

# Mediating Thresholds

## Yedikule Bostans & Theodosian Walls

Author: Elif İcen 10643210  
Supervisor: Prof. Henrique Pessoa Pereira Alves  
Co-Supervisor: Dr. Juliana Canedo  
Advisor: Arch. Tommaso Benassi



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## ABSTRACT

The line between history, culture and community disappears at Istanbul's Theodosian Walls and Yedikule Bostans. Bostans are traditional market gardens that existed for centuries alongside the land walls. They are living archives that embody agricultural practices and ways of coexisting that have connected people, land, and the city for generations. Today, the bostan tradition is threatened by urban pressures and the shift in legal status of gardeners from recognized protectors to informal occupiers. This puts cultural heritage and the people who have kept this landscape alive for centuries at peril.

By encompassing historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions into a cohesive framework, gardens and walls transform into shared spaces for collaborative learning, participation, and community preservation. It also shines a light on the bostans and gardeners by addressing issues of recognition, legitimacy, and access.

Research and design focuses on spatial practices which revitalize bostans and highlight their multifaceted importance. These interventions connect visitors to the historic structure and traditions. The design proposes a place to interact, observe, and experience by integrating the past and the present, human and non-human, the city and the productive landscape.

Yedikule Bostans are positioned as a cultural landscape that sustains memory, ecology, participation and visibility. By underlining the historical and contemporary significance of the site and suggesting interventions that support both use and recognition, the project offers a new understanding of cultural heritage where it is preserved, celebrated and incorporated into the contemporary community.

## ABSTRACT

Il confine tra storia, cultura e comunità svanisce presso le Mura Teodosiane di Istanbul e i Bostan di Yedikule. I bostan sono orti urbani tradizionali che sono esistiti per secoli lungo le mura terrestri. Rappresentano archivi viventi che incarnano pratiche agricole e modelli di coesistenza capaci di connettere persone, terra e città per generazioni. Oggi, la tradizione dei bostan è minacciata dalle pressioni urbane e dal cambiamento dello status giuridico dei coltivatori, passati da protettori riconosciuti a occupanti informali. Ciò mette a rischio il patrimonio culturale e le persone che hanno mantenuto vivo questo paesaggio per secoli.

Integrando le dimensioni storiche, culturali, sociali e politiche in un quadro coeso, i giardini e le mura si trasformano in spazi condivisi per l'apprendimento collaborativo, la partecipazione e la salvaguardia della comunità. Questo approccio getta inoltre nuova luce sui bostan e sui coltivatori, affrontando questioni di riconoscimento, legittimità e accesso.

La ricerca e il design si concentrano su pratiche spaziali che rivitalizzano i bostan e ne evidenziano l'importanza multiforme. Questi interventi connettono i visitatori alla struttura storica e alle tradizioni. Il progetto propone un luogo di interazione, osservazione ed esperienza, integrando passato e presente, umana e non umana, città e paesaggio produttivo.

I Bostan di Yedikule si pongono come un paesaggio culturale che sostiene la memoria, l'ecologia, la partecipazione e la visibilità. Sottolineando il significato storico e contemporaneo del sito e suggerendo interventi che ne supportino sia l'uso che il riconoscimento, il progetto offre una nuova visione del patrimonio culturale, in cui quest'ultimo viene preservato, celebrato e integrato nella comunità contemporanea-

## ÖZET

İstanbul'un Theodosius Surları ve Yedikule Bostanları'nda tarih, kültür ve topluluk birbirleriyle harmanlanır. Bostanlar, yüzyıllar boyunca kara surlarının yanında varlığını sürdüren geleneksel tarım alanlarıdır. Nesiller boyunca insanları, toprağı ve kenti birbirine bağlar. Tarımsal uygulamaları ve birlikte yaşama biçimlerini somutlaştırarak, yaşayan arşivler oluşturur. Günümüzde bostan geleneğı tehdit altındadır: Çünkü, hem kentsel baskılar artmış, hem de bostancıların yasal statüsü meşru koruyuculardan gayrimeşru işgalci konumuna kaymıştır. Bu durum, hem kültürel mirası hem de bu peyzajı yüzyıllardır yaşatan insanları tehlikeye atmaktadır.

Bu tezin amacı tarihsel, kültürel, sosyal ve politik boyutları bütüncül bir çerçevede bir araya getirmektir. Ayrıca bostanları, ortak öğrenme, katılım ve topluluk koruması için paylaşılan mekanlara dönüştürmektir. Bu yaklaşım, tanınma, meşruiyet ve erişim meselelerine değinerek bostanlara ve bostancılara da ışık tutar.

Araştırma ve tasarım, bostanları canlandıran ve onların çok yönlü önemini görünür kılan mekânsal pratiklere odaklanır. Bu müdahaleler, ziyaretçileri tarihsel yapıya ve geleneklere bağlar. Tasarım; geçmiş ile bugünü, insan ile insan dışını, kent ile üretken peyzajı bütünleştirerek etkileşim, gözlem ve deneyim alanı önerir.

Tez Yedikule Bostanlarını, toplumsal belleğı, ekolojiyi, katılımı ve görünürlüğünü sürdüren bir kültürel peyzaj olarak konumlandırılır. Alanın tarihsel ve güncel önemini vurgulayarak hem kullanımı hem de tanınmayı destekleyen müdahaleler önerir. Proje kültürel mirasın korunduğı ve çağdaş toplulukla bütünleştirildiğı yeni bir anlayış sunar.

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## GLOSSERY

**Bostan (pl. Bostans/Bostanlar):** Traditional urban market gardens in Istanbul that have existed for centuries. They are productive landscapes that provide food, support biodiversity, and function as living archives of collective agricultural knowledge.

**Bostancı (pl. Bostancis/Bostancılar):** The traditional gardeners and caretakers of the bostans. Historically a cosmopolitan workforce (including Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Macedonians), they possess deep agroecological knowledge. Today, they are often marginalized by the state as informal occupiers.

**Carrier Bag Theory:** A theory by Ursula K. Le Guin used in the thesis to redefine the architectural and historical narrative of the Land Walls. It shifts the perception of the walls from being a masculine defensive “weapon” (the spear) to a “protective vessel” (the bag) that historically held and nurtured the city’s provisions.

**Contact Zone:** A theoretical space (after Boaventura de Sousa Santos) that allows for “mutual intelligibility” between different experiences and forms of knowledge. In the project, it refers to dismantling the knowledge hierarchy so that traditional agro-ecological knowledge of the gardeners is treated as equal to academic expertise.

**Ecrimisil:** Formally a “compensation fee for the unauthorized use of property.” In the modern era, this squatter tax reclassifies gardeners from historical protectors to informal occupiers, creating legal and economic insecurity.

**Gentrifying Conservatism:** A neoliberal process where the language of environmental protection is used to justify socio-spatial control, replacing labor-intensive gardens with sterile, recreational parks to boost real estate value.

**Geoponika:** A 10th-century Byzantine farming manual documenting a millennium of botanical evolution and agricultural practices in Constantinople.

**Göz Hakkı (The right of the eye):** A cultural tradition allowing passersby to take a small share of produce as an act of shared abundance and social coexistence.

**Gray Space:** A governance concept by Oren Yiftachel describing urban developments positioned indefinitely between legality and eviction. In the context of the bostans, it refers to their legally ambiguous status; by keeping the gardens neither fully legalized nor completely eliminated, the state maintains the power to evict gardeners at will, trapping them in a highly vulnerable state of “permanent temporariness”.

**Inner Wall:** The primary defensive line featuring towers. Historically, the Theodosian Code (422 CE) permitted the lower floors of these towers to be used for storing agricultural tools and produce, marking the early institutionalization of the wall-garden relationship.

**Maşula:** A 1600-year-old traditional irrigation system consisting of specific planting beds equipped with water channels to ensure highly efficient water management.

**Outer Wall:** The secondary defensive line situated between the peribolos and the parateichion, serving as a structural buffer.

**Parateichion:** The area situated between the outer wall and the moat, forming the final landward plateau of the fortification system.

**Peribolos:** The terrace or spatial corridor located between the inner and outer walls.

**Renewal Area (Law No. 5366):** A legal designation that allows municipal authorities to override existing conservation master plans. Applied to the Yedikule bostans in 2006, this status exposes historically protected agricultural lands to speculative urban development, threatening the site's cultural and ecological heritage.

**Strategic Segregation:** A spatial design strategy inspired by historical Iranian Gardens. It physically separates recreational public spaces from professional agricultural zones using elevation differences, permeable fences, and plant buffers to protect fragile crops from disruption.

**Theodosian Code:** The 5th-century legal body containing the 422 CE edict that provides the earliest legal basis for the integration of agricultural storage within the wall towers.

**Theodosian Walls (Land Walls):** A 6.5-kilometer urban defense system built in 413 CE during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II. It is a tripartite system consisting of an Inner Wall, an Outer Wall, and a Moat. These layers transformed the city's periphery into a specialized socio-ecological zone where defense and food production were spatially integrated.

**Typika:** Byzantine monastic foundation documents (9th century onwards) providing textual evidence of the integral role of gardening and “gardener brothers” in monastic life near the walls.

**Urban Commons:** A framework viewing the bostans as shared community resources and sites of collaborative learning, essential for an integrated understanding of urban heritage.

**Vakıf (Waqf):** Ottoman religious and social foundations. Historically, a significant portion of bostans were owned by vakıfs to fund public services, institutionalizing the gardens as protected urban assets.

**Zoo Effect:** The risk of transforming active agriculture into a visual spectacle for tourists. It occurs when uncontrolled public access leads to the destruction of sensitive crops by visitors attempting to “engage” with the greenery.

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# Introduction

As empires rose and fell, the Theodosian walls stood tall, not merely as strategic barriers, but as a vessel bearing an agricultural legacy which nourished the city for centuries. In a symbiotic necessity with Istanbul's physical structure, these bostans and city walls endured for generations. Maintaining that delicate balance are the generations of gardeners known as bostanci. For centuries, they have acted as the primary stewards of the soil, preserving both agricultural knowledge and ecological continuity. This paper examines the cultural landscape of Istanbul's Land Walls and Yedikule Bostans as a historically unified system where defense, agriculture, and urban life have coexisted for over 1500 years.

However, this living heritage faces a crisis today. The escalating conflict between the preservation of productive landscapes and the pressure of profit driven urban development threaten the essence of the land walls. The gardeners are increasingly marginalized to informal occupiers, living in legal limbo with no guarantee of continuity. And modern heritage planning reduces the dynamic labor-intensive gardens to sterilized static monuments. Such interventions threaten to usurp the centuries-old agricultural fabric with sterile recreation parks, and risk the erasure of the region's biodiversity and the collective memory of those who sustain the area.

To prevent this erasure, the walls and gardens have to be redefined in such a way to resist reduction to mere relics without function, and empower bostancis over bureaucracy . Through a multidimensional framework combining field analysis and theoretical inquiry, bostancis become custodians of knowledge for these walls through their lived experiences rather than remnants of a bygone era. Gardens transform from a burden of centuries past into vital and shared urban spaces. While walls reemerge as a receptive vessel for life and community care, drawing on concepts such as cultivating care and carrier bag theory in architecture, rather than a military weapon.

The thesis proposes a hybrid landscape design that functions as a contact zone. By introducing spatial mediations that bridge the threshold between monumental preservation and contemporary community needs, the intervention seeks to renew the historic bond between the landwalls and bostans. Ensuring a resilient future where Istanbul's living heritage is not set in stone, but actively integrated into the city.

The chapter positions Istanbul's Theodosian Walls and bostans not as separate entities, but as a unified system of defense and agriculture established in 413 CE. From the Byzantine era, where defensive moats doubled as irrigation reservoirs, to the Ottoman period, where waqf revenues funded public services, tracing how these gardens sustained the city. However, in the 20th century, the dissolution of the waqf system and rapid urbanization stripped gardeners of their rights, reducing them to insecure tenants paying occupation tax (ecrimisil).

Ultimately, the chapter argues that modern heritage planning has often reduced the walls to a static monument, obscuring the deep, living history of cultivation that defined the landscape for centuries.

## History

### Theodosian Walls & Bostans



Fig.1 Map of Constantinople (1422) by Florentine cartographer Cristoforo Buondelmonte

### Byzantine Period

During the Byzantine period, fortification reached its most developed phase, within which defense, agriculture, and water infrastructure functioned as a unified system. In 413 CE, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II, construction of the Theodosian walls began. The construction began further west of the previous walls of Constantin, increasing the size of the city. Their construction was a response to the needs of the growing city and the increasing threats from external forces. Theodosian walls incorporated a three-layered defense system, including an inner wall, an outer wall, and a moat. They were built following the defense system typology seen in pre-antiquity Anatolian and Mesopotamian cities. The walls are divided by towers for archers and artillery. The new walls, spanning approximately 6.5 kilometers, were one of the most advanced defense systems of their time.(Güler 2022, 441)

Theodosian Walls not only protected the city from military incursions but also symbolized the power and wealth of the Byzantine Empire. Even though they were the most advanced of their time, they faced constant threats from natural disasters and invasion threats. Between the 5th and 15th centuries, they were damaged by multiple earthquakes and invasions, resulting in many repairs and modifications.

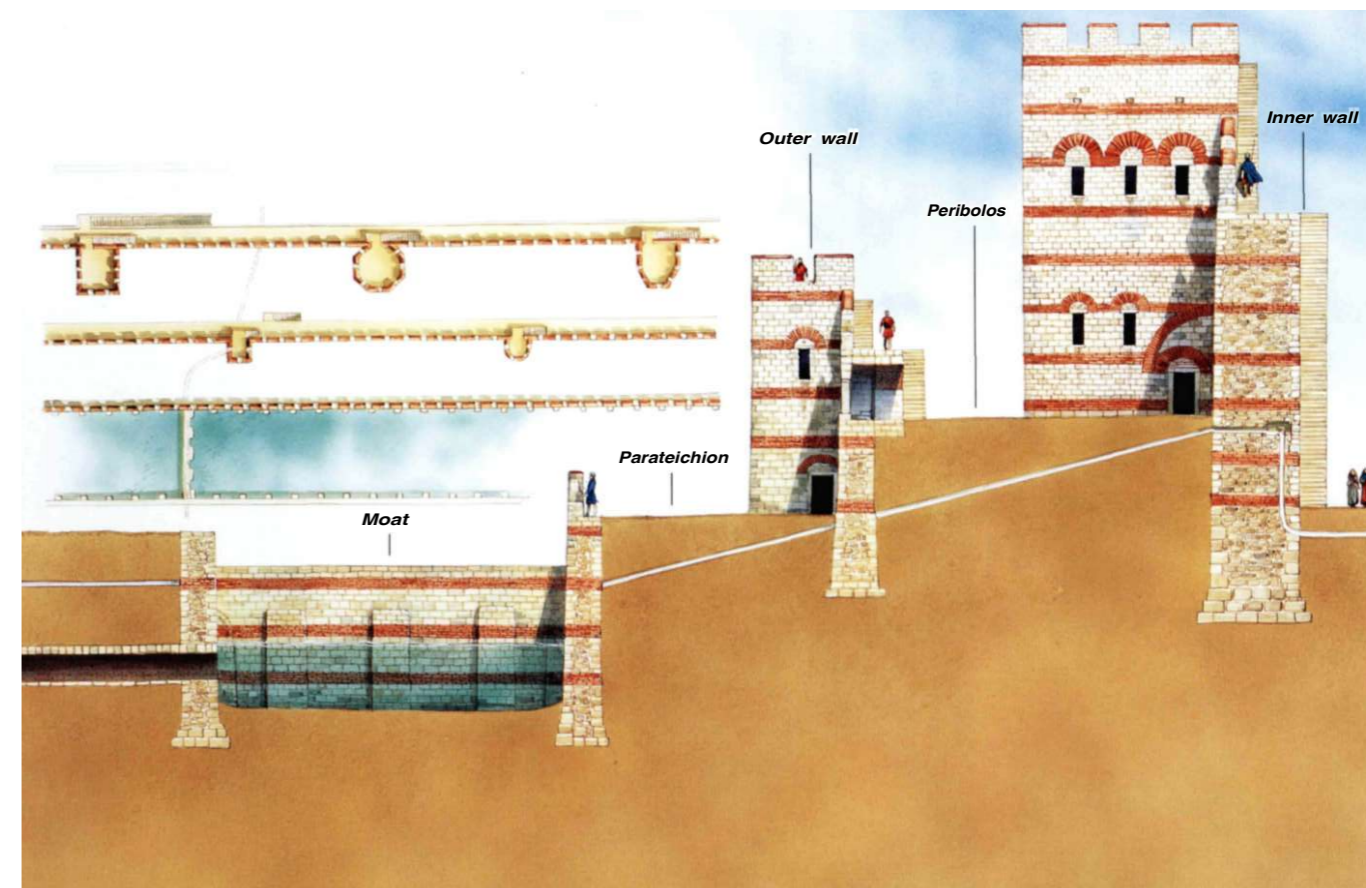


Fig.2 Cross-section and plan of the Theodosian walls illustrated by Stephen Turnbull

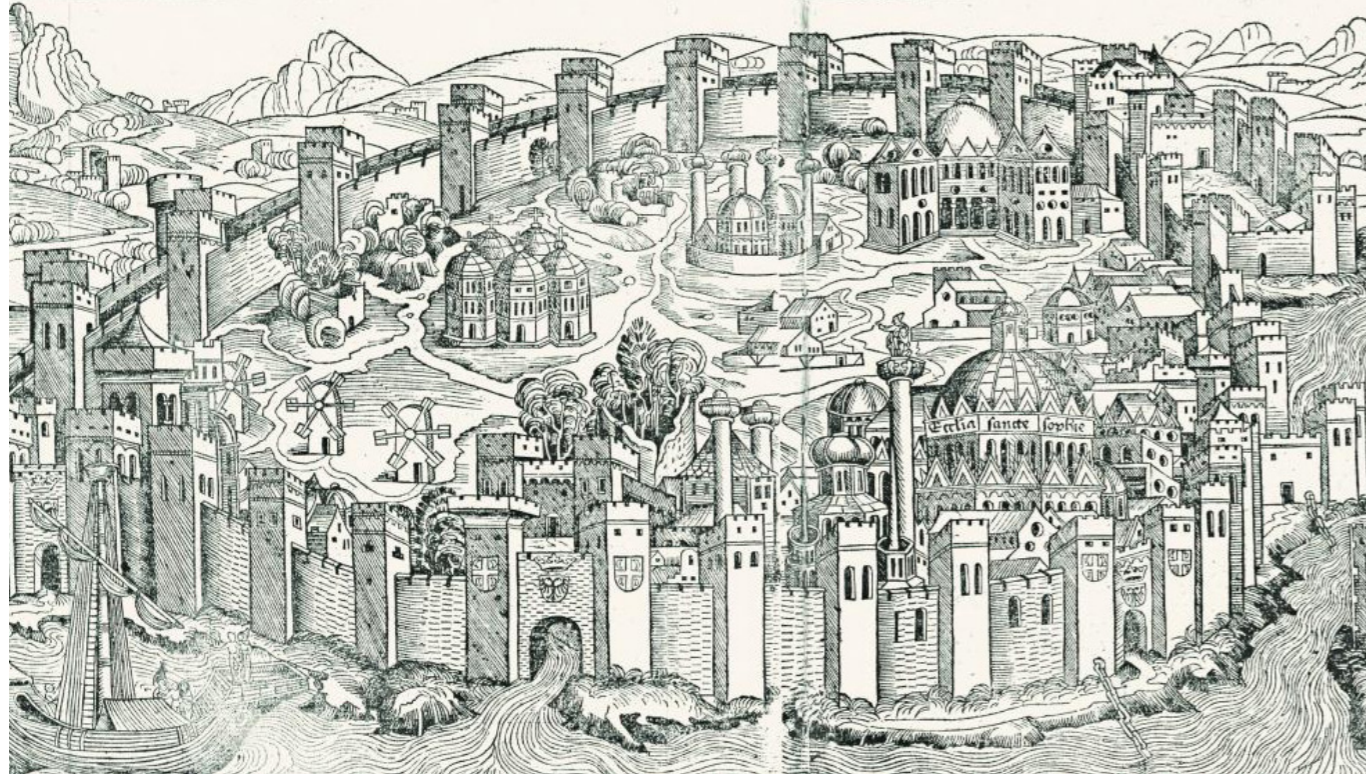


Fig.3 Hartmann Schedel, the first printed map of Istanbul, 1493, woodcut.

From their earliest years, the Land Walls were embedded within a productive agricultural landscape, later known as bostans. Bostans have met the vegetable needs of Istanbul since the Byzantine Period till today. These gardens along and around the walls are documented almost immediately after their construction. The earliest mention dates back to 422, just a few years after their completion, in an edict found in the Theodosian Code (Book VII.8.13)

This edict permitted the lower floors of the towers in the inner wall to be used privately, particularly for the storage of agricultural tools and produce belonging to the landowners in the surrounding areas. (Ricci 2008, 3)

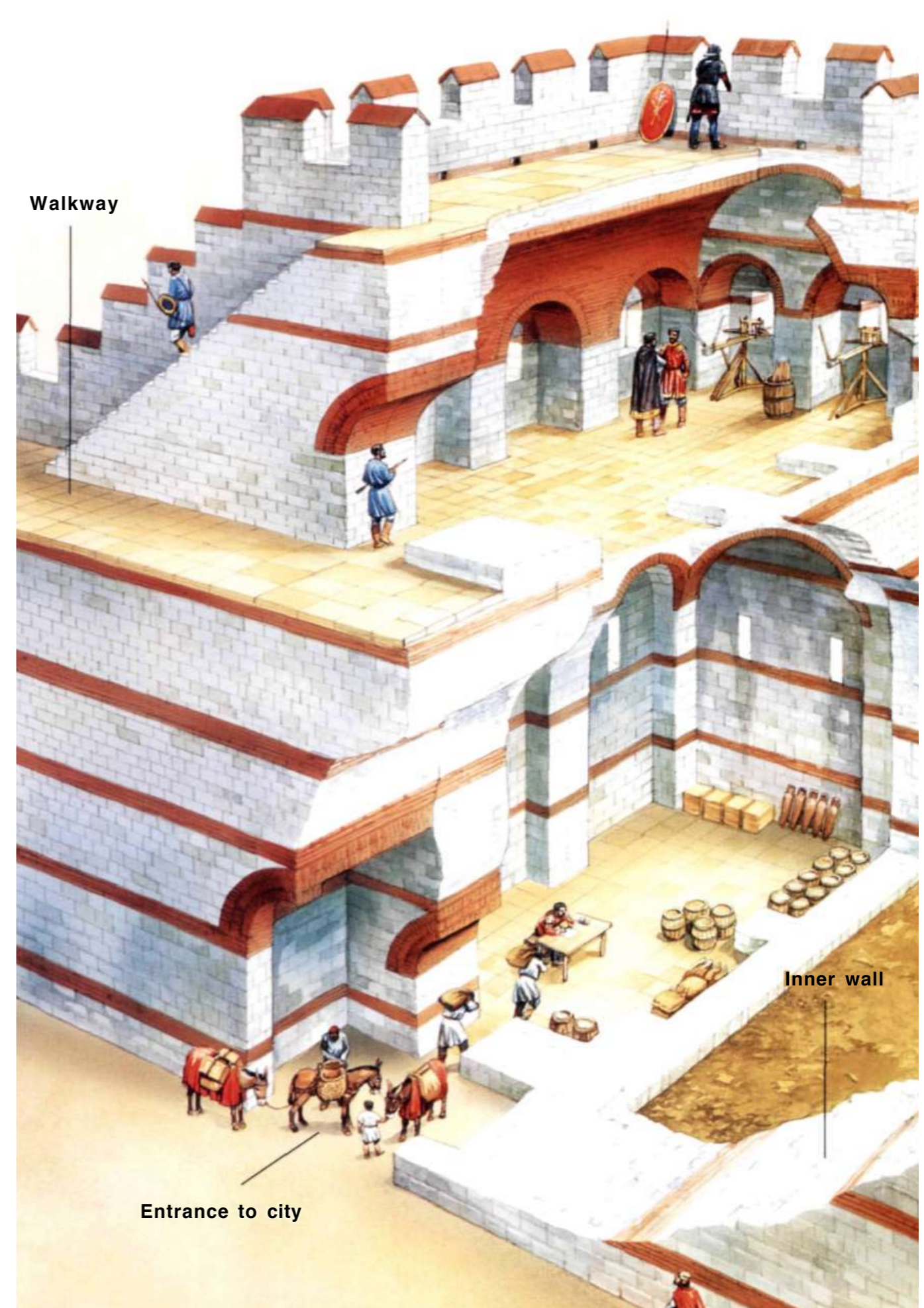


Fig.4 A cutaway section of one of the towers of the Theodosian walls, illustrated by Stephen Turnbull

## Monastic Practices

One of the earliest textual references to these gardens is from the Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents (typika). The Stoudios Monastery, located near the southern end of the Land Walls, provides significant insight. The Typikon of Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople, dated 842, states the following about its finances:

“Though there is no direct testimony, it would appear that the monastery itself was supported by the income from a landed endowment [4], cf. [21], worked, evidently, by free labor, since both agricultural and personal slaves are explicitly forbidden. Nothing is said about any manual labor engaged in by the monks, though we know from other sources that monks were engaged in agricultural labors at the Studite monasteries outside Constantinople, though not at Stoudios itself.” (Thomas et al. 2000, 71)

The agricultural activities are highlighted in many of these typika for the monasteries in close vicinity to the Land Walls. For instance, the Typikon of Athanasios Philanthropenos for the Monastery of St. Mamas, located near the Belgirate Gate, dated 1158, includes the following:

“ (...) The monks’ signatures at the end of the document include those of two vine-dressers, a groom, a baker, and a gardener as well as the above-mentioned gatekeeper. (...) He specifically provides that vine-dressers, gardeners and others working outside the monastery should take meals along with the other monks in order that “the name ‘brotherhood’ may not be just a name.” (Thomas, Hero, and Constable 2000, 979)

These documents from the 10th and 12th centuries highlight the integral role of gardeners in monastic life. Gardeners not only provided essential produce for the monks’ largely plant-based diets but also participated in the daily communal practices of the monastery. This underscores the close connection between monastic communities and agricultural activities in the Byzantine period.

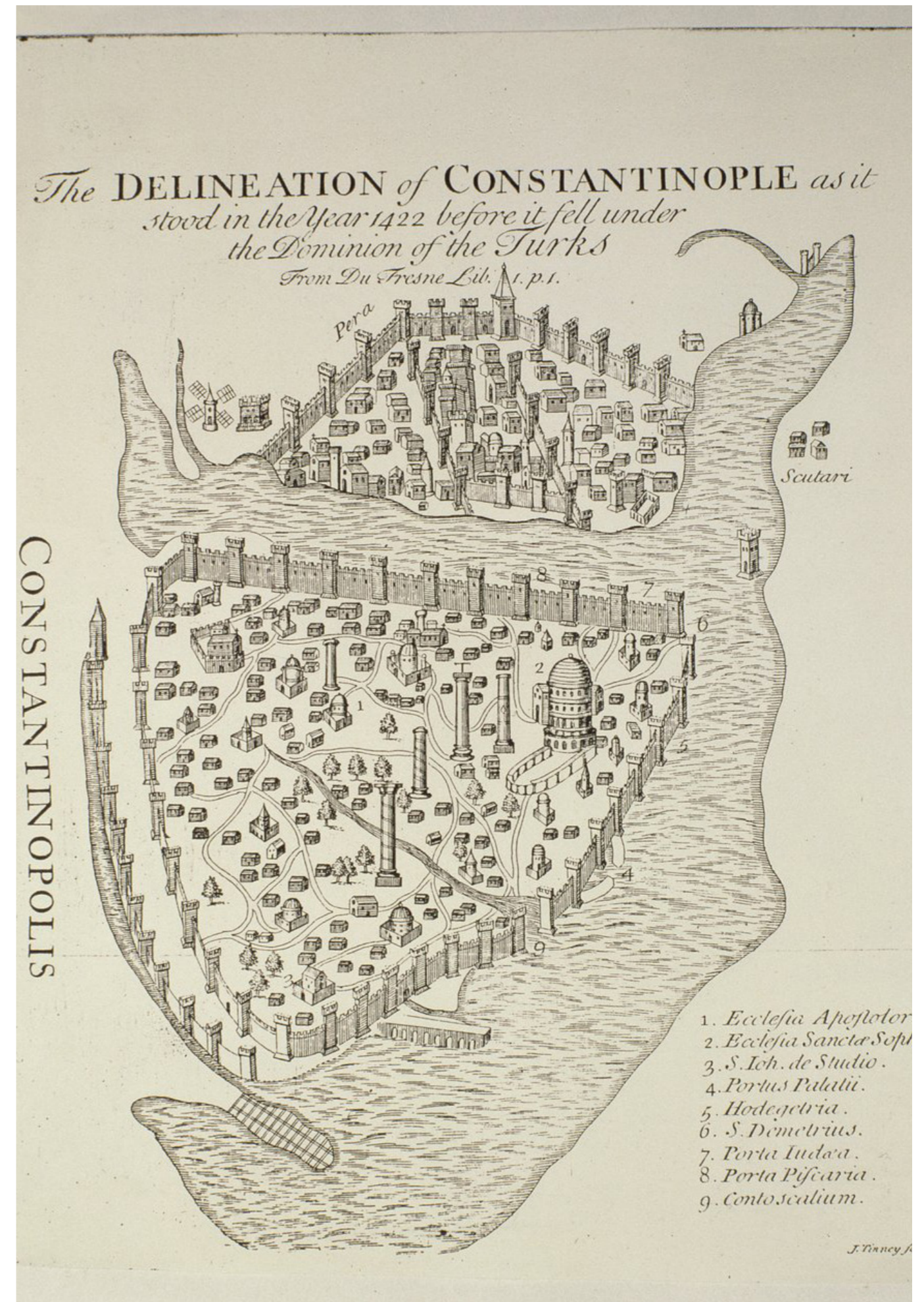


Fig.5 Cristoforo Buondelmonti, the earliest known map of Istanbul; drawn in 1420, printed by Anselmo Banduri in 1711.



Fig.6 Workers in the field (below) and payment scene (above), from an 11th-century Byzantine Gospel, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Cod. gr. 74.

