



## **Up Over for the Down There**

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## Up Over for the Down There

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G.K. Chesterton once famously remarked after a visit to the United States that “travel narrows the mind”. What gives this epigram power, and provides its humour, is its counter-factual claim. The general claim about travel is that it broadens the mind, and that through it one can learn more, not merely about other places and peoples, but also about oneself and one’s own home. It is that claim that lies at the heart of this paper: the claim that Western Australians can well understand themselves and their place through an encounter with people remote both in time and space. This is not an ordinary travelogue: it is the documentary test of a claim about a critical encounter with the past. And that claim, in turn, lies at the heart of every rationale for the study of the social sciences, both as Society and Environment in Primary and the Middle School, and as the discrete disciplines in Senior Secondary School and University.

In 1999, I was invited to participate in an archaeological field survey at Aperlae in southern Turkey. The invitation was, I must confess, the result of rank opportunism on my part rather than a response to professional reputation. Nevertheless, the American colleagues who extended the invitation also made it clear that they would welcome the participation of student volunteers. Those student volunteers, recruited over two seasons, are the source of my evidence today. In the first year, 2000, there were three volunteers, two of whom were students studying in the Arts program at Edith Cowan, while the third was an archaeology graduate from interstate looking for fieldwork opportunities. In the following year, two of those students returned, and were in turn joined by four others, all of whom were students at ECU.

In both years, we were allotted a distinct task: the survey of the extant sarcophagi on the site, and the epigraphic survey. The site is magnificently located, isolated in a remote bay on the Turkish coast. Simply commuting from the pension where we stayed in the village of Ucagiz required a boat ride and then a twenty minute walk across fields. The site itself, and what it told us, made it worth the effort. Aperlae has much in common with some isolated coastal towns in WA. It was not a resort; it was not – except in a highly specialised sense – a fishing village. It was a town based on a single industry: the harvest and manufacture of highly prized purple dye. The raw dye was extracted from the murex shellfish, and the most costly “Tyrian” purple was extracted from the murex trunculus. There is a large natural colony of these in Aperlae’s bay, and as our survey determined, the murex were harvested from the bay and kept alive in large holding tanks (*vivaria*) until there was a sufficient amount for the manufacture of the dye. They were then crushed, the evidence for which is a vast midden to the west of the town, and then boiled

up in a process notorious for its stench. Fleeces were then steeped in the raw dye and it is the dyed fleeces which were then exported.

The survey identified the industrial base, the industrial area and the industrial infrastructure. What it also established was that, during the long dry summer months, the occasional watercourse just west of the city dried up, and the only water in the town was that stored by the inhabitants in cisterns. Over thirty known cisterns have been identified and catalogued, and these would have provided for the drinking needs of about a thousand people. It was tempting, for me at least, tramping around the scrubby site overgrown with sheoak and brambles, to see a metaphor for this place. It was wealthy, isolated, and needed to squeeze every last drop of water from its environment merely to survive. Resisting the limits imposed by nature, the town flourished for a thousand years before it was abandoned after the Byzantine Empire lost absolute control of its Mediterranean coast. The Aperlites adapted their landscape and in so doing imprinted themselves upon it.

While this is what it came to mean to me. To my students, some of whom kept reflective journals at my request, it came to mean different things. For all of the students, this encounter with Turkey was their first. They had all grown up with the same Gallipoli diet, the same appreciation of the fundamental link between our two nations. So to meet Turkish people was to encounter people made heroic by our own familiar narratives. We arrived in late May, long after the Anzac Day crowds had dispersed. Relaxing in Istanbul before the long journey south, I taught them Greek letters on the hotel roof in full view of the great Blue Mosque. We walked Istanbul for the first time. This was an experience upon which they all remarked, just as they were consistently surprised by the courtesy and hospitality which they found, even in Istanbul, still Turkey's most cosmopolitan and therefore least Turkish city.

Once in the south, the Turkishness of the experience intensified, even in Antalya, a city which is half German in summer. In Uçagiz, our home for the two field seasons, we encountered enormous warmth and charm. We also had to accustom ourselves to spare water use. As at Aperlae, there is no convenient water source, so water must be trucked into the village. As one student wrote"

"For some of us the approach to Uçagiz was a little apprehensive, as it is a small fishing village -amenities not a lot- the people wonderful."

