

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVILISATIONS

Rums’ Religious Fairs on the Islands of Gökçeada (Imbros) and
Bozcaada (Tenedos), Turkey

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*In the depths of the sea on the cliff
Between Tenedos and craggy Imbros
There is a cave, wide gaping
Poseidon who made the earth tremble
Stopped the horses there.
Homer- Iliad*

Abstract

This study concerns religious fairs that, in Turkey, are mainly limited to the islands of Gökçeada and Bozcaada. Continued by the resident Greek minorities (Rums), these traditional fairs attract the interest of not only off-island Rum communities but also of the Turkish public in general. Recently, the fairs’ religious, social, and cultural aspects have developed economic and political dimensions. Besides providing new opportunities for faith tourism in these small-economy islands, the fairs also prepare the ground for cultural and economic partnerships between Greece and Turkey. The cultural characteristics of Gökçeada and Bozcaada could set a global example for developing dialogue between civilizations. The centuries-old Greek Orthodox tradition of island fairs could function as a bridge between neighbouring civilizations today. These two Turkish islands in the North Aegean await the world’s interest and continue to contribute to positive relations between Greece and Turkey.

Keywords

Imbros (Gökçeada), Tenedos (Bozcaada), religious fair, faith tourism, dialogue between civilizations

Introduction

Located in the north of the Aegean Sea, the islands of Thasos, Samothrace, Limnos, Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) are known as Boğazönü, or the North Aegean islands. Of these, only Bozcaada and Gökçeada both belong to Turkey and are suitable for habitation. These two islands which, administratively speaking, are separate

townships within the Çanakkale Province (Figure 2 – possess predominantly Turkish populations, but they are also home to shrinking Rum communities.

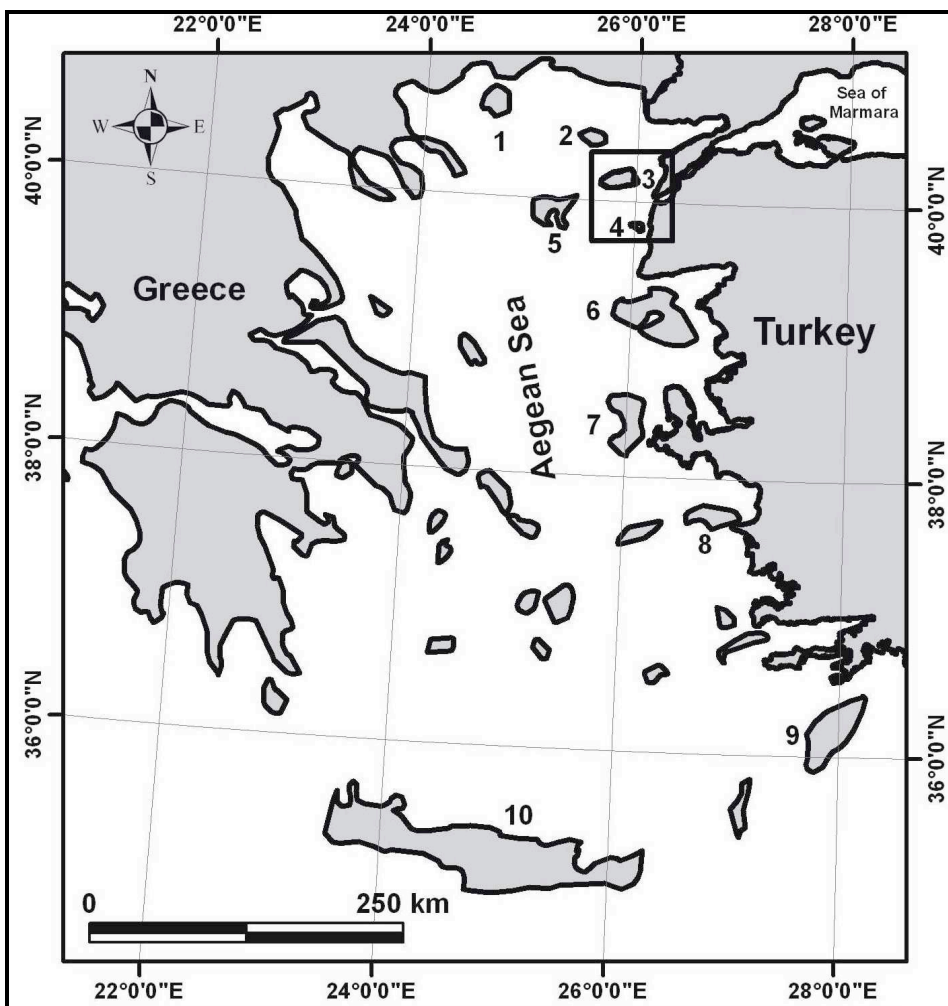


Figure 1 - Location of Gökçeada and Bozcaada islands in the Aegean Sea

- [1 -Thasos, 2 - Samontrace, 3 - Imbros, 4 - Tenedos, 5 - Limnos, 6 - Lesbos, 7 – Chios, 8 – Samos, 9 – Rhodos, 10 – Kriti]

In Turkish, 'Rum' usually refers to a person who belongs to the Christian Orthodox religion, who speaks the modern Greek language and who is *not* a Greek citizen (thus, one speaks of Istanbul, Cypriot, and American Rums). In the Greek language, however, 'Rum' is usually simply synonymous with 'Greek' or 'Hellen' (Millas, 2004: 195), referring to the Greek cultural and political community. There is not, in any case, any standard academic term for referring to this community (Babul, 2006: 53).

