



## Summary :

The Exi Marmara district is located in the area of the Byzantine Exokionion inside the Theodosian walls. During the Ottoman period it was mainly populated by Greek-Orthodox residents. Its parish church was that of the Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos. Societies and associations were established in the district during the 19th century. The community declined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays no Christians inhabit the district.

## Other Names

Exo Kionion, Exokionion

## Geographical Location

Constantinople (İstanbul)

## Historical Region

Constantinople (İstanbul)

## Administrative Dependence

İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality

## 1. Location – Name – Population

The Exi Marmara district (Altmermer in Turkish) is located in the city area within the [Theodosian walls](#), on the way leading from the Davut paşa mosque to the Gate of [Selymbria](#),<sup>1</sup> close to the area where the St Mokios open cistern used to lay, later transformed into a vegetable garden.<sup>2</sup> Initially and before the extension works on the walls were completed by Emperor Theodosius, the area was extra muros,<sup>3</sup> hence the original name “Exo Kionion” (External Column). According to Skarlatos Vyzantios the name was due either to the fact that “Constantine the Great erected his statue there upon a column” or by a statue of the [Emperor Constantine VI, son of Leo IV](#) and Irine.<sup>4</sup> As time went by and before the Fall of Constantinople, the name’s pronunciation was corrupted; consequently, “exo” (outside) became “ex” and then “exi” (six), while kionion (column) became “kionia” (columns) and then “marmara” (marbles). From the Greek altered pronunciation “Exi Marmara” (Six Marbles), the Turkish name Altmermer came about as a direct translation.<sup>5</sup>

The area was populated as early as the Byzantine period. Skarlatos Vyzantios mentions that it was the place where the Arianists had been exiled by Theodosius the Great along with their Patriarch Demophilus, which is why they were called “Exokionians”. Vyzantios mentions also that in the area there were many [Armenians](#), while the Armenian Patriarchate was also located there.<sup>6</sup>

People continued to inhabit the district long after the [Fall of Constantinople](#), rendering it one of the most populated intra muros Christian districts until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the *kadi* of [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul), in 1478 there were 3,151 Greek families living on the Istanbul peninsula.<sup>7</sup> By the next century the number of both Muslim and non-Muslim population increased.<sup>8</sup> Concerning Christian residents, according to records kept by the *wakf* of [Mehmed II](#) in 1540 and 1544 in regard to its revenue, 1,547 Greeks appear to live within the city walls.<sup>9</sup> According to these registers, there are 32 families living in Exi Marmara in 1540 and 43 in 1544. More specifically, an Exi Marmara community is recorded under the jurisdiction of the Kadirga port numbering 10 houses in 1540 and 13 in 1544, as well as a “Mahalle-i Altı Mermer ve Semendirek ve Gulaman-i Hamza Beg” with 32 families in 1540 and 43 in 1544.<sup>10</sup> In the context of the forced [migration](#) in the area by Muslims and non-Muslims from newly conquered areas, the Exi Marmara district was inhabited by settlers from the island of Samothrace.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. The Greek Orthodox community of Exi Marmara from the 16th to the 20th century

The Exi Marmara district with its parish church of [Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos](#), as we will see, had quite a significant population as



early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> After 1740 a slight reduction is recorded, probably due to some fire, but from 1770 onwards the number of residents rises again as indicated by the fees (embatoikion) accounted to the [Patriarchate](#) by the parish.<sup>13</sup>

The area was heavily populated by [Karamanli](#) (Turkish-speaking Anatolian Greek-Orthodox), who “until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century spoke Turkish”, as verified by the fact that a patriarchal [sigillion](#) of 1763 was written in [Karamanli](#) (Turkish written with Greek characters), as well as by the information provided from [Manouil Gedeon](#) that sermons in the area were delivered in Turkish.<sup>14</sup> Several fees paid by the parish, such as the 500 [kuruş](#) contributed in 1804 for the construction of a church in [Pera](#) dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin Mary, attest to a significant and potent community.<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stephanos Papadopoulos refers to the area as fully Greek (*ellinikotati*), probably commenting on the fact that Exi Marmara, as well as the neighbouring districts were mostly, if not exclusively, inhabited by Greek-Orthodox residents.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.1. Church

