

Travel Diary



Turkey, 2014

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I would like to offer Victoria Short and all those associated with the Roger Short memorial fund a massive thank you. This scholarship fund made the trip possible, as I was entirely dependent on it, and it allowed me to make my itinerary as flexible and diverse as I could have wished. I also wish to express my thanks to the Master for his support, and the College for lots of important travel advice, as this was the first time I was travelling alone in a foreign country.

The history of Turkey reads like the history of mankind – from the Hittites to the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Selcuks and Ottomans – and being able to visit the place which at least three major world civilizations thought important enough to battle for was amazing. One of my finals papers this year is intimately connected with the history of Turkey, as is my thesis, and as a historian (and one especially interested in art and visual material), the advantage gained from actually seeing structures and surviving materials first-hand and being able to travel to experience the far-off cultures I have been studying about is almost impossible to overstate.

I look forward to one day returning to this tremendous country.

On a whim and not looking forward to the long wait at Heathrow till my flight boarded, I bought Dan Brown's *Inferno* at the airport. I'm not usually one for 'thrillers', but an easy read was precisely what I was looking for after the long eight weeks of term. It was an enjoyable read, partially because it turned out to be full of art, Renaissance, Venice and Florence references (which anyone who has ever met me will know I talk nine to the dozen about) but mostly because coincidentally the climax of the novel happens to take place here, in Istanbul! Having not known this when I picked up the book, I decided that this must be no less than a sign from the heavens and was feeling quite smug about the trip ahead.

The fun read also made up for the fact that Turkish Airlines had somehow bungled up my meal and had no vegetarian food to serve me: "So a turkey sandwich isn't okay? Would some chicken be alright?" I had to very gently let down both my air hostess and my stomach by telling them that it unfortunately really wouldn't. I did, however, have the 'Turkish cheese pastry', which was really good, and seemed indicative of the kind of thing I will probably be eating the next two weeks. This is not an issue: I like bread. I also had a fun conversation with the lovely gentleman seated next to me on the plane who was also travelling to Turkey as a tourist (the DSLR gave it away), and we exchanged itineraries and shared mutual excitement.

By the time we landed, it was clear I had somehow managed to hitch rainclouds onto the airplane and brought a torrential downpour with me from England. I'd had an hour of sleep in the last 36 hours so I crashed as soon as I got to the hotel, although despite the unpleasant weather I couldn't resist and went on a short walk (umbrella in hand) and spotted the Hagia Sophia minarets! I am definitely in the old bit of the city. The roads are tiny and cobbled, with absolutely minuscule shops and cafés. The impression I got on my way here from the airport is that Istanbul is very European in terms of architecture, planning and city style but the crowds are much more Asian in terms of dress/attitudes (not grumpy at all about constantly being cut in line...!)

I also had my first rip off! Because I'm staying in Istanbul for so long the hotel generously offered me a free dinner upon arrival – when leaving, I bought an extra bottle of water and needed to pay the waiter 3 liras for it. Not having any change, I gave him a 20 lira note which he returned with a ten lira note and 7 lira coins. I was excited at seeing the coins because I've never seen Turkish coins and picked a few up as he hovered about; he then just picked up the note and said something to the effect of "alright, you're done then?" and I felt terribly awkward and couldn't well say "actually, no not really, I was going to pick up that ten lira note..." It was just an awkward situation but probably one I could have taken control of.

I am really excited about going out into the city tomorrow! I plan to start big, with the Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace and so on.

I've realised that the reason my arms have been aching all of today is probably because of hauling seven boxes into storage for the summer before leaving college yesterday...



A clichéd confession: The highlight of my day today was definitely the Blue Mosque, despite thinking for a shamefully long period of time that it was Hagia Sophia. They're not great in terms of signs here, quality and quantity (see my getting lost later) and the two monuments are literally opposite each other and look somewhat similar to the first-time visitor if you don't already know what is what. The Blue Mosque is, in my opinion, infinitely nicer looking from the outside, which is why I made the assumption. A fun fact about its inside is that the chandeliers once had ostrich eggs on them to 'avoid cobwebs by repelling spiders' - which the Mosque's official website now describes as having been "pillaged" for display in Istanbul's museums. What I also found very interesting was how very similar it looks architecturally to the Taj Mahal in India: they were built around the same time, but in very different kingdoms and contexts for usage (as the Taj is a tomb). The idea of 'Islamic architecture' and just how widely it was diffused I found really striking.

On the subject of museums with ostrich eggs, I spent about 20-25 minutes walking round on what seemed like unceasingly upward sloped roads looking for the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum but after going round in many a circle and asking many people (they're either overly keen (India! Shah Rukh Khan! Namaste!) or not very keen at all to give directions...) I discovered to my disappointment that it's closed for the year. Luckily, I plan to salvage this by checking out the Pera Museum at some point, which is private but apparently has some incredible Oriental paintings and a special exhibition right now on East-meets-West, ambassadors, diplomats and the kind of thing.

Another fun thing that I came across was the Yerebatan Cistern, which used to be an open air basilica complete with gardens and things until it a) was pushed underground over the years and b) was turned into an absolutely massive cistern held up by a forest of columns. The entrance and exit span several roads over ground. I don't really think in numbers but I think the figure was something like it can hold 800,000 cubic metres of water.

Apart from this, the Hagia Sophia, the Big Palace (bad translation?) Mosaic Museum and the Archaeology, Ancient Orient and Islamic Ceramics Museums were also admired, all courtesy of my 72-hour Müze Pass.

It is amazing just how widely and well connected Istanbul was. The obelisk in the picture was meant for Karnak in Egypt, a Venetian doge is buried in Hagia Sophia, the similarities between the Taj and the Blue Mosque I mentioned earlier, I saw a sarcophagus covered with etchings of Alexander the Great, and heard of sultans who had been to Budapest!

Onwards and upwards tomorrow with the Grand Bazaar and Topkapi Palace.

(watermark: the interior of the Blue Mosque)

I started off today with the Topkapi Palace, which is absolutely massive. It was so big that getting a handle on everything that was happening in various places was a difficult, if not impossible task, especially having to fight the crowds of guide-led tourists somehow always walking *en masse* in the opposite direction to one. In any case, particularly enjoyable was the fact that all the furnishings in the Audience Chamber (carpet, curtains, cushions, whatnot) were apparently changed for each individual ambassador and emissary depending on their status and how much the sultan could be bothered to impress them. Speaking of the sultans, their opulence was ridiculous. Diamonds the size of my fist, casual bowls full of emeralds and rubies, gold daggers, tons of ivory (literal tons) - the most exciting though was the Peacock Throne, although sadly described here only as 'Nadir Shah's throne'. It's the throne Shah Jahan (Mughal ruler of India) had built and I've always been keen to see it. I must have seen pictures of it but was surprised by the real thing - it was longer/wider than it was high, low to the ground and not very much like a European throne. In continuum with yesterday's theme of, well, continuity, I also saw a British Order of the Garter presented to one of the sultans, Swiss watches, and listened to an Italian composition for a sultan's royal entry to the palace.

