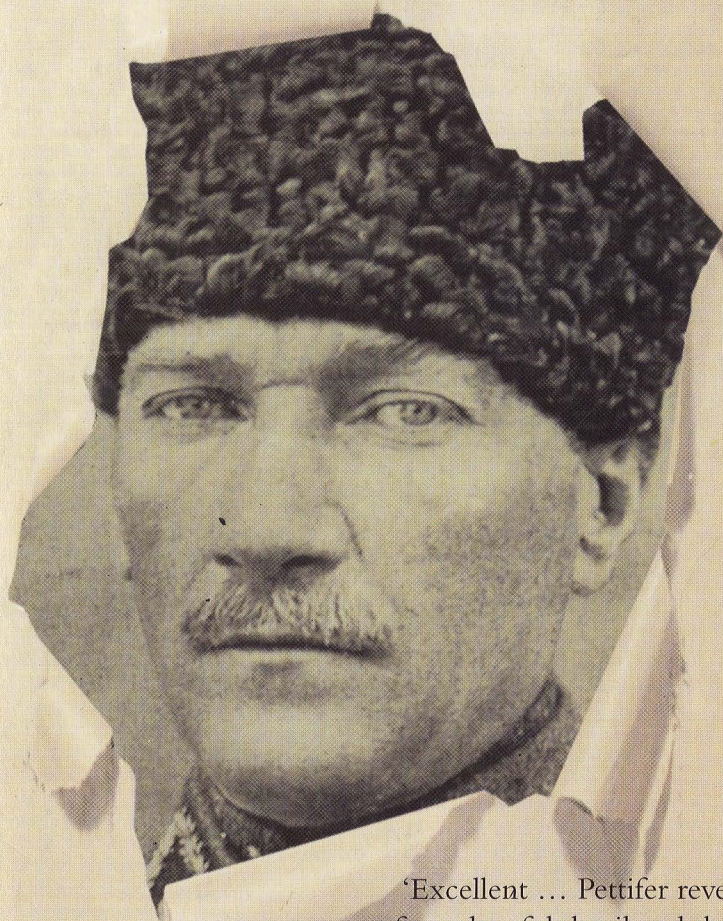


JAMES PETTIFER



‘Excellent ... Pettifer reveals an eye for colourful detail and the style is a model of clarity’ Sara Wheeler, *Independent*

THE TURKISH LABYRINTH  
ATATÜRK AND THE NEW ISLAM



# THE TURKISH LABYRINTH ATATÜRK AND THE NEW ISLAM

---

JAMES PETTIFER



PENGUIN BOOKS  
PUSTAKA PERDANA



1005970

# Contents

*List of Maps*    xiii

*Preface*    xix

*Introduction*    xxi

## Part One    CITIES

1. *Istanbul I: Origins*    3
2. *Istanbul II: Pera and Modernism*    20
3. *Istanbul III: The Lower Depths*    36
4. *Ankara: The Kemalist Monument*    51

## Part Two    COUNTRYSIDE

5. *Zonguldak and the Black Sea*    71
6. *The Armenians and the Kurdish Crisis I*    87
7. *The Kurdish Crisis II*    105
8. *The Islamic Renaissance*    123
9. *The Turkish Diaspora*    138

## Part Three    THE NEW EASTERN QUESTION

10. *Turkey and the European Union*    155
11. *Turkey and the Balkan Imbroglia*    169
12. *Cyprus: Apple of Discord*    185

13. *The Challenge of Central Asia* 197
14. *Turkey, the Middle East and the Future* 212
- Epilogue* 223
- Chronology* 227
- Select Bibliography* 230
- Index* 235

## Preface

More than most countries of its size and importance, Turkey suffers from a degree of ignorance, even indifference. This was not always so. The popular press in England before the First World War shows regular, if sometimes outlandish and highly prejudiced coverage of the late Ottoman world, and there was serious reporting elsewhere. There is hardly any modern equivalent. Only one or two of the quality newspapers have regular correspondents in post in Ankara or Istanbul. Most travel is confined to a few parts of Turkey. Until 1990 it was difficult to move freely without special government permit in some regions of the country, and there are still large areas where the Kurdish war and associated military activities prevent travel in reasonably secure and relaxed conditions. As a result, debate about Turkish issues is often ideologically charged, based on an exchange of stereotypes and *idées reçues*, in the absence of up-to-date information on many topics.

