

History of the Department: A Personal View

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I first heard of Bilkent's Department of Archaeology and History of Art in the spring of 1989. While leading a group of American students on a study tour of ancient Greece, I stopped by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and spotted a flyer posted on the bulletin board. "Teachers wanted," it read. "Contact İlknur Özgen." I had never heard of Bilkent University, but I had met İlknur Özgen and knew that any enterprise she was involved in would be serious. Marie-Henriette and I answered the call and arranged to come for one year. Nearly 30 years later, we are still here.

When we began teaching in September, 1990, the department was beginning its third year. Throughout the university, a sense of excitement filled the air: İhsan Doğramacı's new project, Turkey's first private university, had been launched, but how would each department develop its teaching and research programs, and create a rewarding experience for students and staff? We were all pioneers, given a rare opportunity to contribute, and it was immensely satisfying.

In shaping our undergraduate curriculum, İlknur Hanım masterfully blended the American pyramidal approach – that is, introductory surveys in the first and second years, leading to specialized courses in the third and fourth years – with the thoroughness of a traditional Turkish-German program – layer after layer of detailed information and analysis. In addition, our program highlights the interdisciplinary character of Archaeology, a combination of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. We offer ancient languages, too: Hittite, Greek, and Latin.

Who were the teachers? When we arrived, Jean Greenhalgh Öztürk, Serra Durugönül, and Andrew Fletcher were giving instruction in classical archaeology, ancient history, and technical subjects such as archaeological drawing and surveying. The international flavor has continued ever since, even as staff members have come and gone. My colleagues have come from Canada, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States as well as from Turkey. The atmosphere has always been collegial; there was never that sense of “Turks vs. Others” that often permeates social and political discourse in this country. Likewise, women have always been important in the department, both as staff members – not to mention department chairs -- and as students. Gender discrimination has never been felt here, an aspect that Atatürk would have applauded.

A few years after our first students received their BA's in 1992, the time was ripe to add an MA program. To help us determine the curriculum, we wanted the perspective of someone from outside our own fields of Near Eastern and Classical archaeology. This complementary perspective was supplied, courtesy of a grant from the US Embassy, by Payson Sheets, a Mesoamerican archaeologist and professor of Anthropology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. As a result of fruitful discussions during his two-week stay, our program has featured theoretical approaches -- archaeological, anthropological, and art historical -- as well as topics specific to our region. The first graduate student to finish was Ayşe Atauz, in June, 1997. Altogether, 59 students have earned the MA degree, each distinguished with a substantial research thesis.

Our undergraduate curriculum has undergone modifications over the years. Eleven years ago new requirements for Math, Science, and Social Science courses were introduced. In addition, the Department dropped “History of Art” and became solely “Archaeology,” with

the result that students now apply with “equal weight” points, not “verbal.” Despite the name change, the program retains its traditional strengths.

Our in-class teaching has always been supplemented by a variety of activities, such as field trips to archaeological sites and museums. One ambitious trip took place in 1994, when Fikret Yegül, a distinguished historian of Roman architecture from the University of California, Santa Barbara, organized a week-long study trip of Greek and Roman sites in western Turkey. Generously subsidized by our university, this field trip is still remembered as an amazing learning experience by all who took part.

First year students typically visit Gordion, Aşıklı Höyük, and Gavur Kalesi; third year students tour Ankara’s citadel and Roman remains. Each May, the department leads a trip to Hattusa, the Hittite capital. On occasion, destinations have been further afield: to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Greece, and Rome.

Excavations and surface surveys have provided students opportunities to get first-hand experience in the aims and techniques of research. The department has run its own projects, notably excavations at Hacimusalar and Kinet Höyük, but students have always been free to take part in projects run by other universities, both Turkish and foreign, inside Turkey and abroad.

Other activities have included workshops to recreate ancient technology, such as mosaic making and learning how ancient Mesopotamians prepared clay tablets and wrote on them. For high school students, colleagues have introduced the basics of archaeology, such the concept of stratigraphy. And our public lecture series continues, with, typically, three lectures per semester.

Many of these activities – our field trips, our research projects, student experiences, public lectures, the testimonies of visiting scholars -- were documented in a Department

Newsletter prepared by Ben Claasz Cockson with the editorial assistance of Marie-Henriette Gates. This newsletter appeared annually for five years from 2002 until 2006, when circumstances beyond the control of the department forced its cancellation. This remarkable publication generated great publicity for the department, and has been missed by many. Let's hope that someday it will return to life.

Here you see our graduates of last June.



Let us wish that 30 years from now, in the year 2048, the graduates and their professors will be just as joyful!