Spring’s Gift

Hamza Yusuf

I envy the sand that met his feet
I’m jealous of honey he tasted sweet
Of birds that hovered above his head
Of spiders who spun their sacred web
To save him from his enemies
I envy clouds formed from the seas
That gave him cover from the heat
Of a sun whose light could not compete
With his, whose face did shine so bright
That all was clear in blinding night
I envy sightless trees that gazed
Upon his form completely dazed
Not knowing if the sun had risen
But felt themselves in unison
With those who prayed, and fasted too
Simply because he told them to
With truth and kindness, charity
From God who gave such clarity
His mercy comes in one He sent
To mold our hearts more heaven bent
I envy all there at his side
Who watched the turning of the tide
As truth prevailed and falsehood fled
And hope restored life to the dead
Men and Women through him found grace
To seek together God’s noble face
I envy the cup that gave him drink
His thoughts that helped us all to think
To be one thought that passed his mind
Inspiring him to act so kind
For me this world is not one jot
If I could simply be a thought
From him to God throughout the ages
As revelation came in stages
I pity all who think it odd
To hear him say there is one God
Or he was sent by God to men
To hone their spirits’ acumen
It’s pride that blinds us from the sight
That helps good men to see his light
He taught us all to be God’s slaves
And he will be the one who saves
Humanity from sinful pride
Muhammad has God on his side
So on this day be blessed and sing
For he was born to grace our Spring
With lilies, flowers, life’s rebirth
In a dome of green like his on earth
A few years ago, I was visiting my calligrapher colleagues in Istanbul. As it happened, members of the judging panel for an international calligraphy competition were just arriving at that time. Some of them were old friends, so I wanted to see them before I left for America.

Among them was Mohammed Cherifi, Algeria’s finest calligrapher, who has written at least three copies of the Qur’an and a couple of books on the art. We have known each other for years, and after we chatted a bit, he suggested I come to Algeria to deliver a series of lectures to his classes at the university. I had to demure, but he insisted, saying I would be an ibret (‘ibrāh in Arabic) and, thus, an inspiration for his students.

I believe he made this claim in all sincerity, unaware of its overtones. An ibret is something strange or unusual that serves as a lesson—something to ponder, like a pig that can fly, a monkey that can whistle. An Anglo convert who can do Islamic calligraphy—never mind how well—can be exhibited as an ibret. The quality of the achievement doesn’t matter, only that it was done at all. Even setting aside the social and ethnic implications of such a claim, my Yankee B.S. detectors instantly started to flash, and I declined as politely (and abruptly) as I could. I would never be someone’s ibret. An American who can write! How funny! I may be fat, but this pig doesn’t fly.

The word ibret has a more classical connotation, however, an honorable one, even an enviable one. The following story¹ is in every sense an ibret—an example, or a lesson, for thoughtful people to consider—and it is true. Even the untrue parts have become a bit of history.
An Unlikely Calligrapher

A calligraphic script called *nestalik* was invented in Persia in the fifteenth century or earlier. Some say its originator was Sultan Ali Mashhadi (d. 1520). *Nestalik* was considered the national script of Persia, and it still has a special cachet there. Iranians love their calligraphy: In a nation with more than ninety percent literacy, the calligraphy association is thought to have more than seventy thousand active members.

Since the time of Mir Imad Elhaseni (d. 1615), the greatest Persian exponent of the script, *nestalik* had its advocates in the Ottoman state as well. Many were Persian expatriates and exiles, who were said to have brought the script to Constantinople, while escaping the enforced Shiafication of their country. Be that as it may, Persian language, calligraphy, art, and customs enjoyed high status in the literate Ottoman society. At its height, the Ottoman language was about one-third Persian, one-third Arabic, and one-third Turkish (with plenty of French, Greek, and Italian thrown in for good measure). The Ottoman alphabet was a modification of the Persian, which was a modification of the Arabic.

