

Amorium Excavations

Amorium was one of the longest-running British excavations in Turkey, having begun in 1987 and continued to 2009 with only minor breaks. The first modern reference to this ancient site was by Richard Pococke in 1745.

A preliminary survey season occurred between 11 to 31 August 1987, during which time the walls of the upper town were surveyed, and 30 of the 44 alleged towers were located. In the Lower City some gates and traces of streets and terraces were identified. Inscriptions found in the region of Hisarköy, Hamzahacıllı, and Karayatak, as well as remains of sculpture and architecture, were recorded.

In 1988 the first excavation work took place with the purpose of better understanding the city's development until its destruction in AD 838. Military and civil structures and material from Roman and early Byzantine periods were discovered, including what was possibly a palace or official building dating to around the sixth century AD. Iron and local pottery was found in abundance, though items like bronze objects or terracotta lamps were scarce.

Work in 1989 began 24 July and lasted for five weeks. The team was successful in surveying the upper and lower town and excavating in three trenches. Finds included some ironwork and a group of lamps, along with coins and inscriptions. Some 10,000 pottery sherds from the previous season were studied and appeared to be locally manufactured.

From 1 to 28 August 1990, they completed a detailed survey in the upper town and initiated a new trench in the lower town, as well as excavating a church which exhibited three major phases of construction. About 8,500 pottery sherds were collected and 25 new fabric types discovered. There were relatively few small finds, but discoveries included fragments of fifty glass bracelets.

The team undertook four weeks of work beginning 28 July 1991, focusing particularly on continuing excavation at the Byzantine church in the lower town, and studying the small finds in further detail. They also established an official excavation-house, to comply with Turkish legal requirements, and constructed a storage depot at Hisarköy.

The next season took place in August 1992. The team focused on excavating the upper town where it adjoined the southern defences, the southwest sector of the lower town, and the church complex in the town centre, where some coloured glass mosaic tesserae were discovered. Additional projects undertaken this season included an ethnographic study of farming methods at Hisarköy and a survey of environmental remains that aimed at understanding the range of plants and animals utilised at this site in Roman and Byzantine periods. A hoard of gold and bronze coins was discovered, as were numerous inscriptions and carved stones, and approximately 2,000 pottery sherds. The project director, R. M. Harrison, passed away suddenly in September, immediately following the season's close.

Chris Lightfoot became the project's new director and the team managed to resume work the following season from 26 July to 3 September 1993. Six days were then spent conducting a regional survey on behalf of the Ministry of Culture. Excavation work was carried out at four locations: the lower city church, the lower city trench, and two trenches in the upper city. Approximately 300 stones were inventoried as part of a project to catalogue all carved stones since the project's inception. 82 of the coins discovered prior to 1991 were deposited in Afyon Museum, and about half of these were recorded in detail and photographed.

In 1994 work was commenced between 7 July and 20 August though the actual digging comprised only four weeks, due to limited resources. The regional survey was continued during this season, during which 30 villages and sites were visited. Excavation work continued at the same four sites. At the lower city church, drawings and photographs were created, and an assessment of its conservation needs was undertaken. More than 500 fragments of Byzantine sculpture from the church were inventoried, comprising one of Turkey's largest excavated collections. Some burials found near the trench in the upper city indicated that the site was once a cemetery. An aerial photographic survey of the site was conducted with the help of the BIAA's remote-controlled balloon.

In 1995 notable discoveries included evidence from the siege of AD 838 was discovered, as well as a kiln from the tenth century AD. The lower city church attracted some number of tourists. A rescue excavation was undertaken on a rock-cut tomb in the necropolis, and much conservation and preservation work was done this season. The recording, analysing, and cataloguing of found material, especially glass bracelets, continued at the dig house.

1996 saw the return of many former team members as well as an international group of archaeologists and students, who focused this season primarily on tracing the city's development from the Late Antique to the Middle Byzantine period. Excavation was continued at discrete areas, particularly the lower city church, the upper city mound, and a newly opened trench by the fortification wall in the lower city, even as surface surveys of larger areas were undertaken. New studies of ceramic finds and fresco fragments were begun this season, and conservation work was again heavily prioritised.

A team of 26 continued work from 5 July to 25 August 1997, despite wet and cold weather, focusing on excavation, study, and survey work. Excavation continued on the upper city mound to reveal a series of walls and a pit that included early Roman sherds. Study at the dig house continued on collections as diverse as carved stones, pottery finds, small finds, Ottoman pipe bowl fragments, terracotta loom-weights, metalwork, glass finds, and human bones. An enclosure in the lower city was surveyed, as was a cemetery southwest of the city, and a socio-anthropological survey of the modern village was also undertaken.