In this book I have concentrated on a central question of contemporary Turkish society, the survival of the heritage of the founding father of modern Turkey, Atatürk, and the relationship of that inheritance to the Islamic revival in the country. There are many better qualified people to write about Turkey as a Middle Eastern state; I am primarily concerned with Turkey as one of Europe's near neighbours, a participant in the Balkan crisis, and a source of millions of *gastarbeiters* in Europe. I have also attempted to outline at least the main issues affecting Turkey elsewhere, although on many topics readers may need to consult more specialized literature.

I am very grateful to friends and colleagues for their assistance,

encouragement and advice with writing this book, particularly Ahmet Ciftci, Anı King Underwood, Anastase Sideris, Dr Celia Kerslake, Ovul Tesisler, Avni Oxcan, Mesut Gunser, Ozker Ozgur, Nevena Georgiev, Christopher Walker, Shaban Murati, Professor Richard Crampton, Professor Sir Dimitri Obolensky, Angela Gillon, Graham Francis, Mahmut Simsek, Elif Osun, Metin Silman, Dr Zoran Pajic, Sir Reginald Hibbert, Michael Christides, Professor Richard Seaford, Martin Fryer, Liz Rawson and George Foster, Bernard McDonagh, Hugh Williams, Martin Stone, Miranda Vickers, Ahmet Sapaz, Hugh Poulton, Bob Campbell, Janet Gunn, Dick and Mary Lincon, Steve Playford and Tina Comely.

I have received wise and patient editorial guidance from Eleo Gordon and Daphne Tagg. The Hotel Hippodrome in Istanbul has been a welcoming home, office and refuge over the years in an often turbulent city. I am also very grateful to the librarians of the Oriental Institute, and St Anthony's College, Oxford, and the School of African and Oriental Studies, London.

I would like to thank the many Turkish and Kurdish people I have met over the years for their help with my travels and research, some of whom, in present political conditions, must remain, regrettably, anonymous.

All errors of fact or interpretation are my own responsibility.

Bath, January 1997

# Introduction

If one takes as a basis the laws, statistics and budgets as printed it is easy to prove that the Ottoman Empire is in a state of unexampled prosperity. Life and property are secure; perfect liberty and toleration are enjoyed by all; taxation is light, balances large, trade flourishing. Those who have not an extensive personal acquaintance with Turkey may regard such accounts with suspicion and think them highly coloured, but they find it difficult to realize that all this official literature is absolute fiction, and for practical purposes unworthy of a moment's attention.

Sir Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 1900

In Ottoman times, as today, it was difficult to gain an accurate picture of Turkey from official Turkish publications, although whether this was due to the enormous complexity of the country or to an inherited tradition of official obfuscation is uncertain. The old cliché was that Turkey was a continent, not a country; within living memory it was the centre of a great historic empire that stretched from the Yemen to north Africa, and from the wooded plains south of Skopje to the mountains of the Caucasus. Peoples as far east as the borders of China can see themselves in some senses as Turkish in origin, language or culture, and Turkish identity and political influence are reasserting themselves in many of the new republics emerging from the old Soviet Union. Turkish life and culture have a renewed pattern of complexity and diversity as a result.

When Sir Charles Eliot was writing, the future of Turkey was regarded as part of the 'Eastern Question' – the complex series

of diplomatic conundrums surrounding the fate of the entire Ottoman Empire. The aftermath of the Congress of Berlin in 1878 saw the emergence and territorial consolidation of the ex-Ottoman states in the Balkans, such as Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania, and this was paralleled after the First World War by the emergence of new Middle Eastern countries carved out from old Ottoman territories by the imperialist powers. The 'Turkey' that remained was consolidated by Atatürk into a new republic in 1923. In the West it tended to be perceived as an ethnically and religiously homogeneous state (which in reality it never was) and this misconception has often prevented rational analysis and discussion of some events in the past and in contemporary Turkey. In that sense, there may be said to be an Eastern Question now as there was before the final collapse of Ottoman power in the Balkans.

