpaşa. At that time, the neighborhood hosted the German Embassy, along with residences of pashas, tradesmen, officers, employees of private companies and state offices, a coiffeur, and a café. In the same year, six apartments registered under the name “Azarian” were recorded in Istanbul, one in Asmalı Mescid, one in Çukurcuma, one in Pangaltı, and three in the vicinity of Grand Rue de Pera.¹³ While Bedros and Josef resided in their mansion in Büyükdere (not registered in the *Annuaire Oriental* apartments list) and later on Ayazpaşa Boulevard, Lorans Baruh mentions that Aristakes Azaryan, their father, lived in the houses on Asmalı Mescid and Lorando Streets, both of which were among the family’s older properties.¹⁴

Azaryan Mansion, Commissioning an Armenian *Kalfa*, and the Making of the Büyükdere Piyasa Avenue

The Azaryan Mansion in Büyükdere was originally commissioned by Bedros Azaryan and constructed approximately between 1890 and 1900.¹⁵ The mansion is located on the shore of Büyükdere on the Bosphorus, a favored summer retreat for European embassies and wealthy merchants at the turn of the century. The design and construction of this large wooden house was carried out by Andon Kalfa (Andon Kazazian),¹⁶ one of the many Armenian *kalfas*¹⁷ active in the late Ottoman Istanbul. The project illustrates that the Büyükdere

10 Edhem Eldem, *Bankalar Caddesi: Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Voyvoda Caddesi* (Istanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Bankacılık ve Finans Tarihi Araştırma ve Belge Merkezi, 2000), 26.

11 *Annuaire Oriental* (1903), 2340.

12 Lorans Izabel Baruh, “The Transformation of the ‘Modern’ Axis of Nineteenth-Century Istanbul: Property, Investments and Elites from Taksim Square to Sirkeci Station” (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2009), 157.

13 *Annuaire Oriental* (1909), 455, 1506. The exact commissioners of these Azaryan buildings are not known and are not included in the Azaryan properties map.

14 Baruh, “Transformation of the ‘Modern’ Axis.”

15 The date is approximated from the panoramic photographs of Istanbul from different time periods.

16 This information is given in Liji Pulcu Çizmeçyan’s biographic novel *Istanbul’da Kayıp Zamanlar* and was later used as a reference in the exhibition catalog *Batılılaşan İstanbul’un Ermeni Mimarları*, edited by Hasan Kuruyazıcı. Çizmeçyan, *Istanbul’da Kayıp Zamanlar* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2010); Kuruyazıcı, *Batılılaşan İstanbul’un Ermeni Mimarları / Armenian Architects of Istanbul in the Era of Westernization* (Istanbul: Uluslararası Hrant Dink Vakfı, 2010).

17 According to Alyson Wharton, there is no clear professional separation between a *kalfa* and a *mimar* (architect),

72 shore, as a prominent residential and public space, was a product of multiple agents such as homeowners, Armenian households, *kalfas*, and foreign embassies. The “biography” of the Azaryan Mansion starts with its construction in the late nineteenth century and extends until its restoration in 1980.

The Azaryan Mansion represents a different manifestation of the family’s role in Istanbul’s capitalistic urbanization: located on the margins of Istanbul, the district is fueled by the subdivision of land for sale in the real estate market.¹⁸ The mansion’s horizontal monumentality with its garden and relation with the Bosphorus shore stands in contrast to the vertical hegemony of the Azaryan Palas in Ayazpaşa, as we will see below. A district physically distant but politically close to Pera, Büyükdere attracted upper middle-class non-Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire and summer residences of European ambassadors.¹⁹ The Russian ambassador’s summer residence was particularly influential in shaping the Büyükdere shore. In 1852, Büyükdere witnessed the construction of the first police station, indicating an interest in surveillance and control over the area.²⁰ This further contributed to the flourishing of this upper Bosphorus outpost. Additionally, the outbreak of the Crimean War further animated the region as the Ottoman Navy conducted its drills off the Büyükdere coast.²¹ The combined efforts of diverse actors, including the Azaryan family, and the growing presence of non-Muslim residents and foreign embassies, played a pivotal role in shaping the Büyükdere shore as a significant residential and public space.

With the establishment of Şirket-i Hayriye (Ferry Company) in 1854, Büyükdere became connected to the city center. State documents and correspondences reveal that the area’s infrastructure was primarily developed in response to private demands from embassies, investors, and local residents.²² As an appealingly isolated residential district, Büyükdere attracted significant investments in its infrastructure.

In addition to ferry services, the vehicular roads connecting Tarabya (Therapia) to Büyükdere were renovated and infilled in 1860.²³ In 1899, the main avenues and streets were enlarged to ensure that the buildings had firewalls. The road renewal also required the niches in front of the mansions to be infilled.²⁴ Furthermore, the alignment of the building stock along the waterfront was defined by the embassies. The urban transformation and the reshaping of landform, overall, encompassed the construction of transportation paths and hubs for ferries, trams, and cars.

Multiple actors contributed to the making of and the local administration of late nineteenth-century Büyükdere. As an important diplomatic and residential district, Büyükdere remained a hub of various power networks and was intricately woven together by these actors and their power negotiations. Paolo Girardelli evaluates the position of an embassy as “inherently ambivalent as it belongs physically to one place and legally to

although she mentions a separation between the *kalfa*, the master builder, and the *mimar*, an architect with formal training. *Kalfa* also refers generally only to non-Muslim status. *Kalfas’* relation to the Imperial Architects’ Office, and the nature of their training, are not known. Wharton, *Architects of the Ottoman Constantinople: The Balyan Family and the History of Ottoman Architecture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 27. In similar terms, Oya Şenyurt also claims the blurring distinctions between *kalfas*, contractors, apprentices, and master builders. She, however, highlights the entrepreneurship quality that the *kalfas* embodied. *Kalfas*, according to Şenyurt, could be considered modern entrepreneurs, organizing all the production facilities required for a demand, and directing them towards service. In this sense, they embodied artisanship, contractor, architect assistantship, and operator in a construction site. Şenyurt, *Osmanlı Mimari Örgütlenmesinde Değişim ve Dönüşüm* (Istanbul: Doğu Kitabevi, 2011), 207–242.

18 Documents from the Ottoman archives reveal increasing inquiries for *parça parça furuht* and *ifraz*. BOA, İ.ŞD 26/1229/1/1 (28 Safer 1290 [April 27, 1873]); BOA, İ.ŞD 29/1379/1/1 (5 Ramazan 1292 [October 5, 1875]).

19 Paolo Girardelli, “Power or Leisure? Remarks on the Architecture of the European Summer Embassies on the Bosphorus Shore,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 50 (2014): 29–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S089663460006579>.

20 BOA, A.}AMD_44/3 (7 Recep 1269 [April 16, 1853]).

21 BOA, A.}AMD_47/7 (10 Şevval [July 17, 1853]).

22 For example, the document BOA, İ.ŞE 4/23/8/1 includes repairment demands for the piers, the first by Dr. Palassa’s house in front of the British Embassy, and the second by Russian Embassy Military Attaché Monsieur Sikof’s house. The document BOA, İ.ŞE 4/23/2/1 reveals the sultan’s permission for the British Embassy to repair the pier (17 Zilkade 1311 [May 22, 1894]).

23 BOA, İ.DH 472/31667 (12 Zilkade 1277 [May 22, 1861]).

24 BOA, DH.MKT 2209/21 (28 Muharem 1311 [June 8, 1899]).

another.²⁵ The architecture of diplomacy is extraterritorial and intertwined with tensions over representations.²⁶ While the embassy buildings in Pera underwent a transformation from the local “Ottoman type of the wooden konak with the imposition of alien monumental imprints in a European neoclassical style,”²⁷ the summer palaces in Büyükdere and Tarabya continued to be timber structures.²⁸ The shift from timber to masonry was not linear; yet it is important to note that foreign ambassadors perceived timber construction as local and backward, which was in line with their Orientalist visions of the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ According to Girardelli, the movement of the ambassadors’ residences from Pera to Büyükdere and Tarabya demonstrates these peripheral locations as hygienic and safe enclaves. He interprets this shift, or rather the back-and-forth movement between Pera and Büyükdere, as the dissemination of power across a broad urban topography.³⁰

The construction and repair of the public infrastructure in Büyükdere and the archival documents pertaining to these processes further reveal how fragmented the infrastructural resources were. The municipality sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior in 1903, reporting the decay of Piyasa Avenue, despite the fact that the Russian Embassy had previously notified the authorities of the state of the avenue and asked for repairs.³¹ The letter emphasized the urgent need for repairs to prevent the avenue from becoming unusable the following year. On another note, an earlier letter from the Ministry of Interior in 1875 highlights a request to repair the roads in Büyükdere. According to the document, a landowner named Okyadi Hanım was dividing her land and selling it in pieces (*parça parça fûruht*). A portion of the land was to be allocated for a new police station.³² The cost for the construction of the sewage and sidewalks was supposed to be covered by Okyadi Hanım.³³ The state office further criticized in the document that in the locations where new neighborhoods were forming, the pavement and sewage construction were to be paid for by the landowner. The state, however, was left with the burden of these constructions.³⁴

So, what does this all mean for the Büyükdere waterfront and the Azaryan Mansion? Considering the Bosphorus as a “Grand Allee,”³⁵ or an Ottoman equivalent of a “large European Baroque or early-modern avenue,”³⁶ the Piyasa Avenue, which defines, at once, the shore, the urban walkway, and the rural landscape, becomes a major spine that governs the routes of people, infrastructure, and power relations. In areas encompassing important urban junctions, the state takes charge of managing the urban infrastructure. However, the responsibility for handling secondary infrastructure arising from new urbanization, driven by escalating land speculation and the division of agricultural land for future construction, is anticipated to rest with the landowners.

In Büyükdere, we see a horizontal expansion that becomes a matter of negotiation with the state. This horizontal expansion is most evident with the division of lands; however, not only the land but also the property is divided to maximize profit. For example, in the year 1900, Bedros Azaryan sent a petition to the district municipality demanding the value calculation of his mansion (*sahilhane*) on Büyükdere Piyasa Avenue. Upon investigation, the municipality reported the value of the construction; however, it also figured that the

25 Girardelli, “Power or Leisure,” 30.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, 34.

28 *Ibid.*, 41.

