

SECRET ISTANBUL



EMRE ÖKTEM



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

THE FRAGMENTS OF THE BLACK STONE OF THE KAABA OF MECCA

23

Sokollu Mosque

Şehit Mehmet Paşa Yokuşu, nos. 20-24

Kadirga area

Also accessible from Su Terazisi Sokak Street

• Tram: Sultanahmet



Fragments brought back from Mecca in the 16th century

A short distance from Sultanahmet, the Sokollu Mosque is a little masterpiece by the architect Sinan that possesses a feature that is almost entirely unique in the Islamic world. Under the entrance door, on the mihrab (recess at the back indicating the direction of Mecca), on the minber (pulpit)

and under the dome of the minber, are four pieces of the Black Stone (Hajar al Aswad, Hacer-i Esved in Turkish) of Mecca.

The Black Stone of Mecca is an ovoid sacred stone measuring 30 centimetres in diameter which is situated one and a half meters above the ground in the south-east corner of the Kaaba (the large cube located in the centre of the mosque in Mecca). According to tradition, the Black Stone of Mecca was placed there by Abraham. Legend has it that this antediluvian stone was originally white, but became black following the flood at the time of Noah, as the waters had been polluted by the sins of mankind.



In 605, the Kaaba was damaged in a fire and the Black Stone broken up by the heat. After it had been cleaned up, there were disputes among the chiefs of the tribes of Mecca over the question of who would be given the honour of putting the Black Stone back in its place. The conflict threatened to degenerate into warfare, and so it was eventually decided that the task would be carried out by the young Muhammed, who had not yet become the Prophet but who had already gained the confidence of the inhabitants: Muhammed placed the Black Stone on a large piece of cloth, which the notables of Mecca all gripped at once, returning it to its place. After the arrival of Islam, the Black Stone was preserved in homage to the Prophet Abraham and in memory of the amicable solution found by the Prophet Muhammed, who also kissed it as a sign of submission to the Divine Will. This gesture was subsequently adopted by all Muslims as part of the pilgrimage ritual.

Following the conquest of the Holy Lands of Islam in 1517, the Ottomans found the Kaaba in a state of neglect and requiring renovation. In the late 16th century, the walls were progressively reinforced and the structure repaired. At the same time, the fragments that had become detached were removed to Istanbul and finally inserted into the various locations in the Sokollu Mosque.

Today, the Turkish pilgrims to Mecca who have not succeeded in touching the Black Stone, due to the huge crowds surrounding it, are thus able to complete their rituals and touch a fragment of the stone by visiting the Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Mosque.

Another fragment of the Black Stone can be found inlaid on the exterior of the mausoleum of Suleiman the Magnificent, in the cemetery of the Süleymaniye Mosque.

OBELISKS COMMEMORATING THE “CABBAGES” AND THE “BAMYAS”

Topkapı Palace gardens

• Open daily 9am-5pm except Tuesday

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The memory of exceptional sporting feats

In the gardens of the Topkapı Palace (after coming in through the main entrance, walk to the right towards the military buildings) and at various sites in İstanbul – in particular at Çengelköy and Paşabahçe (see page 263)

on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus – there are strange little columns in the shape of cabbages or *bamyas*, a vegetable also known as “gumbo” or “okra” in English. The memorial in the Topkapı gardens consists of two columns, one of which, erected by Selim III (reigned 1789-1807), represents a cabbage, in honour of a shooter from the Cabbage team who had succeeded in shooting an egg with a rifle at a distance of 434 paces (see opposite), while the other represents the *bamya*. The *bamya* is an unusual vegetable, unfortunately rare in Europe, which constitutes one of the delights of Turkish cooking and is eaten with lamb or chicken. It is usually dried in the sun during summer before being consumed in winter.



THE CABBAGE AND THE BAMYA: VEGETABLES USED AS SYMBOLS BY TWO TOPKAPI PALACE SPORTS TEAMS

The cabbage and the *bamya* were adopted as the symbols of two Topkapı Palace sports teams. According to legend, their origins go back to the 15th century when the future sultan, Mehmed I (who was then governor at Amasya, north-east of Ankara), organised sporting competitions between riders from Amasya, which was known for its *bamyas* (and for being Strabo's birthplace), and from nearby Merzifon, a town known for its cabbages. Encouraged by the palace population, the two teams officially became known according to their respective vegetable symbol. The Cabbage-Bamya rivalry first spread to Edirne [Adrianople] and then to İstanbul, where Mehmed the Conqueror began to hold sports games in the gardens of the newly-built Topkapı Palace. From that time, these Ottoman versions of the green and blue sports teams of the Byzantine era became part of the culture and social life of İstanbul. The colours had changed slightly, however, as the “Cabbages” dressed in green while the “Bamyas” opted for red.