Until about a hundred years ago Turkish identity in Britain meant one thing above all others to mainstream liberal opinion: to be a Muslim, and, therefore, a foe of Western society. The 'Turk' was the 'Other', Muslim, dangerous and untrustworthy. Resistance to this expansionist and militant religion and the theocratic Ottoman state that embodied it – at least for the dominant Sunni believers – was as central to European culture then as resistance to Soviet Communism and its values has been this century. Turkey was the deadly enemy of Christendom, close, powerful, threatening. For generations in Europe, the fight against the Ottoman Empire was a fight for Christianity against Islam, as the armies of the Ottoman sultans swept through the Balkans towards Vienna and northern Europe. In earlier centuries, the Crusades against the Saracens had the same impetus: the battle for Christendom, for the free West, against the tyrannical and doctrinaire East. Turk merged into Arab according to this way of thinking. Christian society represented a free society, whereas Turkish society was despotic, the anti-thesis of the values on which Western civilization was based. In art, this ideology was embodied in works such as Mozart's opera

*The Abduction from the Seraglio*, where the Ottoman harem was seen as a symbol of resistance to the values of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. This ideological prejudice also had a more practical foundation. As an economic entity, the Ottoman Empire meant stagnation and backwardness, compared to the progressive and innovative Christian bourgeois world. In social and family terms, it meant slavery, lack of respect for individual human rights and an absolutist and tyrannical state. This was linked to various notions of unbridled sensuality embodied in the harem and the oppression of women.

In the nineteenth century both England and Germany were strongholds of Hellenism among the ruling élite – a prime minister such as Gladstone could translate Homer from ancient Greek into English in his spare time as a matter of course. The recovery of Hellenism as a political force after the establishment of a Greek state independent of the Ottoman Empire in 1830 was intimately linked to opposition to the Ottoman world as the embodiment of oppression and economic and cultural backwardness. Hellenism was equated with intellectual freedom, the Ottoman world with the absence of intellectual activity or achievement, the world of Milton's 'sensual sty'. Some residual elements of this thinking continue today; the success of a strongly anti-Turkish film like *Midnight Express* in Europe and the USA in the late 1970s was partly dependent on traditional images of Turkish disregard for human rights within a totalitarian state, and the toleration of violence and individual exploitation and the neglect of the rule of law.

In this book I explore how far some of these antitheses have continued to determine our perceptions. In international relations Turkey remains a key country, and all the clichés of Turkey being a bridge between East and West, the meeting point of different cultures, still apply. Despite the end of the Cold War, Turkey continues to occupy a central role as a regional policeman in NATO and Western security thinking. But the Communist period narrowed our vision of Turkey and its role in the world

considerably, and little has changed in many minds since.

The preferred Western picture of Turkey and its development portrays the West's multinationals as a central innovating force in the economy and assumes gradual integration with the European Union and a pro-American policy on Middle East issues. It predicts that Atatürk's heritage will be maintained and secularism will be dominant, for the West, faced with the rise of Islamic radicalism in many countries of the world, has equated secularism in Turkey with 'stability'. The complex and incomplete political achievement of Atatürk is reduced to ending the Ottoman theocratic system and demolishing the power of the Islamic religious institutions. According to this way of thinking, Islam largely ceased to matter as a social or political force in Turkey after 1923, yet this view neglects the gradual reassertion of Islam in Turkish life, at least since the 1950s, particularly through the formalities of Islamic education, and the marked growth of Islamic influences in many key institutions since the early 1980s. In most Western countries, think-tanks, the media and political commentators tend to promote this simplistic view of Turkey's recent history; critics, of whatever persuasion, have not enjoyed a comfortable life, any more than serious critics of the Turkish establishment do within the country, even today. The real doubts about these and related issues made writing this book seem worthwhile.

