

# An English architect in the 19th century Istanbul: William James Smith and Taşkışla<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

An English architect William James Smith had worked in Istanbul from 1842 to 1856, a most politically influential period for the British Empire. Smith, after his appointment to the prestigious project for the new Istanbul Embassy Building of United Kingdom, whose conceptual design was probably by renowned architect Sir Charles Barry, had attained the interest and trust of Ottoman statesmen.

Consequently he was assigned to realise a number of important architectural projects contributing to the modernization of Ottoman Architecture.

Some of the Smith's important works for the Ottoman Porte are: A military hospital [Gümüşsuyu Askeri Hastanesi], a naval hospital, a school of medicine later known as Mecidiye Kışlası then Taşkışla, a part of the Selimiye Barracks, a Glass Pavilion in Dolmabahçe Palace and Tophane Imperial Kiosk [Tophane Kasrı] for Sultan Abdülmecid; a building for the Board of Trade, renovation of the Naum Theatre. His commissions for so many important buildings, in spite of the presence of the notable architects, namely Balyan and Fossati, is a proof of Sultan's appreciation of Smith's works.

Smith worked for both the British Empire and the Ottoman Sultan for a considerable number of grand scale projects. Being Smith's first work of grand scale, Taşkışla has had a major role in the history of the Ottoman Empire and Istanbul in addition to its own interesting construction history.

## Keywords

English architect, William James Smith, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Istanbul, Taşkışla.

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## 1. Introduction

The British architect William James Smith (1807-1884) was sent to Istanbul for the construction of the British Embassy in this city and enjoyed the most productive period of his career as an architect in the Ottoman capital in the years between 1841 and 1858. This period, in which Ottoman-British relations intensified following the Baltalimanı Trade Agreement (1838), coincides with intensive construction activities in which important urban planning was shaped by the moving of the palace to Dolmabahçe after the *Tanzimat* (Reformation) and therefore with various state investments on the slopes of Dolmabahçe and particularly in the area between Taksim and Nişantaşı. It appears that during this period Smith worked on numerous prestigious architectural projects in Istanbul, attracted great interest, and won the recognition of the Palace. At a period when well-known architects such as the Balyans and Fossatis were making their presence felt, the content of the projects commissioned to Smith is proof that the architect was also recognized by the Sultan.

## 2. William James Smith

Knowledge about the professional development of William James Smith before he came to Istanbul is rather limited. Smith's death certificate found in the section of deaths in overseas countries of the British General Records Office indicates that he died on 8 December 1884 in Florence at the age of 77. Hence, it was postulated that he was born in 1807 (GRO, Death Certificate, F005942).

We know that in 1830 he started working at the "Office of Works", a government unit responsible for the maintenance, design and construction of the royal buildings (NA, T1/640 1A: 20465). In a letter he wrote before he retired and in which he narrated his professional life, Smith pointed out that he was trained as an "architect and surveyor" and on completing his professional training, began to work in public service with "very good recommendations" (NA, T1/640 1A: 20465). The only information on the position(s) he held in this service is his

appointment on 30 June 1840 as "assistant surveyor" to the "Metropolitan Improvements" department which was in charge of urban projects and directed by Thomas Chawer and James Pennington. However, one year after this appointment, on 22 June 1841 he left for Istanbul (NA, CRES/1616.).

As for the period when he again worked for the Office of Works after his return from Istanbul to England, he is known to have been recruited as an "architectural assistant" a post created especially for him. In the above mentioned letter, Smith pointed out that during this period he prepared the projects of the reorganization of Burlington House for the new use of the state, the restoration of the Birmingham and Bath post offices, the transformation of the Carisbrooke Castle into an armoury for the militia forces and the Bedford Lunatic Asylum into a factory for arms (NA, T1/640 1A: 20465). However, in 1856 the Office retired him against his will on the justification that there was not enough work for the position he held. Smith's career after this retirement is quite unusual for an architect: "Due to his qualifications and his devotion to the Ottoman State" he was appointed by order of the Sultan first as Headconsul of Livorno (BOA, HH.d.17402; ASLI<sup>2</sup>, *Prefettura di Livorno*, No: 440, date 1862), in 1879 as consul of Florence (BOA, İ. HR. 153 /8129), and finally was awarded a fourth class Mecidi Order while he was Headconsul of Toscana (BOA, İ.HR.176/ 9668). Smith died in Toscana and his grave was found at the *Cimitero Evangelico degli Allori* in Florence<sup>3</sup>. His birth and death dates on his tomb stone in Florence are recorded as 24th March 1807- 9th December 1884.

