

Ottoman Topographies

On a warm spring Sunday, visitors from all corners of İstanbul fill Eyüp. Most make a point to visit the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan to pray in front of the tomb of Halid bin Zeyd and—if there's space—many participate in the midday prayers on Saturday. But other people come to Eyüp simply to enjoy the atmosphere, posing for photographs in front of the fountain beside the mosque and walking in small groups through the square. Regardless of whether visitors pass through the mosque itself, many of them make their way up to the top of the hill that begins immediately behind the mosque. There they might stand on the wide platform built by the İstanbul Municipality and can take in a spectacular panorama of İstanbul. Some might pass from there to a nearby café named after the French writer and traveler Pierre Loti, who, the stories say, spent time here at the end of the nineteenth century.

From the center of Eyüp the hilltop is reached in one of two ways: by taking the funicular that ferries visitors above the graves of Eyüp's cemetery or by walking along the original path that begins immediately behind the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. A fountain stands at the beginning of that path. It is roughly square in shape, its carved white marble rising high above the passersby.

At the top of the fountain, flanked by roundels of the Turkish flag and the Ottoman coat of arms, there is a simple phrase etched into the marble and gilded in gold: "Ebedi Eyüpsultanlılar" (The Eternal Eyüpsultanlıs)." Below, in neatly lettered columns that flank the water spigot, the names of a seemingly arbitrary group of individuals have been inscribed into the marble, along with their dates of birth and death. A moment's reflection and it becomes clear: these are the famous people who are buried here, in a place the fountain calls Eyüpsultan. As someone from the city of Ankara would be called an Ankaralı, someone from Trabzon a Trabzonlu, and someone from İstanbul an İstanbullu, these figures have been marked as natives of Eyüp Sultan.



FIGURE 12. The Fountain of the Eternal Eyüpsultanlıs, June 2012.

At the center of the fountain is a second, smaller inscription. In contrast to the others, this smaller inscription is written in Ottoman Turkish, whose public use was outlawed in 1928, and thus today is illegible to nearly everyone who passes by.

“Is that Arabic?” visitors sometimes ask each other. If their companions know, they will reply, “No, it’s Ottoman.” Regardless, the illegibility of the script seems to mark the fountain as something older, a reminder of the past. But reading the inscription tells a curious story:

He built an adorned fountain, may his
 prayer be answered
 May its proof be Allah, its benevolence Mustafa
 May a drinker drink once more, may it bring
 them health
 May it be a gift to Eyüp Sultan from Mayor
 Ahmet Genç.¹

Below, the inscription adds two dates: May 29, 2002, and 16 Rabī’ al-awwal 1423.² Amidst a landscape of centuries-old tombs, mosques, and graveyards, this fountain marks a relatively recent figure of the past. How did this fountain come to be

here? Why does it juxtapose markers of the Ottoman past with a decidedly contemporary present? And more broadly, what might this fountain tell us about how building stories are told in contemporary Istanbul?

The fountain is one product of the broader project that this chapter explores: how Eyüp became a key place from and through which the Ottoman past was made. When it comes to buildings, we often think about the past as something that already exists in the world. We excavate the past, uncover it, discover it, display it, as though it stands apart from our lives in the present.³ In contrast, this chapter argues that the past is always made in specific places and times. Borrowing Nadia Abu El-Haj's insight, the city must be reconfigured "in particular ways for the objects of [heritage] to become visible, not simply by transforming absence into presence, but . . . by creating particular angles of vision through which landscapes are remade."⁴ Thinking in terms of "Ottoman topographies" provides one frame to help us consider how multiple versions of the past are told through specific places. The fountain serves as an especially rich point of departure. On the one hand, its decoration—especially the inscription written in Ottoman Turkish—is deliberately designed to appear in harmony with the Ottoman-era objects that surround it. On the other hand—and as the inscription itself documents—the fountain is the product of a far more recent conjunction of people, politics, and the material landscape. Beginning with the 1994 municipal electoral victory of the Welfare Party, Eyüp was remade as an "authentic" Ottoman neighborhood. This project was accomplished in two principal ways: the telling of new public histories about Eyüp, and the systematic restoration and redevelopment of the urban landscape in Eyüp's central neighborhoods.

The key actor in this project was the local municipality—and two figures in particular, Mayor Ahmet Genç and İrfan Çalısan, the Eyüp Municipality's Director of Culture and Tourism (*Kültür ve Turizm Müdürü*). But this project was in dialogue with both residents of and visitors to the district, some of whom supported the changes and others of whom spoke out against them. The project of making Eyüp Ottoman was fundamentally a project of establishing new forms of connection between political institutions, government bodies, district residents (both new and old), and visitors to Eyüp.

Collectively, these new forms of connection helped to make Eyüp a new kind of place. Formerly a peripheral district within Istanbul's social geography, Eyüp was recast and reimagined as Istanbul's religious and cultural center through the reclamation of the Ottoman past. Yet as this chapter shows, the reconstruction of Turkey's Ottoman past through the telling of Eyüp's history and the transformation of Eyüp's landscape created uneven, inconsistent, and even contradictory effects. These projects enacted new—but not necessarily shared—visions of history and heritage, economic relationships that rechanneled flows of money and influence, and conflicts about the district's history and importance.

MUNICIPAL POLITICS AND MULTIPLE
OTTOMAN PASTS

On September 12, 1980, following a decade of politically motivated violence, the seeming inability of the country's political parties to govern the country, and an ongoing economic crisis, Turkey's military declared martial law and dissolved the constitution and all political parties. The government was reorganized under the supervision of the newly established National Security Council, which took the lead in liberalizing Turkey's economy, writing a new constitution in 1982, and reorganizing Turkey's system of municipal governance.⁵ Prior to the coup, there had been an increasing awareness that municipal institutions (*belediye*) were unable to deliver services like trash, water, asphalt roads, and electricity equally to all municipal residents. The system was at once too centralized (dependent on Ankara for planning and financing) and too dispersed (municipalities mushrooming on the boundaries of urban centers) to function effectively.