29 *Ibid.*, 35.

30 *Ibid.*, 39.

31 BOA, DH.İD 3/84/2/1 (17 Recep 1331 [June 22, 1913]).

32 BOA, İ.ŞD 29/1379/1 (5 Ramazan 1292 [October 5, 1875]).

33 A similar document, located at BOA, İ.ŞD 26/1229/1/1 (28 Safer 1290 [April 27, 1873]), mentions a woman named Ordiki Hatun, who asks for the division of her land. This document was sent a year before the one mentioned in the text. Besides a police station, this document mentions the construction of a water fountain on the site. The women in the two documents could be the same person. While the documents do not specify which millet Okyadi or Ordiki Hanım belongs to, the first document states that Ordiki Hanım was the daughter of Doctor Franken.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Tülay Artan, “Architecture as a Theatre of Life: Profile of the Eighteenth Century Bosphorus” (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 29.

36 Girardelli, “Power or Leisure,” 40.

74 mansion had been divided into two and rented out to two people.³⁷ One of the tenants, a certain Ataniyadis, sublet the house to someone else.³⁸ This shows how the Azaryans benefited from land division and rental revenues. Land division, property division, and subleasing emerged as tools for maximizing profit.

The architectural typology that is associated with this neighborhood along the Bosphorus is also significantly different from the Azaryan properties in Pera, revealing a different and precarious layer of the construction industry regarding the architects and *kalfas*.

The Precarious: A Wooden House, the Armenian Architect, and the Client

Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyen was the only witness to Andon Kazazyan, who is, in her account, the architect of the Azaryan Mansion in Büyükdere. During my interview with Çizmeciyen in 2016, she told me that Andon Kazazyan (or Kazezyan) was known as “Andon Kalfa,” and the X-shaped wooden bracings that were exposed on facades were his signatures.³⁹ She crossed her index fingers to resemble the exposed wooden bracings and started to explain the other buildings of Andon Kalfa that she still remembered. According to Çizmeciyen, Andon Kalfa built his own house in Osmanbey, adjacent to Çizmeciyen’s family house. This house and another building he constructed on Halaskargazi Avenue with wooden bracings were demolished in the 1950s.

Çizmeciyen’s autobiography is evidence that some histories must survive as stories. As the only remaining witness to an Armenian *kalfa*’s work (whose European and Turkish contemporaries find a place in the archives, at least through their work contracts), Çizmeciyen’s book (which has a storytelling rather than documentary tone) is the only evidence that a *kalfa* named Andon Kazazyan constructed the Azaryan Mansion.⁴⁰ Her narrative focuses on the histories of the mansions together with their inhabitants. After describing the mansions of the “Kayserilian family,” “Frenkian family,” or “Tokatliyan family,” all Armenian families living in the district at the time, she moves on to the Azaryan Mansion:

Right in front of the sea bath, the Azaryans’ big mansion (which is now Koç Family’s Sadberk Hanım Museum) is a sign that we are now in Büyükdere. The whole façade is ornamented with cross-shaped wooden elements. Whenever we see this elaboration, we understand that the architect is Kazezyan Andon Kalfa. All the buildings he built are ornamented in this fashion. In the city, next to our house in Osmanbey, on the avenue, at the corner, there is a similar building. He himself lived in that house. There are some other similar buildings on Halaskargazi Avenue.⁴¹

Later, while narrating her childhood in Osmanbey, she once again remembers Andon Kalfa:

Next to our house is building number 235, where Kazezyan Andon Kalfa used to live. His house was on a very small plot at the corner; therefore, he constructed a large house with cantilevering parts all around. The façade was projecting at the corner towards the street like a ferry prow. Another privilege of this house was its ornamentation unique to Andon Kalfa. . . . A little further, next to the Kafkas Bakery, the architect used similar ornamentations in another building. But his most glorious piece was the Azaryan

37 BOA, BEO 1457/109240/2/1 (13 Zilkade 1317 [March 15, 1900]).

38 Ibid.

39 Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyen, interview by Ashlan Günhan, August 3, 2016, Büyükdere, İstanbul.

40 While Andon Kalfa’s authorship of the Azaryan Mansion is evidenced by Çizmeciyen only, additional evidence supports the oral history accounts of Çizmeciyen. During our interview, she mentioned that Andon had a brother who also was an architect. The *Annuaire Oriental* volume from 1909 proves this information, including addresses of Paul Kazazian (architect) and Andon Kazazian (architect), both in Pangaltı yet on different streets. *Annuaire Oriental* (1909), 663. The Ottoman Bank Archives also include a deposit card that belongs to Andon Kazezian, an architect, living on Büyükdere Street, in Şişli. This address overlaps with the address Çizmeciyen provided. Kazezian Andon, Letter K Collection, OFTK0072, Salt Research, <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/162154>.

41 “Deniz banyosunun hemen hemen karşısında Azaryanların koca yalısı (bu yalı şimdi Koçların Sadberk Hanım Müzesi’dir) artık Büyükdere’ye geldiğimizin işaretidir. Tüm cephe çapraz tahtalarla süslüdür. Bunu görünce hemen mimarını anlarız, Kazezyan Andon Kalfa. Tüm yaptığı binalar bu tarz süslüdür. Şehirde, Osmanbey’deki evimizin yanında, caddede, köşede böyle bir bina vardır. Burada kendisi oturur. Halaskargazi Caddesi’nde birkaç tane daha bu tarz bina bulunur.” Çizmeciyen, *İstanbul’da Kayıp Zamanlar*, 27. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.



Figure 3: Guillaume Berggren, Büyükdere coast, 1875. The arrow shows the building that was demolished before Azaryan Mansion's construction at the same location. Sinan Genim Collection.

Mansion in Büyükdere. The mansion is huge, and its garden extends further until the mountain, people used to say that the Kocataş spring flowed inside this garden.⁴²

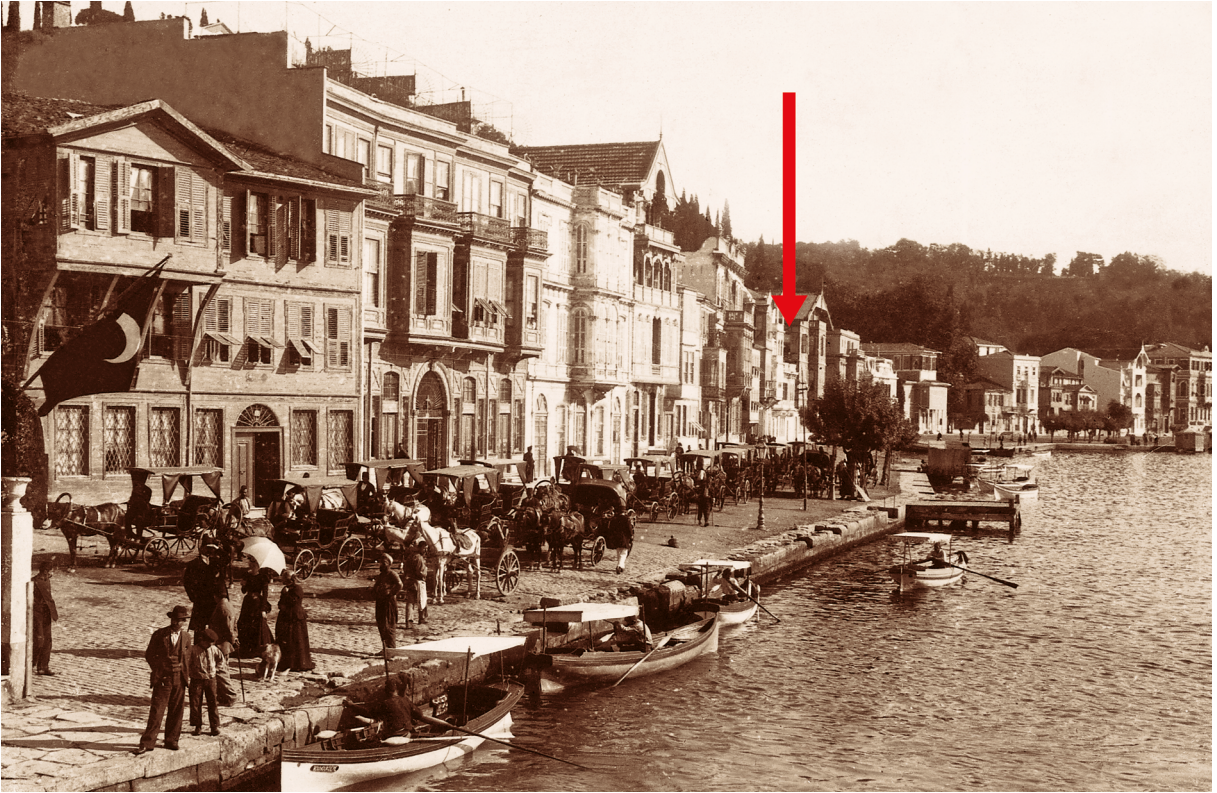
Sinan Genim's photography collection provides information about the construction date of the mansion, as well as the development of Büyükdere as an urban coast. Guillaume Berggren's photograph from 1875 depicts the construction of the waterfront in Büyükdere (fig. 3). Genim claims that the figure in the foreground is probably a *kalfa*, supervising the workers at the back. Genim also identifies the dark-colored boats as infantry boats, claiming that when this photo was taken, the infantry still dominated Büyükdere, and private boats remained scarce.⁴³

This photograph helps date the Azaryan Mansion, given the lack of archival documents. The building located roughly in the middle of the frame, right behind the newly planted trees, which has a cantilever with three arched windows, is a waterside mansion situated where the Azaryan Mansion would be built. According to Genim, most of the buildings in this 1875 photo have been demolished.

