



ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ  
ΑΝΕΘΑΚΕΝ

# Aphrodisias, Aphrodite's city

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The ancient city of Aphrodisias and Aphrodisias Museum have become important tourist destinations after fifty years of constantly expanding excavations. The reason why the city possesses such a huge archaeological importance today is its exceptionally well-preserved marble architecture, architectural relief decorations and inscriptions. These make it possible to thoroughly research and comprehend the marble culture of the Roman period in the Asian province.

At the moment Aphrodisias is on the “UNESCO World Heritage Temporary List” and a candidate for the “World Heritage List.” In Classical antiquity the city was shaped by the cultural influences of the Greco-Roman world. Its close bonds with the centre of the Roman Empire placed the city in a privileged position, and thanks to its rich marble quarries that allowed the training of sculptors who created works for the entire Roman Empire, it became renowned throughout the Mediterranean 1<sup>st</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The cultural influence of the sanctuary of Aphrodite that named the city and the city's Aphrodite cult reached a large area.

One of Aphrodisias' most outstanding achievements compared to similar ancient Anatolian cities is that it managed to preserve the characteristics of a Clas-

Medusa head in Aphrodisias Museum's garden



Aphrodite of Aphrodisias  
(Aphrodisias Museum)

## CULTURAL HERITAGE OF AYDIN

sical city with very few changes throughout Late Antiquity. Investments in the city at this period focused on preserving the existing architecture and sometimes this included changes in order to incorporate new functions. This meant that the prosperous Roman city could transform in stages as it evolved into an important Byzantine city in Late Antiquity.

### THE LOCATION OF APHRODISIAS

Aphrodisias is located in Geyre in the district of Karacasu in Aydın Province. This is in the ancient region of Caria in south-western Asia Minor. The city is south of the Menderes River in the fertile valley created by the river's distributaries (Morsynus – today's Dandalas River). The Morsynus River irrigates an area of approximately 475 km<sup>2</sup> around the city. It springs from Mount Cadmus (today's Akdağ or, as it is called locally, Babadağ) which is 2308 m high and commands the

whole basin. The river valley where the city was founded has fertile agricultural land and in the northern part in particular there is clay suitable for pottery. But the city's biggest source of prosperity in ancient times was the marble and emery stone deposits south of the city.

### RESEARCH HISTORY

Many travellers visited Aphrodisias in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. People like William Sherard, Charles Texier, Charles Fellows, Philippe Le Bas and William Waddington travelled to the area and identified the ruins there as the Aphrodisias they knew from the ancient sources. Initial excavations in the city were carried out by a French team led by Paul Gaudin in 1904 and 1905, and in 1911 A. Boulanger published Gaudin's findings. An Italian team of archaeologists under the direction of Giulio Jacobi carried out excavations in the city in 1937 and 1938.

The Sebasteion









The Tetrapylon



Systematic excavations began in the city in 1961 under Professor Kenan Evrim who remained the director until his death in 1990. His excavation programme at the time aimed to unearth the monumental buildings in the centre of the city. First the sanctuary of Aphrodite, the bouleuterion, the theatre, the Sebasteion, Hadrian's Bath and the stadium were excavated. The buildings as well as many statues, reliefs and inscriptions belonging to them were very well preserved and hence the city has an extraordinarily extensive inventory of artefacts. The most outstanding finds from the city have been displayed in the city's museum since 1979. The *anastylosis* (restoration) of the Tetrapylon that also began at this time was completed in the 90s.

Excavations after 1990 were directed by Prof. Dr. R.R.R. Smith of Oxford University and were sponsored mainly by New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. While the re-

search programme has moved on to new dig sites, it also focuses on more detailed documentation of existing discoveries, conservation and publication. Smaller scope excavations are taking place on new sites with the aim to map out the plan of the city and to gain an insight into Aphrodisias' urban development. Meanwhile excavations are also carried out in an effort to expose the South Agora and the monumental pool in the agora in the city centre and also the broad north-south running street that connects the Sebasteion with the Aphrodite sanctuary. The conservation and restoration of the existing buildings is an important aspect of the excavation project and the work presently taking place in the southern section of the Sebasteion, the *anastylosis* of the monumental gateway and in Hadrian's Bath is part of the comprehensive conservation project. The excavation team has systematically catalogued all the moulded marble pieces from the ru-

South Agora



## CULTURAL HERITAGE OF AYDIN

ins and placed them in purpose built depots. As an extension to the excavation of the Sebasteion, an annex was added to the museum for the high relief sections from the Sebasteion. Detailed architectural history research of the monumental structures is taking place while an inventory of the architectural fragments is compiled.

