

Theatre Buildings of Istanbul in the Tanzimat Era

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ABSTRACT

The Tanzimat Era is a period during which western style theater began to appear in Ottoman Empire and thus western style theater buildings were constructed. Theater buildings were a new type of building that Ottoman society encountered for the first time, which began to appear in classical Ottoman-Islamic city along with Tanzimat. While the existence and number of theater buildings before Tanzimat remained mysterious even in Pera, the Levantine area of imperial capital city Istanbul, approximately ten new theater buildings were built in various neighborhoods of Istanbul during Tanzimat period and the first decade of the 20th century, during which the influence of Tanzimat still prevailed. Two theater architectures were present in the west in the same period: Façade Theater and monumental theater. In addition to façade theatres which date back to 17th century, monumental theater buildings began to appear in Europe, however they gained their real momentum in the same period that coincides with Tanzimat. When compared to façade theaters which were located in building blocks with an only façade opening to street, monumental theaters turned out to be significant focal points in renewed urban planning of cities. This paper deals with theater buildings that were built in Istanbul during the Tanzimat Era. These buildings were analyzed in two aspects. Firstly, the way these buildings were located in the city, aiming to question the relationship of Istanbul with the urban innovations that occurred in that period. Secondarily, architectural characteristics, forms and social meanings of these theaters as a building type that were alien to Ottoman physical and societal geography and newly introduced to the city.

KEYWORDS: Architecture, Ottoman Empire, Theatre Architecture, Urban History, Urban Planning

INTRODUCTION

The Tanzimat Era (1839-1908) was a period during which new building typologies began to appear in classical Ottoman-Islamic city. Among those, one, namely the western style theater architecture is especially significant as the traditional Turkish theatre doesn't need a building or a stage in western sense, although it uses certain spatial arrangements. That's why until Tanzimat there was no need to design a theatre building for traditional performances (And 1972, 18). Nevertheless, there were a few western style theatre buildings in Ottoman Empire before Tanzimat (And 1972, 20). One of them was the French Theater built in 1827 in Pera, the Levantine area of imperial capital city Istanbul, and the other was a theater in Izmir built in early 1830s (And 1972, 21). However, construction of theater buildings gained impetus after the announcement of Tanzimat as the distinguished professor of Turkish theatre Metin And draws attention to the importance of the year of 1839. Several *fermans* (imperial orders) in 1839 given by the then Sultan Abdülmejid to open western style theatres were a starting point for the legitimization of theatres (And 1972, 20).

Unfortunately, there is little information about the exact locations and architectural characteristics of those buildings, even of the ones in Istanbul. That's why in this paper it will be concentrated only on those in Istanbul, and exclude the ones which were built in other cities of the Ottoman Empire. There were approximately 75 new theatres in various neighborhoods of Istanbul during Tanzimat. Their distribution according to the neighborhoods indicates that they concentrated mainly in two districts: Pera and

Şehzadebaşı. Fortunately, there is more or less detailed information about the ones in Pera and Şehzadebaşı-Direklerarası. About the others, which were built in various neighborhoods of Istanbul, it is known that they existed, and it is only known the names of some of them, but there is little information about their exact locations in the neighborhoods and we have almost no information about their architecture.

Among those 75 new theatres; approximately half of them were open-air spaces or gardens which were transformed into temporary theatrical spaces; approximately a fifth of it were coffee-houses, where mostly traditional Turkish theatre like meddah or karagöz was performed; the six in the harbor district Galata were a different kind of performance space named baloz where the main activity was mostly listening to musicians and watching women dancers while eating and drinking. So, there are approximately only 10 theatres, -two of them were palace theatres-, which were indoor spaces and were built especially -or in other words- suitable for western style theatre and opera performances (Plate 1).

First, these 10 theatres will be briefly examined by means of their external architectural characteristics and forms, paying special attention to their locations in the city/neighborhood aiming to question their relationship with the urban innovations which had taken place in Tanzimat. And later they will be compared to their contemporaries in western cities.

