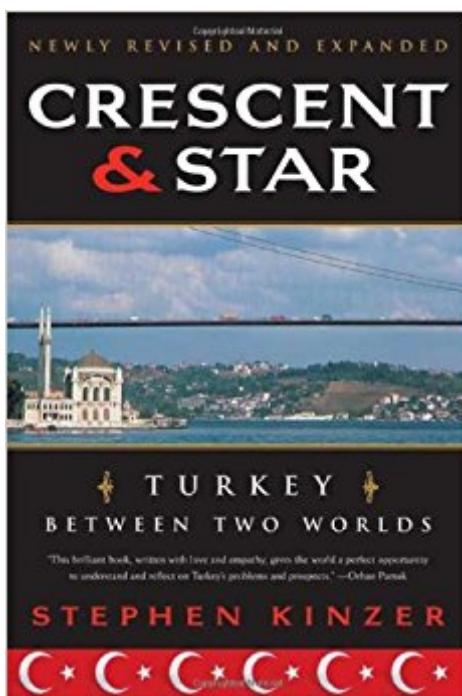


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# Crescent And Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds



## Synopsis

"A sharp, spirited appreciation of where Turkey stands now, and where it may head."

Carlin Romano, The Philadelphia Inquirer In the first edition of this widely praised book, Stephen Kinzer made the convincing claim that Turkey was the country to watch -- poised between Europe and Asia, between the glories of its Ottoman past and its hopes for a democratic future, between the dominance of its army and the needs of its civilian citizens, between its secular expectations and its Muslim traditions. In this newly revised edition of *Crescent and Star*, he adds much important new information on the many exciting transformations in Turkey's government and politics that have kept it in the headlines, and also shows how recent developments in both American and European policies (and not only the war in Iraq) have affected this unique and perplexing nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A passionate love for the Turkish people and an optimism that its ruling class can complete Turkey's transformation into a Western-style democracy mark Kinzer's reflections on a country that sits geographically and culturally at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. Kinzer, the former New York Times Istanbul bureau chief, gives a concise introduction to Turkey: Kemal Ataturk's post-WWI establishment of the modern secular Turkish state; the odd makeup of contemporary society, in which the military enforces Ataturk's reforms. In stylized but substantive prose, he devotes chapters to the problems he sees plaguing Turkish society: Islamic fundamentalism, frictions regarding the

large Kurdish minority and the lack of democratic freedoms. Kinzer's commonsense, if naeve, solution: the ruling military elite, which takes power when it feels Turkey is threatened, must follow the modernizing path of Ataterk whom Kinzer obviously admires a step further and increase human rights and press freedoms. Kinzer's journalistic eye serves him well as he goes beyond the political, vividly describing, for instance, the importance and allure of the narghile salon, where Turks smoke water pipes. Here, as elsewhere, Kinzer drops his journalist veneer and gets personal, explaining that he enjoys the salons in part "because the sensation of smoking a water pipe is so seductive and satisfying." Readers who want a one-volume guide to this fascinating country need look no further. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Americans can no longer plead ignorance about modern Turkey. Recently, several excellent books on the subject have been published by Western journalists: Marvine Howe's *Turkey Today* (LJ 6/1/00), Nicole and Hugh Pope's *Turkey Unveiled* (Overlook, 1998), and now this work by Kinzer, former New York Times Istanbul bureau chief (1996-2000). All three are informative and provocative, though each has a slightly different focus (Howe focuses on the role of Islam, while the Popes provide a narrative history). Interspersing journalistic essays with personal vignettes, Kinzer discusses Turkey's potential to be a world leader in the 21st century, as it is truly a bridge between East and West, politically and geographically. Kinzer questions Turkey's ability to achieve this potential, however, unless true democracy can be established. Whether it can depends on Turkey's military, which, in order to ensure the continuation of the Kemalist ideal of a paternalistic state, has never allowed real freedom of speech, press, or assembly. Kinzer argues persuasively that if the military refuses this opportunity, the consequences (Islamic fundamentalism, Kurdish terrorism, denial of EU membership) could be catastrophic for the Turkish state and its people. An excellent, insightful work; highly recommended. Ruth K. Baacke, formerly with Whatcom Community Coll. Lib., Bellingham, WA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Stephen Kinzer's rambling walk through the saga of modern Turkey will delight the ordinary reader with an interest in this bridge nation, while occasionally distressing the historian. The dedication of this revised version (To the People of Turkey) signals that Kinzer writes

