

BRIEFING NOTE, MAY 2023

COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS | ISTANBUL

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME: EXPLORING THE WONDERS OF WESTERN TURKEY

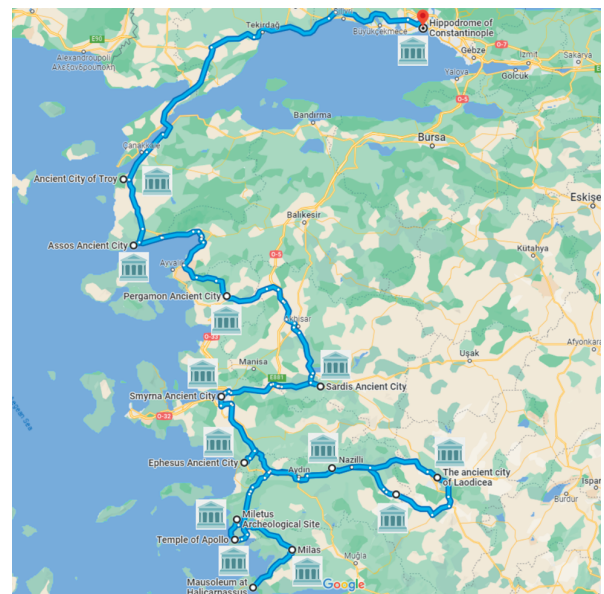


Introduction

A group of Ph.D. students and faculty members from Columbia University embarked on a 2,000-kilometer odyssey through the ancient wonders of Western Turkey between May 17-27. In collaboration with Columbia's Center for Ancient Mediterranean, Columbia Global Centers | Istanbul organized this nine-day journey on the Turkish coasts of the Mediterranean. It included 17 significant ancient sites and 13 archeology museums. More than just a sightseeing excursion, this expedition was designed to offer a unique blend of academic rigor, intellectual camaraderie, and a sense of adventure that would inspire each participant expand their horizons and explore more of these ancient wonders.

From the coastal allures of Halicarnassus, and Pergamon to the grandeur of Troia and

Constantinopolis, the itinerary showcased the legacy of the ancient world, spanning the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and at some sites even the Seljuk and Ottoman eras.



Each day, a dedicated Ph.D. student from Columbia assumed the role of an instructor, delivering presentations that brought ancient

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sites to life. In sharing our briefing note, we hope to ignite a shared sense of inspiration and curiosity. Having been part of this extraordinary odyssey as Columbia Global Centers | Istanbul, we can attest to the impact that such experiences have on one's intellectual growth.

Day 1: Echoes of Sunken Pasts

Our expedition started in **Bodrum** in Southwest Turkey, with an exploration of the ancient city of **Halicarnassus** and the Myndos Gate. Built in the 4th century BCE, this grand structure shows how powerful and wealthy Mausolus, ruler of the Caria region and satrap of the Achaemenid Empire, was.



But there was more to witness. Our next stop was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, which once stood as a majestic structure built for Mausolus and his wife Artemisia II, fascinating the visitors. Though time has taken its toll, the remnants still spoke of a bygone era.

Continuing our journey, we found ourselves in the presence of the Bodrum Castle, a fortress built by the Knights of Rhodes that has stood sentinel for centuries. The Serçe Limanı Glass

Shipwreck exhibition inside the Castle, an archaeological marvel from beneath the waters of the Mediterranean, dates back to the 11th century CE. This sunken ship reveals glimpses of a seafaring past, displaying the remnants of a merchant vessel and its cargo. As we gazed upon this submerged treasure, we imagined the maritime trade that once thrived in these waters.



Our final stop for the day, the ancient city of **Miletus**. A bustling hub of trade and culture in the ancient world, the site welcomed us to explore its ruins and wander through its four ports.

Beside being renowned for its strategic location and maritime power, Miletus was also famous for its contributions to philosophy. With a colleague from Columbia's Classics Department with a philosophy background, it was impossible not to mention Thales, one of the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece and a prominent figure in the early development of scientific thought.



As the sun set on our first day, we left behind

the ancient wonders of Bodrum and its surroundings, preparing ourselves for the next day.

Day 2: In the Footsteps of Dionysus and Aphrodite

Commencing our day at the **Aydın Archaeological Museum**, we delved into the history of the surrounding cities, including Carian cities of Alinda and Alabanda. Immersing ourselves in the artifacts and exhibits, we learned more about the stories of ancient Anatolian mainlanders from before the Ionian era.