## 3. Smith's buildings in Istanbul for the British Government

The new building considered to replace the old embassy residence that burned down in the fire of August 1831 was the starting point of William James Smith's long lasting relations with Istanbul and the Ottoman State. Smith who came to Istanbul in 1841 on an urgent request of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (NA, Work 10/1 (21-40): 38-40) for a "competent architect", rapidly

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<sup>3</sup> Cemetery record number: 2PPsSGIVO1. We thank to Matteo Giunti for his valuable help on finding the tomb of William James Smith in Florence.

rented a temporary residence in Pera for the ambassador and proceeded to do the necessary organization (NA, Work 10/1 (21-40): 30-34). However, the quest for a plot of land for the embassy that would meet the approval of both the British and Ottoman governments lasted four years, and it was finally decided to build the new embassy on the existing plot (Crinson, 1996; Hamzaoglu, 1996). During the design process -the conceptual design was probably by renowned architect Sir Charles Barry (Barry, 1973) - that Smith started before the plot decision was made, he was reminded to design “A building not to decorate the Turkish capital or to attract the attention of passengers going through the Bosphorus but to provide the necessary comfort for the residence of Her Majesty’s ambassador” (NA, Work 10/1 (81-100):94-95). This point is worth noting not only because it shows the expectations of the British government but also because it helps to understand the long processes of budget negotiations between the British government and Istanbul during the construction. Building operations were directed from the Office of Works in London although its site was quite far from England and its execution was subject to different local conditions, and the coincident construction of the Dolmabahçe Palace led to a shortage not to underestimate the shortage of workers and materials. Because of these conditions, the ambassador’s residence could be completed only in 1851 (Figure 1). The English government also asked Smith to prepare a project for the St. Helena Chapel which was located in the embassy garden but burned down in 1847 while Smith was in Istanbul (NA, Work 1/31: 409-410). As the approval procedures for the project prepared by Smith in 1849 were not completed until 1852 after he was called back, the construction was realized according to Smith’s project but by Wood and Pulman, two architects sent from England (NA, Work 1/45:234-235 and NA, Work 1 /44-1(121-187):122-123). The same situation was also true for the consular complex consisting of consulate offices in Galata, the seamen’s hospital, police station and jail. On the request of Cumberbatch, the consul at



**Figure 1.** British Embassy, Istanbul (authors).

the time, Smith had prepared a project for the improvement of the existing hospital in 1846. After the damage caused by the fire in 1847, he revised his project so as to include the consulate, jail, and police station (NA, Work 1/39:85). However, the approval of the project and budget was actualized in 1854 and this project was too materialized by Wood and Pulman (NA, Work 1/44:92-97).

#### 4. Buildings by Smith for the Ottoman State and Dignitaries

During this long and stagnant period when Smith was working for the British government, he established good relations with the Ottoman administration and presented projects to the palace as of 1845. The first among these was the project prepared on the request of the palace in collaboration with the Fossatis for the burnt Galata Bridge and the surrounding quays. We know that the Fossati brothers, with whom he was to cooperate, were very popular and were commissioned at the time for the construction of the Russian embassy and some Levantine churches as well as important Ottoman state projects including the *Darülfünûn* [university], the restoration of Hagia Sophia, and the state archive building in *Bâb-ı Âli* [Sublime Porte]. Another contemporary group of important architects involved in dense construction activity in Istanbul at the time was the Balyan family. The fact that the Balyans were concentrating on the construction of the Dolmabahçe Palace probably was to Smith’s advantage in being entrusted for the Ottoman state commissions.

