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A callous diversion from a livable stage-set; the 75-year story of a "high-market" street

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Abstract

This study probes the relative decline in the quality of commerce in Balıkesir in relation to its urban-architectonic stage. Milli Kuvvetler Street in Balıkesir, an astonishing insertion of 1916 into the organic town fabric, is examined in this paper. Its deviation from an urban space representing a new social model of Turkish Republic in the early 1920s towards a mediocre and untidy streetscape, has been of long interest particularly from the viewpoint of parallel processes of morphological and socio-economic transformation in small towns. This study aims to elucidate spatial dimensions of traditional commerce by investigating a small western Anatolian town and the evolution of its most exquisite linear space of its time and the first upper-class commercial street of Balıkesir. In a historical perspective (between 1920s and 1980s), the principles of the stage design of this social act or ritual in the city, whereby a Western European lifestyle is appropriated are examined for the purpose of discovering their relation with the ritual itself. Within the framework of morphological aspect of the townscape, urban effects of key interventions are analysed adopting methods of townscape analyses such as building heights, plot widths, sequential continuity of urban paths as well as figure-ground relationships in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the physical context in which the economic nucleus to flourish. Some results are noteworthy especially in the case of Balıkesir. It is suggested that the changes observed in the fabric of the square, building height and plot width might have negatively affected the rhythm of shopping activity. Environmental quality and appropriateness is evaluated retrospectively towards a better and vivid social life in the historic centre of the city of Balıkesir. Milli Kuvvetler Street is suggested as an urban generator to reactivate the social life in the city for a much more liveable Balıkesir.

Introduction

Enhancement of human social experience has been slightly downplayed within the debates of 'sustainability of the city'. Therefore, economic sustainability and quality of human action in a city should be considered as complementary issues. Revitalisation of historic quarters should not only aim at sustaining their economic life but also improving public activity and movement in the streets. Regeneration of historic centres should also enhance as the quality of commercial activity, which constitute one of the main indicators of social life, that is to say the liveability of the town in the city.

Along this purpose, this paper probes the relative decline in the quality of commerce in Balıkesir after 1950s in relation to its urban-architectonic stage. Milli Kuvvetler Street (this was named as İstasyon Street since it constituted the axis connecting Municipality Building into the Railway Station) in Balıkesir, an astonishing insertion of 1916 into the organic town fabric, is examined in this study.

It is observed that a significant alteration have gradually occurred in the physical layout of Milli Kuvvetler Street. Accordingly, it is assumed that such physical transformation may have contributed to the gradual decline in the quality of shopping activity along with other socio-economic input. To this aim, the relation between urban-architectural morphology of Milli Kuvvetler Street and urban ritual of shopping along the street is scrutinised.

Urban-architectural Morphology and Urban Ritual of Shopping

The deviation of Milli Kuvvetler Street (Figure 1) from an urban space representing a new social model of Turkish Republic in the early 1920s towards a mediocre and untidy streetscape, has been of long interest particularly from the viewpoint of parallel processes of morphological and socio-economic transformation in small towns throughout Western Anatolia.

This urban transformation is, at the same time, the transformation of both economic and social structure. Milli Kuvvetler Street has become a new axis physically and functionally detached from the traditional core of city, and one with shops that sell goods brought from other cities and countries as well as the one with bank buildings on its both sides particularly in 1940s and 1950s. Opening of the street and selling of imported goods on this new street were quite significant from the viewpoint that it was the generating point of the modernisation process in Balıkesir.

