
Storying the *Sahabe*

In its basic contours, the story of Halid bin Zeyd is simple enough.¹ He lived in a modest house in Medina and was fortunate enough to host the Prophet Muhammad in his home upon the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina. He was a devoted Companion of the Prophet and participated in all the major battles of early Islam.² Halid bin Zeyd joined the Umayyad siege of Constantinople in the late seventh century, where he died and was buried.³ There are differing accounts of how his grave was venerated by the Byzantines. In many accounts, the grave was protected and even became a devotional site for Constantinople's residents.⁴ Others relate that a Byzantine threat to defile his grave was only forestalled by a warning that Christians and their churches living under the rule of Muslims would suffer.⁵ Similarly, there are a range of opinions about how well known his grave was and at what point—if at all—it was lost from view.⁶ The miraculous discovery of his grave confirmed the religious significance of Constantinople's capture in 1453. Ever since, the story goes, this place has been venerated by Muslims.⁷

Yet stories always require an act of storytelling. Their messages can never fully be separated from the materials and contexts of their telling.⁸ In ways large and small, storytellers emphasize some details while obscuring others. They can emphasize their position as storyteller or undercut it, and the choice of which story to tell and which to withhold often depends upon questions of audience, incentive, and goal. To focus on storytelling helps us to consider “the relations between personal experience and expression and its broader context, and upon the interpretation of those relations.”⁹

Scholars of medieval Islam and the Ottoman Empire have already shown us that the politics and practices of telling this story varied over time.¹⁰ This chapter focuses instead on three twentieth-century tellings of this story. It does so to develop two linked arguments. First, situating acts of storytelling in their urban and temporal context provides us with a richer sense of the modes of transmission through which people develop a sense of themselves as Muslim.¹¹ Second,

reading stories in this way challenges a tendency to extract certain stories from their context and hold them up as “essential truths.” By historicizing the practice of storytelling (and, by extension, place making), we can better understand the work that these stories do and their complexity. Storying the *sahabe* can do many kinds of work.

This is especially important in the context of twentieth-century Turkey, as stories of Islam are often flattened or simply folded into political stories. The political dimensions of these stories matter, but we need a richer account of how Islam is enacted in the world. The Muslim-ness of these stories does not simply follow from the fact that they’re told by self-ascribed Muslims; these are stories about Islam because they engage in acts of place making that establish relations between the present and the past that are oriented toward the future.

I begin with Yahya Kemal (Beyatlı)’s essay, “The Eyüp That We Saw in a Dream,” originally published in May 1922, when Istanbul was still occupied by a combination of British, French, and Italian forces.¹² I read his essay against a rapidly shifting political, cultural, and urban context involving the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a shifting geopolitical and religious map, a still uncertain War of Independence in Anatolia, and debates about the precise relationship between national, ethnic, and religious identities.¹³ In a moment when past, present, and future had become new objects of public debate, Yahya Kemal’s act of storytelling wove popular narratives with the genre of the city letter to define Eyüp as a new “national” place of Islam.

I then turn to the 1950s, focusing on Hacı Cemal Ögüt’s two-volume book about Halid bin Zeyd. Blending biography with hadith commentary, Ögüt tells a story of Halid bin Zeyd that focuses much more on a doctrinal religious account that relies on textual commentary and the transmission of hadith. His book centers on the practice of *rivayet*, a term that refers both to the practice of transmitting events across time and place and to the specific act of hadith transmission. Reading Ögüt’s discussion against the rapidly changing social and material landscape of 1950s Istanbul helps us to consider the practices, politics, and anxieties that surrounded Islam in a modernizing city. In his account, storying the *sahabe* becomes a way to establish a kind of continuity amid far-reaching urban and demographic change.

I end the chapter in 2013, listening to Muhammad Emin Yıldırım deliver a public lecture to an audience crowded into the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Organized by the religious foundation of which he was the head, Yıldırım’s lecture calls our attention to the changed context for stories of Islam in Istanbul in the early 2010s. These changes included both a new political relationship between civil society organizations and local municipalities and a reconfigured definition of Islam that linked what Lara Deeb has called “authentication” with an affective register and experience of place.¹⁴ Following these acts of storytelling helps us understand the

generative tension that defines Eyüp, between its powerful story linking person and place and the always changing context in which that story has been told.

CITY LETTERS FROM OCCUPIED ISTANBUL

In May 1922 there might have been many reasons for Istanbul residents to pick up a daily newspaper like *Tevhid-i Efkâr*. The city itself was under occupation by British, French, and Italian forces. The victors of World War I were busy negotiating a postwar settlement. And, above all, there was a war in Anatolia between Turkish forces, led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), and their Greek opponents. But were they to turn past those events, they would have found an essay situated closer to their homes:

Eyüp, the Turks' city of the dead, lingers verdant like an Islamic garden of paradise on the shore where Europe ends. Do those who enter this city of the city, when they felt lost in a dream of cypress trees and tiles, know that they are truly in a dream? Because Eyüp was a dream that the Turkish army that had come to conquer Istanbul in the spring of the year 857 saw before the walls.¹⁵

In a city under occupation, one in which many ostensibly certain truths were up for debate, Yahya Kemal's choice to begin his essay with a retelling of the city's conquest thus made a particular claim about Eyüp and Istanbul more generally in a period of rapid change.

Istanbul had been under the joint occupation of British, French, and Italian forces since November 1918.¹⁶ For some, the city's occupation was experienced as a cause for celebration. For others, it was an occasion for despair. Yet regardless of residents' evaluation of the city's occupation, the cultural geographies of the city's everyday life were reconfigured in far-reaching ways.¹⁷ Although the Ottoman Empire still existed as a political entity in 1922 and was ostensibly governed by Sultan Mehmed VI and a succession of cabinets from Istanbul, it was clear to everyone involved that the future of both Istanbul and the empire would bear no resemblance to the empire that entered World War in 1914.

