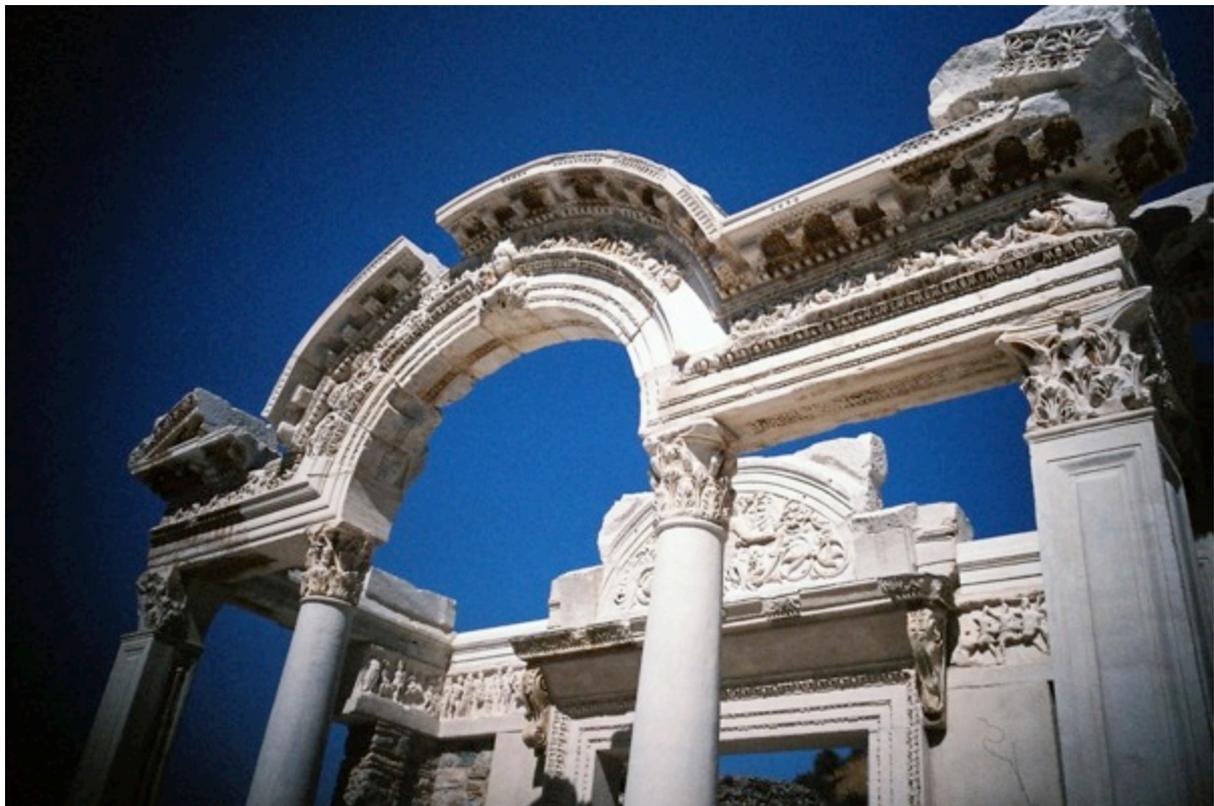


## Turkey Travel Journal, September-October 2014 Odette Chalaby

### Day 1 Ephesus

We arrived this morning in Izmir and, after an hour and a half wait, have finally boarded a long train through the beautiful blistering Anatolian countryside. There are no seats, and the heat clings to my back and face. Yet the small window out onto white houses, olive trees, statuesque hills, and brown burning fields is pulling me into the world outside the carriage. I am perching on a step by the door, mesmerised. I am reminded a little of a similar train journey last year in Andalusia. Every new house, every new worker in the field, every new crop I see is fuelling my imagination about this land that I cannot wait to touch.

We descend from the train at Selçuk, accompanied by a *simit* seller, who has been enticing the carriage with that warm, sesame-bread smell all the way here. Selçuk is peaceful and friendly – a typical provincial town making the best of its proximity to one of the most famous sights in all of Turkey. Everywhere men sit outside playing backgammon and drinking endless cups of *çay*, even at a café that has somehow established itself on the train station platform. We stop for some meze: aubergine salad; *muhammara* (a walnut dip); stuffed vine leaves; and a lemony-sumacy-juicy-green salad. My memory insists that this was some of the best meze I have ever tasted – but in truth it is hard to tell whether a combination of hunger, excitement, and a first taste of real Turkish food perhaps overwhelmed my judgement.

