

REGULATING EXHIBITIONS AT CINEMA-HOUSES IN IMPERIAL ISTANBUL

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Abstract

From its start, the new technology of cinema posed its own tangible and material challenges to entrepreneurs and governments all over the world. These included the use of power sources, the methods of film projection, the physical arrangement of cinema-houses, and other infrastructural measures. The expansion of permanent/seasonal cinema-houses eventually led to the need for standard regulations at exhibition venues. In the Ottoman Empire, after the growth of permanent cinema-houses in the mid-1910s, regulations of exhibitions at cinema-houses introduced obligations, restrictions and a set of rules. The 1916 Draft Regulation and the 1924 Ordinance, both examined in this article, show the Ministry of Interior's (*Dahiliye Nezâreti*) regulations of the physical surroundings at cinema-houses. These regulations are direct products of the facilitative and the prohibitive mentality of political authorities. The article relies on governmental decrees, consular and trade reports, press reviews and memoirs gathered in archival research, and it explores the regulations and legal measures governing cinema-houses in Istanbul during the early cinema period.

Keywords: Exhibition, regulation, cinema-house, Istanbul, early cinema.

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Öz

Başlangıcından itibaren, sinemanın yeni teknolojisi tüm dünyada girişimciler ile hükümetler arasında bazı somut ve maddi zorluklara neden olmuştur. Bunlar arasında altyapısal düzenlemelerin ayarlanması, çeşitli enerji türlerinin kullanımı, film projeksiyon yöntemleri ve sinemalardaki fiziksel tedbirler bulunmaktadır. Zamanla kalıcı/sezonluk sinema salonlarının yaygınlaşmasıyla bu mekânlarda standart düzenlemelere ihtiyaç duyulmuştur. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda 1910'ların ortalarından itibaren, sinema salonlarındaki film gösterimleri çeşitli yükümlülükleri, kısıtlamaları ve bir kurallar dizisini beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu makalede incelenen iki yasal düzenleme, 1916 Kanûn Tasarısı ve 1924 Talimatnâmesi, Dahiliye Nezâreti'nin (*the Ministry of Interior*) sinema salonlarının fiziksel alandaki denetim teşebbüslerini göstermektedir. Böylesi bir denetim, siyasi otoritenin hem kolaylaştırıcı hem de yasaklayıcı zihniyetinin izlerini doğrudan taşımaktadır. Devlet kararnamele, konsolosluk ve ticaret ataşeliği raporları, basın taramaları ve anıları kapsayan bir arşiv araştırmasına dayanan bu makale, sinemanın erken döneminde İstanbul'daki sinema salonlarının denetimini ve yasal düzenlemeleri incelemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Gösterim, denetim, sinema salonu, İstanbul, erken sinema.

Introduction¹

From its start, cinema crossed a number of terrains as a form of entertainment and representation, and as a new form of technology. Early film exhibition venues drew concerns due to potential physical harms to the audiences apart from the film content. While a number of film exhibition practises were inherited from the regulations of already existing performing arts and entertainments, the expansion of this innovative technology in the mid-1910s forced Ottoman authorities at different local institutional levels in order to address cinema on a regulatory level. The technology of cinema and the cinema-going itself required a tangible infrastructural and spatial support, which affected the regulations unlike entertainments of theatre troupes, performing arts or visual devices prior to cinema. Devices for projecting films, qualifications of the operator, the flammable nitrate film stock, and other physical characteristics of cinema-going created a different kind of material concern. These physical threats were both real (i.e. fire hazard, physical health and safety of audiences), but also metaphoric—concern over ideology. As an “international tradable product” (Bakker, 2008, p. 165) films became more available in the empire through a number of channels and entrepreneurs, and this situation posed various questions regarding the technological, material and spatial conditions of exhibition venues.

In the article, the term regulation is situated within the theories of film studies and the discipline of media in a broader sense with a historical and legal approach (Kaushal, 2005, p. 527; Baldwin & Cave, 1999, pp. 1-2). Cinema regulations can be seen as the institutional attempts of local and central authorities to impose a series of rules on film exhibition. The features of regulation are both prohibitive and facilitative for cinema’s development (Baldwin & Cave, 1999, pp. 1-2). The emphasis merely on prohibitions isolates our ability to see practises away “from their broader social and historical conditions of existence and affectivity and this eventually led us to ignore regulations’ productive dimensions in its outcomes” (Kuhn, 1988, p. 4). The productivity of regulation emerges when clearly defined facilitative rules are imposed by the central and local legislators. For instance, in the case that cinema-houses’ entrepreneurs were liable to offer safe, healthy and modern venues for audiences,

¹ With a special thanks to Özge Özyılmaz and Martin K. Thomen for their contribution.

this eventually led to the growth of a cinema market and cinema-going in the empire. Productivity of regulations at cinema-houses reveals itself when both parties, entrepreneurs and authorities, seek the interest of audiences.

Throughout early cinema's development at various venues there are two different classifications on the basis of theatrical or non-theatrical venues, in which exploring the regulation of exhibitions can be more visible and direct. The first is the travelling exhibition, which mostly took place at non-theatrical venues (pub, museum, school, fair, tavern, private houses and coffeehouse) starting from the late 1896 in İstanbul (Stamboul, 1896). The second is the introduction of cinema-houses, which were either specifically built or converted to film exhibition spaces, starting from 1908 in İstanbul. First of all, itinerant exhibitors carried "a repertoire of film prints" to screen at different cities around the world (Müller, 2010, p. 273). Most of these travelling exhibitors, commonly referred to as showmen or operators, were connected to international companies and determined the screening programme at various venues. For instance, in the USA relatively large companies (American Mutoscope and Biograph, American Vitagraph) travelled to different vaudeville houses with various programmes, whereas smaller companies screened the same programme by travelling from town to town, or took part at fairs, circuses and carnivals (Musser, 2010, p. 342). Similar practices are observed in the Ottoman Empire; most of the itinerant exhibitors were connected to Western film companies, visited the empire on occasional basis and screened films along with other live entertainments. Itinerant exhibitions survived until approximately 1908 in imperial İstanbul, after which only sporadic use of travelling operators was common in rural areas and during seasonal periods in the capital.

