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TURKEY

4 July 1985

Mr. Peter Bird Martin  
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USA

Dear Peter,

The other evening, my friend Cengiz Güzelleriç, perhaps the most gentlemanly carpet and kilim monger in İstanbul, took Jim Muller, a visiting political theorist from Alaska, and me to a small corner of İstanbul's Beyoğlu district called the Çiçek Pasajı--"the Passage of Flowers." The Çiçek Pasajı is a collection of emporia to which the late H. L. Mencken would have given his wholehearted approval. In their justly popular guidebook Strolling Through İstanbul, Hilary Sumner-Boyd and John Freely call it

the liveliest and most colorful spot in Beyoğlu, or in all of İstanbul for that matter. The Pasaj is lined with boisterous meyhanes, raffish curbside taverns where one can enjoy a tasty snack washed down with draft beer or raki, that powerful and intellect-deadening national anise drink. In good weather the customers drink at marble-topped beer barrels in the alley itself, dining on nuts or shrimp bought from passing peddlers, occasionally serenaded by a wandering street-musician. Since the Pasaj is common ground to the local fish and flower markets, it is a museum of İstanbul sights and sounds and smells, and every odd and interesting character in Beyoğlu is sure to pass through there in the course of an afternoon or an evening.

I do not frequent the Çiçek Pasajı, but I will confess to having deadened my intellect there a time or two, and I can vouch for the fact that in warm weather this description is apt. Never, however, have I seen it as animated

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as it was on that particular evening in late May.<sup>1</sup>

At the soccer match held that day to determine the city championship, Fenerbahçe had tied Beşiktaş, and the fans had descended on the Pasaj to celebrate the fact that this noble struggle would have to be continued yet another day. Across from our table, an old man played a violin. When he



#### PLAYING THE VIOLIN

finished his tune, a gypsy cut in with a wind instrument while his companion danced about with a tambourine. No one seemed to pay much attention to the artist who offered to draw pencil sketches of the customers--but, when the well-endowed blonde at the next table stood up to shimmy and shake her ample belly, you could almost hear those sitting nearby mutter the old Ottoman saying: "she is so beautiful that she has to go through the door sideways." As some of the besotted rose to dance around her, a street acrobat entered and began to defy the force of gravity and good sense.

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1. See Hilary Sumner-Boyd and John Freely, Strolling Through Istanbul: A Guide to the City (Istanbul 1972) 443.

STREET MUBICIANS IN THE ÇIÇEK PASAJI

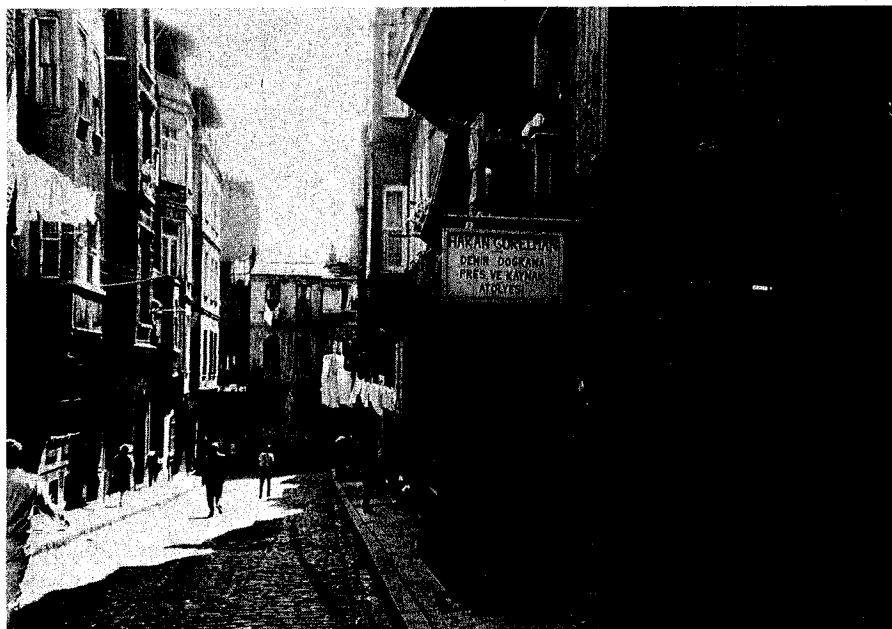


ACROBAT TRYING TO KEEP HIS BALANCE IN THE ÇIÇEK PASAJI



The revellers gathered courage as the evening progressed, and the volume rose. We tried the rakı, found it watered down, and switched to beer, all the while munching Arnavut ciğer (a tantalizing liver dish), şiş kebab, and other Turkish delights. Before long, the question of the relationship between religion and politics in this society, a problem that had much occupied my thoughts that day, slipped my mind--along with nearly everything else. It was almost more than I could manage just to keep afloat on the tidal wave of sight and sound. By the time we left, we were filled to the gills with the good stuff, and the cobblestones loomed large beneath our feet. It was not going to be easy for any of us to get up the next morning. Poor Jim had come in at 3 a.m. a night or two before, and his physical clock was still set on Alaska time (to the extent that it was set on any time at all).

