

2011

# La Masonería en el mundo - Turquía

Archivo C I E M - Madrid

Documentación - países

Adrian Mac Liman  
Centro Ibérico de Estudios Masónicos (CIEM)  
03/04/2011



# THE HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY IN TURKEY

Celil Layikteç

Copyright 2001 by Celil Layikteç. Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for non commercial use, provided that text, all html codes, and this notice remain intact and unaltered in any way. This article may not be resold, reprinted, or redistributed for compensation of any kind without prior written permission of the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact the Librarian at: [librarian@internet.lodge.org.uk](mailto:librarian@internet.lodge.org.uk)

*Note: The archives of lodges in Turkey, prior to the foundation of the Grand Lodge in 1909, were in the hands of foreign obediences. These documents were lost due to wars, persecution, fires etc. I was able to reconstruct the history of Freemasonry in Turkey through a research in the archives of the Grand Orient de France, preserved from the Germans during the occupation in the Bibliothèque Nationale Française (1890 pages microfilmed), plus the archives of the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland. The Greek and Italian Masonic archives had been destroyed during the German occupation.*

## **1721 – 1826**

A lodge which name is lost, operated in Istanbul, somewhere near the Galata tower, during the reign of Osman III (1703 – 1730). The lodge was founded probably around 1721 by Levantines (mainly Genoese people) living in the tower quarters.

The first known Turkish Mason is Sait Çelebi, ambassador to France and later grand vizier. The French officer, Count de Bonneval, after some intrigues in the French Court during the reign of Louis XIV, emigrated to England and later came to Turkey to reorganize the Turkish army. Count de Bonneval took a Turkish name and became Kumbaracı Ahmet Osman Pasha. It is said that he was a mason. Another known mason in this period is İbrahim Müteferrika, who together with Sait Çelebi, started the first printing press used by Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. (The Christians and Jews already had their own printing presses).

10 years after the excommunication of freemasonry by Clement XII in 1748, Mahmud II came under the pressure from his Christian subjects and also the Muslim clergy to take similar action. It was thought that the Pope would not charge a fraternity with atheism in vain, and freemasonry was outlawed in the Ottoman Empire. An English lodge was sacked by the police, but as the British ambassador gave notice in due time, the list of members had been rescued. In the Vatican archives, there is a letter by

the Pope congratulating the French Cardinal Tencin, and wishing that the same could be done in Naples.

According to Gould, Alexander Drummond, the British Consul in Aleppo, had been appointed as District Grand Master for 'the Orient' by the Grand Lodge of England. Later in 1764, Dr. Dionysios Menasse had been appointed District Grand Master for Asiatic Turkey and Armenia.

In 1786 a second charter had been given by the Lodge *Saint Jean d'Ecosse* in Marseilles to the Lodge *Saint Jean d'Ecosse des Nations Réunies* in Izmir. The first charter having been lost during the great Izmir fire. According to the correspondence, this lodge had been consecrated after 1751 and before 1778, and was closed in 1826.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Selim III's mother, Nakshidil Sultan happened to be the cousin of Josephine, Napoléon's wife. Under her influence, lodges from different obediences prospered in the Ottoman Empire. However in 1826, Mahmut II abolished the Janissaries to create a modern army and outlawed the order of the Bektashis to which they belonged. Thus it was possible to describe Freemasonry as a "*kind of Bektashism*", and as a consequence it was also closed and the known freemasons were sent into exile.

### **1826 – 1856**

Mustafa Reshit Pasha, Grand Vizier, had promulgated the Reform Edict of 1839. It is said that he had been initiated while he was Ambassador in London although no evidence has been found for his Initiation. His lodge is not known and as there were no 'family names' in usage at that time. Thus any search for the names of Reshit and Mustafa could be anyone of that name (the practice of having fixed names for families was only introduced by Kemal Ataturk in the twentieth century). His good friend the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Lord Reading, was however a known freemason.

After 1839, with the unofficial permission by the Grand Vizier, freemasonry underwent a slow revival in Turkey.

### **The Crimean War**

The arrival of British, French and Piemontise expeditionary forces and diplomats in Istanbul and Izmir in 1856 led to an explosion of lodges under a variety of obediences.

In 1857 the short-lived *Grande Loge de Turquie* was founded in Izmir by

the Grand Orient of France. After the end of the Crimean War, with the departure of foreigners, this grand lodge came to an end.