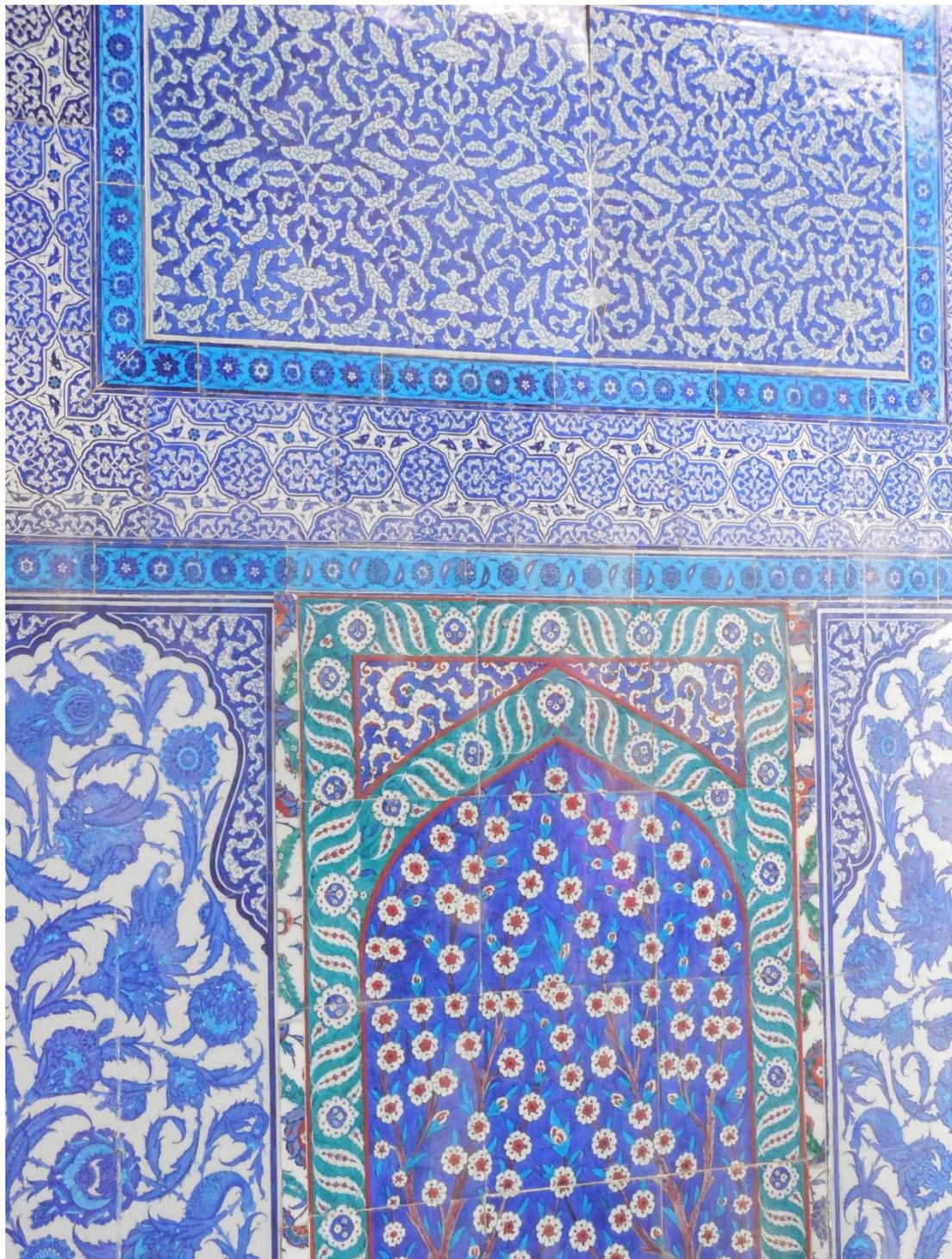
After a standard but tasty lunch of flatbread, eggplant salad and a sort of cheese-filled roll came the Grand Bazaar - I found a Starbucks, a Subway, a Burger King and a McDonalds on the way, shocking when I hadn't seen any chain restaurants for so long and thought Istanbul was (happily) devoid of them. I'd read about the Grand Bazaar being incredibly busy and jam-packed and its sellers persistent to the point of harassment and that this had caused the tourist crowd to thin out quite a bit - but honestly it wasn't too bad, both in terms of crowd or in terms of overly eager shopkeepers. They'd decided that I was Pakistani today and called out to me accordingly.

Picky me doesn't like fruits in desserts, or dates so Turkish delight/ any confectionary is not my thing, so after this I headed over to Suleymaniye Mosque, which took me right through the heart of the old, old city - a bit scary, away from all the tourists I've been getting used to having round and almost claustrophobic but it was fine. Legend has it that after the foundations for this were laid but before building proper had started, the architect pulled a disappearing act - for five years. The sultan was (fairly understandably) furious, and when Sinan returned to Istanbul he explained that the mosque would be so massive that the foundation needed to settle into the soil for five years before any sort of building could commence. Not sure how this equates with actual architecture rules, but the final product was worth the time. It's a really nice building, elegant in its simplicity, but still manages to be very imposing.

I got there at 5.30 and it had just shut to visitors for 'prayer time', and the guard outside said I'd have to wait for half an hour for it to open again. I ducked round, wrapped my trusty scarf round my head and went back and he proceeded to let me in! Was slightly ashamed and slightly pleased by this skulduggery until I noticed that he was letting other tourists in one by one anyway - I no longer had anything to be ashamed or pleased of. It was beautiful being inside, because this mosque was far less rushed than the Blue Mosque had been with all the other tourists, and is incredibly elegant in its

exterior and interior design. Other bits of the mosque's complex included the 'addicts alley' cafe where opium and hashish were (once) sold.

My plan for tomorrow is to chase the Suleymanyî architect to Edirne, a city about a three-hour journey from here, to see the building that he considered 'his masterpiece'. I haven't got bus tickets or anything yet so let's see how this goes!



