

## PREFACE

### *Welcome to Eyüp*

#### WHERE IS EYÜP?

This is a book set in the Istanbul district of Eyüp, home to one of the city's most important Muslim tombs.

If you had never visited Istanbul, much less Eyüp, you might begin where many searches begin: Google. A few keystrokes later and you might see a screen with a range of information. A blurb from Wikipedia tells us that Eyüp or Eyüpsultan is a district of Istanbul without commenting on the difference between those names; another panel juxtaposes a view of the Golden Horn with a map of the district municipality; we are given points of interest, destinations, questions that people ask (Which prophet is buried in Turkey? Who was Ayub Sultan? Where did Eyup come from?). Each of those pieces of information is partial, but at first glance searching for Eyüp on Google enacts a particular kind of place: one where facts and stories can be coordinated, presented, and located in a transparent, legible way.

But there are other ways of locating Eyüp. Some longtime residents, for example, make Eyüp a place of social relationships and shared memories. Their Eyüp is located not just somewhere but *somewhen*. Their stories would take you from central Eyüp to the constellation of neighborhoods that extend in all directions: Akarçeşme and Defterdar as you head back toward the Byzantine land walls; Nişancı extending up the ridge leading to Edirnekapi; Düğmeciler tucked into the valley beneath the ridge of Rami; İslambey as you head up the old streambed toward the hills beyond; the old fields and meadows of Çırçır, Karyağdı, and Gümüşsuyu; and, along the shore of the Golden Horn as it narrows, there is Silahtarağa and Alibeyköy. While each of these neighborhoods has its own history, what matters

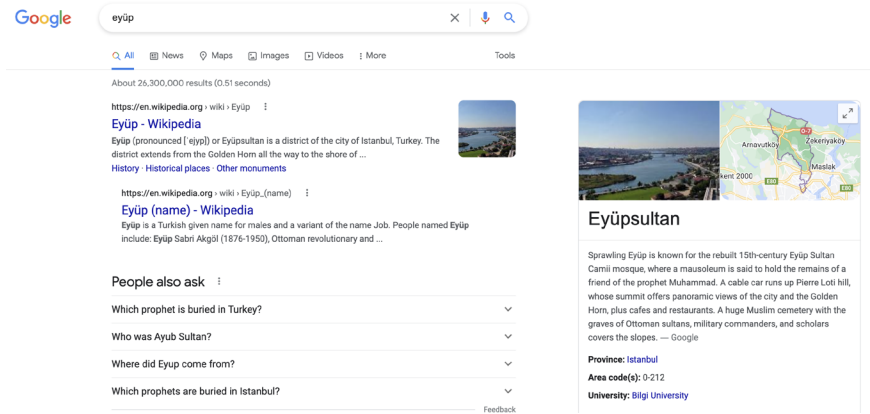


FIGURE 1. Screenshot of a Google search for “Eyüp” from Syracuse, New York, May 10, 2022. Photo of Golden Horn posted to Wikipedia by J1 FilpoC is licensed under CC by 4.0.

is less the exact boundaries between them and more the way that they organize a sense of place. Their Eyüp is enacted through everyday acts of neighborliness, phone calls and text messages, social media posts, and special events.

For these residents, many of these relationships and memories are linked to material sites like schools, factories, gardens, bakeries, coffeehouses, the open-air cinema. Were you to visit today, you would find a few of these sites still standing, such as the school endowed by and located just beside the tomb of Sultan Reşad (Mehmed V). Although that school’s name has changed—from the Reşadiye Model School (Numune Mektebi) to the Eyüp Mixed Middle School (Muhtelit Orta Mektebi) to the Eyüp Middle School to the Eyüp High School (*lise*)—the building still serves as a reference point for those born and raised in the district.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite these buildings and ongoing efforts to maintain connections to those shared social relations, other longtime residents also look at the district where they live and say, “Eyüp is gone” (*Eyüp yok olmuş*). They experience this place as a site of loss, one where the built environment and its contemporary urban life mark absence and change. These two positions are not mutually exclusive; markers of continuity can exist alongside evocations of absence.

