

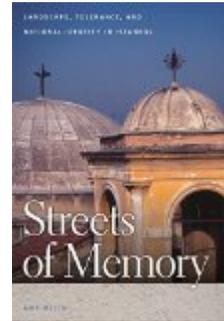
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ebru Boyar, Kate Fleet. *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 376 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-19955-1; \$33.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-13623-5.

Çiğdem Kafescioğlu. *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. xxxii + 295 pp. \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-02776-0.

Amy Mills. *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010. 248 pp. \$64.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-3573-5; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-3574-2.



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Published on H-Urban (April, 2013)

Commissioned by Alexander Vari

The Seduction of Istanbul

Sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. –Italo Calvino, *The Invisible Cities*

Visiting the city of Maurilia, the traveler, in the words of Calvino, encounters the postcard representation of the city's past that buttresses against the contemporary bustling streets of the metropolis. The city intertwines with memory, with voices, with images, establishing a dialogue with historical documents. The interplay of place, of history, and of memory registers for Istanbul cum Constantinople cum Byzantium as it does for Maurilia. Istanbul's historical fabric is that of a palimpsest. The layered names and histories replace the layered manuscripts. The city's intricate past and geographic location at the confluence of waterways, its supple spine dotted with mosques demarcating a distinct Ottoman stamp on its topography, and its multiethnic, -lingual, and -confessional fabric as a product of empires has gathered a repository of visual, printed, and expressive texts. Over the past decade, Istanbul and the country at large has become more promi-

nent in mainstream media, as a tourist destination with visitors reaching into the millions, and as a coveted film location.[1] The works of Turkish novelists Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak exploring the interplay of identity, nostalgia, and memory in some way tackle the questions surrounding the narration of history and how people understand and make sense of it.[2] Likewise, a growing number of popular, practical,[3] and critical texts on the city[4] interrogate the historical and geographical transformations of an urban space, whose name, Istanbul, has been consistent since the interwar years.[5] Specifically, historians of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic have contextualized different temporal and spatial periods working against overwrought and recognizable Orientalist stereotypes and tropes, such as Istanbul is the “crossroads between the east and the west,” the “disordered and chaotic East,” and nostalgic renderings of a tolerant Muslim past towards religious minorities. The field of Ottoman social, architectural, and urban history as well as interdisciplinary approaches to Turkish studies has matured as represented by the differing scope, intent, and approach of the books reviewed here. Each takes as

its subject matter the city of Istanbul, and fleshes out divergent and overlapping themes that navigate the city, its landscape, and its history.

Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu's *Constantinopolis/Istanbul* offers an expansive, rich, and detailed account of changes to the city during the time of Sultan Mehmet II (r. 1444-46, 1451-81). An historian of Ottoman urban and visual culture and early modern urban imaginaries, Kafesçioğlu's attention to an articulated urban environment reflects her vast scholarly production on the subject matter. Conceptually, the slippage of meanings between the city's naming introduces a point of inquiry about the city's meaning and its critical role to the construction of Ottoman imperial power that engaged with a distinct Christian-Byzantine tradition. Sultan Mehmet II's ambitious reconstruction project of Constantinople after its fall/conquest in the year 1453 initiates her examination into the ways that the city's rebuilding correlated with constructing and visually declaring the empire. The overall structure of the book establishes a critical dialogue between a project of reconstruction and its retelling, depiction, and portrayal vis-à-vis the mediums of literary devices, historiography, and visual representations. Each chapter of *Constantinopolis/Istanbul* provides a different interpretative layer undergirding the complex shift from Byzantine Constantinople to Ottoman Istanbul. Instead of simply allowing both names to stand for discrete units, the city is considered an "entity," or a "carrier of meaning in its own right" (p. 208), thus punctuating the city as an agent/actor during this profound period of transformation. In short, guiding the reader through various economic, religious, and political layers of the city creates legibility out of "disparate urbanistic devices and signifying practices that shaped the space and images of [the city]," (p. 225).

This study begins in the years following the conquest of Constantinople (1453-59) by the Ottoman Turks. Emphasizing the city's undulating topography, Kafesçioğlu highlights that Constantinople's natural vistas suggested an organic understanding of how to monumentalize the cityscape depicting the new ruling elite's emerging imperial visions as well as ruling order. She introduces the reader to such building projects as the Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya); the First Palace; and the Citadel along the shores of the Marmara Sea, the economic seat of the Bedestan (Market); the port; and the complex of Ayyub al-Ansari—a companion of the Prophet and warrior during the first Arab siege of Constantinople—emphasizing distinct interventions in the landscape. These interventions represented the pre-conquest Ottoman frontier state and

an emerging imperial order that incorporated and accommodated Byzantine symbols to the urban ordering. By focusing on these earlier projects, Kafesçioğlu highlights the buildings that were ultimately marginalized as the monumentalization gained form throughout Mehmed II's reign and before the immense building program in the sixteenth century during the reign of Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-66).

