

# Some Reflections from a Visit to Turkey

Part 1

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**W**e can learn a lot from people who have gone before us; the lessons of history, sometimes bitter, sometimes pleasant, are nonetheless always instructive. As well as the history books, ancient buildings and relics left behind by great people also tell a story of their aspirations and commitments and can prove a source of inspiration for those who reflect. As Muslims, we should try to understand and take instruction from the lives of those who had love for Allah ﷻ, His Dīn, and His Messenger ﷺ and a real concern for the Hereafter.

On a recent visit to Turkey, my companions and I had the opportunity to see many sights dating back to the 'Uthmāni era. The city of Istanbul itself has tales of victory to tell and of the rule of leaders who had the fear of Allah in their hearts. Yet looking around the city and thinking of the once supreme power of the 'Uthmāni state and its later total dissolution reminds us that when the fear of Allah ﷻ and awareness of the hereafter are abandoned, Allah's ﷻ help is removed. It was in another Turkish city, Konya, at the mausoleum of Jalāluddīn Rumi *rahimahullah* that an inscription caught my eye and brought this fact into sharp relief. On a wall were written the words:

*Whoever has Allah in his heart,*

*His helper in both worlds is Allah;*

*And whoever has other than Allah in his heart,*

*His opponent in both worlds is Allah.*

When the love of wealth, luxury and other worldly concerns supplants the place Allah ﷻ should occupy in a believer's heart, Allah ﷻ takes away His help and instead becomes an opponent; and who can win with Allah ﷻ as an opponent?

After the Khulafā Rāshidīn, whenever the ruling dynasty distanced itself from Allah ﷻ its fortunes declined and it was soon superseded. The Umayyads went this way as did the 'Abbāsids that followed them, with the last in its line of Khalīfahs surrendering to Sultan Salīm I, and handing him the title of Khalīfatul Muslimīn. The era of Salīm I and his son Sulaymān the Magnificent are considered the zenith of 'Uthmāni glory, yet history shows that in subsequent centuries, as the fear of Allah ﷻ was replaced by love of the world, this once great power too was reduced to nothing.

## **Love for Rasūlullah ﷺ**

Sultan Salīm I had his residence at the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, as had all the Sultans who preceded him. A museum today, the Topkapi Palace houses a number of objects attributed to Rasūlullah ﷺ and other great people. From among the objects are said to be hair of Rasūlullah ﷺ, his letter to Muqawqīs of Rome, his blessed swords and a cloak belonging to him. Mufti Muhammad Taqī 'Uthmāni *hafizahullah* mentions that although there is no conclusive proof of the origins of these artefacts, the possibility of their being genuine is enough to create enthusiasm to see them in a believer.

Sultan Salīm I truly appreciated this and his regard for the items associated to Rasūlullah ﷺ was immense. As already mentioned, the last ‘Abbasi Khalīfah had surrendered to Sultan Salīm I; along with his pledge of allegiance, he also handed the blessed artefacts relating to Rasūlullah ﷺ, that were in his possession, to the Sultan. Back in Topkapi, the Sultan had a special room allocated for them and it is said that entrance to it was restricted and its routine cleaning was carried out by Sultan Salīm I himself. The Sultan also arranged for a system involving a number of qurrā to recite the Qur’ān in the room in such a way that as one qārī finished his recital, the next would have arrived and commenced his recital, thus ensuring that the recitation was continuous and uninterrupted. This system was maintained with such dedication that from the time the recitation was started it continued for the rest of Sultan Salīm I’s life and thereafter until the last days of ‘Uthmāni rule.

Such love for Rasūlullah ﷺ was not unique to Sultan Salīm I: our visit to the Rumeli Fort on the shores of the Bosphorus revealed another amazing story of a Sultan’s dedication to his Prophet ﷺ. The Sultan in question was Muhammad I, known by the title of Fātih or Conqueror of Constantinople. The first overt action leading up to his attack on Constantinople was his construction of the Rumeli Fort. The site of the Fort was on the European shore of the Bosphorus, at its narrowest point, opposite an existing fort on the Asian shore which had been built by Sultan Byzid I. When both forts were operational Constantinople would be cut off from the Black sea to the north, leaving the Dardanelles as the only route for seaborne assistance to the city.

The Rumeli Fort was erected within a very short period of time; Mufti Muhammad Taqi ‘Uthmāni *hafizahullah* writes that it is hard to imagine that even the plans could have been drawn up in the estimated four and half months it actually took to complete the fort. What makes the feat even more remarkable is that despite the urgency, Sultan Muhammad Fātih ordered that the structure be designed in such a fashion that an aerial view would reveal it spelling out the word ‘Muhammad’.

Sultan Muhammad Fātih’s love for the companions of Rasūlullah ﷺ was also profound. After the liberation of Constantinople, the Sultan sought out a very special grave: that of a companion of Rasūlullah ﷺ, Abū Ayyūb al-Ansāri ؓ. He had a masjid built nearby and it became the custom of all ‘Uthmāni Sultans to offer two rak’āts in this masjid prior to their initiation as Sultan. We had the good fortune to be able to visit the grave of Abū Ayyūb al-Ansāri ؓ and, as for all Muslims, it was probably the most eagerly anticipated moment of the whole visit to Turkey.

Abū Ayyūb al-Ansāri ؓ and Sultan Muhammad Fatih were both, in different ways, effected by a prophecy of Rasūlullah ﷺ, which makes this action of the Sultan all the more poignant. Rasūlullah ﷺ predicted that Constantinople would definitely be conquered by the Muslims and he affirmed the merit of the amīr and the army that would conquer it. Many great Muslim leaders had tried but Sultan Muhammad Fātih was to be the acclaimed conqueror. Likewise, many Muslims had desired to be part of the blessed conquering army, including Abū Ayyūb al-Ansāri ؓ.

It is reported that when Mu’āwiyah ؓ sent his son Yazīd towards Constantinople, Abū Ayūb ؓ, though advanced in his years, went with him. When Yazīd came to see him on his sick-bed during the expedition, Abū Ayyūb ؓ requested that if he was to die during the campaign, they should not bury him straight away but instead carry his body as far into enemy territory as possible and bury him there; such was his desire to part of a group that Rasūlullah ﷺ had praised. Yazīd’s army failed to penetrate the city’s defences and Abū Ayyūb ؓ was eventually buried at the walls of the city, where many years later, Sultan Fātih came to visit his grave.