

I set off from London late on the evening of the 22nd of July and after a transfer in Zurich arrived in the small hours of the morning into Istanbul. Armed with a rough idea of how to get to the hostel I had booked I wasn't wildly confident, but by chance I met a Turkish student who had been on the same flight. Engin literally walked me the length of Istiklal Caddesi (one of the main shopping streets in Istanbul) to a taxi driver and then promptly haggled and agreed the price for me. This was a kind deed in itself but given the fact it was nearly 4:00am I felt my newly found friend Engin had gone beyond the call of duty. However his kindness was something that I experienced often and throughout the whole of Turkey (a combination of ineptitude on my part with directions and Turkish friendliness) being led to my destination was a common occurrence and was symptomatic of a hospitality that was completely unexpected and contributed to making my five weeks in Turkey.

During our late night stroll down Istiklal Caddesi Engin asked me on first impressions how I felt Turkey was different from Europe. The street we were walking down struck me as remarkably European, wide, with a tramline running down its middle and peppered with immediately recognisable shops such as Starbucks and Adidas. However as we turned off the main street onto one of the narrower side shopping streets the shops changed to music stores, not HMV or Virgin Megastore but smaller independently owned shops selling musical instruments as opposed to CDs and computer games. This gave the street a distinctive flavour different from the one we had just left. In an odd way it felt more Turkish, and the same parallel can be drawn with Turkey itself. Over the five weeks I was there it was in turning off the main tourist drag of the Aegean coast onto the less well trodden roads of Central and Eastern Turkey that this distinctive flavour came through. I would hesitate to call it more Turkish but the national character shines through more clearly there as it has been less westernised and largely left alone by mass tourism.

I fell to sleep exhausted but looking forward to diving in to a city of 11,000,000 people the next day. However my late arrival the night before, the stifling heat of the night, some road works and the call to prayer from the minaret opposite the hostel had contributed to a sleep that any self-respecting insomniac would be disappointed with. Thus it was under the height of the midday July sun that I started walking from Beyoglu (on the northern side of the golden horn) to the southern side and Sultanahmet, the main tourist area of Istanbul. Looking back I can safely say that it was probably not the wisest idea to walk but I like walking and thought that it would be the best way to get a flavour for Istanbul. Half an hour and one sweaty mess later the shaded avenues and air conditioned rooms of the Topkapi palace were a welcome relief from the heat. The palace itself, among other things, houses a collection of treasures left over from the days of the Ottoman empire which including the Spoonmaker's Diamond (86 carats and the fifth largest in the world), the Arm and Skull of St John the Baptist (encrusted with more jewels) and the Topkapi Dagger, with 3 huge emeralds set in the hilt and a watch in the pommel (taking away any doubt regarding the time of death).

I then headed to the Blue Mosque which is set opposite the Hagia Sophia such that the two seem to be facing off against one another. There are a series of fountains and some green space in between the two and on first sight it is not easy to distinguish which one is which. However the interiors are very different, the Blue Mosque is so

called because over 20,000 handmade, blue tiles were used on the walls of the interior.



The Blue Mosque as seen from one of the windows of the Hagia Sophia

The main activity for the next day was a visit to the Hagia Sophia, learning from the walk the day before I opted to take the air-conditioned metro instead. Within no time at all I was dropped within a short walk its huge dome. Slightly irritatingly the presence of scaffolding within the Hagia Sophia meant that the interior of the dome was partly obscured however the sense of scale and the majesty of the architecture remained and surviving mosaics shone through. The best thing about the Hagia Sophia is the way in which one can literally see the layers of history piled one on top of the other. Restoration has scraped back the most recent layers of the walls to reveal the original Christian imagery of the Byzantine artists who had decorated it. The mosaics are so small and intricately placed that without paying close attention one could easily mistake them for frescoes. As you enter the gigantic Islamic calligraphy in the foreground with mosaics of Mary and Jesus in the background also serves to reinforce this impression. Architecturally there is also more to the building than meets the eye. The supporting pillars of the central dome are actually built into the surrounding walls (far more subtle than the exposed pillars in the adjacent Blue Mosque). The Hagia Sophia is a remarkable building full of hidden secrets (there are even some runic inscriptions scrawled by Vikings, however I failed to find them).