(Watermark and picture: the characteristic blue of Turkey; tiles from inside Topkapı)

Day Four: the city of fountains

Edirne

Had been aiming for an early start today but the amount of time I gained in waking up early I lost figuring out how to get to Istanbul Ötogar, the main bus station that services national and international buses. It did mean though that once I had it figured out I got to sample both Istanbul's tram and metro system: I loved the tram, so speedy and clean, the metro seemed older/rustier but I can't really fault it either. Was also pleased to notice that on the metro line I was on 20/21 of the stops were wheelchair accessible!

I'd decided beforehand which company I was going to approach to find a bus to Edirne, but the three people at the counter spoke zero English. We had a slightly exasperating and very prolonged sign session where I confirmed I wanted the next bus to Edirne but he refused to offer me a ticket back to Istanbul leaving any earlier than 8 pm. As it's a three hour journey I was less than keen on this, so I drew him a clock and we arranged on a ticket for the 6 o'clock bus. The bus was really good, with a/c, drinks, a mini TV per seat and snacks all provided. The TV had a film with a sort of Turkish Mila Kunis being smothered with a pillow by a man, the man kissing her hand about 5 minutes later and then rushing away as she grabbed his wrist in what appeared to be an effort to make him stay. All in all it seemed like a disturbing watch so I elected to sleep instead.

The Selimiye Camii, the biggest 'attraction' of Edirne, was immediately on my left as I got off the coach so it made sense to start there. They have a little museum attached and the mosque was once again breathtakingly beautiful, my favourite bit being the 24 step marble staircase apparently carved from a single piece. One of the exits of the mosque led me you underground to the Arasta Bazaar, unique items of which included fruit-shaped soaps and a marzipan-type 'badam halva', an Edirne speciality (the other speciality being roasted liver). I asked the lady who sold me the badam dish how best to get to the two rivers that flow through the city, which can be crossed by the seven existing Ottoman bridges. The lady gestured at the sun outside, told me it was an 8 km walk and offered to help me catch a taxi. Not keen on taking a taxi and slightly dejected, I called the tourist office and several repeated phone calls later found their office. They gave me a map to the city, told me it was a half an hour walk to the bridges and also handed me a lovely guidebook!

I got to the two bridges in 15 minutes, so they were definitely not 8 kilometres away. The scenery was lovely, the river really wide and the place practically empty so very peaceful, but the bridges themselves apart from being old weren't as fun because obviously you couldn't quite see the sides or much of the design of either. They both had sentry look-out stations at the very middle so I sat there for the better part of an hour (in the shade!) and read my new guidebook.

Heading back I passed through Saraçlar Street, the main commercial and shopping centre of the city, and made my best investment yet: a sun hat, because today the heat really started getting to me. Planning to venture over to European Istanbul tomorrow armed with it.

(Watermark: Selimiye Cami)

I began today with the Dolmabahçe Palace. I'd wanted to take a ferry out there and assumed that they were fairly frequent throughout the day but apparently they only run in the early hours of the morning, so I've had to push that to another day. It was really interesting seeing Dolmabahçe after the medieval Topkapi: it was built in the mid-19th century as the Ottoman answer to European architecture, and achieves that and beyond, rivalling Versailles and Schönbrunn in grandeur if not size in my opinion. Its construction cost 1/4th of the annual revenue of the ENTIRE Ottoman Empire (ie a lot of money) - for example just the ceilings themselves put together have 14 tons of gold. Personally I haven't yet got tired of grand palaces, so its beauty was all the more a cause for disappointment: for reasons unbeknownst to me, and despite it still being owned by the Turkish state and not a private company a) They have an arbitrary cap of 3,000 visitors per day after which the palace just shuts b) the only way to visit the palace is with a guided tour c) The tour guide spoke broken English d) To a group of about fifty people and e) for maybe 20 minutes in total, not nearly enough for a palace with over 600 rooms! We were just led from one room to the next with explanations for about four or five of them, and not encouraged to linger. This was very disappointing.

Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and their national hero, died staying in this palace so when he died all the clocks in the palace were stopped and set to 9:05 (his death time); fortunately this slightly creepy practice has now just been limited to the room in the harem where he died.

From here I was super excited to take the funicular to Taksim Square. Said funicular was entirely underground, while I had been expecting the funiculars of the Swiss Alps, but never mind. I'd always thought Taksim Square was a large park, and maybe I missed something, but I only just saw a large square and a statue I then proceeded to walk down what is Istanbul's main non-touristy shopping centre to get to Pera Museum, which is both free for students and such a good museum! I absolutely loved it, it was miles better in terms of management and display and information than the archeological one that I was slightly disappointed by, and it's really unfortunate that Pera is not on the tourist radar. They had two modern art exhibitions on: Andy Warhol and a Stephen Chambers, but one entire floor was dedicated to paintings of European and Ottoman ambassadors and painters which was great as it's what I intend to write my undergraduate thesis on.

After a speedy lunch I climbed to the top of Galata Tower, first constructed on that particular site in the sixth century and the one standing today sometime in the medieval period, for a fantastic birds-eye view of the city. The Istanbul skyline is dotted with minarets but it's only when you climb up that you realise how close the rest of the buildings are to each other, how unplanned the city is and also the fact that it's not at all on level land. This was also the tower from where a guy called Çelebe took off to fly about six kilometres on artificial wings in the seventeenth century (he obviously hadn't heard the story of Icarus...). The sultan at the time, Murad IV, was clearly a confused man: first he offered to reward Çelebe for this feat but then ended up exiling him to Algeria as a perceived 'threat'.

I spent the rest of the evening in a café in this area people-watching, which was nice and relaxing and then snatched a short nap before trying out a restaurant highly recommended for its authentic Turkish food on Trip Advisor, despite being in the super touristy area of the city. The waiters themselves were lovely enough to have made it worth it, and they gave me a Turkish tea on-the-house at the end (apple flavoured, nice enough if you like tea, or flavoured tea, neither of which I do!).



(Watermark and picture: Dolmabache Palace and the view from the top of the Galata Tower)

Day Six: the face that launched a thousand ships?

Troy

It's amazing how much difference a good explanation can make: I joined a guided tour at Troy today (locals call it Troia), and the guide is currently in the process of writing a book on the archaeology of Troy and was incredibly knowledgeable about it, which made what could have just been rocks and rubble probably one of my favourite parts of this trip so far (I do realise I write this almost every day!). Troy is pretty far from anywhere - a 5-5 1/2 hour drive from either of my closest 'bases', so it's been an early morning and a late night for me.

