Turkey, Spring 2009

*Istanbul, one of the world's greatest cities (perhaps my very favorite)*

Top: Rooftop view from Hotel Empress Zoe in Istanbul. Wonderful place to stay. No elevator, narrow winding stairways, no TV (but wifi), perfect location (as you can see), quiet, full of character. My third time staying here in Istanbul. I'll return for the last 4 days of this trip.

Above: Breakfast in beautiful garden at Empress Zoe. Best börek in Istanbul!
I met Patricia on the Bosphorus ferry. A fascinating woman. She writes on war-peace issues and won a MacArthur research fellowship. She was held captive for 10 days by Saddam’s Iraqi thugs.

Photo taken by Patricia’s half-sister, Pamela. Amazing sibling story of the two of them. Born in Ireland and UK from different fathers, lost track of each other but then found each other, and both were living in NEVADA! Patricia’s mother was ashamed of her because her father is Jewish, the result of a casual affair in NY. (Pamela, coincidentally, married a Jew. Patricia is not married.)

Pamela runs cruise tours and says she wants to hire me to lecture on philosophical topics on a cruise. We’ll see, but I’d consider a free cruise if the areas are interesting enough!
Couldn’t resist this tourist shot from Galata Bridge.

Istanbul spans two continents (Europe and Asia)
Mosque in Üskükar, Asian side of Bosphorus
Progressive Turkey. On İstiklal Caddesi, major pedestrian street in modern part of Istanbul. Reminds me of Madrid. Some other parts of Turkey are much more traditional. (See below).

Maybe just the enthusiasm of the present or the limits of my travel experience, but I think Istanbul may be the world's #1 city and Turkey the world's #1 country for the combination of beauty and interest.
May 9, 5 AM: Onward from Istanbul via Turkish Airlines

Aerial view of Anatolia on way to Şanlıurfa

I don't understand why any traveler chooses anything but a window seat. Turkey's landscapes are incredibly varied. Some parts in the northeast reminded (4 years ago) of Switzerland.

Şanlıurfa, believed by some to be the birthplace of Abraham…
Mosque in Şanlıurfa, southeast Turkey. My first time in Mesopotamia.

Archaeological Museum in Şanlıurfa.
Göbekli Tepi

The "Göbekli Tepe" site outside Şanlıurfa, recently discovered and excavated, has (I read) revolutionized our understanding of ancient civilization. (Google "Göbekli Tepe" to learn more.) This is a temple with carved figures from the Neolithic period. Six thousand years before Stonehenge. Before any pastoral civilization. Before pottery. Before the invention of the wheel. Formerly it was thought that such temples existed only in pastoral societies. Now we have learned that temples existed before cities, and this is believed to be the oldest temple ever discovered. Excavations are continuing.

May 11
May 12: three-hour bus ride from Şanlıurfa to Mardin. Bus arrived in Şanlıurfa one hour late, but generally Turkish buses are great.

Mardin, May 13

Woman in burqa and girl with progressive Turkish message for the world

Mosque and (Turkish) state with view from Mardin of the Mesopotamian plains, to Syria
Beautiful courtyard with view like the one in photograph above right outside my (small, airless) room, Mardin

Area of old houses in Mardin "highlands." A visual feast for architecture and the view of the Syrian plains. Children playing in the streets everywhere--friendly and curious.
My sister and I don't agree on everything (as some of you know), but we definitely share a love of Turkish breads and pastries like these, just slightly sweet and subtly flavored. We also share a love of Istanbul and other things Turkish. (We met in Cappadocia years ago.)

*To the Turkey-Iraq border...*