

## ***Origins of Professional Photography in Izmir During the Ottoman Era***

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### **Abstract**

After the invention of the daguerreotype, the methods and technology diffused rapidly from France to the Ottoman Empire. The earliest studios of Izmir date back to the 1860s. Most of them were located in the Frank neighborhood. These studios belonged to Greek, Armenian, or Levantine photographers. Although there are fragments of information and a limited number of photographs that reached this date, much of the history of the Frank neighborhood disappeared during the War of Independence, the big fire that followed it in 1922, and the exodus of Greeks and Armenians out of Izmir. This study delves deeper into this period in order to discover more precisely the dates, locations, establishment, and practices of the first studios of Izmir. The resulting information helps to fill some gaps in the history of photography of Izmir. The study used digital archive analysis. Photographs taken in Izmir (then Smyrna) were examined. Since photography presented great profitability during this period, pioneers who had sufficient experience and skills aimed to increase their profit by opening studios in different locations. The study followed Hannoosh's approach where the Mediterranean Sea is seen as an agent of connectivity over a fragmented region with people of different national, religious, and ethnic identities. The results suggest that Izmir was the second most important city of professional photography-related activities in the Ottoman Empire, well-respected for its artistic and technical capacity in Europe.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Professional Photography, Izmir, History

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## **Introduction**

After the invention of the daguerreotype, the know-how and technology diffused rapidly from France to other countries including the Ottoman Empire. The inventions of Daguerre and Talbot were announced in *Takvîm-i Vekâyî*, the first official newspaper of the Ottoman Empire, on October 28, 1839 (Özendes, 1995). The first photographs of Ottoman territory were taken by Western travelers that aimed to document people, architecture, historical sites and the culture of the Middle East. Istanbul rapidly became the natural center of this new art and technology within the Empire, because it was the capital, and the Sultans supported it. It should be stressed, however, that unlike Europe, where photography had strong ties with the tradition of painting, for the Ottoman Empire it was another new technology being imported, without any links to pictorial tradition (Shaw, 2009).

For centuries, Izmir has been an important port city hosting different ethnic groups. The origins and development of photography in Izmir have not been studied in much detail so far. Sezer (2018) gives a summary of this period before discussing photographers of the new Turkish Republic, i.e. after 1923. Alkan Korkmaz and colleagues (2023) provide a closer focus on the studios that operated in Izmir before 1922, mostly around the Frank Quarter. Their study analyzes the locations of these studios with the help of a mapping method. The studios, most of which belonged to non-Muslims, were replaced after 1922 by Muslim photographers and their location moved towards the city center.

The present study delves deeper into this period to discover more precisely the dates, locations, establishment, and practices of the first studios of Izmir. The resulting information is expected to fill some gaps in the history of photography of Izmir.

## **Methods**

The study used digital archive and content analysis. Data search involved books, journal articles, internet sources, and historical documents such as trade catalogs. Some of the digital archives that were analyzed include Levantine Heritage, Internet Archive, Getty Research Institute, and Rijksmuseum.

## **Izmir at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Izmir has been an active seaport at the Midwestern tip of Anatolia since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was a religious and ethnic plurality thanks to Armenian, Greek, Jewish, and Muslim Ottomans, along with Levantines who mostly held foreign passports. A new quay was constructed between 1867 and 1875 to allow high tonnage commercial ships to dock and to respond to the great amount of trade as the most important commercial port of Ottoman Turkey (Frangakis-Syrett, 2001; Nahum, 2005; Zandi-Sayek, 2000). Izmir witnessed significant economic growth during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, accompanied by a transformation of the urban landscape.

The Frank quarter situated next to the port was the center of foreign trade activities and social life. This quarter hosted banks, consulates, luxury stores, clubs, a theater, a casino, and the headquarters of shipping companies (Driessen, 2005). The Greeks formed the second largest community after the Muslims and lived next to the Frank quarter. The Armenians were located further south in the Basmane district. The first Jewish quarter (also known as Juderia) was located at the foot of Mount Pagos between the Armenian and the Muslim quarters, close

to the Bazaar. Although Muslim Turks formed most of the population, they were largely excluded from the Frank quarter's social and economic life (Inal, 2006). Most of the Muslims lived on Mount Pagos.

The wars of independence that followed World War I, the revocation of the Ottoman rule, and the declaration of the Turkish Republic were important events that shaped Izmir and the neighboring regions. Among these, the most dramatic was the Turkish-Greek war. This war caused the loss of many civilian and military lives and ended with a great fire in the city resulting in the destruction of buildings and infrastructure especially in the Frank, Greek, and Armenian quarters (Kolluoğlu Kırılı, 2005). Furthermore, the bilateral agreement of population exchange between the young Turkish and Greek Republics resulted in the resettlement of Greeks living in Izmir and nearby cities to Greece and Turks living in Greece and Greek islands to Izmir and other western towns of Anatolia (Metintaş & Metintaş, 2018). The rapid commercial, economic, and social development of Izmir at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century suffered a big blow during the Turkish-Greek war and the subsequent great fire. After these events and the population exchange during 1923-1927, the only remaining communities in Izmir were Muslims, Jews, and Levantines.

