

## Turkey 2018 Travel Diary

Roger Short Travel Scholarships Report – *Diana Avadanii*

This trip was generously supported by the Roger Short Memorial Trust.

### Day 1

Breaking into the notebook feels strange as it's so neat and new and white. But here we go...

My travels here were smooth. I flew with Turkish airlines and my mind was blown by the service and facilities. I guess it's all thanks to me booking early. I got to the Ataturk Airport at 8pm and by 10 pm I was already in my room. The transfers were quite easy, although I have to admit I felt paranoid and unsettled on the 15 mn walk from the metro to my accommodation.

I made some day plans before getting here but I am quite flexible. So what's the plan for tomorrow? Meeting with the Urban Sketching Istanbul group at the Miniaturk park. This park has miniature replicas of emblematic buildings in Turkey and while I think it will be a good intro and overview of architecture I would not have visited it otherwise. I don't know this group. I just messaged them on Instagram and told them I will be around. I hope it will all be fine and I will be able to integrate for the day.



### Day 2

I had a pretty good time with Urban Sketchers Istanbul. They were all lovely and I wish I would remember all their names, but unfortunately I don't. The coordinator greeted me and was super friendly. He is a survey engineer and his sister lives in London but he never visited. He was such a sketching geek: he recognized the band of my notebook from the cover only. Then I also met Cobra (pretty sure this is not how you spell her name but this is how she pronounced it) who is an architecture student and with whom I spend most of my sketching time. She told me about her travels to Italy to study architecture, and how she hopes to go back there for future studies. We also talked a bit about Istanbul and the life here, mainly using Google translate on our phones. Then there was a very sweet man who was a corporate trainer. He travelled to Oxford over the summer and he showed me some of his sketches from there. We chatted about his Oxford

experience and he told me that his AirBnB host made a handmade sign and went out to protest Trump during his stay here. I thought it was hilarious!

Overall I enjoyed the Miniaturk park. I found sketching in public very different than anywhere else. Everyone wants to look and take photos. This doesn't happen in UK or other western countries. It definitely takes me out of my comfort zone as I am quite shy with my art. Today I discovered that there is an important architectural monument in Romania, since we were part of the Ottoman empire. I must check that out at some point.

Being on my own is fine. However, everyone stares despite the fact that I wear full length sleeves all the time. It's only men on the street as well. Where are the women? There are so many men just sitting around , or selling stuff, or waiting to give you a ride.

At my departure from Miniaturk I took the wrong bus so my plan to go to the modern art museum didn't happen. I ended up around my neighbourhood and I was wondering around the small Hagia Sophia. Was thinking about sketching it so I went into a small and cosy 'Art Cafe packed with paintings, drawings, most of them unmounted and all over each other. I sit down for some apple tea and instead of drawing the building outside I was much more intrigued and fascinated by the man sitting across from me at the end of the cafe, smoking and leaning against red turkish pillows. Turns out he is a professional artist. He gave me some advice on my shadows and brushes. On my way out he saw the sketch of himself and really liked it. He said that I should come back and hang out after dinner. Later on, I got another glimpse of Kubi as I was having dinner but when I went back to the cafe he disappeared. Maybe I will catch him another day and I will visit his studio.



### Day 3

I started my day at the Blue Mosque. I felt it was a bit underwhelming, but mainly because of the tourists rather than the building. So many people! And the access inside the mosque was quite restricted. You couldn't really admire the tiles and walk around freely. It was all very crowded and guided. Then I walked over to the Hagia Sophia. Loved it! I loved the Byzantine– Ottoman mix in the building. The Byzantine art does feel very familiar as most of Romanian Orthodox Churches have Byzantine murals. After my visit inside I went out on a bench and sketched it. Didn't quite get the sketched I hoped for. Coming here I was worried that I will be harassed by vendors but it turns out that the tourists are the most annoying ones. For example, two men from Singapore took plenty of pictures of me drawing and made me smile for the camera too. I felt rather uncomfortable. Then some women from Iran sat next to me and started taking pictures. And two girls. And another woman. I guess this is the best place to get over my discomfort of having people watching over my shoulder as I sketch and paint.



After that I went to the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art. Bit of a disappointment too. I was expecting lots of ceramics (which I think I will find at Topkapi), but instead there were lots of Qurans and carpets. Still beautiful and I very much enjoyed it, especially the calligraphy. I even saw hairs from the prophet Muhammad's beard. He allowed people to collect his beard when he was cutting it and now it's considered a Holy object. My visit at the museum ended up with me buying an overpriced water. I regret buying it now, but I was too embarrassed to refuse it. It was six times the price of a bottle at the Miniaturk museum cafe. It's strange how much the prices vary around here, even in official proper shops like museum shops and cafes. Afterwards, I spent my afternoon at the Science and Technology museum. I enjoyed the maths section the most as well as seeing medical instruments used from the 11th century onwards. The thing that stood out the most was the emphasis on how many advancements happened in the Islamic world, were translated into European languages years later, were used by scientists in Europe, and the

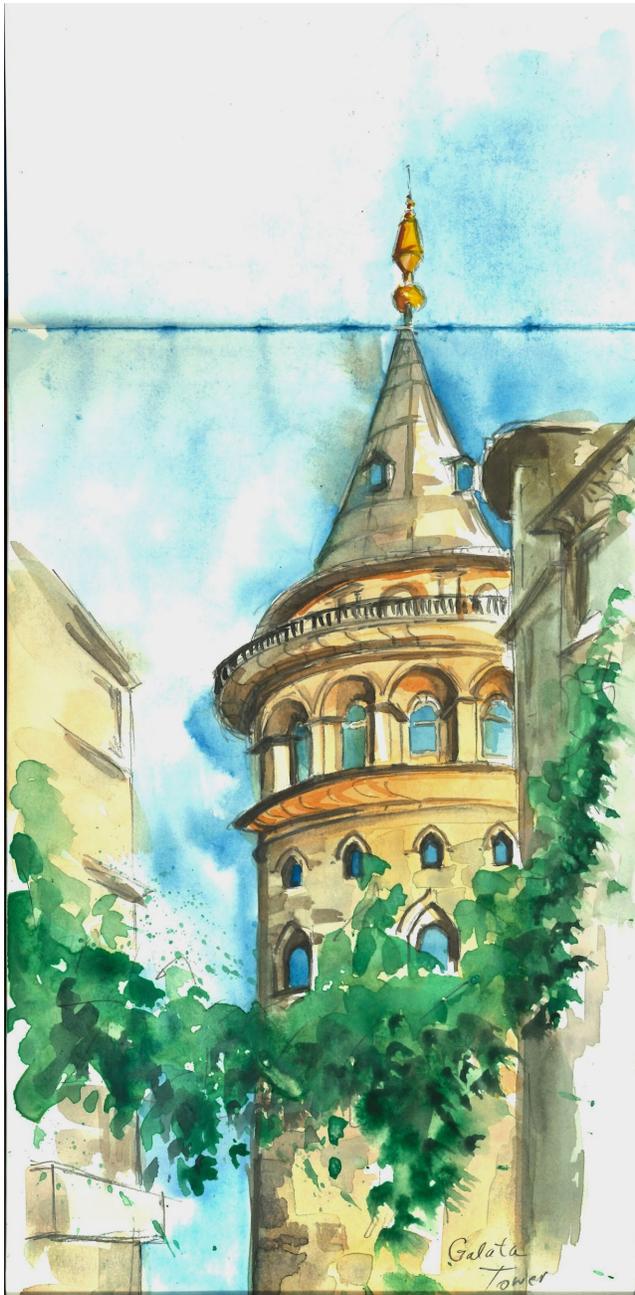
theorem/discovery has an European name now. I am sure it must be frustrating to them, since they put it on almost every panel in the museum. Over dinner Rivka told me that the hieroglyphs were decoded 200 years before the westerners decoded them by an Islamic scholar, but he doesn't receive much credit today. While probably true and fair the whole emphasis on this seemed a bit political. After the science museum I had a tea break and some amazing baklava. Hence, my sketch of food and tea.



Then I went to the Taksim Square where one can admire the Turkey's first monument as a republic. It's all a bit military, but the base reminded me of the Ottoman architectural style. I also found the Romanian cultural center and a Greek orthodox church. Then I saw Rivka for tea, which was lovely. We had an interesting conversation about biases and losses of scientific advancement due to the lack of a widely spoken language. The area around Taksim square looks very European. It reminds me a lot of Romanian interbelic buildings. There are also a lot more European businesses than I hoped for, such as Nero Cafe, and plenty of fashion commercials with western looking models. I took all my travel advice from English speaking sources and British people travelling here and I was expecting a more 'exotic' place. But truth is that a lot of areas are upscale Romanian versions of bazaars and markets. The man playing Rummikub in men-only cafes are similar to the people in my grandparents' village and in the parks in my hometown. The smoking? The same. Breaking sunflower seeds and throwing the residue on the pavement? The



Chora Church and I stood for a while in awe looking at the mural with Jesus. I particularly liked how soft the shadows of the face were looking, and the smooth transition to the beard, with only a touch of pink blush. So after I admired the murals I decided to go to this small neighbourhood mosque, Kazaker Ivaz Efendi. I read about it in this book I found in the Sackler library: 'Self-guide to Iznik tiles in Istanbul'. The mosque was not too far and I enjoyed walking through the streets in the Fatih district and see how people actually live in Istanbul. I really love their wooden houses with bay windows!



