



Summary :

Cibali is located along the city walls of the Golden Horn, shortly before Fanari (Fener) and very close to the modern site of Unkapı. Right after the Ottoman conquest the area was inhabited by Christian Orthodox and Jews, whereas during the 19th century it became the home of Greek Orthodox immigrants from the Balkans and Asia Minor. With the signing of the Lausanne treaty and the exchange of populations, the Orthodox community started weakening numerically.

Other Names

Porta eis Pigas, Agia Theodosia, Mahalle-i Aya, Aya Kenisâsi Mahallesi

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

Historical Region

Constantinople (Istanbul)

Administrative Dependence

Metropolitan municipality of Istanbul (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi)

1. Location and name

The area of Cibali is located along the city walls of the [Golden Horn](#), shortly before [Fanari](#) (Fener) and very close to the modern site of Unkapı.¹ It took its name from the gate of the same name, which was located between the Tüfek-hane and the gate of Agia, a name which, as we shall see, was also given in the old days to the local Christian Orthodox community.

The gate took its name from a dervish from [Prousa](#) (Bursa) who participated with his troops to the [siege of Constantinople](#), Cebe or Cub Ali. Tradition reports that he was the one who entered the city first, after he crossed the Golden Horn with his comrades walking on a fleece. As a reward, the sultan [Mehmed II](#) offered him land in the region and gave the neighbourhood, as well as the gate, whose previous name was Porta eis Pegas, his name.² The neighbourhood created in the lands which were offered to Cebe or Cub Ali, vanished during the end of the 15th century, the name however remained for the area and the gate.³

2. Population

Right after the Ottoman Conquest of [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul), the area was inhabited by Christians and [Jews](#) who mostly dwelled along the Golden Horn, whereas in the zone within the city walls mostly [Muslims](#) and few Christians lived. In the 16th century there were many workshops in the area, mainly for the manufacture of glass, from which the frequent fires which afflicted the quarter might have been caused.⁴

The Armenian Eremya K m rciyan, who visited the city in the middle of the 17th century, verifies that the area was inhabited by Jews and Greek-Orthodox and notes that “around the Cibali gate there are houses on both sides of the road, whereas on its docks a plethora of merchandizes are sold for the needs of the people. [...] On the coasts of Cibali the [craft guilds](#) of the grocers, the fishermen, the butchers, the candle-makers and many other people come for rest and amusement”.⁵ About the gate of Agia, were the walls create a concave semicircle, the same author notes that this is the only place where there is no dock and that the Greek-Orthodox live here next to the sea.⁶

From a register of the reign of the sultan Mahmud II we are informed that in the beginning of the 19th century the abovementioned urban organization of the area still existed. Jews are predominant along the beach between the Unkapı neighbourhood and of Cibali;



few Orthodox live there, whose number rises substantially in the area between Cibali and Agia Kapı, and very few Muslims.⁷

3. The Rum community

3.1. The limits of the parish and its history

The Greek-Orthodox community of Agia or Cibali was actually part of the wider area of Fanari. The stone-built *giavgiri* (*kargir* or *kavgir* = stone building) of the “Treasury of the Common” marked in the 18th century the border between the parishes of Fanari and Cibali.⁸ The parish was initially limited in the narrow zone outside and along the city walls and around the gate of the same name, a zone which practically occupies the whole area along the walls between the gates of Cibali and Petri Kapı towards Fanari. Later, in the 19th century, it was extended within the walls.⁹ We have no specific information concerning the exact limits of the parish until 1830, when the first available documentation of the neighbourhoods of the area is dated.¹⁰

The parish of Agios Nikolaos Cibali or parish of Agia was particularly important and wealthy and, according to the Patriarchal typikon, it was the “first in order” amongst the 37 parishes of the Archbishopric of Constantinople.¹¹ Towards the end of the 16th century the borders of the quarter are formed and the parishioners are divided into *machalelides-ospitanoi* (permanent residents of the area with a land estate within the parish), most of which dwelled along the Byzantine walls, and into *pekiarides-oikatores* (unmarried sojourners and parishioners who did not own land in the area), who, according to a patriarchal decree, were incorporated into the parish.¹² Until the end of the 19th century, the second category of parishioners had no right to participate in the community assemblies, something which created tensions between members of the community during this period. The issue took greater dimensions and was presented as a problem mainly by the **members of the board of schools**, where the children of the *oikatores* were also studying; after the intervention of the Permanent National Mixed Council, the *oikatores*, and whoever was an Ottoman citizen and lived for more than two years in the neighbourhood, gained the right to participate to the community assemblies.¹³ The electoral lists of the neighbourhood, according to the general regulations, were approved by the Permanent National Mixed Council.