Later that day I crossed back over the Galata bridge to meet Victoria Short for a drink and a chat. Initial confusion over where to meet her was quickly overcome and before long I was taking in some spectacular views over the Golden horn and Bosphorus from the rooftop of her apartment. After that we dropped back down to ground level and headed to a nearby restaurant where I had my first taste of Raki and Meze with a nearby hen party at a serving to further debunk any preconceptions of Turkish society that I had brought with me from England. She also assured me that one of the must see sights in Istanbul was the Chora Church, slightly out of the way, but well worth

the extra effort. I went to bed looking forward to taking a ferry down the Golden Horn and then exploring the Chora Church.

I awoke to another scorching hot and muggy day in Istanbul and immediately headed to get the ferry which would bring me nearer to the Church. An hour later I had finished reading my copy of *Midnight Express* (which my father had immediately recommended I read when I told him that I was going to Turkey, an odd recommendation being as it is about a young American who escapes from a Turkish jail for trying to smuggle drugs) and the ferry arrived. A short journey later I was deposited at Ayvansaray and began my walk up to the Chora Church, following the huge 5th century Byzantine walls which managed to protect the Byzantines from all manner of threats, sadly though they couldn't protect me from the midday sun. I was definitely in the right area but the Church seemed to elude me for hours and my failure to bring a map further compounded my fate. Hours later I was a sweaty mess and the sense of relief when I finally found the Church was palpable. I wandered up to the entrance. It was shut and locked. Confused, hurt and in denial that the Church would be closed on the day I had chosen to visit it I paused. In that instant a Turkish child started laughing at me. I was thoroughly defeated. However as chance would have it I was not alone. Three other visitors had also failed to realise the Church was shut on a Wednesday and we fell into step. They were expats, one a female American journalist from Bloomberg news and the other two from Britain. They were visiting the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. I joined them. On the walk there it emerged that the journalist had covered the trail of those responsible for the bombings in Istanbul in 2003. For a city of 11,000,000 people it certainly seemed that Istanbul was a very small place.

We entered the Patriarchate and stood quietly at the back as sermons were read. In spite of being in Turkey it is still the world centre of Greek Orthodox Christianity there were only three people in the congregation. It was not a sight that I had planned to visit while in Istanbul but in the absence of the Chora Church (for now) the Patriarchate was an interesting side trip and drove home just how extensive the population exchange between Greece and Turkey had been. It was with the knowledge that I would see the Chora Church on Thursday that I returned (by taxi) to the hostel.

Instead of taking the Ferry the next day I took a bus and arrived at a now open Chora Church. It did not disappoint and was well worth the wait. In spite of being smaller than the Hagia Sophia it is in better condition and the domes inside (apart from the central one)



contain almost completely intact frescoes and mosaics of stunning detail and quality.

After visiting Istanbul I had decided to head south along the Aegean Coast and a couple of days later was visiting the battlefields of Gallipoli. I stayed one night on the European side of the Dardanelles in Eceabat and one night on the Asian side in Cannakale. There were a lot of hotels and restaurants but I was the only person sleeping in a 6 bedroom dorm in a near deserted hotel. This is because both of the towns (especially the smaller Eceabat) are dependent on the tourism from ANZAC day where the numbers of tourists and prices increase massively. The battlefields themselves are harrowing and for the antipodeans on the tour the effect must have been magnified. It is odd seeing such death in such stunning scenery. The area itself and the memorials which it contains are set against crystal blue waters and fantastic views across the Dardanelles and the tankers that still ply its course today.



The whole set-up of the national park serves to heighten the tragic atmosphere. The main road was built following the line of no mans land and the trenches either side are shockingly close. The memorials themselves are all tragic but none more so than lone pine (pictured left) where 2,300 Australians and 2,500 Turks died over a space of ground 200 metres wide and 91 metres long. The name comes from the fact that the fire was so dense over the course of the battle for Gallipoli that only one Pine tree survived intact and the one that stands there today is a descendant of that same Pine.

