

Belge, Murat. *İstanbul Gezi Rehberi*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1993, 281pp.

ABSTRACT

Istanbul Travel Guide

İstanbul Gezi Rehberi

Murat Belge's *Istanbul Travel Guide* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), which meticulously documents İstanbul's rich historical heritage, has been reprinted 22 times since its first edition in 1983. Unlike other travel writers who mapped out İstanbul's heritage, Belge depicts the evolution of İstanbul by providing a balanced and clear narration, exposing both the contributions and the errors of its rulers. He frequently criticises Republican Turkey, heretofore reluctant to come to terms with its past, for its enforced elimination of some of İstanbul's historical sites. Without resorting to romanticism, Belge presents an honest portrait of the 'forfeited' İstanbul, enabling its readers to identify the gains and the losses incurred by the city's millennia-long transformation.

Istanbul Travel Guide starts its tour in Sultanahmet, the heart of the old town. The first chapter is largely reserved for a detailed description of Topkapı Palace. Belge draws an analogy between this palace and İstanbul, both of which were built not according to a plan but rather expanded gradually in relation to the emerging needs of their residents.

The *Guide* then covers in individual chapters the remaining districts of the historical peninsula: Surlar (ancient city walls), Divanyolu and Aksaray, Eminönü and Cağaloğlu,

Çarşılar, Vefa, Haliç, Fatih and Eyüp. The historical landmarks in these areas are described in great detail and sometimes their respective plans are attached.

Belge consistently underlines Istanbul's multi-faith and multi-confessional make-up and thus eloquently describes Roman Orthodox, Syriac, Chaldean churches, synagogues, mosques, mausoleums and dervish lodges along the way. Information on and criticism of fundamental elements of urban design, i.e. parks, gardens and recreational spaces, transportation links, waste facilities, waterworks and other infrastructure are also provided in the *Guide*.

While most of the *Guide* describes the historic peninsula, Belge also takes his reader into the wealthy Galata, Pera and Beyoğlu districts, and through the breezy Bosphorus across to Kadıköy, Üsküdar and Princes' Islands.

The final chapter of the book is titled "Distant Istanbul" and deals with districts such as Polonezköy, Şile, Küçük and Büyükçekmece, whose distance from the city centre feels shortened since the publication of the book. Belge's focus on specific districts demonstrates that his aim is not to paint a grand portrait of Istanbul. Instead he employs a humorous, endearing yet critical tone to present via its political, economic and sociological background, the evolution of Istanbul through its Roman, Byzantium, Ottoman and Republican periods.

Istanbul Travel Guide is a gem of a guidebook that humanises its subject, making it easier to explore, become acquainted with and recognise.

Ebru Ilhan