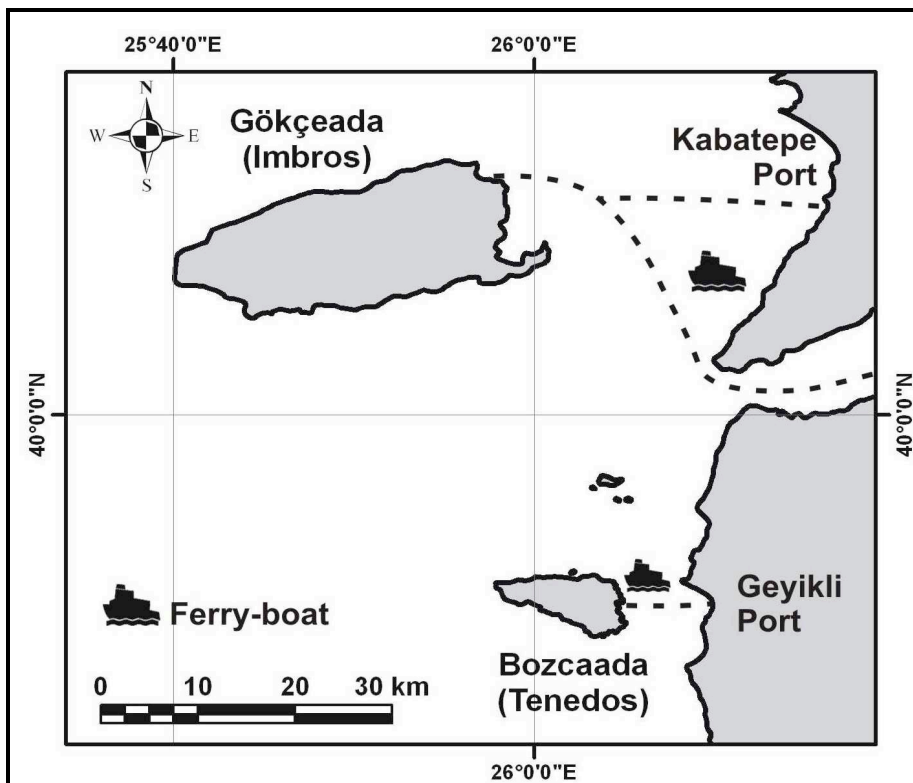


Figure 2 - Location of Gökçeada and Bozcaada and the adjacent coast

An estimated 3000-4000 Rums live in Turkey today (MFA, 2008), and although most reside in Istanbul, 250–300 others live in Gökçeada and Bozcaada. The population composition of these islands underwent considerable change over the course of the 20th Century, with significant Rum emigration, often to Greece, particularly during periods of tension between Greece and Turkey. As a result, the Rum communities of Gökçeada and Bozcaada declined drastically, though today they co-exist peacefully with the majority Turkish population. Small islands tend to develop relatively homogenous and intimate societies with strong senses of common identity (King, 2009:58), yet Gökçeada and Bozcaada do not fit the mould: Religious differences and ethnic identity have led to the Rum and Turkish communities becoming insular and maintaining separate communal lives. Although these communities share a common past and space, they have given the islands a bicultural character. In today's cultural and geopolitical climate though, the islands offer the opportunity to develop relations between Greece and Turkey. Central to this opportunity are the fairs that form an important part of the religious and social organisation of the insular Christian Orthodox Rum communities. These fairs are the subject of the present study.

Tourism is still a developing industry in Gökçeada and Bozcaada and does not generate the income and employment that it does in the Greek Aegean but it is, nonetheless, a

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pillar of the limited economies of these Turkish islands (Pekcan, 2001: 70). At present, tourism in Gökçeada and Bozcaada is mainly of the recreational coastal variety, which limits the tourism season to June through September. There is hope, however, that the islands’ cultural and religious aspects could promote tourism at other times of the year. Events such as religious fairs, Christmas, and other feasts and festivals spread across the calendar could, combined with visits to historic religious buildings like as churches and monasteries, support year-round faith tourism. Joint tourism organisations could contribute positively to relations between the Rum and Turkish communities and between Greece and Turkey in general. This study will consider the unique potential of the Gökçeada and Bozcaada fairs as far as this is concerned.

Turkey is a preferred tourism destination for Greeks. In 2007, Turkey hosted a total of 23,340,911 tourists, of which 447,950 were Greek citizens. Greece often ranks among the top ten tourist-providing countries to Turkey (2003, 2004, and 2005). In 2007, recreational holiday (208,598) was the most common reason for Greek tourists to visit Turkey, followed by ‘visiting relatives/friends’ in a distant second (58,855). Religious visits to Turkey from Greece numbered 12,994, which can be compared with religious visits from another Islamic country, Iran (50,948), and the Christian countries of Russia (9415) and Bulgaria (8251) (TurkStat, 2007b). In total, 137,787 foreigners visited Turkey for religious reasons. In fact, countries with large Orthodox Christian communities (Ukraine, Russia, Greece, and Bulgaria) account for four of the top ten markets for Turkish tourism. This suggests considerable potential for tourism strategies based on Orthodox Christian events and activities. Tourism promotions could boost demand for vacations in Gökçeada and Bozcaada during Easter and Christmas, perhaps helping to transform the islands into vibrant cultural centres. Demand for such holidays could come not only from Rums but from interested individuals of other nationalities as well.

Material and Methodology

Research for this article was undertaken in 2008, focussing on the fairs held at Tepeköy and Dereköy in Gökçeada and in and around the Aghia Paraskevi monastery and the plaza in Bozcaada. At both fairs, interviews and questionnaires were conducted with the Rums participating in the activities, the individuals organising the activities and the religious officials presiding over them. It must be noted though that many of the Rums had reservations about participating in our interviews on account of prior negative experiences with researchers. As a result, researchers had considerable difficulty completing the questionnaires and the author’s proposal to carry out interviews during the questionnaire process was largely rejected by the Rums. Assisted by members of the Rum community and other locals, we opted instead to conduct short interviews that focused on nine questions. The questionnaire was applied to a total of 60 people from the two islands (Table 1). In addition, information on changes that have occurred over the past 50-60 years was garnered from individuals in the older age brackets.