The solution was the formation of a two-tier system of municipal governance. Istanbul was declared a "metropolitan municipality" (*büyük belediye*), with smaller "district municipalities" (*ilçe belediyeleri*) nested within it. The goal of the system was to shift authority for planning and development from central authorities to local municipalities that would—in theory—be more responsive to their residents. In 1983 the Eyüp Municipality was one of more than twenty district municipalities created within this new two-tier system.⁶

This shift in governance happened alongside a massive shift in Istanbul's urban economy, involving both the privatization of formerly state-owned enterprises and the systematic relocation of factories from Istanbul's central districts to its peripheries.⁷ Although this project involved a range of actors and institutions, one of its central characters was Bedrettin Dalan, the newly elected mayor of the reorganized Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. In 1985 Dalan authorized the wholesale demolition of the dense fabric of workshops, factories, and warehouses that filled both shores of the Golden Horn in central Istanbul. Almost overnight, both sides of the Golden Horn were bulldozed and expropriated for municipal use. While many of the formerly state-owned factories located along the waterway had already been sold as part of Turkey's economic liberalization between 1980 and 1984, Dalan's urban interventions spelled the end of whatever workshops had survived. Deindustrialization had a massive effect on Eyüp, which to that point had been a largely working-class district. One consequence of this shift was an increased emphasis on developing Eyüp's potential as a tourist destination. As I note below, the new Eyüp Municipality would play an important role in planning its future development.⁸

This municipal-level political and economic transformation intersected with the rise of Necmettin Erbakan and his National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*). First established in the 1970s, this movement initially played a relatively minor role within a political establishment dominated by the conflict between the

center-right Justice Party and the center-left Republican People's Party.⁹ Erbakan, however, capitalized on the political fragmentation of the 1970s, joining several coalition governments as a junior partner. Following the 1980 coup, Erbakan was initially banned from political life, as were several other leading politicians of the time. Following Erbakan's rehabilitation in 1987, he assumed leadership of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi).

In the 1994 municipal elections, the Welfare Party was the surprise winner in a split electorate. There were several factors that led to the Welfare Party's unexpected success, including the sudden death of Prime Minister Turgut Özal in 1993, municipal scandals in Istanbul that solidified opposition against the incumbent Social Democratic People's Party, and ongoing political fragmentation. All of this made it possible for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to become the mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with only 26 percent of the total vote.¹⁰ At the district municipality level, the Welfare Party's vote share was almost the same. Ahmet Genç, a longtime resident of the district, was elected as mayor of the Eyüp Municipality in 1994.

Genç was a *mahalle çocuğu*—a neighborhood kid—who had moved up through the local organization of the Welfare Party. In many ways his election was typical of the Welfare Party's success in promoting locals for political office.¹¹ But Genç was not actually born in Eyüp; along with his parents, he had migrated to Eyüp in the 1950s from the Black Sea, which made him one of the millions of people who swelled Istanbul's population between the 1950s and the 1990s. These people were part of the large-scale migration to urban centers like Istanbul and Ankara that reshaped cities' landscapes (through the growth of informal *gecekondu* settlements) and their social and political life (through the articulation of contested forms of urban belonging).¹²

In part, the success of the Welfare Party in the 1994 election was predicated upon their claim to represent peripheral neighborhoods that had been "neglected" by an entrenched (and central) political establishment. In one important respect, however, Eyüp differed from peripheral migrant districts such as Ümraniye and Sultanbeyli: Eyüp's built environment—and its identity as a place with its own history—predated the large-scale migration of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.¹³ This provided a different opportunity for local party officials to present themselves not only as representing the desires of an excluded populace but also as rescuing a history materialized in the form of Eyüp's Ottoman-era buildings.

The Welfare Party's 1994 municipal campaign thus mobilized the Ottoman past in a variety of ways. They drew explicit parallels between the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Istanbul and their political campaigns, promising that their victory would be like a second conquest of Istanbul.¹⁴ This enabled two important things: First, they were able to portray themselves as outsiders set on redeeming the fallen city of Istanbul and returning it to its Ottoman Muslim glory. Second, because they framed themselves as "Ottomans," Welfare Party supporters were able to mount an alternative claim for belonging in Istanbul. Even though they were often from

migrant families, mobilizing the Ottoman past helped the Welfare Party simultaneously position itself as very new and very old.

The Welfare Party's rethinking of the Ottoman past was the most visible part of a much broader reevaluation of Ottoman identity in the 1980s and 1990s. When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, its legitimacy and authority were based in part upon an explicit separation from the Ottoman past. That separation was established in several ways, including a new civil legal code, restrictions on religious dress and worship in public, new forms of architecture and urban planning, new calendars, and a language reform that replaced the modified Arabic script of Ottoman Turkish with the modified Latin script of "modern" Turkish.

One of the first signs of changing official attitudes toward the Ottoman legacy emerged in the 1980s, when the then prime minister Turgut Özal mobilized the Ottoman past to negotiate Turkey's changing international relationships. Emphasizing the Ottoman Empire's experience (and ostensible success) governing different ethnic groups, some came to define the Ottoman past as an exceptional example of pluralism and multiculturalism.¹⁵ Simultaneously, the Ottoman past was also often redefined as a "Turkish" one, suggesting the ways that a distinctly modern definition of Turkish ethnicity was mapped back onto the past.¹⁶ The Ottoman Empire could thus simultaneously function as a peerless example of multiethnic coexistence and a Turkish-Islamic synthesis par excellence.

However, although these two modes sometimes aligned, a series of events in the 1980s and 1990s helped to drive them further apart. First, the rejection of Turkey's application to the European Union in 1989 sparked a shift where some framed the Ottoman Empire not as part of Europe but as an alternative to it.¹⁷ Second, the violence that followed Yugoslavia's dissolution and the perception that Europe's slow response to ethnically and religiously motivated massacres was tacit encouragement of Christian massacres of Muslim populations provided further support for Ottoman imaginaries. Third, Turkey's changing cultural economy made the Ottoman past an attractive landscape. Rather than draw on existing symbols and landscapes of the Kemalist state, these new actors articulated a range of new positions, often drawing on "Ottoman" references to construct a new cultural and social vocabulary. For the Welfare Party and its supporters, the "Ottoman" functioned as an explicit critique of Turkey's Republican legacy.¹⁸

The entry of the Ottoman (Turkish-Islamic) past into the public sphere coincided with a new attitude about Turkey's Republican history. Much of the secular establishment came to view the first decades of the Republic as a bygone "early Republic."¹⁹ Simultaneously, formerly public "Republican" symbols entered private venues in new ways, part of an affective relationship that Esra Özyürek has described as a "nostalgia for the modern."²⁰ In short, a new municipal government, the city's deindustrialization, and emerging debates over the meaning of the Ottoman past came together in Eyüp during the 1980s and 1990s.

MAKING A NEW CENTER THROUGH NEW HISTORIES

In June 2013 I was speaking with a group of young women and men who had grown up in Eyüp. All of us were born in the 1980s, which meant that their childhoods had taken place amidst the district's transformation, and that they had been teenagers when the Welfare Party came to power in Istanbul and in Eyüp. All three felt positively about the changes that they had witnessed, and Ali used a story from his childhood to explain how Eyüp had changed for the better:

In 1990, when I was in third grade . . . I remember going to get my teeth looked at in the Çapa Medical Faculty [one of the largest and oldest medical schools in Istanbul, located within the city walls]. I'll never forget this, the doctor asked me, "Where do you live?" "I live in Eyüp," I said. "Allah Allah," the doctor said. "Is there really somewhere like that in Istanbul?" It rubbed me the wrong way because Eyüpsultan, Alibeyköy [the adjacent neighborhood] were always looked down on as slums, bad, filthy neighborhoods [*varoş, kötü, pis semt diye geçiyordu*].