What would the city's complex social, religious, economic, and linguistic landscapes look like in the event of a nationalist victory? What would the city's future look like in the event of a nationalist defeat? In newspapers, the satirical press, and the broader urban culture of 1922, writers, intellectuals, artists, residents, refugees, and visitors alike both critiqued the city's present and imagined many possible futures.¹⁸ The city was home to nationalists, internationalists, liberals, conservatives, refugees, exiles, itinerant Sufis, South Asian migrants, Islamists, Communists, pan-Turkists, and more.¹⁹ Newspapers were published in Ottoman Turkish, French, Greek, Armenian, and English, addressing a multilingual audience across the city. There were fliers pasted to walls, a vibrant magazine trade,

bustling coffeehouses and reading rooms. Live music and records connected Istanbul's streets—and above all the bustling center of Beyoğlu—to the world.²⁰

Although these debates were especially urgent in 1922, they were by no means new to the city. Istanbul had long been a city located at the intersection of multiple geographical imaginaries, but the nature of their intersection shifted markedly over the course of the nineteenth century. Political, cultural, social, religious, and economic changes helped to place Istanbul in relation to the world in a new way. For example, the articulation of new “traditions” across Europe during this period spurred projects within the Ottoman Empire to define a new kind of relationship between citizen and state.²¹ The expansion of communication and transportation networks provided new opportunities to move and reimagine themselves.²² In this context of migration, transformation, dispossession, and exclusion, the connections that defined the worlds of Islam also shifted in profound ways.²³

These new translocal forms of imagination and identification intersected with new efforts to claim the past through projects of archaeology, conservation, preservation, and research.²⁴ This was a period when some sought to redefine an “Ottoman” architectural style.²⁵ Still others called for a new attitude toward “Ottoman” monuments in Istanbul, often imagined to be distinct from a Byzantine world.²⁶ Crucially, that engagement with the past was happening as other parts of Istanbul were being modernized and new forms of “modern” urban life were emerging.²⁷

Istanbul's relationship with the broader world had been changing over the course of the nineteenth century, but the period between the Second Constitutional Revolution in 1908 and Yahya Kemal's 1922 essay was even more consequential. The Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and the utter devastation of World War I called into question what the empire was, what it meant to be Ottoman, what it meant to be Turkish, and what it meant to be Muslim.²⁸

In 1922 Yahya Kemal was one of Istanbul's best-known writers and public intellectuals. He drew inspiration from a range of sources over the course of his life, including everything from French symbolist poetry to Greco-Roman antiquity to a tradition of Divan poetry. Following the Balkan Wars and World War I, however, his views crystallized.²⁹ Articulating a position in which Turkishness and Islam were tightly woven together, he set out to explain his present as the outcome of a historical struggle. He brought that interest to bear in his essays during the early 1920s. Later in his life he described these essays as an attempt to “to comment [*teşrih*] on nearly all old Istanbul's spiritual districts [*ruhani semtler*]” in order to tell “a story of the making of this land [*tevekkün edîşi*] the ‘land of the nation’ [*vatan toprağı*].”³⁰ Most of these essays were published in the newspaper *Tevhid-i Efkâr*, which was known for its support of the National Movement led by Mustafa Kemal in Anatolia.³¹

In one sense Yahya Kemal's writing in 1922 built upon the well-established genre of the “city letter,” which had emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth century and flourished following the 1908 Constitutional Revolution.³² These letters

usually shared a consistent set of tropes: the writer—almost always male—would visit some section of the city and use a passing observation or encounter to comment on contemporary urban mores.³³ These columns drew upon and helped to reproduce “an imagined cultural geography that located various social groups by emplacing their identities and histories in different areas.”³⁴

But in a city under Allied occupation, the question of locating oneself took on new importance. Choosing to ground himself in Istanbul’s “spiritual districts” in the midst of Istanbul’s occupation and war in Anatolia signaled Kemal’s politics.³⁵ He sought to tell a story about Istanbul that both recentered its margins and used Turkishness and Islam to make Istanbul the “land of the nation.” Leaving Istanbul’s central districts for its margins signaled an attempt to tell a story about Istanbul that linked Turkishness and Islam in a particular way.

Eyüp occupied a curious position in the first decades of the twentieth century. As it had been for centuries, the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan continued to be an important religious pilgrimage destination. It also played a role in court protocol, most notably when the new sultan assumed the throne, as Sultan Reşad (Mehmed V) did in 1909 and Sultan Mehmed VI did in 1918.³⁶ The district was also an important center for Sufi brotherhoods, most notably the Bahariye Mevlevi Lodge on the shores of the Golden Horn and the Kashgari Tekke on the hill that rose from behind the mosque. But in a city whose cultural, economic, and social center had shifted to the Bosphorus and the newer districts of Beyoğlu and Pera, Eyüp existed on the margins, uneasily positioned between new factories being built on the shoreline and a crumbling religious landscape. Kemal’s choice to address his audience from Eyüp was to make a claim about what kind of place Istanbul was and should be: a Turkish Istanbul (Türk İstanbul) with Eyüp at its center.³⁷

In “The Eyüp That We Saw in a Dream,” Kemal developed this argument in two linked ways. First, he did so rhetorically, structuring the essay as three nested containers of space-time.³⁸ This was a form of place making that relied on “core truths.” Nested one inside the other, these three envelopes placed Eyüp at the new homeland’s center; in turn, the nation’s essence was rendered simultaneously Turkish and Muslim.