But other residents—many of whom have also lived in this place for decades—define Eyüp as that which is unchanged. Returning after years away, I might run into an old acquaintance. “How is Eyüp?” I ask. “Eyüp is the same,” they shrug. And then there are still others who describe Eyüp not in relation to a changing city but in relation to the person buried at the district’s center, the person whose story is so tightly interwoven with this place: Halid bin Zeyd Ebû Eyyûb el-Ensârî, a Companion (Tr. *sahabe*, Ar. *şahaba*) of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>2</sup> As many would explain to me, “If he [Halid bin Zeyd] hadn’t existed, this”—meaning the mosque and its density of visitors, the neighborhood of Eyüp, even Istanbul as a Muslim

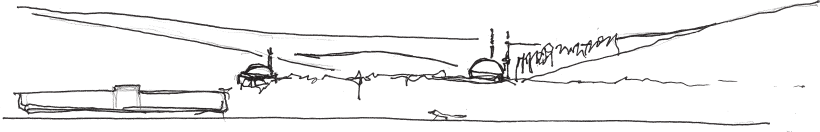


FIGURE 2. Sketch of central Eyüp viewed from the opposite shore, drawn from memory.

city—“would never have been” *Olmasaydı burası olmazdı*. This phrase locates Eyüp not as a place that changes but as a place unchanged.

And then there are those who are visiting Eyüp for the first time. Some might have searched online; some might be traveling as part of an organized tour; but many others might be traveling with friends or on the recommendation of friends, most often to visit the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Sometimes these visitors know a great deal about the mosque and the person buried at its center. They might have learned that Halid bin Zeyd hosted the Prophet Muhammad when he fled Mecca for Medina; that he was one of the Prophet’s most devoted and pious companions; and that because of that devotion, he was inspired to join the Muslim army that besieged Constantinople. Some might have learned that he died of sickness, others that he was martyred in battle. Others may know even more details. But other visitors might know only that Halid bin Zeyd was an important figure, someone important enough to have a tomb built of silver filigree, mother-of-pearl, and turquoise tile. They might simply follow the crowds of other visitors, doing as their neighbors do. They know Eyüp, but their Eyüp is not that of a longtime resident or a Google algorithm.

In short, there are many ways to answer the question “Where is Eyüp?” These many possible answers pose a puzzle: whose perspective is correct? One approach pushes us to search for the “right” answer. That answer is there, existing out there in the world, if only we could gather the correct facts. Another way of answering that question—a more nuanced approach—would tell us that there are many perspectives on Eyüp: where people locate Eyüp has much to do with their own histories and positions in the world. But there is a third way of answering that question: locating Eyüp depends on the practices through which different people enact this place.<sup>3</sup>

This book argues that places are not distinct, singular objects but *multiple*.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Eyüp—home to one of Istanbul’s best-known Muslim shrines—this means that there is no single Eyüp. Rather, different groups and individuals have defined Eyüp—and thus placed Islam—in diverse, overlapping ways. In many cases, these enactments of Eyüp coincide; it is precisely when different ways of knowing Eyüp coincide that people arrive at a shared understanding and experience of Eyüp.

In other moments, it is possible for two different enactments of Eyüp to be physically proximate and yet in totally different places. For example, tourists from France visit Eyüp, passing through the mosque briefly before walking up the road

to the café named for Pierre Loti; they might brush by two high school students—perhaps from a relatively distant district like Avcılar or Esenyurt—visiting the mosque to pray for success with their upcoming exam. Both the tourists and the students know Eyüp, but their modes of using and defining this place never coincide or align.

But there are also moments when different enactments of Eyüp clash: when a longtime resident talks about feeling like a stranger in the mosque; when a tourist and a religious pilgrim rub shoulders during Ramadan; when a religious scholar looks at a changing city and mournfully observes, “We don’t even know how to say a *Fatiha*.” In these moments there are often attempts to police the “correct” Eyüp, to draw boundaries between what should and should not be done, said, or known, or to instruct a public in the “true” meaning of this place.

Where is Eyüp? It depends on how people make this place through various modes of articulation, encounter, and inhabitation. These modes are linked to how people see themselves and others in and in relation to this place, the histories that are woven through it, and Eyüp’s relationship to the city, nation, and world beyond. This book’s approach thus extends one of geography’s core insights: where we are shapes who we are; but through our complex and often contested forms of social life, we are always remaking the worlds in which we live.