Secondly, cinema-houses can be seen as commercial entertainment venues for viewing films with a defined stage and other modern amenities for a high number of general audiences. These spatially bounded commercial venues were also converted from theatre buildings or other types of large constructions. Some of the cinema-houses operated only seasonally, especially during the summer time or festive periods such as Ramadan and Easter. Development of a cinema market, transformation of short films into narrative films and the change in distribution patterns around the world also affected the exhibitions and the growth of cinema-houses in İstanbul. The rise of cinema-houses along with the

longer films and the multiple programmes during the First World War years (1914-1918) gradually led to the decrease of the itinerant exhibitions especially in urban settings. Cinema-houses also paved a way for the creation of standardised exhibition rules, which gradually led to the process of monitoring, controlling, and the enforcement of rules. State agencies could identify cinema-houses for the imposition of obligations and restrictions. Above all, the introduction of permanent cinema-houses meant the institutionalisation of cinema in İstanbul, and this created a stronger control mechanism of state agencies over entrepreneurs and audiences.

Permanent theatrical and non-theatrical spaces, which either exhibited films along with other performances or ones that were converted into cinema-houses, both called for the introduction of new technologically specific regulations for film exhibition. The theatre-oriented licensing, existing regulations of entertainments and performing arts were inadequate to answer the needs of cinema's novel technology in terms of its tangible infrastructural needs, which will be covered below.² The licensing procedures also called for official approval of newly built cinema-houses. The authorities sought to regulate these spaces with the 1916 Draft Regulation and with the 1924 Ordinance of Cinema and Theatres, both of which addressed the physical organisation of cinema-houses, such as seating arrangements, exits, emergency precautions, projection room specifications, operator's responsibilities, other technical and physical restrictions (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916; Alyot, 2008, pp. 637-639).

² For instance, the 1896 Regulation of Theatre, Ortaoyunu, Karagöz and Puppetry (*Tiyatro, Ortaoyunu, Karagöz, Kukla Oyunları Nizamnâmesi*) only covered legal issues of the theatres, ballrooms, *café-chantants*, and exhibiting any type of spectacles such as illusions, puppetry, *karagöz*, *ortaoyunu*, concerts, panorama, or pantomime. This 1896 regulation may probably refer to the different forms of pre-cinematic gadgets, from camera obscura to magic lantern and from phantasmagoria to still photography, but not directly to cinema itself, see (BOA, Y.PRK.DH, 9/28, 11 June 1896). Also, the Conditions of the Privilege of Screening Cinematograph in the Ottoman Empire of 1903 (*Memâlik-i Şâhâne Sinematograf Temâşâ Ettirilmesinin Şerâit-i İmtiyâziyyesi*) stands as the blueprint of regulations in the cinema history of the Ottoman Empire. More on the Privilege please see Çeliktemel-Thomen (2013, pp. 26-32), Ceylan (2010, pp. 7-19), Özuyar (2007).

The article examines the regulation of film exhibitions at cinema-houses in İstanbul within the early/silent cinema context. The focus is on the exhibitions' material aspects—from projecting film stocks to safety of audiences at cinema-houses and the entrepreneurs' technical and commercial liabilities. In doing so, it relies on a number of primary sources from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri*, BOA, İstanbul) and the U.S. Library of Congress (Washington D.C.) that are germane to the interrelation between state agencies and cinema entrepreneurs. The use of evidence is initially dependent on the primary sources which are guided through other secondary works on the topic of regulations at cinema-houses. Factual data is questioned both in a descriptive manner and using analysis of causation. The settings of cinema-houses, is presented numerically in order to display the historical change in the growth of permanent and seasonal cinema-houses in imperial İstanbul.

The Settings of Cinema-houses

Cinema was available in the empire from early on via a number of channels and itinerant exhibitors during the Hamidian era.³ A number of scholars highlight Sultan Abdülhamid II's strict censorship of the press and alleged opposition to innovations during his reign; yet archival research presents a nuanced picture. Nijat Özön, for instance, claims that itinerant exhibitors principally screened cinema and did not have a permanent place during the Hamidian era until the year of 1908, when the Young Turk Revolution took place against the monarchy (1962, p. 168). According to Özön, the main hindrance to cinema's development was the Sultan's anxieties and personal choices (1962, p. 168). Burçak Evren asserts a similar view, depicting the Second Constitutional era (1908-1922) as the period of freedom and the milestone of flourishing cinema market in comparison to the Hamidian era (1995, p. 43). Likewise, Savaş Arslan contends that "audiences in İstanbul had to wait until the fall of the conservative sultan Abdulhamid II in 1908 for the first film theatre" (2011, p. 31). There is a tendency among these scholars to connect the opening of a permanent cinema directly to the Sultan's actions and changing political leadership, but not to the existing infrastructure for cinema market, international entrepreneurship and audience's demand for films. Yet, the

³ Approximately the arrival of cinema in the late 1896 and the end of Sultan Abdülhamid's reign in 1909 is the chronological focus of the long Hamidian era (1876-1909). For more see please (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2015-2016, pp. 155-179).

earliest permanent cinema in Iran was opened in 1904, in Britain 1906 and in Russia it was 1907, which shows that the opening of the first cinema-house in İstanbul in 1908 was timely in comparison to its contemporaries (Naficy, 2011, p. 39; Kuhn, 1988, p. 13; Tsivian, 1998, p. 19). At times, scholars perceive cinema merely as a cultural and artistic phenomenon (Youngblood, 1991, p. viii) and disregard its basic requirements such as a fiscal base, sophisticated equipment, infrastructural needs, and technical expertise and this is in fact the case for Ottoman cinema historiography.

When cinema gradually became a growing public entertainment in the empire, a number of foreign and Ottoman entrepreneurs sought to take more permanent steps in the hope of increasing profits and expanding their businesses. French Pathé had already established connections with the Ottomans, via the engineer-inventor Pierre-Victor Continsouza, as far back as 1898 (BOA, Y.PRK.TKM, 2/34, 1898).⁴ Eventually Pathé collaborated with the İstanbulian merchant Sigmund Weinberg who is also known for his initiative to make films of the Ottoman Imperial Army (*Osmanlı Ordu-yu Hümâyun*) free of charge in 1899 (BOA, Y.PRK.MYD, 22/60, 1899).⁵ In 1908, Weinberg and Pathé collaborated to open the first permanent cinema-house in the empire, Pathé Cinema (Arslan 2017; Evren, 1995, p. 44).⁶ This first permanent cinema-house had a capacity of 825 seats and used electricity for the screenings (Erdoğan, 2017, p. 119). The second Pathé Cinema was opened in İzmir in 1909 (Makal, 1993, p. 32).⁷ Thus, “the largest and most influential French film company” became predominantly a film exhibitor and distributor in the Ottoman Empire until the First World War (Abel, 2010, p. 505).⁸

A number of international film companies gradually began cinema business, particularly in the field of film exhibition and distribution in İstanbul (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922). The cinema market in the empire depended on an international network, aggressive competition and

⁴ Sultan Abdülhamid II even sent him the medal of Fine Arts to show his appreciation of Continsouza’s achievements (BOA, Y.PRK.TKM, 2/34, 1898; Mannoni, 2010, pp. 86, 154).

