

Archaeological research at Aphrodisias in 2021

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In spite of Covid-19, we had an outstanding nine-week season with a lot of exciting results that were achieved by a dedicated team of the vaccinated. The terrible fires that raged across Turkey came close. For several nights we saw the hills above nearby Karacasu glowing red with the forest blaze, but the fire did not come down onto the valley floor where Aphrodisias sits. We were lucky.

Our headline achievements were in the Basilica and Street, and lots of other good things were done for the Sebasteion, the Place of Palms and our marble sarcophagi. There were important new finds – most dramatic, a new late antique philosopher bust.

Basilica. In the Civil Basilica, we completed the excavation of the splendid mosaics in the side aisles (dated in the AD 350s by the governor who paid for them) and a team of student architects documented them in detailed and hand-coloured large-scale drawings. Both photos and drawings are needed to understand how the patterns and motifs work. We also mounted the first set of display panels with the text of the Edict of Maximum Prices of the emperor Diocletian (AD 301) – in Latin, Turkish and English. The edict is an extraordinary list, originally inscribed on the façade of the Basilica, of 1,400 goods and services available in the empire – from chariots, lions and slaves to footwear and the salaries of bath-attendants – all in a forlorn attempt to curb rampant inflation. The new panels are aligned on the side walls of the Basilica and constitute a unique display of this fascinating document.

Street. In the Tetrastylon Street, we worked especially on the period around AD 600 and the subsequent life of our highly unusual Dark Age Complex. The colonnades of the late Roman street were built in the sixth century AD, and we learned this year from its masons' marks that the street

paving was a one-shot project of the same time. No less than 540 masons' marks were recorded by our epigraphists inscribed on the street's large blue-grey marble pavers. The street buildings were destroyed in a huge earthquake of about AD 620, after which the Dark Age Complex grew up on top of the collapsed debris, during the seventh and eighth centuries (these were the *really* dark centuries). The structure is a remarkable three-unit complex of some ambition among more vernacular housing.

There were lots of finds from our exciting Dark Age Complex: an inscribed votive altar, fragments of wall mosaic, a lead seal of a church notary, a pilaster capital with the figure of a peasant pulling a thorn from his foot and a magnificent over-life-size portrait bust found reused under a seventh-century wall. It represents a long-haired bearded philosopher who wears the rolled headband of a priest. The bust was made around AD 400 and so was in use for a comparatively short time before it was recycled into the wall foundation. It is a high-grade piece of work and a classic Aphrodisian survival.

Interesting fragments of marble statuary also came from the investigation of the street drain where it passes in front of the Sebasteion Propylon. These pieces had been used as building rubble in the drain walls when the level of the street had been raised in the sixth century, and they include a female head that probably came from one of the Julio-Claudian reliefs of the peoples of empire that stood in the Sebasteion's North Building.

Other fieldwork. We also made strong progress on the conservation of the 170m-long pool in the Place of Palms. The repair of its southern inner wall was completed, and the battered head of a woodland satyr was found reused in its interior. A new project was begun on the Sebasteion Temple



Basilica, with Urban Park/Place of Palms behind.



Basilica, mosaic floor (AD 350s) conservation.



Philosopher bust, ca AD 400.

to assess how much of its elegant Corinthian columnar façade might be restored. A large new section of one of its columns was excavated nearby, and the positioning of all its surviving columns and architrave and frieze blocks was researched. A new project on the House of Kybele and its City Wall neighbourhood began with detailed depot work on all its old finds, including several boxes of perfectly documented bronze vessels recovered in the 1960s that can be reconnected with their find contexts with precision. There was also much work on the study and documentation of coins, inscriptions and ceramics (especially our vital new ceramic chronology of the ‘dark’ seventh to ninth century).

Monographs. Publication remains a sacred duty, and much work was carried out on the next volumes in our site series. Well on their way towards the press are three monographs, on Diocletian’s Price Edict, on the Place of Palms and on Middle Byzantine Aphrodisias. They will be *Aphrodisias* volumes 12–14.

New sarcophagi. Three inscribed marble sarcophagi, found together by the museum in late 2020 about 2km to the east of the site, were recorded and entered in our sarcophagus database (currently it contains about 850 items). The new pieces represent a typical cross section of such Aphrodisian products: (1) a fragmentary garland sarcophagus of around AD 200 that belonged to a woman with the unusual name of Antonia Agapomene; (2) a plain sarcophagus with a long, erased text of the later second century with a secondary inscription of the mid- to later third century of its new owners, M. Aurelius Apollonios and his wife Aurelia Zenonis; and (3) an arcaded sarcophagus of the early third century, later reinscribed for new owners called Heortasios

and Diadoumenos, in the later third or fourth century when the unusual name Heortasios is first attested. The repeated reuse of these handsome marble chests went on apace from the mid-third century into the Byzantine period.

We also made a display of recently discovered marble sarcophagi in a new annexe to our Sarcophagus Park next to the museum – in which the new examples recorded this year have pride of place.

Museum. We are planning two major new galleries to be constructed inside the empty courtyard of the Aphrodisias Museum, and the moving of the mythological reliefs and marble statues that will be displayed in them, from their depots to our Blue Depot/Conservation Workshop, was a major undertaking. We need these sculptures to be ready for their careful restoration and mounting by Cliveden Conservation, starting next spring, following the methods and procedures set in place by Trevor Proudfoot, our much-missed stone conservator and long-time Aphrodisias participant.

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Display of sarcophagi.