

Harding University in Greece (HUG): Spring 2014

Report #3

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After a few days of study and midterms at the Artemis in Athens, we departed for our third major trip—this one to Turkey. We were originally scheduled to visit Egypt, but the political turmoil there demanded cancelling the trip—Turkey was our backup. Safety and travel are major concerns for Harding. Jeff Hopper and Janis Ragsdale have secured the services of Bruce Tully, a retired Special Agent in Charge of Diplomatic Security Service as a consultant and advisor. Special Agent Tully maintains contacts in the countries that we visit and keeps Jeff and Mike apprized of potential dangers and threats. On his counsel the Egypt trip was cancelled. He and Janis, however, are on the trip to Turkey with us and this is the first time he has traveled with a group of students on one of these excursions. Part of the reason for his presence is to continue to assess our needs and how better to insure our safety (his expertise serves all of Harding's International Studies Programs). He is a delightfully engaging fellow with a portfolio of stories of guarding Presidents, foreign diplomats and heads of state. It has been an honor to get to know him.

Our trip took us to Izmir from which we rode the bus to Kusadasi, the modern port town near ancient Ephesus. Ephesus was the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World—the Temple to Artemis. References to the city appear in the books of Acts and Revelation. The book of Ephesians was to the church in Ephesus (although many scholars argue that it was a letter to be circulated among various congregations).

Excavations at Ephesus began with less-than-scientific focus in 1863 when John Wood, backed by the British Museum, sought the location of the Temple of Artemis. He eventually located it beneath 20 feet of water laid soil. In 1895, the Austrians took over investigation of the site and they remain the principle agency for its excavation and publication to this day.

The remains of the city are impressive and typically range in date from the 1st century BC to the 3rd/4th centuries AD. As is often the case, it is sometimes difficult to disentangle the visual remains into their proper sequence to get a sense of what Paul might have seen, but with care this can be done. The famous Library of Celsus (photo at left) for instance did not exist when Paul was there. It dates from the early 2nd century AD. The temples sponsored by Domitian did not



exist then either (but likely did when the book of Revelation was written in Domitian's reign at the end of the 1st century AD, although many argue Revelation was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD).

Ephesus was the western terminus of a land trade route that entered the interior of Asia and ultimately went to Mesopotamia (and beyond). A busy harbor supported travel westward to other points along the Mediterranean. This strategic location gave it

an economic advantage and with the presence of the great Temple of Artemis (aka Temple of Diana), it became a lucrative center of commerce, trade, and religion.

The temple to Artemis has a long history, but was burned down purportedly on the night Alexander the Great was born by a lunatic who wanted his name to live forever; it apparently worked since we know his name was Herostratus! The temple largely lay in ruins until the time of Alexander, who offered to pay for its reconstruction.

The Ephesians prudently declined his offer stating that it was inappropriate for one god to pay for the construction of a temple for another god. The temple was eventually rebuilt on a scale four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Like the implication of the statue of Zeus at Olympia, when one compares the grandeur and elegance of the Parthenon and realizes that it was not on the list of “Wonders,” one can only imagine the comparative magnitude and



impressiveness of Artemis’ Temple. All that one can typically see of the temple is a haphazardly reconstructed pillar consisting of relatively random column drums stacked on top of each other to mark the “spot” where the Temple stood (photo above). A visit to the site, however, permits one still to see some of the outline of the footings and foundations. We were not able to visit the site up close, however.

of Acts circuitously. Paul’s teaching about Jesus was so successful that conversions impacted the sale of silver shrines to Artemis (cf. Acts 19:18-20). A prominent silversmith in Ephesus named Demetrius stirred up the people, charging that Paul was impugning their goddess (Demetrius was probably more concerned with economics than ideology; cf. Acts 19:23-27).

The agitation probably began in the commercial agora, where many of the shops were located (photo above left). Given Demetrius’ apparent influence, this would have been the logical place to initiate his schemes. The masses migrated to the theatre (photo right), where they chanted “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” for two hours (Acts 19:28-34). The city magistrate eventually quieted the crowds and argued that they were in danger of



Artemis’ temple enters the book

retaliation from the Romans for the illicit assembly and that if they wanted to bring charges against Paul, they should use the courts (Acts 19:38).