### The Geoponika

In the 10th century, the landscape around the Land Walls was mentioned in the Geoponika. This book is a Byzantine farming manual compiled in the 10th century, dedicated to the Emperor Constantin Porphyrogenitus who ruled from 913 to 959. The Geoponika is a comprehensive guide to agricultural practices, drawing from centuries of knowledge and sources as early as the 3rd century. The agriculture in Constantinople is especially mentioned in Book 12. In the Geoponika 12.2 Florentinus talks about the importance of gardening for Byzantians:

**“Gardening is essential to life. For health and convalescence a garden should be developed not at a distance from the house, but in proximity to it, where it will give enjoyment to the eyes and pleasure to the sense of smell...” (Cassianus, 2011)**

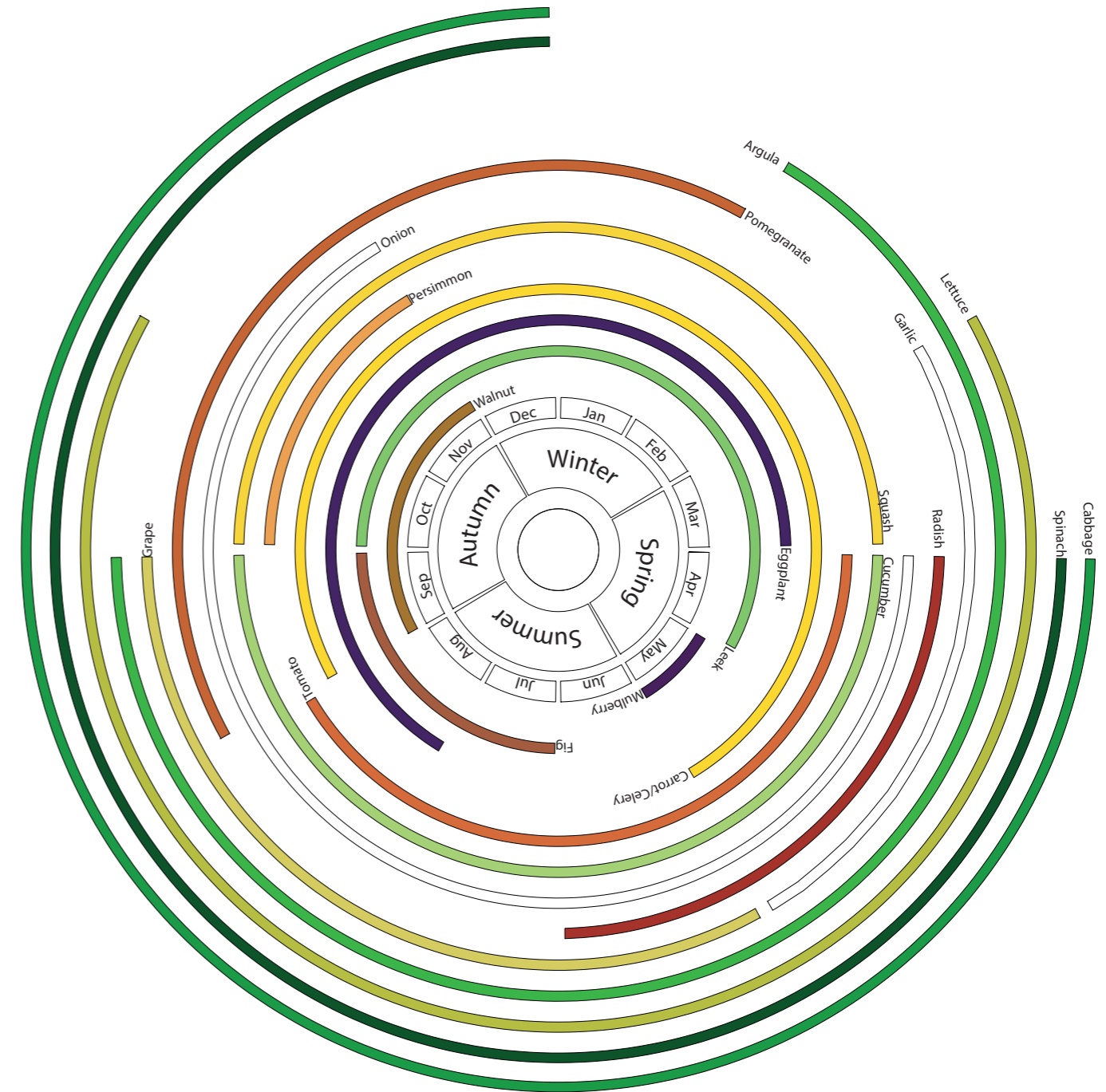


Fig.7 Visualization of which fruits and vegetables are available each month. Produced by the author

The book starts with chapter 12.1: What is sown and what is planted out month by month in the latitude of Constantinople. This chapter was probably written by Kassianos Bassos in the early sixth century. Bassos mentions a large variety of green salads, endive, carrots, onions, cabbage, lettuce along with mustard, rabe and collars. Interestingly legumes, olives, millet and eggplants are not mentioned in the text even though they are grown today. According to Koder, there are 2 explanations: the first one is the climate and the second one is that this chapter of the book was concentrated on fresh vegetables that are hard to transport, thus needing to be cultivated near the consumers.(Koder 1995, 51)

“(…) at least between 2 and 3 km square of the area inside the walls of Constantinople could be used for agriculture and especially for vegetable gardening. (…) In addition to the 2-3 km square inside Constantinople we can imagine that outside the city, along the Theodosian walls (for a length of about 6 km) at least another 10-12 km square could be used for gardening purposes at a distance not more than 2-3 km from the walls…”(Koder 1995, 53)

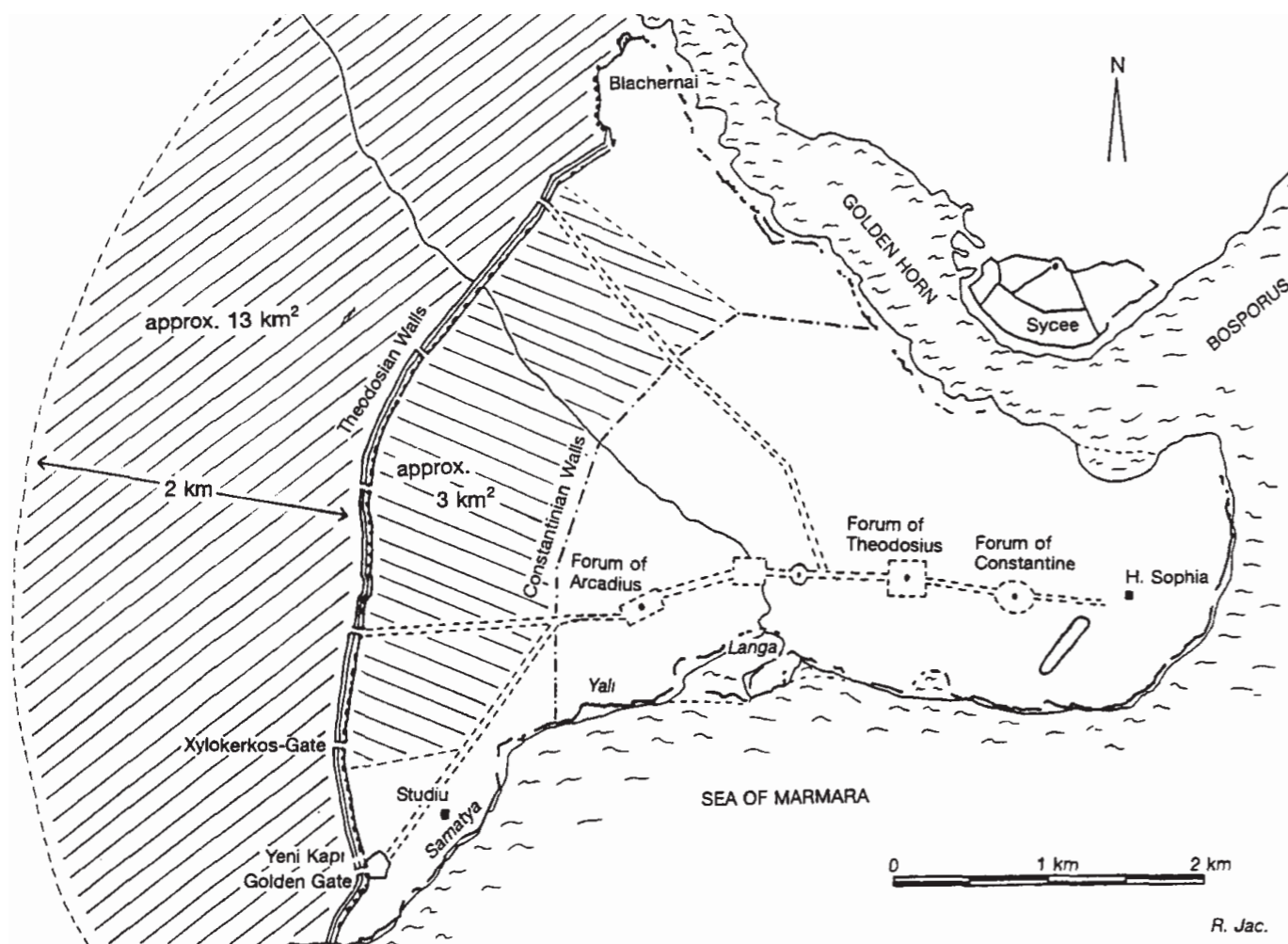


Fig.8 The horticultural zones of Constantinople based on the studies of Koder

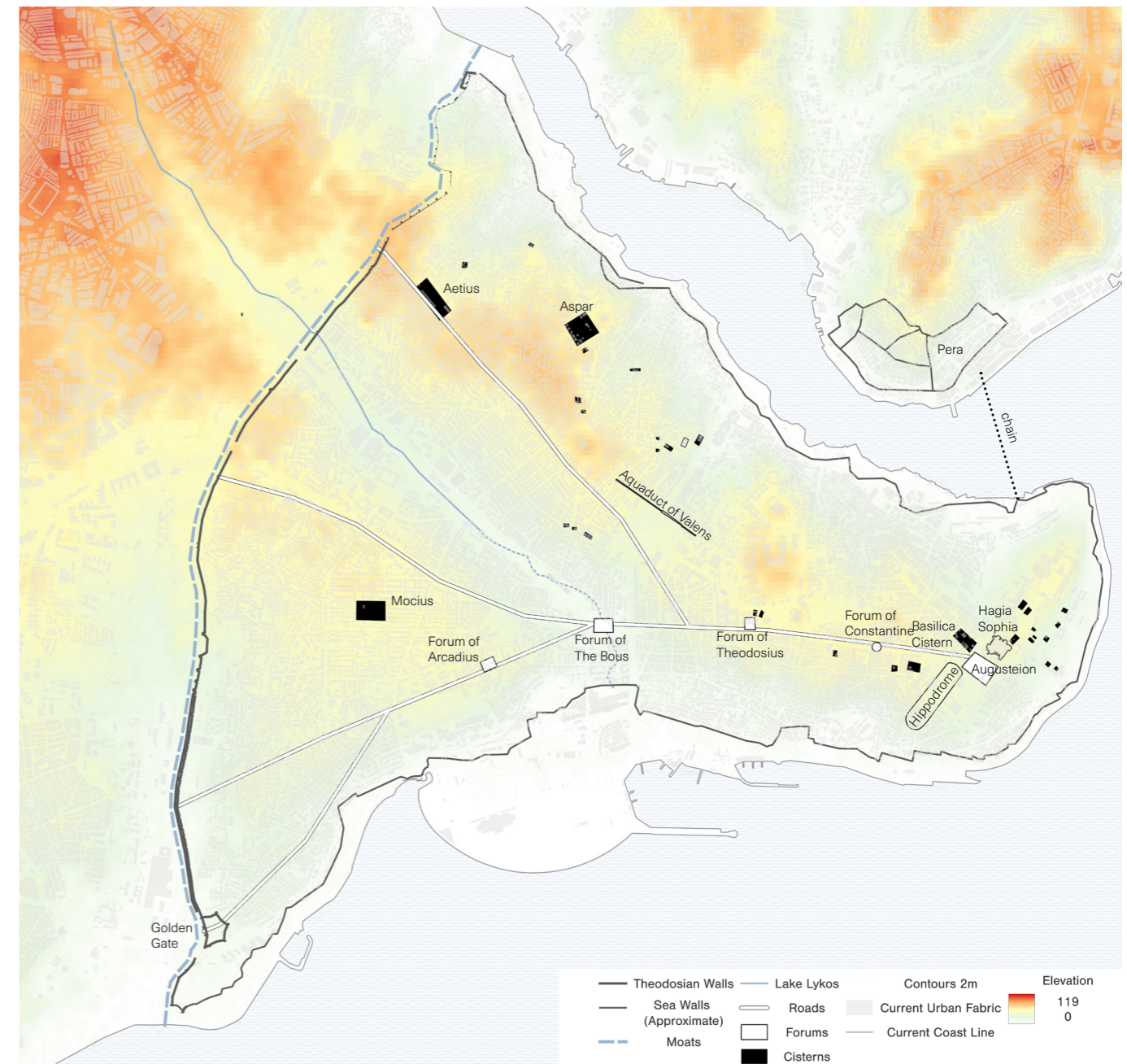


Fig.9 Historical map of Constantinople visualized by the author

### Water Systems and the Bostans

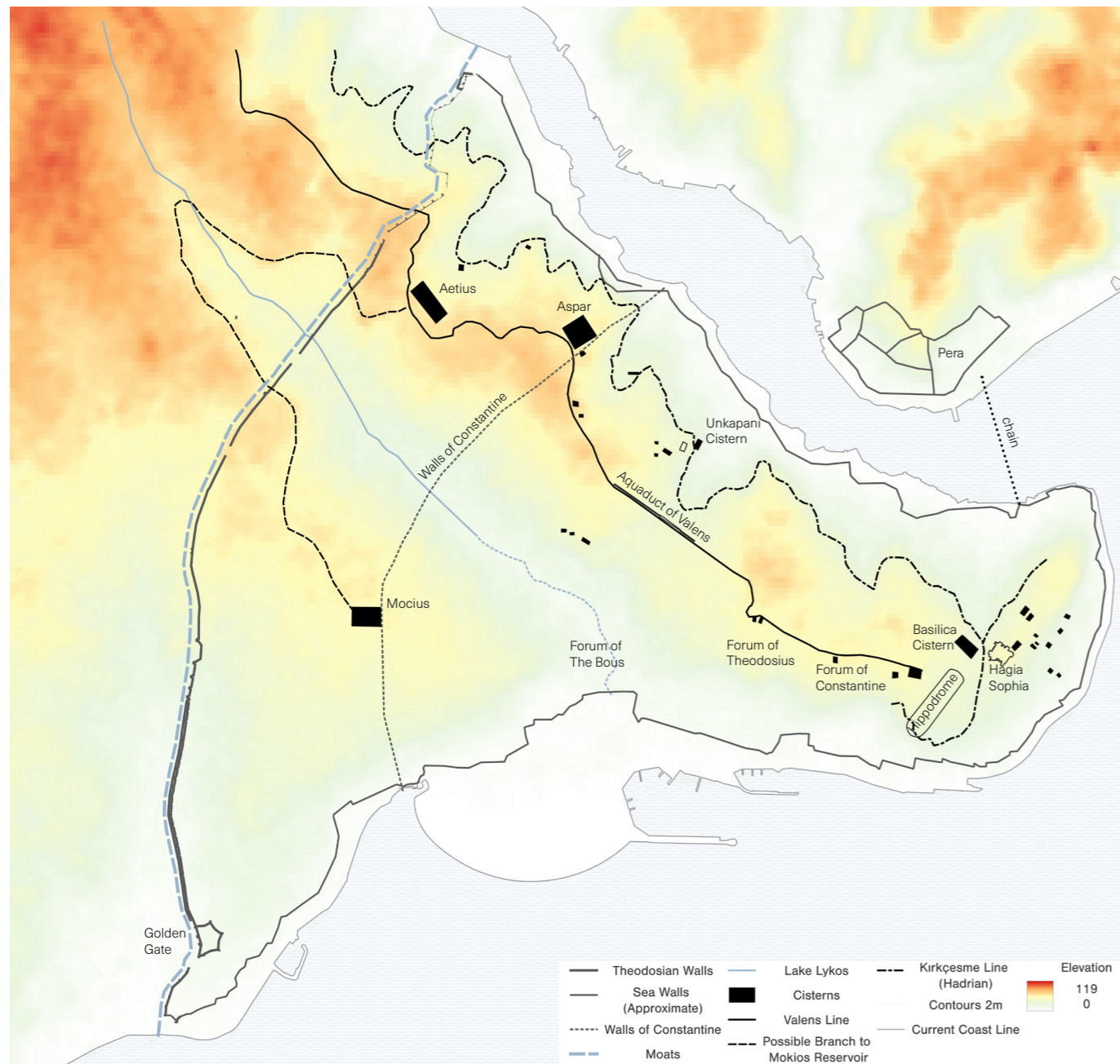
Agricultural practices are inherently tied to water supply and hydraulic systems. Since the Byzantine period, water wells, aqueducts, and cisterns have formed crucial irrigation systems ensuring the sustainability of the gardens.(Shopov and Han 2013, 38) These systems were especially important during times of low rainfall.

The water supply and hydraulic system map of Constantinople and the historic bostans overlap significantly when the bostans, the Land Walls, and the topography are considered together. The moats located on the outside of the Land Walls reinforce the idea that bostans were a crucial component of both the Land Walls and the water supply systems, particularly during times of peace. This indicates that bostans were not

merely agricultural areas but also part of a complex water management system.(Çorakbaş et al. 2014, 38)

In the Byzantine period, open-air cisterns such as Aetius, Aspar, and Mokios were used for water storage and irrigation. After the 15th century, these cisterns were transformed into bostans, and their names were changed accordingly. For example, the Aetius cistern became Karagümrük Çukurbostanı, the Aspar cistern became Çarşamba Çukurbostanı, and the Mokios cistern became Altımermer Çukurbostanı, referring to their topographic qualities as basin (çukur). However, these çukurbostans were destroyed starting from the 1940s, and football fields, marketplaces, and social complexes were built in their place. Today the area doesn't have any traces of these bostans.(Çorakbaş et al. 2014, 38)

Water wells were used to meet the water needs of the bostans. Water was drawn from the water wells in the



bostans using animal-powered water-drawing devices called “bostan dolapları”. As Orhan Okay, a famous Turkish literature professor and a writer, recalls,

“I remember... a “bostan dolabı” (waterwheel) operated by a donkey, squeaking as it drew water.”

The moats, in addition to their defensive purposes, were also used as an important water source. Especially during times of peace, the water accumulated in the moats was used to irrigate the bostans. This demonstrates that the moats were not only of military significance but also supported agricultural activities.(Çorakbaş et al. 2014, 38)

The presence of moats created a naturally humid environment for the bostans. This humidity, formed by the water pools, helped reduce the impact of drought, particularly during the summer months, allowing plants to grow more effectively. A natural ecosystem was formed

between the moats and the bostans: the water in the moats increased the productivity of the bostans, while the bostans contributed to the biodiversity of the moats.

Today, most of the Yedikule bostans are located directly above the moats, offering certain advantages for plant cultivation. The richness of groundwater, the humid soil structure, and the microclimatic conditions could enhance the productivity of the bostans. However, the current irrigation needs of the bostans are primarily met through wells and pools. While the moats themselves are no longer a direct water source, they provide a suitable foundation for the accumulation of groundwater.(Kiran 2019, 182) This allows plant roots to more easily access groundwater, helping to meet their water requirements. This prevents plants from experiencing water stress and supports their healthy growth. In these areas, temperature fluctuations are less severe, and plants are less affected by adverse weather conditions.

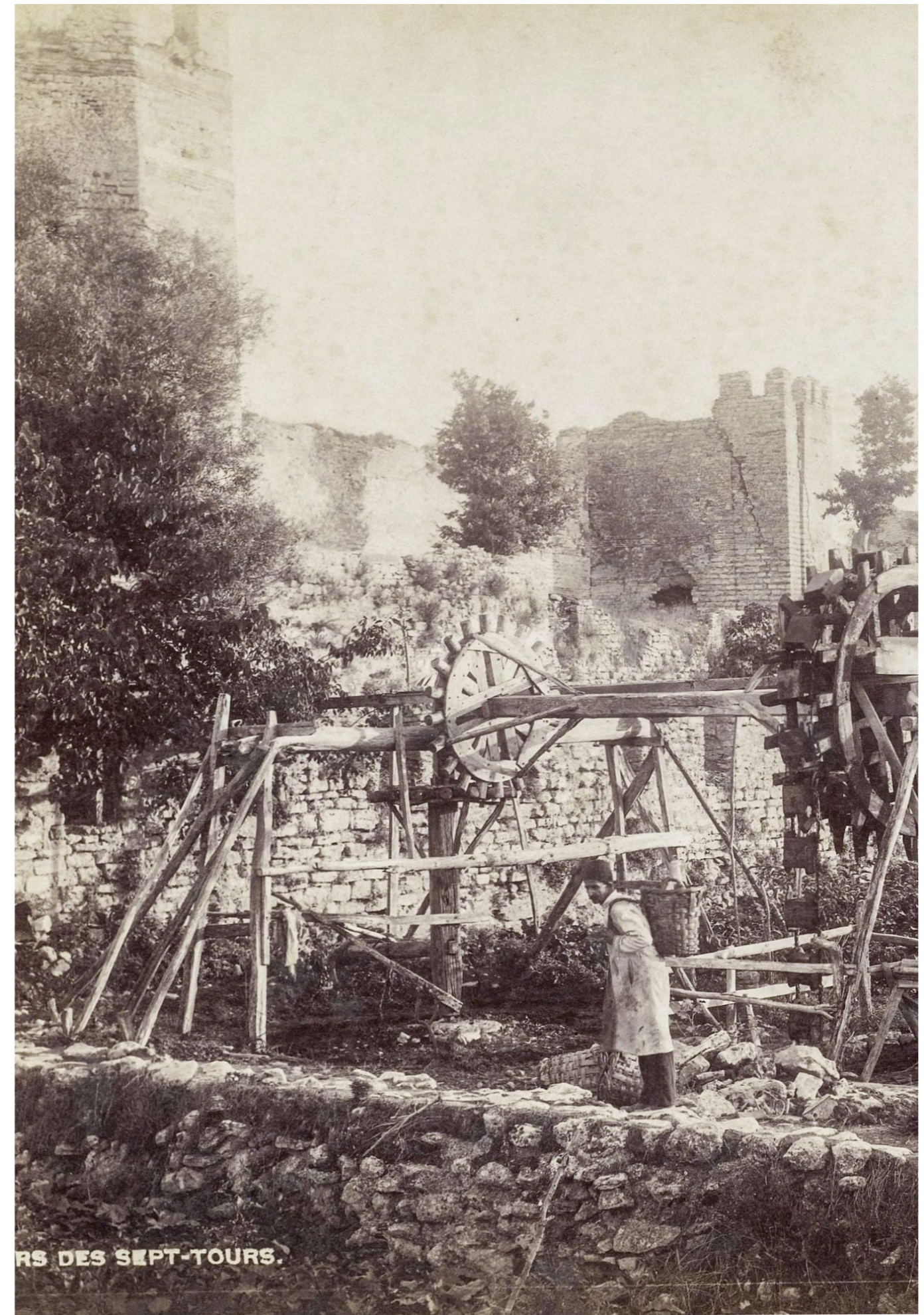


Fig.11 An old photo showing bostans inside the moat of the Land Walls (Ortaylı, İlber, 2003, “Tarihsel Perspektiften Sur Dışı”, in *Surların Öte Yanı Zeytinburnu*, edited by Burçak Evren, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 154-163).

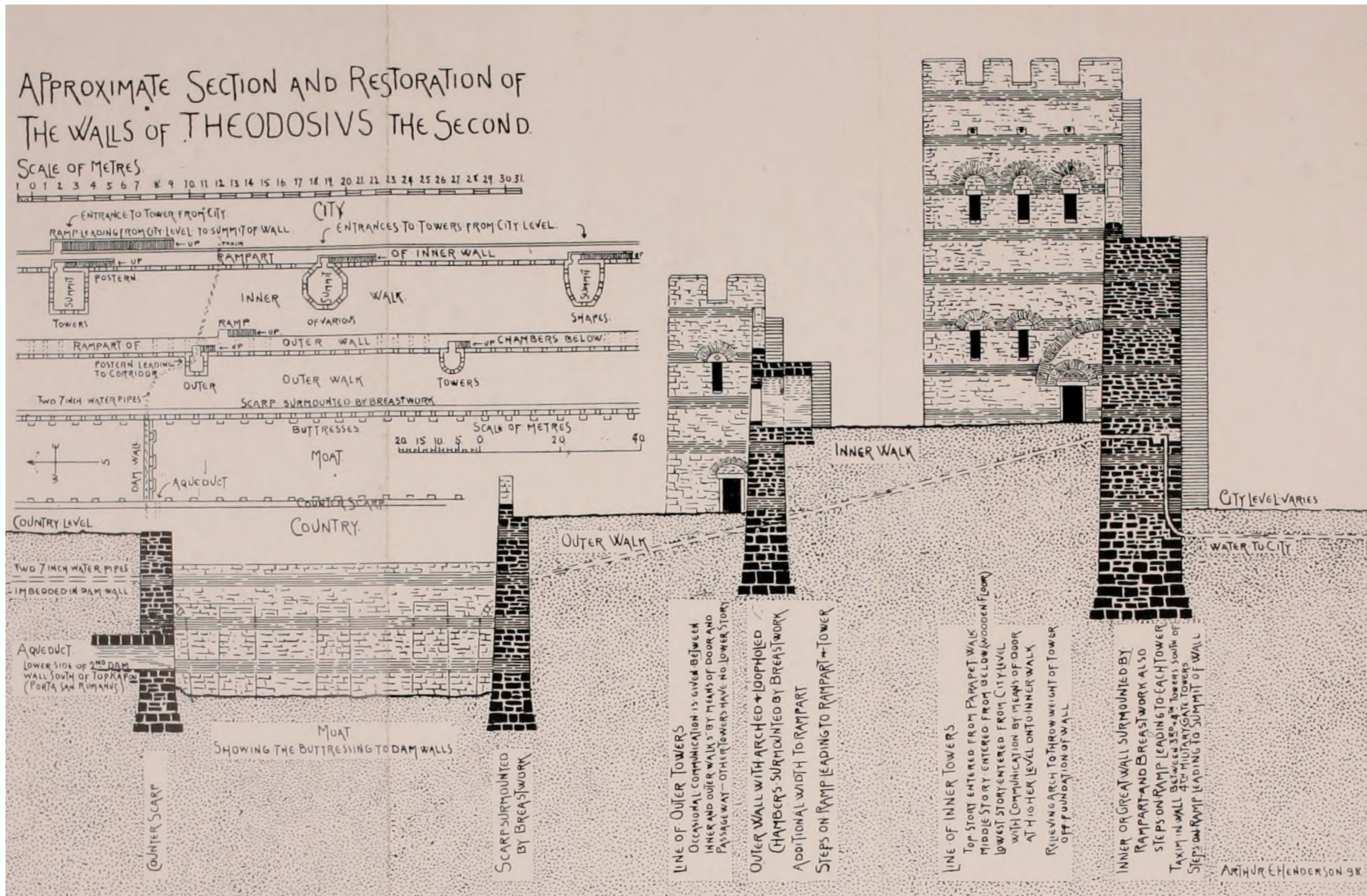


Fig.12 Approximate Section and Restoration of the Walls of Theodosius the Second by Arthur Henderson, 1899

## The Fall of Constantinople and the Ottoman Period

The Ottoman conquest of Istanbul in 1453 caused significant changes in both the demographic structure and the urban landscape of the city. It became a necessity to make new arrangements to meet the city's needs. During the conquest Ottomans used heavy cannon fire, causing significant damage to the walls. The Sultan of the time, Sultan Mehmet II repaired the damaged parts and constructed the Yedikule Fortress to be used as a stronghold, treasury, and ceremonial gateway. While the walls retained their monumental presence, their defensive function no longer relevant. The walls remained a framework supporting new urban, economic, and agricultural systems.

After the conquest, various steps were taken to rebuild and repopulate Istanbul. Sultan Mehmed II supported economic and social revitalization by bringing skilled people to the city from other regions. As part of this effort, approximately 30,000 villagers were settled around Istanbul, and they were tasked to contribute to meet the city's food needs. With these settlements, existing bostans were reorganized and new ones were established.

During the Ottoman period, bostans in Istanbul were widespread both inside and outside the city walls. These bostans were particularly concentrated in the areas adjacent to the Theodosian walls, meeting a significant portion of the city's fresh vegetable needs. While bostans were primarily used for vegetable production, some also included fruit trees. Bostans were not just areas of production, but also a significant part of the city's culture and social life. Different neighborhoods were known for the specific produce and the bostan keepers were respected and considered experts.

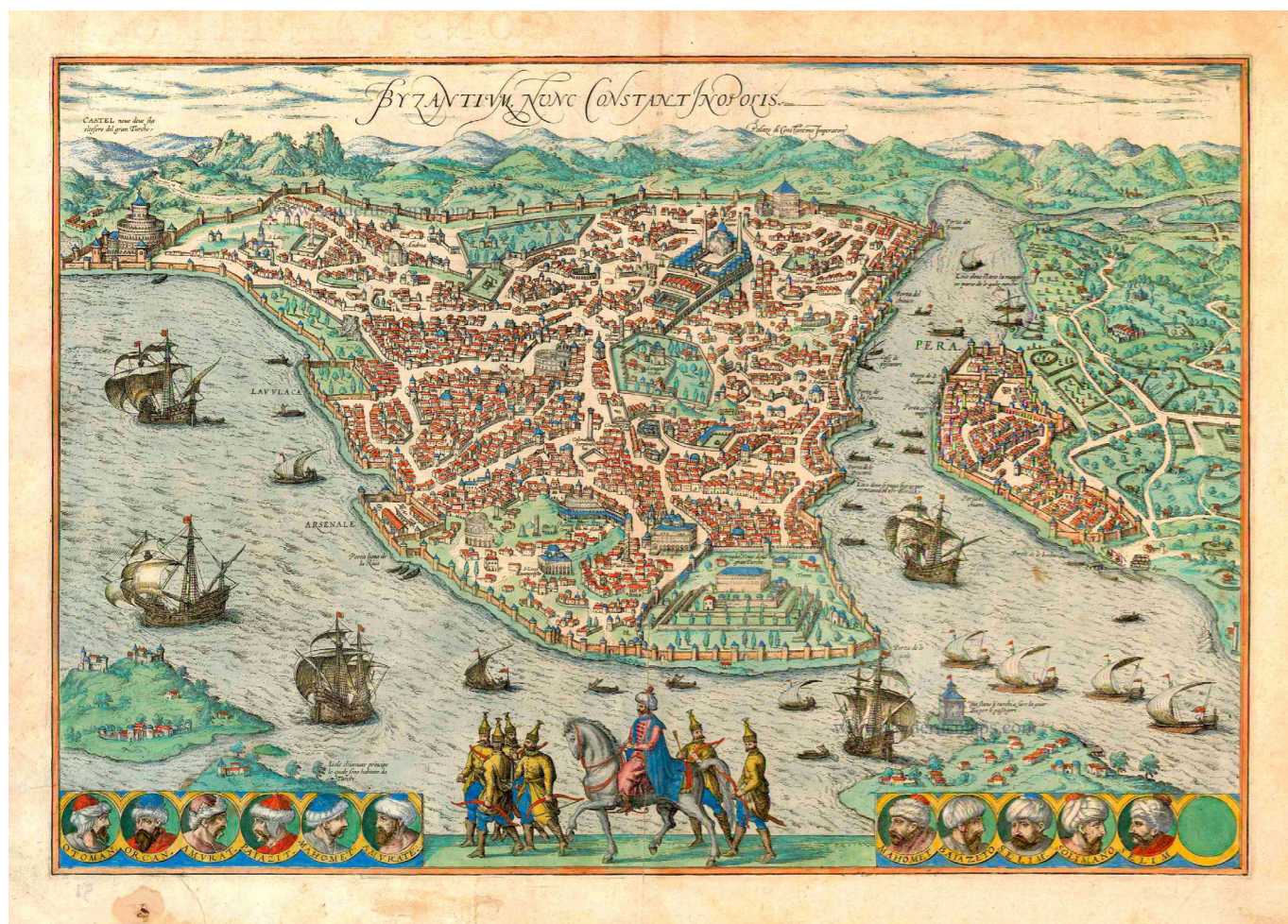


Fig.13 Byzantium Nunc Constantinopolis (Byzantium now Constantinople), published in 1572 by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg.