The “outer” envelope began by imagining a visitor lost in contemplation of Eyüp’s cypress trees and the tiled Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. This visitor,

waking from Eyüp’s dream of cypress trees and tile, might say, “Where am I?! This place where I’m found recalls a verdant Garden of Paradise. And yet how strange it is that the ruins of the famous palace which the Greek Caesars named ‘Blachernae’ are here! These walls which stretch in either direction were those Caesars’ line of defense. Here, by the name of Ebâ Eyyüb Halid, lies a Companion, one born in Medina, who spoke and conferenced with Muhammad! Where is Medina? Where are the towers of the Byzantine palace? What connection [*münasabet*] is there between them?”³⁹



FIGURE 4. Detail of tiles in the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan, September 2019.

That rhetorical question—“What connection is there between them?”—connected Kemal’s essay to a fierce debate: to what extent did Istanbul owe its character to the Byzantine past? The final decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century were a period in which a growing number of archaeological projects delving into the city’s Byzantine past were used as “proof” that the city’s foundations were essentially Byzantine.⁴⁰ In response, others found a “pure” Ottoman identity in the city’s many monuments and architectures.

In the “middle” envelope, Kemal turned to the moment of the city’s conquest in 1453, a historical reference with obvious resonance given the city’s occupation and the growing strength of nationalist forces led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). However, Kemal made the noteworthy choice to include a second event when he narrated the city’s conquest: the doubt of Sultan Mehmed II’s grand vizier, Çandarlı Halil Pasha. After this apparent digression, Kemal turned to the central story of Halid bin Zeyd.

Kemal’s story echoes most of the other versions that would have been circulating at the time in Istanbul: Upon fleeing Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad arrived in Medina. Reluctant to disappoint the residents of Medina who wished to host him, the Prophet instead let his camel decide. The camel, guided by divine providence, knelt in front of the house of Halid bin Zeyd. Halid bin Zeyd became known as the *mihmandar*, the host of the Prophet Muhammad. Like many other writers, Kemal also emphasized Halid bin Zeyd’s participation in the Battle of Badr and then followed him to the walls of Constantinople, where Halid bin Zeyd died in 669 in one of the first Umayyad sieges of the city.

Yet Kemal's essay was not simply repurposing the story of Istanbul's conquest to rally his readers for the support of the nationalist cause. In making Eyüp the "land of the nation," he also addressed two other debates that were playing out in the city around him. First, what was the proper practice of Islam? And second, what was the relationship between a Muslim identity and other forms of ethnic, linguistic, racial, social, or national association?

As they did in many other contexts around the Muslim world in the early twentieth century, debates about "proper" Islam intersected with global discourses of progress, modernity, and rationality. In that, many writers in the late Ottoman Empire sought to redefine Islam by criticizing what they held to be "traditional" religious institutions and practices such as Sufi orders and tomb visitation.⁴¹

Even assuming that one was able to agree on a definition of proper Islam, those debates were entangled with fierce arguments about the relationship between a Muslim identity and other possible identities, above all one founded on Turkishness.⁴² For some writers and intellectuals, such as Şeyhülislam Musa Kazım Efendi and (Babanzâde) Ahmed Naim, Islam provided a common foundation for community that could and should transcend ethnic, racial, and national difference.⁴³ Others, however, argued for a political identity grounded first and foremost in Turkishness.⁴⁴ For example, writers like Ziya Gökalp and Ahmet Ağaoğlu imagined a world in which Islam continued to matter but ceded precedence to a Turkish exceptionalism.⁴⁵

Kemal's essays in *Tevhid-i Efkâr* thus sparked a critique from Ahmed Naim. In 1922 both men were teachers in the Darülfünun (what would later become Istanbul University), but their religious and political positions often brought them into tension. From Ahmed Naim's perspective, Kemal's choice to write evocative essays about these Istanbul sites of pilgrimage associated with "traditional" or superstitious practices like tomb visitation served to "[spoil] [*tahrif*] the tenets and foundations of Islam."⁴⁶ In other words, there was a vigorous debate in the early 1920s about what and where Islam should be. Kemal's celebration of Eyüp and the city's other "spiritual districts" was thus only one of many possibilities.

Read against these two debates, Kemal's decision to highlight the Battle of Badr and the wavering enthusiasm of Çandarlı Halil Pasha in 1453 was noteworthy. The Battle of Badr occurred in 624 between the Prophet Muhammad and a much larger opponent army, castigated by Kemal as "idolators" (*müşrikler*).⁴⁷ The "crushing defeat" of the idolators helped to consolidate the Prophet's control over the cities of Medina and Mecca. In the case of Çandarlı Halil Pasha, the grand vizier (*sadrızam*) and his supporters were Muslim as well, but many would be executed soon after the conquest of the city.⁴⁸ Kemal's choice to emphasize these two small details thus suggests that his goal was not simply to rally Turkish Muslims against foreign occupation of Istanbul but also to castigate those Muslims in Istanbul deemed insufficiently enthusiastic about the independence movement led by Mustafa Kemal.

After taking his readers to the core of Eyüp's dream, Kemal ended the essay by returning to his present and answering the rhetorical question with which he

began: what connection was there between this district and Mecca? Now, having presented his readers with a story that mapped out that connection, Kemal ended with an evocative encounter with the landscape: “I gazed in a trance at the turbaned gravestone of those conquering soldiers beside the Companion Halid; that steadfast stone, which marked the body of an aged soldier, had lost its turban in death but stood lost in thought, as though seeing still the dream of conquest. And isn’t Eyüp the extension of that dream, shaped of earth?”⁴⁹ Dreams—like stories—are never simply ephemeral and immaterial. Rather, they acquire their force from their linkage to specific material sites. These linkages help to establish a set of connections that link multiple places, from Mecca to Medina to Istanbul, and multiple histories, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the occupation of Istanbul.