The construction of *Mekteb-i Tibbiye-i Şahâne* (Imperial School of Medicine) awarded to Smith towards the

end of 1846 was the longest-running project that the architect was to design and build for the Ottoman state. In 1847, a year after the beginning of the construction of the building that was planned as the School of Medicine but completed as the Mecidiye Barracks, Smith was concurrently involved in four different projects. No doubt the most important among these was the **Tophane Imperial Kiosk**, a small scale project designed and built for Sultan Abdülmecid (Figure 2). It was completed in 1851, in plot neighboring to *Tophâne-i Âmire* [Imperial Cannon Factory] Barracks which was the primary headquarters of the military reforms. Sultan Abdülmecid used this pavilion for various receptions where he hosted foreign guests.

Smith's second project, thought to have started in 1847, was the **Gümüştuyu Hospital**. It was built as a part of the of the *Gümüştuyu Kışla-i Hümayûnu* [Imperial Gümüştuyu Barracks] and was situated on the road descending from Taksim to Dolmabahçe on the slope between the Gümüştuyu Barracks and the Ayaspaşa cemetery. It appears that the first construction decision was made together with that of transforming the School of Medicine, into barracks for the infantry (BOA, İ. DH.181/9936). Therefore, we may surmise that Smith, who had the ongoing project for the School of Medicine (Taşkışla) that was not completed yet, might have used this project (or its revised version to suit the plot) for the Gümüştuyu Hospital. There is information that the construction was completed within one year and opened with a ceremony that included the participation of Abdülmecid, his retinue and Smith; and further that the building was heated with a hot water



Figure 2. Tophane Imperial Kiosk (authors).

radiator system, that there were many novelties in the hamam section, and that Smith won the recognition of the Sultan for his innovations (*JC-Echo de l'Orient*, November 4, 1849).

Another hospital project assigned to Smith was the **Bahriye Hastanesi** [Naval Hospital] in Kasımpaşa. In 1848, Sultan Abdülmecid assigned Smith to build a new hospital behind the Naval School. However, before the building was completed, it was decided to transform the new building into the high school for the Naval School and change the building with towers used as the Naval School into a Naval Hospital (*JC*, 1848a, February 16.; 1848b, May 21). This project, completed in 1850 also exemplifies serious function changes during the construction phase.

In 1847, Smith undertook the construction of a masonry pavilion, **İbrahim Ethem Paşa Konağı** for the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Ethem Pasha on the south shore of the Golden Horn in the vicinity of Zindan Kapı as well as the reconstruction of the **Naum Theatre** that had burned down in early 1846. Even though we have no knowledge about the start and completion dates of the first building, we know that the Naum Theatre was completed at the end of 1848 and that the Sultan attended a performance there in February 1849.

As a result of a fire that destroyed a large portion of the Selimiye Barracks in Üsküdar at the end of 1847, the need arose to determine the damage;



Figure 3. Selimiye Barracks (authors).

estimate the cost for the necessary repairs, demolition, and rebuilding; and prepare a project for the rebuilding and application. Following the completion of the estimation and preparations, the design and reconstruction of the northeast wing of the edifice that had burned down completely, including its imperial chamber and the main entrance gate were commissioned to Smith who had by then been assigned many state buildings (Figure 3).

In 1849, the project of the *Manège*, riding school building considered for the Military College, was also assigned to Smith. However, various correspondence among the Office of the Grand Vizier, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that despite the Sultan's order to complete the construction right away, it was delayed because Smith did not send anyone to take delivery of construction materials such as lime and stones and made excuses to delay the work. As a result, a letter was to be written to the British Embassy asking them to warn Smith (BOA, A.MKT. MHM 22/86; HR.MKT 37/19; C.MF 144/7187). Moreover, it was observed that surpassing the estimated cost had created discontent. Nonetheless, the construction of the *Manège* was completed in August 1852 the latest.

The reason for the British government's recalling Smith in March of 1852 after he completed the final aspects of the embassy residence may have been the discontent felt regarding the close relations between Smith and the Ottoman government or the above-mentioned complaints concerning Smith. It is known for a fact that although Smith's projects for the British government were continuing, they had been seriously impeded and that Smith was accused by his country of neglecting his duties. In a similar manner, Smith was often criticized for the projects he did for the Ottoman state. For example, criticisms with regard to his lack of interest in the construction of the Mecidiye Barracks can be added to the above mentioned unfortunate events experienced during the *Manège* construction. On the other hand, we know that following the construction of the Naum Theatre, there were long



**Figure 4.** Glass pavilion in Dolmabahçe Palace (authors).

court cases between its owner and the architect. However, despite all these events, Smith was recognized by the Sultan and his entourage, appreciated with numerous gifts.

