

CONTENTS

Foreword • 9

Preface to the Second Edition • 13

PART ONE

Everyday Life on the Cusp of Mythos and Utopia

Everyday Life in Pre-modern Istanbul • **17**

Modernization and Everyday Life in the 19th Century • **73**

PART TWO

People, Culture and Space

Women, the Tanzimat and Everyday Life • **107**

The Tanzimat Family and Modern Manners • **119**

Etiquette: Ahmed Midhat Efendi and Practical Knowledge of Everyday Life • **135**

The Republican Etiquette of Abdullah Cevdet • **153**

Namık Kemal's Visions of Civilization • **171**

The Literature of Modernization: Notes on the Servet-i Fünun • **175**

Istanbul 1912 • **181**

Ottoman Professions in the Age of Modernization • **193**

Istanbul Gardens and the Evolution of the Concept of Nature in Turkish Culture • **203**

From Hamam to Bathroom: Turkish Bathing Culture • **211**

Streets Dogs of Istanbul, or the Four-legged Municipality • **219**

A Bosphorus Reformer: The Şirket-i Hayriyye: • **227**

The Water Faucet: A Brief History •	245
Variations on the Culture of Death: Shapes and Capitals of Gravestones •	259
Hamams as Social Venues •	267
Coffeehouses: Istanbul's Temples Without Gods •	273
People and Culture in the Minstrel Coffeehouses •	281
Coffeehouses: Introduction to a History of Social Venues in Istanbul •	291
Mevlevi Lodges in the History of Mysticism in Istanbul •	299

<i>Index</i> •	347
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<i>Acknowledgments</i> •	361
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FOREWORD

Throughout history the pendulum of Istanbul's everyday life has swung between the two opposite poles of the Ottoman world: mythos and utopia. This social oscillation, now heralding the end of the once golden ages that had come to a standstill, now accelerating the pace and opening up new horizons in human life, defined the city's identity along the cultural fault line that divides Eastern mythos from Western utopia. Nourished by the empire's rich geography, which was paired by fate with so many different cultures, this identity engraved Istanbul's mark on the log of world civilization.

For Istanbul the mythos is an historical depth and a human experience with roots reaching far back into the past. As in empires all over the earth, in Istanbul as well this creative experience has taken shape within a fabric of cosmopolitan culture in which religion and race were interwoven. It remained the fundamental dynamic of everyday life for as long as the mythos was a protective law governing city life, a scale of values with their spiritual content in the public conscience, a touchstone for determining the ethical and aesthetic criteria of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly.

The city's mythos rose from the ashes of Rome. When this archaic worldview, based on military superiority and a sense of social security, was united with Constantine's political utopia, the city's star shone brightly throughout the medieval period. Byzantine Istanbul, which negotiated time's labyrinth in a single millennium, reached the historical limits of self-sufficiency with its dazzling palace ceremonial, its interminable theological debates and its uprisings fomented by squalor and splendor. At the inevitable parting of ways, where enlightenment faded into twilight, the city's legacy to the Ottomans was nothing more than the historical ruins of the destroyed mythos come crashing down now upon everyday life. Reviving Istanbul's everyday life, the city's new residents embraced the myth of empire, gleaming still beneath the ruins that they cleared away, and made it their own. And Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror went down in history not only as conqueror of a city called Constantinople but as conqueror of the Istanbul mythos as well.

Ottoman Istanbul is a scintillating jewel in the treasure chest of the Turks' social identity, an identity we are on the verge of losing today. As much as the pirates who over the ages looted this treasure—a treasure we have buried now under a thick layer of neglect—the nameless heroes who measured its value in human life also permeated the atmosphere of this city. The Egyptian merchant who brought coffee from Alexandria to Tahtakale; the Uzbek dervish who stopped off on his pilgrimage to Mecca to first pay a visit to the mosque of Eyüb Sultan; the Armenian craftsman who transformed the Jewelry Bazaar into a radiant gleam of diamond, agate and emerald; the Jewish banker who discovered the magical power of money; the fire fighter who passed his youth on coffeehouse benches and cobbled pavements; the medrese scholar who mounted the staircase of knowledge rising to the rank of *kadı*; the Janissary colonel who left his head on the executioner's block as a warning to others; and the Bektashi cloaked in the shadow of the *şeriat* sword—all of them together created the cultural climate that nourished and grew the Istanbul mythos until, in the end, mankind learned to co-exist in this environment.

