

Preface

The Mica and Ahmet Erteğün South Agora Pool Project

During a visit to Aphrodisias in July 2011, Mrs Mica Erteğün was fascinated by a grand Versailles-like pool, 170 m in length, that runs down the middle of what was then known as the city's 'South Agora'.¹ Excavations in the 1980s had unearthed both ends of the pool, but most of it remained unexcavated, unresearched, and little understood. Mrs. Erteğün was intrigued by an honorific poem inscribed on the Propylon of the complex, a columned facade facing the east end of the pool, that describes a 'place of palms' that had been restored in c. A.D. 500 by a great local benefactor called Ampelios:

'... we Nymphs are grateful, because he (Ampelios) gave wonder and splendid beauty to the place of palms, so that anyone who, among our waters, turns his glance around, may always sing the praise both of him and that of the place, and of the Nymphs as well.' (ALA 38; Appendix 1, In 10)

A first hypothesis was that the Nymphs in the poem could be connected to the long pool and that 'the place of palms' probably referred to the whole complex—presumably named after an extensive grove of palm trees. These exciting possibilities were then explored with a generous gift from Mrs. Erteğün in the 2012 campaign. The excavation in that year discovered strong evidence for the palm grove: palm material preserved in wet earth at the bottom of the pool, and planting trenches outside the pool on its north side, between the colonnade and the pool edge.

Thus was born *The Mica and Ahmet Erteğün South Agora Pool Project*. The 2012 season was a 'year zero' of the full project that began in 2013 with a magnificent gift by Mrs. Erteğün of five years of further funding to excavate the pool and to research its complex character, long life, and function. This extraordinary generosity made the excavation of this unusual complex possible, and this volume presents the publication of its results.

The project has shown that the complex was not an agora, but a grand tree-lined urban park with its long pool surrounded by Ionic colonnades. Its earliest part, the North Stoa, was dedicated by a local aristocrat Diogenes to the emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37), and the conception of the whole complex goes back to this period. The leading notables of Aphrodisias were well-connected in Rome and often visited the imperial centre as ambassadors to maintain their city's standing with the emperors. There they seem to have been impressed by a new kind of urban facility, the *porticus* complexes, such as the *Porticus Liviae* in the Subura district and the *Porticus Pompeiana* adjoining the theatre of Pompey in the Campus Martius, which combined colonnades, tree-plantings, water features, and high-quality statues. It seems

these *porticus* in Rome were a direct inspiration for the Urban Park at Aphrodisias, a new and exciting form of public facility that no regional competitors in western Asia Minor matched. They are known to us primarily from literary sources and the Severan *Forma Urbis*, a marble map of the city. The Aphrodisias example, though it contains many local adjustments, gives us an entirely new sense of what these complexes were like.

The Park was laid back to back with the Agora to its north, and it became an urban hub, giving access to the Hadrianic Baths and Basilica at its west end and to the Tetracylon Street and Theatre at its east end. The east end was closed by a massive columned facade, the Propylon (formerly known as the Agora Gate), re-dated here to the late first century AD, which led to the street behind through tunnels under its lateral towers (*pyrroi*). The short north end of the huge Civil Basilica, built in the years around AD 100, opened directly onto the Park at its southwest corner. The Baths then rose above and behind the square's new West Stoa in the Hadrianic period. Entrance to the Theatre was through a stairway (now blocked), up and through a tall retaining wall at the southeast corner of the square.

The relationship to the Theatre is of some interest in the planning and conception of the new complex. The Theatre hill originally extended to the north, across the space later occupied by the Park. A first massive engineering task was to cut this hill back to the current line of the Park's south side, and to support it with a huge 20m-tall ashlar retaining wall which supports the auditorium of the Theatre, which lies above and to the south. A staircase was constructed through the retaining wall that rose to the level of the Theatre's *diazoma* or walkway between its two tiers of seating. The result was a carefully conceived and constructed citizen route across the public-political centre of town, from the Bouleuterion where the Council met to the Theatre where the *demos* met. Notables and citizens could walk across the Agora, into the Park by its central north door, round the pool either in the cool north colonnade or under the palm trees, and ascend the monumental staircase up and into the heart of the Theatre—always staying within the charmed elegant colonnaded architecture of the Agora and the Park without setting foot in vernacular street space outside. (Colonnaded streets were a long way in the future at this point in Aphrodisias.) The new complex linked the two poles of the city's political life, Council House and Theatre.²

This design gives some insight into a question posed from a modern perspective: what was this complex for? It is often not a good question for ancient building projects. The Urban Park was not for any particular function or designed to meet any

1 As described by this writer in Smith *et al.* 2016, 76.

2 This aspect was discussed in Smith 1996, 45–9.

pressing need. It was a public amenity, a beautiful calm shaded space in the centre of town, with colonnades, statues, trees, and a pool across which any light breeze would produce a cooling effect. It was an attractive place for the pleasure and enjoyment of the citizen—it was citizen space. In antiquity, the ideal of citizenship was not to work, to have leisure, and to live off rents and one's property. In such a garden-park, one could relax, sit, talk, walk, enjoy one's status, and transit between different parts of the city.