This book studies how different individuals, groups, and institutions have sought to place Islam by making and transforming Eyüp. Although there are many possible places of Islam, Eyüp—or Eyüp Sultan, as some of my interlocutors would insist—provides an especially rich object of analysis. Focusing on the district’s transformations over roughly the past hundred years, *Placing Islam* examines how understandings of history, urban life, cultural identity, and piety have been woven together.

This is a century of far-reaching transformations in and beyond Eyüp: constitutional revolution in 1908; the catastrophic wars and violence of the 1910s; occupation, revolution, and the uneven project of making “modern” Turkey; industrialization and urbanization; political strife and cultural change; military coups in 1960, 1972, and 1980; globalization, deindustrialization, and neoliberalization; the emergence of a conservative religious political coalition in the 1990s; long-standing and ongoing debates over the boundary between the “religious” and the “secular”; and an ongoing process of rapacious urbanization. These dynamics transform Eyüp and shift how “places of Islam” come to matter. At the same time, Eyüp’s story is not simply a smaller version of those “big” dynamics.

Rather than use Eyüp as a footnote for a story to which we already know the ending, this book seeks to develop a different approach for studying *how* people make places of Islam. They do so in diverse ways that are deeply embedded in the lived and felt specificities that make this place *the* place. But as I also hope to show, this approach is not merely what Shahid Amin has termed “an evocation of a world fiercely local.” Instead, it is an effort to make a place whose geography and

history may be unfamiliar to many readers, “intelligible outside its particular location of space and time.”<sup>5</sup> So I begin not with a story about power and politics but instead with another act that defines this place: welcome.

#### WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

My first encounter with a place named Eyüp came in the form of Orhan Pamuk’s memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. In it, Pamuk uses a visit to the district as an opportunity to narrate his own sense of self, caught between worlds and ways of living. He described taking the small ferry up the Golden Horn to the last stop. There, he found himself frustrated:

My trouble with Eyüp is that this small and perfect village at the end of the Golden never seemed genuine [*gerçek*] to me, it always appeared like a fantasy [*hayal*]. As a turned-in-upon-itself, “Eastern,” mysterious, religious, picturesque, mystical fantasy, Eyüp was so perfect that it seemed to me like someone else’s dream of the East embroidered upon Istanbul, like a sort of Turk-East-Muslim Disneyland existing in Istanbul.<sup>6</sup>

Even though I knew almost nothing about Eyüp when I read Pamuk’s account, his version struck me as incomplete. There were no voices of people who lived in or visited Eyüp. Describing the village—which would have been a working-class district when Pamuk was a teenager—as “a sort of Turk-East-Muslim Disneyland” seemed to deny the possibility of change and transformation. Identifying what Pamuk missed about Eyüp became one of the goals that took me into this project. As I would come to learn, Pamuk’s vision of Eyüp was also foreign to both Eyüp’s longtime residents and its recent arrivals.

When I moved to Istanbul in 2011, I tried to learn about Eyüp in the way that was most comfortable to me: through books. On one of my first visits to the center of Eyüp, I wandered into a bookstore and asked in halting, accented Turkish, “Um, do you have books about Eyüp?” The bookstore’s only employee—Şenol, who would become a friend—responded not by answering the question but by asking the question that is always reserved for people assumed to be out of place: *Nerelisiniz?* Where are you from?

I grew up in Los Angeles during the 1980s and 1990s with a first name that was different enough to be an object of humor in middle school but not so different that I ever felt “foreign.” My Turkishness, insofar as it existed at all, came in the form of my grandmother’s köfte and pilaf along with a handful of phrases she taught me. I came to learn Turkish only as a graduate student, the unfamiliar edges of its suffixes and syntax barely softened by my family acquaintance. When I first began my fieldwork in Eyüp in 2011, my vocabulary was stilted and halting, an awkward mix of Arabic cognates and formal classroom instruction. Over time, however, my Turkish grew more pliable.

As my fieldwork went on, the question “Where are you from?” took on a different form. I could often speak with someone for several minutes before my accent or phrasing marked me as belonging to a different place.

