

Thursday, Nov 5

Today was the day for Ephesus. Another check on the bucket list.

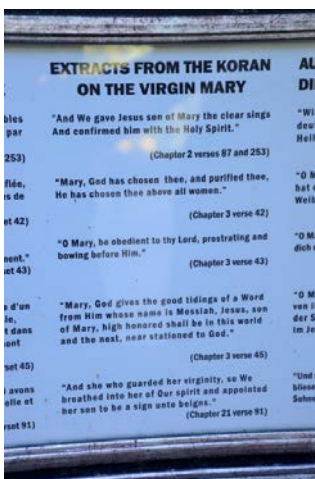
We drove through the town of Selcuk, the town closest to Ephesus. In the distance we could see the Grand Fortress which sits on the highest point of the hill. This was the very first settlement of Ephesus. The walls belong to the Byzantine, Ottoman and Aydınoğulları periods and are reinforced by 15 towers. We did not have time to visit the fortress, but could clearly see it. From our vantage point we also got a great view of Selcuk and could see Ephesus a mere mile away.



Our first stop however, on the way to Ephesus, was at the House of the Virgin Mary (Meryem Ana). This is a Catholic and Muslim shrine located near Ephesus on Mt. Koressos (Mt. Nightingale). It is believed that John the Baptist brought her here from Jerusalem to protect her from the pagans. She hid here for the rest of her life. You ask, how did they know this? The story goes something like this: A bedridden nun in Germany, Anne Catherine, had a dream about the life of Jesus and Mary and the



house (which was built in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), with great detail of what the house looked like. She told the story to a journalist who wrote it all down and published it. Years later the house was found and it perfectly matched her dream.



It is said that the Virgin Mary spent her last days near here, died here and ascended to heaven from here. There is a "wishing wall" in ways reminiscent of the Kotel (Western Wall in Jerusalem) where people put notes with wishes and prayers. Muslims also cherish this place (see picture of sign) as, and this is direct quote from our guide, Mutlu, "Muslims honor all prophets so since Mary was the mother of Jesus, this is a special place for Muslims too."



And finally, we made it to Ephesus. We spent 3.5 hours walking around. I can't describe each stone, each temple, each building. But I will give you some of the high points.

But first let's start with a bit of history.

The excavated remains of Ephesus reflect centuries of history, from classical Greece to the Roman Empire – when it was the Mediterranean's main commercial center – to the spread of Christianity. Ephesus is one of the greatest set of ruins in the Western world. It was first built as a Greek city around 1000 BCE, and quickly became a center for worship of the Anatolian mother goddess, Cybele. But the rooms that are left today are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and were built by the successor to Alexander the Great, Lysimachus.

Ephesus did not become the chief port until it was ruled by the Romans in 129 BCE. According to estimates, Ephesus had a population of 33,600 to 56,000 people in the Roman period, making it the third largest city of Roman Asia Minor after Sardis (which we will visit tomorrow) and Alexandria Troas. Although not near water today, the area was actually right on the Aegean Sea back then, making it a perfect port for trading. Most of the surviving structures we see today are from the Romans. Only about 15% of the city however has been excavated.

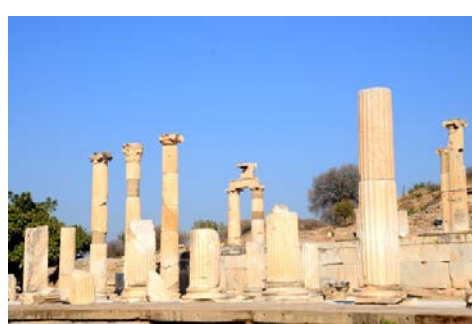
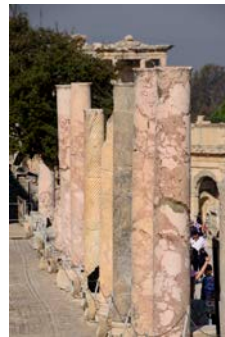
In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Pagans, Jews and Christians primarily lived here, in that order of size. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it was Christians, Jews and then Pagans. Four menorahs have been found carved into the stones here, but no synagogues have been uncovered yet. It is estimated that 2000 Jews lived here. They started out as farmers, but after Ephesus was invaded, they became merchants.