Palace intrigues seeped into this sporting rivalry and, for a period of time, the white eunuchs (who were recruited in the Balkans and served as the palace's internal police) supported the Bamya team while the black eunuchs (who were purchased from merchants in sub-Saharan Africa, sometimes castrated by specialists in Egypt's Coptic monasteries, and occupied important positions within the Harem) supported the Cabbages. The rivalry soon turned into hostility, especially since the violent sporting games, in which archery and rifle shooting were very popular, constituted a sort of preparation for war. In one particularly violent game called *tomak*, opponents would strike each other with a type of club or felt flails. A version of polo was also played, in which riders would throw javelins and wooden skittles at each other. The sultans often attended the games, rewarding the winners generously and even intervening to stop games that had degenerated into actual pitched battles. The games were sometimes followed by concerts, dances and performances by acrobats and conjurers.

Selim III and his nephew Mahmud II (reigned 1808-1839) were the most enthusiastic (and the last) spectators of the Cabbage-Bamya games. In fact, Selim was so fond of the Cabbages that he composed a poem in their honour: “The cabbage, which appears in mid-winter / is like Chosroes' club, and gives vitality to man / for it is like fresh rose petals [...]”. His sporting choice had thus been made for him. In 1812, Mahmud II organised games at Büyükdere (north of the Bosphorus, towards Sarıyer) which were attended by European diplomats who had come from their nearby summer embassies. The latter offered fruits and sweets to the Cabbage and Bamya players, whose games had been particularly spectacular and spurred on by the unique slogans of their supporters: “Cabbage Power!” and “Delights of the Bamyas!”. Mahmud II, who supported the Bamyas and was a great organizer of the vegetable games, was also the one who put an end to them. After abolishing the Janissaries in 1826, he dissolved the *Enderun*, the palace's internal administration on which the Cabbages and Bamyas depended, and, with the aid of Prussian officers, adopted modern methods of military training. The old war games had lost their reason for being.

THE PULPIT OF THE AHRIDA SYNAGOGUE

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Between Kürkçü Çeşme Sokak and Gevgili Sokak Streets - Balat

• Tel: 0212 2938794 • www.turkyahudileri.com

• Email: seheratilla@yahoo.com

• Visits by permission of the Chief Rabbinate



**Noah's
Ark or boat
that saved
the Jews of Spain?**

Originally built in the 15th century and burnt down in 1693, the Ahrida Synagogue was reconstructed from 1694 and classified as a historical monument in 1989. It is the largest and undoubtedly one of the oldest synagogues in Istanbul. At its centre is a remarkable *tebah* (a pulpit resembling the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem) shaped as a boat's prow. For some, the ship's prow represents Noah's Ark, while others claim that the prow is simply a reference to the boats of the Ottoman fleet commanded by Kemal Reis, who saved the Jews of Spain and resettled them on Ottoman territory in 1492. The following phrase is attributed to the sultan at the time, Bayezid II: "You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler, but by exiling the Jews he has impoverished his own country and enriched mine". Restoration work undertaken in 1992 appears to support an old legend, which says that the synagogue was created by demolishing a wall separating two adjacent synagogues.

Sabbatai Zevi (see p. 224) is alleged to have preached to the Jewish community of Istanbul at Ahrida in order to convince them that he was, in fact, the long-awaited Messiah.

The Spanish Jews, known as "Sephardi", still constitute by far the largest group within the Jewish community of Turkey, which previously included the "Romaniotes", descendants of the Byzantine Jewish community whose origins go back to the Jewish diaspora of the Hellenistic period (between the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. and the beginning of Roman domination in the 1st century B.C.), and who were eventually absorbed by the Sephardi during the Ottoman era. Although their name describes them as being Jews within the "Roman" Empire, the Byzantines, in fact, called themselves "Romans", the term "Byzantine Empire" being an invention of 16th-century historians. There is also a tiny Ashkenazi community, which is the result of the migration of German Jews fleeing anti-Semitic persecution in 15th-century Bavaria, as well as the emigration of Jews from central and eastern Europe for economic reasons during the 19th century. The Jews of present-day Turkey are still highly attached to Spain and many continue to speak Ladino, a Castilian interspersed with Turkish words, even though its use has declined among young people.

Ahrida owes its name to its founders, who originated from Ohrid in Macedonia and emigrated to Istanbul in the early 15th century. Ahrida is the Greek pronunciation of *Ohrid*; the Jews of Byzantium used a particular Greek dialect (Yevanik) at that time.

THE PIERCED STONE OF THE TAXIARCHIS CHURCH 7

Taxiarhis Church - Ayan Caddesi 25 - Balat



A reminder of the ancient cults of "pierced stones"

In the garden of the Taxiarchis Church (also called Agios Stratios in Greek or Aya Strati in Turkish), a building houses an *agiasma* (holy spring) dedicated to the Archangel Michael. In the middle of the internal wall,

which cuts the building roughly in half, a large stone at ground level is said to have been pierced by the Archangel's spear.

