

Smyrna Main Ottoman Post Office and Chardirvan-Alti Branch Office

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The color illustrations on the inside and back covers of this issue refer to this article.

The Ottoman Empire established a Ministry of Posts and opened a post office in Istanbul in 1840. In September 1842, the Porte issued a decree to open a post office in Smyrna, the second most important port city of the Empire after Istanbul. It is generally believed that the main Ottoman post office in Smyrna was located on the first floor of the Grand Hotel Huck on the Quay. The collectors of Smyrna picture post cards are well familiar with cards showing different views of the Grand Hotel Huck. There is also a sepia photograph taken in 1909 with a close up view of the post office and the side street which is appropriately named as the Ottoman Post Office Street. In this photograph we see horse buggies waiting in front of the post office under a sign between the first floor windows facing the Quay that clearly reads "Bureaux de Postes Imperiale". Was the main Ottoman Post Office in Smyrna always located in the Grand Hotel Huck? If not where was it before that? To answer these questions one has to look at the travel guides and maps of the period. But first let us go back in history and start with the construction of the Smyrna Harbor.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Smyrna grew from a small town of 2,000 inhabitants to a major port city with a population of over 200,000. The continuous growth in trade and shipping in the port of Smyrna required the construction of a harbor. Some members of the business community formed the *Societ  des Quais de Smyrne* (Smyrna Quay Company) in 1867. The project was built by the French company Dussaud Brothers at a total cost of  400,000 by their own funding. When the project finished in 1876, Dussaud Brothers owned the entire Quay Company. First, a 4-km long retaining wall was constructed all the way from the military barracks at Konak in the south to the Point (Punta) in the north about 50 m offshore

from the old shoreline. The area in between was filled with rubble and paved forming an 18-m wide quay. In the area gained by land reclamation, a new business district with commercial buildings, hotels, shops, and warehouses was created. A dual-track tramway was built on the Quay extending from the Customs House to the Aydin railway station at the Point. The track enabled trains to transport goods between the port and the Aydin train station.

When the construction of the harbor started in 1869, the structures on the new parcels in the area gained by land reclamation also started to be built. Among them was the "Hotel M. Mille" that was opened around 1870 across the breakwater on the northern side of the harbor which housed the passenger hall, passport office and police station. Steamers anchored at some distance from the Quay and, as soon as permission to land was obtained, the hotel agents and guides came on board in small boats (caïques) to take passengers to the passenger hall. The 1873, 1878 and 1882-editions of the *Murray Handbook for Travelers* recommend the Hotel M. Mille, also known as the *Hotel des Deux Augustes* on the Mille Street as the best hotel in Smyrna. Murray handbooks also recommend the restaurant of the Hotel M. Mille. Among the photographs in Atay (1997) is a one taken by Alphonse Rubellin, a photographer of French origin who operated *Studio Parisienne* on the Rue Franque in Smyrna in 1880, showing the Hotel des Deux Augustes. In this photograph we see a sign between the first floor windows illustrating a steamer with "Agency Lloyd" written under it. One can also see the Austrian flag hanging right above from a flag post at the corner of the building. Apparently the Austrian shipping line Lloyd was located at a corner office on the first floor of the hotel.

However another photo taken in 1890 also by Rubellin shows the name "Grand

Hotel Huck” on the same building. Also an advertisement published in *Almanach Synoptique à l’Usage du Levant* (1894) lists the amenities and conveniences offered by the Grand Hotel Huck including the central location of the hotel, tramways at the front, à la cart meal service, and proximity to post offices and telegraph offices. The telegraph offices were located in the same building across from the hotel on the breakwater as the passenger hall. A letter sheet of the hotel used in 1895 by a traveler notes the same as the 1894 advertisement. It is obvious at this point that the Hotel des Deux Augustes changed ownership and its name sometime between 1882 and 1890 to become the Grand Hotel Huck. Since there is no mention of it in these sources it is also obvious that the Ottoman post office was not located in the Grand Hotel Huck at that time.

