It is almost ten years since we travelled to Turkey and the surrounding region on our respective trips. Headlines since have made for grim reading: the havoc wrought by the fragmentation of Syria; riots in Yerevan and Tbilisi; the steady drumroll of terrorist attacks; war in Nagorno-Karabakh; a devastating earthquake; soaring inflation; and a political class which is by turns chaotic, corrupt, and repressive.

It is striking how Turkey, Georgia, and Armenia are all tightly bound up, in their different ways, with the war in Ukraine. Erdogan has tried, with limited success, to position himself as a mediator, with all the attendant ambiguity which that stance implies. Georgia has played host to the tens of thousands of Russians looking to evade Putin’s regime, conscription, or Western sanctions; but at a time when almost a quarter of its territory remains under Russian occupation, and with rapidly diminishing patience. The invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh seems largely to result from Russia’s inability or indifference towards guaranteeing the ceasefire which it brokered in 2020. Although the news is bleak, the region is of central relevance.

Yet, may we be reminded of a Turkish proverb: ‘kahve cehennem kadar kara, ölüm kadar kuvvetli, sevgi kadar tatlı olmalı’, which roughly translates to ‘coffee should be black as hell, strong as death, and sweet as love’. In times of darkness, there are occasional shards of light. The opening of the new home for the Istanbul Modern Museum, sleek and shimmering on the Bosphorus is one such moment. A photo of its architect, Renzo Piano, barefoot in the reflecting pool gives a sense of its gauzy elegance. Every year since our trips, more or less, has brought a superb film out of Georgia: vivid, stark, sometimes absurd, always with a strong sense of the place.

Looking back, we are more and more conscious of how the strength of our connection to this region is not mediated through the news, but through memory and association. It stems from the initial generosity of the Roger Short Memorial Fund—without which our trips would never have happened—and the steadily building community around the scholarships. It is a connection maintained through travel, but also, perhaps more lastingly, through what we remember, read or watch, or have a standing disposition to be interested in. Our memories of the warmth of the people, balmy nights tinged in pink, and the bittersweet taste of Turkish coffee. Long therefore may the RSMF community continue to grow.

Louis Grandjouan, ST 2016
Hugh Moorhead, ST 2016
Abi Reeves, ST 2014
I travelled in September of 2023 with a fellow Roger Short Scholar, Joshua Pearson. It was a three week trip across Turkey, taking us from -19˚ to +35˚C and a 5000m mountain to coastal path. We flew into Istanbul, and then spent a week hiking in each of the Kaçkar mountains, Mount Ararat, and the Lycian way. This breadth showed us the wide range of cultures and landscapes in Turkey, and I am incredibly grateful to the family and friends of Roger Short for the opportunity. By hiking, we had the time to immerse ourselves in places and connect with those living there. It was an experience that I will certainly continue to treasure and I’m sure it will be one of my most vivid memories of studying at Univ.

The trip began with us crashing into Istanbul at 5:45am local time, and not exactly feeling ready to see all that the city had to offer in the 26 hours we had. Regardless, fuelled by excitement for the unknown, we grabbed walnut pastry from a street vendor and got the ferry across the Bosphorus Strait, feeling ready to see all that the city had to offer in the 26 hours we had. Regardless, fuelled by excitement for the unknown, we grabbed walnut pastry from a street vendor and got the ferry across the Bosphorus Strait, our first taste of Turkey, as well as our first view of Istanbul. The day that followed was a whirlwind of colour, smell, and sound, and an intersection of culture—feeling more familiar than expected at points, and yet entirely new in others.

From Istanbul, we flew to the Kaçkar mountains in the north-east, and it was immediately obvious that we’d entered a very different realm. The hills were lined with tea plantations which were introduced with the intention of stalling the outflow of men to the cities, but actually provided employment for women. Buses ran without timetables and were used to transport bread into the remote villages. In the coastal town, Pazar, serving as a gateway to the valleys I particularly enjoyed a cheese shop where we were offered samples of everything and advice on which would be the best aged cheeses for hiking. We came away with bags weighed down with cheese, smoked olives, and honeycomb. The trailhead town was in a cloud for the entire afternoon we were there, but we stood out in our waterproofs amongst the other, entirely Arab, tourists.

