

## Harding University Greece, Fall 2010 (Report #3)

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We have had some really strange weather; it seems like on every trip we have had rain at least part of the time! The trips, while quite educational and rewarding, have often been less than ideal, but we have made the best of it and the students have pulled together very well. We have traveled a lot since the last report and it will be impossible even to provide a brief survey of our visits, but... (what I have composed here is not in chronological order, but is somewhat thematically arranged).

Our trip to northern Greece (a couple of weeks ago) was a long bus ride generally along the eastern coast of Greece, however, our visit today is an important starting point. Today we visited the site of Marathon. At Marathon in 490 BC, the Persians under the rule of Darius I sought to punish the Greeks for siding with the Ionians in their revolt against Persia. Marathon served as Darius' staging area. The Greeks (mainly Athenians) were greatly outnumbered and the Persians were overly confident in their historical and numerical strength. The Greeks took advantage of their own weaker numbers, unexpectedly attacked, and defeated the Persians. Herodotus states that 6400 Persians died and only 192 Greeks. Darius retreated. After this victory, an Athenian soldier ran in full armor to Athens (26 miles away) to announce the victory. Tradition states that he died after delivering the report. The modern Marathon race is essentially a tribute to this historical event. (The photograph is of the hill piled over the tombs of the 192 Greeks who died in the battle.) It is a moving experience to visit the site and stand in awe of the courage and steel of the Greeks.



This year's Marathon is the 2500 anniversary of the victory at Marathon. Enrollment for the full Marathon race was filled early last spring, but the 5K and 10K remained open and 18 of us are participating in the event on October 31 (including Sharon and me). I am excited about the event, not so much for the run (I'll walk the 5K), but for what the battle meant to western civilization!

Further north, another battle between the Persians and Greeks was engaged at Thermopylae. This occurred in 480 BC when Ahasuerus (aka Xerxes; cf. the book of Esther) led the Persians back to Greece to conquer the country which had repelled his father. Thermopylae was a very narrow plain between the coast and the mountains—the plain was barely wider than a freeway (the coast is now much further away because of silting up). The Greeks originally had several thousand soldiers at the site, but a betrayal occurred which permitted the Persians to encircle them. Leonidas was able to assess the situation before their position became impossible

and he permitted the Greeks to flee, but he and his 300 Spartans were determined to stand their ground (along with him were 700 Thespians as well, but for some reason they rarely get the respect they deserve in the historical story). Naturally the Greeks found themselves at a terrific disadvantage and retreated to a hill to fight to the death. The Persians destroyed them with volleys of arrows, the points of which have been found in excavations. (The photograph shows me kneeling next to the plaque that commemorates the event and the deceased on the hill where they made their last stand. The inscription is from Herodotus and reads: “Stranger, tell the people of Lakedaimon [Sparta] that we who lie here obeyed their command” (7.228).)



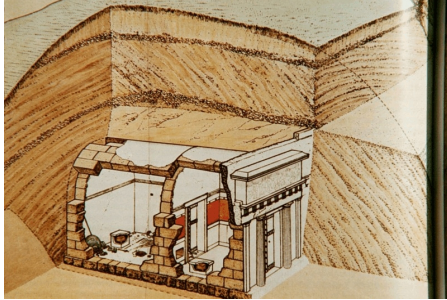
The battle did not defeat the Persians, but did give the other Greek communities (in particular, the Athenians) time to finish their preparations for engaging the Persians. The Persians went to Athens and destroyed the Parthenon (that is the predecessor of the current structure). Others, sailing to the straits of Salamis engaged the Greeks with their trireme boats and the Greeks defeated the Persians. The last major engagement, which was less dramatic, but nonetheless important was in 479 at Plataia when the Persians finally surrendered their attempt seriously to conquer Greece.

It is sobering to visit these sites and realize the courage of these protectors of their country. I once heard someone say (and regretfully I do not remember who) that the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae are why Europe is not Moslem. I think the statement is too simplistic (there are other events that have played into the history [e.g., Christianity]), but undeniably these battles were pivotal! I pay honor to those who have paved the way for our heritage!!!

We visited two significant sites associated with the later development of western civilization and Christianity. One was Vergina, which was near the first major capital of Macedonia and the other was Pella which replaced the first capital. Vergina was where Philip of Macedon was buried and Pella was where Alexander the Great was born. Most Bible students are aware of the impact of Alexander’s conquests to pave the way for much of the cultural context in which Christianity spread. (The photograph shows the tumulus in which Philip was buried.)