The condition I was in may explain why I failed to grasp immediately that something was amiss. We were making our way down İstiklâl Caddesi and then through the backstreets of Beyoğlu to my apartment in the neighboring district



A BACKSTREET IN BEYOĞLU

of Cihangir. It was 10:30 p.m.; and, ordinarily, at that hour, İstiklâl Caddesi is filled with throngs of mustachioed Turkish men. That night, there was almost no one to be seen. The streets were deserted, and a hush had descended over the city--a hush rendered all the more dramatic by contrast with the raucous setting that we had just left behind. It was as if Istanbul

had become a ghost town--or so it seemed until we came upon what might have been termed a gathering of the ghosts.



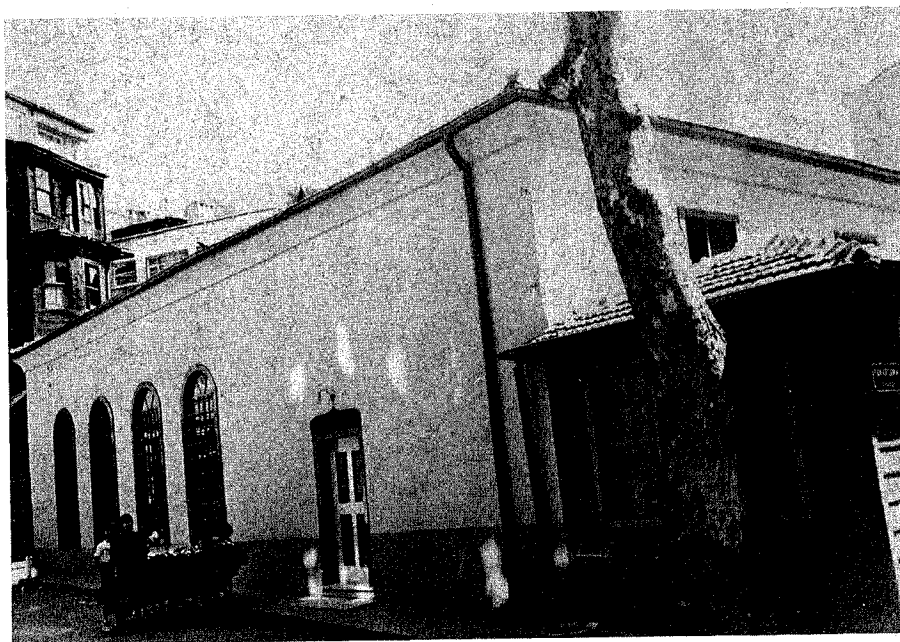
NEAR THE BORDER BETWEEN BEYOĞLU PROPER AND CIHANGIR

What Rome is for churches, Istanbul is for mosques. They pop up wherever you stumble. One of the simplest of these--the Muhyiddin Molla Fenari Camii--was built in the 16th century near the boundary between Beyoğlu proper and Cihangir by Sinan, the greatest of the Ottoman architects. As we approached the small, square, green building, I noticed that the lights were on. Inside, as we slipped quietly past, we could see virtually the entire population of the immediate neighborhood, all on their knees being led in prayer.

Within a stone's throw, on the actual boundary between the two neighborhoods, sits yet another small mosque allegedly built in 1491--the Beyoğlu Firuzâğa Camii Şerifi. Here again, the lights were on. And, as we shuffled slowly by, we paused to gawk at the three or four young boys kneeling on the stairs leading up from the street.

It was then that the whole thing made sense and I remembered what I should have had in mind from the start: the month-long, Muslim festival of Ramadan had begun at sundown that day; and, as a consequence, the entire tone of life in the city had changed. That night and each succeeding night, the drums would sound through Istanbul and every city and town within the land to

remind the faithful to rise and eat--for they were barred from all food and drink through the daylight hours. This year, the fasting from dawn to dusk would be particularly difficult: Ramadan stretched from late May until a day or two before the summer solstice and included a good many of the longest days in the year. Few Turks seem to have been deterred from performing what was required. The restaurants were deserted during the day; and, at night, after