From royal projects to the architectural patronage of the ruling elite and a visual assessment of such projects, the second chapter's three-tiered analysis elaborates on the ways that building campaigns created and communicated an Ottoman Constantinople. The reestablishment of waterways and the punctuation of the urban terrain with public baths responded to the city's repopulation program and the establishment of new social spaces. Royal building projects sculpted the panorama of Constantinople, integrating a redirection of an imperial vision. At this point, Kafesçioğlu's interweaving of the visual, social, cultural, and political gains moorage through the ideas of monumentalization and representation. This lexicon provides an effective way to navigate the author's deft mining of archival and visual materials. In particular, Kafesçioğlu underscores Byzantine, Ottoman, and European urban practices that contributed to the fifteenth-century urban reconfiguration. For example, the decision to construct the New Palace, or today's Topkapı, on the northeastern tip of the peninsula where Constantinople was located and on top of the ancient Byzantine acropolis radically altered the urban topography and established a distinct processional artery reminiscing that of Byzantine pageantry. Likewise, her analysis, from the socioreligious functioning of Mehmet's mosque and its surrounding buildings to the ruling elite's architectural patronage and lesser-known vizierial complexes, suggests an expansive imperial vision which included Ottoman notions of scale, monumental presentation, and administrative power configurations.

What emerges from the author's analysis is a punctuated leitmotif treatment on Ottoman notions of ordering social and public space. The early modern urban imaginary pivots around the idea of the Renaissance. In the third chapter, *representing* the city is set against a varied historical backdrop of accommodation, transposition, and interpretation. Here, Kafesçioğlu contends that the Renaissance was "a cultural movement taking place in diverse centers and peripheries, where new ideas were filtered through extant structures" (p. 134). Drawing upon a wealth of visual and textual material including poetry, archival documents, histories, epics, hagiographies,

photographs, urban plans, maps, and panoramas from archives, special collections, and libraries in Istanbul and other European cities, the author deftly provides contexts, ways of analysis, and skilled readings of Byzantine, Ottoman, and Italian sources and urban practices. Focusing on Cristoforo Buondelmonti's late fifteenth-century manuscript *Libera Insularum Archipelagi*, the Vavassore map, which is based on a ca. 1480 drawing, and Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Chronicarum* image from 1493, Kafesçioğlu's subtle analysis positions these texts against changing cultural meanings that explicitly factor into her historiographical engagement with the fall/conquest narrative of 1453. Specifically, the manuscripts introduce a "bird's eye view" panoramic scope of urban detail from street scenes to religious symbols marking buildings according to different ideological positions. As a result, the visual ambiguity that she identifies disrupts singular ways of reading the city as either Byzantine or Ottoman, Islamic or Christian.

The epic remaking and rebuilding of the city confronted a historical legacy that resonated differently for its new rulers, inhabitants, and audiences alike. In the fourth chapter, the idea of "urban space as inhabited" by mapping out a "residential topography" (p. 14) of the old city and surrounding neighborhoods highlights architectural detail and repopulation practices. Utilizing individual *waqfiyyas* (endowment deeds) and citywide surveys allows the author to reconstruct the social and physical makeup of the city. By so doing, she engages with arguments in Ottoman scholarship about the city's residential patterning post-1453. What emerges is a pattern of control and administration linked to patronage and taste that complicates distinct Ottoman and Islamic notions of urban order according to homogeneous ethnic units.

Lastly, the epilogue provides an overview of the construction projects during the reigns of Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) and Selim I (r. 1512-20) before the massive building activities during the reign of Süleyman I (r. 1520-66)—the period garnering the classical panorama of the city. Kafesçioğlu ruminates upon the distinguished image of classical Ottoman Istanbul, Matrakçı Nasuh's picture from ca. 1537. The monumental and representational scope of the work contemplates the disparate cultural meanings between the city's Byzantine and *ghazi* heritages. The various urban practices and religious, social, economic, cultural, and political syncretism did not, according to the author, result in an arbitrary mapping of the city. To the contrary, the various solutions conveyed an approach that wedded the city with the empire. Drawing upon a range of existing studies and ap-

proaches to conceptualizing the urban environment, the city is placed in dialogue with other central cities in the eastern Mediterranean as opposed to being a lone bastion.