So finally I get to the mosque but it was unclear if it was open, or if they were praying inside. It was up on a hill and I could admire houses on the other side of the canal which I did for a while. At the gate of the mosque was this man in his mid-30s just standing around (on a Tuesday midday). They all do this: standing or sitting in front of their houses, shops, cafes, etc and people watch, which seems very relaxing but when do they get some work done?

So I ask him with Google translate if I can go inside the mosque. He got quite shy and ran in the nearest shop to get his English speaking friend. The friend told me that I should come back later, and then he asked where I am from. We talked a bit about my travels and in the meantime the tall shy man ran to ask the imam if I can visit the mosque. I felt so terrible. The sky man got the keys and opened the mosque for me. I took my shoes off and covered my hair. I felt quite nervous to enter too much and I sort of stood awkwardly near the entrance and admired. The carpet seemed freshly hoovered too. The carpet was blue and thick and the walls were a crisp white with geometric designs and columns. The dome above the room was painted with a red and blue star model. I had this expectation that the interior will be fully covered in Iznik tiles, and that I will just go around and take my time. It turns out that only the mihrab (Mecca oriented altar) had a small border of green-turquoise Iznik tiles, which the guide places in

the 'best period'. At the end of my visit, as I walked out of the mosque court I tried to talk more

with the sky man. He pronounced his name as 'Adam', but I am not convinced I got that correctly. He was enthusiastically talking to me in Turkish and he showed me a beautiful building on his smartphone that probably he was encouraging me to visit. Although he had a smartphone he didn't seem aware of Google translate and how he can use his device to narrow the language barrier between us.

I went onto take the bus to the Fethiye museum, another Byzantine church turned into mosque, and a museum. Again, it got into the way of my planned itinerary. I was meant to go off the bus after two stops, but when the bus got there it was a large influx of people coming in and I couldn't make my way to the door. So I got off on the next station and started walking uphill towards Fethiye. And guess what! In front of me the beautiful red brick building that Adam showed me on his phone started to appear. It was really large and majestic. As I was getting closer, I couldn't grasp it all in one look. It dominated the hill with the deep red colour of the bricks. I learned from a written plaque that the building was the Phanar Greek Orthodox College, a school first built in



1454. The present building was built later on in the 1880s, on land endowed by Dimitrie Cantemir. Romania is formed from 3 historical principalities: Moldavia (East of Carpathians), Wallachia (South of Carpathians), and Transylvania (West of Carpathians). Moldavia and Wallachia have been under the Ottoman empire and we really like to brag about our 'bravery' in battle for keeping Europe's christianity. Dimitrie Cantemir is a Moldavian prince and scholar from my hometown

(Iasi, the historical capital of Moldavia). Very close by the school was a cafe with his name, and his memorial house. He lived 22 years in Istanbul and in the 19th century wrote a comprehensive latin study of the Ottoman empire. While he is widely regarded as an Islamic scholar, in my education he was mainly applauded for his work on the description of the Moldavian states. Retrospectively, I find my education quite nationalistic and christian-doctrined but maybe not all teachers are like that.

Its weird and humbling to realise these cultural exchanges at 24 years old just because I got off the wrong bus station in Istanbul. I wish they were more common knowledge and treasured, rather than blaming the Ottoman empire for inducing practices of bribery and corruption on the 'honest' Romanian political class. There is also a Turkish bath in my hometown that sits in ruins basically, although it's a monument of cultural importance. A real shame...

I take plenty of pictures and I move onto the Fethiye mosque, which was closed. There was a prayer going on in the mosque part and the museum was closed. So I go and sit in the Dimitrie



Cantemir cafe. The decorations were modern and colorful and had nothing to do with the personality who owned the house. And then I noticed it had a bit of a girly girl vibe and the customers were only women. Walking to the bus station I noticed that there were plenty of cafes around and they were all quite 'cute' and had plenty of women customers.

I spent my evening in the area of the Galata tower. I spend the last hours of the afternoon visiting the Modern Art museum. The museum wasn't large at all, and 1.5 hrs was plenty of time to absorb each piece. I was intrigued and fascinated by some of the feminist works in this museum. One was an installation with a video with the artist tacking on more than 10 dresses from different women, and taking them off together. It was a metaphor for the many roles taken by women and how difficult life gets

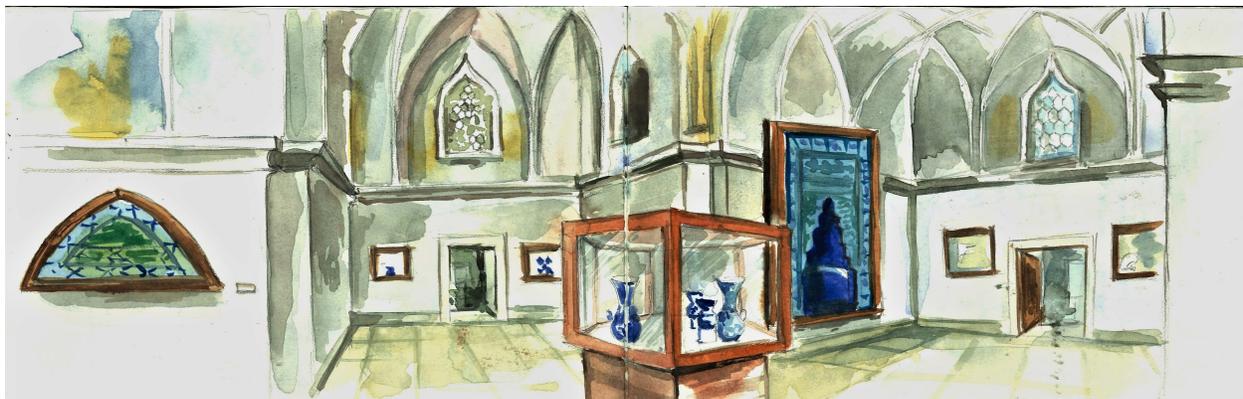
with the more roles women have to take. There were also testimonies from women who donated the dresses and one of them read as following: 'it's hard to be a woman/ one has to think like a man/ act like a woman/ look like a girl/ and work like a horse'.

I walked around the area for the rest of the evening and I sketched the Galata Tower. I was hoping to go up but the queue was too large and I said to myself that maybe it will be better other day.



### Day 5 – Tiles!

My day began at Hagia Irene which was built at a similar time with Hagia Sophia, and its the only surviving Byzantine church with an atrium. It was also never converted to a mosque so it doesn't have any major alterations to the architecture. Is smaller and less imposing than Hagia Sophia but I liked a lot more. Probably because there were only 3 people in. I will never forget the image of the atrium, so perfectly framed, with beautiful soft light highlighting the red-orange and grey tones on the stone walls. I could have easily just spend my time there. I asked another admirer to snap a photo of me and we both talked about how much we loved this place.



