



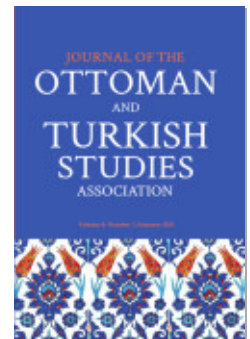
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Sharon Mizbani

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The Art of Infrastructure: Hamidiye Fountains in Late Ottoman Istanbul

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On September 1, 1902, as part of the twenty-sixth anniversary of Sultan Abdülhamid II's accession to the Ottoman throne, a series of opening ceremonies were held to inaugurate a set of new public fountains for the recently-completed Hamidiye waterline in Istanbul. The day began with the most monumental of the series, built in the Tophane neighbourhood not far from a larger, eighteenth-century public fountain that had long shaped the district's social life. As the Ottoman Turkish and French-language press reported, the ceremony was attended by a crowd of municipal and palace officials, chemists, ulema, representatives from European industries, and students from a nearby school (Fig. 1).¹ Abdurrahman Nurettin Pasha, the overseer of the project, spoke on the hygienic benefits of the fountain's scientifically-tested water, and after prayers and the ceremonial sacrifice of a sheep, he collected some of the fountain's water in a specially-made crystal carafe, before travelling to five other new Hamidiye fountains around the city and presenting each of their waters to the Sultan himself.²

While this new Tophane fountain was designed by the Italian architect Raimondo d'Aronco, using a mixture of marble and metal work in an art nouveau and rococo style, a complementary array of smaller mass-produced fountains, drafted by the military engineer André Berthier and produced by the Val d'Osne foundry in Paris, were also placed throughout the city (Fig. 2 and 3).³

1. Newspapers which carried the event included the French-language *Le Moniteur Oriental* and *L'Orient*, and the Ottoman Turkish *İkdam*, *Yeni Asır*, and *Servet-i Fünûn*.

2. See "L'Anniversaire Imperiale," *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 30 August 1902, 3.; for an Ottoman description, see "Kağıthane Su," *Yeni Asır*, 22 Ağustos 1318/4 September 1902, 1.

3. Diana Barillari, ed., "*Osmanlı Mimarı*" *D'Aronco: İstanbul Projeleri 1893–1909, Restorasyonlar, Projeler, Kitaplar* (Istanbul: Istanbul Research Institute, 2006), 205.; For



Figure 1: The opening ceremony of the Hamidiye Tophane fountain and Kağıthane waterline; September 1, 1902. Sourced from *Servet-i Fünûn*, no. 595 (5 Eylül 1318/18 September 1902).

In total, an estimated 126 fountains were constructed from 1898 to 1902 as part of the Hamidiye waterline project, which collected drinking water from the Kağıthane valley and, using imported steam pumps, distributed it throughout the European side of Istanbul (Fig. 4).⁴ The scale of this project and the symbolic and ideological investment in it raises a number of questions, especially when taking into account increasing competition from another mode of water distribution: domestic tap water.⁵

the blueprints by Berthier see BOA.PLK.p.1600 (18 Ramazan 1318/4 January 1901); BOA.PLK.p.5057 (03 Zilhicce 1319/13 March 1902).

4. For a list of extant fountains and a description of the waterline, see Kâzım Çeçen, *Taksim ve Hamidiye Suları* (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi İSKİ, 1992), 172–73.

5. The financial cost required a line of credit from the Ottoman Bank; see İlhami Yurdakul, *Aziz Şehre Leziz Su - Dersaadet (İstanbul) Su Şirketi 1873–1933* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2010), 161.



Figure 2: Opening ceremonies for a marble Hamidiye fountain; Photograph by Ali Sami, September 1, 1902. Image courtesy of Istanbul University Rare Works Library.



Figure 3: Opening ceremonies for a cast iron Hamidiye fountain; Photograph by Ali Sami, September 1, 1902. Image courtesy of Istanbul University Rare Works Library.

