

Date: 09/05/2011 Place: Bergama (Pergamon)

Kms walked: 2930

As well as having crossed 8 countries I am now on a different continent!

When I last wrote I had just entered Turkey and I have to confess now that I was a little nervous, this being the first time to have visited the country. It seems that no matter how many kilometres I have travelled, I still have a fear of the unknown – even if only a little. But this unease melted away very very quickly. I have found the Turkish people to be the kindest, friendliest and most hospitable I have encountered to date. Something particularly cheering is the amount of waves and smiles from drivers (especially lorry drivers) as they pass, often beeping their horns as they do so.

My route from Kesan took me south. It was in the main flat and I was very surprised at the number of coaches that kept passing. There is a very good bus service between the coast and Istanbul. Fortunately I was able to find a couple of minor roads which provided relief from the traffic. The one striking difference between being here and other countries was the complete lack of roadside shrines so on one of the days I made a cross of twigs to mark the place I stopped to pray.

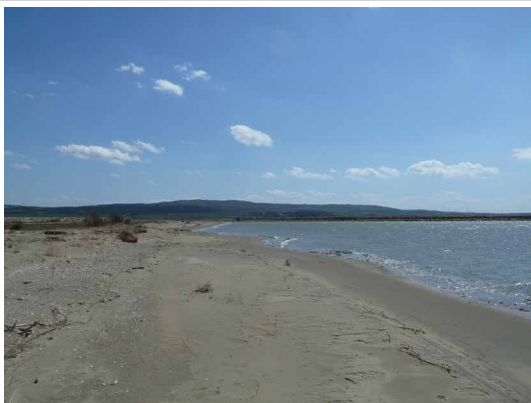


The only traffic I met on this road was a pony & cart



Pause for prayer along the route

After a few days I was just coming to the Gallipoli peninsula and made a monumental error that resulted in my going about 4kms off track and ending up at a river I couldn't cross. However on the bright side it was a lovely day, I got to camp on the beach, something I have wanted to do for some time and I saw my 1st wild tortoise



The beach



Wildlife on the beach

The Gallipoli peninsula was the scene of much bloodshed in WW1. As I left the town of Gelibolu (Gallipoli), I came upon a memorial which moved me to tears. It read

“Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country therefore rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Johnnie's and the Mehmet's for us,
where they lie side by side in this country of ours ...
You, the mothers, who sent your sons from far away countries,
Wipe away your tears;
Your sons are now living in our bosom and are in peace.
After having lost their lives on this land, they have become our sons as well.”

1934 M. Kemal Ataturk

I tried to visit the war trenches to say a prayer for peace but alas the nearby campsite I hoped to stay at was not open yet which meant there was not enough time to visit & I had to return to Eceabat to get the ferry to Canakkale. It was at this point I crossed the Dardanelles, the strait separating Europe and Asia and so arrived on another continent. Later that evening I said the peace prayer in my hotel room. Having reached Canakkale the weather took an unbelievably bad turn and temperatures plunged again. Although I had been able to camp several times up to then, it was now out of the question.

In addition the subject of where to spend Easter had been occupying me of late and Izmir seemed a good choice as there were Catholic Churches there and being on the coast would be easy to reach. In the end I decided to go to there a couple of days early to escape the cold – Izmir is 360kms south of Canakkale. This worked well and I found somewhere reasonably cheap and located within a few minutes walk of a Church which conducted its services mainly in Italian. And I know this is going to sound ridiculous but I bought a kettle so I could boil water for coffee. I felt that if I was going to be there for several days I might as well be comfortable. It also served as an efficient egg boiler! The day I left I was able to give the kettle to someone at the Church, asking them to pass it on to someone who needed it.

Returning to Canakkale by overnight bus meant I could start walking the same day. The following day I made a detour to visit Troy, immortalised by Homer (who was from Izmir) in “The Iliad”. Apparently the hillside was already thought to be of human origin when a German began excavations in 1871. It is a 15 meter high settlement mound, with the 1st settlement dating back to 3000BC. Now it is inland but it used to be a port and was set at a very strategic point at the crossroads of 2 continents where trade routes converge. Although walking in the site did have an air of magic about it, I remembered reading the story of the Trojan Horse when I was little, sadly on a visual level I did not find it very exciting. It's a shame that the treasures originally discovered there are actually to be found somewhere else.