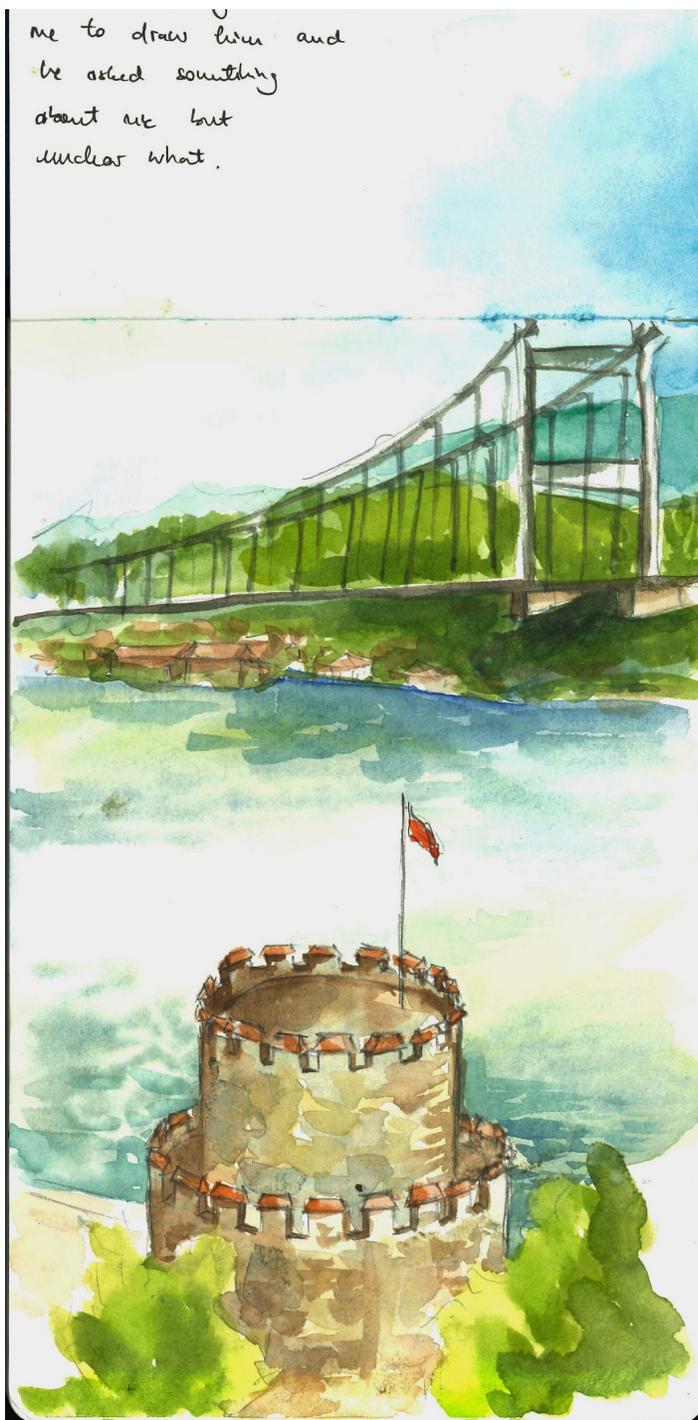
I loved Topkapi! I was there for five hours and I could have easily stayed more. I would happily go again and again and again. I really enjoyed the kitchen section, especially seeing how the dishes style and materials changed with time. I also read that the supply of lamb and sheep came from Wallachia and Moldavia! I even got to read the imperial menu and plenty of other documents with familiar words. Then I visited the courts and the pavilions. All my tile fantasies came true! The pavilions are garden buildings used for circumcision, as library, meeting rooms. Most importantly they were all covered from floor to ceiling in beautiful Iznik tiles. Generally shaped a

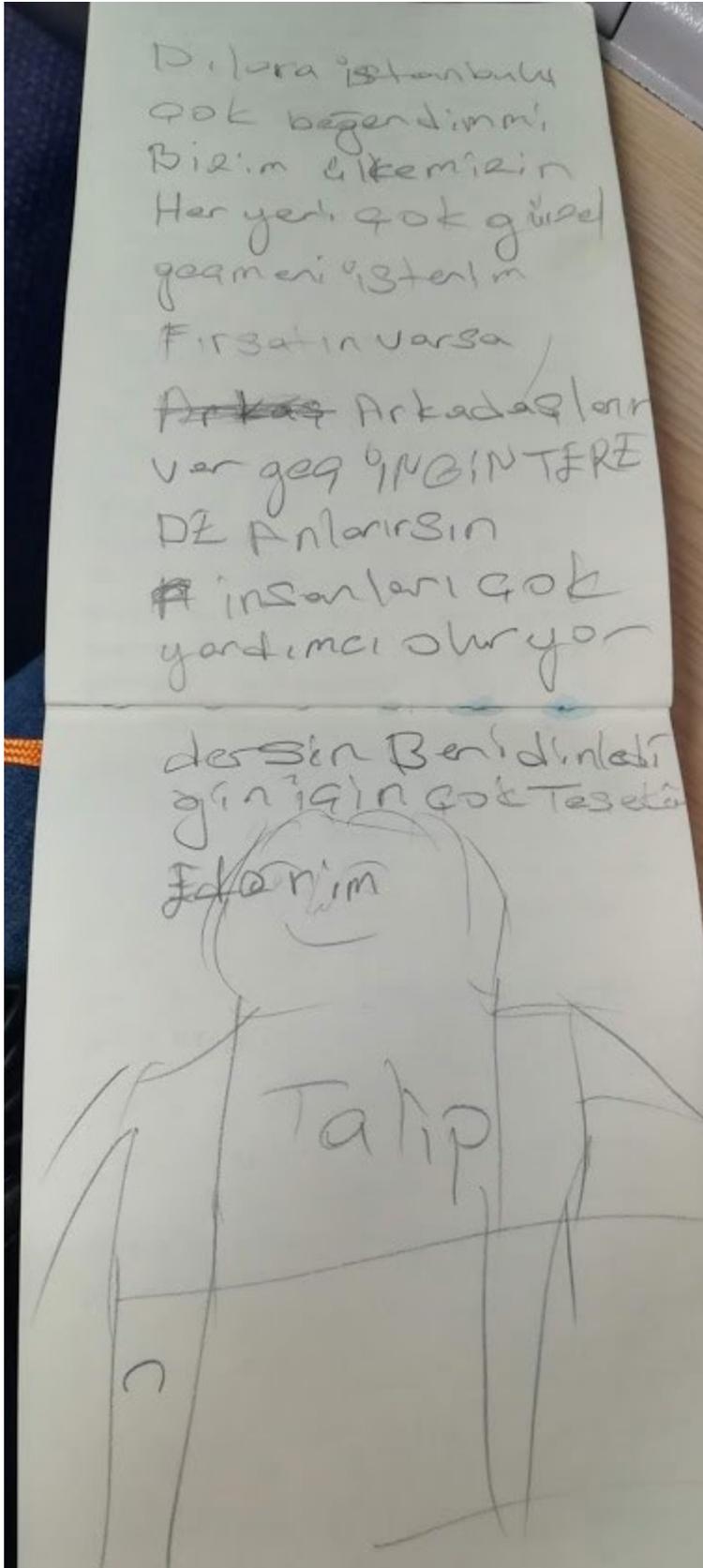
octagons, they had low but very wide sofas in front of the windows.

It was a hard choice between sketching and moving on as I knew there will be lots to see. I probably saw more than 20– 25 tile patterns and I took my time with each. I am very happy now that my tile dream came true!

The great attraction seemed to be the house of Holy objects. The queue for it was two times the one from the Galata tower. There were objects belonging to Abraham and Moses as well as bones from the arm of John the Baptist, and more objects from the prophet Mohammed. There were beautiful tiles there too and the thing that I enjoyed the most was the voice of the imam reading from the Quran and of course the beautiful tiles.

Then the part I was most curious about, the Harem. As I entered I bumped into my friend from the Hagia Irene mosque. We visited the Harem together since he was quite keen to make conversation. I did feel like I would much enjoy the visit on my own and chat over dinner but it didn't feel like an option. He was quite cool. His name was Wassim, he was from Algeria, and he was a medicina school student. He plays guitar and he likes Metallica. I was trying to avoid political or faith based topics of conversations but he made it really hard.





As we visited the harem he kept pointing out how the Ottomans had double standards because they kept women as concubines and slaves, while they supposedly were pious and religious, and that's why the empire collapsed. He had a quite utopic and naive view of society: live and let live, don't impose your values on other people. Unfortunately, things don't work quite like that. After departing from Wassim, I went to the Archeology Museum where I had another Turkish experience I forgot I was familiar with: the Turkish toilet. We used to have them in my high-school as well. Then I went to the tile kiosk where I explored a collection of Seljuk and Iznik tiles from different periods, and I made a panoramic sketch. I learned a lot about different techniques and styles, and I had a good intro into Seljuk tiles in anticipation to my trip to Konya.