Perceptions of Turkey, prior to Atatürk's revolution, had been dominated by historical images of force, especially that of bloodthirsty, murderous hordes intent on despoiling Europe and placing it under the servitude of a misguided and bigoted religion. Until the late 1980s this view of Turkey as a potential threat to the West was deemed antiquated and out of date; the notion that Turkey embodied any problem to Europe seemed absurd. It was a loyal and vital ally: past threats had been superseded by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the growth of modern secular culture under Atatürk in the 1930s, and the integration of Turkish nationalism into the

security framework of NATO as part of the fight against Communism. Turkey appeared to be turning into a modern European country, at least to the millions of north European tourists who began to visit the Mediterranean coastline – the mosque was merely a picturesque building in the old town, Turkish women were becoming increasingly indistinguishable in dress and manner from European female visitors, and peasants were turning into happy and attentive waiters, as if by a miracle. Turkey's Islamic culture made it different from some other holiday destinations, but that was no longer part of a separate or hostile world, no longer an 'Other'. Turkey was 'democratic', having thrown off its difficult heritage of military intervention in politics; it was reasonable and moderate in its growing links with the European Community; and it was a valued and loyal ally, as the outcome of the Gulf War showed – Turkish co-operation over oil pipeline closures and Operation Desert Storm was vital to Western military success. In the 1980s Turkey under Prime Minister Turgut Ozal was seen as a model of Western economic development, with high growth rates, a liberal and open economic policy based on a good inflow of foreign investment and developing stockmarkets, through which Turks and foreigners could share in the growing prosperity and strength of Turkish industry.

Since the early 1990s, serious doubts have begun to emerge about some aspects of this apparent progress and modernization, partly as a result of the rise of Islam as a political force in Turkish society. The Turkish economy is crippled by high inflation and unemployment and burgeoning public debt. The intractable war with the Kurds, who have been fighting to establish a separate Kurdish state in the south-east for many years, has cost billions of dollars and thousands of deaths since the mid 1980s, and victory seems as far away as ever. The environment is threatened by unplanned industrial development and the ever-expanding cities are running short of water and are suffering gross overcrowding, a rising birthrate, and public health problems. As

elsewhere in the world, Turkey has seen a marked revival of radical, if not clearly fundamentalist, Islamic practice: veiled women are now a common sight on Turkish streets; an Islamic political party, the Refah (Welfare) Party, has grown quickly to become a major political force in the country, winning control first of local authorities and then of the government in 1996, and underground Islamic terrorist groups have been established. A new, assertive nationalism has begun to characterize foreign policy after the long stasis of the Cold War, when the United States and NATO shaped Turkish policy largely as they wished. Turkey's co-operation with the United Nations coalition in the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein has left a very uncertain heritage. On every border Turkey has difficulties, and potential and actual security threats. To the south, its relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran are problematic, to the east and north the demise of the Soviet Union has left as many problems as opportunities, and to the west the European Union seems as far away as ever from offering full membership, despite the Customs Union agreement in 1995–6. Turkey avoided military involvement in the Bosnian crisis, but was a closely involved onlooker. It is forming ever closer relations with ex-Yugoslav Macedonia (FYROM), and its troops joined the United Nations force in the Balkan peace-keeping operation, something strongly resented by Serbia.

The Turkish government has seemed indifferent to the concerns of its neighbours, notably the West's liberal democratic values and concern for human rights. The military leaders who ruled Turkey in the early 1980s were responsible, directly and indirectly, for thousands of deaths, often in painful and humiliating circumstances; they have never been charged or put on trial, unlike the Greek colonels from the 1968–74 junta. Many clauses remain in the Turkish constitution and are embodied in individual laws on the statute book that are wholly incompatible with modern notions of human rights. It is far from clear whether they will be removed to facilitate closer Turkish–EU relations,

despite the government's incentive to do so. In 1995 Kurdish opponents of the government of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller claimed that hundreds of Kurdish activists had been killed by police death squads. The invasion of Kurdish inhabited areas of Iraq in the early months of 1995 nearly jeopardized the EU Customs Union. Although there may be a superficial and inevitably temporary diplomatic resolution of these issues, the deeper problems remain.

The Turkish population is large and one of the fastest growing in the region, with some 40 per cent aged under thirty. The current population of around 65 million is expected to rise to well over 80 million by the year 2000. If Turkey did become a full member of the EU, in the next century it would have more members of the European Parliament than any other country and could in theory dominate the Community. Opponents of Turkish membership, such as the Roman Catholic right in France, cite these figures as a new manifestation of the old Ottoman cultural threat.