The years following World War I were an especially tumultuous moment in which phrases like “Islamic unity” and “the Muslim world” came to be defined, mapped, and deployed in new ways. For example, the Khilafat movement in India articulated its political vision for the subcontinent not just in relation to its immediate context but “on behalf of the imagined Muslim world.”⁵⁰ Powerfully, theirs was a vision of Islam not bound to a specific locale or ethnicity but instead conceived as a form of global solidarity. Yet Kemal’s essay, written contemporaneously with that movement, reminds us that there were also imaginaries of Islam could connect the world differently through the materials of places like Eyüp.

Approaching Kemal’s essay as an act of place making also challenges the tendency to decontextualize his writings. Removed from their urban context, Kemal’s essays seem to stand for a timeless and unchanging “Turkish Istanbul.” Rather than take them as general truths about Istanbul, I have offered one way of reading “The Eyüp That We Saw in a Dream” that sees it as one way of making Eyüp a place of Islam, enmeshed with the shifting city and the world beyond. We move now from the 1920s to the 1950s, a shift that helps us see both the continuities in Halid bin Zeyd’s story and the changed possibilities and politics of making a place of Islam.

RIVAYET IN A CHANGED CITY

It is the early 1950s. An old man in a young Turkey surveys the traces of Islam left in a rapidly changing Istanbul: mosques, madrasas, tombs, libraries, and fountains sitting awkwardly beside and between new boulevards, apartment buildings, shantytowns, and transformed ways of life. “We don’t even know,” he writes, “how to recite a Fatiha for our ancestors. We visit some of them, saying only, ‘May God have mercy on them.’”⁵¹ That brief passage introduced and framed Hacı Cemal Öğüt’s two-volume book, *The Famous Eyyûb Sultan (Meşhur Eyyûb Sultan)*.⁵²

Given the fundamental role of the Fatiha—the opening chapter of the Qur’an and a central part of every ritual prayer—Öğüt’s mournful observation critiqued the changed geographies of being Muslim in Istanbul after three decades of urban, political, and cultural change. Where Yahya Kemal storied Eyüp to make a place

of Islam in occupied Istanbul, Ögüt's practice of storytelling responded to a new challenge: the erosion of religious knowledge about Eyüp. Though the person at the center of Eyüp—Halid bin Zeyd—remained the same, Ögüt's project established Halid bin Zeyd's importance based not on apocryphal details and popular narratives but in terms of the hadith that this Companion of the Prophet Muhammad had helped to transmit. Written by a differently positioned author, addressing a different audience, mobilizing an alternative set of genres, and published in a radically changed context, *The Famous Eyyüb Sultan* draws our attention to the shifting relationships and institutions within which this place of Islam was embedded.

Three decades after "The Eyüp That We Saw in a Dream," Istanbul was a city transformed, albeit unevenly so. In 1923 the declaration of the Republic of Turkey ushered in a series of far-reaching changes, beginning with the removal of the capital from Istanbul to Ankara. Some of these changes also included the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; the passage of the Unification of Education Law (1924); the banning of fezzes and turbans in favor of brimmed hats (1925); the closing of all tombs and Sufi lodges, along with the abolishment of the position of tomb attendant (*türbedar*) (1925); the promulgation of a new civil code that mandated marriage in front of a civil official (1926); the substitution of "international" numbers in place of the Arabic ones that had been used (1926); the replacement of Ottoman Turkish's modified Arabic and Persian orthography with a Latin orthography (1928); the banning of titles like efendi, pasha, and bey (1934); and the banning of other forms of religious dress (1934). There was also the abolition of the Caliphate (1924), the closing of the sharia courts (1924), reforms in modes of timekeeping involving new definitions of the weekend and the renaming of the hours and months (1925–26), the removal of the *tuğra* (the sultan's calligraphic seal) from official buildings (1927), the removal of the phrase "The religion of the state is the religion of Islam" from the constitution (1928), and the removal of Arabic and Persian from the educational program (1929).⁵³

The consequences of these changes were not a foregone conclusion and played out in uneven ways. Some religious networks were incorporated into reconfigured cultural networks.⁵⁴ Other religious networks reorganized themselves in provincial spaces.⁵⁵ There were also instances in which religious networks were actively suppressed by the government. But then there were also figures—like Ögüt—who came to operate within the new institutional structure provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı).⁵⁶

Alongside this transformed institutional context for Islam, Istanbul's urban and social fabrics had changed in far-reaching ways. If the city had been neglected between 1923 and the 1930s, a series of planning efforts sought to redefine Istanbul as a "modern" city.⁵⁷ With the end of wartime austerity and the expansion of international programs like the International Monetary Fund and the Marshall Plan, the large-scale migration of rural migrants to Turkey's major cities generated new urban problems.⁵⁸ Both longtime residents of Istanbul and its new migrants

thus encountered a city of patchwork modernity. Major new boulevards redefined the city's contours during the 1950s while new architectural forms—both formal apartment buildings and informal *gecekondu*—created a patchwork urban fabric.⁵⁹

Religious buildings like mosques, madrasas, tombs, libraries, and cemeteries occupied a complicated position in this.⁶⁰ On the one hand, the relationship of religious buildings to their surroundings had been changed by the secularizing reforms of the 1920s and 1930s. Access to some of these sites had simply been curtailed; in other instances, such as libraries attached to religious endowments, their collections were often moved and consolidated; and in a handful of instances, religious buildings were closed outright, left to crumble through neglect or entirely repurposed.⁶¹ On the other hand, and despite these reforms, the meanings and uses of some religious buildings continued. These buildings were thus simultaneously out of place in a secularizing nation and embedded in place, sustained by their long-standing social relations. Because of Eyüp's dense network of religious buildings, and especially on account of the presence of Halid bin Zeyd's tomb, the district served as an especially durable marker of Islam in a churning city.⁶²