Ephesus became rich due to the trade. It was part of the Silk Road as they could export to Greece and the rest of the Mediterranean. It was also like a Mecca as the Temple of Artimus drew pilgrims. However, once the population turned to Christianity, the city began to decline as there were no more pilgrimages.

Several things led to the decline of Ephesus. First, as the harbor was slowly silted up by the Kucukmenderes River (side note, this is where the word meandering comes from), the city's importance as a commercial center declined. Second, Ephesus is on an earthquake fault and the earthquakes changed the sea level, thus they lost the port. Third, there were many marble factories here and the waste went into the sewer and right out to the port which became polluted, turned into a marsh, attracted mosquitoes which brought malaria which led to most people abandoning Ephesus (14<sup>th</sup> century).

How was Ephesus first discovered? In 1860, a British treasure hunter was snooping around and found a column. And as they say, the rest is history. Today Austrian, German, and French archeologists are excavating and the Americans are doing the dating.

We walked down the main boulevard looking at all the ruins and trying to imagine what it must have been like centuries ago.





They have recently opened 5 villas, called Terrace Houses. Excavation began in the 1980's, but they were only opened to the public in the last few years. These were built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and belonged to wealthy Ephesians. They are located on the top of a hill in Ephesus which afforded them spectacular views. These are amazingly intact, with frescoes and mosaic tile. In fact, many of the walls were covered in marble. In one of the dining rooms there were two holes in the ceiling where the slaves would lower the food, so it seemed like the food was coming from heaven. Many of the rooms were two stories high and at one point had columns reaching from floor to ceiling. Unusual for the times, these mansions had running water coming from wells and an intricate canal system. On some of the walls there were graffiti and paintings depicting everyday life. The drawings were of gladiators, caricatures and animals. There were poems of love on the walls and 30 lists of everyday items along with prices. And all this from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. To say these mansions were magnificent would not be an exaggeration. They are considered some of the most vivid examples of Roman domestic architecture, along with Pompeii, to survive until today.



Like much of Ephesus, these mansions were destroyed by the series of earthquakes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The way the mansions destroyed household utensils were found as if the owners had just walked out.

In addition to the magnificence of the ruin of the mansions, the way things were displayed were an art in their own right. It is the Austrian archeologists who are excavating here. Stairs and walkways wove their way up and down and around the rooms and the walkways were see through so we could look below us to see the mosaic floors. These walkways below us and the roof above us also protect the ruins as they are still being renovated. Tables upon tables were laid across the floors and each was covered with pieces of tile and marble and clay like millions of pieces of a puzzle that still need to be put together.



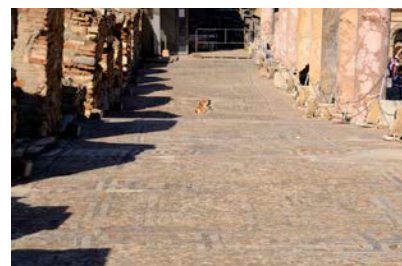
We saw the original statue of Nike. Although now famous for sneakers and other sports paraphernalia, Nike was Winged Goddess of Victory (the Romans called her Victoria). See if you can find the Nike symbol in the statue, as it was taken from here.



We saw the original caduceus.



We passed the shops which each had a different mosaic floor in front of them.





We saw the public latrine which were holes cut into the marble and which had running warm water to clean up. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century it was co-ed. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, men used it for one hour and women the next. In the mansions, they had private toilets, unusual for those days.

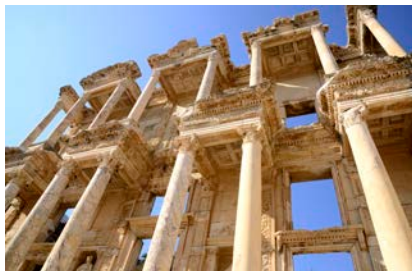


We saw the Heracles Gate. Two large columns with depictions of Heracles stood at the entrance to one of the main street, with a large arch over them. The columns were built in such a way that they narrowed the street, preventing carriages from coming through. The first pedestrian mall?