To the visitor, many of these problems may appear marginal and irrelevant. The great continuities of Turkish life are the warmth and decency of the people, the exquisite beauty of tiles and carpets, great empty skies over the central Anatolian plateau, mint tea, dark, sweet coffee, Troy and Ephesus, the ruined towers of Trebizond; it seems better to forget the government and the immoral perplexities of international politics. What is less obvious is how many Turks feel the same way. In Turkey there is less dedication to public life and the interests of the *polis* than there is in Greece. To say this is not to make a value judgement; the Greek passion for politics has not always produced democratic values and institutions, economic progress, or social harmony, in contemporary Greece any more than it did in antiquity. Many individual Turks have made heroic and often lonely sacrifices for democracy and political freedom, suffering intense pain in government torture chambers and prisons.

The scale of the country, which has always created serious

administrative difficulties for governments, has also made it easier for undemocratic forces, in the form of the military, to take and keep power. The army has been the guardian of Atatürk's secular and modernizing heritage, and in the Cold War the West was forced to support it, almost regardless of the political role it played, and whether or not it was involved in difficult and controversial adventures such as the intervention in Cyprus in 1974, or the periodic suspension of democracy, as in the early 1980s. Critics of Turkey often claim that the national identity is essentially military and anti-democratic, ultimately derived from the military caste of the Seljuks who swept westwards against the Byzantine Empire from central Asia and established the Ottoman world. Apologists claim that the facts of Turkish history, geography and politics make a strong, centralized state with an effective military apparatus essential: a country of 70 million people has to defend a land area of over 300,000 square miles, and thousands of miles of coastline.

The United States has been Turkey's strongest supporter in the West, allowing geo-political calculations to overtake issues of human rights or humanitarian considerations, whereas in Europe there has never been the same uncritical support. So, in 1995, the Clinton administration gave support to the invasion of Kurdistan, whereas most of Western Europe condemned it.

But Turkey's future is linked more closely to Europe than to the USA. Kurdish Marxists and Islamic fundamentalist militants have begun to place bombs in the litter bins of Western Europe, just as they have in the bazaars of Turkey, in Istanbul or in Ankara. And Europeans come to Turkey in their millions, compared to the tens of thousands from the USA. If Turkey is ever to become more integrated with the West, European taxpayers will probably have to pay for the modernization of Turkish agriculture; European leaders will have to find a way to help solve the conundrum of Cyprus; European security chiefs will have to integrate Turkey in such a way that NATO does not become defunct in south-east Europe. If relations between Kurds

and Turks continue to deteriorate and violence between the different *gastarbeiter* communities in Europe becomes endemic, it will be Germans who are killed by bombs in Turkish owned cafés in their cities or Dutch travel agents who are attacked by Kurds. The Eastern Question, the dreadful pattern of contradictions that beset nineteenth-century statesmen, has re-emerged in some respects within Turkey itself. Before the First World War the problem was what to do about the decaying Ottoman Empire; even then, the empire was the 'sick man of Europe' – not of Asia, or the Middle East, even though it held substantial territories far from Europe. After the First World War, Turkey was much too weak to count very much in international relations; after the Second World War, the Cold War seemed to have produced a 'solution' to the problem. But just as the emerging nationalisms of the Balkans led to the First World War, so the break-up of Yugoslavia may prefigure a future of wider ethnic and religious conflict in south-east Europe. Those laying siege to Sarajevo believed that they were trying to solve some unfinished business from those times – both Serbs and Croats often call the Bosnian Muslims 'Turks'.

The war in ex-Yugoslavia is an important argument for the international importance of Turkey and its heritage – a heritage at the heart of the future of Europe. The modernizing, secular agenda for Turkey has been reshaped as a European problem, however much the Turkish governments may try to attract Japanese or other foreign investment as an economic panacea. The political problem can only be solved in a European context, if it is capable of solution. But Atatürk was one Turk who believed he had found the solution to the Ottoman heritage, and his own inheritance is central to the definition of the new Eastern Question.

