Abstract: The district of Abū Ayyūb owned a significant status in Ottoman Istanbul due to its historic core centred around the shrine complex of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (d. ca. 669), a well-known companion of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. As various medieval Arabic sources attest, he lost his life during the Umayyad Siege of Istanbul in the seventh century and was buried around the city walls. Claimed to be discovered following Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, his grave turned into a shrine. At the crossroad of early Islamic, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, the legacy of the shrine signified a representational sacred space imbued with religious and political symbolism.

A close reading of Ottoman sources on the origins and history of the shrine reveals a multi-layered picture with different storylines and elements. My paper dwells on to what degree Ottoman sources relied on the previous Arabic narratives and produced their own version(s) and how this situation is related with presentist approaches pertaining to Islamization of the city, Ottoman legitimacy of rule and shared sanctity in the cityscape.

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