
RSMF

The Roger Short Memorial Fund Newsletter 2: April 2009



Welcome to the second newsletter of the Roger Short Memorial Fund. In this issue we review the dinner held in April 2008, print summaries from the 2008 Short Travellers' journals, give a brief update on what is happening with some of the previous Short Travellers and list the recipients of the 2009 RSMF scholarships.

The Fund. As a brief reminder, and for newcomers to the Fund, Roger Short was a Classics scholar at Univ from 1963 – 1967. He then joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: his first posting was to Ankara. Roger spoke fluent Turkish and developed a lasting love of the country, its people and culture. After representing his country in various postings round the world, he returned to Turkey as British Consul-General. While serving in this capacity on 20 November 2003 he, and several colleagues, were killed in a bomb attack on the British Consulate in Istanbul.

The Fund has been established in his name to foster knowledge and understanding between different cultures and peoples. Specifically, the Fund finances a travel scholarship programme. This programme enables 4 to 6 Univ students each year to travel in the summer vacation for study purposes. The main focus of the travel programme is on Turkey, but may include neighbouring countries.



Progress to date, 2005 - 2009. Since 2005, 27 students have benefited from the travel scholarship programme. Each Short Traveller is interviewed by the Master and selected based on a specific set of objectives. Most of the Short Travellers have met and been entertained by Victoria Short in Istanbul, and have filed a journal of their experiences in the College Library. The journals are available for review by prior arrangement with the Development Office, and a number are available on-line in the Clubs & Societies section at <http://univalumni.org>. There is a prize for the best journal each year selected by the Master and presented at the annual dinner.

For a listing of previous Short Travellers, with the very varied and interesting topics of their studies, please refer to the first Fund newsletter available at the above website.

Roger Short Memorial Fund Dinner 2008



The fourth Fund dinner in April 2008 was held at Merton College, as the kitchens at Univ were undergoing extensive renovation. The dinner provided an opportunity to welcome the Master-elect, Sir Ivor Crewe, and express our appreciation to Robin and Jill Butler for all their support from the first beginnings of the Fund.

In acknowledgement of this unswerving commitment, the Butlers were presented with a Sofra tribal rug. These Turkish rugs are traditionally used both in village houses and for picnics. The sofra ensures that none of the food falls on the ground and is wasted. At the end of the meal, the mother or daughter will carefully collect all of the leftovers and crumbs in the middle of the sofra, wrap it up and bring it to the chicken house to feed the chickens. We hope the Butlers will enjoy their sofra!

As with the previous dinners, the 2008 dinner was again generously sponsored by Amphion Innovations plc.

Abkhaz Obscurity. For a brief period during my Roger Short Memorial project in Turkey this summer the Abkhaz migrants and refugees I travelled to interview were again of international interest. The Georgian invasion of South Ossetia and the Russian response reminded anyone following the news that unresolved conflicts still simmer in the Caucasus.

There are thousands of Abkhaz living in Turkey – some say more than live in Abkhazia itself. Many have of course long since forgotten their ties to a strip of land across the Black Sea, but I was surprised by how many had not. This summer, the threat of war undoubtedly reminded many more of their Abkhaz heritage.

I was told that the strong Abkhaz community in Turkey dates back to resettlement in the 1860s, when entire Abkhaz villages were relocated to central Turkey, complete with their language, culture, and customs. Turkey has ever since been a natural destination for any Abkhaz wanting to escape the isolation that followed their de facto independence in 1992 and consequent CIS embargo.



I was interested in what links existed between the large Abkhaz community in Turkey and the fragile Abkhaz state and economy just across the Black Sea. Increased Russian engagement in Abkhazia has clearly made contact much easier. Travel, phone-calls, and banking are now all possible through Russian intermediaries. The necessary transit visas remain expensive and difficult to organise however, and the multi-entry Russian transit visa, essential for anyone wishing to move back to Abkhazia even for a short time, remains unobtainable to most. Permanent returns are therefore still fairly limited, despite a generous relocation programme administered by the de facto Abkhaz government. The uncertainty that accompanies Abkhazia's vulnerable political status is also clearly hampering investment from the diaspora although many I spoke to were "considering possibilities."