In 2013, by contrast, Eyüp was not that kind of place. "Following the redoing of the Golden Horn," Ali added, "and Eyüpsultan's promotion (*tanıtılması*), people began to say here was a second Kaaba, a second Mecca [*insanlar şöyle bir söz olmaya başladı, burası ikinci Kâbe, ikinci Mekke demeye başladılar*]."

Ali's use of the term *varoş* connects to a broader social geography of Istanbul where Eyüp marked one "urban location of a set of characteristics—poverty, rural origin, Muslim lifestyling, veiling, patriarchy—that function[ed] as an inverting mirror, reflecting back a Turkish modernity characterized by middle-class, urban values and lifestyle, secular clothing, and the autonomous Cartesian individual."²¹ Creating a new Ottoman topography involved several parts: a broader reengagement with the Ottoman past, a political and cultural critique of Turkey's twentieth century, and the articulation of new forms of Muslim life that connected Turkey to the broader Muslim world.

Ali's story also draws our attention to another equally important consequence of making Eyüp Ottoman: it reconfigured Istanbul's social and cultural geographies, turning a formerly marginal district into a place from which new actors could articulate powerful claims for belonging in Turkey and—more immediately—in Istanbul.²² Producing that transformation—one neatly captured by Eyüp's shift from being *varoş* to being a religious center comparable to Mecca—was a key goal of defining a new Ottoman topography.

The Eyüp Municipality was the central figure in reshaping Eyüp during this period, but it was embedded within a far more complicated network of central government institutions, local and metropolitan municipalities, and civil society organizations. These included the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and its various offices, the Council for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage (Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu) in Istanbul and Ankara, the

General Directorate of Foundations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü), and the Prime Minister's Office (Başbakanlık) in Ankara. I turn now, however, to one individual at the center of this project: İrfan Çalışan, the Eyüp Municipality's Director of Culture and Tourism.

In August 1995 Çalışan sat down with Erdal Şimşek, then a reporter from the conservative newspaper *Akit*. In their interview Şimşek turned their conversation to the topic of Pierre Loti. The name referred (and still refers) both to the French writer who visited Istanbul at the end of the nineteenth century and to the café overlooking central Eyüp and the Golden Horn, which was one of the district's best-known tourist destinations. Şimşek began by framing his question in relation to the cultural history of the Republic of Turkey:

The new regime established in Ankara [in 1923] completely disregarded the riches belonging to our history and our culture and tried to invent new things. It intentionally left Eyüp to die. And it embraced Pierre Loti in Eyüp. . . . How do you evaluate this new system—one built upon a rejection of [its] inheritance [*Redd-i Miras*—embracing something (Pierre Loti) that still belonged to the Ottomans?²³

Şimşek's question drew upon a contested topography of heritage that the readers of *Akit* would have been aware of. Eyüp—a place thick with religious meanings—was replaced in the Republican era by the café of Pierre Loti—an “exotic” place associated with a French Orientalist. Although Eyüp retained its “historic” character, that character was produced by absenting Eyüp's religious (and Ottoman) significance.

In his reply, İrfan Bey agreed with Şimşek: Pierre Loti was part of an Ottoman story whose religious core was grounded in Eyüp. However, because the municipality thought of Eyüp “as a whole” (*bir bütün olarak*), İrfan Bey continued, Pierre Loti was not a replacement of an Ottoman story but “a part of [that] whole” (*bir bütünüün parçası*). Rather than seeing Pierre Loti as something distinct from a rejected Ottoman identity, İrfan Bey insisted that Loti—both the nineteenth-century writer and the café being redeveloped in the 1990s—had to be understood as being connected to and subsumed under the broader religious whole of Eyüp.

This brief exchange condenses three interrelated parts of the new public history told by the Eyüp Municipality in the late 1990s: a rethinking of the Ottoman legacy that critiqued the twentieth-century project of both Westernization and modernization; the role of conservative religious media in sharing those histories; and the construction of a new physical infrastructure of and for Eyüp's history. In short, the telling of this new public history was embedded within “interlocking institutions and communities of practice out of which artifacts, maps, names, landscapes, architectures, exhibitions, historical visions, and political realities” linked to the Ottoman past came to ground in Eyüp.²⁴ In the process, Eyüp—or Eyüp Sultan, as most would write—was transformed from a *varoş* place into a “a land of aristocrats” (*aristokrat diyarı*).

Within months of assuming office following the March 1994 elections, the Eyüp Municipality began to articulate a new way of telling Eyüp's history that emphasized two things.²⁵ First, this new history presented itself as a corrective to previous—that is, more “secular”—ways of understanding the Ottoman past. At the same time, this new way of telling history also stressed Eyüp's essential “Ottoman” identity.²⁶ Within a city fundamentally shaped by the long intersection of cultures, languages, and religions, Eyüp's importance stemmed not from mixing but from purity, from the district's uniquely Muslim Ottoman character. One of the first articulations of this new history came in the opening pages of a pamphlet produced by the Eyüp Municipality to document their municipal achievements:

What a shame that throughout the history of the Republic our boorish attitude toward Ottoman history was also reflected in Eyüp and has been able to bring only a few of these elegant works [the wooden mansions and palaces that once lined the shores of the Golden Horn] to the present day.

The village of Eyüpsultan, created from nothing outside Istanbul's walls, is completely the product of the Ottoman understanding of urbanism. Despite the passage of centuries since the city's founding and especially being wrapped in a veil of neglect for the past seventy years, Eyüpsultan has not changed its character as an authentic example of Ottoman urbanism [*Eyüpsultan Osmanlı şehirciliğinin özgün bir örneği olma vasfını değiştirmemiştir*].²⁷

In the Eyüp Municipality's *Third Year Bulletin*, Mayor Genç sharpened his critique of the Kemalist state's rejection of the Ottoman past in favor of “Westernization”: “In place of enslaving ourselves to the West [*Batıya köle olup*] for years in the name of Westernization and being imitators, [we have] now, with local administration, taken the step to becoming a leading country.”²⁸

Mayor Genç criticized the “neglect” of the Ottoman past and the “imitation” of the West in the preface to Mehmet Nermi Haskan's *Eyüp Sultan History*, republished by the Eyüp Municipality:

However, for the last seventy years, an administration that has not known what to do and has had neither goal nor ideal has shown itself with its talent for degrading the city as with people. . . . Societies should know their histories well [*Toplumlar tarihlerini iyi bilmelidirler*] such that they might claim the values in their possession. Otherwise, they will never know what to do and blindly imitate others.²⁹

In critiquing the legacy of Republican reforms and holding up the Ottoman past as the true and authentic ideal of Turkey's cultural identity, the Eyüp Municipality's new public history echoed a wider Islamist critique of the Republic.³⁰ What made it different, however, was the way that this history was tangibly expressed in Eyüp. The material degradation of Eyüp's tombs, houses, cemeteries, and Sufi lodges was taken as evidence of intentional neglect; following 1994, these buildings' restoration and redevelopment became proof of a new respect for an authentic cultural identity. The Eyüp Municipality grounded its claims for new