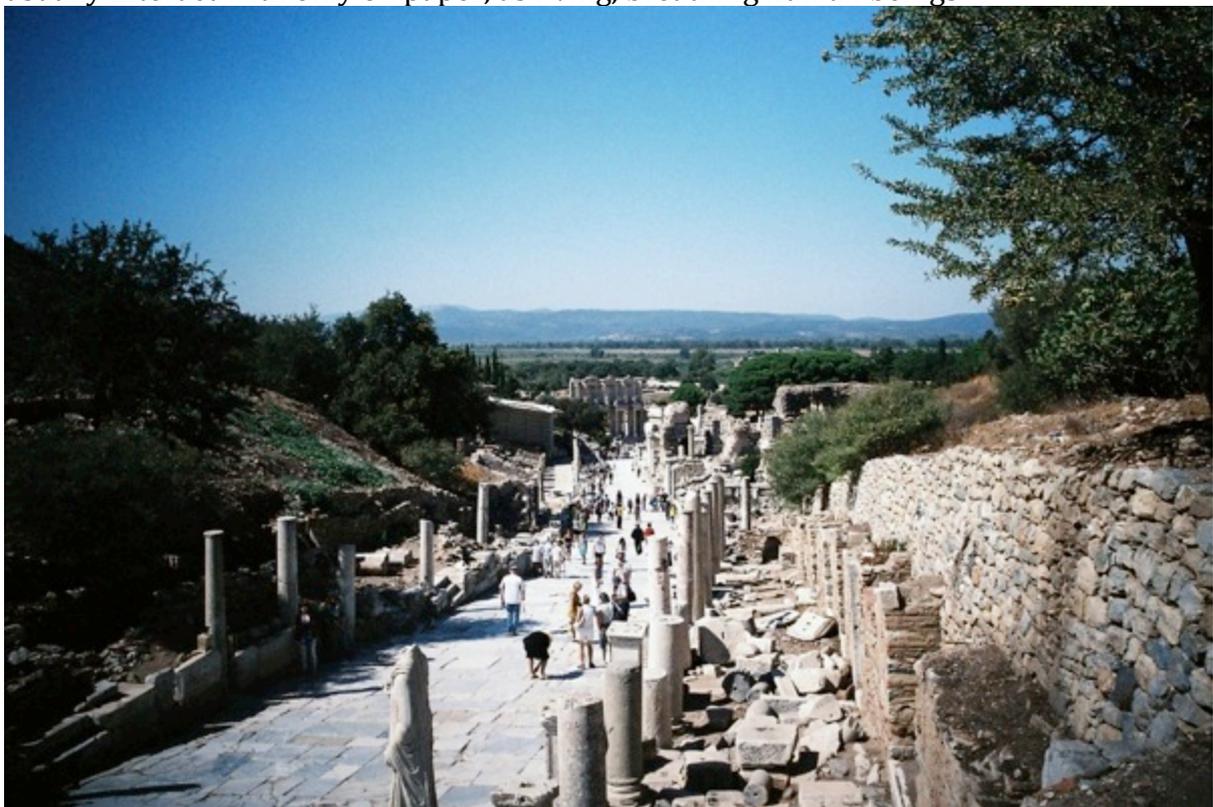


We arrive Ephesus. How beautiful are bold, white, marble ruins in the sun! Izzy reminds me that in Greek times most of these buildings would have been painted bright red, blue, green. What a different atmosphere that colour would have created! Ephesus feels

like the set of a Hollywood movie – you cannot help but imagine toga-tied men and women, slaves and children thronging down its broad avenues. I felt myself at times like one of those women, strolling slowly to the market-place, or excitedly half-running to meet a favourite friend.



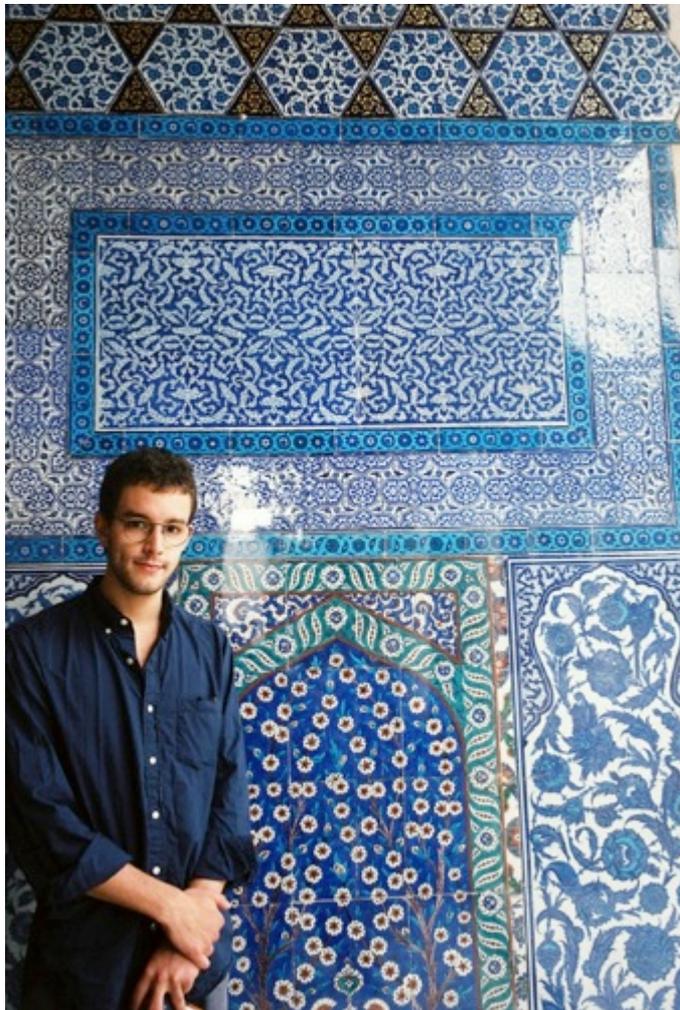
You are allowed to throw yourself into the city – to clamber on the marble stairs, to wander through people’s houses, to enter the temple, and to ascend to the top of the overwhelming arena. Bar the dazy tourists, there are almost no reminders of modern life. This is part of the charm. And so too is the landscape: the trees, mountains, and blue skies that surely played as great a part in the ancient Greek city as they do today. I am continuously struck by the thought that the ancient world has never appeared nearly so vividly to me. For the first time I feel I can comprehend the idea of the Greeks, who I usually interact with only on paper, as living, breathing human beings.



The first thing that struck me in Istanbul was its size. I am not sure why, as I am used to London, but perhaps being a stranger in any sprawling metropolis is naturally daunting. I am staying in Beyoğlu, which before my trip I imagined to be the size of a small borough in London. In fact, it comprises a huge part of the city, and contains many different areas, each with an entirely different vibe. However, I felt I should devote my first day in the city to its fascinating past, so I headed straight to Sultanahmet.

Within a ten-minute walking radius lie four of Istanbul's most visited and most powerful sights. Each tells a different story, and each visit helps peel one more layer of the outer edges of the history of this fascinating city.

The Topkapı Palace stands for the Ottoman Empire in all its glory. In the first room I entered I had an experience I had never thought possible – I was impressed by weapons. These are exquisite and even dainty weapons: swords, shields, armour,



arrows, early guns – all engraved in the most intricate manner. This was a kingdom that waged war, but waged war beautifully. My whole idea for this trip had been that I hoped in Turkey to experience what life is like at the confluence of the East and the West. In Topkapı I had my first experience of what Turkey's extraordinary location meant to the Ottoman world. In the old kitchens of the palace were displayed all the eating utensils of various Sultans and company. These included beautiful Ottoman plates – turquoise, green, red, bright blue, and so on. They also included both beautiful, classical Chinese porcelain, commissioned by various Sultans for the palace, and several ornate, decorative (and rather ugly!) French tea sets, given as gifts from French ambassadors. The harem was undoubtedly the highlight of the visit, as I fell in love with turquoise tile after turquoise tile.

I am interrupted by the olive oil on my salad – the olive oil is delicious here. As are the spices. I must go to the spice market and buy some salad spices.

After Topkapı we joined the queue for the Basilica Cistern - the largest of several hundred ancient cisterns that lie beneath the city of Istanbul – and my first encounter with Byzantium. The tour of the Cistern today is not quite the row-boat experience of

*From Russia with Love*, but is impressive nonetheless. Two Medusa heads, upside down and sideways up.

