



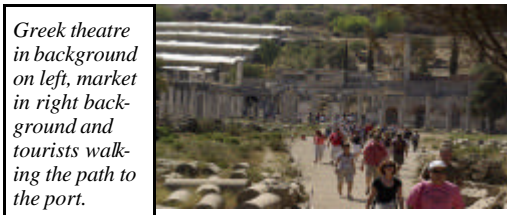
UNDER THE EPHESUS SUN by Monique Crabtree

Six weeks ago I found myself on a coach travelling through apricot and olive groves, past local workers hand picking cotton, and village women wearing traditional Muslim headscarves. No I was not on holiday in Tuscany, I was on my way to the ancient ruins of Ephesus, in modern day Turkey.



Local Turks hand harvesting cotton with olive trees in foreground and fruit trees in background

Ephesus was built in a sloping valley between two hills so we entered the city at the Upper Gate. The upper city looked like a half destroyed ‘Lego’ construction. Huge marble columns stood, leaned, or lay in pieces on the ground. Marble and limestone bricks outlined where the city’s administration buildings had been. We were allowed to walk and touch everything. The marble paths and steps were worn in the middle from much foot traffic.



Greek theatre in background on left, market in right background and tourists walking the path to the port.

From the upper city there is a sloping path down to the residential and shop area. At the bottom of the slope is the city library and market gates. When we stepped into the huge market area we could see the Greek Theatre, site of the Ephesus riot (Acts 19:21 – 41) cut into the hill. The main path between the market and the port passed by the theatre entrance. The port no longer exists because the estuary silted up over the centuries. By the late Middle Ages Ephesus’ population had all relocated to a ‘new’ Ephesus nearer the Turkish coast (Robert 1996:69).

Some theologians suggest that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was not written to Ephesus in particular but a general letter to Gentile Christians in Asia (Bruce 1984: 230). The strongest evidence for this is the absence of the words ‘in Ephesus’ in ‘p46’, which dates from 200 AD and is the earliest manuscript we have of the letter (Snodgrass 1996:21) Klyne Snodgrass (1996:21) says that “as amazing as this ancient city was, it does not help us much

in interpreting the letter” because the letter was a general one.

However after reading Ephesians, visiting the site and reading Ephesians again over some weeks, I am stunned by the connections between the text and the geographical site of Ephesus. In any case understanding first century Ephesus helps us to understand the culture and context of the Greco- Roman world in which Paul was ministering, and writing. 90% of the architecture we see in Ephesus today is Roman, whereas some other ancient cities in Turkey are strongly Greek.



Ephesus experienced many earthquakes. Apparently the city architects weren’t fussy about whether they replaced the columns in a traditional Roman or Greek style

In the upper part of the city are the ‘Baths’ a building that housed a sauna, hot bath and cold bath. Women and children were free to enter, but

men had to pay. The process of cleaning Ephesus dirt off oneself was tedious because it wouldn’t wash off in water (high clay content). Bathers rubbed themselves with oil and scent and left this mixture on their bodies for four hours. By then the mixture was itchy and one applied water and ash to the body. Ash (carbon) plus oil makes soap, so the ancient formula for soap was used to clean the body. In Ephesians 5:25 to 29 when Paul is instructing husbands to love their wives, he uses the analogy of the attention a man gives to cleansing and washing his own body so that it is spotless and without blemish. This is the same attention the husband should give to the wife, so that she is holy and cleansed. One needed to be patient in the bathing process in Ephesus as it took over 4 hours, and in the same way husbands need to be patient with their wives.

Verses 22 and 33 of chapter 5 talk about the wife being subject to and respecting her husband. It is interesting that Ephesus had a female gymnasium as well as a male gymnasium. This was a place where girls could go to be schooled, and trained in sports (Wason 2006). At 16 years of age, the most gifted girls were sent elsewhere to continue their training and studies.

There is a commonly held be-

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lieve that the Amazon warriors, a group of all female warriors, founded Ephesus (Perseus 2007). There are ancient Greek stories describing these women who may have migrated from the Steppes region between Russia and Kazakhstan. Some stories depict Amazons as only interacting with the male gender for childbearing purposes (Perseus 2007). In other evidence the Amazon society was two gendered but matriarchal with the women tending the animals and hunting with bow and arrow, while the men stayed home and looked after the children. Dr Jeannine Davis-Kimball spent five years excavating more than 150 burial mounds of 5th century BC and found skeletons of women warriors with weapons. The excavators found no children buried beside the women. However, they did find them beside the men (Gill 2007).



Amazon warriors with shields and weapons are depicted on this temple

If Ephesus was founded by Amazon warriors what influence had they left on the place by first century AD? The presence of a female gymnasium is one example that girls were given opportunity to excel in sports and studies. The largest temple, situated in the bottom part of the city near the gymnasium, was dedicated to Artemis, who was known as the goddess of the wilderness, the hunt and wild animals, as well as fertility (Leadbetter 1997). Artemis is often depicted carrying bow and arrow. There may well have been opportunity for the women of Ephesus to be competitors in the Games, hunters, priestesses, as well as mothers and homemakers. Perhaps Paul was encouraging women who had lived independently of men and were now marrying, to take the time to respect their husband's opinions as well as holding their own?