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gökçeada	31	51.7
Bozcaada	29	48.3
Total	60	100.0

Table 1 - Distribution by island of individuals to whom questionnaire was applied

Gökçeada and Bozcaada

Bozcaada is located 22 km south of the entrance to the Çanakkale Strait/Dardanelles (Figure 2). It has a surface area of 37.6 km² (Figure 3) and has 17 outlying islands and islets of various sizes (Kaptan, 2008: 19). The Geyikli ferry pier is 5.6 km from the city of Çanakkale and is 46.7 km from Gökçeada (Figure 2). Located at the southwestern end of the Gulf of Saros, Gökçeada is Turkey's largest island, with a surface area of 289.5 km² (Figure 4). Gökçeada is 51.5 km from Çanakkale and 22.5 km from Kabatepe Port on the Gelibolu Peninsula (Figure 2). The island has 95 km of coastline and is not far from the Greek islands of Limnos (18.2 km to the southwest) and Samothrace (21.7 km to the northwest). The port at Kuzu provides a connection between the island and the mainland and is 22.5 km from the port at Kabatepe in the west of the Gelibolu Peninsula and 53.1 km from Çanakkale (Figure 2).

Viniculture and wine products are central to the islands' economies and fishing is also an important industry. Since scheduled car ferry services began in 1996, tourism has increasingly come to be seen as an essential economic activity and income generator (Çenet, 2008:2). The islands' Mediterranean climate has led to the development of recreational coastal tourism, resulting in a brief tourism season from June through September (Yaşar, 2005: 213). Although Bozcaada has macro-Mediterranean climatic characteristics, its North Aegean location gives it somewhat cooler than usual summers (Akkan, 2004: 27). Gökçeada likewise possesses a Mediterranean climate, with relatively low seasonal variability



Figure 3 - Map of Bozcaada (Tenedos).

Although the third-largest island in Turkey, Bozcaada is the only Turkish county with no villages. There is only one town in Bozcaada, and this consists of the Cumhuriyet (Rum)

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and Alaybey (Turkish) quarters. Cumhuriyet includes buildings influenced by Rum architecture whereas Alaybey is characterised by Turkish architecture. In contrast, Gökçeada features a central town (Çınarlı) and nine outlying villages (Kaleköy, Eski Bademli, Yeni Bademli, Zeytinliköy, Tepeköy, Dereköy, Uğurlu, Eşelek, and Şirinköy).

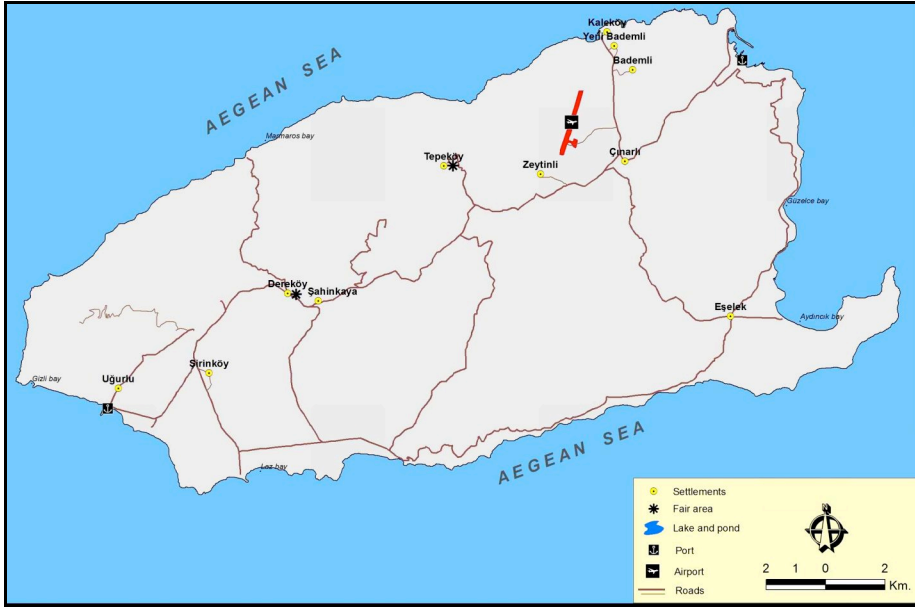


Figure 4 - Map of Gökçeada (Imbros).

The Cultural Development of Gökçeada and Bozcaada

Gökçeada, Bozcaada, Samothrace, and Thasos were among the first Aegean islands to be taken by the Ottoman Empire (Hayta, 2006: 9). Gökçeada and Bozcaada fell under Ottoman control in 1455–56, during the rule of Sultan Mehmet II (“The Conqueror”), immediately after the conquest of Istanbul. The islands’ ethnic, religious, and cultural structures remained unchanged under the generally tolerant Ottoman regime, but between 1912 (the Balkan War) and 1923 (the foundation of the Republic of Turkey), the islands were swept up in World War I and the Greek-Turkish conflict, changing hands many times. In 1922, when the Lausanne negotiations were launched, Rhodes and 12 other islands were controlled by Italy, and the remaining Aegean islands were under the control of Greece (Hayta, 2006: 241). The Lausanne Treaty¹ resulted in Turkey relinquishing its rights over all of the islands except for Gökçeada, Bozcaada, and the Tavşan (Rabbit) islands (Hayta, 2006: 259; Emecen, 2003: 61). Turkey successfully argued at the Lausanne Conference that it should retain control over Gökçeada and Bozcaada on account of their military importance and location close to the mouth of the Çanakkale Strait/Dardanelles (Mutlu, 2005: 107).

