

REPORT ON THE 2005 TURKEY AND CYPRUS FACULTY SEMINAR

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Summer 2005

I was privileged to participate in the 2005 University of Richmond Faculty Seminar which provided an opportunity for ten members of the faculty to explore Turkey and Cyprus through on-campus study in the spring and over two weeks of on-site travel in May. We visited Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir; the regional cities of Denizli, Konya, and Kayseri; as well as smaller towns and villages. We journeyed along the famed Silk Road from the Aegean coast to Kayseri, providing views of the Anatolian plain and such exotic landscapes as the travertines at Pamukkale and the rock and cave formations of the Cappadocia region. We toured the Greco-Roman ruins of Pergamon, Ephesus, and Hierapolis; early Christian havens and places of worship at Goreme and Zelve; Byzantine and Ottoman palaces, churches, and mosques in Istanbul; and Turkish sties and museums in the national capital of Ankara. We also visited the campuses of eight universities and one historic preparatory school. On Cyprus, we were hosted by Yakin Dogu University, visited the cities of Lefkosa (Nicosia) and Girne (Kyrenia) in the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, and crossed the UN Green Line into the Republic of Cyprus (Greek).

In both Turkey and Cyprus we heard lectures by and engaged in discussions and informal conversations with numerous academics, national and local government officials, and NGO representatives. We explored such issues as higher education, politics, economics, national security concerns, the war in Iraq, Turkish-American relations, Turkey's pursuit of membership in the European Union, the place of Islam in Turkish national life, the Turkish-Greek communal relationships in Cyprus, the 1974 partition of the island, and the prospects of reunion, to name a few. We all came away with much greater knowledge and understanding of both Turkey and Cyprus, more

nuanced views of their prospects and challenges, and a heightened awareness of the strategic importance of Turkey as a Western oriented Islamic state located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia.

Turkey and Cyprus are intriguing places, each with huge contradictions, great promise, and complex questions about their futures. What is the role of Islam, with which some 99 percent of Turks identify, in a professedly secular state? What are the chances the powerful Turkish military will intervene again in the Turkish government as it has done on four occasions since 1960? Will Turkey join the EU? What are the implications of Turkish entry for both the EU and Turkey? How can the communal divisions on Cyprus between the majority Greeks and minority Turks be resolved? How will the 2004 entry into the EU of the Republic of Cyprus (Greek) affect the situation? Although these and many other questions are worthy of attention, as an historian I have decided to concentrate the balance of my report on aspects of the legacy in contemporary Turkey of the republic's founder, first president, and national icon, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Mustafa, his given name, was born to middle class Islamic Turkish parents in 1880 or 1881 in Salonica, now in Greece but then in the polyglot and decaying Ottoman Empire. He was educated between 1893 and 1905 in military schools where he was exposed to European, rationalist, reformist ideas of the Committee of Union and Progress, the "Young Turks" who were gaining influence in the Empire. He also gained the name Kemal, meaning "perfection," from an admiring teacher. Following his schooling, he served in the Ottoman army, fighting in the Italian and Balkan Wars of 1911-1913 and in World War I when the Ottomans were allied with the Central Powers

of Germany and Austria-Hungary. He gained fame in the successful campaign against Allied, mainly British, forces on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915 and later commanded Ottoman armies in less successful campaigns against the Russians in the East and Arabs and their British allies in Palestine and Syria.

The Ottoman Empire disintegrated in the wake of its defeat in the war. Its Mediterranean and Arabian provinces were lost, either becoming independent states or League of Nations mandates to the British (Palestine and Iraq) or French (Syria and Lebanon), the Armenians and Kurds proclaimed independent states, France occupied Cilicia north of Syria, Italy occupied Antalya on the Mediterranean coast, Greece moved into Izmir (then Smyrna) and much of western Anatolia, and the straits were internationalized under British leadership. To the dismay of Turkish nationalists, this was accepted by the weakened Ottoman Sultanate in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres.

