



Mrs. Johnson

A CAT FANCIER IN TURKEY

by Shirley Johnson

Turkey is a wondrous land of anachronisms. In the capital city of Ankara one sees horse carts, burros, and automobiles ranging in years from 1926 through 1966, all travelling the same roadways. On the hills overlooking the city, people live in houses made from the ruins of an ancient Seljuk citadel while in the city itself the latest in modern architecture rears in the sky. Women swathed in veiling and dressed in the ancient bloomers walk side by side with girls attired in scanty sundresses.

Living in Turkey for the past three years has been a rewarding but frustrating experience. Tap water in this modern city of nearly 500,000 people is not considered safe to drink; consequently, the little red water jug carried back and forth to American-

purified watering points becomes a way of life for both you and your cats . . . unfortunately, though, the cats can't help carry! Kidneys are a staple food for human consumption, and the butchers just can't understand why you want them chopped or ground since nobody else eats them that way. (I never had the heart to tell them I fed them to my cats!) The cats even dined royally on steak which sells for about 35¢ a pound on the market.

Turkey is a country whose history lies in antiquity but whose modernity dates back only about 35 years to the time of the great Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. This man, a great general during the first World War, led his country from almost the Dark Ages to its present progressiveness in the span of his own lifetime, until his untimely death at 56.

Until Ataturk, Turkey's people had only given names. Arabic was the written language, men still wore the fez and women the veil and the Moslem religion held full sway over the people. Ataturk recognized the necessity of instilling nationalism in his people. He made it against the law for men to wear the fez, a symbol of religious subservience, while keeping the Moslem religion intact except where it interfered with the development of national unity. Perhaps his greatest single contribution was the substitution of a western alphabet and



Turkish Villagers



Pigeons at Istanbul Mosque

written language for the difficult Arabic, a giant step towards the modernization and westernization of his country.

Ankara is located where three streams come together and whose bluffs create a natural fortress. The name "Ankara" may come from the Greek for "anchor" or perhaps it is the unidentified Hittite city "Ankuwa." 3500 years ago Ankara was Hittite. This people dominated Asia Minor through a type of confederation between the 19th and 12th centuries B.C. About 1200 B.C. the Phrygians invaded with King Midas (he of the "golden touch") being their most famous ruler. After their capital city of Gordium fell, Ankara became part of the Lydian Empire. In 550 B.C. it was part of Persia, and in 334 B.C.

became a part of Alexander the Great's empire. When he died, the city was conquered by the Seleucids, and in 278 B.C. it was invaded by the Galatians. In 25 B. C. the city became part of the Roman Empire. Ankara was a brilliant Roman city and capital of the province of Galatia. It was famous as a slave-trading center, for its hard cheese and for its yogurt, curdled with the fresh juice of fig leaves.

St. Peter came to Ankara in 10 A.D. to preach Christianity to its numerous Jews. St. Paul and St. Timothy came about 51 A.D. and founded one of the first apostolic churches in Asia Minor. The early Christians of Ankara were backsliders, however, as appears in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians!

In 620 Ankara was sacked by the Persians; in the 8th century the Arabs attacked, in the 9th, took and burnt the city twice; the Byzantines then recaptured the city, but in 871 the city was taken from them and held for some sixty years by an Iconoclastic sect known as the Paulicians. Two hundred years later the first Seljuk Turkish conqueror of Ankara arrived, and for some time the city was alternately Byzantine, Seljuk and Crusader held. Finally, in 1143, Ankara began a century and a half of Seljuk domination.

The Seljuk Turks at one time ruled all eastern and central Asia Minor from Konya, Turkey. Around the start of the 13th century many of the Ankara Christians turned Moslem, and after the 15th century they lost bit by bit the use of Greek. After the Seljuks were the Mongols, and then in 1354 the Ottoman Turks conquered Ankara. Tamerlane the Scythian besieged the city in 1402 and took the Ottoman Sultan Yildirim Beyazit I prisoner. The sultan committed suicide the following year and two of his sons who escaped went on to found the great Ottoman Empire.



Lace Makers and Sellers at Alanya



Rug cleaning by the Citadel

With this backlog of civilizations, Ankara is an archaeologist's paradise, with some remnants left of each city, co-existent with the modern town of today.

Ankara is known for three specialities, the Ankara goat, the Ankara cat, and the Ankara (Angora) rabbit. The goat is stocky and low set with very silky, curly, fine hair. It evidently was brought to Ankara from the east of the Caspian Sea by migrating Turcoman tribes around the 12th century. Hundreds of years ago Ankara was the center of an important industry based on goat hair of this type which is called in Turkish "tiftik." The goat's hair was pulled out by hand which made it grow back even thinner and finer, but this hurt the goats, so they were wet down with water mixed with lime and ashes. Today only trade in raw tiftik is important in Ankara but a very few specialty shops sell shawls and sweaters made out of the cloth which is called "cymatilis" or "camelot."

The Ankara or Angora rabbit is indigenous to the area with long white silky hair. Unlike the goat, it acclimatizes well and the best Angora rabbit hair now comes from Italy, France and Japan.