Fortunately conflict steered clear of Abkhazia this summer. It's capital Sukhumi is still to repair the damage caused by the last war. For many of those I interviewed however, the conflict was a reminder of just how isolated and obscure Abkhazia has become. In the months that have passed it is unfortunate to see Abkhazia again sliding back towards this isolation and obscurity. From what I gathered during my short time in Turkey and previous visits to Abkhazia - this is the real obstacle to resolving Abkhazia's status and the instability this sustains.

Michael Gibb

Turkish Nationalism. Turkey is an incredible country of which I have only seen a very small part. However even the three weeks I spent this summer in the north-western part of the country left an indelible impression on me. I went with the intention of studying the republican aspect of Turkish political culture with the help of Dr. Fuat Keyman of Koç University and to acquire some firsthand experience of the political situation in Eastern Anatolia. However, I arrived to find my plans impracticable and expectations misplaced. Once in Istanbul I found that Dr. Keyman unexpectedly had had to leave for, of all places, my native Canada where much of his research is conducted. My plans to accompany fellow Roger Short Scholar Michael Gibb into eastern Anatolia also subsequently evaporated as the situation in Georgia rapidly escalated. Over the course of the following days the entire region risked being destabilized as Russian troops launched a partial invasion in the name of protecting the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Turkish nationalism is striking for its celebration of 'modernization'

Confining my travels to the northwest, however, enabled me to experience a side of Turkish nationalism I might not have appreciated had I made the trip east. I spent a week in Istanbul with Michael Gibb, attending an astonishing Abkhaz demonstration against the Georgian government and visiting the city's many historic sites and neighbourhoods. Later I travelled down the Aegean coast visiting the island of Bozcaada, the ancient cities of Assos and Bergama, and the major port of Izmir. Turkish nationalism is striking for its celebration of 'modernization' and this is particularly evident in the densely populated and heavily industrialized Northwest. Following the establishment of republican Turkey, Anatolia's unfathomably rich history has been significantly neglected, evinced in the crumbling ruins of Greek, Roman, and Ottoman physical culture. This is especially the case where economic development has been given undisputed priority. Though Turkey enjoys a splendid natural beauty, much of this seems to have been spoiled in the environs of Istanbul, along the Sea of Marmara, and down the Aegean coast. The fabled splendour of the Ionian countryside has in many places been ransacked by deforestation, strip-mining, industrial production, and especially poorly regulated urbanization.

Rob Ballingall

Dostoevsky and Pamuk. I was aware of architectonic precision of Pamuk's novels and encountered several commonalities between his treatment of urban space and that of Fedor Dostoevsky, arguably the greatest Russian novelist of the nineteenth century. Once in the city, however, it was hard to find any topographical point of contact between the two former imperial capitals. The explicitly artificial, postcard-like European facades of St Petersburg are quite different from ancient walls of Istanbul. Dostoevsky's underground man links Petersburg's status as the world's "most abstract city" with the fact that it is also the most "premeditated" (indeed, its otherworldliness is a key element in a well-defined historical identity). The inhabitants of Petersburg suffer, in the words of the underground man, from a pathological surplus of consciousness that is exacerbated precisely by the city's "premeditated" quality.

By contrast, Pamuk's Istanbul reads almost like the reverse of a post-card. While the cannon of touristic sights, from the sacred tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari to the buzzing Bazaar district, frame its narrative, it is the intimate exchanges within domestic settings, the stories told and meals shared that infuse the city with meaning and not the other way around. Here the private intrudes upon the public sphere with dramatic effect. The streets of Istanbul are dominated by the swarming bodies of its inhabitants, its ancient walls weathered by the chafing of human bodies. It is the bitter smell of Turkish coffee and the oily, almost animalistic odour of baked baklava that permeate the streets here, and the hubbub of human exchange, and the incessant bell chimes that signal congregation which constitute the inescapable aural backdrop to one's experience of the town. Istanbul then, is erected on human society itself; its monuments are the haggling street-salesman, the pensive chess player, and rakish young Casanova prowling the streets at night.

