

Sites and Histories

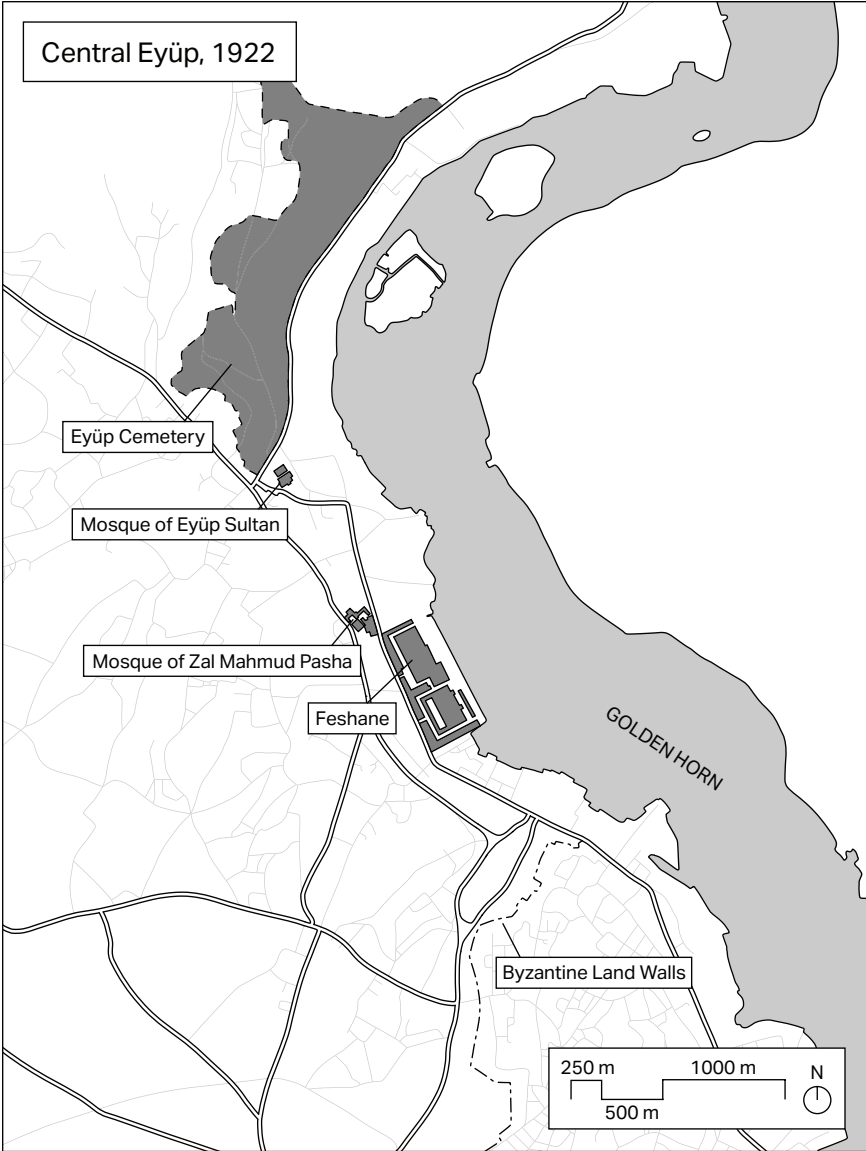
Because this book focuses on Eyüp's twentieth-century transformations, the district's Byzantine and Ottoman histories are largely peripheral. However, knowing some of that history will help readers who are otherwise familiar with the book's reference points. This chapter sketches out the rough outlines of Eyüp's histories and geographies. It also aims to provide readers less familiar with Istanbul with a general picture of the city and highlight scholarship for further reading.

The central neighborhoods of Eyüp discussed in this book are located along or near the Golden Horn.¹ This waterway runs roughly northwest from the Galata Bridge, where it meets the Bosphorus, until it reaches Eyüp. At this point the gulf bends roughly ninety degrees to the northeast. If you were traveling by ferry along the Golden Horn, Eyüp is where the boat would make its final stop.

