

PART I

Storytelling (*Rivayet*)

According to what has been storied [rivayet olunduğuna göre], as a result of Hâzâ kabr-i Ebî Eyyûb [sic] being written on the stone discussed above, the building of a holy tomb was immediately commenced and upon its completion a holy mosque was appended, and it is still famous as the Mosque of Eyüp.

—AYVANSARAYÎ HÜSEYİN EFENDİ, *THE GARDEN OF THE MOSQUES*

Because he died during the siege, this warrior was buried in Eyüp. When Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror seized Istanbul in the year 857 hicri (1453), it is storied [rivayet olunuyor] that from among the ulema Akşemseddin Efendi saw in a dream that Ebâ Eyyûb el-Ensârî was buried in Eyüp and that a kitabe inscribed in Hebrew was found atop his grave.

—AVRAM GALANTI, *YENİ MECMUA*, JULY 13, 1918

IMAGINE THAT YOU WERE TO WELCOME PEOPLE TO YOUR HOME. You might begin by pointing out some preliminaries—the washroom, where they might leave their coats and shoes, where they should sit—but at some point your conversation might turn to stories. There are the stories we tell about where we’re from, where we grew up, went to school, found work, and fell in and out of love. These stories are never simply just stories; they are part of the physical texture of one’s home. Homes are never simply the material objects that define them. Adapting Divya Tolia-Kelly’s phrasing, stories and material cultures “become nodes of connection in a network of people, places, and narration.”¹ Through storytelling, people create accounts of “what constitutes a place, of what in a place is possible and what is not possible.”²

Geographers, like those in many other disciplines, have become increasingly interested in stories and storytelling over the past two decades.³ Where cultural geographers once drew on concepts of discourse, that concept has largely been eclipsed by that of stories.⁴ As Emilie Cameron notes, this shift has been “part of a project to reclaim what [was] lost, overlooked, or otherwise poorly served by geography’s [conceptualization of] narrative, power, knowledge, and discourse through the 1990s.”⁵ Stories, she points out, are never simply abstract texts but “ordering strategies” that are practiced in specific times and places, bound up with “the materials in which they are carried.”⁶ In telling stories, people bring other people, places, and things into relation. Instead of assuming that these stories simply play out on an already existing “stage,” we should consider how stories make those places in the first place.⁷

This interest in storytelling has often overlapped with a careful attention to the texture of things. Things travel, decay, and matter unevenly.⁸ Studying storytelling

is thus not simply an exercise in looking *at* stories but in working *through* them, considering how their materialities shape the meanings and the places that they come to define.⁹ Such insights align with—and have emerged out of—a rich tradition of scholarship on the worlds of Islam. This interest also overlaps with studies of public culture that examine how everyday media like newspapers, penny novels, and postcards create identities.¹⁰

However, beginning from the traditions of Islam also provides a productive critique of how geographers have thought about stories. This section focuses on the practice of *rivayet*, a term that I translate as “storytelling,” although the term’s meaning is considerably richer. In its simplest sense, it designates the act of transmitting something heard or witnessed.¹¹ It also carries a more specific meaning in the context of hadith scholarship, referring to the act of transmitting a hadith from a shaykh (*mervî*) to a student (*râvî*).¹²

My interest in the term was first sparked by its use in accounts of Eyüp’s history, but I came to realize the term is also closely linked to the role that Companions like Halid bin Zeyd played in transmitting hadith. Following the term helped me begin to think about the multiple ways that places of Islam could be defined. In English, “story” is often juxtaposed with “history,” yet working in Turkish calls our attention to a different range of possibilities for creating relations across time and place. Comparing genres like *rivayet*, *hikaye*, *tarih*, *roman*, *masal*, *siyer*, *efsane*, *kısa*, *menkıbe*, and more challenges us to broaden the familiar English-language opposition between history and story.¹³

In pairing *storytelling* and *rivayet*, this book acknowledges a rich and growing body of geographical scholarship on stories but argues that we would benefit by widening the languages, histories, and disciplinary traditions within which we work. Similarly, this book is indebted to careful scholarship on Islam and Islami-cate worlds but suggests that we should move beyond seeing textual traditions as simply *representing* the world to examining how they make places of Islam in multiple ways. The chapters that follow take up these conceptual concerns by tracing some of the twentieth-century acts of storytelling that have made Eyüp a place of Islam.