Nariman Skakov



Luidprand of Cremona and Theophanes Continuatus. Two great witnesses of tenth Century Imperial Byzantine pomp remembered the Imperial Palace from opposite sides of the Peloponnese.

"beyond description how much pleasure and joy was experienced by those staying there, because of the draughts of the summer winds and circling breezes" Theophanes Continuatus VI.26

They both agreed that the palace complex outside the Theodosian walls was so situated to make the most of a cool breeze. It remains a haven from the bustle of urban life, but only just. Houses on Hocacakir Caddesi pile up against the south-east of the walls. To the north-west, a belt of rubbish and stockyards was the site of a homing pigeon market. I had to crouch at times, lowering myself close to the semi-restored brick, for I feared that I might be blown away.

Robin Froggatt-Smith

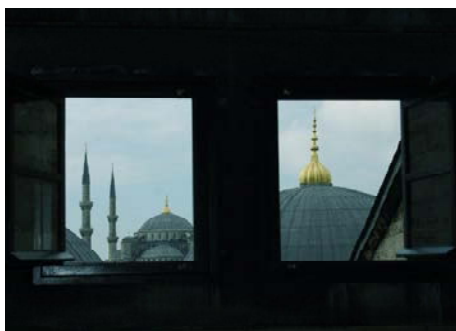
Olivier Holmey writes: My trip to Turkey was undoubtedly the highlight of my last summer holidays. I would not have been able to undertake such an ambitious project without the generous help of the Roger Short Memorial Fund. I first spent a whole week in Istanbul relaxing in a beautiful hotel at the heart of Sultanahmet, drinking tea, eating gorgeously sweet baklavas, visiting, basically enjoying life! Then I headed off to Ankara and the contrast was striking. Arriving there alone at night when you don't know a word of Turkish is very unsettling. It is very grim and unfriendly, at least at first sight. Thankfully, as always throughout my trip, I found my way around with the help of very affable and smiley strangers in the street. I soon left though, crossing Turkey from North to South by bus until I reached my final destination: the small village of Fevzipasa (named after the famous Field Marshal and Prime Minister of Turkey), headquarters of the archaeological dig I had ventured to participate in, my first ever! As all firsts, it was a very exciting and stressful experience, but it taught me oh so much, both about Turkish culture and language and about the world and lifestyle of archaeologists. Waking up every morning at dawn, digging the ground all day with the meagre hope of finding the remnants of an ancient wall or one or two artefacts and going to bed at 10 pm at the latest is probably not what most would see as a good way to spend one's holiday. But I found it brilliant. After only two months there, I could not imagine doing anything else, so returning to Paris felt very strange. Things as simple as drinking tap water I considered madness. Now that I have grown used to my life again, I can only think of one thing: going back...



2007

Geri Della Rocca de Candal holds the Presidency of the Oxford University Italian Society, launching a program of inviting relevant guests from a wide range of areas, the highlight being Romano Prodi, former Italian prime minister and president of the European Commission. In August 2008, he travelled to central Asia, visiting the most important caravanier cities in Uzbekistan, especially Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. In 2009 he has planned a conclusion to his Roger Short travel by returning to Tbilisi in Georgia in Easter and visiting Azerbaijan. Later in 2009, between August and September, he is planning to take the long route between China and Russia, visiting the Southern branch of the Silk Road on the Takla Makan desert, down to Lhasa in Tibet, then back to Beijing by train. From Beijing to Vladivostok and then Petropavlosk in the Kamchatka peninsula, to visit the Kuril Islands between Russia and Japan and then Kamchatka itself.