Istanbul's age of mythos experienced its first great upheaval in the 18th century. A welter of thoughts and emotions, harbingers of a utopia on the horizon of the future, affixed their own lifestyle to Istanbul's identity in this century. From this time forward, a social specter with a split-personality would haunt the cultural atmosphere of everyday life, representing two diametrically opposed worlds. For those who had taken refuge in the secure world of the mythos, this specter was terrifying indeed. The utopia, strengthened under the aegis of political authority, was interfering in the life sphere of the mythos in such a way as to reinforce the collective fear, with the result that the home truths of everyday life were always weighed incorrectly in the balance of past values. Istanbul paid a high price for this miscalculation in 1730. As they destroyed the magnificent symbols of utopia at Sa'dabad, those who were eager now to salve the injured sense of justice in the public conscience undoubtedly fantasized about how they might recover the mythos' lost paradise. But the paradisiacal gates had shut never to open again, and everyday life began to disintegrate on a city-wide scale. Henceforth the mythos would henceforth live its last days in the form of silent yet profoundly felt psycho-social upheavals in an Istanbul whose face was now obscured by darkness.

The 19th century is Istanbul's utopian era. Casting its spell over the city, this magical power appeared on the scene in the guise of a "religion of civilization", complete with its devout followers, crazed fanatics and zealous disciples bearing good tidings of paradise on earth to societal visions. Legends that Istanbul hung suspended in a place near to god on the summit of Mount Olympus sprang eternal in this religious community.

Utopia is a future concept that attempts to restructure the socio-cultural fabric of everyday life in Istanbul. Salvation from the grip of past time and from the mythos' theme of purification from sin constituted the essence of this concept. This sense of liberation, which was transformed

into a social construct during the 19th century, carved out a new Lebensraum for utopia by expunging past sins from the memory of everyday life. To this end, traditions are stashed away in storage chests and consigned to oblivion, and Istanbul eventually becomes the world's biggest flea market as the dashed idols of the mythos pile up in the city's marketplaces. While the world of traditional mentality, which finds no customers in this market, buries an entire social lifestyle in the depths of history, the now empty symbols of the mythos that has been left behind manage to survive today as touristic souvenirs in the nostalgia carnival.

As it carved itself a niche in Istanbul's everyday life, utopia, creating no culture itself, functioned instead as a marketing mechanism for ready-made lifestyles manufactured in another time and place. Every debate that arose on the question of modernization therefore evolved into an advertising campaign to help rather than hinder the basic functioning of this mechanism. Eventually, the intellectuals, designing in the fertile soil of everyday life modernization projects to accord with the European visions of the great men of state, constructed a stage set for a world that could be imitated. In this fragile fantasy world man was transformed into an anxious creature who feels compelled to define himself in terms of another identity and is a perpetual cultural nomad in a life converted into a stage set. The highest price utopia exacted from Istanbul is, without doubt, that by destroying the mythos' flexibility toward cultural norms it also destroyed the city's knack of inventing a kaleidoscope of lifestyles, which had once been its principal feature. Indeed, the standardization of social responses, the caricature of life based on imitation at the individual level, and the city-wide proclamation by every new culture of its own hegemony without first being melted down in the imperial crucible, are the most glaring surviving vestiges of Istanbul's torn fabric. Concomitantly, utopia gave Istanbul the idea of turning everyday life into a technical project. Steamboats and tram lines accelerated the pace of time, and city gas and electricity transformed traditional hardships into modern conveniences. In return however Istanbul paid for this with her very identity, which got lost somewhere between cultural alienation and the technical practicality of every life.