MUHIYIDDIN MOLLA FENARI CAMII

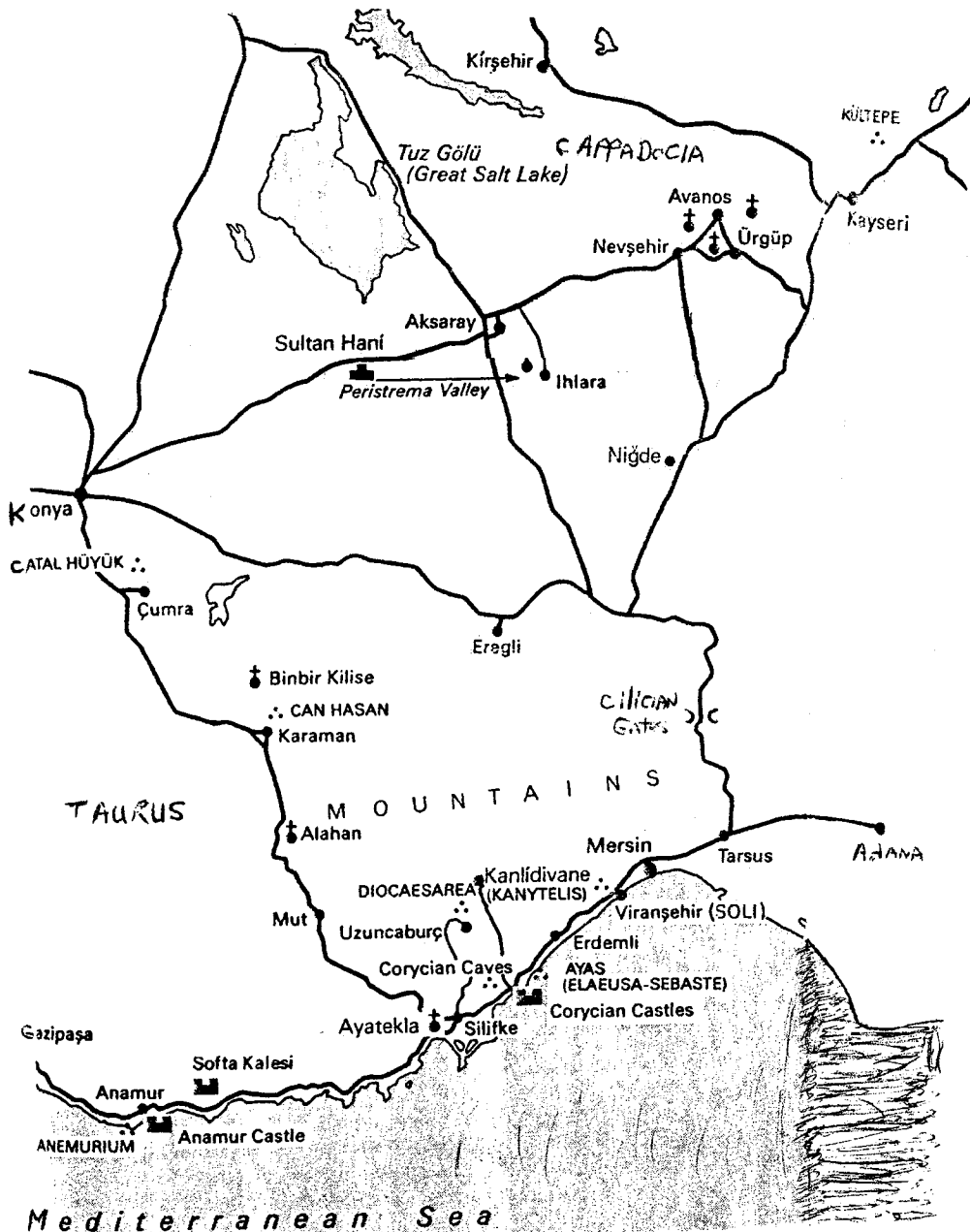
the evening meal, the mosques were full. In Istanbul, however much one may try, one cannot escape the religious question for long--not even by visiting the Çiçek Pasajı.

### III

Outside Istanbul, except in the tourist towns that sprawl along or near the beaches at places like Çeşme, Kuşadası, and Bodrum, there is no escape at all. So we discovered a few days later when we flew to Adana, drove across the great plain of Smooth Cilicia to Tarsus (birthplace of the apostle Paul), and then motored through the Taurus mountains by way of the Cilician Gates to Kayseri (the Roman Caesarea) in south central Anatolia. Wherever we stayed, the drums echoed through the night; and the müezzin's early-morning call to

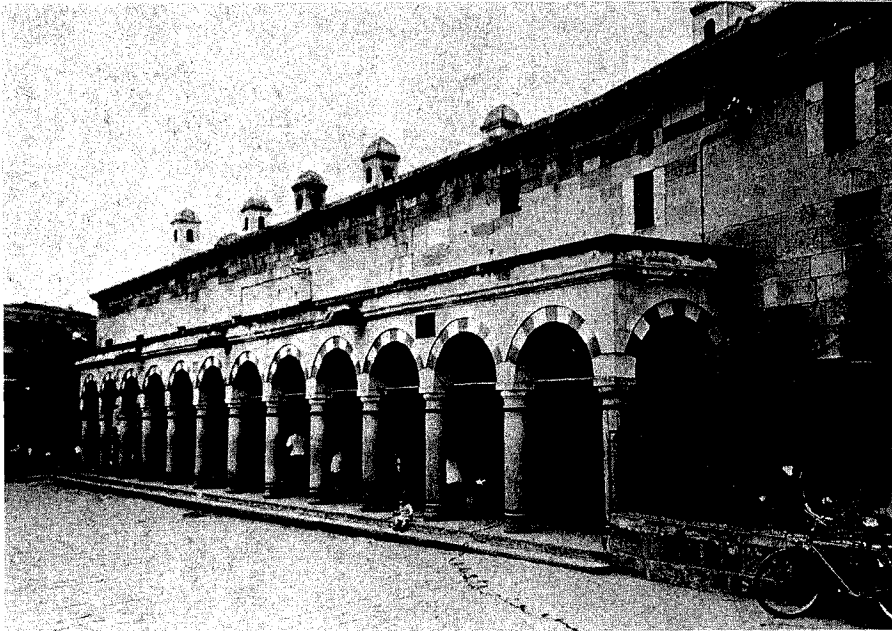
prayer, amplified by loudspeakers at the top of each minaret, was far too loud to ignore. At one point, we wandered off the main road and through a village. There, we found the entire population gathered at the mosque. The multitude unable to crowd in the modest building were outside, on the pavement, down on their knees, listening intently to the amplified sound of the imam's Friday noontime sermon.