Here several hills surround the central neighborhoods. The best known—and the closest to the water—rises directly beside the Golden Horn. Many people call it Pierre Loti after the French Orientalist who was reputed to have frequented a café at the top of the hill.² Others, however, insist that the hill should be called by a more appropriate Turkish Muslim name. They often use names like Karyağdı Hill, İdris-i Bitlis Hill, or simply Eyüp Sultan Hill.³ Today the hill's slopes are filled with graves, serving as one of central Istanbul's largest cemeteries.

Were you to stand at the ferry station in Eyüp, face west, and turn slowly from west to south, you would see three prominent ridges, first Rami, then Topçular, and then—looking roughly in the direction of the land walls—Nişancı. Valleys sit between each of those ridges: İslambey Boulevard traces the valley between Pierre Loti and the slopes ascending to Rami, and Düğmeciler is tucked between Rami and Topçular. In the past, many of these small valleys were also streambeds, although those waterways are largely invisible today.

Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire between 330, when the Emperor Constantine renamed the city of Byzantium after himself, and 1453, when the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II captured the city and declared it his capital.⁴



MAP 2. Central Eyüp, 1922.

At one point when Constantinople served as the capital of the Byzantine Empire, this area was known as Cosmidion, after the cult of the Saints Cosmas and Damian based in the area. A small church, to which a monastery was later added, sat somewhere near the center of what is now Eyüp. In addition to that church there were several other churches in the district, and evidence suggests that it was



FIGURE 3. The Mosque of Eyüp Sultan and the Eyüp Ferry Station as seen arriving via the Golden Horn, November 2012.

once a Christian religious center.⁵ Because of these saints, the area came to be an important Byzantine healing shrine.⁶ The shrine seems to have survived the Latin conquest of the city in 1204, although the last mention of the shrine comes in the early 1400s.⁷

The shrine in Cosmidion was only one node in the broader Byzantine devotional geography. The Hagia Sophia was at the center of that network, but the city was filled with churches, monasteries, and convents both within the city walls and beyond. Hagiographies and itineraries helped to instruct pilgrims and residents alike in how to move through this religious landscape.

In the fourteenth century Constantinople's religious legacy and political symbolism made it an alluring but contested target for the emerging Ottoman Empire. After weathering two sieges in 1394 and 1422, the city was finally captured in 1453 by Ottoman forces commanded by Sultan Mehmed II. Following the city's conquest, Sultan Mehmed II embarked upon an ambitious and sometimes contentious project of rebuilding the city.⁸ For some, the city's capture consolidated the political rule of the Ottoman Empire. There were others, however, who wondered why an empire of Islam would establish its capital in one of the world's most important centers of Christendom.⁹

Echoing patterns of encounter that had played out in Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Levant since the first arrival of Muslim armies, many of Constantinople's most important Christian shrines were transformed into places of Islam. Eyüp's

transformations thus followed similar events across other mixed confessional landscapes.¹⁰

Discovery stories were important to many of these transformations; here, it was the miraculous rediscovery of the tomb of Halid bin Zeyd. Details vary among different accounts,¹¹ but the rough outline of the story is as follows: Upon the Prophet Muhammad's death, Halid bin Zeyd joined one of the Umayyad armies that besieged Constantinople in the second half of the seventh century. He was motivated by a desire to realize a hadith of the Prophet: "Constantinople will absolutely be conquered. The commander who conquers it [will be] a great commander and that army [will be] a great army."¹² He died during the siege, and at some point between the seventh and fifteenth centuries his tomb was lost from view. Nevertheless, there are accounts that suggest that Halid bin Zeyd's tomb sometimes served as a place of pilgrimage for Christians as well, reminding us of the dense devotional geography that characterized this district.

During the siege Sultan Mehmed II tasked his spiritual adviser, the Sufi shaykh Akşemseddin, with discovering the grave of Halid bin Zeyd. Akşemseddin secluded himself and prayed for guidance. In that moment—in what might have been a dream—he saw the place where Halid bin Zeyd had been buried. He indicated the spot and said, "This is the place." After testing his adviser, the sultan commanded that his soldiers dig where the shaykh had indicated. At a depth of two arms' lengths they found a gravestone inscribed in Arabic: *Hadha qabir Abā Ayyūb*. This is the grave of Ebā Eyyūb.

