

Archaeological research at Aphrodisias in 2020

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Although the corona virus reduced our campaign, we got much useful work done at Aphrodisias this summer. For a month in June to July, our team focused on study in the depots, research for publication and conservation. The ancient monuments were carefully checked; all vegetation was cut and cleared from the site; new information panels were set up; and material for publication projects was documented in the depots. The focus of depot work was on finds from the Tetrapylon Street, South Agora and House of Kybele.

The Tetrapylon Street runs north to south from the Tetrapylon to the Theatre, and its excavation, begun in 2008, is designed to investigate a key urban artery and to bring new information about late antique, Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman Aphrodisias. The completion of the excavation in 2020 was delayed due to the pandemic. Important publication work, however, was carried out on the finds. All objects for a planned collaborative monograph were drawn, photographed and documented in detail. They present a remarkable historical profile from Roman to Ottoman times.

The South Agora/Place of Palms was the city's second public square, measuring 215m × 70m. Recent excavation in 2012 to 2017, funded by Mica and Ahmet Ertegun, has shown that it was an urban park with a long water-basin (170m × 30m) surrounded by palm trees. The complex was 'the place of palms' mentioned in a sixth-century poem inscribed on its East Gate. Current work is focused on the restoration of the marble perimeter of the pool and on publishing a monograph that describes its excavation and history. In 2020, the study of finds for publication was completed, and the whole complex was cleared of vegetation and plants. The restoration work, generously sponsored by Mr Ömer Koç and the Geyre Vakfı, will resume in 2021.

The East Gate (or 'Agora Gate') of the urban park was a colossal two-storeyed columnar façade. In 2020, new research on its inscribed dedication suggested the monument belonged not in the mid-second century AD as previously thought, but in the late first century AD. The carved ornament was photographed and studied; its character is consistent with this revised chronology.

A new project was begun at the Civil Basilica in 2018 to restore parts of its façade and display Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices, which was inscribed on the façade's marble panelling in AD 301. The building was cleared of plant growth, earlier conservation work controlled and the geotextile covering renewed where necessary. Anastylis will resume in 2021.



Aphrodisias, North Agora: clearing of vegetation (2020).

The House of Kybele, an impressive late antique mansion, was excavated by Kenan Erim between the 1960s and 1980s at the northeastern city wall in conjunction with a modern village water channel from which the main parts of the Zoilos Frieze had come in the 1950s. Formerly called the Water Channel House, the complex has been renamed the House of Kybele after a striking late antique cult figure of the goddess that was found in it. A new project aims to study, conserve and publish the house and its finds. The area was cleared and the standing remains mapped in a new state plan in 2019. In 2020 the locations of all the finds excavated in the house were determined and the house itself was cleared of plant growth. Objects to be included in the publication were identified and documented.

Coin finds from 2019 were studied, and the main catalogue of excavation coins, from 1997 to 2019, is now complete. Particular attention was paid to the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic coins from the Tetrapylon Street for its planned collaborative publication.

Study of excavated pottery was focused on Byzantine and Islamic material. The finds from 2019 were sorted and arranged in groups of medieval pottery from the Tetrapylon Street, Basilica and South Agora. A particular focus was the material found in the Tetrapylon Street from 2008 to 2019, in preparation for its publication. A reliable stratigraphic chronology of the street's main occupation phases was constructed, and, as a consequence, an interesting new historical narrative of post-antique Aphrodisias is emerging.

It is striking above all that there are significant finds belonging to the period of the Byzantine 'Dark Age' (seventh to ninth century). Ceramics of this period are not always present at Anatolian sites and their assessment can be difficult.

A repertoire of kitchen and storage shapes could be identified, most suitable for daily use and fired in a strong dark-red colour.

Work on inscriptions focused on our planned corpus of the inscriptions of Aphrodisias being prepared by Angelos Chaniotis. Of the ca 900 inscriptions found at the site between 1961 and 1994, ca 600 have already been published by Joyce Reynolds and Charlotte Roueché. Their locations in the excavation-house depots, in the museum depots and on the site were checked. About 150 inscriptions in the museum depots were identified and photographed, and their transcriptions checked. Two new inscriptions from the surrounding area were brought in to the museum and recorded: (1) a late Hellenistic funerary stele from Ataköy for a woman named Artemis, daughter of Eupolemos, and (2) the lower part of a base of the Roman period, also with a funerary text, from Antioch-on-the-Meander.

The publication programme remains a high priority. Editing of the next site monograph is well advanced: A. Wilson and B. Russell (eds), *The Place of Palms: An Urban Park at Aphrodisias* (Aphrodisias 12). The manuscript for a new monograph by M. Crawford – *Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices* (Aphrodisias 13) – was completed, and photographs and drawings were prepared for a new reconstruction of the Edict inscribed on the Basilica façade to be included in the volume.

A new museum project to cover the existing courtyard of the Aphrodisias Museum, sponsored by Lucien Arkas, was begun in 2019, and in 2020 detailed planning continued with the project architects, ARTI-3 of Izmir. A delicately decorated Roman fountain basin (see photo below), brought from Karacasu, was restored and set up on a custom-made modern base in the garden of the Aphrodisias Museum. A relief from the Aphrodisias Sebasteion, *Claudius with Land and Sea Figures*, was requested on loan for an exhibition in Istanbul. It was dismantled from its museum installation and crated for transport. A large photograph was mounted in its place in the sequence of reliefs in the Sevgi Gönül Hall.



Aphrodisias: large decorated Roman fountain basin, restored and mounted in the museum garden (2020).



Aphrodisias: Temple of Aphrodite converted into a church, after cleaning (2020).

The Aphrodisias team lost a most valued member this year, Jim Coulton, who died in Edinburgh in August 2020. Jim was an inspiring archaeologist and historian of ancient architecture. He worked at Oinoanda and Balboura, where he led a six-year survey published in two pioneering volumes, *The Balboura Survey* (2012). At Aphrodisias Jim was working on the Temple of Aphrodite and its conversion into a Christian church. He had found out the precise original position of every block that was redeployed from the temple to make the church. He left a complete manuscript for a monograph on the subject. Jim was a person of unfailing generosity and unusual modesty. He will be much missed at Aphrodisias.

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