The parish church in the Exi Marmara district is dedicated to the Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos, located between the mosques of Davut paşa and Hekimoğlu Ali paşa .<sup>17</sup> With regard to its exact location, it either coincides with a Byzantine church dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Cyrus or an old monastery, one of the many in the area, built there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated to the Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos.<sup>18</sup> According to Manouil Gedeon, the church used to be called differently earlier but “an old icon of the Virgin Mary with the inscription Gorgoepekoos was found in a neighbouring mosque, which was handed to the parishioners of the Exi Marmara church by their Muslim neighbours; thenceforth the church was re-named and called Gorgoepekoos up to this day”.<sup>19</sup> In the journal kept by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, the church is registered as dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.<sup>20</sup>

Even though the exact year the church was constructed is unknown, it was possibly built before the Fall of Constantinople; Gedeon puts it around 1449, judging by an inscription found in the church yard.<sup>21</sup> It is included in the Korobeinikov list in 1538 as “Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos at Exi Marmara” and was known as Gorgoepekoos already in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

The French traveler Lechevalier, who visited the city in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, records that at the time a chapel dedicated to Michael the Archangel also existed; the same piece of information is also provided by Skarlatos Vyzantios, who adds data on a holy water fountain ([agiasma](#)) dedicated to Virgin Mary the Savior.<sup>23</sup> Another holy water fountain was found in the [narthex](#) of the church.<sup>24</sup>

The Exi Marmara, as well as other districts of Istanbul, often suffered from fires that spread easily to the mostly wooden houses. In the great fire of 1660, both the district and the church were probably destroyed. The church was rebuilt in 1691, but burned down again in 1782 and was totally destroyed in 1821.<sup>25</sup> In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the priests’ cells were constructed, while the whole building was re-constructed between 1833 and 1835.

Reşad Ekrem Koçu refers to two more great fires that inflicted the area in 1898 and 1899, none of which affected the Christian district though.<sup>26</sup> Towards the end of World War I, another fire destroyed the Exi Marmara district.<sup>27</sup> The whole ecclesiastical complex was set afire during the [Istanbul Riots](#) (September 1955), when the Palaiologian double-faced icon of the Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos, which was considered miraculous, was burned.<sup>28</sup> The church was renovated in 1965.

The reputation earned by the church was mainly attributed to this miraculous icon. However, the church itself became a significant pilgrimage that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century “attracted not only hundreds of pilgrims per month, but thousands”<sup>29</sup> as recorded by Gedeon in his manuscript.



That tradition remained active until the beginning of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indicative is the narrative contributed by the Constantinopolitan journalist Stephanos Papadopoulos who had visited the place twice with “a rented horse”, since there was no other means of transportation to reach the area. He remembers: “For many years it was said that miracles were happening in that church. This kind of news was diffused within the Greek population all over Constantinople, the neighbouring villages inhabited by Greeks and in Thrace. The Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos icon was miraculous [...] Scores of people were visiting the Exi Marmara area [...] It was widely discussed that two or three times the icon despite having been placed in the church, was found the next morning firmly tied, so as not to fall, around a branch of a tree in the churchyard. In the meantime, the priest of the church was earning a lot of money”.<sup>30</sup>

This specific pilgrimage bore significant profit to the church, which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century owned 22 landed properties,<sup>31</sup> while Exi Marmara ranked in the second class of parishes, according to the division by “Taxiarches”, the association of Constantinopolitan sextons.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.2. Education – Associations

As early as September 1763 a Greek school operated in the area. There, besides the teacher, an educator worked between 1800 and 1806.<sup>33</sup> In 1841 the school building was completely reconstructed. In 1845 Manouil Gedeon remarks that the community ran a **monitorial** school (the older, more advanced students taught the younger ones), where his relative Athanasios Panagiotou taught.<sup>34</sup> In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1906, there were two schools operating in the Exi Marmara community, a six-class school of primary education and an all-girls nursery school. The first one closed down in the 1950s.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of the formation of numerous associations (*syllogoi*) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the Greek-Orthodox, the Greek community ran societies and associations, as did all the communities in town. In 1878 the “Annunciation Religious Confraternity” was established, while as early as 1872 the Educational Association “

Helikon” was founded and in 1896 the musical society “Terpsichore”.<sup>36</sup> Along with the Virgin Mary Gorgoepekoos church and its associations, the Exi Marmara community was also reputed for its embroideresses.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.3. Decline of the community