The ongoing socio-economic process in Balıkesir is examined in the light of various facts such as; overall economic change in Turkey, impacts

of global economy, and in particular, channelling of upper-middle income groups to out-of-town shopping areas (e.g. MM Migros, Gima) in Balıkesir. Due to the scarcity and deficiency of the historical documents, it was considered to be most appropriate method to follow the decrease from the newspaper adverts as well as headlines related to the economic context in the city between 1940 and 1960. The major parameters of the quality of economic and social life are assumed to be; amount of goods for upper-middle class social groups, and that of import goods, availability of services, particularly for the early republican bourgeoisie in Western Turkey while their indicators are restricted to newspaper advertisements. Hence, the newspaper headlines showing considerable changes in these parameters are highlighted throughout this study. For instance, advertisements of various retailers such as those who sell exquisite hats, elegant fur coats and fashionable watches are typical manifestations of the quality of commercial life along Milli Kuvvetler Street around 1950s (Figure 2). At this point, it is of interest to understand how physical context support and enhance this positive quality of shopping.

Within the framework of morphological aspect of the townscape, urban effects of key interventions are analysed adopting methods developed by various scholars including Lynch and Curran (Lynch 1960, Curran 1983). Morphological aspects that can be considered to have influenced the quality of socio-economic life, are synthesised from above-mentioned references. Various townscape analyses are conducted such as building heights, plot widths, sequential continuity of urban paths as well as figure-ground relationships in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the physical context in which the economic nucleus to flourish. Some results are noteworthy especially for the fact that one could establish principles of the relative decline in the quality of shopping in the case of Balıkesir. For instance, replacement of traditional bazaar (which appears to have been a *distributor collector space*) with shopping arcade of 1950s (which became a *distributor space*) has significantly contributed to isolation of this street from the broader urban context and thus pedestrian movement. Moreover, removal of the first Municipality Building (which served as an urban magnet) seems to have caused the destruction of the continuity between the Zagnos Pasha Mosque and the Railway Station. This formation may have been accelerated by the domination of the node -Cumhuriyet Square- (a potential urban square) by traffic junction (round-about) in front of the Railway Station, particularly after the opening of Bursa-İzmir motorway. Furthermore, functionally and spatially (at least locationally) organised and differentiated trade groups for the control of tax (Bac) collection -which was a significant input in the commercial life of the town- had later been brought together in mix-use commercial buildings. This type of unification of these dispersed

commercial units may have reduced the human movement between these nodes through various paths. It is suggested that the changes observed in the fabric of the square, building height and plot width (hotels) may have negatively affected the rhythm of shopping activity.

This study elucidates spatial dimensions of traditional commerce by investigating a small western Anatolian town and the evolution of its most exquisite linear space of its time and the first upper-class commercial street of Balıkesir. In a historical perspective (starting from the early republican period until late 1980s -which represent the ramification of the post-modern consumerist era in less developed areas), the principles of the stage design of this social act or ritual in the city, whereby a Western European lifestyle is appropriated are examined for the purpose of discovering their relation with the ritual itself. However, visual materials of this formal analysis could not be totally illustrated due to the limitations regarding the space in this paper.

When the transformation of silhouettes on both sides of the street is analysed, one cannot fail to notice that the deformation in the proportion of width-to-height is so abrupt that the sense of "high-market street" is lost (Figure 3). Thus, one could observe that length of shopping period for individuals is profoundly reduced along the street. Moreover, the analysis of the transformation of plot widths also reveals that the regularity of the rhythm of shoppers is impaired to a great extent via enlargement of shop windows (Figure 4). Furthermore, continuity of shopping paths is interrupted with the deformation of figure-ground relationship as the basis of the web of shopping.

Some results are noteworthy especially in the case of Balıkesir. It is suggested that the changes observed in the fabric of the square, building height and plot width may have negatively affected the rhythm of shopping activity. Furthermore, web of shopping is stretched to such a great magnitude that a series of interruptions seem to have occurred. Additionally, insertion of web of vehicular traffic right into the heart of the former web also seems to have caused the destruction of the shopping fabric (thus social fabric) within the historic town centre.

Consequently, one can suggest that Milli Kuvvetler Street has been fragmented from the broader urban context with a series of misguided interventions since 1955.