The sultan ordered the construction of a tomb and mosque complex on the site where the grave had been discovered. The complex became the first mosque built by the Ottomans in the conquered city and marked one of the first steps in making Constantinople into İslambol, a place where Islam was plentiful.¹³ However, the complex's location outside the city walls and not in the city's center suggested that there were still unresolved debates over the place of Islam in Constantinople in those first decades of Ottoman rule.¹⁴ As Çiğdem Kafescioğlu has observed, "The site that sanctified Ottoman conquest of and rule over the city remained outside, embodying the tensions between the ruler's centralizing, imperial vision, in which Constantinople represented the natural seat of power, and the ghazi vision, in which the city was no more than a target of conquest and expansion."¹⁵ Regardless, in the decades and centuries that followed, Eyüp became a thriving center for religious, cultural, and social life.¹⁶ Over time, the mosque complex and the neighborhoods that surrounded it came to be known by a variety of names, sometimes Eyüp, sometimes Eyüp Sultan. Eyüp was also referred to by names that stressed its religious importance, including "town of His Excellency Halid" (*belde-i Hazret-i Halid*) and the "sacred district" (*semt-i mukaddes*).

Eyüp became one of the three distinct suburbs that existed in relationship to the city of Istanbul proper: Üsküdar, on the Anatolian shore; Galata, on the northern shore of the Golden Horn where it met the Bosphorus; and Eyüp. As a mark of its

importance, Eyüp also came to house a *kadı* court (*kadılık*), whose jurisdiction stretched from the Byzantine land walls to the villages of Çatalca and Silivri in the west.¹⁷

The district's religious significance was established and communicated in a variety of ways. Beginning with the rule of Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603–17), new sultans were publicly girded with the Sword of Osman to mark their public ascendance to the throne and signal their commitment to a project of holy war (Tr. *gaza*).¹⁸ From the mosque, the new sultan would return to the palace by land, tracing a dynastic geography that linked Topkapı Palace with Eyüp and the sequence of imperial mosques and tombs in central Istanbul.¹⁹ The mosque complex was also linked to a broader geography of Islam in other ways, such as through the circulation of the woven covering of the Kaaba (*sürre*), which was returned from Mecca, ceremonially draped over the tomb of Halid bin Zeyd, and then paraded through the streets of Istanbul.²⁰

Eyüp also became a center for architectural and religious patronage.²¹ Key figures within the Ottoman court, including Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (1505–79),²² Vizier Zal Mahmud Pasha (d. 1580),²³ the Chief Harem Eunuch Hacı Beşir Ağa (d. 1746),²⁴ and Sultan Mustafa III's daughter Şah Sultan (1761–1803)²⁵ all endowed major complexes near the mosque complex of Eyüp Sultan. During the sixteenth century in particular, the immediate environs of the mosque were transformed by new tombs, madrasas, libraries, and graveyards.²⁶ It was also during this period that Eyüp became one of the most developed cemetery complexes in the city.²⁷ Eyüp's Sufi lodges were also an important part of the district's religious life.²⁸

Yet Eyüp was not simply a religious destination removed from the everyday rhythms of the city. It nurtured a vibrant community of craftspeople, farmers, and shopkeepers and was especially known for its toy makers.²⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly given its proximity to the fields and pastures west of Istanbul, Eyüp was also known for its dairy products.³⁰ Many of these fields were also sites for recreation (*mesire alanı*), such as the Fields of Daffodils (Fulya Tarlası) above the valley of Gümüşsuyu. In addition to the daffodils for which the fields were named, roses, hyacinth, narcissus, and tulips were all grown there and sold in a flower market in Eyüp's center.³¹

Meanwhile, members of the Ottoman elite—particularly women within the imperial family—built palaces and mansions along the shoreline of the Golden Horn until the eighteenth century.³² As the center of elite Ottoman cultural life shifted from the Golden Horn to new waterfront palaces along the Bosphorus in the early nineteenth century, however, many of these palaces and mansions were repurposed as some of the Ottoman Empire's first factories.³³

The principal Mosque of Eyüp Sultan was completely rebuilt at the end of the eighteenth century. Around the same time, Mihrişah Valide Sultan (1745–1805) endowed the construction of an extensive complex (*külliye*) immediately adjacent

to the mosque.³⁴ That complex included a large tomb, a primary school (*sıbyan mektebi*), a public fountain (*sebil*), and a public kitchen (*imaret*). Beyond the complex's social and religious functions, it also served as one of Istanbul's most notable examples of "Ottoman baroque" architecture.³⁵