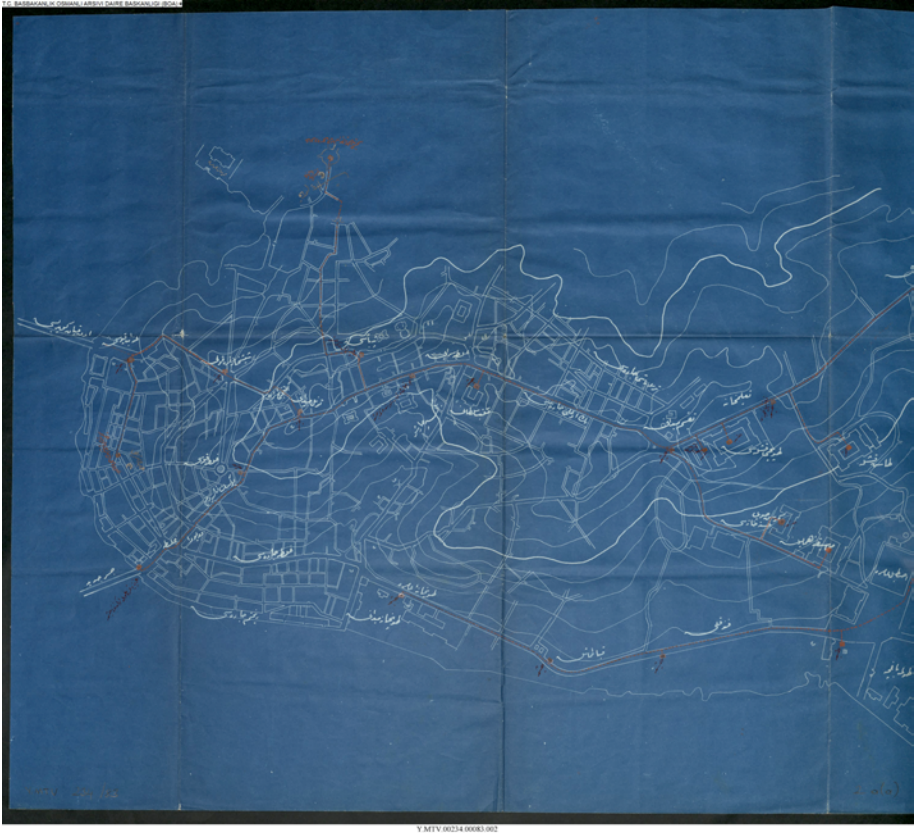


Figure 4: Map showing the locations of the Hamidiye fountains, 1902. Image courtesy of the Presidency Ottoman Archives, Y.MTV.00234.00083.

As a map from 1888 shows (Fig. 5), the Hamidiye water project directly overlapped with the waterlines operated by a foreign concessionary company, the *Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople* (*Dersaâdet Su Şirketi*), which sourced water from the brackish Terkos Lake and provided tap water to the homes of Beyoğlu residents.⁶ While this mode of water consumption was not widely adopted among the broader population of the city, it nevertheless offered and displayed a particular culture of water usage in which water was necessarily conceived as a monetized commodity, to be consumed by individuals in private. Yet the Hamidian state, in their 1882 contract with the French company, insisted on the continued development of the public fountain form, to the point of making their construction the second condition of the conces-

6. To give an example, the brackish water of Lake Terkos was described as “stomach-splitting” [*mide delen*], dirty, filmy, and suitable only for outhouses; see Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Günlerde* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), 159.



Figure 5: Map showing the locations of Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople water-lines and fire hydrants, 1888. Image courtesy of the Presidency Ottoman Archives, DVN.MKL.00029.000 | I.

sions.⁷ Some historians have interpreted the slow and inconsistent adoption of private piped water among the population of the city and the continued usage of the public fountain network as a process of “reluctant modernization.”⁸ This approach entails a certain teleology, with the finality of piped domestic water taken as a historical given. Instead, I argue that the Hamidiye fountain-building project was an infrastructural manifestation of a particular regime of practices, discourses and techniques of rule involving water—what has been termed a *hydromentality*—no more or less “modern” than piped water.⁹ Although the term *hydromentality* has largely been deployed to describe contemporary modes of water consumption and infrastructure, it also offers a conceptual framework to analyze historical water discourses without resorting to the rhetorical dualism of science and spirituality, or the teleology of the modern and premodern binary.¹⁰ Thus, I outline the specific *hydromentality* instilled by the Hamidiye fountains, both by analyzing the discourses within which they were embedded, such as those of hygiene, taste, charity, piety, and beauty, and by examining the structures themselves: their materiality and form.¹¹