FROM ADANA (LOWER RIGHT) NORTH TO KAYSERI AND ON TO CAPPADOCIA





In Kayseri, once a dusty market town and now a bustling, small city, we had great difficulty finding anything to eat. The local restaurants were many, but they were nearly all closed for the month of Ramadan. Had it not been for guidance given by one of the vultures dispatched by the local rug merchants to scour the town for dollar-laden tourists, we might not have found the one place still open.



MUSLIMS WASHING THEIR HANDS AND FEET BEFORE ENTERING KAYSERI MOSQUE

In the course of our stay in Kayseri, we stopped off twice to let these merchants display their wares. The protocol for such a visit is inflexible: the halıcı always offers his potential customers tea and coffee, if nothing else. But, in Kayseri, during Ramadan, this simple act of hospitality proved impossible to perform. No one in the entire city dared to break the religious ban. The halıcı might send a boy out to procure a cold soft drink for his foreign guests from one of the many small grocery stores, but he could not persuade anyone to provide the traditional hot drinks found everywhere in Turkey. Religious feeling is too powerful to ignore in the rapidly growing market towns and cities of Anatolia. We had come to Kayseri to look at the mosques from the Selcuk period (ca. 1071-1283), but we sometimes found them difficult to enter. At prayer time, they were packed. At other times, they tended to be locked; and, when they were not, one would find a great many men inside praying or reading aloud from the Koran.

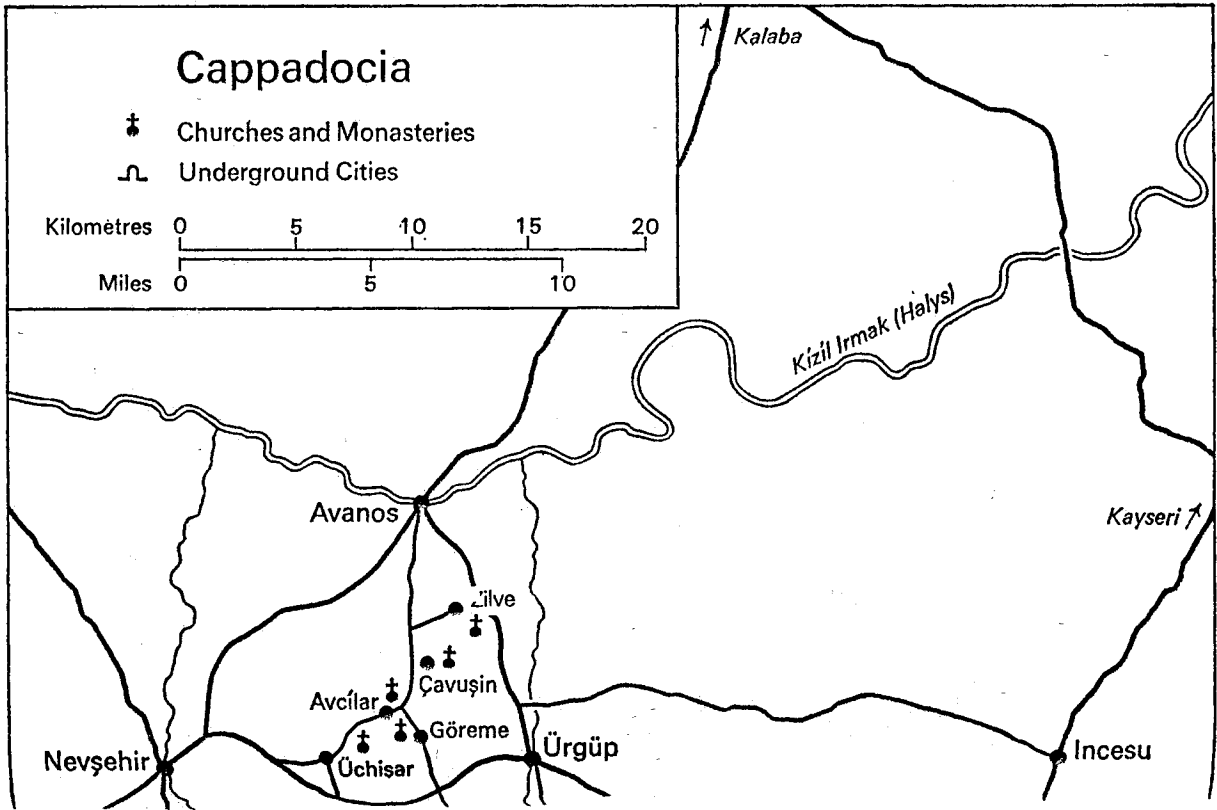
Piety was no less in evidence when we abandoned Kayseri and headed west over the neighboring mountains to the eroded hill-country of southwestern Cappadocia. Geologically, this is perhaps the most peculiar region in all of Anatolia. Much of the area is covered with a deep layer of tufa, a soft stone composed of the mud, ash, and lava that once rained down in prodigious quantities from Hasan Dağı and Erciyes Dağı, the two volcanoes (now dormant) that still tower over the region. As the millenia passed, the rivers and streams of Cappadocia carved out canyons, gorges, valleys and gulleys, and the