At this point, master plan of 1944 by German architect and planner E.Egli arouses one's interest because of his humane approach (Egli 1944). The Egli plan (Figure 5) is examined as an attempt to heal and rehabilitate this disconnected network. As could be observed in his original drawings recently found in the municipal archives, Despite its modernist approaches

the plan exhibits an urbane attitude that brings human purpose, action and role forward in planning.

Human purpose which should be the essence of sustainable urban design seems to have been achieved by Egli plan to a certain extent.

However, various revisions have diverted the plan from its soul and seem to have become the catalyst for the retrogression process mainly after the 1950 fire. Despite its orthodox approaches, the modernist plan planning - quite similar to Jansen plan for Ankara in late 1920s - exhibits an urbane attitude that brings human purpose, action and role forward in planning as could be observed in his original drawings recently found in archives.

Conclusion

Although pitfalls of the analyses due to the scarcity of documents before 1940s can be discussed, the major principles behind the decline in the quality of shopping could be formulated as follows:

1. Length of shopping time is significantly decreased.
2. Rhythm of shopping has become quite irregular.
3. Continuity of shopping flow has been interrupted.

In relation to above-listed points, principles of urban-architectural transformation are further determined as follows respectively:

1. Silhouette of Milli Kuvvetler Street is irregularly and excessively raised at the cost of human scale.
2. Plot widths have been enlarged due to the widespread standards of display.
3. Figure-ground relation is drastically reversed at the peril of pedestrian continuity.

Hence, it is concluded that there is a clear and quite strong correlation between the principles of decline in the quality of shopping and that of physical environment. Consequently, it is proposed that highlighted matters should be improved to bring back the original quality of shopping to the street.

Environmental quality and appropriateness is evaluated retrospectively towards a better and vivid social life in the historic centre of the city of Balıkesir. In conclusion, following points can be stated as a guiding framework for planners and administrators of the city. Firstly, reconstruction of the triangular continuity of Egli Plan (triangular formation connecting commercial, religious, administrative and interchange centres; namely 17th century bazaar, 15th century mosque & late 19th century municipality, government, and mid-20th century railway station) with infill projects throughout the historical quarter. Secondly, (re)reversal of the figure-ground relationship for the design of better urban spaces so as to

achieve the revitalisation of human movement within the centre. Moreover, silhouette should be regulated to bring human scale to the street, and larger plot width should be further divided to give a sense of traditional high-market street. Milli Kuvvetler Street is suggested as an urban generator to reactivate the social life in the city for a much more liveable Balıkesir.

Figures



Figure 1

Şık ve zarif
ŞAPKALAR

Uzun ve zarif
KASKETLER

S. ŞENER
MODA TAKİP EDEN
YEGANE
ŞAPKA MAĞAZASI
MILLİ K. CADDESİ TİP 22
BALIKESİR

ATÖLYEMİZDE UCUZ VE ŞİK KASKET DİKİLİR

ORATOR

En sevdiğinizinize hediye
ORATOR saati, fakat neye?
Çünkü; Zarif ve hassastır diye.
Paralarınız gitmez heba!ye!
Hatırlatır Sizi her saniye.
HASAN ÖZKUYUMCU
M. Kuvvetler Caddesi
No. 13 Balıkesir

Sayın Bayanlarımıza bir tavsiye

Kıyık mantolarını almazdan önce Kürk Manto kullanın. Bu yasa arkadaşlarımızdan şikâyet rahatsızlığı ve acı dolu bittir. İyilikleri hakkında soruda bulununuz! Bu kumaş Manto parası ile o'nda şık bir Kürk Manto'ya sahip olursunuz.

