

SPLENDID PALAS HOTEL



1908

I S T A N B U L

Some time during the second half of the nineteenth century, following the death of his father Mustafa Efendi –a kolağası (a military rank between captain and lieutenant colonel) in the Ottoman artillery– the poet Edhem Efendi took his two young brothers and left his native Island of Chios (in Turkish, Sakız Adası) for İstanbul. With his paternal uncle’s help, he obtained a government position and did his best to raise his brothers properly. Indeed, they both had brilliant careers: his brother Esad started out as a government functionary and rose to the position of grand vezir, while his other brother Kâzım joined to Ottoman military and rose to the rank of müşir (marshal).



Best known as Sakızlı Müşir Kâzım Paşa (Marshal Kâzım Pasha of Chios), his name was long associated with tales of heroism, notably at the Siege of Plevna during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, until he retired in 1909. Having been greatly impressed by the hotels he had seen during his travels in Europe, according to the chronicler and encyclopedist Pars Tuğlacı, Kâzım Pasha purchased the plot of land on Büyükkada (the largest of the Prince’s Islands near İstanbul) where the Giacomo Hotel had stood before being destroyed by fire in 1911, and built the Splendid Hotel there. The current owners of the hotel, however, believe (based upon accounts passed through generations) that the Giacomo Hotel burned down much earlier, and that the Splendid was built in 1908 and opened its doors in 1909.



Once construction had been completed, three waiters from the famous Tokatliyan Hotel named Dikran, Tavit, and Onnik leased the building and began to run it as a hotel. They had previously run a restaurant named Splendid, and decided to give the hotel the same name. It was also popularly known by Kâzım Pasha's name, however. Although the Pasha's intention had been to build the hotel of stone, the architect Kaludis Laskaris had managed to convince him that a wooden structure would be preferable. For his part, Kâzım Pasha had two domes added to the structure, which originally looked much like a French apartment building. The hotel's interior decoration reflected the tastes of the three entrepreneurs. The walls were adorned with paintings by such artists as Ratzkowski and Mocel, and the hotel was furnished with crystal sets from Christofle, flatware from DDO, wicker chairs from Lion, and furniture from the Austro-Ottoman store in İstanbul. There was no electricity on the island at the time, so that a fuel-burning generator had to be used to power water heaters, elevators, and lighting.

In 1911, Kâzım Pasha applied for a permit to build a jetty in front of the hotel. The plans he submitted are now preserved in the Ottoman Archives, and the Council of State granted him the permit he requested. As the hotel belonged to a militaryman, it was often requisitioned during the war years for the use of the military. The "Kâzım Pasha Hotel," as it was known to some, was used as a temporary hospital to alleviate a shortage of beds during the Balkan War in 1912. Some 200 wounded soldiers were housed there, and the Ottoman Red Crescent Society asked the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman government) for assistance in providing for their clothing and medical needs.

When the pain of these difficult years subsided somewhat, the operators of the hotel made an effort to liven things up. A number of celebrities stayed there during the years leading to World War I, but by the time the war had started, the only regular customer was the great poet Yahya Kemal Beyatlı. The poet Halit Fahri Ozansoy recalled that even with that one single customer, the hotel remained respectful and fully operational.

SPLENDID-PALACE
PRINKIPO (Île des Princesses)
Propriétaires: **NORIG et DAVID**

<p>POSITION MAGNIFIQUE Éclairage électrique Ascenseur Chauffage Central Salons Particuliers Appartements avec BAIN et TOILETTE Prix Modérés Arrangements spéciaux pour séjour prolongé.</p>		<p><i>Cuisine Française</i> et Orientale Cave de 1^{er} Ordre Consommations de 1^{er} Choix Magnifique Terrasse sur la Mer <i>Vaste Jardin</i> PÂTISSERIE, CONFISERIE GLACIER.</p>
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Succursale: Salon-Restaurant de 1^{er} Ordre **DOUBLE D.**
Galata, Rue Mertebauy, 1, 2 & 3.



As with many words that begin with two consonants, a situation that presents difficulties for some Turkish speakers, the hotel's name was sometimes mispronounced as İspilandit during those years. On the eve of World War I, it had become one of İstanbul's most exclusive establishments where soirées and balls would be organized for a mostly non-Muslim clientele. The war, however, hurt business and the hotel's operators found themselves unable to repay their debt to a financier named Karagözyan who had lent them their original capital. The case went to bankruptcy court, but Kâzım Pasha's intervention managed to save the hotel's carefully selected furnishings.

Over the years, Splendid lost some of its luster because of changing management and the fact that it was not always used as a hotel. In particular, it was rather maltreated by the British during the occupation that followed World War I. In 1919, the British occupation forces housed Russian soldiers and their families there for some eight or nine months. Although Kâzım Pasha lodged a complaint with the British Embassy, demanding compensation for losses and damages to the hotel and its furnishings –even forming a commission to determine and evaluate the harm– the British authorities ignored him. After the end of the occupation, in 1923, he sent a report to the military headquarters of İstanbul that detailed the entire process, signing it “The Proprietor of the Hotel.”