But, I feel somehow that, no matter how impressive the Cistern is, what I really need is a taste of Byzantium itself, and not just the water system that kept it going. I am reading Judith Herrin's *Byzantium*, and I think one quote sums up the book: 'The Byzantines regarded theirs as the great civilization, and Judith Herrin splendidly shows how right they were' (Norman Stone, Guardian). The next stop, at Hagia Sophia, does everything possible to confirm this analysis.

Hagia Sofia, the church of Holy Wisdom, served as a cathedral and as the seat of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the date of its construction in 537 until 1453. It was at the heart of Byzantium, and upon its capture Sultan Mehmed II was so impressed he ordered it to be converted into a mosque (and it remained a practising mosque until 1931 and the reforms of Atatürk). The Hagia Sofia is, first and foremost, an example of the height of Byzantine architecture and design, with its beautiful golden mosaics, two-tiered structure, domed roof, and warm lighting. It is also the inspiration behind the classical domed Ottoman mosque style that is the outstanding feature of Istanbul's skyline today. It is one of the most stunning buildings I have ever entered – and I say this despite the fact that half the interior is covered in scaffolding!

The final stop is the bridge to modern day Istanbul – a functioning mosque, in which for the first time in Istanbul I don a headscarf, and am restricted to the women's section. I had been warned that the Blue Mosque did not merit the queue it attracts, that it was



not as impressive as its name suggests. Yet when we entered, and looked up together with hundreds of other tourists and worshippers, I cannot help but think that every one gasped in awe at the shining azur structure touching us on all sides.

The day I first met Mimar Sinan.

Today I met Mimar Sinan. It was a special day. An aborted attempt to go to Istanbul modern (the weather insisted that we stay outside) ended up revealing one of the greatest secrets in the city. On our original journey to the museum, we walked past a medium-sized mosque, which stood out mostly for it's being an appealing old building amongst a stretch modern impositions.

The moment I stepped inside, I could feel the power that this beauty exuded. Multi-coloured sunlight streamed in through hundreds of pink, purple, blue and green glass windows. The luscious carpet was deep red and gold. The domed ceiling was intricately patterned in its entirety. Bar one solitary worshipper, we were alone in the building. What a contrast with the herds at the blue mosque yesterday! I watched man praying with wonder. Not only has he the physical beauty of this building to interact with, he also has a deep spiritual connection to what this dappled light is saying.



Unlike the Blue Mosque, which dedicates about 10x1 metres to women, there appeared to be nowhere for women to pray here. Most mosques do not provide these separate spaces, so all this beauty is for the most part an exclusively male privilege, with women praying in the more appropriate location of the home.

Burying this thought, I look up at the ceiling once again and am lost again in the building. We leave the lonely worshipper in peace, and look outside to see if any information is at hand. An information panel reveals what we had been looking for: the architect, Mimar Sinan. It turns out this is a mosque designed by, as many would say, the greatest architect of the Ottomans. Koca Mi'mâr Sinân Âğâ was the chief Ottoman architect and civil engineer for sultans Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III. He was responsible for the construction of more than 300 major structures and other

more modest projects, such as his Islamic primary schools (sibyan mektebs). He is considered the greatest architect of the classical period of Ottoman architecture, and has been compared to Michelangelo, his contemporary in the West. His designs proliferate not only in modern Turkey, but are also to be found in Damascus (still considered one of the city's most notable monuments), in Sofia, Bulgaria (currently the only functioning mosque in the city), and in Bosnia and Herzegovina where his Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge is now UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, at that moment, these great feats could not compare the power he held over me in that tourist-free spiritual manifestation next door to Istanbul modern.

If ever one moment is meant to capture the feeling of being at the very crossing point of the Orient and the Occident it is surely sailing on the Bosphorus from its European to its Asian shore. It was a perfect day: blue sky; warm sun; cool water breeze. The domed skyline sung. We caught a commuter ferry on which I found myself in conversation with a man that made this half hour long journey every day. He could not see why I had chosen to spend my time as a visitor in such a boring manner: "There's nothing for a tourist on the Asian side". But this trip was not about what I might find in Kadikoy or Moda – it was about physically experiencing this continental divide, and coming closer to an understanding of Turkey's layered identity. The divide – so significant on paper – of course dissolves in reality to irrelevance, the only immediate difference between the two halves of Istanbul being the price of a Turkish coffee.

Two grand mosques guard the area of the spice bazaar. The first – the New Mosque (of course, only Istanbul could call a 500 year old mosque new) – is an impressive structure, whose graceful domes and arches retain a sense of authenticity and daily use. However the second of the two is one of the most peculiar, and also my favourite, mosque in the city. The mosque plays with you before you even reach it, by challenging you to find an entrance amongst the labyrinthine shopping streets. Finally, a small archway with a discrete plaque bearing the mosque's name in Turkish: Rustem Pasa Cami. I venture in, curiously following the only route available - a steep staircase. The mosque is perched



wisely above the hustle of the bargaining streets below, and in its leafy, cool, intricately tiled courtyard peace reigns. The mosque floats above the human, just as the top part of Hagia Sofia appears floats above us mortals in the sky.

The nearby spice bazaar snatches you back down to fiery earth. The eyes feast once again, not on delicate arches and tiles, but instead on the multi-coloured textures of tea, spices, nuts and dried fruits. Yet of course the serious sensations here are the smells. Hibiscus, rose and pomegranate tea. Pistachios. Sumac, cumin, chilli. I wonder how people used to this glory can ever survive in England! (I wonder what I will do!)



Istanbul modern was an unexpected and sharp introduction to modern day Turkish society, identity, authority and the problems inherent in all of these. One short film seduced me for its full 20 minutes. This was Kutlug Ataman's 'Women who wear wigs'. Simultaneously four wig-wearing-women, each of whom is at odds with the blunt reality of Turkish life, tell us about prejudice, authority, alienation, and injustice. One woman, a transvestite, tells a story of constant confrontation with barbaric police: sexual, verbal and physical assault; unwarranted accusations; days of innocent time lost in prison. A university student tells her story just with her words, too uncomfortable to reveal her physical identity to the camera. Frustration, anger, and sadness pierce her narrative. Until recently, the law prohibited headscarves in Turkish universities, but without her headscarf this woman feels naked, ridiculed and assaulted. So that she can wear her headscarf and thereby not lose her self she wears a wig to cover it. But still, she cannot stand her image, and feels such self-hatred walking around dressed up this way. She feels like an alien to herself, and sometimes cannot force herself to bear the pain and sit through whole classes.