The 'Lone Pine' on the Gallipoli Peninsula

Additionally my respect for Atatürk was increased when I heard not only that he had played a key role in the Turkish success in the battle, not only that his pocket-watch had taken a bullet but also that he had been so magnanimous in victory:

*"Those heroes that shed their blood
and lost their lives...
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country,
therefore rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Jonnies
and the Mehmeds to us where they lie side by side.
Here in this country of ours...
You, the mothers,
who sent their sons from far away countries
wipe away your tears.*

*Your sons are now lying in our bosom
and are in peace.
After having lost their lives on this land they have
become our sons as well."*

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, ANZAC Memorial, 1934.

Basing myself on the other side of the Dardanelles in Cannakale for the second night and the tour of Troy that would follow the next morning I fell into a Raki assisted sleep and awoke the next morning to find I had been destroyed by mosquitoes. I stumbled to the shower (due to lack of blood) and entered their lair. I took incredible satisfaction in killing every mozzie I saw in there and headed to the minibus for Troy placated. Troy itself (as I was constantly told) is not as intact as Ephesus or the majority of the other classical cities. In part due to the cavalier attitude of its discoverer ***** who basically took the best treasures for himself digging them up having given his Turkish workers the day off before hauling them onto waiting ships bound for *****. Our tour-guide 'Captain' Ali (so called because he was a Turkish submarine captain during the Cold War, apparently) was unorthodox in his methods veering off onto unconnected diatribes about the Iraq War and the number dead on that particular day while talking about the mud brick houses of Troy. This aside the city was interesting but not being a classics scholar some of the finer points of the city were probably lost on me as not that much has been left intact. What was interesting was the archaeological work which had revealed the different layers of city built on city as Troy had progressed through the ages. Having seen Troy I headed South along the coast to Bergama and the ruins of Pergamum. The bus was slow but the scenery was stunning and before long I had struck up a conversation with my neighbours as we wound our way up and down the hills which hug the coast. The older of the two was a customs officer who worked in the East of Turkey and the younger was radio engineer on his national service. In spite of the language barrier we were still able to talk mainly about football and the fortunes of Besiktas, the team which both supported. I also showed them two two pound coins I had, I thought it would be a nice curiosity. Unfortunately they both mistook the coinage for gifts and I didn't feel miserly enough to ask for them back as my new found friends were seemed genuinely pleased with them. I did however get a guitar pick back as consolation. Soon after that bus rolled up to a halt on the hard shoulder in the pitch black and unceremoniously dumped myself and another woman on to the motorway. Sprinting across to the other side I manage to ask her for a lift and she duly obliged as her husband arrived in the car. Before long I was dropped outside my pension as the husband and wife continued the heated discussion they had been having throughout the journey.

The next morning I started early and visited the Red Basilica and the ruins of Pergamum. The Red Basilica was originally a temple to the Egyptian gods however it was too large to be converted to a church so Christians actually built a basilica inside it. However Bergama's main attraction is the Acropolis. Safe to say it was another incredibly hot day as I began my stomp up the hill to visit the ruins. Luckily I hitched a ride with a passing car. The ruins themselves were impressive but it was quite difficult to get a sense of what they would have looked like (unlike Ephesus where you get a real sense of the layout of the town). Also the signs were literally nonsensical, whoever translated them must have had fun inventing a language somewhere close to English, I could only feel sorry for my Czech friend who I had teamed up

with from the pension to visit the Acropolis because he had to translate from nonsense to English to Czech.

That afternoon a couple of bus journeys later took me to Selcuk, the town which is home to the classical city of Ephesus. Wandering around trying to find a hotel I settled on the original choice offered to me at the bus station then headed into town for dinner. After haggling 1 lira off each dish I felt cheap but the cumulative discount allayed any nagging guilt. I retired to bed with my wallet and belly full.

The next morning I set off for Ephesus and arrived to find the site teeming with tourists. I took a leisurely stroll around the ruins and found a seat in the 25,000 person amphitheatre before wandering across to the library, the most famous of the ruins preserved within the city. Through an architectural sleight of hand the library was made to appear bigger than it is (though in truth I haven't been able to properly work out what that sleight of hand was). Safe to say that the monument is the centrepiece in a site which, unlike Pergamum and Troy, gives a genuine sense of how a classical city would have functioned.



