

My Only Visit to Turkey.

My only visit to Turkey was a day-trip to Kuşadası and Ephesus from the Greek island of Samos nearly twenty years ago. We were on a walking holiday in Samos and because I was then a lecturer at Kingston College and my wife Caroline was teaching in a school in Surrey, we were taking our holiday in August. This, I discovered, is definitely not the best time to visit Ephesus.

Despite the August heat, we had been enjoying our time on Samos, the ancient home of Pythagoras. The walks had been interesting and we had visited some of the archaeological sites. The towns of Vathy and Pythagoreio had been pleasant enough and not too crowded, and we had bathed on some of the island's beaches. Now I was looking forward to the visit to Ephesus.

As a one-time Classics scholar, I was aware that it had been an important city in the ancient world and I knew it had also played a significant part in the early development of Christianity. So it was with some excitement that I joined our party as we set off in the morning to catch the ferry to Kuşadası, the port on the Turkish mainland.

When we arrived at Kuşadası, we were met by a red-jacketed Turkish guide. He showed us to the coach which was to take us up to Ephesus. On the ride up he purported to give a potted history of the city. He mentioned the neolithic settlement and the Bronze Age, though he was a bit vague as to who lived there at the time. He told us of the Lydians and the Persians and then the Romans who were succeeded by the Turks, before the city was eventually abandoned in the 15th century. By that time the harbor had become completely silted up. The city is now some five kilometres inland.

Never once did he mention the Greeks, even though it had once been part of the ancient Ionian League and, indeed, had been a Greek-speaking city from the Mycenaean Bronze Age until the Turks captured it from the Byzantines at the beginning of the 14th century. From what our guide told us, you would never think the city had ever had anything to do with Greeks.

It was, however, at the point where he began talking about Turkey as the birthplace of democracy that I switched off, so to speak, and watched the scenery as, like many a schoolboy, I let the "teacher's" words go in one ear and out of the other.

Eventually our coach arrived at Ephesus. It was mid morning and it was becoming very hot. Our hearts sank: the ancient ruins were already heaving with people brought there by the coach-load.

Our guide took us inside the city; I recall passing down a street lined with ancient monuments and buildings; everywhere there were inscriptions. Yet I saw not a single word in Lydian, nor any written in ancient Persian; nor did I see any inscription written in Latin. They were all written in *Greek*. But whenever I stopped to read one, I got called on by our guide who seemed keen to direct us through the crowds as expeditely as possible.

We were allowed, however, to look at the façade of the Library of Celsus for a few moments. Indeed, the façade is so dominating, one could not avoid seeing it. It was certainly impressive and our guide did tell that it had been a Roman library. But we got no closer; we were not able to enter it or to see the ancient theatre. We had to hurry on. There was, apparently, another sight that we must see.

Soon we came to it and our guide proudly pointed to a phallus inscribed in relief on a paving stone. This once great city where the temple of Artemis had stood with its massive altar, one of the Seven Wonders of the World – this once great city which had been among the first centers of Christianity and where the Third Ecumenical Council of a united Christendom had been held – this great city in which the apostle Paul had once lived for a time and where St John had retired, and in which many believe that Mary had

been assumed into heaven – this once great city where men and women had lived and worked for seven and half millennia was now epitomized for us in a wretched sign that had once shown matlos the way to the red-light district!

You can imagine my disappointment as we were bundled off into our coach. I have no doubt that our guide carried on talking to us about the glories of his country on our journey back to Kuşadası, but I listened to not a word of it.

If one wants to see what remains of Ephesus which, in its heyday had been the greatest city of Roman Asia and second only to Rome in size, one must avoid the summer. Come when the weather is cooler and the crowds are less and, above all, give yourself plenty of time to look around and equip yourself with a good guide book. Some of our party did have the latter; but we were given no opportunity to make use of any such books.

After the all too hasty and far from satisfactory visit to Ephesus, we were brought back to Kuşadası for lunch in a crowded restaurant. Were we never to avoid the crowds?

Then after lunch we were taken to carpet stores. I had not been looking forward to this but, in fact, it turned out to be the most enjoyable part of our visit to Turkey.

Our party, I think, was split up as it visited various carpet outlets. I remember just a few of us in a room with all the carpets around us. Caroline and her friend Catherine, who was an art-teacher, had a pleasant time being shown various different carpets, being told where they came from, what the patterns meant and so forth. The rest of us just sat, chatted and watched as we were given glasses of Turkish herbal tea from time to time. It was great to be out of the sun and away from the crowds; it was cool and we were relaxed. The salesmen were happy to take their time and proudly showed their wares; there was no pressure to buy since, I am sure, they sensed that a sale would be made and they were in no hurry.

Later, feeling relaxed and content, we made our way to the harbor to catch the ferry back to Samos. It was there that I received my final souvenir of Turkey: a very painful bite from a passing gadfly.

Fortunately, the visit to Samos was towards the end of our two weeks holiday, so my swollen and still painful calf did not cause too much bother during the remaining days.

After we had got back home in Leatherhead, I had three souvenirs from Turkey: two carpets and a swollen and painful calf. We still have the two carpets, but I am pleased to say the gadfly's souvenir has long since disappeared, though its memory lives on.