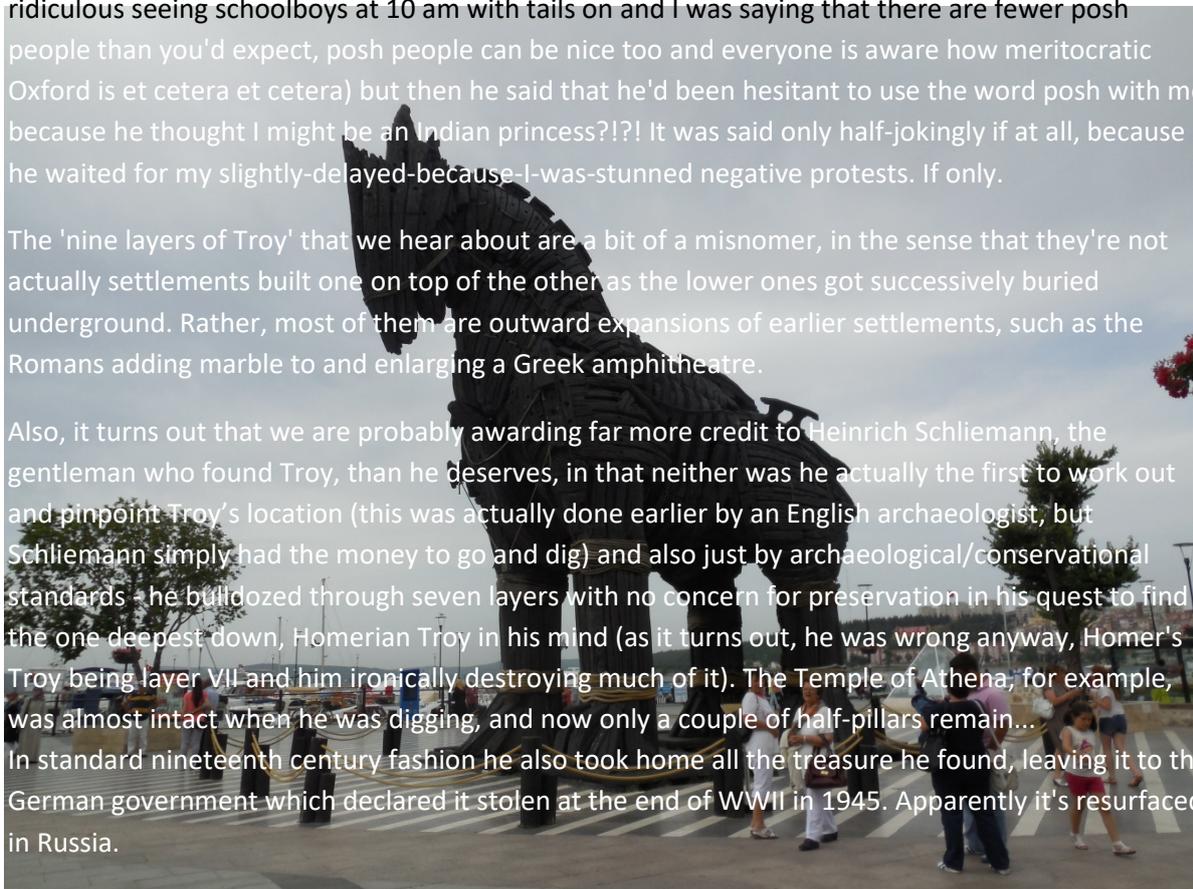
I met two Australians from Sydney at lunch today and was doing the usual debunking of Oxford myths to them, I think I let out the word 'posh' (only because he said he had been to Eton and it was ridiculous seeing schoolboys at 10 am with tails on and I was saying that there are fewer posh people than you'd expect, posh people can be nice too and everyone is aware how meritocratic Oxford is et cetera et cetera) but then he said that he'd been hesitant to use the word posh with me because he thought I might be an Indian princess?!?! It was said only half-jokingly if at all, because he waited for my slightly-delayed-because-I-was-stunned negative protests. If only.

The 'nine layers of Troy' that we hear about are a bit of a misnomer, in the sense that they're not actually settlements built one on top of the other as the lower ones got successively buried underground. Rather, most of them are outward expansions of earlier settlements, such as the Romans adding marble to and enlarging a Greek amphitheatre.

Also, it turns out that we are probably awarding far more credit to Heinrich Schliemann, the gentleman who found Troy, than he deserves, in that neither was he actually the first to work out and pinpoint Troy's location (this was actually done earlier by an English archaeologist, but Schliemann simply had the money to go and dig) and also just by archaeological/conservational standards - he bulldozed through seven layers with no concern for preservation in his quest to find the one deepest down, Homeric Troy in his mind (as it turns out, he was wrong anyway, Homer's Troy being layer VII and him ironically destroying much of it). The Temple of Athena, for example, was almost intact when he was digging, and now only a couple of half-pillars remain...

In standard nineteenth century fashion he also took home all the treasure he found, leaving it to the German government which declared it stolen at the end of WWII in 1945. Apparently it's resurfaced in Russia.

Anyway, what I learnt today was that there's no conclusive proof that the Illiad and Odyssey are true stories and if the Trojan War ever happened, and finding Troy has neither proved nor disproved that. Homer wrote his epics almost 500 years after he claimed the War to have happened, based on oral stories, but his descriptions of the site are exemplary, right down to the location of oak trees and vistas. One hole is potentially with the Trojan Horse bit, where as we know it a couple of Greek soldiers hid inside a wooden horse that the Trojans wheeled into the city, the Greek soldiers coming out at night, killing the guards and opening the gates to the city and signalling to their fellow soldiers hid on a nearby island. The islands that Homer describes exist today just as he said they do, but having seen them they are really quite far away - not quite the quick sea crossing three and a half



thousand years ago. How this happened without anyone seeing in that space of time is a puzzle. Then again, if Alexander the Great believed in Homer and even performed a sacrifice to Achilles at Troy, who are we to disagree?



(Watermark and picture: The Trojan horse statue donated to the town by Hollywood after they were finished filming, the probable battle site of the Trojan War)

D

ay Seven: Ups and Downs

Bursa

Today has been interesting. I'd planned a day trip to Bursa, the first capital of the Ottoman Empire. It is an inland city across the Marmara Sea, but dreading the prospect of yet another 5.5 hour coach journey from Istanbul, I decided to take a 1.5 hour ferry to the nearest dock and then a combination of bus and metro for another hour to get there, thus making the journey shorter and prettier and far more enjoyable. I had downloaded exact directions, bus timetables and the like as well, so was fairly confident I could manage this.