We started into the mountains at 5am the next day, having read that it got very misty later in the day. We weren’t able to see far beyond our bags for the entire day, but awoke the next morning in perfect clear, to discover where we’d pitched the tent. Our journey through the Kaçkar mountains featured striking and entirely untouched scenery, with one of the locals estimating 500 hikers per year, but it was the people we met that made it so special. They welcomed us into their homes for food and to sleep with a level of hospitably totally unfamiliar to us, although they certainly had their fun with Google Translate in return! In the temporary pastoral village we passed through, they spoke no English, but enjoyed asking whether I had an ‘aesthetic nose’ (one of the women wanted a nose job) while we were munching through walnut pastry fresh from the oven and a bottomless pot of tea. We stayed with an ex-politician who was building a guesthouse, and his daughter gave an insight into the differences between Ankara and the rural regions in particular regard to women, between enthusing about English literature (she was a particular fan of The Hobbit). We summited Kaçkar Dagi a few days later after heading back up into the mountains, and then walked out to the south-east on one of the longest but most memorable days.

The tea culture is something that was consistent throughout the trip and every part of Turkey we visited, despite the other wide variations. The east is more conservative, and I felt that somewhat in the mountains, but considerably more on the roadtrip to the start of our next hike. We passed through Erzurum and Agri, two cities that very clearly receive no international tourism, although Erzurum was of great importance historically. We were warmly welcomed and encouraged to try the local delicacies of baklava.

We met with the guides and other hikers in the Mount Ararat ( Ağrı Dağı in Turkish) group in a hotel in Dogubeyazit, before heading to the base of the mountain the following morning. Having spent the past week at 3000m, we were by far the most acclimatised in the group, a large proportion of whom were Dutch. This meant the pace felt as glacial as the summit ice cap, but the world of multi-camp expeditions (complete with pack-horses) was something neither of us had experienced at Istanbul.

The Hobbit (the Ararat sign had to do! Julia Johnson

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phase. I’m not sure whether the sudden gain of 40˚ or the cultural change was more of a shock to the system, but both were immediately apparent in the popular party destination. We were no longer getting stared at because we were tourists, but because we looked like we had come out of a bush backwards.

The Lycian Way meanders along the coast between historical sites from numerous periods of rule, and we enjoyed swimming amongst the ruins of a Roman fishing port on the first day. The unquestionable highlight was Myra, and we were the only people there for the duration of our visit. The carved stone tombs were what excited me about the Lycian Way, particularly as a geologist, and they didn’t disappoint. I’d seen one high on a hillside from the bus into the trail, but this was truly spectacular, with a more recent style of column. It is one of two necropoleis in Myra; the other, further up the river, was still painted in the 1800s.

The leg of the hike beyond here was around a headland to a lighthouse, and through some gorgeous (and blissfully cool) woodland. The wildlife of the day ranged from a tortoise to a scorpion—only one of which I wanted a photo with! Another day of forest hiking beyond and we reached Olympos, which was incredibly preserved but not quite as awesome as Myra. From here we hiked in the dark to a hill where natural gas seeps out of the ground and is permanently alight, inspiring the legend of Chimaera. We didn’t manage to spot the three-headed beast while toasting our marshmallows, but that was probably for the best. We headed back to Antalya the following day and had the evening to chase the final few foods we wanted to try, before flying home the following morning, straight back into Michaelmas.

AMY PATerson, 2023

I travelled to Türkiye last spring and am immensely grateful to the Roger Short Memorial Fund for the opportunity. My trip involved a multi-day horse ride through the valleys of Cappadocia and a half marathon through the streets of Istanbul. Below is an attempted but insufficient summary.

The story of my trip to Türkiye begins (perhaps unexpectedly) in a sleepy maize-fringed town in South Africa in 2008. My mum had just returned from an overseas trip and brought back dazzling depictions of hot air balloons floating over fairy chimneys as elegant horses stood in the foreground. This ‘land of beautiful horses’ became a fantasy realm for my horse-obsessed, expanding little mind.
I drew hot air balloons, fairy chimneys, and horses on every permitted surface. Even my first guitar got a layer of paint and a scene from one of my mum’s photographs painted onto it. On weekends I would saddle up my farm pony, Bluebell, and ride through the familiar green valleys on the way to count cows, imagining I was surrounded by fairy chimneys.

