

Map of Ottoman Constantinople and its water systems by Robert Walsch, 1838

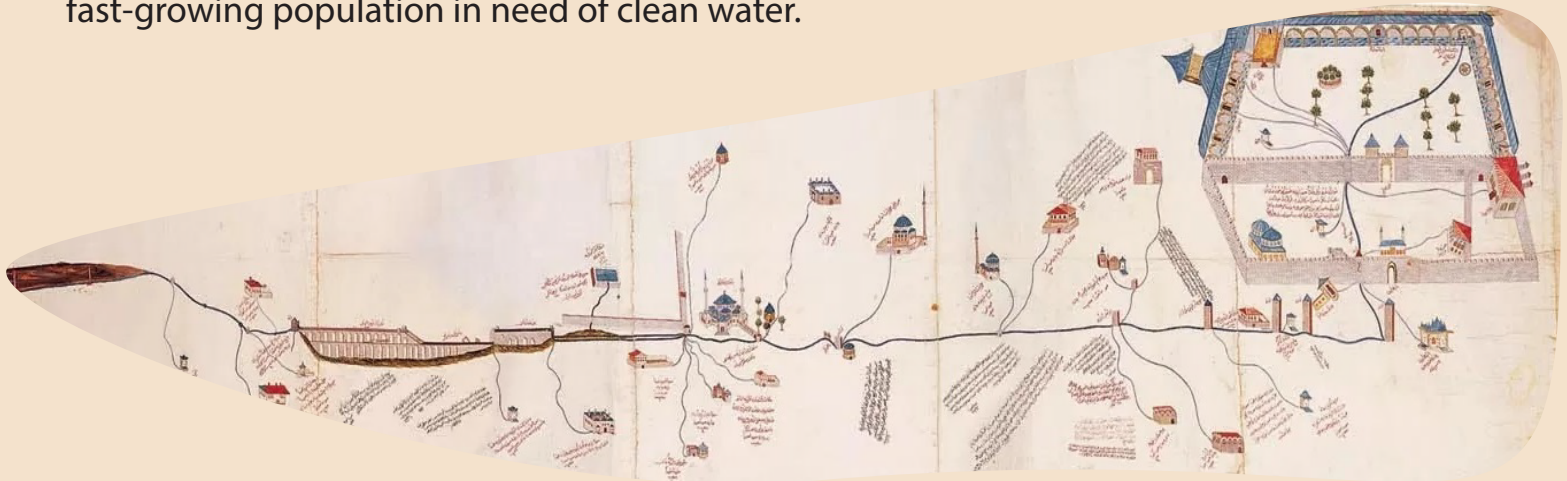
# CELEBRATING WATER

The Museum of Water and Aquatic Center in Istanbul

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The culture of water has been integral to Istanbul's identity from the Roman and Byzantine eras through the Ottoman period to the present day. This significance stems from Istanbul's unique geographic location straddling the Bosphorus strait linking two seas and separating two continents. Additionally, its climate, characterized by high humidity and frequent precipitation, has supplied abundance of fresh water, which in turn has fed water-intensive lifestyles. Historically, this included sophisticated bathing culture, a profusion of street fountains, ornamental water features, a taste for well irrigated gardens, and under Ottoman rule ritual ablutions. Today, eating fresh fish and taking a ferry/cruise on the Bosphorus are beloved everyday activities. At the same time, Istanbul faces several issues surrounding its relationship with water, such as increasing periods of drought and flooding, aquifer depletion, and a fast-growing population in need of clean water.



The map showing the water ways coming from Valens Aqueduct to Topkapi Palace, 1815

This studio explores the cultural and material significance of water as a public good in urban space. The site is along the fourth-century Aqueduct of Valens, which was part of the Roman, and later Byzantine and Ottoman urban water infrastructure. The infrastructure included several monumental public baths and small bath houses that were forerunners of the Ottoman hamams, four open-air reservoirs, and around 180 covered cisterns. One of the rare surviving Late Antique monuments in Istanbul today, the Aqueduct stands as a relic of the imperial culture of water that sustained the city for centuries and a monumental backdrop to the city's current struggles.

In the first part, students will explore the Aqueduct of Valens and its evolving relationship with the city as well as its reception in urban imagination. They will study the architecture and infrastructure of water and the current challenges stemming from climate change. In the second part, they will develop a detailed design proposal that combines the typology of a museum building with the typology of an urban leisure space. Accordingly, they will design a Museum of Water as a cultural attraction that promotes the history and importance of water in Istanbul and an indoor community swimming pool. The program includes presentation spaces for a permanent show on Istanbul's historic waterways and contemporary issues relating to water infrastructure in the city, cafe, indoor 25m swimming pool, a pool for leisure, Turkish bath, changing facilities, and outdoor splash pads, wading pool, and storm park/rain gardens. We will visit Istanbul from Oct.19 till Oct. 26, 2024 and hold workshops with ITU students.