

A late-antique fountain at Aphrodisias and its implications for spoliation practices

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In 1904-5, French railroad engineer Paul Gaudin conducted a campaign of excavation focusing on the SE sector of Aphrodisias where a villager had found a relief fragment. Gaudin there uncovered (fig. 1) the tetrastyle façade of a fountain, which he incorrectly designated a “gymnasium”.¹ The intercolumniations were decorated with re-used relief panels, which are now on display in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.² The structure was further excavated, studied and reconstructed in 1989 by K. Görkay,³ but has yet to be fully published. “Gaudin’s Fountain” was built in late antiquity entirely of spolia from other monuments. It thus provides insights into late-antique practices of spoliation and re-use; it also illustrates late-antique renovations undertaken in the city’s final, Christian phase.

There are several difficulties regarding the dating and interpretation of the fountain. Very little documentation from Gaudin’s excavations survives: no notebooks, no findspot plans, no lists of finds, just two brief reports and few photographs.⁴ To help remedy this, extant blocks were classified and scrutinized in the 1980s. Two of the four façade columns were re-erected by K. T. Erim. Then in 2012-13 the present author cleaned the large trench of growth and fill, measured and drew a plan, clarified the archaeological phases, and, with the help of Görkay’s reconstruction, numbered the blocks of the superstructure that lay scattered around the fountain. With the help of H. Mark, a reconstructed elevation drawing was made, and, with the help of G. Paul, a physical anastylosis of the entablature and pediment without using cement or clamps, which was set on the ground (fig. 2).⁵

The first part of this article describes the fountain, its archaeological components and phases. The second tackles the question of the origins (i.e., the original location), purpose, and date of its re-used architectural components. The third discusses the Early Christian treatment and display of sacred images on the façade, with attention given to the mentality of destruction and recycling in Asia Minor at this period.

1. Description

The fountain complex lies southeast of the center, more or less at the junction of roads running N-S and E-W through the city. If one proceeded south along the N-S street from the Sebasteion Temple, the façade of the fountain would have created an impressive vista, since it was centered on the street (fig. 3). The façade also fronts onto an E-W street that

1 M. Collignon, “Note sur les fouilles exécutées à Aphrodisias par M. Paul Gaudin,” *CRAI* 2 (1904) 703-11, fig. V; also id., “Les fouilles d’Aphrodisias,” *Revue de l’Art français ancien et moderne* 19 (1906) 39-40, fig. 2.

2 Istanbul Archaeological Museum inv. nos. 1613, 1613a, 1613b and 1613c.

3 Görkay’s architectural study was published briefly in R. R. R. Smith, “Archaeological research at Aphrodisias, 1989-1992,” in C. Roueché and R. R. R. Smith (edd.), *Aphrodisias papers* 3 (JRA Suppl. 20, 1996) 23-27, figs. 20-21. See also the brief mention in J. Richard, *Water for the City, fountains for the people. Monumental fountains in the Roman East* (Turnhout 2012) 230 and 260.

4 Collignon 1904 (supra n.1) 703-11, fig. V, and id. 1906 (supra n.1) 39-40, fig. 2.

5 The reconstructed pediment was not placed on top of the columns because only 2 of the 4 columns remain standing today and none of the other supporting elements remains *in situ*. A missing frieze block was replaced by plain masonry cemented into the gap.