By the mid-eighteenth century, a good number of Ottoman calligraphers were expert in the *nestalik* script. Their quality was high. Their standard was Mir Imad, whose works were collected, treasured, and considered models of excellence.

Around that time, a boy was born in Astitane, an early name for Istanbul—the capital of the *Devlet-i Aliye-i Osmaniye* (the Lofty Ottoman State). Istanbul was the abode of the caliph of Islam, the sultan, and was the cultural, political, religious, and military heart of the Muslim world. It was where the action was—Islam’s last cutting edge of high culture.

The boy came into the world as Mehmed Es’ad. The right side of his body was paralyzed, and the left side was afflicted with tremors. He was small. Because he could use only his left hand, he became known as Yesari—“the Lefty.”

Yesari labored for two months over this task and at last had some samples prepared...
to show the master. Amazed to find that the boy’s work so closely matched his own, Dedezade said, “My son, please write this in front of me, so that I may observe.” Yesari wrote the lesson so quickly with his tremulous left hand that Dedezade was awestruck. “This is God’s gift of talent to you,” he said. “You will master this art of calligraphy in a short time.”

Yesari received his new lessons and rapidly mastered them, soon reaching the level of competence required to receive his icazet (permission or license to be a professional; ijazah in Arabic). The master invited all the other masters—including Veliüddin Efendi—to a grand icazet ceremony at one of the main mosques of Istanbul. The year was 1753. As was done in those days, the icazet candidate wrote out five or more works in the presence of the assembly. After examining these pieces, the seyhülislam exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, “Alas, I missed the honor of being this boy’s teacher. I didn’t understand.”

Other calligraphers confirmed Yesari’s license. At the same time, he finished his schooling and became a kadi (judge). During this stage of his life, Yesari had to work...
hard for his living, which was meager. Later, as he gained prominence, his income became sufficient, but like most calligraphers, he was never rich. Yesari became known as “The Imad of Rum,” likening him to the great Persian calligrapher. (Rum refers to Anatolia and the European areas of Turkey.) Seyhüslislam Velîüddin Efendi, witnessing the unparalleled beauty of his writing, said of Yesari, “The true God has sent this person to break the nose of our prideful arrogance.”

Mehmed Es’ad’s fame increased daily. The great and the mediocre came to him for lessons, until it was said his house became like a bazaar for calligraphers. Outside his door, paper sellers, pen cutters, penknife makers, and ink makers would gather and sell their materials to Yesari’s many students.

Yesari’s rank as a kadi also rose, and he became a teacher of calligraphy at the royal palace. Sadly, as his fortunes rose, his health began to decline, until, as the sources say, “He left this perishable world and moved to the world of eternity.” On 11 Receb, 1213 AH (19 December 1798 CE), his body was given to the earth, as they used to say in Turkish. His son, Yesarizade, whom we shall soon read about, was buried next to his father. (The site was destroyed when the street was enlarged.)

The story cannot conclude here, however. One cannot help but say, “Wait, I want to know more details of Yesari’s life! How did a terribly handicapped child survive and prosper in a society that had no physical therapy and which did not expect much from the handicapped? Could he walk or even stand? How did he get to his various jobs around the city? How was he able to do the Hajj? What was his married and family life like? Many people must have known his value and helped him—who were they? And how did they help him?” However, the sources are silent regarding these questions.

Professor M. Ugur Derman, the world’s leading authority on Islamic calligraphy, told me that a basket was made, a sort of horizontal carrying case, for Yesari Efendi to lie in and be carried from place to place. But such conjecture, such information was considered private, not public material. The sources tell us what he did and recount the story of his education, death, and burial. They provide anecdotes and detail his works, which are legion, both on paper and as inscriptions on stone. We will have to be content with that.