Fig.14 Le siège de Constantinople (1453) by Jean Le Tavernier after 1455



Fig.15 The May 10 1556 Istanbul (Constantinople) earthquake. Hand colored woodcut. Private collection, Prague. (Printed by Herman Gall in Nuremberg, 1556)

During this period, the walls suffered from two major earthquakes, one was referred to as the “small apocalypse” in 1509, and the other in 1766. The people who lost their houses due to these earthquakes used the material from the walls to rebuild their homes.

The rulers of the time turned a blind eye towards the people and even though the walls were somewhat repaired, they stayed mostly damaged.(Arabacıoğlu and Aydemir 2008, 72) By the 19th century, the defensive function was almost completely lost due to the advancements in artillery; consequently, parts of the walls were demolished to use for building materials or to open up space for infrastructure projects like railroads. Fortunately, international pressure helped to curb the destruction. In 1894, the walls faced another earthquake that caused significant damage, and due to the economic hardship and warfare the Ottoman Empire was facing at the beginning of the 20th century, they were not repaired. In 1910, there was a discussion about demolishing the walls, filling the moats, and building a ring road. The discussion was short-lived due to the opposition from Turkish and international archaeologists.(Arabacıoğlu and Aydemir 2008, 74)

### Bostans Under Vakif Ownership

During the Ottoman period, a significant portion of the bostans in Istanbul were owned by vakıfs. Vakıfs were religious and social institutions established to fund charitable works and social services. These foundations would operate the bostans to generate income, which would then be used in accordance with the vakıf's objectives.

Vakif lands were used for various agricultural purposes. In Bahaddin Yediöldiz's article titled “The Economic Aspect of 18th Century Turkish Foundations” (Vakıflar Dergisi XVIII, Ankara, 1984, pp. 5-41), the author categorizes agricultural lands and enterprises belonging to foundations into seven types: land plots, gardens, bostans, meadows, fields, farms, and mukataa (tax farms). Among these, two types of land: gardens and bostans are similar. This diversity shows the wide range of agricultural activities that vakıfs were involved in and their ability to produce for different needs.

**Bostans, specifically, were generally allocated for vegetable production, enclosed by walls, and contained small houses for the gardeners, stables, water wells, and pools.(Bilgin 2010, 87)**



Fig.16 Plan of the city of Constantinople and its suburbs, in both Europe and Asia; geometrically surveyed in 1776 by Franz Kauffer, verified and augmented in 1786 by Kauffer and M. Le Chevalier.

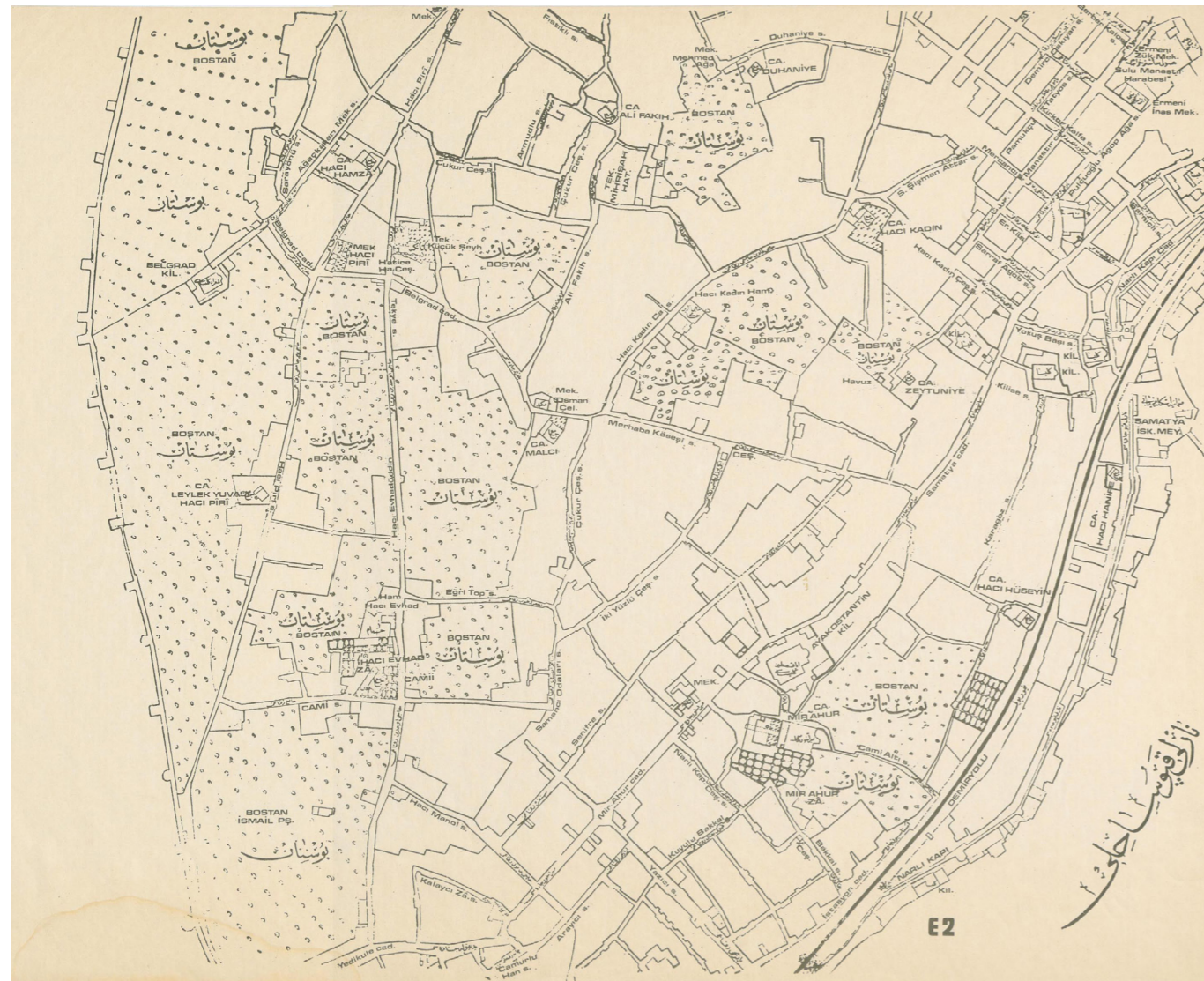


Fig.17 Map showing Yedikule in 19th century by Ekrem Hakki Ayverdi

## Waqf-owned bostans were generally located in the inner and outer parts of the city walls and were particularly concentrated in regions such as Langa and Yedikule.

### Prevalence and Operation of Waqf Bostans

A 1735 register of guarantors (kefil defteri) records 1,381 bostancı (gardeners) working in 344 bostans within the walls of Istanbul (Shopov and Han 2013, 35). This number does not include the Hassa (imperial) gardens; the inclusion of which would provide a more complete picture of the size and scale of agricultural production in Istanbul.

A 1585 foundation deed (vakfiye) indicates the need to protect 18 bostans belonging to the Süleymaniye Waqf in Langa, highlighting the value of bostans within the city and their vulnerability to construction (Çorakbaş et al. 2014, 44). The 1634-35 Bayram Pasha foundation deed emphasizes that agricultural lands extended to the city walls and underscores the significance of these lands (Shopov and Han 2013, 36)

### Characteristics and Locations of Waqf Bostans

Waqf records often mention the presence of structures such as wells, water wheels, pools, bostancı rooms, and stables within the bostans. These structures were essential for irrigating the bostans, housing the workers, and caring for the animals. A 1708 foundation deed mentions a large well, a water wheel, a gardener's room, a toilet, a barn, and a stable in a bostan near Yedikule, demonstrating the sophisticated infrastructure of waqf bostans. In the 1634-35 Bayram Pasha deed, it is stated that agricultural lands within the city walls reached the city walls and when describing the boundaries of a fruit garden, the wall of a mosque, endowed rooms, private property, the city wall, and roads are mentioned. This garden also had structures such as a pool, two water wells, a kitchen, and a stable, and extended from the Yedikule walls to the Hacı Piri Mosque. (Shopov and Han 2013, 36)

Waqf-owned bostans were generally located in the inner and outer parts of the city walls and were particularly concentrated in regions such as Langa and Yedikule. A 1491 waqf accounting does not mention any agricultural land within the city walls belonging to the Hagia Sophia Waqf, but a 1765 vakfiye indicates that the same waqf owned a large agricultural land in the Langa bostan. This suggests that waqfs became more interested in agricultural lands inside the city walls over time. It is seen that some bostans in the Yedikule region were operated by state administrators (Bayram Pasha, Ismail Pasha, Hazinedarbaşı Süleyman Ağa), reflecting the importance the state placed on agricultural activities and the investments made in this area. Although the Yedikule inner city agricultural lands are not mentioned in the 15th and 16th century surveys, it is understood that from the 17th century onwards, waqfs invested in these lands and transformed them into agricultural production sites. In the 1709 Hazinedarbaşı Süleyman Ağa deed, it is stated that the waqf property in Hacı Piri Street was limited by the Belgrad Church and Bayram Pasha Garden, demonstrating that neighboring properties were an important point of reference in determining the boundaries of waqf lands. (Shopov and Han 2013, 36)

### The Origins and Demographics of the Bostancı

In Ottoman Istanbul, the workforce within the bostans was remarkably diverse, yet it was predominantly made up of individuals of Albanian origin. A significant number of these workers came from the Premet region, referred to as "Premet" or "Prem" in historical documents, which is located in modern-day Albania. This group included both Muslims and non-Muslims, showcasing the ethno-religious diversity of the Ottoman workforce. (Bilgin 2010, 90) Besides the Albanians, there were also workers from other regions, including Tirnova and Yanya, as well as individuals from Üsküdar and those of Jewish descent. Furthermore, a considerable number of the workers in the Yedikule bostans came from the Macedonian region.

These workers originated from areas like Sarigöl, Ostrovo (modern Arnisia), Vodina (modern Edessa), Selanik (modern Thessaloniki), Manastır (modern Bitola), Ohri (modern Ohrid), Pirlpe (modern Prilep), Eğridere (modern Ardino), and Nikita (modern Nea Nikiti) and were thought to have spoken Slavic languages. (Shopov and Han 2013, 36) This diversity underscores Istanbul's cosmopolitan character and the different backgrounds of those engaged in its agricultural sector.

### Hierarchy and Operations within the Bostans

The bostans of Ottoman Istanbul had a distinctive hierarchical structure, consisting of three main tiers: kethüdas (stewards), ustas (masters), and ameles (laborers).

Kethüdas (stewards) played a vital role in the administration of the bostans. They were responsible for the management of the gardens and were typically appointed by the sebzeçibaşı (head greengrocer). Sebzeçibaşı served as the kethüda for the bostans within the Istanbul city walls. This highlights the central authority the sebzeçibaşı held over the bostans. However, following the Patrona Halil revolt, it was decided that the kethüdas of the bostans outside the city walls would be selected from the gardeners' guild. While kethüdas within the city walls were chosen from the bostancı ocağı (gardeners' corps), those outside the walls could come from the ranks of the usta. (Bilgin 2010, 92)

Each bostan was managed by an usta (master), who was responsible for its overall operation. These ustas could be either Muslim or non-Muslim. The usta managed daily operations, supervised the workers, and ensured efficient production. The workers under the usta were known as amele (laborers), and each bostan typically employed one to four ameles, who were responsible for daily tasks. When hiring ameles, the usta was required to vouch for them or have them vouched for by a trusted individual. Workers were given a temessük (permit) to confirm their employment. Regular inspections were conducted, and workers without a temessük or a guarantor were dismissed. Following the Patrona Halil rebellion in 1730, these inspections led to the repatriation of undocumented and unguaranteed workers. (Bilgin 2010, 92) The income of the gardeners also contributed to the repair budget for the city walls. In other words, the gardeners supported the maintenance of the walls. The skills of the gardeners allowed for cost-effective vegetable production and minimized the potential negative effects of large-scale competition. (Kanpak 2016, 174)

The vegetables produced in the bostans were typically delivered directly to the sebzehane (vegetable storehouse), which supplied the palace's vegetable needs and distributed the surplus to the public. This illustrates the crucial role the bostans played in meeting the needs of both the palace and the general populace. (Bilgin 2010, 87)



Fig.18 Coloured Illustrations of Ottoman Bostancis by Jean Brindisi, 1855

### Descriptions in Records and Social Life

Records often described bostan workers based on physical characteristics. This included mustache color and style (e.g., yellow or trimmed), beard type (e.g., sparse or brown), height (e.g., medium), and age (e.g., young man or fresh young man). Some records also noted birthmarks or other identifying features. (Bilgin 2010, 93) The social environment within the bostans was characterized by conflicts, accidents like falls into wells, and damage caused by animals, highlighting these areas as an integral part of daily social life. The significant concentration of Albanian workers resulted in increased surveillance of these areas, especially after the Patrona Halil revolt.

### Importance of Bostans During the Ottoman period

In the Ottoman era, bostans played a critical role in ensuring the city's self-sufficiency, while also contributing to the city's green spaces. These gardens were widespread not just within the city walls but also in the surrounding areas, especially in the suburbs like Eyüp and Yedikule. They enhanced the urban landscape and fulfilled a crucial function in providing the city's food supply.

The bostans met Istanbul's demand for fresh fruits and vegetables, greatly aiding the healthy sustenance of the city's inhabitants. These areas, established in and around the city, facilitated easy transportation, ensuring the quick delivery of perishable goods to consumers. Furthermore, they acted as significant commercial areas where various produce were grown and marketed. Some bostans also produced yogurt, creating a market-oriented income stream. These production activities not only provided food but also generated employment for many, adding vitality to the city's economy.

Bostans also served as social interaction hubs, where people from different cultures converged. Gardeners from various ethnic backgrounds, including Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Macedonians, worked together in these spaces, creating an environment for cultural exchange. Relations of solidarity and cooperation developed among the workers, reinforcing social bonds. The bostans also served as vital centers for preserving traditional farming methods, conserving local seeds, and the historical fabric of the city, while also contributing to the city's beauty. With features such as water wells, pools, and canals, the bostans also added to urban infrastructure. Furthermore, they provided important examples of sustainable farming practices. The use of animal manure in the bostans improved soil fertility, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. The use of local seeds contributed to biodiversity, while traditional irrigation techniques ensured efficient water use. These practices, combined with the expertise and knowledge of the gardeners, ensured the continuation of traditional agricultural knowledge.

In conclusion, the bostans of Istanbul in the Ottoman era played a significant role not only in meeting the city's food needs but also as social, cultural, and economic centers. They served as an example of sustainable farming practices, contributing to the preservation of traditional knowledge and skills. The bostans, being a crucial component of urban life, are an important legacy of the Ottoman period and therefore are among the values that must be protected.



Fig.19 Illustration titled The Triple Wall of Constantinople from Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, London/Paris, Fisher, Son & Co. (1836-38), by Robert Walsh and Thomas Allom



Fig.20 Photograph by Sebah & Joaillier, taken in Istanbul between 1888 and 1899, showing the exterior walls of Yedikule Fortress. Albumen print.



Fig.21 Istanbul, Guide Constantinople, Mamboury, 1929.



Fig.22 Istanbul, Guide Constantinople, Mamboury, 1951.

### Urban Transformation Under the Turkish Republic

The Republican period started a transformation in the relationship between Istanbul's land walls, their surrounding bostans and the institutions that governed them. Following 1923, the dissolution of the Ottoman waqf system and the transfer of land to the state reshaped ownership and management structures, leaving bostancis in a legally and economically insecure position. Combination of these changes with rapid urbanization, infrastructure development, and shifting perceptions of agriculture as a predominantly rural activity, accelerated the decline and fragmentation of bostans.

At the same time, planning and conservation efforts began to reframe the Land Walls as heritage monuments surrounded by green zones. While these interventions were presented as protective measures for the walls, they often pushed agricultural practices to the background. This created a tension between preservation, urban development, and socio-spatial practices. As a result revealing the difficulty of sustaining the walls and the bostans as living cultural landscapes, rather than reducing them to static and symbolic historical artifacts.

### Changes in Ownership and Management from the Ottoman to the Republican Era

Following the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Istanbul went through a period of urban transformation. In the Ottoman period, many of the bostans in Istanbul were managed by waqfs. These foundations used the income they generated to cover the expenses of mosques, madrasas, and other charitable institutions. However, with the establishment of the Republic, this system underwent fundamental changes.

Many foundation lands were transferred to the National Property (Milli Emlak) and later divided among the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), Fatih Municipality, the Ministry of Finance and private individuals.(Kahraman 2021, 350). This situation led to a significant transformation in the management and ownership structure of the bostans, and the bostans largely came under state control. Although some foundations continued to exist during this transition, the administration of many bostans passed into the hands of the state.(Kiran 2019, 158)State institutions took the place of the foundations, and the bostancilar went from being the owners of the land to being its users.

With the change in ownership, the bostancis went from being the owners of the land to being its users. In this new situation, the bostancis who continued to use the land had to pay ecrimisil. Ecrimisil is compensation paid when a property is used without the owner's permission (squatter tax).(Kiran 2019, 151) This practice redefined the relationship between the bostancis and the state which placed them in a legally insecure position. The bostancis were no longer the owners of the land but people who used the land by paying a fee on top of the rent to the state. This situation negatively affected the motivation of bostancis to make long-term plans and investments and caused them to worry about continuity.

In some cases, municipalities also played a role in the management and ownership of the bostans. However, in general, the authority of the National Property was more decisive. Municipalities were effective in the bostan areas, especially through zoning plans and urban transformation projects. These uncertainties led to the inability to fully determine the ownership status of some bostans, which caused legal problems.

Despite these challenges, traces of the Ottoman foundation system remain visible in places like Yedikule. Foundations such as the "Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Vakfi," "Sultan Mahmudi Han Vakfi," "Belgradkapı Panagia Greek Orthodox Church Foundation," and "Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation" still exist, reflecting the historical legacy of the waqfs (Kiran 2019, 209). These remnants highlight the deep-rooted connection between the bostans and the Ottoman-era institutional structures.

This situation adversely affected the traditional functioning and social structure of the bostans and led to legal and economic uncertainties. This transition process created significant difficulties for the protection and sustainability of the bostans.

In 1935, French urban planner Henry Prost included the preservation of the city walls in the master plan of the city. According to this plan, the walls should be surrounded by green spaces and building restrictions were established 500 meters to the west and between 80-100 meters to the east around the walls.(Bilsel, n.d.) The walls could be



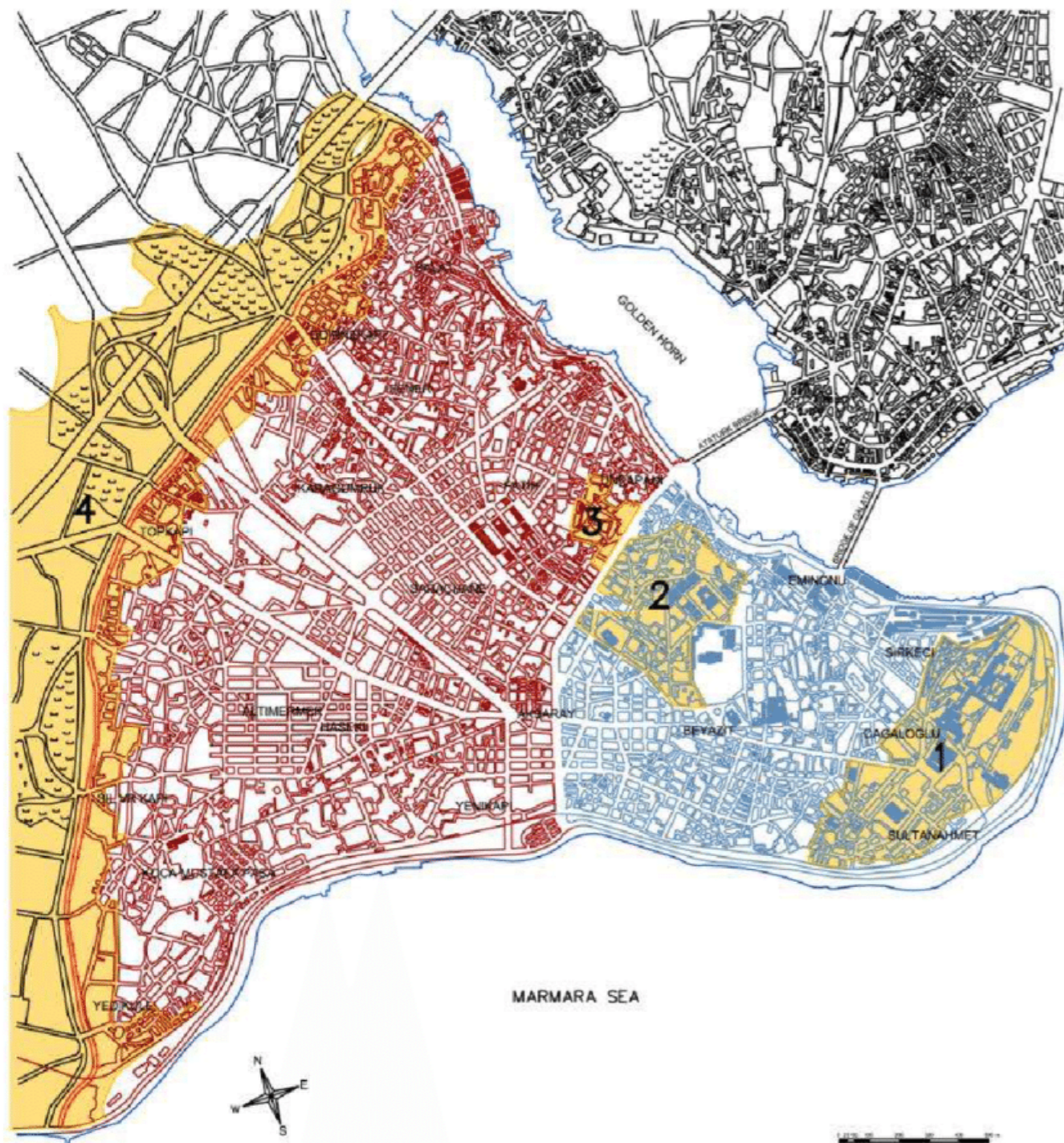
According to this plan, the walls should be surrounded by green spaces and building restrictions were established 500 meters to the west and between 80-100 meters to the east around the walls. The walls could be protected due to these regulations despite the rapid growth, unplanned urbanization and population growth.

Fig.23 Urban plan of Henri Prost for Istanbul

protected due to these regulations despite the rapid growth, unplanned urbanization and population growth. Prost's vision aimed to preserve the walls by integrating them into continuous green belts encircling the Historic Peninsula.

In the 1950 restoration work was done on some sections of the walls due to the 500th year of Istanbul's Conquest, particularly in Topkapi and Edirnekapi areas.(Güler 2022, 445) In 1956, new roads were planned around the land walls which required the construction of new passageways. To open up these passages through the walls, some parts were reinforced and some parts of the moats were filled up. The restoration done around Edirnekapi (Edirne Gate) was criticized due to the over-correction of the ruin identity.

By 1985, the land walls as well as the other historical areas of Istanbul were recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites underlining the international importance of the walls. In the late 20th century, major restoration projects were launched but most were criticized for prioritizing reconstruction over authentic preservation. The restorations lacked an overall coherence. Implementations were launched without completing surveys and were carried out through fragmented tenders that resulted in inconsistent approaches.



### The Decline and Transformation of Bostans

The rapid urbanization and construction that began in Istanbul in the 1950s had a significant role in the shrinking and disappearance of the bostans. During this period, the population growth caused by intense migration (Istanbul's population increased from 1 million to 13 million) increased the need for housing, which led the urban lands to open for development.(Arabacıoğlu and Aydemir 2008, 72) Specifically, the construction of major roads such as Millet Caddesi, Vatan Caddesi, and the coastal road led to the destruction of many bostan areas.(Arabacıoğlu and Aydemir 2008, 73) During this time, agricultural activities were relegated to rural areas, and the bostans within the city began to be seen as less economically valuable. From the 1960s onwards, increasing migration and unplanned developments led to the formation of new informal neighborhoods outside the city walls and the overloading of the city center. All these factors contributed to the significant reduction and disappearance of the bostans. (Pérouse 2010)

The 1980s marked a critical point in the loss of Istanbul's bostans. Urban plans from the 1980s often categorized bostans as "green spaces" while failing to protect their agricultural function and continuity. These plans framed bostans as areas that could be thematically organized or repurposed as generic green spaces. This approach

disregarded the plans designated the areas along the city walls as green spaces but specifically planned Yedikule's wall-adjacent areas as playgrounds. Similarly, while the 2003 development plans aimed to preserve the agricultural character of historical bostans, the implementation of these decisions proved inadequate.(Arabacıoğlu and Aydemir 2008, 75)

The increasing pressure for profit particularly encouraged the development of bostan lands in central urban areas. These lands were repurposed as parking lots, marketplaces, sports fields, or residential areas. Such transformations led not only to the physical disappearance of bostans but also to the end of agricultural activities.

### Withering of Bostancıs

Until the 1950s the people working in bostans were mostly Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Albanians and Macedonians and largely minorities. These groups were experienced in gardening and passed down their knowledge from generation to generation.(Kaldjian 2004, 292) According to records from 1735, the majority of gardeners in Istanbul's bostans were Christians. Following the establishment of the Republic, the demographic structure changed significantly as many minorities left the country or shifted to other professions.

Fig.24 UNESCO protected sites of Istanbul



Fig.25 The Karamlides traveling on their carts, leaving their homelands behind during the population exchange between Turkey and Greece.

The void left by the departure of minorities was gradually filled by migrants from the Black Sea region, particularly from the district of Cide in Kastamonu. From the mid-1950s onward, these migrants began working in bostans, initially alongside Albanian and Bulgarian gardeners and later managing the gardens themselves (Kaldjian 2004, 292). They typically managed bostans as family enterprises.

2004, 286)

This family-based model contributed to the efficient operation of bostans. Instead of selling their products wholesale, Cide migrants started marketing them directly. They increased their income by selling at neighborhood markets, roadside stalls, restaurants, and to other retailers.

“They usually live near their bostan; very few live on their bostan. In the fields, men typically prepare the beds for planting, sow, irrigate, operate motorized equipment, and harvest; women often participate in harvesting but seem to have exclusive responsibility for weeding” (Kaldjian

Since the 1980s, rapid urbanization and profit driven development have increasingly threatened the livelihoods of bostancis. Many were perceived as “occupiers” and deprived of legal rights, forced to leave without compensation. Makeshift structures and greenhouses were demolished under the pretext of visual pollution. (Kahraman 2021, 351)

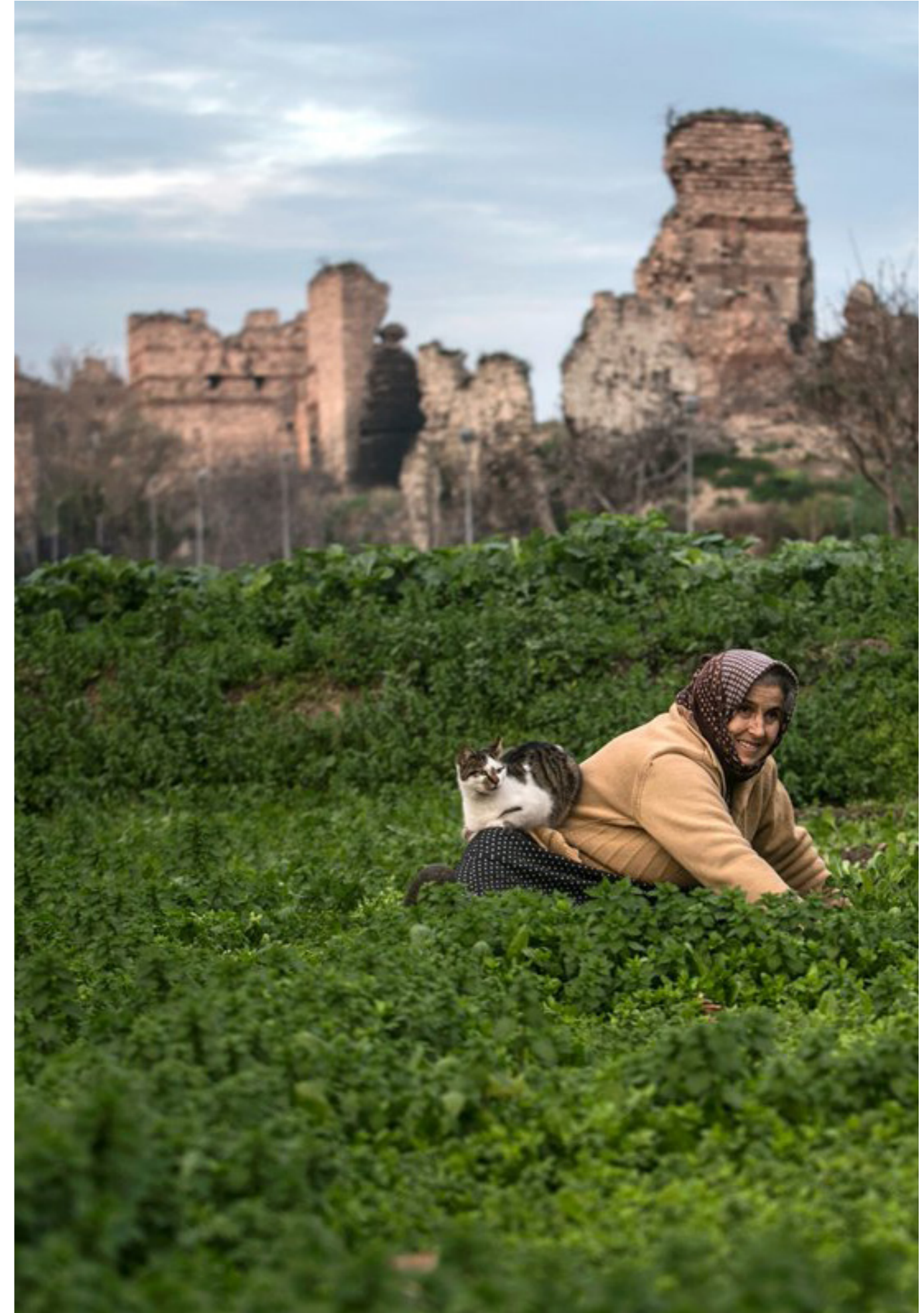


Fig.26 Bostancis in Yedikule, photo by Tolga Sezgin/Nar Photos

## Conservation Plans and Ongoing Challenges

In the 2003 Conservation Master Plan, it is stated: “The moats outside the Land Walls Plan approval boundary will be cleaned through archaeological studies and preserved as an integral part of the walls with landscape arrangements. The bostans adjacent to the walls that were present on the 1875 map and have persisted to this day will be preserved. The walls, towers, gates, and moats of the Haliç, Marmara, and Land Walls will be endowed with cultural functions upon obtaining the approval of the Conservation Board and will be integrated with surrounding green areas, archaeological exhibition parks, exhibition/viewing terraces, and theme parks.”