### Day 6

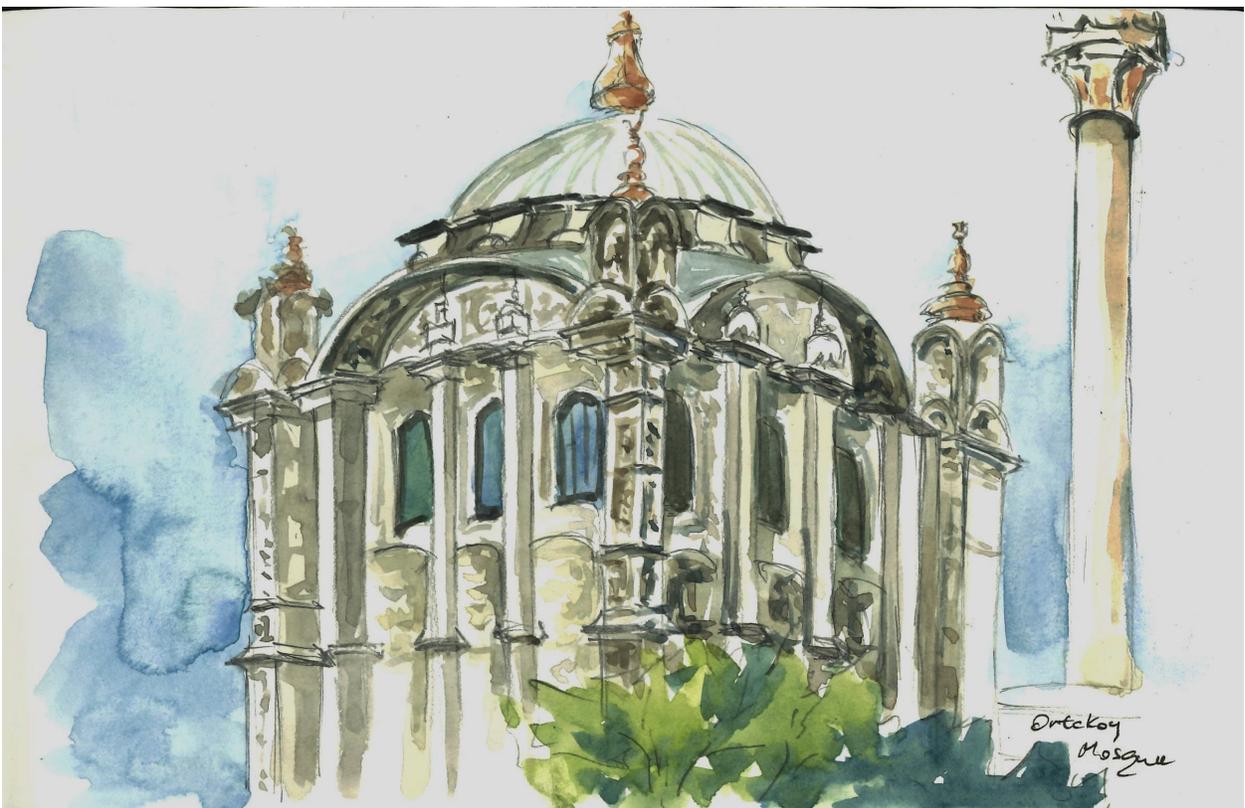
My day started at the Rumeli Hisari Fortress. This is the first fortress built after the conquest of Constantinople and sits on the narrowest part of the Bosphorus, in a strategic position. The fortress was full of friendly cats and even more friendly people! As I was sketching a man named Talip came around and tried to convince me to sketch him as he was trying to make conversation. He wrote a message in Turkish on my notebook but I couldn't decipher all of his handwriting in order to put it into Google translate.

I left Rumeli Hisari and went along the shoreline to the Ortakoy Mosque, a beautiful baroque mosque in the

Besiktas neighbourhood. The shoreline with the the cafes and the parks, the occasional palaces and gates is absolutely beautiful and looks like a posh area. I managed to visit the mosque before the prayer started, and then I sketched it from a bench. A nice middle aged lady sat next to me and admired my sketch. She told me she was from Pakistan, and that her children graduated from London universities. She had a very good English, and she told me about her struggles to quit smoking while she had a cigarette. Then her husband came around holding two bananas, clearly for them two, but he gave his one to me. Very sweet of him, and the banana was amazing. They went on a boat tour and I went to the Yildiz place only to discover that it was closed due to renovation. The strange thing was that there were a line armed policemen guarding the road to the palace and informing the public of the closure. I thought there was a bit over the top for a museum under restoration, but then there are police and armed police everywhere around here: underground, parks, squares, etc.

After a tea and snack break I went to the Dolmabahce palace, their version of Versailles. Its baroque and opulent and the gardens and the front gates look very much like their European counterparts.

Then I took the funicular to the Taksim square. I was expecting something overground, but it's basically a tilted underground. I strolled down their shopping street connecting the square with the Galata Tower. There I met Hackhan, the corporate trainer I met at USK Istanbul in my first day. We sat on the docks and sketched an evening scene. The mosque in my sketch is the Rustem Pasha mosque and to the right there should be the Galata bridge.



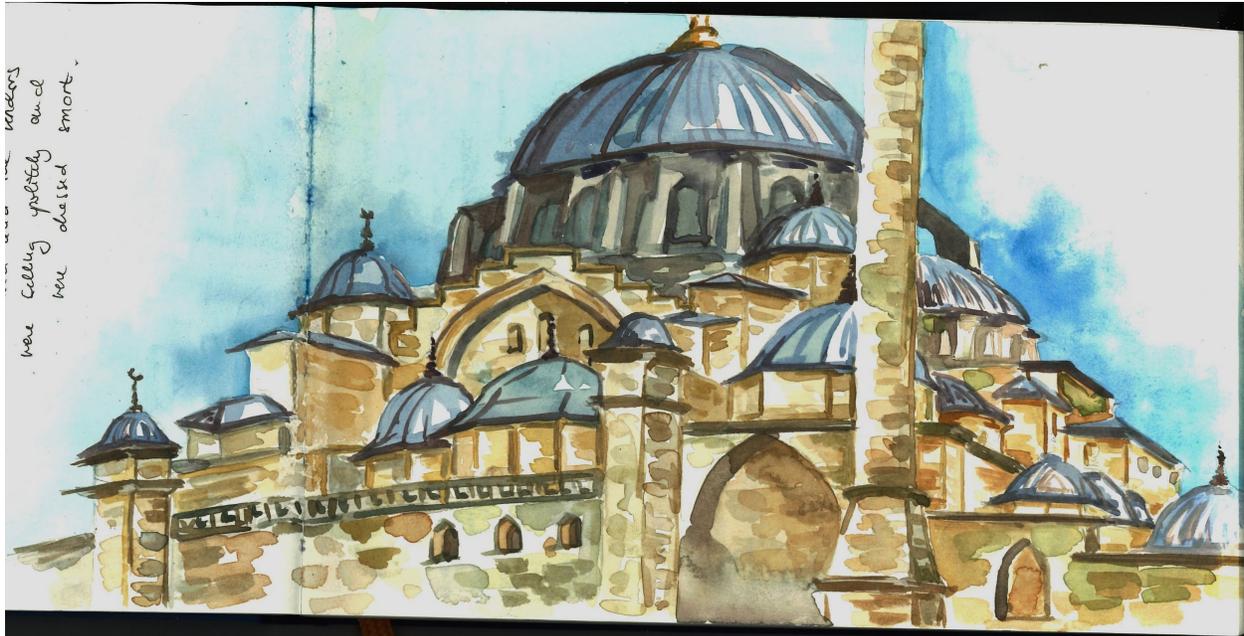


Hackhan also translated for the Talip's message. He asked me if I enjoyed Istanbul, and advised me to travel to the rest of the country. He also told me I should be friends with Turkish people abroad as they are loyal and helpful people. Sadly, I wasn't able to tell him there how much I loved Istanbul.

## **Day 7**

The first objective of the day was the Bayezid Mosque, which unfortunately was under restoration and inaccessible. So I proceeded with visiting the Grand Bazaar. Again, I was surprised! Having been in Romanian bazaars and some Russian ones I was expecting narrow corridors, overflow of products hanging from everywhere, harassing vendors, mixed products and shops placed randomly. And it was really the opposite. The corridors were quite spacious and you could admire a beautiful ceiling. The shops were clustered on themes and each had its own cubicle. Everything was quite well curated and the vendors were wearing shirts and costume trousers. I looked a lot more like a British covered market rather than a bazaar. However, the streets surrounding the bazaar were a lot more to my expectation.

Then I went to the Suleymaniye mosque, where it seemed that they were praying early so I had to wait for the ceremony to end. That was a good opportunity to sit down for a sketch. I really enjoyed walking around the gardens of the mosque and seeing the tomb of the sultan Suleyman and one of his wives, Hurrem.



One of the documentaries I was watching mentioned Hurrem. She was an interesting character. A Christian slave brought from the Balkans she was first his concubine. Then she became free in order for the sultan to marry her and was the first wife and concubine allowed to have more than one boy with the sultan. Generally, they had one mother per son, since the custom was that the prince getting to the throne will kill all his brothers. So the moms worked a lot the palace politics to make sure their son will inherit the throne.

The interior of the mosque was breathtaking. Granite columns support the half domes and the middle dome. There are also beautiful stained glass windows. Huge circle chandeliers were hanging from the the half domes and the walls were decorated with marble decorations, calligraphy, and geometric motifs. In here, similar to the rest of the mosques, women have a separate designated prayer place, generally further away from the mihrab, towards the entrance of the mosque, behind wooden panels.

Then I wandered through the spice bazaar and I went to the New mosque, where some amazing Iznik tiles were accessible in the cloisters. There I flickered through an English version of the 'Islamic law' out of curiosity. It had all the rules related to prayer, lifestyle, practice, and then details about the life of the prophets. it was very explicit and clear in telling people what to do and it was neatly organized.