The study of what we know of his biography, however, can and should lead us to the smashing of stereotypes. We tend to have a mental image of the Islamic calligrapher as a thin, ascetic, humble person who would never even sign his own work. The fact, however, is that calligraphers came in all sizes and types. Far from being mere copyists, as some may think, the best of them were usually highly learned, educated, and ethical people, and they were acute observers of the human condition.

Es’ad Mehmed Efendi, or Yesari the father, could only be what he was and survive. He could not be a man of tricks or falseness. In his physically dependent condition, his only protection was sincerity, so, like Popeye, he was what he was. Yesari was a profoundly artistic soul gifted with a classic Islamic education, which, as we saw, allowed him to become a kadi. He was a civilized man, a builder, an efendi.
The *nestalik* script, which Yesari learned first, was still basically in its Persian or Mir Imad style. It was beautiful when written small but did not work well when written large—a necessity for architectural inscriptions. The Ottomans took the long word *nestalik* and shortened it to *talik*, a confusing nomenclature, as *talik* is also the name of an older, obsolete script. Yesari Efendi was the first to work out new principles that allowed the script to be written large enough to be legible from a distance. His inscriptions are still to be seen and admired in the city of Istanbul. He was, therefore, in the calligrapher’s usage, an opener of a new road—the founder of a whole new way of writing.

A Precocious and Talented Son

Sons of calligraphers rarely equal or surpass their fathers in the art, but Yesari’s son—Elhac (*al Hajj* in Arabic) Yesarizade Mustafa Izzet Efendi—was an exception. He is thought to have been born in 1770, but in those days, people often didn’t take pains to record birthdates, only death dates.

Yesarizade (literally, son of Yesari) studied the *talik* script with his father and received the *icazet* from him. He also studied with other calligraphers and received *icazets* from them as well, by way of getting their blessings. The *icazet* text is written in a document, usually beautifully calligraphed and illuminated, called an *icazetname*. Yesarizade received many titles and honors, both symbolic and real. In his later life he was thrice appointed *kadiasker* (a bit like a Supreme Court judge).

Yesarizade was often considered to be a wag, a jokester, an exaggerator. Mehmed Süreyya, in his biographies of the Ottomans, wrote of him, “He was loquacious, a possessor of knowledge and skills, the greatest master of music of his time, and in *talik* calligraphy, the Imad of Rum. Regarding his ‘lies,’ they say, ‘If Yesarizade swears an oath, truly, it is a lie!’”

In his *Conversations on History* (*Tarih Musahabeleri*, 1923), the late-Ottoman historiographer Abdurrahman Seref (pronounced Sheref) Efendi gave an account of Yesarizade, which I have translated and shortened here:

Although he was one of the masters of music, his mastership of calligraphy in the *talik* script surpassed his musical skill. The masters of the art think he even surpassed his father. He was notorious for his exaggerations, which went so far as to be called lies. Sultan
Mahmud II always saw Yesarizade in the company of Izzet Molla (whose calligraphy was poor). He asked Izzet Molla the reason for this, and he snapped back, “Yesarizade, who says prayers for you, writes well. I, your servant, can read a bit. When we are together, we make one literate person.” [Author’s note: In Turkish, a literate person is called a “reader-writer.”]

Others were not so kind and mercilessly attacked Yesarizade in the press. One commentator, Süleyman Faik Efendi, ranted:

It is Yesarizade, who in the path of knowledge has attained the rank of kadi of Istanbul and wanders about the marketplaces like a lunatic, yet I can say nothing critical of his calligraphy. But his lies have reached a level of Neuzül billah (I seek refuge with God) that has hitherto been unknown. All he says are lies and hurtful things. You can’t be friends with such a man. May God repair him!

In 1842, Yesarizade was appointed superintendent of the Official Calendar Preparation Office and Imperial Printing House. He prepared a beautiful talik typeface for these offices, which has never been surpassed or equaled. The following year he was released from his duties, and in 1846, he was again appointed kadiasker. He died in 1849, and was buried at his father’s side.

