

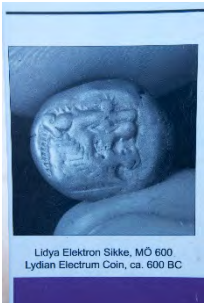
Day 7 Friday Nov 6 Sardis

Today was such a full day (we walked 23,000 steps) that I will be sending this in two parts. The first part is Sardis and Philadelphia.

After breakfast (with my wonderful olive bar), it was time to hit the road again as there was still so much to see. The scenery was beautiful along the way, including farm, vineyards, cotton fields and just the gorgeous mountains..



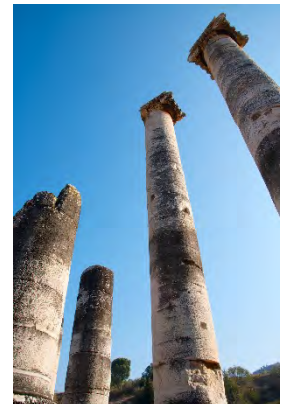
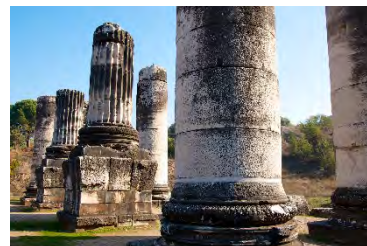
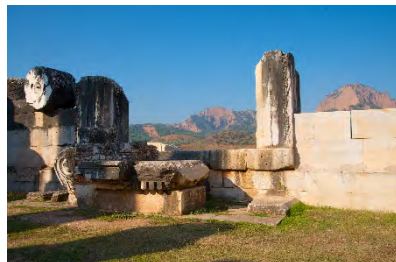
Our first stop was Sardis, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Lydia, one of the important cities of the Persian Empire, the seat of the proconsul under the Roman Empire and the metropolis of the province of Lydia in later Roman and Byzantine times.



Sardis today is remembered in part as the place where silver and gold coins were minted for the first time. During its long history, Sardis changed many foreign rulers until its incorporation into the Roman Empire in 133 BCE. Sardis was reconstructed after the catastrophic earthquake of 17 BCE and enjoyed a long period of prosperity under the Roman rule and then within the Byzantine Empire, until it was finally destroyed by the Mongols in 1402.

We made two different stops before lunch. The first was to see the remains of the Altar of Cybele from the late 7th century BCE. Cybele was a fertility goddess and was worshipped throughout this area. The Altar was flanked by crouching lions, the animals sacred to Cybele.

All that remains are a few columns and a red brick church that was built among the ruins. This part of Sardis sits by the River Pactolus. The sands of the River Pactolus were rich in gold and that gold was panned and then minted into the first gold coins in or around 7th century BCE. All thanks (mythically) to King Midas, the one of the golden touch. And that is the myth surrounding the river. You remember King Midas. The story goes like this: King Midas earned the gratitude of Dionysus, Greek god of winemaking and revelry, for hosting the god's mentor. As thanks, Dionysus agreed to grant Midas any wish he desired. Midas wished that whatever he touched would turn to gold. However, he soon realized his blessing was a curse when the food he tried to eat turned to gold and when he hugged his daughter, she too turned into gold. Saddened and starving, Midas prayed to Dionysus to remove his golden touch. Dionysus told Midas to wash his body in the River Pactolus and this would wash the curse away. Midas did just that and thus the river became full of gold.





And notice, graffiti seems to be a problem everywhere in the world.

On the way out there were some women selling handmade felt flowered necklaces. I didn't buy any, but they were so colorful, I couldn't resist a picture (which they allowed me to do, but without them in it).

But the history of most interest to me, was the history of the Jews in Sardis which we saw on the second stop. In the 3rd century BCE, King Antiochus III encouraged Jews from various countries, including from Babylonia, to move to Sardis. Here is the story as found on the Bet Hatfutsot (Diaspora Museum) website:

Since 1958, Harvard and Cornell have both been excavating Sardis. These excavations unearthed perhaps the most impressive synagogue in the western diaspora yet discovered from antiquity. The discovery of the Sardis synagogue has reversed previous assumptions about Judaism in the later Roman Empire. It also provided indisputable evidence for the continued presence of Jewish communities in Asia Minor and their integration into general Roman life at a time when many scholars previously assumed that Christianity had eclipsed Judaism.

The synagogue was a section of a large bath-gymnasium complex that was in use for about 450 – 500 years.



Sinagog, MS 4.-5. yy
Synagogue, 4th-5th c AD

Caius Norbanus Flaccus, a Roman proconsul during the reign of Augustus at the end of the 1st century BCE, wrote about the religious rights of the Jews of Sardis, included the right to send money to the Temple of Jerusalem.