Figure 4 shows a photograph dating from 1900, where we see the Azaryan Mansion in the middle of the frame. The Büyükdere coast had become a busy street within a couple

42 "Bizim evin yanına 235 numarada Kazezyan Andon Kalfa otururdu. Evi çok küçük bir arsa üzerinde; köşe başı olduğu için fırdolayı çıkmalarla bayağı büyükçe bir ev yapmıştı. Cephe, köşede vapur burnu gibi sokağa uzanırdı. Bu evin bir ayrıcalığı da Andon Kalfa'ya has süsleriydi. X harfi şeklinde çapraz tahtalarla tüm ahşap cephe kaplıydı. Bu süsler Andon kalfanın simgesi haline gelmişti. Biraz daha yukarıda Kafkas Ekmek Fırını'nın yanında bu mimar tekrar bu süsleri kullanmıştı. Ama en görkemli eseri Büyükdere'de Azaryan yalısydı. (Şimdiki Sadberk Hanım Müzesi.) Yalı çok büyük, bahçesi de dağa kadar, içinde Kocataş suyu akar derlerdi." Çizmeciyan, *İstanbul'da Kayıp Zamanlar*, 110.

43 Sinan Genim, *Konstantiniyye'den İstanbul'a: XIX. Yüzyıl Ortalarından XX. Yüzyıla; Boğaziçi'nin Rumeli Yakası Fotoğrafları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2012), 2:752.



of decades. These two images provide before and after documentation of the Azaryan Mansion, whose construction must have been between 1875 and 1900.

Doğan Kuban and Çetin Anlağan attribute the commission of the Azaryan Mansion to Bedros Azaryan and note that it was built on the site of a previously burnt-down mansion in Büyükdere.⁴⁴ Among the stylistically diverse mansions of (elite) non-Muslim communities in Büyükdere, the Azaryan Mansion reflects the prevailing “Westernizing” tendencies of its era. Kuban and Anlağan interpret the house as an example of the eclecticism that dominated architectural trends at the end of the nineteenth century (fig. 5). Accordingly, this wooden house reflects a common typology with its central plan and central projection, and yet it is distinguished by its façade design. The exterior of the building suggests the hybridization of a sofa plan with a “chalet.”⁴⁵ The projection of the sofa, which was used as the pinnacle of the Ottoman architectural style, here culminates at a balcony similar to an Alpine chalet.⁴⁶ The diagonal wooden decorations on the façade are also inspired by wooden architecture in central Europe (fig. 6).⁴⁷ Yet Kuban and Anlağan argue that this articulation, crafted during the heyday of art nouveau, reflects a somewhat dull and mechanical choice.⁴⁸ These diagonal wooden elements also defined the form of the windows on the projection.

Situated within an expansive garden extending to the site of the Russian Embassy at the back, the Azaryan Mansion shares a characteristic feature with most mansions along the Bosphorus: monumental trees within its garden, cascading up the hill. Girardelli relates the transformation of the Bosphorus shore and its environment to the expansion of imperial

Figure 4: Anonymous, Büyükdere coast, 1900. The arrow shows the Azaryan Mansion. Sinan Genim Collection.

44 Doğan Kuban and Çetin Anlağan, “Azaryan Yalısı,” *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993–1995), 502–503.

45 *Ibid.*, 502.

46 For further information on the chalet, see Deniz Türker, *The Accidental Palace: The Making of Yıldız in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2023), 121–158.

47 Kuban and Anlağan, “Azaryan Yalısı,” 502.

48 *Ibid.*, 503.

Figure 5: Azaryan Mansion.
Photograph: Aslihan Günhan,
July 2016.



initiatives, embassies, and the Ottoman upper-middle class.⁴⁹ He points out that the embassies conformed to the urban trend of the Bosphorus shore, where the new typology of waterside mansions emerged with narrow and steep gardens behind. Imperial property, such as palaces, was developed on larger lands with flatter topography. The intertwined relation between the built and natural environment here was further accentuated by the materiality of architecture, predominantly timber structures, and the presence of “local” architectural features.⁵⁰

Earlier scholarship on Armenian architects and the limited amount of publication on the Azaryan Mansion provide complicated narratives of modernization, tradition, and nationalism. Behçet Ünsal criticizes the Azaryan Mansion for being an example of “catalog architecture.”⁵¹ He argues that the building’s timber construction and floor plan contrast with the local typology and demonstrate an eclectic mentality.⁵² Similarly, as I stated above, Kuban and Anlağan criticize the mansion’s façade, considering it to represent a dull and mechanical taste as opposed to the art nouveau tendencies of the period.⁵³ This argument is based on the assumption that art nouveau and stone masonry were considered the symptoms of modern architecture, while timber construction and the wooden house were the aesthetic other of modern architecture. For its proponents, the wooden house’s

49 Girardelli, “Power or Leisure,” 40.

50 Ibid., 41.

51 Behçet Ünsal, “Azaryan/Vehbi Koç Yalısı,” in *Boğaziçi Sahilhaneleri*, by Orhan Erdenen, vol. 2, *Avrupa Yakası*, Kültür Yayınları Serisi 3 (Istanbul: IBB Kültür AŞ, 2007), 442.

52 Ibid.

53 Kuban and Anlağan, “Azaryan Yalısı,” 503.



Figure 6: Azaryan Mansion to the right, before its restoration. Courtesy of Sadberk Hanım Museum.

authenticity and its status as a national heritage seemed to deteriorate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in Istanbul, where the “Westernization” trend dominated the scene.⁵⁴ While the wooden houses were ephemeral, works by non-Muslim architects were considered bogus. The works and mansions of Armenian and Greek architects, in this sense, were treated as anomalies that destroyed the quality and meaning of the “Turkish house.”⁵⁵ While scholars such as Doğan Kuban and Sedat Hakkı Eldem aim to reintegrate the (Turkish) wooden house into historical narratives with a claim that modern architecture is not able to respond adequately to the vernacular traditions, the works of the non-Muslim architects seem to be further pushed out of their narratives.

Recent scholarship has been reintroducing Armenian architects and *kalfas* back into the historiography of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman architecture. Identification of building biographies and authorships has gained momentum, with a critical eye towards Orientalism and self-Orientalization in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Relative democratization in historiography is most evident in the recentralization of non-Muslim *kalfas* as important agents of architecture and urbanism, who had been previously deemed as the “other” of nationalist narratives of modernity.⁵⁶ The pluralist attitude in scholarship, therefore, has been paying similar attention to these previously marginalized figures, as it has been to the previously marginalized building typologies and materials like wooden houses and timber construction. I would like to situate Andon Kalfa within this line of inquiry. An archival document from the Presidential Ottoman Archives provides a very important insight into the commissioning of Andon Kalfa.⁵⁷

54 Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *Türk Evi Plan Tipleri* (Istanbul: İTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi, 1955), 12.

55 For more on this topic, see Esra Akcan, “Eldem, Arseven, Egli ve ‘Türk Evi’ Tezinin Algılanan Nesnelliği,” in *Sedat Hakkı Eldem II, Retrospektif*, ed. Bülent Tanju and Uğur Tanyeli (Istanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Yayınları, 2009), 51; Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *Turkish Houses: Ottoman Period / Türk Evi: Osmanlı Dönemi*, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Türkiye Anıt Çevre Turizm Değerlerini Koruma Vakfı, 1984).

56 For more, see Kuruyazıcı, *Armenian Architects of Istanbul*; Ahmet Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2015); Ersoy, “Aykırı Binanın Saklı Kalfası: Hamidiye Camisi ve Nikolaos Tzelepis (Celepis),” in *Batılılaşan İstanbul’un Rum Mimarları*, ed. Hasan Kuruyazıcı and Eva Şarlak (Istanbul: Zoğrafyon Lisesi Meunlar Derneği, 2001), 104; Oya Şenyurt, *Osmanlı Mimarlık Örgütlenmesinde Değişim ve Dönüşüm* (Istanbul: Doğu Kitabevi, 2011).

57 BOA, ŞD 190/60/4 (30 Rabiulevvel 1327 [April 21, 1909]). Due to the lack of the surname in the document, it is not certain that the Andon Kalfa mentioned here is the same Andon Kazazyan who constructed the Azaryan Mansion, yet the dates and details fit the timing and therefore suggest the likelihood that it is the same Andon Kalfa. The transcription of the document is as follows:

“Nezaret-i Evkaf-ı Hümayun

Mektubi Kalemi

Cennet mekân Fatih Sultan Mehmed Han hazretlerinin camii şerifleri derununda Sultan Mahmud Han-ı evvel hazretlerinin bina kerdeleri olan kütüphanenin kurşunlarıyla sair bağı mahalleri muhtac tamir olmasına mebni icra kılınan keşf ve münakasasına mübin tanzim ve leffen takdim olunan defterle pusulaya nazaran kurşunlara aid olan üç yüz altı guruşluk tamiratdan maada mahallerin tamirati on iki bin beş yüz guruşda İmalat-ı Osmaniye müdürü izzetlü Mehmet

A certain Mehmet Bahri Bey was commissioned to repair the Fatih Library, but he did not sign the contract. At this point, Andon Kalfa demanded the job and even paid a deposit to get the commission. He also offered to waive the first installment, and as a result, he received a commission for the repair of the library. The document illustrates the precarious professional life of an Armenian *kalfa*. It shows that the repair job was commissioned by a tendering procedure. Although not described in detail, Andon Kalfa was not the first choice, and it was the Turkish Mehmet Bahri Bey who ultimately received the commission. Andon Kalfa, an Armenian architect, had to pay a deposit to get the job, and furthermore, he waived the first installment that was supposed to be paid to him for the task. Andon Kalfa not only acted as an entrepreneur in this competitive commission but he also downgraded the financial value of his profession to be eligible.⁵⁸

We do not know Andon Kalfa's professional background. He might not have had formal training at all, and since he was called *kalfa*, he was probably not an alumnus of Sanayi-i Nefise. His façade design demonstrates his familiarity with European revivalisms, which he might have emulated as an apprentice. Either way, it is clear that he developed his own professional network. We know that he was not the private architect of the Azaryan family, who commissioned various Armenian architects for their apartments, as we will see below.