AFTER NOONDAY PRAYERS AT KAYSERI'S 11TH-CENTURY ULU CAMII

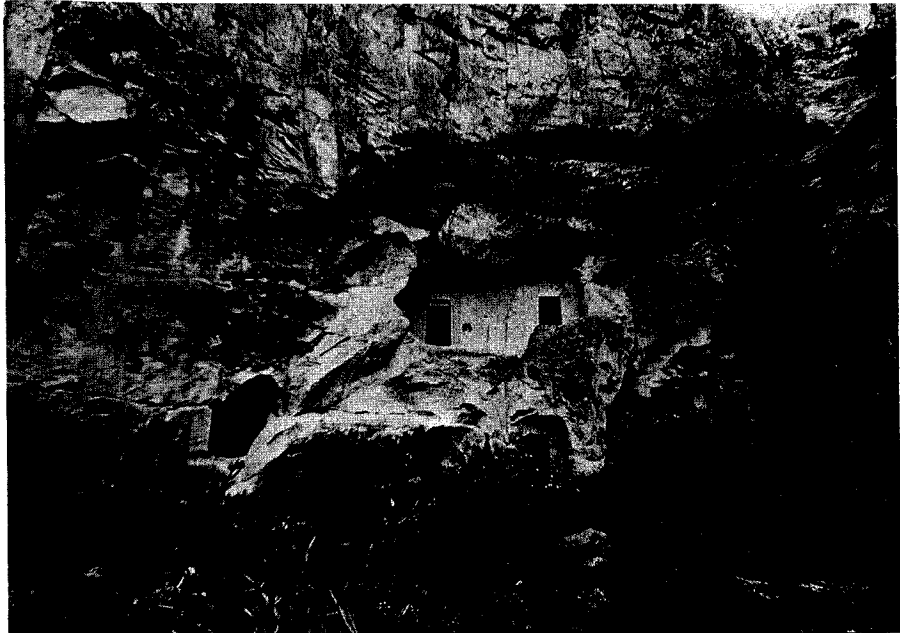
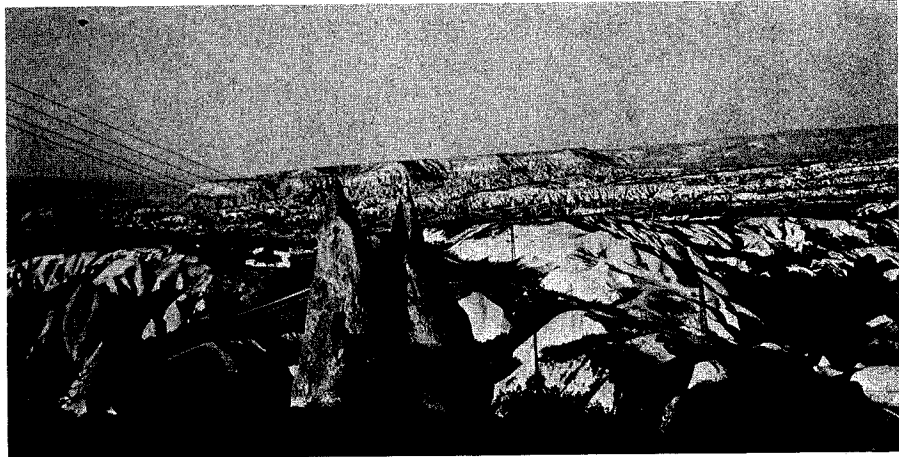
elements eroded much of what remained of the porous stone. Where fragments of the hard basalt stratum that lies under much of the tufa were somehow raised up and embedded within the melange of mud, ash, and lava, they have protected the porous stone below them. The result is a display of sculpture, extraordinary for the variety of its subtle colors and strange forms. Here one finds, in shades of rust, ochre, umbre, mauve, magenta, violet, and brick-red, every sort of spire, needle, stalagmite, crag, fold, turret, ridge, and pyramid that one can imagine. And one finds as well a great multitude of cones of the sort that the local Turks call peri bacaları--"fairy chimneys."