In its most general terms, everyday life is the history of the ordinary man. Every development that shapes the life of this anonymous hero falls within the domain of socio-historical research, whose purpose is detailed analysis of the dimensions of human-centered change to give a clear portrait of society. This approach, so out of favor with Turkey's classical historiography, founded and developed on a political settling of scores with the past, has generally been the subject of the so-called popular genres of writing. Indeed, this popular genre, which from the 1920s became widespread among the literati in particular, has defined the contemporary perspective that views everyday life today as "Istanbul nostalgia". Such popular writing about Istanbul by a group including authors and journalists such as Ahmed Rasim, Musahipzâde Celal, O. Cemal Kaygılı, E. Ekrem Talu, S. Muhtar Alus, and researchers such as A. Refik Altınay, R. Ekrem

Koçu, R. Ahmed Sevengil and Haluk Y. Şehsuvaro lu, has in a sense developed as a covert reaction against official historiography, bringing to the agenda the restoration of past time, in a sentimental and exaggerated style, as a counter to the harsh criticisms leveled at traditional Ottoman culture by Republican modernizers. The Istanbul image sculpted by these writers is the source of this “nostalgia literature”, which is mass-produced today and scarcely more than a pale imitation of its originators’ work.

The essays that constitute this book were written between 1985 and 1993 as the offshoots of a comprehensive study aimed at analyzing everyday life in Istanbul from a socio-historical standpoint. Part One has two primary themes: first, defining the social topography of Istanbul’s classical and modern periods from the point of view of everyday life and, second, laying bare the dynamics that shaped the city’s physiognomy. With this purpose in mind, a series of fundamental elements, extending from the neighborhood to the urban scale of life, have been treated in terms of their socio-cultural relations; the emphasis here is on the areas of life defined both by traditional institutions, which ensure historical integration, and by modern institutions, which cause disintegration. In Part Two, post-Tanzimat Istanbul is brought into the foreground and an effort is made to trace the social image of everyday life on the plane of human, cultural and spatial relations. A series of questions, such as the mode of operation of the social mechanisms that integrate human beings with everyday life, and the question of conformity, or the lack thereof, to the standard forms of life presented by the ideology of modernization constitute the basis for discussion in this section.

In sum, this work proposes to show that Istanbul is more than a mere fairground consisting of Beyo lu and its entertainment culture and to offer an objective account of the history of this fantastic world, indeed of this vanishing social identity fraught with question marks, which nostalgia literature has turned into a fetish. The solution through scholarly investigation of the problems posed here would without doubt be the greatest reward this work could possibly receive.

1995

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

We stand today on the threshold of a new age. If we do not want to stumble over this threshold, we are going to have to find within ourselves the courage to probe not merely the geography in which we live, but the entire cultural heritage that surrounds us. We can embark on this exciting venture by coolly taking stock of a tumultuous history, which, originating in a past with memories reaching back to life on the steppe, is fastened now onto the present. As we do so, one question remains of standing importance: Who is responsible for carrying out this procedure? Each and every one of us, without doubt, but above all the contemporary historian himself. This cultural soil, which nourishes the type of the new historian, not only bears traces of the footprints of the classical researchers who journeyed back into the past, but also embraces social memory, which can discover the past within the future. The contemporary historian thus has the potential for recording this memory, in all its details, in the log of the civilization of which it is a part.

Time is the soul of history. After having departed from the lifeless residue of the complex political upheaval that left the Ottoman Empire in ruins at the beginning of the century, this spirit unexpectedly turned around, leaving us, on the eve of a new age, to face similar problems, as if we were stepping into the age of knowledge through stage sets out of the past. Those who repeat rote-fashion the hackneyed script of the master-slave dialogue against these familiar old backdrops are attempting to stage our desire for life as a society by employing us as walk-ons in their own political projects. Our yearning for success, our battered national identity and our ideals so weary of languishing at civilization's gate make us inevitable partners in the tragic drama acted out by these novice players. What we need, however, are new dreams and visions that will emancipate our souls from this banal ancient tragedy—visions that belong uniquely to us and tell only our story.