To the outside world, it seems as though Atatürk provided modern Turkey with an identity that it did not have before, that he made it a modern nation state. This is certainly how he is

portrayed in the very limited amount of space he is accorded in English school-books, a kind of Turkish Oliver Cromwell or George Washington, a 'man of the people who told the Turkish people who they were to be in the twentieth century', according to an English school textbook published in 1951. In the view of most Turks from the secular élite, it is much simpler: it was Atatürk who gave them their freedom from theocratic government and secured the borders of the modern Turkish state in the chaos that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk's regime represents, in the 'official' view of modern Turkey, a complete break with the Ottoman world, in a psychological sense; the beginning of modernism in Turkish life; a Europeanization of the country, with the abolition of the old Arabic script and the substitution of the Latin alphabet, mass literacy campaigns, industrialization and the end of the power of the mullahs. The military realities were simple: Turkey appeared to be mortgaged irrevocably to France, Britain and Greece after the Ottoman military débâcles at the end of the First World War, and the partition of the country seemed to be an inevitable result of the deals between the Entente powers and the last sultan. Atatürk led a renewed Turkish army from the East, in the manner of the original Seljuks, and drove the *gavurs*, the foreigners, from Turkish soil. Turkish identity is often therefore seen as racially and ethnically exclusive, and even today the official definition of Turkishness is partly based on racial and linguistic criteria.

But as in so much of modern Turkish life, the Ottoman heritage is present below the surface, powerful and difficult for the forces of modernity to overcome; what are on the surface national simplicities conceal complex patterns of difference and multiple identity. A symbol of this is the life of Atatürk himself. He could perhaps be seen as the 'ultimate Turk', a warrior hero who swept from the East to save the country, but his origins were not in Turkey, let alone eastern Turkey. It has often been suggested that he had some Albanian or Slav blood among his ancestors.

His family came from the Balkans, from Macedonia, and had their business in Ottoman Greece. His mother Zubeida grew up in southern Albania and spoke Greek well. Many of the other leaders of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908—a classic modernizing movement mainly led by army officers against the ramshackle imperial system—were also from Macedonia, then one of the most economically advanced and prosperous parts of the empire. (This may seem strange today, when the Balkans are torn by war and bankrupted by United Nations sanctions and associated economic chaos, and when in the old Yugoslavia the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was by far the most backward and poorest republic, with myriad social and economic problems.)

Before the First World War the Macedonian region, including parts of the old territory of *Roumeli*—some of which is now northern Greece, south Serbia, Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)—was booming: the tobacco industry supplied newly established cigarette factories as smoking became a worldwide habit, mines were opening for manganese and lead in the Sar mountains, and newly built railways running through the region made it a focus of rivalry between the powers in the race for the riches of the Middle East. Construction projects such as the German imperialist centrepiece, the Berlin–Baghdad railway, had the same significance as the Arab oil pipeline routes do today, subjects of national rivalry, intrigue and the struggle for influence over small countries. As Berlin took over one Balkan route, the tsar in Moscow planned a competing line to go through Serbia, a fellow Orthodox Christian country, and meet the Adriatic at Shëngjin on the Albanian coast.

The Balkans and Macedonia offered other resources, some traditional, such as the horses that had been reared in the region since antiquity, giving so many place-names based on the Slav root word for horse, *kono*, as in Kónitsa, in northern Greece, or Konispol, in Albania. And timber. The Thessaly mountains were famed for their timber since the earliest times—Jason cut timber for the *Argo* on Mount Pelion before sailing with his men

to the Black Sea in search of the Golden Fleece. Pelion is 10 miles from the modern Greek port of Volos, with its yachts along the harbourside, good fish restaurants and evocative harbourside monument to the Civil War. From there ferries leave for idyllic islands in the Sporades. Above the town the villages are pure rural Greece, with simple stony paths between white houses, small neat churches with bell towers. Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece and home of the ancient gods, is to the north; the Turkish coast, let alone Ankara and the dry stony wastes of the Anatolian plateau, seem a very long way away. Although there are some parts of Greece where echoes of the Ottoman occupation linger on, living links with the past, like the old Turkish cemeteries in Crete where flowers are still laid on gravestones written in the Ottoman script by a scattering of descendants, Pelion seems purely Hellenic, although not Mediterranean. Under the plum trees, wild strawberries grow, not grapes or olives. On the steep slopes above Kala Nera rainfall is high; even in August the heat never singes the chestnuts and beech trees and rare shrubs and bracken. In the autumn the rain starts a thousand streams down the mountain whose head is lost in thick grey clouds. In classical mythology it was the home of Chiron, wisest of the centaurs; during the Second World War the Resistance fighters, the *andartes*, hid from the Germans in the deep tangled undergrowth, guns resting on holly trees above the narrow roads. People hide from the autumn downpours, sitting over dark green bottles of retsina in draughty cafés with *tavli* boards. Below the high limestone cliffs the last tourists read in the sun and swim, the sea a tapestry of blues.