The excavations at the site have uncovered remarkable finds, not the least of which are the remains of Philip himself (of course, some disagree, but the evidence points very strongly to that identification, based upon analysis of the skeletal remains which reflect exactly his physical



anomalies as ancient literature describes them). (The other photo shows how his tomb was encased in the tumulus.) Philip's charred remains were entombed in a magnificent gold box with an embossed Macedonian star on its top.

From Vergina/Pella we made our way through Thessalonica eventually to Philippi. While Paul was still in Asia Minor, he saw a vision of a man inviting him: "Come over into Macedonia

and help us" (Acts 16:9). Paul's compliance led him to Philippi which was the first place where the gospel came into Europe. One of his first visits was to the riverside where he "supposed there was a place of prayer" (Acts 16:13). While we do not know exactly where this was, we visited one of the proposed locations and could easily envision Lydia's compliance with Paul's preaching to be baptized. (The photograph is where we visited the river that skirts the city.)



Paul's preaching brought him into conflict with the establishment when he cast out a spirit of divination from a woman. Paul was taken before the authorities in the marketplace (Acts 16:19), where he and Silas were falsely accused, beaten and imprisoned. (The photograph is the location of the marketplace and is almost certainly where Paul attempted to defend his actions.) This conflict of the accusations and his imprisonment stands in stark contrast to the serenity of the baptism scene. Most of the people in our group were moved by the visit.

Paul eventually made his way across Macedonia to Berea where he encountered his typical opposition from the Jews. The brethren ushered him to the sea (Acts 17:14). The text simply narrates that Paul went to Athens. Most believe that he embarked on a ship at the sea, which likely would have been the port city of Dion. (The photograph shows the remains of a second century shrine dedicated to Isis.) The area has become silted up and the ruins tend to be heavily bogged down in water. The excavations have revealed a very well planned city.





We made a one-day trip to Delphi. It started out rainy, but just before we arrived at the site, the sun emerged and it was a beautiful day. The scenery is incredible. Delphi is not mentioned in the Bible, but it was an extremely important site in antiquity. It was the site of the ancient well-known “Oracle of Delphi.” Many ancient countries would send delegates to Delphi for advice regarding important decisions dealing with public policy and international politics. The oracle—a woman—would enter the special chamber in the temple where she would

utter phrases and sounds which then would be put in “intelligible” language by the priests. “Intelligible” is marginally defined since their statements would be delivered with sufficient ambiguity that the client’s interpretation would not impugn the priests’ statements (in other words: the priests could not be wrong). (The photograph is of the foundations of the temple where the oracle would receive her visions.)

Recent studies indicate that the likely source of her visions was noxious gases which she inhaled as she sat over two deep fissures. The special chamber—the adyton—was strategically located immediately over the junction of two earthquake faults. Interestingly the Old Testament indicts those who... “‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God?” (Isaiah 8:19). The evidence implies that the oracle probably spoke such incomprehensible mutterings. When Paul condemns witchcraft in Galatians 5:20, the Greek word that he uses is *pharmakeia*, from which we get the word pharmacy. Surely the word for witchcraft draws part of its significance from the frequent use of drugs to induce the visions or revelations.

A fairly unique site that we visited is only about 10 miles from our campus. Brauron is now in a rural environment and was dedicated to Artemis. In this case, Artemis is not the same bawdy character who was worshiped in Ephesus; instead she was the protector of girls and women especially as the girls were transitioning into womanhood and of women as they would undergo the turmoil of childbirth. The temple and shrine were intended to assist in the training and promotion of women’s arts and most of the artifacts from the site reflect this emphasis. In this



presentation, Artemis was the protector and advocate of the common person and in many cases those who were marginalized. Interestingly, there was a shrine dedicated to Artemis on the Acropolis in Athens (it was just inside and to the right as you pass through the Propylea). I guess you could say that Brauron had a “satellite campus.”

The hotel that Harding purchased to serve as our campus in Greece was named (and still is) “The Artemis” after the presence of the shrine nearby. Certainly, we do not worship Artemis (or any of these deities), but it is reassuring to know that at least occasionally there was serious concern for those in need.

We leave on Monday for our 19-day trip to Egypt, Jordan and Israel. I will have a lot of difficulty streamlining that report to the highlights of the trip.

Shalom.

Dale