⁵ For a recent work on Sigmund Weinberg see Arslan (2017, pp. 87-92).

⁶ According to Burçak Evren, the Pathé Cinema was renamed several times in the following years: as Belediye Cinema in 1916, Anfi Cinema in 1919, Asri Cinema in 1924 and Ses Cinema in 1941 see Evren (1995, p. 44). Already a provider of photographic merchandise, Weinberg also became Pathé’s distributor (Özön, 2003, p. 34).

⁷ Dilek Kaya also notes that there were four cinema-houses in İzmir by 1908. See Kaya (2017, p. 142).

⁸ For Pathé’s activity in imperial İstanbul see Özen (2007).

the foreign entrepreneurship in the empire. Historian Şevket Pamuk indicates that international trade regulations had been shifting since the 1830s, after the Ottomans signed the Baltalimanı Treaty with the British Empire in 1838 (1979-1980, p. 164). This treaty marked the end of the empire's trade monopoly in its own territories. Firstly, the British gained free trade rights and gradually other European powers began to have privileges in the Ottoman territories. Foreign entrepreneurs paid less tax and custom fees and had a more advantageous position in comparison to the local merchants (Pamuk, 1979-1980, p. 165). The profitable state of doing cinema business was visible to the Western entrepreneurs and the Ottoman merchants' willingness to collaborate with them gradually led to the opening of cinema-houses. From early on French companies –Pathé, Éclair and Gaumont– supplied films and cinematic devices in the empire. These companies “dominated international film distribution before the mid-1910s” around the world (Bakker, 2008, p. 187).

While Europeans started the cinema business in the empire, the U.S. also began to search for possible trade alliances (U.S. Daily Consular and Trade Reports, No. 133, 1910; U.S. Daily Consular and Trade Reports, No. 74, 1911). They were not only interested in exhibition but also in selling American film supplies and devices (U.S. Daily Consular and Trade Reports, No: 6468, 1911).⁹ The empire seemed potentially lucrative, as a number of consul reports called for business proposals in the region. American Weekly Consular and Trade Reports make an important observation about the commercialisation of the cinema market:

It is a question of only a short time until every important town in the Middle East has a moving picture theatre. At present France has practically a monopoly of the business of furnishing films, but there seems to be no reason why American manufacturers might not share in the business (U.S. Weekly Consular and Trade Reports, No. 41, 1910).

The emerging Hollywood studios were to obtain a lasting presence in the world cinema market starting from the First World War (Bakker, 2008, p. 185); the U.S. was going to have its own share not only in Europe, but also in the Ottoman Empire.

⁹ The list of cinema-houses recorded in 1922 shows that Americans only owned one venue starting from 1919 in İstanbul (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 31 December 1922), see Appendix.

Cinema-houses in Imperial İstanbul

Records about the number and features of cinema-houses in the Ottoman Empire are fragmented and mostly about the urban centres of İstanbul, İzmir and Salonika. İstanbul was the main hub for cinema market throughout the region. Based on the number and range of cinema-houses in the city, it is possible to further examine the information presented in the regulation of film exhibitions in the following part.

One of the earliest sources indicating the number of cinema-houses in the capital comes from the İstanbul Municipality (İstanbul Şehremâneti). According to the two different records of the Statistical Journal of İstanbul Municipality (1329 and 1330 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyyât Mecmuası), covering the years of 1913/1914 and 1914/1915, there were 25 cinema-houses in İstanbul on the eve of the First World War (1329 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyyât Mecmuası, 1330, p. 345; 1330 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyyât Mecmuası, 1331, p. 301).¹⁰ There were seven districts in the capital indicating the cinema-houses which did not show any changes in the numbers between 1913/1914 and 1914/1915. The details of the records can be viewed in Table 1:

The Number of Cinema-houses in İstanbul in 1913-1915	
Beyoğlu	14
Kadıköy	3
Adalar	3
Beyazıt	2
Bakırköy	1
Üsküdar	1
Anadoluhisarı	1
Total	25

Table 1: The number of cinema-houses in İstanbul (1329 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyyât Mecmuası, 1330, p. 345; 1330 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyyât Mecmuası, 1331, p. 301).¹¹

There are multiple secondary sources on the number of cinema-houses in İstanbul. For instance, Cesar Raymond's geographical survey on the Beyoğlu (Pera) district of İstanbul reports that there were 11 cinema-houses in the capital: "Amphithéâtre de Petits-Champs, Cirque de

¹⁰ The use of double dates, as indicated above, is related to the lack of days and months in the Muslim Calendar (*the Hicri Takvim*) used in these original records.

¹¹ See Appendix.

Péra, Cinéma Central (1911), Cinéma Cosmographe, Cinéma Etoile, Cinéma Luxembourg, Cinéma Magic (1914), Cinéma Orientaux (1912), Cinéma Weimberg (Pathé Cinéma, 1908), Théâtre Odeon and Théâtre d'Hiver de Petits Champs" (1915, p. 15).¹² Ali Özuyar notes that there were more than twenty cinema-houses in İstanbul by 1914 which considerably increased during the war years (2017, p. 230). Nezih Erdoğan meticulously lists the permanent and seasonal exhibition venues in his recent work, both theatrical and non-theatrical ones, including cinema-houses between the years 1896 and 1922; and it appears that the number of cinema-houses drastically rose between 1914 and 1915 (2017, pp. 274-275). Likewise, this fact is visible in İ. Arda Odabaşı's latest book, in which he highlights the parallelism between the increase in the number of cinema-houses in İstanbul and the Ottoman Imperial Army's film production in 1914 along with the initial publications on cinema during the same time frame (2017, pp. 18-19). Above all, cinema's development in the empire was dependent on several determinants such as newly established cinema-houses, local film production, publications on cinema, audiences' demand for films, and the emergence of narrative films and variety in film programmes.