We could relate this incident and its resolution within the framework of the general reorganization of the administration of the Orthodox communities after the compilation of the general regulations of the Orthodox **millet** during the 1860's. After all, the **operation of the communities** according to regulations and constitutions, as well as the constitutional strengthening of the role of the secular representatives in the communities' administration are basic characteristics of the second half of the 19th century.

The Cibali Orthodox community gains a great importance when finally at the end of the 16th century the **Patriarchate** is relocated at Fanari, west of Agia, and thus important **Phanariot** families, kapou kechagiades (*kapu kehaya* = representatives) of the Danubian Principalities, **postelnikoi**, dragomans (interpreters) etc., but also important merchants start dwelling in the area. The 18th century is the “golden age” of the community. The Greek-Orthodox exceeded the Jews in numbers, mainly in neighbourhoods around the church and towards Fanari; amongst them some of the most distinguished personalities of the Orthodox community of Constantinople dwelled, such as the **family of the dragoman Gikas**, Banesa Soutzaina, mother-in-law of Stefanos Maurogenis, **dragoman of the fleet**, the families of Fenerlis, **Zarifis**, Zafeiropoulos and others. They were mostly the owners of the two and three-storey *giavgiria* and the mansions of the coastal road which appear from the beginning of the 18th century to transform the landscape of the area. Also furriers, silk traders, kougiumtvides (from the Ottoman Turkish *kuyumcu* = goldsmith), terzides (from the Ottoman Turkish *terzi* = tailor) and others have their houses here.¹⁴ In the coastal lot-garden of the church the fishermen and the *gripades* (owners of fishing boats) of the community rented the small harbours, owned by the church.¹⁵

3.2. Churches and agiasmata

In the period which followed the Ottoman conquest in the wider area of Cibali **Orthodox churches** were scattered, around which Christians dwelled. Many of them were in the course of time transformed into mosques, whereas others disappeared until the 17th century, either due to the frequent fires, either due to the general urban policy adopted by the Ottoman state from the end of the 16th



century onwards; according to this policy, the non-Muslim populations were relocated from the centre of the walled city –in order for the Muslim populations to inhabit these areas - and were settled towards the coast and around the gates of the walls.¹⁶

Rather early, from 1481 or until 1512 at the latest, Agios Nikolaos (St Nicholas) becomes the parish church of the community,¹⁷ a small church located between the gates of Agia and Cibali –from which the name of the church “Agios Nikolaos of Cibali” comes from-, on the city wall. However, the site continued to be called the Agia neighbourhood, from the nearby Byzantine church which was dedicated to [St Theodosia](#). This church was transformed few years after the Ottoman Conquest, most probably in 1512, into a mosque and was named Gül Camii, whereas until that time it is possible that it was used as an arsenal of the Ottoman fleet. According to the tradition, the Ottomans saw the church adorned with roses, since on the day of the Conquest the memory of the holy martyr Theodosia was celebrated, thus they gave it this name (gül = rose).¹⁸ Today the church is still used as a mosque. In 1837, during repair works in the building, a mosaic was discovered, which was detached and was carried to the nearby church of Agios Nikolaos.¹⁹

The church of Agios Nikolaos is not known from the Byzantine period, although [Manouil Gedeon](#), referring to sultanic decrees, claims that in this position there was a church before the Ottoman conquest.²⁰ This specific church became known after the transformation of the church of Agia Theodosia into a mosque. It is mentioned by Gerlach in 1576 and by Paterakis in 1604.²¹ It was destroyed by a great fire in 1716 and was rebuilt few years later, in 1720, when, with the purchase of the nearby agiasma of St. Charalambos its space was expanded towards the east. In 1790 extended repairs were made in the church and a narthex was built. In 1838, within a favourable climate, thanks to the beginning of the period of the [reforms of the Ottoman state](#), when the permits for the rebuilding and the repair of non-Muslim temples were given more easily, the church was rebuilt. The church could have suffered possible destructions by the [Janissary](#) corps with the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, which obviously caused the aforementioned reconstruction. The repairs were undertaken by the kalfa (master builder) [Chatzinikolis Niktaidis](#). In 1906 the church was repaired one more time after the earthquake of 1894 and its wooden-carved throne was created, whereas in 1920 its bell-tower was erected.²² The ecclesiastic complex was renovated for the last time in 1998 by the Nikolaos Vardinogiannis Foundation.²³

