

Visualisation and Perception. Ephesos as a Modern Construct

ILIE-IULIAN GANCIU and BARBARA RANKL, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austria

JASMIN SCHEIFINGER, University of Vienna, Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austria

The ruins of Ephesos were never completely covered by soil, and since their rediscovery extensive research and rebuilding activities have taken place. The UNESCO-World Heritage Site not only attracts millions of visitors every year but also represents an important centre of archaeological, conservation scientific, and heritage study research. The Ephesos of today is nevertheless not simply preserved, but instead is rather artificially created.

This paper presents a part of the ongoing research project “Construct and agency. The various stories of Ephesos”, which focuses on the fundamental reasons for the image of Ephesos as it is presented today. The research explores which parameters constitute or define the way the site is represented, and how and why this changed in the course of its long period of research. It questions the way the construct and agency of Ephesos are influencing the image of the site. Would this make the ancient life history of this archaeological site no longer disconnected from that of the archaeological park, but rather be understood as an artistic synthesis? The differentiated approaches to reconstruction of ancient ruins and their effect on the legibility of the site will be dealt with, as well as new methods in visualisation and issues concerning the commercialisation of heritage for mass tourism.

Key words:

Ephesos, heritage management, reconstruction, archaeological prospection, conservation science.

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INTRODUCTION

Ephesos is one of the most important archaeological sites in Turkey, and is internationally sought out by both tourists and researchers. Since 2015 it is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. The reasons for the national and international interest lie in the wide range of natural and architectural treasures and vivid reconstructions of archaeological structures.

The ruins of the ancient city of Ephesos were never completely covered by soil, and the interest of explorers was already aroused in the 15th century. The first excavations were commissioned by the British Museum in the 1860s, and these were continued by the Austrians from the late 19th century until today [Wiplinger and Wlach 1996].

The visual appearance and the perception of an archaeological site are the results of the disciplines who study them. Since the beginning, Ephesos was subjected to alterations by natural processes but also by human intervention. Intensive excavations made new structures visible and enlarged the information about the ancient city. Extensive rebuilding activities of ancient ruins and conservation interventions play a significant role on how the site is presented today. Additionally, the infrastructure changes done with the purpose of attracting more tourists lead to a radical alteration of the city's appearance. Ephesos transformed from an untouched site into an archaeological park, which changed the visibility and legibility of the cultural landscape. Along with these changes, also the perception of the site has changed.

Like all archaeological heritage sites, Ephesos is a product of excavations and historical investigations and is now a significant commodity in the global tourist market. What is seen as unique, in terms of heritage and

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Author's address: Ilie-Iulian Ganciu, email: iulian.ganciu@oeai.at; Barbara Rankl, email: barbara.rankl@oeai.at; Jasmin Scheifinger, email: jasmin.scheifinger@oeai.at. All researchers are affiliated to the Austrian Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Franz-Klein-Gasse 1, 1190 Vienna, Austria.

commodification, is placed in a global, comparative context. From this perspective, Ephesus is advertised as being the ‘grandest and best preserved ancient city found on the territory of modern Turkey’ (Lonely Planet)¹. The advertisements go even further in claiming that Ephesus is ‘the best place in the Mediterranean to get a feel of what life was in ancient times’². The advertisement used by the national companies, such as Turkish Airlines, manages to attract up to almost 2 million visitors every year, making it one of the most visited archaeological sites in the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Research in Ephesus started more than 120 years ago, when John Turtle Wood was commissioned by the British Museum to discover the *Artemision*. With the excavation of the first trenches in the centre of today's archaeological park, the visualisation of Ephesus began (Fig. 1a) [Wohlers-Scharf 1995]. At the beginning the activities were limited to excavations, and no stabilisation or conservation of the unearthed structures was carried out. The Austrian involvement began in 1895. Until the Second World War, the focus of the research was on large-scale excavations of the major monuments and the main outlines of today's visible structures were revealed. In the course of clearing work after an excavation, fallen columns were set upright and architectural elements were moved or stored, but still no serious attempts were made to restore the monuments [Demas 1997]. The period after the Second World War marks the beginning of restoration, reconstruction, and presentation in a broader way in Ephesus [Demas 1997]. Reconstructions of prestigious monuments such as the Library of Celsus and the Gate of Mazaeus and Mithridates were carried out. In 1951 the site was officially opened to visitors [Demas 1997]. This represents a turning point in the decision making process in Ephesus, as tourism played a more important role.