THE THEATRES¹

The first theater which was built after the announcement of Tanzimat was the Naum Theater (Figure 1). In 1840 it was built as a timber construction by an Italian named Bosco. In 1844 it was renovated by its owner Naum and during the fire of 1847 it burned down. The construction of the third theater by the famous Italian architect brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fosatti belong to the year of 1848. It was burned down once more in 1853 and built again by an English architect named Smith. The theater was destroyed at the end of the 1870 big fire of Pera. It was located on the Grande Rue de Pera at the right corner of the Sahne Street across the Galatasaray Lycee. As its entrance façade was situated on the main road, it was one of the important public landmarks of the Grande Rue de Pera. As we can observe from the drawing of its elevation; ground floor level of the entrance section was retracted a little bit inside; the same design of two pilasters and two colonnades with differentiated heads (Ionic at the ground floor and Corinthian in the first floor) continues on the first floor and it finishes with a triangular pediment on top.

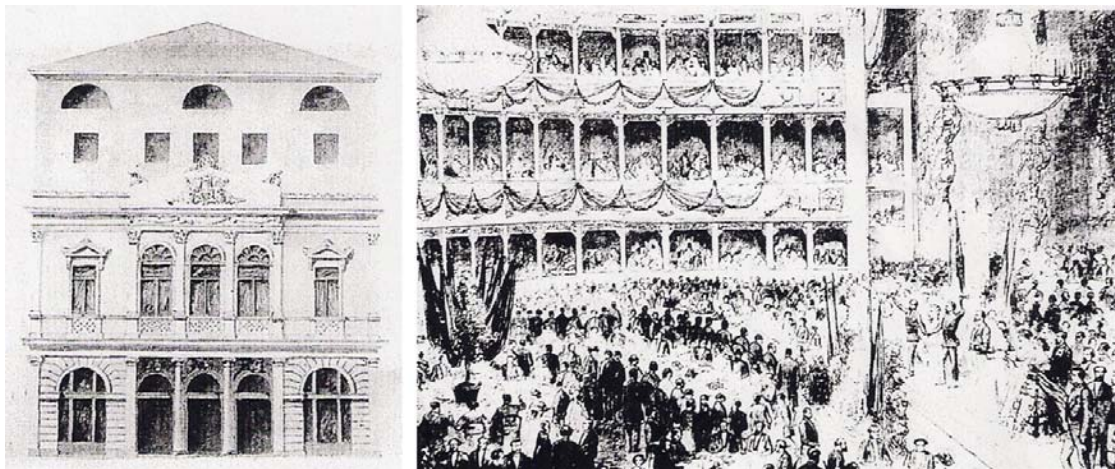


Figure 1: Naum Theatre. Left: Front façade (Heinrich 1989, Abb.9). Right: View of the auditorium in 1862 (Anonymus 1940).

¹In this chapter the following sources were used: And 1972; Can1993; Gülersoy 1993; Karaboğa2011; Öner 1994-1995; Özsoysal and Balay2011; Pekman2011; Polat2001; Sevengil1959.

The privilege given by Sultan Abdülmecid to Naum Theatre for being the only theatre in town, ended in 1862 and right in this year a new theatre building, the Şark Theater was built. Its name was changed several times, first to Alcazar de Byzance then to Petit Alcazar. It was demolished during the construction of the street railway. In 1884 the architect Aznavur built a new building in six months. In 1892 it totally burned down. Şark Theatre was at the spot on the Grande Rue de Pera where later the famous Tokatlıyan Hotel will have been built. This theater also had a direct entrance from the avenue. The facade was decorated with marble and bronze statues.