Constantinopolis/Istanbul is essential reading for students and scholars of early modern Ottoman and Renaissance history, urban and cultural practices, and art history and architecture and will benefit many institutional collections. The research is top-notch and integrates material from many sources, including an impressive range of hitherto untapped archival documents. Kafesçioğlu provides context and multiple registers of reading these documents while engaging with entrenched historiographical topics, making this work a handsome contribution to the fields of early modern urban and Ottoman history. Her navigation of the materials conveys her regard and esteem for the city, which is carefully apparent on every page.

In Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet's *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, the sights, sounds, and smells of the city staged alongside catastrophic events and royal pageantry provide a captivating and rewarding read. The first pages set the scene with a short compendium (of major and minor players, recorders, visitors, and observers of and to the city), a chronology, and an all-too-brief history. All in all, the authors seem to be addressing an undergraduate audience or a soon-to-be-visitor to the city. Yet, what is purportedly an introductory text and provides a social and thematic portrait of Istanbul from its conquest/fall in 1453 until the early twentieth century is as ambitious in scale as it is with its treatment of a range of primary sources. The careful construction of architectural history and residential patterning, historical and historiographical context in Kafesçioğlu's work does not transpire in this volume. Granted, the projects diverge in scope and intent. Yet, the lack of careful attention to context, let alone the field, produces a polyvocal perpetuation of Orientalist allusions to a four-hundred-and-fifty-year imperial span. This is surprising, especially since the fields of Ottoman social history and the significance of Istanbul as the imperial capital are quite developed.[6]

The first chapter appropriately begins with the conquest/fall of the city in 1453. And, the reader is immediately introduced to the tone, style, and approach of the authors to the source material. Drawing upon official histories, travel accounts, archival documents, and Ottoman literature interspersed with visual materials, Boyar and Fleet convey historical events through the bristling voice of contemporary observers. The authors attempt to de-

bunk particular myths attached to the Ottoman realm and/or engage with historiographical debates. Specifically, in chapter 2, “The Palace and the Populace,” the position of the Ottoman sultan as ruling in seclusion instead of interacting or responding to his subjects as well as his appearance at Friday prayer as an act of display to “ensure legitimacy” (p. 31) are mentioned yet remains only superficially analyzed. The authors’ discussion of various acts of petitioning, meting out of punishment, elaborate circumcision celebrations for young princes, the sounds of canons, and visual explosion of fireworks offers a colorful perspective but lacks in interpretation. At the beginning of most subsections, the authors state a claim. For example, at the beginning of the section on pageantry, they write that “feasting and festivity were essential to maintain order in the city and that the population had to be allowed enjoyment was realised by Selim II, who regarded making the people of the city joyful an essential element of successful rule and one that his ancestors had also followed” (p. 47). In such instances, which are numerous throughout the book, recent scholarship could easily have been introduced to flesh out, contextualize, or offer added perspective. Instead, the authors continue with the voice of an observer or follow up by stringing together events from a variety of temporal contexts.

In the next chapters, the themes of fear and death as described through natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, blizzards, plagues, fires), political revolution, alcohol consumption, and consequently the state’s responses to them, depict Istanbul, according to Boyar and Fleet, as a dangerous and unruly city. The calamitous effect is punctuated, or soothed by, the next chapter’s focus on welfare and the charitable endowment’s (*waqf*) programs of providing for the well-being of the populace through the distribution of food, provision of medical care, construction of mosques, and the handling of beggars. Here, the authors discuss how courtly women supported imperial endowments, which are mentioned without drawing upon, referring to, or couching claims within recent scholarship.[7]

The chapter entitled “The Consuming City” ranges in descriptions from the vivid display of market goods, to the establishment of controlled prices (i.e., *narh*), from the sumptuous display of robes and various finery, to the marking of minority groups according to their colored robes. The next two chapters, “Outings and Excursions” and “The *Hamam*,” provide tableaux of the population at leisure, either enjoying conversations, relishing coffee at a coffeehouse, strolling amidst the gardens, or reclining

in bath waters. The final chapter, “The Nineteenth Century,” positions a city still impacted by plagues, fire, superstitions, streets dogs, and poor roads against a backdrop of changing lifestyles: European forms of leisure, of dress, and of urban order. Although Boyar and Fleet introduce ideas of pleasure and display, violence and transformation, which serve as organizational devices, the challenge that emerges is then how to untangle the chronological overlapping and entwined primary source threads in an undergraduate classroom. When I used this book in my class on the history of Istanbul, the students were quite critical of the organization of the material and had difficulty following specific arguments. In short, my students were more confused by the overall narrative structure although they became interested in the thematic approach.