The library of Ephesus, notice the lack of tourists in the photo (no mean feat).

All of the constituent parts of the city have been preserved or restored such that they, taken as a whole, allow the visitor to appreciate the way in which the city would have functioned, from the library to the toilets.

The next days in Selcuk were spent visiting the Basilica of St John, a huge building built by Justinian to house John the Baptist's hand. It is in the shadow of an imposing Byzantine castle which was sadly closed due to structural issues. I found this a bit symptomatic of the Turkish tourist industry, there is such a wealth of world class historical monuments but often they aren't being used to their full potential (Ephesus

aside, which was teeming with tourists). I also followed the course of an old Byzantine aqueduct which runs through the centre of the town. All of this done I felt that, for a few days at least, I would give ruins a rest.

The ruins of the Basilica in the foreground all in the shadow of the imposing Byzantine castle.



Enter Oludeniz and the stunning setting of steep hills rolling down to the turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea. The lagoon is famous as

being a fantastically beautiful setting. However much of its former charm has been lost due to tightly packed sun beds and huge throngs of package tourists. I still spent a few days in Ouldeniz, visiting the nearby Butterfly valley (no butterflies) and relaxing. Speaking to some other tourists though it became apparent that one of the 'must do' activities was to board a *gulet* a sort of traditional Turkish schooner and spend a few days rounding the coast from Fetiye on the Aegan to Olympos on the Mediterranean. I had not planned on doing this when I arrived in Turkey but I am glad to say that it was one of the highlights of the trip. Initially it looked unlikely that I would be able to get onto a boat at all. Being peak season they were all full but at the 11th hour I managed to grab a place on the deck of the Bluestar all of the cabins were taken and I looked forward to sleeping out under the stars. Fortunately all of the other people on board were amicable and I hit it off with two students from Cambridge, Cam and Tom who were at university in Leeds and Canterbury, the three of us would spend the rest of our time in Turkey together. For the next four days and three nights the Bluestar and its charges docked at some fantastic locations as the boat rounded the southern part of the Aegean and entered the Mediterranean. We stopped at some stunning towns such as Kars which still retains its charm in addition to being a successful tourist destination. Possibly the highlight though was the sunken Byzantine city of Kerkova where the steps of the streets simply disappear into the sea. In between all of this there was a lot of swimming, cliff diving with some spectacular backflips executed (though sadly not by me):



At the end of the four days I left with a shared sense of camaraderie with my fellow 'boaties' and five of us stayed on in Olympos which had once been a major trading centre. Today it is an intensely relaxing place and with the ruins running down to a stunning beach all in the shadow of Mt. Olympos. In between playing cards and swimming I found time to hike up to the eternal flames (though not without getting severely lost on the way in the pitch black) and visit some of the ruins overlooking the bay.



The beach and mountain of Olympos and one of the eternal flames

A few days later I boarded a bus to Antalya, I was only staying for a few hours before getting on the next leg of my journey (an overnight bus to Cappadocia). To kill time I headed into town and decided to get a haircut and a shave from a Turkish barber. I

had been told that it was an experience not to be missed. I left the barber's an hour later. It was most certainly not a typical experience, I looked like a recruit for the marines and was sporting a very, very, short back and sides. It was not my finest hour (awful haircuts however seem to be a staple of mine while on holiday), however the shave was really good, it involved a lit q-tip which singed the hairs on my ears and cheeks and a series of neck cracks afterwards that left me feeling less like I had had a shave and more like I had just been reborn. Before and after are shown below (notice the shock on my face in the after photo).

BEFORE

AFTER



An overnight bus later I was feeling very tired when we rolled up into Cappadocia in the early hours of the morning, a small fracas with a toilet the night before had left me tired but there was no time to rest as we headed to the Goreme Open Air Museum a Unesco World Heritage site and more importantly a complex of fantastically preserved rock cut churches carved into soft rock. The rock was originally lava spewed out of Erciyles around 2000 years ago, it hardened and over the coming years churches and homes were cut into the rock. It is a surreal place and is reminiscent of some of the scenes from Star Wars.



