

BACKGROUND

HISTORY

Earliest Times

Semistra, the earliest-known settlement on the site of İstanbul, was probably founded around 1000 BC, a few hundred years after the Trojan War and in the same period that kings David and Solomon ruled in Jerusalem. Semistra was followed by a fishing village named Lygos, which occupied Seraglio Point (Seray Burnu) where Topkapı Palace stands today.

Around 700 BC, colonists from Megara (near Corinth) in Greece founded the city of Chalcedon (now Kadıköy) on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. Chalcedon became one of a dozen Greek fishing colonies along the shores of the Propontis (the ancient name for the Sea of Marmara). The historian Theopompus of Chios, cited in John Freely's *Istanbul: The Imperial City*, wrote in the latter half of the 4th century that its inhabitants 'devoted themselves unceasingly to the better pursuits of life'. Their way of life was apparently in stark contrast to that of the dissolute Byzantines, who founded their settlement across the Bosphorus at Seraglio Point in 657 BC.

First Incarnation: Byzantium

Legend tells us that Byzantium was founded by a Megarian colonist named Byzas, the son of the god Poseidon and the nymph Keroessa, daughter of Zeus and Io. Before leaving Greece, Byzas had asked the oracle at Delphi where he should establish his new colony. The enigmatic answer was 'Opposite the blind'. All this made sense when Byzas and his fellow colonists sailed up the Bosphorus and noticed the colony on the Asian shore at Chalcedon. Looking west, they saw the small fishing village of Lygos, built on a magnificent and easily fortified natural harbour of the Golden Horn (known to the Greeks as Chrysokeras) on the European shore. Thinking, as legend has it, that the settlers of Chalcedon must have been blind to disregard such a superb position, Byzas and his mates settled here and their new town came to be called Byzantium after its founder.

The new colony quickly prospered, largely due to its ability to levy tolls and harbour fees on ships passing through the Bosphorus, then as now an important waterway. A thriving marketplace was established and the inhabitants lived on traded goods and the abundant fish stocks in the surrounding waters. In all, the early Byzantines were a fortunate lot. They walled their city to ensure its invincibility from attack, enslaved the local Thracian population to do most of the hard work and worshipped the Greek Olympian gods. Theopompus of Chios might have thought that the Chalcedons lived a good clean life when they first established their city on the opposite shore, but he had no such compliment for the Byzantines, writing that they 'accustomed themselves to amours and drinking in the taverns'.

In 512 BC Darius, emperor of Persia, captured the city during his campaign against the Scythians. Following the retreat of the Persians in 478 BC, the town came under the influence and protection of Athens and joined the Athenian League. It was a turbulent relationship, with Byzantium

TIMELINE

1000 BC

The settlements of Lygos and Semistra are founded by Thracian tribes; Plinius mentions the founding of Semistra in his historical accounts and a few traces of Lygos remain near Seraglio Point

657 BC

The god Poseidon and the nymph Keroessa, daughter of Zeus and Io, have a son, Byzas, who travels up the Bosphorus and founds Byzantium on the site of Lygos

335 BC

Byzantium is granted independence but stays under the Athenian umbrella, withstanding with Athenian help a siege by Philip, father of Alexander the Great, in 340 BC

ISTANBUL'S HISTORIAN

This book is littered with mentions of the writings of John Freely (born 1926), an American academic who has been living, working and writing in the Istanbul on and off since 1960. Put simply, what Freely doesn't know about the architectural and cultural history of Istanbul probably isn't worth knowing. His eminently readable books include the following:

- *The Byzantine Monuments of Istanbul* (with Ahmet Çakmak; 2004)
- *Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul* (1999)
- *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (1996)
- *Sinan: Architect of Süleyman the Magnificent* (photographs by Ara Guler; 1992)
- *Strolling through Istanbul* (with Hilary Sumner-Boyd) (1972)

revolting a number of times, only to be defeated by the Athenians. During one of the revolts, the Athenian navy mounted an expedition against Byzantium and Chalcedon and sailed up the Bosphorus to establish a settlement at Chrysopolis ('the City of Gold'), site of the present-day suburb of Üsküdar. From this base they successfully besieged Byzantium.

The Spartans took the city after the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BC) but were ousted in 390 BC, when Byzantium once again joined the League of Athens. It was granted independence in 355 BC but stayed under the Athenian umbrella, withstanding with Athenian help a siege by Philip, father of Alexander the Great, in 340 BC.

By the end of the Hellenistic period, Byzantium had formed an alliance with the Roman Empire. It retained its status as a free state, which it even kept after being officially incorporated into the Roman Empire in AD 79

by Vespasian, but it paid significant taxes for the privilege. Life was relatively uneventful until the city's leaders made a big mistake: they picked the wrong side in a Roman war of succession following the death of the Emperor Pertinax in AD 193. When Septimius Severus emerged victorious over his rival Pescennius Niger, he mounted a three-year siege of the city, eventually massacring Byzantium's citizens, razing its walls and burning it to the ground. Ancient Byzantium was no more.

The new emperor was aware of the city's important strategic position, and he soon set about rebuilding it. He pardoned the remaining citizens and built a circuit of walls that stretched roughly from where the Yeni Camii is today (Map p63) to the Bucoleon Palace (Map p50), enclosing a city twice the size of its predecessor. The Hippodrome (p56) was built by Severus, as was a colonnaded way that followed the present path of Divan Yolu. He also erected a gateway known as the Miliarium Aureum or, more simply, the Milion. A marble stellae from this gate can still be seen today (Map p50). Severus named his new city Augusta Antonina and it was subsequently ruled by a succession of emperors, including the great Diocletian (r 284–303).

Decline of Rome & the Rise of Constantinople

Diocletian had decreed that after his retirement, the government of the Roman Empire should be overseen by co-emperors Galerius in the east (Augusta Antonina) and Constantine in the west (Rome). This resulted in a civil war, which was won by Constantine in AD 324 when he defeated Licinius, Galerius' successor, at Chrysopolis.

With his victory, Constantine became sole emperor (r 324–37) of a reunited empire. He also became the first Christian emperor, though he didn't formally convert until on his deathbed. To solidify his power he summoned the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (İznik) in 325, which established the precedent of the emperor's supremacy in church affairs.

Constantine also decided to move the capital of the empire to the shores of the Bosphorus. He built a new, wider circle of walls around the site of Byzantium and laid out a magnificent city within. The Hippodrome was extended and a forum was built on the crest of the second hill, near today's Nuruosmaniye Camii (Map p63). The city was dedicated on 11 May 330 as New Rome, but soon came to be called Constantinople. First settled as a fishing village over 1000 years earlier, the settlement on Seraglio Point was now the capital of the Eurasian world and would remain so for almost another 1000 years.

Constantine died in 337, just seven years after the dedication of his new capital. His empire was divided up between his three sons: Constantine and Constans. Constantinople was part of Constantine's share. His power base was greatly increased in 353 when he overthrew both of his brothers and brought the empire under his sole control.

Constantius died in 361 and was succeeded by his cousin Julian. Emperor Jovian was next, succeeded by Valens (of aqueduct fame, p82).

The city continued to grow under the rule of the emperors. Theodosius I ('the Great') had a forum built on the present site of Beyazıt Square and a massive triumphal gate built in the city walls, the Porta Aurea (Golden Gate; p128). He also erected the Obelisk of Theodosius (p56) at the Hippodrome. His grandson Emperor Theodosius II (r 408–50) came to the throne as a boy, heavily influenced by his sister Pulcheria, who acted as regent until her brother was old enough to rule in his own right. Threatened by the forces of Attila the Hun, he ordered that an even wider, more formidable circle of walls be built around the city. Encircling all seven hills of the city, the walls were completed in 413, only to be brought down by a series of earthquakes in 447. They were hastily rebuilt in a mere two months – the rapid approach of Attila and the Huns acting as a powerful stimulus. The Theodosian walls successfully held out invaders for the next 757 years and still stand today, though they are in an increasingly dilapidated state of repair.

Theodosius II's other achievements were the compilation of the *Codex Theodosianus*, a collection of all of the laws that had been enacted since the reign of Constantine the Great, and the erection of a new cathedral, the Sancta Sophia (Aya Sofya; p49), which replaced an earlier church of the same name that had been burned down during a riot in 404.

Justinian & Theodora

Theodosius died in 450 and was succeeded by a string of emperors, including the most famous of all Byzantine emperors, Justinian.

During the 5th and 6th centuries, as the barbarians of Europe captured and sacked Rome, the new eastern capital grew in wealth, strength and reputation. Justinian (r 527–65) had much to do with this. A former soldier, he and his great general Belisarius reconquered Anatolia, the Balkans, Egypt, Italy and North Africa. They also successfully put down the Nika riots of 532, killing 30,000 of the rioters in the Hippodrome in the process.

Three years before taking the throne, Justinian had married Theodora, a strong-willed former courtesan who is credited with having great influence over her husband. Together, they further embellished Constantinople with great buildings, including SS Sergius and Bacchus, now known as Küçük Aya Sofya (p57), Hagia Eirene (Aya İrini; p65) and the Basilica Cistern (p58). Justinian's personal triumph was the new Sancta Sophia (Aya Sofya, p49), which was completed in 537.

Justinian's ambitious building projects and constant wars of reconquest exhausted his treasury and his empire. Following his reign, the Byzantine Empire would never again be as large, powerful or rich.

AD 79

Byzantium is officially incorporated into the Roman Empire by the soldier-emperor Vespasian, who was described by the Roman senator and historian Tacitus as 'infamous and odious'

330

Constantine the Great declares Byzantium the capital of the Roman Empire, names it New Rome and commences an ambitious building program; the city soon becomes known as Constantinople in his honour

379

The emperor Theodosius I (the Great) makes Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire; he erects the Obelisk of Theodosius, pilfered from Karnak in Egypt, at the Hippodrome in 390

408

Theodosius' grandson Theodosius II inherits the throne as a child; his sister Pulcheria, a devout Christian, takes a vow of virginity to avoid being forced into marriage and acts as her brother's regent

524

Justinian, who will become the most famous of all of the Byzantine emperors, marries a courtesan called Theodora, the daughter of a bear-keeper at the Hippodrome

527

Justinian takes the throne and makes Theodora joint ruler; the Imperial Council counsels the Emperor to flee the city during the Nika riots in 532, but Theodora persuades him to stay and fight

Under Siege & In Decline

From 565 to 1025, a succession of warrior emperors kept invaders such as the Persians and the Avars at bay. Though the foreign armies often managed to get as far as Chalcedon, none were able to breach Theodosius' great walls. The Arab armies of the nascent Islamic empire tried in 669, 674, 678 and 717–18, each time in vain. Inside the walls the city was undergoing a different type of threat: the Iconoclastic Crisis. This began in 726 when Emperor Leo III launched his quest to rid the empire of all forms of idolatry. Those who worshipped idols, including the followers of many saints, revolted and a number of uprisings ensued. The emperor was ultimately triumphant and his policy was adopted by his successors. It was first overturned in 780, when the Empress Eirene, mother of the child emperor Constantine VI, set out to restore icons. The issue was finally put to rest by the Empress Theodora, mother of Michael III, another child emperor, in 845.