The town clerk referred to Ephesus as the “temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky” (Acts 19:35, ESV). The reference to the stone is typically understood to allude to a meteor that hit the ground, which the people then venerated as a token from God—Artemis in this case. It is easy to image a pagan mindset thinking that only a god could throw something from the sky and hence its target should be considered sacred (one might remember the delightful movie several years ago entitled *The Gods Must Be Crazy* to appreciate elements of this thinking). The location of the temple is unusual in that it was built in a flood plain, not on the typical higher elevation. Its location contributed significantly to its demise. The site was eventually buried under a thick layer of flood-laid silt that caused its location to be lost. John Wood spent seven years looking for the site and eventually excavated what was left of it. Many of the remains are in the British Museum.

Our tour took us mainly to the town of ancient Ephesus. While the students were touring the ruins in the upper part of the city, with Mike James’ permission, I paid my entrance fee to see the “Terrace Houses” that are hidden under an elaborate protective shelter. These ruins flank the southern slope near the Library. The ruins clearly belonged to the elite of the town and their dates typically run from the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD. Some of these houses were multi-storied with elaborately decorated marble paneling and vibrantly decorated frescoes (photo right). These houses rival those of Pompeii and speak elegantly of the opulence of part of the citizenry of Ephesus.



Ephesus eventually lost its importance and population when the bay that had served as the basis of much of its commercial significance silted up and was no longer useable. In addition, the advent of Christianity and its influence neutralized much of the lure of Artemis.

In the afternoon we visited what is called the Church of St. John where John the apostle was supposed to have been buried. While strong tradition from 2nd century church fathers narrates that John came to Ephesus with Jesus’ mother, there is little that can be traced with accuracy of the locations of any events associated with them. The remains of the church building, however, date to 6th century (built in turn upon remains of a church building from the 4th/5th centuries AD) and preserve a crypt, which is supposed to house John’s remains. A well-preserved baptistery demonstrates that the ceremony involved immersion (photo left).



Our afternoon consisted of a visit to a leather factory/outlet. Along with the professional models, three students were selected to “model” some of the garments. The jackets and accessories were very nice and well-crafted. The lamb leather garments are extraordinarily supple, but they remained out of my budgetary priority (fortunately I was able to buy a black blazer in 2001 on the trip Sharon and I went on with HUG!).

On this tour, we were able to visit to one degree or another five of the seven cities associated with the “Churches of Asia” to which John wrote his Revelation. Ephesus was the first that we visited. The second was Izmir, the modern name for the biblical city of Smyrna. There was essentially nothing to see here (nor was there at Thyatira through which we drove), but it was good to have been to the respective sites nonetheless.

Our visit to ancient Sardis (another of the cities of Revelation) exposed us to some impressive 2nd-3rd century AD ruins. Sardis has some rich history with connections to Gyges (likely background to the Gog/Magog imagery of Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20) and Croesus, the proverbial rich man of antiquity with his gold resources. Gold extracted from the streams near Sardis contributed to the reputation. Sardis also served as the staging area for Darius and



Ahasuerus (Xerxes) from which they launched their ill-fated attacks against Greece in 490 and 480 BC respectively.

Essentially nothing was exposed of the ruins of John’s day, except the pavement of the Persian Royal Road that served as the main thoroughfare (photo left) connecting the city with the coast and then inland to Susa, 1600 miles to the east. The citadel of Sardis was captured twice in antiquity by attacking armies that were able to penetrate the defenses because of neglect by the defenders. These armies were those of Cyrus the Great in 547 BC and later by Antiochus III who recaptured the city in 214 BC. Likely this reputation of neglect serves as the basis of John’s warning when he quotes Jesus: “I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (Rev 3:3). In addition, Sardis was known for its production of woolen outer garments for men and women in the classical world.¹ Perhaps this is part of the significance of Jesus’ reference in Revelation when he describes “people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, ...” (3:4-5). The word for garments in both cases is also the formal term applied to the outer cloak characteristic of the classical world.

¹ Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey* (Istanbul, Turkey: Yayinlari, 2012), 297.