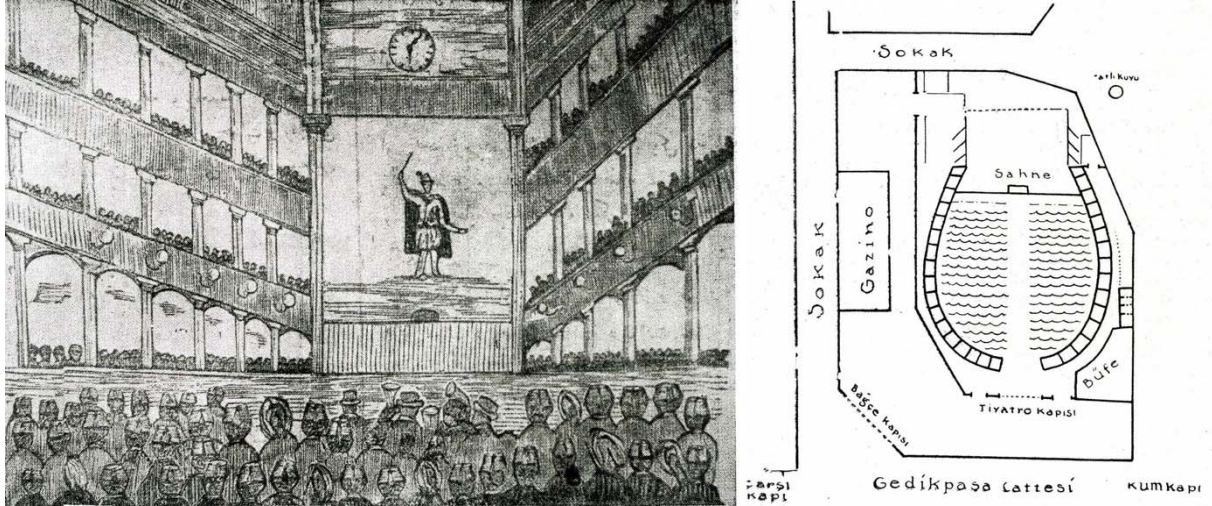


Figure 2: Gedikpaşa Theatre. Left: View of the auditorium (Karaboğa 2011, 21). Right: Plan (Karaboğa 2011, 23).

Gedikpaşa Theatre was first built for a circus company in Gedikpaşa Tatlıkuyu in 1860 (Figure 2). In 1864 the circus left and the building was used by other ballet and opera companies. After several renovations Armenian artist Aramyan, who convinced the government to support the theater, rendered the establishment of Osmanlı Dram Company and Gedikpaşa Theater became the setting of this company that belonged to famous actor and writer Güllü Agop. Its last renovation date was 1870. It was demolished in 1884 in one night. There was an open space, something like a garden in front of the theatre, so the visitors entered from the street through a gate with brick columns and oil lamps. The facade of the theater had marble columns and stairs.

Concordia Theatre was also one of those buildings which was transformed from an existing entertainment space. Its builders were Ricci and Parmeggiani. The construction date was 1871. It was located on the site where the famous St. Antoine Church stands today. In 1874 the theatre hall burned completely and the next year another building was built. In 1906 it was torn down with the purpose of building a church.

Elhamra Theater which was opened in 1871 and burned down in 1874. In 1875 Barborini planned a theater with two storeys and a balcony. It was called Varyete, Eldorado, Verdi and Odeon respectively. It was located on the urban block next to the Hüseyin Aga Mosque. It survived until recently.

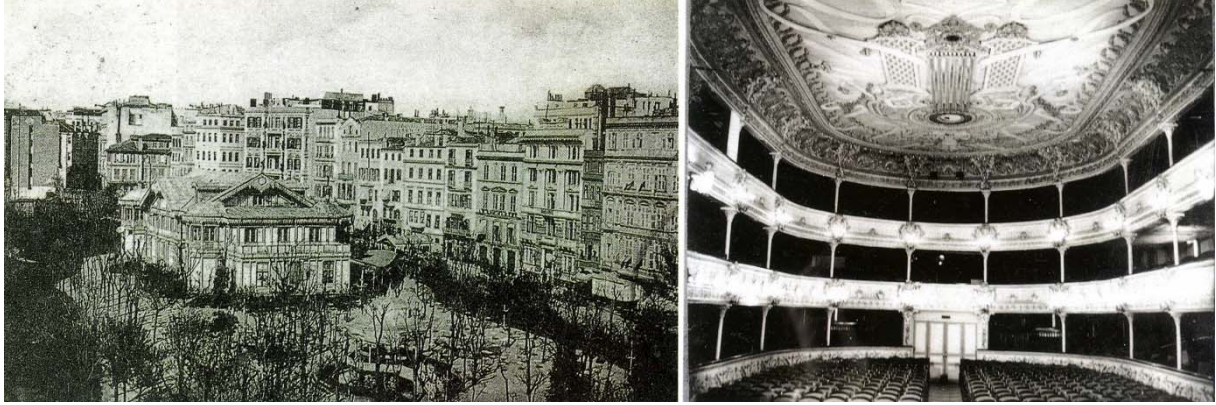


Figure 3: Tepebaşı Winter Theatre. Left: Ariel view (Gülersoy 1993, 34). Right: View of the auditorium (Gülersoy 1993, 49).