I crossed over the bay onto the Galata region, in order to visit the Galata Mevlevi House, the first sufi lodge in Istanbul. It was an amazing visit and I learned a lot about life at the lodge and sufism, again great preparation for my time in Konya. I particularly liked the stage for the sema practice, the swirling dervishes dance. I also found out that all lodges and orders have been banned in 1925, but it's unclear to me why. I finished my day at the Galata Tower and I finally got in after waiting in the queue for 30 mins. But when I got up there I understood why its such a popular

landmark. At the top one has 360 views over Istanbul. I was fortunate enough to admire an amazing sunset over the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn while I was up there.



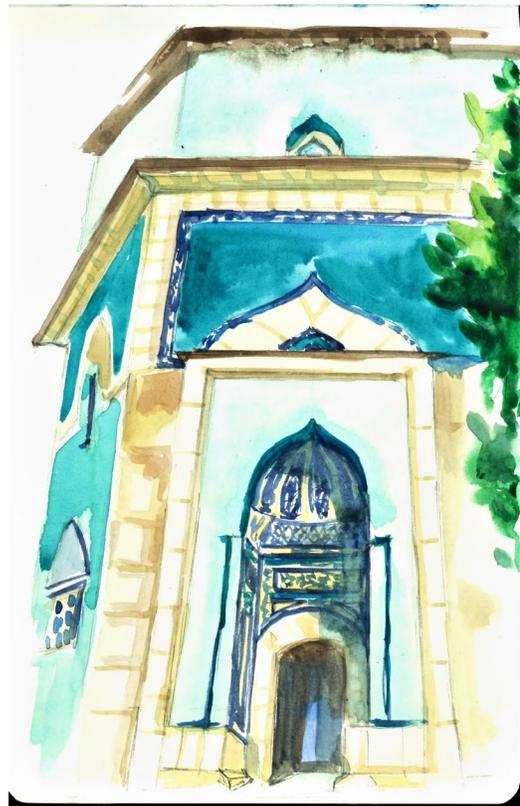
I am very happy I finally went up there! It was worth it!

## Day 8

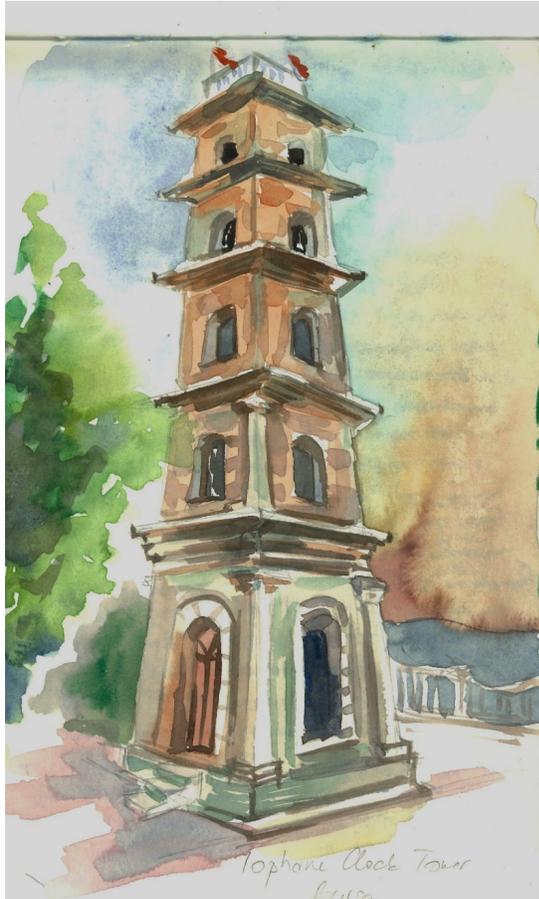
I took the seabus and a land bus to arrive to Bursa in the morning. What a fascinated journey it was! I started my day by going to the famous Green Mosque and the Green Tomb of the sultan Mehmed I. This mosque was amazing and I was alone in it for most of the time!

The mosque is a lot more how I expected the other to be too: almost fully covered in beautiful green tiles. While I was admiring a man comes and starts chatting with me, fairly loudly, about the tiles and the history of the mosque. His english was good and he explained he is not a guide, but just wants to have a chat. His name was Yanos and he was a local artist. Apparently he did ceramic painting, as well as carpet restoration. He said he was working with the Victoria and Albert museum too.

I went to his shop set up in a traditional ottoman house very close to the mosque. We had some tea and chatted more about ceramics, his job, and Bursa. After talking to him I went back to the Green Tomb in order to sketch it. When i finished my drawing I realized that a girl was watching me from distance. She asked if she can come and see it. Her name was Emine and she was modestly dressed, all black, wearing a headscarf. She was so incredibly sweet and shy and we had a conversation via Google translate. She told me she is from Eastern Turkey, and that she is a theology student. She came there in order to relax since she finds the tomb a peaceful place. She said she wants to learn English and to travel in Europe. We exchanged Instagrams and I went on to visit the Bursa city museum. The museum was really well curated and arranged and I would have loved it if there were English panels too, not just in Turkish. I continued by going to Ulu Cami, the mosque of 21 domes built under Mehmed I. Inside there was a functioning water fountain and beautiful light pouring on it from the windows of the main dome. There were a lot of people

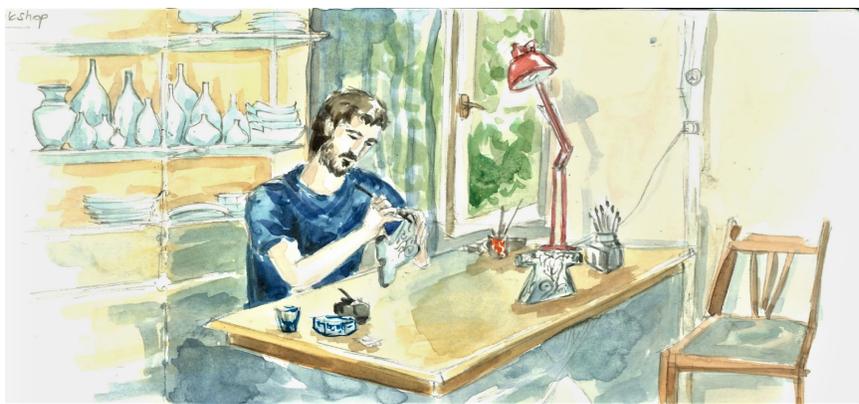


sitting on the floor chatting, kids running around, some people praying, and other just hanging out by the fountain. Some were tourists but most weren't. I am confused on what exactly people do in the mosque between praying. This one specifically, due to the fountain it seemed more like an inner garden.



When coming in Turkey I said to myself that I want to experience a hammam, but all the ones in Istanbul seemed a bit of a tourist trap. So I went out of my way to find a neighbourhood hammam in Bursa. I went to Kaynarca Kaplicasi, which dates from the 17th century and uses thermal waters as the hot water tap. The hammam experience was exactly how I wanted it. Raw, authentic and very Turkish. No one spoke English and they were all very curious and kind with me. The bath itself was a marble room with a bench along the walls and marble basins with a hot and a cold tap. You took combined water from the basin and poured it on yourself. The woman who scrubbed and massaged me was quite raw and unapologetic too. I never knew what would come next. Another bucket of water on my head? A super hot towel on my back? Scrubbing my face? I was pretty much like a doll in her hands and the language barrier impeded me from refusing anything. With time left to spare until my seabus back I went to the city center and admired the sunset from an elevated platform where the old city walls used to be. I also managed to sketch the Tophane Clock tower just before I went back to Istanbul.

## Day 9



The seabus to Yalova was larger than the one yesterday and the scenery of the journey was even more fascinating as we passed by the Princess Islands. The time to get to Iznik is shorter than to Bursa, which makes sit a more appropriate day trip. Once called Nicaea this is a

small town first settled by Alexander the Great and had on and off Byzantine and Ottoman rulers.

Since I knew that the tile museum was under renovation since 2012 I started my visit with a stroll on their main pedestrian street leading to the Yesil Camii mosque. In my Iznik tiles in Istanbul guide I read that the industry declined drastically in the 17th century due to the import of chinese



ceramics and fewer large projects like mosques and palaces that required lots of tiles. So I was quite surprised to find a street full of workshops and people painting ceramics. I was ecstatic! I was so happy and enthusiast that I think I was the one overly friendly, not the Turkish people minding their own business and painting tiles. As I walking from shop to shop I came across 'Brave Brush'. There I met and hanged out for quite a while with Emrah, a young ceramic artist. He told me about his process of tile painting, how he became an Iznik artist and he showed me works with his own modern personal style. I thought his graphics were amazing and that he would be a

great illustrator. The brush is brave because his hand is so steady that he doesn't need to use a transfer paper to transfer a hand drawing design. He draws directly on the ceramic and then uses a brush to trace the drawing. He also told me about the firing and how changes in temperature can affect the colour of the glazing, making it more yellow. It was an amazing afternoon and I even got invited back to paint my own tiles if I want to. I got myself a small pot with an Ottoman tulip, Emrah's favourite classic motif and I went on to other shops and the Yesil Camii mosque.



