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The Incredible Turk. The Twentieth Century. Prod. Burton Benjamin. Narr. Walter Cronkite. CBS. 15 Feb. 1959. *YouTube*. Web. 15 Nov. 2012.

During the 1950's, America and Turkey, although still allies, found their relationship becoming somewhat strained. As Ali Güngör Işıklar writes in An *Analysis of Turkish American Relations: Improvement or Deterioration,* with the Lebanon crisis coming to a head in 1958, Lebanon urgently needed help, and the United States was willing to provide "rapid support from incirlik Air Base in Turkey. Although the Democratic Party demonstrated no objection to this, it resulted in a negative perception by the Turkish public," because the Turkish authorities were only "notified" and not "consulted" (36). The Cold War started to get colder, leaving no room for underlying friction or outright hostility amongst "friends"; thus, several measures had to be taken. "The Incredible Turk," a thirty minute episode of *The Twentieth Century* (CBS), aired on 15 February 1959, and was, in a subtle way, one of those measures.

Hosted by Walter Cronkite and sponsored by The Prudential Insurance Company of America (the corporation, according to its 1959 annual report, "continued to contribute to public information and understanding" by sponsoring *The Twentieth Century*) (13), the program offers a truncated biography of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk—"The Father of the Turks." Deftly edited by Aram Boyajian, magnificently scored by Alan Hovhaness (himself Turkish), and carefully written by Lael Wertenbaker, *The Incredible Turk* presents a story very much like that of Charles Foster Kane's: a grandiose public figure who embraced his burgeoning power to the point of becoming, as the film states, "adored, also respected, also hated and feared and ruthless in dealing with those who oppose him." Atatürk is portrayed as a pillar of strength and a natural-bom leader, even before his tenure as Turkey's dictator (1923-1938); during World War I, he becomes recognized for his "brilliant strategy and ferocious personal leadership" which "changed the course of [...] the campaign and the war." His prowess was recognized at a time when the Turkish people were experiencing the sufferings of an Ottoman regime that kept them poor, hungry, illiterate,

and unsafe; his reputation, ultimately, earned him the right to take over the country, which he achieved without much opposition and with a great deal of fanfare. According to Cronkite, this "fantastic dream [was] not of empire or conquest, but of creating a democratic Turkey, a new kind of Turk in his lifetime." The viewer learns of Ataturk's separation of church and state; his abolishment of the fez (according to the program, a symbol of Oriental "fatalism and ignorance") and preference for the bowler hat; the substitution of the Arabic language for Latin script; his compulsory schooling mandate; and, his "unveiling" of Turkish women. We are made aware of Atatürk's admiration for Western culture, industrialization, and ideals, which makes the American television viewer more comfortable with Turkey as our ally.

The Incredible Turk is filmed in a style strongly reminiscent of Frank Capra's World War II *Why We Fight* films. As Erik Bamouw writes in *Documentary: a History of the Non-Fiction Film*: "In form, the films were emotionalized history lessons-word-dominated, like many war films. The illustrative footage was largely culled from existing material, from a great variety of sources" (158). Included in these films were animated maps, a "style of commentary" that "was muscular and down-to-earth" (159), and stories that were "simplistic in interpretation" (160). *The Incredible Turk* contains all of these elements (the footage coming from The Library of the President of Turkey and photographer Julien Bryan, as stated in the acknowledgements), along with a firm belief that the Turkish population is equally as proud and patriotic as its Western allies, based on Atatürk's steady leadership; in this case, however, these elements are presented in televisual form, designed for a much larger American audience.

Nonetheless we must not overlook the program's propagandistic purposes - as, for example, at the end of the episode when we are told of the aging Atatürk's monetary generosity and his quiet lifestyle with "his six adopted daughters." We even get to see him swimming with a child (presumably one of his own), and then getting out of the water to sunbathe; he is seemingly comfortable and happy living a life of pure, well-deserved contentment until his death on November 10th, 1938, a tragic day for the weeping Turkish people. By this point, *The Incredible Turk* sufficiently proves its thesis (that Atatürk is a natural leader, upholding Western values); however, the episode is certainly not enough to heal the Turkish-American alliance, an alliance that showed "impressive permanence and strength," but was "vitally affected" by "significant" and dubious "changes"

during the Cold War years (Harris 3), like the secrecy associated with the ratification of the Cooperation agreement, the ineffectiveness of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), and Turkey's eventual decline in financial stability (Harris 68-74).

Works Cited

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Douglas Charles MacLeod, Jr.
SUNY Cobleskill

The Incredible Turk is a 25-minute news documentary produced in 1958 by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) as part of "Twentieth Century" series and claimed to be the first filmed biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It was written by Lael Wertenbaker, a well-known journalist and writer at the time. The documentary was published on YouTube in 2011.

The program introduces the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to an American television audience and reflects the prevailing Cold War mentality. It comes as no coincidence to find that the documentary begins with footage of a Russian soldier on the Turkish-Soviet border. In the wake of the Second World War, with the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan (1948) the US government decided to back Turkey and Greece financially and militarily against Soviet expansion. Turkey's new president, Celal Bayar, and a newly elected government led by Adnan Menderes' Democratic Party gave up its policy of war-time neutrality and became an ambitious ally of the Western Bloc by 1950. Turkey sent