Alyson Wharton's works on the Balyan family shed light on this less precarious group of Armenian architects. Taking Gülsüm Baydar's definition of the *kalfa* as an in-between stage, "not the traditional Ottoman architect, but also not the 'foreign architect' or 'modern Turkish architect'," ⁵⁹ she develops a similar narrative to that of Ersoy, wherein she claims that the "non-Muslim *kalfas* were either employed by the permanent corps for building, or they were given contracts to carry out buildings on behalf of the official bodies."⁶⁰ Uğur Tanyeli offers a more general discussion, where he states that it is quite a recent phenomenon for a single architect to gain the power to design and shape a building with all of its details. In other words, the development of the emblematic figure of the architect came later in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The scant archival information on Andon Kalfa tells us about his repair jobs, including the repair of public buildings such as madrasas, libraries, and embassies, which fits well with what Ersoy and Wharton argue.

Ayazpaşa and the Azaryan Apartment (Palas)

The Azaryan Palas in Ayazpaşa stands as a testament to the family's establishment of visual hegemony, a feat accomplished through skillful negotiations and strategic use of architectural language. In contrast to the fragmented networks of diverse actors in Büyükdere, urban developments in Ayazpaşa were predominantly influenced by three major forces: the palace, the municipality, and the patron.

In 1909, Josef and Bedros Azaryan relocated to their apartment in Ayazpaşa, the Azaryan Palas. During the same year, Krikor Zohrab, a writer, lawyer, and a deputy in the Meclis-i Mebusan after 1908, became a resident of the Azaryan Palas situated on Ayazpaşa Boulevard. Notably, Ayazpaşa experienced significant urbanization during the first decade of the 1900s. On the 1882 city map (fig. 7), the German Embassy and the layout of Ayazpaşa Boulevard,

Bahri Bey uhdesinde takarrür etmiş iken mumailayh tamirat için mukavele name teatisine yanaşmamış binaenaleyh işbu tamirat ile mumailayh uhdesinde takarrür iden diğer tamiratı Andon Kalfa deruhde iderek merkum kefalet makamında hazineye yüz elli lira depozito akçesi bırakmış ve tamirata mübaşiretinde bervec-i peşin verilmesi lazım gelen ilk taksiti dahi peşinen almayacağını ifade etmiş olduğundan kurşunların hazine-i evkaf kurşun müteahhidi ve mahal-i sairenin de merkum Andon Kalfa maarifetiyle icrayı tamiri için minhayfelmecmua on iki bin sekiz yüz altı gurus masarif-i tamiriyenin üç yüz yirmi dört senesi evkaf bütçesi dahilinde tesviyesi masarif-i idaresi ifadesiyle isti'zan kılınur. olabada emru ferman hazreti menlehel emrindir.
3 şaban 1326 / ve 17 ağustos 1324."

⁵⁸ Ahmet Ersoy says that *kalfas* had to "combine a variety of qualities like designer, contractor and entrepreneur in their personal performances." Ersoy, "Sarkis Bey's Dream: An Alternative House of Sciences and the Fall of the Traditional Builder," in Kuruyazıcı, *Armenian Architects of Istanbul*, 59.

⁵⁹ Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoğlu, "The Professionalization of the Ottoman-Turkish Architect" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 1989).

⁶⁰ Alyson Wharton, "The Identity of the Ottoman Architect in the Era of 'Westernization'," in Kuruyazıcı, *Armenian Architects of Istanbul*, 21.

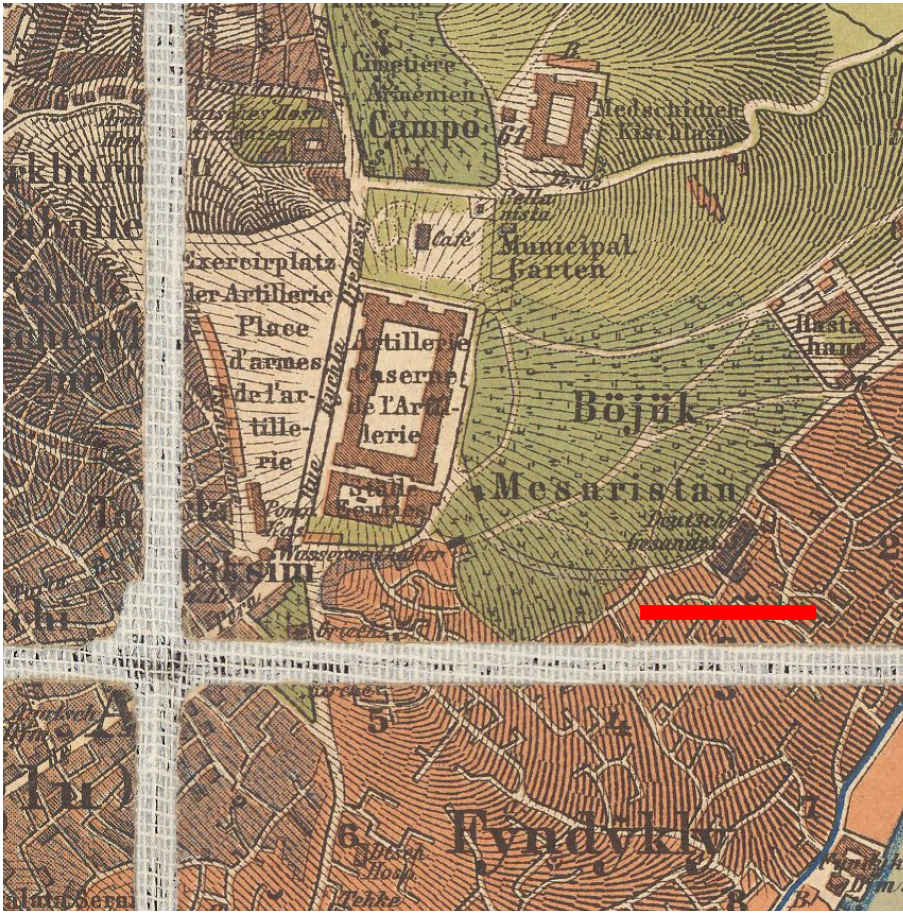


Figure 7: 1882 Istanbul city map and the German Embassy building, the building accentuated by the author. C. Stolpe and Julius Straube, *Plan von Constantinopel*, 1882, 1:15,000 scale, 57 x 69 cm, David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.



Figure 8: Consulate General of Germany in Istanbul. Salt Research, postcard, 13,6 x 14 cm, Taksim Collection, AHISTTAX1007.

stretching from the Artillery Barracks to the Ayazpaşa Cemetery, are depicted. The embassy's construction, which took place between 1874 and 1877 (fig. 8), acted as a catalyst for the rapid expansion of the neighborhood. Subsequent maps, known as the "German Blues" and dating to 1913–1914, clearly delineate the street network to the south of Ayazpaşa Boulevard, distinctly designating the boulevard as a main artery for the first time (fig. 9).

The construction of the Azaryan Palas and the flourishing land market went hand in hand with the influx into Ayazpaşa of Ottoman and foreign merchants and professionals such as consuls, embassy employees, lawyers, and officers. Over the course of a century,

Figure 9: 1913–1914 German Maps (Alman Mavileri), the boulevard accentuated by the author (Dağdelen, *Alman Mavileri*, 2006).



Ayazpaşa, now known as İbnü Street, has maintained its status as the most sought-after street in the Beyoğlu district in terms of market value (fig. 10), primarily due to its strategic position within the city's topography and geography. İbnü Street, being a south-facing boulevard situated at a higher elevation than its connecting streets, benefits from a favorable climatic orientation and offers unobstructed views of the Bosphorus for its apartments. This combination of factors contributes to its sustained market value over time. As illustrated in the map below, İbnü Street's market value surpasses that of the surrounding streets and even the Bosphorus shore, likely owing to its elevated topographic position, allowing residents to enjoy picturesque sea views and the desirable south-facing façade.⁶¹

61 I would like to thank Murat Güvenç for sharing this insight during the workshop and for recommending this source, which is an outcome of a project he led as part of the Data Driven Policy Making Tool.

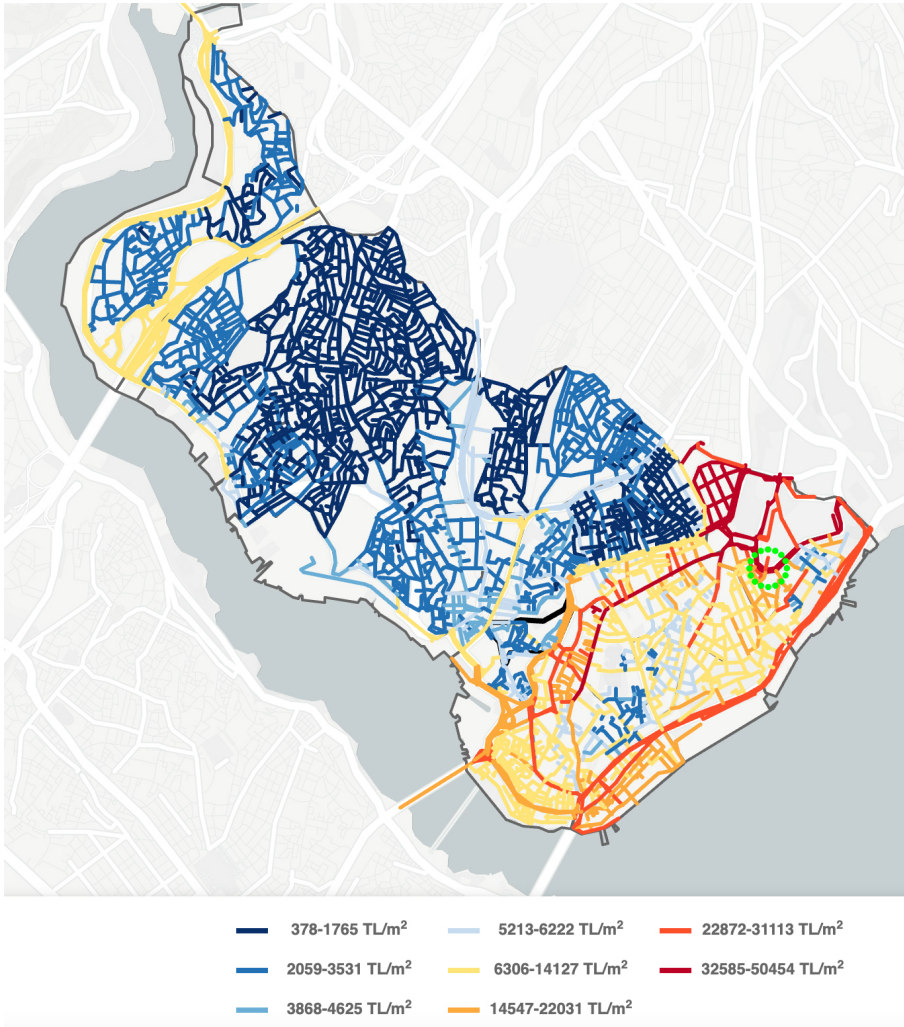


Figure 10: Beyoğlu district's current market value, the green circle locating the Azaryan Palas on İnönü Street, 2018. Kent 95, harita.kent95.org.