The ruins of the Synagogue of Sardis were discovered in 1962. The dimensions of the building, its many decorations, including mosaics on the floors, marbling of the walls, various pieces of ritual furnishings and especially the over eighty Greek inscriptions and six Hebrew fragments found in the interior, have helped confirm that this was indeed a synagogue. The Synagogue of Sardis has been acclaimed as the most outstanding Jewish monument from Antiquity, and the largest synagogue unearthed in the entire region of Asia Minor and the Aegean Sea.

The synagogue was in a central section of the city and not near the Jewish quarter. It seems to have been an integral part of a larger complex that included a gymnasium (school), some shops, and the public bath. Since the synagogue was so close to these public buildings, it was believed that either the synagogue buildings were converted after the Jews arrived, or, since there were so many Greek inscriptions, the inclusion of the synagogue within a public space should be understood as an expression of the Hellenistic nature of local Judaism.

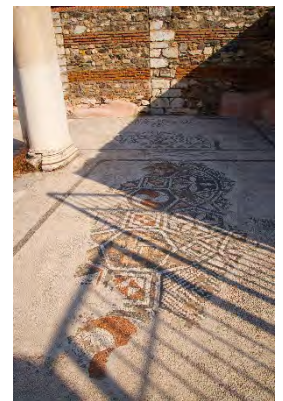


Since its discovery in the early 1960's, the common accepted assumption is that the synagogue belonged to the fourth century BCE (based on the discovery of a number of coins from the 3rd and 4th century BCE beneath the mosaic floors). However, more recent research suggests that it may be from the 6th century BCE. Yet another theory suggests that the building was used as a worship place by the Jews already from the 3rd or 4th century BCE, but it acquired the current mosaic floors sometime during the 6th century, following several renovations.

The structure of the synagogue is not like any I had seen before. It is written that the structure recalls a typical Roman basilica, certainly not your typical Jewish layout. It has a rectangular structure of 130 yards long and 20 yards wide on an east to west axis. This in itself was surprising to me as Jerusalem is south of Turkey and the ark of a synagogue generally faces Jerusalem. It was so large that it could hold 1000 people. This speaks both to the size of the Jewish community and to its wealth and political status.



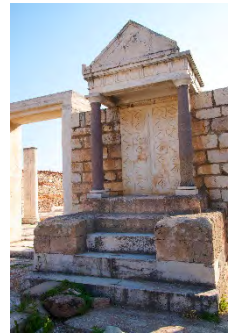
The entry way was a large square (I don't know the dimensions) with columns on all sides and a large urn in the center. The floors were all mosaic, some of which can still be seen.



There was a long central hall flanked by two rows of columns. The entrance was located at the east end and the hall ended with an apse (semicircular recess covered with a dome) and three rows of curved stepped benches situated at the west end. It is believed that those seats were reserved for the elders of the community. A marble table with two eagle bas-reliefs on the outer sides of its legs along with two sculptures of lions standing on both sides of the table has been preserved in front of the apse and probably served as the bimah of the synagogue. The decoration is believed to have a double symbolism: the eagle was a known Roman symbol while the lions were frequently used in the local art of Lydia, a region that in Antiquity was renowned for the wild lions that still roared its countryside. The lion of course also has strong Jewish symbolism associated with the Tribe of Judah and Jerusalem.



At some point later in time, the hall was shortened and two shrines were added on each side of the central door. These niches, one in the Doric style and the other one in late Corinthian style, are believed to have housed the Torahs.



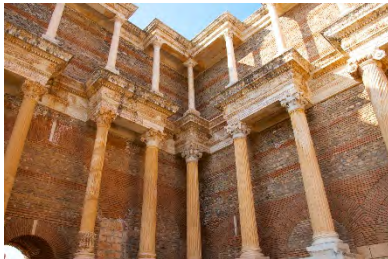
We could still see some of the mosaics on the floors. Some were geometric, others floral and yet others animal decorations. Parts of the walls were covered in marble. There are still Greek inscriptions remaining which seem to commemorate names of community members, benefactors and their wives and donors. There is a practice that has not changed! What is most interesting however, is that the names included "God-fearers", meaning non-Jewish supporters of the synagogue. The synagogue was destroyed in 616 when Sardis was captured by the Persians. It was never rebuilt and that was the end of the Jewish community of Sardis. In 1965, after it was discovered, the renovation began.



The outside wall of the synagogue was made of red brick, and that brick wall was the back wall of a row of shops facing the main road. Some were owned by Jewish merchants and others by Christian traders (known by the crosses or the names found among the ruins). And of course the public latrine.



And on the other side of the synagogue was the large gymnasium, with a large field in front, where would-be gladiators could learn to be gladiators, and a swimming pool in the back.



And then it was time for another local, wonderful lunch. We ate at a restaurant named Divan, and it was indeed divine.

But this was a day of archeology. Our next stop was Philadelphia, which was referred to the "New Jerusalem" in the Book of Revelation. The only thing left here is a small portion of the Cathedral. But the

more interesting part of this visit was the market next door. Once again we got to look at the beautiful vegetables and the people. Some of you may be getting tired of my market pictures, but I love observing and documenting the colors of daily life. I just wish you could hear the sounds and smell the aromas.