According to tradition, mentally ill individuals who passed through the hole would be healed and children would be spared from childhood diseases. Prayers would also be granted to the faithful. These sorts of pagan rituals were practised in the heart of the Orthodox church from the earliest times.

In antiquity, passing through a hole was often an act of initiation. The hole symbolised the maternal uterus and passing through the hole was taken as a sign of spiritual rebirth.

In ancient texts, the Taxiarchis pierced stone was known as Zurlopetra or Zolohopetra, which is said to have signified "the stone of the madmen" and to have given its name to the nearby district of Zuropetra. Although the church's existence has been documented since the 16th century, the current building dates from 1833. Despite the complete disappearance of Greek churchgoers from the area, the church is perfectly preserved and holds a large collection of ancient icons.

MORE PIERCED STONES IN ANATOLIA

Anatolia boasts many pierced stones. For example, in the village of Solfasol (now lost among the suburbs of Ankara), there's a pierced stone in the basement of a saint's mausoleum; only the innocent are permitted to pass through its hole, while sinners, however thin, remain stuck. At Nallihan and close to Gaziantep, children suffering from whooping cough are passed through a pierced stone. At Mudurnu and Isparta, anorexic children are passed through a pierced stone for healing. At Erzurum, passing through a stone in a windmill is said to cure squints, coughing and aphonia, while at Alaşehir (the "Philadelphia" of the Apocalypse of St. John), the passing is meant to cure coughing. Near Selçuk, young people pass through a pierced rock in the act of marriage. At Karaman, this ritual is observed by those wanting children. The most famous example of a pierced stone can be found three kilometres from Hacıbektaş, at the site of the mausoleum of Hacı Bektaş Veli, founder of the Bektashi Sufi order and venerated by the Alevis, who hold a great annual festival centred on his tomb. The Hacıbektaş pierced stone is located at the back of a cave where the saint is said to have withdrawn for contemplation and meditation. Here again, only the innocent are able to pass through, while the sinner who remains stuck must make a pledge to the saint in order to be set free.

There are also pierced stones in southern Italy, with similar rituals. In Apulia, for example, the Sacra Rocca di San Vito in Calimera is also found in the middle of a church. The faithful pass through the hole in the rock once a year, on Easter Monday, in order to purify themselves from their sins, ask for fertility and be healed of sickness.



THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET IN THE HIRKA-I ŞERİF MOSQUE

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Muhtesip İskender Mahallesi

Akseki Caddesi

Fatih

• Open between morning and evening prayers

• Relic on display during Ramadan

• Metro: Emniyet/Fatih



**A holy relic
ironed with
a clothes iron**

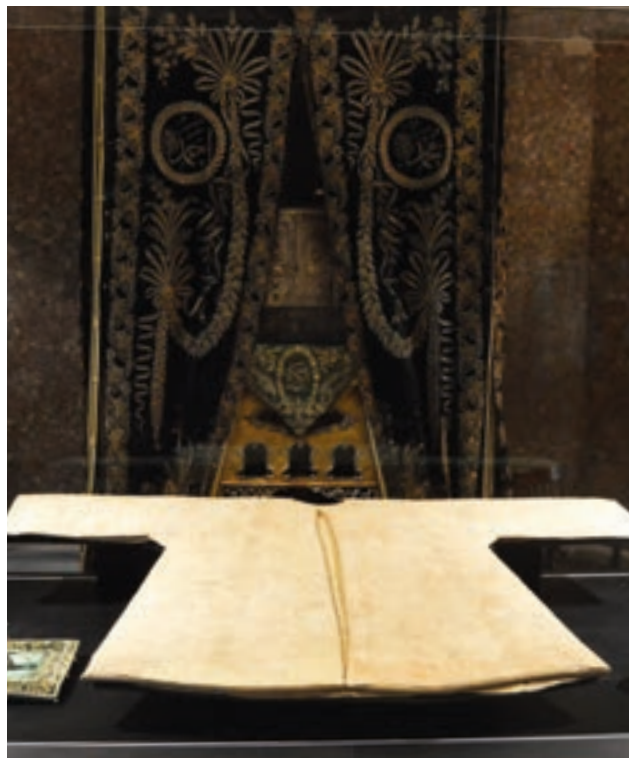
The Hırka-I Şerif Mosque was built by Sultan Abdülmecid in 1851 specifically for the purpose of housing and protecting one of Islam's holiest relics – the Mantle of the Prophet.

Nevertheless, it has recently been the victim of over-zealous devotion: it has been ironed with a clothes iron.