Of all this conflicting and partial information on the exact numbers of permanent/seasonal cinema-houses, another municipality record of İstanbul displays quite rich data on the city's cinema-houses. The data, gathered from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri*, BOA) reveals the number of cinema-houses between 1918 and 1921, and the owner or leaseholders of the venues.¹³ There is also a classification based on permanent and seasonal cinema-houses in the document. The location of cinema-houses is divided according to the municipal district of five neighbourhoods: Beyoğlu, Galata, Kadıköy, İstanbul (Suriçi), and Makriköy (Bakırköy). Seasonal film exhibitions took place mostly around the festive days and religious celebratory periods, thus a number of venues are also listed under this division. This municipality record was either kept during licence applications or used for taxation purposes, even though the purpose is not clearly stated (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922). For instance, Ali Özuyar's work on cinema-houses shows how the municipality of İstanbul gathered tax revenues from a number of cinema-houses in 1921 (2007, pp. 113-123; 2017, pp. 309-316). The be-

¹² The exact publication date remains controversial. The author refers to Sigmund Weinberg's Pathé Cinéma by writing "Cinéma Weimberg".

¹³ See Appendix.

low-charts display the number of cinema-houses and the film screening venues in imperial İstanbul based on the classification of permanent and seasonal exhibition practises.

There were 27 permanent and seasonal cinema-houses in 1918, 32 in 1919, 72 in 1920 and 88 in 1921. The data in Table 2 shows that the number of commercial cinema-houses in İstanbul more than tripled from 1918 to 1921; thus, the itinerant exhibitors were challenged by this new range of venues, their fixed film repertoire and longer programmes. The largest increase during this period was from 1919 to 1920, where the number of cinema-houses more than doubled in one year (Table 2) (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922).

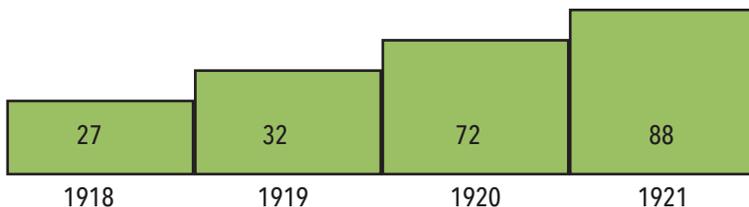


Table 2: The number of permanent/seasonal cinema-houses in İstanbul (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922).

There are two periods of growth in the number of cinema-houses. The first wave started between the years of 1914 and 1915 as indicated above. According to Burçak Evren, the reason for this increase was the foreign entrepreneurs' interest in looking for new markets (1994, p. 8). Entrepreneurs converted old theatres, circus buildings and music halls into commercial cinema-houses (Evren, 1994, p. 8). Also, cinema market in the empire was developing in many ways from cinema-going to production and the change in exhibition practises due to film length and genres (Odabaşı, 2017, pp. 18-19), which affected the number of cinema-houses as a whole. The second wave took place during the Armistice Period, between 1918 and 1921 as can be seen in Table 2. Wartime leisure definitely witnessed a gradual rise in the number of cinema-houses. There were 24 permanent cinema-houses in the city in 1918, 25 in 1919, 37 in 1920 and 49 in 1921. The permanent cinema-houses were largely located in the Beyoğlu district and spread to other parts (Suriçi, Galata, Kadıköy, and Makriköy). The largest increase was recorded from 1919 to 1921; almost a 50 % increase can be observed in the number of permanent cinema-houses in İstanbul (Table 3) (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922).

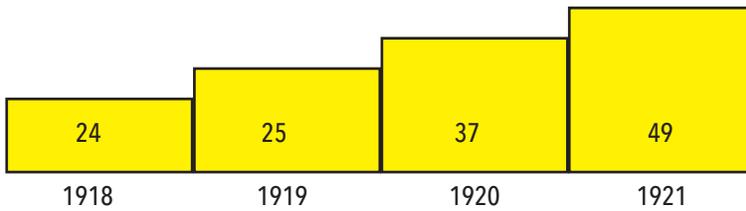


Table 3: The number of permanent cinema-houses in İstanbul (BOA, DH.UM-VM, 117/45, 1922).

The number of seasonal cinema-houses, including the premises located in gardens, increased dramatically from 1918 to 1921 in İstanbul. There were only 3 seasonal cinema-houses in 1918, 7 in 1919, 35 in 1920, and 39 in 1921. The highest increase was experienced from 1919 to 1920, when the numbers increased 5 times (Table 4) (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922). These seasonal cinema-houses, mostly located in the Anatolian side of the city, in Kadıköy and Üsküdar, were typically active during the summer time, religious holidays and other festive periods. They were cheaper than the permanent ones and served as a popular leisure activity especially for families with children (Evren, 1993, pp. 540-541).

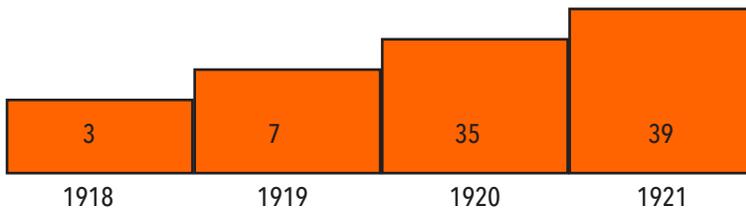


Table 4: The number of seasonal cinema-houses in İstanbul (BOA, DH.UM-VM, 117/45, 1922).

The available data suggests that there were more permanent cinema-houses in İstanbul than seasonal ones between 1918 and 1921. Permanent cinema-houses made up 53 % of the total number, while seasonal cinema-houses were 47 % as seen in below chart (Table 5) (BOA, DH.UM-VM, 117/45, 1922). The high number of seasonal cinema-houses may be related to the above-mentioned reasons.

Another source includes G. Gilbert Deaver’s survey about recreations in İstanbul during the Armistice Period (1918-1922). Deaver’s survey reports that there were 32 permanent cinema-houses and 12 seasonal

cinema-houses in İstanbul in 1921 (1922, p. 264), which is indeed conflicting with the above-mentioned municipal data. Deaver also presents the names, the seating capacity, and the location of only 26 cinema-houses in the capital (Deaver, 1922, p. 264).¹⁴ In brief, most of the numbers discussed above indicate that the number of cinema-houses increased during war-time and Armistice years and many of the cinema-houses began to operate on a permanent base. This development eventually introduced the institutionalisation of cinema-houses within a standard exhibition practises and fixed programmes; which also paved a way for the state’s intervention by regulating these spatially-bounded commercial venues.

