

by Şamil Erdoğan, Meliha Atalay & Müfide Yoruç Çotuk

Today we have much evidence that modern Sports Culture has its roots in Ancient Olympic Games. Many excavations are held by archaeologists to understand the idea of sport as the ancient world's culture by searching Ancient Olympia. However there are many ancient stadiums and maybe many more are waiting to come into daylight all over the world, where the ancient civilizations breathed. It is clear that promotion and protection of these sport sites can help us to understand sport culture in civilizations other than Ancient Olympia and help us to see the connections between those that continue to this day.

Anatolia where civilizations of very great importance have flourished since ancient times has witnessed and still bears some of the most important sport sites of antiquity.¹ In Anatolia there are at least 32 antique sites and can be listed, according to their antique geographical regions:²

Aiolis:	1. Pitane	Lydia:	17. Blaundos
Ionia:	2. Didyma		18. Nysa
	3. Ephesos		19. Saittai
	4. Magnesia		20. Sardeis
	5. Miletos		21. Tralleis
	6. Priene	Lykia:	22. Arkynda
	7. Smyrna		23. Kadynda
Caria:	8. Aphrodisias		24. Letoon
	9. Kedrai		25. Rhodiapolis
	10. Labranda		26. Tios
	11. Myndos		27. Silkyon
	12. Theangela		28. Perge
Kilikia:	13. Anazarbos	Phrygia:	29. Aizanoi
	14. Seleukeia		30. Kibyra
Masia:	15. Pergamon		31. Laodikeia
Pamphylia:	16. Aspendos	Pisidia:	32. Selge

In this paper, four of these sites were chosen in order to go into more detail about the well preserved structure of their type as well as their special characteristics:

1. Didyma: Ionia Region
2. Aphrodisias: Caria Region
3. Aizanoi: Phrygia Region
4. Perge: Lykia Region

Aphrodisias

One of the most attractive antique cities of Anatolia is located at Aphrodisias, which in the ancient geographical context lays in the north-

eastern confines of Caria, in the vicinity of the Maender valley. The impressive remains of this once-splendid city are situated on a high plateau, 230 km. southeast of İzmir (Smyrna).³

Athletes had great importance in Aphrodisian life and the contests and athletic festivals, included in the Aphrodisian festivals, were held in stadium, which was located in the northwest quarter of the archaeological site.⁴

It is believed that the stadium was built in the first or second century A.D. and was principally used for athletic events and games, though it was also used for periodic competitions in sculpture, evidence of the high esteem in which such arts were held in Aphrodisias.⁵

Aphrodisias is the well-preserved structure of its type surviving from the ancient world. Enclosing a field 262 m. long and 59 m. across, at its widest point it ranks among the largest of the Roman world. There are about 30 tiers of benches, which seated some 30.000 people. Citizens may have flocked to political meetings and to festivals honoring Aphrodite. The circular walled arena at the near end probably was installed as a place to hold animal fights and the earthquakes damaged the site. Today the stadium is unfenced and so well preserved that restoration is not considered necessary. Being built so close to the northern part of city walls, it is believed that the stadium was designed as part of the northern defense system in case of outside attacks.⁶ Prof. ERİM who initiated the excavations of the Aphrodisias starting from 1961 until 1970 under the auspices of New York University, called this stadium the "Super Bowl of antiquity".

Perge

15 km. East of Antalya, Perge lies at the foot of a plateau on the edge of the valley of the river Kestros. Perge does not appear in history until Alexander the Great's arrival in 333 BC. Like other Anatolian cities, Perge reached the peak of its fame in Roman Imperial times, during the first three centuries AD. However, the present-day ruins in this area date from Byzantine times. Turkish archaeologists have excavated in this area since the 1940's.⁷

1 ATUN, Mustafa, "Sports Sites for Olympia and Development of the historic Heritage", in: *ICOMOS-Congress of the German National Committee, Nov. 15-17, 2001 Berlin, Germany.*