In the inevitable tragedy that is growing up, at age 17 I left my sleepy hometown and Bluebell behind to study medicine in Cape Town and shelved my Cappadocian dreams. That is, until a twist of fate found me transplanted from South African soil to the grand grounds of Univ, and an email about the Roger Short Memorial Fund found its way into my inbox.

The news that I had been offered funding for a trip to Türkiye came with equal parts excitement and activity. I spent evenings researching the different multi-day horse rides in Cappadocia and recruited a small crew of friends willing to come along for the (literal) ride. In case one long distance activity wasn’t enough, we managed to align the trip with the Istanbul Half Marathon.

We started our trip in a cave home in the town of Ortahisar, which reminded me more of the fictional city of Cittàgazze in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* than any real town I had ever been to. Upon arrival as a result, a cave sleep in. When we crawled out, we found a feast of olives, breads and coffee prepared for breakfast. We saddled the horses and set off for White Valley at a faster pace than the day before. The paths through some of the region, particularly in the White Valley, are narrow and tricky to navigate, and we marvelled at how effortlessly agile and surefooted the horses were.

Soon the rain started again and eventually the routes became impassable. We headed back to the ranch, and the thrill turned to sadness as we said goodbye to our new horse and human friends.

We left Ortahisar with happy memories despite wet clothing and none of the famed air balloons I had drawn as a kid. We arrived onto the bustling streets of Istanbul and collectively caught our breath as we crossed over the Golden Horn. We spent the first day gazing up in awe at the Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque, and vainly attempting to taste all existing flavours of Turkish Delight.

![Riding between the fairy chimneys in Cappadocia.](image1)

![Spice Bazaar, Istanbul.](image2)
Our second day in the city featured the Istanbul Half Marathon. We soaked in views of iconic landmarks including the Suleymaniye Mosque, Dolmabahce Palace, and the Saint Stephen Bulgarian Orthodox church as well as the cheers of Turkish supporters and musicians en route. To add to the festivities, on our way home from the run, we stopped off at the Spice Bazaar to refuel and I bought my body weight in olives.

Another perk of the half marathon (and reason to appreciate the city of Istanbul) was that the city had arranged for everyone who had a half marathon ticket to have free public transport for the day. We made the most of it by hopping on a tram and visiting the Panorama 1453 Historical Museum (which was mind-blowing).

Our final day was spent meandering through the Grand Bazaar buying a few precious pieces to take home with us. We said our goodbyes and inadequate thank yous to Türkiye and left with a sneaking feeling that we would be back.

JOSHUA PEARSON, 2023
I travelled with another Short Scholar, Julia Johnson. The vision for the trip was to go trekking in a range of locations in Türkiye, seeing the breadth of the country and travelling to some of the more remote areas. That was the plan, anyway…

At 5:45am local time, we landed in Istanbul. Before I had persuaded myself I actually wanted to be awake (Istanbul is two hours ahead of the UK), we had passed through border control and were rushing to make the most of our 26 hours in Türkiye’s largest city. The idea was that, by visiting Istanbul, we could adjust somewhat to Turkish culture before travelling further east. This turned out to be a rather flawed plan: Taksim, where we were staying, felt like any other European city, with its workspaces and bars, while the historical centre had a certain fairy-tale atmosphere, heavily catering for international tourism. Regardless, we zig-zagged our way between stunning mosques, sprawling bazaars, and sesame-roll vendors. While the consistent vision of the Blue Mosque was wonderfully aesthetic, it was the peace of the New Mosque that will stay with me.

The first walking location was the Kaçkar mountains, wedged between the Black Sea and Georgia, in the very north-east of the country. One flight and a couple of buses later, we were in a trailhead town (1400m above sea level), discovering that the route book wasn’t lying when it claimed cloud could cover the northern slopes. What it hadn’t emphasised is how much of a destination this was. The town was full of restaurants and hotels, aimed at Turkish and Arab tourists. As we hiked uphill the following day, we passed a half-built village of cabins, and spoke to a couple, who told us that next season they would have a large business. Based solely on the superb quality of the coffee they served us, I have no doubt they will succeed. This optimism, and scale of vision, appeared again and again, throughout Türkiye. The Turkish dream of building a strong business was evident, and perhaps one of the few consistent points of view as we crossed Türkiye.