The Prophet's cloak was given to Uways Al Qar(a)ni ("Veysel Karani" in Turkish), a man who converted to Islam during the Prophet's lifetime but whom he never met personally. In Islamic tradition, however, he is venerated as a "*sahabi*", a term applied to the Prophet's immediate companions, due to his burning desire to see Muhammed and the spiritual bond established between himself and the Prophet. More than just a straightforward gift, this cloak, given to Qarani by Ali, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet, symbolises the transmission of spiritual knowledge, the true gnosis. Al Qarani's descendants, the Uwaysi family, preserved the cloak and brought it to Istanbul in the early 17th century under an imperial decree issued by Ahmed I. The Uwaysi family continues to hold the privilege of guarding this relic, which is extremely precious both because it is one of the Prophet's personal effects and because it embodies the continued communication of his esoteric tradition. In Islamic tradition, putting on someone else's clothes signifies that one identifies with them. Thus, even today, sheikhs wear robes that have been worn by generations of religious leaders.

The buildings designated for conserving the Holy Mantle include a mosque, a place of residence for the oldest representative of the Uwaysi family, and a small barracks for the company of guards charged with protecting the relic, which has been turned into a primary school. The highly eclectic architecture of this ensemble, in which Doric columns mingle with the Baroque and the neo-Gothic, also features wonderful calligraphy created with a reed pen by Kazasker Mustafa İzzet Efendi.

Ever since it was moved to Istanbul, the mantle has been greatly venerated by the city's residents. Previously displayed during the last two weeks of Ramadan, due to the large crowds of visitors it may now be viewed by the faithful throughout the whole of Ramadan.



The cloak, which is 120 centimetres long, is beige in colour and composed of eight pieces of fabric woven from the hairs that grow under the throats of young camels.

In 2009, viewings of the mantle were suspended for quite mysterious reasons. It is said (although denied by the religious authorities of the city), that the relic's last curator hired an employee in 2002 who was a little too zealous and devout. The latter is said to have ironed the mantle several times. After a while, the conservator became concerned by its rapid and unusual deterioration and, horrified, entrusted the relic to an expert in the restoration of ancient fabrics.

Another cloak belonging to the Prophet, woven from goat hair, is preserved in the Chamber of the Sacred Relics in the Topkapi Palace, and has given the chamber its more familiar name of "Pavilion of the Holy Mantle" ("Hırka-i Saadet Dairesi"). The poet Kâ'b Bin Zuheyr received this cloak from the Prophet and it was later removed to Istanbul by Selim I after the conquest of Egypt under the Mamelukes, who had taken possession of the holy relics of Islam.

THE GLASS OF MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK

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Vefa Bozacısı shop
Avenue Katip Çelebi Cad., no. 104/1
Vefa
• Tel: +90 212 519 49 22
• www.vefa.com.tr
• vefa@vefa.com.tr
• Metro: Vezneciler



The Survivor of Boza and Şıra

Both a cafe and a shop, the beautiful Vefa Bozacısı establishment offers a number of typically Turkish drinks. Boza is served there between October and April and şıra from April to October.

Vefa Bozacısı (“house of Boza in the Vefa area”) was founded by an Albanian family originally from Prizren, who emigrated to Istanbul in the 1870s, just before the Balkans became the setting for the Russo-Turkish War. Finding it difficult to establish themselves in the boza sector (where the Armenians had gained the upper hand over the Albanians), this family introduced a new way of producing boza that allowed them to make their fortune in a neighbourhood where many high-level bureaucrats resided. Instead of conserving the boza in wooden barrels, which encouraged the spread of bacteria and rapidly spoiled the precious liquid, they used enormous marble jars, which were both hygienic and decorative. The establishment quickly became renowned and attracted clients as illustrious as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, a great Vefa regular whose personal glass is still proudly exhibited in a bell jar.

There were previously hundreds of family-run boza bars in Istanbul, a practice that is now disappearing (though several boza producers can still be found in Turkish Thrace, another reminder of its Balkan origins). That the Vefa Bozacısı establishment continues to thrive is a testament to its consistent quality.



Şıra, which is served during the summer season, is a refreshing drink made from grape juice, or occasionally from dried grapes soaked in water. It has suffered more violently from religious controversy than boza, since şıra, if fermented too long, turns into wine.

Apart from the traditional manufacturing of boza and şıra, Vefa also sells classic vinegar and Italian-inspired balsamic vinegar, both of which are highly sought by food-lovers. All of these products can be taken away in elegant glass bottles. In summer, their homemade ice cream is excellent.



BOZA: A CONTROVERSIAL DRINK

Boza is a slightly fermented beverage made from millet and sugar. Very rich in carbohydrates, vitamins and lactic acid, it is recommended for serious athletes and pregnant women. Boza was also previously made from wheat, maize and other crops.