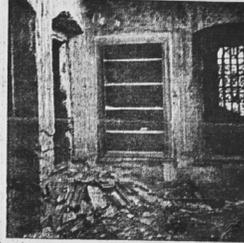
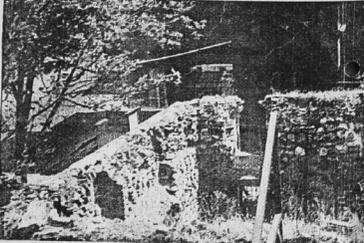
31
Ağustos 1994
CARQ-AMBA

Beklenen

Vakit

Çiftçilerin yardımcısı arlar

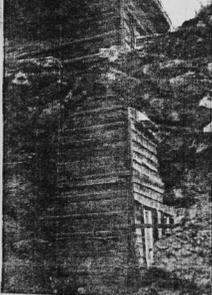
■ Kalle ve verim artırmada büyük rol oynadığını farkeden çiftçiler, özellikle son 10 yılda, bakkınlara tozlanmada balınlara kullanmaya başladılar. Ege Tarımsal Araştırma Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü Araştırma Şube Şefi Ali İnan'ın söylediğine göre 2 kat olacağını söyledi. Balınlara özellikle yabancı döllenen bakkınlarda çok büyük katkı ve kalle artışına sebep olduğunu vurguladı.



Hicri 952 senesinde Zehra Binti Abdülhalim Hatun tarafından yaptırılan 500 yıllık Çerçobay Camii, yaklaşık 40 yıldır ibadete kapalı ve depo olarak kullanılıyordu... Gayesi, tarihi eserleri restore ederek hizmete açmak olan Eyüpsultan Tarih Kültür ve Çevre Koruma Derneği tarafından Çerçobay Camii'nin tekrar ibadete açılması için başlatılan bir çalışmadır.

Eyüp'te öze dönüş

✓ Bir zamanlar ahır ve depo olarak kullanılan cami ve tarihi eserler eski kimliklerine kavuşturuluyor



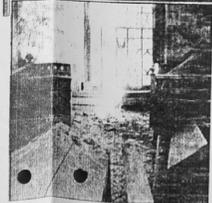
Burası, bir zamanlar Osmanlı Devleti'nde Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı yapmış bir paşanın, Kaplıca Deresi'ne Hasan Hüseyin Paşa'nın türbesi... Sanki bir ahır, yakacak olarak kullanılmış, türbe de depo yapılmış. Şu anda da içinde hayvanlar içli oluyor.

YUSUF AYDIN

■ Tarihi eserleri restore ederek hizmete açmak gayesinde olan Eyüpsultan Tarih Kültür ve Çevre Koruma Derneği, Eyüpsultan'da harabe haline gelmiş bütün tarihi eserleri restore etmek için çalışmalar yapıyor.

■ Eyüpsultan için geliştirdikleri yirmiyeye yakın projeyi hızla uygulamanın amaçladıklarını belirten dernek yöneticileri, firans noktasında çekimleri sıkararak daha geniş bir alanı kapsayacak şekilde çalışmalarını sürdürüyor.

■ "Eyüpsultan tarihi eserleri ile adeta bir açık hava müzesidir. Ancak bu gücünde eserlerin büyük bir kısmı ligstazikitten ve bakımsızlıktan dolayı harabe haline gelmiştir. Aralık 1990'da kurduğumuz Eyüp Tarih Kültür ve Çevre Koruma Derneği bünyesinde harabe haline gelmiş bu eserlerimizi restore ederek tekrar hizmete açmayı planlıyoruz."



Eyüp tarihi eserleri ihya çalışmaları hızla sürüyor. Tarihi Eyüp semti eski güzelliğini yitirecek. Eyüpsultan Tarih Kültür ve Çevre Derneği harabe haline gelmiş tarihi eserleri tekrar eski haline getirme hizmete açması için çalışıyor. Tarihi eserleri, eskisine uygun olarak restore ediyor.

Bu çabaya destek olalım

■ Hayatımızda yaşadığımızın derneğe yardım etmenin en güzel yolu derneğe yardım etmektir. Yardım etmenin en güzel yolu derneğe yardım etmektir. Yardım etmenin en güzel yolu derneğe yardım etmektir. Yardım etmenin en güzel yolu derneğe yardım etmektir.

FIGURE 13. "A Return to Origins." Photocopy of *Vakit*'s front page, August 1994.

forms of urban, national, and transnational identities in the new public history that it told.

In some respects, the way of telling Eyüp's history that emerged in the 1990s was not new. From the very first decades of the Turkish Republic, a range of writers had contested the rejection of the Ottoman past. Writers like Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, and Refik Halit Karay were acutely aware of how the telling of history could function as a potent political and social critique.³¹ By the same token, Eyüp's history was not unknown. As chapter 3 described, Eyüp's history was a frequent topic of newspaper serials during the 1950s, with columnists detailing the district's various—and almost always vanished—Ottoman wonders.

What changed in the 1990s were the coordination and the scale of this history telling. For the first time the Eyüp Municipality explicitly positioned itself as the authorized “protector” of Eyüp's history. This account helped establish the local municipality as a key political actor. Newspapers like *Vakit*, *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Akit*, *Yeni Asya*, and *Zaman* played a key role. Marketed to a conservative and religious audience, these newspapers generated a broader public religious awareness about Eyüp and Islam that was neither the “taken for granted” Islam of the Turkish state nor the everyday Islam “embedded in the fabric of social existence and reproduced through communal practice.”³² Instead, these newspaper stories were a mediated heritage that transmitted and transformed everyday understandings of Eyüp(sultan).³³

In the first two years following the Welfare Party's 1994 municipal victory, Eyüp's transformation was a regular news item in the conservative press. Usually published as full-page spreads that combined text, photographs of Eyüp, and photographs of Mayor Genç and Director Çalışan, newspaper articles closely echoed—if not outright copied—the history told by the municipality in municipal publications. “Eyüp is now a ‘Sultan,’” declared one boldface headline in *Milli Gazete* in 1994. An August 1994 article published in *Vakit* declared, “A Return to Origins in Eyüp.” Photographs accompanying the article's text juxtaposed the ruins of small mosque in Eyüp with images of workers repairing mosque walls and restoring Ottoman inscriptions. The article began by referencing a prior history of the state using mosques as storehouses and stables as part of Turkey's state-led secularization: “Mosques and historic monuments once used as stables and depots are now embracing their previous identities.”³⁴