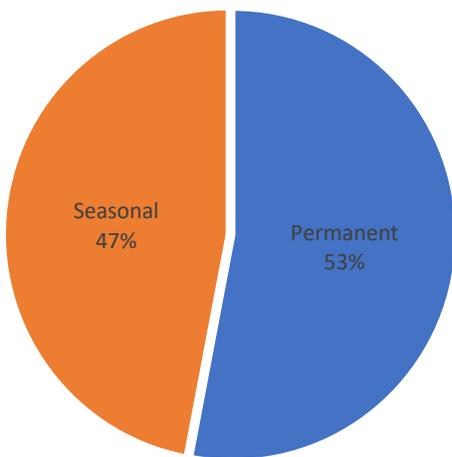


Table 5: Permanent (53 %) vs. seasonal (47 %) cinema-houses in İstanbul between 1918 and 1921 (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922).

Regulating Exhibitions at Cinema-houses

The Conditions of the Privilege of Screening Cinematograph in the Ottoman Empire of 1903 stands as the blueprint of regulations in the cinema history of the late Ottoman Empire (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2018).¹⁵ This important document carries the signatures of two Ottoman subjects, İbrahim bin Yunus and Ahmet from Makriköy district of İstanbul, who might have been entrepreneurs and initiated drafting the 26 clauses of the conditions with the Hamidian bureaucrats (BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ, 46/16, 29 March 1903). Only two clauses (13 and 14) of the Conditions of the Privilege specifically refer to the cinema-houses and exhibition venues

¹⁴ See Appendix.

¹⁵ The original name is “Memâlik-i Şâhânedede Sinematograf Temâşâ Ettiirilmesinin Şerâit-i İmtiyâziyyesi”. A number of works offer a detailed analysis of this regulation see Çeliktemel-Thomen (2013, pp. 26-32), Ceylan (2010, pp. 7-19), Özuyar (2007).

in a broader sense, indicating that “a special building” (*husûsî mebânî*) had to be built for exhibitions and the safety measures should be taken at these screening venues (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2013, pp. 26-32). Another step to introduce a set of rules took place during the war years. The Ottoman Ministry of War (*Harbiye Nezâreti*) passed the Censorship Act in 1914, stating that all theatres, including cinema-houses, had to submit a copy of their programmes to the police (*Sansür Talimatnâmesi*, 1914). Subject matter regarding politics or war in films was strictly monitored. However, none of these regulations offer detailed information about the material aspects of film screening venues and exhibition practises in comparison to the 1916 Draft Regulation and the 1924 Ordinance which will be examined in this section.

The commercialisation of cinema-houses created an arena for municipalities and police wherein security and safety issues at these venues also became the target of the authorities. The safety of audiences at cinema-houses was the focus of state, as is reflected in the 1916 Draft Regulation Concerning the Management and Opening of Theatres, Cinema and Similar Entertainment Venues, which contained clauses about the technical and physical aspects of regulating film exhibitions at cinema-houses (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916).¹⁶ The increasing number of cinema-houses in urban centres made it possible for the authorities to initiate this centralised imposition of law. In other words, as more permanent spaces emerged, more concrete regulations followed. The 1916 Draft Regulation was amended several times, and for this purpose legislators looked for regulation models from Europe in order to grasp the function of cinematic devices, the operator’s responsibilities and the logistics of projecting practises. Therefore, the Ministry of Interior (*Dahiliye Nezâreti*) sought information about cinema regulations in countries such as Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, France and Sweden (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/60, 1918; BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 29/8, 1918; BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 29/7, 1918; BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 29/3, 1918; BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 29/15, 1918). For instance, in reply to this investigation, the Ottoman Empire’s Honorary Consulate in Geneva wrote that there was military censorship of film exhibition and printed media in France and the information was gathered and passed to the Ministry of the Interior (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 29/15, 1918). It appears that other consuls also contacted the Ministry and sent the requested information.

¹⁶ Hereafter the Draft Regulation, in Ottoman-Turkish “*Tiyatro, Sinema ve Benzeri Eğlence Mekânlarının Açılış ve İdâreleri Hakkında Düzenlenen Kanûn Tasarısı*”.

The Draft Regulation indicates a clear resemblance to the 1924 Ordinance of Cinema and Theatre which was in practise during the early Republican years (Alyot, 2008, pp. 637-639).¹⁷ It is important to note that both of these documents have similarities in content. The 1916 record is a draft regulation (*nizamnâme taslağı*) that was centrally prepared by the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the Police and the Security General Directorate (*Emniyet-i Umûmîyye Müdüriyeti*) for enforcement throughout the empire. The 1924 record is an ordinance (*talimatnâme*) set by the same institution (*Dahiliye Vekâleti*) as well. Both of them targeted licensing procedures directly and the responsibilities and liabilities of entrepreneurs. Scrutinising specific clauses from these documents shows themes that continued throughout this period in the regulatory framework.

Clause 31 of the 1916 Draft Regulation addresses the licence requirements and makes distinctions between spatially-closed buildings and open-air venues (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). The authorities' goal seems to be locating each business physically, checking the premises for public safety and enforcing special requirements based on the venues' features. Once a venue was registered with the municipality during the licensing procedure, officers from the police to censor officers and controllers could also review the content of the programme during the actual screening and could ban films that they considered "harmful" or "dangerous". The state also aimed to standardise the regulation of these spaces. Thus, any entrepreneur without a proper licence or those failing to follow the regulations was subject to the Criminal Code (Sebîlürreşad, 1923). The 1924 Ordinance states that "prior to the opening of the cinema-house, three copies of its facilities and equipment plan will be provided to the municipality, and an inspection will be performed by the municipality" (Alyot, 2008, pp. 637-639). Also, any changes made after opening must be explained in writing to the municipality, and a new inspection will be performed (Alyot, 2008, pp. 637-639).