In some areas, the residents became troglodytes and carved out great underground cities stretching seven and eight stories down within the tufa. Elsewhere, they hollowed out homes and places of worship for themselves within

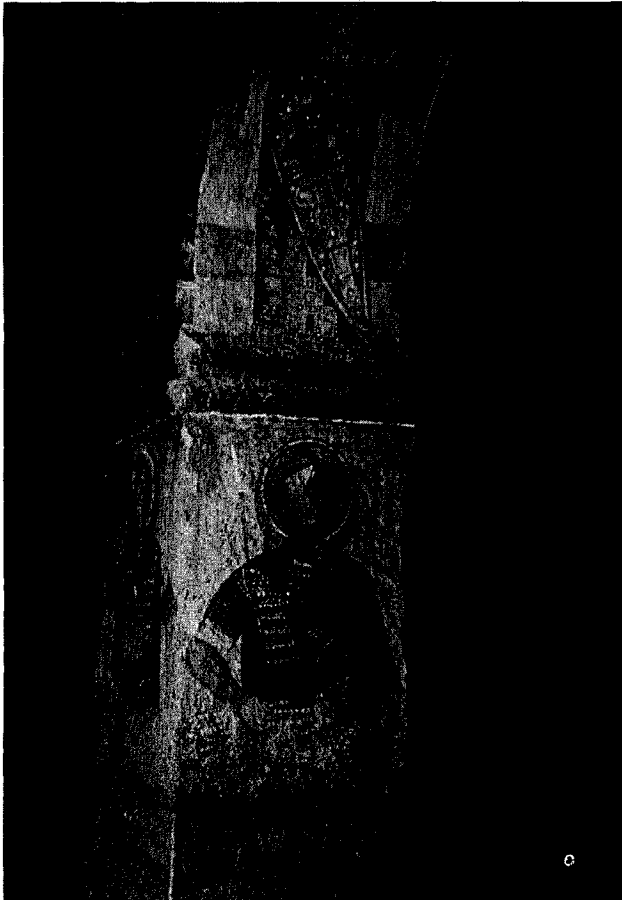


STREET-SCENE IN CAPPADOCIAN VILLAGE OF ÜCHISAR

THE LUNAR LANDSCAPE OF CAPPADOCIA



the peri bacalari or scoured out caves in the sides of cliffs. This work was begun in pagan times; when the Christianity took hold, the effort reached a feverish pitch. St. Basil the Great (329-379), Bishop of nearby Caesarea (Kayseri), formulated the Rule that still guides monastic establishments within eastern Christendom today. Under his inspired leadership, Cappadocia



DISFIGURED FRESCO IN CAPPADOCIAN CHAPEL

became a major monastic center, and it stayed vigorous as such until the Turkmen conquered and subdued the region a thousand years later. The area itself was heavily, if not predominantly Christian until 1923--when the Greeks left their rupestrine homes and chapels behind and were forcibly removed to Greece. What remains is a vast museum of Byzantine art. Some of the chapels cut in the cones and rock cliffs of Cappadocia are relatively bare, but many contain frescoes of unsurpassed beauty, elegant in their design and superb in color.

Unfortunately, these have nearly all been damaged. The guidebook I bought in the area ascribed the damage to children and specified that Greek and Armenian children had done their part. This claim seems extraordinarily implausible. There is a system to the assaults. In nearly every case, the attacks have been aimed at the faces of the figures represented. It matters little

whether those who disfigured the frescoes were young or old; the motive for the vandalism was almost certainly religious. Most of the damage was no doubt done some sixty years ago when the Greeks left, but some of the desecration has taken place in chapels buried and hidden from view until the last two decades. In Cappadocia, the old Muslim hostility to the graven image appears to be alive and well.

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 2. For excellent surveys, see Guillaume de Jerphanion, Une nouvelle province de l'art Byzantine: les églises rupestres de Cappadoce (Paris 1925-1942), and Nicole et Michele Thierry, Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce (Paris 1963).

BYZANTINE FRESCOS IN CAPPADOCIA



There can be no question that religious passions run deep. In Ürgüp, where Jim and I stayed, the drums were beating all night--and loudly enough that sleep was virtually impossible for anyone in the town. More telling is the fact that, wherever we went, the women were dressed in traditional country garb, and they all had their hair and often their mouths covered with scarves. In the village of Üçhisar, this was true even for nine-year-old



#### WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CAPPADOCIA

girls. It was in the course of this trip that I began to fathom the degree to which Atatürk's program of deliberate secularization has left much in Turkish life virtually untouched. If the religious question remains unsettled and therefore unsettles Turkey to this day, this is presumably one of the many reasons why.