The Azaryan family's investment in the newly emerging Ayazpaşa Boulevard played a pivotal role in increasing the value of land in this area.⁶² Beyond geographic factors, the family's architectural choices and disputes with the state hold symbolic significance in terms of this economic venture. The 1921 *Annuaire Oriental*, the only volume in the post-genocide era, reveals another aspect of this important property.⁶³ The family-owned company, Azarian Frères et Cie,⁶⁴ which Bedros and Josef operated, relocated from Galata to Sirkeci. While Bedros disappears from the almanac, Josef's address is still 77 Ayazpaşa Boulevard. The drastic change in demography in the post-1915 period such as the disappearance of many Armenian architect names is visible in the *Annuaire Oriental*. A similar demographic change occurs for the residents of the Azaryan Palas.

In the aftermath of 1915, previously unlisted individuals such as Manouk Azaryan and Artin Azaryan, became residents of the apartment. Additionally, non-Muslim occupants, including the Ukrainian Delegation Office, Harold Thomson, Robert Modiano, and Alex Pangiri of the German Embassy, who previously resided in a different building on the same boulevard, now shared the building. This substantial shift in microdemography during the Armistice period contrasts with the buildings' former inhabitants. It transforms the

62 While the market value map in figure 10 is based on 2018 values, the physical and geographic conditions of the site have been affecting the land value since the beginning of rapid urbanization on this street.

63 *Annuaire Oriental* (1921), 264.

64 Formerly known as Azarian Père & Fils.

Azaryan Palas from a symbol of family power into a secure refuge in the tumultuous post-genocide era. Undoubtedly, as a family-owned apartment strategically located in the city center and in close proximity to foreign embassies, the Azaryan Palas must have instilled a relative sense of security and comfort, making it a gathering place for the family amidst the rising violence against Armenians.⁶⁵ The apartment's high-rise structure, along with its guarded gate and central circulation system, likely offered additional architectural benefits, enhancing the family's sense of privacy and security. Given Josef and Bedros's status as high-ranking elite members and proxies of an international insurance company, their ownership of the Azaryan Palas must have undoubtedly reinforced the family members' decision to settle in this property. In a relatively short span of less than fifteen years, the apartment underwent a remarkable transformation, evolving from a representation of the family's influence to becoming a sanctuary in the drama of the post-1915 period.

Azaryan Palas: Building a Façade and Claiming the Oversight

Josef and Bedros Azaryan commissioned many buildings across Istanbul, but it is the Azaryan Palas, located on Ayazpaşa Boulevard, that has preserved their legacy to this present day. Alongside their renowned presence in various locations, the family also possessed residences in Büyükkada and Büyükdere. Moreover, they leased some of their properties, like Azaryan Han in Galata, to different companies, such as the Hisar Cement and Hydraulic Lime Company.⁶⁶ As the family expanded their influence through the acquisition of land and property, the construction of the Azaryan Palas adjacent to the German Consulate emerged as a symbol of their wealth and power right from its architectural design phase.

The construction of the Azaryan Palas (fig. 11) started in 1903 and was overseen by the architect Leon Gurekian, who happened to be married to Mariamik, the daughter of Bedros Azaryan. Leon Gurekian is known to have close relations with the Balyan Architectural Workshop, as Sarkis Balyan entrusted him with his personal architectural archive.⁶⁷ Gurekian's architectural education was extensive, having obtained his degree from Istituto di Belle Arti in Rome, and a complimentary degree from Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri in Rome. In his personal notes, Gurekian writes:

Among my best productions, we can note the residence of the former Grand-Vizier Halil Rifaat Pasha. [Raimondo] d'Aronco was my competitor. Architect Sarkis Bey, who was responsible for the construction of the former first minister's residence, chose my project. I was named the private architect of the Grand Vizier, who awarded me with the Medjidie decoration in 1900.⁶⁸

This note in Gurekian's notebook illustrates a compelling case: Sarkis Balyan, an influential figure in the architectural sphere, was foreseeing the construction of Halil Rifaat Pasha's residence, and he recruited an architect to design it. It was Balyan who appointed Gurekian, another Armenian architect, for this project located in Nişantaşı (fig. 12). This illustrates the significance of patronage in the world of late Ottoman architects. Gurekian's design for the residence showcased distinct features, such as a timber façade adorned with horseshoe arched windows and extended roof eaves embellished with timber buttresses, a style described by Alyson Wharton as "revivalism."⁶⁹ Wharton further delves into the concept of revivalism, pointing out that it was part of a national imaginary and identity construction through traditional forms. However, she argues that Armenian architects

65 For more on the Armenian properties and the confiscation laws, see Nevzat Onaran, *Emvâl-i Metrûke Olayı: Osmanlı'da ve Cumhuriyette Ermeni ve Rum Mallarının Türkleştirilmesi* [Law of Abandoned Properties: Turkification of Armenian and Greek Properties in the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey] (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2010).

66 BOA, HR.UHM 121/47/3 (21 Rabiulevvel 1330 [March 10, 1912]).

67 The archive was donated to Yerevan by Armen Gurekian, Leon's grandson, in 2016.

68 Leon Gurekian private notes, courtesy of Armen Gurekian. The original text in French reads: "Parmi mes meilleures productions on peut noter la Résidence de l'ancien Grand-Vizir Halil Rifaat Pacha. J'avais d'Aronco comme concurrent. L'architecte Sarkis Bey, chargé de la construction de la résidence du 1er Ministre d'alors, choisit mon projet. Je suis nommé l'architecte privé du Grand Vizir, qui me récompense par une décoration de IV Medjidie (1900)."

69 Alyson Wharton, "Armenian Architects and 'Other' Revivalism," in *Revival: Memories, Identities, Utopias*, ed. Ayla Lepine, Matt Lodder, and Rosalind McKeever, Courtauld Books Online (London: Research Forum of The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2015), 150–167, <http://courtauld.ac.uk/research/courtauld-books-online/revival-memories-identities-utopias>.



Figure 11: Pervititch Map of Ayazpaşa, Azaryan Palas marked in red. Salt Research, 63 x 59 cm, Ayazpaşa Collection, APLPEAYAZ30.

like Gurekian, Leon Nafilyan, Nigoğos, and Sarkis Balyan were practitioners of “syncretic revivalism.” Instead of catering to conflicting nationalist visions, these architects navigated a cosmopolitan architectural sphere.⁷⁰

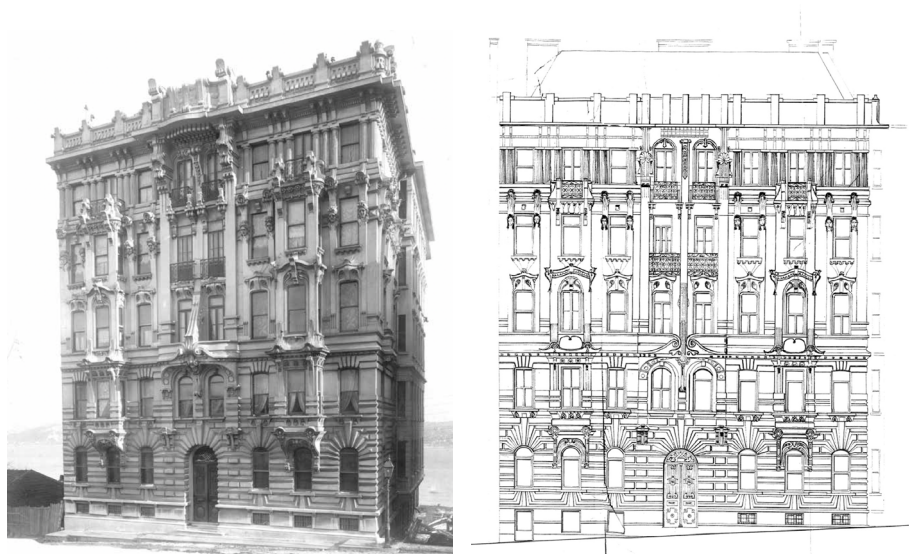
To comprehensively address the question of how late Ottoman architects managed the agendas of their affluent patrons, one must delve into the realms of patronage and finance. This entails an in-depth examination of the nascent Ottoman bourgeoisie and their role as agents of architectural production, with their distinctive positionalities and interests. Understanding these dynamics can shed light on the complex interactions between architects and their wealthy commissioners, which undoubtedly influenced the choices made in the design and execution of architectural projects. This multifaceted analysis will provide an understanding of the sociocultural and economic contexts that shaped the architectural landscape during that era.

Figure 12: Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha's Residence in Nişantaşı (Gurekian, *Leon Gurekian Architetto*, 26).



