



Ephesus Celsus Library



Tiled ceiling of Slope House

The Wonders of Ephesus

A Journey to a Modern City of the Ancient Age

By Ela Erozan Gursel

If you dream of travelling across time into the golden ages of the Hellenistic, Roman and early Christian periods, you should consider visiting ancient Ephesus in the west of Turkey. Years ago, when I first explored this magical place, I was a student fascinated by ancient history and archaeology. Nonetheless, I hadn't imagined its mesmerising splendour. It took walking the marbled streets and contemplating the ruins of its exquisite buildings to transport me back in time.

This magnificent Ionian city-state was founded in the 11th century BCE by Androklos, son of the Athenian King Codrus. According to legend, Androklos left Greece after his father's death and founded Ephesus at the place shown to him by a fish and a boar, as the Oracle of Delphi had predicted.

Ephesus has been home to Greeks, Lydians, Persians, Romans, Christians and Turks. A powerful commercial hub, the city was as well-designed as any modern metropolis with agoras, parliament buildings, avenues, city gates, library, gymnasium, amphitheatre, stadium, shops, houses and even a brothel. Among its prominent inhabitants were such philosophers as Heraclitus and Herodotus, the poet Hipponax, the painter Parrhasius and the historian Xenophon.

Paul the Apostle, an important figure in Early Christianity, lived in Ephesus. Historians believe that the Gospel of John might have been written there. The Seven Sleepers, considered saints by Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims, were immured in a cave in Ephesus ca 250 CE during Roman persecutions. Emerging as if from sleep three centuries later, the miracle of their presence was seen by Christians as proof of the body's resurrection. The fact that Ephesus was one of only seven cities addressed in *Revelation* is also evidence of its influence on Christianity.

Regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis had columns 17.5 metres high and was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens, covering an area as large as a modern soccer field. Dedicated to the Greek goddess of the hunt, forests and fertility, the marble temple was said by the second century

Greek traveller and geographer Pausanias to be the largest building in the world. Unfortunately, little remains today of this magnificent temple except the foundation and a few sculptural fragments.

The Library of Celsus, which once held nearly 12,000 scrolls, was built by Gaius Julius Aquila in 125 CE in memory of his father. Its façade has been carefully reconstructed from all original pieces and its exaggerated entrance emphasises the building's grandeur. The clever architect placed the reading rooms on the east side to optimise the morning light.

Near the library, on Mt. Coresus' slopes, stood luxurious homes similar to Pompeii's villas. Occupied from the first to seventh centuries CE, the Slope Houses were excavated beginning in the 1960s and opened for public viewing in 2001. I strongly recommend visiting them to get a feel of the lifestyle of the elite in Ephesus.

Ephesus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the greatest outdoor museum in Anatolia, welcoming more than a million tourists annually from Easter to November. I would encourage you to visit in spring or autumn when the weather is moderate and you can explore this magnificent ancient town with neither heat nor crowds. Another hint: enter the town through the upper gate (Magnesia Gate) so that your visit proceeds downhill.

You can reach Ephesus, which is only 55 km from Izmir International Airport, by rental car or shuttle bus. There are some nice bed and breakfast inns in Selcuk and nearby villages, and many hotels are located in Kusadasi or Soke, by the seacoast.

Ela Erozan Gursel moved to Singapore from Turkey at the end of 2008. She writes on global business trends for a financial newspaper and several business magazines. A past resident of Istanbul and Washington, D.C., her move to Singapore allowed her to join the 2009-10 ACM Docent Training Programme.

Photos courtesy of the author