

# Turgutreis 1974-1997: Anatomy of a Future Unlived

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The research at Turgutreis now spans more than a generation. In the Turkey of the second half of the twentieth century, a generation is a long time. And perhaps nowhere else in Turkey has a generation of change been more expansive than on the southwest Aegean coast where we have worked since 1974. One can hardly imagine a broader range of transformation than at Turgutreis; even the present-day name of the place is a recent appellation whose common usage came well after our first visit. Statistics tell a convenient if only partial story. In 1965 the area which today comprises the study area, at the tip of the Bodrum peninsula, contained 2,464 souls clustered in three small villages: Karabağ, Akçaalan, and Karatoprak. Thirty years later, there were 15,000 year-round and more than 100,000 persons in the summer. On the whole of the peninsula, between 1985 and 1998, at the height of development, the population grew by 200 percent overall, from 37,966 to 75,994 year-round residents and hundreds of thousands in the summer.

In Turgutreis, a "city" of vacation houses, condominiums, and hotels has appeared where previously stood the three small villages. One might dismiss this development as normal; as only a reflection of a larger phenomenon seen across the Mediterranean. But unlike most such locations, what what previously existed at Turgutreis survives on paper. We were able to penetrate past statistics, to the physical and cultural form of the transformation itself which displaced a localized way of life and building by an entirely divergent ideal. Human faces could be layered over statistics and generalities. What is most impressive has been the apparent ease and the rapidity of this process. Perhaps in the United States an equivalent such transformation was related to the industrial urbanization of the first half of the nineteenth century; or to the post-industrial de-urbanization of the first half of the twentieth century. But in both instances, the equivalent change took several generations. In Turgutreis we witnessed less than one. This temporal compression crosses a threshold which represents a significant change in comparison to precedents elsewhere.

The impetus for this research began elsewhere - in the United States where at the end of the '60's I was caught up in the political movements of that period. I began the investigation of an "anthropology" for built-form that could contextualize the political struggles within the framework of physical environmental constraints. The earliest studies were in the discarded shells of the early industrial landscape of New York; in the poor inner-city quarter of Mantua in Philadelphia; in the extraordinary small village of San Leucio in Italy, that was the remnant of an eighteenth century Bourbon social experiment. (1) It was the Turkish architect Doruk Pamir, a colleague and friend at the Pennsylvania State University, who suggested a Turkish study when I first left for Columbia University. He teamed me together with Suha Özkan, then a young faculty member at Middle East Technical University (METU), and in March of 1974 we met in Ankara to begin a rather complex

process of deciding on a site. This quest entailed addressing the larger question of what would be an appropriate problematic given the Turkish situation at that moment.

The Turkish situation was complex. By 1974, Turkey was entering the politico-economic storm which led to the 1980 military coup. (2) Underlying much of the political disorder was the divergence of two components of Turkey's modernization project which previously had been perceived as one and the same: namely "development" on the one hand, and "Westernization" on the other. (3) Turkey was experiencing the gradual destabilization of old meanings of "Westernization," such that by the '70's the term was being intertwined with membership in the "Western Alliance." A changing internal order could not tolerate the political dimension of this distinction. And the Western Alliance itself was shifting such that the nature of Turkey's military importance was diminishing. In Turkey, the rise of a new internal political landscape increasingly jostled the old political mandate for an entirely secular state. At one level, one can define the project as having emerged out of these uncertainties; or more precisely even, as having been produced by them.

In 1974, Doruk had returned from teaching in the States to the rapidly changing situation. We agreed to search for the site of an "anthropological" study that could give meaning to the spiraling events. Together with Suha we drove for several days of searching and discussing Kerouac's "On the Road." What we were searching for we did not exactly know. It was to be something of the "old" Turkey; something in flux or even threatened. It would be a pleasant place and not yet discovered; not Bodrum, which was already being adopted as a refuge from larger events by the artists and intellectuals. Instead, for example, we headed down to Kaş. The last leg of that foray was a poor dirt road with abundant runoff from the spring snows which mired us in the mud. Kaş, with its one small *pensyon*, was pristine - too pristine we thought. We passed through Afyon where signs in French still abounded and snippets of French could still be heard here and there on the streets. We returned to Ankara and headed east to Cappadocia. The urbanistic riches of Avclar and Üçhisar were not to be believed, waiting to be discovered and exploited by the new Westernization, and indeed they have since been. Then there was Cyprus with its Turkish minority and mounting tensions. I flew to Nicosia alone, Doruk and Suha having been denied visas. Our idea was to explore the possibility of working in the Turkish quarter. I was able to meet with Rauf Denktash who was hidden away in a cellar-like headquarters, but I was quickly put back on a plane by my Greek handlers. And by the end of March we had found nowhere that suited us.