According to the same plan: “No structure within the inner conservation area of the Land Walls, apart from historical monuments, may exceed a height of 6.50 meters. Bostan areas within the Land Walls’ inner conservation zone that have lost their natural characteristics will be preserved through landscape projects. Urban areas such as Eğrikapı, Edirnekapı, Topkapı Kaleiçi, Sulukule, Mevlanakapı, Silivrikapı, and Yedikule, which have partially retained their texture, will be restored to the traditional architectural identity of the Historic Peninsula. The green conservation zone of the Land Walls will be used for public benefit, integrated with uses such as archaeological exhibition parks, viewing terraces, walking paths, and recreational areas. Pedestrian arrangements and squares will enhance the perception of the walls, integrating them with surrounding pedestrian axes and squares.

In the urban design and landscape projects to be prepared for these areas, ecological studies will be conducted in line with the identity of the Historic Peninsula. The existing green fabric will be preserved, and the quality of the landscape will be enriched with plant and tree species associated with the Historic Peninsula and Istanbul. The agricultural character of the historically persistent bostan areas will be preserved.”

(Fatih District 1/1000 Scale Conservation-Oriented Implementation Master Plan, 2003)

This plan was a turning point for the preservation of the area. The aims of the plan were cleaning and studying the ancient moats, establishing a continuous green belt, introducing cultural functions to the surrounding area, and protecting historic gardens known as bostans. It also included strict regulations on building heights.

However, this plan was undermined by fragmented implementation and insufficient coordination among stakeholders. In the 2006 report of ICOMOS-UNESCO, they underlined the lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and municipal authorities. This situation resulted in uneven restoration of sections since some received significant attention while others were neglected. The absence of a cohesive strategy compromised the integrity of the walls and hindered their full potential as a monument.

One of the major criticisms of the recent interventions was the prioritization of aesthetics over authenticity. Many instances of original material were replaced with modern substitutes, corroding the historical fabric of the walls. The EUROPA NOSTRA report warned against this overly reconstructive approach, which risks creating a fabricated historical environment rather than preserving the walls’ genuine character.

Jean-François Pérouse argues in one of his lectures that the prevailing focus on the walls as a symbol of the 1453 Ottoman conquest creates a screen memory that overshadows their broader significance. (Pérouse 2010)

By viewing the Land Walls primarily through the lens of conquest, we risk erasing their role as a dynamic, evolving monument that has witnessed countless cultural, political, and architectural shifts. A more nuanced understanding of the walls is essential to fully appreciate their multifaceted value and their relevance to Istanbul’s identity today.

The bostans adjacent to the walls that were present on the 1875 map (fig.27) and have persisted to this day will be preserved.



Fig.27 A large-scale map compiled by the author from scanned maps on Salt Research Archives, based on the 1875 map of Istanbul by Ekrem Hakki Ayverdi.

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### Ecological Analysis

Theodosian Walls and Yedikule bostans function as a vital ecological Backbone, serving as a biological hinge that connects Istanbul's northern life-support systems to the Marmara Sea. Rather than viewing the monument and agriculture as separate entities, this chapter defines their relationship as a protective symbiosis. By framing the gardeners' labor as the active immune system of the walls, this analysis argues that preserving these productive landscapes is essential for maintaining the city's environmental resilience against the sterilizing pressures of redevelopment.

### Ecological Backbone

Positioning the Bostans and the Theodosian Walls as an ecological whole requires shifting the analytical scale from the administrative boundaries of Fatih Municipality to the limits of the biosphere. According to Gilles Clément's concept of a Planetary Garden, the gardens are not only local plots of urban agriculture, but a part of a global ecological system where the boundaries of the biological structure transcend property boundaries. In the specific context of Istanbul, this perspective is directly related to the northern forests, water basins, and agricultural lands defined as life support systems (Yaşam Destek Sistemleri) in the city's 1/100,000 Scale Environmental Planning Plan (ÇDP) report. (ÇDP 2009, 29). Yedikule is a vital fragment representing the southernmost point of this broad macro-system within the Historical Peninsula, possessing an ecological continuity beyond administrative boundaries.

The Theodosian Walls function as a continuous Ecological Spine embedded in the urban fabric, stretching between the rich forest ecosystems and water basins in the north of Istanbul and the Marmara Sea in the south. Examining Istanbul's historical macroform and geography reveals that the city's ecological sustainability is ensured through valley systems and green corridors extending from north to south. The Land Walls line, with its approximately 6.5-kilometer stretch from the Golden Horn to the Marmara Sea, is the most tangible extension of this north-south axis within the urban fabric. The Land Walls line with the cemeteries and bostans act as a biological hinge connecting the "Life Support Systems" in the north to the southern shores, allowing the passage of species and ecological flow. (ÇDP 2009)

Istanbul's rapidly growing urban fabric materializes as a closed mesh that stifles biodiversity, traps heat, and prevents water from reaching the soil. In contrast, the Land Walls and gardens form a critical open mesh within this impermeable fabric. This area functions as a valve regulating the city's metabolic flows:

**Air Circulation and Urban Cooling:** In Istanbul's geography, northerly winds (poyraz) are vital for the city's air quality and cooling. The open space created by bostans in the Yedikule region and the topographic corridor created by the land walls allow the prevailing winds to penetrate into

the densely built-up Zeytinburnu and Fatih areas, reducing the urban heat island effect.

**Water Drainage and Permeability:** Unlike asphalt and concrete surfaces, bostans absorb rainwater, replenishing the groundwater table and mitigating urban flooding. Historic maşula systems, water wells and pools utilize groundwater rather than mains water, maintaining the hydraulic balance of the area (Zerner 2020, 51). The preservation of these agricultural characteristics is essential not just for food production but for flood mitigation and soil aeration.

**Avian and Biodiversity Corridor:** Theodosian walls provide a refuge for flora and fauna trapped within the closed urban network. The connection between northern forests and urban areas is maintained through this open mesh.

In this context, the destruction of gardens and their transformation into hard surfaces and manicured landscapes under the guise of "parks" is not only a loss of cultural heritage; it also means closing the metabolic valve that provides north-south air and water flow in the city and clogging the open mesh.

### Ecological Mosaic: A Protective Symbiosis

To fully grasp the ecological agency of Yedikule, it is necessary to abandon the static binary of "Monument" and "Agriculture." Instead, it should be understood that the area exists in a protective symbiosis relationship where the historical walls and bostans mutually guarantee each other's survival. This relationship is not a poetic metaphor, but a structural and functional interdependence that has been operating for sixteen centuries. This symbiosis works in two different directions: the walls act as a morphological container protecting bostans, and the gardeners act as an immune system protecting the walls.

Historically, the Land Walls not only defined the city's defensive boundary but also, with their morphological structure consisting of inner, outer walls and a moat system, created a protected in-between zone for agriculture. Since the construction of the Theodosian Walls in the 5th century, the defense system was entangled with agriculture. The permission granted in the Theodosian Code of 422 for the lower floors of towers to store agricultural tools proves that gardens were already part of the military infrastructure of the walls at that time. The land walls created a protection from development for centuries within the dense urban fabric. If the walls had not formed a physical barrier against urban sprawl, these fertile lands would have been swallowed up by the residential fabric years ago.

Consequently, the survival of the walls has been dependent on the active labor of the gardeners. These two systems do not simply coexist; they are in a vital protective relationship. The cultivated garden acts as the guardian of the Land Walls. The active presence and productive labor of the gardeners have historically prevented the area from being seized by the sterilizing forces of modern urban planning.

# Analysis

As Kaldjian points out,

“Since the late 1990’s the number of gardens within and along the outside of the old city walls has been expanding northward from Yedikule toward the Topkapi Gate. Beyond the gardens, where the municipality has built small play grounds, various uncultivated spaces are filthy and strewn with garbage, alcohol bottles, and broken glass. The tidy, well-tended gardens, in contrast, provide a photogenic foreground and ensure an unimpeded view of the 1600-year-old walls that are so much a part of Istanbul’s identity. Similarly, a bostan protects and enhances the Piyale Pasa Mosque, built by Süleyman the Magnificent’s famous architect, Sinan. Throughout the city, gardeners have beautified numerous hectares of land and serve as something like park rangers. With their constant presence and fruitful actions, they effectively patrol and monitor their areas, keeping out unwelcome and illegal activities, which can include garbage dumping, unpermitted construction, and criminal activity.” (Kaldjian 2004, 299)

This symbiosis between the tended Bostans and the neglected city walls offers a counter model to the neoliberal lawn aesthetic or sterilized park concept. Municipal recreation projects often impose a static visual order, replacing the complex biodiversity of the bostans with hard surfaces and monoculture lawns. This sanitizing process destroys the biological intelligence of the area. Consequently, the preservation of the Land Walls is inextricably linked to the preservation of the managed labor of the bostancis. The bostans act like the immune system of the Theodosian Walls, preventing modern urban planning from sterilizing the area.