2 SALTUK, Secda, *Ancient Stadiums*, Istanbul 1995.

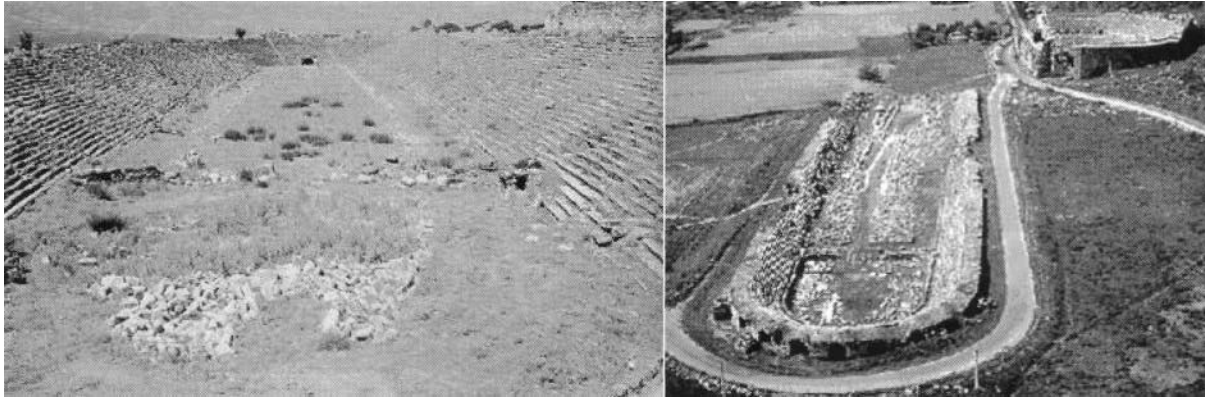
3 ATUN, "Sites".

4 AKURGAL, Ekrem, "Ancient Civilizations and Ruin of Turkey", Istanbul 1995.

5 ERİM, Kenan, "Anatolian Research Project, Aphrodisias Excavations", in: *Bulletin* 63-4, Nov. 8, 1963, p. 2.

6 ERİM, Kenan, "Aphrodisias", in: *National Geographic Magazine*, p. 779.

7 BEAN, George, "Southern Turkey", London 1968, p. 27.



Stadium of Aphrodisias;
Stadium of Perge I.

The stadium in Perge is one of the well-preserved stadiums of antiquity, being second only to that at Aphrodisias. Probably erected in the 2nd century AD, the well-preserved rows of seats supported by a barrel-vaulted construction had a seating capacity of 12.000. the entrance of the (34 x 234m) arena lay at the southern end, but the monumental gateway, only a few fragments of which have been discovered, is no longer in existence.⁸

Below the seats on the east side, thirty chambers are to be found, opening to the outside and possessing communicating doors. The spectators passed through every third chamber, which led to the arena. The remaining twenty rooms served as shops. On the walls are inscribed the shopkeepers' names or their trades. The U-shaped stadium was built completely out of stone on flat land outside the city-walls of Perge in a north-south direction.⁹

Didyma

Anatolia Ionian culture was a common creation of old Anatolia ethos like Lydia, Karia and Lykia and of the Phrygian who gained a characteristic of Anatolian ethos.¹⁰

As HERODOTOS mentioned; Ionians have established their cities under the most beautiful sky and in the best climate. The twelve Ionian cities (Miletos, Myius, Priene, Ephesos, Kolophan, Lebedos, Teos, Klazomenia, Phokaia, Samos, Khios and Erytra) formed a federation called the Panionion.¹¹

This federation built a very famous temple known as the Temple of Apollo on the West Anatolian shore and they organized Didymaion festivals every four years. The earliest dates of these festivals were 200 BC and Panionion experienced glorious days during Roman Times.