Alongside the newspaper campaign, the Eyüp Municipality also embarked upon an ambitious program of assembling an archive of Eyüp's history and supporting the publication of histories about Eyüp. One of the first books they published was Mehmet Nermi Haskan's *History of Eyüp*, originally published in 1993 by the Turkey Touring and Tourism Administration Foundation and republished in 1995 as the *History of Eyüpsultan*.³⁵ They also republished Cemal Ögüt's out-of-print and relatively unknown *Eyyûb Sultan*, originally published in 1955.³⁶

In addition to republishing (and thus claiming for the municipality) out-of-print volumes, the municipality also organized an annual symposium. Beginning in 1997, a wide variety of individuals presented papers on all manner of topics relating to Eyüp and its history. Despite the breadth of the papers, now published in the twelve volumes of *The Eyüpsultan Symposium with Its History, Culture, and Art (Tarihi, Kültürü ve Sanatıyla Eyüpsultan Sempozyumu)*, only a fraction of papers addressed Eyüp's Republican history.³⁷ Those that did address Eyüp's more recent history tended to focus on the various restoration projects within the district. On the topic of the district's history in the 1950s, '60s, or '70s, however, there was almost nothing.

Finally, the municipality also opened several new spaces for the consumption of the Ottoman past. As İrfan Bey described in an August 1995 interview, one of the municipality's first goals was gathering documents and knowledge about Eyüp. Finding very little, they set out to acquire whatever materials they could and establish an archive and library under the sponsorship of the Eyüp Municipality that would become the first of its kind among Istanbul's municipalities.³⁸ In addition to this archive and library, they turned restored Ottoman monuments into public educational centers, a local museum, and municipal offices. Significantly, these spaces were open to a broad range of Eyüp's population. Municipal publications from this period repeatedly stressed the venues' openness to the "people" (*halk*), in contrast to the ostensibly "elite" nature of cultural venues in other districts. The Ottoman past was imagined and presented as an authentic past in which not only the cultural elite but a broad pious public could participate.

When I met with İrfan Bey in his office on the top floor of the Eyüp Municipality in 2013, tall bookshelves overflowing with books about Ottoman history, culture, art, architecture, and poetry lined the walls of his office. Behind his desk was a long credenza topped with an elegantly bound collection of books whose spines spelled *Eyüpsultan Külliyatı (The Collected Works of Eyüp Sultan)*. Included among those books were Mehmet Nermi Haskan's history of Eyüp, Cemal Öğüt's two-volume biography and commentary, and the reprinted proceedings of the Eyüpsultan Symposium. I asked him a general question about how Eyüp had transformed during the 1990s. Expecting that he would list the many changes in Eyüp's material landscape, I was surprised when he opened instead with a discussion of scale:

It's necessary to evaluate [these changes] at both the micro- and macroscale [*küçük ölçekli ve büyük ölçekli*]. When we say macroscale, how is this center [*merkez*] known as Eyüp accepted within the world of Islam, what kinds of viewpoints are there, what kinds of recognitions are there? . . . How is Eyüp evaluated within the scale of Turkey and how is Eyüp evaluated within the scale of Istanbul? When this is considered in that way—it's only when considered within these scales that the projects undertaken during the 1980s, '90s, and 2000s can be properly understood.³⁹

One of the reasons that the Welfare Party and its successors the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) and the currently ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve

Kalkınma Partisi) have been so politically successful is their ability to organize at the local level, mobilizing a form of “vernacular politics” grounded in local cultural and social traditions.⁴⁰ At the same time—and as İrfan Bey’s emphasis on the “micro- and macroscale” demonstrates—the Welfare Party’s understanding of the local (*yerel* or *yerli*) was articulated in relation to the “global.” The retelling of Eyüp’s history during this period was a scale-making project that connected Eyüp imaginatively and institutionally to other local, national, and global actors.

One site in which those connections were particularly apparent was Mayor Genç’s opening address at the annual Eyüpsultan Symposium. In 1998, for example, Mayor Genç drew on the familiar trope of the world as a “global village” to contextualize the importance of the symposium: “Our world, undergoing a very rapid change and transformation, has become a sort of small village. Everyone knows a little about some things, a lot about others. Despite that, we’re in a period that is experiencing a great impoverishment of knowledge, far from the real qualities and true topics of ‘knowledge.’”⁴¹ As he framed it, the municipality’s symposium not only had local significance, but it also contributed to a project of establishing “global” knowledge. Mayor Genç made that connection even more explicitly in his opening address in 2000, saying, “Our own cultural values, acquiring universal dimensions, are obligated to surpass locality [*yerellik*] and become world property.”⁴²

At one of the last symposia organized while Genç was still mayor, he returned to these familiar themes. After a decade in office, his municipal administration had refined and polished its message. His introduction to the symposium demonstrates that making an Ottoman topography was not just a project of local belonging, national history telling, or even global Islam; instead, it was woven out of all three, both grounded in and helping to reshape Eyüp’s connections to the broader world:

There are three fundamental pillars that make it possible for a society to intervene in history as a subject: religion, culture, and civilization. Religion is the only source of a society’s spirit of emergence, existence, and mastery over situations under any circumstance. In this country—despite everything—the thing that has formed society’s map of meaning is being Muslim [*Müslümanlık*] and another thing, another doctrine, another project can never replace the local [*yerli*] mentality and attitude that simultaneously surround and render meaningful a person’s internal and external world.⁴³

Although Eyüp Municipality publications produced in the decade prior to the Welfare Party’s 1994 election occasionally alluded to national and global events, they rarely framed local municipal governance in terms broader than Eyüp itself. What changed in 1994 was the emergence of a self-conscious and sustained project of placing Eyüp (rather than Istanbul) on the global map. The project was successful in part because Eyüp was home to the mosque and tomb complex of Eyüp Sultan. Eyüp, the story went, had always been a holy site of global significance, but the Eyüp Municipality took it upon itself to transform Eyüp into a form of “world property.”

RESTORATION AND REDEVELOPMENT

In the lead-up to the March 1994 election, *Eyüp News*, a local newspaper that supported the Welfare Party and edited by Genç himself, published a series of articles that highlighted the dilapidated state of Eyüp's historic built environment. Framing Eyüp's ruinous state as symptomatic of both the current municipality's ineffective governance and the broader antipathy of the secular Kemalist establishment toward any trace of the Ottoman past, these articles promised that an Eyüp under Welfare Party administration would be a very different place.

True to his word, Mayor Genç took immediate steps in April 1994 to transform Eyüp's material landscape. Official municipality publications always included a section on the restoration and reconstruction projects that had been conducted. Making liberal use of "before" and "after" photos, these publications set out to demonstrate the municipality's success. As one headline in the municipality's *Third Year Bulletin* framed the project, "Eyüpsultan has made peace with its history."

If one part of that project was telling new stories about history, the second part involved transforming the buildings linked to them. The Eyüp Municipality played a key role in these transformations, but they were only possible because of coordination between actors and institutions operating at the municipal and national levels. Moreover, Eyüp was not transformed evenly; because of the different legal and economic statuses of different buildings, Eyüp's redevelopment was haphazard and patchwork.