At the same time the rising costs and complexity of archaeological excavations and conservation work required the assistance of private investors whose interests had to be catered to. The presentation of the ruined site through reconstruction work constituted an effective tool to attract and satisfy sponsors [Ladstätter 2018]. Gradually preventive conservation strategies of the monument inventory were performed, which culminated in the roofing of Terrace House 2 [Krinzinger 2000; Ladstätter and Zabrana 2014]. Due to the effort of presenting and mediating the ruined site, the development of tourism rapidly accelerated (Fig. 1b). Already in the 1980s Ephesus could count more than 2 million visitors per year [Zabrana 2015]. However, external factors can have a negative impact on the numbers of visitors, as the last years have shown, effects, like the global economic crisis or the political destabilisation, led to a variable amount of tourists in Ephesus [Ladstätter 2018].

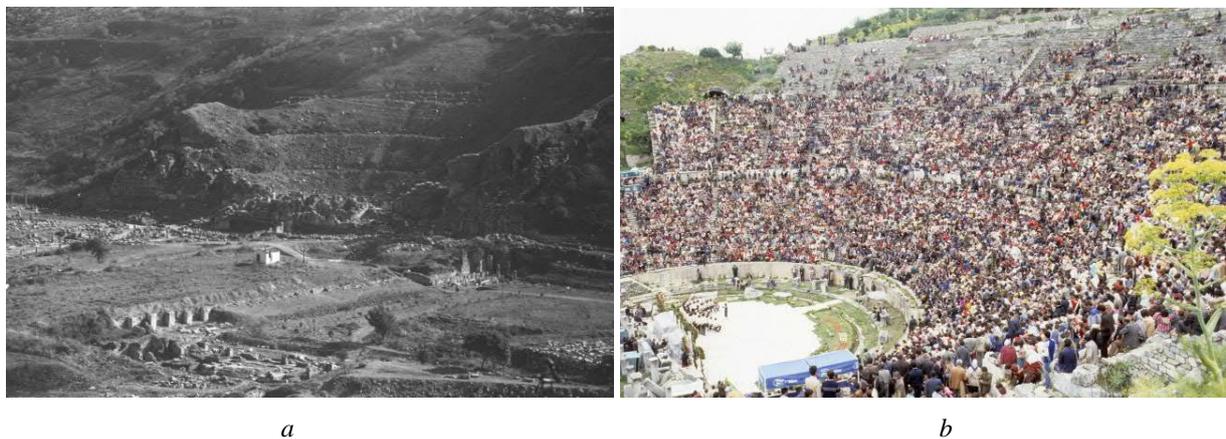


Fig. 1. Great Theatre, Ephesus a) before extensive excavation work; b) modern use of the theatre (© ÖAW-ÖAI)

¹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkey/attractions/ephesus/a/poi-sig/1066097/360857>, accessed on 4.02.2019.

² <https://www.atlasandboots.com/tips-visiting-ephesus-turkey/>, accessed on 4.02.2019.

WHAT DO VISITORS SEE?

Walking through the world heritage site Ephesos is an impressive experience which remains in the visitor's memory for a very long time. But what does the visitor see? An ancient city, with streets, temples, and markets or a construct of the 20th century, with the attempt to convey antiquity?