### **The creation of an irregular Irish Grand Lodge:**

In 1856 Captain Atkinson, an Irish officer in the 47<sup>th</sup> British Regiment, claiming to possess an Irish warrant created three lodges in Izmir and then "*The Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of TURKEY*". (The constitution of this Grand Lodge is in the Irish archives). This was however a fraudulent commercial enterprise - Atkinson initiated some 200 masons and then disappeared with the funds.

### **The creation of the District Grand Lodge of Turkey (English Constitution)**

The irregular masons started to visit or join English and French lodges. There was literally a panic in London and in a swift move, the Grand Master, Lord Zetland ordered the foundation of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Turkey, in Istanbul. The first Provincial Grand Master being the British Ambassador Sir Henry Bulwer. The consecration ceremony taking place on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1862 in the Embassy.

### **The Supreme Council of Turkey (1861)**

The founder (1861) and first Sovereign Commander of the Scottish Rite in Turkey (1864) was Prince Abdülhalim Pasha, or shortly, Halim Pasha, Brother of the Khedive (Governor of Egypt, then part of the Ottoman Empire). Halim Pasha was uncle of the Khedive Ismail Pasha under whose rule the Suez Channel had been opened. Halim Pasha was also Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Egypt (English Constitution). In 1869 this Supreme Council was recognised by the American Southern Jurisdiction.

### **The extinction of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Turkey**

In 1869 Lord Bulwer had been recalled to London and at the same time Halim Pasha was in exile in Istanbul. Having good relations with the Sultan, he was proposed as Provincial Grand Master. But as his proficiency of the English language was insufficient, an American, John Peter Brown, Secretary at the American Embassy and known writer and researcher of the Islamic mysticism was elected in his place. Hyde Clark, the P.D. Regional G.M. in a letter to a Bro. Harvey (*I could not read his family name*) in London, proposes that there would be simultaneously two Grand Masters. This proposition was not carried on for obvious reasons.

After Brown, Bro Stephen Scouloudi was elected Grand Master in 1873. The Provincial Grand Lodge was run inefficiently; dues were not or

could not be collected. Thus in 1884 when Scouloudi resigned, no one was elected in his place. At that time there were four English Lodges in Istanbul and seven in Izmir.

### **Lodges at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, there were in total 11 English, 7 Scottish, 2 Irish, 1 Polish, 2 Spanish, 5 German, 15 Italian, 2 Greek, 6 French and 1 Hungarian lodges - plus a few chapters attached to the English, Scottish and Irish lodges in Istanbul, Izmir and Thessalonica alone.

*{There were many lodges in the rest of the big cities of the Empire too (in the provinces of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Bulgaria, Romania and Macedonia and also in different cities of Anatolia) but as they were not relevant to the creation of the Grand Lodge of Turkey, I did not include them in this study.}*

### **Constitutional Monarchy**

Three sons of Sultan Abdulmedjit, the Princes Murat (later Sultan Murat V) and two of his brothers, Nurettin and Kemalettin had been initiated in the French Lodge Prodoos. Five Grand Viziers, including Midhat Pasha who masterminded the first Constitutional Monarchic regime, Turkish ambassadors to European countries and foreign ambassadors to Turkey, famous freedom writers and poets were members of this lodge. Louis Amiable, French Lawyer and politician, writer of the history of the Lodge “*les Neufs Soeurs*” cradle of the Encyclopedists in Paris before the Revolution, was the Orator of the Lodge. (He was in Istanbul on contract to reorganize the Turkish Bar Association).

After the suicide (?) of Sultan Abdulaziz, Prince Murat acceded to the throne on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1876, but due to a mental illness, was deposed three months later and his brother Abdulhamit was enthroned, but only after bargaining with Bro. Midhat Pasha, and promising to start the constitutional process. He was not long to go back on his promise.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1878 Abdulhamit sent Grand Vizier Bro. Midhat Pasha into exile in various places, but finally to Taif (port city of Yemen, then a province of the Ottoman Empire) arranging his death by poisoning there. On the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1878 Abdulhamit adjourned the parliament indefinitely, starting a period of absolute despotism which lasted 30 years.

Cleanti Scalieri, W.M. of the Lodge Prodoos plotted a bloody but unsuccessful kidnapping of Murat V from the Ciragan Palace, to restore

him on the throne. (Articles on the subject by Bro. Rizopoulos and myself in the *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Volumes 104 and 107 respectively)

A Masonic political party: Union and Progress, created according to the model of the “Carbonaries” in Italy.