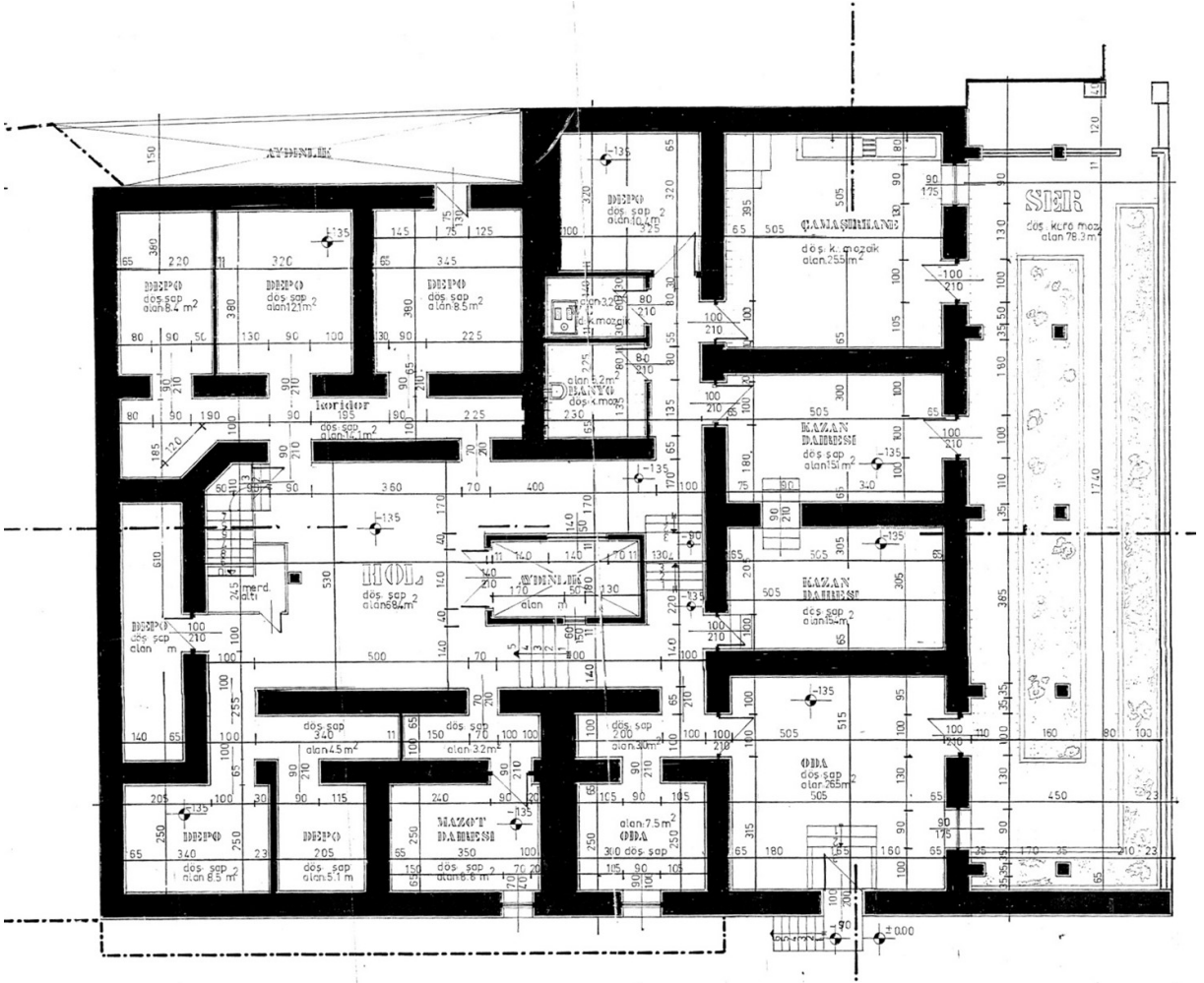
Figure 13: Azaryan Palas in Gümüşsuyu (Gurekian, *Leon Gurekian Architetto*, 34).

Figure 14: Azaryan Palas, north facade survey drawing. Istanbul Cultural Heritage Preservation Board #2 Archives.



Gurekian's choice of materials and architectural elements in the design of Halil Rifat Pasha's residence appears to reflect specific demands or preferences either from his client or possibly from the contractor, Sarkis Balyan. In contrast, his design for the Azaryan Palas in Gümüşsuyu takes a different stylistic approach (fig. 13). The architectural choices for this building may position both Gurekian's architecture and his client in a novel symbolic position in relation to the state. This could suggest a departure from more traditional language, potentially embracing more innovative elements. This approach might have reflected a desire to showcase the Azaryans' wealth and status through architecture that stood apart from a language favored by state authorities.

Indeed, Gurekian's design for the Azaryan family, particularly the Azaryan Palas, which he designed for his father-in-law Bedros and the latter's brother Josef, introduces complexities to the narrative of architectural production in the late Ottoman Empire. The stylistic choices, as well as the real estate market and its actors, play significant roles in this context. In his personal notebook, Gurekian states: "Among (my) apartments, the most artistic and important are that of Mr. J. Azarian in Ayas Pacha, near the German Embassy, and



my personal apartment next to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also in Ayas Pacha.⁷¹ A landmark that still exists today as the Gümüşsuyu Palas, the Azaryan Palas is distinct for its heavily decorated façade (fig. 14). The interplay between symmetrical organization and art nouveau elements of the façade, I argue, signifies a distinct performance of power, notably different from the more localized notion of revivalism seen in the residence of Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha, especially in terms of building materials and stylistic choices. The façade's elevated portal and rusticated ground floor, reminiscent of palazzos, harmoniously blend with the ornamented and symmetrical five-story building, accentuated by cornices. The decorative elements, such as alcoves, human figures, and macarons, highlight the apartment's verticality, creating a contrast to its horizontal lines emphasized by cornices and an accentuated parapet. This interplay of neobaroque and art nouveau elements allows for a play of light and shadow, as noted by Müjde Dila Gümüş.⁷² Gurekian makes use of white limestone for the façade's decorative elements, a standardized façade material mostly imported from Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷³ He repeated a similar

Figure 15: Azaryan Palas, basement floor survey drawing. Istanbul Cultural Heritage Preservation Board #2 Archives.

71 Leon Gurekian private notes, courtesy of Armen Gurekian. The original text in French reads: "Parmi les appartements le plus artistiques et importants celui de Mr. J. Azarian, a Ayas Pacha, près de l'ambassade d'Allemagne, et le mien personnel, à côté du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, également à Ayas Pacha."

72 Müjde Dila Gümüş, "İstanbul'un Art Nouveau Mimarisine Bir Bakış," in *İstanbul Art Nouveau'su*, ed. Müjde Dila Gümüş, Sanat Dizisi 15 (İstanbul: Albaraka Yayınları, 2023), 66.

73 Nilüfer Baturayoğlu Yöney and Ahmet Ersen, "19. Yüzyılın Sonu ve 20. Yüzyılın Başında İstanbul'da Yapı Dış Cephelerinde Kullanılan Yapay Taşların Mimari Değerlendirmesi-3 Yapay Taşların Türkiye'ye Gelişi ve Kullanımı," *Restorasyon ve Konservasyon Çalışmaları Dergisi* 4 (2010): 14–21.

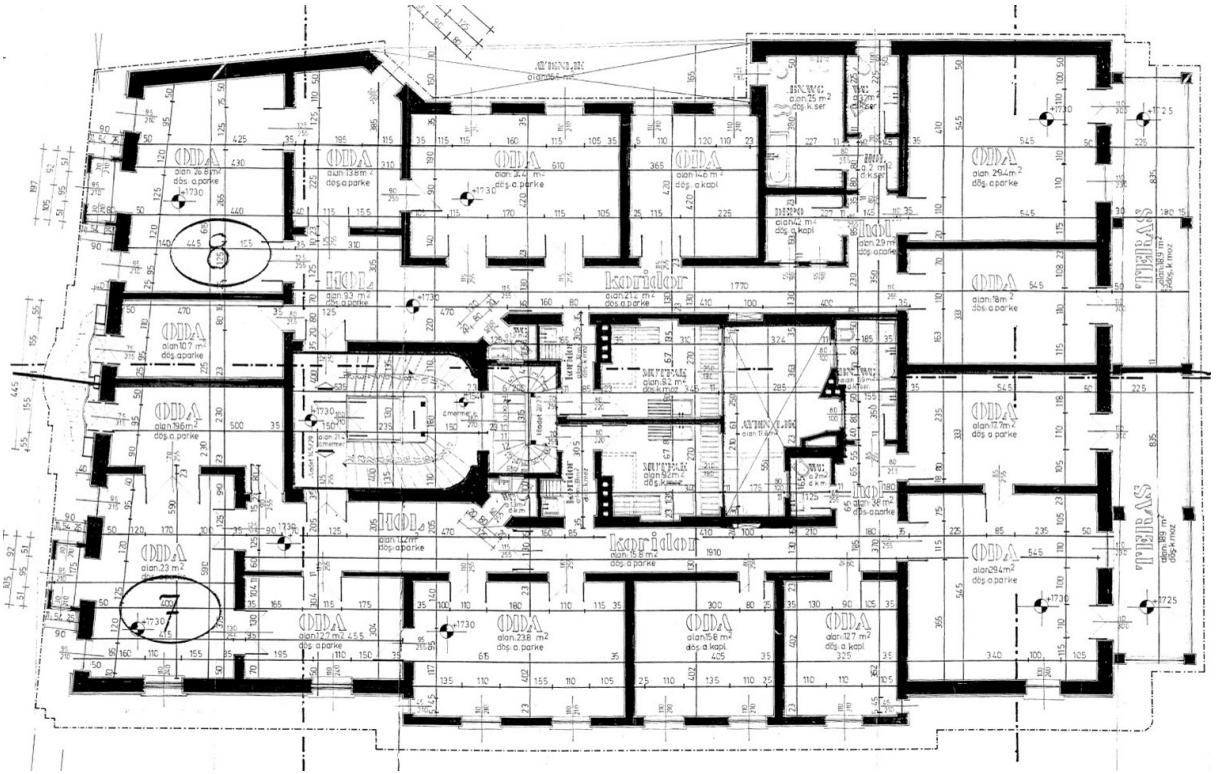


Figure 16: Azaryan Palas, third-floor survey drawing. Istanbul Cultural Heritage Preservation Board #2 Archives.

construction technique in his Maksud Şahbaz Apartment in Şişli. This choice of materials and the stylistic decisions clearly indicate a peculiar agenda on the part of the patron and the architect, showcasing their particular vision for the building's design. The high-rise apartment stands as an example of how late Ottoman architecture implied a complex interplay of personal agendas, artistic choices, and the availability of building materials from the global market.