Kadri Albayrak
Tuhafiye ve Kürk Manto Mağazası

Figure 2

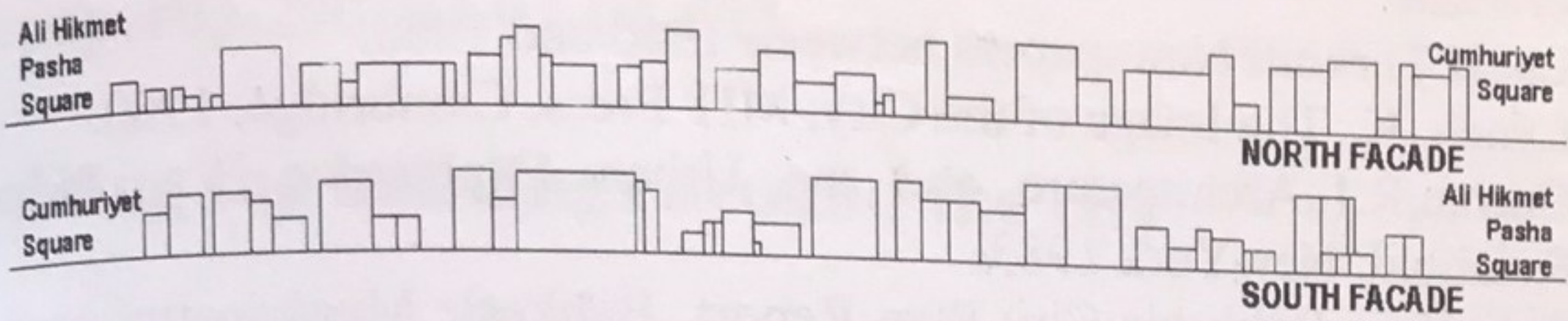


Figure 3

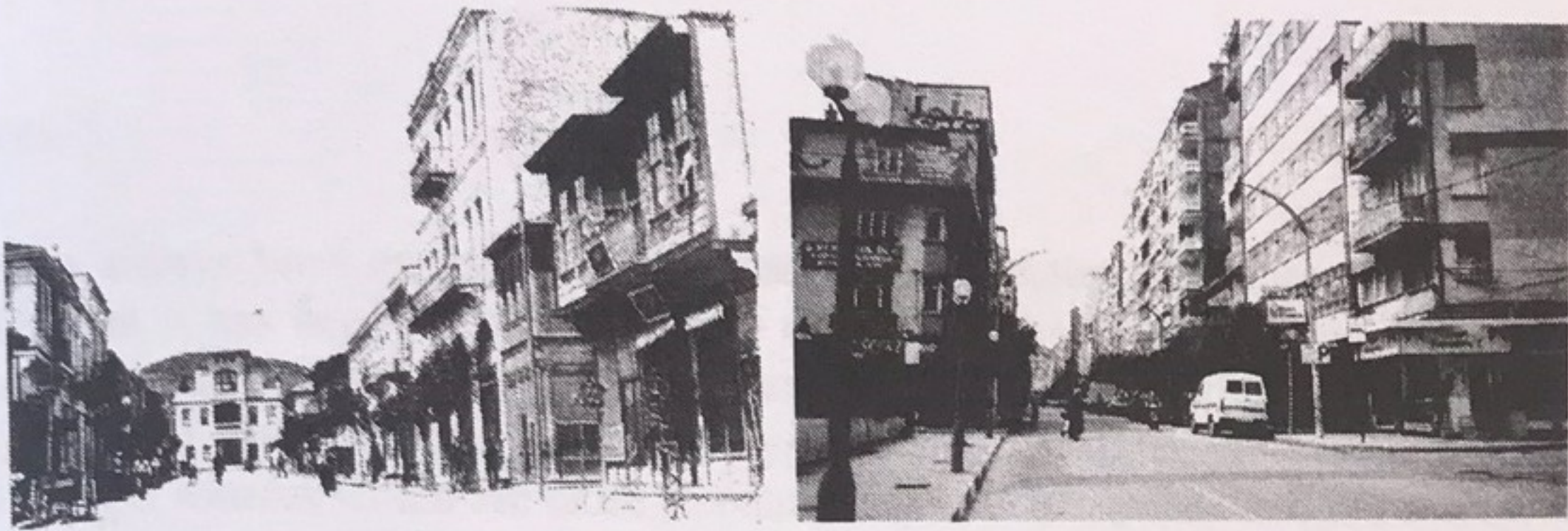