Sardis has an unusual synagogue dating from the 2nd/3rd century AD. It apparently was a pre-existing building, which somehow became property of the Jews of the community who converted it to a synagogue. This is the largest synagogue of the Diaspora² and has some features uncharacteristic of synagogues. There are two elevated platforms at the back of the room (rather than at the front), one of which was the “seat of Moses” (cf. Matt 23:2; photo right) and the other held the Torah scrolls. When the Torah was read,



the scrolls were taken to the other end of the building and laid on a table supported by two uprights with eagles carved on them (above left). The eagle was a symbol of Rome and these apparently came from an earlier Roman monument. At each end of the table was a statue of two lions back-to-back (above right), which were from 6th century BC images associated with Cybele. Perhaps the lions were re-interpreted as the “Lion of Judah” terminology of Genesis 49:9-10.



The synagogue was adjacent to a huge gymnasium with a large exercise area measuring approximately 212 x 212 feet (photo left). From the palaestra (exercise area), one would proceed to the frigidarium into the tepidarium and finally into the cauldarium to unwind after the workout.

²Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 308.



We also visited the ruins of a temple to Artemis dating originally from around 300 BC. The construction was never fully completed and some of the remaining columns were functional but not finished. Destruction hit in 17 AD necessitating reconstruction. In front of the temple is the reconstructed altar over the still-visible ruin of a free-standing altar to Artemis dating originally to the 6th/5th centuries BC (photo left; Janis Ragsdale is in the background for scale).

The next day found us at Pergamum. The acropolis of Pergamum is very high and has a breathtaking view of the valley below. It is surmounted with an elaborate temple complex, and most of its remains date from the Hellenistic period and hence would have been in place when



John wrote to them. The steep theatre, dating from the 3rd century BC, was embedded into the hillside (photo left). Like most theatres we have seen, this one was expanded through time and eventually grew to have a capacity of some 10,000 people. Next to the theatre was the Altar of Zeus built in the 2nd century BC (photo below left). All that remains is the foundation measuring approximately



120 x 112 feet. The altar's fragmentary superstructure was taken to Berlin in the 1880s by the Germans, where it remains in their museum. With the emphasis at the end of the 1st century AD to pay homage to Caesar, and with the emphasis on such worship at Pergamum along with additional foci to worship Athena, Zeus, Dionysus, Asklepius and others, some have suggested that John refers to this religious milieu

when he wrote: “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev 2:13).

On a platform above the Altar to Zeus and the theatre stood a temple dedicated to Athena as the one who provides victory. She was also a focus of worship and the foundations of her temple can clearly be traced (photo right).



On the same platform are the ruins of the library at Pergamum that had access to some 200,000 scrolls (but apparently only about a tenth of them were stored in this facility). At one point, the libraries of Pergamum and Alexandria were in competition and Ptolemy V (204-180 BC)³ closed the export of papyrus to Pergamum. The people of Pergamum, undeterred by this restriction, enhanced the use of leather in the form of parchment as the item-of-choice on which to preserve their works.⁴ Pergamum’s role in the use of leather and its refinement as a writing surface is reflected in the linguistic corruption of the town’s name to apply to “parchment.” Plutarch (*Antony* 58) reported that the Pergamum library was plundered by Mark Antony, who gave the collection to Cleopatra. Sadly, much of the accumulated knowledge of the ancient world literally went up in smoke when the Alexandria library was eventually lost to fires in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.



On a much lower hill a couple of miles away, we visited the Asklepeion of Pergamum. This, too, was an important part of the ideology and economy of the town. A well-paved street enters the facility and one passes through the formal entry where stood an altar to Asklepius; this was decorated with serpents—one of the motifs of the healing god (photo upper left). The forecourt opened into a large courtyard within which were a number of features. Among them were “sleeping rooms,” a library, and a theatre. One unusual feature was a tunnel (photo left) through which people passed on their way to the “treatment center;” in these locations patients would hear hidden voices,

³ This is the same Ptolemy who is known from the Rosetta Stone. The Rosetta Stone was discovered by Napoleon’s troops in 1799. It preserved an inscription in three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Egyptian Coptic, and Greek. From this evidence, Francois Champollion in France was able to decipher hieroglyphics, using the other two languages as his base reference points.