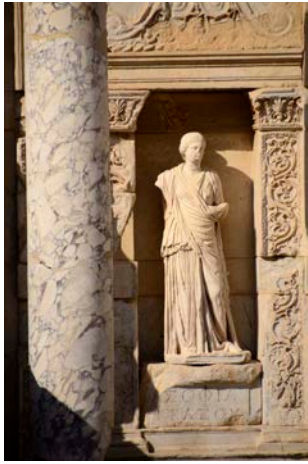


We saw fountains. The Nymphaeum fountain built in the year 12 in the honor of Emperor Trajan. A large statue of Trajan with a globe at his feet stood at the base of the two-story fountain.

And then there is the library. The library itself is designed with an exaggerated entrance which is magnificent (I know I am using this word a lot – but it really is). The façade has been reconstructed from all original pieces and 70% is original. The library was built in the years 114 to 117.



There are four statues of women in the niches in the front representing Sophia (wisdom), Arete (virtue), Ennoia (intellect) and Episteme (knowledge).



The library was mostly built by Gaius Julius Aquila, in honor of his father, Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus, an Ancient Greek who served as governor of Roman Asia in the Roman Empire. Thus it is called the Library of Celsus. Celsus paid for the construction of the library with his own personal wealth and is buried in a sarcophagus beneath it.



The library held nearly 12,000 scrolls in niches around the wall. There were reading rooms on the sides so people could borrow them to read. The building faces east so that the reading rooms could make best use of the morning light. Often it was the slaves who had to read to their masters as the slaves were often the scribes and the masters did not know how to read. The scrolls were originally made from papyrus and later from parchment.



On the front center step of the Library is an engraving of a menorah. No story. No history. No idea why. But there it is.

Next to the library is the Agora, the meeting place or market. And behind the Agora is the Great Theater. The theatre dominates the view down Harbor Street, which leads to the silted-up harbor. It sat 25,000 people and was first built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by the Greeks, and then later rebuilt by the Romans. When in Greek hands, it was used for plays. When in Roman hands, it was used for gladiator fights. For this reason there is a gladiators' graveyard.

One of the things Ephesus was famous for was the Temple of Artemis which was built in 550 BCE and was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. In 268 AD, the temple was destroyed. Today there is just one column left of what was likely a magnificent temple.

There are two theaters left in Ephesus. The first, the Odeon, built around 150 AD, was a smaller theater that seated 1500 people. The upper part of the theater was decorated with red granite pillars. Imagine how beautiful that must have been. The second theater was much larger, seating about 25,000 people. This is believed to be the largest outdoor theatre in the ancient world. This Great Theater dates back to the Hellenistic period. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, it was successfully reconstructed and expanded by the Romans to the current 25,000 people. There is a road, called Marble Road (you can guess why) that runs between the Library and the theater, considered part of the sacred walkway.



I learned that you can always tell the difference between a Greek and Roman theater. The Greek theaters were usually larger than a semi-circle and the first row was not raised. In the Roman theater there is a raised wall between the arena and the seats so the lions could not get out.

There is also a Gymnasium (school) which is just being excavated. It was used for teaching students about sports and about being a gladiator.

All in all, Ephesus is an amazing place. I am sure one could visit again and again as new things are constantly being uncovered. Such an amazing store of history.

We finally had to leave as it was time for lunch and more adventures. On the way out one has to walk by all the shops selling knickknacks and souvenirs. But the best was a sign offering "Genuine Fake Watches."



We had lunch at a local restaurant, Selcuk Koftecisi. Mutlu took us to what looked like a deli counter and we each chose which salads or grilled meats we wanted. I love all the salads so I was a happy camper.

After lunch we made our way to the Ephesus (Efes) museum where many of the statues and reliefs that were uncovered are now displayed. Many are in excellent condition which in itself is amazing. One of my favorite was the Mother Goddess, who is Artemis. As I mentioned above, her temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Little is left of the temple, but two statues have been found and fixed.



Artemis was the daughter of Leto and Zeus, and the twin of Apollo. In other cultures she is the goddess of the wilderness, the hunt and wild animals, as well as fertility. She is the helpers of midwives as a goddess of birth. But in Asia Minor (which is now Turkey), she was worshiped just as a fertility goddess.

In one legend, Artemis was born one day before her brother Apollo. Her mother gave birth to her on the island of Ortygia, then, almost immediately after her birth, she helped her mother to cross the straits over to Delos, where she then delivered Apollo. This was the beginning of her role as guardian of young children and patron of women in childbirth.

The statue of Artemis found in Ephesus shows her in the eastern style, standing erect with numerous breasts on her chest.