As a result of the growing interest of Sultan Abdülaziz for the Western theatre, his visit to Vienna in 1867 and maybe because of the lack of a monumental theater in Istanbul after the destruction of Naum Theatre, a big theater building was decided to be constructed despite limited space and budget (Yazıcı 2010, 93-94). The Muslim cemetery area in Tepebaşı-Pera was chosen by the sultan and it was enlarged by using the left-over soil from the tunnel construction. After years of diplomacy between the mayor and the upper class residents of the neighborhood a public garden in the Parisienpromenade style with the Tepebaşı Winter Theatre inside opened in 1881 (Figure 3). Although it was required to be a stone structure, it could not be materialized due to the financial crisis. Its architect was Housep Aznavur. Its neoclassical entrance section facing the Rue de Petits-Champs had four pilasters with Ionic heads and a parapet at the end. The building survived until 1970s. Throughout the 20th century it was known as the Drama Theatre of Istanbul Municipality Theatre Company and it totally burned down in late 1970s.

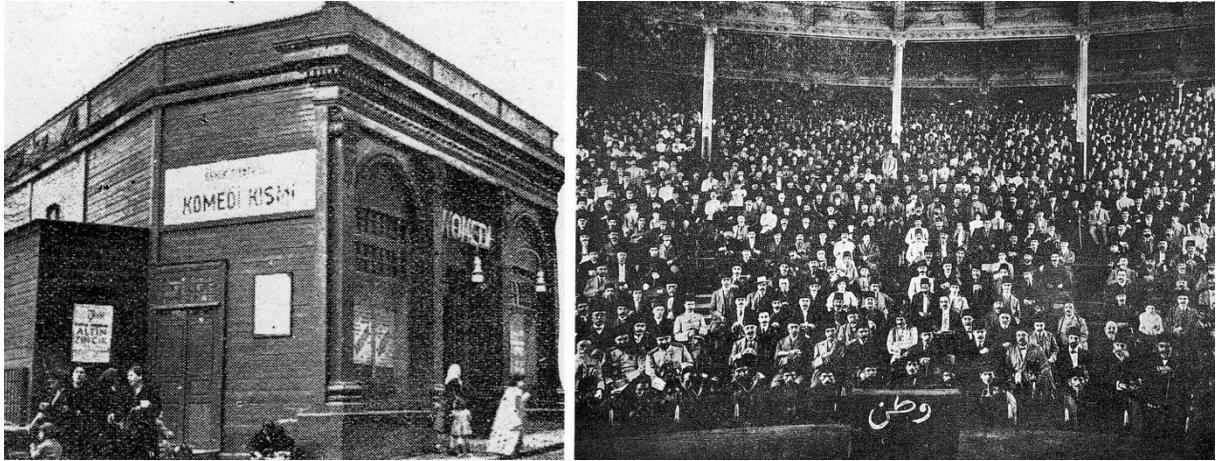


Figure 4: Tepebaşı Summer Theatre. Left: Front façade (Gülersoy 1993, 83). Right: View of the auditorium (Gülersoy 1993, 82).

In this public park a garden theater which was planned to be used during summer, Tepebaşı Summer Theatre was built in 1889 by Barbordini (Figure 4). It was situated behind the Winter Theatre. In 1890, it was burned down. In 1905 Campanaki transformed it into an indoor theatre and enlarged it to host 1200 people. Thanks to its amphitheater shape, it was known as 'Amphi' as well. In the first half of 20th century it was known as the Comedy Theatre of İstanbul Municipality Theatre Company. It totally burned down in 1970s.



Figure 5: Varyete (Ses) Theatre. Left: Front façade of the Halep Passage (URL-1). Middle: Entrance of the theatre(URL-1). Right: View of the auditorium (URL-1).

The Varyete Theater situated in Halep Passage in 1885 (Figure 5). In 1904 the theater was renovated. During the renovation, Campanaki designed a new door and changed the facade. It is the only theatre building which survived until today. For a long time it is known as the Ses Theatre.



Figure 6: Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre. Left: Front façade (URL-2). Right: View of the auditorium (Tuğlacı 1981, 186).