The powerful emperors of the Bulgarian empire besieged the city in 814, 913 and 924, never conquering it. Under Emperor Basil II (r 976–1025), the Byzantine armies drove the Arab armies out of Anatolia and completely annihilated the Bulgarian forces. For this feat he was dubbed *Bulgaroctonus*, the 'Bulgar-slayer'.

In 1071 Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (r 1068–1071) led his army to eastern Anatolia to do battle with the Seljuk Turks, who had been forced out of Central Asia by the encroaching Mongols. However, at Manzikert (Malazgirt) the Byzantines were disastrously defeated, the emperor captured and imprisoned, and the former Byzantine heartland of Anatolia thus thrown open to Turkish invasion and settlement. Soon the Seljuks had built a thriving empire of their own in central Anatolia, with their capital first at Nicaea and later at Konya.

As Turkish power was consolidated in Anatolia to the east of Constantinople, the power of Venice – always a maritime and commercial rival to Constantinople – grew in the west. This coincided with the launch of the First Crusade and the arrival in Constantinople of the first of the Crusaders in 1096.

The Crusaders: Interlopers from the West

Soldiers of the Second Crusade passed through the city in 1146 during the reign of Manuel I, son of John Comnenus II 'The Good' and his empress, Eirene, both of whose mosaic portraits can be seen in the gallery at Aya Sofya (p49). In 1171 Manuel evicted Venetian merchants from their neighbourhood in Galata. The Venetians retaliated by sending a fleet to attack Byzantine ports in Greece.

The convoluted, treacherous imperial court politics of Constantinople have given us the word 'Byzantine'. Rarely blessed with a simple, peaceful succession, Byzantine rulers were always under threat from members of their own families as well as would-be tyrants and foreign powers. This internecine plotting was eventually to lead to the defeat of the city by the Crusaders.

In 1195 Alexius III deposed and blinded his brother, Emperor Isaac II, claiming the throne for himself. Fleeing to the West, Isaac's oldest son, Prince Alexius, pleaded to the Pope and other Western rulers for help in restoring his father to the Byzantine throne. At the time, the Fourth Crusade was assembling in Venice to sail to Egypt and attack the infidel. Knowing this, Prince Alexius sent a message to the Crusaders offering to agree to a union of the Greek and Roman churches under the papacy if the Crusaders could put his father back on the throne. He also promised to pay richly for their assistance. The Crusader leaders agreed, and Enrico Dandolo, Doge of Venice, led the crusaders to Constantinople, arriving in 1203.

Rather than facing the Crusaders, Alexius III fled with the imperial treasury. The Byzantines swiftly restored Isaac II to the throne and made Prince Alexius his co-emperor. Unfortunately, the new co-emperors had no money to pay their allies. They were also deeply unpopular with their subjects, being seen as Latin toadies. Isaac fell ill (he died in 1204), and the Byzantines swiftly deposed Alexius and crowned a new emperor, Alexius V. The new emperor foolishly ordered the Crusaders to leave his territory, conveniently ignoring the fact that they believed themselves to be owed a considerable amount of money by the Byzantines. Their patience exhausted, the Crusaders attacked. On 13 April 1204 they broke through the walls, and sacked and pillaged the rich capital of their Christian ally.

When the smoke cleared, Dandolo took control of three-eighths of the city, including Aya Sofya, leaving the rest to his co-conspirator Count Baldwin of Flanders. The Byzantine nobility fled to what was left of their estates and fought among themselves in best Byzantine fashion for control of the shreds of the empire.

After Dandolo's death, Count Baldwin had himself crowned emperor of Romania ('Kingdom of the Romans'), his name for his new kingdom. Never a strong or effective state, Baldwin's so-called empire steadily declined until, just over half a century later in 1261, it was easily recaptured by the soldiers of Michael VIII Palaeologus, formerly the emperor of Nicaea, where the Byzantine Empire in exile sat. The Byzantine Empire was restored.

The Ottomans: Upstarts from the East

Two decades after Michael reclaimed Constantinople, a Turkish warlord named Ertuğrul died in the village of Söğüt near Nicaea. He left his son Osman, who was known as Gazi (Warrior for the Faith), a small territory. Osman's followers became known in the Empire as Osmanlıs and in the West as the Ottomans.

Osman died in 1324 and was succeeded by his son Orhan. In 1326 Orhan captured Bursa, made it his capital and took the title of sultan. A victory at Nicaea followed, after which he sent his forces further afield, conquering Ankara to the east and Thrace to the west. His son Murat I (r 1362–89) took Adrianople (Edirne) in 1371 and extended his conquests to Kosovo, where he defeated the Serbs and Bosnians.

Murat's son Beyazıt (r 1389–1402) unsuccessfully laid siege to Constantinople in 1394, then defeated a Crusader army 100,000 strong on the Danube in 1396. Though temporarily checked by the armies of Tamerlane and a nasty war of succession between Beyazıt's four sons that was eventually won by Mehmet I (r 1413–21), the Ottomans continued to grow in power and size. By 1440 the Ottoman armies under Murat II (r 1421–51) had taken Thessalonica, unsuccessfully laid siege to Constantinople and Belgrade, and battled Christian armies for Transylvania. It was at this point in history that Mehmet II 'The Conqueror' (r 1451–81) came to power and vowed to attain the ultimate prize – Constantinople.

The Conquest

By 1450, the Byzantine emperor had control over little more than Constantinople itself.

The first step in Mehmet's plan to take the city was construction of the great fortress of Rumeli Hisarı (see p217), which was completed in 1452. He also repaired Anadolu Hisarı, the fortress on the Asian shore that had been built by his great-grandfather. Between them, the two great fortresses then closed the Bosphorus at its narrowest point, blockading the imperial capital from the north.

548

Theodora dies; during her reign she was known for establishing homes for ex-prostitutes, granting women more rights in divorce cases, allowing women to own and inherit property, and enacting the death penalty for rape

565

Justinian dies; his lasting memorial is the church of Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya), which was to be the centre of Eastern Orthodox Christianity for many centuries

717

Leo III, a Syrian, becomes emperor after deposing Theodosius III; he introduces a series of edicts against the worship of images, ushering in the age of iconoclasm

1203

Enrico Dandolo, Doge of Venice, leads the crusaders of the Fourth Crusade in a defeat of Constantinople; after his burial in Aya Sofya his bones are disinterred by locals and thrown to the dogs

1261

Constantinople is recaptured by the soldiers of Michael VIII Palaeologus, formerly the emperor of Nicaea, where the Byzantine Empire in exile sat; the Byzantine Empire is restored

1451

Mehmet's army defeats that of the Byzantine emperor and he takes power in Istanbul, becoming known as El-Fatih, 'The Conqueror'; he commissions the Italian painter Gentile Bellini to paint his portrait in 1479 and dies in 1481

The Byzantines had closed the mouth of the Golden Horn with a heavy chain (on view in Istanbul's *Askeri Müzesi*, p114) to prevent Ottoman ships from sailing in and attacking the city walls on the north side. Mehmet outsmarted them by marshalling his boats at a cove where Dolmabahçe Palace (p116) now stands, and having them transported overland during the night on rollers and slides up the valley (where the İstanbul Hilton now stands) and down the other side into the Golden Horn at Kasımpaşa. As dawn broke his fleet attacked the city, catching the Byzantine defenders by surprise. Soon the Golden Horn was under Ottoman control.

As for the mighty Theodosian land walls to the west, a Hungarian cannon founder named Urban had offered his services to the Byzantine emperor for the defence of Christendom. Finding that the emperor had no money, he conveniently forgot about defending Christianity and went instead to Mehmet, who paid him richly to cast an enormous cannon capable of firing a huge ball right through the city walls.

Despite the inevitability of the conquest (Mehmet had 80,000 men compared with Byzantium's 7000), Emperor Constantine XI (r 1449–53) refused the surrender terms offered by Mehmet on 23 May 1453, preferring to wait in hope that Christendom would come to his rescue. On 28 May the final attack commenced: the mighty walls were breached between the gates now called Topkapı and Edirnekapi, the sultan's troops flooded in and by the evening of the 29th they were in control of every quarter. Constantine, the last emperor of Byzantium, died fighting on the city walls.

The City Ascendant

The 21-year-old conqueror saw himself as the successor to the imperial throne of Byzantium by right of conquest, and he began to rebuild and repopulate the city. Aya Sofya was converted to a mosque; a new mosque, the Fatih (Conqueror) Camii (p95), was built on the fourth hill; and the Eski Saray (Old Palace) was constructed on the third hill, followed by a new palace at Topkapı (p62) a few years later. The city walls were repaired and a new fortress, Yedikule (p128), was built. İstanbul, as it was often called, became the new administrative, commercial and cultural centre of the ever-growing Ottoman Empire. Mehmet encouraged Greeks who had fled the city to return and issued an imperial decree calling for resettlement; Muslims, Jews and Christians all took up his offer and were promised the right to worship as they pleased. The Genoese, who had fought with the Byzantines, were pardoned and allowed to stay in Galata, though the fortifications that surrounded their settlement were torn down. Only Galata Tower (p104) was allowed to stand.

Mehmet died in 1481 and was succeeded by Beyazıt II (r 1481–1512), who was ousted by his son, the ruthless Selim the Grim (r 1512–20), famed for executing seven grand viziers and numerous relatives during his relatively short reign.