In other words, a cacophony of voices and details in Boyar and Ebru’s book causes an absolute confusion for a reader unfamiliar with the city’s history, its imperial connections, its political economy, and trans-imperial commercial exchange routes, leaving her asking more questions instead of receiving a coherent treatment of material. Suffice here to reproduce the following sentence as a telling example: “Contemporaries predicted that this ‘horrible, cruel, mad and malignant Turk,’ as the Genoese merchant Jacopo de Promontorio called him,[22] would be in Italy within eighteen months and would exterminate the Christians,[23] for whom he was said by Enrico di Soemmern to have such a strong loathing that if he saw one he would immediately cleanse his eyes as if contaminated[24]” (p. 8). Each footnote refers to a different primary source. The effect is an uncritical treatment of these accounts, which through their random juxtaposition leave the reader entirely perplexed.

Cultural geographer Amy Mills’s *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* centers on the neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, one of Istanbul’s historic non-Muslim areas situated along the Asian side of the Bosphorus Straits. Landscape and place provide the foundation for Mills’s exploration of urban and landscape transformations in the imagining of the Turkish nation. The enactment of belonging in the aforementioned neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, through conversations, interactions, and engagements on streets, in homes, in stores, in neighborhood associations, and—outside of it—in the diaspora is integrally related by Mills to the idea of belonging to the nation and to critiques of the state.

The historical narratives of expulsion, silencing, tol-

erance, and belonging unfold over the course of six chapters, primarily focusing on Kuzguncuk streets. The political transition from the Ottoman Empire to the republic of Turkey is depicted in the historiography and in popular accounts as one being from a multiethnic, religiously justified rule of an imperial, monarchic order to a nation-state structure that prioritized ethnic homogenization and implemented policies in making the republic modern. Kuzguncuk is set against the backdrop of nationalist state policies, such as the Wealth Tax of 1942-43, the September 6-7, 1955 anti-Greek riots, and the 1964 expulsion of Greek citizens. Central to Mills's analysis of Kuzguncuk is the historical positioning and understanding of that history by its residents, a history that focused on instilling a sense of what it means to be Turkish. Mills's astute lens punctuates this read with voices and silences, gestures and glances. She draws out minute details collected during her years living, conducting interviews, and doing field observations in the neighborhood.

Contemporary Istanbul relishes in the production of nostalgia in which the neighborhood of Kuzguncuk (and other ones such as Fener, Balat, and Beyoğlu) is subjected to gentrification processes which capitalize on the historical reproduction of a multiethnic, harmonious, cosmopolitan past, which in turn become embedded in the production of the state. In the second chapter, Mills demonstrates how the production of the *nostalgic* landscape takes on an ideological stance that silences the very history that is part of its production as such. The physical landscape of the neighborhood as imagined and captured in popular television series, namely *Ekmek Teknesi* (Bread Boat) from 2002 until 2005, and *Perihan Abla* (Sister Aba) in the late 1980s, rhapsodizes the landscape's history. The neighborhood's wooden structures, churches, mosques, synagogues, shops, and close-knit streets reproduce a narrative of "historical multiethnic harmony" that silences and fabricates the past (p. 63).

The subsequent chapters cover competing claims on place, its history, and belonging as explored with an examination of the Kuzguncuk Neighborhood Association and its role in the anti-Greek riots of September 6-7, 1955. The gendered construction of identity impacts notions of belonging and exclusion in Kuzguncuk as well as the importance of the neighborhood to the identity of former Kuzguncuk's Jews, located in Istanbul and Tel Aviv. With each chapter, stories and gestures, whispers and silences, smells and sounds layer the neighborhood, continually complicating the production of the neighborhood that is intrinsically related to the state's production. Yet, these

ethnographic details and telling of neighborhood transformations to include the entrance of non-Muslim residents, Muslim migrants, and new gentrifiers, emphasize that the landscape, ideas of tolerance, and identity are not static but that difference is constructed through the intersections of gender, class, ethnicity, and migrant status. Thus, narrations of a history of property confiscation and riots, and neighboring practices amongst women make the politics of the state uneasy and contested. Although Mills's intricate unraveling of voices and of stories focuses on overturning static assumptions of history and of identity rooted in the neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, she also provides a strong analysis of the state itself and its hegemonic nationalizing narrative. *Streets of Memory* is a welcome contribution to classes focusing on theory and applied methods, gender and state formation in urban contexts as well as to advanced courses on Turkish republican history.