As for the court theatres: The first Ottoman court theater, Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre was built in 1858 according to the projects of Fossati brothers and Barborini by Nikoğos Balyan (Figure 6). It was a thin, long and three-storey building with two neoclassical pediments on its facade. It had a capacity of 300 people and it was located at the Dolmabahçe Square just outside the entrance of the palace, in front of the Dolmabahçe Bezm-i Âlem Valide Sultan Mosque. Although it was part of the palace, it was a detached building. In 1863, a fire broke out and its interior was partly burned and was never recovered. For a long time it was used as warehouse and demolished in 1937 during the construction of the İnönü stadium. Some scholars used to interpret it as a "dominant public structure thanks to its free standing style, monumentality, scale and central place" (Yazıcı 2010, 34). However, it should be noted that it was not used by the public. Besides the members of the Palace only the non-Muslim nobles, ambassadors, high-level members of the military forces and the foreign guests were invited to the performances there (Gerçek 1997, 138). Yazıcı (2010, 35) draws attention that the building was mostly interpreted as a fabulous stone structure of its time because of the smaller, less monumental and wooden theater building examples at that time.

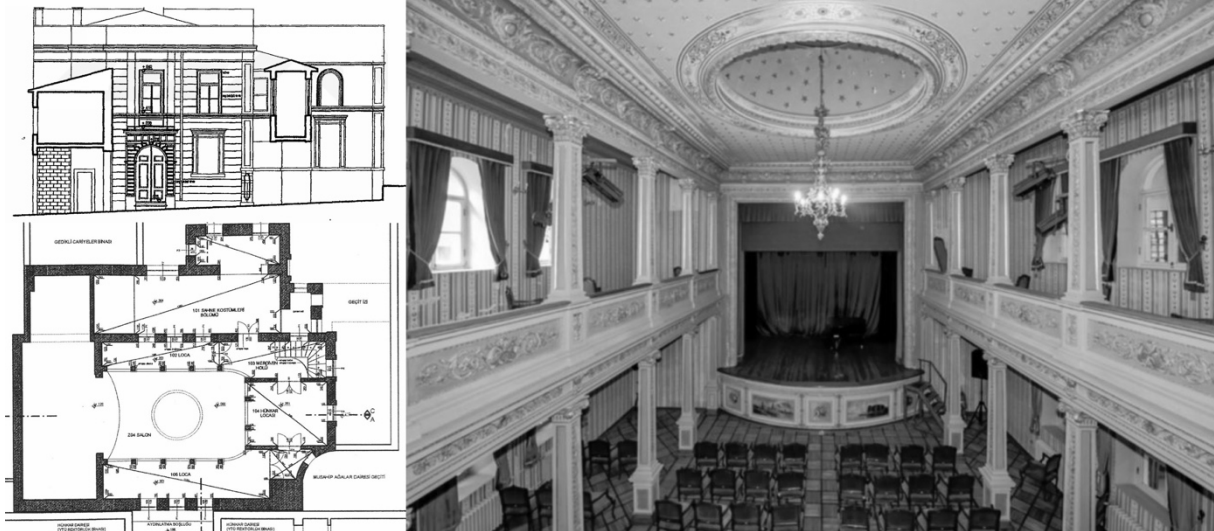


Figure 7: Yildiz Palace Theatre. Left: Front façade and plan (Polat 2001, 109 and 102).
Right: View of the auditorium (URL-3).

The second court theater was situated inside the Yıldız Palace complex (Figure 7). It was completed in 1889 and it had a capacity of 150 people. There is still controversy about its architect. Kuban (2007, 666) mentions Raimondo D'Aronco, and And (2014, 96) claims that the architect was Yanko. On the other hand, Şakir argues that the architect of the plan is unknown but the applier was the court architect Vallauray (Şakir 1954, 2972). Yıldız Palace Theater is not a detached building, it is part of the palace structure. So it is not distinguishable from other parts of the palace and not visible from the outside. It is still intact.

COMPARISON

In this chapter, the characteristics of these theatre buildings will be briefly compared to the ones in western cities of the same era, in order to understand how and to what degree the modernization of Tanzimat period was internalized by the rulers and the public, in case of western style theatre in question.