Smith's last important and final works in the capital were within the complex of Dolmabahçe Palace. The fact that as of 1852 he had helped procure materials from foreign countries for the palace, and had worked especially on the monumental staircase and its roofing can be traced in the documents. Finally, in the years 1853-1854, he built the Dolmabahçe Palace *Camlı Köşk* (Glass Pavilion) and the Alay Pavilion for Sultan Abdülmecid. Camlı Köşk was realized as a viewing pavilion that allowed the Sultan to see the street. The winter garden that gave its name to this special pavilion must have been an annex suggested by Smith (Figure 4).

Although Smith's relations with the Ottoman administration lasted until 1858, he is not known to have pursued any other projects in the Ottoman capital in the following three to four years.

##### **5. Taşkışla – From *Mekteb-i Fünûn-u Tıbbiye* to the *Mecidiye Kışla-i Hümayûnu***

The Embassy Building and the Imperial Mecidiye Barracks are Smith's two best known projects in Istanbul. When the need arose to build a masonry building with modern facilities and a

new organization to replace the Medical School located in a wooden building in Galatasaray, an imperial decree for the construction of a new Medical School building was announced by Sultan Abdülmecid. Following this announcement, preparations were made for the construction of the present day Taşkışla building (Batur, 2013) (Figure 5). As the aim was to design an institution and building that would represent Ottoman Modernization, a design program was prepared that included a school for 300 students and a teaching clinic for 200 patients, a pharmacy, laboratories, a morgue, and various service sections and a mosque, clock tower, two pools and an Imperial Chamber.

Following the design and preparation works that began with the participation of “Mr. William James Smith, an architect from Europe who is perfect in his profession” excavation began on 15 January 1847 (1263, on Friday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of *Muharrem*), the date found appropriate by the Head Astrologer (BOA, İ. DH 138/7070). The ceremony on the occasion of the first stone laid was held on 24 February 1847 (1263, on Wednesday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of *Rabiülevvel*) with the participation of Sultan Abdülmecid. Great care was devoted to the ceremony for it to be sublime. The document informing that the budget was exceeded and that an additional budget was prepared shows that no expenditure cuts were made for the construction (Batur, 1996).

### 5.1. Transformation to barracks

While the construction was proceeding and the school's rough construction was almost finished, the decision was changed, almost abruptly and for an unknown reason. The document dated 5 October 1848 (7 *Zilkade* 1264) announced the decision regarding the school's being changed to a barracks, provides no explanation but lists the things that had to be done (BOA, İ. DH 181/9936).

There are also numerous documents regarding the change in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives. Some parts that were already built had to be torn down or transformed to fit the new function and new additions had



Figure 5. Taşkışla (authors).

to be made. The reason for the change of function is not mentioned in these documents; however, they include the term “*Hasbel-icâb*” (as required) (Batur, 1996).

### 5.2. Details regarding construction for transformation: Construction survey register

The survey register with reference number HH.d.17402 is in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive (BOA, HH.d.17402) (Topçubaşı, 2013). This leather bound rectangular register consists of 18 pages of text as well as a one page cover letter filed as belonging to the register; that contains the answer given to the letter.

The first page of the register contains an introduction sentence and the date 18 December 1853 (17 *Rabiülevvel* 1270). The last page has the conclusion of the calculations and the date 1 January 1854 (*gurre -i Rabiulahir* 1270).

According to the register, an application for a survey permission was made on 4 August 1853 (28 *Şevval* 1269) and the permission was received on 12 August 1853 (7 *Zilkade* 1269). The register was kept as of 18 December 1853 (17 *Rabiülevvel* 1270), was completed on 1 January 1854 (*gurre -i Rabiulahir* 1270) and signed by the Minister of Commerce on 6 January 1854 (6 *Rabiulahir* 1270) for presentation to the Sultan.

