

Saturday, Nov 7 part 2: Aphrodisias

Aphrodisias

But wait. There is more. We were about to visit one of the most beautiful archeological sites of one of the most beautiful cities, Aphrodisias, which is still partly excavated and partly undiscovered, and I mean that both literally and figuratively as tourists have yet to discover it as well. What made this visit particularly special for us is we had a special guide, one of the archeologists from this site. For some reason I do not have his name. But it was magical to walk around with someone who knew the history so intimately.

Aphrodite was the goddess of love, known as Venus by the Romans. She was one of the most colorful characters in Greek mythology. It is said she was born of pure white sea foam and stepped onto land in Cyprus, displaying her beauty for all to behold. This is the scene one so often sees in famous paintings and sculptures.

Countless temples and altars have been dedicated to Aphrodite. But none are as beautiful as in the city founded in her name and where her sanctuary resides. And the remains of her temple were some of the most intact and beautiful we had seen, maybe second only to the library in Ephesus.

Ara Guler, the discoverer



The story of how this ancient city was discovered is also serendipitous. A Turkish photographer, Ara Guler was driving to cover a story and lost his way in the middle of the night on his way back to Izmir. He decided to spend the night at the first village he came to, Geyre. He stopped at a coffee house, and to his amazement saw statues embedded in the coffeehouse walls. He saw pieces of columns being used as cornerstones of homes. Everywhere he walked, pieces of ruins were integrated into the village life. These were the ruins of the ancient city of Aphrodisias.



Kenan Erim

He photographed all he could and sent them to Kenan Erim, a Turkish archaeologist working at Princeton University. That was in 1960. Erim jumped on the first plane to Istanbul and proceeded immediately to Geyre. There he began excavating and continued to do so until the day he died. Erim is credited with uncovering Aphrodisias and is now buried there not far from the Temple of Aphrodite. Out of respect for the amazing work he did and the life he dedicated so the rest of the world could see and learn and understand, I am including a photo of his grave.



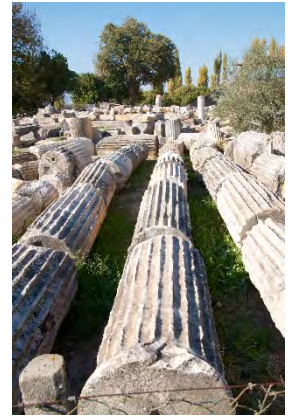


In order to protect the city, and the farms surrounding it, no cars are allowed in. Instead there is a parking lot and a tractor trailer takes you in and out. And while we were waiting, I caught these two playing backgammon. It reminded me of the old, stone backgammon board we saw just this morning. Some things never change.



There is little known about the history of this city but given what has been uncovered so far, it was likely a large, populous and very advanced city. There are no city walls as it is believed that Aphrodisias had no enemies. Some of the ruins date back to 5000 BCE. There are baths consisting of five large spaces, a large agora, a stadium that seated 30,000 people, two theaters, one in the Greek style larger than a semi-circle, seating 8,000 and another, for merchants and farmers, seating 12,000, and of course the Temple of Aphrodite.





This is the agora.



This is the farmer's theater