Although the municipality's restoration projects are my focus below, Eyüp's Ottoman topographies were embedded within a context of urban redevelopment and infrastructural expansion. In Eyüp, for example, the Eyüp Municipality worked with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to expand the network of drainage and sewer lines. The administration also set about paving roads with new layers of asphalt, adding parks and gardens throughout the municipality, and introducing better street lighting. In conversations with many longtime residents of central Eyüp, they frequently mentioned the illumination of the Eyüp's central cemetery as one of the significant changes of this period.

The municipality's restoration projects, however, became an object of debate in the Istanbul press. Soon after the unexpected 1994 electoral triumph of the Welfare Party in Istanbul's local elections, the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* published a critique by the well-known architect Oktay Ekinçi that addressed some of the changes that had begun to take place in Eyüp.⁴⁴ Readers of *Cumhuriyet*, a longtime bastion of the laicist, Kemalist, and well-educated political and social establishment, would have been familiar with many of the terms that Ekinçi mobilized, words like "religious" (*dinsel*) and "religiosity" (*dinsellik*) and his distinction between "history" (*tarih*) and the "history of Islam" (*İslam tarihi*), because of the heated cultural and political debates precipitated by the emergence of the Welfare Party in the 1990s. They also would have been aware of the central role that Istanbul's material landscapes played in those debates.⁴⁵

These debates were not simply about current and future uses for these landscapes; they were also about how and why some buildings were used as vehicles for stories about the past.⁴⁶ The fact that Ekinci's essay appeared in a national paper with a readership well beyond this one district suggests that these seemingly minor interviews and interventions into the built environment circulated within a much broader reading public. Just as the interviews with municipality officials published in conservative religious newspapers like *Akit* and *Yeni Şafak* addressed a pious readership, Ekinci's article in *Cumhuriyet* was addressed to a readership that generally identified itself as secular.

Referencing the newly elected mayor Ahmet Genç's widely publicized restoration projects, Ekinci phrased a rhetorical question: "Mayor Ahmet Genç's emphasis upon those works 'connected to a religious lifestyle' within such a rich 'mosaic of cultural heritage'—such as his taking ownership of 'türbe and dergah' along with tombstones—while at the same time never mentioning the old Eyüp houses and streets that are at least as valuable and also found in need of protection, might mean what?"⁴⁷ A few paragraphs below he answered his own question: "These questions' response doubtless lies both in an understanding of 'historical works' only as related to 'religious culture' and, more importantly, in the protection of the richness of civil architecture creating a situation that openly 'impedes urban rents' [*kentsel rantları*] in our present moment."⁴⁸ Ekinci's critique highlighted two issues fundamental to the politics and practice of restoration during the 1990s: First, what sorts of buildings were designated as "historical"? And second, how should the preservation of the built environment be balanced against the desire to maximize the rents generated by those properties? Civil architecture—and Eyüp's historic center in particular—occupied a particularly interesting place within these debates.

Until the 1970s, "historical works" were typically monumental structures like palaces or mosques. Even that understanding generated heated debates about the importance of a mosque: were mosques important as expressions of architectural mastery or as sites of ongoing religious practice? Following the 1968 Venice Charter, in which "civil architecture" came to be designated objects worthy of preservation, the practices and the objects of conservation in Turkey began to change.⁴⁹ A new antiquities law in 1973 (Law no. 1710) established the category of the "protected area" (*sit alanı*) to protect monuments within a broader urban context. However, because the practical and policy infrastructures needed to enforce this law were not sufficient, it often proved difficult to establish effective "protected areas."⁵⁰

One of the first of these areas to be established in Istanbul was Eyüp. In 1977, after members of the Council for Immovable Antiquities and Monuments (Gayrimenkul Eski Eserler ve Anıtlar Yüksek Kurulu) reviewed a development plan prepared by the Istanbul Municipality and submitted for their approval, they designated central Eyüp and its surroundings a "protected area."⁵¹ While many of Eyüp's major mosques, tombs, and madrasas had been registered previously, the establishment of the *sit alanı* was important for two reasons: First, it greatly

expanded the range of objects designated as “historical” from major mosques, tombs, and monuments to houses, trees, cemeteries, and fountains. Second, and in line with that expanded designation, the object of heritage thus came to be seen not just as a single (usually monumental) object but the urban fabric (*kent dokusu*) itself.⁵²

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, the network of heritage actors was further complicated. Two new municipal actors—the Metropolitan Municipality and local district municipalities—came to agitate for projects of restoration under their supervision. During the same moment, Turkey’s heritage sites were increasingly oriented toward global audiences as “World Heritage” sites, a shift best exemplified by the choice of Turkey’s first World Heritage sites, Hagia Sophia and Topkapı Palace. Interestingly, and despite its status as a *sit alanı*, Eyüp was not nominated as a World Heritage site during this period.

Additionally, the formation of a new supervisory body changed the institutional landscape of restoration: the Councils for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage were placed under the supervision of the Ministry for Culture and Tourism. Restoration thus came to be wedded to (and occasionally in tension with) a project of tourism. This was the context in which Ekinci was critiquing the Eyüp Municipality’s restoration projects. He worried that the Welfare Party would only protect “religious” heritage on account of their politics while letting “civil” heritage be redeveloped for economic profit.

At the same time there was an alternative answer to Ekinci’s question. As one individual who worked for the municipality during that time explained, the different paces of the restoration of religious and civil architectural sites had less to do with a politics of Islam than with the different legal regimes that governed these buildings. In general, mosques, madrasas, and Sufi lodges are property of the Turkish state and administered by the General Directorate of Foundations. Although their restoration required numerous kinds of administrative coordination, it was still simpler than the restoration of civil heritage sites, which could be mired in protracted and messy legal debates over inheritance.

One of the most important sites for these restoration and redevelopment projects was the central square in front of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan. Since the destruction of the former market in the 1950s, this square had functioned as a major transportation and social hub for the district.⁵³ Many of the major routes to Istanbul’s peripheral districts like Gaziosmanpaşa and Alibeyköy passed through central Eyüp. There were bus stops, taxi stands, auto repair shops, barbers, cafés, and greengrocers. In short, there was a neighborhood ecology that catered to neighborhood residents, many of whom worked in the factories that lined the Golden Horn and lived in the vicinity of the central square. At the same time, the square’s urban density posed challenges for the mosque and its surrounding monuments. Pollution, noise, and the automobile traffic passing through Eyüp’s center harmed the physical fabric of the mosque and limited the square’s use for religious purposes.



FIGURE 14. Buildings adjacent to Eyüp’s central square rebuilt during the 1990s based on Nezih Eldem’s “Arasta Palace” designs, July 2022.