Two theater architectures were present in the West in the same period: facade theater and monumental theater. In addition to facade theatres which dated back to the 17th century, monumental theater buildings began to appear in Europe a century before Tanzimat, however they gained their real momentum in the same period that coincided with Tanzimat. When compared to facade theaters which were located in building blocks with an only facade opening to street, monumental theaters turned out to be significant focal points in renewed urban planning of cities.

Distinguished professor of theatre studies Marvin Carlson (1989, 98) draws attention that in the history of theatre buildings facade theatres are always been commercially focused theatres because they have sought the business heart of the city. They were often built in open spaces within the centers of urban blocks, surrounded by other buildings on all four sides, facing toward surrounding streets. Access to them might well be only through a passageway between these pre-existing structures, with no opportunity offered for a distinctive façade (Carlson 1989, 102). Ses Theatre in Beyoğlu is just one of those examples which had even no facade and was connected to the street through a passageway.

Carlson (1989, 109) points out also that “during 18th and 19th centuries most facade theatres tended to follow the prevailing codes of facade decoration of the period rather than to make use of elements that might specifically identify them as theatres”. During 19th century districts of “entertainment and recreation emerged in European cities where

citizens go for a variety of experiences set apart from the concerns of everyday life" (Carlson 1989, 110). Carlson (1989, 112) add that the urban companions of facade theatres have been other leisure establishments -cafés, hotels, small specialty stores and less culturally respectable competing entertainments- panoramas and vaudevilles, menageries, burlesque houses, wax museums, freak shows, and more recently cinemas. In the early 19th century, the first modern entertainment district in a European city has been the Boulevard Du Temple in Paris where several facade theatres concentrated in a rather restricted area (Carlson 1989, 112). Being the Grand Rue de Pera its main backbone, Pera was also this kind of a western style entertainment district in Istanbul alongside Direklerarası in Şehzadebaşı where mostly traditional Turkish arts were performed.

Carlson (1989, 116) describes the pattern of boulevard theatres in Paris whose facades set them apart from their neighbors, and which had been followed generally by the facade theatres elsewhere in Europe and in America in the late 19th century, as follows: "[...] almost invariably utilizing elements of the classical architectural repertoire, displaying highly eclectic blends of columns, pilasters, pediments, balustrades, niches with statuary, urns, and palladian windows." Carlson (1989, 118-119) adds:

"The façade is normally divided into three horizontal units, the lowest containing entrances, and often little else, the second containing the most impressive architectural elaboration, based upon windows, arches, columns, and pilasters, and the third offering much more modest fenestration, often topped by a pediment or other roof element. In façade theatres of the late 18th and early 19th centuries the middle unit was almost invariably the most ornate, making the strongest architectural statement [...]. The two most common arrangements for this space were a colonnade, a row of ornate windows, or a combination of the two, usually three arched windows and and four columns."

Almost all theatres built during Tanzimat are in this category of facade theatre by means of their structure as attached buildings in the existing dense urban blocks of the Pera and Direklerarası districts. Therefore, many of those theater buildings didn't have even a proper facade. Few of them had such a facade, which Carlson described in detail. From narrative descriptions on some of them, for example like Gedikpaşa and Şark theatres, it could be imagined that their facades would have been impressive by means of facade theatre design. But about one example it could be pretty sure: Naum Theater, the most famous theatre building of the Tanzimat Era. As there is the drawing of its front elevation, it could easily argued that it had been one of those theaters which had a proper facade as mentioned by Carlson. It had mostly the same characteristics of the facade design of the 19th century examples in Paris.

In the second part of this chapter, the monumental theatre buildings in western world built in 18th and 19th century will be compared to their counterparts in Tanzimat period in Istanbul. Carlson (1989, 73) points out that in the eighteenth century public theatres became significant elements in the new urban design. He adds that "the rulers who had the power to effect urban changes had to begin considering the signifying possibilities of the theatre as a cultural monument rather than as a private possession." Thus, in the middle of the eighteenth century, monumental theatres gained widespread cultural approbation. Civic authorities acknowledged the building of monumental theaters as the most identifying symbol of dedication to the arts. The concept of theatre as a public monument was firmly established in France. Briefly, the features of its design were "the physical isolation, the multiple vistas that made these buildings both landmarks and nodes in the new cities and the formidable exterior decoration with the massive portico" (Carlson 1989, 79) at the center. The climax of this kind of design was the Paris Opera Garnier (1875) located at the intersection point of several boulevards which were opened during Hausmann's rebuilding of the city in the Second Empire. By the second half of the 19th century, the opera house had become an obligatory monument for any city