His tombstone reads, “He is the Everlasting God (Hüve-l Baki). The great master, son of Yesari, who has achieved the mercy and forgiveness of God, Elhac Mustafa Izzet Efendi, read, to please God, for his soul, the Fatiha. 2 Shaban 1265 [AH].”

As for his craft, Yesarizade took his father’s teaching all the way home. Legend has it that he wrote more than seventy thousand lines of celi talik, mostly for inscriptions. (Celi, or jalål in Arabic, means big and clear.) He was a fast writer. Unlike his father, who wrote his models and stencils in
black ink on white paper, Yesarizade wrote his in yellow arsenic ink on black paper. He had an unusual way of correcting his work, making it recognizable.

Yesarizade and other great calligraphers left their mark on the very fabric of Istanbul in the form of architectural inscriptions—including the names of government offices and a huge agglomeration of poetry, dedicatory and otherwise—cut into stone with great expertise, then painted and gilded. These artists also wrote inscriptions for gravestones that can be seen all over the city in cemeteries, large and small. These works are constant reminders of generations past, of the temporary aspects of life, and of the permanence of the Creator.

**The Yesaris’ Art and Teaching**

Like his father, Yesarizade had many students. The most famous was Kadiasker Mustafa Izzet, but his work in _talik_ is rather rare. He wrote eleven _masâhîf_ (copies of the Koran) one of them in _talik_, as well as an inscription in the Washington Monument.8

Interestingly, both teacher and student alike shared the same name, Mustafa Izzet, and besides being the greatest masters of calligraphy of their time, they were both lofty figures in the Islamic judiciary and religious establishments and were also world-class musicians. Their broad talents—or, at least, their gravitation to the judiciary—may perhaps be ascribed to the fact that calligraphy instructors teach their students to recognize their own mistakes and their own successes—to be self-critical. Hopefully this skill transfers to other facets of their lives and makes them more fair-minded people.

The student who transmitted the _talik_ style to the main line of Yesari’s successors was Ali Haydar Bey (d. 1870), who passed the torch to Sami Efendi (d. 1912). Professor Derman, in his book, _Selections from the Calligraphy Collection of the Sakip Sabanci Museum_, recounts the following story, which gives a very personal account of how art and ethics influenced life in Ottoman times. I translate:

Sami Efendi studied _talik_ calligraphy with Kibrisizade Ismail Hakki Efendi (d. 1862) and received the _icazet_ from him in 1857. But Hakki Efendi’s skill languished a bit behind that of Ali Haydar Efendi, the _talik_ master of that time. Ali Haydar, noticing the promise shown in young Sami’s work, sent him a message: “While your teacher and I both studied with the late Yesarizade, there was a difference in the degree in which we took the teaching. I have seen your calligraphy here and there; you are very talented. Come, and let us work at calligraphy a bit!” But Sami Efendi did not respond to Ali Haydar’s invitation, nor could he have.

Later, when Hakki Efendi died, after the burial, Sami Efendi went straight to Ali Haydar’s home and knocked on the door. When the master emerged from his rest and Sami was presented to him, he said, “My son, I have been sending messages to you for some time. Where were you?”

Sami said, “If my master Ismail Hakki Efendi had heard that I was working with you, it would have hurt his feelings. But today, we committed him to the soil of forgiveness. I immediately ran to you. Now you are my calligraphy master,” he added, folding his new master’s hand in his. Hearing of Ismail Hakki’s death from Sami Efendi, Ali Haydar Bey embraced the loyal and faithful student with tears in his eyes.

Years later, Sami Efendi would tell his own students the story I mentioned
above: “Only death can separate a teacher from his student. If I had left my teachers, I would not have gained their blessed transmissions of calligraphy. Carsanbali [pronounced Charshambali] Arif Bey and I studied with Ismail Hakki. Later, he left Ismail Hakki to study with Ali Haydar. I went to him [Ali Haydar] only after my teacher died. There was enough of a difference between us that in spite of his huge talent, Arif was unable to earn any money. As for me, I earned armloads. When my father died, he left a good deal of debt. Thanks to calligraphy, I was easily able to pay these off,” he said.