Based on a book written by Goupil-Fesquet, one of the first photographs in Izmir was taken in 1840 from the deck of the ship *Iena* at the presence of Archduke Friedrich of Austria during a demonstration of the invention. The oldest surviving daguerreotype of Izmir, taken by de Prangey in 1843, depicts the Kervan (Caravan) Bridge, a bridge used for the passage of caravans for trade, frequently visited by foreign travelers (Bengisu et al., 2024).

The earliest studios of Izmir date back to the 1860s. Most of them were located in the Frank neighborhood which was the most prestigious district hosting Consulates, European-style hotels, restaurants, art galleries, banks, and shops. Almost all of these studios belonged to Greek, Armenian, or Levantine photographers. Some of the leading studios of the period will be analyzed in this paper with a focus on the role of the Mediterranean Sea on the studios and professional photographers.

### **The Mediterranean Sea: An Agent of Connectivity**

The Mediterranean is seen by historians as an agent of connectivity over a fragmented space. People, goods, languages, and ideas were brought into contact. Such contacts were unstable, violent, and conflictual due to distinct national, religious, ethnic identities. However, they provided exposure to and exchange of new ideas and practices. Photography manifests this connectivity: equipment, consumables, know-how, ideas, photographs, technicians, and photographers were always in motion on land and in the sea, particularly the Mediterranean (Hannoosh, 2016). Professional photography in Izmir originated through these routes. It also diffused from Izmir to other cities. Three of the period's important professional photographers are discussed below. Many other studios existed at the time, some of which left very small traces in terms of photographs and information.

### **Svoboda**

Alexander Svoboda studied painting in Budapest and Venice. He practiced painting and photography in Bombay in the 1850s. He became a member of the French Society of Photography in 1856. Svoboda set up one of the first studios in Izmir, Rue Franque, in 1858 (Hannoosh, 2016). He formed strong personal ties with Britain and the two private British

firms that constructed the first two railway lines in Ottoman Anatolia. Svoboda wrote the book titled "The Seven Churches of Asia" published in 1869. This book included his personal travel account, also describing details of how to reach these historically important churches by these trains. Twenty of his albumen silver prints were mounted throughout the book. They included photographs of modern Turkish towns such as Izmir (Figure 1) as well as ruins remaining from early Christian churches and classical monuments (Herring, 2015; Soloyev, 2021). Svoboda was commissioned to photograph the visit of Sultan Abdülaziz to Izmir in 1863 and other official events. He moved to London in 1867 and presented his photographs at the Arundel Society. He may have concluded his career in photography after the publication of his book (Soloyev, 2021).

Figure 1: View of Smyrna, CA. 1859 – 1867, Albumen Print (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)



## Krabow

According to the 1893 commercial guide of Smyrna (Nalpas & de Andria, 1893), Krabow's studio was located on Rue Franque (Figure 2). In this guide, it was advertised that his studio could take all kinds of photographs, enlarge them to natural size, and make all types of reproduction. Based on various sources, it is estimated that Friedrich Wilhelm Krabow opened the studio in the 1870's or 1880's. In a photograph taken in this studio, two people are seen: presumably a high-ranking officer and his aide (Figure 3). From the verso of the photograph, it is noted that the studio received medals from the Ottoman Sultan (Abdülaziz or Abdülhamid II), and the Swedish-Norwegian King, probably Oscar II. Krabow was commissioned to take photographs of Aydın and Denizli after a devastating earthquake in 1899. From various photographs and documents, it can be concluded that Krabow moved

from Izmir to Hamburg (Germany) and opened another studio in the Blankenese district. A cabinet card from this period (Figure 4) shows the address of this studio. The address printed on the back of another photograph from the same period indicates that the studio in Izmir was presented as the main one while Blankenese was listed as a branch. This is a good example of the connectivity between different countries across the Mediterranean and beyond. It also shows the prestige of Izmir as an important center of professional photography at the turn of the century.