Since 1895 excavations have been carried out by the Austrian Archaeological Institute and approximately 15 % of the entire urban area has been excavated in more than 100 years of excavations. If one were to double the years of excavation activities, still not even half of the city would be visible. As a result, a falsified picture of an ancient city is presented to the visitors. On the one hand, there is the influence of each excavation director, influenced by their own time and their specific interest in certain periods or monuments. On the other hand, it is not only about structures which cannot be seen because they are not yet excavated; it is also about inaccessible areas. There is a boundary around the officially accessible archaeological park, which excludes whole city districts and important monuments e.g. the East Gymnasium, Magnesian Gate, the stadium or the Vedius Gymnasium [Ladstätter 2018].

The way in which the tourists visualise and experience the site depends also on the type of tours that they join. Such group tours are often limited to specific buildings, because there is a focus on 'must-see' monuments; therefore tourists are shown a small selection of structures. By contrast, choosing an individual tour offers the possibility of having a more extensive and comprehensive experience (use of audio guides, guide books).

NEW METHODS IN VISUALISATION

Technological developments in archaeology offer the possibility of gaining information without the use of excavations. The new methods can identify archaeological structures hidden below the surface. The role of geophysical archaeological prospection surveys on ancient sites has increased in the past decades as it provides a non-invasive investigation of buried structures. Since 1995, 175 ha have been measured by geophysical prospection methods – via magnetometry and "ground-penetrating radar" (GPR). With the interpretation of geophysical survey results (Fig. 2) it is possible to reconstruct the city layout in general and the development as well as the alterations of the ancient city. Although the structures may not be visible to the visitors at first, there are ways to make them legible for them. Thus, researchers and visitors get an idea of what the ancient city really looked like.



Fig. 2. Detail of the lower city quarter in Ephesos, GPR depth slice 60-70 cm; data collection and processing ArcheoProspections®, ZAMG (© plan: ÖAW-ÖAI/Jasmin Scheifinger)

A visual reconstruction of the city of Ephesos has been created in 2010 in a joint project between the “Austrian Archaeological Institute” (ÖAI) and the Technical University of Darmstadt³ and is now available in the Ephesos Museum in Selçuk. Also a more recent project in Ephesos that dealt with visualisation started in 2017. This project⁴ focuses on the 3D reconstruction of *tabernae* that were excavated in 2015 and the result was turned into an animated short film that came out in 2017. It is about the life cycle of the *tabernae* as well as their interior, and their findings [Schwaiger and Scheifinger 2019].

Such digital reconstructions and videos are only one way to use visualisations, which can broaden the perspective of the audience. Since digitalisation and new media have become part of everyday life, the field of archaeology could – and should – make use of the opportunities they offer. While some apps provide diversified information related to the archaeology of a country, like for the history and archaeology of Wales or the British archaeology, some sites, e.g. Pompeii, have their own app. The site Tel Lachish in Israel uses a mobile app, which shows i.a. real-time, on-site virtual reconstructions through an “Augmented Reality” (AR)⁵ software [Kösebay Erkan 2018]. The aforementioned examples are models that are currently not part of the mediation of the archaeological park Ephesos but could be considered after further research.

MODELS OF PRESENTATION

Another important aspect of visitors’ experience is the presentation of the visible monuments in the archaeological park and its surroundings. Those monuments constitute artificial constructs and are results of the long research activities in Ephesos. They are the products of decisions made by individuals on how to deal with excavated structures.

With every excavation new monuments are unearthed and interpreted. Dealing with those fragile structures has not just an effect on the status of preservation, but also a tremendous impact on the visibility and legibility of the whole site [Stedtner 2018]. Visualisations are made according to goals, values, and priorities which is probably why they are received so ambivalently within heritage management [Skrede et al. 2018]. Looking at the research history of Ephesos, this issue becomes clear.