Continuing our expedition, we arrived at the ancient city of **Nysa**, a place with many mythical tales and architectural splendor. Nysa was said to have been the birthplace of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and revelry. According to legend, he was born to the mortal princess Semele and Zeus, who disguised himself as a mortal to be with Semele. But her doubts led her to ask him to reveal his true form, resulting in her tragic demise. Zeus saved their child, Dionysus and as he grew older, he discovered the art of winemaking and taught it to humanity. Ancient festivals honoring Dionysus thus initiated, occurring every spring when grapevines bloomed anew.



A significant component of these festivals was theater, with plays written specifically for performance during springtime celebrations.

Walking among the ruins, we were struck by the Nysa's impressive amphitheater, one of the three in Turkey. Visualizing the plays and performances that once took place within its stone walls, we were impressed by the artistic prowess of the ancient inhabitants.



After an 80-kilometer bus ride, our final destination for the day was **Aphrodisias**, a city renowned for its significance to Roman emperors. Our visit began with the sebasteion, a 1st century CE temple complex dedicated to emperors. Our presenter for the day, Susan Rahyab, Ph.D. Student, Classical Studies, underlined that the upper two floors were decorated with marble reliefs, which reflect the realities of Roman imperialism and brutality with the images of the emperors as conquerors.

Aphrodisias was also a place of celebration and athleticism. Its grand stadium with a capacity of c. 30,000 people was a testament to the spirit of competition and physical excellence. Being the best preserved of all ancient Greek stadia and also one of the largest, the stadion accommodated traditional Greek athletic contests and was used for gladiatorial combats and wild-beast fights during festivals.



The city's theater was another highlight of our visit, which houses a fascinating archive of inscriptions. These offered insights to the political intrigues and power struggles that unfolded in the city, allowing us a glimpse into the political landscape. We were able to read, discuss, and analyze parts of these inscriptions thanks to our expert group of Columbia students and faculty members. This enriched our understanding of the context and shed light on the dynamics of the era.

As the day drew to a close, we departed Aphrodisias with appreciation of its legends, cultural celebrations, and political legacies.

Day 3: Deadly Depths and Striking Revelations

We explored the ancient cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea on our third day. The former sits on a mountain ridge, while the latter is adjacent across valley, each is visible from the other.

We were immediately drawn to the necropolis of **Hierapolis**, or the city of the dead, which was an integral part of ancient societies, reflecting their beliefs about maintaining a connection between the living and the dead. Our presenter for the day, Brett Lee Stine, Ph.D. Student, Classics, reflected that it was not at all possible to fully grasp the impact of a necropolis until entering this site personally and walking among more than 1,200 tombs and 300 inscriptions.

Among these were the famous “Cursed Tomb.” The inscription around this sepulcher refers to the curses inflicted upon those who violate it, invoking diseases, as well as punishments in the next world. Being reminded of the mystical allure of ancient civilizations, our group engaged in discussions regarding the motivations behind the presence of curses as such, discussing their significance in relation to worldly laws and governing authorities.



Continuing our journey through the city, we arrived at the Apollo Temple. This impressive sanctuary held great religious and cultural significance. Among the unique features of this temple was the alphabetical oracle which allowed visitors to seek answers by selecting letters. We eagerly participated, choosing letters that represented our names and read responses we would have heard from the oracle.



The next stop for the day was the ancient city of **Laodicea**, which thrived as a significant metropolis with a substantial population and immense wealth.

We were intrigued by the presence of one of the Seven Churches of Anatolia, which held religious significance in early Christianity and were mentioned in the Book of Revelation. The connection to the biblical figure of John the Apostle, who penned seven letters to these churches, added a layer of depth to our visit. As we explored this site, we discussed the legacy of faith and the intertwining of religion and history.



After learning about customs surrounding death and encountering one of the most important heritages of early Christianity, we embarked on a three-hour journey at the end of the day towards our next destination.

Day 4: An Oasis of Gods and Travelers

Our day unfolded at the ruins of **Priene**, a city nestled amidst breathtaking nature, which embraces the rugged landscape with remarkable harmony. The buildings were of unparalleled craftsmanship, prompting us to ponder how such magnificent stones were extracted and transported from the nearby cliffs.