It was all smooth sailing (pun unintended) up to Mundanya, the Bursa dock. Getting off the ferry and onto my chosen bus, I realised that tickets needed to be bought from automatic machines and

couldn't be bought on the bus (this is a questionable system in the first place and is where everything began to unravel). The machines were only in Turkish and while sometimes you can work out the 'from' and 'to' bits, these were indecipherable. As I tried to figure this out the bus driver signalled that I had two minutes to get a ticket, and began to pull away. Suddenly my saviour appeared - a middle-aged woman leapt off the bus, ran to me, and pulled me back onto the bus and after a sentence or two to the driver with him nodding his assent, she told me that she would help me retroactively buy a ticket at the ötogar, the main terminal where we were to get off. I was of course super pleased with this and started chatting to this lovely helpful old lady. She spoke very limited English: in broken sentences, she explained that she'd been teaching herself English on the computer. Over the course of the bus journey I told her what I was doing there and we swapped stories. It soon became apparent that the reason I was able to understand some of the stuff she was saying was not because Turkish had been divinely revealed to me overnight but because she was actually reverting back to German when she didn't know the English word: I asked her and it turned out she was visiting a high school friend (who was sat next to her) in Turkey for two months, an annual journey that she makes, while she actually lives in Germany. At this point they both asked to take a photo with me, which I agreed to, and she showed me pictures of her house, two sons, her brother (?), her friend's son, and her son's friends.

After a while we got down and this is where all understandable communication with this lovely lady all but ended. To start with she'd brought me to the wrong stop; nevertheless, she bought me my retrospective ticket and I was thanked her profusely. She then asked me for my ferry ticket back, repeatedly shook her head at it, and marched me over to the main ticket office. This was 12.30 pm, and my ferry back was at 7 in the evening: she told me I had no hope of getting to Bursa and back in

time for this, and suggested buying me a ticket back to the dock. Having looked up the fact that Bursa was a 20-30 minute journey away from the ötogar, I wasn't a ready believer of this, but the two men at the ticket office were nodding their agreement. I thought that the most sensible thing to do then surely would be to get on a bus to Bursa ASAP, so I could at least utilise what time I did have, but they seemed to be enjoying discussing my predicament - in Turkish, of course, and showed no inclination of giving me my return ferry ticket back. I repeatedly said "okay, just tell me how to get to the centrum [centre of the city] from here and got 'poor thing, what does she know' looks

until after almost half an hour more of standing around I was finally pushed into a bus and *then* got to Bursa half an hour later.

An issue with Bursa is that, as I'd figured out, absolutely no one speaks English to the extent that even the wrong pronunciation of Turkish words is met with blank stares. I kept asking for directions to 'Ummi Camii', pronouncing it as it's spelt as I knew the tourist office was near there, but it was only the third person for whom it clicked that I meant 'ummi jamii'. As always, the tourist office was fantastic - spoke more English than anyone else, showered me with tons of maps and guidebooks and gave me super accurate information on how to get back to the port. At this point I finally calmed down and realised that though I had probably lost an hour or so to Well-Meaning But Confused Lady And Co., I could still salvage this.

The second interesting person I met today: I was doing my best impression of looking-lost-at-crossroads and a man stopped to ask me if I was looking for someone: I told him where I wanted to go and he said he'd take me there. Instantly wary I asked him to just point me the way, and he laughed and said that he was neither a tour guide nor selling me something but was headed where I was going in any case because his company is currently restoring the tiles/ceilings/carpets et all of the monuments on that entire site and he was there to check up on them. Having done a conservation internship last summer we got talking, him telling me about his work and his background and life and vice-versa; and when we got there he offered to show me round everywhere. It was great to be shown round by not only someone who knew his stuff but someone who had basically created a lot of it - superficially anyway - and he knew all the ins and outs of everything, turning on fountains for me and taking me places otherwise closed to visitors.

By the time we had said our goodbyes I had not very much time left: I wandered around the bazaar for a bit but saw nothing of much interest, and am currently on the ferry back as I write this. I leave for Izmir tomorrow morning, and am there for three days.



(Watermark and pictures: With the conservationist, the outside of the (blatantly blue) Green Tomb, a couple of creepy mannequins in the Bursa Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts)

D

ays Eight and Nine: sun and sea

Izmir and Cesme

Merhaba from Izmir, this city is lovely! At first I wasn't sure whether or not to include it on my itinerary, sources stating that it's "just a business town". Happily I did still include it, and happily this isn't true, because this weekend have been wonderful.

I got in on Saturday morning, and first off, my hotel room is amazing, because when I had trouble finding a place to stay online my dad offered to use his points to book me a room. The only thing I'd say is that it's definitely a very business hotel, not touristy, for example the front desk recommends that I take a taxi everywhere which is obviously not what I'm doing or within my budget really, and on the first day when I asked the concierge for a map and directions to the first place I wanted to see he said "ah..I wouldn't recommend you go there..it is a ..what do you say..ghetto". So it's a bit intimidating.

Anyway, despite these dire warnings, I continued on to see the agora of Izmir, a hangover from Alexander the Great's time, who ordered the building of this city. It was absolutely empty! A vast expanse of land (see picture) off the main road, lots of dug-up remains, and absolutely no one but a stray dog for company. After having seen and read my fill, I headed over to the Kemaralti Bazaar opposite. I'd read somewhere that you can find anything there if you look long enough, and this is literally true - I saw shops dedicated to things from wigs to wedding dresses, leather works and household goods. Since it's a local bazaar, it's also far less touristy and cheaper than the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, where the hawkers can get annoying, so I thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere walking around here and also had a chance to try one of this region's local specialities: *kumru*, special bread topped with sesame seeds that is usually stuffed with some sort of meat (Turkish sausage and salami) but the veggie version of which has tomatoes, grilled cheese and green pepper.

I walked down to Anansör in the evening, which is the old Jewish quarter of the city, but is interesting because its two main parallel streets, an upper and lower, are 56m apart in height! In 1909 someone decided that this daily trek wasn't fair to the elderly, the disabled, the pregnant, or the lazy, and built an elevator between the two streets. I took a joy ride on this. It was strange seeing people using an elevator between streets as part of their daily commute, but the views from the top were really nice and there was also a very cute café at the top.

This elevator was about three kilometres from my hotel each way, and I walked the entire way along the promenade on the very edge of the sea, and it was beautiful. The sea here is really rough, not someplace you can swim in, but the waves are all the more magnificent for that and I am a big fan of the sea spray. And the wind was phenomenally gusty!