From fifteenth-century manuscripts and urban plans to nineteenth-century travel narratives, from the bristling voices of sixteenth-century Ottoman and foreign observers of the city to twentieth-century Kuzguncuk's residents remembering the 1955 anti-Greek riots and the 1964 expulsion of Greek citizens, the array of historical documents and methods of analysis and narration encountered in these three works are as complex and varied as the city itself. Yet, the seduction of Istanbul is apparent. It is tempting to fall into orientalizing tropes. The (re)production of "exoticized" historical snippets are readily apparent to the city's contemporary visitor. There is not a rigid binarism that captures Istanbul, not East/West, not Islamist/secularist. Here, the slash in *Constantinopolis/Istanbul* undergirds the slippages of meaning, of time, and of space. The city is neither one nor the same. Cigdem Kafesçioğlu eloquently demonstrates how the grand post-1453 reconstruction plan, while visually articulating a monumental and emerging Ottoman architectural vocabulary reflecting an imperial and urban vision, accommodated the city's polyvocal Byzantine-Christian past. Amy Mills demonstrates that the production of the state's homogenizing narrative when examined at the level of place is more varied over time, given the shifting contours of Kuzguncuk and that of the memory of its residents. These works question the connection between historical documents and the telling of the city, prompting questions pertaining to Istanbul's past and its future in much the same way that Italo Calvino prompts the reader to think about the relationship between memory and the city captured in a postcard, or in a face.[9]

Notes

[1]. Recent blockbuster movies filmed in Istanbul include Olivier Megaton's action thriller *Taken 2* (Europa-Corp and Grive Productions, 2012), and the twenty-third James Bond spy film, *Skyfall*, dir. Sam Mendes (Eon Productions, 2012). For a more complete reference, see Özlem Koksak, ed., *World Film Locations: Istanbul* (London: Intellect Ltd., 2012).

[2]. Select titles include: Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage, 2006) (originally published in Turkish, 1990); Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, trans. Erdağ Gökner (New York: Vintage, 2002) (originally published in Turkish, 1998); Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (New York: Vintage, 2008) (originally published in Turkish, 2003); Elif Şafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008); and Elif Şafak, *Flea Palace* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 2005). Critical works on the Turkish novel and interwar Istanbul include: Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Azade Seyhan, *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context*, World Literature Reimagined (Modern Language Association of America, 2008).

[3]. At the time of the writing of this review, a search on Amazon.com with "Istanbul" in the title generated 642 titles for "Travel," 421 for "Literature and Fiction," 134 for "Biographies and Memoirs," and 972 for "History." In particular, the market for travel guides has exploded with more contemporary guides, such as *Time Out* and *Wallpaper City Guide*. Travel writing for Constantinople/Istanbul is extensive and offers a rich history of urban navigation that has been understudied.

[4]. Recent works in film studies include: Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, Tauris World Cinema Series (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

[5]. Select titles include: Pelin Derviş, Bülent Tanju, and Uğur Tanyeli, eds., *Becoming Istanbul: An Encyclopedia* (Istanbul: Ofset Yapımevi, 2008), in conjunction with an exhibition at Garanti Gallery in Istanbul; Deniz Gök-

türk, Levent Soysal, and İpek Türeli, eds., *Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Çağlar Keyder, ed., *Istanbul between the global and the local* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

[6]. For popular histories of Istanbul, see Philip Mansel, *Istanbul: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London: John Murray, 1995); and John Freely, *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998). The chapters in Halil Inalcık et al., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), provide an overview of social history. Recent monographs and edited volumes isolating out themes that resonate in the book under review include: Shirine Hamadeh, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*, Publications on the Near East (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Dana Sajdi, ed., *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008); Roger A. Deal, *Crimes of Honor, Drunken Brawls and Murder: Violence in Istanbul under Abdülhamid II* (Istanbul: Libra Yayınmevi, 2010); and Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[7]. A recent monograph includes Lucienne Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turhan Sultan*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publications, Co., 2007).

[8]. Recent works include: Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2006); and Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[9]. Consider Doug Saunders's treatment of Istanbul in his *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (New York: Vintage, 2012).

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Çiğdem, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* and Mills, Amy, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.

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