

e-postcard from Cirali

5/23/2004

The Brotherhood

Hello to all,

We'd been searching for a giant Turkey flag for a couple of days. We wanted to shoot a photo of us on the bike in front of one, since we'd seen so many. Turkey is filled with Turkish flags. They adorn cars, they fly from apartment windows and they are draped in massive scale down the sides of factory, retail and government buildings. On the latter they are often accompanied by a giant portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.

He came to power in 1923 after leading a four year war of independence against the Greeks and the remainder of the WWI allies. He immediately declared a secular state and led Turkey into the modern world, ironically with a decidedly Western orientation.

The end result is a nation of 65 million people that looks and feels like Europe with minarets. The Western portion of the country is almost completely developed, with beautiful roads, robust infrastructure and a full compliment of industrialization.

It is also steeped in nationalism. In comparison with India, you will probably find more signs of nationalism such as flags and national symbols in 10 kilometers in any direction from any point in Turkey than you will find in a 1,000 kilometer radius anywhere in India.

Since we were riding over a national holiday celebrating youth, many buildings were decorated with huge Turkish flags, and we were actively searching for one that would make a good background for a portrait. We'd tried a police station with stereo flags flanking a three story tall portrait of Atatürk, but the armed guard at the parking lot entrance would have none of it. There's a general ban on photos of government buildings and critical infrastructure and he was not willing to risk his career on a couple of American tourists.

A little further down the road we saw a two story flag on a building along a frontage road. We exited the highway and made our way back to the building. It turned out to be the fire station for the town of Aydin, Turkey. When we stopped to pose the bike, the firemen immediately came out to see what was happening. When Kemal, our guide, told them what we wanted to do, they immediately straightened the flag, stopped traffic and helped execute the shot.

After the shot was completed, they invited us into the facility to inspect their equipment. They were proud to show us their state-of-the-art German and American made fire trucks, firefighting equipment and rescue gear. When I mentioned that Steph's step-brother was a fireman in Los Angeles, they insisted we have tea and coffee with them. Supervised by the chief, the duty crew carried chairs and the table from their dining room outside and arranged them on the patio. The firemen gathered around us and answered our questions about their staffing levels, schedules, tactics, alarm rate and incident types.

They were interested in where we lived, and once they found out we were from the San Diego area, they expressed condolences for the firefighter who was lost in the wildfires last fall. They knew all the details of the wildfires and the specifics of how the firefighter was killed. They were very solemn, and told us repeatedly that "We are all brothers, we who fight fires. It is a brotherhood. We lost a brother in your town."

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At that point one of the crew members brought out a carefully preserved Turkish newspaper clipping and handed it reverently to Kemal. Kemal read it to us, and it was then we learned that the article was a tribute to the firemen killed on 9/11. The firemen were completely silent as Kemal translated the article for us. When he finished, several of them were very emotional as they repeated, "We are all brothers, we who fight fires. It is a brotherhood." There were several moist eyes as they told us, "We lost many of our brothers that day."

The chief then told us that every year on the 11th of September his department and those of the surrounding cities gather in the town square for a moment of silence in honor of their fallen brothers.

In the silence that followed, I pondered the image of several hundred Muslim firefighters from cities across the region gathered in a town square in a medium sized Islamic city in Southwestern Turkey standing silent in tribute to their fallen brothers in New York City.

A brotherhood indeed.

Be well,
Doug

P.S. – some photos of our recent travels follow

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The chapel in the restored home of the Virgin Mary. Local history tells she came North with St. John the evangelist and lived the rest of her life in this house tucked into a valley south of Ephesus. We attended what turned out to be a private morning mass here conducted by a priest and two nuns. It was a very moving experience. The priest was from India and one of the nuns was from San Francisco. Near ancient Ephesus, Turkey.



Steam locomotive with roses and minaret. National steam railroad museum. Selcuk, Turkey.



Antique Turkish National Railway Logo. National steam railroad museum. Selcuk, Turkey.



Posing in front of a Turkish flag at the fire station. Aydin, Turkey. Photo by Kemal Ertem.



The duty crew and the chief demonstrate their late 1800's hand pump. It was used in the Ottoman Empire era. Aydin, Turkey.



Entrance to the temple of Aphrodite, the Roman goddess of love and sensuality. Ancient Aphrodisias, Turkey.



Stadium at Aphrodisias. It is the one of the largest and best preserved Roman stadiums in the world. It was built to hold 30,000 people for traditional Greek athletic events such as running, discus, javelin, etc. The playing field of the stadium is 270 meters long. The stadium was built in the 2nd century A.D. Ancient Aphrodisias, Turkey.



Seat detail at the stadium. The hole is not a cup holder; it was used to hold up a stanchion supporting an awning to shade the crowd from the sun. There were reserved seats in the stadium, which were carved with the owner's name. Ancient Aphrodisias, Turkey.



Theater with stage and ruins of backstage buildings. The theater held 15,000 at the city's peak of development. The original Greek seating portion of the theater seen in this photo was built in the 1st century B.C. The upper Roman seating portion (not restored and not pictured) was built in the 2nd century A.D. Ancient Aphrodisias, Turkey.



Face from the marble frieze that surrounded the theater. No two faces are alike among the scores that have been recovered. It is assumed they are the likenesses of famous actors and characters of the day. Ancient Aphrodisias, Turkey.



Sunset at Pamukkale. Hot mineral water pouring from the ground formed these pools over the centuries. Greeks and Romans came here as a medicinal treatment, often as a last hope to cure illness. The area around the pools is covered with thousands of tombs. The local merchants of the day required people to pay in advance for the treatment and tombs, because many visitors never left alive. Pamukkale, Turkey.



Praying mantis at sunrise. This praying mantis was on our bike cover when we came out in the morning. Pamukkale, Turkey.



In a field of wild poppies. Along the road in Southwestern Turkey. Photo by Kemal Ertem.



Hand made wooden Gulet boat approximately 12 meters (about 36 feet) long. The wood slabs in the foreground are lying on a wooden keel that will be used for the next boat constructed. It costs about \$30,000 and takes six months for a simple boat, about \$70,000 and a year for one fitted out with cabins and a full interior. I didn't see a single engineering drawing, plan or template in this shipyard. They have been building these boats, using these methods, in this area for hundreds of years. Selimiye, Turkey.



A hand made wooden boat heads out to sea. Selimiye, Turkey.