For dinner I decided to try out a restaurant on the seafront, and had a sort of vegetable ciabatta. I'm not a big fan of soft drinks, so I only bought food. A couple of minutes later the waiter came out with a free drink and biscuits, his "treat". Izmir is, again, not very English-heavy.

On Sunday, I visited Çesme, about an hour's drive from Izmir and the westernmost point of Turkey. It's only a short ferry ride away from Greece (or a Greek island, in any case). Çesme is a

resort-holiday lover's paradise. The sea is the most blue I've seen anywhere, the sand is the whitest, and it's perfectly calm and tranquil. I'd planned my trip to coincide with market day, so I wandered round the market for a bit, bought some grapes and spent much of the morning on the beach.

Towards evening I decided to check out the view from Çesme's fort, built in 1508 by the son of Sultan Mehmet (the Conqueror) to defend the port from pirates. The views were indeed excellent, and I headed back to Izmir in the late evening pleased with my "day trip to the beach!!"

Back in Izmir I went to the same café for dinner, largely because they have tons of tasty-looking veggie food, which is not always easy to find. I wasn't expecting anything more for free at all, but this time the waiter brought out an ice cream sundae! I protested this time, because it is a bit ridiculous to keep showering me with extra food not once but twice, and also because I'd seen on the menu the price of what he'd given me yesterday and it was double what I'd payed for my own dinner, but he refused to listen. As I got up to leave I went to the counter again and asked to pay, but to deaf ears. It's been really nice of him and I really appreciate it, but it's almost embarrassing now! I took another long stroll along the seafront before heading back to my hotel at night, it's shocking that I'm more than halfway through my holiday!



(Pictures: the spring at the Izmir agora from which Alexander the Great is supposed to have drunk before he founded the city, free food and drink, a cannon from Cesme fort looking out to Greece)

Day Ten

Ephesus

My second and last ancient history day trip: today I visited Ephesus, one of the twelve city-states of the Ionian League which has mostly Greek and Roman remains today. It was one of the seven churches of Asia, the site of a large gladiators' graveyard, and possibly most famous for being the site of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world - the Temple of Artemis. I was surprised to discover that its remains have been found/that something of the temple exists, because prior to planning my Turkey trip I had thought that the pyramids were the only Wonder still standing. Which is kind of still true, as there's essentially one reconstructed pillar and a load of rubble left at the Temple site, but still. Legend has it that when the Temple was burnt by the crazed Herostratus, Alexander the Great offered to rebuild it but the city told him that one god shouldn't have to build a temple to another.

So many Americans. Ephesus was literally echoing with the American drawl, apparently - clearly - it's super popular with people who have come over from the States on a cruise as it's close to the harbour. This may've been why entry was so much more expensive than anywhere I've ever been, as well. The weather plays a big difference when you're out in the sun all day, and it was a stunning 38 degrees at Efes yesterday, and blinding sunlight which may partially be why I'm saying this, but I'm not entirely sure it was worth it. It's supposed to be the best-preserved ancient city in Turkey, and it may well be, but there's a point when you're hungry and hot and thirsty and need the toilet and everything seems to be going wrong! It wasn't all bad, the library of Celsus and the Great Amphitheatre (sat 20, 000) were massive and definitely a sight to see, but overall I didn't find that Efes was all it had been cranked up to be. I also skipped the Church of the Virgin Mary (where Mary supposedly spent her last days) and the cave of the Seven Sleepers (where seven young Christian men escaping prosecution entered into a deep sleep for 200 years and woke up and Christianity was officially a good thing again).

Unfortunately I've been a bit antisocial today: I met and shared a taxi with a real-life archaeologist on her way to a dig, some Libyan things that they'd just discovered, but she seemed quite quiet and I didn't really broach conversation beyond basics either. I was actually surprised how short an amount of time she spent looking at things, you'd think this kind of stuff would be right down her alley and she'd be closely inspecting everything. I was also amused by the fact that she didn't take an audio guide/spend much time at the information display boards - she clearly knew her stuff!

You may also be interested to know that I didn't go back to my favoured café last night. I did consider getting a takeaway or something but while it was usually on my way back from the sea I was coming from another direction yesterday and it wasn't en route, and I wanted an early night. I did say a sad farewell to the hotel and the sea and Izmir, though.

Ankara tomorrow! The second last leg of my journey...I'm glad that I've dropped the idea of going to Dogubayazit, which is a small town home to the Ishak Pasha Palace (supposed to be so beautiful!), but also about twelve kilometres from the Iranian border and not the best place to visit because of ISIS right now - scary stuff. (Picture: the site of and the one remaining (reconstructed) pillar from the Temple of Artemis)

Day Eleven: Capitalin' it up

Izmir->Ankara, Ankara

In Ankara today! Ankara is larger than any American city save NY, and the sheer crowds are a little overwhelming. It is also very, very modern. It was quite a small city up until recently, in the 1900s, when Atatürk decided that he would make Ankara, and not Istanbul, the capital of the new Republic of Turkey. And they love Atatürk here, even more so than in the other cities, which is saying something. Almost every major statue I've seen has something to do with him. I got in at about lunchtime and as I was sat in a café having lunch on the main road downtown (Atatürk boulevard, of course) a bus with its speakers on full blast went past, not sure what it was saying but it was plastered with photos of their biggest national hero.

After lunch I headed to the older bits of the city - Ankara does have some pre-modern history, for example King Midas is buried about an hour's journey away from the city centre (tempting as it was I did not attempt this journey), and Timur the Lame (the guy who founded the Mughal dynasty in India) fought a battle against an Ottoman ruler here as well. I stopped at the Haci Bayram mosque, first built in 1427 next to and over the Temple of Augustus (which was at this point in use as a church by the Byzantines). The mosque was smaller than I was expecting; the Temple famed because Res Gestae Givi Augusti (the Achievements of the Divine Augustus) were inscribed in both Latin and Greek on its walls and are basically the most important written evidence from his day about his reign and the state of the Roman Empire – thus they've been called 'the goddess of inscriptions'. From here I walked down to the Roman Baths and the Column of Julian, and then headed for some starkly different stuff: the Mausoleum of Atatürk, called the Anitkabir. It was huge, very solemn, and soldiers and flags and things everywhere – very patriotic. I thought it interesting that he was given an Islamic burial and buried in the direction of Mecca etcetera - as I understood it he was agnostic/ an atheist. His mausoleum is interesting as well in that I would imagine a big reason for his shift away from Istanbul was to create a new, modern Turkey away from the remaining vestiges of the Ottoman Empire, but the building itself seems to have quite a lot of Ottoman/classical influence.