Istanbul is perhaps the most resplendent vision we have created over the centuries. Every generation has made it a virtual duty to pass this vision along to posterity, spoiling it a little, adding a little color to it, even substantially modifying its original identity. The Istanbul we stand

before as spectators today is very different from the poet's "dream city", but at least we know that what seems to be slipping away from us will certainly be ours again one day. Who then are "we"?

This author believes that "we" are the "primary element" in the orbit of civilization of which we are part. He views the artificial history that post-modernism has tried to construct around the concept of "the other" as a project of political identity that will self-destruct at the blind spot where it pretends not to see that "primary element". One question remains however. Is the writing of history based on scholarly scruples possible against an ideological backdrop that has been fractured, even polarized, around the notions of "we" versus "the other"? Or, to put it another way, does the contemporary historian really have an honest answer, free of subterfuge, to the ordinary man's question, "Who am I?"

Among the welter of possibilities that an imperial city offers the historian, *Everyday Life in Istanbul* attempts to tell from a variety of angles the fascinating story behind this complex question of identity. Six new essays have been added to the second edition, which has also been enriched with additional illustrations not included in the first edition. With these additions, the book has come one step closer to the honest answer it seeks.

1999

PART ONE

Everyday Life on the Cusp of Mythos and Utopia

EVERYDAY LIFE IN PRE-MODERN ISTANBUL

The foundations on which all historical cities rest are valid for Istanbul as well: legend, wealth, complexity, a sense of greatness. But Istanbul violates this general rule by exceeding the classical limits laid down for imperial cities. There is within her history a part of the history, culture and way of life of other cities as well and, more important than all this, a part of the human adventure we call everyday life. Viewed from this angle, Istanbul is a world stage, and there is no great statesman, artist, merchant, traveler, or even ordinary person, who would spurn a role on this stage, or at least not be an eager spectator of the drama being staged here. When we consider Istanbul, we therefore embark on a discourse characterized by plurals. For Istanbul has not civilization but civilizations, not history but histories, not lifestyle but lifestyles.

Everyday life in Istanbul is the product of three separate periods, chronologically consecutive but fundamentally different. The first period from 1453 to 1520 is a segment of

time in which the city's new residents attempt to get to know their environment and begin to build an everyday life based on their traditional cultural values. We call this the Founding Period. The approximately two hundred years from 1520 to 1703 are the period in which the people who made Istanbul what she is—who gave her personality and soul—strained and surpassed their own limits in every area in which their strength and energy sufficed. The city acquired its historical silhouette in this period, and the image it created became a criterion of values for all time. This historical process is called the Classical Period. The period from the beginning of the 18th century up to the first quarter of the 20th is a race against time in which Istanbul was alienated to the original image she had created and therefore sought new terms in which to express herself. In general we regard the term “modernization” used for the post-Tanzimat period as appropriate for this segment of time. Here, only the first two periods are considered in their main outlines.



A) The Founding Period (1453-1520)

Byzantine Istanbul, which had preserved its character as a fortress-city throughout the Middle Ages, immediately following the conquest commenced a rapid rise to the position of an administrative center befitting its Ottoman identity. During the founding period this new identity, which came into being at the geographical juncture where the legacy of the Christian East fused with Islamic tradition, gathered into itself all the forms of life on a broad cultural map encompassing the

Mediterranean and the Balkans. Two major factors may be mentioned that govern the material and spiritual forms of everyday life within this structure according to new rules: the strategic administrative decisions taken by the ruling class, and the place of the volume of trade within the economic potential. These two factors, which shape the living conditions of all medieval cities, structured everyday life across a broad social spectrum ranging from demographic structure to cultural identity, from housing and construction activity to the organization of trade.



A woodcut of Istanbul in the Byzantine period that appeared in Hartmann Schedel's Welt-Chronik of 1493. Byzantine monograms are visible on the gates of the walled city, as well as the three windmills at Samatya. The roofs have collapsed on the lateral wings of the Church of the Apostles on the site where Fatih Mosque was built following the conquest.