During the nineteenth century, the expansion of factories like İplikhane and Feshane along the Golden Horn also spurred Eyüp's transformation into a workers' district.³⁶ Migration at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century—particularly following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the Balkan Wars (1912–13)—led to an influx of Muslim migrants from many parts of the Balkans. Although Eyüp had been important to dynastic ceremonies for centuries, it was only with Sultan Reşad (1844–1918) that a sultan chose to build his imperial mausoleum in Eyüp. Designed by Mimar Kemaleddin, the mausoleum and an adjacent school marked an especially noteworthy example of Ottoman neoclassical style.³⁷

Although Eyüp always existed at some distance from the centers of Istanbul's political, social, and economic life, that distance became even greater following the 1923 establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The new government instituted new limits on religious life, closing many tombs, nearly every Sufi lodge, and the system of Islamic education that had existed during the Ottoman Empire.³⁸ These reforms were experienced unevenly in Eyüp, as they were everywhere else in Turkey.

As Islam was becoming less visible during the 1920s and '30s, however, Eyüp's industrial activities became more visible. Feshane was nationalized, renamed the Defterdar Factory, and became an important textile factory for Sümerbank, the state bank and industrial holding company established in 1933.³⁹ Meanwhile, much of the shoreline between the Byzantine land walls and Alibeyköy was filled in with a patchwork fabric of warehouses, mills, workshops, and small factories.

The modernization of broader Istanbul produced uneven impacts in Eyüp.⁴⁰ For example, a 1943 report submitted to central authorities of the Republican People's Party (CHP) stressed Eyüp's distance from the "modern" resources of Istanbul, something that posed challenges for the local party organization.⁴¹ At the same time, there is also evidence that, because of the density of mosques, madrasas, and tombs in the district, urban planners sought to protect Eyüp from some of the modernization projects that were transforming the rest of the city.⁴²

In 1956, Eyüp's relationship to the rest of Istanbul was profoundly reshaped by the building of new major asphalt boulevards that linked the center of Eyüp to the Edirne Highway (Edirne Asfaltı) on the ridge above and to the shore road that paralleled the Golden Horn. The construction of these roads led to the destruction of both the market complex that once stood in front of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan and much of the nearby Toy Makers' Avenue (Oyuncakçılar Caddesi). These interventions helped to turn the square into an important transportation hub linking central Istanbul and the growing peripheral districts of Alibeyköy and Gaziosmanpaşa.

Like the nearby districts of Balat and Alibeyköy, Eyüp's shoreline was filled in with factories and workshops, particularly those specializing in textile production. This industrial landscape helped to draw new migrants to Eyüp. While some settled in the district's core neighborhoods, others were drawn to the informal housing districts (*gecekondu*) that emerged on the margins of Eyüp's core. Eyüp came to be home to a vibrant social life, with restaurants, cafés, cinemas, and more.⁴³ Eyüp's mosques and tombs continued to be important devotional sites, but factories' whistles coexisted alongside the call to prayer.

During the 1970s, Eyüp became a site of urban struggle between factions on the left and the right.⁴⁴ Its factories, workshops, and even old monuments were inscribed with competing slogans, showing how the materials of the city itself could be enrolled in the decade's political struggles. The coup d'état of September 12, 1980 brought these conflicts to a violent end. In the coup's aftermath a slew of new changes reshaped Eyüp's relationship to the world once more.

A new system of municipal governance, designed to devolve planning authority to local municipalities, led to the establishment of the Eyüp Municipality in 1984. Meanwhile, the factories and workshops that had once lined the Golden Horn and sustained Eyüp's social and economic life were bulldozed and moved away from the shores of the Golden Horn. Some longtime Eyüp residents left during this decade, following those who had already moved to more developed and cleaner districts of Istanbul in the 1960s and '70s. What would Eyüp be without its factories? It was in this moment of flux that Eyüp's "historic" character became a renewed object of interest and debate. The district became one key site where wider debates about Ottoman heritage, public Islam, and shifting political alliances came to ground. These debates, as you will learn, continue today.