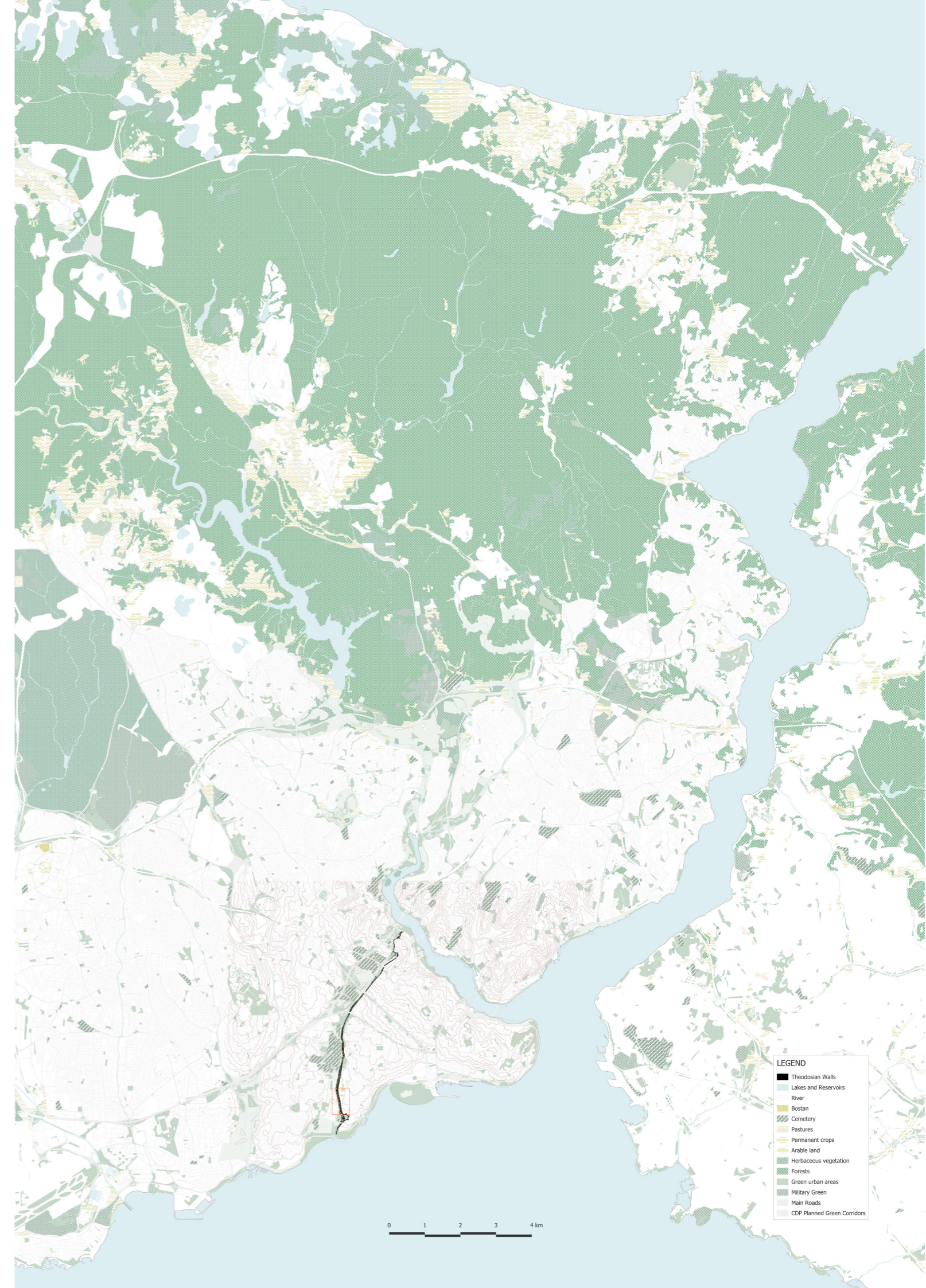


Fig.28 Green Systems of Istanbul



Fig.29 Current Green system



Fig.30 Current Structural Systems



Fig.31 Transportation nodes



Fig.32 Main roads



Fig.33 Rail System

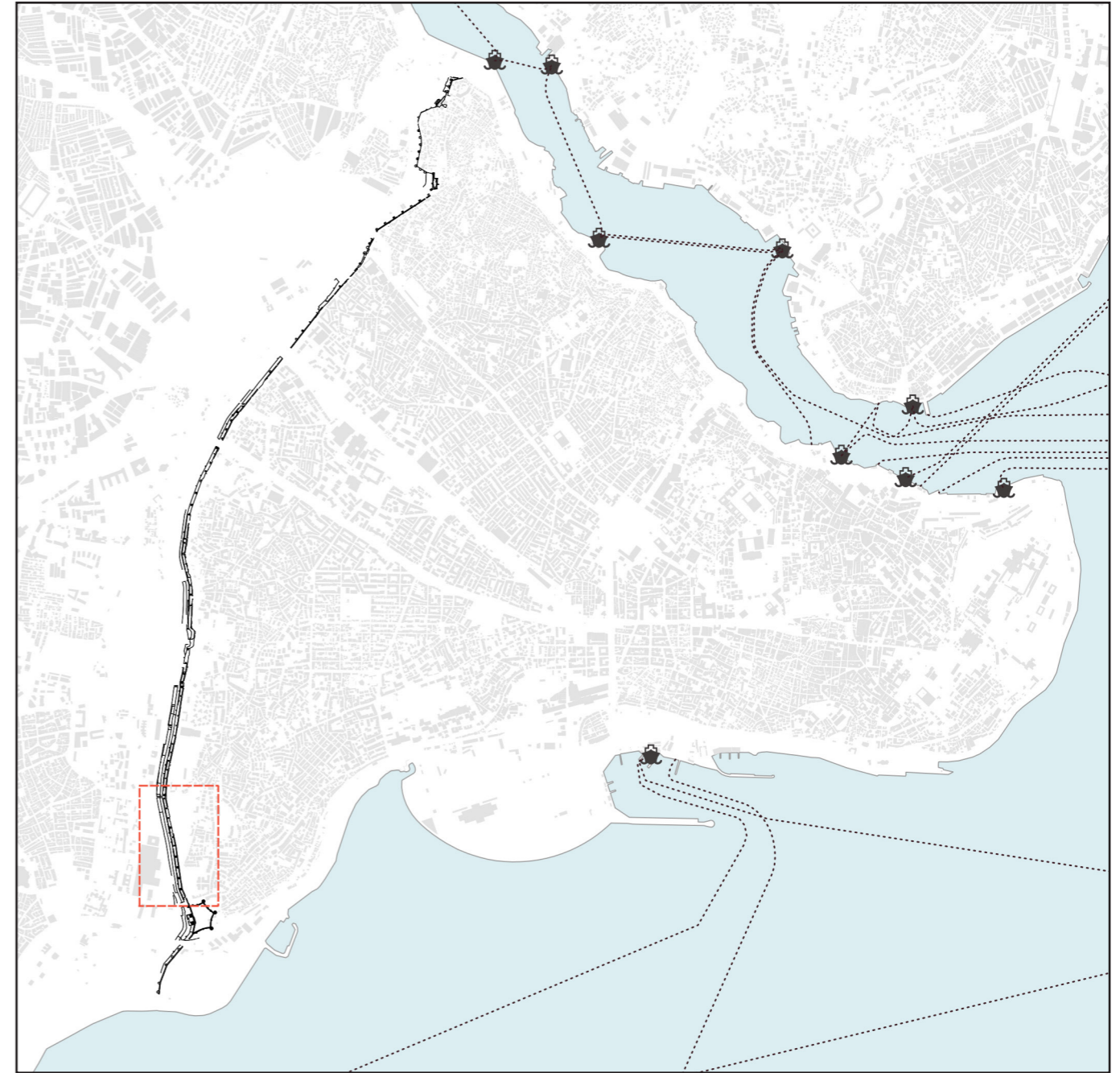


Fig.34 Ferry System

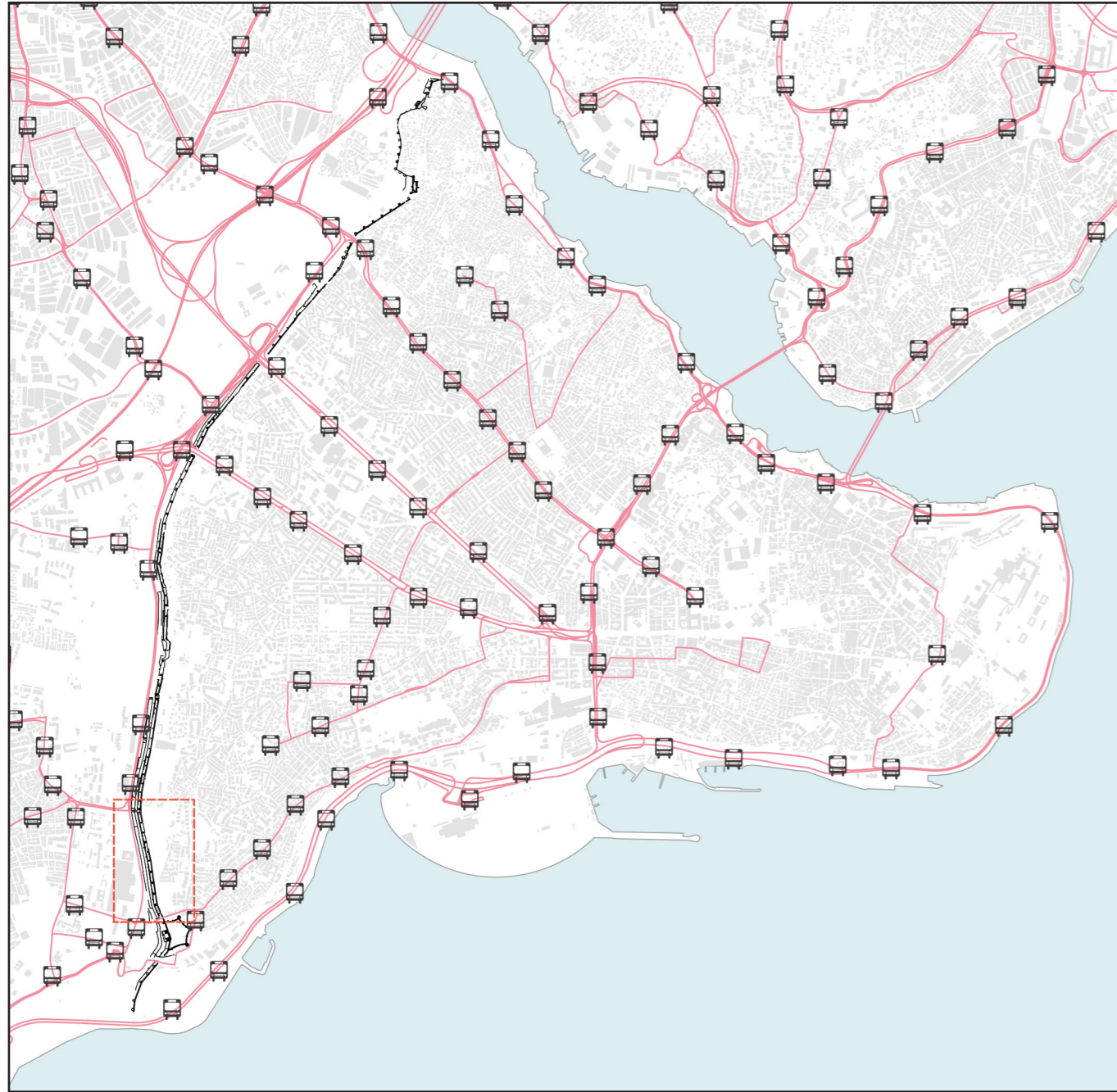


Fig.35 Bus System



Fig.36 Bicycle Paths

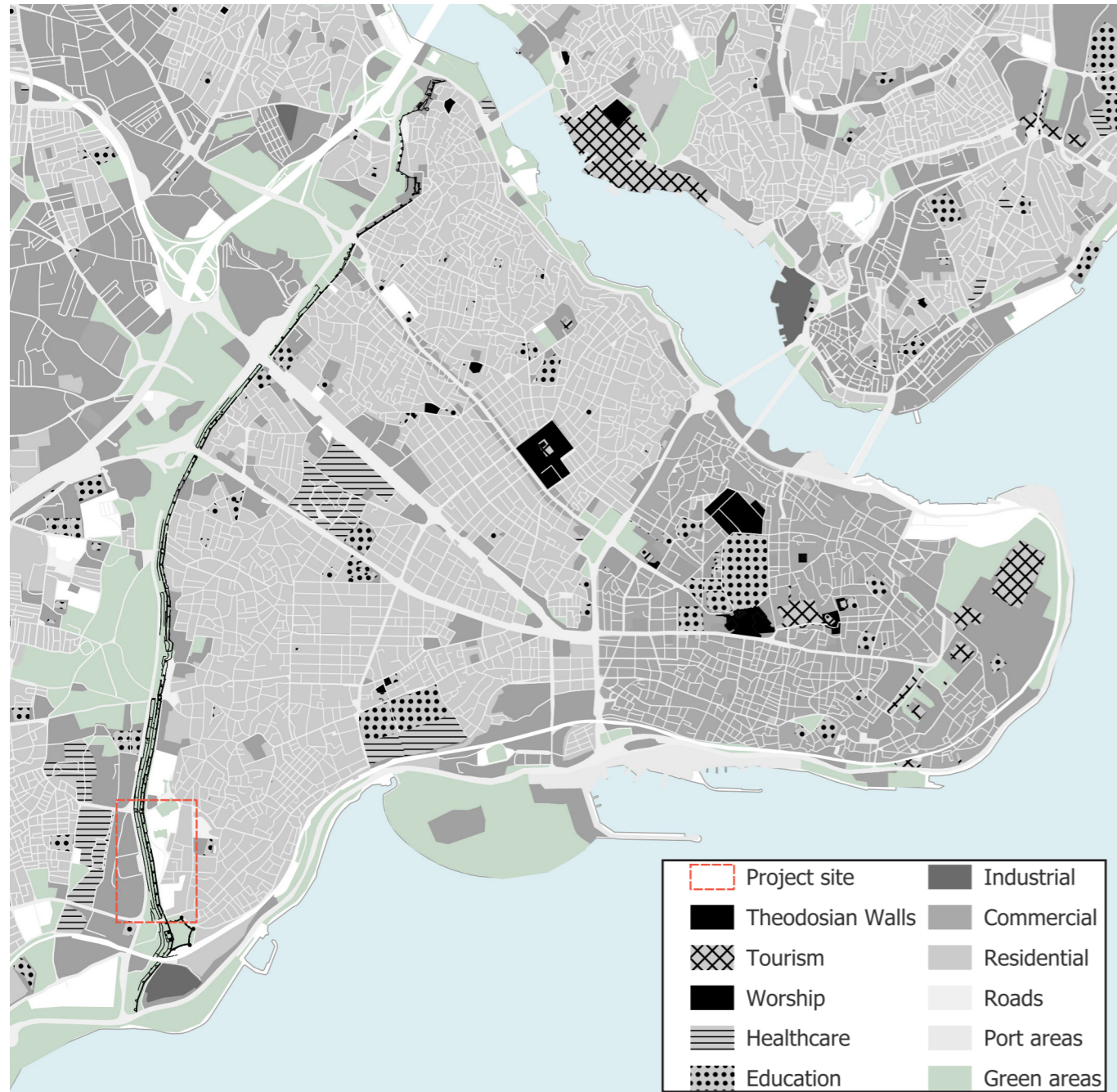


Fig.37 Landuse



Fig.38 Land Marks

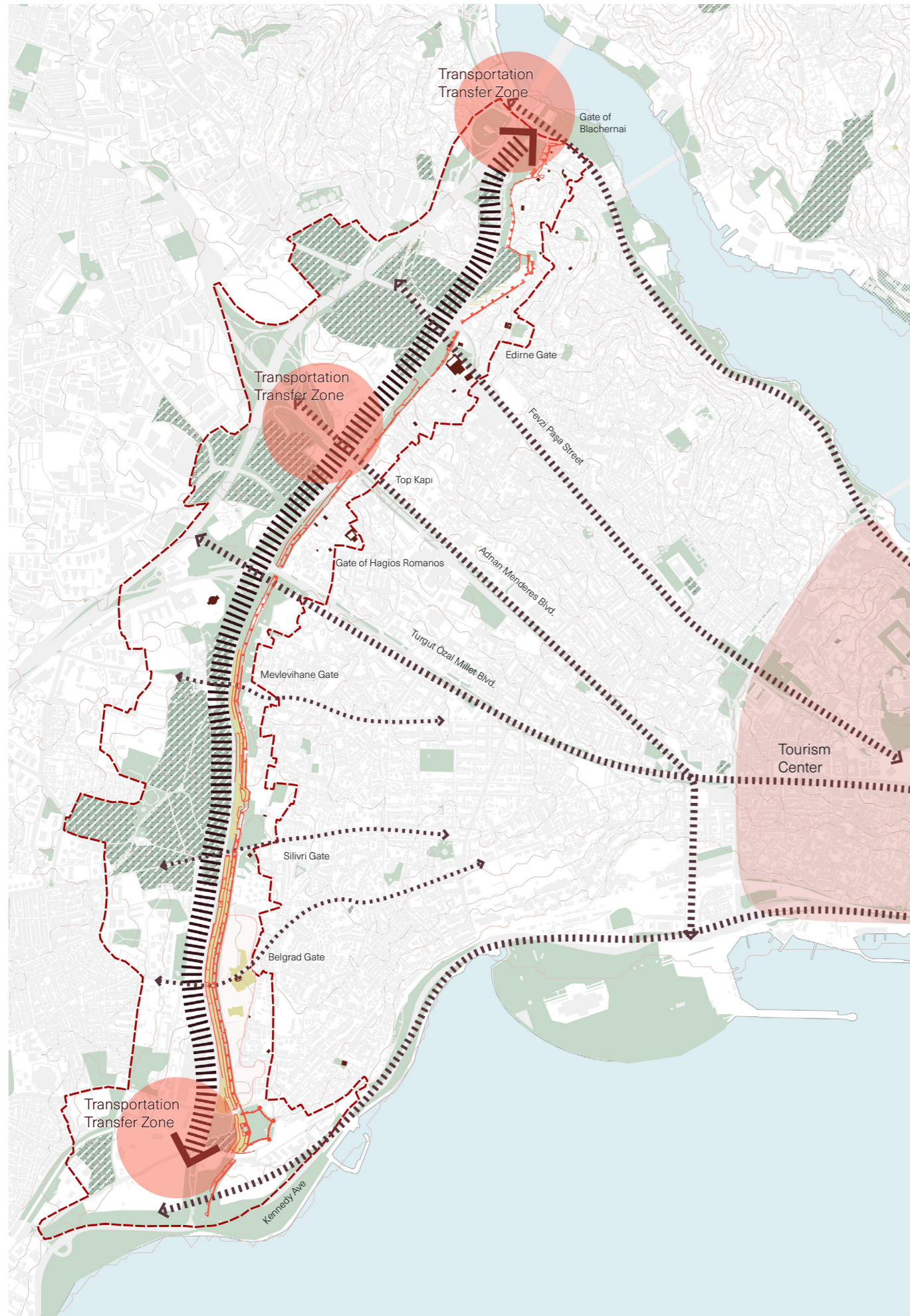


Fig.39 Analysis

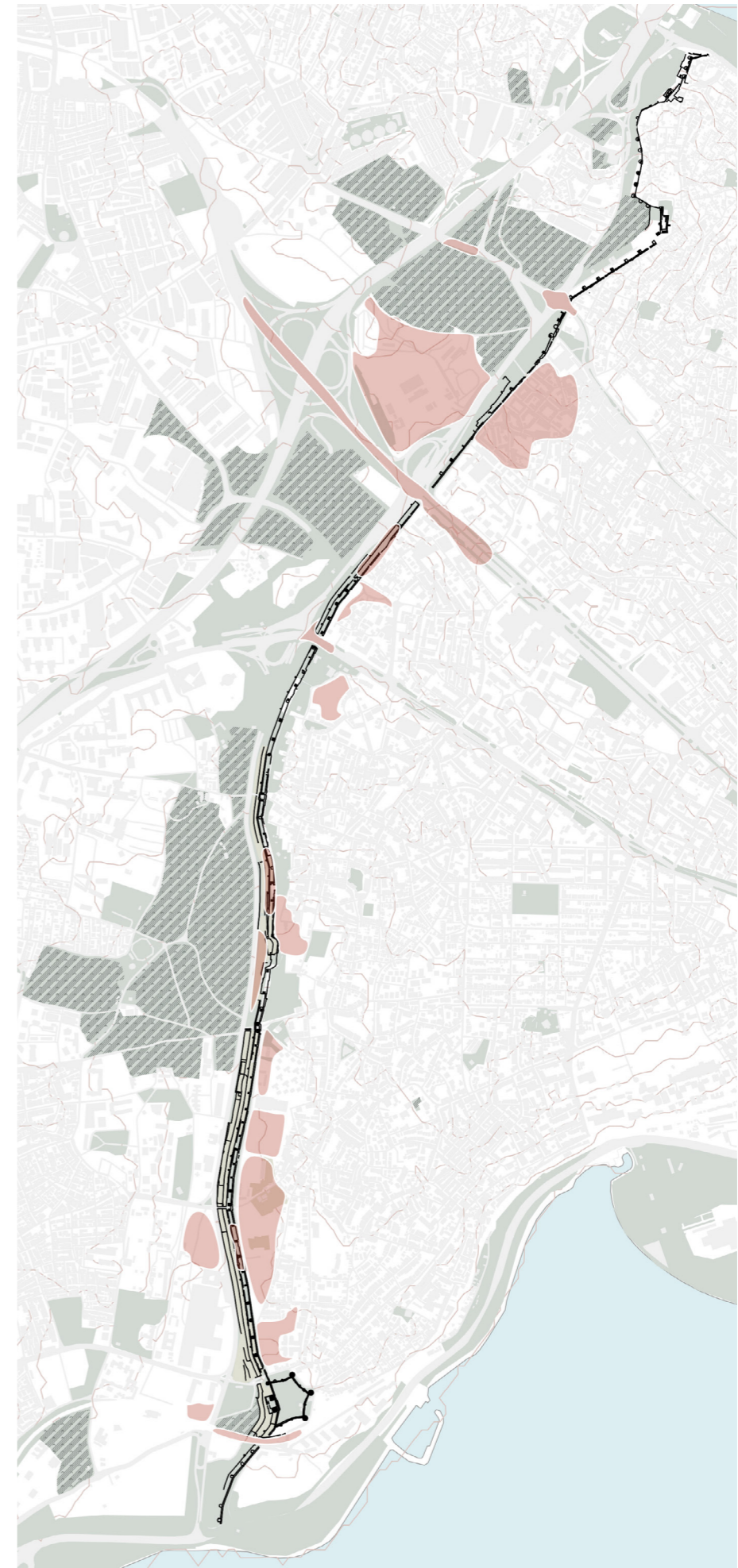


Fig.40 Main Problems

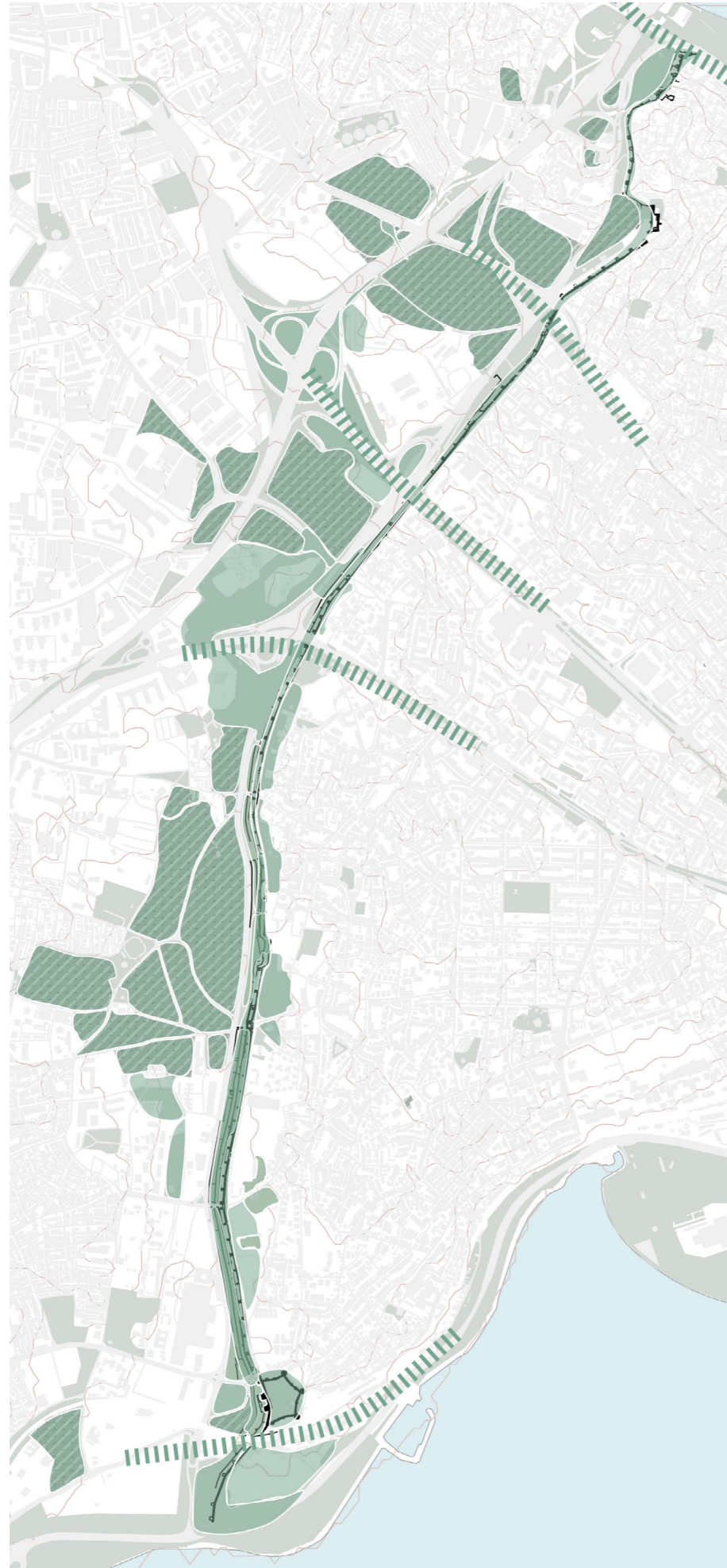


Fig.41 Strengths

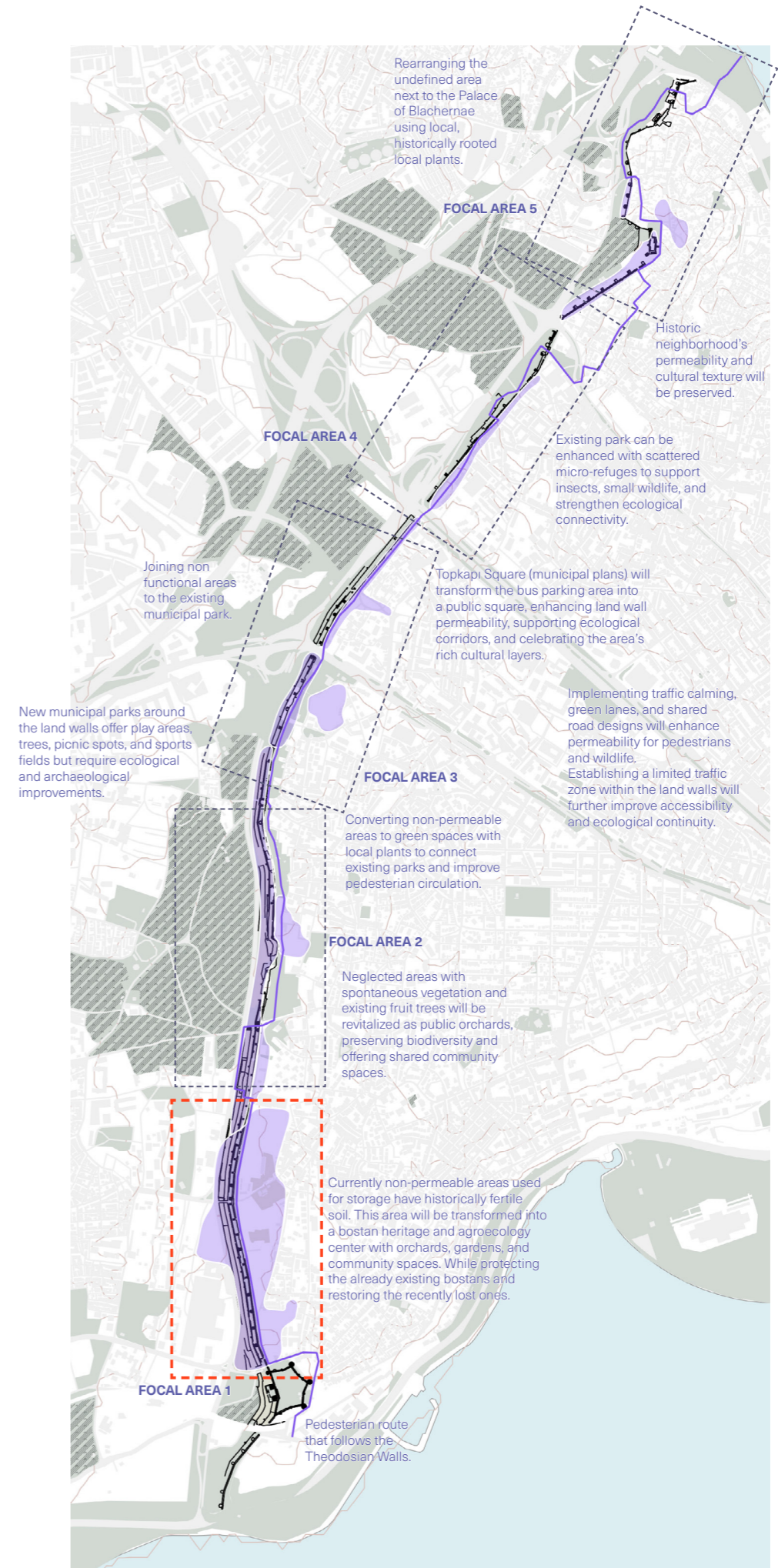
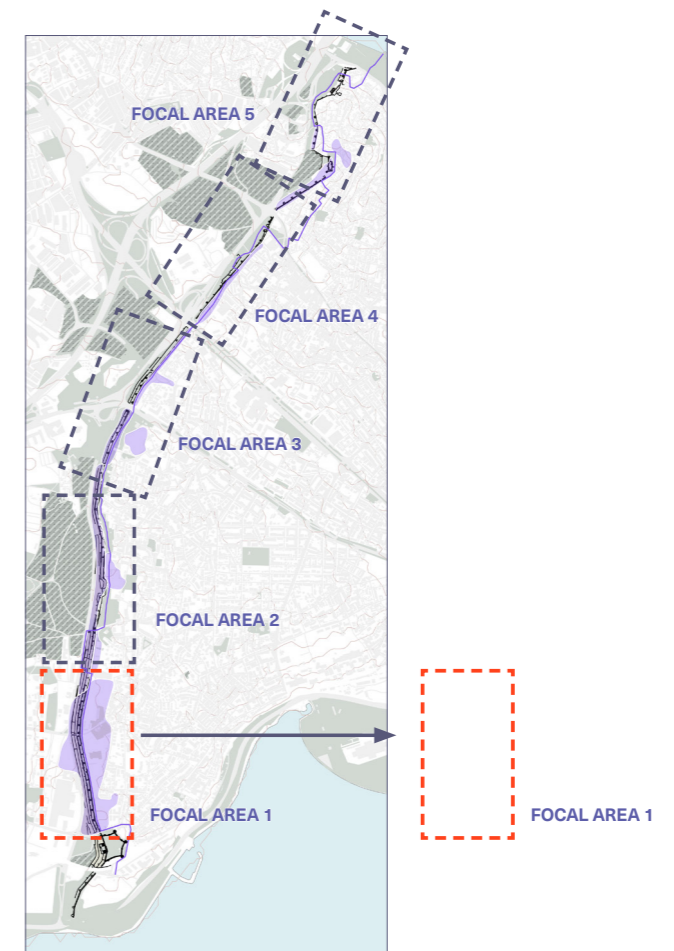


Fig.42 General Theodosian Zone Strategy

# Study Area



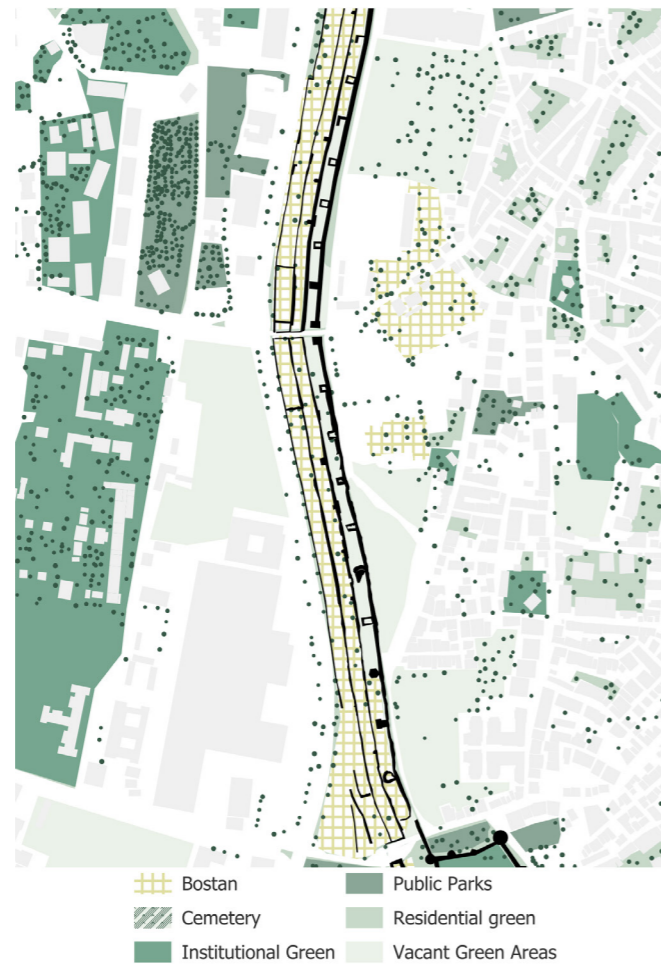


Fig.44 Existing Green Areas

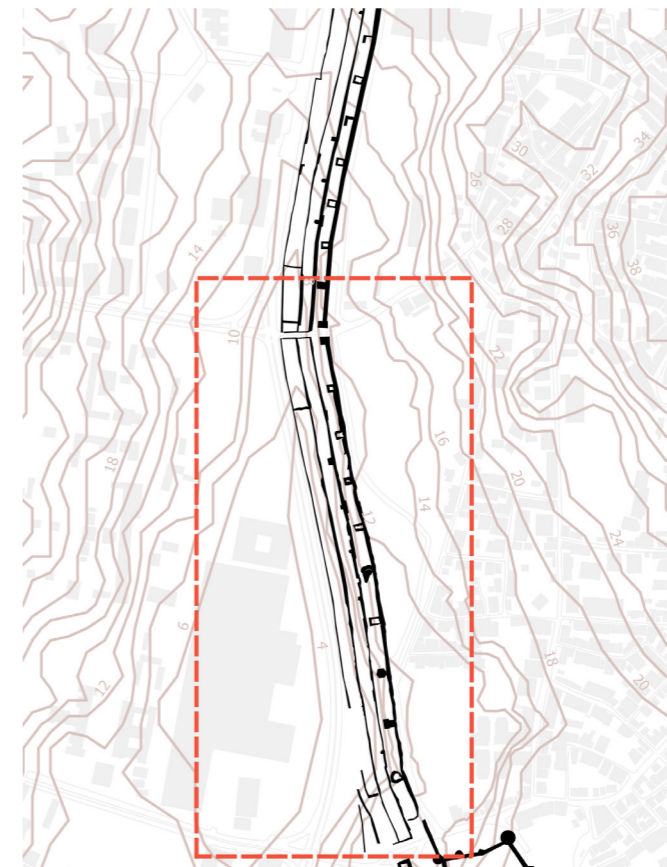
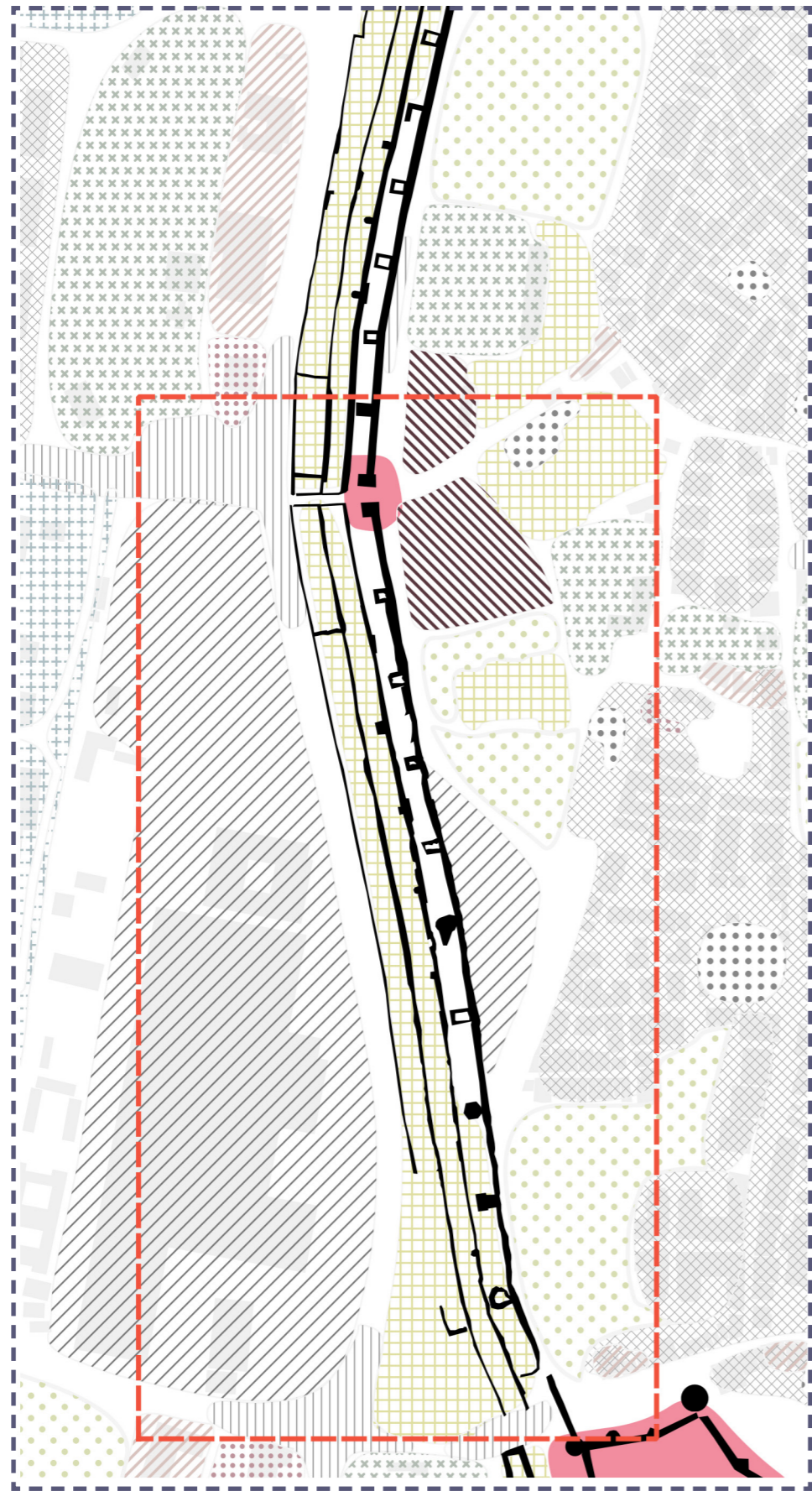


Fig.45 Topography

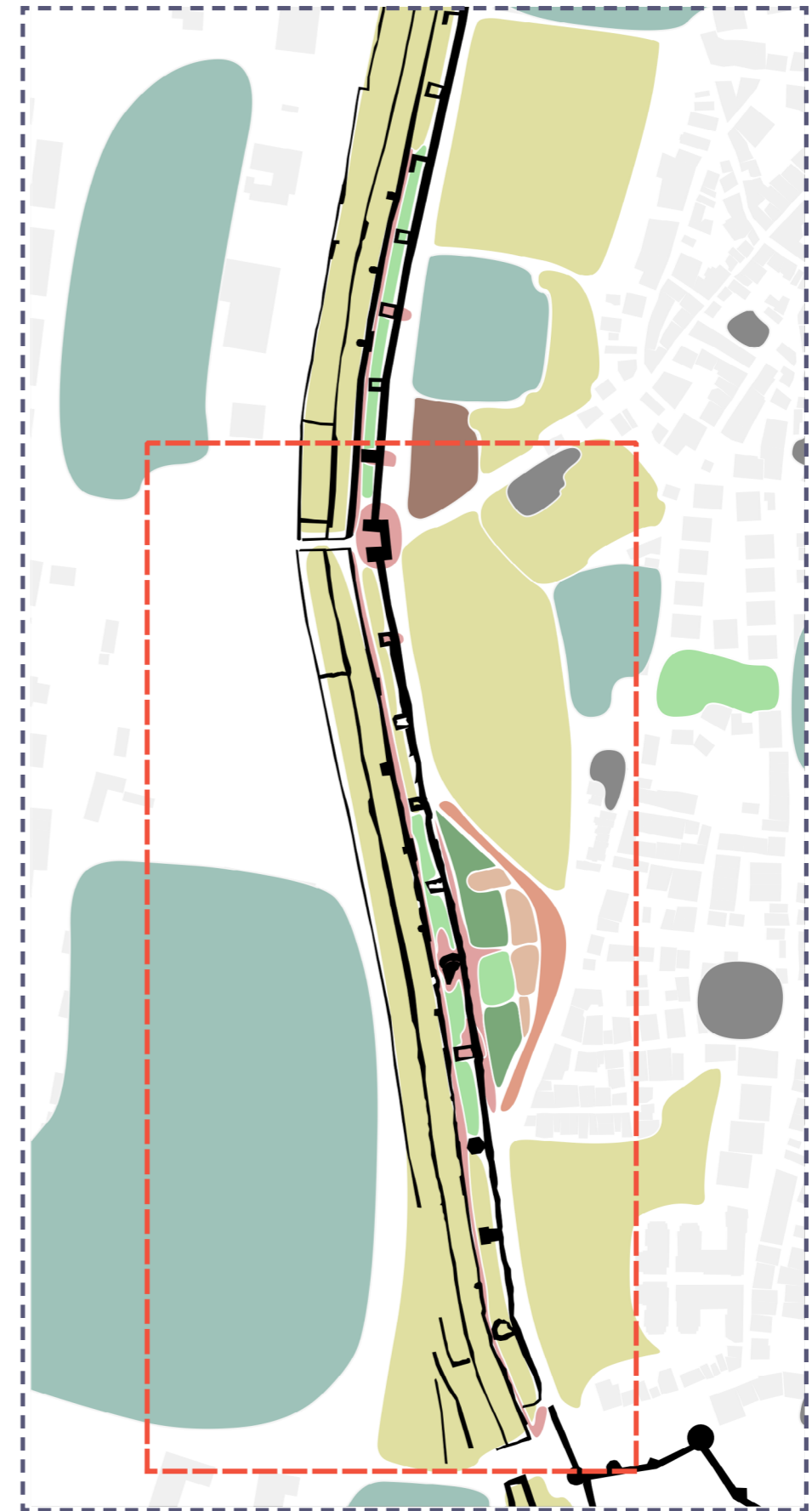


Fig.46 Conservation Importance



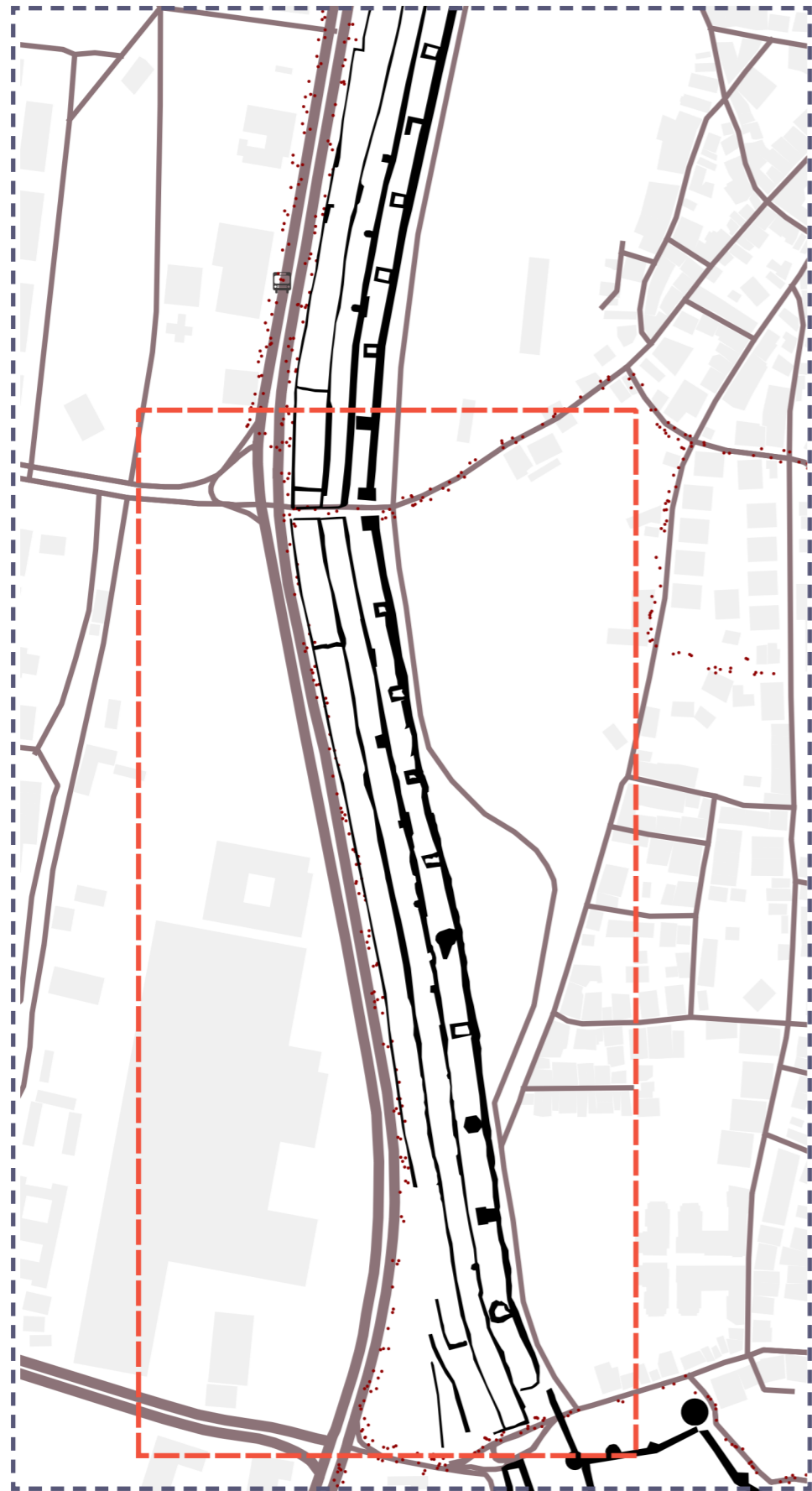
- |                    |                  |                    |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Bostans            | Healthcare Use   | Residential Use    |
| Commercial Use     | Municipal Use    | Touristic Use      |
| Construction Zones | Recreational Use | Transportation Use |
| Educational Use    | Religious Use    | Underdeveloped     |

Fig.47 Current Usage Zones



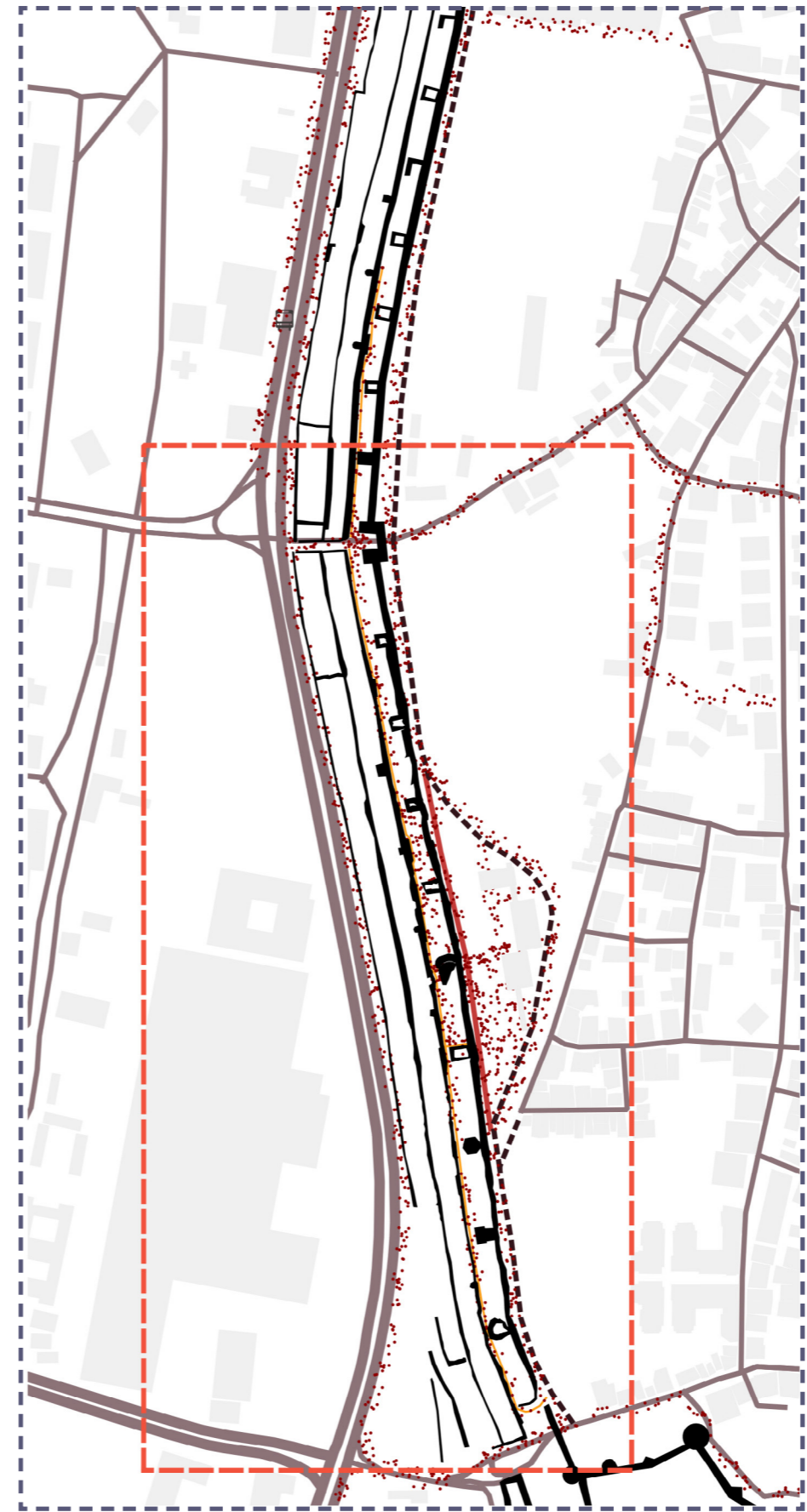
- |                             |                  |                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Land Wall Interaction Zones | Weekly Bazaar    | Recreational Areas |
| Bostan Contact Zones        | Bostans          | Religious Zones    |
| Social Zones                | Open Green Areas | Municipal Area     |