It was late afternoon by this point, and I spent a while searching for the Hamamönü district, which is meant to be nice and full of restaurants and cafés and shops and gives you a taste of what an Ottoman town was like centuries ago, but after walking three kilometres and being told it was another two more I frankly didn't have the energy after a long day and hopped onto the nearest metro station. One complaint about Ankara: for all it being the capital and so modern, their metro system is terrible! Only two lines, very few stops on each, and genuinely worse than both Izmir and Istanbul.

Getting back to Atatürk boulevard, I spent the early parts of the night walking along this street, which is super busy and lit up even after dark. Most shops and things were open, so I popped into a few just for the fun of it before heading back. Not sure what my overall conclusion about Ankara is yet. I think perhaps one day just isn't enough to get a feel of such a big, pulsing city, and I think the main problem is that you feel very anonymous which I usually like but can be disorienting in a new place especially when you don't know the language. I did have a lovely taxi driver who drove me

round a longer route to get to the Augustan Temple for no extra charge, showing me some extra parks and sights and stuff of his city, but I'm not sure it's been enough. Judgement reserved!

Day Twelve

Ankara->Istanbul, Istanbul

Back in Istanbul! I woke up leisurely today, and made my way over to Chora Church/Mosque/Museum, surprisingly easily with a combination of different trams. The internet suggested taking a taxi as public transport is difficult because it's located at the heart of a maze of tiny tiny streets, but I definitely didn't find this to be the case. The GPS bit of Google Maps that can tell you what direction you're walking in even when you're offline has basically been the cornerstone of my trip.

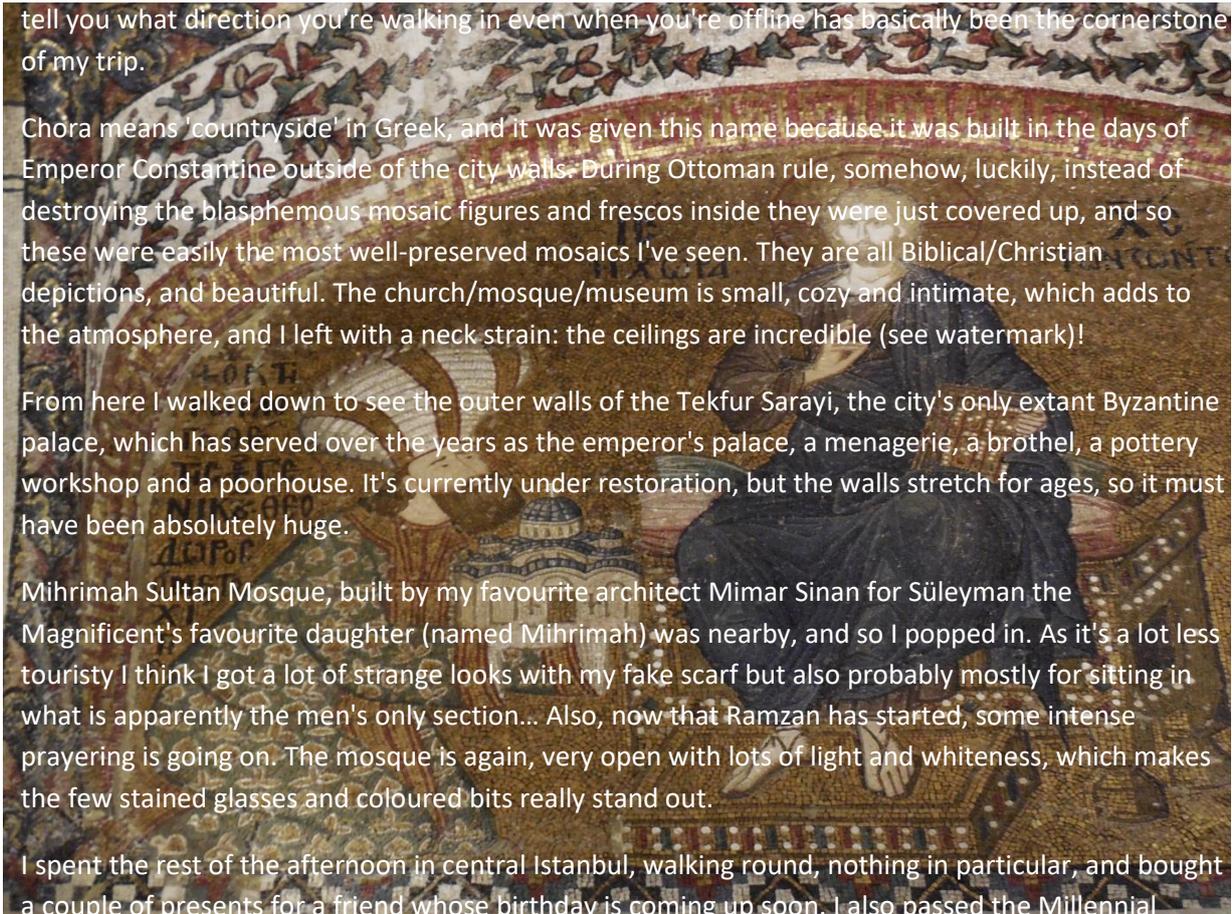
Chora means 'countryside' in Greek, and it was given this name because it was built in the days of Emperor Constantine outside of the city walls. During Ottoman rule, somehow, luckily, instead of destroying the blasphemous mosaic figures and frescos inside they were just covered up, and so these were easily the most well-preserved mosaics I've seen. They are all Biblical/Christian depictions, and beautiful. The church/mosque/museum is small, cozy and intimate, which adds to the atmosphere, and I left with a neck strain: the ceilings are incredible (see watermark)!

From here I walked down to see the outer walls of the Tekfur Sarayı, the city's only extant Byzantine palace, which has served over the years as the emperor's palace, a menagerie, a brothel, a pottery workshop and a poorhouse. It's currently under restoration, but the walls stretch for ages, so it must have been absolutely huge.

Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, built by my favourite architect Mimar Sinan for Süleyman the Magnificent's favourite daughter (named Mihrimah) was nearby, and so I popped in. As it's a lot less touristy I think I got a lot of strange looks with my fake scarf but also probably mostly for sitting in what is apparently the men's only section... Also, now that Ramzan has started, some intense praying is going on. The mosque is again, very open with lots of light and whiteness, which makes the few stained glasses and coloured bits really stand out.