The origins of boza can undoubtedly be found in zythum, a fermented drink produced by the Egyptians in antiquity. Xenophon's *Anabasis* refers to a similar drink consumed in an area corresponding to modern-day eastern Anatolia. During the Ottoman period, the manufacturing of boza was the privilege of the Balkan peoples, especially the Albanians. The army consumed large quantities, as prior to the discovery of the extraction of beet sugar at the beginning of the 19th century, cane sugar was expensive and the carbohydrate-rich foods helped soldiers against the cold of the Balkans. The consumption of boza was subject to continual theological controversy, since the delicious drink contained a small amount of alcohol. The legal experts distinguished between “acidic” boza, rich in alcohol, and “sweet” boza, which good Muslims could drink without any crises of conscience. However, certain sultans such as Murad IV (1623-40) or Selim III (1789-1807), who were more devout, strictly forbade all varieties of boza, acidic or sweet. This prohibition is also explained by the fact that the boza establishments had become places where political plots were hatched. Boza was previously served sprinkled with cinnamon, ginger and finely grated coconut. Today, boza is decorated with cinnamon and roasted chickpeas, called leblebi.

THE SILIVRIKAPI CLUB

Silivrikapı Gate (inner gate in the Byzantine walls)
Avenue 10. Yıl Caddesi
Bus: Silivrikapı (Zeytinburnu line)



***A club
in memory
of a sporting
achievement***

Hidden inside the Silivrikapı Gate (the inner gate in the Byzantine walls), a remarkable club of colossal dimensions hangs from the wall. Contrary to what you might expect, it was not used to knock out opponents during ferocious battles in the Middle Ages, but was used simply for sports training by warriors.

Among the Ottomans (and in particular the Janissaries – see p. 56), when a record was broken in a sporting competition, it was customary to hang the record-breaking objects (javelin, bow, club, etc.) on the wall of either a mosque or monumental gateway.

Although the clubs regularly used for training soldiers (instead of dumbbells) weighed 25-30 kilograms, Sultan Murad IV (reigned 1623-1640), who was known for his Herculean strength and imposing stature, used to train

with a club weighing 102 kilos, which he held with just his little finger.

The inscription accompanying the club hanging at Silivrikapı reveals the identity of the hero, “Whoever beholds the club of Idris the wrestler, native of Rize, member of the corps of halberdiers of the Old Palace, and recites the Fatiha (first chapter of the Koran, recited for the departed) will give up his soul in the faith, 1090 of the Hegira -1679 of the Julian Calendar”.

Until a few years ago, the club was crowned with two large whalebones, whose disappearance remains as great a mystery as their origins.



The clubs used for training in the Topkapı Palace are conserved in the weaponry section in the Palace museum.

THE ŞAZELI TEKKESI

14 Mehmet Ali Bey Sokak
Between the beginning of Yıldız Caddesi and the Serencebey slope
(Serencebey Yokuşu) - Beşiktaş
• Open during hours of prayer



**A Sufi
centre in art
nouveau style**

A Muslim brotherhood adopting the latest art nouveau style: the perfect symbol for the reign!" exclaimed François Geogon, the great biographer of Sultan Abdülhamid, builder of the Şazeli Tekkesi.

Constructed in 1903 by the Italian architect Raimondo d'Aronco in the purest art nouveau style, which was then in vogue in Europe, the Şazeli Tekkesi (Ertuğrul Tekkesi) abounds with floral architectural details and other decorative features typical of this style. The spiritual retreat was built at the request of Sultan Abdülhamid II in homage to Sheikh Hamza Zâfir Medeni, head of the Şazeliye Brotherhood¹ (*Chadhiliyya* in Arabic), which has given its name to the institution. The tekke is also known in Turkish as *Ertuğrul*, from the name of the father of Osman Gazi, founder of the Ottoman dynasty. The shrine's mosque was used principally as a place of worship for the Ertuğrul regiment, an elite corps responsible for protecting the sultan, whose troops were recruited from Turkoman groups in the Domanıç region, birthplace of the imperial dynasty. This represented a nostalgic, but significant, return to Turkish sources, which had often been neglected or ignored by the House of Osman in previous years. The tekke was also an instrument in the pan-Islamic policy of the sultan, whom Bismarck, by no means a Turkophile, considered to be the greatest diplomat of his time. Sheikh Zâfir originally came from Tripolitania, in Libya, and was held in great esteem in North Africa. The tekke thus welcomed sheikhs and ulema from many Muslim religions and, through the connections that it established between the capital and spiritual centres on the periphery, helped to increase the influence of the caliphate's institution, which was held by the Ottomans. The European art nouveau style used here, in an Islamic country, was therefore perfectly in accordance with the philosophy of cultural mixing to which the tekke bore witness.