The population structure of post-conquest Istanbul is made more complex by the addition of the Muslim sector to the existing legacy of Byzantium's Christian communities. This structure is fundamentally different from that of the Byzantine period. The characteristic division of the Istanbul population under the administration of the Paleologues, which was based on the principle of religious unity yet fragmented by sectarian differences, gives way to a supra-sectarian religious polarization in the time of Mehmed the Conqueror. This polarization, which had a profound impact on

everyday life, shaped the structure of the population within the separate religious traditions of Christianity and Islam. Thus, although the cultural dynamics that constitute the spiritual aspect of everyday life depend on the canonical rules of small sectarian groups, at a more general level they express themselves as the founding powers of the Christian and Muslim communities.

The demographic structure of Byzantium is a subject as yet insufficiently understood.¹ Nevertheless, the composition of the population bequeathed to Ottoman Istanbul by an empire that

stretched from the Mediterranean to the Balkans can be determined by taking the geographical regions into account. In addition to the orthodox Greek population, which constituted the majority, the Latins, representatives of the Italian trading colonies consisting of Venetians and Genoese, Armenians of Anatolian origin, the Teutonic and Balkan tribes presumed to have been the basis of the mercenary army, Jews, Syrian Arabs and a small number of Turks engaged in commerce constitute the basic elements of this population. When the city passed into Turkish hands, the size of the population was quite small, and is generally assumed to have been between fifty and eighty thousand in this period.²

Following the conquest the housing problem is solved by the population policy the Ottomans had originally implemented in Anatolia and Rumelia.³ In addition to tilting the population balance, which was the fundamental factor in everyday life, in favor of the Muslims, it was initially conceived that Istanbul should provide refuge to a skilled population from different religious communities settled by means of exile. It was therefore planned to give priority to the settlement not only of influential administrative and religious families but also of artisans who would preserve the city's economic order from collapse. In the initial phase, however, since the wealthy merchants could not be persuaded to give up their lucrative activities in Anatolia and Rumelia, this class was subject to enforced exile through orders dispatched to the offices of the *Kadı* (judge). Persons brought to Istanbul in this way were housed around the hans and markets built in the city's commercial districts.⁴ This collection and resettlement in the city of artisans from the neighboring provinces took many years, and, particularly following the conquest of Egypt, the close to fifty branches of crafts existing there began to decline with the transfer to Istanbul of its master architects, stonemasons,

ironsmiths, carpenters, swordmakers and silk spinners.⁵ The settlement of Christians engaged in trade was carried out by the same methods. Greeks with expertise in a given branch of trade were settled in the city's commercial districts, while others were dispersed to nearby villages.⁶

Parallel with the settlement of the skilled population, the settlement of the Muslim and Christian people, who constituted the majority, in separate districts created specially for them paved the way to a *mahalle* (residential quarter) culture that left its stamp on the city's everyday life. The establishment of Christian and Jewish quarters adjacent to the Muslim quarters continued up to the period of Suleiman the Magnificent. From the second half of the 16th century on, no further districts were created for non-Muslims, who were instead compelled to move to appropriate districts within the city.⁷

The construction activity that had commenced with the repair of the city walls and Byzantine buildings⁸ gathered momentum with the process of creating residential quarters within the city's walled area. The first districts that were established are noteworthy as small-scale settlement units where religious communities (*cemaat*) organized around a religious, cultural or ethnic identity were housed. The mosque, large or small, was the center of the Muslim quarter. These centers, which governed the life of the community in both the religious and the administrative sense,⁹ were constructed by prominent men of state who had taken part in the siege and were named for them. Among these men who established residential quarters during the time of Mehmed II, in addition to names such as Bâli Süleyman Agha, Hacı İlyas Agha, Seyyid Hasan Agha, Çakır Agha and Ali Fakih, sheikhs from the ranks of the *Ulema* (religious hierarchy) also played a role in the establishment of the first residential quarters. Quarters bearing the names of men of religion such as Şeyh Ebu'l-Vefa, Şeyh