Islands are frequently associated with intensive migration but the nature, type, and sequence of migration affecting an island is intimately linked with the island’s history (King, 2009: 54). Due to their locations, Gökçeada and Bozcaada have long been

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scenes of migrations, not only on account of local conditions but also due to national and international influences (Özözen, 2005: 41). For example, in line with the Lausanne Treaty, 1923–25 witnessed the so-called 'Turkish-Greek Population Exchange', the compulsory migration that sent Turkish Rums to Greece on the one hand and Greek Muslims to Turkey on the other. It is estimated that between one and one and a half million people were relocated from Anatolia to Greece and *vice versa* during this exchange. Of these, about 600,000 people were moved to Turkey from Greek territories (Millas, 2004: 223; Ağanoğlu, 2001: 306, Arı, 2000: 177). Only the Turks residing in Western Thrace and the Rums living in Istanbul, Gökçeada, and Bozcaada were exempt from this process. Regardless, external circumstances – such as the Cyprus problem, the conflict in Western Thrace, and the Aegean dispute – caused a series of partial Rum emigrations from the islands. Today, just 25 Rums live in Bozcaada, which has a total population of 2276 (TurkStat, 2007a). Of Gökçeada's 8672 residents in 2007, there were 167 Rums. By contrast, in 1912, there were 9555 people living in Gökçeada, just 99 of whom were Turks. In the same year, Bozcaada's population totalled 6620, just 1200 of whom were Turks. Bozcaada's population distribution of the early 20th Century differs significantly from its distribution today as well (Karpat, 2003: 154). Thus, the vast majority of Rums emigrated even though this was not required by the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange. These population dynamics can be observed in the case of Gökçeada (Table 2).

Years	Turkish Population	Rum Population	Total
1912	99	9357	9456
1927	157	6555	6712
1950	200	6125	6325
1960	289	5487	5776
1970	4,020	2571	6591
1985	7,138	472	7610
1997	8,313	258	8571
2000	8,607	300	8907
2007	8,505	167	8672

Table 2 – Population distribution on Gökçeada
(Sources: Soydan, 2008; Özözen, 2005; PACE Report 2008)

Immigrants to Gökçeada tended to be internal migrants arriving from Anatolia whereas emigration tended to be international in nature, with Rums departing not only the island but Turkey as a whole. Even though the number of insular Rums has greatly decreased, Gökçeada still possesses a uniquely diverse population in its Aegean context, with migrants from various regions of Anatolia co-existing with the Rums (Özözen, 2005: 47).

The Rums who left the islands relocated to countries such as Australia, the USA, South Africa, and Greece in particular. Those insular Rums whose emigration was more or less involuntary tended to maintain soil- and sea-dependent lifestyles in their new homes, living largely off of agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing. In fact, such was the longing for the homeland that the insular Rum settlers of Salonika in Greece named their new settlement Nea Tenedos (New Bozcaada). A related issue is that these migrant insular Rum communities continue to participate in the religious fairs that take place on their ancestral islands. Furthermore, migrant islanders have established various organisations to promote cooperation and international solidarity among the various

expatriate Rum communities: thirteen Imbrian associations operate in different countries today (Özözen, 2005: 52), including the Imbrian Society of Melbourne-Australia, the Imbrian Brotherhood of South Africa, Sillogos Imvrion-Athens, and the Panimbrian Benevolent Society-USA.

On 14 April 1987, Turkey applied for full European Economic Community membership. The Copenhagen Summit of 22 June 1993 saw the Council of Europe determine criteria that candidate countries would have to meet as preconditions to full membership. The three groups of criteria, known as the Copenhagen Criteria, are political criteria, economic criteria, and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. One of the main issues dealt with in the political criteria is the protection of minorities from discrimination (European Council, 1993; Europa Glossary, 2009). Turkey's strong desire to join the European Union (EU) prompted the Turkish Grand National Assembly to make constitutional and political reforms along the lines of the Copenhagen Criteria, and negotiations for EU membership were subsequently launched. At the start of the 1990s, Turkey's Bozcaada and Gökçeada policy underwent a major shift with the lifting of the requirement for a special visa for migrated Rums who wished to visit the islands. This was followed by the offer of tourism management degree programmes and cheap government-backed credit for tourism-related enterprise. All of this has contributed to increasing numbers of expatriate Rums making visits to the islands, especially during the summertime, in order to attend traditional meals and family gatherings, participate in religious celebrations, and spend time with friends and relatives (Babul, 2006: 48). A more recent trend is the resettlement of some expatriate insular Rums, a result of Turkey's 2003 enactment of laws granting foreigners the right to acquire property *per* the Copenhagen Criteria. Indeed, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that there is nothing preventing the 60,000 expatriate Rums who settled in Greece from returning to Turkey.

Religious Fairs in Gökçeada and Bozcaada

Traditional fairs can acquire a variety of functions (economic, social, religious, recreational, etc.) over time. 79 such festivals take place in Turkey today (Çalışkan, 2008: 218), yet nearly all of them are predominantly economic events. Only three traditional fairs are religious in nature: A Muslim Turkish fair at the village of Tekke in Bolu (Western Black Sea) and two Orthodox Rum fairs in Bozcaada and Gökçeada. This lack of religious fairs today conceals their former prevalence during the Ottoman period, when fairs often contained religious and recreational elements (Şen, 1993: 11). In the past, commerce at fair sites in the cities was dependent on the presence of sufficient buyers and goods for sale. As a result, fairs were generally scheduled to coincide with the dates of official and/or religious bairams and festivals. There is a continuity of religious fair tradition that stretches from ancient Greece to Christian churches in Europe today (Göney, 1984: 157). Nevertheless, there is but scant documentary evidence concerning the purposes and meanings of the Gökçeada and Bozcaada fairs in former times: Be that as it may, it can be said is that these fairs possess no commercial functions today.

In the recent past, however, the religious and recreational functions of the Bozcaada and Gökçeada fairs were supplemented by their facilitation of social interaction among young insular Rum of both genders. The fair was once termed a 'marriage bazaar' (the Greek *nyfopazaro*) on account of the ease with which young people could chat with

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members of the opposite sex with minimal intervention from their elders. According to locals who remember the fairs of more than six decades ago, the fair was celebrated solely around the Bozcaada monastery and in various villages in Gökçeada, with pack animals being used to carry supplies to the fair sites. People would stay in the vicinity of the monastery and churches for about a week, during which time the butchers opened stalls, and fruit vendors sold their goods, for example, watermelons. Merchants arrived from outside the island to sell items for children, such as confectionary.