Indeed, we made great friends there, in particular Ugur, who was opening a bar (we were first in) and also (inevitably) ran a carpet shop. He never tried to sell us a carpet. We all bought one anyway. The pace of life was so different. Even Perth, perhaps the most somnolent of Australia's cities, buzzes with business compared with Uçagiz. Our own patterns were well established. We rose early to leave in the boat at 5 am for a jetty near the site. We ate on the jetty, and then walked to the site for a 7 am start. At midday we would usually down tools, have a quick swim and/or snorkel and walk back to the jetty for the 1 pm boat to be back at Uçagiz for late lunch at 2 pm. Then sleep, rest or

play until 5 pm when there was recording and other clerical work until 8 pm dinner. It is a Mediterranean rhythm, not an Australian one, but (apart from the early starts), it was easy and welcome.

There were many highlights of our two seasons of fieldwork. I want to mention only three. In our first season, one of our volunteers became very involved with the people of the village. She had gone to the trouble of learning a little Turkish, and had become interested in the lives of those around her with more than an anthropologist's interest. She was invited to dinners in shacks, and shared something of humble family lives. When we went to the little resort town of Kas for 36 hours R&R, she stayed behind in the village. That meant, I think, far more to her than the archaeology. She told me afterwards that the fieldwork had confirmed for her that archaeology most certainly was not her thing. What was her thing was the lives with which she had become involved. As a result of this experience, she undertook doctoral studies in anthropology. Her topic related to Turkish culture and society *in extremis*, and in particular the strategies for dealing with natural disasters. She has returned to Turkey twice, the second time living in the town of Adapasari for a year, and working at the University there.

My second anecdote relates to the second season. One of our volunteers that year was of Greek background, specifically – and like many Perth Greeks – from Kastellorizo. Kastellorizo is not merely the furthest flung fragment of the Greek Republic, it is also only a few kilometres across the water from Aperlae. One gets a very clear view from Kas, where we spent our weekends, and when we took some aerial shots of the site in 2000, the plane had to be very careful of Greek airspace in making its approach (although we did get some handsome flybys). For this student, the visit to Turkey was a crucial opportunity to reconnect with a lost past. Many Kastellorizians still have title to land on the mainland: houses in Kas and Myra and Finike. Most have never been. On this occasion, not only was my student able to visit places intimately connected with her construction of identity, the very Greekness of a site like Aperlae was a daily and poignant prompt. On one occasion, we were reading a sepulchral text, and we deciphered the name “Demetrius”, not an uncommon Greek name, especially from the Hellenistic period onwards. And it is also her father's name. In that moment, past and present became enmeshed.

But this is not merely about pilgrimage or self-discovery. It is also about a wider point of awareness, that moment that people in the education business call “the aha moment”. When the lights come on and understanding begins. I'll let one of the students tell the story. This is an (authorised) excerpt from her diary:

Profound thoughts are unavoidable under such conditions, here I was a mature age student from Australia falling over the remains of a people that would have never have guessed at the obituaries of their loved ones was a Project of a country that did not exist even in Herodotus' world. Only a couple of metres from the tideline on the shore of Aperlae that the most profound moment of

my journey found me, Dr Leadbetter asked me to uncover the text of a newly discovered tomb. So while the film Tomb Raider was being released in Australia I was on the other side of the world tomb reading.

Of the volunteers I took with me to Aperlae, a few are completing their studies. One intends to become a teacher; another already has; one has gone into the navy; another is completing her doctoral dissertation. For all of them, it was the experience of a lifetime, that most (although not all) would do again if they had the opportunity. This place did not mean the same thing to each of them, but different things and for different reasons. One constructed meaning out of the lives of the living; one out of the names of the dead; a third out of the simple experience of discovery.

Even beyond that was the nature of daily conversation. Aperlae is so like a WA mining town. Isolated and located at the source of the wealth, it is not adapted to the landscape. Rather, the landscape, with its agricultural terraces and great cisterns, was adapted to it. The riches generated by the dye industry were in some part poured back into the town, with its grand walls and gates and, in the Byzantine period, more than six churches. These metaphors did not escape us. The strategies used by the Aperlites helped us make more sense of the Western Australian predicament – in terms both of relative wealth and relative isolation. We returned understanding a little more about ourselves and the place that we have come to call ours, and that the history of another place up over on the other side of the world can mean an enormous amount to life down here in Perth.

To return to G.K. Chesterton: his journey to the United States might have been an unfortunate one; it might have confirmed his prejudices, even diminished his idea of America. Our experience in Turkey was different, and we all returned not merely knowing more about ourselves, but also much more about the place in which we live.

But to leave it there is to leave it at something perilously like travelogue. In matters of identity and history, we also need to ask the question of future direction, particularly in the context of this conference. Where do we go? For me at least, on a personal level, it means back, in some way, to Turkey. It is my intention - in my role as an educator of pre-service teachers – to take young teachers and pre-service teachers to Turkey for their own experience of the Up Over. In that way we can enrich, even if only a little, the lives of their future students in the Down Here to 2029 and, I hope, beyond.