The text in the cover letter contains some information regarding the building. The letter written to apply for a survey permission signed by *Es-Seyyid Mehmed Hasib* and dated 4 August 1853 (28 *Şevval* 1269) states that a person named Hoca İstefan Kalfa was assigned to the construction of the building, that he was totally responsible of the solidity and expenses, and that no officer assigned to the building by the *Hazine-i Hassa-i Şahâne* [Imperial Treasury] was to make the pay-

ments. It also states that on completion of the building, the expenses came to be more than the estimated cost, that large amounts of money had been given to Istefan Kalfa, and that although it was clear that the nearly completed building was going to be finished with little disbursement, the amount drawn from the Treasury since Istefan Kalfa, began to work on this project reached forty-two thousand and something *keses* (a unit of money corresponding to 500 *kuruş*). The letter also states that the Sultan ordered that Es-Seyyid Mehmed Hasib, author of the said text, the Minister of Commerce, and officers of the building council inspect and examine the cost to determine whether or not the said amount was spent in vain; the letter also requests permission for inspection with the Minister of Commerce, Es-Seyyid Mehmed Hasib and the officers as well as the *amicus curiae*.

The text at the end of the register, dated 1 January 1854 (*gurre -i Rabiulahir 1270*), is in the form of a report. The first fact in the document is with regard to the commission. The commission consisted of the Minister of the Imperial Treasury, the *müftü* of the council of public works, Es-Seyyid Mehmed Hasib, council members Tahir Efendi and Haydar Bey, the palace master-builder, master-builders of the building council and the *amicus curiae*. The record also contains information regarding the result of the calculations. According to this document, the construction cost of the building was forty-one thousand three-hundred ninety-four *keses*, four hundred ninety-two and a half *kuruş*. The expenditure made for tearing down some finished parts due to change of function was three thousand one hundred seventy-eight *keses* one hundred twenty-seven and a half *kuruş*. Hence the total expenditure was forty-four thousand five hundred seventy-three *keses*, one hundred twenty *kuruş*. It also states that there was a difference of two hundred sixty-seven *keses*, one and a half *kuruş* compared to the amount stipulated by Istefan Kalfa and that this difference was due to the facts that Malta stone instead of bricks was used for the dormitories and walk paths and that some parts of the roof were covered lead rather than tiles. It

also points out that upon Istefan Kalfa stipulating the sum at the *Meclis-i Vâlâ* [Great Council], the job as a whole was given to him, a contract was drawn and a warrant prepared. The report states that the building was flawless with regard to solidity and that the expenditure must be accepted and paid by the treasury. In addition, the report notes that the difference resulting from work done which was not included in the contract cannot be accepted due to regulations and that Istefan Kalfa could not claim a right to this effect.

Unlike the other document, the document prepared by the Minister of Commerce and dated 6 January 1854 (6 *Rabiulahir 1270*) states that some drawings explaining the form of the building were given to Istefan Kalfa.

The calculations in the survey register begin by identifying the building to which the register belongs. This section is followed by a description of the works. The calculations in the register are listed under two main headings: expenditures of the original building and expenditures of construction pulled down due to function change.

In the explanation, works and materials are designated by floors and spaces. However, work sequencing was not the same for each floor. The main headings are expressed as lower floor, first floor, second floor, and third floor. Sub-headings are used as well. On the other hand, some work descriptions are explained and detailed within themselves.

The said barracks building is also of importance as it is one of the first examples of many buildings by William James Smith built in Istanbul. Data concerning how long the architect was involved in the construction process or whether he was at all involved could not be found within the scope of this study. However, the text analyzed shows that Istefan Kalfa, the contractor, was given the project before the construction began and that a model of the building was made during the construction process. The construction accomplished by Istefan Kalfa is described as “flawless with regard to the initial exploration and contract” and praised in the report prepared by the survey committee.