Doruk and Suha subsequently chose Turgutreis, a newly organized municipality on the Bodrum peninsula, as yet undiscernible as an urban entity with its three small villages and working landscape of tangerines

making a strong agrarian economy. It was to be a textbook case-study. The old culture would be overshadowed by the touristic appeal of the place once infrastructural investments were complete - principally a new road connecting to the historically impenetrable interior. The road would forever alter the timeless relationship of the place to the sea - Braudel's "island that the sea does not surround."<sup>(3)</sup> In 1974 the old road from the '30's was passable to jeeps, donkeys, camels; with some inconvenience to automobiles and much more difficult for busses. That would soon change, and we were to plan for the local effects of this transformation and to advocate for those who had long lived there. For our purposes this case-study seemed ideal, not only as physical environment, but also social environment. Our subject was to be the heroic "moderns," in the sense of the old Westernization, whose lifeworld was to be the subject of analysis and understanding relative to what was to come.

At the end of June 1974 the Columbia team arrived at Turgutreis, after a stint of intensive Turkish language training in New York; a visit to San Leucio in Italy, the site of a prior study just finished; and several days of orientation in Ankara where we met up with the METU team. Our first view of the peninsula and sea was unforgettable, as we slowly wound down the primitive road from Milâs to Bodrum. And more extraordinary still was the first view of the plain of Turgutreis, as we manoeuvred through the narrow streets of Upper and Lower Akçaalan: before us a lush green "sea" extended to the coastline and horizon beyond. It was beautiful, but hardly untouched or "timeless." It had a certain vitality. The 20th century had brought several significant transformations; yet the physical and social environment seemed to retain a continuity with the distant past. These previous thresholds of change dated from the '20's and '30's. First was the European-mandated "population exchange" of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, an attempt to conclude decades of festering turmoil in the region with roots in world conflict. Greeks were expelled from the mainland to the islands; Turks from the islands to the mainland.<sup>(5)</sup> Profound relationships were severed; personal friendships shattered. The division of labor within the local economy was radically altered. Indeed, one could say that the 1920's represented the worst such diaspora since the third century BC when Mausoleus depopulated the Lelegian cities in the region. The economy recovered, but fifty years later the social wounds still remained beneath the surface.

The second threshold came with the transformation in agriculture beginning in the '30's, from the timeless Mediterranean subsistence production of grain and olives, to the tangerine cash crop created by the new technology of irrigation comprising deep wells and internal combustion pumps. The rich alluvial soil and the abundant water table close to the surface made the transition easy and profitable. In a short period, the area went from one of the poorest on the southwest coast to one of the richest, without external infrastructural development. Economic upgrading occurred without undue external controls and interferences. It must be emphasized that this transformation was, from all appearances, a remarkably gentle and sustainable one, at least in comparison to the era of new road infrastructure and tourism which was to come. In June 1974 we had a good sense that things would change, but we had no idea of the magnitude. The place was still relatively untouched, but the roads were planned and the new municipality was in place for purposes which could only foreshadow "development." A plan for the "Halicarnassus Seashore National Park" had been prepared to protect that investment. Made under the aegis of the United States Agency for International Development and the United States National Park Service, it basically applied a North American formula to the Turkish situation.

The initial premise of our study was pragmatic and straightforward; to represent the existing material culture of the place such that planning for the transformation could adequately reflect and preserve this character which was, after all, the source of its continuing touristic potential. We felt that the plan for the "Seashore National Park" did not go far enough, and was without specifics toward this goal, especially in

the sense that the question of material culture had to be directly engaged through highly personalized case-studies rather than a generalist inventory. Our approach was to invoke the daily lives of some fifteen families, chosen based on their representative diversity of social-economic status and geographic distribution of their domestic environments. Our study-families seemed optimistic for the future. Their land produced cash. Already relatively comfortable, most foresaw further benefit from modernization. New infrastructure was coming - roads and electricity. The first televisions had already arrived.