Istanbul modern also reveals a great deal about Turkey's modern cultural identity. Its major exhibition outlines the evolution of modern Turkish art from its beginnings over a century ago up until today. Most striking is the similarity of much of this art to the rest of continental Europe. In fact, until the chronology reaches the 1990s or 2000s, you feel as if you could be in a museum in France! Throughout the period, the Turkish state funded artists to go and learn from the capitals of culture in Europe, and the work they produced reflects this. Hints of the East are, disappointingly, few and far between; but when do appear the art in the collection is at its most stunning.

One instance in which this challenge is met is through Erol Akyavas. Throughout his art are evident references to traditional Islamic thought and mystical overtones: religious symbols; calligraphy; architectural forms. He is, so the information card in the museum tells me, 'one of only a few artists to create an original synthesis of Western rationalism and an Eastern world view'. His art is deep and powerful, and as a viewer I am in by the spiralling excitement of this worldview.



**Mansur Al-Hallaj, 1987**

Another artist that I think achieves the same striking synthesis is Nuri Iyem.



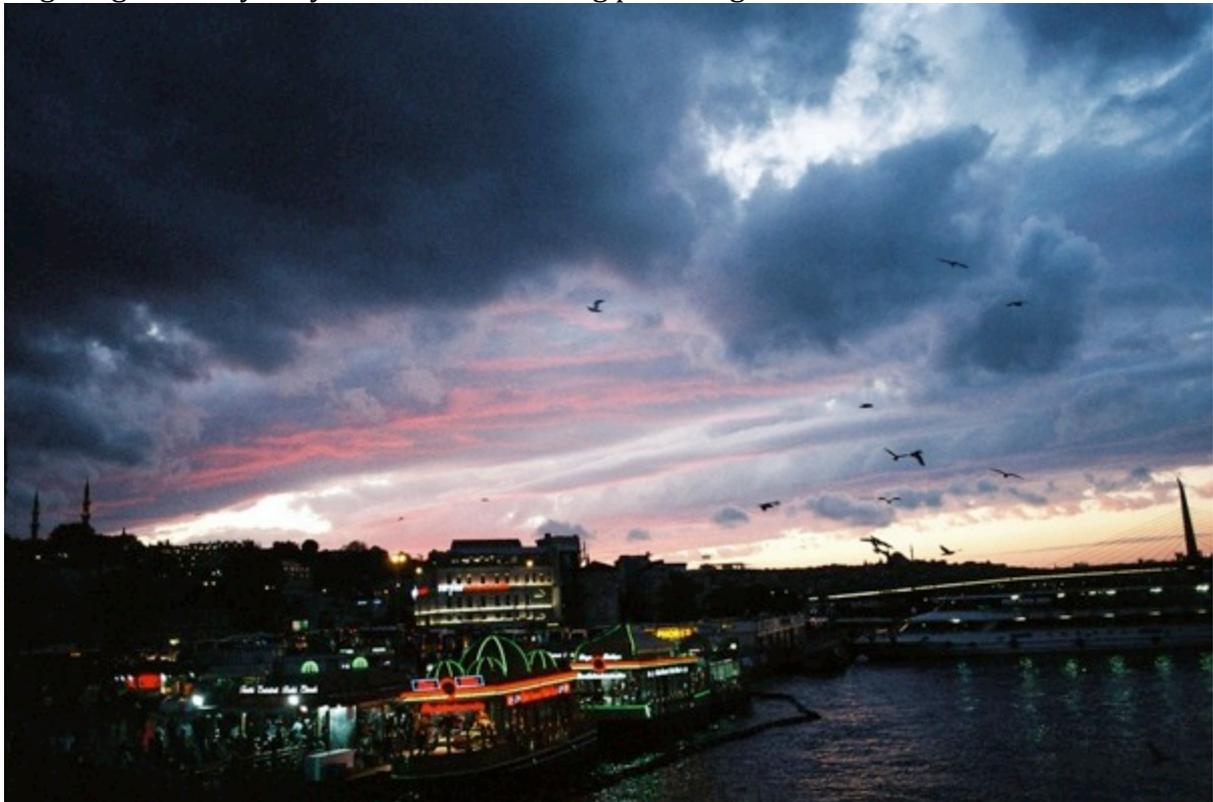
**Country Women, 1979**

I have become addicted to Turkish breakfast. I alternate between the creamy, warm, tomato-bursting *menemen* and the traditional cucumber, tomatoes, white cheeses, bread, olives and various jams or honey. My favourite place to consume it is in residential Chihangir, where the smart cafés are populated with Turkish people, and where sitting on the side of a leafy street watching the world go by is an endlessly pleasurable activity.

Today we visited the recently restored Pera Museum, which had a very eclectic mix of exhibitions. On the top two floors were exhibitions celebrating street art. On the next was an exhibition about the interplay between diplomatic envoys and Turkish society, including paintings by diplomats and paintings of diplomats. On the bottom was an exhibition of a collection of weights and measures, dating back from thousands of years ago to today.

We also visited one of Istanbul's many free and fabulous modern art galleries that is aiming to get the public involved in contemporary art. ARTER was on the pedestrian highway of Istiklal, and its hexagonal interactive ping pong in the window had definitely drawn the crowds in.

The bizarre Grand Bazaar. It is surrounded by an endless maze of small shopping streets that constitute its non-tourist component – shops selling Tupperware, children's clothing etc. These streets are hard enough to navigate, but they are also thronging with the local population. The Bazaar itself is tourist town, but the beautiful building and lingering air of mystery makes it an enticing place to get lost in.



The walk across Galata bridge is a highlight of any visit to the city. The bridge connects Sultanahmet to Beyoglu, and at sunset you have the most beautiful view of countless

mosques, the water, and Galata tower. Lining the sides of the bridge are men fishing, and their catches are still wriggling around in buckets. The fish is sent straight to a fish market at the Beyoglu side of the bridge. September is the season for 'blue fish' (small, white fish) and bonito. In the market some vendors are frying the just caught fish and putting it in crusty white baguettes: Istanbul's famous fast-food.



Discoveries about Turkey from a friend I made

54% of the people live in the countryside

Consequently agriculture is the main bulk of the economy

It is one of the world's only self-sufficient countries - it can produce everything it needs to consume (except coffee, which is of vital importance)

It is Russia's main trading partner

Turkey was the world's 8<sup>th</sup> most visited country last year?