Öğüt was born in 1887 in the village of Alasonya (now known as Ellassona, Greece). He moved to Istanbul around the turn of the century, graduating from the Faculty of Law at the Darülfünun in 1913.⁶³ He worked first as a müezzın in the Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Mosque in the central district of Aksaray before being appointed the mosque's preacher (*vaiz*) in 1915.⁶⁴ He would also work for a period in the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Following his participation in the War of Independence, he declined to stand as one of Istanbul's parliamentary representatives in the first Republican People's Party governments. Instead, he traveled through parts of the Muslim world to learn how Turkey's transformations were perceived in other Muslim countries. On returning to Turkey he fell into disfavor with state authorities, likely because of his relationship to other religious leaders. Nevertheless, he continued to deliver lectures in public mosques and to private groups in his home.⁶⁵ Famously, in December 1950 he joined the first memorial program organized for soldiers from Turkey who had died during the Korean War.⁶⁶ He was an active writer, publishing thirteen books on a variety of religious topics.⁶⁷

Although *The Famous Eyyüb Sultan* is not precisely contemporaneous with (Bediuzzaman) Said Nursi's *Epistles of Light (Risale-i Nur)*, it is useful to read Öğüt's book as a similar project. Like Nursi, Öğüt connected a range of authoritative texts, thus "bridg[ing] differing times and situations [to] shape new senses of community and society."⁶⁸ But where Nursi's work was focused primarily on producing a shared social identity and became central to the formation of religious networks organized in relation to his work, Öğüt's book focused on place. Above all, he sought to transform how his audience would encounter Eyüp.

Like Yahya Kemal, Öğüt explained his book was needed because of the ignorance of his audience. Yet where the imagined visitor in Kemal's essay encountered Eyüp as a gap in historical knowledge, Öğüt's book was framed much more explicitly as a response to a lack of knowledge about Islam:

Quite some number of people are encountered who know neither the value and honor of Hazreti Halid (R.A.A.) nor his elevated position. We encounter such ignorant and undeserving [*nasipsiz*] people—both those from out of town and locals from the area—that are found doing such things that suit neither our national manners nor our traditions. There’s no feeling of respect nor of affection in these poor people’s hearts for these great individuals. We’ve seen with our own eyes that even foreign travelers visit Ebu Eyyüb’s tomb, when they visit Istanbul and while touring the Turks’ national works that they’ve seen on their maps. But the surprising fact is that while foreigners, showing their respect according to their own manners and feelings, take off their hats and hold them in their hands before this great figure while they visit the tomb, some of our ignorant and careless Muslims stroll through the tomb, their hands clasped behind their backs and whistling while they pass through, or sing songs and ditties, cigarette dangling from their lips, swinging a chain around and around, while they come and go.⁶⁹

The Famous Eyyüb Sultan sought to transform how its readers would interact with this place. Ögüt did so by providing his readers with an authorizing and authoritative discourse. This marks the first significant difference between Kemal’s essay and Ögüt’s two volumes. Kemal drew upon the genre of the “city letter,” even as he reworked its site and perspective to ground a nationalist politics. In contrast, Ögüt’s work emerged out of a genre of hadith writing and commentary. This difference mattered not only to the way that each writer established the authority of his storytelling but also to the ways that time and the city were enmeshed with Eyüp.

Ögüt’s use of *rivayet* makes this clear. On the one hand, *rivayet* can carry multiple meanings, including story, account, rumor, tale, and report. Although some of these meanings seem to be in tension (in English, for example, a report and a rumor make very different claims about truth and verifiability), they share something common: an emphasis on *transmission*. Something becomes a *rivayet* when it is transmitted from person to person, from place to place, or across time.

As Ögüt observed, the act of transmission raises a problem: transmission can go awry. Ögüt began his text by acknowledging his sources but critiquing some for “never having shown their source,” thus resulting in a work based on “opinion and belief.”⁷⁰ In contrast, Ögüt emphasized his practice of documenting all sources to establish a firm foundation for his work. Part of his critical practice involved gathering as many “documented” (*mevsuk*, Ar. *mawtūq*) sources as possible.⁷¹ At the same time, Ögüt also stressed that one’s relationship to these sources was interrelated with one’s devotional identity. After evaluating the various documents that established the truth of how Halid bin Zeyd’s tomb was discovered, he declared that a “sincere believer and true Muslim” would not object to the tomb’s location; only a “restless and spiritually ill” person would not understand the truth of his proof.⁷²

Ögüt also emphasized how his project about Halid bin Zeyd was distinct from other genres of history circulating in the 1950s. Part of this difference stemmed from his subject matter. “In truth,” he wrote, “I know that writing the biography [*tercüme-i hal*] of His Excellency the Mihmandar [Halid bin Zeyd] does

not resemble writing an ordinary history book [*alel'ade bir tarih kitabı*].⁷³ Elsewhere, he asked his readers to make a similar distinction. Just as one shouldn't visit a grave casually, he wrote, one should also avoid reading this book like a "story [or] novel."⁷⁴ Both writing and reading the book were embodied projects of self-cultivation, acts of "using and being used by language . . . expressing and attending to bodily movement and sound."⁷⁵ Ögüt hoped that his book would help his readers live more attentively and carefully as Muslims.⁷⁶

Rivayet were thus both a source and an epistemological problem for Ögüt, something to be gathered but evaluated with care. However, Ögüt's use of *rivayet* also functioned in a second, linked register that highlighted a tradition of hadith transmission. Hadith refer to the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. For many Muslims, hadith form a key part of the tradition through which they define what it means to be Muslim. Crucially, hadith often require interpretation and evaluation, practices that have varied widely over time and space.⁷⁷ The act of *rivayet* designates the transmission of hadith from a teacher to student.⁷⁸

The Companions of the Prophet are inextricable from the body of hadith because they helped to transmit these hadith across place and time. Evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of specific hadith can hinge upon the veracity of the Companion who first transmitted the report. Not surprisingly, Ögüt stressed Halid bin Zeyd's piety, humility, and commitment to Islam.

