

Saturday Nov 7 part 1 Laodicea

As on every morning, we were picked up at 9 o'clock. Things do seem to start later here. We drove past the travertine mountains to the ancient town of Laodicea on the Lycus. This was the second largest city after Ephesus, but as explained below, the wealthiest. The city was built in the second century, with city walls added in the fourth century. It was built between 261 and 253 BCE by King Antiochus II in honor of his wife, Laodice. This was once one of the most important cities in Anatolia, built on a natural trade route. It was a center of banking and exchange and had a cloth weaving center where the weavers used goat wool. The wool was a distinctive jet black, as a result of the minerals in the water the goats and sheep drank. Due to all that banking and trading, Laodicea was the wealthiest city of the ancient world. When destroyed by an earthquake in the year 60, they refused any aid from the Roman Empire and rebuilt the city with their own wealth.

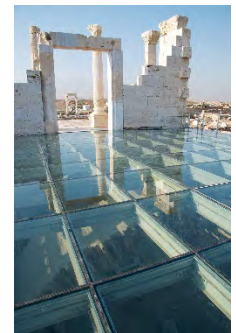
As in many of the Hellenistic cities, there was a large Jewish colony here, estimated at about 7000 Jewish men, merchants, and their families living here, although no synagogue has yet been excavated. At one point, Flaccus confiscated the 20 pounds of gold which was being sent annually to Jerusalem. That helped increase the wealth of the city.

Laodicea was also well known for its school of medicine with many herbs growing only there being used to cure illnesses. Two of the doctors from Laodicea were so famous that their names appear on the coins of the city, all of which were minted in Laodicea.

Ruins of the buildings in the city that have been excavated include a stadium, baths, temples, a gymnasium (school), theaters and a Senate House. One of my favorite things was a backgammon table (see the pictures below). One can still see the line of the ancient wall and the remains of the Ephesus gate, streets flanked by colonnades and lots of pedestals, once holding up statues. The city ruins bear the stamp of Roman extravagance and luxury, rather than of the stern and massive solidity of the Greeks.

One of the unusual features of the site is that it was totally excavated by Turkish archaeologists. And it is still a working site with cranes everywhere lifting up stones, and artisans adding new marble to old marble.

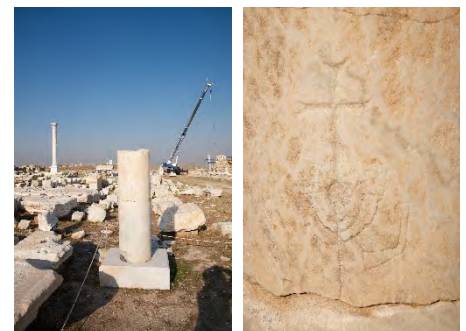
The temple area was huge, two stories high. We entered on the top floor and there is a glass walkway over the second-story so we could look down and see the ruins. Everything was displayed in a magnificent way.

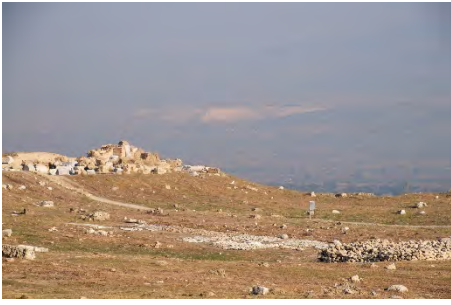


This was also the only city other than Ephesus to have two theaters, one seating 8000, the other seating 12,000. The theaters have been excavated but not yet touched so you still see the old broken rows of seats.



In the Agoura, there is one marble column engraved with a menorah with a cross above it. People lived here side by side and believed that one religion grew of the other. The second example of how people could get along comes from the church built here. The church had two entrances, one for the Christians, and one for the pagans. Again living peacefully side-by-side.



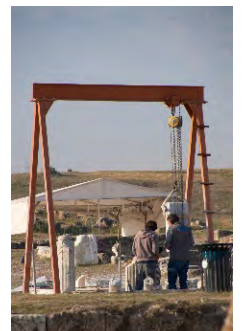
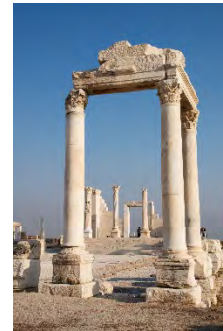
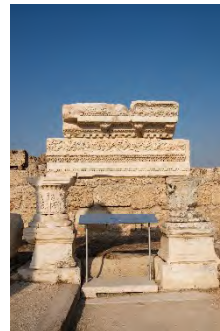
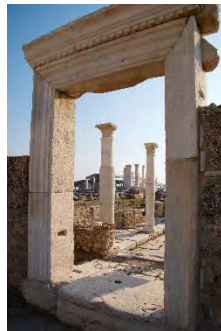


Speaking of churches, the people here were so rich that many families had private churches in their homes. So far seven churches have been excavated, but no synagogue yet.

Laodicea is across the valley from Pamukkale and there was once a large lake between them. The two cities would fight over control of the lake and thus the fishing.



We ended the tour at the tiny shop and café here. We stopped for a cappuccino, and the owner, Boomly, insisted we try the fresh pomegranate juice. We had a nice discussion, and I bought a few trinkets here, to help support the excavation and him. He insisted on helping me choose the souvenirs saying some were not as pretty as others.





Then it was back into the car to drive to our next site. We drove about an hour and a half through the mountains up about 1000 m above sea level. We passed shepherds with their sheep, tobacco fields, trees turning orange and red, fruit stands along the side of the road, and of course mosques.



We stopped for lunch at the Anatolia Restaurant, a restaurant and hotel with cabins for campers and with an outdoor garden and got to eat outside. We were the only ones in the place and as usual on this trip, the food was fabulous. Some of what you see was ours, some was Mutlu's, but the tahini pumpkin dessert – that was all mine!



And the rest will come in part 2....