The variety of approaches to the conservation and presentation has an immediate effect on the visual legibility of the ruins and it affects the way the archaeological information is perceived [Matero 2006]. In the case of Ephesos this plethora of approaches is clearly evident, since there is no uniform concept of methods or materials used for handling archaeological structures at the site. Most of the reconstructed monuments from the 20th century try to convey antiquity. Whether this mediation strategy succeeded is an open question and sparks a vivid debate among scholars. The eclectic approach to the restoration and interpretation of monuments in Ephesos constitutes an organic and unplanned growth through time. It is the result of individual decisions made without reference to any overriding plans, guidelines, or framework for the site [Demas 1997]. The rationales or goals of reconstruction enterprises in Ephesos vary a lot, whether it is to further research, attract visitors, to make a philosophical or political statement, or to respond to a religious vision [Demas 1997].

Especially along the famous Curetes Street – due to excavation and reconstruction – even today an urban appearance can be observed. Along the Curetes Street models, of different kind of restoration, their motivation and their method can be studied [Koenigs 2017].

The differentiated approach can be illustrated in two examples, both on the Curetes Street. The first is one of the earliest reconstructions in the archaeological park, the anastylosis of Hadrian's Temple (Fig. 3a). The monument is to be presented as a harmonious whole and should convey an antique building. For this purpose, new artificial stone elements were made. These are recognizable as such and nevertheless fit optically into the structure [Demas 1997].

The second example represents a differentiated approach that can be found in the architectural collage of the Memmius monument (Fig. 3b). The depiction of an ancient building has been abandoned. The monument was

³ The reconstruction was prepared for the exhibition ‘Byzantium – Grandeur and Everyday Life’ at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn. [Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH 2010]

⁴ For further information, see Jahresbericht [2017, 64 f].

⁵ A. Bernardini et al. describe the benefits of augmented reality as “a mobile application [...] by using the localization services and some vocal comments, pictures, and videos, visitors could be guided in real time through many archeological sites, also hidden and inaccessible. [...] The results of an evaluation test which collected visitor’ impressions and suggestions showed us that the mobile application allowed them to visit archaeological remnants in a more participative way but that most visitors were unable to deeply understand what they visited and in particular to imagine what relation the archaeological remnants had with the ancient urban landscape”. [Bernardini et al. 2012, 354].

designed to present the fragmented nature of the structure and the history of collapse and destruction. The built-up original marble elements are neither installed in their original position nor do the newly installed components convey an ancient form. The additions are made of rough concrete cast in geometric abstract form [Schmidt 1993]. Even though in both re-erection processes the same material – namely concrete – was used intensively, the appearance differs tremendously due to the different theoretical backgrounds. Next to the variety of reconstruction methods one can find natural ruins and excavated structures with different degrees in terms of conservation treatments. The resulting construct which arose through time became part of the modern history of Ephesos and has value in its own right [Demas 1997], but also illustrates a great challenge in modern monument preservation.



Fig. 3. a) *Anastylis of Hadrian's Temple, Ephesos*; b) *Experimental reassembling work of Memmius monument, Ephesos* (© ÖAW-ÖAI)

In the end, all excavations and conservations are critical acts. The decision on what is conserved and how it is presented are a product of contemporary values and beliefs about the past in the present. The aspects of site conservation and the presentation of the ruins become more difficult when considering the demands of tourism and regional development for the larger physical and political contexts [Matero 2006].

THE NARRATIVES OF EPHEOS

The tourists' perspective consists of what they can see on site and storytelling. Archaeology is storytelling. Which stories, and why these are told in a certain manner, depends on underlying circumstances. In the case of tourists, these stories come from tourist guides, guide books, and audio guides, to which we can add a visual reconstruction of Ephesos that is presented in the Ephesos museum in Selçuk (not at the site). Although the last three are created in collaboration with experts of the ÖAI, the first one seems to be one of the most popular forms used.