Our exploration led us first to the sanctuary dedicated to Egyptian gods within the city. Here, we came upon inscriptions and artifacts that paid homage to the deities of Isis, Serapis, and Anubis. The presence of an Egyptian temple within an Anatolian city might seem unusual, but it reflects the cultural and religious interactions that thrived in Asia Minor during ancient times. Such intermingling was not uncommon, highlighting the diversity of the region. Trade routes connected different civilizations and facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas, playing a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural connections. This vibrant exchange enhanced the richness of its cities like Priene.



Moving forward in the day, we arrived at **Claros**. Surrounded by fruit gardens, the fertility of the area is still evident today, painting a vivid picture of the region's agricultural prosperity back in time. And the Temple of Apollo shows that Claros was yet another center of prophecy, like Delphi and Didyma. Divine guidance to most pressing questions was sought within these sacred grounds.



We also discovered the unique katageion, a structure next to the Temple serving as a guesthouse for pilgrims and travelers, of which there were plenty in Claros. Travelers were required to book their room in advance and pay the necessary amount to stay in the katageion, which was equipped with a bath and a kitchen.

Day 5: Roman Legacies and Christian Heritages

Our destination was **Ephesus** on the fifth day, an ancient metropolis, originally founded near an ancient sanctuary dedicated to the earth goddess Artemis, which was among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It has later undergone two relocations and the one that stands today is from the Roman Empire.

One of the highlights of the day was how our presenter for the day, John Izzo, Ph.D. Student, Classics, drew attention to the large population of enslaved and formerly enslaved people that lived in the city. He was particularly interested in studying monuments and inscriptions of formerly enslaved people and told us how Ephesus was an important center of slave trade.

The Library of Celsus is one of the most distinctive buildings in Ephesus, standing as a beacon of knowledge and learning. It used to house an impressive collection of more than 12,000 scrolls that enriched the intellectual pursuits of the city's inhabitants. Though the

library's original collection is no longer intact, its renovated façade and architecture continue to inspire visitors.



Continuing our journey, we arrived at the enormous theater with a capacity of around 25,000 people, believed to be the largest in the ancient world. It still hosts performances to its modern audience today, for them to witness the acoustics of this ancient construction.

The grand finale of our Ephesus expedition was the Basilica of St. John, a site intertwined with the legacy of John the Apostle himself. It is believed that John lived in Ephesus around 40 CE and that he brought Mary, the mother of Jesus, to this very place. The Basilica itself was built later, by Justinian I in the 6th century CE. Standing within the walls of the Basilica was exciting and helped us better comprehend the rich cultural heritage of the region.



Our day concluded in **Şirince**, a place with a rich history, which thrives through its agriculture today, producing fruit wines and olive oil. As the sun set, the wines of the region accompanied us as we reflected on the day.

Day 6: From Golden Rivers to Marble Splendors

We set off to **Smyrna** on a beautiful morning, the ancient city from which modern-day İzmir derives its name. The legend surrounding its relocation adds an intriguing dimension to the city's history. Our presenter for the day, Shenda Kuang, Ph.D. Student, Classical Studies, mentioned how Alexander the Great, while hunting in the vicinity, fell asleep beneath a tree and dreamt of founding a city in this very spot.

Located at modern İzmir's heart, Smyrna's agora is one of the largest of its kind. It was built during the Hellenistic era but was destroyed by a major earthquake afterwards. The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius rebuilt the agora and nearly all remains belong to public buildings of that period.



The second ancient site we visited was the nearby city of **Sardis**, the capital of Lydian civilization, where we traced stories on the origins of money. The Pactolus River used to run by the ancient city of Sardis, and was famous for its alluvial gold, making Lydians the wealthiest people around.

The gymnasium in Sardis, our next stop, was one of the largest in Asia Minor. It served not only as a place for bathing but also as a social hub for ceremonies. This bath building covering 23,000 square meters had gold-colored inscriptions and marble columns,

reflecting the city's prosperity and status as a crossroad of imperial trade routes.



Particularly intriguing at our final destination, the Artemis Temple of Sardis, was learning about how marble blocks weighing up to 23 tons were lifted and placed with specially built lewis in this grand structure. Adding another layer to our expedition was the crane near the temple from the 1907 excavations, serving as a reminder of the efforts undertaken to unearth these wonders.