This little story illustrates several major features of how great calligraphy is taught, learned, and used in life. The most significant is the concept of loyalty and love that exists between the teacher and the student. There is no money transaction here. What the student learns for free, he later teaches for free. Freedom from payments and gifts ensures freedom from corruption. Furthermore, the teacher-student loyalty helps the teacher’s feyz (the spiritual qualities that are inherent in a great master) to flow to the student, enriching the experience of hard work and assiduous practice. Without this feyz, practice can be stultifying drudgery.

One should not assume that this tradition—especially the concept of only one teacher for one script—is some quaint Oriental mumbo-jumbo or superstitious ritual. Rather, it has very real consequences that must be understood by both the student and the connoisseur. Every script is personal. A master’s style is recognizable. A student learns a style according to the method of his master, who learned it from his teacher, who learned it from his teacher, continuing back. Receiving contrary instructions interferes with the delicate process of transmitting a style, confuses the student, and disturbs the results. Once the student becomes a master, then he can benefit by learning the methods of other masters.

Sami Efendi, the strongest exponent of the Yesarizade school of talik, died in 1912. The last two great masters of the twentieth century were Hulusi Efendi (d. 1940) and Necmeddin (pronounced Nejmeddin) Okyay (d. 1976), both of whom were religious scholars. Necmeddin Efendi was a life-long imam at the Valide Sultan Mosque in Uskudar, outside Istanbul. His last surviving student is M. Ugur Derman, who is currently not practicing the art but is unquestionably the world’s sharpest authority on the art and criticism of Islamic calligraphy, its history, and its biographies.

In February 2006, the world lost the other great student of Necmeddin, Professor Ali Alparslan, a professor of Persian literature and a great quality teacher of classic talik calligraphy, which he learned from Necmeddin, and of other scripts, which he learned from the late Halim Özyazıcı. I had the great fortune to have studied with Ali Bey for twenty-two years. He was a very strict teacher; it took me thirteen years to get my icazet from him. He passed on to me many words of ethics and wisdom. He left many fine students, important successors in the making; I do not presume to call myself one of them. May God enfold him in His infinite mercy.

In short, at the hands of these extraordinary people, talik calligraphy gained a
completely new look: lean, clean, and powerful. You may wonder why there are so few masters of this script. Perhaps it is because talik is simply so subtle a script that it flees from those who try to catch it. It is terribly difficult both to teach and to write. I have found that spending my life trying to get close is worth the effort and the chagrin, though knowing I cannot get near the goal. The style is so strong, the line so alive and vivacious, that simply coming close is an honor. Working at it gives me better critical consciousness of the master’s work.

Talik is not a good script for writing copies of the Qur’an because one has to clutter up the script with vowels and other reading signs. (Yesarizade’s illustrious student, Kadiasker Mustafa Izzet, wrote a copy of the Qur’an in tiny talik. It is gorgeous, but the talik concept seems compromised.) The two calligraphers we have learned about here as well as Sami, his students, and a few others did produce wonderful panels consisting of Qur’anic verses and texts from the hadith literature; they are masterpieces that bring the viewer to renewed appreciation of the meanings of these texts each time they are seen. In fact, one of the obligations of a calligrapher is to highlight well-known Qur’anic verses and hadith so they may be understood in deeper ways. The intent is to accomplish the exact opposite of turning these texts into jingles or slogans, the common curse of our time.

The new talik writing, especially in its celi form, has lost its nostalgia for Persia. An orphan no longer, it is unencumbered and free. (Of course the great works of the Persian masters will never be forgotten, but that is another story.) The new talik needs no adornment, no zinet (marks of decoration and balance). It is stark naked, radiant in its flaming blackness, or its brilliant watery glow in pale ink, or its cool arsenic flow. It is nearly three-dimensional. It is a new thing, a very challenging piece to play, fleeting, unable to be caught except by a mere handful of extraordinary artists.