⁴ Mark Wilson correctly points out that animal skins had been used as a writing material before this in the ancient world, but with this embargo, apparently the people of Pergamum refined the product for which it became widely-known (Ibid., 281-82).

which uttered positive messages of encouragement to reinforce their treatments. A surprising component of the treatment was its holistic design. They tried to integrate not only physical activity, but also positive mental and subconscious treatments, along with physical treatments such as consumption from a sacred spring (which still flows; photo right), bathing, mudpacks, and medications (some of which would certainly strike us as bizarre!).



After we ate lunch, we headed through some serious rain storms to the modern town of Canakkale where we spent the night. This was our overnight before visiting ancient Troy the next day. In Canakkale, we saw the Trojan Horse that the producers of Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004, starring Brad Pitt) gave the town after filming the movie (I am at the foot of the horse in photo right).



On Sunday we visit the ancient site of Troy connected with the stories of Homer's *Illiad*. The excavations at Troy began in earnest when Heinrich Schliemann searched for the site to legitimate a historical basis of Homer's stories. Regretfully, Schliemann misidentified the stratum associated with the Mycenaean campaign, but he did much to demonstrate his goal (the photograph shows the minimally reconstructed entrance into the 3rd millennium BC palatial area with which Schliemann misidentified the Troy campaign; Tulley and I are in front of the ramp leading into the gate). It was thrilling to witness the reality of a pivotal excavation focusing on historiography. A number of criticisms may be leveled against his work: he misinterpreted the chronology, his techniques have been ridiculed by modern archaeologists, and he seems to have merchandised the finds, his work still should be recognized as a step in the right direction. Rarely does an innovator's work stand the long term test of a discipline's maturation. After his initial treasure hunting endeavors, Schliemann realized the need for more careful work and attempted to excavate with an eye to stratigraphy. He also vindicated the idea that ancient stories were not always simply fictional fabrications. We were able later in our trip to see some of the



finds from the excavations at Troy when we visited the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.

I had hoped that we might be able to have our Sunday worship at Troy, not because it had any direct biblical significance, but because it is only a few miles from New Testament Troas where Paul received the

Macedonian call (Acts 16:7-10) and where he later gathered with the believers “on the first day of the week to break bread” (Acts 20:6-7). The rain, however, derailed our plans and we had worship that evening in Istanbul, after ferrying across the Dardanelle Strait from Asia to Europe.

Istanbul is a historic and unique town, straddling two continents—Europe and Asia—and controlling the straits, which pass from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Current events highlight elements of this strategic need with the Crimean/Ukrainian/Russian tensions. These political concerns are by no means new.

Much of the visit to Istanbul addressed elements of later Church, political, and ethnic histories, but even these are often rooted in the events of the contexts of the Old and New Testaments. It is impossible to deal with all of the things that we saw and visited within the span of this report (nor have I done so with anything else earlier!), but I will focus on those that are more directly connected to biblical and early historical concerns.

Modern Turkey is a secular Moslem country, which overtly attempts to maintain a separation of Islam from the government. Most of us in the USA would probably argue that it is not successful, but when compared with other countries in the region—Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, etc., they are quite successful. This situation is under fire by those who would like to bring the entire country under *sharia* law, but resistance by a large segment of the population has managed to curtail that implementation.

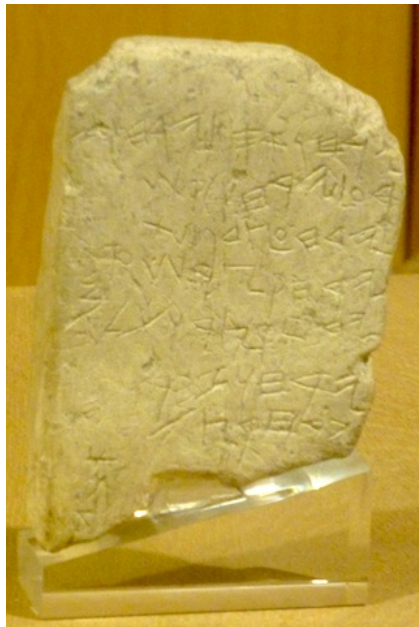
That said, there are mosques everywhere, but these typically come from the centuries prior to the 20th when Ataturk managed to change the structure of the country. The mosques, however, still dominant much of the thinking. There are few church buildings anywhere and those one usually encounters are historical buildings that no longer have any viable devotees connected with them.

