

The Grand Lodge of Turkey

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My experience with the Grand Masonic Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Turkey

The first Lodge known to be founded on the Ottoman soil is the Iskenderun. On August 1, 1909 the first Grand Lodge of Turkey was established. Due to some political and social instabilities and conflicts in 1935, the Grand Lodge of Turkey decided to cease its activities by themselves in order not to be placed under any pressure by legislation. At that same time organizations such as the Turkey Teachers Association and the Boy Scouts were dissolved by law.

In 1946 new laws and regulations concerning originations such as Freemasonry went into effect. In 1948 Freemasons started their Izmir and Ankara branches. In 1955 lodges in Ankara founded their own Grand Lodge and invited the lodges in Istanbul and Izmir to join this Grand Lodge. At the end of the same year the Grand Lodge of Turkey was established in Ankara and thus Turkish Freemasons showed their intention to become a member of the global mainstream of Masonry. As of that date the Grand Lodge of Turkey became the sole Masonic authority on the Turkish soil.

Even though the Grand Lodge of Turkey had been recognized by some jurisdictions, Grand Lodges known as Regular and led by the United Grand Lodge of England and Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland did not.

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The general recognition by the Grand Lodges of Scotland and New York happened in 1962. The Grand Lodge of Scotland, in order to enable all the remaining regular Grand Lodges to recognize the Grand Lodge of Turkey, organized a Re-consecration Ceremony in April 1965. Elections were held on May 2, 1965. Within eight months the Charters of existing 40 Lodges had been renewed and 3 new Lodges had been Regularly formed and Consecrated. Since the beginning of May 1965, 149 Lodges have been Regularly established by Consecration and Charter, and have labored regularly without interruption, since that time.

Of the 73 active Lodges in Istanbul one is a Research Lodge and one is an Education Lodge. Freedom Lodge No. 35 works in English, as do Dikmen Lodge No. 22 in Ankara and Ephesus Lodge No. 42 in Izmir. There are over ten thousand Regular Freemasons in Turkey. Turkey is the only Islamic State where a Regular Grand Lodge exists.

Now that the history is out of the way I would like to share my personal experience with members of Freedom Lodge No. 35. I became a Master Mason in 1966, at Chicora Lodge No. 366, Charleston Heights, South Carolina. I was stationed onboard the USS Tattnell DDG 19 at that time, and was soon deployed to the Mediterranean. When we reached Turkey, we received word that all Master Masons of the Sixth Fleet were invited to the Convocation of Freedom Lodge No. 35 in Istanbul.

There were only six Master Masons on my ship. We were Machinist Mates, in the same Division and from Chicora Lodge No. 366. When we arrived at the Lodge, we were shocked to find out no one else from the fleet was attending.

The Lodge was fantastic. The Tyler was armed with a jewel-incrusted sword that was dated before Christ and they had two military guards standing by. The meeting was quite

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impressive, the officers' jewels and the working tools were beautiful. The ceremony was done perfectly. The meeting ran late into the evening and we were supposed to be back on the ship by midnight. But the six of us put our heads together and decided that we would take whatever punishment we would get and stay until everything was over.

They had gone all out with a catered dinner. The food and drink were excellent. They kept telling us they were so grateful to have us attend. We finally got a cab and got back to the ship in time to change clothes and stand morning quarters. We knew we were in trouble. The Division Officer and Engineering Officer were just getting started good in chewing us out when the Messenger of the Watch came down and told them that we were to be ready to go back ashore. A message had been received from the American Ambassador to the Captain of the ship. Transportation was being sent for us. The members of the Lodge had been so pleased with us that they sent three limousines to get us and we were given a tour of Istanbul that no ordinary tourist would ever get. We went places that Americans would never see such as deep into the Mosque that were not open to the public.

By the time we got back that evening, there was a message from the Sixth Fleet Commander to our Captain saying how well we had represented the Fleet. What we didn't until we returned back to the states was that a gift had been sent back to our home Lodge. A set of working tools of the Master Mason Degree, along with a very nice letter to the Lodge had been received. It was definitely an experience I will never forget.