Another piece of information about the location of the main Ottoman post office comes from a map insert in given in the German *Brockhaus* encyclopedia. In this map the Turkish post office is located at a spot in the Turkish business district of the city. The 1873 and 1878-editions of the *Murray Handbook for Travelers* note that the Turkish post office was located “in Spartali’s Buildings near the Bazaars.” The 1876 *Imerologion Calendar and Guide* gives the location of the Ottoman post office at Agios Yeorgios street (Ayi Yorghi, a.k.a. Rue St. George) and Edip Efendi as the postmaster (Turkish translation is in Berber 2008). A comparison of the 1898 German map of Smyrna and a 1905 British insurance map (Goad 1905) places the location where the Ottoman post office was in the 1898 German map in the Spartali building at the intersection of Pechtemaldjiler Itchi and Ayi Yorghi streets. On the other hand, the Macmillan *Guide to the Eastern Mediterranean* notes that the Ottoman post office is “on the quay, near Grand Hotel Huck.” Now it is clear that the main Ottoman post office in Smyrna moved from Pechtemaldjiler Itchi

street to Grand Hotel Huck sometime between 1898 and 1904. But can we be more accurate?

An interesting hint comes from the quite rare *Pechtemaldjiler Bachi* postmarks and Ottoman Post Office guides of 1903 and 1909. In vol. 8 of Agaogullari and Pabuc-cuoglu, two *Pechtemaldjiler Bachi* (Pestamalcilar Basi in Turkish) postmarks are illustrated. The negative dateless postmark illustrated has the Ottoman Fiscal Calendar year 1319 (corresponding to the Gregorian year 1903) carved along with the inscription. The 2nd bilingual postmark illustrated has a date of 1903. The *1903 Guide Postal* published by the Ottoman Postal Administration lists *Pechtemaldjiler Bachi* as a branch post office accepting regular mail only. The *1909 Guide* does not list it at all, indicating that it had already been closed down. Thus we conclude that the main post office moved to the Grand Hotel Huck in 1903 while the old post office still operated a few more years (maybe even less than a year considering the rarity of its postmarks) as a branch office under the name *Pechtemaldjiler Bachi*.

The reason the main Ottoman post office moved in 1903 from a place in the Turkish business district to an area dominated by the Levantines, minorities and Europeans, was the recognition of the shift of the center of business and commerce to the area around the Grand Hotel Huck after the construction of the Smyrna harbor and Quay. The Russian ROPIT and German post offices were located in a building on the Quay right across from the Grand Hotel Huck. The same building also housed the offices of the French shipping company *Messageries Maritimes*, and McAndrew & Forbes Company. Later in 1908 the Italian post office opened also in the same building. The Austrian Lloyd was in a building next to the Grand Hotel Huck. The card illustrated on the back cover shows how an enterprising person was able to take a brisk tour of all the post offices in Smyrna to collect the stamps and postmarks of each.

The Ottoman post office in Smyrna had no choice but to move to this area for economic survival to be able to compete with

the foreign post offices that were getting the majority share of mail from all kinds of businesses in Smyrna. It appears that at that time the only building available in this district with a large enough ground floor space for the main Ottoman post office was the Grand Hotel Huck. The Grand Hotel Huck's ground floor covered an area of 8,000 square feet (approximately 740 square meters). The other buildings had either passages (known as *verhane* in Smyrna) leading from the Quay to the Rue Parallele housing different shops and offices, or did not have large enough spaces.

The Ottoman post office that was quite widely used in the Turkish business district in this period was Chadirvan-Alti (*Şadirvanalti* in Turkish). This branch post office located on the Ali Pacha Caddesi (old Courthouse Street) was within the compound of Chadirvan-Alti Mosque. The exact location of the Chadirvan-Alti branch is marked in Goad (1905) about 300 feet southeast of the old main post office. The Chadirvan-Alti branch post office probably took over the mail posted from this business district after the main Ottoman post office moved to the Grand Hotel Huck on the Quay in 1903 and became the major branch post office in Smyrna. Although the first mention of the Chadirvan-Alti post office is in the *1903 Guide Postal* (published by the Ottoman Postal Administration), there are a number of covers postmarked with a date of mailing as early as 1901. Agaogullari and Pabuccuoglu give the first use of a bilingual Şadirvanalti (Chadirvan-Alti) postmark as 1901. The *1903 Guide Postal* lists Chadirvan-Alti as a branch post office accepting regular and registered domestic and international mail. The same status of the Chadirvan-Alti branch post office was also noted in the 1909, 1913, 1914, and 1915 *Guides Postales*. However it was re-moved in the *1924 Guide Postal* issued by the Postal Administration of the newly declared Republic of Turkey.