The building boom that Mehmet kicked off was continued by his successors, with Selim's son Süleyman the Magnificent (r 1520–66) being responsible for more construction than any other sultan. Blessed with the services of Mimar Sinan (1497–1588), Islam's greatest architect, the sultan and his family, court and grand viziers crowded the city with great buildings. Under Süleyman's 46-year reign, the longest of any sultan, the empire expanded its territories and refined its artistic pursuits at its court. None of the empires of Europe or Asia were as powerful.

Rule of the Women

Süleyman's son Selim II ('the Sot', r 1566–74) and his successors lost themselves in the pleasures of the harem and the bottle, and cared little for the administration of the empire their forebears

had built. While they were carousing, a succession of exceptionally able grand viziers dealt with external and military affairs.

Before the drunken Selim drowned in his bath, his chief concubine Nurbanu called the shots in the palace and ushered in the so-called 'Rule of the Women', whereby a series of chief concubines and mothers (*valide sultans*) of a series of dissolute sultans ruled the roost at court. Among the most fascinating of these women was Kösem Sultan, the favourite of Sultan Ahmet I (r 1603–17). She influenced the course of the empire through Ahmet, then through her sons Murat IV (r 1623–40) and İbrahim, ('the Mad', r 1640–48) and finally through her grandson Mehmet IV (r 1648–87). Her influence over Mehmet lasted only a few years and she was strangled in 1651 at the command of the *valide sultan* Turhan Hadice, Mehmet's mother.

For the next century the sultans continued in Selim's footsteps. Their dissolute and often unbalanced behaviour led to dissatisfaction among the people and the army, which would eventually prove to be the empire's undoing.

Decline, then Attempts at Reform

The motor that drove the Ottoman Empire was military conquest, and when the sultan's armies reached their geographical and technological limits, decline set in for good. In 1683 the Ottomans laid siege for the second time to Vienna, but failed again to take the city. With the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, the Austrian and Ottoman emperors divided up the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire went on the defensive.

By this time Europe was well ahead of Turkey in politics, technology, science, banking, commerce and military development. Sultan Selim III (r 1789–1807) initiated efforts to catch up to Europe, but was overthrown in a revolt by janissaries (the sultan's personal bodyguards). The modernisation efforts were continued under Mahmut II (r 1808–39). He founded a new army along European lines, provoking a riot among the janissaries, so that in 1826 he had to send his new force in to crush them, which it did. The bodies of janissaries filled the Hippodrome and the ancient corps, once the glory of the empire, was no more.

Sultan Abdül Mecit (r 1839–61) continued the catch-up, continuing the Tanzimat (Reorganisation) political and social reforms that had been initiated by his father Mahmut II. But these efforts were too little, too late. During the 19th century, ethnic nationalism, a force more powerful even than Western armies, penetrated the empire's domain and proved its undoing.

Ethnic Nationalism

For centuries, the non-Turkish ethnic and non-Muslim religious minorities in the sultan's domains had lived side by side with their Turkish neighbours, governed by their own religious and traditional laws. The head of each community – chief rabbi, Orthodox patriarch etc – was responsible to the sultan for the community's wellbeing and behaviour.

Ottoman decline and misrule provided fertile ground for the growth of ethnic nationalism among these communities. The subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire rose in revolt, one after another, often with the direct encouragement and assistance of the European powers, who coveted parts of the sultan's vast domains. After bitter fighting in 1831 the Kingdom of Greece was formed; the Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians, Armenians and Arabs would all seek their independence soon after.

1520	1550–57	1556	1574	1826	1839
Selim's son Süleyman, who would come to be known as 'The Magnificent', ascends to the throne; his first acts as sultan are a series of military conquests in Syria, Hungary and Rhodes	Süleyman's chief architect, Mimar Koca Sinan, designs and oversees construction of the great Süleymaniye mosque complex for his patron; he is buried in a tomb just outside its walls	Süleyman dies while on a military campaign in Hungary; his death is kept secret for days while word is sent to his son Selim so that he can take control in İstanbul before word arrives	Selim II – known as 'The Sot' – drowns after falling in his bath while drunk and is succeeded by his son Murat III, who orders the murder of his five younger brothers to ensure his accession	The Vakayı Hayriye, or 'Auspicious Event' is decreed under which the corrupt and powerful imperial bodyguard known as the Janissary Corps is abolished	Mahmut II implements the Tanzimat reforms, which aim to stop the rise of nationalist movements by integrating non-Muslims and non-Turks into Ottoman society through civil liberties and regulations

As the sultan's empire broke up, the European powers (Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia) hovered in readiness to colonise or annex the pieces. They used religion as a reason for pressure or control, saying that it was their duty to protect the sultan's Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox subjects from misrule and anarchy.

The Russian emperors put pressure on the Turks to grant them powers over all Ottoman Orthodox Christian subjects, whom the Russian emperor would thus 'protect'. The result was the Crimean War (1853–56), with Britain and France fighting on the side of the Ottomans against the growth of Russian power. During the war, wounded British, French and Ottoman soldiers were brought to İstanbul for treatment at the Selimiye Army Barracks, now home to the Florence Nightingale Museum (p124), and the foundations of modern nursing practice were laid.

Even during the war, the sultan continued the imperial building tradition. Vast Dolmabahçe Palace (p116) and its mosque were finished in 1856, and the palaces at Beylerbeyi (p215), Çırağan (p119) and Yıldız (p119) would be built before the end of the century. Though it had lost the fabulous wealth of the days of Süleyman the Magnificent, the city was still regarded as the Paris of the East. It was also the terminus of the *Orient Express*, which connected İstanbul and Paris – the world's first great international luxury express train.

Abdül Hamit II & the Young Turks

Amid the empire's internal turmoil, Abdül Hamit II (r 1876–1909) assumed the throne. Mithat Paşa, a successful general and powerful grand vizier, managed to introduce a constitution at the same time, but soon the new sultan did away both with Mithat Paşa and the constitution, and established his own absolute rule.

Abdül Hamit modernised without democratising, building thousands of kilometres of railways and telegraph lines and encouraging modern industry. However, the empire continued to disintegrate, and there were nationalist insurrections in Armenia, Bulgaria, Crete and Macedonia.

The younger generation of the Turkish elite – particularly the military – watched bitterly as their country fell apart, then organised secret societies bent on toppling the sultan. The Young Turk movement for Western-style reforms gained enough power by 1908 to force the restoration of the constitution. In 1909 the Young Turk-led Ottoman parliament deposed Abdül Hamit and put his hopelessly indecisive brother Mehmet V on the throne.

When WWI broke out, the Ottoman parliament and sultan made the fatal error of siding with Germany and the Central Powers. With their defeat, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, İstanbul was occupied by the British and the sultan became a pawn in the hands of the victors.

Republican İstanbul

The situation looked very bleak for the Turks as their armies were being disbanded and their country was taken under the control of the Allies, but what first seemed a catastrophe provided the impetus for rebirth.

Since gaining independence in 1831, the Greeks had entertained the Megali Idea (Great Plan) of a new Greek empire encompassing all the lands that had once had Greek influence – in effect, the refounding of the Byzantine Empire, with Constantinople as its capital. On 15 May 1919, with Western backing, Greek armies invaded Anatolia in order to make the dream a reality.

Even before the Greek invasion an Ottoman general named Mustafa Kemal, the hero of the WWI battle at Gallipoli, had decided that a new government must take over the destiny of the Turks from the ineffectual sultan. He began organising resistance to the sultan's captive government on 19 May 1919.

The Turkish War of Independence, in which the Turkish Nationalist forces led by Mustafa Kemal fought off Greek, French and Italian invasion forces, lasted from 1920 to 1922. Victory in the bitter war put Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938) in command of the fate of the Turks. The sultanate was abolished in 1922, as was the Ottoman Empire soon after. The republic was born on 29 October 1923.

Downgraded: No Longer the Capital

The nation's saviour, proclaimed Atatürk (Father Turk) by the Turkish parliament, decided to move away, both metaphorically and physically, from the imperial memories of İstanbul. He established the seat of the new republican government in a city (Ankara) that could not be threatened by foreign gunboats. Robbed of its importance as the capital of a vast empire, İstanbul lost much of its wealth and glitter in succeeding decades.

Atatürk had always been ill at ease with Islamic traditions and he set about making the Republic of Turkey a secular state. The fez (Turkish brimless cap) was abolished, as was polygamy; Friday was replaced by Sunday as the day of rest; surnames were introduced; the Arabic alphabet was replaced by a Latin script; and civil (not religious) marriage became mandatory. The country's modernisation was accompanied by a great surge of nationalistic pride, and though it was no longer the political capital, İstanbul continued to be the centre of the nation's cultural and economic life.

Atatürk died in İstanbul in 1938, just before WWII broke out, and was succeeded as president by İsmet İnönü. Still scarred from the calamity of its involvement in the Great War, Turkey managed to successfully stay out of the new conflict until 1945, when it entered on the Allied side.

The Coup Years

The Allies made it clear that they believed that Turkey should introduce democracy. The government agreed and called parliamentary elections. The first opposition party in Turkey's history – the Democratic Party led by Adnan Menderes – won the first of these elections in 1950.

Though he started as a democrat, Menderes became increasingly autocratic. In 1960 the military staged a coup against his government and convicted him and two of his ministers of treason. All three were hanged in 1961. New elections were held and a government was formed, but it and ensuing administrations were dogged by corruption charges, and constitutional violations and amendments. In 1971 the military staged another coup, only to repeat the process in 1980 and install a military junta, which ruled for three years before new elections were called. It seemed to many observers that the far left and extreme right factions in the country would never be able to reconcile, and that military coups would be a constant feature of the modern political landscape. However, voters in the 1983 election refused to see this as a *fait accompli* and, rather than voting in the military's preferred candidates, elected the reforming Motherland party of economist Turgut Özal. A new era had begun.

1854–56

The Crimean War is fought between Imperial Russia and an alliance that includes the Ottoman Empire; Florence Nightingale arrives at the Selimiye Army Barracks near Üsküdar to nurse the war-wounded

1915

Armenian populations are rounded up and marched into the Syrian desert; Armenians allege that Ottoman authorities were intent on eradicating the Armenian population from İstanbul and Anatolia

1920–22

Turkish Nationalist forces led by Atatürk fight off Greek, French and Italian invasion forces in the War of Independence

1922–23

The Grand National Assembly, led by Atatürk, abolishes the Ottoman sultanate and proclaims the Turkish Republic; Atatürk becomes its first president

1934

Women are given the vote; by 1935 4.6% of the national parliament's representatives are female, a percentage that sadly hasn't increased much to this day

2005

Europe commences accession talks with Turkey regarding its candidacy bid for the EU; the French aren't keen but the UK is a staunch supporter

THE RECENT PAST

Under the presidency of economist Turgut Özal, the 1980s saw a free market-led economic and tourism boom in Turkey and its major city. Özal's government also presided over a great increase in urbanisation, with trainloads of peasants from eastern Anatolia making their way to the cities – particularly İstanbul – in search of jobs in the booming industry sector. The city's infrastructure couldn't cope back then and is still catching up, despite nearly three decades of large-scale municipal works being undertaken.