Day 7: Of Power and Serenity

Our seventh day was solely devoted to the city of **Pergamon** and it began with a cable car ride to the pinnacle of the Pergamon acropolis, located on a mountainside. The city's name, believed to have originated from the Hittite era, signifies its position as a "high city" or a "citadel".



Ayelet Gila Wenger, Ph.D. Student, Classical Studies was the presenter of the day, and as we were climbing up, she was asked: How did the citizens of this town navigate their way to the top, and, more intriguingly, how did they transport the colossal marbles? Ayelet said that this was a question that had not occurred back in the library, where theater seat capacities and various dates seemed more important. We delved into a discussion about the role of elevation in shaping the city's appearance.

Next, we went to the well-preserved theater, a masterpiece from the Hellenistic period. With its 36-meter height and capacity to accommodate approximately 10,000 spectators across 78 rows of seats, it is one of the steepest ancient theaters. The adjacent terrace below the theater offers a wide panorama. A marble temple sits right next to the theater on a podium, around 5 meters and 25 marble stairs above the level of the theater terrace, which is dedicated inevitably to Dionysus.



Our final destination within Pergamon was the Asklepieion. Following the colonnaded sacred road, above which the acropolis glides, starts one of the most important treatment centers of ancient times. It was here that individuals seeking cures would bathe in the holy spring,

with the hope that the deity Asclepius, the first doctor-demigod in Greek mythology, would appear in their dreams and provide them guidance for recovery.



On our way forward to our next stop, Ayelet focused on a healing tale recounted by Aelius Aristides, a patient of the Asklepieion in Pergamon. This narrative wove together elements of miracles, healing, and the intersecting realms of medicine and mythology, leaving us with lots of thoughts.

Day 8: Layers for All to See

Our journey took us first to **Assos**, a city that has witnessed numerous conquests throughout its existence on the eighth day. It holds a remarkable position with breathtaking views of Lesbos in the south, Pergamum in the southeast, and the great Mount Ida or modern day Kaz Dağı in the east.



We started from Assos's acropolis, from the highest point of the city. The first marvel we encountered was the Athena Temple, a unique structure with its Doric style built by Aeolian colonists from Lesbos, who are believed to have founded the city around 9th century BCE. The temple dedicated to Athena, protector of Assos, was covered with friezes that depict the battle between Heracles and a centaur.

The bouleuterion, translated as council house or the senate, was our next stop. Overlooking the Lesbos Island, this view served our group as a reminder of the legendary poet Sappho who was born there. In honor of her legacy, we remembered her poetic words:

While she lived here beside us she honored you
like a goddess for all to see:
it delighted her most to hear you singing.
Now among all the women of Lydia
she stands out, just as, once the sun's
finished setting, the rosy-fingered moon
surpasses all the stars, spreading her light alike
on the salt sea and over all
the wide blossoming country meadows.[1]



[1] The Poetry of Sappho, translation and notes by Jim Powell, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Our expedition then led us to the fabled city of **Troy**, where we first visited the meticulously curated Troy Museum. Melody Anne Wauke, Ph.D. Student, Classics, underlined why visiting the museum was crucial to making more sense of this ancient city's nine distinct layers corresponding to its nine major periods. Wauke was impressed that the curation of the museum proved very adept at providing a comprehensive historical framework for the visitor to benefit from.



The remains of Troy I, the first layer, suggest that the city was founded around 3,000 BCE. Although not much is known about the first Trojans, earliest findings indicate that Troy had common features with the settlements that lay along the Aegean. Troy II, notable for having been misidentified as Homeric Troy, was known to be larger. Even less is known about Troy III-V, due to careless excavation practices in order to fully unearth the citadel of Troy II. However, these settlements appear to have been smaller and poorer than previous ones. Troy VI-VII encompassed a fortified citadel located on a steep slope, overlooking a sprawling lower town with a significant population. But it was destroyed by a fire. Greek settlers revived Troy VIII, and the Romanized Troy IX was notable for the structures built by Emperor Augustus in 1st century BCE and 1st century CE.

Troy's most renowned legend, that of the Trojan Horse, came alive as we encountered a replica of this iconic structure at the ancient

site. It was unfortunately under construction, but it helped us remember the tale immortalized by Homer's epic poems, which captures the strategy employed by the Greeks to infiltrate the city after many years of battling, and claim victory.

At the end of the day, we left ancient Troy and the Dardanelles behind to start our journey to Istanbul.

