



Beyond Anitkabir: The Funerary Architecture of Atatürk

**The Construction and Maintenance
of National Memory**

Christopher S. Wilson

BEYOND ANITKABIR: THE FUNERARY
ARCHITECTURE OF ATATÜRK

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The Construction and Maintenance of National Memory

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*This book is dedicated to my father,
Samuel Warren Wilson (1932–1992).*

Introduction

This book is not about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) – at least not directly. It is not about Atatürk's birth in the Ottoman city of Salonika (today Thessaloniki, Greece), nor his childhood in the family of a customs civil servant. This book is also not about Atatürk's early success in the armed forces of the Ottoman Empire, nor his dislike of the empire's occupation after World War I. It is neither about Atatürk's leadership during the subsequent Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), nor his secularizing and westernizing reforms as first president of the Republic of Turkey (1923–1938). Lastly, this book is not about Atatürk's last days and his death, although these events provide the beginning to the story.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died in a bedroom (Figure I.1) in Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul, the former Ottoman seat of government, at exactly 9:05 am on 10 November 1938. He had been seriously ill for some time and was in Istanbul, rather than Ankara – the new capital of Turkey – at the advice of his doctors, who recommended its sea-level altitude and mild climate. Soon after Atatürk's death, preparations began for his official funeral, which would take place in Ankara 11 days later. The famous German modernist architect Bruno Taut was commissioned to design the catafalque that would be the architectural focus of that event. In the meantime, a temporary yet dignified catafalque (Figure I.2) was arranged in the Grand Ceremonial Hall of Dolmabahçe Palace. Atatürk's coffin lay upon that structure from 16 to 19 November, after which it was draped with the Turkish flag, loaded onto a gun carriage and escorted through the streets of Istanbul to Seraglio Point. There, the coffin was transferred to a battleship and taken to Izmit, where it was then loaded onto a special train, arriving in Ankara on the morning of 20 November 1938.

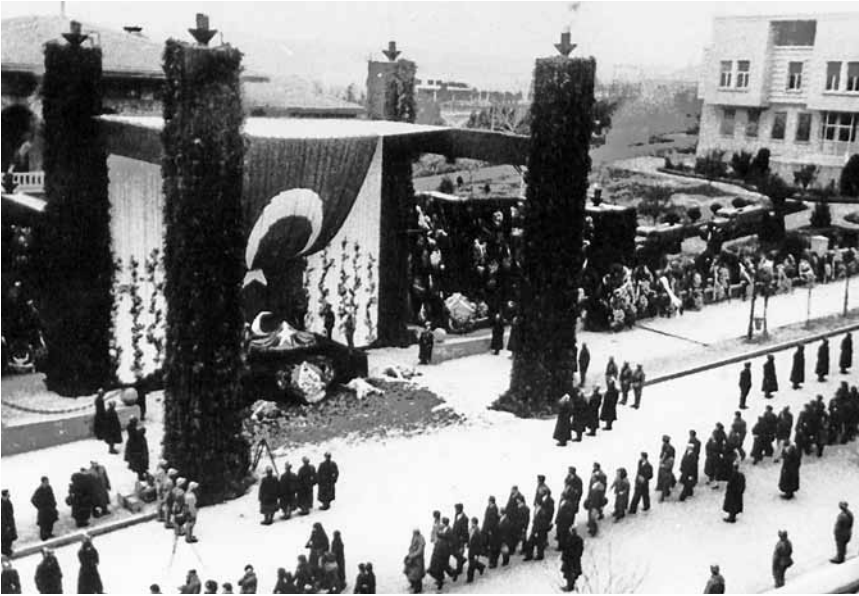
Upon leaving the train, the coffin was again loaded onto a gun carriage and ceremoniously paraded through the streets of Ankara and placed onto Taut's catafalque (Figure I.3) located in the forecourt of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Building, known today as the Second Parliament Building. The coffin remained there for the rest of the day as the body lay in state. Atatürk's official funeral took place the next morning, on 21 November 1938. At the conclusion of