Our work was seen as bridging the literature of then recent empirical study by architects related to built environment documentation; and the then heightened interest among anthropologists in the daily life of extant Western normative cultural settings. Among the precedent studies from architects were Giancarlo DeCarlo's long-term structural analysis of Urbino; Bernard Rudofsky's remarkable life-work culminated in the "Architecture Without Architects" exhibition at the MOMA; Edward Allen's elegant *Stone Shelters* study; or even the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz published as "Intentions in Architecture." From anthropology came the work of Oscar Sanchez related to the legitimization of daily life around his Mexican case studies: his *Five Families*, or his *The Children of Sanchez*, which together became a starting point for us. And for example, there was the more abstract but influential work from Henri Lefebvre embodied in the 1971 English translation, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. Close to Turgutreis was Fatma Mansur's remarkable study, *Bodrum*, just published, which in some sense became the foundation for our work.

Our intention was that this genre of new "engaged" research could be redeployed toward the exigencies of actual problem-solving, pushed further than DeCarlo could at Urbino. Also threaded through our strategy was the politics of the so-called "advocacy" movement in the States, although by then it was already under the conservative censure which would cause its demise. Lingering in our sensibility was the ideal that the "common voice" could enter into the realm of design discourse. Given the extraordinary social and physical environment which we found at Turgutreis, this goal made good sense. The sophistication of local urban and building practice far exceeded the normative limits of professional expertise relative to issues like compatibility with climate, natural resources, and cultural evolutions. At Turgutreis we sensed that there was something to be addressed relative to the new material culture then just appearing - in effect the final phase in the "Internationalization" of the place, spanning the period from the artificial partitioning of the Treaty of Lausanne to the imposed building tectonic of the Mediterranean touristic economy which was spreading from Spain eastward. Even Turgutreis, in its relative isolation, was poised to move from "modernization" to Western Modernization with exposure to the full complement of global forces. We imagined that the "common person" could be represented in this process; and it turned out that the "common persons" were all too willing to participate. In 1974 they seemed to understand the importance of our task in that the future represented something new. Later on, as their fantasy of the future remained un-lived, their naive faith evaporated, and our relationship to the social landscape gradually changed, as did the landscape itself.

Having identified the study subjects, the methodology of the fieldwork evolved over the course of the next two months. Our technique focused on the physical documentation of the domestic environments and material culture in general; interrelated with a written social record based on extensive interviews. Both documentation types passed through several stages during the on-site period until a standardized inclusive framework was attained for each subject family. This raw information was reformulated and reformatted during the following year. The graphic representation of the built environment began with measured field sketches produced by numerous visits to each family and to the other sites under consideration (the latter related mostly to the grain and water infrastructures). These sketches were translated into hard-line architectural drawings (plan, section, elevations,

and detail) on site during our two-month stay. At the same time, the families and several other individuals (like Hasan Muslu, the miller), were interviewed extensively. An interview checklist had to be developed such that each case-study could be compared for the same base information. A lexicon of the idiosyncratic local terminology related to material culture was also developed. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English. During the course of the following months the English text was then reformatted according to a common organizational framework. As a final stage, this generation of text was then heavily re-edited by Carl T. Burton, Professor of English at Columbia. Burton collaborated on the question of the literary character of the texts, deliberately attempting to blur the boundary between the devices of fictional and anthropological representation.

During this same period of textual deliberation historical research was begun with the intention of placing the 20th century developmental thresholds at Turgutreis within the more than 2000 years of recorded history on the Bodrum peninsula. And the graphic representation was undergoing several stages of development before arriving at the choice of final language and technique. A certain communality between graphics and the written texts had to be developed - the development of a common nomenclature, for example, for spaces and their implements. A series of progressive growth diagrams were developed for each family compound, correlated with the textual descriptions focusing on each family's perceptions of their social and physical morphologies. A very important aspect of the visual "language" problem had to do with how to render the "softness" of the traditional building forms and tectonic, which were clearly not compatible with the hard-line and hard-edge techniques of modern mechanical drafting. A free-hand technique was developed, together with an extensive lexicon of building elements which could be duplicated as needed. In this way the team could achieve a considerable variation within a uniform visual rhetoric.

After approximately a year of cross-fertilization between Ankara and New York, the fieldwork results were more or less finalized, with textual and graphic work completed at Columbia and additional field study completed as needed on the METU side. At that moment we imagined that it was time to move on to the crucial step of building the work into a "proposal." By 1976, however, the political turmoil in Turkey had already begun to set in, affecting everything. The project faltered and then became dormant. The possibility of projecting to a "plan" was erased. In going back to the work a decade later, however, we decided that it had potential other than originally intended, in that the moment which we had frozen in time could become a reference for understanding the changes which had intervened. The southwest Aegean coast had waited for nothing: not for political stability and certainly not for detailed urban planning. The changes were momentous.