The Ottoman Turk occupation of almost the entire Middle East from ca. 1500 to 1918, put them in control of most of the geographic area of the events of the Old Testament and a large area of the events of the New Testament. With that control, they garnered ruins, remains, and artifacts from sites associated with the Bible. Generally the Ottomans were not directly involved in the excavations, but being the ones who granted the licenses to foreign nationals to dig, they commanded agreements that brought into their coffers large elements of the collections that archaeologists found. This is one reason so many of the remains from sites we visit are no longer in the areas from which they come, but are in foreign museums—the Elgin Marbles and components of the Artemis Temple in the British Museum, the Altar of Zeus in Berlin, Hammurabi’s Code in the Louvre in France, the Ishtar gates from Babylon in Berlin. But it also explains the presence of many artifacts from other modern countries in Istanbul’s collections-- items from excavations in Israel such as Megiddo, Gezer, Taanach, and my own site of Bethshemesh, parts of the Ishtar Gate from Babylon, and “Alexander’s Sarcophagus” from Sidon.

Among the artifacts in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum is an elaborate sarcophagus usually called “Alexander’s Sarcophagus” (photo right), which is a misnomer. It is thought, instead, to have been the sarcophagus of Abdalonymus who received his kingship because of Alexander’s generosity and who in turn honored Alexander and his victory over the Persians by commemorating the conflict on the sides of the sarcophagus. It is a beautifully crafted piece with dramatic detail.



Regretfully the floor in the museum that houses artifacts directly connected to ancient Israel and Palestine was closed, but we were permitted by pre-arrangement to visit it briefly—for about 15 minutes! It was frustrating, but we saw two very important inscribed pieces.

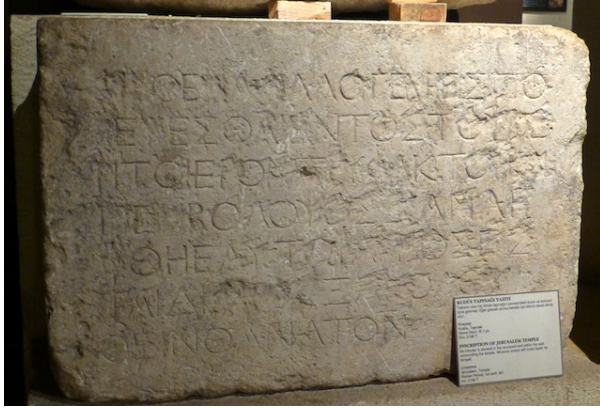


One was the inscription from the Siloam tunnel through which the students had passed when we were in Jerusalem. The inscription commemorates the intersection of the two tunneling crew as they worked toward each other through the spur of rock. The inscription is from the time of Hezekiah as he tried to provide a secure water supply for Jerusalem in the face of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30; Isa 22:9-11).

Another inscription is from the Gezer excavations in the early 1900s. It is a writing exercise, a poem describing the seasons on the basis of agricultural activities (photo left). It is usually referred to as the Gezer Calendar and is arguably the oldest Hebrew writing thus far discovered.⁵ Since ancient societies were so tied to agricultural cycles in many ways it more suitable to describe the year according to agricultural seasons rather than by names of months. This is what is reflected when Ruth and Naomi return “at the beginning of barley harvest” (Ruth 1:22).

After the group left the floor with the remains from Palestine, I lagged behind looking for another inscription that I remembered was in the museum. It is an inscribed stone from Herod’s temple in Jerusalem and warned Gentiles not to pass the wall in which the inscriptions were

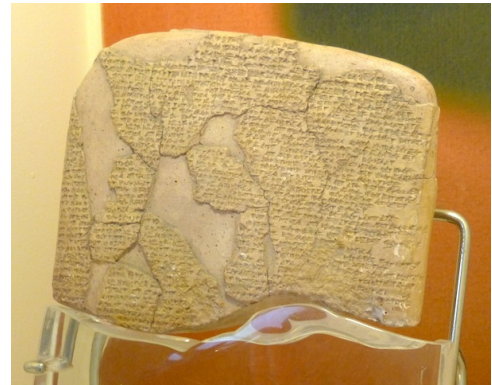
⁵ The other candidates are the abecedy recently found at Tel Zayit in the southwestern Shephelah and an inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa. The abecedy does not say anything, but is simply a listing of the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet. The translation of the inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa remains uncertain and debates swirl not only of what it says, but whether it is actually Hebrew or Phoenician.