Rum islanders still attach special importance to maintaining their religion and traditions, and religious zeal is more or less a prerequisite for being a member of the insular Orthodox Rum community. The insular Rum grant their religion pride of place within their social organisation, to the extent that its importance supersedes that of other cultural characteristics (Erginsoy, 2006: 142). This attitude has contributed to the present state of the religious fairs. Rums generally hold social activities in or around religious buildings, and in nearly every village, the church is the primary communal meeting space, together with the adjoining primary school and gardens (Ağaryılmaz and Polat, 2002: 95). Churches assume a fundamental role in the organisation of the fairs. For instance, the Bozcaada fair is supported by the Komisizus Theotoku Rum Orthodox Foundation, and the fairs commence with religious services performed by the Fener Rum Patriarch or the Gökçeada Metropolitan (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - A religious ceremony held by the Rum Orthodox Community in the Aghia Paraskevi monastery garden prior to the start of fair entertainments (Bozcaada, 2008) (author's photograph).

The Bozcaada fair is held in the vicinity of the Aghia Paraskevi monastery. Religious services and festivities take place successively during the fair, which is held annually on

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25–27 July. Our interviews and observations of the 2008 fair suggest that about 400 people travelled to the fair from abroad in order to participate. This fair takes place in other Greek communities elsewhere, but Turkish Rums in particular view Aghia Paraskevi as their primary religious celebration. The Greek island of Lesbos, close to Bozcaada, also has a settlement called Aghia Paraskevi, and Lesbos is home to an annual Aghia Paraskevi feast, taking place in Plomari on 26 July. Furthermore, Aghia Paraskevi Day is celebrated in many parts of Cyprus, with a traditional fair in the Cypriot town of Paphos featuring various entertainments and booths selling handicrafts (Cyprus events web, 2009).

The Bozcaada and Gökçeada fairs feature both indoor and outdoor activities, and all ceremonies and entertainments are attended by visitors as well as locals, by young as well as old, by women as well as men. The entertainments and religious ceremonies in Bozcaada are held in the monastery garden (Figure 6), and in the evenings, the entertainments continue in the square in front of Bozcaada Castle while the religious ceremonies continue at the church. In Gökçeada, the entertainments are held in Dereköy and Tepeköy. For example, the 2008 Dereköy entertainments were held in a large, walled, private garden. In contrast, the Tepeköy fair entertainments took place in the village square, surrounded by coffee houses and taverns (Figure 7).



Figure 6 - Fair entertainments in Bozcaada monastery garden (author's photograph)

The Virgin Mary Fair (Panayia/Eorti Dispenagies), held annually in Gökçeada on 15–22 August, is celebrated by means of various social, religious, and recreational activities. Over one thousand Rums travel from elsewhere in Turkey and abroad to take part in the festivities. The greater popularity of the Gökçeada Fair compared with the Bozcaada Fair is likely related to the large size of the local Rum population in the past. Additionally, the worldwide Orthodox Rum community attaches special importance to

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Gökçeada since this is the birthplace of Fener Rum Patriarch Bartholemeos. ‘The significant moment of presence on the island for the returning Rums appears as the celebration of the Panayia, which plays quite a central role in their return to the island. The Rum see themselves as being in their native land at the time of festival and see their obligation to keep the tradition going as their main reason for coming back’ (Babul, 2006: 48). Indeed, when visitors to the fairs were asked whether they had attended this particular fair before, a majority (77%) responded in the affirmative. This is especially true of the responses obtained from the Gökçeada fair (Table 3). In total, 46 of the 60 contributors replied that they had attended the same fair before, and these individuals were asked a follow-up question, namely whether they participated in the fair every year. A majority (65%) responded in the affirmative (Table 4). These results indicate that many of the Rum visitors to Gökçeada participate in the same fair almost every year and there is anecdotal evidence that increasingly greater importance is being attached to the Gökçeada fair as the years go by.



Figure 7 - Fair entertainments (including concerts and folk dancing) continue until late at night in Tepeköy Square (Gökçeada, 2008) (photograph by Barba Yorgo)

	Island		Total (Frequency)
	Gökçeada	Bozcaada	
Participants	28	18	46
Non-participants	3	11	14
Total	31	29	60

Table 3 - Number of visitors who had previously attended Gökçeada or Bozcaada fairs.

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Island	Participants	Non-participants	Total (Frequency)
Bozcaada	9	9	18
Gökçeada	21	7	28
Total	30	16	46

Table 4 - Annual participation of spectators in Bozcaada or Gökçeada fairs.

When 55 contributors were asked whether they visited the island every year, 33 (60%) stated that they did so. Strikingly, the rate of annual visits was again considerably higher in Gökçeada than in Bozcaada (Table 5). Participants at the Gökçeada fair seem to have stronger links to the island.

	Island		Total (Frequency)
	Gökçeada	Bozcaada	
Participants	25	8	33
Non-participants	5	17	22
Total	30	25	55

Table 5 - Spectators at the Bozcaada and Gökçeada fairs who visit the island in question every year.

Local research identified that in former times entertainments were held at all of the Rum villages in Gökçeada even though the fair is now held only in the villages of Dereköy and Tepeköy. These fairs represent the islands’ greatest social, cultural, religious, and tourism event, regularly attracting large numbers of visitors. The fairs determine the temporal and spatial relationships that the Rums have with the islands: The fair sites resemble ‘contact zones’ in which the orbits of expatriates – who historical and geographic circumstance have scattered to the ends of the Earth – briefly yet regularly intersect and, at this point of intersection, participants encounter their shared past (Bendrup, 2008; Pratt, 1992).

Out of the 60 participants surveyed, 48 (80%) were born in Turkey. The number of Greek- and foreign-born contributors is higher however at the Gökçeada fair (Table 6). Furthermore, a majority of participants travelled to the fairs from mainland Turkey. They tend to live in cities rather than on islands: Istanbul (17 people), Izmir (7), Çanakkale (2), Ankara (1), and Antalya (1). Among the questionnaire contributors was one individual from New York, as well as participants from Athens, Thessaloniki, and Kavala in Greece (Table 7).