AN ITALIAN IN ISTANBUL

Based in Istanbul from 1893 to 1909, the Italian architect Raimondo d'Aronco was one of the favourite architects of Sultan Abdülhamid, during whose reign he built numerous public and private buildings still admired today: a myriad of buildings and lodges within the enclosure of the Yıldız Palace, including the Chalet Pavilion (Şale Köşkü), which was used to accommodate Wilhelm II during his visit in 1898; the Huber family palace in Yeniköy, now the president's summer residence; and the Italian summer embassy in Tarabya. He also designed the building of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Mines on Sultanahmet Square, opposite the Hagia Sophia.

¹ A brotherhood founded in the early 13th century in Egypt by Abul Hasan Taqiuddin Ali bin Abdullah ash-Shadhili, a Sufi master of Moroccan origin. Scattered throughout North Africa, the Shadhiliyah reached Istanbul and were able to flourish there due to Abdülhamid's special interest in the brotherhood, whose sheikh became the sultan's spiritual guide. In gratitude, and remaining faithful to their benefactor and fellow member, the Shadhiliyah dervishes celebrated their special rituals at Abdülhamid's funeral.

THE ÇIRAĞAN PALACE HAMMAM

?

Çırağan Palace Kempinski Hotel
Avenue Çırağan cad., no. 32
Beşiktaş

- Visiting by appointment: meetings.istanbul@kempinski.com
- The hammam may be hired for dinners or cocktails
- Bus: Çırağan. Pier: Beşiktaş

**The sultan's
personal hammam
which miraculously
escaped the flames**

Inside the magnificent Çırağan Kempinski Hotel, the Çırağan Palace hammam is the only part of the historical palace which escaped the fire that devastated the premises in 1910.

Although it is no longer used as a hammam, it may be visited by appointment or hired for private events.

Built by Sarkis Balyan (son of Garabed Balyan), Çırağan Palace was completed in 1871 for Sultan Abdülaziz, who was only able to make use of the building until he was dethroned in 1876. From 1878 to 1904, Sultan Murad V was held prisoner there after being dethroned several months after Abdülaziz, allegedly for mental health reasons. In 1909, the Ottoman Parliament left its site close to St. Sophia and moved into the palace, where it was only able to operate for two months. On 6 January 1910, a fire caused by a short-circuit destroyed almost the entire palace, with the exception of the walls and hammam.

The hammam, which is made of intricately carved marble, is a delightful mixture of Moorish and classic Ottoman styles. The second chamber, at the back, is crowned with a dome whose window, shaped as a twelve-pointed star and surrounded by twelve hexagonal windows, allows a soft white light to filter through. Given that Abdülaziz was sympathetic to the "Bektaşî" Sufi brotherhood, was this intended to serve as a reminder of the stone of submission (*teslim taşı*), which members of the brotherhood wear as a necklace in memory of the twelve imams revered within Shiism and certain Sunni mystical traditions?

The narrow entrance to the second chamber leads us to believe that a gate may have disappeared in the fire, perhaps one similar to that in the hammam of the sultans in the Topkapı Palace. This gate would have allowed the sultan to shut himself away in complete tranquility during his most vulnerable moments, in particular when he was washing his head with soap, with his eyes closed.

The hammam may be hired for dinners or private cocktail parties.

THE ATATÜRK CARPET

Atatürk Museum in the Pera Palace

Meşrutiyet cad. no. 52

Tepebaşı Beyoğlu

• Museum open 10am—11am and 3pm—4pm

• Metro: Şişhane

11

“A carpet
that foretold
the death of Atatürk

After the First World War, Mustafa Kemal rarely stayed with his mother, who lived at Akaretler/Beşiktaş, since the apartment was under surveillance by the Allied occupation forces who suspected this young Ottoman army general of scheming against their interests, suspicions which were entirely correct.

The future founder of the Turkish Republic thus often stayed in room 101 at the Pera Palace where he met his friends to assess the political situation. In 1981, on the occasion of Atatürk's 100th birthday, the room was transformed into a museum in which 37 of his personal effects were put on display, including: binoculars for military exercises, glasses, toothbrush and toothpaste, crockery, a clothes brush, tea and coffee cups, spurs, suits, branded underwear, hats, pyjamas and slippers. The most interesting and enigmatic of these objects is a prayer mat (*seccade*) made of silk and embroidered with gold thread, which was given to Atatürk by an unknown maharaja.

In 1929, an Indian prince presented himself to the Secretariat of the Presidential Office of the Republic to request an audience with Atatürk, a request which was granted immediately. Though the purpose of their meeting and the identity of the maharaja is still a mystery today, we do know that when he took his leave, the maharaja gave Atatürk a prayer mat woven in India as a present. This mat was then sent to room 101 at the Pera Palace, where Atatürk still stayed on occasion.