found (photo left). The wall served to demarcate the court of the Gentiles from the more holy Temple; it warned of the potential of danger. Josephus refers to the wall in two places (*War* 5.188-212; 6.113-36), indicating that they were written in Greek and Latin. Only two examples have been found and the one in Istanbul is the only one complete. The inscription on the other, which is in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, is defaced and preserves only half the inscription. The legal issues surrounding this wall are what

prompted Paul's arrest in Jerusalem eventually leading to his imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima and then his transport to Rome where he was to have a hearing before Nero (Acts 21-28).

We also saw one of the ancient copies of the Hittite treaty with the Egyptians (photo right). This is the oldest treaty for which we have copies preserved from both governments. Hattusilis was the Hittite king and Ramses II was the Egyptian king. The Egyptian version leaves the impression that the Hittites were frightened into surrender to end the hostilities whereas the Hittite version, which is usually considered more neutral and accurate, indicates that the hostilities were essentially a draw.⁶

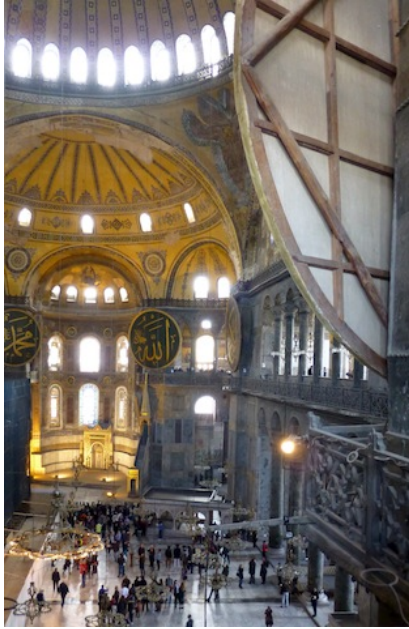


Another feature in the museum were glazed tiles depicting various creatures that were part of the Ishtar gate complex of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (photo right). There was also a statue of Shalmaneser III (photo left), who led a military campaign to Qarqar in which he engaged a coalition of kings, which included Ahab of Samaria. According to the Assyrian annals, Ahab had contributed 2000 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers to the campaign.⁷ This conflict occurred in 853 BC, but the Bible says nothing about it.



⁶ Translations of the two treaties appear conveniently and with brief introductory comments in James B. Pritchard (editor), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with Supplement (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 199-203.

⁷ For the annalistic record of this campaign, see Pritchard, 278-79.



Of a non-biblical significance, we visited the famed Hagia Sophia—a massive church building constructed on the site of two earlier church buildings that had occupied the site and which were destroyed. The first had been built by Constantine in 360 AD; the second by Theodosius II in 415. After its destruction in 532, Justinian directed that another church building be constructed on the site, which is the structure that now stands. It was finished in 537 AD. The building is huge by any definition and especially given the time of its construction (photo left). It was by far the largest church building in the world for over a thousand years! The height of the dome from ground level is 55.60 m (= appr 182 feet). The building was converted to a mosque in the 15th century, but in 1935 under the rule of Ataturk it was neutrally converted into a museum.



The so-called “Blue Mosque” (photo left) which is near the Hagia Sophia is more formally known as Sultan Ahmed Mosque. The popular name derives from the extensive use of blue tile decorations on the interior. The mosque was the first to have six minarets, which at the time rivaled the major mosque a Mecca. When the sultan was rebuked for this presumption, he sponsored the construction of a seventh minaret in Mecca. The mosque was built in the early 17th century, but its preservation and care belie its age. It is bright and airy. One aspect of mosques, contrasting usually with the church buildings with which they were contemporary is their simple elegance.

This report focused on educational and historical issues, but be assured that we have enjoyed ourselves with more leisurely activities. Among those were visits to the Grand Bazaar and the Egyptian Spice Bazaar. We also went for a cruise on the Bosphorus Strait, which provided some needed down time and a survey of some of the city from sea level.

The Turkey trip substituted for the cancelled Egyptian tour, but all of the students with whom I have spoken affirm that this was a wonderful and enlightening sojourn. All of the Turkish people with whom we interacted were gracious hosts.