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"Another Holy Land"

Maxwell Institute Development Council Visits Turkey

by Kristian Heal



The development council in front of the Library of Celsus

In September, Morgan Davis, Daniel Peterson, and I led a development council tour through some of Turkey's most remarkable religious sites. In doing so, we followed in the footsteps of a fifth-century abbot called Daniel, who was told not to go to Jerusalem as he had planned, but instead to "go to Byzantium and you will see a second Jerusalem!" Daniel did indeed go to Byzantium, or Constantinople as it was called then, and found a city filled with Christian sites. Fifteen hundred years later, Maxwell Institute friends and scholars descended on Turkey to explore the ancient ruins and religious sites of this other holy land.

The tour began and ended in Istanbul, the ancient city of Byzantium, and site of the new Roman capital built by Constantine the Great between AD 324 and 330. Though almost nothing survives from the first two centuries of the city, we were able to stand on the site of the first Council of Constantinople (381), which was held in the old Hagia Irene (now in the grounds of the splendid Topkapi Palace). The original Hagia Irene and the original Hagia Sophia were burned to the ground in 532 during the Nika riots. Justinian I (527-65) eventually put down the riots decisively and brutally (a story we recalled as we walked the site of the hippodrome) and found in the smoldering ruins of his city the determination to restore the glory of Constan-

tinople through an ambitious building program.

The greatest monument to Justinian's labors is the magnificent Hagia Sophia, which took just five years to build. This iconic building transported us back through time as we stared up into its enormous open nave and saw the undimmed splendor of Justinian's golden ceiling, marveled at the awesome cherubim, and wondered at the many other gorgeous mosaics added in later centuries. Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque by Mehmet the Conqueror shortly after he captured Constantinople in 1453, and just under 400 years later it was made a national museum.

Other delights we saw in Istanbul include the evocative Basilica Cistern, the stunning mosaics of the Chora Church, splendid and peaceful mosques, the incredibly rich Archeological Museum, the Topkapi Palace, and the Dolmabahçe Palace, which represents the last effervesce of the Ottoman Empire. We could have spent weeks exploring Istanbul and still have only scratched the surface of this remarkable city.

From the Topkapi Palace we were able to look over the Bosphorus toward ancient Chalcedon, the site of the fourth ecumenical council. During the rest of the tour we visited the ancient city of Nicea, where the first and seventh ecumenical councils took place, and Ephesus, home to the third ecumenical council.

From our itinerary it is clear that we were interested in exploring Turkey's role in the formation of the Christian church and the making of the creeds. Of course, this story begins with the apostolic ministry of Paul (legends also place John and Mary in Ephesus) and the spread of Christianity in Asia Minor. Following in Paul's footsteps, we visited Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, and Pergamum, home to four of the primitive Christian communities referred to in the book of Revelation.

Ephesus is justly celebrated, and we gladly waded through the endless river of tourists to

explore and enjoy the magnificent ruins of this ancient city, ending up in the grand theater, where we imagined the crowds praising (the rather hideous looking) Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19). The other sites were less crowded, though no less evocative, and we all enjoyed the ruins of the ancient markets of Smyrna with their stone arches and the Acropolis of Pergamum towering high above the plains.

Turkey's varied landscape was always interesting and often stunning, no more so than among the stark geological wonders found in Cappadocia. The highlands of central

Turkey are not just home to geographical wonders, however. There we found evidence of centuries of Christians living in the harshest of environments, with homes, churches, and monasteries hewn out of volcanic rock formations. The frescoes in these rock-hewn churches were far simpler and less elegant than



The Göreme Valley of Cappadocia, Turkey

the fine urban mosaics we saw in Istanbul, but the devotion was no less obvious. Even in the Byzantine period, Christians in these regions lived precarious lives and were often forced to find refuge in large underground cities as advancing armies crossed the region heading for

wealthier areas in the west. Although the Christian population of Turkey today is miniscule, the magnificent cathedral churches and humble rock-hewn monastery bear witness to centuries of earnest devotion in this other holy land. It was this personal aspect of the history of Christianity lived in

rural, unstable, and harsh conditions that struck us, just as much as the steady decline and loss of plain and precious truths that we, as Latter-day Saints, see in the development of the creeds formulated in this remarkable country.

Kristian Heal, PhD, is director of advancement at the Maxwell Institute.

Lectures & Events

Laura F. Willes Book of Mormon Lecture

BYU Professor James Faulconer will give the Laura F. Willes Book of Mormon Lecture for 2012-13 on "Sealings and Mercies: Moroni's Final Exhortation in Moroni 10." The lecture will be held on Tuesday, January 15, 2013, at 7:00 PM in the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center at Brigham Young University.

Neal A. Maxwell Lecture

The Neal A. Maxwell Lecture for 2013 will be given by James S. Jardine of the law firm Ray Quinney & Nebeker on Wednesday, March 20, in the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center. Exact time to be announced.

Lectures by Royal Skousen

BYU Professor Royal Skousen, editor of the Book of Mormon critical text project, will present a series of three illustrated lectures on "25 Years of Research: What We Have Learned about the Book of Mormon Text" at the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center.

- Tuesday, February 26, 2013, 7:00 PM:
"The Original and Printer's Manuscripts"
- Tuesday, March 5, 2013, 7:00 PM:
"The Printed Editions"
- Tuesday, March 12, 2013, 7:00 PM:
"The Nature of the Original Text"