“So where are you from?” my interlocutor would ask.

“*Amerikalıyım*,” I would reply. “I’m American.”

They might compliment my Turkish before asking, “So what’s your name?”

“Timur,” I would answer.

“But that’s a Turkish name.”

“My mother’s side of the family is Turkish,” I would explain. “My grandmother was from Izmir, my grandfather Tatar.”

That family history would help them locate me, as they continued with “Ah, so then you’re Turkish” (*o zaman Türksün*) or “So you’re one of us” (*bizdensin*).

Yet that shared connection was tenuous, especially if the person with whom I was speaking was especially pious: “Are you Muslim?”

Here, and in contrast to the questions I was comfortable answering and the compliments I was comfortable accepting, my answers often stumbled. In fact, I often resented being asked at all. Growing up in Los Angeles, religion was something that other people did. Although questions of belief and faith had come to play a more prominent role in my life as I grew older, I almost never made my own views public.

As I carried out my fieldwork, I was fully aware of the irony of the situation: I wanted to learn more about other people’s geographies of belief but chafed at being asked the same questions. In my field notes, I often wrote about my frustration at feeling like the question was an attempt to push me into someone else’s narrative. My first thought on being asked was often, “What’s it to you?” (*Sana ne?*) Out of politeness, I usually tried to answer their question with a noncommittal response: “I’m a human” (*insanım*).

At the same time, I fasted during Ramadan, sometimes joined in Friday prayers, recited the Fatiha when it was appropriate, and repeated *Amin* as clearly as those around me when someone prayed for health or good fortune. Yet when measured against some of my friends born in Turkey—who would likely never have been asked “Are you Muslim?” because that identity was legally designated on their ID cards—I knew more about Islam and Eyüp and Arabic than they did.

What was at stake in these introductory conversations was not just *who* I was but *where* I existed in relation to my interlocutors. As my Turkish improved and as I spent more time in Eyüp, negotiating the question of where I was from changed. For two years I taught free classes in English at a small community school a stone’s throw from the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan and attended classes in Ottoman Turkish. On most days I would stop by the bookstore where Şenol worked, often dropping in on the long conversations that took place there. These regular routines came to define my experience of this place, but they also helped to reorient how people knew me in relation to Eyüp.

I forged friendships with some people, developed passing acquaintances with others, and have—in the decade since I first began to learn about Eyüp—fallen out of touch with many more. The bookstore where I once spent so much time has been turned into yet another shop selling plastic toys and religious paraphernalia. The community school where I used to teach is only a shadow of its former self. As a friend wrote to me on Facebook in 2020, “It’s become a melancholy place” (*hüzünlü yer oldu*).

But there are things that stay the same: The small restaurant just off the main square is still there, and when I last visited in 2019, they welcomed me back with a smile. A few streets down is the barbershop where I first began to try to meet people in Eyüp. The barber has known me for over a decade, and our conversations have ranged from Eyüp’s history to education to the politics of the war on terror to Ottoman history to Islam, all the while interspersed with the regular rhythms of his work. These relationships—and the contexts in which they played out—matter because they shaped my sense not only of how Eyüp has changed but also of how certain parts of it continue to stay the same. They also remind me that my access to these places might well have been different were I perceived by my interlocutors as a different kind of person in this place.

#### WHERE ARE YOU FROM, DIFFERENTLY

The act of placing others was woven into the encounters that make Eyüp. A story from one afternoon in June 2013 provides one example. That day a woman and her young son entered the courtyard of the community school where I used to teach several days a week. Those who frequented the school called this place the *sıbyan mektebi* (primary school), a name that acknowledged its former use during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The school sat on a narrow road that stretched between the mosque and a busy four-lane boulevard. In contrast to the busy square that defined the mosque’s opposite side, this side of the mosque was often quiet and relatively deserted. Apart from the handful of people who deliberately visited the building, most visitors stumbled in by chance, perhaps drawn in by the hand-lettered signs displayed around the gate, perhaps reading the curious name displayed on a plastic sign: Tefekkür Bahçesi, the Garden of Contemplation.