He collected these hadith and transmitted them to his readers to address a gap that he observed in the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Despite the presence of the building, and the number of people who prayed there and visited the tomb, people "did not know Halid bin Zeyd's biography nor were his hadith recited [*hadisi şerif okunmuyor ve tercümei halini . . . bilmiyormuş*]."⁷⁹ Referencing examples of several Companions buried in Cairo whose hadith were recited or taught in the mosques linked to them, he called for something similar to take place with Halid bin Zeyd in the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Two points follow from Ögüt's account.

First, his definition of Islam was embedded in a system of authoritative and authorizing discourses, but it was only one of many possible definitions. His passing reference to the other ways that people visited this place of Islam reminds us that storytelling helps to "[create] an account of what constitutes a place, of what in a place is possible and what is not possible."⁸⁰ Second, Ögüt's imagined geography of Islam was not confined to the territory of Turkey. Here and elsewhere, Ögüt's book stressed a history of connection, tradition, and transmission that linked Eyüp to Mecca, Medina, Cairo, Damascus, and elsewhere. Although he made no direct reference to the projects of secularization and nationalization that defined the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, we should read Ögüt's book as an alternative way of enacting a shared geography of Islam through language, genre, and practices of citation. Although Ögüt's book does not precisely follow the translation of the hadith compendium *Sahih al-Bukhari* and its commentary in twentieth-century Pakistan, *The Famous Eyyüb Sultan* also demonstrates how "connectedness across

time and space was so vital to the function of the text and the authority of its exegetes that . . . temporal and spatial difference appeared to collapse.”⁸¹

Even as Ögüt’s book helped to link Istanbul to a wider geography of Islam, this geography was deeply woven into Eyüp. In an oft-repeated phrase, he described Halid bin Zeyd as “[this] land’s [*memleket*] first mujahid, Istanbul’s spiritual conqueror [*ma’nen fatihi*], and, in the afterlife, this world’s standard-bearer [*diyarın alemdari*].”⁸² Ögüt’s use of *memleket*, in contrast to more abstract terms like province (*il*) or city (*şehir*), emphasized that the geography of this relation was one where Halid bin Zeyd and this place were bound by relations of obligation, history, affection, and hospitality. Belonging to this place, in other words, was not simply about a physical location but about the imagined, devotional, and affective relations that connected people to places and vice versa.

Elsewhere, Joel Blecher has observed how “Deobandi scholars spoke to their present by maintaining a connectedness with a conception of the Islamic past.”⁸³ In some respects, Ögüt’s *The Famous Eyyûb Sultan* is similar: through a practice of *rivayet*, he sought to connect his readers with a tradition of Islam. At the same time, Blecher’s observation might be extended. What was at stake in Ögüt’s project was an effort to connect his readers with both a *when* of Islam and a *where* of Islam. This place of Islam was enacted through Halid bin Zeyd, beloved Companion of the Prophet Muhammad. While there were overlaps between Yahya Kemal’s “The Eyüp That We Saw in a Dream” and Ögüt’s history, Ögüt established his authority and the truth of Eyüp in a very different way. There are no references to politics, the government, or the contested legacies of Turkey’s secularizing reforms in *The Famous Eyyûb Sultan*, but that absence is also, in its own way, a choice. Read against the backdrop of the 1950s, Ögüt’s book asks us to consider the endurance of religious networks woven in and through Istanbul. Alongside important discussions of figures like Said Nursi, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, or Samiha Ayverdi, Ögüt offers one more point of entry into these multiple worlds of Islam.⁸⁴

TELLING SIYER: NEW GRAMMARS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

One evening in early June 2013, Muhammed Emin Yıldırım stepped into the preacher’s pulpit (*vaiz kursu*) in the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. He was not the imam of the mosque, a position that would have made him an employee of Diyanet, the Ministry of Religious Affairs. He was instead the director of the Siyer Foundation (Siyer Vakfı), a religiously oriented civil society organization.⁸⁵ He shifted his robe around his shoulders, looked out at the crowd of men who filled the congregational space under the dome, and began to speak in measured, elegant Turkish:

I knew that I was going to have difficulty speaking today, because I knew that I was going to be in the presence [*huzur*] of this exalted *sahabe*, Halid bin Zeyd Ebû Eyyûb



FIGURE 5. Flyer advertising a lecture sponsored by the Siyer Foundation, June 2013.

el-Ensârî. And I know that that Ebû Eyyüb el-Ensari who—on the path of Allah, in the name of Allah—carried the banner of the Divine Word of Allah [*Allah yolunda, Allah namına i'lâ-yi kelimetullah sancağını getiren*] from Medina to here is here among us tonight, and I'm fearful because of that.⁸⁶ My hands shake, my tongue is tied. *Rabbim!* Let my plea be this: let my *nefis* not be mixed with my words!⁸⁷ Let what is told be one with those who listen.⁸⁸

On the one hand, Yıldırım's opening address echoed a familiar way of telling Halid bin Zeyd's story, using his life and person to draw a connection between Medina and Eyüp. On the other hand, however, both the event itself and small details in Yıldırım's lecture speak to the changed possibilities for making a place of Islam in contemporary Istanbul. In other words, even if the story of the *sahabe* was largely unchanged in its core details, its context—and thus the possibilities for creating a place of Islam—has continued to shift.