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and precision one expects of the historian. This is not a criticism of Kinzer's work but rather an attempt to define its genre. Those who came to Kinzer's writing as this reviewer did through his superb treatment of the Nicaraguan conflicts (The Blood of Brothers) will anticipate the bent of Kinzer's method. Kinzer, the erstwhile Istanbul Bureau Chief of the New York Times, does not hold back his own views and even prescriptions for the nation that has become his subject. The book's earliest pages telegraph this. Published in 2008, the book's introduction observes that a new regime has emerged in Turkey that is likely to govern for years to come. This is good, because this regime draws its strength from the people's will, but it is also disturbing. The first chapter's opening line introduces us to a personal preference:

My favorite word in Turkish is *istiklal*. This is not a bad thing, for Turkey and the Turks have been referents of oddness and even incarnate evil for Westerners since Medieval times. A Western writer who can be forthrightly described as *turkophile* is well placed to be a sympathetic and even accurate guide into this unfamiliar people and its complicated composition. For Western observers as for the Turks themselves ambiguities abound: Is Turkey a Middle Eastern country? Or is it European? Is Turkey Muslim? Or secular? Is the nation comprised of a single ethnicity that represents turkishness? Or is Turkey a composite state with large and venerable minorities whose adherence to the national mythology is tenuous? Kinzer's introduction of many of Turkey's hard-wired enigmas is often channeled through a conversation with one friend or another. This adds an appealing personal hook for the non-expert reader (a group to which this reviewer manifestly belongs). The author effectively personalizes issues that are difficult to grasp in the abstract. One emerges from *Crescent and Star* impressed with several facets of Turkey's challenges and opportunities that are not independently unique, but that in combination profile Turkey as an exceptional nation. First, one senses that events of the 20th and 21st century have left Turkey a conflicted nation. The coming to terms with its past has been uneven, leaving the Turks deeply divided as to the answers to difficult questions and even to the degree to which those questions can be permitted consideration. For example, what exactly happened to the Armenians? What would Turkey's heroic paterfamilias, Ataturk, think of Turkey's governing Islamic party? Second, Turkey oscillates between a xenophobia that was for generations practically prescribed and a longing to join and be respected among the community of nations. A deeply

existential variation of this theme turns on the place in the world outside of Turkey’s boundaries in which the nation most naturally belongs. Is it the complex of Muslim nations in its neighborhood? Or is Turkey’s belonging place rather the frustrating and often humiliating European family? Third, who are the appropriate custodians of Turkey’s identity and well-being? Is it the generals, who have stepped in to restore order so often as to constitute in some minds a backstop against political and cultural experimentation gone wrong? Or is it the Turkish people more generally, their will channeled through democratic process? Or ought trust in the guidance of Islamic centers of guidance be the nation’s modus operandi, no matter how undemocratic this option might turn out to be? Fourth, what is to be expected of Turkey’s minorities, preeminently the Kurds? Can a stateless people whose population straddles multiple nations in the region be entrusted with the challenge of becoming one component of a Turkish state? Or is independence and therefore separation from and rebellion against the Turkish state an irremediable instinct that must be suppressed? And who gets to say? Kurds or non-Kurds? And if Kurds, which ones? The mere partial enumeration of these questions shines a light on the appropriateness of the book’s subtitle: Turkey Between Two Worlds. The phrase is patient of more than one application. Turkey emerges from Kinzer’s wide-ranging description as a country between. As I write this review eight years after the publication of *Crescent and Star*’s 2008 revision of a 2001 original, news of a failed coup and the suppression of dissent with which it has been met have barely faded from the front pages. A 2nd revision would doubtless add even further texture and color to the nation’s between-ness. But Stephen Kinzer has moved on to other things, and it would be too much to ask of him a life-long chronicling of Turkey’s wrestlings with its betweenness. What he has given us is an impressionistic portrait of a nation that can confuse, but can also be loved, a people that is in the midst of drafting its own future, a state that must decide the purpose toward which it governs, a place and a people of disturbing beauty.