Over the mountains at Makrinitza, in 1878 Charles Ogle, a special correspondent of *The Times*, was murdered for trying to report on the Turks' battle with local Greek freedom fighters. The Ottoman commander slit his throat himself, in cold blood. In the nearby village of Tsagarada, the chestnuts are laid out to dry on plastic sheets, at night the wooden houses creak in the strengthening wind like old ships. Tsagarada waits for the

betrayals of the winter, the storms sweeping north up the Pagasitic Gulf 2,000 feet below. It is home to the largest plane tree in the country (it needs eighteen outstretched arms to encircle it) and, in Ottoman times, to the timber industry – the giant hardwood trees were much in demand for harbour and railway construction. Tourism then was unknown. Greek *rayahs* (non-Muslim subjects of the empire) toiled under whiplash to bring the great trees down from the mountainsides to the coast while Turkish beys owned the woods and logging rights. It was a recipe for bitter conflict. Ali Riza, Atatürk's father, was one such bey, the son of an elementary schoolmaster. As he could read and write, he obtained a minor post in the imperial system as a customs clerk, but it was poorly paid. He was stationed with his wife Zubeida in a lonely mountain village, and, learning of the money to be made from the timber trade, he found a partner in Salonika and set up in the logging business. But the mountains were in turmoil and the bands of Greek irregulars who were trying to drive the Turks from Greece burnt his timber, persuaded his labourers to go on strike and disrupted his transport arrangements to the coast. The firm went bankrupt and the Rizas had to leave the mountains, their hopes of prosperity destroyed. The empire founded by the great sultans was disintegrating, even in this out-of-the-way place. With Zubeida, Ali Riza returned to Salonika, the great rambling, multi-racial and multi-cultural city on the Axios estuary. There, in 1881, Mustafa Kemal was born.

Salonika was the Ottoman world in miniature. The streets were full of Ladino-speaking Jews, Slav speakers from the northern Balkans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, Albanians, Vlachs, Armenians, the northern European trading community, and tens of thousands of Gypsies. The Turkish community was a minority in one of the largest cities of the empire. Here Mustafa grew up. He became an outstanding military cadet and associated himself with the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 against the absolutism of Sultan Abdül Hamit II (1876–1909), known as the Damned. He suffered discrimination and banishment to the outer

fringes of the crumbling empire as a result of his political views. But he was to save what could be saved of the old territories from the wreckage of the First World War and the foreign invasions of Turkey.

A cynical Islamic friend in Istanbul claims Atatürk is seen by his admirers as the Turkish Elvis, always returning from the dead to haunt the present. Virtually alone among the founding father figures of modern nation states, he is still revered, at least officially; his statues still stand in every town square in Turkey, whereas those of Tito, Stalin and Hoxha have gone. But they stand in a world that has changed. One of the final disasters of the First World War was the anti-Russian war on the eastern front. After the Second World War Turkey became a key NATO barrier against Russian expansionism, but today Istanbul districts like Karikoy are crowded with Russian traders. They arrive in the old port in ships with barely painted-out Communist names, the language of Tolstoy and Turgenev rattles with Slavic consonants around the minarets and domes; Russian shoes are removed by mosque doors, broken, cheap and cracked with wear; atheists for forty years stare at the green baize cloth over the grave of Sultan Mehmet II (1451–81), hammer of the Albanians. He now lies under only 5 feet of grey stone; he was a short man, a fat man, a heavy drinker even by the standards of the early sultans. He unleashed a great blood-bath in the final siege of Scutari in northern Albania. His army was led by 600 drummers and Anatolian *zurna*-players mounted on elephants, and 60,000 corpses littered the battlefield; the eagles and vultures from the Thate mountains must have feasted for weeks. Thate means 'barren' in Albanian; the mountains could not have been better named for the opponents of Turkey that day. Mehmet pushed the frontier of the empire to the mountains of Montenegro, *Mal e Zi*, the Black Mountains – the last few stones left in God's pocket when he made the world, according to Balkan folklore. The Buna river was the sultan's last frontier. It is a windy, wet, lonely estuary, the antithesis of the glamour of Istanbul.