Day 9: A Confluence

Our final day unveiled the historical wonders of Istanbul, once Constantinople, encompassing Byzantine as well as Ottoman legacies. We started with the Hagia Sophia. Originally built by Emperor Justinian I between 532 and 537 CE, this magnificent building stands as the third iteration of the cathedral at the same spot, as the prior ones had been destroyed. Isidore of Miletus, renowned architect, whom we encountered in his hometown, contributed to its creation.



Our path led us next to Hagia Irene, the oldest known church in the city today. This Byzantine structure has never been converted into a mosque. It is said to occupy the site of an ancient temple to Greek gods and goddesses, transformed into a church by Emperor Constantine I in the 4th century CE.

Our next stop was the Basilica Cistern nearby, an underground reservoir. Constructed between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, this

subterranean cistern spans approximately 138 meters by 65 meters and stored 80,000 cubic meters of water. A forest of 336 marble columns supports the ceiling, two of which bear reused blocks with the enigmatic portrayal of Medusa. While the precise origins of these heads remain a mystery, it is believed that they were relocated from a nearby Roman structure.



Continuing our way, we arrived at the Hippodrome of Constantinople. Stretching approximately 450 x 130 meters, it was capable of accommodating 100,000 spectators. Statues of gods, heroes, and emperors decorated it, with remnants still visible today. The Obelisk of Theodosius was one of these, relocated from ancient Thebes to Constantinople. Thought to be built by Pharaoh Tuthmosis III in the 15th century BCE, the Obelisk found its new home after more than a thousand years, and symbolized Rome's victory over the Egyptian civilization.



During our final day, we also explored the Topkapı Palace Museum and the Grand Bazaar, two landmarks from the Ottoman era. The majestic halls and artifacts of the Ottoman palace showed us the grandeur of the Empire. The still bustling marketplace showed how centuries-old commercial traditions continued.

Ellen Morris, Associate Professor, Classics, one of the faculty members organizing the trip, is mainly an Egyptologist who focuses on ancient imperialism. During our visit to the Topkapı Palace, she referred to the common features of ancient Egyptian and modern Ottoman empires in terms of promoting and maintaining their royal power. Her remarks about how divinely ordained rulers cultivate an air of mystique around their power to encourage obedience informed our every step at the palace.



While the day drew to a close, we reflected upon the layers of history that shaped Istanbul. From the Byzantine marvels of Hagia Sophia and Hagia Irene to the subterranean mystique of the Basilica Cistern, and the Hippodrome, each site bore witness to the city's enduring legacy. Our journey through time was enriched by the echoes of more recent empires and the stories they left behind.

After traveling around numerous sites and delving into the depths of time together for nine days, our odyssey through history and architectural wonders of the Eastern Mediterranean had come to a close in Istanbul,

an apt final destination. Though parting ways was difficult, it was with gratitude we said goodbye, cherishing the memories forged during our adventure.



Participants:

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John Izzo, Ph.D. Student, Classics

Ata Turkoglu, Program Officer, Columbia Global Centers | Istanbul

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Itinerary of the Journey:

Day 1: Halicarnassus, Mylasa, Miletus, Didyma

Day 2: Nysa, Aphrodisias

Day 3: Hierapolis, Laodicea

Day 4: Priene, Claros

Day 5: Ephesus

Day 6: Smyrna, Sardis

Day 7: Pergamon

Day 8: Assos, Troy

Day 9: Constantinople

Columbia Global Centers promote and facilitate the collaborative and impactful engagement of the University’s faculty, students, and alumni with the world, to enhance understanding, address global challenges, and advance knowledge and its exchange.

The ten centers –located in Amman, Athens, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, and Tunis– work individually and as a network to drive teaching and research across disciplinary boundaries, in partnership with experts and scholars from their regions. By exploring global ideas both on campus and through their work in these regions, Columbia reaffirms its relevance and its commitment to creating meaningful impact and contributing a positive legacy for generations to come. It also opens up extraordinary possibilities for like-minded partners to join in achieving these transformative goals.

Columbia Global Centers | Istanbul was established in 2011 and is directed by Ipek Cem Taha, a Turkish journalist and businesswoman, and a graduate of Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs and Graduate School of Business. A hub for students and scholars from Columbia and universities in the region, the Istanbul Center has embarked on a wide range of programs since its inception, including key issues of our times: from refugee health to gender equality; entrepreneurship to arts and culture; politics of memory to archaeology, civil society to sustainability.

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