Fig.48 Proposal Spatial Function Organization



⋯ Pedestrian Circulation    — Secondary vehicle road  
— Primary vehicle road    Bus Stop

Fig.49 Pedestrian Mobility



⋯ Pedestrian Circulation    - - - Limited traffic access    Bus Stop  
— Primary vehicle road    — Segirdim path  
— Secondary vehicle road    — Pedestrian only

Fig.50 Proposal Pedestrian Mobility

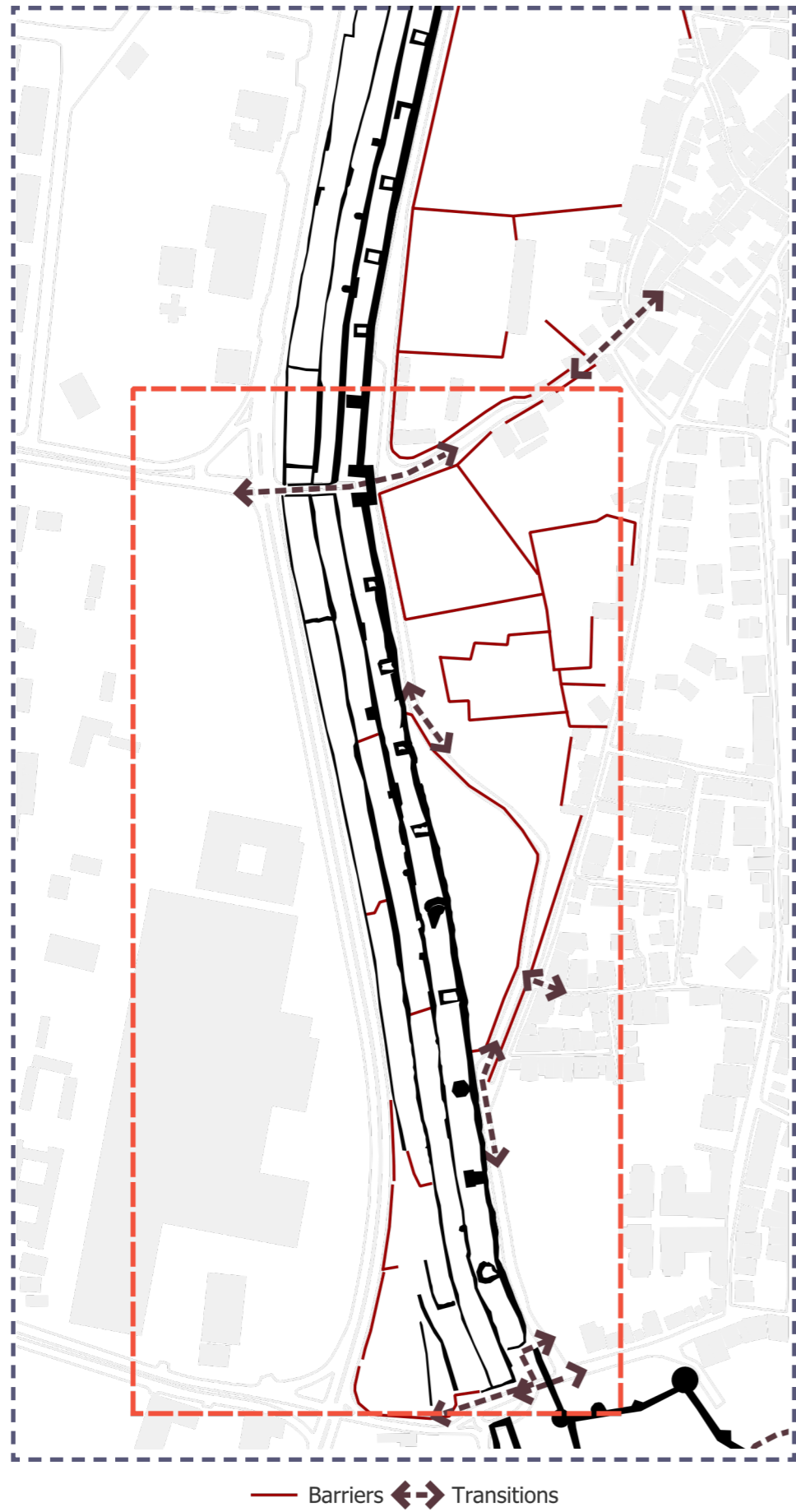


Fig.51 Borders and Passages

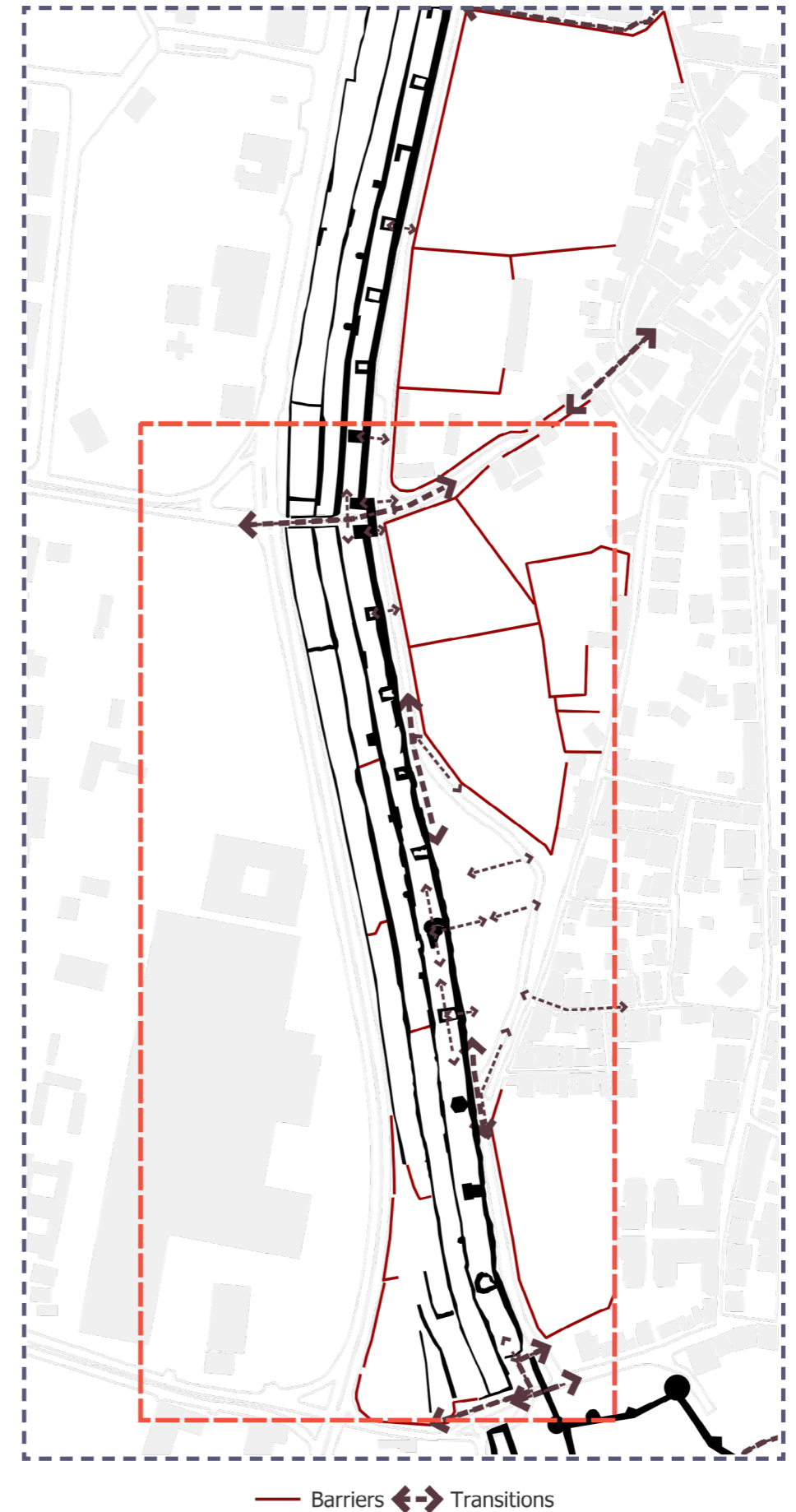
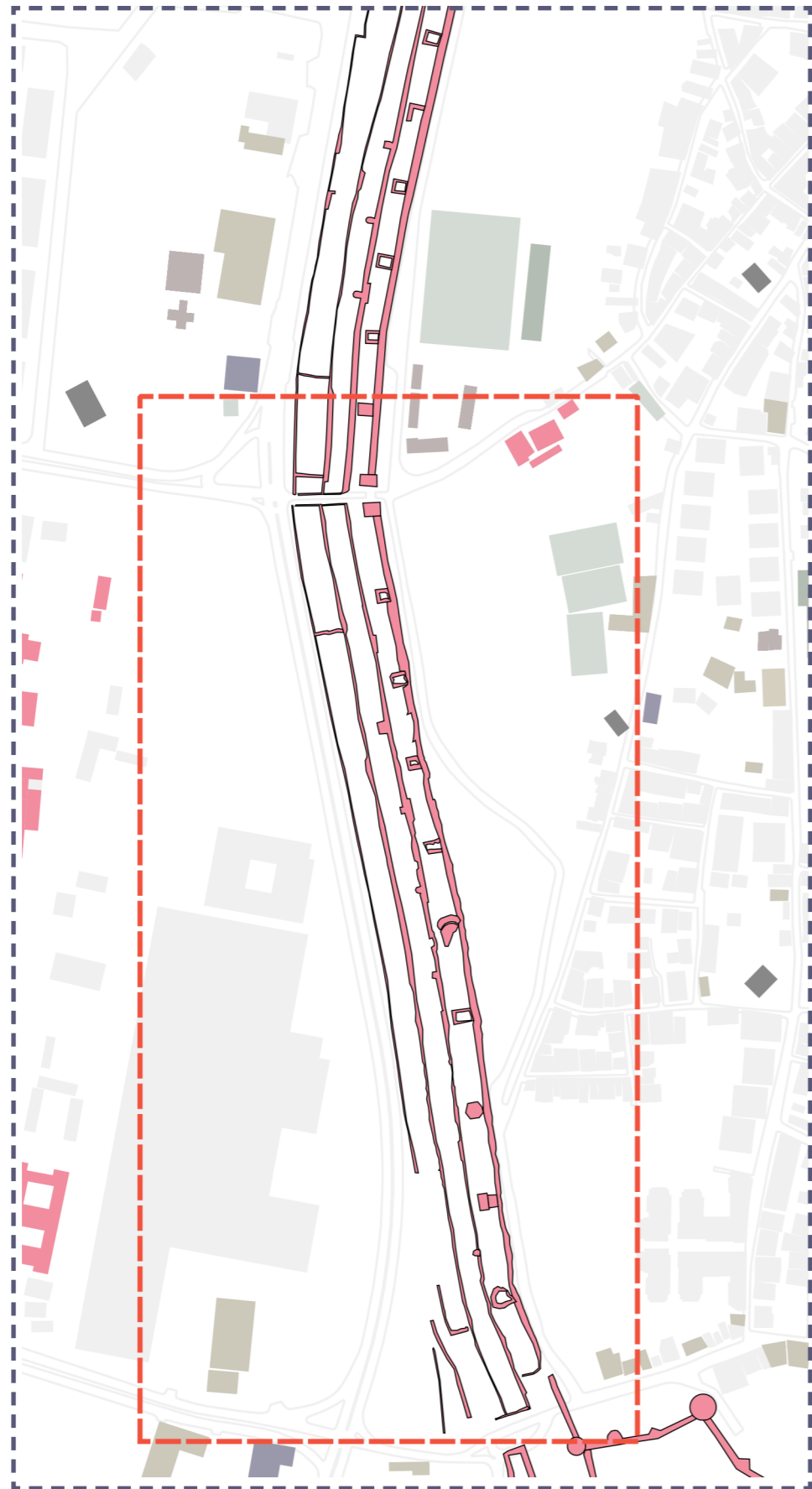
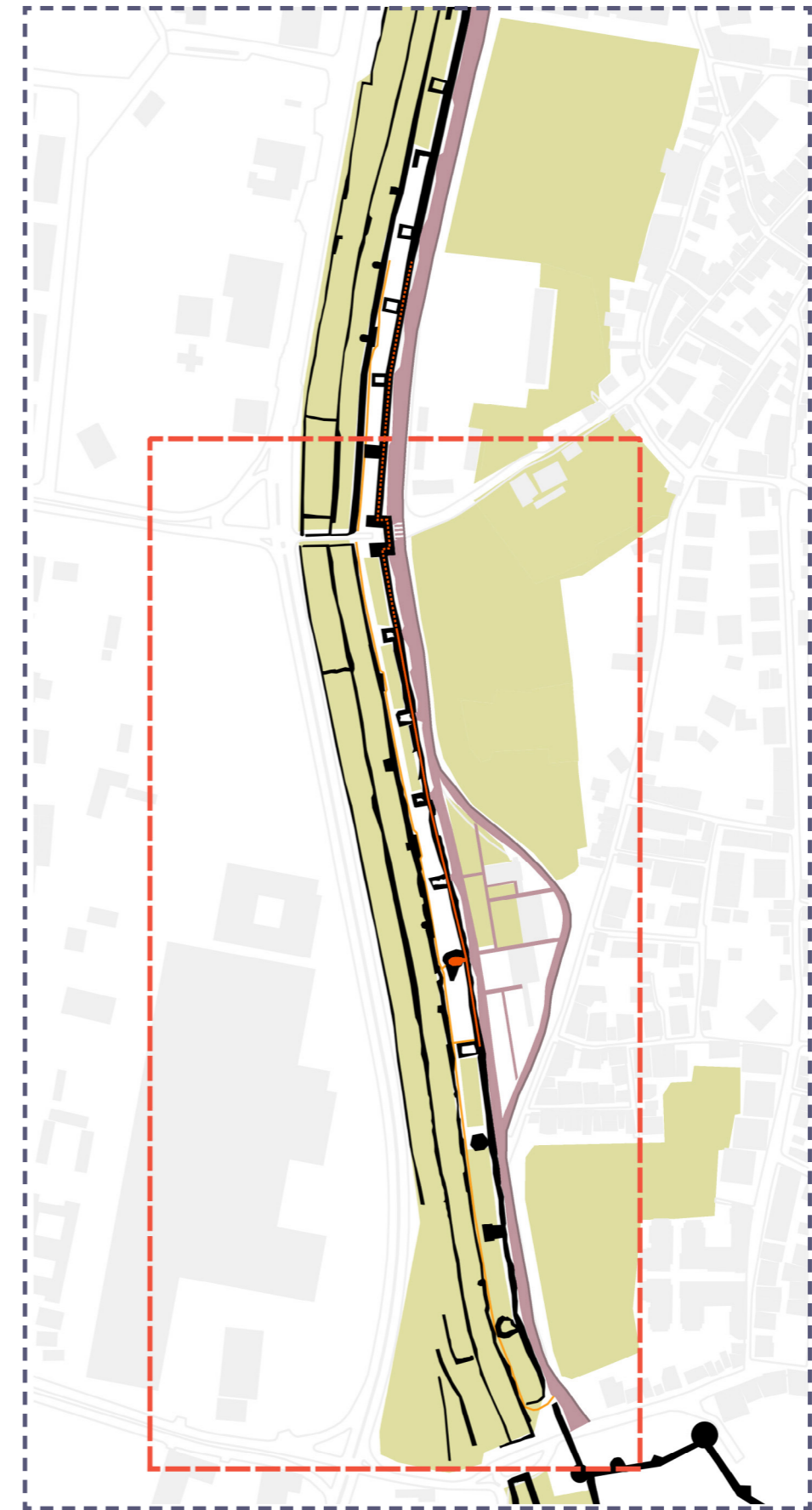


Fig.52 Proposal Borders and Passages



- Monuments
- Commercial
- Sport
- Place of worship
- Foundation and Association
- Football Field
- Education
- Government

Fig.53 Building Functions



- Land Walls Route
- Segirdim Path
- Bostan
- Wall Walk Path
- Bicycle Road

Fig.54 Proposal Pedesterian Paths

## Urban Geopolitics and Spatial Analysis

This section analyzes the political and legal mechanisms used to marginalize the Yedikule Bostans. It argues that the municipality's interventions as parks or recreational areas are not a result of a lack of well-intentioned planning, but rather active strategies aimed at displacement and socio-spatial control. The analysis reveals how ambiguity has become a tool of governance by reading the current situation of the gardens through Oren Yiftachel's concept of "Gray Space."

### Gray Space

To understand the vulnerability of the Yedikule gardeners, it is necessary to abandon reading the situation solely through the binary classification of legal or illegal. Instead, the area functions as what Yiftachel defines as "Gray Space"

"(...) 'gray space' refers to developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between the 'lightness' of legality/approval/safety and the 'darkness' of eviction/destruction/death." (Yiftachel 2009, 250)

In Yedikule, this grayness is a form of governmentality; a mechanism that neither fully integrates bostans into the legal fabric of the city nor completely eliminates them, but instead marginalizes them within the historical center.

The current status of the bostans is often described by the municipality as informal, distorted or unplanned, implying a temporary administrative oversight. However, when Yiftachel's framework is applied, this is defined not as a planning failure, but as a conscious act of un-planning. Gray spacing is not merely a legal status definition; it is a "ceaseless process of producing social relations" that maintains the power of the dominant group (state/municipality) over the marginalized group (the gardeners). (Yiftachel 2009, 250).

Historically, the gardens were "White Space"; registered in Ottoman waqf deeds, they were integrated and fully legitimate parts of the city's provisioning system. Their descent into the "Gray Zone" began with the transfer of authority to the state and the refusal to specifically zone the land as urban agriculture in modern zoning plans. By keeping the land's status ambiguous and turning a blind eye to the bostans for decades and legally classifying bostancis as squatters, the state retains the power to criminalize them at will. This allows the municipality to bypass the obligations of "corrective or equalizing policy" and to employ "a range of delegitimizing and criminalizing discourses" when the land is necessary for capital accumulation. (Yiftachel 2009, 250)

The fundamental function of the Gray Zone in Yedikule is the imposition of a state of "Permanent Temporariness." (Yiftachel 2009, 251) The state keeps the gardeners in a state of limbo where their existence is tolerated but their future is never secured. By refusing to grant secure property rights or zoning recognition,

the municipality actively prevents the development of permanent agricultural infrastructure.

This legal uncertainty functions as a "holding strategy" for future confiscation. Without tenure security, bostancis are hesitant to make necessary investments such as greenhouses, advanced irrigation systems, or soil improvements for fear of sudden eviction.

In the words of Ahmet, a bostancı in Yedikule, "If this property were mine, I would install a complete irrigation system, I would set up a drip system (...) But it's not feasible, you can't trust it because it's not your own land; it belongs to the state. (...) Because in the municipality records, it shows that we're occupying the land. We pay rent for occupancy, we pay extra for the National Estate, but we're still seen as occupiers. We're considered occupiers, meaning we've come here and settled, and the state has allowed you to stay, but the state says "I can make you leave whenever I want." That's what the law says." (Ahmet Kaplan and Şükriye Kaplan, "Bostancıs' interview with the author," October 2024)

The declaration of the Yedikule area as a "Renewal Area" under Law No. 5366 in 2006 was materialization of this strategy. This decision allowed the central government to override local conservation plans and legitimize the erasure of the bostans by declaring them obsolete to make way for new development projects. "Following the adoption of decision of "renewal", bulldozers of Fatih Municipality came to the site and demolished two urban gardens (...) They also damaged Theodosius Walls by removing nearly one meter of soil of their basements. However, it is known that the illegal construction activities within the same area started before that decision with Yedikule Villas-four story luxury residences." (Durusoy 2016, 131)

Gardeners, treated as invaders on the land they have cultivated for generations, are trapped in a cycle where they cannot improve their conditions because they are temporary, but cannot leave because this is their livelihood.

In Yedikule, this segregation is evident in the distinction between land and labor. The municipality's "Recreation Implementation Project" views the land as a visual commodity, a green backdrop for the city walls, while seeing the labor of the gardeners as an element of contamination to be removed. (Durusoy 2016, 131) The gardeners are rendered invisible in the planning process. They are denied the right to participate in determining their own future. The state severs the link between people and place where dominant interests (tourism, real estate) exploit and displace marginalized groups, preserving the scenery while erasing the society that produced it. The bostans are thus treated not as a living heritage site defined by labor, but as empty land awaiting correction by the state.

## Gentrifying Conservationism

The greatest threat facing the Yedikule Gardens is, paradoxically, not the neglect of the area, but the projects presented under the guise of conservation and beautification. Since the 2010s, the vision developed by local administrations for the Theodosian Walls and their surroundings has tended to transform productive agricultural areas into large-scale recreational landscapes. This chapter argues that the municipality's recreational area interventions are not innocent landscaping; a critical spatial analysis reveals these interventions to be mechanisms of what Lopes De Souza described as "Gentrifying Conservationism." (Lopes De Souza 2016, 1) where the discourse of environmental protection is instrumentalized as a tool for socio-spatial control. In this framework, green space is not a neutral amenity, it is a strategic asset used to reorganize the city's class structure.

In Yedikule, this manifests through municipal projects that propose replacing the historic bostans. This shift represents a neoliberalization of conservation where environmental values are selectively used to create exclusive landscapes that cater to the aesthetic preferences of the elite while displacing existing users. This process, under the guise of environmental protection, is gentrifying the area by rendering invisible the bostancis who have been cultivating the land for centuries.

Interventions such as the "Yedikule Walls Protection Recreation Project" treat the area not as an integrated urban agricultural zone, but as a park arranged solely with recreational activities in mind. This approach, ignoring the centuries-old professional agricultural production of the gardens, threatens to transform the area into hobby gardens similar to those seen in other parts of Istanbul, focusing on consumption rather than production.

However, a total rejection of open space in favor of pure agriculture ignores the genuine social needs of the neighborhood. There is a critical conflict: while the lawn is a tool of erasure, the community requires a space for gathering. As Amani-Beni et al. argue, successful urban agriculture must separate productive units from public units to protect the crops from damage while allowing ordinary visitors to engage with the site. (Amani-Beni et al. 2021, 16) Without a designated central meeting spot, the productive landscapes face the zoo Effect, where visitors trample sensitive crops on the productive units in their attempt to access the green space. Therefore, the site requires a meeting spot that facilitates community assembly, physically separated from the agricultural beds to ensure that the meeting place supports, rather than destroys, the soil.

Study Area - Walls Photographic Survey

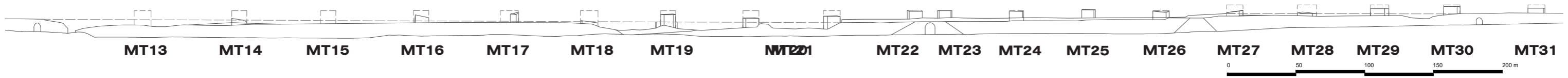


Fig.55 Walls Photographic Survey Key



MT13

MT14



MT15

MT16

MT17

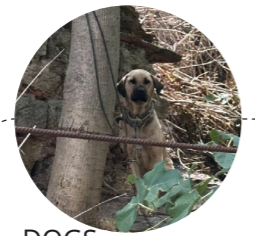


Fig.57 Walls Photographic Survey compiled by the author using photos from istanbulsurlari.ku.edu.tr



Bostancis use localized practices like barriers and surveillance to foster a sense of protection and resilience. These informal strategies transform the gardens into hybrid landscapes that support both community and cultivation.

### SAFETY



**DOGS**  
Bostancis rely on the dogs to guard the crops, deter potential threats, and maintain a sense of security in a landscape lacking clear boundaries or formal protection. It is a form of care that transcends human-centric perspectives, where dogs are not merely tools but partners in the survival and continuity of the bostan.



Leaving food and water out for stray animals is a common cultural tradition rooted in compassion and coexistence. Bostancis not only provide food and water for stray cats and dogs but also often adopt them as part of their community. By caring for these animals, the bostancis create a symbiotic relationship.



**CATS**  
Cats help controlling rodent populations, which protect crops and prevents damage to the gardens. As natural pest managers, they reduce the need for chemical interventions, supporting sustainable cultivation practices.



**LABOR OF CARE**  
is often invisible, underpaid, or unpaid and is associated with traditionally feminized roles or marginalized groups, which are given a lower value by the dominant system

### CARE

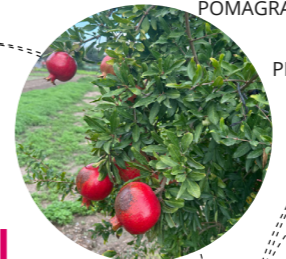


The stone, once for grinding wheat, now serves as a structure to accumulate water for birds to drink. This shift is an example of how a seemingly "ruined" or repurposed object can play a vital role in supporting life.



### HEIRLOOM SEEDS

Heirloom seeds are not merely biological materials; they are carriers of cultural, historical, and ecological heritage. These seeds embody a legacy of care, cultivated through the collaboration between human effort and nature's dynamics across generations.

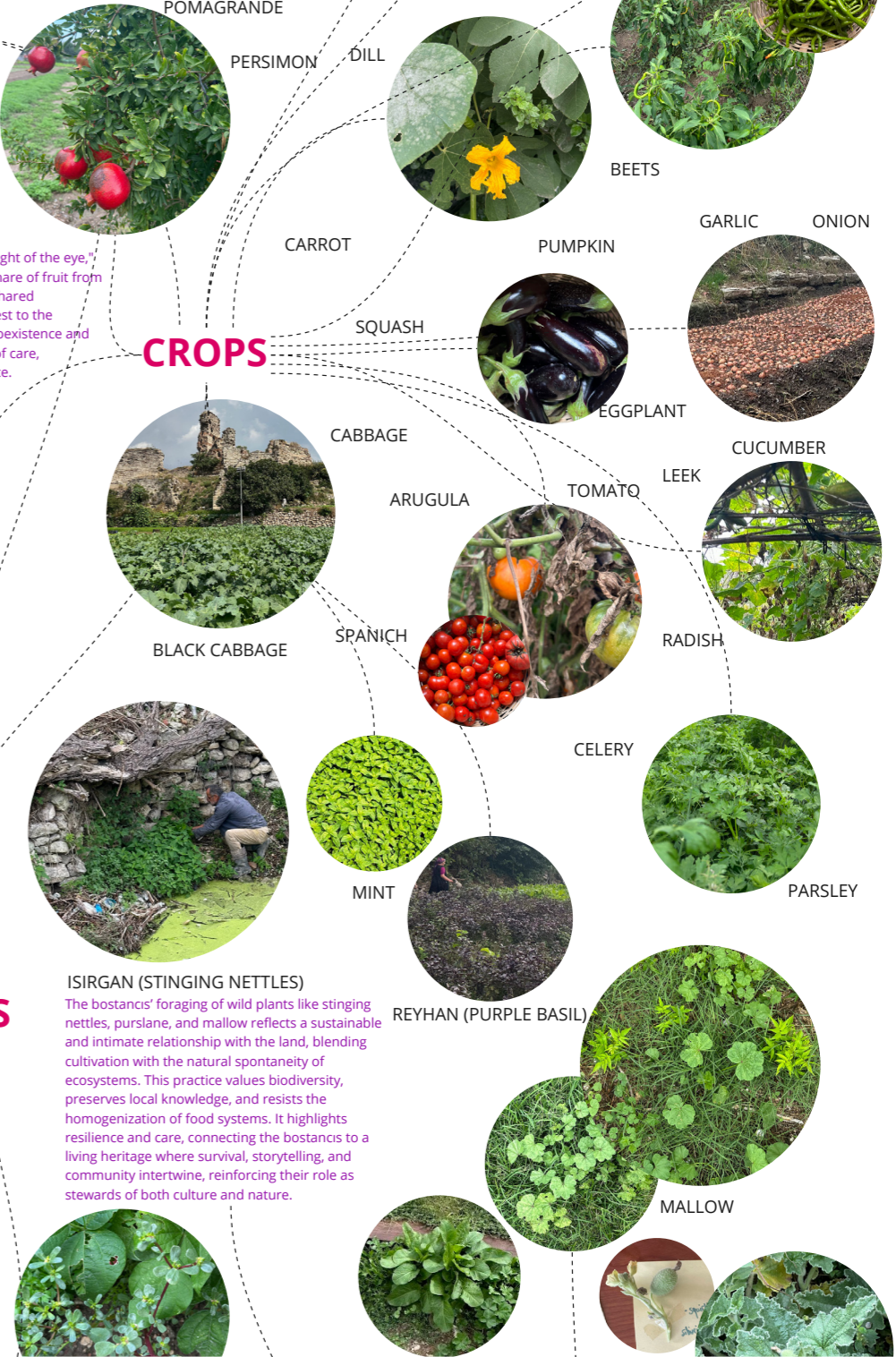


**POMAGRANDE**  
**PERSIMON**

### GÖZ HAKKI

a cultural tradition meaning "the right of the eye," allows passersby to take a small share of fruit from trees as an act of generosity and shared abundance. By offering their harvest to the community, the bostancis foster coexistence and transform the trees into symbols of care, connection, and collective resilience.