The Odeion at Troy – used for performances of music amongst other things



Troy as it used to be

Continuing south I came to Behram, the new name for Assos and incidentally the people in the area still call it Assos. Here again I was in the footsteps of St Paul. He walked to Assos from the port of Troas. I wondered had I followed the same route, I travelled from Troy inland through Ezine as it was shorter than following the coast. There is a major archaeological site here also and as I looked down the old road running alongside the necropolis I wondered if St Paul had trod there. The information board informed me that the road dated from 6th C BC.

After Assos my journey continued along the coast within sight of the sea and more opportunities for camping nearby. At one campsite I had a breakfast that was so beautifully presented I had to photo it! Even the tomatoes were peeled.



The old road along the necropolis at Assos.



Beautifully presented breakfast

The next major port of call was Bergama – another renamed city, it had previously been known as Pergamon. My spirit of adventure (and laziness) took over and instead of staying on the main road which was at least a day longer, I took to the mountains in a more direct path. I knew that there would probably be no hotel accommodation so I was rather relying on the weather to hold which it did until later that night. But my tent walls were waterproof still. However the next morning I discovered I had camped in a puddle – it almost felt as though I was lying on a water-bed! Also the rain had not stopped. I waited til it eased then quickly packed up & was on my way. The tent was sodden though. Continuing my way the route started to climb and climb and climb. I would say it probably climbed to about 800meters. Views were magnificent and it reminded me somewhat of Italy en route to LaVerna. Later on the sun made a welcome appearance & I was able to erect the tent and dry it out.



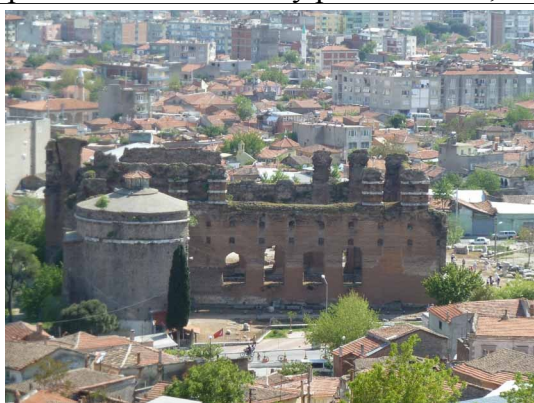
Camping in a puddle



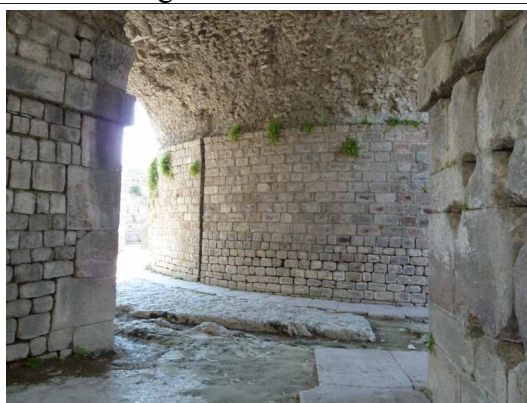
Far reaching views

Finally I reached Bergama which has a wealth of archaeological findings. The first one that I visited was a building that started off life as a temple to the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis. Subsequently it was Christianised and is one of the seven Churches mentioned in the Revelations of St John. During the Ottoman period a circular section of it was transformed into a Mosque which is still in use today. It was fascinating to walk around it and search the stonework strewn around for traces of Egyptian motifs, Muslim designs and Christian symbols. After that a good long walk took me to the top of the hill where the main city of Pergamon was situated. Here could be visited Athena's temple, the temple of Dionysus and the altar of Zeus. It was an impressive site with good views across the plain below.

The following day I took the opportunity to visit a huge site devoted to healing. It is situated on the plain below the main ancient city. At it can be found temples dedicated to Asklepios, the Greek god of medicine, Hygieia, his daughter as well as a temple to Apollon, his father. There is also a huge treatment centre catering for both physical and psychological problems. Treatments included dream interpretation carried out by priest doctors, mud baths, blood letting and herbal remedies.



The Red Hall – one of the Churches mentioned in St John's Revelations. The circular structure to the left in the picture is now a Mosque.



Circular treatment centre at Asklepion

So I have been steeped in ancient history for the past while. The next place I am really looking forward to visiting is Ephesus. And much to my delight, two friends are coming out to meet me at Izmir and will walk with me from there to Ephesus where we will stay for several days.

So take care and God Bless

Ann