In the Ottoman context, as elsewhere, the late nineteenth century was marked by an increased concern with the hazardous effects of contaminated water and its role in the spread of epidemic disease. In Istanbul, the fountain became a primary target of sanitary reformists who argued, in convergence with the beneficiaries of private water companies, that the water from fountains was inherently unsafe due to its antiquity and public character.¹² In response, the inauguration of the Hamidiye waterline was accompanied by two illustrated treatises that reassured the public of the line’s hygienic qualities: *Kağıthane*

7. Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople, *Actes De Concession Statuts* (Paris: Imprimerie Semichon, 1882), 2.

8. See Noyan Dinçkal, “Reluctant Modernization: The Cultural Dynamics of Water Supply in Istanbul, 1885–1950,” *Technology and Culture* 49, no. 3 (2008): 675–700.

9. Sofie Hellberg, *The Biopolitics of Water: Governance, Scarcity and Populations* (London: Routledge, 2018), 16–17.

10. The concept of “desenchantement de l’eau,” drawn from Weber, is an often-deployed framework for this period. See for example Vincent Lemire, *La Soif de Jerusalem: Essai d’hydrohistoire (1840–1948)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011).

11. Through this approach, I aim for methodological solidarity with Indigenous and post-colonial critiques of the hegemonic conceptualization of water as an abstracted, de-spiritualized, and de-spatialised commodity. See for example Joanne Barker, “Confluence: Water as an Analytic of Indigenous Feminisms,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 43, no. 3 (2019): 1–40.

12. Advocates for private water would publish articles in the local press immediately following outbreaks of cholera; see for example J. Michal, “La Question Des Eaux,” *La Turquie*, 19 September 1874.

Suları ve Hamîdiye Çeşmeleri, and *Dersaâdet'de Hamîdiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu* (in Ottoman and French), composed by the physicians Besim Ömer and Alexander Kamburoglou, respectively.¹³ Displaying their own mastery of hygienic science, the authors utilized chemical and bacteriological analyses conducted by the Levantine chemist Pierre Apery to demonstrate that the Hamîdiye water “was among the most pure of its type” and supplied under “the soundest scientific conditions.”¹⁴ As Besim Ömer wrote, public water was crucial for both the health of individual bodies and the health of human society, and the fountains which distributed it worked to cure both individual and social illnesses.¹⁵ Likewise, as Kamburoglou argued in 1907, it was imperative that the supply of hygienic water not undermine the “eminently humanitarian principles” of piety and charity evident in the fountain form.¹⁶

Alongside these statements that demonstrate a particular hydromentality of beneficence and health, the form and design of the cast iron and marble fountains further loaded the practice of water distribution and consumption with signifiers very different from those of the domestic tap. The *tuğra* of Abdülhamid II embossed on each fountain, and the name of God originally intended to crown the cast iron type (Fig. 6), were rather clear denotations of intended popular meaning, and infused the interaction with a spiritual significance. The Tophane fountain, for instance, bore an inscription comparing the water to the Zamzam well in Mecca, and equating drinking from it to prayer.¹⁷ The fountain served as a site for the public exchange of charity and care in return for supplication and prayer that was absent with the privacy and placelessness of domestic tap water.¹⁸

13. Besim Ömer Paşa, “Kağıthane Suları ve Hamîdiye Çeşmeleri [1321],” in *İstanbul Su Külliyyâtı*, ed. Ahmet Kal'a, vol. 13 (İstanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2000), 93–103; Alexander Kambouroglou, *Dersaâdet'de Hamîdiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu [1319]*, ed. Ömer Faruk Yılmaz (İstanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2008). Excerpts and revisions of these texts were also published in medical journals such as *Nevsâl-i Âfiyet* and the *Gazette Medicale d'Orient*.

14. Ömer Paşa, “Kağıthane Suları ve Hamîdiye Çeşmeleri [1320],” 102.