The conditions in clause 32 show the authorities' concern about public health and safety in cinema-houses. It states that aside from customary laws, nine conditions would apply to the running of cinema-hous-

¹⁷ Hereafter the Ordinance, in Ottoman-Turkish "Sinema ve Tiyatrolar Zabıtası or Sinema ve Tiyatroların Sıhhat ve Emniyet Nokta-i Nazarından Haiz Olmaları Lazım Gelen Şerâiti Gösterir Talimatnâme".

es. These principally concern the technical and logistic issues affecting the physical safety of the premises, with an emphasis on fire prevention. Ventilation to improve air quality and safety in the projection room was an important dimension (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). Deaver's 1921 report of İstanbul's cinema-houses reveals that they were poorly constructed and that their ventilation needed improvement (Deaver, 1922, p. 265). It reports that "the lighting and heating in the cinema-houses were fairly good in the majority of the cases" (Deaver, 1922, p. 265).

In the Draft Regulation, the first condition of clause 32 is that carbon lamps must be the source of the reflective light used during the projection. Also, the projector should be encased in an appropriate and small fireproof room, which is situated away from the direction of the public exit (second condition) (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). This small room should store the device, which should be covered with an exhaust system equipped through the ceiling of the structure (third condition) (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). The Ordinance also covers the issue of power used in the cinema-houses and notes that if a coal lamp is used for projecting, the coal should be stored in a self-closing iron container. However, it also highlights that licensed cinema-houses and theatres are obliged to illuminate the premises only using electric lighting. Those venues that are allowed to operate must be in accordance with the regulations of high voltage electricity promulgated by the Ministry of Public Works (*Bayındırlık Nezâreti*). The Ordinance also emphasises the use of coloured hazard lights, which should illuminate the interior of the cinema hall and its' exits during the entire show (Alyot, 2008, p. 638).



Figure 1: Hale Cinema in Kadıköy, İstanbul (Sinema Postası, 1922).¹⁸

The third and fourth conditions of the Draft Regulation state that the projection room should be ventilated and capped by metal, and that a bucket of water should be found nearby (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916).¹⁹ It is known that newly built cinema-houses, such as Elhamra (1921) in İstanbul, had a separated projection room located at the balcony level (Duru, 2001, p. 255). Likewise, the conditions of the 1924 Ordinance notes that the projection room, which contains “the cinematograph machine,” must be fire resistant, and must have a device to circulate air as to not retain smoke (Alyot, 2008, pp. 638-639). The Ordinance presents

¹⁸ This cinema-house was owned by a church and run by Mr. Kyriakoupoulou under the name of firstly Şark and then Apollon until 1921 (BOA, DH.UMVM, 117/45, 1922). Later, in 1922 it was called Hale Sineması (Sinema Postası, 1922; Özüyar, 2017, p. 295).

¹⁹ For the projector, the term used in the text is “cihâz-ı âkise” which can be translated as “reflective device” (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916).

details about the room: The room, to be at least 12 metres square, must be at least 2 metres wide and 3 metres tall. The window from which the projection passes must have a shutter made of a fire-resistant material. There is a meticulous description of how the shutter should be used: the shutter must automatically close if the operator removes his foot from the lever holding the shutter open. Otherwise it is stated that a shutter is required only in the case where the window is at least 5 millimetres in thickness and is affixed into the wall or another fire-resistant material (Alyot, 2008, pp. 638-639).

Fire prevention was one of the main reasons for the regulation of exhibitions the world over. In 1897, in France 120 people were burned alive due to the use of a non-electric source of light (Meusy, 2010, p. 257). In 1910, in Russia a fire during a film screening at a social club killed 93 people and injured 45 (Youngblood, 2010, p. 557). Nitrate was in fact the biggest fire hazard. The nitrate film stock, a fragile and self-flammable material, could be affected by temperature and "could easily catch fire" (Hiley, 2010, p. 283). The non-metallic elements used in the cellulose nitrate were more flammable than the lamps and dynamo (Erdoğan, 2015, p. 57). Deadly fire incidents were also common in the Ottoman Empire due to the lack of efficient fire-fighting system and wooden construction. Between 1918 and 1923, 3,460 houses burnt in İstanbul due to the devastating fires, caused by various reasons (Criss, 1999, p. 29). There were cases related to film screenings as well. For instance, Sabuncuzade Louis Alberi, the translator for the Yıldız Palace, wrote that a film which he was watching in 1902 ended suddenly, and he linked that to an electricity failure. He noted that "the audience, believing that the machine had exploded, trampled each other trying to escape" (Sabuncuzade Louis Alberi, 2007, p. 252). Likewise, the newspaper, *Saadet*, announced an incident that took place in Salonika due to the use of electricity for a cinematograph device (*sinematograf makinası*) in 1908 (BOA, DH.MKT, 2645/30, 1908). The news read as follows:

On Monday, the first day of the religious holiday, at around 2 o'clock, during the cinematograph exhibition, the cinematograph device in one of the box seats across from the stage was burnt into ashes due to an electrical fire at the Salonika Beyaz Kule Terakkî Garden's Winter Theatre. The fire spread to other seats; women, children and men ran to the glass doors scared to death and broken glass caused injuries. Luckily, there was no loss of life. The fire was immediately extinguished (BOA, DH.MKT, 2645/30, 1908).

Another film exhibition hosted at Arap İzzet Paşa's mansion in İstanbul, an agent (*mabeynci*) for the Yıldız Palace, ended calamitously in a fire in the 1910s (Alus, 1997, pp. 277-278). The mansion was illuminated by electricity and the same power was used for the film screening. However, overheated wires caught fire and one person died (Erdoğan, 2015, p. 58).

Officials sought to provide a safe environment at film exhibition venues by maintaining secure surroundings at these venues. Thus, the regulations for cinema-houses emerged in a productive manner even though the central and local authorities imposed rules; they were also facilitative for the cinema market and audiences. In brief, the Ottoman authorities were concerned about the projector's lamp and other potential fire hazards due to the use of power sources (Özen, 2008, p. 47). Thus, fire prevention measurement is one of the central issues in both of the Draft Regulation and the Ordinance. The Ordinance states that fire resistant rooms should not emit smoke. Doors must open outwards and should be locked whilst the device is in operation (Alyot, 2008, pp. 638-639). If the projection room has doors that open to the cinema hall or to the corridor, these must also be fire resistant (Alyot, 2008, pp. 638-639). In addition, the Ordinance notes that while the device is in use by an operator, two fire retardant blankets and a bucket of at least 10 litres of water must be in the projection room at all times, in case the film stock catches fire (Alyot, 2008, pp. 638-639).

