

A Turkish Tapestry: Impressions of Turkey *by John Carpita*

Turkey is like its famous Turkish coffee, thrice boiled—with the froth on top, a strong, heady brew of old and new.

What I learned about Turkish history and culture during our visit reminds me of the beautiful carpets we saw and touched. Everything past and ancient is there, interwoven inextricably with the present and modern. Young Turks in the latest European fashions share the streets with those wearing traditional costumes. Modern subway systems are under construction in Izmir and Istanbul. Tourist buses and Mercedes make way for horse-drawn wagons and tractors on rural highways. A pony cart passes a businessman in a suit talking into his cell phone. Delivery trucks compete for street space with hand carts. A man staggers by with a huge furniture piece strapped to his back. Street vendors balance trays and platters of food on their heads. Our bus intrudes on Karacasu's market day, one definitely not sanitized for tourists, with live goats and cows and butchered animals as well. A young man sits on his haunches on a wall, cigarette in hand. Horses and camels have been replaced by tractors, but you sense a time warp here, a scene unchanged for thousands of years.

Our hosts in Izmir were more than gracious and hospitable. We were spoiled rotten and treated like royalty. Our visit was reported on national television and in major Izmir area newspapers. As one of our group put it: "The good news is that we had our 15 minutes of

national fame [per Andy Warhol]. The bad news is that it happened in Turkey." Jerry Fay spoke for all of us when he asked Mayor Kemal Basak'la if he was too old to be adopted by the Mayor.



Street vendor at work in Istanbul.

One American dollar is equal to 270,000 (+/-) Turkish lira (TL). This meant we were millionaires several times over for \$50, say. This led to conversations like this: One evening, Debbie Yazici, Ben's wife, asked me if I had change for a 5,000,000 TL bill, as she wanted to leave a tip for the baby-sitter at the hotel. I replied that I didn't, but that she could have a million lira bill. She replied, "Thanks, I owe you a million."

Incidentally, if you dread traveling with your small children, park them at the airport and rent Ben and Debbie's two and four year old boys for your vacation. They are real troupers and were adopted by everyone after our first few days of bus travel. Along the same line, jettison your tour group and ask for ours. We had forty of the most gracious and delightful people that

you'll ever meet, an opinion unchanged by being cooped up in a tour bus for hours on end with them.

On our first outing, I stepped out of the hotel wearing red shorts, a white shirt and blue tennis shoes. Someone said, "Boy you look patriotic." I replied "Maybe I should paint a target on my back, too." This was less than three weeks after the African embassy bombings and less than two weeks after US retaliatory raids in Sudan and Afghanistan. Actually, in all the walking we did, much of it at night, in Izmir and Istanbul, I never felt apprehensive. We stayed out of the really dark alleys, mind you, but then I don't go in dark alleys in Seattle either.

Riding in a Turkish *taksi* is not for the faint of heart. Most city streets are narrow and winding and have very few traffic markings, least of all center lines. Taksi drivers must all have been camel racers at some point in their present or past lives. In Bodrum, on my first ride, we careened from our hotel to the

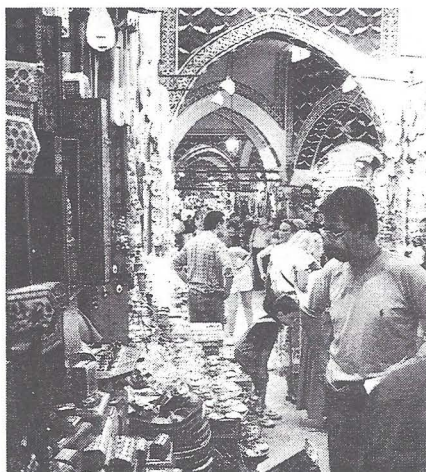


Turkish taksi approaches the Valens Aqueduct in Istanbul, constructed in the Fourth Century, A.D..



marketplace near the harbor, at one point challenging a huge water truck for ownership of the roadway. I had my foot braced against the front seat the whole ride. In Istanbul, we took a taksi from the Grand Bazaar to the Hotel Maramar. About halfway there, Julia Ince-Scott, Turkish-American and a chemical engineer from the L.A. area, noticed that the driver hadn't turned his meter on. This led to a heated dialogue in Turkish of increasing rapidity and volume, complete with waving hands and gestures that even we non-Turkish speakers could understand. All the while, the driver was weaving from lane to lane in frenetic traffic, with jackrabbit starts and lurching stops within inches of cars in front of us and to the sides. Whew! Disney could make a ride out of *that* experience.

In Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, I bargained for scarves in a tiny shop, about 8 foot square, with all but a few square feet covered with colorful, exquisite silk scarves. Four scarves for 28,000,000 TL was the asking price. I offered 10,000,000. He countered with 22,000,000 and a Turkish coffee. I offered 14,000,000 and no Turkish



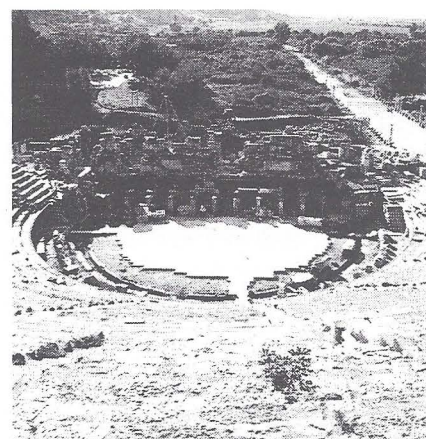
The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. Over 5,000

coffee. We settled for 18,000,000 and he had his young helper get two Turkish coffees anyway. He spoke very good English and had been to the 'States' at least twice. He knew where Seattle is and wanted to take his wife of three years there before they had children. His father had started this business in 1969 and he had taken over recently. After several minutes of pleasant conversation, I reluctantly rejoined our group. What a delightful encounter.

On the first night of the symposium, we had a formal dinner at the Asanôr Restaurant, arguably Izmir's best, but certainly its most spectacularly sited. It sits atop a cliff overlooking Izmir Bay. We approached it from below the cliff, totally awed by the sheer cliff wall and lighting effects, and went into the elevator vestibule. Only four people at a time could squeeze into each elevator. When our group got to the restaurant level, we expected the door to open automatically, not realizing that *Itinis* meant Push. The look on the attendant's face when we arrived back at the bottom was priceless. We were honored by the presence of the Governor of Izmir Province and Mayors and Council Members from most of the cities that make up metropolitan Izmir. Everyone was so gracious. And the food!! Course after course, delicacy after delicacy. Some of the ladies had to give up after a while. After dinner, someone opened a window so we could hear the musical trio playing on the deck outside. After a few minutes, we realized that they were playing American hit tunes from the 50s and 60s and singing in English. The lead singer was clad in leather

and his head was shaven, but he performed a beautiful rendition of *Love Me Tender*, an early Elvis hit, for me.

Ephesus was the highlight of the trip in terms of ancient ruins. With very little imagination, you can visualize Flavius or Domitian or some other Roman citizen of Ephesus going about their daily



The 25,000 seat theater at Ephesus. The ancient harbor lies to the top of the picture, but the Aegean Sea is now five miles away.

business. Maybe they'll stop by the spice shop or some other little store on their way to the Library of Celsius after registering a complaint with the senate, or city council, in the odeon, the small theater. After a leisurely visit to the Library, there's time for a pit stop in the marble-seated public latrine by the Temple of Trajan before catching a matinee at the theater. It was a special treat to spend the whole afternoon of my 52nd birthday in Ephesus, particularly since I've long been interested in archeology. In addition, Ephesus played a prominent role in the development of the early Christian church. Saint Paul taught for three years there, but was forced to leave after

a riot, instigated by a disgruntled silversmith named Demetrius, filled the theater with people shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for several hours. As the agora, or market place, is very near the theater, it was probably very easy to gather a hostile crowd. The Apostle John was an Elder in the church there also. It was truly inspiring to be there where these things had actually happened.

While in Turkey, I had the pleasure of reading Turkish Reflections, by Mary Lee Settle. She lived in Bodrum for three years in the early 1970s and then returned for an extended visit in 1989. I thoroughly enjoyed the entire book, but there is one passage that stands out, from her preface:


"Turn off a main road, wander into a village, go to see an ancient ruin, and you are in another country, the one where people live as they have for so many thousands of years, They are not conscious of saving a culture. They are not resisting change. They are digesting it, as they always have. It is so slow that it is more like the erosive carving of rocks.

It is not that they are frozen in time, far from it. They simply have, from mother to daughter and father to son over the centuries, kept ways they have found useful. They belie our naive idea that when

kingdoms replaced kingdoms, or ideas replaced ideas, they somehow wiped out the past. This did not happen - not in building and not in thought. They may have changed the old patterns, but they have not obliterated them.

I have a sense that when the new armies came, and the new conquerors rolled over Anatolia like great destructive storms, the people who survived went on about their business as soon as the turmoil was over, and they were forgotten again. It is heart-lifting to see this among the ordinary people who live there generation after generation. It is a reminder in the twentieth century, when revolutionary and puritan governments try to blot out the past and change the symbols, that all of this has been tried before, and didn't succeed then. As each new belief, or conversion, or dynasty, has come, the people who have had to live through these changes have never quite succumbed to them.

There are clues all over Turkey to this instinct for revival and survival. A street meanders where a path was. A wall is rebuilt where a house has fallen. A space is left that once was an *agora*, because it has always been an open space, not for logical reasons, but for the habit of conserving, of not crossing the unimaginable barriers of change."□



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