15. Besim Ömer Paşa, “Kağıthane Suları ve Hamîdiye Çeşmeleri,” *Nevsâl-i Âfiyet* 3 (1321/1903): 10.

16. Alexander Kambouroglou, *L'aqueduc d'eau de Source et Les Fontaines Hamidié de Constantinople* (İstanbul: Imprimerie du Levant Herald, 1908), 22. Such an argument would be extended by İstanbul's municipal archivist in 1936, see Osman Nuri Ergin, *Türkiye'de Şehirciliğin Tarihi İnkişafı* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1936), 8.

17. Zekeriye Kurşun, *Bâki Kente Âb-ı Bekâ Hamîdiye* (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2006), 10.

18. For a study on the charity of monumental fountains, see Nicola Verderame, “On the Crossroads of Modernisation and Heritage: Fountain-Building in the Late Ottoman Empire” (Ph.D. dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2018).

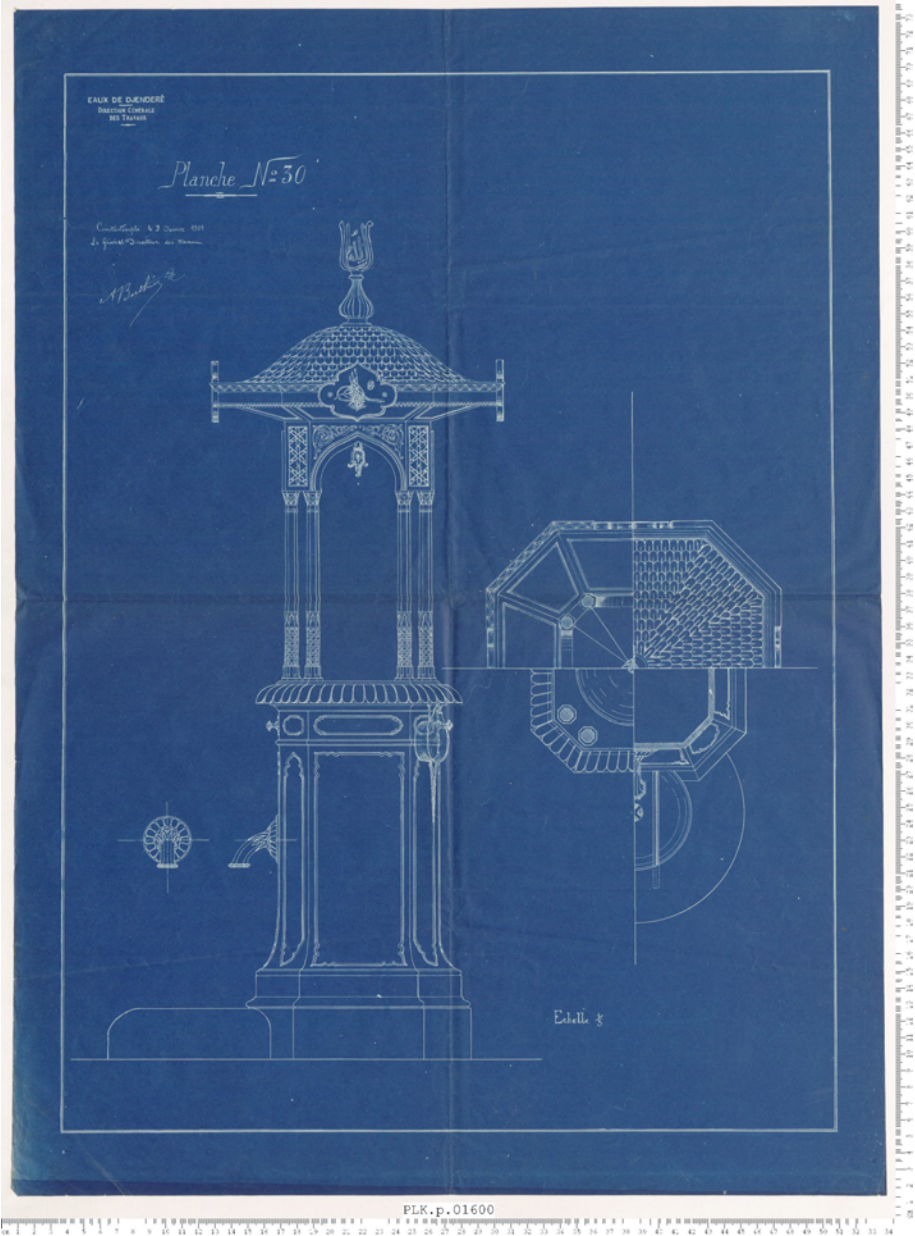


Figure 6: Blueprint of the cast iron fountain by Berthier. Image courtesy of the Presidency Ottoman Archives, PLK.P01600/0001.