The municipal elections of March 1994 were a shock to the political establishment, with the upstart religious-right Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) winning elections across the country. Its victory was seen in part as a protest vote against the corruption, ineffective policies and tedious political wrangles of the traditional parties. In İstanbul Refah was led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a proudly Islamist candidate. He vowed to modernise infrastructure and restore the city to its former glory.

In the national elections of December 1996, Refah polled more votes than any other party (23%), and eventually formed a government vowing moderation and honesty. Emboldened by political power, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and other Refah politicians tested the boundaries of Turkey's traditional secularism, alarming the powerful National Security Council, the most visible symbol of the centrist military establishment's role as the caretaker of secularism and democracy.

In 1997 the council announced that Refah had flouted the constitutional ban on religion in politics and warned that the government should resign or face a military coup. Bowing to the inevitable, Erbakan did as the council wished. In İstanbul, Mayor Erdoğan was ousted by the secularist forces in the national government in late 1998.

National elections in April 1999 brought in a coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit's left-wing Democratic Left Party. After years under the conservative right of the Refah Partisi, the election result heralded a shift towards European-style social democracy, something highlighted by the country's successful bid to be accepted as a candidate for membership of the European Union. Unfortunately for the new government there was a spectacular collapse of the Turkish economy in 2001, leading to an electoral defeat in 2002. The victorious party was the moderate Islamic Justice and Development Party, led by Phoenix-like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who – despite continuing tensions with military hardliners (see p38) – has run an increasingly stable and prosperous Turkey ever since.

ARTS

Turks have a unique attitude towards the arts, being as likely to read, view and listen to works created a century or a decade ago as they are to buy a newly released novel or album. This merging of the old and the new can be initially disconcerting for the foreign observer used to gravitating towards the fresh and new, but it makes for a rich cultural landscape and gives contemporary artists a solid base on which to build their practices. Traditional art forms such as carpet weaving are pretty well bound by tradition and have remained unchanged over the centuries, but there's no lack of innovative contemporary art in İstanbul, particularly within the disciplines of music, literature and cinema.

CARPETS

Turkish women have been weaving carpets for a very long time. These beautiful and durable floor coverings were a nomadic family's most valuable and practical 'furniture', warming and brightening the clan's oft-moved homes. The oldest-known carpet woven in the double-knotted Gördes style (Gördes is a town in the mountains of northwest Turkey) dates from between the 4th and 1st centuries BC.

It is thought that hand-woven carpet techniques were introduced to Anatolia by the Seljuks in the 12th century, so it's not surprising that Konya, the Seljuk capital, was mentioned by Marco Polo as a centre of carpet production in the 13th century.

The general pattern and colour scheme of old carpets was influenced by local traditions and the availability of certain types of wool and colours of dyes. Patterns were memorised and women usually worked with no more than 45cm of the carpet visible. Each artist imbued her

work with her own personality, choosing a motif or a colour based on her own artistic preferences, and even events and emotions in her daily life.

In the 19th century, the European rage for Turkish carpets spurred the development of carpet companies. The companies, run by men, would deal with customers, take orders, purchase and dye the wool according to the customers' preferences, and contract local women to produce the finished product. The designs were sometimes left to the women, but more often were provided by the company based on the customers' tastes. Though well made, these carpets lost some of the originality and spirit of the older work.

Carpets made today often use traditional patterns such as the commonly used eye and tree patterns, and incorporate all sorts of symbols that can be 'read' by those in the know. At a glance, two carpets might look identical, but closer examination reveals the subtle differences that give each Turkish carpet its individuality and charm.

Traditionally, village women wove carpets for their own family's use, or for their dowry. Knowing they would be judged on their efforts, the women took great care over their handiwork – hand-spinning and dyeing the wool, and choosing what they judged to be the most interesting and beautiful patterns. These days the picture is more complicated. Many carpets are made to the dictates of the market rather than according to local traditions. Weavers in eastern Turkey might make carpets in popular styles native to western Turkey. Long-settled villagers might duplicate the wilder, hairier and more naïve *yörüük* (nomad) carpets.

Village women still weave carpets, but most of them work to fixed contracts for specific shops. Usually they work to a pattern and are paid for their final effort rather than for each hour of work. A carpet made to a fixed contract may still be of great value to its purchaser. However, the selling price should be lower than for a one-off piece.

Other carpets are the product of division of labour, with different individuals responsible for dyeing and weaving. What such pieces lose in individuality and rarity is often more than made up for in quality control. Most silk Hereke carpets (Hereke is a small town near İzmit, about 100km southeast of İstanbul) are mass-produced, but to standards that make them some of the most sought-after of all Turkish carpets.

Fearing that old carpet-making methods would be lost, the Ministry of Culture now sponsors a number of projects to revive traditional weaving and dyeing methods in western Turkey. Some carpet shops will have stocks of these 'project carpets', which are usually of high quality with prices reflecting that fact. Some of these carpets are also direct copies of antique pieces in museums.

Most carpet shops have a range of pieces made by a variety of techniques. Besides the traditional pile carpets, they usually offer double-sided flat-woven mats, such as kilims. Some traditional kilim motifs are similar to patterns found at the prehistoric mound of Çatal Höyük, testifying to the very ancient traditions of flat-woven floor coverings in Anatolia. Older, larger kilims may actually be two narrower pieces of similar, but not always identical, design stitched together. As this is now rarely done, any such piece is likely to be fairly old.

Other flat-weave techniques include *sumak*, a style originally from Azerbaijan, in which intricate details are woven with coloured thread by wrapping them around the warp. The loose weft ends are left hanging at the back of the rug. *Cicims* are kilims with small and lively patterns embroidered on the top.

As well as Turkish carpets, many carpet shops in İstanbul sell pieces from other countries, especially from Iran, Afghanistan and from the ex-Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The major difference is that Turkey favours the double-knot technique and Iran favours the single knot. Turkish carpets also tend to have a higher pile, more dramatic designs and more varied colours than their Iranian cousins.

If you're keen to read more about Turkish carpets and rugs, it's worth getting hold of *The Classical Tradition in Anatolian Carpets* by Walter B Debby, *Kilims: The Complete Guide* by

NAMING RIGHTS

Even when it was ruled by the Byzantines, Constantinople was informally known as 'the city' (*polis*). The name İstanbul probably derives from this (the Greek for 'to the city' is '*eis ten polin*'). Though the Turks kept the name Constantinople, they also used other names, including İstanbul and Dersaadet (City of Peace and/or Happiness).

The city's name was officially changed to İstanbul by Atatürk in the early republican years and the use of the name Constantinople was banned for having, it was thought, unfortunate imperial connotations.

Alastair Hull or *Oriental Carpets: A Buyer's Guide* by Eessie Sakhai. Most serious collectors eagerly await their bimonthly copy of the excellent magazine *Hali*, published in the UK.

For information on buying a carpet when in İstanbul, see p136.

LITERATURE

Turkey has a rich but relatively young literary tradition. Its brightest stars are greatly revered throughout the country and bookshop shelves groan under the weight of new local releases, a growing number of which are being translated into English. From its refined Ottoman roots through the flowering of politically driven literary movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, it has progressed to being predominantly concerned with investigating what it means to be a Turk in the modern age, particularly if one is displaced (either by the physical move from country to city or by virtue of one's ethnic background).

Ottoman Literature

Under the sultans, literature was really a form of religious devotion. Ottoman poets, borrowing from the great Arabic and Persian traditions, wrote sensual love poems of attraction, longing, fulfilment and ecstasy in the search for union with God. Occasionally they wrote about more worldly pleasures and triumphs, as Nabi Yousouf Efendi's 16th century *Eulogy of Constantinople* (republished in Chronicle Books' *Chronicles Abroad: Istanbul*) attests.

Early-20th-Century & Nationalist Literature

By the late 19th century the influence of Western literature began to be felt. This was the time of the Tanzimat political and social reforms initiated by Sultan Abdül Mecit, and in İstanbul a literary movement was established that became known as 'Tanzimat Literature'. Its major figures were Sinasi, Ziya Paşa, Namık Kemal and Ahmet Mithat Efendi, all of whom sought to broaden the appeal of literature and bring it into line with developments in the West.

The Tanzimat movement was responsible for the first serious attacks on the ponderous cadences of Ottoman courtly prose and poetry, but it wasn't until the foundation of the republic that the death knell of this form of literature finally rang. Atatürk decreed that the Turkish language should be purified of Arabic and Persian borrowings, and that in future the nation's literature should be created using the new Latin-based Turkish alphabet. Major figures in the new literary movement (dubbed 'National Literature') included poets Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and Mehmet Akif Ersoy, and novelists Halide Edib Adivar, Ziya Gokalp, Ömer Seyfettin and Aka Gündüz.

Of these figures, İstanbullu Halide Edib Adivar (1884–1964) is particularly interesting. A writer and vocal leader of the emerging women's emancipation movement in Turkey, she was an ally of Atatürk and a leading figure in the War of Independence. Her 1926 autobiographical work *Memoir of Halide Edib* recounts her privileged upbringing in Beşiktaş and Üsküdar, progressive education at the American College for Girls in Arnavutköy and subsequent marriage to a noted mathematician, who humiliated her by taking a second wife. After leaving him, she joined the Nationalists, remarried, worked closely with Atatürk and wrote a popular history of the War of Independence called *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928). In later years she worked as a university lecturer, wrote over 20 novels – the most famous of which was probably the 1938 work, *Thewn and his Daughter* – and had a brief stint as a member of parliament. A fictionalised account of the early part of this fascinating woman's life can be found in *Halide's Gift*, an enjoyable novel by American writer Frances Kazan.

