The organization of subjects in a major bookstore in Ankara offers a visitor clues about the peculiarities of a Turkish discourse on cultural heritage. In a large section that, for lack of a better term, could be labeled “Anatolia,” one can find a Turkish translation of the *Iliad*, a catalog with exquisite pictures of Hellenistic sculpture, a dictionary of “Anatolian gods,” an anthology of Turkish folk poetry, compilations of children’s bedtime stories featuring the tale of the mythic King Midas or the folk hero Keloğlan, an academic dissertation about Bronze Age cities, and a compilation of Turcoman handicrafts, all of which may be placed next to posters of heavily restored archaeological monuments (most often the Celsius Library of Ephesus) or a yacht lost in a turquoise bay, or juxtaposed with reproductions of proto-Hittite statuettes from Alaca Höyük—the examples can be multiplied. Hence one is compelled to ask: What taxonomy of culture brings all these works and objects together? What project is served by the forcible elimination of disciplinary boundaries between archaeology, anthropology, classical philology, literature, art history, and architecture? Why is this discourse so adamant in negating distinctions between “high” and “popular” cultures, the courtly artistic traditions of the past and the vernacular? And towards what persistent ideological ends?

In the writing of the histories of art and culture of Turkey, the trope of Anatolia has historically interseced with competing political projects. For a generation shaped by defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, Anatolia, though at the time no less ethnically heterogeneous than Ottoman Macedonia, came to be seen as the source of Turkishness. It was during the last years of the Ottoman Empire that ethnographic expeditions were sent to the heartland to determine its ethnic make up, and that Anatolia—poverty-stricken and “real”—was first contrasted to “Turan,” the mythic homeland of the Turks in Central Asia. In the 1930s the Republic, under the one-party rule of the Republican People’s Party (RPP), made Anatolia a central metaphor of a national myth of origin, one that sought to establish that the contemporary Turks were the autochthonous “race” of the land. The Neolithic civilizations of Central Anatolia were embraced as an alternative heritage, one that facilitated Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s modernizing reforms and the break with the Islamic traditions of the empire. Corporatist and ruralist ideas (Köycülük) continued to shape the perceptions of Anatolia in the 1940s among both “progressive” and “conservative” authors, who adopted positions that occasionally conflicted with the cultural policies of RPP.

The transformation of Anatolia into an organizing paradigm of aesthetic culture was initiated in the mid-1950s, in the writings of a group of public intellectuals associated with “Anatolian humanism,” or “Blue Anatolia” (*Mavi Anadolu*). Departing from the racialist paradigm of the early Republic, the “Blueists” (*Maviciler*) forcefully argued that all the civilizations that flourished in Anatolia from prehistoric times to the present constitute a cultural continuum and should therefore be embraced as the cultural forbearers of contemporary Turkey. Sabahattin Eyüboğlu (1908–73), who had previously played a leading role as a writer, translator, and educator in the state-sanctioned “humanism” of the 1940s, shaped the group’s positions concerning cultural policy and public education. The novelst Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı (1886–1973), who wrote under the name Halikarnas Balakçısı, provided the foundations of a characteristically millenialist theory of history, while the philologist Azra Erhat (1915–82) contributed her translations and anthologies of ancient Greek texts. By 1971 “Anatolian humanism” amounted to a close-knit and meta-historical narrative of cultural heritage. While embracing all past civilizations, the Blueists clearly privileged some episodes in the history of the land: the Hittites, because—or so the Blueists believed—they served as a bridge between the “first” civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Aegean world; Troy, because the Trojans were the “aborigi-
nal” people of Anatolia, who, not unlike the Turks of the early twentieth century, resisted a “Greek” occupation; Ionia, because the Ionians gave the West the Homeric legend and initiated the world’s first philosophical enlightenment. The histories of Islamic art written under the influence of Blue Anatolia tended to emphasize individual creators over courtly traditions, as counterparts of the figure of the genius-artist in Renaissance Europe.⁵

This essay presents an analysis of the discourse on “Anatolia” as both a historiographic category and an aesthetic ideal. I shall treat “Anatolia” as an aesthetic discourse precisely because its chief metaphors, while contingent on historical circumstances and political programs at the time of their enunciation, have outlived those initial conditions. I will begin by outlining a prehistory of the “Anatolia” discourse in the revolutionary historiography of the 1930s. Focusing on the years between 1954 and 1971, I shall then examine the recurrent metaphors of Anatolian humanism within a wide spectrum of interdisciplinary work, such as anthropological survivalism and cultural diffusionism, through which an organicist system is made manifest. A study of the organicist paradigms that underlie Anatolia is, I believe, useful in dismantling the modern Turkish project of aestheticizing the nation and points to some of the paradoxes of cultural modernism at large. Of particular interest for this study are the ways “Anatolia” translated a modernizing ideological project (such as the building of a socially and culturally cohesive nation, Westernization, and rejection of cosmopolitanism) into lasting interpretive categories of art and culture, working as a device both of aesthetic distinction and of cultural authentication.

THE AUTOCHTHON AND THE AUTHENTIC:
THE TURKISH HISTORY THESIS AND ITS
AFTERLIFE

Printed in 1932 for Turkish schools, Tarih I (History I) prefigures in a few sentences what has since become a major concern of Turkish historiography of culture:

Who created Mediterranean civilization?...The tribe [that founded the first Mediterranean civilization] was the Turks who had been driven out of the Turkish motherland of Central Asia...Until not so long ago, people were so misinformed that they imagined and assumed an autonomous Greek civilization in the entire Mediterranean basin...The first inhabitants of the Aegean Sea, just like those of the land west of the Aegean and of those of Thrace, belonged to the same root and race (they were Turkish).⁶

The unnamed “land west of the Aegean Sea” is, one may assume, Hellas—in the nineteenth-century Romantic imagination the site of the origin of Western European civilization—while the “misinformed” are the educated classes of Europe, brought up in the paradigms of philhellenic humanism.

Having fought the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22) against modern Greece and its Western allies, the revolutionaries led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk came to engage in the 1930s with the idea of the West and its cultural origin. A staunchly independent and sovereign Republic’s suspicions of the imperialist West were tempered by its founders’ faith in the Western idea of progress. Unlike the Ottoman reformists of an earlier generation, the founders of the Republic believed that cultural Westernization, along with technical modernization, was essential for the participation of Turkey in “contemporary civilization.” And yet, as Sibel Bozdoğan has observed in her history of the Turkish architectural culture of the era, the Turkish Republic aspired “to be Western in spite of the West”—and not merely due to the political hostility of the Great Powers and the role they had played in the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The Western scholars who had hitherto studied Turkey had remained within the confines of an Orientalist paradigm, which represented the Levant as an unchanging civilization in permanent contrast to Europe. Although acknowledged as soldiers and rulers of Muslim empires, “the Turks” had figured in Western studies as inferior to Arabian and Persian civilizations.⁷

The revolutionary history of the Turkish Republic not merely rejected the philhellenic scholarly tradition—that Hellenes created an autonomous and exemplary Western civilization in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE—but also ventured to revise the Orientalist discourse concerning the Turks and the role they had played in history.

In 1931 the Society for the Study of Turkish History (Türk Tarihini Tetkik Cemiyeti)—later renamed the Turkish History Society, was charged with the mission of counteracting the philhellenic and Orientalist bias of European histories by means of a national narrative that could be implemented in republican public education.⁸ Convened in Ankara July 2–12, 1932, under the aegis of Atatürk, the First Turkish History Congress produced a twofold Turkish History