Beginning in the late 1990s, a set of cultural, economic, political, and religious changes reshaped the fields within which Islam was practiced. First was the emergence of new cultural markets, productions, and opportunities, something that involved new television channels, retail environments, and forms of consumption.⁸⁹ Second, following the military intervention of 1997, religion was redefined less as a matter of state control and more as a matter of individual belief. This redefinition was linked to the emergence of new religious actors who took to

describing their field of action not as the “state” but rather as “civil society.”⁹⁰ At the same time, the Justice and Development Party’s consolidation of power following their electoral victory in 2002 signaled not so much the withdrawal of state power as a transformed modality, one in which the state ostensibly reflected rather than dictated how its citizens understood Islam. Instead of “controlling” religion, government policy and judicial decisions have instead highlighted its “freeing.”⁹¹ At the same time, these debates over Islam in Turkey are not simply constituted in relation to “secular” actors or the “state” but also in relation to a set of “internal” traditions as well.⁹²

The Siyer Foundation was established in 2010 with the declared goal of bringing people into a closer relationship with the Prophet Muhammad and thus “furnishing the possibility of living with Him [*sas*] once more, no matter how great the difference in time and place extends.”⁹³ While many religiously oriented organizations in Turkey today are connected to specific religious communities, the Siyer Foundation insists that their work stands apart from any other “community, party, group, or gathering” (*cemaat, hizb, grub, firka*).⁹⁴ However, they do form one part of an emergent landscape that has sought to instill in their audiences more “authentic” forms of Islamic knowledge and practice. Putting the political and economic relationships woven into these groups to one side, many of these groups are organized around self-conscious and reflexive debates about the sources and methods for defining correct Islam. In Turkey today these groups thus participate in the formation of an “enchanted modern” linked to specific sites, texts, and social relationships.⁹⁵

The foundation’s name, *siyer* (derived from Ar., *sirah*, pl. *siyâr*), refers to a distinct genre in which stories of the prophets and other exemplary figures are used to communicate a manner of conduct.⁹⁶ The goal of these stories is to help people model their behavior on the Prophet and so perfect their own practice of Islam. In its name, mission, and activities, the Siyer Foundation deploys a particular form of storytelling to refashion the relationship between its audience and their vision of Islam.

Yet the lecture in June 2013 depended on the conjunction of several factors beyond the mission of the Siyer Foundation. The first was the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which was responsible for the administration and use of the mosque. Yıldırım’s lecture would not have been possible without their permission, pointing to the way that the line between religious institutions of the “state” and institutions of “civil society” has become quite permeable in practice in contemporary Turkey. Indeed, the lecture was introduced by Muammer Ayan, the Eyüp District Müftü (Eyüp İlçe Müftüsü). The second was the Eyüp Municipality, which provided logistical support for hosting the event (for example, helping to erect a portable video monitor in the square outside the mosque). The institutional context for the lecture thus involved much more than the foundation itself; this context was itself a historically specific one, linked to the changing configurations that have come to

define a public for Islam in contemporary Turkey. Acts of storytelling help to make places, but their capacity to forge connections also depends upon a set of political, social, and economic relationships.

The lecture in June 2013 was the fifty-second lecture in the Siyer Foundation's project 82 Provinces, 82 Companions (82 İl, 82 Sahabe). The project's title speaks to the decidedly contemporary context for this storytelling. The eighty-two provinces in the project's title refer to the eighty-one provinces that make up Turkey and the province of Cyprus. The nation thus figures as the invisible framework for this story. At the same time, their decision to narrate the history of the nation through the Companions challenges conventional narratives organized around Turkey's 1923 founding and key figures like Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk).⁹⁷ Strikingly, however, the Siyer Foundation's project also largely bypasses alternative Ottoman histories deployed in opposition to Republican histories.⁹⁸ Using the Companions to tell the stories of Turkey's provinces—and using Halid bin Zeyd to retell Istanbul's story—makes visible alternative connections across time and place that redefine Istanbul from a city of cosmopolitan encounter into one in which claims for belonging are articulated primarily in terms of Islam.⁹⁹

Yıldırım told a story that would have been familiar to anyone with a passing knowledge of Halid bin Zeyd, the Prophet Muhammad, and the history of Eyüp Sultan. In its general contours, his story echoed that of Yahya Kemal and Cemal Ögüt. Similarly, his description of Halid bin Zeyd as an exemplary model of piety for his audience largely paralleled Cemal Ögüt's presentation of Halid bin Zeyd in the 1950s. However, it differed in two important respects.

First, Yıldırım's lecture emphasized an embodied, affective understanding of Islam in ways that were decidedly contemporary. Yıldırım did not simply want his audience to hear his words. Both through his delivery (itself mediated through his own embodied performance) and the content of his lecture, Yıldırım worked to make his audience *feel* the truth of his words. For example, he stressed the embodied physicality of the Companions, who “[taking] only their horse, their *cübbe*, a single sword . . . traveling without crushing any flowers, [crossing] from geography to geography all the way to these lands, [planted] the message of Islam . . . in the hearts of humankind.” He also referred repeatedly to the *nefis*—both his own and a more general collective. *Nefis* carries a complex set of meanings, but Yıldırım's use of the term referenced a tradition in which the *nefis* was the desiring, impulsive self that turned away from Allah.¹⁰⁰

This desiring self was fallible but could be instructed through stories. As Yıldırım evoked his own fallibilities, he argued for the value of reading the stories of the Companions: “Whenever I'm bored (we're human) . . . I read the life of a blessed Companion and I tell my self (*diyorum nefsim*), are you a man, look at these men!” His point was precisely that engaging with these stories provided a way for him and his audience to cultivate in themselves a proper practice of

Islam. Halid bin Zeyd's five qualities become the model and goal for Yıldırım's lecture: (1) The blessings in his life (*hayatındaki bereket*); (2) his certainty of purpose (*hedefindeki istikamet*); (3) the affection in his heart (*yüreğindeki muhabbet*); (4) the truth of his knowledge (*ilmindeki selimiyet*); and (5) the continuity of his service (*hizmetindeki devamiyet*).