After a day walking through clouds, a cold night (socks freezing inside the tent was a new
low for me) and a morning crossing a pass at 3250m, we dropped down a pleasant alpine pasture towards the yaylar (temporary upland village) of Davali. The path entered the village over a wonderful stone bridge, in the style for which the area is known. We walked through the village and sat down for lunch. Just as we were packing up, a man (Ismail) emerged from a house and came over to say hello, bringing us two fantastic pastries (bread stuffed with walnuts). We chatted for a couple of minutes (with some assistance from Google Translate, offline version—cellular connection was a long way away), and he then invited us for çay (tea).

We had read that the residents of the Kaçkar placed a lot of importance giving strangers çay, and perhaps our lunch location had been strategic. Regardless, the welcome we received was incredible: We were offered a range of foods (including lung), and plied with çay. One of their neighbours had a particularly wicked sense of humour, asking us “What brand of sun cream do you use?” None that morning, which had not been the sensible thing! We were repeatedly asked if we wanted to stay with them that night, but felt we should press on to visit Sırakonak, the permanent village downhill of Davali. They then offered to drive us down there, as they were taking their dairy products for sale.

After surviving the drive down, we were introduced to Fahrettin and Ulia, who were in process of building a guesthouse, and who invited us to stay. The couple had worked internationally, mostly in CIS countries, and only recently returned to Sırakonak, Fahrettin’s childhood town. We had coffee, because their daughter, Elvin, was home from school in Ankara, and preferred coffee to the local çay. Fahrettin then suggested a walk, and the five of us (six including Çavaş, their ex-military dog) wandered through the village to a viewpoint. On the walk back, Fahrettin explained that this was an old Armenian village, and pointed out graves—evidence of a dark past.

Summitting Kaçkar Dağı, the highest peak in the Pontic Alps at 3937m, was great fun, but hard to write about. Although not a technical climb, the navigation was far from simple, and the length of day (we decided to descend to the gateway town that day) gruelling.

Climbing Ararat took five days, mostly to allow for altitude acclimatisation. Accordingly, a lot of time was spent in barren camps, drinking çay, and watching the procession of pack horses between the camps. I found it strange to realise that I was staring at Iran. Our guide pointed out the sound of military drones.

The summit day was predictably brutal: 12:45 wake-up, lam breakfast and a 2am trudge upwards. The pace was extraordinarily slow, but, having developed a spot of food poisoning six hours earlier, I was rather thankful. The cold was bitter: estimated -10°C, with a further 10-20°C of wind chill. At around 3am, we strapped on crampons and continued across the ice sheet. One group member violently revisited the breakfast, colouring the ice a delightful yellow; food poisoning or altitude sickness, I don’t know. The summit itself was surreal: the mountain cast a shadow over the clouds. The views stretched on and on.

Coming down the mountain, the guides were a lot more relaxed: it seemed a stressful lifestyle. They explained they took groups for five days, had two days off while groups changed and then returned to climb Ararat again. The camp cook explained that he was studying computer science at university, but it was a family business and so he helped out.

Our final hike was the Lycian way, along Türkiye’s Turquoise Coast. Arriving in Antalya was a shock: buzzing boulevards, lined with bars and nightclubs. Some towns we hiked
through were overrun by tourism; others were surrounded by a mosaic of greenhouses—from the plants growing by the road, I guess the area is fantastically fertile. One suspects this fertility allowed classical civilisations to build the impressive structures along our route: the cliff tombs in Olympos were striking, but it was the perfectly preserved amphitheatre in Demre (formerly Myra, where Santa Claus is from) that really blew my mind.

Having travelled from Istanbul to the eastern border and back to the southwest of the country, we certainly saw several sides to Türkiye. While there was some top-quality hiking, it was the people we met that made this trip special: from the shop owner who tried to find the perfect cheese for hiking, to the outspoken local politician who explained our route and the couple who gave us a lift on their tractor. I am very grateful to the Roger Short Memorial Fund for enabling this trip. The generosity of many of the people we met across Türkiye was overwhelming and it was an experience that will certainly stay with me. I hope that future generations of Short Travellers will have as positive an experience.