An old Ottoman concept has it that “Ah” (pronounce the “h”) is the sound the heart makes when struck by the arrow of love. “Ah” must also be the sound the heart makes when seeing celi talik by Yesarizade. “Ah” must have been the sound made by his pen as it flowed across the black paper, dipped in poisonous arsenic ink. To contemplate the celi talik of Yesarizade and Sami Efendi is to awaken willingly or unwillingly to beauty, to have one’s emotional blinders removed. One never tires of such work; it seems ever fresh and new.

The Istanbul Camelot

Why did calligraphy flourish in the Ottoman context and in the city of Istanbul so much more than any other place? Most Muslim civilizations produced calligraphers, but there was something special going on in Istanbul. In the early days of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims lived in an environment that was unabashedly Islamic—they did not have to try too hard to live the Muslim life, and this was in a city and empire that was teeming with Christians and Jews.

However, by the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, endless social and political conflicts arose. The Ottoman state was on its last legs. Its leaders were experimenting with European reforms, as the old models were no longer working well. Generally, these reforms fit into an Islamic context and style, and this helped prepare the Ottoman peoples for the twentieth century reality that was coming; hence, the Ottomans were generally better prepared for the changes than people in other Muslim countries of the time.

As the nineteenth century agonizingly wore on, however, the various regions of the empire seceded through revolution or
were lost in the almost constant warfare. Istanbul and other cities became bivouacs for the continuous streams of Muslim refugees flowing south from their lost homes in the Slavic-Orthodox World. Istanbul was chaotic, but it held, and culture flourished, no aspect of it so everlastingly as the art of calligraphy. This period came to an abrupt end in 1928 with the abolition of the Arabic script, but it left a legacy that was nothing short of stupendous.

I once asked my teacher, Hasan Celebi (pronounced Chelebi), why Istanbul was so important to calligraphy. Why was it the world capital of the art? His reply was something like, “The air, the weather is best here. We have beautiful views wherever we look, and examples of first-class calligraphy are everywhere. And this is where we can all get together and communicate. This is the capital of calligraphy—the great ones lived, died, and were buried here.”

I think that is a good enough explanation. But I would add that the whole Ottoman, and later Turkish, emphasis on an easygoing loyalty and the presence of calligraphic history—the availability of constant feedback and criticism and, importantly, a customer base—have been important factors in creating a supportive and protective atmosphere for these artists and their art.

Yesarizade Mustafa Izzet Efendi lived in this scene. He was a friend of Sultan Mahmud II, the most successful of the reformer sultans. That his good friend was the highly ethical Izzet Molla tells us more about his real character than do the diatribes of contemporary journalists. It is likely that being a nonconformist, Yesarizade was misunderstood. Every soul has to struggle with its oddities, and many people find novel ways to deal with them. Yesarizade’s “lies” are possibly of this order, but we shall never really know. We can, however, love the memory of such masters as Yesarizade and his father and enjoy their art. The more we see of it, the more we marvel and wonder: Who was guiding their hands—an angel?

Finally, let us let Izzet Molla speak about himself as much as about his times. The following is such a paradigm of the tensions hidden in Muslim societies that we may call it a social principle. In Acquaintances I Have Known with My Heart and with My Eyes, Ergun Göze gives this account:

This is a story with an important meaning and carries the richness of being an ibret. Hancerli Bey was a Greek Christian, but well versed in Ottoman culture and very experienced in language and semantics. Also present at the Session of Religious and Spiritual Knowledge [Meclis-i IIm-u Irfan] was a certain efendi, an imam, who had no share of these lofty attributes. He listened to Hancerli Bey’s discourse in amazement. Finally he was so astonished being next to this sea of knowledge he blurted out, “This efendi! If he knows so much about Islamic knowledge, why doesn’t he convert to Islam?”