Figure 2: A Page From Annuaire des Commerçants de Smyrne & de L'Anatolie, Listing Photographers of the Period (Nalpas & de Andria, 1893)

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<b>Pepinéllos Apostolos.</b> Rue Fassola.	<b>PHOTOGRAPHER.</b>
Rassit Effendi.	Calighéris Spiro. Local Rossi.
<b>PROFESSEURS de FRANÇAIS.</b>	Krabow F. W. Rue Franque.
—	(Voir annonce page 77.)
Arlaud A.	<b>Michel.</b> Grands portraits groupes et reproductions en tous genres. Spécialités des portraits souvenirs à 1/4 Medj. la 1/2 douz. Portraits grands naturel à 1 Livre Turque. Rue des Roses No 47.
Balladur J. G.	<b>Rubellin Père et Fils.</b> Portraits en tous genres, vues et types (Photographie Parisienne. Rue Franque. Passage Psarochano. Voir annonce.
Datody Alphonse.	<b>Zambat N.</b> (Photographie Universelle) Portraits en tous genres. Prix très modérées. Place Fassola No 77.
Datody Charles.	<b>Zilpoche J. et Ch. Bukmedjian.</b> Petite Rue des Roses ( Voir annonce page 8.)
Denotovich Joseph.	
Deportu A.	
Hochepeid G.	
Mussoulou Joseph.	
Mousta Effendi.	
Narick J.	
Perré Remon.	
Slaars Bonaventure.	
Sali Effendi.	
<b>PEINTRES.</b>	
—	
<b>CURTOVICH OVIDE.</b> Artiste Peintre. Atelier au Chalei de l'Eden.	
<b>Paléologue G.</b> artiste. Rue Franque.	<b>QUINCAILLIERS.</b>
Papazogiou Giovanni. Rue Servetadhica.	—
<b>PEINTRES DECORATEURS.</b>	<b>Ascher Joseph.</b> et Grand dépot Mercerie et Bijouterie Rue Sarakilar.
—	Atamian. Rue Franquu No 65.
<b>Blaverge Théodore.</b> et miroirteur, 154, Place Fassola.	<b>Andonoglou Frères.</b> et droguistes en gros 13, palya Psaradhica.
<b>Costanzo Joseph.</b> Doreur spécialité pour enseigne. Rue Fassola No 9.	Alexandrakis G. Yol Bejesten.
Deleo Bernard. Rue Echelle Hollandaise.	Agamzanian Agop. Yol Bejesten.
Savopoulos S. Rue des Maltais.	Akiozoglou Cie.
	Agozar A. G. Local Spartali.
	Arditi Frères. Eski Pazar.
	<b>Bonomo B.</b> Bitt pazar.
	Boulgaridhis Frères 12. Rue des Verreries.



Figure 3: A Photograph Taken at Krabow's Studio (Left) and Verso (Right) (İpek Cabadak Collection)



Figure 4: Ella Bierbach's Portrait, Taken at Krabow's Studio in Hamburg, for a Costume Party (Murat Bengisu Collection)



## Rubellin

Alphonse Rubellin opened his photography studio in the 1860s or 70s under the name Maison Rubellin at 120 Rue Merchant (Jacobson, 2007), and later, with his son joining in 1900, this workshop was named Rubellin Père et Fils. The business operated under this name until 1913 (Weber-Unger & Domanig, 2011). It is understood from the logos he used in his photographs that he later moved to Rue Franque - Passage Psarochano and used the name Photographie Parisienne (Paris Photography House). Rubellin was one of the most active and successful photographers of the Ottoman Period. He documented historical sites in many places such as Izmir, Istanbul, Rhodes, Ephesus and Athens. Rubellin and his son used studio and city photographs on many postcards to satisfy the orientalist curiosity of the West and to market them to travelers visiting Izmir. These postcards served to provide a glimpse of the city to friends and family overseas or just to keep a memory of a visit. Postcards started to gain popularity towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The postcard was a different way to create long-distance connectivity and communication between cities and people. Many portraits and city photographs (see for example, Figure 5 and 6) that have survived from this studio have made a significant contribution to the cultural heritage of Izmir.

Figure 5: Portrait of an Unknown Turkish Man and Boy in Traditional Costume, Albumen Print (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)





Figure 6: Boats Along the Seafront, 1890 (İpek Cabadak Collection)



## Discussion

The analysis of three professional photographers, their careers, and their work aimed to provide a realistic understanding of the period in terms of activities, interactions, and dynamics of the profession. Various strategies were used by the studios to increase profitability such as opening branches in other cities, editing postcards, and producing photographs that would seem exotic or different to non-locals. The turmoil and instability of the period presented a big challenge to all the studios of Izmir. Some of the studio owners had to flee during the war and some of the shops burned down during the Great Fire. The Mediterranean Sea played an important role in the continuation of the careers of these photographers. For example, it is known that some of the Greek and Armenian photographers continued their work in Greece, Cyprus, or other parts of Europe, after they left Izmir. Similarly, some Muslim photographers arrived to Izmir from the Greek islands.

## Conclusion

Izmir was the Ottoman Empire's second most important city in terms of professional photography. Many important photographers opened their studio at the Frank District and produced studio portraits or outdoor photographs for professional purposes. Some of them moved to other cities via the Mediterranean Sea and continued their work there. Technology, culture, and equipment were transported from one Mediterranean port to another, so did photographs, postcards, and photographers. All this connectivity helped the development of photography in the region.



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