Island	Place of birth (Country)			Total (Frequency)
	Turkey	Greece	Other	
Gökçeada	22	7	2	31
Bozcaada	26	3	-	29
Total (Frequency)	48	10	2	60

Table 6 - Distribution of visitors by country of birth

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Islands	Islands or Turkey	Athens	Kavala	New York	Thessaloniki	Total (Frequency)
Gökçeada	10	11	-	1	9	31
Bozcaada	22	3	1	-	3	29
Total	32	14	1	1	12	60

Table 7 - Distribution of visitors by the country/city of residence

Participants seem to use the fairs as means of maintaining links with their particular island. Thus, when 53 contributors were asked whether ‘they participated in any religious fairs on the other island (Gökçeada/Bozcaada) or in Greece’, only 7 answered in the affirmative while 47 stated that they did not participate in any other religious fairs whatsoever (Table 8). This suggests that place is more important to participants than the fair tradition itself. Moreover, expatriate insular Rums were interested primarily in their personal pasts, in the islands that they had left years earlier.

Island	Participants	Non-participants	Total (Frequency)
Gökçeada	4	24	28
Bozcaada	3	22	25
Total	7	46	53

Table 8 - Participation of spectators in fairs other than that in Bozcaada or Gökçeada.

Participant Satisfaction and Problems Encountered at the Fairs

Contributors generally rated the organisation of the religious fairs quite highly. A total of 14 people responded to the open-ended question of ‘In your opinion, what is the most important problem in and around the fair area?’ Eight responses concerned the Bozcaada fair, and six concerned the Gökçeada fair. Interviews and responses tended to highlight negative spatial use. For example, the two portable toilets set up in the Bozcaada fair area were considered insufficient to meet participants’ needs. The lack of necessary arrangements around the Bozcaada fair area was the primary complaint of participants at that event. Likewise, there were requests concerning the arrangements in Tepeköy square, where Gökçeada fair entertainments are held.

The entertainments at the Bozcaada fair were characterised by intimate and cooperative relations between the Rum and Turkish communities, and it was considered natural and appropriate for Turks to come and watch the games and folk dances. This was not the case in Gökçeada, where the Turkish community kept its distance, thus suggesting that its participation would have been unwelcome. When organisations to foster collaboration between the two ethnic communities are finally developed, it may be that problems and conflicts concerning Turkish involvement in the fair will be resolved over time (Table 9).

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Island	Too few toilets	Environmental design is insufficient	Marketing of event in Greece is insufficient	Narrow roads traffic problems	‘Turkish interest in the event prevents us from enjoying ourselves as a community’
Bozcaada	3	3	2	-	-
Gökçeada	-	2	-	2	2
Total (Frequency)	3	5	2	2	2

Table 9 - Primary problems encountered by visitors during island fairs.

The Potential of Island Fairs: Faith Tourism and Opportunities for Dialogue between Civilisations

An estimated 3000 to 5000 Rums visit Bozcaada and Gökçeada annually. On the face of it, these visitors come to participate in religious fairs and festivals such as Christmas and Easter. For instance, there were about 500 visitors to Gökçeada alone during Easter on 18–19 April 2009.

In Turkey, Rums have a total of 108 places of worship, 90 of which are open to the public. A number of buildings of importance to the Orthodox Christian community are located in Gökçeada and Bozcaada. Gökçeada, in particular, possesses numerous religious buildings dating back to the 18th Century and a number of these have been restored or are still intact and act as places of worship. The Gökçeada and Bozcaada Metropolitanate, one of the four metropolitanates of the Istanbul Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, is located in Gökçeada. Next to the metropolitanate is Gökçeada’s cathedral, the Koimesis Tis Theotokos (1835). The town centre also holds the large Hagia Barbara church. One of the oldest churches in Gökçeada is Hagios Georgios (1780), located in Zeytinliköy (Yurtseven, 2002: 48). The Aghia Marina church (1780) in Kaleköy was the former metropolitan cathedral and is complemented by nine monasteries in the vicinity. Dereköy houses the Aya Yorgi church (1784) on the plaza of the lower quarter, and the Church of the Virgin Mary (1775) nearby. The Hagi Katerini monastery is located 500 m from the village and is one of several monasteries around Dereköy. The Hagios Nikolaos church is on the coast by Marmaros Beach. The only church in Bozcaada belonging to the Orthodox community and open for worship is Panagia Kimisis (1869). Other important sites are the Aghia Paraskevi chapel in Ayazma and the ruins of Yıldızlı Church, about 1 km from the town centre.

Recently, the Turkish government has given permission for and helped fund the restoration of various Rum religious buildings in the islands. Restoration expenses of buildings belonging to non-Muslim communities are usually paid by the General Directorate for Foundations (GDF), a department affiliated with the Prime Minister’s Office. Restoration of the Bozcaada church bell tower was carried out with 280,000 YTL (approximately €120,000) allocated from the Promotion Fund of the Prime Minister’s Office. The Aghia Marina church has also been restored (Figure 8). Such government-funded initiatives help conserve the islands’ cultural richness and diversity, enhance their draw for tourists, and improve relationships between the Rum and Turkish communities and Greece and Turkey in general.



Figure 8 – Four storey clock tower of Panagia Kimisis church, the restoration of which was completed in 2007 with Turkish government contributions (Bozcaada, 2008) (author’s photograph)

There are also important religious buildings from the islands’ Ottoman period. One of these is Merkez Mosque (1813) in Gökçeada’s Çınarlı quarter. The 17th Century Köprülü Mehmet Pağa and Alaybey mosques are located in Bozcaada (Figure 9).