Yesil Camii is a beautiful mosque across from the tile museum. It's beautifully framed, which I didn't manage to quite get into my sketch. I also went to see the Green Mosque, which was more modern, with a green dome and green geometric motifs painted on the outside.

I walked to the Iznik lake to admire the sunset as I anticipated that there will be a good scenery. The lake is oriented east-west, and the city is at the east end. This makes the sun go behind the lake flanked by mountains every night.

My journey back was smooth. I was tired but incredibly satisfied. In the seabus I chatted with some giggly girls via Google translate. They were from Eastern Turkey and they worked as an accountant and hair dresser. They were very curious and chatty and they told me that the migration of young people from eastern to western Turkey is common. They also wished to travel and see the world like most young people I met so far...



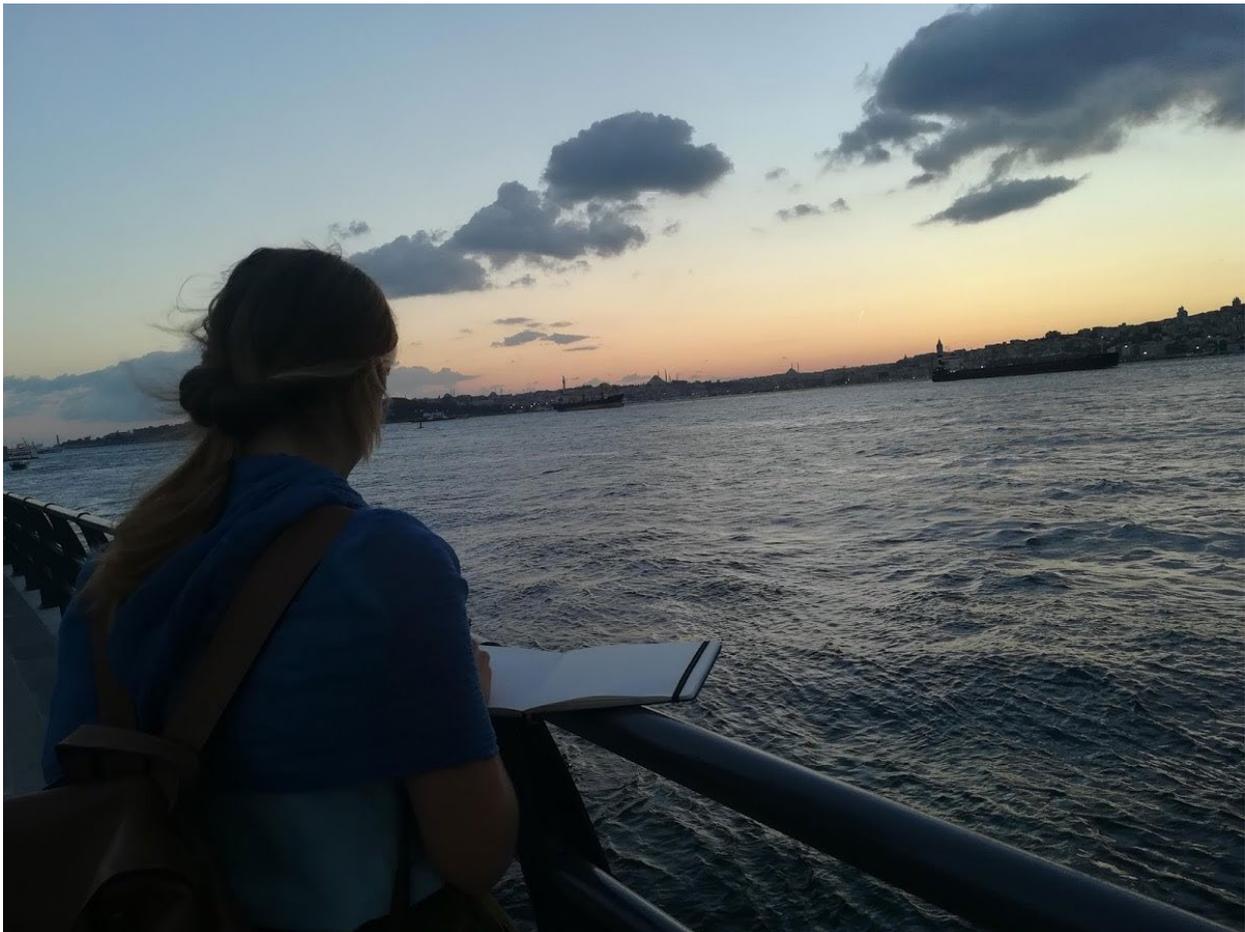
## Day 10

Today I went on a Bosphorus hop-on hop-off cruise. It started from the Dolmabahce palace and passed by it so I could admire it in its whole splendour.

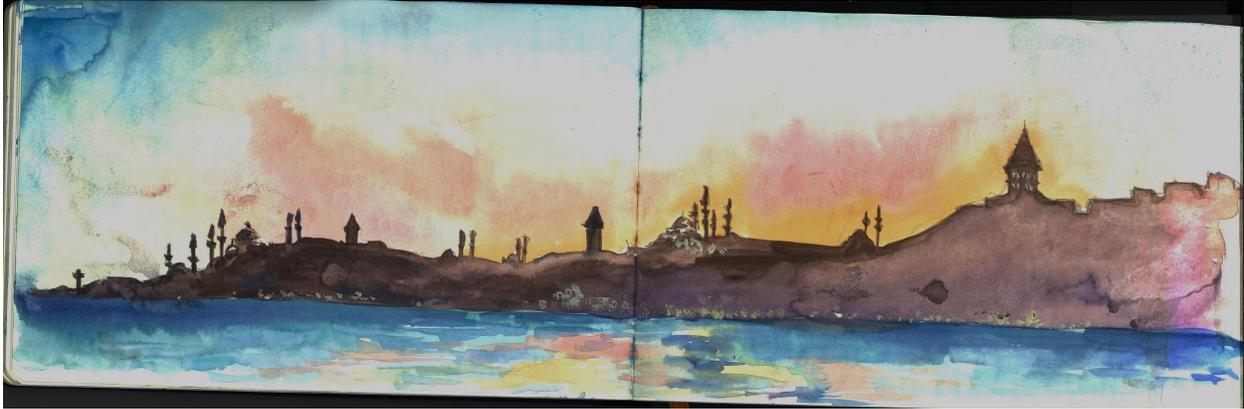


I hopped off at the Anadolu Hisari, a fortress on the Asian side across from the Rumeli Hisari. The views were so amazing! I sat with some tea and a waffle and sketched Rumeli Hisari. The place was so amazing! I spend more time walking around the narrow streets surrounding Anadolu Hisari and sketching than I planned. The second stop on the Asian side was the Beylerbeyi Palace, built in the 19th century in order to host guests. Everything is fancy and posh around here too. From the boat I could see plenty of villas with their own pool and boat parked on the Bosphorus.

In the evening I met with Wassim, the guy from Algeria I met at the Topkapi Palace. We went to Uskudar and admired the sunset and he was kind enough to wait for me while I did a skyline sketch. It turned out to be a pretty poor representation of a visually and artistically famous spot, but I am blaming the wind and the anxiousness of having someone waiting for me, rather than my skills. We had dinner and I got to know him better. He is a very sweet guy and he talks with lots of love about his teenage sister. He told me lots of stories of abuse and religious fanaticism from Algeria, and how disappointed he is in the political class. That's why he is quite apathetic when it comes to voting, as many people with his liberal view are. We lived quite close to each other so we took together the Marmaray train back on the European side. So my last night in Istanbul was quite enjoyable.



Istanbul is such an amazing place. It's not just the picturesque scenery, it's also the people and the atmosphere. That's why I am pretty sure I will return. For Istanbul, and tile painting!



### **Day 11**

I initially had a morning flight to Cappadocia but a month ago the flight was changed to an afternoon one. So while I was hoping to have a full afternoon in Goreme, it turns out that this is more of a transition day. I arrived in the evening in Goreme and my first impression was that it is a very touristy place. Goreme seems to have only tourist accommodation and entertainment and the people working here commute from nearby villages. This is probably because Goreme sits in a valley full with the famous fairy chimneys. The tourists around me seem more from Western and eastern Asian countries, rather than from other muslim countries like many of the tourists in Istanbul.

### **Day 12**

Cappadocia is a fairly extended region and without a car there are some interesting landmarks that one can not reach. So I convinced myself to take a bus tour in order to explore some locations that were further away.

The scenery here is amazing. The fairy chimneys are made of tuff and ash base with a lava top. Since the lava is stronger than the base to erosion, nature forms beautiful mushroom shaped formations. But the dry climate is key, because otherwise these wouldn't be visible.



The first stop of the tour was a panorama view of Goreme. It was truly beautiful and amazing, but full of InstaTourists. Everyone from other buses on the same route was tacking thousand of selfies and pictures.