We returned to Turgutreis for the first time in 1986, the work now having shifted to Columbia. The place was recognizable, but already transformed through urbanization and the introduction of the new tourism economy. We found that the original families were by and large still extant in the houses which we knew so well, but their lives were changing way beyond what anyone ever could have imagined in 1974. The people which we had interviewed were becoming old; their children were coming of age as a very different next generation. The subject families could still remember what had been. By then they began to deeply comprehend the enormity of change which was upon them and what they had lost in the process. Their view of the world was a bitter-sweet one. They recognized certain advances in the material aspects of their lives, but the optimistic future which many assumed in 1974 remained un-lived. The nature of our dialogue with the families changed. But a dialogue it still was, at least at the beginning. They valued seeing our many photographs and depictions of their houses; and they appreciated our shared memories of a different moment in time. We went back again in 1990, 1994, and 1997, until the original generation and any meaningful extant representation of its culture were largely erased. And by then the memory of what once was became very difficult for them to rehabilitate.

Our visits were not exercises in nostalgia. We became equally fascinated with what was new as well as erasure. We constructed a record of the buildout of the new municipality's Master Plan, which had quickly urbanized twenty kilometers of coastline with hotels and second homes. We were very interested in the new architecture, especially at two scalar extremes: of the monumental new urban landscape which was emerging; and of the detail related to a Mediterranean modern vernacular which was being modified locally, most significantly in the transcription of local decorative motifs to the new constructive techniques. Indeed, certain aspects of this practice were even mandated by local laws in a largely futile attempt to retain something of the traditional building character: i.e. punched openings in spite of the column and slab construction; or required use of the traditional *kubbe* at the parapet corners. At the middle scale, however, the environment of the domestic compound and the most important focus of our original study, changes were wide-ranging and brutal. In the new building, gone was the sensitivity to the site and climate. Gone were the old house types, which blended social organization with the landscape and placed a premium on the family as a coherent organism. Instead the stereotypical modern Western house emerged both in individual and collective form. It was configured by the concentration of modern service cores, rather than by social gathering. Equal status was given to private rooms as to public space. The exterior was constrained by discrete outdoor space in the form of balcony. Within this homogenized urbanization one could only hope still to find localized particulars related to the public presence of historical continuities. There were precious few, largely *ad hoc* survivors.

In life there are always reasons why some things do not get finished: sometimes they are inadmissible, sometimes uncomprehended. The overwhelming phenomenon of the Turgutreis transformation and our slowly evolving cognizance of the importance of our documentation has made it extremely difficult to arrive at an end point. The question of "what it all means" has been difficult to sort out from inside of the work; not to mention the difficulties associated with the implicit criticism of our Western enculturation which the work raises. In a sense what it documents can be seen to reflect critically on ourselves. We did not succeed to replace our original goal of producing a "plan" based on our data. And while the project is "anthropological," we were not anthropologists and could not bring the ingredient of a continuous disciplined academic discourse with which to cloak the raw material of our work. This is not to say that "anthropology" as a formal discipline could not stand to emphasize more engaged application, but the academic legitimacy for an anthropology of building as we liked to call it, could not come just from "architecture." The joining of "anthropology" and "architecture" remains an elusive goal in both the academy and practice.

And so the material remains unpublished; and in our academic milieu perhaps only publication can be considered as legitimate end point.<sup>(6)</sup> Considering our own academic benefits from this long experience, the project has had its obvious pedagogic value. Each of the return trips generated a design studio at Columbia; each attempted to reflect on "architecture in development." In general the transformations which we documented were themselves transformed in the studios: systemized for use as operative strategies for additional urbanization. This use of the work pointed toward the dilemma that the only sound basis for envisioning an "improved" environment at Turgutreis seemed to be to advocate urbanizing further.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the pedagogic effectiveness of this work would be to ask the generation of students who participated. This has not been done. While one can hardly expect their experiences to have been unrewarding, the definition of exactly what students gained could involve a complex consideration. For sure, in 1974 an important aspect of the experience from the Columbia side was making the bridge between the States and a nation and culture which was "modern" but not yet "Western." Today's Turkey can no longer hold the same clarity of distinction, further underlining the enigmas of how much we actually

accomplished in the later stages as a comparative cultural project. Given the global ebbs and flows of the present moment, perhaps it is too soon to adequately evaluate this side of things. One would hope, as a minimum, that one day the material can find a home close to its origin in Turgutreis, of interest to those who find a need for whatever reasons, to understand where they came from at a defining moment in the the new Turkish identity which has emerged in the past decades.