Although obviously structured by Islamic notions of piety and ethics in Istanbul, it should be noted that the same foundry that produced the Hamidiye iron fountains also manufactured similar charitable fountains in Paris in the 1870s, indicating that the patronage of mass-produced cast iron fountains was a broader phenomenon in this period.¹⁹ On one hand, the reproducibility of these cast iron and marble fountains, its ability to be deployed at scale, and its dependence upon global networks of manufacture and trade, marked it as a development of the late nineteenth century, reflecting a new assemblage of techniques and water practices. On the other hand, the Hamidiye fountain was clearly entangled with a long history of public patronage in the Ottoman Empire and engaged with the sensorial and aesthetic understandings of this practice. Indeed, as the historian Shirine Hamadeh has described, eighteenth-century Ottoman fountains were emblematic of an architectural aesthetic of sensual pleasure, visual beauty and auditory delight.²⁰ By the late nineteenth century, both European travelers and Ottoman elites began to conceptualize the fountain as emblematic of a particularly Ottoman architectural style, valorized in treatises like the *Usûl-i Mimârî-i Osmânî* (1873).²¹

The Hamidiye fountains, too, continued to be described in the language of beauty, with Besim Ömer noting that the “fountains had been built in a very ornate and heart-ravishing style” [*gayet müzeyyin ve dilrubâ bir tarzda inşa edilen çeşmeler*] and were both “artistic and eye-catching” [*musanna’ ve nazar-rubâ*].²² While it is difficult to know how residents of Istanbul would have judged the aesthetic qualities of these fountains, a petition from a low-ranking official described the Hamidiye fountains as “heart-embellishing in form” [*dil-ârâ inşasıyla*] and noted the public demand for one in their neighborhoods.²³ To invest the otherwise utilitarian material of cast iron with late nineteenth-century notions of beautiful craftsmanship, foundries such as Val d’Osne retained individual sculptors to produce new works in limited series: rather than utilizing the available schematics from factory catalogues, for instance, the design of the Hamidiye fountains recalled earlier Ottoman monumental fountains through the use of analogous, miniaturized details. The pointed arches,

19. Academic research into nineteenth-century European fountains remains limited; for a brief study of Glasgow’s “Alhambresque” cast-iron fountains see Paul Dobraszczyk, “Ornament and Purity: Macfarlane’s Drinking Fountains,” *Victorian Review* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 17–20.

20. Shirine Hamadeh, *The City’s Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

21. Ahmet A. Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

22. Ömer Paşa, “Kağıthane Suları ve Hamidiye Çeşmeleri [1321],” 2, 9.

23. Y.PRK.AZJ.41/84 (29 Zilhicce 1318/19 April 1901).

engraved geometric and floral patterns, overhanging “tiled” roof and crescent moon finials of the Hamidiye fountains represented a skeuomorphic translation of the visuality of the stone, monumental-scale Ottoman fountain into a new architectural medium. While factory produced, their design reflected both practical and aesthetic considerations.

The Hamidiye fountain-building project was the architectural manifestation of a particular late nineteenth-century hydromentality, one which engaged with hygienic and scientific standards for evaluating and interacting with water, but which also framed daily water consumption as a sacral and aesthetic sensorial experience. My aim in this paper has not been to deem one set of consumption practices as superior to any other, but rather to propose that the study of these structures cannot be separate from the water they supplied, or vice-versa. Like domestic tap water, the form of water distribution represented by the Hamidiye fountains expressed a specific ethos of water consumption, and constituted an assemblage of particular techniques, practices, and rationalities worthy of further study.

SHARON MIZBANI is a Ph.D. student in the History of Art department at Yale University, specializing in the comparative architectural and infrastructural history of the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. (sharon.mizbani@yale.edu)