There is a surplus of trained teachers that the government cannot afford to employ

There is a desperate need of highly qualified people in business and industry, so many highly qualified Europeans from Spain and other countries whose economy is bad are coming to Turkey and making money in banks and so on

It is the world's largest apricot exporter

Cappadocia is famed for its woven carpets and for its agriculture.

Olive oil is produced in the south, but until recently sunflower oil was much more widely used in central Anatolia.

As I am sitting in a dressing gown I will write about Ağa Hamamı. This is a historical Turkish bath, which was constructed by Fatih Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (the 7th Ottoman Padishah), and used as a private hamam by Mehmed and his sons. At that time, Beyoglu was not a settlement area and the Padishahs would come to the area for hunting. The building was constructed as a hunting house in 1454, and the hamam was

below the two flats above. This hamam cannot attract wealthy tourists, as the ones in Sultanahmet do, and due to its slightly rogue location in residential Chihangir it is comparatively extremely inexpensive. However, there was a cockroach in hot stone room, so perhaps the price came with a cleanliness compromise...

Despite this minor concern, the hamam was an extraordinary experience. Izzy and I had had no idea what was coming for us. After changing, we were sent down to the main room. In the centre is a giant heated marble raised surface which you lie on, and around the edges there are taps which you use to throw water on yourself when the heat becomes so bad you feel you are going to explode. This is one of Istanbul's only mixed hamams, and we were in the heat room with three French girls and one boy, all our age.

After about twenty minutes of death heat, the three girls were gruffly summoned out of the room to have their body scrub. It soon became clear that the boy's scrub was to take place next to us in the main room. The continued expression of fear and pain on his face as his massage got more and more intense and his skin got more and more raw was more than a little concerning.

Soon two of the girls reappeared, and Izzy and I were summoned to the female scrub room. We opened the door to find two topless ladies, one old and very large, the other young and slim. The elder one ordered me to lie down on her marble table, and she began to scrub. I was too scared to protest! Izzy had to sit watching in anticipation, as the other French girl was still undergoing treatment. I was too scared to even laugh as she tickled my feet with the scrubber to the end of the earth and back. The soap foam massage topped off the experience, as bubbles went flying around the room and a bag of soap was tipped out onto my back.

After the bath Babel café. The perfect early evening, sun shining, people happy, a Spanish artist in love with the wonderful music. Buika, Terry Callier and much more.

Istanbul's Biennale, one of the most important events in the contemporary art world, is aptly named Art International. The galleries exhibiting are from all over the world, as are the collectors, art students, and artists. This is an important side of Istanbul today: stylish, modern, business-minded, talented, and ultra international. Yet a photo from an Istanbul based gallery, and the Turkish artists Burak Delier, is a reminder of the tensions of this cosmopolitan society's delicate balance between two worlds. The photo shows the attempt to reconcile Turkey's European political ambitions with its Islamic, and non-Euro friendly, Islamic reality.



What is the artist saying? In the first place, he seems to be pointing to the tension between these two identities. Perhaps this is a criticism of the Turkish government's attempt to try and assimilate the country into something it doesn't belong with. The photo at first seems to say that Europe and Islam cannot go together – and it says this through its being so surprising and jarring. There is something unusual and striking in the image, which makes us think that the two elements do not sit comfortably together. Yet, after looking into the woman's eyes for a while a new possibility emerges. Perhaps this woman is actually showing that despite first appearances, the unlikely combination of Turkey, Islam, and the EU is exciting, dynamic, and coherent. The woman is looking into the future, and she can hold onto her Turkish identity and her Islamic faith whilst bearing the EU flag.

The Chora church is out of the way of historic sight central in Sultanahmet. The area is modern and ugly. Unlike anywhere else we have been in the city, every single woman is wearing a headscarf, and many a full hijab. Izzy and I, both bareheaded, and with Izzy's long blonde locks suddenly seeming much blonder and longer, were shouted at by two cars of men, one drawing up and even stopping next to us. But here is hidden one of Byzantium's best preserved churches in the world, and some of its most glorious surviving golden mosaics.



One section inside has the famous gold mosaics from floor to ceiling. Mary's deathbed is the best. There is an almost comical element to these depictions of outsized humans, tiny ones crouching at the feet of giants. The scenes all appear so serious! Yet the mosaics hide the reality of Byzantine high society. For example, one of the mosaics, actually in Hagia Sophia, is of Empress Zoe and her husband Emperor Constantine IX flanking Christ. It looks the picture of stately seriousness and reverence. However, behind it is a story. Until at a late age, Zoe had been a spinster. But upon becoming

empress “she suddenly discovered the joys of sex” (*Byzantium*, Judith Herrin) and married three times. Each time she married, her husbands face had to be reset, and his name erased and rewritten, and in the final mosaic his name is written in distorted writing as it was too long to fit in the original space!

After two golden sections lies a surprising third one, covered in bright coloured paintings, again from floor to ceiling. These are marvellous again. I spent much too long just walking back and forth from room to room, gazing at the ceilings. The Chora church really is reason enough to come to Istanbul.

A five-minute walk away down a traffic-clogged road lies another beautiful slice of the past, but this, unlike Chora, is living, breathing history. Sinan has worked his magic again. We are alone with a man hoovering. The mosque is supremely clean; the red carpets actually look brand new. Every time I have stepped into an empty mosque I feel that I step into another spiritual and silent dimension of Istanbul.

SALT Galata is a contemporary art space that includes artists studios, an art library, and two floors of exhibition spaces. Perhaps most curiously though is what happens in the basement. The building is the old Ottoman Bank, and below all this contemporary art remains the giant safes, locked chambers, and records of the bank – all open to the public to come and explore.

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I am making my way to the Archaeology museum to commence Sultanahmet round 2. Judith Herrin has ordered me back to get better taste of Byzantium. It is pouring with rain and somehow this makes the city more real. Tourists seem few and far between, and I am reminded of how dynamic, living, and working the city really is. I would love to live here, a small apartment in an old building in Chihangir...

Violence is erupting on the Turkish-Syrian border.



The archaeological museum is elegantly eerie. I found bold and broken lions, originally guarding Byzantine Constantinople's Palace of Boucouleon. I lose myself in rooms and rooms of giant marble and stone sarcophagi. They lie against stone walls and stand next to

marble columns, and all interact with warm low-level spotlights to create a feeling of anticipation, as if a play is about to be acted in this strange setting of an ancient burial chamber.