Though not part of the National Literature movement, İrfan Orga (1908–70) is probably the most famous Turkish literary figure of the 20th century. His 1950 masterpiece *Portrait of a Turkish Family* is his memoir of growing up in İstanbul at the start of the century and is probably the best writing about the city ever published. Exiled from the country of his birth, he also wrote a swathe of nonfiction titles, including the fascinating *The Caravan Moves On: Three Weeks among Turkish Nomads*. English translations of both works are available internationally.

Late-20th-Century Writers

The second half of the 20th century saw a raft of local writers gain popularity in Turkey. Many were socialists, communists or outspoken critics of the government, and spent long and repeated

periods in jail. The most famous of these writers was poet and novelist Nâzım Hikmet (1902–63). Internationally acclaimed for his poetry, Hikmet was in and out of Turkish jails for 30 years due to his alleged communist activity. Released in 1950 after a concerted lobbying effort by the Turkish and international intelligentsia, he left the country and died in exile. His masterwork is the five-volume collection of lyric and epic poetry entitled *Human Landscapes from My Country*. The most readily available English-language translation of his poems is *Beyond the Walls: Selected Poems*.

Yaşar Kemal (born 1923) is another major literary figure whose work has a strong political flavour. A former agricultural labourer and factory worker, he writes highly regarded epic novels dealing with the human condition. Kurdish by birth, his best-known work is probably 1955's *Mehmed, My Hawk*, which deals with the lives of Kurds in Turkey. Two of his novels – *The Birds are Also Gone* and *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* – are set in İstanbul. Kemal was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999.

Aziz Nesin (1915–95) was perhaps the most prolific of all the Turkish political writers of the 20th century. A satirist, he published over 100 books and was jailed several times for his colourful indictments of the country's overly bureaucratic system and social inequalities. *Out of the Way! Socialism's Coming!* is one of the few of Nesin's works to be translated into English.

Since Halide Edib Adivar blazed the trail, there have been a number of prominent female writers in Turkey, chief among them Sevgi Soysal, Erendiz Atasü, Buket Uzuner, Latife Tekin and Elif Şafak.

During her short life, Sevgi Soysal (1936–76) was known as the author of strong works promoting women's rights in Turkey. Her 1975 novel *Noontime in Yenişehir* won the most prestigious local literary prize, the Orhan Kemal Novel Award.

Another writer who focuses on the experiences of women in Turkey is Erendiz Atasü (born 1947), a retired professor of pharmacology. Her highly acclaimed 1995 novel *The Other Side*

ORHAN PAMUK

When the much-fêted Orhan Pamuk (born 1952) was awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize for literature, the international cultural sector was largely unsurprised. The writing of the İstanbul-born, now US based, novelist had already attracted its fair share of critical accolades, including the €100,000 IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, *The Independent* newspaper's Foreign Fiction Award of the Month and every local literary prize on offer. The only prize Pamuk hadn't accepted was the prestigious title of State Artist, which was offered to him in 1999 by the Turkish Government but which he knocked back as, he stated, his protest against the government's incarceration of writers, 'narrow-minded nationalism' and an inability to address the Kurdish problem with anything but force.

In their citation, the Nobel judges said that in his 'quest for the melancholic soul of his native city' (ie İstanbul), Pamuk had 'discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of culture'. The only voices heard to criticise their judgment hailed from Turkey. Like Elif Şafak, Pamuk had been charged with 'Insulting Turkishness' under Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code (the charges were dropped in early 2006), and some local commentators alleged that in his case the Nobel Prize was awarded for political (ie freedom of speech) reasons rather than purely on the merit of his literary oeuvre. Whatever the reason, most Turks were thrilled to hear of the country's very first Nobel Prize win, and rushed to local bookstores to buy copies of his backlist titles.

Most critics describe Pamuk's novels as post-modernist, citing similarities to the work of Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino. He often uses a 'point of view' technique whereby he presents the internal monologues of interdependent characters, splicing them together so as to construct a meticulous overall narrative, often around a murder-mystery theme. Though not the easiest books to read (some critics have called them difficult and self-absorbed), they're meticulously researched and extraordinarily evocative of place. Most are set in his home town, İstanbul.

Pamuk has written seven novels to date. His first, *Cevdet Bey & His Sons* (1982), is a dynastic saga of the İstanbul bourgeoisie. *The Silent House* (1983) and *The White Castle* (1985) both won local literary awards and cemented his reputation, but were nowhere near as successful as his bizarre Beyoğlu detective novel *The Black Book* (1990), which was made into a film (*Gizli Yuz*) by director Omer Kavur in 1992. After this came *The New Life* (1995), followed by his most lauded book to date, *My Name is Red* (1998). A murder mystery set among the calligraphers of the sultan's court in the 16th century, *My Name is Red* took six years to write and was described by the IMPAC judges as 'A rare tour de force of literary imagination and philosophical speculation'. Pamuk's most recent novel is *Snow* (2002), which explores issues around the conflict of Western and Islamic ideologies in modern Turkey and is his most accessible work to date. In 2005, he published a memoir, *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, and in 2007 he published *Other Colours: Essays and Stories*. Of these titles, only *Cevdet Bey & His Sons* and *The Silent House* are not available in English translation.

of the *Mountain* looks at three generations of a family from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the 1990s, focussing on a central female character. It was published in English through a grant from the Arts Council of England. Atasü has also written *That Scorching Season of Youth* (1999) and three volumes of short stories.

Buket Uzuner (born 1955) writes short stories and novels, the best-known being *Sound of Fish Steps* (1992), which was greatly admired by the local literary set when it was first released.

Latife Tekin (born 1957) has built a reputation as Turkey's major magic-realist novelist. Her first novel, *Dear Shameless Death* (1983), which told the story of a family's difficult migration to a big city, had a strongly political subtext and was well received by local readers. Tekin's subsequent novels have included 1984's *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills*, another look at the displaced members of society, *Night Lessons* (1986), *Swords of Ice* (1989) and *Signs of Love* (1995).

High-profile writer Elif Şafak was born in Paris in 1971 and has lived and worked in France, Spain, Ankara, İstanbul and the US. She is currently based in Tucson, Arizona, where she works in the Near Eastern Studies Department at the University of Arizona. Şafak's first novel, *Pinhan (The Sufi)* was awarded the Mevlana Prize for the best work in mystical literature in Turkey in 1998. Since then she has released five novels that have either been written in, or translated into, English: *Mirrors of the City* (1999), which won the Union of Turkish Writers Prize in 2000, *The Gaze* (2000), *The Flea Palace* (2002), *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004) and the controversial *The Bastard of İstanbul* (2006). In 2006, Şafak and her Turkish translator and publisher were charged with 'insulting Turkishness' under the notorious Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code for raising the issue of the alleged genocide of the Armenians in *The Bastard of İstanbul* (the Turkish translation of which is 'The Father and the Bastard'). The case was eventually dismissed for lack of evidence. In the novel, Şafak tells the story of two families – one based in İstanbul, the other an exiled Armenian family living in San Francisco – who share a family secret connected with Turkey's turbulent past.

Turkish-born (but American-based) writer Alev Lytle Croutier, internationally known for her bestselling *Harem: The World Behind the Veil*, has also written a children's book set in İstanbul called *Leyla: The Black Tulip*.

MUSIC

Turks love music and listen to it in many forms, the most popular of which are the overwrought vocal style called *arabesk* and the slick Western-influenced pop styles performed by artists such as Tarkan. Though many foreigners immediately conjure up the trance-like sounds of Sufi Mevlevi music when they try to categorise Turkey's musical heritage, the reality is worlds away, sitting squarely within the cheerful modern-day vulgarity of Eurovision-style musical romps. These forays into the international scene stem from a solidly populist tradition of *arabesk* and folk, and are packaged with a thickly applied veneer of Western pop. Some local product can't be easily pigeonholed – the fusion sounds of Baba Zulu, for instance – but overall there are four dominant genres today: folk, *arabesk*, *fasil* and pop.

Ottoman, Classical & Sufi Music

The Ottoman court liked to listen to traditional classical music, which utilised a system of *makams* (modalities), an exotic-sounding series of notes similar in function to the familiar Western scales of whole and half-tone intervals. The result was a lugubrious sound that owed a lot to Persian and Arabic classical influences. Usually improvised, it was performed by chamber groups. Though out of favour for over a century, this form has recently undergone a slight revival, largely due to the work of İstanbul-based ensembles such as Al-Kindi. Its *Parfums Ottomans* double album makes great listening.

While the court was being serenaded by such music at its soirees, another classical genre, the music of the Sufi Mevlevi, was inspiring followers of the religious sect. Its complex and refined sound was often accompanied by vocal pieces featuring the words of Celaleddin Rumi (Mevlana), the 13th-century founder of the sect.

After the founding of the republic, the performance of traditional classical music was actively discouraged by Atatürk and his government. The great man considered it to be too redolent of contaminating Arabic influences, and he encouraged musicians and the public to instead

turn their attention to Western classical music. The fate of Sufi music under the republic was even more extreme. With the forced closure of the Sufi *tekkes* (lodges) in 1923, the music of the order was in effect banned, only re-emerging when Prime Minister Turgut Özal overturned the ban on Sufi worship after he came to power in 1983. Today there's a healthy recording tradition among Sufi musicians and a whole new genre of Sufi-inspired electronic-techno sounds by musicians such as Mercan Dede, whose albums *Nar*, *Seyahatname*, *Su* and *Nefes* have built huge international fan bases over recent years.

Anatolian Folk Music

As well as encouraging Western classical music, the republican government began a programme of classifying, archiving and promoting *halk müziği* (Anatolian folk music). Spanning 30 years and involving 10,000 songs, the programme had its positives and negatives. On the plus side, parts of a rich musical heritage were documented and promoted. Less positively, any music that was deemed 'un-Turkish' (usually due to its roots in the music of ethnic minorities) was struck from the record or forced to conform with the dominant sub-genre.

Until the 1960s and 1970s it was still possible to hear Turkish troubadours (*aşık*) in action around the countryside, playing their particular variety of *halk müziği*. These *aşık* were members of the Alevi sect of central Anatolia and had a set repertoire of mystical songs always featuring the *saz* (Turkish long-necked, stringed instrument) and vocals. Fortunately their music has been revived in studio form, with artists such as Ruhi Su, Arif Sağ, Yavuz Top and Musa Eroğlu reinterpreting the music of the wandering *aşık* for modern audiences.