Figure 9 - Alaybey Mosque constructed in the 16th/17th Century (author’s photograph)

The province/city of Çanakkale, with which the islands are administratively affiliated, is a tourism destination as well. In 2007, 249,158 foreign tourists – of which 14,821 (6%) were Greek citizens – stayed in Çanakkale. By comparison, 7867 foreign tourists stayed in the islands (4,290 tourists in Bozcaada and 3,577 in Gökçeada). Tourists come to Bozcaada primarily from Germany, England, France, the Netherlands, the USA, and Australia while tourists to Gökçeada tend to live in Greece, England, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, and Denmark. These figures show the islands’ international tourist draw.

Tourism constitutes one of the main sources of income for islanders during the summer. There is an increasing tendency for individuals on both islands to open up their homes as guest-houses or bed and breakfasts (Figure 10). In 1994, there were just eight guest houses in Gökçeada; today, there are 65 guest houses out of a total of 94 accommodation facilities. In Bozcaada, guest-houses account for 38 out of 69 accommodation facilities. Of the 59 of our contributors who responded to the question of ‘Where do you stay on the island?’ 36 (61%) stated that they stayed either in their own house or in the house of a relative/friend who lived locally. 23 (39%) said that they stayed at a hotel or guest house. 17 (15%) contributors at the Bozcaada fair and 16

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(27%) of the contributors at the Gökçeada fair actually have a house of their own on the island.



Figure 10 – Guest-houses in the islands frequently feature traditional architecture (Bozcaada) (author’s photograph)

Islands	Own House	Friend’s or Relative’s House	Hotel or Pension	Total
Gökçeada	13	11	7	31
Bozcaada	9	2	17	28
Total (Frequency)	22	13	24	59

Table 10 - Distribution of participants by accommodation preference.

Mosques, churches, monasteries, and historic Rum and Turkish houses co-exist in Bozcaada and Gökçeada, manifesting cross-cultural interaction and providing the islands with faith and cultural tourism appeal. Unlike the tourism destinations in the Greek Aegean or on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast, such attractions provide important advantages in terms of competition. ‘Culture’ is certainly a boon to the local economy. It is, however, more than just a tourist attraction: culture also exerts an influence over the ways in which tourism develops (Scheyvens and Momsen, 2008: 500). Developing Bozcaada and Gökçeada for faith and cultural tourism could protect the islands from

the abrasive and artificialising effects of other forms of tourism, for example casino tourism, which has been mooted as a potential source of income. Promotion of tourism and preservation of the islands’ multicultural structure are mutually reinforcing.

Obstacles to Tourism Development

The brevity of the tourism season and the inadequacy of transportation system are the primary impediments to continued tourism development on the islands. The islands’ tourism season is largely limited to July and August. In 2006, a total of 24,675 tourists visited Bozcaada in July and August (Hamlacıbağı and Özkök, 2006: 404). The majority of Gökçeada’s 60,000 tourists came in the same two months. 90% of these tourists came from Turkey, and 10% came from abroad (Gürak and Genç, 2008: 121). Passenger and vehicle numbers on the ferry route between Bozcaada and the mainland peaked in August every year between 2000 and 2007, with July being the second-busiest month. June and September represent the shoulder season, and both of these months have tended to be about equally popular though recent years have seen September accrue a greater percentage of tourist arrivals. These statistics are borne out by the questionnaires, which show most people preferring to visit the islands in July and August (Table 11). Be that as it may, whereas none of the Bozcaada fair contributors preferred visiting the island in September, 13 Gökçeada fair contributors selected this month as ideal.

Islands	Preferred months				
	May	June	July	August	September
Gökçeada	5	16	31	30	13
Bozcaada	1	4	13	12	-
Total (Frequency)	6	20	44	42	13

Table 11 - Months when fair participants prefer to visit the islands.

Most of the islands’ artistic, cultural, and sporting activities occur in July and August. Two important open-air events take place in Gökçeada annually in August: The Gökçeada Film Festival and the Gökçeada Fair. Bozcaada possesses a richer cultural calendar, with events beginning in June, intensifying in July and August, and tapering out slowly into October. June has wine tasting days and the Kite Festival; July has sail races, the *Iliad* reading days, and Aghia Paraskevi Fair; August has the Bozcaada Festival; September has the Grape Harvest Festival; and October has the Mountain Bike Marathon Race.

The islands are in need of organisations that can help extend the tourism season. With their varied environmental and cultural characteristics, Gökçeada and Bozcaada could support a diverse tourism industry that is active throughout the year. Areas ripe for exploitation include built heritage (archaeological and historical sites), the folkloric environment, cultural traditions (such as Rum and Turkish folklife and foodways), the climate and scenery, and entertainment. In addition, the islands are quite close to Troy, Gallipoli, and Kazdağı (Mount Ida) National Park as well as other areas of historical and

archaeological interest, such as Assos, Alexandria Troas, and the Apollon Smintheus Temple.

Inadequate transportation poses a serious obstacle for the islands’ development. Ferries departing from Çanakkale link the islands to the mainland but ferry crossings are few and far between except for during the summer, and there is no public transport between the islands themselves. Additionally, even though both the Rum and Turkish communities of Gökçeada and Bozcaada agree that a sea connection with Greece would be beneficial, the Greek government has ruled out such a direct link, citing Schengen regulations. This is despite Schengen presenting no difficulty as regards connecting Greek and Turkish ports (Report of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, 2008). Turkey has constructed the customs buildings necessary for opening two ports in Gökçeada to international travel. A 2007 meeting of government and business representatives from Kavala (Greece) and Çanakkale (Turkey) evaluated the possibility of establishing a maritime link between the port of Kavala and that of Kepez (Çanakkale). The Greek side was supportive of the idea of opening this route and initiating a regular connection (Tezcan, 2008: xiii). If direct express ferry routes could be established between Greece and Gökçeada and between Gökçeada and Bozcaada, a sharp spike in tourism demand could be anticipated. There is also the potential for developing joint tourism strategies and programmes involving creating maritime links between the islands in the Greek and Turkish Aegean (Figure 11).