Apart from the [agiasma](#) of St. Charalambos, in the chapel under the board house of the parish there was a agiasma of [Vefa](#), which previously belonged to the Educational Macedonian Brotherhood.²⁴ Another important agiasma was the one attached to the parish of Cibali as the “holy agiasma of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin in Vefa Meidan”, which is reported that it existed from the Byzantine period in the quarter which later took the name Sforakiou, from the name of a Byzantine patrician.²⁵ Here, according to a tradition, the emperor [Constantine Palaiologos](#) was buried.²⁶

3.3. Population

After the Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople and according to a census of the [kadi](#) of the city, in 1478 there were 3,151 Greek-Orthodox households in the Constantinople peninsula.²⁷ During the next century the population, Muslim and non-Muslim, was raised.²⁸ Concerning the Orthodox population, according to registers of 1540 and 1544, related to the income of the [vakif](#) of Mehmet II, 1,547 Rums are documented within the city walls.²⁹ The Agia quarter, as the area was widely known until the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, was a vakif of [Hagia Sophia](#), but the capital tax was an income of the Fatih mosque. From the abovementioned registers of this vakif we are informed that in the Cibali or Agia Theodosia neighbourhood, known also as Mahalle-i Aya or Aya Kenisâsi Mahallesi, there were living before 1481³⁰ 10 families from [Lesvos](#), 55 families from [Trebizond](#) and 50 families of fishermen, in total 115 families.³¹ The origin of these Orthodox from different places apart from Constantinople is part of the [colonization policy](#) followed by the Ottoman state, which transferred to the new capital Muslim and non-Muslim populations from various newly-conquered regions. Also, and according to [Kritoboulos Imbrios](#), after the Conquest of the city, the sultan Mehmet II settled Greek-Orthodox “by the beach of the harbour of the city, who were mariners, people who were previously called Stenites, offering them houses and tax exemption for some time”.³²

From the beginning of the 19th century, the population gap created by the resettlement of the upper social strata of the Orthodox



community of Cibali is covered, mainly from the middle of the 19th century onwards, by numerous Orthodox immigrants from various places of the Ottoman Empire (mainly [Caramanlis](#) but also [other people from Asia Minor](#), Epirotans, [Macedonians](#)) and from the Kingdom of Greece. The new inhabitants came mainly from the middle and the lower social strata. Others made a fortune, whereas others lived in rented houses, although by the early 20th century the distinction between *ospitanoi* and *oikatores* had already vanished.³³ The constant waves of immigrants resulted in the expansion of the community towards the local hinterland.³⁴

3.4. Education and associations

The parish of St. Nikolaos had a [school for the Greek language](#) since 1770, which was housed near the church, and a “communal school”, which was located opposite the church, in a sea-side estate which belonged to it, as Manouil Gedeon informs us.³⁵ The two schools were housed together around 1837; few years later a school for girls was created and later a kindergarten. The construction of a proper building in the estate-garden of the church in order to house the community schools was made in 1906 thanks to a generous donation by Stefanos Zafeiropoulos; to honour him, the education complex was named “Zafeiropouleia Schools”.³⁶ The one-storey wooden building housed the kindergarten, the school for girls and the school for boys.³⁷ The school’s building was requisitioned during World War I, thus in that period school classes had to be relocated in houses of the area. In 1906-1907 was established a soup kitchen for poor students, which was housed in a building next to the school.³⁸ As every Rum community in the 19th century, the Cibali community too was largely [organized into associations](#). It is worth mentioning the following clubs and brotherhoods: in 1908 the “Achilles” [gymnastics club](#) was founded –the club also had an important band, the famous *fanfara*- which operated until 1922. The “Didaskalikos Syndesmos” (Teaching Association) was founded in 1906 and in 1911 the Teaching Gymnastic Club (“Didaskalikos Gymnastikos Syllogos”). From 1862 the “Mnemosyne Association in Fanari” was operating, initially based within the limits of the Cibali community. In the framework of its activity the club offered public lessons and organized [theatrical performances](#), whereas in 1870 an amateur theatrical group was also founded.³⁹

3.5. Decline

With the crossing to the Turkish Republic the community faced a series of problems. After the signing of the Lausanne treaty and the obligatory [population exchange](#), the community started weakening demographically. The first to leave were the ones who were not included in the category of the *établis*, i.e. the people who had settled in the city before the 5th October 1918. In the academic year of 1934-1935 76 children studied in the mixed five-grade school, a number which was reduced in the following years. During the 1920’s the possession of part of the land estate of the community was questioned.⁴⁰