I.1 Atatürk's Bedroom in Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul



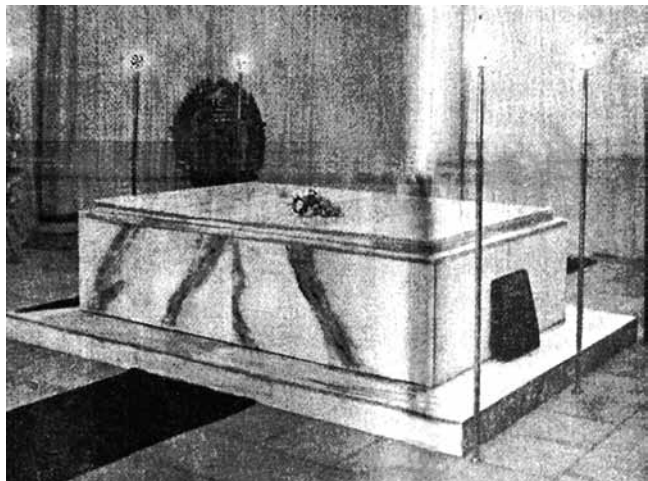
I.2 Atatürk's
Catafalque
in the Grand
Ceremonial Hall
of Dolmabahçe
Palace



I.3 Atatürk's
Catafalque in front
of the Turkish
Grand National
Assembly, Ankara

ceremonies, which included processions of Turkish soldiers, foreign honour guards, representatives of friendly nations and the general public, Atatürk's coffin was again carried on a gun carriage and escorted through the streets of Ankara to the Ethnographic Museum, where a temporary tomb (Figure I.4) had been prepared. Atatürk's body lay in this tomb until 10 November 1953, exactly 15 years after his death, when it was moved to a permanent mausoleum, called Anıtkabir – in Turkish literally, “memorial tomb” – where it still lies today (Figure I.5).

As previously stated, this book is not about Atatürk. Instead, it is about the representations of Atatürk as seen in the examples of funerary architecture that have housed his corpse since his death, listed above: the bedroom in Dolmabahçe Palace where he died, the catafalque in Dolmabahçe's Grand Ceremonial Hall, Bruno Taut's catafalque for his official funeral in Ankara, the temporary tomb in the Ankara Ethnographic Museum, and his mausoleum Anıtkabir. Related to these constructions are also the transfer ceremonies when Atatürk's body was conveyed through Istanbul and on to Ankara in 1938; from Taut's catafalque to the Ethnographic Museum, also in 1938; and from the Ethnographic Museum to Anıtkabir in 1953.



I.4 Atatürk's temporary tomb in the Ethnographic Museum, Ankara



1.5 Atatürk's
mausoleum,
Anıtkabir, Ankara

Being the final construction in this series and also the grandest, Anıtkabir is the most well known of all of them. It receives approximately 8 million visitors every year, both Turkish and foreign, and is a national monument for Turkey – some would say the national monument for Turkey. However, the constructions that housed Atatürk's body before Anıtkabir are just as equally significant, hence the first meaning to the title of this book: All of these settings and ceremonies – not just Anıtkabir – were, in one way or another, architectural representations of Atatürk.

Atatürk did not create these representations himself, which is an impossible post-mortem task, unless planned before one's death. Instead, those who were left after his death created them and subsequent generations have maintained them. Individually, these representations were separate moments that occurred at different times and under quite varying circumstances – some accidental, some designed, some temporary, and some permanent. Taken together, they were and are the outcome of the intersection of identity, memory, nationalism and architecture, which shall be explained in more detail in later chapters.

Although it may not be possible to attribute one singular national or collective memory for Atatürk or the nation of Turkey, the representations seen in the funerary architecture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk have been and continue to be a major factor in shaping Turkish national and collective memory, hence the second meaning to the title of this book: the on-going or future shaping of Turkish national identity and memory that will now take place following the construction, maintenance and institutionalization of Anıtkabir. It is the goal of this book to narrate the "beyond Anıtkabir" of the past in order to predict the "beyond Anıtkabir" of the future.