

On a Magic Carpet

With impeccable timing we travelled to Turkey, just three days after the Coalition forces moved into Iraq. We were with a group of archaeology and history enthusiasts visiting the remains of ancient Greek and Roman civilisations which occupied the Aegean coastlands of Western Anatolia from the sixth century BC onwards.

We enjoyed clear, sunny weather all the way from Shipton, over the Alps and Balkans to the Sea of Marmara, arriving in Istanbul to low cloud, a biting north wind and snow blizzards. The wind followed us across the Dardanelles into Asia, prompting many of us to put on all the clothes we had with us! But as we drove south spring began to emerge, flowers bloomed and fleeces gave way to T-shirts and sunhats, even in the mountains.

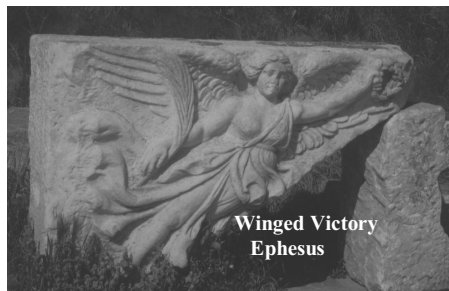
TOURISTS WELCOME

We felt perfectly safe; Turkey is a huge country and we were at least a thousand miles from the war zone. Only once did we see heavy aircraft flying eastwards. We encountered the warmest of welcomes wherever we went. The Turkish economy is in dire straits and their tourism industry is badly effected by the war. Shopkeepers sit idly sipping tea, hire boats ride empty and hotels face cancellations. All this was a bonus for us as the ruins, normally heaving with visitors, were practically deserted. At one site we were cornered by TV cameras and asked whether we felt safe in Turkey. I tried my best to reassure the world but we never did see ourselves on screen! We encountered no animosity for 'starting the war', and even joked about the England/Turkey football match with school boys.

ANCIENT VERSUS MODERN

A few words of Turkish go a long way - 'good morning', 'hello' and 'thank you' produce a delighted response, especially in the countryside, but in the towns many speak good English, and the schoolchildren are keen to display theirs. Women in the towns wear western clothes, hairstyles and makeup, whereas most countrywomen sport the traditional voluminous patterned Turkish trousers worn with

baggy woollen jumpers, or waistcoats, flat slippers and headscarves. Tradition also seems to have the women working in the fields or homes, while the menfolk sip coffee or apple



tea in the cafes and put the world to rights. In Turkey one can be a millionaire; a glass of tea costs one or two million lira (about 50p) and getting money out of a cash dispenser can be an unnerving experience - press the button and stand well back as the shoal of notes hits you!

SIGHTS TO CONJURE WITH

In two sunny weeks our magic carpet took us to the windy plains of Troy where Hector met his match at the hand of Achilles; the great library at Pergamon whose contents Mark Antony gave to Cleopatra as a wedding gift, and whose ruins now stand carpeted in blood-red anemones; the magnificent theatre at Ephesus where Paul unwittingly provoked a riot of local silversmiths afraid of losing their profitable trade in models of their goddess - 'Great is Artemis (Diana) of the Ephesians!'; enigmatic Didyma whose oracle rivalled even that of Delphi; Miletus where we stood knee-deep in asphodels; lovely Aphrodisias backed by snow-capped peaks, and finally Bodrum, ancient Halicarnassus, where King Mausolus had fashioned for himself a gigantic and ornate funerary monument, giving us a word we still use today. And so back via Istanbul's cloud and rain to sunny Shipton. A magic carpet indeed!

Margaret Ware