## 6. Conclusion

It seems that Smith's Istanbul period in the years 1842-1856 was overshadowed by Fossati's brilliant career at approximately the same period. Compared with Fossati's Russian Embassy or the *Darülfünûn* and his restoration of Hagia Sophia that caused great excitement in the world of architecture, or Garabed Balyan's construction of the imperial labelled Dolmabahçe Palace, Smith's designs remained of secondary importance even though they were of monumental quality. Yet we cannot overlook that Smith created a group of buildings predominantly of Neo-Renaissance character enriching Istanbul's architectural accumulation.

## Abbreviations

A.MKT.MHM: *Sadâret Mektubî Kalemî, Mühimme Kalemî*  
 ASLI: *Archivio di Stato di Livorno* [Livorno State Archive]  
 BOA: *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* [Ottoman Archive of Prime Ministry]  
 C. MF: *Cevdet Maarif*  
 CRES: Records of The Crown Estate and predecessors  
 DH.d: *Dahiliye Nezâreti Defterleri*  
 GRO: General Records Office  
 HH. d: *Hazine-i Hâssa Nezâreti Defterleri*  
 HR. MKT: *Hariciye Mektubî Kalemî*  
 İ.HR: *İrade, Hariciye*  
 İ.D: *İrade, Dahiliye*  
 JC: *Journal de Constantinople*  
 NA: National Archives  
 NA Works: National Archives, Records of the successive Works departments, and the Ancient Monuments Boards and Inspectorate  
 T1: Records created or inherited by Her Majesty's Treasury Board Papers and In-Letters

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### 19. yüzyıl İstanbul'unda bir İngiliz mimar: William James Smith ve Taşkışla

İngiliz Mimar William James Smith, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun siyasi açıdan en etkin olduğu 1842- 1856 yılları arasında İstanbul'da çalışmıştır. Smith, tasarımı büyük olasılıkla ünlü mimar Sir Charles Barry'ye atfedilen Büyük Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun İstanbul Elçiliği binasının yapım sürecinde görev almıştır. Elçilik binasında çalışmış olmanın sağladığı saygınlık sayesinde Osmanlı devlet adamlarının ilgisini ve güvenini kazanmış ve bu süreç, Osmanlı mimarlığının çağdaşlaşmasına katkı sunan büyük projeler için kendisine teklif götürülmesinin yolunu açmıştır.

Gümüşsuyu Askeri Hastanesi, Denizcilik Hastanesi, daha sonra Mecidiye Kışlası ve Taşkışla olarak anılacak olan Tıp Okulu, Selimiye Kışlası'nın bir bölümü, Dolmabahçe Sarayı Camlı Köşk, Sultan Abdülmecid için Tophane Kasrı, Ticaret Borsası ve Naum Tiyatrosu'nun yenileme projeleri, Smith'in Osmanlı Sarayı için gerçekleştirdiği önemli çalışmalarından bazılarıdır. Balyan ve Fossati'ler gibi ünlü mimar-

ların varlık gösterdiği bir dönemde Smith'in çok önemli projeleri üstlenmiş oluşu, Sultan tarafından takdir edildiğini kanıtlamaktadır.

Smith, hem Britanya İmparatorluğu, hem de Osmanlı Sultanı için çok sayıda büyük ölçekli projede çalışmıştır. Smith'in büyük ölçekli ilk işi olan Taşkışla, sadece kendi ilginç yapım tarihi açısından değil, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve İstanbul tarihi açısından da önemli bir yapıdır. Sultan Abdülmecid'in isteği üzerine 1846 yılında Tıp Okulu (*Mekteb-i Fünûn-u Tıbbiye*) olarak tasarlanmıştır. Üç yüz öğrenciye eğitim verebilecek bir okul ile iki yüz hasta kapasiteli bir eğitim kliniği, ayrıca eczane, fizik, kimya ve botanik laboratuvarları, morg, cami, saat kulesi, iki havuz ve bir *Daire-i Hümayûn* yapım programını oluşturmuştur. Hafriyata 15 Ocak 1847'de başlanmış, ilk taşı koyma töreni ise 24 Şubat 1847'de padişah Abdülmecid'in katılımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmalar hızla sürdürülmüş ve yapı büyük ölçüde bitirilmişken 1849 yılında Tıp Okulu'nun kışlaya dönüştürülmesine karar verilmiştir. 1849 yılındaki karar değişikliğinin gerekçeleri bilinmemektedir.