Mustafa Kemal was dispatched by the Sultan in 1919 to disband the Ottoman 3rd Army at Samsun, but upon arriving in this Black Sea Coast town, he resigned his commission, organized a national congress at Erzurum, was elected leader, made Ankara in central Anatolia his headquarters, and led what in time became a successful nationalist movement against both the Sultan and occupying powers. May 19, the day of Kemal's landing in Samsun, is now celebrated in Turkey as a national holiday commemorating the beginning of the war of independence. We experienced the May 19 holiday in the Cappadocia region where we saw school children, dressed in colorful costumes, marching on parade grounds and prominently displaying the Turkish flag.

Turkish nationalist forces under Mustafa Kemal's leadership defeated the Armenians and Kurds, settled Turkey's eastern boundary with the Soviet Union, and after

hard fighting bested Greek forces. Meanwhile, Italy and France withdrew from southern Turkey, the British signed an armistice pending negotiation of a new international treaty with Turkey, and the increasingly irrelevant Sultan fled into exile and the Ottoman Empire came to an end. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and the Allied Powers recognized Turkish independence, fixed most of its frontiers (except for Iraq and Syria which were settled later) and arranged for a compulsory exchange of Greek and Turkish populations, Greeks from Anatolia and Turks from Macedonia and Crete. With Turkish independence now secured and internationally recognized, the Grand National Assembly, the popularly elected legislature, declared Turkey a republic, made Ankara, then a town of some 30,000 in the center of the Anatolian peninsula, the new capital (it is now a city of over 3 million), and elected Mustafa Kemal, widely regarded as the leader responsible for Turkey's successes, president. Kemal now had political power to go with the prestige of his nationalist and military leadership. He set about to shape the new Turkish republic in accord with his strongly held beliefs in nationalism, secularism, and Westernization.

Mustafa Kemal saw nationalism in geographic terms. Anyone who ended up within the boundaries of the new Turkey was a Turk. He had little regard for other identities. This view was no doubt at least in part a consequence of the role of nationalism in the demise of the Ottoman Empire. As Christopher de Bellaigue argues in a recent *New York Review of Books* article:

The Turkish Republic's attitude toward minorities only makes sense if you have an idea of the contribution that the nationalism of ... minorities made to the decline of the Ottoman Empire The process of making new nations

[e.g., Greece, Serbia, Romania] was lethal for the empire and very often for those Muslims who were caught up in it; millions of Muslims were forced out of those newly independent states . . . and fled to Anatolia, the empire's heartland. By the eve of World War I, Anatolia had become a refuge for dispossessed Muslims from the Balkans and from the Caucasian territories that Russia had won during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878.

During and after World War I the Empire was also troubled by non-Muslim minorities, in particular, Gregorian Christian Armenians who revolted and collaborated with the Russian enemy, and Orthodox Christian Greeks who encouraged the intervention of Greece. The Armenians were deported from their indigenous areas by the Ottomans during the war at great cost in human life (creating for Turkey the persistent and still haunting genocide question) and Greek forces were defeated by the Kemal-led nationalists in the early 1920s. In the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne the Allied Powers insisted that Turkey commit to guarantee the religious and linguistic rights of the relatively small numbers of Armenians, Greeks, and Jews that remained within its territories. Larger, non-Turkish, Muslim minorities such as the Kurds and religiously heterodox Alevis received no such recognition or guarantees. In Mustafa Kemal's new state Muslims were to have only one identity: Turkish. Among his most famous sayings was "Happy is he who calls himself a Turk."

Kemal moved to secularize and Westernize his new Turkish state through a series of reforms between 1924 and 1935. The Caliphate, *shariah* courts, religious schools, and dervish brotherhoods were abolished, Turkey was declared a secular state, and all references to Islam were excluded from the constitution. A state controlled Directorate of

Religious Affairs was created to maintain mosques, employ their *imams*, and determine the content of religious education to be provided in national schools. New law codes were adopted based on European models: the Swiss civil system, Italian criminal code, and German civil law. Marriage was made a civil contract, women were granted full civil rights including the franchise, and veiling was discouraged generally and prohibited in schools and government offices. The fez was outlawed, western style clothing encouraged for both men and women, a new alphabet based on Latin was introduced to replace the Arabic alphabet, and a new system of national schools was established to teach the new alphabet. The Western Gregorian calendar was introduced and Sundays replaced Fridays as the weekly holiday.