At this groundless and inappropriate interjection, the others present froze, like ice. Izzet Molla, who was at his core annoyed at ignorance and the ignorant, and considered ignorance the exact opposite of Islam, shot back this response: “Say, Efendi, how about you? Since you are this ignorant, why don’t you give up Islam and become the heathenish wretch you seem to be?”

WORKS CITED
The following works were used to prepare this article:


Notes

1 This article was written at Shangri-la—The Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, September 2005. I would like to thank the following people for bits and pieces garnered from conversations with them over the years that also found their way into the article: M. Ugur Derman, Irvin C. Schick, Hasan Celebi, Nabil Safwat, the late Ali Alparslan, and Cinucen Tanrikorur. Thanks also to Sevim Kalyoncu, Uzma Husaini, and my wife Sally for their help and encouragement. Special thanks go to Deborah Pope of the Doris Duke Foundation, who gave me the free time to write this article.

2 I will be using a slightly modified version of Turkish spelling throughout, as it reads more easily than Arabic in its Latinized spelling. Where it seems appropriate, I also give the transliterated Arabic. Due to printing difficulties, I did not always use the Turkish diacritics.

3 *Efendi* is an honorific for those in the religious establishment.

4 Gravesites and tombstones are important elements in Ottoman biographies. In Mahmud Kemal Inal’s *Son Hattâlar* (*The Last Calligraphers*), Yesari Efendi’s grave is described as follows: “On the road from the Fatih to Asik Pasa [Ashik Pasha] districts, now a road called Gelenbevi Avenue, on the left side above the retaining wall, he is interred next to Tuti Abdüllatif Efendi. There is a calligraphic inscription over the small cemetery area that reads, ‘Every soul shall taste death (Qur’an). The two who have been given God’s mercy and forgiveness, Tuti Abdüllatif and the Üstad-i Ekrem Elhac Mehmed Es’ad-üleysari Efendi, for their souls read the Fatiha.’ The inscription on Yesari’s tombstone reads, ‘Huwa al-B¥qÏ, which means, ‘He is the Everlasting God.] Üstad-i Ekrem ve magfurun leh, hattat elhac Mehmed Es’ad-üleysari Efendi ruhicün Elfatiha. Sene 1213 [1798 CE].’”

5 I give the inscription in its transcribed Ottoman form for its flavor.

6 Inal wrote, “I was president of the Evkaf [Endowments] Museum Directorship Committee when we decided to save the tombstones from destruction by moving them to the museum. A bit later, they were moved to the graveyard of the Fatih Mosque under the care of the Ministry of Endowments.” He continues, “The late aforementioned’s wife, who died twenty years later, was buried in the Rumeli Hisari Cemetery. Her tombstone reads, ‘Hüve-l Baki. The Dweller in Heaven, the great master Mehmed Es’ad-üleysari Efendi’s honored wife, who is the recipient of God’s Mercy and Forgiveness, Lady Hadice—Read the Fatiha for her soul. 24 Jumada-l Ula 1235 [1819 CE].’”

7 Ottoman names and titles were often quite protean, so that at times one form is used and at other times another. I use some variations here, as would have been done in an Ottoman text, both for color and for a taste of a different style.

8 Two months after his death, his seaside home in Bebek was put up for sale. In a newspaper, the following notice was placed: “Yesarizade’s house, attached to the garden of Karavül House in the Bebek District, is for sale.” Mahmud Kemal Inal relates in a footnote, “This mansion was purchased by his former student of the same name (Kadiasker Mustafa Izzet, Chief of the Ulema and Representative of the Sherif of Mecca, who lived in it until he himself died in 1876). Such a coincidence, then, that the house passed from one great calligrapher to another and from one Izzet to another. All these famous homes (wooden houses along the Bosphorus) either burned down or were pulled down and destroyed.”