On entering the courtyard, visitors found a cluster of seemingly mismatched objects. There were several fraying nylon tents set up in the middle of the courtyard; clusters of plastic chairs; a few benches; a wooden playground set; and several tall plane trees that shaded most of the courtyard. All around the courtyard there were chest-high walls that protected hundreds of Ottoman-era gravestones, and finally, at the near end of the courtyard, there was a small building fashioned of thick-cut stone. The director of this place was a man named Mehmet Emin Hoca.

Whenever visitors entered, he would welcome them and introduce this place as the *sıbyan mektebi*. Because many visitors didn't know that term, he would tell them that the *sıbyan mektebi* had been the system of primary education that existed before the Turkish Republic, under the Ottoman Empire. This school had been endowed at the end of the eighteenth century by Mihrişah Valide Sultan, one of the wives of Sultan Mustafa III and the mother of Sultan Selim III.<sup>7</sup> The school was one part of a broader complex that included her tomb, an *imaret* (public kitchen), and a *sebil* (public fountain), all located immediately across the road.

The school was a marker, Mehmet Hoca would continue, of Mihrişah Valide Sultan's piety and generosity and a reminder of the key relationship between education and religion that existed under the Ottoman Empire. That empire was, of course, in the past, but if you were to sit in the courtyard under the spreading plane trees, surrounded by carved marble gravestones and beneath the minaret of the nearby mosque, it was easy to feel the persistence of something.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, state authorities reorganized the educational system and closed this system of primary schools.<sup>8</sup> Deprived of its function as a school and its funding, the building fell into disrepair and later was used as someone's home until a fire broke out. The building was restored in the 1990s. When I taught there between 2011 and 2013, the complex was used by a branch of the Association for the Dissemination of Knowledge (İlim Yayma Cemiyeti).<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Hoca was proud that the complex was being used as a school again. For him, the school's activities linked education and religious devotion in a manner that corrected the error of the Republic and honored the example of the Ottoman past.

The woman who walked in that afternoon wore pants and a modest blouse but was not wearing any sort of head covering. She would have blended in with the crowd in many of Istanbul's other districts that were not known for their religious identity, such as Taksim, Beşiktaş, or Kadıköy. Although people dressed in a variety of ways in Eyüp, her choice nevertheless signaled something different than those of women who came to visit the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan and its tomb of Halid bin Zeyd Ebû Eyyûb el-Ensârî while wearing long, loose-fitting coats and carefully knotted head scarves.

As he did for almost every visitor, Mehmet Hoca bounded up from where he had been sitting. Ah, welcome, welcome. *Hoş geldiniz*. Where are you from? *Nerelisiniz?*

We're longtime Eyüp folk, the woman replied. *Eski Eyüplüyüz*.

No, he corrected them, we don't have the right to say Eyüp. *Eyüp demeye hakkımız yok*. You're from Eyüp Sultan. *Eyüp Sultanlısınız*.

Eyüp or Eyüp Sultan? I knew from experience that Mehmet Hoca insisted on the latter because it stressed the importance of Halid bin Zeyd and Islam to this place. By insisting that we didn't have the right to say Eyüp, he was signaling a broader argument about how people should relate to this place. Yet Mehmet



Hoca's stress on "Eyüp Sultan" was itself relatively recent, largely the product of debates that crystallized in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

The woman understood his critique immediately and replied in a tight voice: Well, if you mean we're from the vicinity of the place where the Companion of the Prophet Halid bin Zeyd Ebû Eyyûb el-Ensârî is buried, then yes, we're from here, *biz buralıyız*.

She and her son walked out of the courtyard and passed up the road in the direction of the mosque itself.

In one respect, this brief encounter follows the familiar fault line between "secular" (Eyüp) and "religious" (Eyüp Sultan) claims to place.<sup>11</sup> But the woman's response was not so much a rejection of Islam as it was a different enactment of it. Both she and Mehmet Emin Hoca shared a knowledge of the person buried at the mosque's center and both explained that person's importance in terms of his status as a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad. In that, their stories about this place coincided. But where they clashed was in the way that those stories were linked to being *of here*, being *buralı*.

Welcoming people to Eyüp—or not, as the case may be—involves both judgments about where Eyüp is and where people are from. These acts of welcoming help bring us into the wider histories that this book explores: how people create places of Islam amidst a changing city, nation, and world.