In the twelfth season at Amorium, in 1998, the team focused on conservation and site enhancement, which involved removing spoil heaps, cleaning trenches, and further cleaning and conserving the lower city church, which was generally seen as one of the site's principal attractions. The total count for coins recorded since 1987 was brought to 283, and two samples of a very rare type of luxury glassware were discovered. An exploratory trench was dug in the lower city, revealing two large structures from the seventh to eleventh centuries AD. Finally, a group of young Turkish archaeologists conducted research on a group of Byzantine belt buckles in Afyon Museum.

Financial and practical reasons necessitated freezing fieldwork at Amorium during 1999, though during this time progress was made in preparing publications and studying finds from previous seasons. Lectures on various aspects of research at Amorium were delivered in Turkey, Britain, and North America.

Work recommenced in 2000 between 9 August and 7 September. Some repair and cleaning work was undertaken, as was further site conservation and enhancement. A three-year topographical and archaeological survey project of the site was initiated, and good headway was made. Excavation work continued only on the trench by the lower city circuit wall, where the primary floor of the

rectangular building therein was revealed. Glass fragments, Roman sculpture fragments, and fresco fragments were studied.

A successful season was enjoyed in 2001, during which a topographical survey of the site and surrounding cemeteries was completed and geophysical surveys were conducted on discrete areas. Excavation at the site's centre revealed a bath building with a hypocaust system, among other structures. Pottery restoration was undertaken on some vessels, as individual studies on a variety of topics were pursued. Conservation and site enhancement continued as all new spoil heaps were removed.

Work continued between 24 June and 15 August 2002. Excavation was again focused on the centre of the site, specifically the bath building dating to the Dark Ages, and the large structure displaying evidence of catastrophic events from the 838 siege. After a four-year hiatus, the lower city church was again excavated, and eight tombs – with grave finds largely intact – were excavated and recorded. The geophysical survey focused on the lower city. Conservation and restoration work on select finds continued.

In the summer of 2003, the earliest known epigraphic reference to Amorium was found on a stone at Ballihisar village (Pessinus). Meanwhile, a project of stone repair was undertaken at the lower city church and excavations continued around the bathhouse, where numismatic finds continued to point to AD 838 as the date for the destruction layer. A new trench was also opened. A study of marble revetment fragments coming out of the Byzantine bathhouse was undertaken, as was further work on coin recovery, metalwork classification, and cataloguing finds.

The 2004 season was significant for the discovery of a nine-line Greek inscription near the bathhouse dated to the first century AD. The excavation in the enclosure produced pottery, coins, and even an amber bead. Cemeteries surrounding Amorium were surveyed this season, with some 97 tombs systematically recorded. Intensive work on the planning and conservation of the lower city church continued, including the investigation of three small sondages in the aisles.

In 2005 the main thrust of the seven-week season was on conservation, though significant progress in excavating was seen, as a complete baptistery was discovered on the side of the lower city church, a Christian tomb was investigated, and the enclosure area revealed some interesting finds and some tanks for grape pressing. A phasing plan for the site's stratigraphy was created, and research work continued on textiles, stone fragments, and glass finds. A website for the project was also launched in 2005.

In 2006, excavations were limited to the baptistery of the lower city church and the enclosure. Work in the latter revealed further stratigraphical details and a substantial number of carbonised seeds. Two new inscriptions citing the name Amorium in Greek came to light this year, as did another coin from the Amorium mint. The last of the spoil heaps near the church was removed, and some conservation work was undertaken inside it to repair a lintel.

2007 was marked by a visit from the governor of Afyonkarahisar, Haluk İmga, as well as the publication of an Amorium guidebook. The main emphasis of this season's study was on continuing the excavation of the lower city church, where a stepped entrance into the church, three new rooms with Byzantine frescoes, and a cemetery with 28 tombs were discovered. New plans and architectural drawings were created, and individual research projects on a variety of topics were continued.

The 2008 season saw the continued excavation in the enclosure trench, where two human bodies bearing signs of a violent death were discovered, together with coins that further indicated the likelihood that they had been victims of the AD 838 siege. Pottery and more dichroic glass samples were also found. At the lower city church, they discovered additional tombs, one containing a silver pendant cross, and were successful in excavating the southeast chapel to the floor level. Stone conservation work on some of the church's major architectural features was carried out. The small finds database was updated, bringing the total to 8,350 items. Finally, improvements were made to the Amorium project's facilities, labs, and storage units.

The last season of fieldwork at Amorium under Dr. Lightfoot's direction was carried out in 2009, though the project remains active. During this six-week season, excavations around the lower city church revealed still more tombs, with interesting grave objects and intact textiles, a pressing tank, and a stone screw press weight. The large building excavated in past seasons received some attention again, as the areas were cleaned and surveyed, and underwent some basic conservation work. Conservation work was carried out on architectural fragments around the site.

To date, four volumes of Final Reports have been published. Other volumes are in preparation, notably a volume on the excavation of the Lower City Church (by Prof. E.A. Ivison) and a volume on the inscriptions of Amorium (by C.S. Lightfoot).