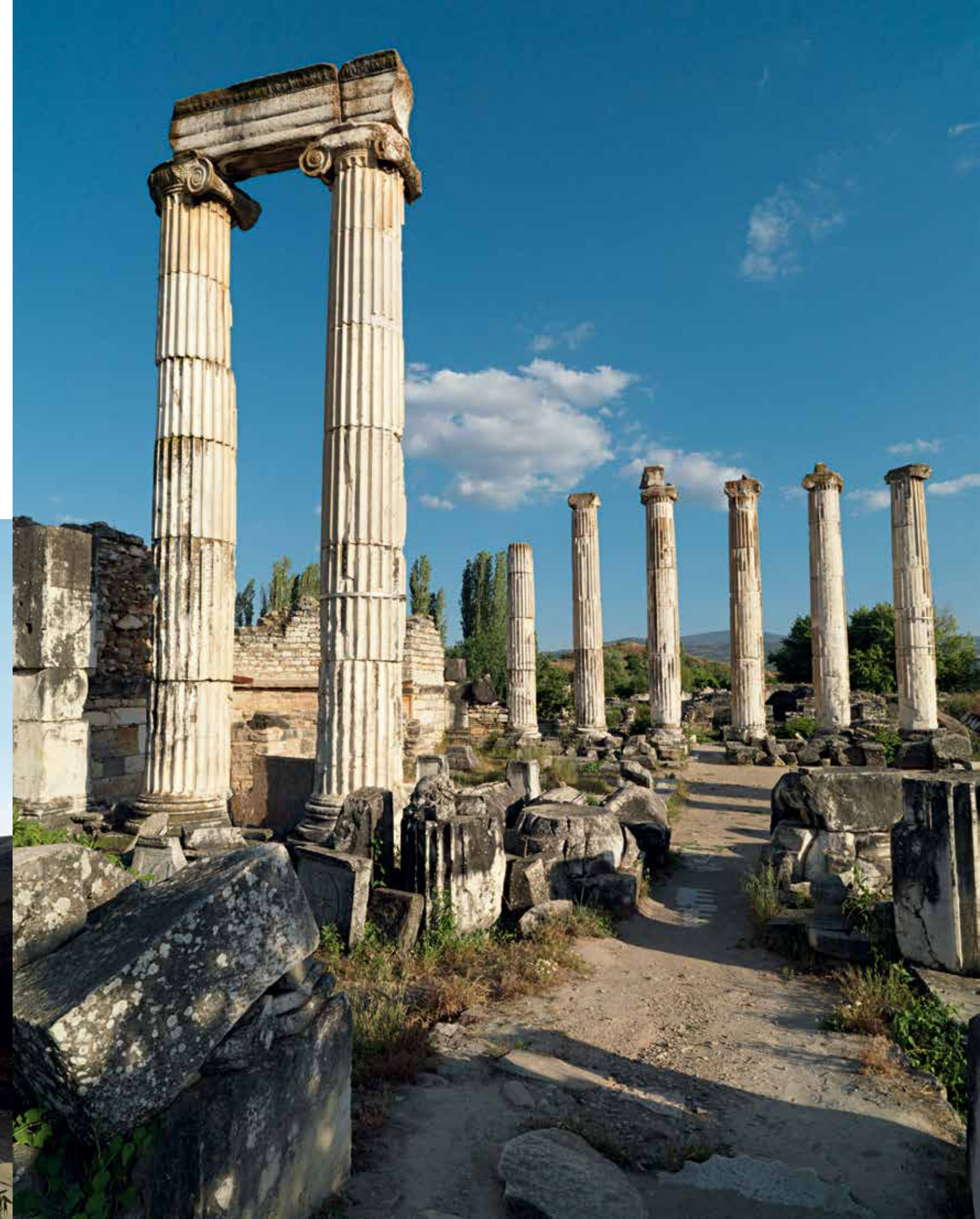
Some of the most abundant finds in the city are the exceptional and plentiful inscriptions. Researchers like Charles Fellows, William Waddington, William Paton and Louis Robert studied the inscriptions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These increased sharply however when systematic excavation was undertaken and have become the most ample source of information with regard to the city's history. Free access to the inscriptions archive has been made available through the internet.

## THE REGION'S EARLY HISTORY

The city of Aphrodisias was founded in an area that has been populated since Prehistory. It is founded on top of two prehistoric settlement mounds (Theatre Hill and Pekmez Höyük) and covers an area of about 50 acres. The earliest pottery examples found here date back to the Neolithic Period but the earliest positively identified settlement on Pekmez Höyük dates to 2700-2600 B.C. Architectural remains and pottery fragments unearthed during excavations show that settlement continued here until 2200 B.C. The archaeological finds resemble the First Bronze Age pottery examples in Beycesultan in Denizli's Çivril district which is the most well documented prehistoric settlement in western Anatolia.

The Temple of Aphrodite





## CULTURAL HERITAGE OF AYDIN

There is a resettlement phase on the Theatre Hill, sometimes called Acropolis Hill in literature, dated to around 2200-1900 B.C. This phase also featured *megaron*-like structures and it was succeeded by the last phase dated to approximately 1900-1600 B.C. The site fell into ruin after that date. Rare Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age objects discovered here suggest the existence of a small village-like settlement.

The excavations of Theatre Hill produced Lydian pottery fragments or what could be termed as imitations of Lydian pottery from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Wild Goat Style pottery, similar to the Ionian from around 600 B.C. has also been found. A piece of ceramic from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. decorated with graffito was unearthed during the excavation of the Roman bouleuterion and it constitutes one of the very rare inscriptions in the Lydian language discovered outside the Lydian kingdom.

Fragments of marble sculptures found in the Aphrodite sanctuary and a round piece of a marble plinth, are seen as

proof that monumental architecture existed here in the Archaic Period; however the available data is not sound enough to support this assumption. A study is underway to re-evaluate the material from the Archaic Period found in the sanctuary and it appears that a group depicting a sitting mother goddess figure made out of terracotta and fragments of a marble lion sculpture are from the sanctuary's Archaic Era. So far the finds seem to belong to a simple altar but no evidence has been discovered to show the original place of the lion that was moved in the Late Roman Period and used in part for the construction of the city wall.

The wall ruins have been positively dated to the early phase of the temple and the remains of a mosaic floor date to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.; these ruins could possibly belong to a *sekos* with a *peribolos* plan. Existing evidence shows that this temple was the only monumental edifice in the area where the city of Aphrodisias was founded until the monumental city centre was built. It must be emphasized that the temple's

A sarcophagus in Aphrodisias Museum's garden