Each return trip has increased the risk of romanticizing what we found in 1974; or of simply indulging a voyeristic superficiality. We have learned that it is not enough to cite the empty lesson that nothing can last. Probably my most memorable revisit was in 1998, without students, when I could reflect on the seeming enormity of what had come to pass at Turgutreis; and at the same time on how miniscule that change has been relative to similar transformations everywhere. As I walked up the road to Karabağ, to seek out Ali Karakağ who I knew was still alive, I was connected to similar phenomena in my childhood in the States. I realized that perhaps one value in the work is its global connectivity. I thought about Hasan Çaputçu's family who I had also just visited. I puzzled about Hasan's present resignation, given that in 1974 he had expressed deep concern about the relatively minuscule changes already underway.

In 1974 the house of Ali and Zeynep Karakağ had been far from the changes, sited high above them in Karabağ. Then Karabağ looked much like it must have at the beginning of the 15th century when Turgut Reis was born there. Looking at the new urban landscape, I found it ironic that all this transformation should be made in the name of the famous Ottoman Admiral born on the same spot six centuries ago. I thought of how, until recently, Ali made his daily trek down from his sanctuary for tea, and how he must have felt as the invasion crept toward him. I walked past the detritus of the new tourism, the modern holiday houses scattered along the road; and then past the now abandoned house of Hatem and Nurtem Tengiz and the remnants of their beautiful garden where we had enjoyed their hospitality. It still seemed to be the most beautiful of all of the houses that we studied, built on the site of a once powerful spring, still faintly trickling and connecting back to Lelegians who must also have appreciated it. I thought that if Turgutreis were ever to have a museum of its cultural heritage, it should be here; but it would have to happen fast!

At Karabağ, modern roads were being superimposed on the maze of old paths and hedgrows, leading to above the village where pretentious and domineering new villas were popping out of the steep elevation. It was shocking to see the small house of Ali and Zeynep Karakağ, now dwarfed by a huge mound of earth rudely intruding into the yard, as if

to express impatience with this remnant of the old order. Zeynep died in 1990, but Ali, then 78, had managed to hang on. He was home and he was generous as ever, offering the traditional greeting, *ho! geldiniz*. He knew why I was back, the limits of language seemingly insignificant. In spite of the disarray of his yard, there were still the familiar grapes to be offered from the *ferék*. There was precious little left of what he knew as irrevocable only 25 years before. "It is difficult times now," he related. He did not sell his land for new construction; he tried instead to continue with his tangerines, but a blight destroyed them. Gone even were the four chickens which had been present in the previous year. He talked most of all about the strangers; of criminality and immorality. "As the number of buildings increased, adultery increased." I found the metaphor intriguing. When we said goodbye, we knew it was definitive. I looked back with the fleeting thought that it may yet be too early to give up.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In particular see Richard Plunz, *Mantua Primer. Toward A Program for Environmental Change* (Baltimore: United States Public Health Service, 1970); Richard Plunz, *San Leucio. Vitalità d'Una Tradizione. Traditions in Transition* (New York: George Wittenborn and Company, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>For an overview of the political situation which led to the 1980 coup see Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>This point is convincingly developed by Atila Eralp in "turkey in the Changing Post-War World Order: Strategies of Development and Westernization," in Ayle Öncü, Çağlar Keyder, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, eds., *Developmentalism and Beyond. Society and Politics in Egypt and Turkey* (Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup>Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean* 2 vols., (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 160.

<sup>5</sup>The local effects of this displacement are well described in Fatma Mansur, *Bodrum. A Town in the Aegean* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

<sup>6</sup>Although the original study has long existed in manuscript form, it has not been revised to incorporate the material of the successive return visits. Very limited publication of the work includes: Suha Özkan, Richard Plunz, Alfred Medioli, "The Grain Cycles and a Windmill at a Village on the Aegean," *Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi* 3 Middle East Technical University (Spring 1977); Suha Özkan, "Cycles of Sustenance in Traditional Architecture," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 7 (Fall, 1995).