After the model of Young Italians, Young Germans and Young Swiss, the Young Turks organized in Paris with the aim of bringing back the constitutional monarchy. But the Young Turks talked a lot but did not act. Five freemason, military students in the faculty of medicine started a revolutionary party that later took the name of Union and Progress. Their model was the Italian quasi-masonic revolutionary society, the “Carbonaries”.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the main European powers had obtained an immunity for their subjects living in the Ottoman Empire. This immunity system was called “capitulations”. The Turkish police did not have the right to search a house belonging to a foreign subject. Thus the members of Union and Progress in Thessalonica were able to plot their revolution in Italian, French and Spanish lodges gathering in houses belonging to foreigners. To get around the Capitulations, the police organized a robbery in the temple of the lodge *Macedonia Risorta*, where the archives were kept, to obtain the members’ lists, but a freemason in the police force tipped off the Worshipful Master of the lodge in time. The frustrated policemen took revenge on the furniture of the temple. The police tried also to harass the members by waiting in the street for them to leave the building.

### **Abdulhamit and freemasons**

Abdulhamit knew very well what freemasonry was about. As stated above, three of his brothers were freemasons. The princes Kemalettin and Nurettin were in line for the throne. Most of the European powers were governed by freemason kings and ministers. For these reasons, Abdulhamit did not want to alienate the Freemasons. Therefore, while persecuting the lodge members of the Italian, French and Spanish lodges in Thessalonica, he gave large donations to the charity efforts of English Lodges in Istanbul.

He even planned the creation of a Grand Lodge in Istanbul, of which he would be the Grand Master. This lodge would act as a senate, assembling the leaders of the different warring communities in Istanbul, (mainly Turkish intellectuals, the members of the Italian, Levantine, Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities). This project was never realised but shows the intricacies of the way Abdulhamit’s mind worked.

## **The Second Constitutional Monarchy**

A great number of high ranking officers were Freemasons and as well as being members of the Union and Progress Party, low ranking officers were not required to become Freemasons to be accepted into the Union and Progress Party, but they hoped to get a quicker promotion if they would be initiated first.

The action of the Union and Progress Party, and its threat to invade Istanbul with the armies stationed in Thrace, obliged Abdulhamit to promulgate once more a Constitutional Monarchy on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1908.

The reaction was not long to come. On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1909 the fundamentalists took control of Istanbul.

The freemasons in Thrace, mainly from Thessalonica, organised an army of reservists. Almost all officers were freemasons. There were too many officers so some actually joined the expeditionary force as simple soldiers. The army recaptured Istanbul from the fundamentalists, there were bloody battles and hangings, and Abdulhamit was dethroned by a committee of five deputies, all of them Freemasons.

As a result of all this, freemasons became the target for the hatred of fundamentalist Islam.

### **The Masonic State.**

According to the French historian Thierry Zarcone, the period from 1908 to 1918 could be called "*The Masonic State*". The Union and Progress Party in power used freemasonry in its foreign relations. Deputations of mason parliamentarians went to Italy, France, Hungary and Germany. The freemason deputies claimed that with their effort, democracy, that is the French slogan of *liberty, equality and fraternity*, was prevailing now in Turkey and that the European powers should be of assistance. The Albanians had revolted against the Ottoman rule and the Italian parliament was about to vote an aid program for the rebels. After the intervention of the Grand Lodge of Turkey, the Italian freemasons in the parliament were effective and the motion failed to be carried.

Eleven months later, at the end of 1911, after Italy's expedition to Libya (which was Ottoman territory at that time), the same scenario was repeated, but naturally this time the Grand Orient of Italy could not act against its own government. In answer to the letter from the Grand Lodge of Turkey, the Grand Master issued a very general statement on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1911 ("*Per l'Impresso di Tripoli*", *Rivista Massonica*, 1911, No. 15-16) and the relations between the Italian And

Turkish Grand Lodges were severely affected.