anywhere in the world wishing to establish its European-oriented cultural credentials, from Cairo in the East to Manaus in the Amazonian jungle (1989, 83). Carlson (1989, 79) refers to these buildings as “public monument” in the sense that they are architecturally notable for their physical isolation and their multiple scenery which make them landmarks as focal points and civic symbols for the cities. He also adds that the monumental theatre suggests by its location and isolation an affinity with other public cultural monuments and therefore it is almost never found at or near the commercial center of a city, but more likely near elegant residential areas or surrounded by public parks and gardens (Carlson 1989, 98). Among the theatres built in Tanzimat period there were two examples which could be discussed by means of the concept of monumental theatre which Carlson puts forward.



Figure 8: Tepebaşı Winter Theatre. Left: Ariel view (Gülersoy 1993, 47). Right: View from the street (Gülersoy 1993, 32).

Tepebaşı Winter Theatre was a part of modernization project which included a western style city garden, “promenade” as Parisiens calls it, in the heart of the Pera. According to the typical characteristics of monumental type theatre buildings, it had physical isolation, however it didn’t had any multiple vistas, any boulevards emerging to it. It could be noticed only while passing by the Rue des Petits-Champs adjacent to it (Figure 8). However, although it could be seen as a building and attract attention of the passers-by or the ones strolling in the public garden, it looks more like a chalet, wooden mansions for hunting, than a monumental theatre or an opera building. Furthermore, its entrance facade confronting the avenue was also a modest one: single storey high annexe with three arched windows and four columns. This façade configuration resembles more to the designs of facade theatres than the monumental ones.



Figure 9. Left: The square in front of the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre (URL-4). Top right: Front façade of the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre (URL-2) Bottom right: Front façade of the Drottningholm Palace Theatre (Photo: Mehmet Kerem Özel Archive, 2016).

The other theatre building which will be discussed on the topic of monumental theatre is Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre. That it was a detached building; that it was located at -and actually shaped- a square whose other features were the gate and the mosque of the palace; that it was a theatre building made of stone which was never seen before till that time in Istanbul, could make us think that it could be an example of monumental theatres. Furthermore, that it was so positioned that it received the avenue which arrived -and therefore faced the ones who were coming- from Beşiktaş direction could serve its clear visibility and monumentality (Figure 9). However, first of all, comparing it to its contemporaries like Cairo Opera House (1869) or Amazon Theatre in Manaus (1896), -without even mentioning the ones in Europe-, its exterior design didn't give the public any clue that it was a theatre. Besides, in history there were lots of examples of monumental theatre buildings which were built by the rulers as public monuments at the major squares of the cities, like the royal opera houses throughout the world. Not only because of its design it is argued that Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre did not have a monumental quality. It was not a monumental theatre also due to its location in the city. Its situation near the palace was not enough to interpret it as monumental. Its location was not central considering the whole of the city. It was on a square on a secondary avenue, connecting the governmental and commercial center of the city to Beşiktaş and Ortaköy which were mostly a residential district nearly located Bosphorus village on the European side. Maybe we could claim that this artery was important because of the newly established monarchical residences (palaces) were on this route, however one thing is clear that it wasn't a part of the development area of the modern city, because the development axis of the city was the Taksim-Şişli line. Even the new tram line on this avenue which was one of the modernization projects of Tanzimat was established years after Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre was burned and lost its use as a theatre (Çelik 1986, 90). So, actually the design and location of Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre resembles more a court theatre, -for example Drottningholm Palace Theatre near Stockholm-, than a monumental theatre on a public square, although its builder, Sultan Abdülmecid who "stood against to the criticisms on his theater passion and formed a role model as the audience, satisfied his needs and ambitions with its [alleged] visibility and [so-called] monumentality" (Yazıcı 2010, 35).

CONCLUSION

To sum up, in the light of this study it could be argued that although the Tanzimat Era made western style entertainment, theatre and opera known and widespread in the society of the imperial city of the Ottoman empire, the modernization projects which it brought along, didn't reach to the necessary degree of quality in terms of designing and constructing high level theatre buildings that could compete with their European

contemporaries.

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