This aspect of citizen pleasure, without practical function, is superbly attested in the complex by another of its remarkable features, its 'graffiti' or semi-public writing, published here in detail by Angelos Chaniotis. The edges of the pool and the porticoes are covered in more than 500 items of chiselled drawings, gameboards, and personal text messages. Other buildings in Aphrodisias and elsewhere, such as stadia and theatres, have seat inscriptions, but none has the density and variety of this Place of Palms. In most of the city's inscriptions, the elite speak down to their compatriots in large dedications and public documents. In the assembled graffiti of the pool complex, we see and hear citizens of all levels speaking to each other and upwards to their betters. It is an extraordinary body of material from all through the complex's long life; it both animates the space and testifies to its intense and prolonged use as a place of idling citizen relaxation.

The complex had carefully designed origins in the early first century AD, and like most ancient structures it had a long later life. It is one of the key aspects of this publication that it is able to demonstrate phases of repair and re-modelling much longer than might be expected. Like the Hadrianic Baths, their pool complex was deeply loved by the Aphrodisians and was maintained with great effort and expense up to the widespread urban collapse of the early-mid seventh century. The late antique period saw an intense proliferation of gameboards carved on the pool perimeter. After it went out of use, the pool began to be used for successive waves of debris and dumped material thrown in from the pool edges. It is these dump layers that produced such an extraordinary panoply of finds of marble, metal, ceramic, glass, and wood. Heavy marble items, such as portrait heads and the tail of Troilos' Horse, could not be thrown far and were found close to the edges. Lighter items were found thrown further in, in diminishing quantities, towards the middle of the pool.

The carefully recorded excavation also allows a detailed narrative of what happened in this space after the pool went out of use, from its filling up to transformation into agricultural space, from the seventh century to the Ottoman period. This is a long, painstakingly-won archaeological story.

Research in the area started with the very first excavations at Aphrodisias in 1904–5, when Paul Gaudin, a railway engineer, and the talented archaeologist Gustave Mendel, excavated much of the West Stoa, which they treated as part of the Hadrianic Baths, their main focus. Giulio Jacopi's single season of pre-war excavation in 1937, with the noted scholar of Roman architectural history Luigi Crema, excavated much of the North Stoa (the Portico of Tiberius) with its mask-and-garland frieze. Kenan Erim's excavations (1961–1990) continued work in the southern part of the West Stoa in 1969. Part of the pool's south

perimeter was discovered in 1984, and in 1988 further excavation discovered both of its curved ends. In 1979, Nathalie de Chaisemartin began work on the garland friezes of Aphrodisias, and has produced many interesting studies of the friezes of the Urban Park, sometimes with diverging views of its function.³

The naming of the complex has had several changes, from Portico of Tiberius, to South Agora, now to the Place of Palms, a name attested for it in the verse inscription of late antiquity mentioned above. 'Place of Palms' is a poetic and evocative name. The purpose of the complex is better captured by the term Urban Park. This is intended as a modern English equivalent of the specialized Roman use of the term *porticus* which seems so visibly to have inspired its design. Luigi Crema had seen the complex was not an agora, and his term 'Portico of Tiberius', so long employed to refer to the whole complex by Kenan Erim, as well as to the North Stoa, also comes close to its ancient character.

The excavation of the pool in five long campaigns, 2013–2017, and the documentation of the whole complex was a great opportunity to study an active city centre over a very long period, both its life as an ancient park from the first to the seventh century and its long later life after the pool no longer functioned and was filled and forgotten from the seventh century onwards. The project was highly collaborative in nature. A large international team of experts from six countries made specialist studies, represented in the chapters here, of numismatics, ceramics, architecture, epigraphy, statuary, and faunal and archaeobotanical remains. The aim is an integrated archaeological study framed by historical questions. All the recovered remains and their study are tied to the rigorous, in-phase stratigraphic excavation of the whole previously unexcavated area of the pool. That is, the excavation went down in each layer across the whole area at the same time. The excavation was designed and overseen by Andrew Wilson and Ben Russell, ably assisted in the field with organization and documentation by Andrew Ward in 2012–2013, John Sigmier in 2013, and Allison Kidd in 2013–2017.

The main research and writing of the chapters of this publication were carried out at Aphrodisias in 2018 and 2019, in part of the excavation house called the Quiet Room, in which contributing scholars work in peace without further duties in the field. The gathering of the main authors in these seasons allowed fruitful interaction and swift collective decisions on narrative and interpretation, as well as the creating and collecting of the illustrations needed. Further seasons were devoted to refining, editing, and completing the chapters, drawings, and documentation.

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3 de Chaisemartin 1987; 1989a; b; de Chaisemartin and Lemaire 1996; de Chaisemartin 1998; 1999; forthcoming.

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R. R. R. Smith
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