No attention was paid to the mat until 1938, the year in which Atatürk died. It was then noticed that the design on the mat depicted a clock 20 centimetres in diameter showing the time as 9.07am. The time shown is unsettling, in fact, since Atatürk died on 10 November 1938, at 9.05am. The surprise does not stop there: the design also depicted ten chrysanthemums. Given that “chrysanthemum” is *kasımpatı* in Turkish and that the month of November is called *Kasım*, we might begin to wonder whether the mat predicted the time of Atatürk's death in coded fashion.

THE COLUMNS OF THE KILIÇ ALI PASHA MOSQUE

Avenue Necati Bey Caddesi
Kemankeş area
• Tramway: Tophane

15



Columns that warn of earthquakes

event of a landslide or earthquake, the columns begin turning on their axis, thus indicating to the worshippers that they must end their prayers and leave the building. Indeed, the ground on which the Kılıç Ali Pasha Mosque was built



At the entrance of the Kılıç Ali Pasha Mosque, two narrow columns were placed at the corners of the walls by the architect Sinan. Although the columns appear at first sight to be entirely classical, in reality they have one extraordinary feature: in the event of a landslide or earthquake, the columns begin turning on their axis, thus indicating to the worshippers that they must end their prayers and leave the building. Indeed, the ground on which the Kılıç Ali Pasha Mosque was built is highly unstable since it was reclaimed from the sea.

The mosque was built in 1580 for the Ottoman admiral Ali Pasha (1519 – 1587), alias Giovanni Dionigi Galeni, a Calabrian who, after converting to Islam, made his career in the Ottoman navy. After becoming Grand Admiral of the fleet, he decided that he would build a mosque in the manner of any Ottoman dignitary wishing to be remembered by posterity. On expressing his desire to build a mosque, Kılıç Ali Pasha was told that as commander of the fleet, he would only be allowed to construct it on the sea, which was perhaps a discreet way of suggesting to him that an old pirate like him was not under any obligation to erect a mosque. Taking the advice literally, Kılıç Ali ordered the bay to be filled in and invited the architect Sinan to begin the works.

There are also columns designed to warn worshippers of earthquakes at the Şemsi Pasha Mosque, which is also built on unstable ground at the edge of the sea. Unfortunately, this system no longer works due to changes made to the structure of the mosque over the centuries.

KILIÇ ALI: AN ITALIAN SAILOR CAPTURED BY PIRATES WHO BECAME ADMIRAL OF THE OTTOMAN FLEET



The son of a poor sailor, Kılıç Ali or Uluç ali (known as Occhiali by the Europeans) was born in 1519 at Le Castella, near present-day Isola Capo Rizzuto in Calabria. Originally destined for the priesthood, he was taken prisoner by the corsairs of Hayreddin Barbarossa and served on the galleys. After several years of captivity, he converted to Islam and joined the Ottoman pirates. He enjoyed rapid success and became

the intrepid leader (*rais*) of the Barbary Coast. He joined forces with the famous Dragut, Bey of Tripoli, and finally came to the attention of Piyale Paşa, admiral of the Ottoman fleet, who then gained the support of Kılıç Ali's ships during naval expeditions. In 1550 Kılıç Ali received official responsibility for the Aegean island of Samos and became Governor of Alexandria in 1565. In the same year, he participated in the Siege of Malta, in which Dragut died. Kılıç was appointed Bey of Tripoli to replace him. From this maritime base, he undertook numerous raids on the Sicilian coast, Naples and his native Calabria. In 1568, he was appointed Governor of Algiers, a province that became progressively more independent. In 1571, he commanded the left flank of the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Lepanto, which marked the decline of Turkish naval power. During the rout, Kılıç Ali not only succeeded in gathering and evacuating eighty-seven Ottoman ships but also seized the flagship of the Knights of Malta and took their banner as war booty, which he then offered to the sultan. He was now known as "Kapudan Pasha" (commander of the Ottoman fleet). He continued his expeditions on the Italian coast, recaptured the Tunisian ports which had fallen to the Spanish and constructed a fort on the Moroccan coast opposite Spain. Kılıç Ali Pasha died in 1587 and was buried in a mausoleum situated in the courtyard of the mosque that he had erected at Tophane, Constantinople [see opposite].

DID CERVANTES PARTICIPATE IN THE BUILDING OF THE KILIÇ ALI PASHA MOSQUE?