Of course I am taking photos too, but I also want to experience the place in person, not through my camera only. The frenezy was so large that

someone from my bus (young Indian man) took some unsolicited pictures of me because 'I was just sitting there'.

Then we went to the Derinkuyu underground city and while I was expecting caves in a mountain, this literally was a underground city in a relatively flat area. This is the largest underground city of the area and its estimated that it has a capacity of 20 000 people and their livestock !!! That's huge! Another thing that I liked was their defense mechanism in case you were following them down the corridors. They had these intricate corridors which they could block behind them with a huge stone wheel with a tiny hole in the middle. This is how they stabbed their following enemies one by one. Then we went to the Ala church which was carved out of stone, starting from one of the mountain caves. This church was next to an oil refinery and belonged to a wealthy family. I was fascinated to how similar to the Byzantine style the Christian murals inside the cave were. Although from the 4th century many of the paintings were well preserved. I could easily see how the Byzantine style evolved 'naturally' from that kind of depiction. Another interesting thing was that all the saints has the face and eyes carved out during ottoman occupation because of the strong prohibition of iconography and representation in Islam.

We had lunch in a very nice and lush spot in Ihlara valley where I managed to sketch one of the huts over the river. In the afternoon we visited the Selime monastery, which is basically a whole mountain with caves and a church. I really enjoyed exploring different rooms and finding bits of old paintings. The people from the nearby villages still used the lowermost caves for storage as many had makeshift doors and locks on them. The village at the end of the mountain was simple and looked poor, very much like Romanian villages. Soon we were surrounded by kids dressed poorly, with no shoes, asking for money in exchange of hugs. Again, it definitely felt a bit weird and uncomfortable, mainly because the attitude of the other tourists was to take pictures and admire how 'culturally authentic' and 'in harmony with nature' the place was. No, they were unfortunately just a poor community.

That where the tour ended. I did wonder on the bus ride back to Goreme if I made a mistake taking the tour. Maybe. The places were definitely interesting and I am happy I got to explore places unreachable by public transportation. Unfortunately I shared the experience with people that were preoccupied with selfies and the perfect photo most of the time, with little interest in history, culture, or Turkey in general.



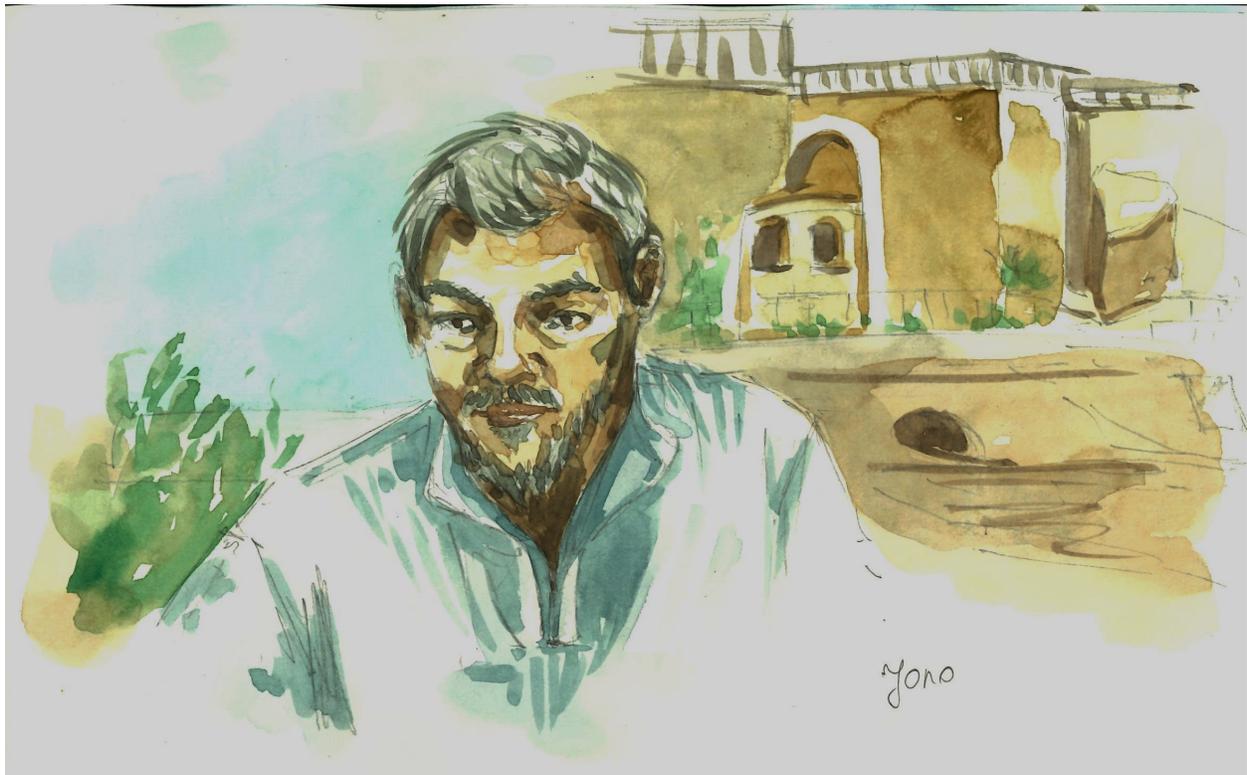
### Day 13

Today as a day a lot more in my comfort zone. I started my day by hiking in the Pigeon valley and looking at some rocks on the way. It's not all just tuff, there are also some carbonates. The trail was closed and I had to trace it back for a while. That's when I met an interesting group of travellers. Ingrid was 39 and she was an English teacher from Indonesia. She was incredibly well travelled and we spend the rest of the hike talking about her adventures in Australia, Chile, US, and Europe. We discovered we were both quite organised travellers and we enjoyed doing hotel searches and planning trips more generally.

Domika was a Slovenian girl just two years older than me. She just finished her master degree and she was taking a break and travelled with her friend Ingrid. They knew each other because Ingrid hosted Dominika in Indonesia while she was working on a project there. She was super nice and we had plenty of things in common, including our disapproval towards the huge numbers of InstaTourists in Cappadocia. We talked about our professional life, and passion for different sports, and life as an immigrant in Western Europe. We got on quite well and I hope to keep in touch with her. Then the third member of their party was Yono, Ingrid's dad. He was 65 but he looked so young! He was incredibly cheerful and energetic. I showed him my sketches so far and he took pictures of each one of them, enjoyed them with child-like joy.

I sketched the Uchisar castle over a tea break before going in in order to see 360 views over Cappadocia. I could see Goreme from there and the valley I hiked on, as well as plenty of other valleys and geomorphological features.

I ended up spending a lot of my day with these 3 travellers and the whole day was at a slower pace than I planned. I enjoyed having lunch with them and I sketched Yono during our meal.



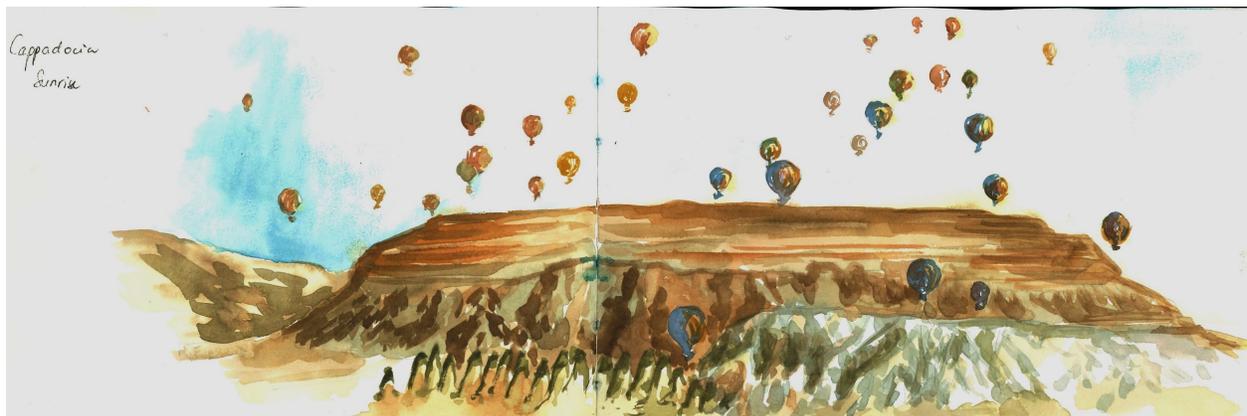
He was so incredibly happy to be part of my sketchbook. On the way back they preferred to take a bus, while I went on to hike through the Love valley and explore the fairy chimneys.



## Day 14 – Morning

What an early morning! The sunrise over Goreme was beautiful. It was amazing seeing all the hot air balloons take off. I tried to sketch but the light was actually quite sharp at some point and I couldn't see as well as I wanted.