Most of the tourist guides give a very brief tour, one that does not present the ancient city's true image. A guided tour in the ancient city has an average length of 75 minutes and focuses on must-see monuments that are strung together. Guided tours key highlights often include: Herakles Gate, Temple of Hadrian, Latrine, Celsus Library, private house, Theatre, Marble Street [Ladstätter 2018].

One can argue that this itinerary is also determined by the fact that some areas are restricted from the public, like the East Gymnasium and Magnesian Gate, as well as the stadium and the Vedius Gymnasium [Ladstätter 2018]. But at the same time the Terrace house, considered a hotspot of Ephesos, is visited annually by only 8,5 % out of the 2 million visitors [Ladstätter 2018], a fact that might be influenced by the additional entrance fee but might correlate with the brief tours offered by tourism companies. This behaviour could be seen also in light of modern tourism, as well as of leisure tourism, where archaeological sites are defined as the exotic touch of a vacation beside the sea, where short visits at sites are meant to entertain the tourists without boring them [Eres and Özdoğan 2018].

In their visiting experience often are included visits to carpet shops, pottery workshops, or 'historical themed malls'. Given the circumstances, tourists experience the consumerism aspect of the past through its transformation into

mass-produced objects of modern material culture. In this way the site might not be perceived as a locus of the past, but rather as a stylistically differentiated place of modern consumer experience [Gazin-Schwartz 2004].

Another way of experiencing Ephesos is through pilgrimage tours. These tours focus on the religious aspect of the site and include landmarks such as Mary's church, Mary's house, theatre – where the Big Riot against Paul took place – St. John Basilica and the Seven Sleepers, the latter is not open for visits.

With all restrictions considered, the site of Ephesos is still a site rich in monuments, but the focus of mass tourism is on its landmarks and not on the historical reality. Visitors see not only artificially created monuments, but also monuments from different periods put together with no differentiation (Fig. 4). The Hellenistic-Roman metropolis shapes the image of Ephesos and seems to display all other aspects of the ancient city [Ladstätter 2018]. It has to be added that the late antique and Byzantine structures were of no interest in the early years of excavations, the focus was on phases of the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period. Which led to a destruction of most of the Byzantine and late antique remains within the city centre. The presentation of Ephesos is not representative of any single period and is completely anachronistic. An example of that is how the tourist maps treat all the buildings as being contemporary.



Fig. 4. Touristic use of the Curetes street, 2009 (© ÖAW-ÖAI/Sinan Ilhan)

CONCLUSION

The excavation and conservation activities conducted in the last centuries in Ephesos have led to the transformation of the city from a natural landscape with ancient ruins to an archaeological park utilized for mass tourism. During the century long transformation from abandoned ruins to a tourist mecca, Ephesos has borne silent witness to the vicissitudes of 20th century archaeological and restoration theory and practice and to the growth of the tourism industry in Turkey.

The Ephesos of today could be seen from two different perspectives: one of a ruin of an ancient city which represents the testimony of a multi layered past; and from a consumerist perspective, where monuments, squares, and streets could be rented for festive dinners and concerts. Is the site keeping its value as an authentic document of the past or is it heading towards a Disneyfied version of antiquity? The scientific community has to be aware of the fact that every treatment made will influence the way Ephesos is preserved, presented, and perceived. At the same time it has to regulate the misuses of the site caused by mass tourism which in the long term can affect the preservation of the site.

The role of various stakeholders and their functions in this process has to be considered in order to avoid issues of misrepresentation. The way the site is perceived varies depending on the narratives presented. Adding new research results, such as the development of reconstructions of ancient ruins and new archaeological evidence, create new narratives which can lead to a better understanding of the artistic synthesis that Ephesos is nowadays.

For a functional management of the site, conservators, archaeologists, and heritage managers should act as a joint enterprise. The great challenges, but also chances for the research activities at Ephesos in the near future are dealing with new approaches in tourism, a sustainable preservation concept, as well as the implementation of new methods in archaeology.

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