

A TRAVEL TALE OF ADVENTURE AND ROMANCE, TURKISH STYLE

By Frances Roberts

The year, not so long ago, that I went to see what Turkey was all about, I was joined by a lovely and lively group of friends from other far-flung places. We spent nearly a month exploring marvels of history, starting in the fabulous city of Istanbul, making a wide circle through the country, and ending there for another visit.

Oh, the wonders! From the big metropolis, we went to Metropolis—a formerly lost city that is now being excavated on an enormous site by archaeologists from an American university. Here we sat in an ancient amphitheatre that was only half dug out, and listened to a talk about the project before we were allowed to roam the pathways between building foundations and streets. At one point we were shown a large rectangular stone that featured a game the original workmen of Metropolis played in their spare time. It was backgammon! I didn't know it was THAT old!

And at Pergamon, where Alexander the Great kept all his loot from battle, we walked on the paths above a hospital's underground patient rooms. Why were they underground? Because one of the treatments of the ill was to have someone walk on a path filled with grids through which the patients could hear what was said by the "doctors" above. It consisted of encouraging words: "You are feeling better," "Your illness will soon be gone," "Encourage health to return to you," "The gods are on your side; they will make you well." Obviously, we didn't invent the power of suggestion.

At Ephesus, the magnificently preserved library enthralled us almost as much as the line-up of toilets out in the open air, where in the good old ancient times one could use the facilities and sit together with friends for a cozy chat. At Ephesus I also ventured on a rented camel ride. It was most wobbly and quite uncomfortable.

Staying at a marvelous hotel inland, we admired the opulent atmosphere and glorious decor. More than ten stories of rooms surrounding an atrium equally high were graced by beautifully decorated spacious balconies. But the crowning glory was the birds who lived and nested in the atrium, golden canaries and other species who swooped about and sang their songs. Also required were hired young men who went floor to floor cleaning up after the birds on balconies and handrails everywhere.

We visited a potter's studio hidden in a cave—which stayed much cooler than the outdoors when the kiln was fired. He created beautiful paintings on the tiles and *objets d'art* that he made for us. I tried at his wheel to make a clay vase and succeeded in getting it perfect in shape—until I poked a hole in the bottom.

At one point, we crossed the River Meander—which does just that as it winds through lush farmlands, worked almost exclusively by women whose men spent their days at a coffee house, not working.

In the capital, Ankara, we marveled at the plumbing in a huge preserved Roman bath, some of it usable today. And we traversed the monumental pathway to the shrine to Kemal Ataturk, founder of modern Turkey, whose edict making women the equals of men is under attack by Islamic fundamentalists today. Our tour guide, a young university student, often expressed her anger over that.

And then to Troy and the disappointment of the vanished excavation site ruined by its first discoverer, Schliemann, who dug a damaging large ditch destroying much evidence of its history. Tourism has decreed that the loss be made up by a large wooden horse supposedly like the original.

At last we were back in Istanbul, to revel in the Blue Mosque's grandeur and the many other features of a major international city. Russian vendors brought truckloads of goods—shirts and shoes, furniture and pots—to sell on the sidewalks beneath our hotel windows, but our travelers wanted to do some real shopping at the famous Grand Bazaar, so thither we went, to my most treasured adventure of all.

I was soon abandoned near the entrance by everybody who was traveling with me as they swooped down the endless aisles assaying merchandise by the ton, or so it looked to me, as the Bazaar is unbelievably enormous. Every kind of garment, jewel, or junk was available, but I really wasn't interested. So, I leaned my elbow on a high counter of a little shop that looked to have beautiful jewelry but was unoccupied.

Not so. A tall, handsome young man came out from a curtained section to the rear and approached me. Our conversation went like this:

"You look sad. What is the matter?" he asked.

"I hate to shop," I replied.

His delight made his face glow.

"Will you marry me?" was his instant response.

"I think that there might be a problem. Our ages are very different."

"Not a problem for me. Could you come with me tonight to meet my parents?"

"I would love to, but I am leaving in the morning for America, and I need to pack."

"Alas, I just know we would be happy together. And I wish I could come to see you off to say a fond goodbye! But I thank you forever because you made me so happy for a moment!"

The rest of our chatter was equally silly, but a sort of instant comedic rapport made it most enjoyable. Soon my friends arrived to carry me off, and so I had to

abandon my instant Turkish lover to the inevitabilities of modern life. But to be sure, that charming young man “made my day” into the most memorable of all I spent in that enchanting country.

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