Mustafa Kemal was shaping the new Turkey in accord with his republican, nationalist, secular, equalitarian, statist principles. These reforms were imposed by the national government in Ankara, an authoritarian government dominated by its leader until his death in 1938. Although there were elections to the Grand National Assembly every four years, opposition political activity was curtailed. The GNA re-elected Kemal president every four years without opposition. Although Kemal's state was authoritarian it was not totalitarian, allowing, in the words of his biographer, Andrew Mango, "a reasonable space for free private lives."

Mustafa Kemal's reform program was unsettling to many in Turkey. The Kurds, resentful of the Turkification and secularist policies, frequently rose in revolt. The most serious in 1925 and 1937 were brutally suppressed. There were also religious riots staged by Islamic fundamentalists and attempts to assassinate Kemal, but the powerful Turkish state responded with arrests, trials, and executions. Many Muslim traditionalists no doubt

were quietly and privately uncomfortable with the direction and pace of change. However, the bulk of the Turkish population seemed to welcome the stability and modernization resulting from Kemal's regime. The first of many statues of him was erected in Istanbul in 1926. When surnames were made mandatory in Turkey in 1934 (another western reform), the GNA bestowed upon him the surname Atatürk, meaning "father of the Turks." His political associates continued to dominate Turkish politics in the generation after his death and to be guided by his principles. His Republican People's Party granted him the title of "Eternal Leader." In 1951 the GNA passed a law making it a criminal offense to insult the memory of Atatürk. Construction was begun in 1944 on a massive monument to the republic's founder on a commanding hill in Ankara. In 1953 his remains were transferred to this mausoleum where Turks and visitors alike come to pay their respects. In our travels we were continually reminded of the apotheosis of Atatürk. His statues, busts, death masks, and photographic images are omnipresent. In the square adjacent to the town hall in the central Anatolian village of Agrinas (where we met the mayor) stands a full-length statue of Atatürk. His bust rests on a plinth in front of the main building of Robert College in Istanbul. His death mask is in every university classroom we visited in both Turkey and the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus.

Atatürk's image is on every unit of the new Turkish currency. Clearly he has come to be revered by the Turkish state as its founder, defender, policy guru, and national hero.

Ironically, he has been elevated to quasi-divine status by a professedly secular society.

Atatürk's revered status in contemporary Turkey is an enigma. Given the claim that 99 percent of Turkey's population is Muslim, the intensity of Muslim fundamentalists such as those we heard speak in Istanbul, the pervasive calls to prayer,

and the widespread covering of women's hair, especially outside the larger more cosmopolitan cities, it seems paradoxical that Turks honor a figure who was an atheist, who lived a libertine life and died of cirrhosis of the liver, and who diminished the public role of Islam in Turkish society. How well do modern Turks really know Atatürk or understand his principles?

The evolution of Western political values since World War II has created a contradiction between Atatürk's admiration of the West and other of his policies, in particular his authoritarianism and his view of the place of minorities and the military in Turkey. It follows that his efforts to emulate the West, from dress to institutions, would lead later Turkish leaders, mindful of his principles, to seek to integrate with Europe by joining the European Union. As early as 1963 Turkey sought and gained associate member status in the then European Economic Community and applied for full membership in 1987. Twelve years later, in 1999, EU leaders recognized Turkey as a candidate country and membership negotiations will begin in October 2005. European leaders have been slow to include Turkey, certainly in part because of its economy (it would be the poorest country in the EU), but also because of questions about its stability as a functional democracy and its treatment of minorities. For Atatürk, a general who used the military to create and defend his new state, the military was a carefully nurtured national institution which continued to receive under Atatürk and his successors the largest portion of annual Turkish budgets until this year when it fell to second behind education. (This milestone was called to our attention by several Turkish speakers.) The military, embracing Atatürk's principles, including in particular his secularism, has intervened in the government on four occasions, in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1998, to either

stem corruption or the influence of Islam. On each occasion the military has returned power to civilian authorities, but the military has come to see itself as the guardian of Atatürk's reformist legacy, of the constitution, and of the Turkish state. Military intervention in the political arena, however, is an anathema to the EU. We were assured by both military leaders and academics that the military will not intervene again, but how confident can we and more importantly the EU be given recent history and the military's "guardian" role?