The Ankara (Angora) cat is, of course, of most interest to us. *Felis angorentis* is descended from the manul cat, *Felis manul*, domesticated by the Tartars and Chinese. Evidently it arrived in Ankara

On December 17, 1919 Ataturk organized resistance to the combined forces of the sultan and the Allies. He invited deputies from all over Turkey to Ankara, and on April 23, 1920, the Grand National Assembly met in the city for the first time. In the battle of Sakarya (August - September, 1921) Ataturk drove the Greeks back, and on October 13, 1923, Ankara was proclaimed capital of Turkey. A German architect named Jansen was invited to draw up plans for its expansion, and the outer walls of the city were torn down.



At the village fountain



On the Bosphorus. Blue Mosque of Istanbul in distance

about the same time as the goat and from the same region. The specific Angora cat has long glossy white fur with eyes of different colors . . . one blue and one chartreuse or one pea green and one amber. It is timid and with a poor disposition and has the reputation of not living long and becoming almost deaf and blind toward the end of its life. There are very few of the

real breed left in Ankara. Usually the odd-eyed white, both long and short haired, is referred to as the Ankara cat and Turkish people will tell you quite seriously that these cats are peculiar to Ankara. No amount of discussion can convince them that the orange-and-blue-eyed white cats are well-known to breeders and cat fanciers in the States.

In the Ankara zoo the odd-eyed whites are caged, unfortunately both long and short-haired varieties together (see photo below) and they mate indiscriminately as I witnessed personally. If any controlled breeding of them exists, I never saw it or heard of it in my three years here.

Another unusual variety of cat is said to live in Turkey, in the little known Eastern area, the swimming Van cats, native to the Lake Van region. I was never fortunate enough to see any of these, and, in fact, my information about them was gleaned from American newspaper articles. I have sometimes wondered if they are only a legend, as they have been described to me in several different ways, no two of which coincide!

My Siamese cats were always a source of wonder to the Turks who seldom see them but, due to the vast number of stray cats wandering the streets, even less seldom buy them, as they could never really believe that any one would seriously consider paying large amounts of money for a cat.



LH and SH cats caged together "Ankara" cats breeding indiscriminately at Ankara Zoo.



Glenclick (Youth Park) of Ankara



View of Ankara

The American community in Ankara was always delighted to buy all the kittens that Kor-di' Cattery produced, and had I been willing to breed my females more than the once-a-year standards I impose, I would still have had waiting lists for kits. One beautiful male was sold to an American captain and his wife in Germany, resulting in the establishment of a cattery; several

others were sold to another American captain and his wife in Ankara and from these resulted WESEC Cattery of Fort Huachuaca, Arizona.

The Turkish people like cats, probably because their religion is Moslem, and there is a charming old legend that the Prophet Mohammed cut off the sleeve of his robe rather than to disturb his sleeping cat. On the other hand, they dislike and fear dogs, and many an American has found to his sorrow that it is not wise to allow his dog to run loose. Cats, however, are found on every street corner, in every alleyway, and lurking around every trash barrel. Fat, thin, sleek, scrawny, and in every color combination imaginable, they prowl the streets of Ankara, which is said to be a modernization of the old word Angorra.

As mentioned in Mr. Adolph Suehsdorf's article about cats in the April, 1964, "National Geographic," Persians and Angora cats are distinct breeds and not the same. It is generally considered that the Angora cats did originate in today's Ankara and that they were a long-bodied breed with a small head and flowing coat of fine, crinkly hair, again like that of the Angora goat. After 1900 the Angora went out while the Persian became even more popular and successful. There is reason to believe that the real odd-eyed longhair rarely seen in Ankara today is the original Angora breed.

Maintaining a cattery in Ankara was a real experience. Our commissary necessarily stocked only a limited amount of pet food and none of the varieties which my babies liked. Consequently, for our three years overseas, they dined "high on the hog" with the afore-mentioned steak, liver, kidneys, human consumption tuna, salmon, boned chicken and turkey.

One benefit was that any drugstore in Turkey carried normal stateside prescription items on the shelves, so that terramycin, penicillin, etc., could be purchased at any time.

Cat litter was available only rarely at the American drug store, so newspaper was the only answer, as Turkish serv-



Off to market



Ataturk's statue in Ankara (Criminals are hung from the horse's tail)

ice stations evidently never heard of "Oil-Dri" or any such comparable material. Ankara is built almost entirely out of cement blocks, so even sawdust and wood shavings were in short supply. Even that standby of cat breeding, the potty pan, was seldom available in the drugstore, so purchases of five and six at a time when they did arrive frequently caused raised eyebrows among those not in the know.

For real confusion, though, nothing could beat shipping time. The first requirement, or course, was the up-to-date rabies shot which could only be obtained (through the military veterinarian at least) on Wednesday afternoons. This had to be done at least 30 days before shipment. Then the cats and their carriers had to be weighed in and fees determined by the airline. Forty-eight hours prior to shipment, one — and only one — Turkish veterinarian had to issue a health certificate on each cat. Upon obtaining this, the cats had to be transported to the customs office, located at the airport some 25 miles from Ankara, where customs clearance (a Big, BIG thing in Turkey!) had to be obtained. These papers then had to be returned to the airline office back in downtown Ankara, and the following morning the cats were again taken to the airport for shipment. By the time the cats were actually on their way stateside you felt like you had won a major war.

Turkey, with all its frustrations, was a rewarding and exciting experience, one that I will treasure always.



Stork and Cats at Mosque