Osman Hamdi Bey, whose stylish paintings I saw at the Pera museum, founded and promoted the museum. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century he helped pass a law to stop foreign archaeologists taking finds from Ottoman territories back to their countries. The museum's abundance is due to this law and to Bey's vision, housing pieces from far and wide across and beyond the Ottoman empire from Syrian Palestine to Troy.

One of the most entrancing features of the museum is its garden. I think it was even more magical in the rain. Deep green trees tower over a space filled with archaeological wonders: columns, sarcophagi, statues, animals. They are everywhere you look, still surviving the wind and wet thousands of years later.

Hagia Irene (the church of Holy Peace), a two-minute walk from the museum was the first church built in Constantinople, but sadly its beautiful domes are obscured by restoration work and it is hard to get a sense of the building.

Theodosius' obelisk stands as impressive as one might expect – it is an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh's obelisk, that was re-erected in the Hippodrome of Constantinople by the Roman emperor Theodosius I in the 4th century AD. The Hippodrome no longer survives, but it was a fundamental part of the ancient city. The two factions that organised all the events – the Blues and the Greens – themselves played a powerful role in politics and society, once proclaiming a new patriarch and on several occasions using the hippodrome to vent frustration at rulers through organised protests.

Little Hagia Sophia is a beautiful Byzantine church that like its big sister was turned into a mosque. From the outside the two are identical, with the recognisable reddish colour. It is still a functioning mosque, and it feels so natural that you are almost surprised to remind yourself of its origins. The harmony inside the mosque shows how fluidly the Arab conquerors tailored the Byzantine's wonderful architecture to their own design, and now it is with Islam that



the dome is surely most of all associated.

**Eid Mubarak!** There is standstill in Istanbul as people return to their towns to spend the feast days.

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There are cats everywhere! They are so regal – my favourites (I know little about cats) are the purple-grey coloured and silky and sleek. It appears that they only relax on beautiful things: tiled courtyards; green marble steps; classical balconies.



A morning stroll around Ortakoy – a village-type cluster of shops, restaurants, and a very ostentatious mosque by the water – where supposedly families in Istanbul come to hang out at the weekends. It has a distinctly seaside and nostalgic feel about it – Brighton on Bosphoros. Shops selling cheap jewellery, worry beads, and surprisingly endless baked potatoes are mixed among student bars and cafes (we are right by two big universities)

In the bus, driving through the lunar landscape of Kapadokya from Nevşehir to Uçhisar. Flat ridges and flat-topped mountains with unusual angular edges populate the barren, sepia plains. Since the clouds had captured Istanbul, the bright sunlight is a welcome introduction to central Anatolia. A couple of cars pass us by. The road is extremely good, perhaps surprisingly given the lack of moving vehicles on it.

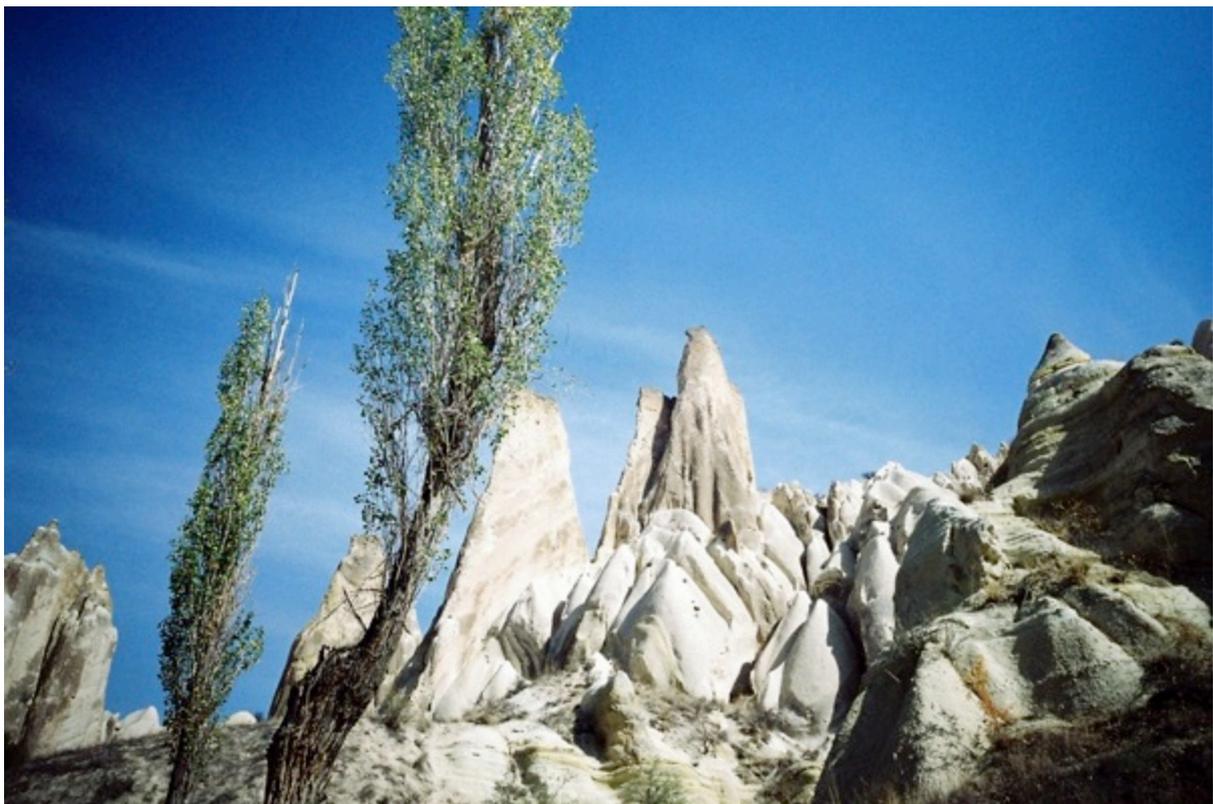
The first sighting of some fairy chimneys! - oversized fungi from an imaginary world. Vineyards begin to appear – gluttonous splashes of green against the brown. Now the sparse vegetation is becoming steadier. One more car passes in the opposite direction. The drive should take about 45 minutes, and I can see the first town. It is very long and thin, about twenty buildings in width but stretching out for kilometres. We drive into it. There is a lot of construction underway – half built apartment blocks and high rises abound.

A sign to Göreme and Uçhisar leads us back out into the open.