The sultan's grave is trodden on now by a Russian black-market trader, who places a worn-out sock on the baize edge. In the afternoon he will buy leather jackets in the bazaar to take home and sell to the young *mafioski* in Moscow – that will pay for the trip for him. Sultan Mehmet and what he represents is merely a tourist attraction, a monument to pleasure and procreation. A small brass plaque by the tomb notes that he had the three wives prescribed by the Koran and twenty-six children. In the seventeenth century the Turkish population was maybe 8 million people; now many more live in Istanbul alone. Even in these days of one wife, the city planners are assuming there will be 20 million in the greater Istanbul region by the year 2020. In the hot, turbulent streets, it seems as if they are already here.

The great railway stations of Istanbul float like ships on land, great oblong concrete behemoths stranded on solid earth. Haydar Pasha station is on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus. A beggar leans against the Ottoman police station nearby, an exquisite little eighteenth-century building decorated with blue tiles. The largest Turkish flag that is made flies from the roof, a billowing crimson banner. (One of the original Ottoman military ranks was that of flag-bearer. It was a job often done by Albanians in the Ottoman army – they were careless of death.) From here the modern servants of the Turkish state catch the night express to Ankara. They take off their smart black shoes and curl their cotton socks under the seat in front of them, relieving some of the tensions created by the perfect external conformity required of Turkish government officials. They are heading east, towards the vast plains of Anatolia, and the capital. Beyond lies the long war with Kurdistan, the problems in the Caucasus, the old enemy Russia, the hated Saddam, the Iranians who claim that most of the interesting elements of Ottoman language and culture came from them. Today they claim the Turks are the most corrupt Muslims of all, hardly deserving the name of Allah's servants. It is very difficult to be Turkish; in the loyal bureaucrats' view

great national discipline is necessary to surmount these ever-present threats. And from time to time the army has to be there to enforce order. The arrogant Westerners may dislike it, but they live in less complex and troubled parts of the world and should restrain their criticisms. That is how most of the Turkish ruling élite see things, whether they are bureaucrats in their offices, diplomats with the most perfect manners at their receptions, or soldiers standing in the howling January wind and the deep snow at Mus on the eastern frontier.

On the other side of the Bosphorus, in the safe European quarter of Pera, my friend Ull is musing on the future in his flat. The television shows a huge Islamic demonstration in the Anatolian town of Sivas, with ranks of veiled women enthusiastically tearing up copies of *Penthouse*. Sivas is the fundamentalist capital, if the movement could be said to have one. It is a strange irony that Sivas was where Mustafa Kemal held the Congress in 1919 that laid the foundation of his power in modern Turkey. Like many other nondescript middle-sized towns that few Westerners visit or have even heard of, it is now an Islamic fortress, from where, perhaps, like the original Ottoman Turks, Islamists will have to try to take the Sodom and Gomorrah of Istanbul. It would be the second Turkish takeover of an externally ambiguous and corrupt city that has been colonized by Westerners; the first, in 1453, surged on past Constantinople to conquer the Balkans for Islam and threaten half of Europe. And today, Vienna has no gates. Ull is thinking of history: 'Against the Islamists, we modern Turks must stand and fight. I hate them . . . I hate them. We must defend what Atatürk built. I would die for Atatürk.'

But Atatürk is already dead. On 6 November 1938 his liver finally gave up, enlarged and hardened after years of being washed daily by floods of *raki*, the aniseed spirit that turns as white as milk; according to a Turkish saying, when you drink too much *raki*, you swallow the monster. Atatürk swallowed two monsters – *raki* and the future of Turkey – and tried to shape his life with them.