BRITISH MUSEUM: ANKARA'S POODLE

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Category: Opinions

Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia, 23 April 2013

Please bear with me as I try to make sense of things that have been troubling what passes for my mind. Being the believer in conspiracies that I am, I seem to think there is a link but where on the large circle of items do I begin?

First. There is the news that the British Museum is at it again. The troublesome khatchkar that the late Catholicos Vazken gave to the Museum is back down in the basement somewhere. The first time, it was at the request (probably demand, actually, by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office which conveyed the message) of the Turkish Ambassador of the day. When it was pointed out that the Museum accepted the khatchkar with the signed agreement that it would be "displayed or returned" (and "the British Museum never returns anything") the khatchkar was again put on display. It is back in the basement, no doubt at the request of the current Turkish Ambassador (though that is denied in a letter to me). Conceding that it is violating its own agreement, I have been told that the British Museum is "seeking new opportunities to place it on public display."

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Second. The British Museum is re-arranging its displays in "Room 54" and the room will be (or is) labelled "Ancient Turkey." When it was pointed out that there ain't not no such animal as "ancient" Turkey, the reply was that the visitor who may not have a good grasp of English ("would not be immediately apparent to non-English speakers") may have a hard time finding some of the artifacts and treasures of the civilizations and cultures that have existed on the Anatolian plateau unless directed to "Ancient Turkey." Thus, however, that visitor whose grasp of English may not be too strong will somehow know that if he wants to see the Museum's collection of the treasures of the Armenians, Assyrians, Carians, Cilicians, Cimmarians, Colchians, Commagene, Georgians, Greeks, Hattians, Hittites, Hurrians, Iberians, Kurds, Luwians, Lydians, Mitahni, Persians, Phrygians, Romans,

Scythians, Seljik Turks, Urartians, he will amazingly go to "Ancient Turkey"!

When asked if that same visitor with poor awareness of the English language will go to "Mexico" (or "Ancient Mexico") to see the Aztec treasures, or to "Peru" (or "Ancient Peru") to see the Inca treasures, or "Honduras" (or "Ancient Honduras") to see the Mayan treasures, answers there have come none. When asked whether the Museum will put "Byzantium" into "Ancient Turkey," answer there has come none.

Third. Turkey is already making grand plans to mark the Centenary of its founding. Among the plans will be the opening, in 2023, of the "World's Largest Museum"! Other than self-satisfaction (or, should it be "self-delusion"?), why does Turkey need the World's Largest Museum? Because, it will use the occasion to "mark its 10,000 years of culture." That's right. Turkey, with its scant 800 years, will assign itself the inheritor of all those who lived on the Anatolian plateau. In truth, Turkey is possibly the only country in the world whose tourist attractions and historic areas were created by others. Thus, that which is proclaimed as "Turkish" has nothing to do with Turkey. Already, the names of several regional museums have been changed to reflect the "oneness" of Turkey's "past."

As a passing note, I have suggested to the British Museum that someone consult the "Macmillan Dictionary of Art" and read the 37 pages devoted to Armenian Art and the seven pages devoted to Turkish Art and ask if the Museum can justify subsuming Armenia into "Ancient Turkey." Answer there has come none.

Fourth. Turkey has demanded that the British Museum return some Roman (note "Roman") artifacts allegedly removed illegally from Turkey.

But, to get back to my quandary.

Since Armenia has a recorded 3000 years history––which, by British Museum standards must mean that it is "Ancient Ancient Armenia"––it has been suggested that it could easily solve the problem of the bothersome khatchkar by setting up a room or an area labeled "Ancient Armenia" and install its famous head of Diana, for instance, as pride of place and the khatchkar at the entrance. I have also suggested that it should risk the ire of the Turkish Ambassador.

Thus, you see my problem. How do I say what is going around in what passes for my mind? How do I find where on the circle of thoughts to start the link? And, if I am confused, how do I ask others to get involved?
And, then it came to me, and I thank you all for your patience.

It occurred to me when I got to this point that these actions by the British Museum are its solution to the problem created by the demand of Turkey for the return of those Roman artifacts: "Let us appease the Turks." How? Revamp the British Museum's collection to meld with Turkey's claim of 10,000 years heritage, so that the Turks can place a plaque at the entrance to the World's Largest Museum that reads: "For more Turkish treasures, please visit our branch in London."