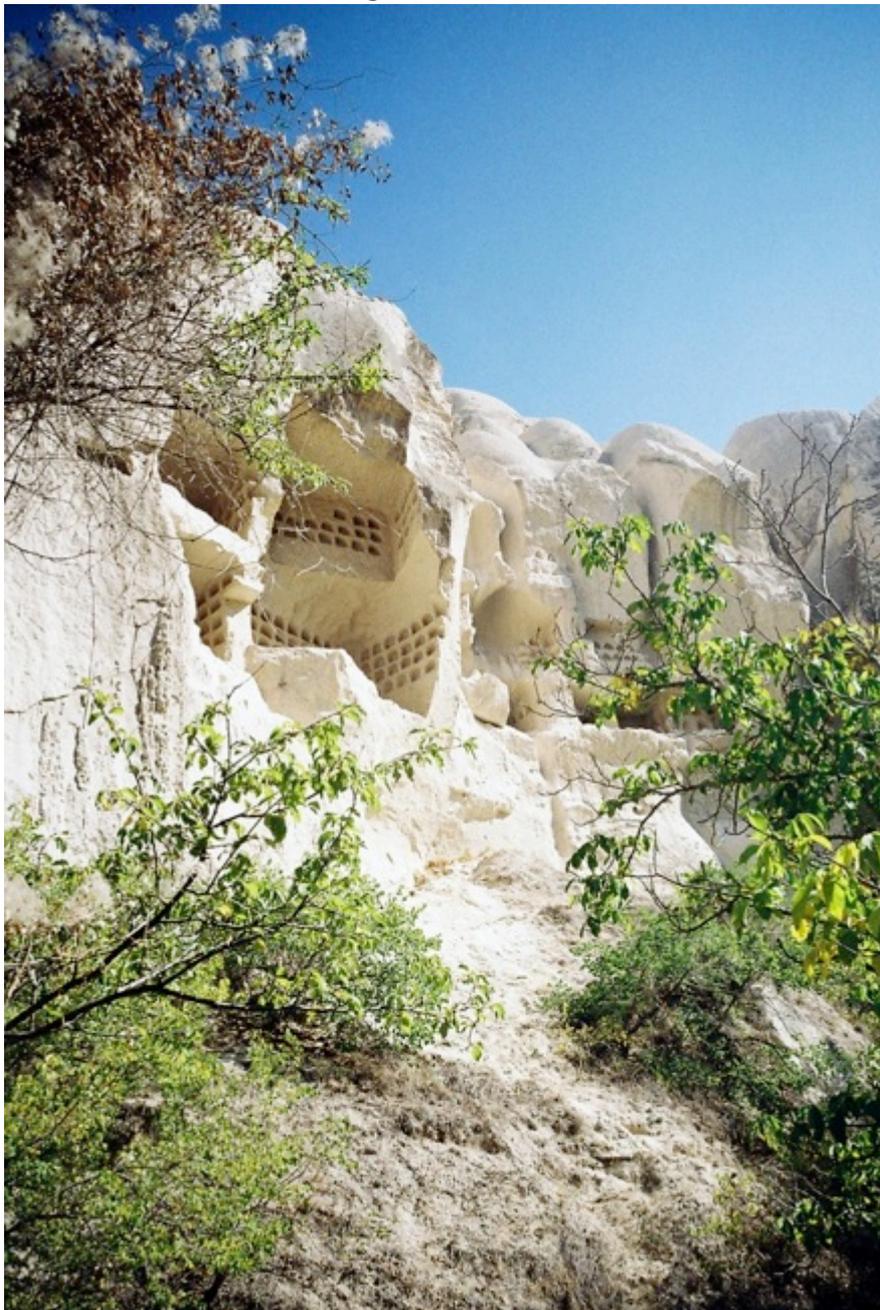
In the evening I strolled up to Uçhisar castle, the highest point in Cappadocia, which is a giant rock formation in which a path has been caved out all the way up to the top viewpoint. I also saw the glorious balloons for the first time at sunset – a multi-coloured mosaic against the pink sky and purple rocks.

Today Turkish tanks lined up just across the Syrian border as ISIS stormed the Kurdish border town of Kobani.



Today we attempted to explore as much as we could without a guide, so that we could try and get a sense of the area. Luckily Uçhisar, where we are staying, is on the edge of Göreme National Park, so we can hike without driving anywhere. The problem with hiking in the Park's valleys without a guide is that it is very easy to get lost, and there are no detailed maps of the area. The afternoon confirmed this helpful advice.

However, our morning was highly successful, as we walked the fairly easy 'Pigeon Valley', which takes you from Uçhisar at one end to what Lonely Planet describes as the 'hippie hangout' and tourist centre of Göreme at the other. 'Pigeon Valley' takes its name from the thousands of pigeons that used to live here. Evidence is to be found in the small holes you can see dug into the tall rock formations all along the valley. The inhabitants of this area dug out the soft rock structures to create homes for the pigeons.



The pigeons had two main uses. Their excrement was collected and used as a fertiliser, and they were used to carry messages.

Unfortunately weasels have largely destroyed the pigeon population. It is truly impossible to describe the eccentric jawdropping beauty of hiking through these valleys. Every turn brings you to a new rock formation, to a new skyline. It is almost like each corner you turn you have made it onto a new planet.

We also attempted to hike Love Valley, but as we got lost amongst its indistinguishable and labyrinthine trails the walk was more of a wander around than a hike. More successfully we

visited the El Nazar Killise – an old Byzantine church. The church was filled inside with brightly colour frescoes from wall to ceiling. However, the faces had been scratched out of all the colour painted figures by Muslims, to whom depictions of these holy people is terrible sacrilege.

Tokalı Kilise (Buckle Church) was the principal sanctuary of a large monastic centre in Byzantine Cappadocia. It has the whole story of Jesus' life covering its ceiling. It is also different from every other church in the open air museum in that it is painted all over in a striking Lapiz Lazuli blue.