In the upper part of the city stood a Roman Imperial Temple. The fact that Ephesus had four imperial temples indicates it was a prosperous and highly honoured city in the Roman empire. Our Turkish guide was quick to say that imperial temples never became a religion, that they were more a meeting place to promote unity amongst all the different cultures in Roman Empire. It would have been difficult for the new Christians in Ephesus to decline of-

fers of their friends to dine and chat in the Imperial temple. Ephesians chapter 4 clearly states the Ephesus Christians are no longer to live as the Gentiles do, in practicing impurity.

In fact Paul goes on to say that the new believers are not to grieve the Holy Spirit because they are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. Ephesians chapter 1 talks of the Holy Spirit being a deposit in us that guarantees our inheritance.

Paul chose to use financial language on purpose because the temple of Artemis was also a bank. Coins were minted there and credit given and a type of banking carried out (Turizm 1998). If a new Christian could not invest their money in the temple of Artemis, to gain favour from her, and avoid her judgement on their crops etc, what were they to do? Paul suggests they needed to focus on the opposite financial transaction. The true God wants to invest into the person. God puts a deposit into the person, called the Holy Spirit, who is a guarantee that the new believer will not suffer God's judgement. So the Ephesus Christian could plant their crop and grow their herds without fear of judgement of the gods.



Sloping path joining the upper city to the residential. Celsus library in middle background and silted estuary now farmlands the background before the hills..

Once we left the upper city we headed down a steep path on the side of a mountain. In the middle of the path stood a metal ring where the Torch used to be attached to the ground. This was a primitive lighthouse using olive oil as fuel. The light was not allowed to go out and it was used to guide the ships up the estuary to port. Christians who travelled this main path would pass by this torch frequently. So words such as John recorded to the angel of the church in Ephesus, in Revelation 2:6, "Repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" would be a poignant reminder to the Ephesian believers to persevere.

The double pipes system



Final Chapel 2007

You are cordially invited to the Tabor College 'Final Chapel' to be held at the College on Thursday, 29th November (1:00–3:30pm). This special occasion is set aside to thank God for his faithfulness throughout the year, to celebrate our unity in Christ and to seek his favour for those students who are completing their formal studies at Tabor this year. Of special significance will be the op-

portunity to share communion together. Our guest speaker will be Ps Ann Ison, a long time supporter of Tabor College who has considerable experience as an educator (TAFE) and in pastoral ministry. Chapel will be followed afternoon tea.

We hope you can join with us for this time of farewell and celebration.



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Ephesus Sun (continued)

After passing the torch we headed down to Curate street, a street of shopfronts. Here we saw the underground terracotta pipes leading into each shop and home. One pipe system carried running water from the aqueduct to the first century homes. Another pipe system carried hot air to centrally heat the first century homes. Though this technology left a small environment 'footprint', it came at a huge human price. The slaves in this city were responsible for bellowing the hot air through the pipes, keeping the water in the baths regulated, and cleaning the homes which would have captured dust due to their design.

A typical Ephesus house had rooms built around a courtyard. The rooms had no windows but were open to the courtyard which had no roof. Hence the sun, wind and rain had access to the middle of the home. The floors were covered in mosaics and the walls had fresco paintings.



Small, well placed bricks make up the walls and archways of Ephesus side street

Slaves were sold at the marketplace. Class divisions in Ephesus society were encouraged. For example you could not enter the State Agora in the upper city, where political and religious meetings were held, if you were wearing 'field clothes'. Nor were you allowed to touch the papyrus reeds in the Celsus library if you were a slow reader. This is because the humidity from your hands would damage

the papyrus over time.

Paul's words to slaves in this context would have brought them some comfort. "Serve with enthusiasm as if you were serving God himself, because the good that you do God will return to you" (Ephesians 6:8). Paul also challenged Christian masters to act kindly to their slaves because all people are equal, regardless of the clothes they wear, or their literacy skills (6:9).

The Roman Empire tried to create harmony amongst its citizens using the Imperial temple system, Paul suggested being a Christian brought true harmony to one's life and one's relationships. "Christ is our peace, who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:14 - 19). The slaves and marginalized may not have access to the State Agora meetings, nor the library scrolls, nor the best food in their master's house, nor Roman citizenship, but they had access to the Father, who created the world and they were to be treated as brothers and sisters by fellow Christians (2:18).

There is a fountain near the library dedicated to Trajan the Roman emperor. The fountain was built by Trajan in 110AD, fifty years after Paul wrote his letter to Ephesus. Paul states in chapter 1 that "God has put all things under Christ's feet" (1:22). Trajan's inscription under his statue which remarkably has only the feet remaining, says "I have the world under my feet" Did Trajan know of Paul's writ-

TABOR COLLEGE INC (WA)

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ings that claimed that Christ, not the Emperor, had the world under His feet?

I am planning to return to the Mediterranean to visit more Christian historical sites in 2008. Biblical Archaeologist, G E Wright suggests that "Biblical theology and Biblical archaeology must go hand in hand if we are to comprehend the Bible's meaning" (Roberts 1996:n.p.) If you would like to join me (on a tax deductible trip for those in paid ministry), please contact me at monique.crabtree@wn.com.au. It is faith building stuff to visit these places first hand, to see the engineering and architectural feats, and ponder the culture and context in which the early Christians lived.

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Downtown Izmir (formerly Smyrna), twenty minutes from Ephesus.