Turkey's views on minorities is yet another barrier to its entry into the EU. As Stephen Kinzer of the *New York Times* noted, "something about the concept of diversity frightens Turkey." The only minorities that Turkey seems to recognize are the three, Armenian, Greek, and Jewish, acknowledged in the Treaty of Lausanne whose numbers today are in the tens of thousands. We were told on several occasions that "in Turkey we have no minorities." This reflects Atatürk's geographical concept of nationality as embodied in his slogan "Turkey for the Turks and the Turks for Turkey." To him it was impossible for a Muslim resident of Turkey to be anything but a Turk. However, the population of Turkey is far from homogeneous and today anthropologists note as many as 26 ethnic groups among its population. The largest and most troublesome are the Kurds of southeastern Turkey who constitute some 20 percent of Turkey's population of 70 million. Many Kurds did not in Atatürk's time and do not today consider themselves Turks. They speak one of two Kurdish languages, Kirmanji or Zaza, and have resisted Turkification. Kurds are not of one mind politically – some want greater rights within Turkey, others want broader regional autonomy, and some want to break away and join fellow Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria to create an independent Kurdistan. The latter,

represented by the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party, known as the PKK, and led by Abdullah Ocalan, waged a bloody guerilla war against the Turkish army and security forces from the late 1970s until 1999 when Ocalan was captured, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for treason. In May 2006, during our time in Turkey, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that he "was not tried by an independent and impartial tribunal" and called for a retrial. Turkey, mindful of its application to the EU, has indicated that it will conduct a new trial in accord with European standards. Also, for the same reason and to undercut the appeal of the PKK to Kurds, Turkey has made some conciliatory gestures, including the release of PKK members arrested during the troubles and the repeal of Atatürk-era laws banning broadcasting in Kurdish, Kurdish-language schools, and even private use of the Kurdish languages. These are positive steps which most likely would not have occurred without the EU issue, but do they really reflect a fundamental change in Turkey's views on minority rights and diversity?

Atatürk and his legacy remain a paradox. He and his memory are revered as the architect of the modern Republic of Turkey, but his principles to which Turkish leaders and much of society remain committed put Turkey at odds with twenty-first century liberal democratic values and complicate Turkey's professed desire to become Westernized and enter the new Europe of the EU. Will Turkey be prepared to sacrifice more of the Atatürk legacy to improve its chances of joining the EU? (This, of course, leaves aside the question of just how open the EU is to the membership of an Islamic, Asian state.)

My expanded knowledge and first hand experience of Turkey and Cyprus will inform and enhance a number of courses I teach, including: (1) History 100 Introduction

to History: Churchill in which attention is given to Churchill's role in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915 and subsequent involvement in the re-ordering of the Middle East as British colonial secretary after World War I; (2) History 243, Modern Britain which includes material on Britain's relations with the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; (3) History 290 British Empire and Commonwealth with its coverage of British involvement in the Middle East; (4) History 400, Research Seminar for Majors: British Diplomacy since 1800 in which students may research and write on Anglo-Ottoman and Anglo-Turkish topics; and (5) IS 400 Senior Seminar: Imperialism and Post-imperialism which gives attention to British, French, and Russian expansion into areas of the Ottoman Empire and the legacy of imperialism in the contemporary Middle East. I am deeply grateful to the office of International Education for this wonderfully enriching faculty development opportunity. I have come away with a much stronger appreciation of the strategic significance of Turkey and of the complexities of this fascinating society with its mix of modern and traditional, secularism and Islam, European and Asian.

NOTE: In writing this essay I have drawn on travel experiences, conversations with faculty colleagues and persons we met in Turkey and Cyprus, and a wide range of articles, books, and websites. Among the more helpful printed and on-line sources are: Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook Press, 1999); Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford:

Oneworld Publications, 2003); Christopher de Bellaigue, "Left Out in Turkey," *New York Review of Books* (14 July 2005): 43-47; Sami Zubaida, "Turkish Islam and National Identity," *Middle East Reports* (April-June, 1996):10-15; *The Economist* (19 March 2005); and <http://www.economist.com/counties/Turkey/>.