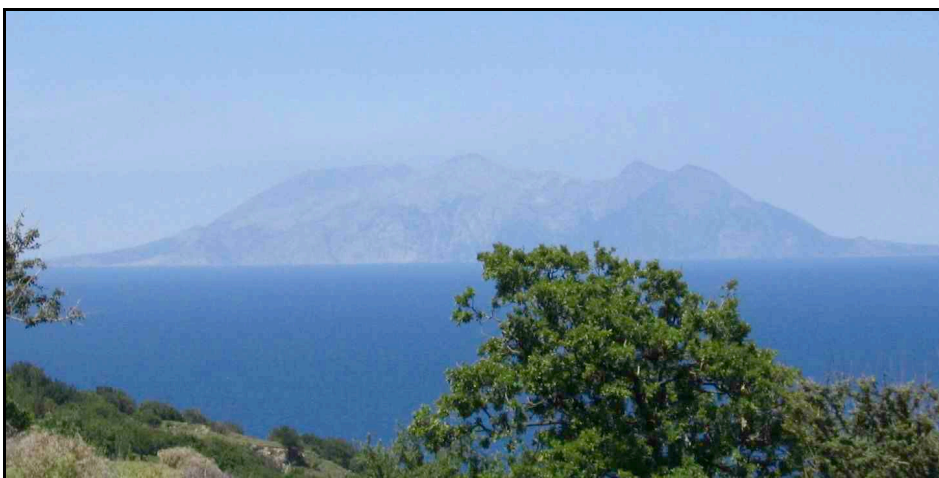


Figure 11 - Gökçeada and Bozcaada are close to many Greek islands. Photograph of Samothrace (Greece), taken from Tepeköy (Gökçeada) (author’s photograph)

The airport in Gökçeada, construction of which began in 1997, is currently open for civil aviation, and its runway length of 1200 m makes it suitable for small planes. When completed, the airport’s runway will measure 2040 m, permitting large passenger planes to land. The airport’s completion will contribute to the islands’ further integration into the international environment. Improvement of transport provision along the lines discussed in this study are of paramount importance to local tourism growth.

Conclusion

The current political situation makes it difficult to establish and operate new organisations aimed at fostering positive relations between Turkey and Greece. In light of this, event tourism provides an excellent opportunity: The antiquity and traditional nature of the island fairs make them a politically and culturally acceptable setting for engaging in intercultural dialogue. The music groups, local governors and NGOs from Turkey and Greece that participate in the fairs tend to exchange mutual messages of peace and goodwill. Recently, friendship visits and messages of goodwill have been exchanged between Gökçeada and Bozcaada and various Greek settlements (Kalivia, Nea Halkodania, Iasmos, Egros, Paros, and Neapolis), all with the aim of developing collaborative networks.

Expatriate Rums visit the islands with their families not only during the summer holidays but also for Christmas, Easter and the religious fair weeks. The island fairs, so central to insular Orthodox Rum identity, provide an interface for Greece and Turkey to build positive relations. On the local level, these events also allow the insular Rum and Turkish communities the chance to overcome past hostility and mistrust. Indeed, the fairs are more or less unique in being large events that attract the participation of both Rums and Turks. Especially for those visitors from elsewhere in Turkey or abroad, these fairs often represent their first instance of Rum-Turkish cultural interaction, and the fairs continue to draw new participants. These special occasions produce an atmosphere in which different cultures and religions can share in the entertainment and work to understand one another's beliefs. The religious fair tradition, which dates back to the Byzantine period, is on the cusp of attaining new functions, namely overcoming entrenched prejudices and developing tolerance in the North Aegean. Further development of the fairs holds out a great deal of hope for Gökçeada and Bozcaada, for Rums and Turks, for Greece and Turkey.

Considering the limited economies of Gökçeada and Bozcaada, faith tourism activities could make a significant contribution to local economic development. The growing stature of the islands as Christmas and Easter destinations could help cement their place in the faith tourism market. The fact that these are Turkish islands that have gained prominence on account of Rum festivals makes them ideal as targets for joint Greek-Turkish initiatives and investment. Local collaborative work is also possible on such issues as agriculture, tourism, fishing, viticulture, wine production, and sea transport.

The cultural and religious characteristics of Gökçeada and Bozcaada are more than mere tourist attractions; they contribute to dialogue between civilisations. Such a contribution cannot just be limited to fair days. The islands could host studies, meetings, conferences and festivals on inter-civilisation peace and tolerance. In this manner, Gökçeada and Bozcaada could develop as exemplars of regional development and of the rich Aegean culture in the 21st Century.

Acknowledgement

I would like to extend my thanks to my colleague Dr. Cengiz Akbulak for his valuable contributions in preparing the maps.

Endnotes

1 The Lausanne Treaty, dated 24 July 1923, and the Treaty of Ankara (Traité d’Amitié, de Neutralité, de Conciliation et d’Arbitrage/Friendship, Neutrality, Conciliation and Arbitration), dated 30 October 1930, are pivotal events in the history of Greek-Turkish relations. For this issue, see Demirözü, 2008; Soysal, 1983.

2 The Turkish constitution recognises the property and inheritance rights of all citizens under Article 35. In addition, property rights are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (MRG Report, 2007). Rums who hold Turkish citizenship are under no restrictions as regards property. However, denaturalised Rums are considered foreigners. The essentials concerning foreigners’ acquisition of property in Turkey were dealt with in Title Deed Law No. 2644, dated 1934. On 3 July 2003 though, new legislation was passed that facilitated foreigners’ acquisition of property in Turkey. The provision of this law, which removed barriers to the sale of property to foreigners, was later annulled on 14 March 2005 by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Turkey. The Law, including the recent regulations with respect to foreigners’ acquisition of property, was enacted on 15 July 2008. Furthermore, legislation has recently been enacted that facilitates the demands of minorities in Turkey to acquire property using community foundations. The improved law allows 161 religious minority foundations, recognised by the General Directorate for Foundations (GDF), to acquire property. The GDF reports that there have been 1,263 applications by 121 foundations for acquiring property since the law amendment (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

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