Folk Revival: Türkü, Arabesk & Fasil

In the 1980s traditional *halk müziği* underwent a revival, popularised by musicians such as the soulful Belkis Akkale, who fused it with pop to form a new sub-genre known as *Türkü*. The extremely popular İbrahim Can and Nuray Hafiftaş followed Akkale's lead.

Even before Belkis et al were experimenting with *Türkü*, rock musicians such as Cem Karaca were using folk influences to develop a distinctive form of Anadolu rock featuring politically charged lyrics. Since his death in 2004, Karaca's *Hayvan Terli* album has gained a whole new audience for this type of music. The music of Zülfü Livaneli, a popular singer and *saz* player who incorporates Western instrumentation into his protest songs, clearly shows the influence of Karaca and is best known internationally for his music for Yılmaz Güney's film *Yol* (The Road).

The popularity of some musical genres defied the government's early attempts to promote a national music based solely on *halk müziği*. Two examples were *fasil* and *arabesk*, and they're still going strong today.

A mix of folk, classical and *fasil* traditions, *arabesk*'s name attests to its Arabic influences, specifically Egyptian dance music. First popularised by a local lad, Kaydar Tatliyat, in the 1940s, it was frowned upon by the nationalist government because of its Arabic influences and mournful tone. The government went so far as to first restrict and then ban Arabic musical films and recordings from Egypt and Lebanon to stop further 'contamination' of local musical tastes. Turkish devotees ignored the ban and tuned in to Radio Cairo for regular fixes of their favourite sounds.

Arabesk songs have traditionally been geared towards a working-class audience from central and eastern Anatolia and are inevitably about the oppressed – sometimes the singer is oppressed by love, sometimes by his lot in life. Though artists such as Müslüm Gürses have their devoted followers, two singers are the undisputed kings of the genre: İbrahim Tatlıses and Orhan Gencebey. A Turk of Kurdish descent, Tatlıses is from the southeastern town of Urfa and sells truckloads of CDs; Gencebey, who is also an actor, is possibly even more popular – have a listen to his *Akma Gözlerimden* and you'll see why.

As the soulful laments of *arabesk* were building the genre's national following, *fasil* (sometimes referred to as *Gypsy*) music was taking the taverns and nightclubs of İstanbul by storm. Usually performed by Turks of Armenian, Jewish, Greek or Gypsy origin who had no religious scruples preventing them performing in places where alcohol was served, this lively music usually featured the *klarnet* (clarinet) and *darbuka* (drum played with the hands). Solo improvisations from the stars of the orchestra were commonplace, as were boisterous renditions of emotionally charged songs by vocalists. Today this is the most popular form of music played in the city's many meyhanes (see p148).

Turkish Pop & Rock

On the streets you may hear the plaintive strains of *arabesk*, but they're likely to be overlaid by the powerful sounds of Turkish pop, which is pumped out of shopfronts and cars across the city. Dominated by solo artists rather than bands, pop's pantheon of performers have built their success on a long and rich tradition of popular solo vocal artists trained in *sanat*, or art music. Many have also been influenced by *arabesk*.

The first of these vocal stars to build a popular following was the fabulously camp Zeki Müren, Turkey's very own Liberace. Müren released his first album in 1951 and went on to record in classical and *arabesk* styles. Like Liberace, he liked nothing better than frocking up (his stage performances saw him appear in everything from gladiator costumes to sequin-and-feather confections) and was particularly beloved by middle-aged women. He died on stage at a comeback concert in İzmir in 1996 but recordings such as *Kahir Mektubu* still sell like hotcakes.

Following in Müren's cross-dressing footsteps is talented vocalist Bülent Ersoy, whose restrained classical idiom is best heard in her reinterpretation of late-19th-century repertoire, *Alaturka 1995*. Born in 1952, Ersoy is known by her many fans as Abla (Big Sister) as a show of support for her gender change (male to female). Before her operation she was banned from performing because of her 'effeminate ways'; afterwards she managed to successfully lobby Prime Minister Turgut Özal (a big fan) for her right to perform and also for the general civil rights of transsexuals in Turkey.

Though Bülent has attained diva status, her profile comes nowhere near to attaining the royal status given to Sezen Aksu. Aksu's influence on Turkey's popular music industry has been enormous. She's done everything from overseeing the Turkish contributions to the annual Eurovision contest to recording innumerable blockbuster albums of her own, along the way grooming up-and-coming stars such as Tarkan and Sertab Erener. In among her musical accomplishments she's managed to be an outspoken and controversial commentator on feminism and politics. Her most popular album is probably *Deliveren* (2001), though everything she's done since hitting the music scene in the 1970s has been pretty impressive.

Relative newcomer Sertab Erener has a lot to live up to if she's to take over the throne from Aksu one day. The İstanbul-born winner of the 2003 Eurovision contest hit the big time with her album *No Boundaries*, which sold over four million copies. Her winning track 'Every Way That I Can' was performed and recorded in English (the first time that a Turkish Eurovision entry wasn't performed in Turkish) and has built her a loyal international following.

Popular rock outfits such as Duman, Replikas, 110 (electronica) and Yakup regularly play gigs in İstanbul and are worth catching if you get the chance.

Finally, no discussion of contemporary Turkish music would be complete without a mention of the two very different pin-up boys: Tarkan and Ceza.

Tarkan's albums regularly sell millions of copies and his catchy brand of music is the stuff of which recording empires are made. Pretty-boy looks and a trace of attitude are all part of the Tarkan package, and have landed him a mega-lucrative Pepsi contract among other endorsements. His most successful album to date, 1998's *Ölürüm Sana* (I'd Die For You), featured tracks written by former collaborator Sezen Aksu and sold 3.5 million copies in Turkey alone. His *A-acypsin* (1994) sold over two million copies in Turkey and one million in Europe, making him Turkey's most successful recording artists ever. He even released a self-titled perfume a few years ago (we kid you not).

Ceza is the king of the local rap/hip-hop scene; his fan base is so devoted that he is regularly mobbed in the street. Have a listen to his *Rapstar Ceza* and you'll get an idea about what gets them so excited.

CINEMA

Birth of an Industry

Just a year after the Lumière brothers presented their first cinematic show in 1895, cinema first appeared in Turkey. At first it was only foreigners and non-Muslims who watched movies, but by 1914 there were cinemas run by and for Muslims as well, and the Turks' great love for the artform was up and running.

The War of Independence inspired actor Muhsin Ertuğrul, Turkey's cinema pioneer, to establish a film company in 1922 and make patriotic films. The company's first release was *The Ordeal*, based on a novel about the War of Independence by eminent writer and republican Halide Edib Adıvar. Within a decade Turkish films were winning awards in international competitions, even though a mere 23 films had been made.

After WWII the industry expanded rapidly, with new companies and young directors. Lütfi Akad's *In the Name of the Law* (1952), Turkey's first colour film, brought realism to the screen in the place of melodrama, which had been the main fodder for audiences throughout the 1940s.

Cinema as Social Commentary

By the 1960s, Turkish cinema was delving deeply into social and political issues. Metin Erksan's *Dry Summer* (1964) won a gold medal at the Berlin Film Festival and another award in Venice. Yılmaz Güney, the fiery actor-director, directed his first film *Horse, Woman, Gun* in 1966 and scripted Lütfi Akad's *The Law of the Borders*, which he also starred in. His 1970 film *Hope* was a turning point for national cinema, kick-starting a trend towards simple neorealist treatments of contemporary social issues that continues today. In this and similar films the commentary about life in modern Turkey was bleak indeed, and the exploration of issues such as the poverty-driven drift from rural areas to congested urban environments introduced a theme that would return again and again. The titles of Güney's subsequent films were representative of the industry's lack of optimism about the future of the country and their industry: after *Hope*, he released *Lament* in 1971, followed by *Sorrow*. It's not surprising that the government imprisoned him for three years after the 1971 coup.

The 1970s brought the challenge of TV, dwindling audiences, political pressures and unionisation of the industry. This was highlighted at the inaugural İstanbul International Film Festival in 1976, when the jury determined that no film was worthy of the award for best film. Despite the depressed start to the decade, the quality of films improved, and social issues such as the plight of Turkish workers in Europe were treated with honesty, naturalism and dry humour. By the early 1980s, several Turkish directors were well recognised in Europe and the USA, though they were having trouble getting their films shown at home. Despite winning the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, Yılmaz Güney's bleak *The Road*, which explores the dilemmas faced by a group of men on temporary release from prison, was banned for 15 years in Turkey before finally being released in 2000. Güney had worked on the film while in jail (his second jail term), passing directions on to co-director Şerif Gören. His last film, *Duvar* (1983), made before his untimely death aged only 46, was a wrist-slashing prison drama.

Though the industry wasn't yet booming, things were looking up by the 1980s, with some excellent films having redemptive themes symbolic of the more optimistic political climate. The most successful film of the decade was probably 1983's *A Season in Hakkâri*, directed by Erdan Kırıl, which addressed some of the issues surrounding the plight of Turkey's oppressed Kurdish population.

Critical Acclaim

The 1990s were an exciting decade for the national cinema, with films being critically and popularly received both in Turkey and internationally. Notable among the many releases were Zeki Demirkubuz's *Innocence* (1997), which followed the story of an ex-con trying to survive in a society that had changed radically since his incarceration a decade before; and Omer Kavur's *Journey on the Hour Hand* (1997), a very different type of film, which can best be described as an existential mystery.

Many of the most highly regarded films of the 1990s were set in İstanbul. These included *Journey to the Sun* by Yeşim Ustaoglu, which won the top prize at the İstanbul International Film Festival in 1999; the wonderful 1995 *İstanbul Beneath My Wings*; 1998's *Cholera Street* by Mustafa Altıoklar; and *The Bandit* (1996) by Yavuz Turgul. Many of these films explore important social and political themes. *Journey to the Sun*, for instance, is about a boy from the provinces who comes to the big city and is frequently mistaken for a Kurd due to his dark skin. Needless to say, he's treated appallingly as a result.

Cinema Today

Turks have taken to cinema-going with alacrity over the past decade, and the industry has gone from strength to strength. Some local releases are accruing box-office receipts from audiences numbering over four million, which is sure to encourage the industry to grow and prosper. Recent local tours de force in both box-office and critical terms have included the controversial *Valley of the Wolves IRAQ* (Serdar Akar, 2004), the dramatic *My Father and My Son* (Çağrı Arkan, 2006), *Ice Cream* (Yüksel Aksu, 2006) and the laugh-one-minute-cry-the-next *The Magician* (Cem Yılmaz, 2006).