I was shocked by the tourist behaviour at the sunset. To begin with, almost all women I saw were wearing makeup and some sort of dress. Some also brought with them high heels on a 5am on a steep hill, in order to take the perfect shot. And others even had different outfits. They were all looking 'lost' and 'candid' into the sunrise while girlfriends or boyfriends were taking hundreds of pictures. While I was sketching a German girl approached me and we walked back to Goreme together. She told me she was on Erasmus in Sophia and that's why she came to visit Turkey. She also wanted to go to Bucharest so I gave her some rough advice. Then I got ready for my bus to Konya!



## Afternoon

The transit to Konya happened according to the plan and the bus journey was smooth and very pleasant actually. After my arrival I went straight to the Mevlana museum to see Rumi's shrine. There were some English explanations but not to all of the objects. The museum is basically a mosque with small rooms around the inner yard. The rooms were each presenting clothes, musical instruments, calligraphy instruments, and objects that belonged to the lodge, to Rumi, and his son.



Mevlana Museum.  
 I arrived in Konya!! For this event all happened as planned and there were no delays or postponing. Upon my arrival in Konya I travelled and went straight to the Mevlana Museum. There are some English explanations but not to all the objects so my understanding is a bit fragmented. The museum is basically what looks like a narrow street with ~~rooms~~ rooms around the inner yard. The rooms were each presenting the clothes, musical instruments, calligraphy instruments, objects that belonged to the lodge and to Rumi and his son.

It was very similar to the Mevlana lodge in Istanbul but it also had new information. I think this place was very similar to a monastery and then got closed when the orders got banned in Turkey, so the mosque itself wasn't a running mosque anymore. However, visitors still had to cover their shoes with plastic bags, but not take them off. Inside there was the tomb of Rumi, his son, and other leaders of the lodge after them. So although this wasn't a mosque per se, many of the visitors were walking around praying at the shrine and objects that belonged to Rumi, while other were just taking selfies. It was an odd mix and I didn't quite know how to relate to the place: praying space or museum?

On my exit I visited the mosque nearby using the women's entrance. It looked relatively new, with a modern interior.

Konya is a nice place. Smaller than Bursa, with less tourists. People look a lot more conservative than in Bursa and Istanbul, and they stare more too. It has less cafes per meter square than Istanbul, and surprisingly people are a bit more harrasive with selling, begging, inviting you in their restaurant, etc.

## Day 15

My second day in Konya started with the Karatay Madrasa museum.



Hybrid Head Palace Ceremonies  
 13th cent. Palace Period  
 "Karatay Madrasa" inscription  
 double headed eagle with the inscription 'el muqam' and 'es sultan' will become the Sultan's symbol.  
 Karatay Madrasa

Madrasas were schools of 'Islamic and positive sciences' and central Konya is full of them. Most are different types of museum now. The standard structure is that of a inner large 'pool' under a dome surrounded by student and teaching rooms. The school that I visited today is a tile museum dedicated to Seljuk tiles and ceramic, so of course it was a delight and pleasure to visit. The interior was fully covered in green-turquoise star shaped tiles, very similar to the Green Tomb in Bursa. Among the objects the star shaped tiles with geometrical and animal motifs were predominant. The ceramic is red, while the Iznik tiles are famous for the white ceramic.



Then I walked around the Aladdin mound, which is a hill with a park and a mosque, before going to the stone works museum. This was also really interesting since intricate stone carvings are the mark of Seljuk architecture, and Konya offers the best and oldest examples of this. Then I wandered around the city center and into a nice cafe for a break. Again, there was one of those cafes with women only customers and staff. I never realize how few women

are in public places until I see them all at once and then I notice. In the evening I found an amazing terrace overlooking Rumi's shrine so I couldn't help myself from sketching it. My day ended at the Mevlana Cultural Center to watch the 'sema' ceremony. I was expecting a small cosy stage with balconies like the one I saw at the lodge in Istanbul, but it was a huge stage in a modern building.



Again I felt a weird mix on how I was supposed to relate to what I was seeing. Was it a dance? A performance? Or was it someone's prayer? As the dancers entered the scene they kneeled and bowed multiple times. The opening prayer of the Quran was also said and their swirling seemed

more like a moving meditation rather than a dance. People applauded at the end but I wasn't sure if that was really the appropriate thing to do. Since orders are banned now in Turkey I am very curious if the men dancing relate to their movements as a prayer and spiritual act or as a performance. They rotated for about 30 minutes so I had the time to do a quick sketch.



## Day 16

This is my last day in Konya and in Turkey! I had an evening flight so my day began with packing and a pursuit of finding postcards. Although they sell absolutely everything as a souvenir postcards are not very popular, and the ones that you find are of quite poor quality.

Then I went to the Azizia mosque, one of the few examples of a baroque mosque in Konya. I walked to the Konya Ethnography museum which had clothes, furniture, carpets, and other objects from the 18th-20th centuries. I was very excited to see some black and white photos of Turkish women wearing traditional clothing, since the representation of women in art was poor or non-existent to the most of museums I have been to. They weren't wearing a headscarf and had coins in their braids, plenty of jewellery, and layers of clothing. They all reminded me of Romanian gypsies. Then I left for the Archeology museum which was focused on Roman tombstones and Neolithic objects found at a site near Konya. I was particularly impressed by some skeletons buried with bracelets and in the fetal position, which reminded me of the tombs and shaman burial traditions in South Siberia.

I finished my day at the women-only hammam as I was curious to see how it will differ from Bursa. It turns out it was quite different. The corridors were narrower and smaller, and you had to bend down to go to different cleaning and steam rooms. Towards the end of my stay three curious teenage girls came around me and tried to talk to me. However, without my phone and the power of Google translate our exchange was very limited. The first thing they were curious about was to see if I was married, and where I am from. They asked a lot about my faith, and they seemed very insistent on it. Once they understood I was Christian they all seemed terrified and started pointing at the sky, and say that Allah is only one. It made me think that from the outside it's not obvious that Christianity is a monotheistic religion. Of course I agreed that there is only one God, and then they tried to get me to pray with them, and repeat a prayer after them. Of course that didn't quite happen. Although I asked them about Instagram and they all nodded yes, when we were out none come to talk to me once I obviously had my phone. Maybe because their grandma and moms were keeping an eye on them. So I didn't push for it.

I then took a bus to the airport, only to find there was a 90 min delay. That was fine. As it didn't impact my connection to London, as I left plenty of time between the flights. There was no sketching today, as my mind was mainly on my travel back and logistics.

Turkey was truly amazing and I feel both humbled and inspired now. I know I will go back to Istanbul, and I really want to go back and paint tiles with Emrah. I see Emrah's works on Instagram everyday now, as he posts often, and I chatted with Emine too. I loved Turkey, but it's not just rainbows and beautiful sunsets. There is no Wikipedia here. The website booking.com is restricted too. The society is patriarchal with mainly men engaged in the workforce. It's all beautiful and fascinating to me but Emine, the girls in the seabus, the girls from the hammam, the girl from USK Istanbul, they all want to properly speak English and travel too, and do all the things that for me are a click away.

I also really enjoyed sketching in public, once I got used with all the curious looks. Without that I wouldn't have talked to Kubi, Emine, the lady from Pakistan, and plenty of other random tourists. I enjoyed sharing my sketches with people. It was like we were all travelling together and seeing familiar landmarks but through my eyes.

It was an amazing trip and I am curious to see how it will manifest further in my life and art - Thank you!

*Advice for solo women travelling through Turkey:*

As you might have guessed from my diary reading advice from Western visitors, and experiencing Istanbul as an eastern european produced a contrast between my expectations and the reality. Of course the first advice to give would be to document yourself from all kind of sources available on the Internet and in your social circle. In my experience I was mainly approached by two types of men: those that want to sell me something and the ones that were genuinely curious about me (my drawing). Once you have covered the basics and arrived in Turkey as a solo female traveller my advice is the following: drop the western hat and don't be afraid to be 'rude' (by western standards). By that I specifically mean, to not feel obliged to engage in conversation with vendors if you are clearly not interesting in purchasing anything, don't be afraid to refuse impromptu 'guides', don't be afraid to straight blank people that want to show or sell you something. I also suggest trying to avoid eye contact, or prolonged eye contact and smiling at strangers (men) while walking on the street. All these will just signal that you know exactly where you are going, what restaurant you want to eat in, and what you want to visit and that you are not available for conversations. Unfortunately, Istanbul is full of tourist traps and although I got less selling harassment than I was expecting, there was still some. Cappadocia has even more tourist traps and targeted activities. Surprisingly, I found Konya the place where people harassed me the most to buy things. And I think that while in Cappadocia and Istanbul they have millions of tourists, Konya doesn't quite see the same number. So people were more insistent with trying to 'show me around', invite me in restaurants, or even begging for money. Again, it might sound harsh but don't engage in conversation, smiling or eye contact, but just move on.