
EYÜP, ISTANBUL'S RING GEM

If we compare Istanbul, which served as the capital of diverse civilisations, to a ring, then Eyüp is its gem, because it is the first district chosen by Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror as a place of regular and planned resettlement.

Extraordinary attention is shown to Eyüp, which being the first Muslim Turkish settlement in Istanbul occupies a special place in the city's geography. Among the three parts into which Istanbul was once subdivided (Galata - Üsküdar - Eyüp), Eyüp was the one with the greatest sanctity and importance. The main reason for this is the fact that THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (May God commend him) foresaw the conquest of Istanbul and praised the soldiers who would someday manage this. For centuries, every Muslim combatant has nursed the ideal of proving himself worthy of the praise of the Prophet. Thus, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, honoured with this title for having conquered Istanbul, called this sacred and loved district Eyüp, after Hz. Halid bin Zeyd Eba Eyyüb el Ensari, spiritual guiding light of the conquest. Since also Hz. Halid's tomb is in this district, it is known not just as "Eyüp", but also as "Eyüp Sultan". This green district, blessed with heavenly peace, which extends along the Golden Horn, has been called in this way since the days of the conquest.

There are many documents and a wealth of general information concerning Eyüp, a district that has so much resonance among Muslims. Researchers, writers, poets and artists are endeavoring to help make Eyüp better understood among the general public. In addition to all this, for the last eight years (1997-2004) the Eyüp Municipal Administration has been regularly organising "Symposia on the History, Culture and Art of Eyüp Sultan". We can comfortably state that these have satisfied a true cultural need. The quality of the papers presented to the symposia and the publications collecting these papers are worthy of a place like Eyüp.

The following collection is a selection from the eight volumes collecting the papers presented during the symposia. The articles have been selected from among around four hundred and provide us with a detailed map and an analysis of its composition, so to speak. Thanks to this selection you will learn about pre-conquest Eyüp, post-conquest Eyüp, Eyüp during the republic, contemporary Eyüp and the Eyüp of the future. Apart from learning about the geography of Eyüp, which symbolises the harmony between water (The Golden Horn), earth (historic Eyüp and the area outside the city walls), and greenery (Silahtar - Sâdâbad - Kemerburgaz), you will also learn why the place is considered sacred and is loved so much, thanks to the articles that we have chosen. At times you will wander along the roads of Eyüp under the guidance of a traveller from centuries ago, while at times you will admire the painted decorations inside an Ottoman mausoleum that has survived to our days. You will see how the past has led to the present and how the present will lead to the future.

For different cultures and civilisations to co-exist by getting to know each other, instead of clashing, must be difficult, but it is also interesting to note that while justice and peace reigned over the Muslim ruled lands spread over three continents, the same was not always true in other places. We

can see this clearly by comparing the histories of the zeniths of Roman, Islamic and Indian civilisations, which are considered among the most glorious experiences of humankind. The aim of this book is in a way to furnish you with clues concerning the nature of the Ottoman State, which is considered the most important representative of Islamic civilisation, through the example of Eyüp.

While you study the Muslim Turkish identity hidden in these texts and between the lines, we shall be enjoying the fact that we are sharing this district of ours with you. As human beings with (we think) many points in common, we will learn a lot from a detailed study of Eyüp.

In the following pages, you will learn from authoritative experts about the places, buildings, famous and less famous people, persons that created the architecture - art - science of Eyüp, the harmonious conjunction of water, earth and greenery that makes up the charm of Eyüp, the mystic traces of Hz. Halid (Eyüp Sultan) that have survived to our days, the charms that have survived the passage of time, the bird houses that are a monumental reflection of compassion, the harmonious sounds rising up to celestial levels and much more. Maybe you will not be content with reading about it and an inner voice will lead you towards Eyüp. Who knows!

In almost every country there are places or areas that are considered sacred, because of a person, an event, an institution, temple etc. or because of all of the above. Generally the moral values making up the nature of a country are also the elements of sanctity of a certain place within that country. In Europe we cannot isolate the elements of sanctity tied to a certain site, be it of Pagan, Jewish or Christian traditions, from its national context. When we look at the map of the sacred places of our country we see that the main sites and the general overview are related to Islam. Consequently when we describe Eyüp we are also describing the moral elements that constitute our country. Even though Eyüp is but a drop within the whole of Turkey, one must not forget that seas are made of drops. In a way Turkey is Eyüp and Eyüp is Turkey. By getting to know Eyüp you become familiar with the whole of Turkey.

The fact that both local and foreign visitors have always been visiting Eyüp, shows us that the spiritual meaning of Eyüp has not changed since the days when it was founded, notwithstanding the almost 600 years that have elapsed since then. An evaluation of the identities and nature of the visitors, be they local or foreign, crystallises all the aspects of Eyüp, which we have been mentioning. Of course a local visitor's sense of belonging and comprehension of the values tied to Eyüp and a foreigner's quest for "new discoveries" will be different. Nevertheless, the fact that Eyüp is open, in all the meanings of the word, to both local and foreign visitors, is what makes it different and valuable.

If this volume, with which we have tried to explain, within a per force limited number of pages, the essential nature of Eyüp, has served the purpose of awakening in you new curiosities and questions, we shall deem ourselves fortunate. We have tried to explain a great cultural and moral wealth by explaining the way it is reflected in Eyüp. The rest depends on you, dear readers. I thank you for your interest and congratulate all those that have contributed to the making of this volume.

With my respects,
Ahmet GENÇ
Mayor