Ethan Kay recently started his D. Phil. at University College on hybrid corporate-NGO partnerships in rural India. I am [he writes] affiliated with the Department of Social Policy and the Department of International Development. I spent this past summer in the Balkans (as a traveler), Chernobyl (working for United Nations Development Programme), India (providing strategy consulting to a rural microfinance and women's empowerment NGO), and the U.S. (working on the Barack Obama Presidential Campaign). I am returning to India over Easter Break to study Hindi in the Himalayas, and will be conducting 9 - 12 months of field work in India for my D. Phil. starting this September. I have such fond memories of my summer in Turkey: it was a wonderful opportunity to explore the beauty, culture, and politics of a magnificent country, and to spend time with Mrs. Victoria Short, Univ Old Members, and fellow Roger Short Award winner Geri Della Rocca De Candal.



2009

Johanna Roberts

A first year PPE undergraduate, with special interests in Middle Eastern politics and European Integration. She plans to work with an NGO in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon before travelling through Syria to Turkey.

Kate Purcell

A one year Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) student, with particular interests in refugee law and human rights for asylum seekers. She has recently started taking lessons in the Turkish language. The trip will provide essential field work, by tracing the journey a Kurdish or Palestinian asylum seeker might take from the refugee camps of Syria, across the border into Turkey and subsequently into Greece.

Luke Fenwick

A second year D.Phil History student, interested in the lives of "ordinary" people in an environment of considerable social dislocation and disruption. He plans to travel throughout Cyprus, studying the divided island from the point of view of officials and the inhabitants.

Lucy Fisher

A second year Classics undergraduate, with interests in archaeology and Alexander the Great. She plans to travel extensively in Western Turkey, visiting the important sites of ancient history.

Alice Morton

A second year Classics undergraduate, with similar interests and travelling with Lucy Fisher.

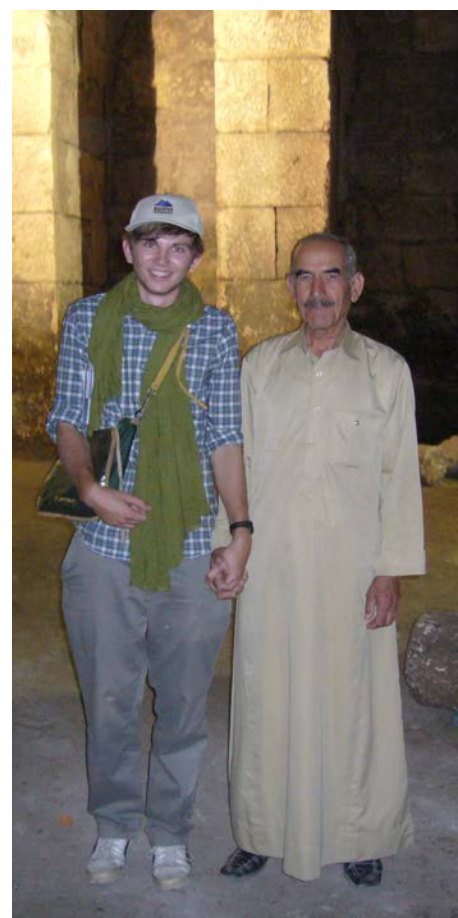


The Short Travellers Club

It is gratifying to see the increasing interactions between the growing community of Short Travellers. The expanding network of contacts is generating a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and information.

In the course of time, we plan to develop a handbook for new Short Travellers, with lists of possible contacts, do's and don't's regarding travel in Turkey and the surrounding region. It would also be interesting to organise occasional lectures at Univ from invited guest speakers, who could talk about aspects of Turkish culture, history, and politics.

Any additional suggestions for developing "Club" activities would be very welcome, as well as help in their organisation.



Appreciation. Thanks again to all donors. It is your support which has made the travel scholarships possible. Our sincere thanks go to Judy Longworth and her team in the Development Office for their organisational support. Finally a big thank you to all contributors to this newsletter, in particular Robin Froggatt-Smith, for his design and production.

Donations may be made to:

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