The Ordinance and the Draft Regulation both refer to the easily flammable nitrate celluloid film stock in various clauses. The fifth condition of clause 32 considers that issue, stating that "as the film reels through, it should be fed into a metallic chest" to prevent it from becoming a fire hazard (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). The Ordinance indicates that "the film should wind easily from one iron spool to another" as during these years hand-cranked devices were common. Other details included in the Ordinance are as follows: the films should be stored in a metal or other sort of fire resistant container and only films required for immediate use should be kept in the projection room. To protect the film reel from heat, there should be a protective shield between the lens and the reel itself. Moreover, the device's setup and conveyance should conform to the electric standards set by the Ministry of Public Works. The Ordinance specifies that the areas surrounding the storage area of the films "should be covered in iron or another similar fire-resistant material, and the films themselves should be hung from an iron cord" (Alyot, 2008,

pp. 638-639). As mentioned conditions six and seven of the Draft Regulation state similar points (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). Although the two official regulations show the authorities' concern about fire hazard, the 1921 report about cinema-houses indicates that authorities were not good at enforcing the rules, in brief; cinema-houses still lacked a sufficient measurement against fire hazard (Deaver, 1922, p. 265).

The Ordinance mandates that "only operators who have reliable skills and abilities are able to operate the machine," which is similar to the Draft Regulation by sorting out the duties of film exhibitor. The Ordinance further notes that "other than this operator, no one should be allowed access to the projection room. Only the projection staff is permitted to enter the room, and "a notice to this effect should be posted on the door of the room" (Alyot, 2008, p. 638). For instance, the contract for Ali Efendi Cinema reveals that owners of the venue had to determine the operator's duties and the implementation of electricity wiring in 1914 which is indeed earlier than when these two regulations were formulated (Gökmen, 1989, p. 32).

Smoking, both in the projection room and inside the exhibition hall, is referred to in both of the regulations. The eighth condition of Draft Regulation states that "smoking is not permitted in the projection room" (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). The Ordinance covers the issue of smoking, delineating different locations at the venues, the exhibition hall and the projection room respectively. It states that "smoking, the use of fire or of a torch is prohibited in the projection room"; also "smoking is prohibited in cinema saloons except when all of the lights are illuminated" (Alyot, 2008, p. 639). Thus, not only the operator but also the audiences are not allowed to smoke during the screening.

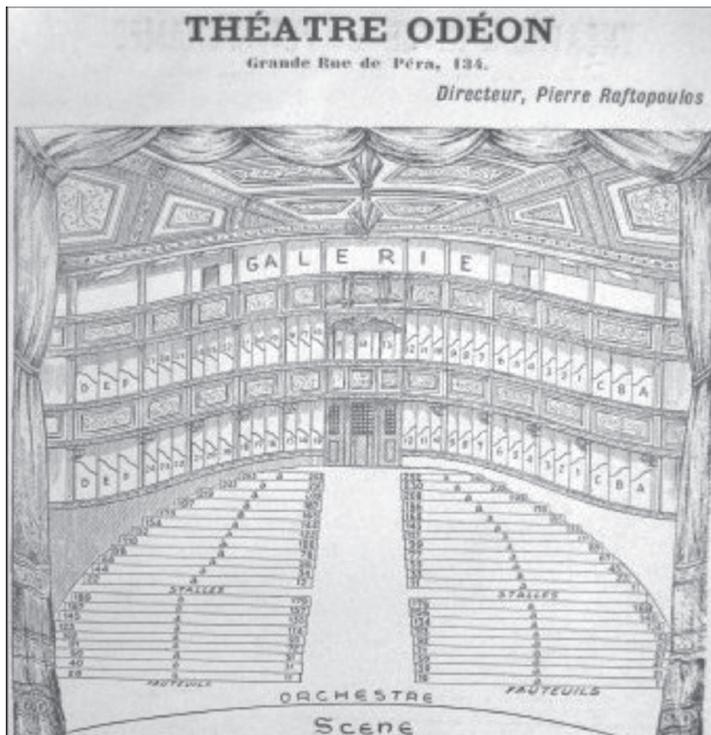


Figure 2: Seating plan of the Odéon Theatre in İstanbul (Cervati, 1908).²⁰

The last condition of clause 32 requires that the projection room should not have overheated lighting and should have only small and metallic entries for wiring (BOA, DH.EUM.VRK, 28/13, 1916). The Ordinance entails strict regulations about the control of a power source. It imposes a certificate of inspection in every six months performed either by a licensed electrical engineer or the electrical department's staff at municipalities (Alyot, 2008, p. 638).

The Ordinance further orders a certain seating plan for audiences at cinema-houses. In 1921, there were three cinema-houses in İstanbul with a seating capacity of approximately 1000: Magic with 1005 seats, Ciné Amphi with 1030 seats, Cinema Tepe with 1000 seats (Deaver, 1922, pp. 264-265).²¹ For instance, Elhamra Cinema's seating plan was arranged

²⁰ There were film screenings starting from the early years at the Odéon Theatre which later was named as Éclair (Le Moniteur Oriental, 26 January 1897). For more details on this venue see Özuyar (2017, pp. 40-41, 96).

²¹ See Appendix.

meticulously, with a space between the stage and performing level of the orchestra. The first-class seats contained ample spacing between each row (Özuyar, 2007, p. 126). The venue had 21 box seats, 200 leather seats (wide and comfortable), 200 upper level seats, 300 first and 200 second class seats available for audiences (Scognamillo, 1991, p. 36). Considering that this venue hosted large audiences, the authorities attempted to regulate it for the audience's health and safety. The Ordinance provides detailed space measurements and refers to the health of audience's eyes in regard to measurements and distances in the exhibition hall. Indeed, eye fatigue during early cinema was a wide-spread problem due to the flickering images, thus initial advertisements on cinema-houses emphasised the quality of their images (Erdoğan, 2017, pp. 85-86). It also states that the number of audience cannot outnumber the seats of the venue, so that in cases of emergency evacuation would be possible (Alyot, 2008, p. 639). The Ordinance's stipulations about exits further show the aim to improve health and safety. "Cinema-houses should at least have two exits with doors at least 90 centimetres wide and opening outwardly when pushed; a sign should be posted writing "Emergency Exit" (Alyot, 2008, p. 639). The nearest exits should be marked with signs on the walls and illuminated with red lights."

