İstanbul: A *Cultural History*. Peter Clark. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2012. p / bk 264 pp. ISBN 978-1-56656-845-6. Price US$ 15.00.

There are many Istanbuls: The one visitors to the city see, the one experienced by residents who were born and raised there, expatriate İstanbul; and many more that resist categorization. The cultural complexity that arises from the liminality of both the city itself and the way it is experienced is the very essence of İstanbul. Attempting to write a cultural history of this city is a grand project that is praiseworthy for its audacity; however, it is also prone to fault lines. Peter Clark's *Istanbul:* A *Cultural History* is one such work. The text traces the history of the city from its inauguration as "the city of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great" on 11 May 330 to recent times, focusing on not only critical moments, but also the social and political contexts that engendered such moments. The exploration of this past involves an elaborate study of Byzantine, Greek, Roman and Christian histories that extend beyond Marmara and Thrace, along with the Aegean and central and southwest Anatolia, establishing the palimpsest of cultures that comprise the cosmopolitan -- though at a different level -- Istanbul of today. Clark's exploration covers architecture, arts, religion, as well as political narratives. The conquest of the city by Mehmed II receives due attention, including the actual siege. Not all the Sultans are studied in as much detail, but interesting personages that are often excluded from similar volumes are introduced. However, such choices appear to be somewhat random, which creates an imbalance in an already over-sweeping account.

The chapters are rather loosely connected. The first three comprise the historical narrative of the city from Byzantium to the late Ottoman period. Whilst the fourth explores the public life with a focus on the non-Muslim elements of the city under the broad title of "modernity and foreign influences," the fifth strolls quickly through the old Pera and its nearby vicinit. vicinity. The material on the non-Muslim elements is particularly valuable as it highlights the diversity of cultures of İstanbul. Another historical section on the "end of empire" interferes, followed by a chapter on the "waters," and another on some of the "international visitors" to the city.

Although such a loose structure is understandable to an extent, the feeling of randomness prevails. The final chapter, titled "Contemporary

Istanbul," briefly refers to several critical incidents and people of the city's recent past and present, but cannot recapture the living organism of the city. Even a work as current as Clark's *Istanbul* cannot catch up with its dynamism: both the Ali Sami Yen and İnönü soccer stadiums are no more, having been recently vacated. Clark is clearly informed about the city's past and present. The chapters on its history are detailed in a way that suggests references to a wide variety of sources. Yet, it is a problem of the work that not many of those sources are mentioned, apart from a relatively short Further Reading list. This problem often makes the writer's assertions questionable, an issue that stands out especially with controversial subjects such as religion and ethnicity. Clark's conclusions appear generalized in spite of their details, posing a challenge to the reliability of the information outlined.

Istanbul with its complex history of deeply entangled and intermingled economic, social, cultural and political realities is at once an elusive and fascinating city to explore. Not one could do justice to it all: Clark's *Istanbul* is another text with particular limitations can only partially help us grasp the city's diverse and ever-changing potential.

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