Dawn in Goreme and the hot air balloons rising over the fairy chimneys for their dawn flight

The most spectacular of the cave churches that I visited was the Dark Church, it has had the frescoes restored and as a result you can get a real sense of what the churches would have originally looked like. The picture below gives a real sense of the quality of the carving and the vividness of the paintings.

Over the following few days we hired a car and toured around some of the less accessible areas of Cappadocia, this meant we could beat the tour busses. The first journey was dropping a friend back in the dark on some seriously poor roads. It was an interesting experience to say the least, especially given the roads carved into some severely steep hills. However the sights rewarded the extra effort. The first of these was one of the huge underground cities called Derinkuyu. The city was fully functional including ventilation shafts, wine presses, cellars, grain storage and stables. My personal favourite detail were the circular doorways and the huge circular stones which could be rolled across to keep out intruders and invaders. These circular stones had a hole in the centre through which arrows were fired. It has eight floors which extend down 85 metres and only ten percent of it has been opened to the public.

We had finished at the underground city very early (in fact other than an American family with a hyperactive child we were the only people there) as a result there was time to take in a hearty breakfast of Menemen which put simply is scrambled egg, but with tomatoes, onions and peppers. I think it was my favourite Turkish food (other than the pottery stew which you have to smash open with a hammer) because it is so simple and delicious. Anyway, the next stop was the Ilhara valley which was really beautiful with a babbling brook running down its verdant middle verged by steep, rocky slopes. In these slopes were more rock cut caves and churches and while they might not have been as manicured as the ones at the Goreme open air museum their untouched feel only added to their charm. We then had lunch on what I can only describe as a fixed raft set in the middle of the brook. It was fantastic setting but sadly the food and the swarm of wasps which it attracted weren't quite as good.

I had decided to head east from Cappadocia and spend roughly a week travelling around the North East of the country to see if there was a marked difference between the East and West of Turkey and visit some of the churches and monasteries left over from the Byzantine era especially Ani which one thousand years ago had been a huge city rivalling Constantinople.

Initially I headed to the North East of Turkey from Cappadocia (a long journey, especially when one considers that France can fit comfortably within Turkey's borders) and the city of Erzurum. The journey had been by an overnight train and I had been very ill spending more time in the toilet than in my seat. As a result when we arrived I was very tired and weak and stumbled to my hotel bed. I didn't see much of the city other than a search for a pharmacy, it looked quite grey and bleak and there was a noticeable drop in the temperature. I slept for the whole day and the following evening and feeling a bit better moved into the foothills of the Kackar mountains and the small town of Yusufeli. The region is famed for its fantastic white water rafting on the Çoruh River however the water levels weren't high enough because it was the middle of summer. Even a burst of rain wasn't enough, in spite of the fact that I couldn't do some white water rafting the journey to Yusufeli was far less painful than the one before and I felt on the mend when we decided to go stamp chasing for our

passports and hop over the border to Georgia for a day and a night. It was a frantic mini-trip but one I am glad that we undertook.

We began at the bus stop of Yusufeli, I had been shot! Though it was only by a young rascal with a bb gun, he took aim again but a cold, hard stare persuaded him that I was far too dangerous to risk provoking (in reality I secretly wanted a go). Heading from Yusufeli on a packed minibus we wound our way up some precipitous cliffs which were mildly reminiscent of the Milford Sound in New Zealand (soon to be even more reminiscent as many of the valleys in the region are set to be flooded by a huge hydroelectric dam). It is stunning country and before long we had wound our way down the other side of the mountains to the Black Sea coast. From here we caught a taxi along the coast to the border. The climate changes on the coast and it becomes mildly sub-tropical with a lot of green foliage. On the Turkish side of the border it was relatively quiet with few people around however once we had crossed the border into Georgia the reverse culture shock was fairly massive (having been in Turkey for a month). Scantly clad sunbathers were everywhere and the beaches were packed, Georgia immediately seemed more hectic than Turkey and first impressions were not proven wrong. Tom, Cam and I hoped aboard the nearest minibus which was absolutely packed to the gunnels and darted off to the town of Bat'umi. We arrived in the early evening and in addition to the domed roofs of the mosques there were also churches and synagogues. We headed to the seafront, unbeknownst to us Bat'umi was a centre for Georgian tourism with visitors from all over the region and other countries. As a result the place was full of tourists and had something of a party atmosphere we sat on the seafront and then went to an open-air nightclub, it was fun but the reverse culture shock defined the evening. We returned to our hotel (which was possibly one of the sleaziest buildings I have ever been to) awaking to find that instead of the 18 lari (the Georgian currency) the cost of a bed was 80 lari. Feeling thoroughly cheated we were happy to return to Turkey (though not without a man in the customs queue convinced that producing phlegm was the best way to reach the head of the queue). I was glad that we had seen Georgia but looking forward the slower, more honest treatment we had become used to receiving in Turkey.