In fact, planners working in the Eyüp Municipality, including Hülya Yalçın, Gülnur Kadayıfçı, and Hatice Fahrünnisa Kara, had begun developing plans for the square’s renovation almost as soon as the municipality was established in 1984. They worked with the widely respected architect and urban planner Nezih Eldem to reimagine the square’s function. After eight years of work, their development plan encompassing the entire urban area surrounding the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan was approved in 1993.⁵⁴ Several other prominent architects and institutions were also involved in this work.⁵⁵ Although the Eyüp Municipality’s plan included a range of elements, a core design element was the construction of the “Arasta Palace” (Arasta Kasrı) in the central square.

As Eldem explained in a 1997 presentation, this building would address two needs: it would provide for the functional needs of pilgrims and tourists, offering bathrooms and other opportunities for rest; and it would occupy much of the space of the square, filling in the architectural void—what he called an “embarrassment of development” (*imar ayıbı*)—that was left by road construction in 1957.⁵⁶ However, the project required both a substantial financial commitment and extensive coordination between the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (responsible for major arterial roads), the General Directorate of Foundations (which managed some of the property in the district’s center), and the Councils for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage, among others.

With the election of the Welfare Party in 1994, however, circumstances shifted quickly. The municipality was able to clear out many of the mechanic shops, taxi stands, and cafés that had come to surround the square. They summarized their efforts in 2000:

Only six years previous, the area immediately across from the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan, among the most important pilgrimage centers of the Islamic world, had been

abandoned to scrap men and repair shops [*hurdacı ve tamirci*]. The historical works and wooden buildings that were found in these environs had been left to disappear. . . . The visitation space [*ziyaret alanı*] of those coming to Eyüp from outside the district had been reduced to only the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan.⁵⁷

Yet redevelopment did not simply remove industrial activity. It also destroyed several businesses with deep roots in the community, something most visible in the struggle over the small Orient Café (Şark Kahvesi). The café was run by Metin Heper, a longtime resident of Eyüp whose family was deeply interwoven into the district's religious and cultural life.⁵⁸ Although Heper went to court to challenge the municipality's invocation of eminent domain, he ultimately lost. The building in which his café had been located was bulldozed and replaced with a new two-story complex.

One afternoon in 2013, I was having lunch with a longtime resident of Eyüp in the restaurant that sat above where Metin Heper's Orient Café used to be. "Eyüp is gone," she said, "*Eyüp yok olmuş.*" Her point was that the social relationships that had once constituted the neighborhood for her—relationships often articulated through businesses that used to line the square—no longer existed. Eyüp is more popular today than it has ever been, and the square serves as a key open space for hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. However, the square also serves as a key example of Ekinci's critique: it is a place of commerce. Most of the square's businesses are now oriented toward visitors from outside the district because catering to those visitors helps to pay the square's relatively high rents.

Alongside the square's transformation, debates over the redevelopment of a second site, Feshane, show how questions of urban norms, heritage, and cultural identities played out in the 1990s. Feshane, one of the first factories established by the Ottoman state during the nineteenth century, initially focused on the production of the fez, but it later came to produce a range of textiles. Following the 1923 establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the factory was renamed (the fez having been banned in 1925) and reorganized under the administration of the state industrial holding company Sümerbank. Over the twentieth century the original Ottoman-era building was expanded and rebuilt. By the late 1970s it had become a sprawling complex along the shores of the Golden Horn.⁵⁹

The September 1980 coup set in motion far-reaching shifts. During the economic reforms of the 1980s, many state institutions, including Sümerbank, were privatized. Even if it had been profitable for Feshane to stay open, the policy of removing industrial activity from the Golden Horn to Istanbul's outlying districts policy established by Dalan rendered that impossible. Because the original factory building was a registered landmark, it mostly survived the initial demolitions, but determining its new function posed a problem.

One early plan proposed repurposing the building as the Museum of Textile and Industry, but following the 1989 municipal election Feshane was reimagined as the future site of Istanbul's Museum of Modern Art (Çağdaş Sanat Müzesi).⁶⁰ The building was opened to the public in 1993 as the venue of the Second Istanbul

Biennial with the expectation that it would become the city's first modern art museum. The transformation of a former industrial site into an art museum was in keeping with global shifts, but it was framed in a very different light by newspapers associated with the Welfare Party.

In June 1993—nine months before the municipal elections that would bring the Welfare Party to power—*Eyüp Haber* published a front-page photo of flags flying in front of Feshane with the caption, “The flying of all the Zionist and imperialist countries’ flags—chief among them Israel and America—in the skies above Feshane and only the Republic of Turkey’s flag not being found is attention grabbing.” The article accused the biennial of being party to an intentional plot to “erode” the district’s spiritual and religious importance. As three high school students were quoted, “Whose culture are you trying to sell to whom?” *Eyüp Haber*’s critique of the modern art biennial—and the proposed modern art museum to follow it—was that “modern art” was foreign to the local grounded forms of belief and social life in Eyüp. It was an imposition from “outside” designed to continue a legacy of Kemalist attempts to secularize and Westernize places like Eyüp.

Political disagreements and the victory of the Welfare Party in the March 1994 elections put an end to the modern art museum, but this created a new problem: an empty building. Despite the building’s temporary use as an art gallery, there were still several major structural issues, most notably a location on the shore that left it prone to flooding. In 1998, after four years of disrepair, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality began a second restoration project in consultation with the Eyüp Municipality. The complex was reopened in 1999 as a new site for the consumption of a distinct “Ottoman” past. Newspaper articles reviewing the plans described what visitors would find: “Among the interesting sections in the Living Nineteenth Century Market is the historic barber. Gentleman can be shaved in the old style with a straight razor. Inside there’s also an old Turk coffeehouse named Kiraathane.”⁶¹ Furthermore, all the handicrafts for sale—embossed copper, textiles, and calligraphy—would be produced on-site by local artisans.

In many respects the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality restoration plans followed those meant to turn the building into a modern art museum. There was, however, one important difference: the main entrance was to face the Golden Horn. When most visitors to Eyüp arrived by water—as was the case until the middle of the twentieth century—the entrance would be the first place that visitors would see.

In Feshane’s original configuration, this entrance was topped by the Ottoman coat of arms, a *tuğra* (imperial seal) of the sultan, and two *kitabe* (inscriptions) on either side. With the de-Ottomanification of the Turkish Republic these objects were removed when the factory complex was nationalized and reopened following 1923.⁶² In their place, factory directors built a control tower that overlooked the complex. The first restorations undertaken to transform the building into a modern art space did not replace the Ottoman emblems, choosing instead to highlight the building’s industrial heritage in ways that echoed the transformation of other repurposed factory spaces such as London’s Tate Modern. In contrast, the

municipality's restorations in 1998–99 returned the Ottoman insignia, a change in keeping with the broader “recovery” of the Ottoman past under the Welfare Party municipal administration.