I spent the rest of the afternoon in central Istanbul, walking round, nothing in particular, and bought a couple of presents for a friend whose birthday is coming up soon. I also passed the Millennium

Column, which marked the ends of the Roman Empire, and was the cornerstone for all their measurements of distance. It's amazing that it even survives today. I came back to my room to rest for a bit before going out again in the evening, and strolled along the sea after dinner. Again, potentially because of Ramzan, it seemed a lot more lively and busy and lit up, and I had a really enjoyable walk across the Galata Bridge.



D

ay Thirteen: the day that started low and steadily got better

Istanbul

I headed to the utterly underwhelming Egyptian/Spice Bazaar today, supposed to be full of (unsurprisingly) spices and a great sight but I didn't think it particularly so, perhaps because I'm used to seeing spices.. I found the whole thing was very tourist-g geared and that the owners of the stalls were massively ripping people off. I did however venture outside to the side streets around the bazaar, which were much more reasonable, had more variety and the hawkers much less annoying (Mrs. Shah Rukh Khan! -(who is an Indian actor)). I was amused by the fact that here was the second or third time I've seen long flat escalators that go downstairs to public toilets, which look so official that the first time I saw them I thought there was something interesting to see down there and was rudely shocked.

After this I took an underwater metro to Asia, crossing continents in less than two minutes and underneath the sea, which was very fun. See the handy diagram that they've put up on the tracks. Although I did exit on the Asia side, it was a bit impromptu of me with no maps or ideas of where to go and what to see, and after declining offers to go on a hot air balloon, I headed back to Europe.

Back in Taksim Square, there was a protest going on. When I saw the police I thought "this is fun, maybe they're doing a drill or something", and then I saw (rather heard) the protesters and thought "this is steadily becoming less fun" and made my way away from the throng. Walking down Istiklal also meant that I was back in the vicinity of Pera Museum, and I had a long day (much like the Ashmolean in Oxford) so I popped in to say goodbye.

On the topic of museums: Florence Nightingale worked in Istanbul, and she seems to have been incredible, bringing down mortality rate at the hospital from something like 95 to 5 percent. There's a museum to her housed in the present-day army barracks, which displays things like her famed lamp. You need to apply for permission to visit the place, fax a copy of your passport, et cetera. I had asked at Reception a couple of days ago to get this done for me because my Turkish is unfortunately still limited to words and phrases like "men" "women" "how much?" "no" "hello", and apparently they finally called back today evening saying they're closed on the weekends and can fit me in on Monday, by which time I would have flown out. So unfortunately that isn't happening.

Anyway, after Pera, I realised that my watch had stopped working an hour ago, at 8.35 and that time was still moving on regardless. I slowly wandered back in the direction of Sultanahmet (the old city, where I'm staying). As I neared the harbour I heard calls for a Bosphorus night cruise, and because I haven't done this yet I jumped on (luckily, not literally).

It was chilly on the upper deck after we took off, so I headed downstairs, and as I descended the stairs the captain called to me. A fleeting image raced through my head of ye olden days, when enemies were probably called in to the captain's cabin, offered a cup of Turkish tea and then thrown overboard or asked to walk the plank, but these may have been slightly premature thoughts. He was just being nice, and showed me all the sights and pointed out things and chit-chatted with me on the hour-long journey, and excitingly at the halfway point when we turned to go back he let me steer

the entire way – it was great fun! Some stuff was lost in communication: "all these people selling stuff on the piers, are they always there at night or is it something to do with Ramadan?" "Ah yes, sometimes people come here for marriage [honeymoon] and they have a party on deck, or belly dancing, they pay like 2-3-4 thousand euro, we go on half day cruise." Or "is fasting difficult?" "Yes, especially because I don't smoke" but about fifteen minutes later he proceeded to light a cigarette. Otherwise, we managed fairly well and it was super fun at the helm!



(Watermark and pictures: the underwater metro to the Asian side, a small police force gathered in Taksim Square during a protest, behind the helm of the cruise ship, a Mango tag in Indian rupees!)

D ay Fourteen

Istanbul, Istanbul->London

I woke up really really early this morning because I just couldn't deal with the fact that I was leaving and was in denial about this fact. Just after sunrise, I took the long route to the Blue Mosque, which was the first place I 'visited' in Turkey and now also the last. On my way I bumped into (not literally, it's quite a large structure) Sultan Ahmet III's fountain, which is Ottoman rococo and, as always, beautiful. I almost didn't recognise the square connecting the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia when I reached: without the tourists, it was so bare!

On the flight back to Heathrow a girl sat down next to me, and offered me m&m's. We got talking and bonded over our shared appreciation of the in-flight movies, and as it turns out she was heading to Oxford! It was such a coincidence. She's staying with a host family and taking an English course at the language school, even though I thought her English above adequate. She also spoke Turkish, Italian and Spanish and wants to learn Chinese next...so impressive. She asked me if I'd picked up any Turkish and I had to shamefully tell her that I didn't know anything near what I probably should, although it's been fun how similar many Turkish words are to Hindi (things as varied as sikkae - coin, dikkat - they use it for 'danger' but it's 'problem' in Hindi, inquilab - revolution, dukkan - shop, sabun - soap).

So, final thoughts as I sit at the airport and think over the last two weeks. From seeing prehistoric ruins to ancient to medieval to modern, to meeting so many different people, to a beach weekend: Turkey has been amazing. I don't think there was ever a point I felt threatened or unsafe, and people have been incredibly helpful (even if things messed up it's always been with good intentions (thinking back to the German lady in Bursa)).

I've found the language bit most interesting: having always lived in English speaking countries or former colonies I've assumed that people will always know at least minimal English, but that really wasn't the case here. Using language as power and for social mobility and all that sort of thing probably come into play at this point. In India especially, it's an indicator of lower social status and uncultured ways to not speak English, so it was really good to see people so obviously at peace with their own culture (like the girl sat next to me today, saying that her brother is starting to learn English now, at 12). Although I'm all for a universal language and stuff it is definitely a shame for people to rank languages or for knowledge (or lack thereof) of them to be an indicator of poverty.

I would say that I haven't particularly enjoyed the whole tradition of having to cover myself from hair to ankle every time I wanted to enter a mosque. Nevertheless, I have felt very safe my entire time in Turkey, whether I was surrounded by people in Istanbul or hunting for the deserted agora in Izmir in a dubious area, and outside of mosques, absolutely anything goes. The fact that Turkey is constitutionally secular is probably a reflection of/reason for this.

I could end by quoting Napoleon on Turkey, or Rumi, or someone else who's much better with words than I've been but this is it. It's been a splendid journey.



(Excavations in progress in Istanbul: there will always be a reason to come back!)

THE END