Retracing our steps we were aiming to get as close as possible to the town of Kars on the Armenian border with a view to seeing the ruins of the ancient city of Ani the following day. However the public transport in the far north east of Turkey is not completely regular so with dusk approaching we decided to break for the night in the tiny village of Şavşat. It sits in the Yalarar valleys a small but incredibly verdant area in the north east of Turkey. With the sun setting we quickly joined a game of football being played by some local kids who spoke a bit of English following this they took us to a local café with what can only be described as a beer garden. With the sun setting over one of the hills of the valley and the temperature rapidly falling we retired to the hotel. It was one of those evenings where the tranquillity of the setting and the friendliness of the locals combined to create a fantastic atmosphere.

The following day we set off on the first bus determined to reach Kars, the scenery quickly changed from the lush green of the day before to a more typically bleak steppe setting, we climbed up to the Cam Pass before dropping back down to reach Kars which was particularly bleak. Dumping our bags we headed up some steep steps to the castle which dominates the town. It was built in 1153 by Saltuk Turks but was also the scene of fierce fighting in World War One between Russians and the remnants of the Ottoman empire. On the way we passed a fairly impressive looking

Armenian church which was under repair (I don't think it was being converted into a mosque) which was indicative of the changing attitudes of modern Turkey to its Armenian connections (though at the time of writing the border is still closed). That afternoon we decided to hire a car to drive to Ani the next day, but not before playing another game of football with some locals which soon turned into something of a spectacle.

Ani was the destination for the next day and it seemed in an odd way like a bit of a pilgrimage, it had been the final destination, the point right on the eastern border of Turkey, and for the last week I had wound my way there. It was the last week that I would spend in Turkey and Ani did not disappoint. As we drove there on unmade roads it was not hard to imagine Mongol horsemen riding across the huge, bleak expanse which faced us.

Cam and me with the 'team' from Kars



We had hired the car because there were a couple of smaller abandoned churches which could be reached along the way. This however involved turning off the 'main' road (a bigger track with smaller bumps) and onto 'side' roads (smaller tracks with bigger bumps). Along the way we had seen some shepards and their ferocious looking dogs and had been warned by a local guide (who had lost a part of his hamstring to one) that they were not to be trifled with. A couple of the dogs had chased our car when we drove past their flocks but we sped away. Having parked and walked to our first church we rounded a corner and found ourselves face to face with an enormous white dog with ice cold blue eyes. It was not happy to see us. Immediately it raised it heckles and began to bark, then it charged. All three of us scattered and it was only a couple of minutes later that we realised that this devil creature was attached to a sturdy chain. The sheepdogs of eastern Anatolia have been bred to protect their flocks against wolves and I am ninety percent sure that somewhere along the way the two interbred, because it looked just like a wolf. However it was probably a Kangal cross of some sort, the biggest breed of dog is called the Kangal and that evening in Kars we saw one dragging its owner down the street. The Kangal dog is the national dog of Turkey and is a source of national pride to the extent that they even feature on some of the coinage. They are huge as the picture on the page below (taken from the internet) shows:



The Kangal, a seriously scary dog (I now want one).

After our run in with the dog we went into the old Armenian church. It was in a bad state of repair and was being used as a grain store. I found it a bit saddening because it was clearly once quite a beautiful building and had obviously been completely neglected. After driving to two more villages it became fairly apparent that this was routine. The neglect of the buildings while sad is unsurprising. If I lived in a remote, windswept, eastern Turkish village and needed somewhere to store grain and there

happened to be a large, dry and sturdy church then I am sure that I would do exactly the same thing.