Despite the enthusiasm and fanfare with which the complex was reopened, the nostalgic marketplace failed. Less than a year after it opened, news coverage reported that forty of the original fifty stores had closed, citing a combination of high rents and inconsistent customers.⁶³ The company originally hired to plan events for the complex withdrew from their contract, and in 2000 the site's management was taken over by Beltur, a company owned by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. For the next fifteen years Feshane served as a multipurpose conference venue and fairground, hosting everything from Ramadan festivities and municipal government functions to regional festivals and religious tourism festivals.

The use of Feshane has continued to generate debate. A March 2013 interview with a tour guide and art historian provides one account. Attila Bey was born in the Aegean city of Izmir but arrived in Istanbul in the 1970s for university. Trained as an art and architectural historian, he had worked in a variety of capacities for several universities and state-run museums. When we spoke, he was also working for a tour company, guiding middle-class secular Turks through Istanbul's historic neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, Eyüp figured prominently in that itinerary.

When asked to explain Eyüp's transformation over the more than three decades in which he'd lived in Istanbul, he began by drawing a general contrast between “Turkish” and “Arabic” culture. Eyüp in general, he said, had been both socially and visually spoiled, transformed by an “Arabic” culture that had replaced and otherwise obscured the “Turk” culture that had once existed there. The problem, he continued, was that there were two cultures in Turkey, a top-down elite culture that had never been completely accepted and something that was its complete opposite.

He sighed, “We can't find something in the middle.” For him, Feshane's transformation—first its failed place as an elite cultural institution (the modern art museum) and its status as fairground—was symptomatic of that inability to find a common ground. “I look at Feshane,” he said. “It's either seen as a place for the Istanbul Festival [i.e., the modern art biennial] . . . or it's a garlic festival. . . . Fine, there shouldn't be an opera there, but neither should there be a garlic festival. It should be something more acceptable. Elitist culture can't go everywhere, I understand that . . . but this,” he said, referring to the building's current uses, “this isn't culture.”⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

In contrast to the square and Feshane, the fountain with which this chapter opened merited little newspaper coverage. However, and in keeping with a tradition of Ottoman fountains, its inscription helps to date when it was built: May 29, 2002. May 29 is the day on which Fatih Sultan Mehmet conquered Constantinople in 1453, and during the 1990s public reenactments of the Conquest on May 29

were one way that the Welfare Party grounded its present political claims in the Ottoman past in opposition to a ruling “Republican” elite.⁶⁵ May 29 continues to be celebrated in Istanbul; the only difference is that the once oppositional character of the Conquest celebrations has now become thoroughly institutionalized in municipal activities. The exact dating of the inscription suggests that the fountain was officially unveiled as part of those celebrations.

A year later, however, the daily newspaper *Milliyet*—likely tipped off by local opposition politicians—published an article about the fountain.⁶⁶ In it, Mayor Genç admitted that he was indeed the patron of the fountain but, because he didn’t want the inscription to be read, he had asked that it be written in Ottoman. Yet, as the news report explained, the construction of the fountain and family grave complex at the entrance to the cemetery had a complicated legal history.

Because of the Eyüp Cemetery’s long history of use, it is very difficult to find an open plot. In 1996 Mayor Genç had purchased a family plot on the back hillside. Meanwhile, the entrance to the cemetery had been occupied by a *mezarıcı* (grave maker), a situation common throughout Istanbul. The *mezarıcı* owned a quarter of the property, with three-quarters owned by another group of women. The Directorate of Cemeteries (Mezarlıklar Müdürlüğü), attached to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, tried to claim the property. The women sold their share in the property but the *mezarıcı* refused, forcing a court case in which he lost his property. At that point Mayor Genç petitioned the Directorate of Cemeteries to exchange his family plot at the back of the cemetery for the location at the front of the cemetery. Upon receiving approval, Mayor Genç erected the fountain beside a family plot. As of summer 2022, the only person buried there was Genç’s father, Efraim Genç.

At the beginning of this chapter I opened with three questions that this fountain raises: How did it come to be here? Why is the fountain decorated in the way that it is? And what might this fountain tell us about the politics of the built environment in contemporary Istanbul? The first question is straightforward enough to answer: Mayor Genç leveraged his authority and influence as mayor to petition the Istanbul Directorate of Cemeteries for the right to plot—which resulted in a newspaper article polemically headlined “Ahiret Torpili.” *Torpil* are networks of patronage through which official work is accomplished.⁶⁷ Here, an *ahiret torpili* refers to those networks that produced a grave site for Mayor Genç and his family. More broadly, building the fountain also required that Mayor Genç coordinate with the municipal water utility (İSKİ) to connect the fountain. As with so many other transformations in Eyüp during this period, the fountain required the conjunction of institutions with diverse interests.

The fountain’s decoration was a product of the reemergence of the Ottoman past in late 1990s Istanbul, one part of the debates about the history of the Turkish Republic and the legacy of secularizing and Westernizing reforms that divided “modern” Turkey from its Ottoman past. Even though the fountain was new, it materialized an alternative form of the modern that “challenge[d] the

secular-nationalist elites who had occupied positions of administrative authority” for much of Turkey’s history.⁶⁸ Writing about the same engagements with the Ottoman past in the 1990s, Alev Çınar has pointed out the doubled dimension of history writing: “The national subject that declares itself into being through the writing of history presents itself as having an eternal presence that is validated by its historicity and hoariness; at the same time, it also performs itself as new and modern.”⁶⁹

But Çınar’s formulation can be further sharpened: what emerged in this moment was not just a new national subject but a new *municipal* one, one that articulated its newness relative to both the distant Ottoman past and its immediate predecessors. Thus the figures commemorated on the fountain were not *İstanbullu*—as one could argue based on the location in the broader city of Istanbul—but *Eyüpsultanlı*. This fountain materialized a new form of place embedded within a shifting set of political, cultural, and economic relationships.

In the process, the district’s transformation generated arguments about political and cultural identity. Among some longtime residents, Eyüp’s transformations also provoked deep anxieties as the social and economic relationships that once defined the district were swept away. In their place, a new public history stressed Eyüp’s Ottoman past even as the traces of the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s faded away. But other longtime residents—and many visitors today—praise the transformation. Remembering decades when Eyüp was a *varoş* district on the peripheries of Istanbul, its air thick with the scent of sewage and factory waste, these people praise what Eyüp has become: Istanbul’s spiritual center.

Eyüp was remade in the 1990s in large part because the municipality was able to reconfigure the kinds of stories that were told about Eyüp and, by extension, Islam. They articulated new public histories and restored the built environment. In acting, routinizing, and narrating Eyüp’s importance, the municipality was able to establish one account of Eyüp as a place of Ottoman Islam.⁷⁰ This project had a clear political dimension, as the Welfare Party’s “framing” of Eyüp as an essentially Ottoman-Islamic place helped them ground their policies, but it also reminds us that buildings’ meanings are never fixed and may yet continue to change.⁷¹