

Turkish President restates his belief that Muslims discovered America

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Christopher Columbus has been removed from the Turkish school syllabus after President Erdogan claimed Muslim sailors discovered the Americas in the 12th century.

In his initial remarks, [reported](#) over the weekend, Erdogan said; "it is alleged that the American continent was discovered by Columbus in 1492. In fact, Muslim sailors reached the American continent 314 years before Columbus, in 1178."

The President has since defended his comments, which were widely mocked, stating that his critics "have never believed a Muslim can do such a thing."

Columbus has now been removed from Turkish school textbooks, and President Erdogan said that "an objective writing of history will show the contribution of the East, the Middle East and Islam to the sciences and arts."

In spite of apparently widespread derision, including criticism from opposition newspapers, Erdogan stood by his comments. Suggesting that his theory should be taught in Turkish classrooms, he said that "a big responsibility falls on the shoulders of the national education ministry."

"If this history of science is written objectively, it will be seen that Islamic geography's contribution to science is much better than what's known."

The Turkish President hit out at critics, saying that "very respected scientists in Turkey and the world" agree with his theory but that "some youth of our country have begun objecting to this without doing any research or paying attention to discussions. Not only youths, but also some very senior figures have begun disputing it."

Erdogan's claim is based on a description in Columbus' diaries, where the explorer described a mountain as being Mosque-like. [The Times](#) (£) reports that "most historians believe it was a metaphor to describe the shape of a mountain" rather than a literal description of an actual Mosque.

Erdogan is seen to have moved Turkey away from secularism in the past decade, and today Mark Lowen reports for the [BBC](#) that "Erdogan's 'New Turkey' drifts towards isolation." Erdogan's rule has also seen several steps towards authoritarianism and Islamism, [The Economist](#) reports that the number of Sunni clerical schools has doubled in the past five years alone.

The removal of Christopher Columbus is not the only change made to Turkey's beleaguered textbooks. Two weeks ago, [AFP](#) reported that pictures of genitals in biology textbooks had been replaced with images of "fluffy ducklings, cute polar bears and a human mother with her newborn baby."

After new "moral codes" were introduced by Erdogan's government, a number of "sexually explicit" words like "breast" have also been removed, according to the report.

Erdogan's remarks are similar to improbable claims made by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month, who argued that genetic science and cosmetic surgery were first invented by ancient Indians.

Modi cited Karna and Ganesha as evidence of this ancient scientific knowledge and said: "We can feel proud of what our country achieved in medical science at one point of time. We all read about Karna in the Mahabharata. If we think a little more, we realise that the Mahabharata says Karna was not born from his mother's womb. This means that genetic science was present at that time. That is why Karna could be born outside his mother's womb."

"We worship Lord Ganesha. There must have been some plastic surgeon at that time who got an elephant's head on the body of a human being and began the practice of plastic surgery."

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