

Archaeological Research at Aphrodisias in 2019

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Aphrodisias illuminates for us the life of eastern Roman cities into the post-classical world, brightly and in great variety. The current research project focuses on the character and history of the site from Roman into late antique, Byzantine and Ottoman times. In 2019 we had an excellent season, with two months of excavation and research in July and August, and four months of conservation and restoration from June to early October. We had a great team from New York, Oxford and several Turkish universities, and pursued major work in the Civil Basilica, Tetracylon Street and South Agora.

Our new project to excavate fully, conserve and present the façade of the early Imperial Civil Basilica, begun in 2018, achieved major results. The tiled marble floor of the vestibule was restored. The fragmentary mosaic floors of the long side aisles were excavated, lovingly conserved and closely documented. The eastern side of the building was excavated to allow the eventual positioning of panels carrying the famous Aphrodisias version of Diocletian's Prices Edict, which was inscribed on the façade of the building in AD 301. The massive columnar architecture of the building's façade was conserved in our marble workshop-depot, and four colossal columns were set up in position towards the end of the season. They are already a striking new landmark on the site.

Work on the South Agora and its magnificent 170m pool focused on publication and conservation. Two teams of marble conservators worked in opposite directions around the delicate marble pool surround, lifting, repairing and resetting broken and damaged elements. Study, documentation and writing-up of the pool excavation and its extraordinary body of archaeological material – wooden, ceramic, metal and marble artefacts – were brought to successful conclusions.



The South Agora.



The Tetracylon Street.

Major excavation focused on the late antique Tetracylon Street, at both its northern and southern ends. At the south, the long access ramp from the street to the tunnel into the South Agora was excavated to reveal a complicated series of drains, water pipes and discrete phases of the ramp's life, from the second to the seventh century. The adjacent Cryptoporticus House, on the eastern side of the Tetracylon Street, was drawn carefully in plan and section in both its upper and lower levels.

At the northern end of the Tetracylon Street, the remaining part of the old Geyre road and adjoining street wall were removed, and soundings were made on both sides of the street paving to look for datable material. Pottery showed the surviving marble street paving to be later than expected – a final (it turned out) sixth-century restoration of the road surface. Even more surprising, both associated ceramics and its almost complete lack of foundations below the early Imperial street level showed that the tall Niche Monument cannot be of the mid-first century AD, as formerly thought, but is also most likely of the sixth century AD. The early Imperial statue base that belongs in its central niche was probably redeployed here from elsewhere.

To the north of the Niche Monument, new excavation revealed a remarkable structure, of the especially 'dark' eighth and ninth centuries, adjoining it and built over part of the street. We are calling it the Dark Age Complex. It consists of a series of small domestic units built out over the street on top of the seventh-century street collapse which remained in use all through the Byzantine period.

On the eastern side of the street, a highly decorated marble doorway of the second to third century through the back of the street colonnade was uncovered. The doorway is fronted by a black-and-white diamond-patterned marble floor

in the colonnade and two bases posted symmetrically to either side of the street columns. This was a grand, carefully maintained entrance into an imposing residence behind and above the street. The abundant window glass and wall mosaic found fallen from the upper storey attest to its opulence.

The Kybele House, one of the most impressive mansions of the late antique city, excavated in the 1960s and 1980s near the northeastern city wall, was completely cleared, cleaned and drawn in a new state plan – in readiness for an exciting new project.

Much other study and publication work was undertaken – on coins, ceramics and environmental remains of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, on late antique statuary, on inscriptions and graffiti of all kinds and on such major buildings as the Bouleuterion, Sebasteion, Stadium and the Ottoman bath-house on Pekmez Hill. Major new joins were made during the study of the giant figured consoles from the Hadrianic Baths. New pieces were added to the colossal fragmentary statue found in the drain in front of the Sebasteion Propylon in 2018. Two new sarcophagi appeared from the southeastern necropolis and major plans were developed for a new covered display space in the courtyard of the Aphrodisias Museum. Construction begins in 2020.

Trevor Proudfoot

Our season ended with the very sad news that Trevor Proudfoot passed away in early September. Trevor was our chief marble sculpture conservator and he worked at Aphrodisias every season from 1989 to 2018. He designed and carried out all the major sculpture restorations at the site, many of them characteristically bold and innovative: the shield portraits, the Zoilos Frieze, the Young Togatus, the Seasons Sarcophagus, the Blue Horse and no less than 65 life-size marble reliefs from the Sebasteion. All these



Console.



Trevor Proudfoot.

extraordinary pieces and many others that Trevor restored are on display in the Aphrodisias Museum. Trevor worked tirelessly on site conservation as well as high-specification sculpture. He devised the lime-mortar wall-capping programme that continues with his methods to this day. He led the recent major programme of restoration and conservation in the Hadrianic Baths, and in the South Agora in 2018 he made a complete survey of the damaged marble perimeter of the pool and devised the strategy for its conservation. He was a towering figure who did great things for Aphrodisias. He will be much missed by the Aphrodisias team.

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