

Turkey's Treasures in Trouble

Mark R. Fairchild

I'VE VISITED MORE THAN 300 ANCIENT cities throughout Turkey that date back to the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods. Most of them have never been excavated, and many of them are scarcely known. For some places only the names used by the modern residents remain—the ancient ones forgotten to time. Others are currently underneath modern Turkish cities, but most of them are located in remote, seldom-visited regions.

For protection, many of these villages and towns were built on mountaintops or on strategically located precipices. Over the centuries, trees and brush have covered these sites and have made visitation very difficult. In many instances, there are no modern roads that lead to the sites. At other times, a rutted dirt road or a cow path is all that leads nearby. Directions to these unmarked sites are unclear and difficult to find. Even the best Turkish

roadmaps (in a book titled *Köy Köy Türkiye Yol Atlası*) mismarks about 40 percent of the ancient sites, by my estimate. To locate these places, my strategy has been to talk to nearby villagers.

On one trip I came to Balkis, a small village in northwest Turkey in search of the ruins of the ancient city of Kyzikos. As I turned off the road and pulled into the lot of a small cafe, the eyes of a dozen men stared at me. In Turkey men commonly gather at the village cafe and sip çay (tea) at tables outside. I was a stranger, and they don't typically see many strangers in Balkis. After a few customary greetings, I was invited to sit and offered çay. I don't like çay, but I drank it anyway, knowing that I was making a connection with the villagers. Whatever discussions the men were having prior to my arrival were now suspended, and I was the focus of their attention. In short order, the questions came: "Where are you from?" and "What are you doing here?" I explained that I was a professor at an American university, and I was interested in examining the ancient ruins of Kyzikos. Most of the men were not familiar with the name Kyzikos, but I explained that I was looking for an ancient city located in the woods and surrounding countryside. Most of the men knew of ruins that existed out in the brush, but they didn't know anything about them. After a bit of discussion, the men determined that Ahmet (not his real name), one of the men, should accompany me to the ruins.

Ahmet spent the rest of the day showing me the extensive ruins of ancient Kyzikos. Of particular interest were the ruins of the ancient amphitheater. Only three amphitheaters are known in ancient Anatolia, and one of them is in Kyzikos. We trekked through trees and heavy brush for two hours before arriving at the amphitheater ruins.

At the end of the day, Ahmet insisted that I have dinner with him and his family. Ahmet actually lives within the Roman baths of Kyzikos. Before dinner Ahmet introduced me to his neighbor, who had returned from prison about a year previously. His neighbor had been caught trying to sell antiquities on the black market. He explained to

Rescued from the black market, this piece of a frieze depicting a winged charioteer was recovered while being smuggled out of Turkey. The smuggler, whom Mark R. Fairchild met just one day after taking this photo in the Bandirma Museum where the frieze now resides, had broken the frieze into pieces in order to sneak it out of the country.



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me that he had dug up a frieze with a beautiful relief of winged charioteers. He broke up the relief panel to smuggle the pieces out of the country, but he was caught and jailed. As we were talking, it dawned on me that I had just seen a frieze similar to this at the Bandırma Museum the day before. I was puzzled when I viewed the objects because the frieze appeared to have fresh breaks, and the separate pieces had newly exposed surfaces. I pulled out my camera and flipped back to the shots I had taken a day earlier. As I showed the photos to Ahmet and his neighbor, they affirmed that this was the frieze that Ahmet's neighbor had uncovered. Undeterred, Ahmet's neighbor continued his clandestine activities. To him, the rewards far outweighed the risks.

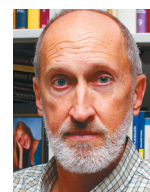
Illegal digs are ubiquitous in Turkey. Almost all of the sites are not protected

by fences; guards often find evidence of illegal digs.

Last year at another village in Turkey, I met a new friend who accompanied me to ruins in the nearby hills. At the end of the day, we returned to the village cafe, where we talked to several people who boasted about the objects they'd found. With so many objects available on the black and gray markets, collectors and curators are tempted to acquire impressive pieces that cannot be properly vetted. In recent years, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was forced to return the so-called Lydian Treasure, and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts returned a large statue of Herakles to Turkey.

Simply put, Turkey has vast treasure buried underground. In the past, Turkey scarcely realized the value of its hidden treasures and was ill-prepared to excavate them. Today, however, Turkey's universities are training the next generation of historians and archaeologists who are

eager to explore Turkey's past. In recent years, a few new digs have begun at some sites around the country. But Turkey's resources are limited. Meanwhile, scores of ancient sites are left unprotected and are being ravaged by locals who are hoping to hit the jackpot.



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Meeting, an academic conference at the ancient site of Ephesus in Turkey.

Biblical Views

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³ See A. Guillaume, "Is 44:5 in the Light of Elephantine Papyri," *Expository Times* 32 (1920–1921), pp. 377–379. Guillaume cites a number of Biblical passages that may allude to the practice: Ezekiel 9:4; Revelation 7:3; 13:16; 20:4; and possibly Galatians 6:17.

⁴ See Muhammed A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great* (626–331 B.C.), Victoria A. Powell, trans., revised ed. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 474–489. The Old Babylonian period Code of Hammurabi makes reference to the illegal shaving of a fugitive who had a slave's hairstyle (laws 226–227; see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed. [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], p. 124). Babylonian contracts and letters occasionally mention incisions (i.e., tattoos) on hands, arms and legs of servants; see the examples listed by Huehnergard and Liebowitz, *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (2013), 72.45–48. The Israelite practice of marking a perpetual slave is mentioned in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17.

⁵ Herodotus (*Histories* II.13) describes a similar custom for Egyptians: "If a runaway slave takes refuge in this shrine and allows the sacred marks, which are the sign of his submission to the service of the god, his master, no matter who he is, cannot lay hands on him." (See Aubrey de Selincourt, trans., *Herodotus, the Histories* [London: Penguin, 1954], p. 171. Also, see Philo, *Laws* 1:58 and Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 59. W. Hayes (*The Scepter of Egypt*, Part 2 [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953], pp. 219–221) describes various tattoo marks on female figures from various periods. In addition, James Breasted cites some examples of branding captives (*Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, vol. 4 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906–1907], par. 405).

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those of us who are being saved it is the Power of God." I Corinthians 1:18




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