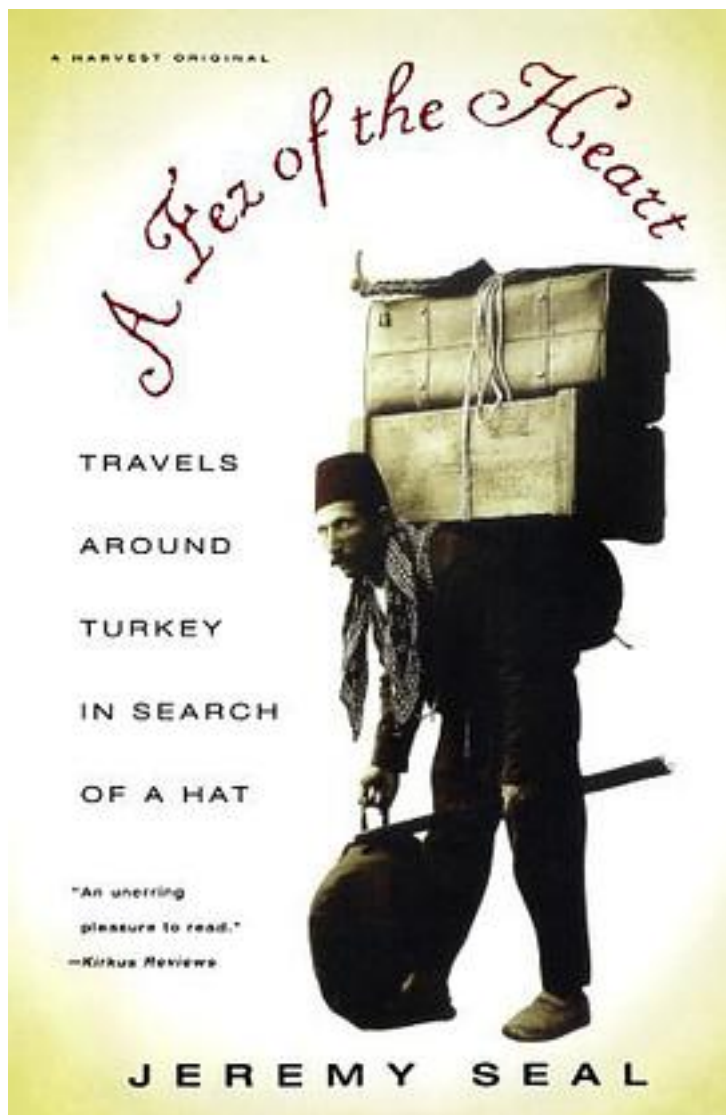


A Fez of the Heart



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What is more Turkish than the fez? Almost anything, as it turns out. Just two years after Turkey was officially proclaimed a republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk outlawed the fez. For Ataturk, the maroon felt headgear foisted on Turkey's turbaned Ottoman precursors by a similarly reform-minded ruler, Mahmud II, just 100 years earlier, symbolized Turkey's backwardness?unlike the European hats Ataturk himself favored. It's not taking anything away from the book to say that first-time author Seal, after traipsing through Ankara, Istanbul, Cappadocia and many much more obscure Turkish towns (as well as the Moroccan city of Fez), doesn't discover the origins of the fez. But aided by fluent Turkish (it fails him once when he believes a host has invited him to hunt Kurds, only to discover that the game is kurts, or wolves) and wry sensibility, he does offer both an engaging, often very funny travelogue and real insights into Turkey's troubled balancing act between modernity and tradition, between Europe and Islam. For those who were surprised by the plurality gained by Turkey's pro-Islamic Refah (or Welfare) Party in the most recent elections, Seal's book shows that we could all learn a lot from a hat.

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