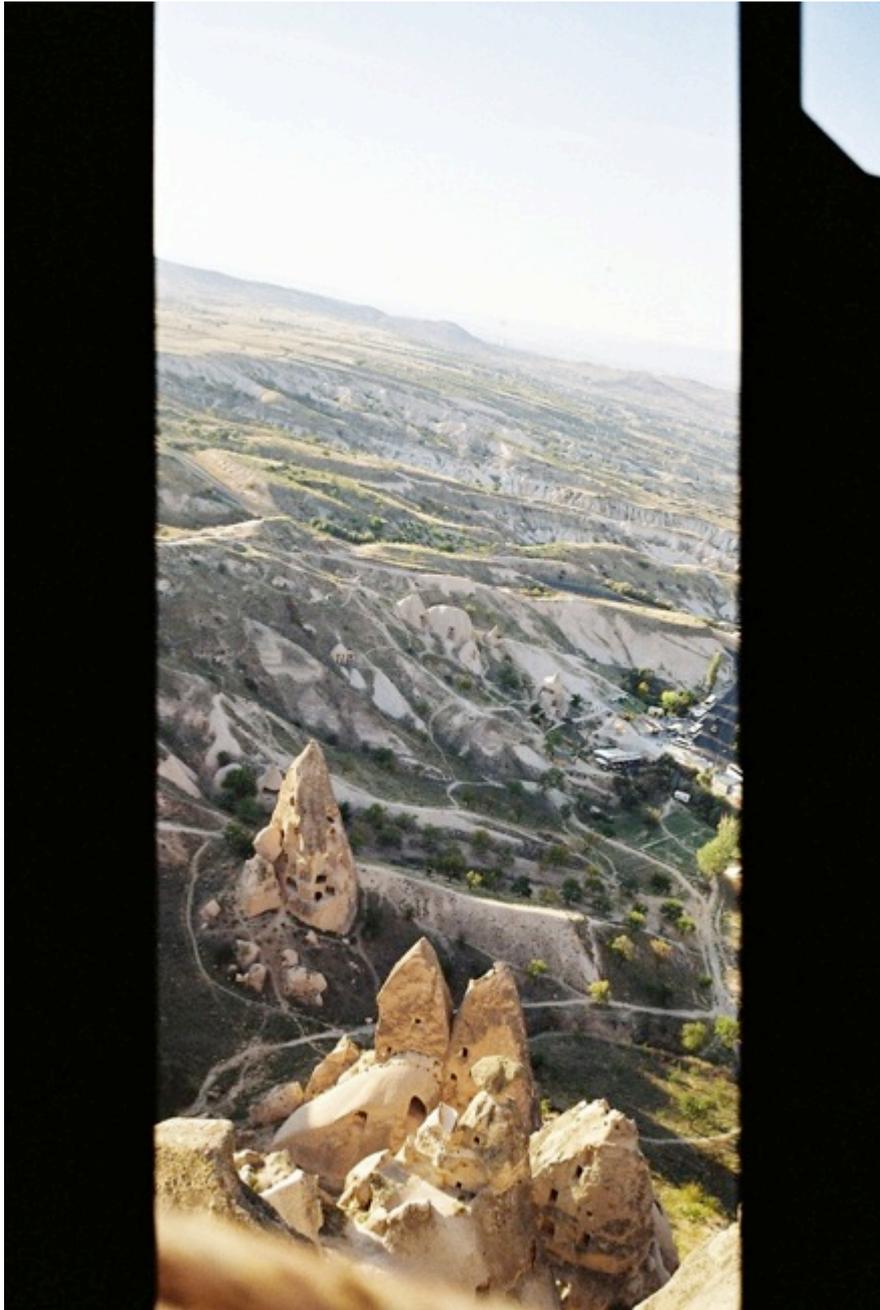


Today violent protests broke out across the whole of Turkey – in Istanbul, Ankara, and in most South Eastern cities. 14 people were killed. A curfew has been imposed in the southeast. The protestors (largely Kurds) are protesting Erdogan's inaction in preventing Kobani's fall to ISIS, and his failure to protect the Kurdish population.

We spent a long morning hiking through trails that dipped in and out of Red and Rose valleys. Our guide (without whom I would have been completely lost) has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the local plants, and is best friends with all the local people we meet. I discovered the joys of the Russian olive, the deep yellow of the Walnut tree, and the plant whose root powder is used as a fixative in Ottoman oil painting.

I cannot put on paper the mystical beauty of these valleys, with layers of multi-coloured rock, fairy chimneys everywhere, canyons, and of course the humanly constructed caves and pigeon nests dug into the soft rock. We stopped at two beautiful early Christian churches. The first, 'Column Church', is on the first floor of a carved out rock cave. It is almost like a cathedral – it is filled with intricately designed floor to ceiling columns, has a giant altar, and simple red symbolic artwork. This was not what I expected to find climbing up the ladder carved into the inside of the cave wall. The second, 'Cross Church', had a beautiful Maltese cross carved out onto the ceiling.

The afternoon took us to Cavuşin, an old Greek town that is now composed of abandoned houses and tourist targeting small group of stalls. The houses really do look different here to the ones in the surrounding Turkish towns – in particular they have very long thin door-shaped windows. The town is where a very old Greek population used to live until they were ordered back to Greece 1924 Population Exchange Agreement.



Nearby the town is one of Cappadocia's famed underground cities. Early Christians used the underground cities to hide from enemies. At first, before Constantine's acceptance of Christianity as an official religion, these enemies were Romans. Later they were Turks and Arabs. The cities were entirely self-sufficient, and there are 40 of them in Cappadocia, though tourists can only enter 13. In the cities each family had a room to eat and sleep in. There were communal stables and food storage areas on the first floor, which were used all year round (not just when they were hiding), as the temperature inside the caves remains constant at 11-17 degrees C all year

round. The passages between the rooms are all very low, this is so that any enemies that make their way into the city cannot move fast with their giant spears. In the rooms where there are entrances to the city, the Christians found ingenious ways to make sure the invaders could not get past that room into the heart of the city. They carved a giant round stone door (in the shape of a giant cheese), which they rolled across a doorway. This stone was extremely heavy (needed several people to roll), but it could only be moved at all from the inside of the room, and not from the outside as the stone is bigger than the doorway.

The Ottoman government shut down the cities later on when the area became part of the Silk Road. The government gave 100% insurance to traders passing through the Empire, and employed villagers in the communities to help keep the traders and their goods safe from bandits and robbers as they passed through. However, the bandits were

using the cave cities as a place to hide and to stash away their loot. With bandits in control, the cave cities became extremely dangerous for travellers to pass near, and made the government's life hell. Thus, they were shut down.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Roger Short Memorial Fund as well as the College for this wonderful, inspiring opportunity. My experiences in Turkey have developed my understanding of one of the world's most important countries, and in particular of this country's unique position between East and West. I have come to fundamentally reconsider many of my opinions about the relationship between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and have learnt incomparably more than I ever could from books alone. This was a most memorable trip, and I hope members of the college continue to benefit from this unique opportunity for many years to come.