One of the most significant events hosted by the Splendid Palas Hotel was held on 9 October 1921, a benefit dinner for soldiers injured in the war. Invitations and a concert program were printed for the occasion, in which the Darülelhan Fasil Heyeti (Musical Ensemble of the İstanbul Conservatory) gave a performance. Teodor Plakis came to work as a waiter at the hotel in 1925. Haralambos Melanidis had joined in 1913 and stayed on until 1963 in various capacities, including as the hotel's general manager. With such new and old dedicated staff, the hotel quickly redressed itself. Newspaper advertisements began to appear in 1929; one mentioned services including European and Oriental cuisine, a chamber orchestra and jazz band, and full board from 5 TL. It declared: “Special rates for families and long stays.



Find out about the Splendid Hotel's prices before you rent a home." After the hotel was restored, its dining room was also rented out for functions like engagement parties. In 1929, the hotel was being operated by a certain Mr. Lala when Mustafa Kemal visited Büyükada and had dinner at the Splendid, staying quite late. In fact he was no stranger to the family, among whom he counted several friends, notably Kâzım Pasha's daughter Nazire Hanım. He had often visited Kâzım Pasha's daughter Nazire Hanım's home at the Karlo Apartment building in Şişli during the Armistice, before crossing over to Anatolia to lead the War of Independence.

By the 1930s, the Splendid Palas had become quite colorful. Arnoldi Zirkin and the Arnoldi Jazz Hall Orchestra" livened up Büyükada's evenings. Spending time at the Splendid was seen as a reward. In 1931, the Society of the Employees of the Orient Railroad took its members on a boat trip; in the evening, they all came to the Splendid for dinner and dancing. The hotel survived a small fire that year, caused by an explosion in the fuel line of a motor

All the important commercial registers and tourist guides of the period mentioned the Splendid Hotel. Thus, for instance, the 1929 Salnamesi (1929 Yearbook) referred to it as "İspilandit" and the Annuaire Oriental for 1932 as "Splandit Oteli." In accordance with new policies requiring commercial signs to be in Turkish, hotels in Büyükada began to use new names that nevertheless made references to their old identities; thus, the Splendid's new sign proclaimed: "Kazımpaşa Oteli-Eski Splandit" (The Kâzım Pasha Hotel-Formerly Splandit). Street names were also changed, and in 1934, Macar Caddesi (Hungarian Avenue) on which the hotel was situated became 23 Nisan Caddesi (23 April Avenue, referring to the date when the Grand National Assembly was inaugurated in 1920). In general, hotels on Büyükada operated on a seasonal basis: business increased in Summer and decreased in Winter, and that is how the Splendid Palas Hotel worked for many years. A newspaper advertisement stated that it was open "from 1 April to October."



The remaining months would be spent doing repairs and planning the next season, which would also be announced to the public through the newspapers. One such advertisement heralded the opening of the Summer season and shared the news that the new director of the hotel would be a certain Mr. A. Allahverdi.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk visited the hotel once again in 1934. Cemal Granda, Atatürk's butler, described this visit at length in his memoirs, noting that it lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

In 1936, Kâzım Pasha –“the century’s most senior marshal”– passed away, and the hotel was inherited by his notoriously beautiful daughter Nazire Tokgöz. She only stayed at the helm for five years, however, as she died in 1941. The hotel remained closed for some time following her death, until it was taken over by İsmail Hakkı Tokgöz. Once it reopened, the Splendid Hotel was considered by many to be a first class establishment. In those post-war years, it was one of only a few places where a woman could spend the night alone with room prices starting from 7-10 TL, a “perfect” guest house with its American bar and dining room. Even today, the hotel is one of the most noticeable wooden structures on Büyükkada, and for that reason, it has been the setting of choice for numerous movies since the earliest days of Turkish cinema, as well as an inspiration for many novels.



When İsmail Hakkı Tokgöz died in 1957, the hotel passed on to Nazire Tokgöz’s daughter Belma Hatice and her husband Nihat Hamamcioğlu. Under their leadership, the hotel continued to flourish, for they were well aware that the Splendid and Büyükkada were nothing less than a tradition. And there are many examples to illustrate this point. For example, the very same hotel that hosted an exhibition of the Turkish painters Ayetullah Sümer and İbrahim Çallı in 1953 welcomed amateur painters in 1985. The Republic Ball which was not celebrated in Büyükkada after Atatürk’s death, was revived in 1996 at its former address, the Splendid Hotel, and was repeated in subsequent years. And in 1997, it was once again the Splendid that hosted Greeks who returned to their homeland after an absence of thirty-five years.

The Hamamcioğlu family continues to operate the Splendid Hotel as a subsidiary of the tourism investment corporation Turyat Turizm Yatırım ve Ticaret Ltd. Şti. which they founded. The family owns several historical businesses, and aims at running the Splendid Palas Hotel not just as a commercial enterprise but as a family heirloom and as their cultural heritage.