One of the churches and the village which surrounds it.

After visiting some of these more remote churches we rejoined the main road and arrived at Ani. It is so bleak that it is hard to imagine it was once a thriving centre for trade and home to 100,000-200,000 people. However there are a few buildings still standing namely a cathedral and churches as well as the mosque of Minuchir.



Today Ani stands literally feet from the Armenian, Turkish border. At the time of writing this border was closed and the bleakness of the landscape adds to the sense of hostility that the fence and watchtowers on either side embody. The situation stems from allegations of genocide issued by the Armenian population of the Ottoman empire in the early parts of the twentieth century. It has not been resolved to this day.

Leaving Ani we headed back to Kars where after spending another night we caught a train bound for Istanbul. Thankfully I had booked a flight from Erzurum (one of the first stops) so only had a few hours on the train and then a short flight back to Istanbul. Cameron and Tom on

The deserted ruins of Ani

the other hand were staying on the train all the way back to Istanbul which was going to take nearly two days. I did not envy them one bit.

I read a short history of Turkish aviation in the on board magazine and was amazed to learn that people had been attempting to fly from the Galata tower in Istanbul across the Bosphorus since the middle ages. Some of the stories seemed ridiculous such as a person who launched themselves off of the tower in a conical cage filled with gunpowder (a sort of rocket I suppose). Safe to say that modern Turkish aviation much more sensible. When the plane landed the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan Istanbul seemed a million miles away from the eastern parts of Turkey. I only had the day as my flight left in the small hours of the morning. I had set aside my last day (Sunday) for shopping in the bazaars. The bazaars are closed on Sunday. This was very annoying, as I wanted to buy myself a leather jacket. However as luck would have it I was accosted as I got off the bus by a man who owned a leather shop.

THE BIG HAGGLE:

I was led into his shop, offered some tea and then shown some jackets. There was one which I liked and my new found friend was eager to haggle a price and complete the sale. Now, I have no idea what the market price for a jacket is and I wanted to look around to see how his prices and products compared with some other shops. I told him this, he did not look happy and asked me what price I would pay. When I said 'I don't know, I need to look at some other shops' he then dropped his price. This

process continued for around 5-10 minutes with the price slowly dropping from £155 to £55. With the price dropping the salesman's temperature was rising. The price sounded good so I repeated one last time 'I don't know, I need to look at some other shops' adding 'if your price is the best I will come back.' He looked furious and refused to believe that I was doing anything other than lying demanding that I promise hand on heart that I was telling the truth. Leaving the pressure cooker atmosphere of the shop I spent a few hours looking around other shops and found that I could haggle the price down to £100 or maybe £75 for similar jackets but no-one would go any lower. It is actually quite a tricky process to haggle and not agree a price with a shopkeeper and I knew that if I did this I would be honour bound to buy a jacket, doing this left a few more shopkeeper's noses out of joint. Exhausted I returned to the first shop where the salesman's face lit up and the fury he had previously display melted away under a smile. I received a couple of kisses on the cheeks and was treated like royalty for staying true to my promise. I got a few more lira off before I was asked if I wanted to look at the jeans. I did not want to look at the jeans.

That evening I had a meal in the dining district of Istanbul (Nevizade) with a couple of friends I had met in Selcuk a few weeks before. Nevizade has a fantastic atmosphere with everyone dining outside. Tom and Cameron's train rolled in from Kars at around 9:00pm and they joined us for one last beer before I disappeared off on my flight. It was a great send off and I was really lucky to have some of the people I had met along the way see me off.

Seeing Turkey was such a fantastic opportunity and the pre-conceptions of the country that I held were completely blown away when I actually travelled there. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and have already been singing the praises of the trip and the scholarship which made it possible to any second years who will listen. The memories and friends that I made while there are reminders of the great time I had and I really hope that the scheme grows, in future I want to contribute to its continued success but in the meantime I am looking forward to the next Turkey dinner and the chance to thank in person all of the people who afforded me this opportunity.