The floor plan drawings of the Azaryan Palas reveal various design decisions that contribute to the building's functional and aesthetic aspects. The symmetrical organization of the two apartment units incorporates two staircases—one for resident and guest circulation and the adjacent one for service circulation. Strategically positioning the kitchen and the lightwell along the middle axis ensures compact service zones while maximizing the amount of light and providing views for the rooms. Historic photographs confirm that the Azaryan Palas was originally designed as a free-standing building with all four sides open to the view. Survey drawings from 1998 indicate several additions, such as the lightwell on the eastern façade and the terrace on the south. The basement floor shows that the infrastructural elements were incorporated into the design, such as laundry, storage spaces, and heating rooms (fig. 15). The typical floor plan reveals the concentric scheme of the plan organization (fig. 16); the main staircase is connected to the entrance hallway, extending longitudinally along the north-south axis. The rooms on the Ayazpaşa Boulevard side constitute the only nonorthogonal volume of the apartment, deviating from the otherwise symmetrical layout. The series of three-to-one ratio of rooms defines the façade organization on the exterior.

Moreover, the survey drawing of the ground floor indicates the presence of shops on the northeast corner of the apartment. The coexistence of residential and commercial programs in a single building, as observed in the Azaryan Palas, reflects a practice that can be traced back to European tradition.⁷⁴ While the high land value of Ayazpaşa Boulevard and the plan

74 Diana Barillari and Ezio Godoli, *Istanbul 1900: Art-Nouveau Mimarisi ve İç Mekanları* (Istanbul: Yem Yayınları, 1997).

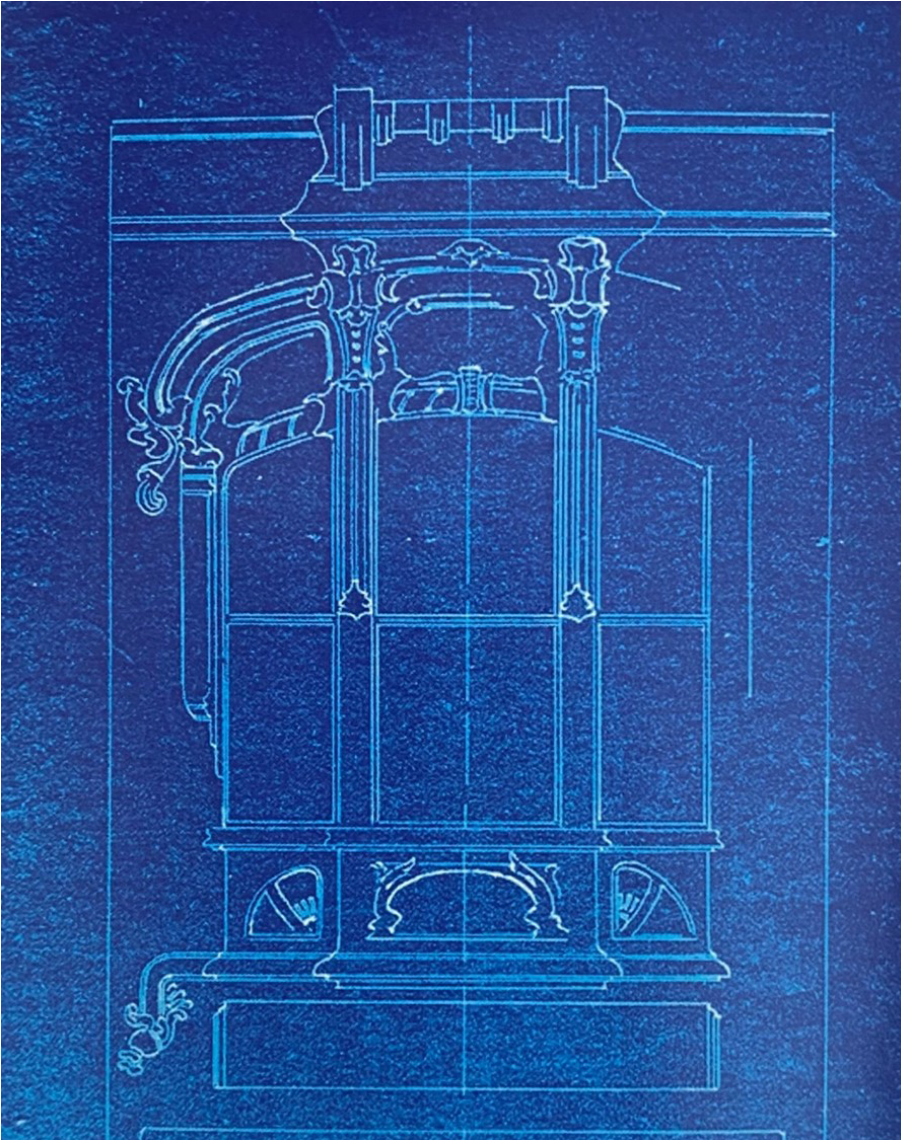


Figure 17: Leon Gurekian's sketches for "Constantinople Shop Projects" (Gurekian, *Leon Gurekian Architetto*, 38).

scheme of the Azaryan Palas provide suitable conditions for accommodating commercial activities on the ground floor, the loss of original drawings leaves a question mark regarding the original programmatic intentions of this space. Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that the new apartment typology of the nineteenth century aimed at maximizing the profit from the land both in plan and in section. This resulted in a strategic utilization of spaces to cater to the demands of the growing urban population and the rising real estate market. In the Azaryan Palas, the raised piano nobile serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it facilitates separation from the street, providing a sense of privacy for the residents. On the other hand, it allows for another floor below the ground floor that can still benefit from the street and daylight. The apartment plan demonstrates the modernizing apartment typology in Istanbul,⁷⁵ a response to the increasing demand in the land market. The façade facing Ayazpaşa Boulevard enhances the symbolic value of the building, reinforcing the reputation and prestige of its commissioners. This design caters to a cosmopolitan audience, aligning with the family's cosmopolitan identity.

75 For more on apartment typology in Istanbul, see Ayşe Derin Öncel, *Apartman: Galata'da Yeni Bir Konut Tipi* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2010).

Both Leon Gurekian, the architect, and the Azaryan family are considered cosmopolitan figures characterized by mobility and multiple affiliations.⁷⁶ Gurekian's architectural approach rejects a rigid categorization of cultural belonging and architectural language. Instead, he offers a plurality in his designs, accommodating various preferences and influences from his clients. Similarly, the buildings commissioned by the Azaryan family members, being tradesmen in Istanbul and collaborating with European companies, exhibit a similar diversity of stylistic representations and construction techniques. The collaboration between Gurekian and the Azaryan family showcases the complexity of architectural production of the era, characterized by cultural mobility and a multifaceted outlook that transcended conventional boundaries.

Gurekian's portfolio during his practice in Istanbul demonstrates that his stylistic choices varied according to different patrons—such as private investors, non-Muslim bourgeoisie, and high-ranking bureaucrats—and to different typologies—such as commercial or residential buildings (fig. 17). I propose here to focus on the role of patronage in shaping stylistic choices. This differentiation further emphasizes the possible audience of the Azaryan family, including European investors, international representatives, and financial stakeholders. In the context of late Ottoman Istanbul, historians have associated art nouveau with European capitalism and the struggle of the Levantine bourgeoisie and the Ottoman elite to represent their cosmopolitan aspirations.⁷⁷ I regard the design decisions of the Azaryan Palas as a manifestation of the international capital they help circulate through their insurance company, catering to the cosmopolitan taste emerging on Ayazpaşa Boulevard.

The family of growing financial wealth, who traded machines, weapons, and cartridges, demonstrated their power not only through the façade of their buildings but also through their negotiation capability with the imperial palace and the municipality. These negotiations provide insights into their role in urbanization, which extended beyond land accumulation to include vertical expansion and control over gaze and silhouette.⁷⁸ In 1903, the government suspended the construction of the Azaryan Palas, alleging that it was overlooking (*nezareti olmak*) the Beşiktaş (Dolmabahçe) Imperial Palace.⁷⁹ A report by the Istanbul Municipality (*şehremaneti*) stated that the building of Josef Azaryan Efendi could not be allowed further construction since it was gazing over the “holy and grand Dolmabahçe Palace.”⁸⁰ In another document, the municipality further details the inspectors' reports, which claim that the side of the Azaryan Palas building sees the so-called pashas' apartment (*paşa dairesi*), where the military personnel of the palace resided, and the adjacent garden of the Dolmabahçe Palace, and suggested that this could only be prevented if the windows were covered with iron (fences). Furthermore, the municipality insisted that if an adjacent building were to be constructed, the windows of the Azaryan Palas should be completely canceled.⁸¹ The report states that Josef Azaryan spent seven thousand liras on construction and bought the land for four thousand liras. The municipality asked for the windows to be sealed or stated that, otherwise, the building was going to be confiscated.⁸² The documents pertaining to the back-and-forth demands between the Azaryan family and the municipality highlight an important issue in the urban modernization of Istanbul: building heights. While many of the archival documents on capitalistic urbanization reveal the commodification of land, and the division of agricultural lands for construction,⁸³ the plethora of documents related to the Azaryan Palas reveal a different concern: the increasing building heights. The

76 Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary*, 24.

77 Barillari and Godoli, *Art-Nouveau Mimarisi ve İç Mekanları*, 30.

78 On Azaryan family's investments and trade networks, see Metin Ünver, “Azaryanlar: Osmanlı Devleti'nin Son Döneminde Bir Ermeni Tüccar Aile,” in 19–20. *Yüzyılda Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu: Kaynaşma, Kırgınlık, Ayrılık, Yeni Arayışlar*, edited by Fatih M. Sancaktar, Recep Karakaya, Abdurrahman Bozkurt, Ramazan Erhan Güllü, and Cezmi Bayram (Istanbul: 2015), 1:97–115.

79 *Ibid.*, 1:111.

80 BOA, Y.MTV 253/171/1/1 (25 Ramazan 1321 [December 15, 1903]).

81 BOA, Y.MTV 253/171/2/1 (25 Şaban 1321 [November 16, 1903]).

82 *Ibid.*

83 See Burcu Arıkan, “A Mode of Space Production in the Nineteenth Century: İcadiye Neighborhood as a Case of İfraz” (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2021).