In general, the community of Agios Nikolaos at Cibali was one of the communities which depleted fast in the era after 1923. After the fire of 1928 many parishioners either moved to other quarters, often keeping however their stores and workshops in the area (largely carpenter’s shops and wood warehouses), or gathered around the church. Also here we meet most of the Greek-Orthodox –most of them of Karamanli origin- until the 1950’s, on the central street which connected the beach with area within the city walls.⁴¹ In 1949, according to a patriarchal census, in the area there were 69 families, whereas in the community school there were 18 male and female students.⁴² In 1939 the community meal was reestablished as a philanthropic union, which few years later offered 100 portions of food serving also the quarter of Diplofanaro, located around the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but also the coastal zone of Fanari until Balata.⁴³ In 1953 a philanthropic brotherhood was also founded in the community.⁴⁴

However the decades which followed and the hostile climate of the relations between Greece and Turkey, mainly due to the Cyprus issue, led to the full disintegration of the community.

Generally, the area of Cibali, which was famous for its taverns, the coffee shops along the Golden Horn and its bakeries, became from the early years of the Turkish Republic and mainly after 1950 an infamous area, densely populated and noisy. Many internal immigrants lived here, mostly from the Black Sea and especially from the Rize region. Cibali was transformed in the 1980’s, when great reformation works were undertaken along the Golden Horn and all the coastal huts and workshops were demolished, along



with the crumbling building of the Zafeiropouleia Schools.

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25. The quarter was later known with the name of molla Semseddin Gürani, a favorite of the Conqueror, and of the also favorite of Mahmud II Sheikh Ebü'l Vefa, from which the name Vefa Meydan came, see Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Ενορίες Αγιωτάτης Αρχιεπισκοπής* (Athens 1996), p. 137.
26. According to an amusing popular tradition, the name Vefa was an alteration of the phrase “m’ efages” (you got me) which is considered to have been said, shortly before he died, by Constantine Palaiologos to the Ottoman soldier who killed him, see Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Ενορίες Αγιωτάτης Αρχιεπισκοπής* (Athens 1996), p. 137.
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28. According to Ottoman sources, between the years 1520 and 1535 the Christian population in Constantinople was 25,252, see Mantran, R., *Η καθημερινή ζωή στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον αιώνα του Σουλεϊμάν του Μεγαλοπρεπούς* (Athens 1999), p. 79.
29. These numbers however include only the people who paid a capital tax in this specific vakif. Γεράσιμος, Σ., «Έλληνες της Κωνσταντινούπολης στα μέσα του ΙΣΤ΄ αιώνα», *Η Καθ' ημάς Ανατολή 2* (1994), pp. 118-119.
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Glossary :

	agiasma The holy water (as well as the sacred place from where the water spurts), which the faithful drink, sprinkle or wash themselves in
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order to be healed.

board of schools

The board of schools (ephoreia) consisted of members either elected by the community or nominated by a commission. They were authorized to supervise the proper functioning of the educational institutions.

dragoman of the fleet

Office of the Ottoman administration, which used linguists among the citizens, as to all positions of dragomans (interpreters). The dragoman of the fleet had his see at the Kesim-Pasha in Istanbul, which hosted the administration of the fleet as well. He was engaged mainly to issues concerning the islands of the Aegean Sea, which belonged to the jurisdiction of kapudan-pasha. The most famed dragoman of the fleet was Nikolaos Mavrogenes, who, after about 30 years in duty, ascended the office of the potentate of Vallachia. The last dragoman of the fleet Nikolaos Mourouzis was assassinated in 1821 and the office was abolished.

kadi

Office that combined judicial, notarial and administrative duties. The kadi, who held court at the kaza's seat, registered all legal acts and documents in the court's codices (sicil). The kadi passed judgement based on the saria (the holy law of Islam), taking also into consideration the kanun (sultan law) and the customary law (örf). Resort to his court had all the subjects of the Empire. The kadi had also administrative duties, which he performed in collaboration with the officials of the kaza., and he had to supervise tax collection.

postelnikos

Postelnikos was an office in the Danubian Principalities. His duties were equivalent to those of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

wakf (vakif)

A foundation, a grant of land or other source of income, including tax revenues, which was considered to be dedicated according to the sacred law (şeriat) and was used for religious and charitable purposes.

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