The second difference involved a subtle but important grammatical shift. Instead of narrating Halid bin Zeyd's life in the simple past tense (*Halid bin Zeyd welcomed the Prophet and then came to Istanbul*), he repeatedly used an unfulfilled conditional (*If Halid bin Zeyd had not come to Istanbul*). This grammatical shift turned the present into the evidence for the past: *If Halid bin Zeyd had not come to Istanbul, none of this would be here; because we are here, Halid bin Zeyd must have come.*

He addressed Halid bin Zeyd directly: "Ey Ebu Eyüp el-Ensari, if you hadn't come what would our state have been? Some of us Zoroastrian, some of us who knows what, some of us Christian, some of us idolators, we would have died bereft of faith [*imandan mahrum olarak ölüp giderdik*]." Implicit in this formulation was the notion that the audience was *not* "bereft of faith"; it was a Muslim audience whose position in both time and place was guaranteed by the truth of Halid bin Zeyd.

This grammatical tense also provided a way for Yıldırım to exhort his audience to be more like Halid bin Zeyd. "Had we been more like him [*Eğer . . . olsaydık*]," he closed the lecture, "we wouldn't find ourselves in the world we now live in, a world of faithless [*imansız*] people." The truth of the story—its connection of past, present, and future in this place—was established by means of a grammatical frame that positioned him and his audience in relation to the world. Making places through acts of storytelling involves not only decisions about what events, places, and people to include but also other grammars that render other connections impossible. Yıldırım's version of Eyüp, one in which his audience took on the responsibility of being a neighbor to and in the presence of Halid bin Zeyd, was a place where his vision of Islam was made real in the world.

With its emphasis on self-cultivation, Yıldırım's story echoed the story work of pietistic groups in places like Lebanon and Egypt.¹⁰¹ His story could be connected to a much broader religious and legal tradition of thinking about the "inward" self.¹⁰² Significantly, however, Yıldırım's 2013 lecture also stressed that the training of one's *nefis* was also the result of being acted upon.¹⁰³ To be in the presence (*huzur*) of Halid bin Zeyd involved both the cultivation of these five exemplary qualities and the positioning of the audience in a specific relation of power and authority. This evening of storytelling became an opportunity through which individuals were asked to imagine themselves in intimate connection through Halid bin Zeyd to the Prophet Muhammad in an Istanbul that could not have been without them. In the process, Yıldırım's lecture reminds us that sharing a

place requires a common experience of the links that connect that place to other times, places, and people.

CONCLUSION

Cities are fashioned from the fabric of stories: stories of life, death, friendship, family, nation, love, loss, growth, change, achievement, failure, arrival, departure, memory, tradition, and more. Some of these stories, like fragile scraps of thread scattered in the wind, barely survive the moment of their telling. Others, however, are woven of more durable things: cloth, paper, stone, even bodies. The stories told about Halid bin Zeyd, Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, are exemplary instances of what I call *building stories* in this book: these are stories that weave personal histories with evaluations of the urban landscape; but they are also material projects, both embedded and embodied in a particular time and place even as they establish connections beyond.

Juxtaposing three tellings of Halid bin Zeyd's story, this chapter has offered three linked contributions. First, it has introduced the importance of the Companions to Muslims and Islamic history more generally and outlined the specific contours of Halid bin Zeyd's story. Second—and as the shift from stories to storytelling aims to emphasize—acts of telling and transmitting stories are forms of place making. Storying Halid bin Zeyd functions as one key mode through which people have made Eyüp a place of Islam.

Yet precisely because this story seems to have an almost mythic force, it is crucial to situate acts of storytelling in their spatial and temporal contexts. While much of Halid bin Zeyd's story has remained strikingly consistent, the practices and politics that guide his story's telling have shifted in important ways. Focusing on storytelling in Occupied Istanbul, modernizing Istanbul, and the Istanbul of the Justice and Development Party helps us attend to powerful continuities while also challenging the idea that Eyüp's meaning exists as a single, stable essence.

Finally, this chapter has sought to explore the productive slippage between a "story" and genres like the city letter, *rivayet*, and *siyer*. If geographers' current interest in "story" emerges out of a critique of concepts like "discourse" and "narrative," this chapter points toward an expanded conceptual vocabulary for storytelling. Although historians of the Ottoman Empire have productively explored questions of genre,¹⁰⁴ this chapter suggests one way of bringing "secular" genres like the city letter into conversation with "religious" traditions like *rivayet* and *siyer*.

Of course, there are multiple forms of storytelling that make place in Istanbul. There are the stories of the city's other Companions and its many other saints. There are stories whose telling has made this city Byzantine, Christian, Armenian, Greek, Jewish, and Roma.¹⁰⁵ There are stories that gender the city, making places dangerous or safe.¹⁰⁶ Alongside these "big" stories there are also smaller, everyday forms of storytelling that weave human life with gardens, animals, festivals, music, food,

and more. Today, two stories have become especially important for contemporary Istanbul: Istanbul as an “Ottoman” city and Istanbul as a “Muslim” city. Their telling can help to make the city an open place—indeed, a sheltering *mihmandar*—but more often, the telling of this story can also justify an ethnonationalist politics of closure and exclusion. Following Halid bin Zeyd’s story provides one way to consider that tension.