#### IV

I do not mean to suggest that there is any immediate danger of there being an Islamic Revolution here. That I do not believe. Nor do I intend to intimate that, in the countryside and the market towns, nothing of real importance has changed. There has, in fact, been a great revolution in

agriculture since 1945, and the attitude towards technology and rapid economic development, as evidenced by peasants and townsmen alike, is extremely positive. Indeed, when the Islamic fundamentalist National Salvation Party (NSP) of Necmettin Erbakan took part in three coalition governments in the 1970s, it always insisted on being given the Ministry of Industry and Technology. In the spheres in which Atatürk's cultural, economic, and social revolution attained noteworthy victories, it has altered the political direction taken by the religious impulse. What it has not achieved is what it aimed at--the elimination of that impulse from political life.

Religion has, in fact, been steadily growing in importance. There are now 200,000 students attending religious schools, and another 120,000 are enrolled in private Koran courses sanctioned by the Director of Religious Affairs. Whereas, in 1950, there were no theological faculties in the country, there are now eight; in 1984, these had a total student body of 6436. More telling is the fact that the number of Prayer Leader and Preacher Schools (Imam-Hatip Mektepleri) has increased dramatically while the number of students attending these schools has gone up at an even faster rate. There is every reason to suppose that, during the last thirty-five years, Turkey has been in the grips of a major religious revival.<sup>3</sup>

#### INAM-HATIP MEKTEPLERI

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Schools in Operation</u>	<u>Number of Students Enrolled</u>
1924	29	1442
1933	0	0
1963	45	9284
1973	143	36378
1984	374	212878

That which can be charted in statistics is equally evident on the streets of the major cities. I know a good many Westerners who, over the years, have visited Turkey from time to time. No one among these has failed to comment on the startling increase in the number of Turkish women (as opposed to the many Arab and Iranian visitors) wearing various forms of Islamic dress. Even in the heat of high summer, many can be found sporting cheap raincoats along with scarves to cover their hair. Others don large shapeless gowns topped with cloth coverings for the head--while not a few, every time they leave the house, put on the full çarşaf (literally, "sheet")--black, blue, or

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 3. See Nicholas S. Ludington, Turkish Islam and the Secular State (Washington, D.C. 1984).



brown--that covers everything but the face and often all but the eyes. The number of women wearing these variations on traditional Islamic garb grows with every passing year.



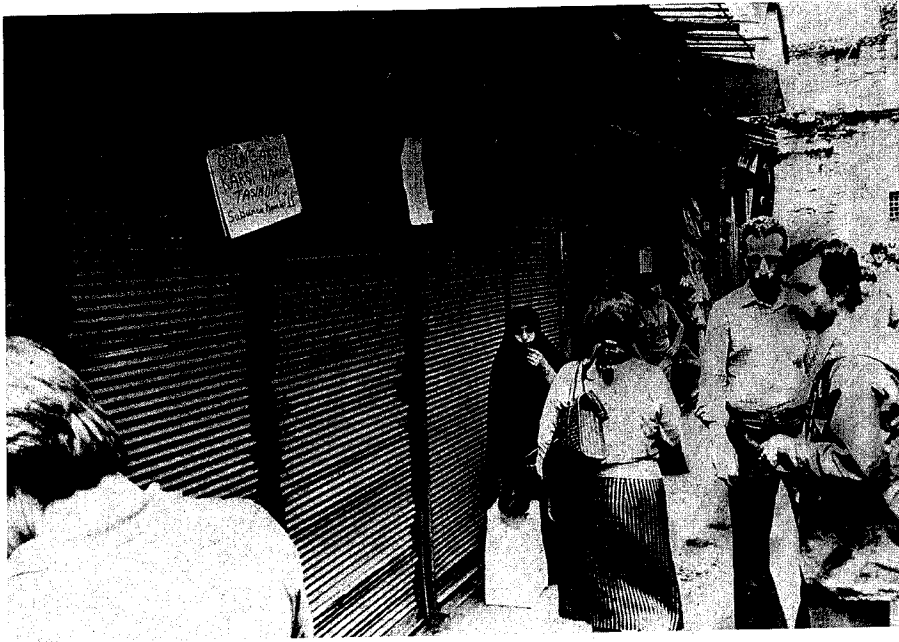
#### MUSLIM DRESS IN ISTANBUL

The logic behind this choice of clothing is evident in one recent Turkish best-seller, now in its fourth printing and available to the masses during Ramadan in the form of extracts published in the popular press. Entitled Sexuality in Islam and written by Imam Ali Riza Demircan, the book argues that

The husband should not allow his wife to attend any gatherings, however small, where men who are not her immediate relatives may be present. He must see to it that she does not speak to any male unless in extreme cases of emergency. She must not be allowed to see female friends who talk to her about their husbands and about the particulars of their intimate lives, nor must she get in touch with any women who may be disrespectful of the divine orders to cover up.