Figure 4

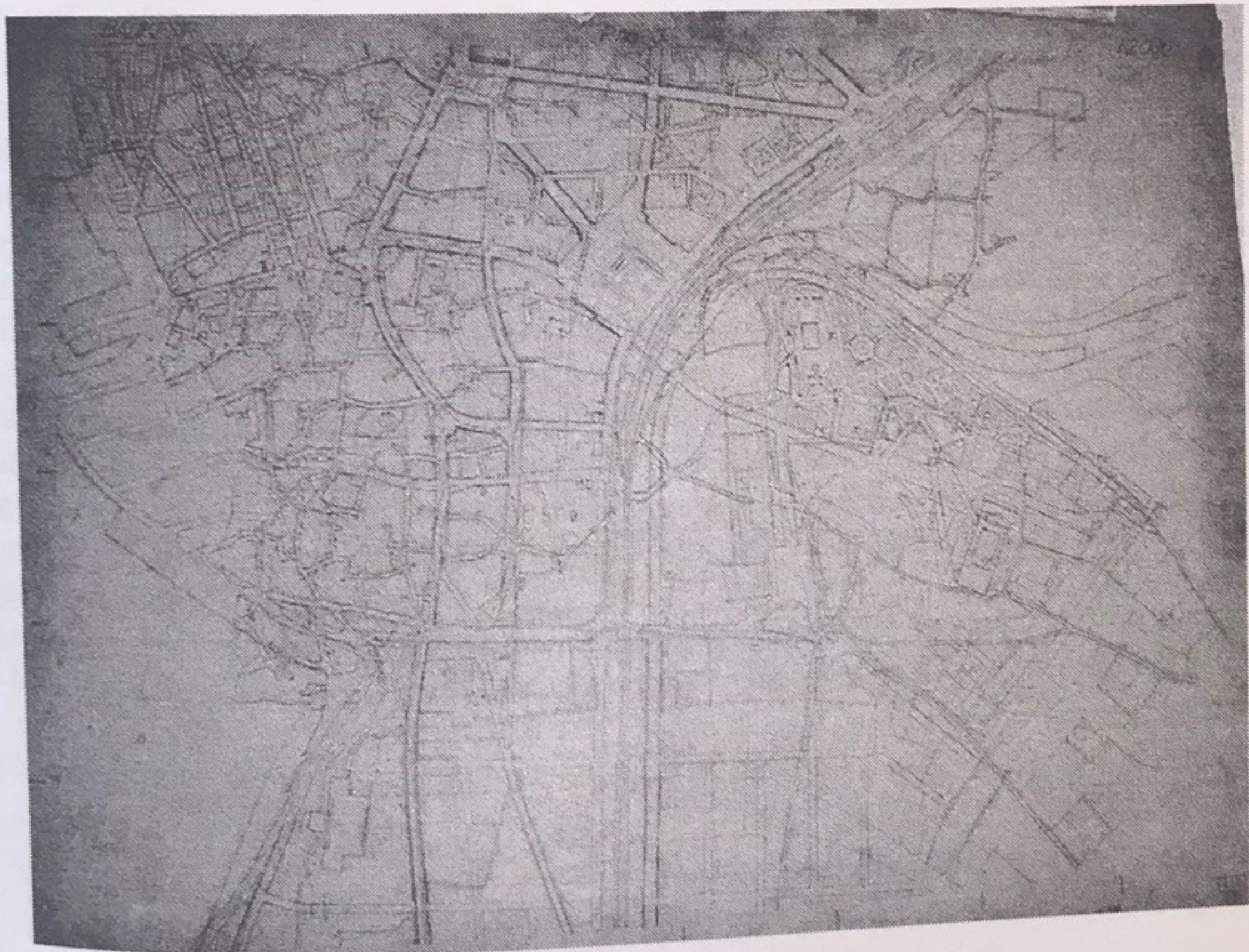


Figure 5

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