

Cnidus Excavations

The Classical site of Cnidus had been the subject of multiple British archaeological projects in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, before Ian Jenkins relocated the 'Sanctuary of the Muses' in 1997, which now took the form of a goat pen and herdsman's hut, this part of the ancient city had not been visited for over a century. In conjunction with R. Ögan, the director of the Cnidus excavation, Ian Jenkins initiated a project to better understand the context of the many finds recovered there (now housed in the British Museum).

In 1999, there was a preliminary photographic survey to prepare for an excavation, at which point it was photographed and prepared for future work. In 2000, work was continued on the sanctuary. Publications from Newton's survey in the 1850s were informative and showed that some of the masonry found by him had been smashed in the construction of the goat pen, though his site plan differed in detail from what the new team found, and a corrected plan was undertaken. The sanctuary had originally been built near a spring of fresh water, and displayed evidence of terracotta pipes.

In the third season, which took place in 2001, the top of a Classical foundation was partially excavated below where a modern wall had been constructed. A space believed to be a baptistery (filled by the spring) was also found. A new area was explored to the south of the courtyard with the aim of finding the entrance and establishing the level of the Classical pavement. Finds included a glass game piece, a partial inscription, and a bone comb. At the season's close, the sanctuary was tentatively re-dated to the late fourth or early third century BC. The Sanctuary of Demeter, another nearby site, was also visited and planned.

In 2002 excavations continued, focusing primarily on the sanctuary's stylobate, courtyard, courtyard wall, and some nearby streets. In the middle of the courtyard a cistern shaft was found and excavated nearly 6.5m downwards. The fourth season's work was helpful for clarifying the sanctuary's layout and date. Some of the finds, as well as its location itself – near a spring and grottoes – pointed towards nymph worship, rather than the Muses.

In 2003, the fifth season of work allowed an accurate site plan to be established, and the sanctuary (now better classified as a Nymphaeum) was dated and put into the context of Newton's British Museum finds. The statuettes found by Newton were nude, which also fit better as nymphs, and some marble relief fragments showed nymphs dancing with Pan. The pottery pointed to construction sometime around 300BC. It continued to function into the Roman period, though it may have fallen into disuse during late Pagan and early Christian times. The later pottery is indicative of the transformation of the sanctuary into a church at the end of the fifth century AD. It may have been used for a few centuries before being abandoned. Two structures were found unexpectedly, known as the 'Gymnasium' and the 'Roman building'.

In 2004, attention was focused on the east side of the site and on part of the ancient high street of town. The original street entrance was found in the course of clearing the area, and a well-preserved mosaic pavement was found. A complex referred to by Newton as a gymnasium was also investigated, though its function remained unclear. Researchers from the University of Konya conducted their own excavations, centring on the harbour terrace.

Ill health prevented Jenkins from continuing the excavation in Turkey in 2005, and so work instead was carried out in the British Museum. An inscription from the so-called gymnasium was studied, and found to record information about a notable citizen, probably the famous Cnidian Artemidoros, who allegedly attempted to warn Caesar of the plot against his life.

Excavation was resumed in the so-called gymnasium and harbour terrace between 21 August and 10 September 2006. The 'gymnasium' yielded three terraces, with three rooms and a possible veranda. One of the mosaics can be dated to sometime before 250BC. Steps were cleared from the street in the corner of the terrace, revealing a second entrance and uncovering a cistern.