İSTANBUL THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

Writers and film-makers have long tried to capture the magic and mystery of Istanbul in their work. For a taste of the city, try the following:

- **Aziyadé** Few artists have been as deeply enamoured of the city as the French novelist Pierre Loti (1850–1923). His romantic novel introduced Europe to both Loti's almond-eyed Turkish lover and the mysterious and all-pervasive attractions of the city itself.
- **James Bond** The sultan of all secret agents pops up twice in Istanbul, first in 1974's *From Russia with Love* and then in 1999's *The World is Not Enough*. The city provides a great backdrop for his suave manoeuvres and sophisticated seductions.
- **L'Immortelle** Alain Robbe-Grillet directed this 1963 film before going on to collaborate with Alain Resnais on *Last Year at Marienbad*, and both films score high on the Esoteric-0-Meter. Here, a man is obsessed with a woman who is being followed around Istanbul (gloriously shot) by a sinister man and his two dogs. Go figure.
- **Midnight Express** Alan Parker's 1978 film has three major claims to fame: Giorgio Moroder's insufferable score, Brad Davis' homosexual sex scene and the Turkish tourism industry's virtual demise on the film's release. Mention it to a Turk at your peril.
- **Murder on the Orient Express** Hercule Poirot puts ze leetle grey cells to good use on the famous train in this 1934 novel by Agatha Christie. It was made into a film by Sidney Lumet in 1974 and features a few opening shots of Istanbul.
- **The Inspector Ikmén Novels** Barbara Nadel investigates Istanbul's underbelly in a suitably gripping style. Whether they're set in Balat or Beyoğlu, her books are always evocative and well researched (see boxed text, p95).
- **The Turkish Embassy Letters** This 18th-century memoir was written by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the observant wife of the British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte. Based on letters she sent during the posting, it's a fascinating account of life in and around the Ottoman court and city.
- **The Mask of Dimitrios** This 1944 spy thriller directed by James Negulesco is based on an Eric Ambler novel. A ripping yarn, it opens with a body being fished out of the Bosphorus. Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre give great performances.
- **Tintin** You'll see the T-shirts everywhere in the Grand Bazaar, but true devotees should check out this 1961 film by Jacques Vierre, which has the Belgian boy detective accompanying Captain Haddock to Istanbul.
- **Topkapi** Melina Mercouri's funky outfits, Peter Ustinov's hilarious performance and great shots of Istanbul make Jules Dassin's 1964 comedy spoof worth a view.
- **Constantinople** Orhan Pamuk says that this travelogue, written by Italian Edmondo De Amicis in 1878, is the best book ever written about Istanbul.
- **The Janissary Tree** Author Jason Goodwin also wrote the highly regarded *Lords of the Horizon: A History of the Ottoman Empire*. In this crime novel, he has Yashim Töğralu, court eunuch, unravelling intrigue and murder in 1836 Istanbul. The courtly detective reappears in a 2007 sequel, *The Snake Stone*.
- **The Sultan's Seal** Another historical crime novel set in the city. Jenny White's hero is Kamil Pasha, a magistrate in one of the new Ottoman secular courts who is asked to investigate the murder of an English governess working for Sultan Abdülaziz's granddaughter.
- **Innocents Abroad** Mark Twain's account of his 'grand tour' includes sharp observations of Istanbul.
- **Sweet Waters** Before he became Mr Vita Sackville-West, Harold Nicolson wrote this extremely moving love story cum political thriller set in Istanbul during the Balkan Wars.
- **Enlightenment** Though best known as Orhan Pamuk's English translator and John Freely's daughter, Maureen Freely is also a well-regarded novelist. In her latest novel, which is set in Istanbul and has the ostensible structure of a thriller, she writes about truth, repression and the personal and political risks of becoming enmeshed in a foreign culture.

Contemporary directors of note include Ferzan Özpetek, whose 1996 film *Hamam*, set in Istanbul, was a big hit on the international festival circuit and is particularly noteworthy for addressing the hitherto hidden issue of homosexuality in Turkish society. His most recent release, *Saturno Contro* (2007), was an enormous success in Italy, where the filmmaker lives and makes most of his films. Though Özpetek hasn't shot a film in Turkey for a number of years, he recently chaired the jury for the national competition at the Istanbul International Film Festival.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's 2003 film *Distant* received a rapturous response from critics and audiences alike when it was released, winning the Jury Prize at Cannes among other accolades. The story of two cousins – played by Muzaffer Özdemir and Mehmet Emin Toprak – who are both alienated from society, is in the bleak but visually beautiful tradition of Güney's films. His most recent film, *Climates* (2006), was also in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Contrary to what film festival catalogues would encourage the international filmgoer to believe, the local industry does venture into territory outside political commentary and lamentations on the emptiness of the human condition. Reasonably recent examples have included the blockbuster action/revenge flick *Wildheart – Boomerang Hell* (2002), directed by Osman Sinav; and the hilarious outer-space spoof *G.O.R.A.* (2004) directed by Faruk Sorak.

VISUAL ARTS

The visual-arts scene has played second fiddle to that of music, cinema and theatre for years, but all of this is changing with the opening of a swathe of top-notch privately funded contemporary art galleries in the city. See The Arts chapter (p185) for more details.

ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING

Istanbul has been plagued by hyper-growth during the last few decades as villagers move to the city by the tens of thousands in search of a better life. This has placed great pressure on infrastructure and services. On some issues the government is making real progress (see p39), on others it still faces significant challenges.

Many of the green areas in and around the city have been developed for housing, making open space a rare commodity. Although there are a few protected areas around the city – the Princes' Islands (Kızıl Adalar) and the Beykoz Nature Forests near Polonezköy, for example – a low average of just over 1 sq metre of forest reserve is put aside per person; conservationists say the average in Europe is about 40 sq metres per person.

Air pollution in the city is a big problem. Though clean-burning Russian natural gas has replaced dirty lignite (soft coal) as the preferred winter heating fuel, air pollution is still significant, largely due to the ever-increasing number of cars jamming city roads. The national Ministry of Environment, established in 1991, is trying to implement programs to reduce smog across the country's large cities, but the International Energy Agency has criticised its efforts, saying that current measures don't go far enough.

The major environmental threat to the city is pollution of its waterways. Increased oil exports from the Caspian Sea region to Russian and Georgian ports and across the Black Sea has led to increased oil-tanker traffic (and risk of accident) through the narrow and winding Turkish Straits, which comprise the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus. With 50,000 vessels per year using this route, and one in 10 of these carrying oil or liquefied natural gas, the threat of a major spill is very real. Accidents are increasing in frequency, with the worst probably being the March 1994 collision of the Greek tanker *Nassia* with another ship. Thirty seamen were killed in this incident and 20,000 tons of oil were spilled into the Straits a few kilometres north of Istanbul, triggering an inferno that raged for five days. The possibility of this happening closer to the city is very real, as was illustrated in November 2003 when a Georgian-flagged ship ran aground and broke in two – fortunately it was carrying dry goods rather than oil.

Ships using these waters also cause major water pollution by releasing contaminated water as they ballast their holds. Though government has made genuine efforts to flush water through the Bosphorus and Golden Horn (the relocation of the current-blocking 19th-century Galata Bridge and municipal rubbish-removal programs being perfect examples), the waters are still

WAITING FOR THE QUAKE

Istanbul lies over the North Anatolian Fault, which runs for about 1500km between the Anatolian and Eurasian tectonic plates. As the Arabian and African plates to the south push northward, the Anatolian plate is shoved into the Eurasian plate, and squeezed west towards Greece. This movement creates stress along the North Anatolian Fault, which accumulates, and then releases pressure as earthquakes. Thirteen major quakes in Turkey have been recorded since 1939, with the latest in August 1999 devastating İzmit and Adapazarı, about 90km east of Istanbul, leaving nearly 20,000 dead and 100,000 homeless. Istanbul remained relatively unscathed, although the suburb of Avclar to the west of the city suffered hundreds of deaths when jerry-built dwellings collapsed.

This pattern of earthquakes leaves Istanbul in an unenviable position. Locals are half-panicked, half-fatalistic about the next one, but no-one doubts that it's coming. The city has been hit four times by major earthquakes in the last 500 years and experts predict that the strain placed by İzmit's earthquake on nearby stress segments along the fault could lead to another major quake within the next few decades.

As the destruction at Avclar illustrated, much of the city's urban development in the last few decades has been poorly built and is unlikely to make it through a major quake. Sadly, the government doesn't seem to be forcing developers to raise their game when it comes to building quality, and when the big one comes the consequences are likely to be catastrophic. Then again, Aya Sofya has made it through more than its fair share of quakes and still crowns the first of the city's hills. Many locals look at it and take heart.

highly polluted and have contributed to a major decline of local fish stocks. Overfishing has also been a contributing factor.

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Though the Turks are firm believers in democracy, the tradition of popular rule is relatively short. Real multiparty democracy came into being only after WWII, and has been interrupted several times by military coups, though government has always eventually been returned to civilians.

The historical power of the military is embodied in the make-up of the National Security Council (NSC), which comprises high-level government and military leaders and meets monthly to 'advise' the government. Its relationship with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) national government is extremely uneasy, largely due to the AKP's soft Islamist ideology and the military's firm allegiance to the ideal of the Turkish secular state. In 2007, the AKP insisted on elevating former foreign minister Abdullah Gül to the position of president, replacing the strongly secular Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The army went into a frenzy, arguing that the fact that Mr Gül's wife wore the headscarf (see p40) meant that the country's secularist status would be irrevocably compromised on the international stage. The situation was so serious that some Turks feared another military coup. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called a general election to sort the issue for once and all, and the election campaign that followed was fought pretty well solely on the Islamist vs secular-state issue, with Mrs Gül's right to wear a headscarf being heatedly debated. The result, when it came, was an enormous shock to the NSC and a ringing endorsement of the government. Over 47% of the electorate was clearly happy with the way in which the prime minister and his government were running the economy and the EU accession process, and had no problem with the AKP's Islamist bias (nor, it can be inferred, were they fussed about whether the first lady wore a headscarf or not). Retreating to lick its wounds, the army was forced to come to terms with the fact that it is no longer the main player on the national political stage and that a pious and increasingly prosperous Anatolian middle class has become the nation's new major power bloc. The jury is out as to whether the generals will take this lying down or not; the overwhelming yes vote in an October 2007 referendum proposing that Turks directly elect the president was the political equivalent of rubbing salt into the army's wounds, and will probably only feed its resentment of the AKP.