It is apparent that the Chadirvan-Alti branch post office was closed sometime after the Great Fire of September 1922 that destroy-

ed half the city, and as many as 25,000 buildings including most of the business districts this post office served; although the compound of the Chadirvan-Alti mosque which housed the post office was spared. Also destroyed were the Spartali's Buildings near the Bazaars which once housed the old main Ottoman post office in Smyrna. Once the clients were gone, so was the Chadirvan-Alti post office. In the Great Fire of Smyrna the Grand Hotel Huck which housed the main Ottoman post office was also totally destroyed. The Great Fire of September 1922 brought the end of an era in the postal history of Smyrna. Sometime after the Great Fire, the main Turkish post office in Smyrna started working in the old Bourse building on the Quay, which was occupied by the National Bank of Greece during the Greek occupation.

The author would appreciate hearing from readers interested in the postal and social history of this legendary city.

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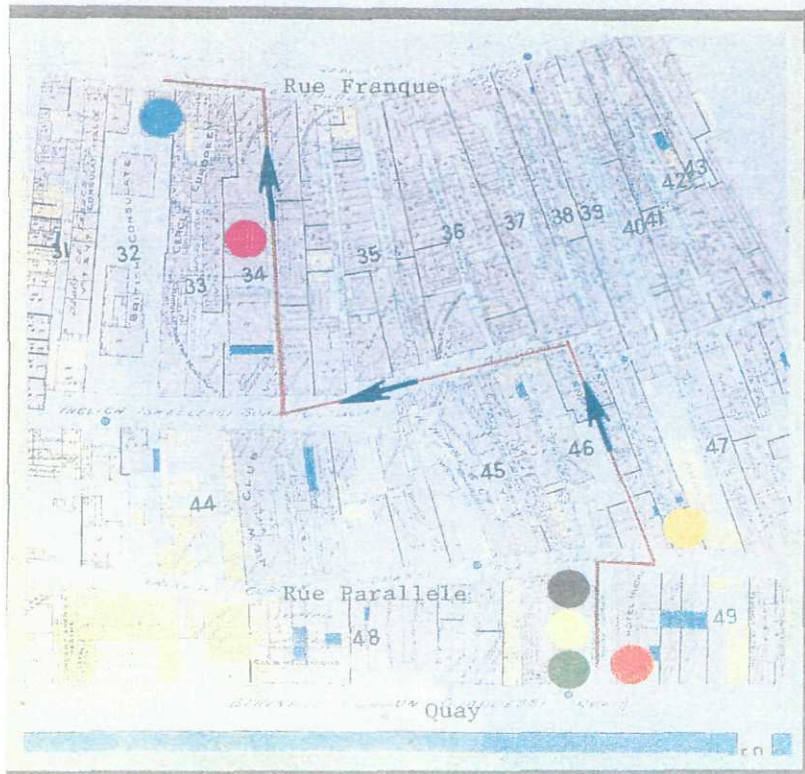


A tour through all 7 post offices operating in Smyrna at that time, August 9, 1910, with a 10-para (or equivalent) stamp, each tied with the proper postmark. It would be a good guess to assume that this dedicated collector started his tour at the Ottoman Post located on the first floor of the Hotel Huck and finished at the British Post on the Rue Franque.



Smyrne — Grand Hôtel Huck.

After completing the first four post offices in the vicinity of Grand Hotel Huck, he probably walked through the Ottoman Post Office Street, turning to the right at the Rue Parallele, stopped by the French Post Office, then walking through the Rue Viorghiu, turning to the left at the Marina Street and proceeding along the Quai Anglais (English Scala), then turning to the right to enter the Tenekides Verhane (passage) to reach the Austrian Post Office and then walking through the passage, turning to the left at the Rue Franque to complete the tour. The distance from the Ottoman to British Post office should be about 1,400 ft (415 meters) according to the Engineer Goad's 1905-insurance map. What an experience it must be through the crowded bustling streets of Smyrna!



Post Office	Year Opened
● Austrian	1748
● French	1835
● Ottoman	1842
● Russia	1857
● British	1872
● Germany	1900
● Italy	1908