OLIVIA STRACHAN, 2023

I would like to extend my gratitude to the RSMF whose generous travel grant made my trip to Turkey and Iran possible.

My journey started off by eating my way through Istanbul trying doner, baklava, stuffed mussels, tavuk göğsü, and a full Turkish breakfast. Wandering around a variety of different districts in pursuit of local food was a beautiful introduction to the city. I have a personal interest in the Byzantine era which stemmed from an extended stint in Venice learning about the intersection between West and East and how this has filtered down into modern perceptions. The influx of external cultural influences due to Istanbul’s position as a central trading hub was palpable. The stark differences between the districts of different groups of people and the overlapping nature of their hallmarks was a fascinating reminder of what this city has always been. I visited many mosques including the famed Hagia Sophia, but it was Suleymaniye Mosque up on the hill that stole my heart with its spectacular views over Galata and the Bosphorus. Another day was spent getting lost in the Grand Bazaar and procuring some headscarves and Turkish coffee as well as a beautiful handmade jacquard jacket.

Next, we headed to Izmir and after some questionable driving, we made it to Pergamon. Wandering around the ancient ruins of this great city was eerie with the silence of the wind over the mountains, but fascinating to learn about the history of the place.

Keen to explore the history of the entire region further we headed to Ephesus. Much busier but equally spectacular with its reconstructed library, you got a real sense of what it might have been like to exist in such a place. Finally, a day was spent exploring Izmir and it was the Kemeraldizi Bazaar here that was one of the highlights of the trip. Much less aimed at tourists than the markets in Istanbul, it had an air of authenticity that made it incredibly compelling.

I then flew to Tehran, an overwhelming place seemingly a million miles apart from my personal experience of the world making it all the more compelling. We crisscrossed our way...
the city of Isfahan with its ancient roots and spectacular architecture. Its very dominance is a testament to Persian ingenuity which we were reminded of at every point from the windcatchers to the qanats allowing all these cities to thrive in the harshest of environments. The sprawling market and spectacular Shah Mosque at Naqsh-e Jahan Square were simply beyond comparison. Reading about Iran’s place in the past and its current narrative only scratches the surface. It was certainly an interesting exercise comparing the information that we were exposed to internally vs externally: a reminder of the importance of always questioning what is presented to you as fact, no matter who it comes from.

We also visited Persepolis which I could talk about for days. Looking back 2500 years through the lens of the incredible reliefs that cover the site was the ultimate testament to the human connection that felt like the central theme of this entire trip.

Finally, I can’t help but mention the incredible food! I was enveloped by flavours I had never been exposed to before—sour cherry pork, sweet cucumber with vinegar sekanjabin, saffron, cardamom, and rose water in everything.

I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to further expand my experience of the world by visiting a place that is so fundamentally misunderstood in the West and the chance to expel my own misconceptions about one of the most incredible countries I have ever been to.

❖ ❖ ❖

across the country, with our preconceptions being stamped out at every turn. We visited Tehran, Kashan, Isfahan, Yazd, and finally Shiraz with one day spent with nomads far up in the Zagros mountains. I had anticipated great things, but nothing could have prepared me for the scale, the colour, the age, or the distinctness of what we saw.

Persia’s cohesive identity sets it apart from anywhere else I have ever visited. The resilience and hope of everyone we encountered, particularly the women, was a testament to the Persian spirit. I have never felt more welcome and safe in a country, with genuine goodwill extended to us by everyone we encountered. A particular highlight was...
natural resources sector. I still get to travel a lot, but mostly on loud and bumpy UN helicopters.

2011

JOSEPH BARLEY
I am still living in Greece, between Athens and Epidaurus, working as a translator, writer and guide. My next book, due out next year with OUP, is an anthology of Greek short stories in translation entitled 'Athens Tales'. Alongside my work with the Slow Cyclist (for whom I guide in Zagori and Crete) I am promoting my own private guiding services and have even made a website: www.joshuabarley.com.