Music, theatre and oratory contests were held as well as sport events.¹²

The Apollo Temple in Hellenistic Didymaion (300 B.C.-A.D.200) measured 51.13 x 109.34m and was the third largest structure of the Hellenistic world, being outdone in size only by those at Ephesus and Samos. Although the Hellenistic Didymaion was of greater dimensions than the archaic temple, it was merely an adaptation of the original plan. It rose on a high krepidoma 3.5m. in height, with 7 steps. In addition, there was a flight of 14 steps in the middle of the east front.¹³

The 7 stepped structure, dated to the Hellenistic period and lying 15m. south of the temple is the remnant Didymaion were held. It is evident that the steps on the southern side of the Temple's krepidoma were once used as the northern seating area of the stadium. From this close and unique relationship, we understand that the stadium was used for sacred races, which took place in connection with the religious ceremonies held at Didyma. On some of the rows of seats were carved names belonging again to the late Hellenistic period. Over 200 of the names that were carved are still legible today. The names are mostly concentrated on the front row, considered to be the best place. High officials are not particularly provided with the better seats but rather everyone is seated randomly without paying attention to their titles. The starting posts of the races in the Didyma stadium can be seen on the east edge of the runway. There are a total of nine square blocks on the ground with holes in their centers, probably for some type of flagpole. Three of the larger blocks are placed in a straight line with a distance of 4.88 m. from each other. The remaining six smaller blocks are placed in groups of three and more to the front.¹⁴

⁸ BEAN, "Turkey", p. 33; AKURGAL, "Civilizations", p. 467.

⁹ SALTUK, "Stadiums".

¹⁰ AKURGAL, "Civilizations", p. 203.

¹¹ HERODOTOS, *V. Century B.C., Historia Apodexis*, Istanbul 1991.

¹² BEAN, George, "Aegean Turkey", London 1972.

¹³ SALTUK, "Stadiums", p. 51-52.

¹⁴ AKURGAL, "Civilizations", pp. 225-226.

Stadium of
Perge II;
Stadium of
Aizonai.



The major part of the Temple of Apollo still stands at the present day and even in its ruined state it is said to be a very impressive building. It could one day be possible to restore a great part of the Didymaion by re-erecting the fragments lying on the site.¹⁵

Aizonai

Aizonai near the village of Cavdarhisar, 54 km. southwest of Kutahya is another well preserved stadium in Anatolia. Aizonai dates back to the 1st century B.C. the magnificent remains, which are still standing, bear witness that the city passed through a very glorious period in the 2nd century A.D.¹⁶

Not far from the temple there is a bath-gymnasium complex and beyond that an impressive stadium. Near the entrance of the stadium on the end-wall to the right are a series of inscriptions and a row of seven wreaths carved in low relief, all commemorating victors in the games. Only a small part of the stadium's seating has been excavated, and much of it seems to have been disturbed by earthquakes. The vaulted substructures that supported the seating are largely intact and the general outlines of the building are very clear. The total length of the stadium is measured to be 213.6m. However, the exact sports ground is estimated as 212.3m. due to the curvature of the surrounding facade. There

has been some restoration work done on the southern part of the stadium during the years 1990 and 1991. During this restoration work it has been discovered that the southern part of the stadium was not circular as seen in the old plans but ended in a straight line. The stadium ends at a monumental facade with high windows, beyond which lies the theatre – a strikingly original arrangement. No other stadium and theater combination like this one has been found anywhere else in the world. The theatre also seems to have suffered from earthquake damage. The stage building lies in shattered heaps and large sections of the seating have been undermined. To the right of the stage area is a section of seating that is virtually intact. There appear to have been at least twenty-five rows of seats, and the topmost row is said to offer a splendid overview of the site.¹⁷

In addition to the Stadiums, in Anatolian fields there are also many Palaestra and Gymnasion complexes but those can be the subject of another long presentation.

It is clear that promotion and protection of these sport sites can help us to understand sport culture as it has been continuing from the very beginning of mankind. Therefore further studies are required to present them to the world for better understanding of our historic and cultural heritage within the sports context.

¹⁵ SALTUK, "Stadiums".

¹⁶ AKURGAL, "Civilizations", p. 267.

¹⁷ SALTUK, "Stadiums".