As Turkey seems to veer ever closer to becoming an Islamist state with a strongman in charge, I wonder if author Stephen Kinzer would wish to revisit his thesis in this 2001 book, revised 2008, that Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s accession to power over the past dozen or fifteen years represents a long-delayed flowering of democracy in a moribund oligarchy. Kinzer’s book accurately portrays the current tensions in Turkey between Kemalists and Erdoganists (for lack of a better word for the AKP

and its supporters), but I often found his descriptions of the former veering toward caricature and the latter tending toward hagiography. (You can't get far into the book without knowing where Kinzer's sympathies lie.) The truth is that both points of view have some validity, and there are conscientious voices on both sides. Kinzer's book is an accessible general guide to modern Turkey's problems (albeit with only six years since its revision it seems a bit dated, especially given Erdogan's recent election to the Presidency), and gives enough history and perspective that the general reader can better appreciate what he reads in the newspapers. The book also has many charming and illuminating anecdotes from Kinzer's many years of exploring Turkey - and those made me envious, as I have greatly enjoyed my two brief visits to Turkey, and have always wished I could spend more time there.

This is for the 2008 revised edition of Stephen Kinzer's outstanding contemporary history of the Republic of Turkey. *Crescent and Star* captures all of the paradoxes of modernism, Islam, Western liberal values and Eastern despotism that make Turkey one of the most interesting and relevant nations in the Middle East. Turkey is an enigma among Americans who still tend to view the republic through cold war lenses as an oddly secular Islamic state that stood side by side with America on NATO's southern bulwark against the Soviets. *Crescent and Star* is an attempt to update that view, and Kinzer, the former Istanbul bureau chief for the *New York Times*, is just the writer for the job. Kinzer tracks the Republic's turn to the Islamic right in the late 90s and its post-9-11 emergence as a confident regional power broker ready to cast off American, NATO and European Union constraints to pursue its own interests. And more and more, these interests involve the role of Islam in global politics. What emerges is a picture of 21st century Turkey as a youthful, dynamic, Islamic powerhouse ready to assume its place as the leader of the Mediterranean Union, the EU's solution to the problem of Turkish inclusion in the European economic system. I read *Crescent and Star* in preparation for a trip to Turkey. I am glad I did. But be sure to read it whether you plan to go or not. It's that good.

I bought this book as a prelude to a recent visit to Greece and Turkey, and found it to be spot on with respect to the "Between Two Worlds" subtitle. Turkey unexpectedly (to me) proved to be a thriving and bustling nation, with evident prosperity, but also a clear split between secular liberals and Moslem conservatives. Picture women in burkas or head scarves mixed in with (young) women in low-rise jeans and you get the idea. Our tour group hotel was moved from near the scene of the recent demonstrations to across the Bosphorus to the Asian side, as a modest precaution. But we

saw plenty of (peaceful) demonstrators on both sides, chanting slogans and waving flags. The discussion of modern Turkey's "father" Mustafa Kemal Attaturk in this book is very helpful in giving insight to the massive changes this society has undergone and why there is now backlash by conservatives on one side, and opponents to some of Erdogan's programs and methods on the other. A well done analysis and a good read.

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