



THE LEGENDS OF ISTANBUL

Maiden's Tower



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Istanbul is a metropolitan city in Republic of Türkiye, has a history goes back centuries, it is a surprise to no one that a city as old as Istanbul comes with a baggage. There is a hidden story that waits to be discovered in every bit of it. Today, I will share the story of Maiden's Tower (also known as "Leander's Tower", and locally as "Kız Kulesi", in short "Tower"), which is one of my favorites; as someone who was born and raised in Istanbul. By the way the tower is an architectural work inherited from the Byzantine period, tracing back to year 1110.

The story has it; there lived an emperor who loved his daughter more than anything in the world, and he was told by an oracle that his beloved daughter to die by a snake bite on her 18th birthday. Thus, the emperor ordered a tower to be built in the middle of the Bosphorus to prevent the prophesy come true. Princess was locked up at the tower for years, to be kept safe. The time has past fast, and her 18th birthday arrived, the emperor ordered a basket of exotic fruits to be delivered to her daughter to celebrate the occasion. Princess was full of joy hoping soon to return to the land and join her family, she welcomed the gifts but when she reached to an apple from the fruit basket, she was bitten by a snake who was hiding in, and she died at that instant. In another version of this story a witch curses the emperor with taking away his beloved daughter on her 18th birthday and delivers the fruit basket with the hidden snake to ensure her curse come true.

Yet, the origin of the name of Leander's Tower comes from another legend, from Greek myth of Hero and the Leander. Hero was one of Aphrodite's priestesses who lived on the other side of the Bosphorus, and Leander was a young man who fell head over heels in love with her and every night crossed the sea to be with his love. To guide him better, Hero lit a lamp in the tower every night. Their love lasted the whole summer, but when winter arrived a storm came, and the wind blew out the light of the tower. As a result, the young man got lost and drowned. The next morning, people also found the corpse of Hero on the cliff under the temple. She could not bear the death of her lover and had been reunited with him.

So, no matter which story you pick, you will see there is pure love behind it; a father and a daughter or two lovers, and the tower itself is where the girl would be locked to be protected yet the end will still be a sad one, where the girl is to cease.

Today, the tower is still there to see and recognized as one of the most significant symbols of Istanbul. Thus, the Tower has been subject to many philatelic items from stamps to post cards, and FDCs, over the years. Below you may find a few samples from my collection which proves the Tower is not just a symbol of city of Istanbul only but has more meat to that; and is considered as a landmark referenced on international platforms as well, that is representing Türkiye, proudly.



The image of the tower was first used on a stamp as part of the 1914 Pictorials (aka 1st London series), later overprinted for the abolition of the foreign forces. Between 1914 and 18, British and Indian troops fought against the Ottoman Turks in Mesopotamia (now Iraq), after many setbacks, Baghdad was taken by the British forces in March 1917, following in 1918 the stamp overprinted and revalued at 1.5 Indian Anna. Finally in 1920 reprinted as part of the 2nd London prints.

A postcard from 1909

A postcard from 1917 printed with 20 Para value

A post card printed in 2004



An FDC with the full sheet set of stamps printed for the Euromed 2020 Traditional Gastronomy event.



Printed in 2019 for the Turkish culture year in Japan



The tower is used on various stamps as a recognized symbol of Türkiye.



Back of 10 Turkish liras banknote, circulated from 1966 to 81.