RODRIGO GARCIA-VELASCO
After a year in Chicago teaching at Northwestern University, I have now returned to London to take up a position at the Department of History at UCL, where I will continue pursuing my interests in the history of inter-faith relations in the medieval Mediterranean. Last summer, my partner and I brought our friends and family to Skopelos, in the Sporades islands, for a small preparatory celebration prior to our wedding in Oxford, which will take place on 4 May 2024.

JOANNA PALERMO
It's been a busy year: I've taken a role as a COO of a dark kitchen company called Jacuna based in London. We're working hard to grow the business across the UK. I do hope to get some down time, and have a long trip to Australia planned for the end of the year. No itinerary is yet detailed, so any recommendations would be welcome! I've continued to dabble in archaeology, and last year published a part of my doctoral thesis in the compendium Circuits of Metal Value.

ELIZABETH POUGET (MACDONALD)
I'm currently on maternity leave after giving birth to Ambrose, a baby brother for our daughter Marianne, on Christmas Eve last year. The best Christmas present for us all!

2014

SAMVARTIKA BAJPAI
The highlight of my 2023 was spending three weeks in Uzbekistan, with the cherry on top being that our flights allowed us a stopover in Istanbul. This was my first time visiting the city with my partner and it was a joy to re-experience the city with the eyes of a first timer. I had a San Sebastián cheesecake and plenty of orange wine in Kadiköy to mark my birthday, and an overall fabulous time. Work and life in London continue as regular otherwise.

ODETTE CHALABY
I have had a busy but exciting year, albeit with a lot of it taken up by work. I am in the early years of a career as an environmental and planning barrister. More importantly, I got married to my now husband Thomas — it was a long time coming as we have been together since sixth form! We are currently planning a delayed long honeymoon to Japan. Hopefully more travels on the horizon than I have had time for recently…

2016

JOHN-HENRY CHARLES
I guess my big news is that Johanna (fellow Roger Short Traveller from 2016) and I became engaged earlier in the year. If a bike ride through 3 countries, across lots of kilometers, and consuming lots of raki (our Roger Short experience) doesn't bond you I'm not sure what will... A wedding in 2025 is on the cards, then potentially a honeymoon cycling from Turkey to Azerbaijan—we'll keep you posted(!).

HUGH MOORHEAD
I continue to be employed as an equity analyst covering the exciting world of Benelux and Nordic banks. The work remains as challenging as ever and I'm hopefully improving myself in the process and not making too many disastrous investment recommendations. The job also includes the occasional bit of travel although this largely entails office meetings and little in the way of cultural immersion. I am also enjoying living in Stockwell with my saintly OM flatmate, Jordan Reed (Modern Languages, 2012).

I was very fortunate to be able to travel a fair bit in 2023, although alas not to Turkey or the surrounding region. Instead my excursions took me to Panama, which I would highly recommend to anyone who loves gorgeous tropical coastlines, and India, where I saw the old enemy lift the world cup in Ahmedabad surrounded by 100,000 increasingly despondent India fans.

I hope to see everyone at the Roger Short dinner this year—always a highlight of my year.

2018

DIANA AVADANII
In the past year I have completed my first year as a full-time researcher in battery materials at KIT. It has been an incredibly intellectually stimulating year and I have had lots of fun around the lab. I have also enjoyed going to museums and concerts in Heidelberg, Stuttgart, and Fribourg in my free time, and hiking in the summer in the Alps. I am always happy to connect to fellow Short Travellers who might pass through south-west Germany, so do reach out.
TRAVEL JOURNAL PRIZE
The prize for the best journal is awarded at the dinner each year by Richard and Anna Morgan, life-long friends of Roger’s and founding contributors to the Fund.

HONORS
The University College Record listed the following academic honors:
❖ Diana Avadanii (2018) awarded a DPhil for her thesis “The role of grain boundaries in plastic deformation”.
❖ Paula Domingo Pasarin (2022) awarded Master of Philosophy (Slavonic Studies)

APPRECIATION
Thank you to the Master’s office for the ongoing assistance and organisational expertise.
We are grateful to all the Short Travellers and supporters who wrote in and sent photos. We could not produce the newsletter without your contributions. We very much look forward to reuniting with those able to attend the dinner in April.

INFORMATION

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Felice Nassar
Director of Development
University College, Oxford
OXI 4BH
+44(0) 1865 276674
felice.nassar@univ.ox.ac.uk

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