With the constitutional change and the foundation of the Turkish Republic both the community and the area started to decline. The district with the celebrated *meyhane* (taverns) at the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a forgotten area a century later.<sup>38</sup> The Greek Orthodox community followed the same degressive course. Even though in 1949 the Exi Marmara Philanthropic Association was re-established,<sup>39</sup> sheer numbers attest to the decline. According to the 1949 patriarchal census, there were 37 families residing in the area, some of which were accommodated by the soup-kitchens of the St Constantine church of Samatya.<sup>40</sup> A few years later, as indicated by data from Christophoros Christidis’ personal archive since 1955, the community was in tatters numbering only 17 families and running a charitable confraternity.<sup>41</sup> Nowadays no Christians inhabit the area.

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2. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινούπολεως* (Αθήνα 1996), p. 262. Murat Belge explains how the cistern became obsolete at the time of the Ottoman Empire and was used a vegetable garden until the 1980s, while nowadays it has turned into a free space for athletic and cultural activities. Belge, M., *Istanbul Gezi Rehberi* (İstanbul 2007), p. 157.

3. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις. Η Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική Α* (Αθήνα 1851), p. 299.



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8. According to some Turkish sources, Christian population in town numbered 25,252 inhabitants from the period 1520-1535. Mantran, R., *Η Καθημερινή Ζωή στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον αιώνα του Σουλεϊμάν του Μεγαλοπρεπούς* (Αθήνα 1999), p. 79.
9. These numbers, however, most probably refer to those who paid harac (capital tax) to the wakf in question. Γεράσιμος, Σ., «Έλληνες της Κωνσταντινούπολης στα μέσα του ΙΣΤ' αιώνα», *Η Καθ' ημάς Ανατολή Β* (Αθήνα 1994), pp. 118-119.
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12. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Αθήνα 1996), p. 266.
13. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Αθήνα 1996), p. 266.
14. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Αθήνα 1996), p. 268; Γεδεών, Μ., *Ιστορία των του Χριστού πενήτων* (Αθήνα 1939), pp. 45-47.
15. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Αθήνα 1996), p. 263.
16. Παπαδόπουλος, Σ., *Αναμνήσεις από την Πόλη* (Αθήνα 1978), p. 21.
17. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις. Η Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική Α* (Αθήνα 1851), p. 300.
18. *Ημερολόγιον 2008 Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου* (Αθήνα 2008), p. 191.
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## Glossary :

	<b>agiasma</b> The holy water (as well as the sacred place from where the water spurts), which the faithful drink, sprinkle or wash themselves in order to be healed.
	<b>akçe (asper)</b> Basic numismatic unit of the Ottoman Empire. During its "classical" period, 40 silver akçe were equivalent to a gold coin. Later, the akçe was debased and in the end of the 17th century it was replaced by the kuruş.
	<b>kadi</b> Office that combined judicial, notarial and administrative duties. The kadi, who held court at the kaza's seat, registered all legal acts and documents in the court's codices (sicil). The kadi passed judgement based on the saria (the holy law of Islam), taking also into consideration the kanun (sultanic law) and the customary law (örf). Resort to his court had all the subjects of the Empire. The kadi had also administrative duties, which he performed in collaboration with the officials of the kaza., and he had to supervise tax collection.
	<b>monitorial system</b> Teaching method developed by Joseph Lancaster, under which the older students (in Greek: "protoscholoï") taught the smaller children some skill or activity.
	<b>narthex</b> A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.
	<b>sigillion</b> Lat. sigillion – seal – 1. During the Byzantine Period the word sigillion refers to the official document bearing a seal issued by the imperial secretariat. The sigillia were divided into lead-seals and gold-seals (chrysobullon sigillion). The same name was used by state services for other documents. The imperial secretariat started to use the first sigillia in the mid 13th c. The Ecumenical Patriarchate replaced former documents known as "hypomnemata" with the sigillia. 2. During the Ottoman Period the sigillia were documents issued by the Patriarch usually for the confirmation of some privileges or the notification of some decision of the Synod.
	<b>wakf (vakif)</b> A foundation, a grant of land or other source of income, including tax revenues, which was considered to be dedicated according to the sacred law (şeriat) and was used for religious and charitable purposes.



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