### **The Creation of the Grand Lodge of Turkey (Ottoman Grand Orient)**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1909, the dormant Supreme Council of Turkey (1861) was revived. This Supreme Council first consecrated 4 Turkish lodges. These 4 lodges plus 3 Italian, 2 French, 1 Spanish and 2 Egyptian lodges (One of them, Resne, English Constitution) assembled to form the Grand Lodge of Turkey on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1909, and elected its first Grand Master, the Minister of the Interior Mehmet Talat S. Pasha, who later became Grand Vizier (Prime Minister). This Grand Lodge was consecrated by the Supreme Council.

### **The closing of lodges in 1935**

This Grand Lodge gave charters to a total of 66 lodges, mainly in Turkey but also in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Greece, Lebanon and Palestine.

In 1935, the year when Freemasonry decided to hibernate, 6 ministers, the President of the Parliament, more than 60 deputies and many state governors, were Freemasons. Ataturk's private doctor, M. Kemal Oke, was a Past Grand Master.

In 1935 the English, Germans and Russians transformed Turkey into a vast stage for propaganda and espionage. The Nazi propaganda machine was also stressing the Judeo-Masonic danger. The Ministry of the Interior, Sukru Kaya, a 33° Scottish Rite Mason, in order to curb these activities passed a law from parliament closing all clubs and societies. Freemasonry was not mentioned in the text, but the minister warned his brothers that it would be wiser to stop the activity of Freemasonry by its own free will. That's how things happened and the reason why Freemasonry was able to recover its buildings after the war.

All lodges did not close. The Supreme Council continued its activity behind closed doors, even chartered 3 new lodges. Craft lodges met at the homes of brothers. The police showed a knowing tolerance to all this, with the tacit approval of the President of the Republic Ismet Inonu, who even gave a little financial aid to the Supreme Council.

### **The awakening (1948)**

Turkey wanted to be accepted by the U.N. The Turkish diplomats were told that Turkey was not a democratic nation and that even Freemasonry was closed, as it was in all the totalitarian regimes.

The President approached his personal doctor, Supreme Grand Master M. Kemal Oke, the same doctor who looked after Kemal Ataturk, and told him that the time to resume official working had come.

In 1948 lodges, under the Supreme Council, started to labour in Istanbul and Izmir, and in 1949 in Ankara.

A troubled period started with lodges trying to liberate themselves from the Supreme Council's rule. The Grand Lodges of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir were created, and finally those three grand lodges united on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1956 to create a totally independent Grand Lodge of Turkey.

### **International Recognition**

After the initial recognition by some American and European Grand Lodges, in 1959 an official deputation by the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited Turkey. The recognition process was delayed to 1963, due to the military coup of 1960.

Most of the regular Grand Lodges had recognised the Grand Lodge of Turkey, except England and Ireland. In order to satisfy them, the Grand Lodge of Turkey was reconsecrated by the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1965. (That is why our Grand Officers' regalia is green). In 1970 the Grand Lodges of England and Ireland recognized the Grand Lodge of Turkey.

### **The schism of 1965**

Friction was continuous between the Supreme Council and the Grand Lodge.

At the end of 1964, The Grand Secretary, on his own, gave a letter to Bro. Suleyman Demirel, stating that he (Demirel) was not a freemason. The Grand Secretary was actually the Senior Warden of the lodge in which Demirel had been initiated in 1955. Demirel used this document against the fundamentalist wing in his political party, was thus elected to the Presidency of the party and reigned on Turkish Politics until 2000, when he retired as President of the Republic.

In the 1965 Grand Master elections, the Brother who issued this letter was elected, in spite of the Supreme Council's secret opposition. The Supreme Council preferred the election of a Brother who would be obedient to them and tried to cancel these elections. This led to a lot of turbulence in the ranks of Turkish Freemasons. Finally a schism occurred, with a small group of brothers creating a separate Grand

Lodge, which later attached itself to the French Grand Orient. Today this irregular grand lodge has about 3000 members and is in relations with a Turkish Women's Grand Lodge. This is a rather new body and has a few hundred members, organized in all major cities in Turkey.

Today the Grand Lodge of Turkey has about 180 lodges in 10 cities, with 12000 active members. It is recognized by all the regular Grand Lodges and is active, promoting freemasonry in the Balkans, Russia and turkic language speaking former Soviet Union republics.

We have a research Lodge that is publishing a quarterly research magazine "Mimar Sinan" (named after Sinan the famous Turkish architect). Since 1991, I have published the bimonthly Masonic magazine TESVIYE (*level*), in the name of the Grand Lodge of Turkey.

**Celil Layiktez – 09/04/2001**