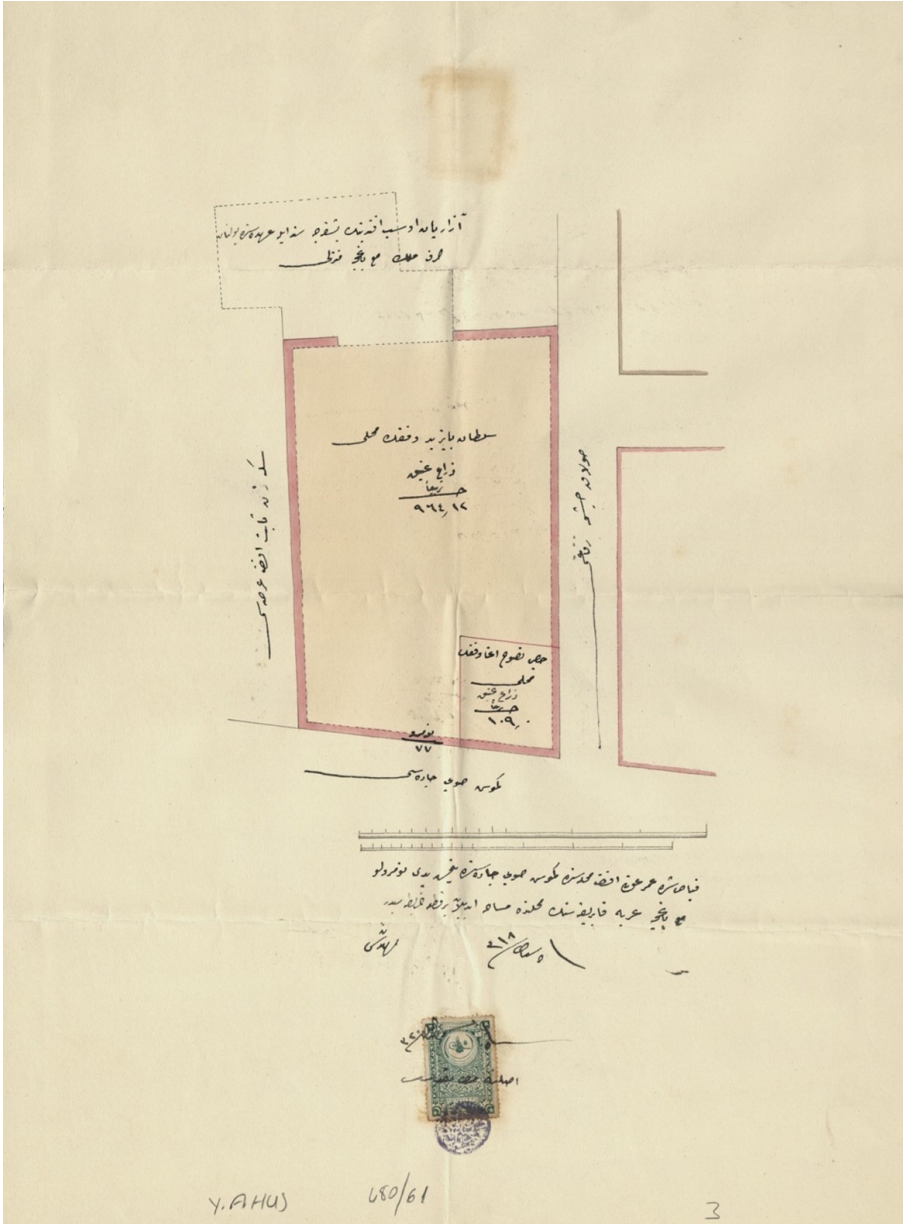


Figure 18: Outlines of the Azaryan Palas. BOA, Y.A.HUS 480/61/3 (20 Şaban 1322 [October 30, 1904]).

construction of high-rise apartments clearly unsettled the imperial palace; less because they became prominent elements of the hill above the palace than because they secured a dominating gaze over it.

The archival documents further accentuate the Azaryans as powerful actors in urbanization and its visual consequences. Josef Azaryan insisted on demanding seventeen thousand liras as compensation for his property after the government suspended the construction of the Azaryan Palas. Despite the municipality's attempts to negotiate for a lower amount of thirteen thousand liras, Josef Azaryan insisted that the exposed bricks and cement during the ten-month suspension caused financial losses, justifying his claim for the full amount of seventeen thousand liras.⁸⁴ The municipality eventually concluded that the Ministry of

84 BOA, Y.A.HUS 478/93/1/1 (15 Recep 1322 [September 25, 1904]).

Finance (Hazine-i Hassa) could not afford to compensate the Azaryans.⁸⁵ Instead, the report went on, stating that the windows should be sealed. The expenses were to be covered by the municipality as a penalty for failing to stop the project before it reached the present height.⁸⁶

A single apartment building belonging to the Azaryan Family demonstrates the powerful role of the family in civic architecture in late Ottoman Istanbul (fig. 18). Gurekian's Azaryan Palas visually engages in a dialogue with the Dolmabahçe Palace designed by Garabet and Nigoğos Balyan. The Azaryan Palas further put itself on par with the palace (physically and politically) by negotiating with the state and eventually retaining its oversight on Dolmabahçe.⁸⁷ Little could accentuate further the economic wealth and power of the Azaryan family and the diminishing power of the imperial palace, than the architecture, stylistic choices, and the visual prominence of the Azaryan Palas.

Conclusion: Power, Architecture, and Capitalistic Urbanism in 3D

This article has explored two distinct forms of how capital accumulation was translated into prestige, power, and urban rent, exemplified by two properties of the Azaryan Family: a lateral growth in and towards Büyükdere and a simultaneous vertical growth in Taksim, Pera, and Gümüştuyu. Bedros and Josef Azaryan, wealthy merchants and actors in a global network of trade and insurance, channeled a visible portion of their investments into land and property in Istanbul. While they owned and constructed *hans* in Galata, where their principal office was located, they also constructed apartments along the Grand Rue de Pera and Ayazpaşa. *Annuaire Oriental* volumes verify the existence of these apartments that bear the name "Azaryan,"⁸⁸ however, it was the Azaryan Palas on Ayazpaşa Boulevard that served as the family residence and gained them recognition. The property became a source of rental income for the family; however, it is their architectural self-representation through expressive use of art nouveau elements on a high-rise building and the bureaucratic power they manifested through negotiations that, I argue, mark this property and their commissioners as key figures in the capitalistic urbanization of Istanbul. The increasing influence of nonstate actors and investment networks on the built environment informed the urban transformation and expansion of late Ottoman Istanbul. Also, the capital holders' power vis-à-vis the state conspicuously increased during this period. The Azaryans wielded visual power through their high-rise apartment and still managed to maintain it with only minor alterations. The building became a manifestation of the family's power in many dimensions—through its height, visual prominence, architecture, and decorative façade—representing the family's aspirations to a cosmopolitan audience.

Büyükdere presents a different trajectory of urbanization. The archival documents pertaining to *parça parça fûruht* demonstrate how the division of agricultural land becomes a common strategy for gaining profit through land and stimulating construction. While landowners in Büyükdere divided and sold their lands for future development, the Azaryans divided their property into parts which increased their revenue. Büyükdere's urban development also demonstrates how the state delegated infrastructural developments to the landowners, further fragmenting systems of urbanization. The same period also witnessed the precarious working conditions of Armenian *kalfas*. The complexities of late Ottoman urbanization emerge distinctly in the histories of the two Azaryan properties, illustrating its fragmented, polyvocal, and sometimes precarious nature.⁸⁹

85 BOA, Y.PRK.BSK 72/50/1/1 (7 Rebiulahir 1322 [June 21, 1904]).

86 BOA, DH.MKT 865/95/1/1 (15 Rebiulahir 1322 [June 29, 1904]).

87 I am borrowing the term "oversight" from Nicholas Mirzoeff as he discussed in his book *Right to Look*. While Mirzoeff discusses the term in relation to slavery and plantation, I transplant the expression to highlight the visual governance and hierarchical distinction between the overseer and the observed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

88 For example, see *Annuaire Oriental* (1909), 1506.

89 In 1925 the Azaryan family sent a letter to the Turkish Consulate in Milan to ask for the recognition of their change of nationality, from Turkish to Italian. In the same year, the Italian Embassy appealed on behalf of the Azaryans, stating that the Turkish authorities had occupied the properties of the Azaryan family, including a fully furnished large country house and a garden with trees on Baghdad Street. The letter indicated that Aristakes Azaryan, residing in Italy since 1914, retained ownership of the house. Furthermore, the authorities had expelled tenants, removed the doors of the family's private garden, and allowed unrestricted access to passers-by. The government utilized *emval-i*

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metruke (abandoned properties) laws to confiscate Armenian properties, benefiting economically from their land and buildings while assimilating the landscape and economy through Turkification. The afterlife of the Azaryan properties still reveals manifold complexities of capitalistic urbanization in Istanbul. See BOA, HR.IM 58.6.9 (May 2, 1925); BOA HR.IM 58.6.4 (May 2, 1925).

The Azaryan Mansion in Büyükdere was purchased by the Koç family, whereas the Azaryan Palas in Gümüşsuyu was purchased by the Demiriz family, who migrated to Istanbul from Erzincan, acquiring wealth as railway contractors. Yıldız Demiriz, daughter of the family, states in her memoir *Sradan Aile* that her family purchased the apartment from its owners who were living in Paris at the time. The family renovated the apartment once they purchased it; Demiriz states that half of the apartment had central heating while the other half did not. They added elevators, radiators, and large balconies to the southern façade with reinforced concrete additions. The 1939 Erzincan earthquake stimulated a wave of immigration of other family members to Istanbul, who lived with the Demiriz family in the Azaryan Palas. As a tragic repetition, the Azaryan Palas was once again a sanctuary for post-disaster displacements. The Azaryan properties, therefore, have been symbols of economic and symbolic capital and shelters for family members for the last one hundred years. Demiriz, *Sradan Bir Aile* (Istanbul: Yorum Sanat Yayınları, 2009).

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