### CROPS



**CARROT**

**PUMPKIN**

**EGGPLANT**

**GARLIC** **ONION**

**CUCUMBER**

**TOMATQ**

**LEEK**

**RADISH**

**CELERY**

**PARSLEY**

**ISIRGAN (STINGING NETTLES)**

The bostancis' foraging of wild plants like stinging nettles, purslane, and mallow reflects a sustainable and intimate relationship with the land, blending cultivation with the natural spontaneity of ecosystems. This practice values biodiversity, preserves local knowledge, and resists the homogenization of food systems. It highlights resilience and care, connecting the bostancis to a living heritage where survival, storytelling, and community intertwine, reinforcing their role as stewards of both culture and nature.

**REYHAN (PURPLE BASIL)**

**MALLOW**

The recent femicide on the northern part of the walls, where no bostans exist, underscores the vulnerability of unattended spaces. While the parts of the walls with gardens feel safer due to the bostancis' care and presence, true safety requires the government and municipalities to take responsibility. The gardeners' actions mitigate risks, but these efforts remain a temporary response to deeper systemic challenges.

### Katiller belli suçlu sizsiniz



Kadınlar için cohenleme çevreleri Güneyi. Gençli düzünden, adaletsizlikten ve cozasızlıktan ötür alan evkiler hemen her gün köyüne seldiyor, katediyor

### FOOD SAFETY



Turkey leads Europe in food safety risk notifications, with concerns over pesticide residues and aflatoxins in exported produce. Many returned shipments are reportedly sold locally, raising health risks.

Care thinks of subjects "through connectedness with others," on the ontological level as much as on the political one.

### POLITICAL ECOLOGIES

### RESISTANCE

Bostans serve as a site of resistance against dominant property regimes and capitalist urban development

### POLITICAL GARDENING

The act of gardening as a tool for social and political change

### COMMONS

They are not a commons, but they have an atmosphere of the commons." - Shopov

### LOCAL CONTROL OVER FOOD SYSTEMS

At Yedikule Bostans, I became part of the harvest, gathering the offer of bostans before transforming them into menemen, a dish woven from tradition. In that moment, the distance between soil and table dissolved. I was no longer just a consumer but a thread in the cycle of cultivation and nourishment. Bostans is a system where food moves not through distant markets but through hands that know the earth. Beyond sustenance, this act became a quiet rebellion, honoring the legacy of the bostans while resisting the pressures of neoliberalism.

### FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

### GOVERNMENT AND MUNICIPALITIES

### URBAN AGRICULTURE

### INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

### LAND TENURE and SECURITY

### TANGIBLE HERITAGE

FOUNDATIONS  
PRIVATE  
UNESCO  
NATIONAL ESTATE  
CONTESTED



**HEDGEHOGS**

**SQUIRRELS**

**BATS**

**ACTIVISTS**

**NGO'S**

**RESEARCHERS**

**ECONOMIC PRESSURE**

### URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS



### SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

**EARTHWORMS**

**BEETLES**

**MILLIPEDES AND CENTIPEDES**

**FUNGHI**

**CATERPILLARS**

**SNAILS AND SLUGS**



**RODENTS**

**APHIDS**

**PESTS**

Gardeners often sell to local friends and neighbors at reduced prices or give to those in need, while those with access to wealthier customers might get a premium for higher quality produce.

**ROADSIDE STANDS**

**LOCAL MARKETS AND BAZAARS**

**RESTAURANTS**

**SPARROWS**

**DOVES**



**MAMMALS**

**STARLING**

**CROWS**

**BIRDS**

**RAVENS**

**BUTTERFLIES**

**PIGEONS**

**MOTHS**

**POLINATORS**

**BEES**

### FAUNA

**CO-OPS**

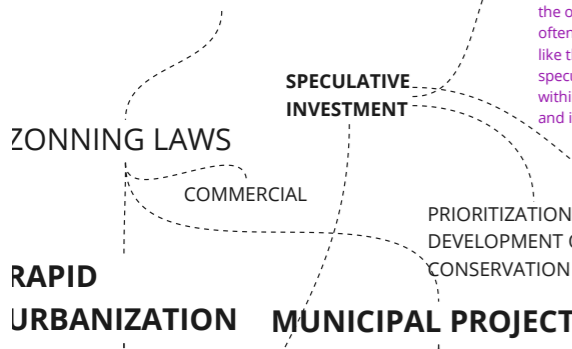
### TRADE THAT FEEDS US

### BOSTANCIS

GOVERNMENT AND MUNICIPALITIES



**LEGISLATIVE ISSUES**



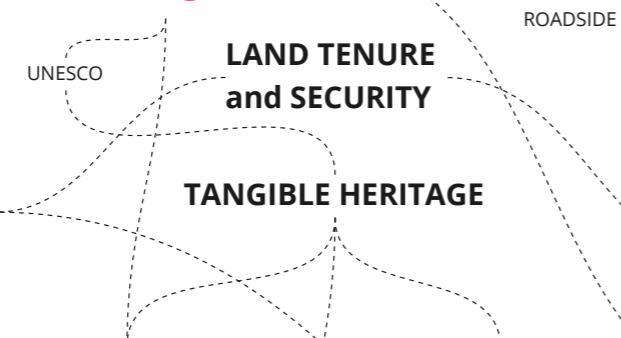
**ZONING LAWS**



**ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS**



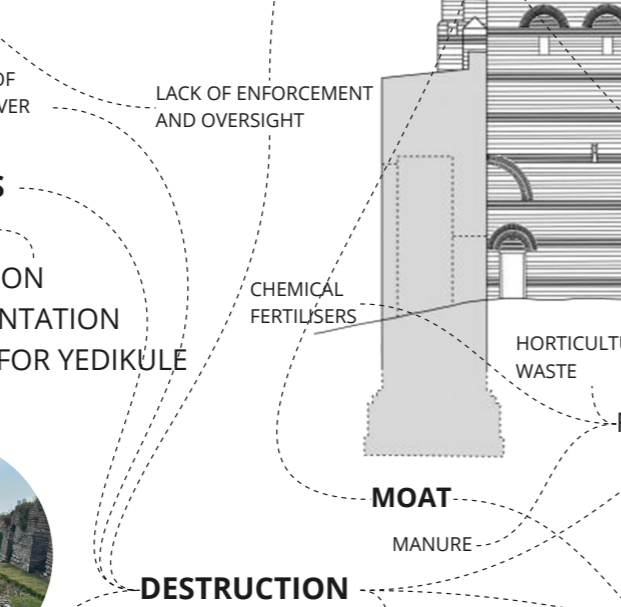
**INTANGIBLE HERITAGE**



**INTANGIBLE HERITAGE**

**RENEWAL AREA**

The Yedikule area, including bostans, was declared a "renewal area" in 2006. This designation allows for the override of existing conservation plans, which often prioritize the preservation of agricultural areas like the bostans. The "renewal" status allows for speculative investment in housing and development within conservation areas, disregarding the tangible and intangible value of these sites



**DESTRUCTION**



**EXPLOITATION**

Often exploit the existing water supplies, such as wells, to sell water for commercial landscaping, which indicates that these alternative uses of the land are prioritized over the historical agricultural practices of the area



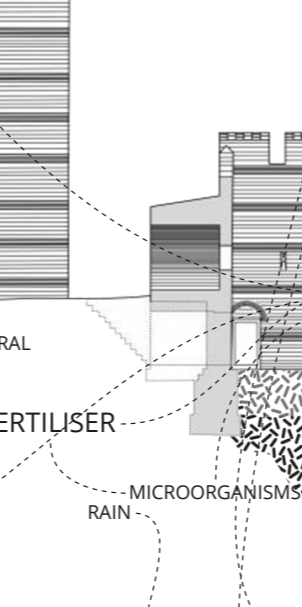
**TRADE THAT FEEDS US**



**TRADE THAT FEEDS US**

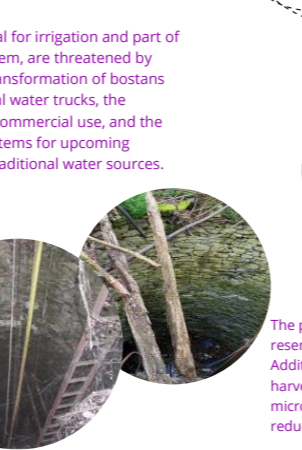
**AGROECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE**

"The bostan agroecosystem is a store of agroecological knowledge that serves as a model for urban agriculture. Over centuries, master gardeners have developed a specialized set of skills to sustainably provide food and employment to the urban population. Understanding the bostans helps us understand the constraints and obstacles faced by urban agriculture."

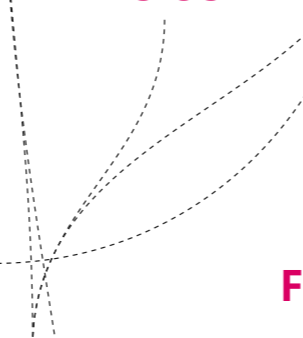


**WATER**

The ever-changing nature of water bodies teaches us about the interconnectedness of natural and social systems, as well as the role of power in shaping our access to essential resources. The commodification and privatization of water, where water is transformed from a public good into a marketable commodity, further complicates this, and leads to conflicts over control and access.



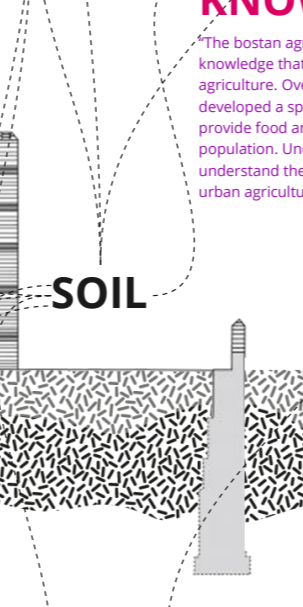
**TRADE THAT FEEDS US**



**FLORA**

**SPONTENIOUS VEGETATION**

This spontaneous vegetation softens the walls' imposing presence, blurring the line between human-made and natural worlds.



**WATER**

**MAŞULA** is a system of planting beds in the Yedikule gardens, each with water channels for irrigation, that are part of a system of traditional gardening and water management



**TRADE THAT FEEDS US**



**WILD FIG**

**GREEN CORRIDORS**

**IMPROVED ACCESS**

**URBAN COOLING**

**NEGLECTED LANDS**

The neglected areas along the land walls, full of wild plants and spontaneous greenery, are often overlooked yet serve as critical reservoirs of urban biodiversity. When integrated into green corridor strategies, the land walls can act as a spine for the historical peninsula, connecting fragmented ecosystems, enhancing ecological resilience, and enriching the cultural and environmental narrative of the city.

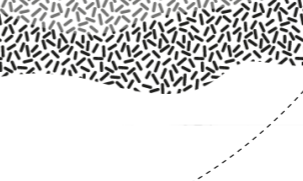
**GREEN CORRIDORS**

**IMPROVED ACCESS**

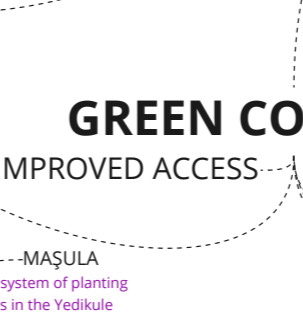
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**WATER**



**TRADE THAT FEEDS US**



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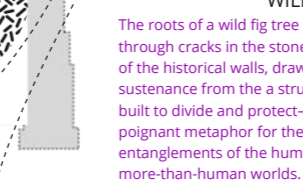
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**WATER**



## Commons & Architectures of Care

This section argues that the narrative of the city walls should be transformed from an aggressive defensive focus into an inclusive carrier bag that protects urban metabolism and collective nourishment; it suggests that the informal social practices of gardeners are in fact a vital form of metabolic repair and spatial self-governance. However, the current governance gap and renovation threats leave this cultural landscape politically vulnerable. The proposed design strategy aims to overcome this vulnerability by creating contact zones that combines technocratic planning with the gardeners' agro-ecological tacit knowledge. Shaped by a logic of strategic segregation and insurgent conviviality, this approach aims to transform Yedikule into a productive urban infrastructure where the right to produce and the right to the city coexist.

## Atmosphere of Commons

The gardens of the Yedikule Land Walls are neither a public space open to everyone in the classical sense, nor a closed private property.(Zerner 2020, 53) On the contrary, what Aleksandar Shopov calls an "atmosphere of commons" prevails here. This atmosphere is a whole set of social practices that exist outside of formal state or market mechanisms; produced through mutual support, daily negotiation, and the collective management of shared resources.(Zerner 2020, 53)

The analysis of Yedikule requires focusing on Eizenberg's concept of Actually Existing Commons, rather than viewing the uncertainty in legal status as an obstacle(Eizenberg 2012). In the neoliberal city, as public spaces become increasingly commercialized, such commons are defined not by title deeds but by labor and social relations. Although the gardeners on the city walls are officially coded as "occupiers," they are in reality the de facto managers of an uninterrupted agricultural production and "provisioning system" that has continued for 1600 years.

Yedikule operates on a logic of negotiated access. Unlike parks where entry is a civic right, the gardens are spaces based on social interaction and use value. Visitors' entry to the area usually occurs through "greetings" and "negotiations" with the gardener; this is often reinforced by traditional sharing practices such as "the right to see." This dynamic rejects the "exchange value" of land in the real estate market, prioritizing "use values" such as communal sustenance, access to fresh food, and belonging. Gardeners produce not only vegetables but also a social fabric and a space of autonomy for individuals atomized by urbanization.

Despite these strong social practices, there is a significant "Governance Gap" in the area. The lack of a formal "organizational infrastructure" for these everyday practices in resource management leaves the area politically vulnerable. This vulnerability was further deepened by the area being declared a "Renewal Area" in 2006; this status granted the municipality the authority to prioritize

speculative projects by bypassing existing conservation rules.(Ince and Kadirbeyoğlu, n.d.)

The perception of gardeners as temporary or unregistered weakens them legally in the face of property-focused urban transformation projects. The gardeners' local and tacit knowledge of preserving the ecological and physical integrity of the city walls is often overlooked by centralized planning approaches that design green decor or hobby gardens. Therefore the survival of bostans as a de facto common good depends on closing this governance gap and legitimizing their everyday labor practices into a recognized political claim.(Scharf et al. 2019, 2)

The transition from an informality to a political claim is materialised through the Yedikule Bostanci Association, which was formed to provide the gardeners with a formal representative body during negotiations with the municipality. By seeking legal recognition and stature as an association of workers, the gardeners move beyond being seen as "informal occupants" to becoming recognized political actors demanding their right to production. This association acts as the necessary mediation interface that pools local initiatives into a strong network, allowing the gardeners to engage with city administration.

## Spatial Practices of Care: The Carrier Bag Theory

Treating the Land Walls solely as an isolated military defensive object excludes the fact that architecture is inherently a care labor that provides shelter, food, and continuity essential for human survival.(Krasny 2019) This chapter redefines the Land Walls through Ursula K. Le Guin's "Carrier Bag Theory," shifting the narrative from the spear (the wall) as a masculine defensive "weapon" to a "protective vessel" that historically and ecologically held the city's provisions.(Guin 1986)

Le Guin's theory suggests that the first cultural tool in human history was not the spear (a weapon of heroism and killing), but a bag or basket (a vessel for gathering and sharing).(Guin 1986, 3) When this perspective is applied to the Theodosian Walls, the monument's function transforms from a military object of conquest into a vessel carrying the city's metabolism. Historical evidence places this vessel model at the center: the Theodosian Code of 422 AD (Codex Theodosianus Book VII.8.13) legally permitted the use of the lower floors of the towers in the inner wall for the storage of agricultural tools and crops. This historical document proves that the military infrastructure was planned as a food storehouse ensuring urban food security even during its construction. For approximately 1600 years, the spaces (peribolos) and moats between the city walls have functioned as the city's food basket, ensuring the city's physical and biological survival throughout sieges and imperial changes.

In this context, the gardener is not a figure outside of property ownership in the area, but a primary actor in the city's Metabolic Repair process(Tornaghi and Dehaene

2020, 600). Modern urbanization has created an ecological disconnect between land and waste, and between production and consumption. The gardeners in Yedikule are repairing this rift by transforming urban organic waste into soil fertility and by continuing traditional methods such as the 1600-year-old "maşula" (a type of traditional gardening method). The gardeners' reconstruction of the soil through generations of improvement is a concrete form of resistance and spatial self-governance against the neoliberal tabula rasa approach that disregards the existing environment.

The continuous presence of the gardeners in the area creates a multi-dimensional protection and security mechanism:

**Social Security:** The presence and residences of the gardeners in the area have created an order by ensuring that the areas at the foot of the city walls are free from harm and trash.

**Physical Preservation:** The constant supervision of gardeners acts as a "park ranger," preventing damage to the walls from illegal excavations, dumping, or vandalism.

**Ecological Hydrology:** The operation of ancient wells and the preservation of the soil's permeable structure regulate water flow, protecting the wall foundations from erosion and static deterioration.

**Bio-Cultural Continuity:** Agricultural know-how and seed heritage ensure that the monument remains not a dead pile of stones, but a living and productive Cultural Landscape. Consequently, these care practices are a radical part of urban life.

The design proposal aims to protect the Land Walls with relational links between people, land, and the monument, by affirming the gardener's maintenance labor as a vital infrastructure system. Thus, the fortifications cease to be static ruins and return to a living and nurturing vessel for the future of

## Information Hierarchy: Contact Zone

The struggle over the future of the Yedikule Gardens is as much an epistemological battle as it is a spatial conflict. To propose a design that will effectively protect this area, it is necessary to dismantle the existing knowledge hierarchy that prioritizes technocratic and monumental expertise over the gardeners' lived, agro-ecological knowledge. This section examines the necessity of transforming the area into a "Contact Zone" where different types of knowledge and actors interact as equals.

While local initiatives like the gardens are often celebrated as inherently democratic, one must be wary of the concept of the "local trap." (Follmann and Viehoff 2015, 15) This concept reminds us that the local scale is not a priori "good" or fair; rather, scales are produced through social struggles. In Yedikule, simply being "local" does

not automatically grant gardeners a voice in the future of the city. For gardens to function as a true commons, the local scale needs to be conceived as part of a "rooted cosmopolitanism" linked to global struggles for food sovereignty and spatial justice.

One of the biggest obstacles to the preservation of gardens is the official conservation discourse's perspective on heritage. For decades, historic green spaces have been preserved not as living systems, but as static antique objects to be observed from afar. This "museumization" lens classifies gardeners' activities, such as composting or traditional irrigation, as marginal, unproductive, or even visual pollution. This creates a hierarchy where the hegemonic knowledge of planners and archaeologists outweighs the resilient knowledge of gardeners. However, gardeners possess an ancient agro-ecological knowledge system, which researchers call tacit knowledge, encompassing the management of 1600-year-old wells and traditional irrigation canals called maşula. Within the current hierarchy, this expertise is marginalized; it is often considered temporary or informal by municipal and renewal authorities.

To counteract this exclusion, the area must be conceived as a "Contact Zone." The contact zone, theorized by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, is a space that allows for "mutual intelligibility" between different experiences and knowledge without destroying the identity of the participants. (Juris 2013, 41) In this framework, the designer's role is not to speak on behalf of the gardeners but to provide the necessary spatial infrastructure for translation.

This translation process acknowledges that a single "master plan" is insufficient for the complexity of Yedikule. Design; It facilitates a "multi-stakeholder dialogue" where archaeologists, architects, and gardeners can develop a shared understanding of their different but overlapping interests in soil and stone.

True spatial justice cannot be achieved without cognitive justice, which demands equal status for scientific and traditional types of knowledge. The design proposal embodies this principle through two fundamental infrastructures:

**The Library (Active Memory):** The Library is a place to keep the site's history alive. It gathers the stories passed down through generations and details about local seeds, making sure this knowledge doesn't get frozen or forgotten like an object in a dead museum. Knowing that they are part of a long history gives the neighborhood the confidence to keep trying new things and experimenting with the land today.

**The Workshop:** The Workshop is a physical meeting spot where people can work together to keep the shared gardens running. It is a space for learning by doing, where everyone can freely trade their skills and ideas. In this space, traditional work like making compost or improving the soil is recognized as an important job that helps the

city function. This helps people see the gardener not as a temporary visitor, but as a respected expert who truly looks after the monument.

By building these places where people can talk and share what they know, the design moves the Land Walls away from being a site of constant disagreement. Instead, it becomes a spot where everyone's knowledge is valued. This ensures that the old walls are protected by the strong connections between the people and the land they treat as a living resource.

### Spatializing Insurgent Conviviality

The design strategy developed for the Yedikule Land Walls must manage a delicate tension: How to create space for the public's "Right to the City" without compromising the gardeners "Right to Produce"? Without clear spatial boundaries, uncontrolled public access threatens crop productivity and risks transforming urban agriculture into a spectacle for the curious gaze of visitors, i.e., a "zoo effect" (Shopov, 627). To prevent this, the design follows a Strategic Segregation strategy that separates production units from public recreation areas.

Inspired by the structural logic of historical Iranian Gardens, the design advocates for a clear distinction between pleasure landscape and production landscape. This is not an act of exclusion; it is a practice of Care Architecture that uses elevation differences, permeable fences, and plant buffer zones to protect the fragility of crops from accidental damage or vandalism. Design provides the necessary privacy and security for gardeners to continue their ancient techniques, such as the maşula irrigation system, without being hindered by recreational traffic, by creating these "protected zones". In this context, gathering spaces, especially cafes and market areas, are consciously transformed into arenas of insurgent conviviality and political expression. Unlike ordinary city parks, this conviviality is based on the use value of the land]. The market area strengthens social ties through communal feeding and local food exchange, instead of the logic of real estate speculation, by establishing a direct link between producers and consumers.

The interaction between the Land Walls and the city is mediated by a system of walkpaths that connect previously separated urban sectors while celebrating the site's agricultural identity. To protect the professional labor of the gardeners, these paths are structured to provide public access without disrupting cultivation; this is achieved through a form of separation such as level changes and marked walkways that acts as a symbolic measure of security for the crops. By confining public movement on defined walkways and viewing terraces, the design allows the public to perceive the monument as a living, productive infrastructure rather than a static ruin.

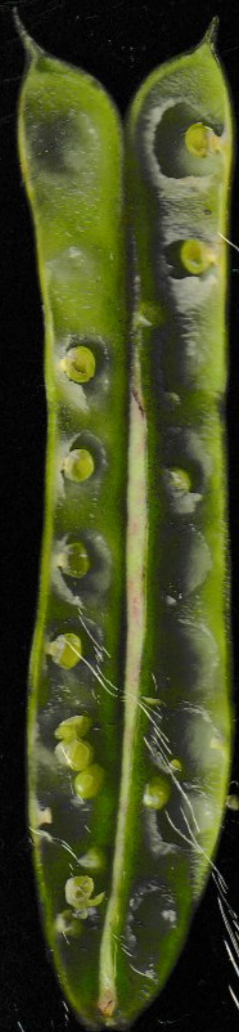
Most importantly, these social areas are strategically concentrated at specific points to preserve the integrity

of the soil. Uncontrolled pedestrian traffic causes soil compaction, which destroys the soil's ability to absorb water and regulate heat. By keeping social activities on defined platforms and walkways, the design ensures that the open and permeable soil of the gardens continues to act as a metabolic valve. This approach treats the garden not as a finished aesthetic object, but as a living urban infrastructure where social interaction and ecological survival are interdependent.

In summary, spatializing conviviality at Yedikule means creating a hybrid landscape that integrates social education with professional farming. By carefully zoning the site, the design protects the gardener's livelihood and the city's ecological health, ensuring the Land Walls remain an active, generative vessel for the city's metabolism.

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**DESIGN**

# Study Area



Fig.60 Study Area - Masterplan

# Master Plan

## LIBRARY

The library provides a study and information space, serving as a contact zone where knowledge, culture, and community intersect. It supports learning, collaboration, and engagement with local history, agriculture, and heritage.

## WALL WALK PATH

A pedestrian path atop the Theodosian Walls links the towers and Belgrade Gate. Bridges span broken sections, creating a continuous cultural promenade and viewing terrace along the historic fortifications.

## END OF WALL WALK PATH

The route ends at an already restored staircase, providing safe access to the ground level.

## TOWER PASSAGE & STAIRCASE

Main tower 17 features a door connecting the outer side of the wall to the inner wall, and a staircase providing access to the Wall Walk bridge. Together, they create a continuous passage linking the inner fortifications with the elevated path along the walls.

## EDUCATION BOSTANS

Education bostans serve as interactive contact zones where schools, the public, and bostancis engage directly with local crops and agroecological practices.

## GATHERING SPACE

An amphitheatre offers stepped seating for events and gatherings, with views of the walls and gardens.

## PATH FOLLOWING THE SEGIRDIM LINE

By tracing the route once used by soldiers, it highlights the fortifications while maintaining a respectful distance from the masonry. Its slight elevation prevents ground disturbance, allowing existing bostancis to continue cultivating the land uninterrupted, turning the former defensive corridor into an accessible cultural walkway woven through living heritage.

## COMMUNITY GARDEN

A community garden will allow residents to grow local crops, engage with urban agriculture, and experience living bostan heritage.

## RESTORATION OF FORMER BOSTAN AREAS

Zones that recently lost their bostan status will be revived, restoring their productive role and reintegrating them into the living agricultural heritage of the area.

## WEEKLY BAZAAR

A weekly bostanci market (bazaar) will be held along the pedestrian route beside the Land Walls, celebrating local produce and urban farming traditions while activating the historic promenade.

## CAFE

A cafe offers a social space for visitors to rest and gather, connecting the pedestrian route, community garden, and surrounding heritage areas.

## BOSTANCI ASSOCIATION

A dedicated bostanci association will protect the rights of bostancis and traditional urban farming practices.

## WORKSHOP CLASSES

Workshop spaces host hands-on training in urban farming, tree care, cooking, and craft skills, led by experienced bostancis who are the educators, promoting practical learning and the transmission of bostan traditions.

SPORTS AREA

RESTORED BOSTAN

SPORTS AREA

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

SPORTS AREA

## REDIRECTED TRAFFIC

The road along the Land Walls is converted into a route with limited service access, while the parallel street takes on regular traffic.