The seats in the theatre should be attached to one another and upholstered. The seating capacity of the premises should be established by the municipality prior to its opening. The first row of seating should be at least three meters from the stage. Each seat should have a width of 50 centimetres and the space between each row should be 100 centimetres. Having audiences stand in the aisles or other spaces in the venue is prohibited during performances. Over the main door of the cinema saloon, the following sentence should be clearly displayed: "The Mayor only permits audience in seated areas during screenings, no standing is allowed" (Alyot, 2008, p. 639).

Conclusion

The article provided an examination of regulating film exhibitions at cinema-houses in imperial İstanbul during the early cinema period. It shed light on a number of historical cases about the existing regulations of entertainments and the regulatory space for projecting films. Drawing on a number of archival documents, with the emphasis on restrictions, inspections, and obligations, sources revealed that authorities' exhibition regulations at İstanbul's cinema-houses were, by and large, in alliance

with the interest of audiences. Film exhibition was not highly regulated during the itinerant era, which is roughly the period starting from the arrival of cinema into the empire in late 1896, up to the gradual rise of cinema-houses in the mid-1910s. Itinerant exhibitors hosted their programmes under varying physical conditions, consequently policy-makers' attempts to introduce a standardised spatial formation was relatively restricted. Thus, the institutionalisation of cinema eventually became possible via the cinema-houses in the empire. Yet, travelling exhibition continued even after the introduction of permanent cinema-houses especially in the countryside and during seasonal periods at urban settings. This exhibition practise was challenged by the unsettled issue of infrastructural inadequacy and technological needs within the larger process of Ottoman modernisation.

After the opening of the first cinema-house, in 1908, in İstanbul, the number of permanent and seasonal cinema-houses gradually rose throughout the First World War and the Armistice periods. Various developments contributed to the rise of cinema-houses from the changing distribution patterns of international cinema market to the entrepreneurs' willingness to make profit, to the start of local film production, the emergence of narrative films and the growing demand of audience for films. Cinema-houses, as spatially bounded commercial buildings, were specifically designed for film screenings with modern facilities. Even the ones which were not newly built had to be renovated based on this latest technology's needs.

Two documents in particular show the conditions of exhibition regulations, legal and commercial liabilities, and strategies to create a safe and secure environment at cinema-houses: The Draft Regulation of 1916 and the Ordinance of Cinema and Theatre of 1924. The Draft Regulation appears to be amended several times; the Ordinance was in use during the early Republican years. Today, the conditions of the both records provide a tangible guide in order to understand authorities' mentality and their goals to regulate exhibitions based on the infrastructural needs. Nevertheless, cinema with its novel technology, infrastructural arrangements, and its challenging spatial needs required a new set of rules for a working legal and commercial system between the entrepreneurs and authorities; and safe premises for audiences. This process paved a way for the institutionalisation of cinema in İstanbul due to the introduction of standard exhibition regulations at cinema-houses.

2. The number of cinema-houses in imperial İstanbul in 1913/1914 (1329 Senesi İstanbul Belediyesi İhsâiyât Mecmuası (1913/1914).

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۱۱ قونسر محلاری ، نیارو و سنه‌مالر

اسمى دواز	دواز داندنده كوتى تيارو تورك	دواز داندنده واجه تيارو تورك	سنه‌مالر	هر بر دائره ده بولان تيارو قومايتارلك اسمى	هر بر قومايتارلك سنو و ويران لى	سنو و ويران لى		مسافره شهرة گلش اجنى تيارو قومايتارلك
						لان شنان	اجنى لان	
بازيد	۳	۱	۱۴	بكي عثمانلى قومايتارلك حسن افندى وازيه	۷	۱	۲	۲۵
					۱۵	۲	سينما	
فاتح	۱	۲	۱					
بك اوغلى								
بكي كوي								
اطولون حصارى								
اسكدار								
قاضي كوي	۲	۲	۳	آبولون و حسن افندى				
اطهار		۲	۳					
مترى كوي		۱	۱					
يكون	۶	۹	۲۵					

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۱۱ قونسر محلاری ، نیارو و سنه‌مالر

اسمى دواز	دواز داندنده كوتى تيارو تورك	دواز داندنده واجه تيارو تورك	سنه‌مالر	هر بر دائره ده بولان تيارو قومايتارلك اسمى	هر بر قومايتارلك سنو و ويران لى	سنو و ويران لى		مسافره شهرة گلش اجنى تيارو قومايتارلك
						لان شنان	اجنى لان	
بازيد	۳	۱	۱۴	بكي عثمانلى قومايتارلك حسن افندى وازيه	۷	۱	۲	۲۵
					۱۵	۲	سينما	
فاتح	۱	۲	۱					
بك اوغلى								
بكي كوي								
اطولون حصارى								
اسكدار								
قاضي كوي	۵	۲	۳	آبولون و حسن افندى				
اطهار		۲	۳					
مترى كوي		۱	۱					
يكون	۹	۱۶	۲۵					

3. The list of 26 cinema-houses in imperial İstanbul in 1921 (Deaver, 1922, pp. 264-265).

Name	Location	Seating Capacity	Classification
Magic	Pera	1005	1 st Class
Etoile	Pera	541	1 st Class
Cosmograph	Pera	900	2 nd Class
Russo-American	Pera	342	2 nd Class
Luxemburg	Pera	460	1 st Class
Ciné Palace	Pera	482	1 st Class
Éclair	Pera	452	1 st Class
Central	Pera	350	2 nd Class
Cinema Orientaux	Pera	466	2 nd Class
Ciné Amphi	Pera	1030	1 st Class
Pangaltı	Pera	450	2 nd Class
Cinema Variété	Pera	752	2 nd Class
Majestic	Pera	200	3 rd Class
Cinema Ali Efendi	Old İstanbul	280	2 nd Class
Cinema Kemal Bey	Old İstanbul	338	2 nd Class
Alemdar	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Cinema Milli	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Military Museum	Old İstanbul	300	1 st Class
Cinema Ertuğrul	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Şark Sineması	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Cinema Kumkapı	Old İstanbul	300	2 nd Class
Cinema Taksim	Old İstanbul	300	2 nd Class
Cinema Appollon	Üsküdar	400	1 st Class
Taksim Garden	Pera	400	2 nd Class
Cinema Tepe	Üsküdar	1000	2 nd Class
Layla Bahçesi	Old İstanbul	---	2 nd Class

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