Men are warned as well that they should "not remain alone with a woman in any closed space" because such contact, no matter what its purpose may be, can lead to sexual intimacy. When interviewed by a female reporter, the Imam refused to shake hands with her, explaining, "You must not misunderstand me, but it would be dangerous for me to touch you." Women are called upon to don the çarşaf because it prevents them from becoming discrete objects of desire.

THE COVERED WOMEN OF ISTANBUL



Foreigners who work as archaeologists in the countryside have taken note of the increasing number of the villagers who fast during Ramadan and refuse water even when laboring in the summer heat; more than one has remarked on the attempts made by the villagers to curb the drinking of alcoholic beverages by the foreigners on the dig. Sometimes, there is pressure to contribute to local religious causes. As a force within the society, Islam is not to be neglected or ignored.

At times, this religious revival has had ugly political repercussions. Turkey is, as I have noted in earlier letters (PAR-6 and PAR-7), 97% Muslim. That figure, though pertinent, disguises one important fact. A sizeable proportion of this population is Alevi, and the Alevis are considered heretics by Sunni Muslims and Shiites alike. The census records the number of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians--but it makes no distinction between Muslims. So, there is no way to tell just how many Alevis there are. They may make up one-sixth, one-fifth, or even one-fourth of the total population. There may be as few as five or as many as fifteen million Turks who adhere to a sect that combines a mystical doctrine of Shiite origin with elements of Christianity and remnants of the shamanism common among the pre-Islamic Turkmen of Central Asia. Like mainstream Shiites, the Alevis deny the legitimacy of the Sunni succession of Caliphs and assert that it is from the line of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, that the leader, who is both infallible and without sin, must emerge. They carry their devotion to Ali to an extreme that shocks and revolts both Sunnis and mainstream Shiites, virtually identifying him with the godhead; and they perform rituals that other Muslims loath. Their women openly join in, sometimes even dancing; and on some occasions, the Alevis actually employ intoxicating liquor in their rites.

The holy law (Shari'ah) dictates toleration for Jews and Christians as "peoples of the book," but it does not extend the same privilege to Muslim heretics. As a consequence, intermarriage between Alevis and Sunnis is almost unheard of, and the Alevis remain a people apart--with their own customs, their own traditions, their own ways. In many districts, they live in separate villages. Where the villages and towns are of mixed population, the Alevis live in a distinct quarter. Not surprisingly, the adherents of this sect have been among the most vigorous supporters of the country's secular regime. They rallied to Atatürk in the 1920s and 1930s; they supported Ismet İnönü and the Republican People's Party (RPP), first against Adnan Menderes and the Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950s, and then, later, against Süleyman Demirel and the Justice Party (JP) in the 1960s. And they still tend to vote for the parties of the left. More than any other group, apart perhaps from the remains of the old secular Kemalist elite, they feel threatened by the

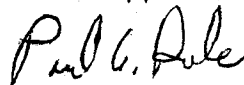
tacit alliance between the advocates of "liberal" (i.e., free-market) economic policy and the Sunni traditionalists and fundamentalists unhappy with the secular state. From an Islamic Revolution, they would have the most to lose.

The religious ferment associated with the Islamic Revival and the rise of the National Salvation Party did not leave the Alevis entirely unscathed. The ugliest incident took place in Kahramanmaraş, a town near Gaziantep, in December, 1978. On the 20th day of that month, three Sunni students were expelled for disciplinary reasons from a secondary school in the town. The next day, two Alevi teachers were assassinated. The aftermath was catastrophic. As one reporter subsequently put it,

The funerals started a chain of events, pitting Turk against Turk. Children's skulls were crushed against the walls; fires were set indiscriminately to Alevi houses. "Kill them! Kill the heretics! Kill the communists! Kill the devils!" a Sunni imam ... shouted through a loudspeaker as mobs rampaged through the city... It took an estimated 15,000 Turkish troops, including crack commando units, to restore order in the city. Many of the 1,000-odd wounded were flown by helicopter to nearby Gaziantep. When I reached Kahramanmaraş, it resembled an armed camp. Steel-helmeted troops patrolled the streets, pelted by rain mixed with snow. Soldiers manning roadblocks searched every car, every bus, every passenger. A dusk-to-dawn curfew froze all life in the city. Under strong political and military pressure, [Prime Minister Bülent] Ecevit had to clamp martial law on 13 provinces inhabited by one-third of Turkey's population.

Six months later, the martial law administration indicted 807 men, women, and teenagers for "armed insurrection and massacre" with the prosecution demanding death sentences for 350 of these.<sup>4</sup> It took the coup of the 12th of September 1980 to end the wave of intercommunal strife that the events at Kahramanmaraş set off. Six days before the army took over, more than 40,000 supporters of the National Salvation Party had marched through the streets of Konya, openly calling for the establishment of an Islamic state. Many Turks believe that the army acted not a second too late.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Rahe

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4. Andrew Borowiec, The Mediterranean Feud (New York 1983) 57-58.

CAPPADOCIANS MAKING POTS, DOING LAUNDRY, AND POLISHING QNYX