Cervantes was taken prisoner on 26 September 1575, off the coast of Catalonia, by Algerian corsairs commanded by a renegade Albanian. He spent five years in captivity in Algiers, until a ransom was paid by his parents and the Trinitarian Order, which specialised in the redeeming of captives. This period of his life supplied the literary content for chapter XXXIX of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (in which Kılıç, or Uluç, Ali Pasha is called "Uchali") and two plays whose action is set in Algiers: *El Trato de Argel* and *Los Baños de Argel*. Cervantes' period of captivity coincides curiously with the building of the mosque and opens the possibility that the captives in Algiers were in fact sent to Istanbul (all the more likely given that Kılıç Ali Pasha had been Governor of Algiers) in order to assist in building the mosque, leading some specialists to claim that Cervantes participated in the construction work as a prisoner of war.

ALMS STONE OF THE IMRAHOR MOSQUE

1

2 Avenue Doğancılar Cad., Üsküdar

• Metro: Üsküdar



Remains from the Islamic charitable tradition

In the courtyard of the Imrahor Mosque in Üsküdar, an ancient porphyry column, which was previously located on Doğancılar Avenue, is surrounded by anachronistic mosaics. It is still used today as an alms stone, a historical relic of Ottoman charity.

Usually found at the entrance or near mosques, shrines (such as saints' tombs) and charitable institutions, alms stones are blocks of stones that are generally ancient columns in marble, porphyry or granite. They often have a hollow part at the top or a hole in the actual column shaft where visitors could leave coins, food or old clothes to be passed discreetly on to the poor.

Donations were often made in the following way: on their way to the evening prayers, several hours after sunset, the faithful would place coins on the alms stones. After prayers, the needy left the mosque last and took coins equal to the daily price of bread before disappearing into the night. In this way, neither the donors nor the other worshippers knew who had need of this money, nor how much had been taken.

"PLAY THE PIANO LIKE A GOOD MUSLIM WHO GIVES ALMS"

Although Islamic piety mandates almsgiving, it also seeks to avoid humiliating the poor and making the rich proud. The Islamic principle thus ensures that while giving alms, the left hand of the donor must not know what the right hand is doing. Thus, to make fun of a bad pianist, Turks still today say that he plays the piano like a good Muslim giving alms: his left hand does not know what his right hand is doing.

Alms stones were also situated near the tombs of executioners. Although Ottoman society despised these professionals, it nevertheless provided for their families after the executioners had died.



OTHER ALMS STONES IN ISTANBUL

There are other beautiful alms stones near these mosques: Mehmet Ağa (Fatih), Sümbül Efendi (Kocamustafapaşa), Hakimoğlu Ali Paşa (Kocamustafapaşa), Laleli (see p. 20), Süleymaniye, Nuruosmaniye, Yeniciami (Eminönü), Sultanahmet, Arap Camii (the Arab Mosque, Karaköy), Kemankuş Mustafa Paşa (Karaköy), Aşçıbaşı (Üsküdar) and next to the Kazlıçeşme fountain (see p. 132). This list is not exhaustive.

ŞAKIRIN MOSQUE

5

2 Avenue Nuhkuyusu Cad., Karacaahmet

• Bus or dolmuş from Kadıköy on Üsküdar Square. Get off in front of Karacaahmet *tekke*



A
“feminine”
mosque?

Opened for Islamic worship in April 2009, the Şakirin Mosque impresses both the faithful and visitors with its modern architecture that breaks with more traditional local customs regarding places of worship: glass-covered side walls in the nave, aluminium composite dome (instead of the lead used in Ottoman mosques), gently rising stairways, chandelier composed of elements shaped like drops of water (symbolising divine grace falling on the faithful like rain, water being associated with divine mercy in Islam, a religion born in the desert), minbar (pulpit where the imam preaches) strewn with dried flowers covered in a transparent protective layer, and so on. Even though we find the traditional Islamic 99 names of God and the sura “Nur” (Light) from the Koran on the circular chandelier, the mosque still surprises.

In addition to its revolutionary architecture, the building has been the subject of heated controversy. Although the overall plan was the work of a man (Hüsrev Tayla), the decoration and internal architecture were partly designed by a woman (Zeynep Fadilloğlu), who is more accustomed to designing chic restaurants or luxury villas in London and Istanbul than places of worship. This is the first time that she has helped to design a mosque. She describes her work as follows: “Rather than simply designing a monument, I have been careful to introduce more emotion, to take account of how one feels there, to encourage meditation and communion with God. This is perhaps what makes the mosque more ‘feminine.’”

Financed by the Şakir family, renowned for their charitable and philanthropic work, the mosque is dedicated to those who praise the Lord, with a discreet reference to the name of its sponsors (in Arabic, *chakir* means “he who thanks God”).

Constructed on a 3,000 m² site, in the middle of a 10,000 m² garden, the Şakirin Mosque has two 35-metre minarets and can accommodate 500 worshippers during communal prayers. Located on the edge of the immense Karacaahmet cemetery, it is intended to become the “ceremonial” mosque on the Asian side of Istanbul, for the funerary prayers of leading figures.