HACI PIRI MOSQUE

### Tower Characteristics

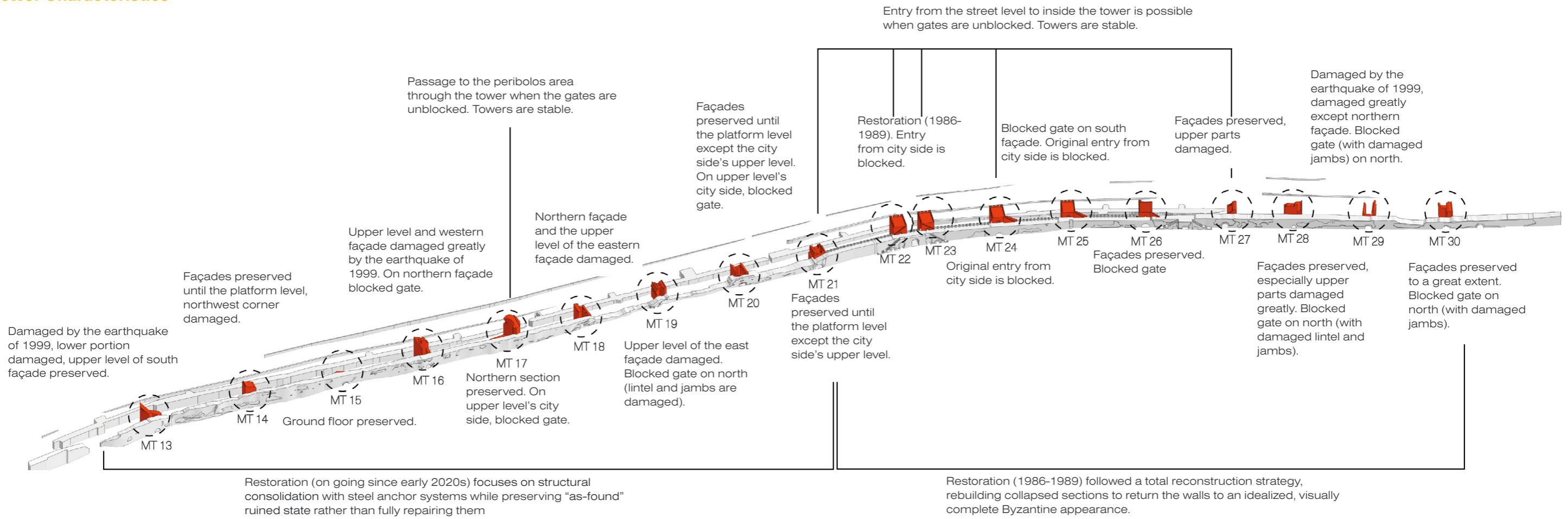


Fig.61 Tower Characteristics

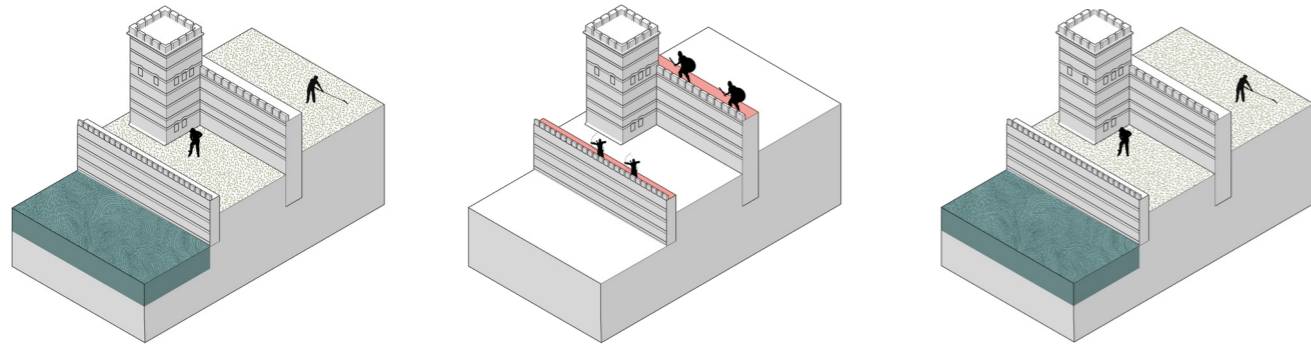


Fig.63 View from Tower 22 of the Belgrade gate by Nickmard Khoey Historical Archive - flickr



Fig.62 Towers 22 to 17 by Caner Cangül

HISTORICAL USAGE



PROPOSED USAGE

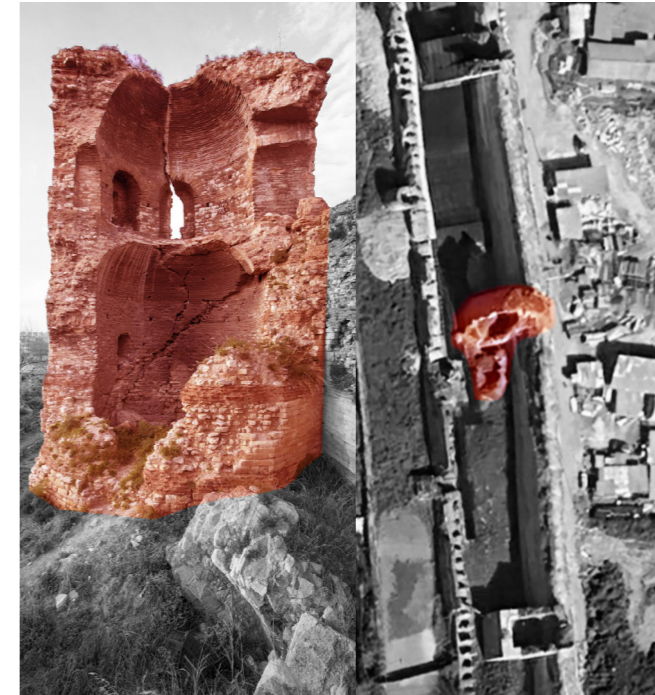
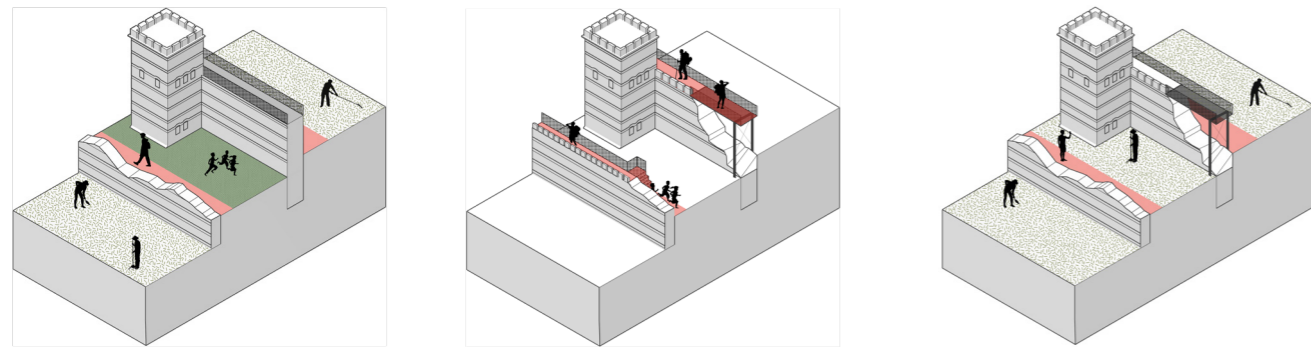


Fig.64 Historical and proposal usage of landwalls

Fig.65 Existing situation of Tower 17 and Belgrade Gate, photos from istanbulsurlari.ku.edu.tr

**DESIGN SITE**

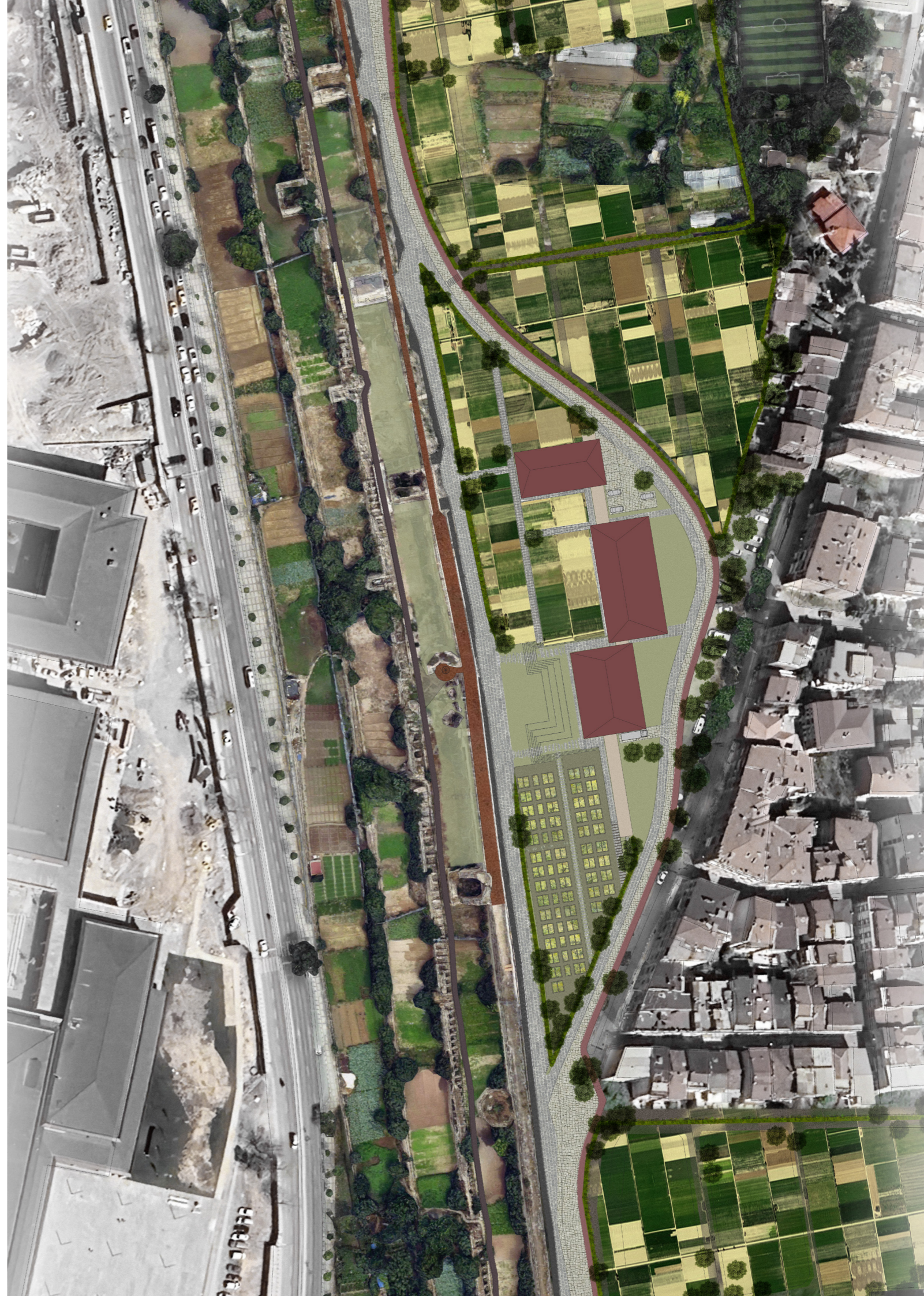
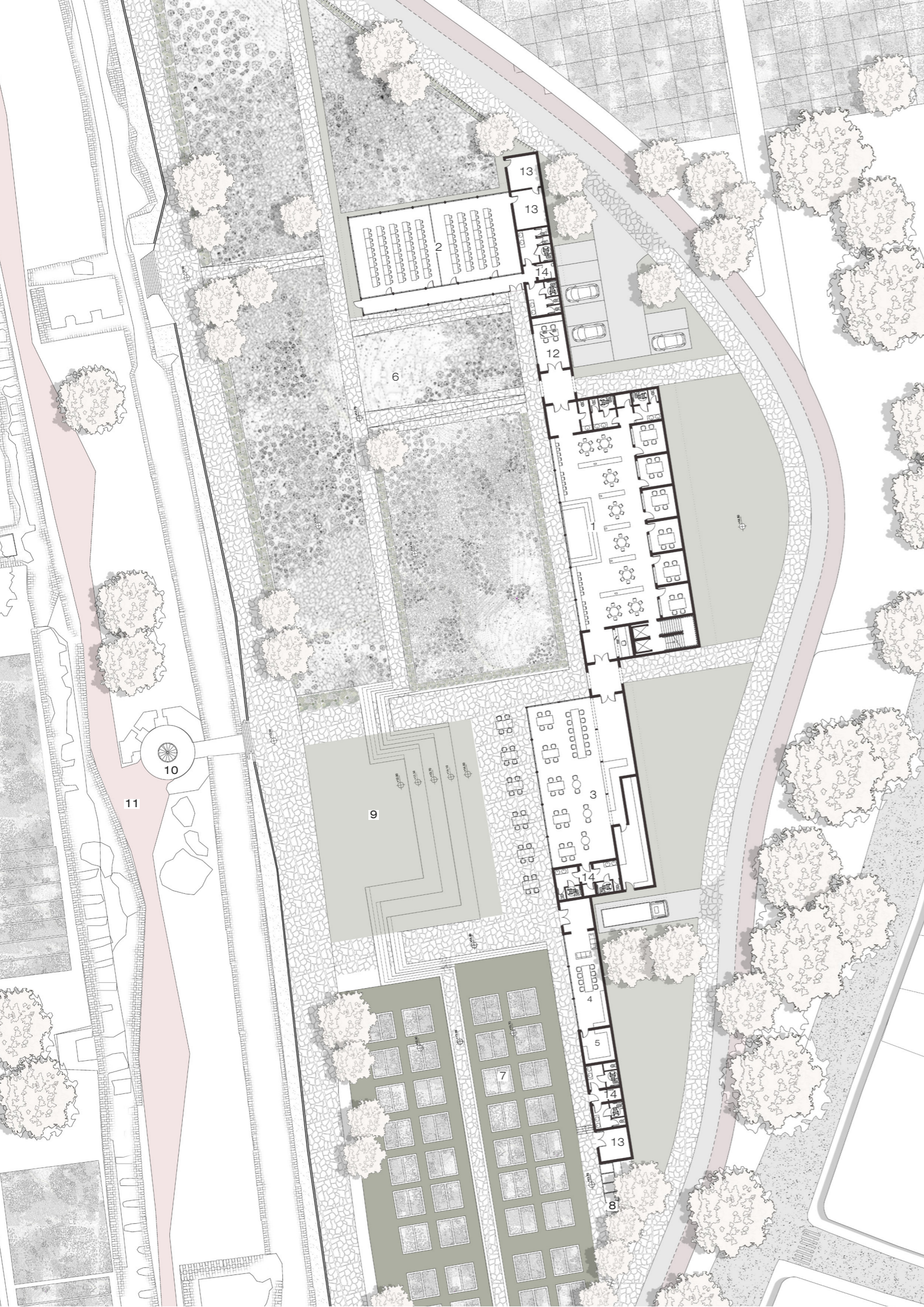
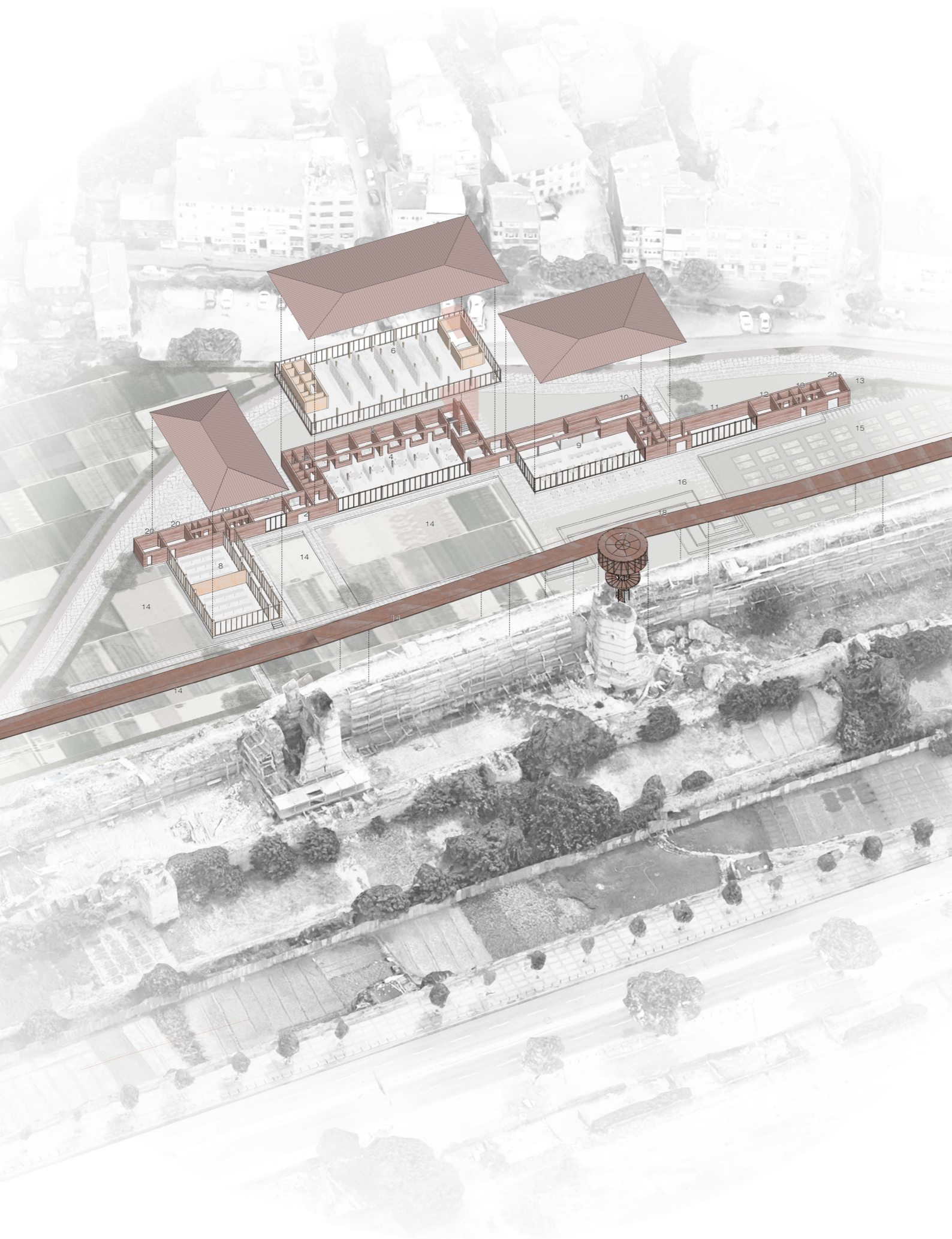


Fig.66 Design Site - Master Plan, Scale 1:500



- 1 Library
- 2 Workshop Classrooms
- 3 Cafe
- 4 Bostancı Association
- 5 Seed Exchange Library
- 6 Education Bostans
- 7 Community Gardens
- 8 Community Compost
- 9 Amphitheater
- 10 Segirdim Walk Path
- 11 Tower 17 Staircase to Wall Walk

Fig.67 Ground Floor Plan



- 1 Public Entrance
- 2 Event Entrance
- 3 Library Reception
- 4 Group Study Space
- 5 Group Study Rooms
- 6 Quiet Study Space
- 7 Services Desk
- 8 Workshop Classrooms
- 9 Cafe
- 10 Kitchen
- 11 Bostancı Association
- 12 Seed Library
- 13 Community Compost
- 14 Education Bostans
- 15 Community Gardens
- 16 Grass Amphitheater
- 17 Tower 17 Staircase
- 18 Wall Walk Path
- 19 Toilets
- 20 Storage

Fig.68 Annotated Exploded Axonometry

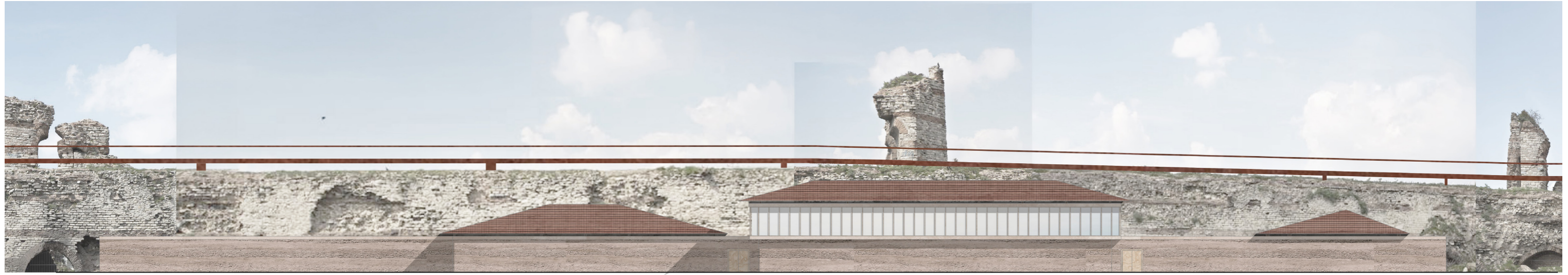


Fig.69 East Elevation



Fig.70 West Elevation



Fig.71 North Elevation

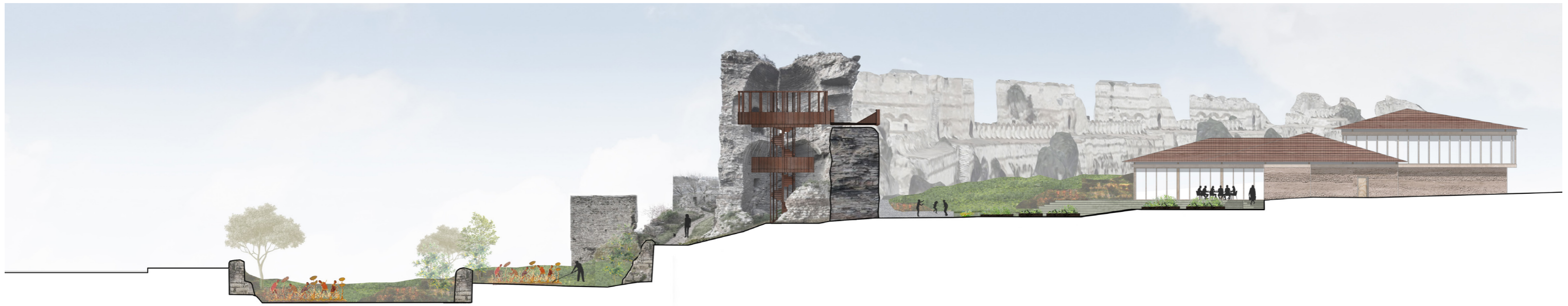


Fig.72 South Elevation

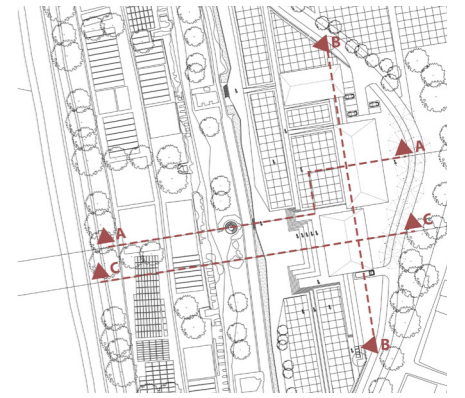


Fig.73 Section AA

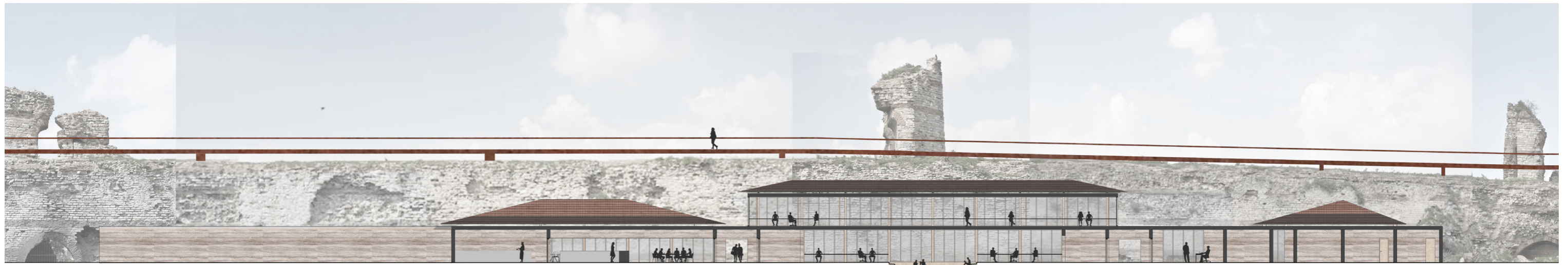


Fig.74 Section BB

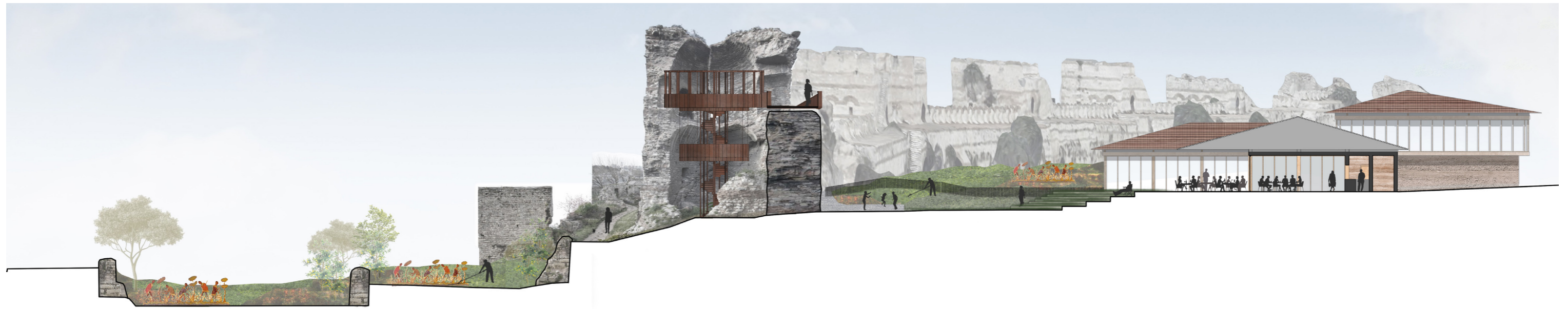
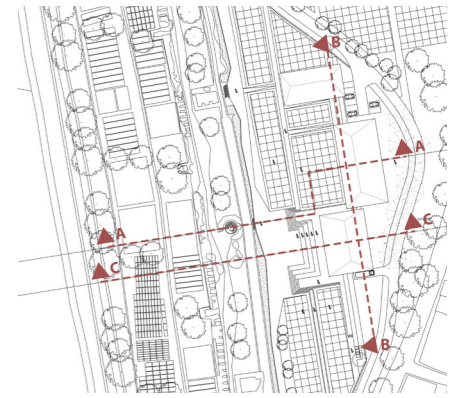


Fig.75 Section CC



Fig.76 Tower 17 and wall walk path

## Messner Mountain Museum “Firmiano” (MMM), Castel Firmiano

### Werner Tscholl

Client: Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano–Alto Adige

Design: 2001–2003

Construction: 2003–2006

In accordance with the conservationists' creed, which states that nothing should be inserted that cannot be reversed at a later date, all the exhibition facilities, visitors ramps, staircases etc. were made of steel and inserted into the existing ambiance. Normal construction steel was used; the individual elements were simply screwed together to create a tower within the tower, as it were. Where the steel elements are used externally they will be allowed to rust gradually so that in time their colour will match that of the existing reddish porphyry. (Schlorhauser 2008, 274)

This approach sets a clear example for the design of the staircase and wall walkway on the Theodosian Walls: the intervention demonstrates how contemporary circulation systems can be added in a lightweight and recyclable way, increasing accessibility while respecting archaeological integrity. The contrast between raw steel and ancient stone reinforces temporal legibility, while the independent structural logic ensures that the historic walls remain untouched.

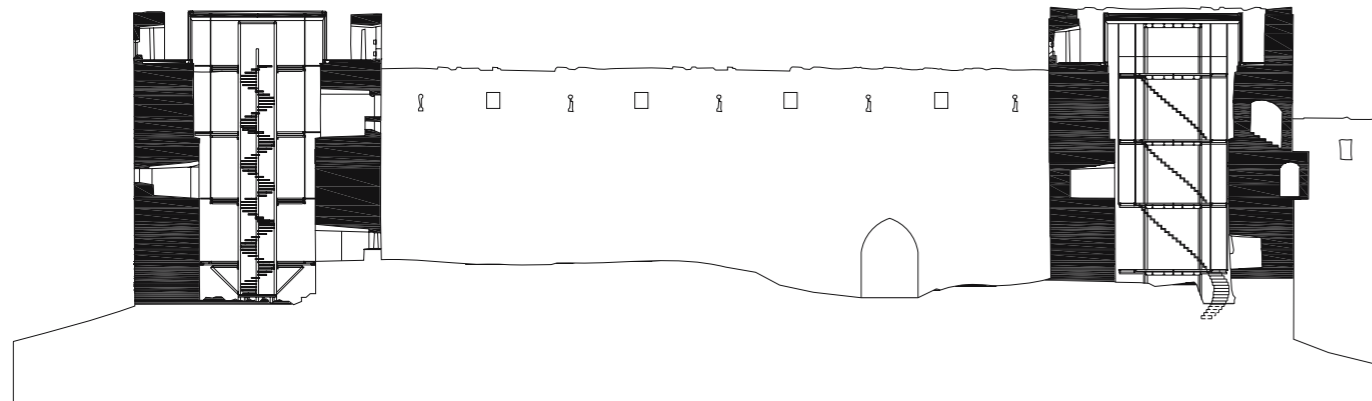
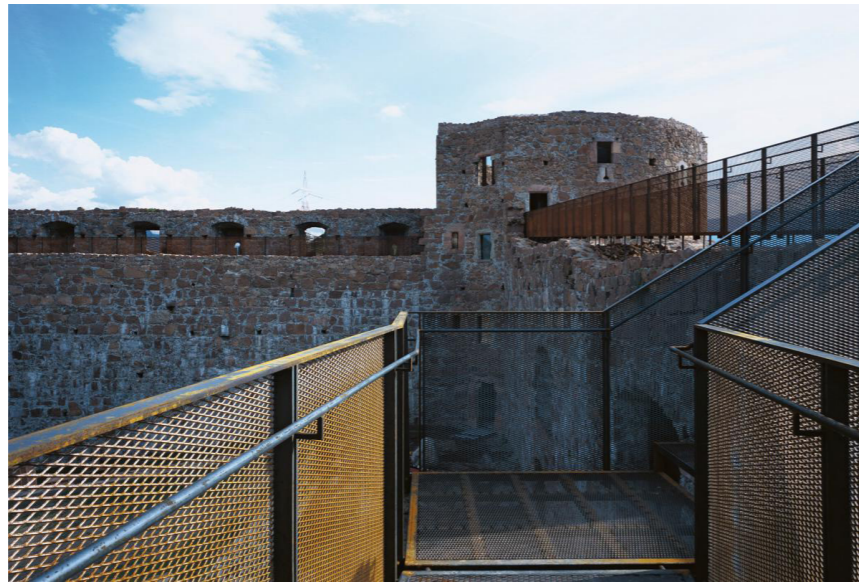
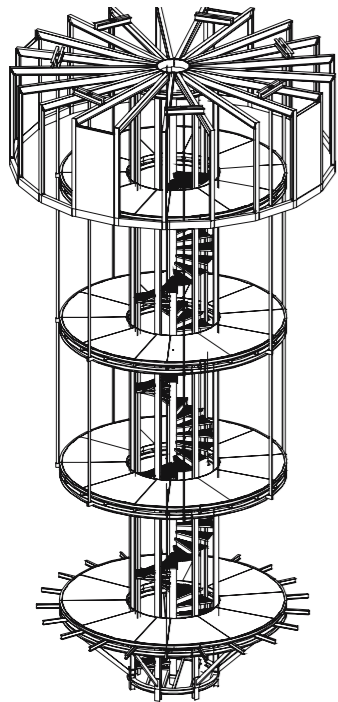


Fig.77 Drawings of interventions by Werner Tscholl  
Messner Mountain Museum obtained from Schlorhauser 2008, 276



Fig.78 Photos by Alexa Raine obtained from divisare.com

# Conclusion

Yedikule landscape is a collective unified system where the defensive structure of the Theodosian Walls and the productive agricultural lands of bostans have existed together through empires. Today the landwalls and bostans are treated as separate entities and consequently the agricultural lands and the bostan culture face the danger of erasure.

To ensure the survival of this legacy, Theodosian Walls and Bostans must be protected as a system. This thesis proposes spatial interventions to safeguard the historical structure of the landwalls, the productive nature of the bostans and the knowledge and wellbeing of bostancis while integrating them into urban life. However to ensure the safety of bostans and bostancis it is fundamental to ensure the land security for gardeners. Their current legal status puts bostancis in a legal limbo where they are treated as squatters, putting them into a precarious situation that threatens the continuity of this tradition. Bostancis should be legally recognised as the tenants of the land. Instead of the current ecrimisil (occupation tax) system, the bostancis should be offered long term contracts with the condition to keep the land productive. They should be recognised as the stewards of the land and the safekeepers of historical agricultural knowledge. Legal legitimacy is a must for the preservation of this culture. Only when the bostancis are secure in their land, the spatial strategies for public integration and restoration can be effective. Consequently a bostanci association should be maintained to formalize representation and protect the right of the gardeners while protecting the traditional practices and heirloom seeds.

The design proposal is a mediation strategy which resolves the inherent tension between public access, monumental preservation, and productive labor. To implement this solution, public visitor spaces must be separated from productive bostans ensuring that the efficiency of the harvest and the health of the soil is undisturbed. The walk paths must be clearly distinctive from bostans but they still make them visible without disturbing the farmers' labor.

To highlight the bostancis craft and the continuity of the tradition the proposal introduces contact zones. These zones bring bostancis and the public together while placing bostancis as educators. This way the public can engage with bostancis and learn the craft directly from them. This engagement legitimizes the craft through participation and visibility while highlighting it as a cultural heritage.

Spatial strategy also includes a cafe, weekly street bazaar for bostan produce, amphitheatre for gathering and a community garden where the neighborhood can take part in urban agriculture and experience the bostan tradition. These interventions repair the modern disconnect between production and consumption, land and waste by highlighting the importance of bostans for food security. It makes the food cycle evident by celebrating the care and labor of bostancis (from seed to harvest to the market) then enjoying dishes from locally grown vegetables and fruits in the cafe and finally to community compost where the whole cycle starts again.

Yedikule is not a local issue, it has global importance. As a UNESCO world heritage site, the unified system of bostans and landwalls should be recognised as a living cultural heritage. The project treats the history as a live entity by offering an alternative to museum style preservation. By securing the legal rights of bostancis and integrating bostans, landwalls and communities together it creates a global template for urban resilience rooted in production and care.

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