Another interesting outcome from the election was the successful candidacies of 19 members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Socialist party. It was the first time since the early 1990s that overtly nationalistic Kurds had taken seats in the 550-member legislature, something that infuriated the far-right Nationalist Action Party, which won 71 seats and has called for the execution of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been incarcerated in a Turkish jail since being found guilty of treason in 1999. Nationalist Action Party supporters became even more

infuriated, and gained extra recruits, after a spate of incidents in which Turkish soldiers were killed by PKK fighters on or near the Iraq border. This led the Turkish government to pass unprecedented legislation authorising cross-border raids allowing the Turkish army to pursue and apprehend PKK fighters on Iraqi territory, something that the Iraqi government strongly protests.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Istanbul itself is actually two political entities: the city and the province. The city is organised as a *büyükşehir belediyesi*, or metropolitan municipality, with several large sub-municipalities under the overall authority of a metropolitan city government.

The current metropolitan city government is perceived to be doing a pretty good job of coping with the demands on city infrastructure that the continuing influx of migrants from the provinces is making. It's also considered by most to be doing an excellent job with the provision of municipal services such as transport, and with the introduction of environmental programs such as the clean-up of the city's waterways. Accusations of corruption and cronyism are of course made from time to time (particularly about the sub-municipality governing Sultanahmet), but overall, voter approval is quite high.

It's true to say that this positive view of Istanbul's municipal government kicked off during the office of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current prime minister, who was elected the Refah Mayor of Istanbul in 1994. Before being ousted by secularist forces in the national government in late 1998, he made many changes and improvements, not least being to the population's overall confidence and pride in its home town. The current city mayor, Kadir Topbaş, worked as an adviser to Erdoğan (he's also a member of the AKP) before going on to become the mayor of Beyoğlu, one of the largest sub-municipalities. An architect by profession, he concentrated on the suburb's urban fabric while in office and did much to improve the safety, amenity and appearance of its streets and public buildings. The fact that he was elected mayor of the city in March 2004 with a huge majority is testament to the fact that İstanbulullus approved of what he did in Beyoğlu and wanted to see the same types of programs occur over the city as a whole. And this does indeed seem to be happening, with huge and visionary public works projects such as the Marmaray project (p234) now underway in the city.

MEDIA

Turkey is going to have to lift its game when it comes to the promotion of a free and diverse media if it is to have its bid to join the EU taken seriously. At present 70% of the Turkish media is under the control of only two companies: the Doğan and Bilgin groups. Doğan owns eight newspapers, including *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet* and *Radikal*, as well as the CNN Türk and Kanal D TV channels. It controls between 40% and 60% of national advertising revenue and 80% of distribution channels, and also has interests in banking, tourism, electricity and fuel distribution. Bilgin owns *Sabah* newspaper, ATV TV and dozens of periodicals. Like Doğan, it has interests in many other industries.

In 2002, local and international media analysts were outraged when the Ankara government passed legislation smoothing the way for media groups to enter into public tenders and trade on the stock exchange. Seen by many as a move tailor-made for Aydın Doğan, the head of the Doğan Group, the legislation made it possible for Turkish media barons to bid for government contracts and acquire stakes in the many state-owned companies being earmarked for privatisation. Critics feared (and still do) that the media channels owned by these barons would be pressured to present government-friendly media analysis as a way of staying sweet with Ankara and promoting the financial interests of their parent companies. The jury's still out as to whether the demands of the EU for the sanctity and importance of a free press will prevail over the behind-the-scenes machinations of powerful tycoons.

FASHION

Fashion in Istanbul is best described as eclectic. Every season the latest trends spotted on the catwalks in Paris, Rome or New York are reworked for and by the local market, hitting the shelves in a remarkably short period of time. Though international chains such as Zara do

THE HEADSCARF DEBATE

No issue is as hotly debated in Turkey as the Constitutional Court's imposition of a national ban on the headscarf (*eşarp* or *türban*) being worn in the public domain. The fact that girls and women are kept out of schools, universities and professions as a result of the ban is considered by many to be a national disgrace. Others argue that the headscarf is a challenge to the national identity that cannot be countenanced; allow the headscarf, they argue, and the secular state fought for by Atatürk's generation is totally undermined. National newspapers, such as the pro-Islamic daily *Zaman*, point out that any argument that defines secularism as totally against every kind of social and public manifestation of religion is both naive and misguided, but they haven't yet managed to prompt the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to force a constitutional amendment overturning the ban. Such an amendment looks as if it's on the horizon, though, particularly since the AKP's emphatic win in the 2007 national election, in which the right to wear the headscarf was a major issue.

Passions within the AKP run at fever pitch on this issue. The wives and daughters of a majority of cabinet members (including the Prime Minister and President) wear the headscarf, and they and many Turks have been outraged when their choice of head covering has led to them being excluded from important ceremonial events. Equally contentious was the expulsion from the national parliament of a deputy from Istanbul, Merve Kavakçı, who insisted on taking her oath of office while wearing a headscarf. Ms Kavakçı was subsequently stripped of her parliamentary immunity and prosecuted. Democracy in action? We think not.

this supremely well, local store Yargıcı (p143) is the most popular outlet for main street fashion, and can always be relied upon for a fetching summer frock in the latest colours and style or an accessory *de jour*. Glam areas such as Nişantaşı and Teşvikiye (p114) or swish shopping malls such as Kanyon (p143) are the places to go to access real European designer items, which are snapped up by the blond-tipped, tanned and immaculately groomed wives of the city's bankers, industrialists and politicians.

At the other extreme are the young suburban women sporting the latest in Islamic chic, invariably a long denim skirt instead of jeans, a fitted (but not too revealing) top and a colour-coordinated headscarf. Cleverly applied makeup to feature the eyes is all part of the demure but modern package. The most popular fashion trend of all is a perennial one: young Turks love their jeans, and currently wear them tight and slung low. Local chain Mavi (p141) is where both male and female aficionados choose to shop for their latest pair.

The local designer fashion scene is thriving and does an inspired line in Ottoman-influenced styles created using rich fabrics and embroidery. Gönül Paksoy (described as the 'new Hussein Chalayan') is probably the queen of this trend, but there are plenty of aspirants dotted throughout Nişantaşı and Çukurcuma just waiting to hit the pages of *Wallpaper* or *French Vogue*.

The uncompromising Chalayan (known in Turkey as Hüseyin Çağlayan) is, of course, the king of the scene, albeit from a distance. Despite the fact that his clothes are difficult to find in Istanbul – we've seen them at Harvey Nichols at Kanyon (p143) but nowhere else – his influence is felt everywhere. After all, he's a local boy who's made it to the big time (well, nearly local – he is in fact a Turkish Cypriot who trained in London), and he's proud of his heritage. More of a conceptual artist than a fashion designer, he undertakes intense historical research as part of his creative process, and has referenced Byzantine, Ottoman, Georgian, Armenian and Greek historical styles in a number of his collections. He freely admits that he likes taking ideas from the past and putting them into contemporary garments, and this appropriation has characterised most of his collections.

LANGUAGE

Writing of Constantinople in 1857, Herman Melville said 'You feel you are among the nations', and when it comes to language, the city hasn't changed much. Melville saw this Babel-like reality as a curse, and after taking the reins of government half a century later, Atatürk and his republican colleagues agreed, establishing the modern Turkish language to take over from its 'contaminated' Ottoman predecessor, which was full of Arabic and Persian influences. All Turks were encouraged to learn and speak the new language (and its Latin alphabet) rather than Ottoman Turkish, regional dialects or foreign languages.

FREEDOM TO SPEAK

Although Turkey has been implementing a wide range of reforms for its EU membership bid, the country's new penal code still retains the infamous Article 301, which prohibits people from 'insulting Turkishness'. This article has been the basis for a series of recent high-profile prosecutions of journalists, writers and artists, exposing Turkey's freedom of expression credentials (or lack thereof) to the world.

The most famous case to hit the headlines was that of Turkey's Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Orhan Pamuk, who was tried after publication of an interview he gave to a Swiss newspaper in which he referred to the ongoing Armenian controversy and the government's heavyhanded response to the Kurdish issue during the 1990s. Charges were dropped in early 2006, but Pamuk had become a reluctant political symbol and a target for nationalists, and the damage to Turkey's international reputation had been done.

Lesser-known but just as important cases have followed. Journalist and author Perihan Mağden was tried for 'turning people against military service' after she wrote an article in the *Yeni Aktuel* titled 'Conscientious objection is a human right'. Her case, heard in the Sultanahmet law courts in mid-2006, was a debacle because ultranationalists were allowed to demonstrate loudly outside the courtroom throughout the hearing. Critics claim that the fact that security forces did little to quell the protestors makes them complicit. A similar situation occurred at the trial of Elif Şafak, author of the *Bastard of Istanbul* (see p30), who, along with her publisher and Turkish translator, was prosecuted for comments made by Armenian characters in her book. Charges against her were also eventually dropped.

Most disturbing of all was the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist and editor Hrant Dink in Istanbul in January 2007. Editor-in-chief of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos* and a controversial figure for his outspoken views on what he described as the genocide of Armenians at the hands of Ottoman Turks in 1915, Dink was shot to death by a 17-year-old Turkish nationalist, who had no doubt been motivated by the fact that the outspoken journalist had been charged on three occasions under Article 301.

Verity Campbell & Virginia Maxwell

Fortunately, contemporary Turkey is reclaiming its polyglot heritage as well as taking pride in its own national language and you'll have no trouble at all communicating in English and, to a lesser extent, French, German or Russian when you're here. Snippets of many foreign languages can be heard throughout Old Istanbul (particularly in the Grand Bazaar) and you'll also notice that the city has particular quarters in which dialects are spoken. Two examples are Ladino, a medieval Spanish dialect that is still used by some descendants of the Sephardic community that migrated here during the Spanish Inquisition; and Aramaic, which is still spoken by many members of the city's Assyrian Church (see boxed text, p138).

By learning a few Turkish phrases you'll do your bit to charm the locals; see the Language chapter (p245) for tips.

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