

Aphrodisias in 2017

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Aphrodisias continues to favour its investigators with remarkable archaeology: the two-month season in July and August 2017 saw rich finds and important results. Our team worked on a variety of monuments and projects – Stadium, Sebasteion, Temple of Aphrodite, Bronze Age material from the Theater Hill and restoration in the Basilica. The main focus however was on excavation in the Tetracylon Street and the South Agora.



Pool (centre) and Tetracylon Street (in trees on right)

The excavation of the Tetracylon Street is designed to investigate a key urban artery and bring new information about Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Aphrodisias. Work in 2017 was concentrated to the south of the Sebasteion's Propylon, supervised by Ine Jacobs and funded by the Headley Trust, the Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation and the British Institute at Ankara. The specific aim in 2017 was to investigate further the post-Byzantine bath building discovered in 2016.



Seljuk bathhouse (foreground), Tetracylon Street and Propylon to the Sebasteion (behind and left).

As exposed this year, the bathhouse consists of four rooms and a *praefurnium* on its eastern side: Room 1 is a water chamber or built water tank; Room 2 is a large hot room with a hypocaust floor; Room 3 is a smaller chamber to the southwest, possibly a tepid room; and to its east, Room 4, with benches on its western and northern walls (added later), was possibly a changing room (*apodyterium*). Room 1 has a circular opening in the middle of its floor, once closed probably by a metal plate, and was heated from below by the *praefurnium*. The hypocaust floor in Room 2, excavated this year, turned out to be of rather haphazard construction, supported by irregularly disposed *pili*. The bathhouse was probably first constructed, not in the mid Byzantine period (as supposed in 2016), but in the Seljuk period. It was adjusted and enlarged through Ottoman times. Finds in 2017 include remarkable fragments of moulded plaster decoration from the hot chamber, Room 2.

The South Agora at Aphrodisias is dominated by its pool (see photo above), partly excavated in the 1980s. Test trenches in 2012 revealed planting trenches for palm trees, and a five-year project – The Mica and Ahmet Ertegun South Agora Pool Project – was completed this year, 2017. The excavation of the pool was supervised by Allison Kidd, Ben Russell and Andrew Wilson, and generously funded by Mica Ertegun.

The excavation of the pool was completed as planned in August and brought a sharp light to bear on ancient and medieval life in the centre of the site. The complex known as the South Agora was a sumptuous public park laid out in the Tiberian period (AD 14–37) with a 170m-long ornamental pool at its centre surrounded by palm trees and marble colonnades. The pool was completely renovated in ca AD 500 and was kept functioning into the early seventh century. It was then gradually filled in on both sides, with successive layers of rubble and debris from the surrounding buildings.

Dense and important finds came from the lowest of these layers, close to the pool floor. The range is impressive: pottery, lamps, roof tiles, wooden planks, marble architecture, statuary, inscriptions, bronze coins, reliquary crosses, lead tablets, gold-glass ornaments and a variety of iron weapons.

Among several high-quality finds of marble portrait statuary – an Aphrodisian speciality – two pieces are of special importance. A remarkably preserved bearded male portrait head (right), probably of a provincial



governor, has the hairstyle and technique of the Theodosian period (ca AD 400). It also bears a tiny covert Christian three-letter inscription added by the sculptor on its neck under or 'behind' the long beard: XMG. This is an abbreviation of the Greek for 'Christ was born to Mary' and marks emphatically the faith of the person writing it.

The second find (right) is a masterpiece from the very end of ancient statue production. It has a stubble beard, bald skull and a Constantinopolitan 'mop' hairstyle of the early sixth century AD. The portrait combines personal truthfulness in its unflinching baldness with the best contemporary fashion in its deeply drilled crown of curls. Even the very last statues at Aphrodisias remained undiminished in technique and effect.

A horse's tail of blue-grey marble excavated on the south side of the pool was an unexpected discovery. It was found to join break to break to the rear of the blue-grey marble horse and group of Troilos and Achilles excavated earlier in the Basilica and now mounted in the Aphrodisias Museum. The tail was carved in one piece with the body of the horse – a bravura sculptural performance in a huge block of difficult local marble.

The 2017 campaign at Aphrodisias produced an abundance of exciting finds on the street and in the pool, and their excavation and thorough documentation were due to the extraordinary hard work of our student team and local



workforce. Our government representative was Tarık Güçlütürk from the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Aphrodisias was formally inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site at the 41st Session of the World Heritage Committee held in Krakow, Poland, on 10 July 2017.

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