

Antiochia ad Cragum Archaeological Research Project



The Small Bath complex on a foggy day.

Antiochia ad Cragum, founded in the second century BCE, is a Hellenistic and Roman city situated on the slopes of Mount Cragus overlooking the Mediterranean in modern Antalya, Turkey. It historically served as a haven for Cilician pirates in the first century BCE before coming under Roman control after Pompey the Great's naval victory. The city flourished during the Roman and Byzantine periods and features structures such as temples, churches, necropoleis, and multiple bath complexes. Excavations have been ongoing for over two decades by the Antiochia ad Cragum Archaeological Research Project (ACARP) under the direction of Michael Hoff of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Thanks to the generous support of the AIA and its donors—which covered my airfare—I had the opportunity to join the 2025 field season. I was especially excited to immerse myself in Turkey's unique culture, as Anatolia, geographically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has been home to some of the world's oldest civilizations.



The view from the acropolis.



The swimming cove we visited every Friday.

On the first day, Dr. Hoff gave us a fascinating site tour. He explained that Roman bath complexes, which were the main areas being excavated this season, were an integral part of daily life, being designed for hygiene, relaxation, and socializing. These featured a sequence of cold (*frigidarium*), warm (*tepidarium*), and hot (*caldarium*) rooms, all heated by a *hypocaust* system beneath the floor. Water flowed continuously using gravity-fed pressure from an elevated aqueduct nearby—as evidenced by smoothed marble pavers and worn depressions around the ancient fountain. Nearby, skeletons were uncovered—one with a fatal head wound and signs of scurvy—and over 2,600 coins from across Europe, likely indicating later medieval pirate activity.

Under the guidance of Dr. Leticia Rodriguez of the University of Houston, I assisted in excavating the Small Bath complex. I quickly adapted to spiky plants, blisters, and occasional encounters with camel spiders, scorpions, and snakes. We



Me, sweeping a floor I had just uncovered.

started our days before sunrise and every meal with black tea (çay in Turkish, pronounced 'chai'). Alongside excavation, my schedule included pottery and bone washing, report writing, lectures on Roman architecture and conservation, and swimming on Friday afternoons.

Weekly excursions took us to archaeological sites like Aspendos, Syedra, and Selinus, as well as museums in Alanya and Antalya. It was exciting to see artifacts from Antiochia ad Cragum on display at the Alanya museum. I was also struck by the fact that the items on display were all Turkish heritage, originating from its land and people, unlike many items in Western

museums. This expanded my awareness of museum ethics, especially after having experienced nearly every stage of the artifacts' lifecycle—from excavation and conservation to cataloging museum collections.

Thoughts about cultural legacy and history became more pertinent amid the Twelve-Day War between Iran and Israel in June 2025. Despite images of detonating bombs on the news, the local community remained unshaken. Their response in contrast to my own reminded me of the privilege and distance shaping Western perspectives on conflict, challenging me to reconsider how I navigate uncertainty.



The group visited Aspendos, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the best-preserved ancient theaters in the world

One of the most rewarding aspects of my time abroad was the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with people from various backgrounds—especially the Turkish professors, students, and locals. These exchanges taught me a lot about both myself and the world. We discussed a wide range of topics covering philosophy, religion, and geopolitics. Some of my new friends even gave me a Turkish name, İskenderiye—their version of Alexandria. Its linguistic evolution from *Alexandros* in Greek to the city of *Iskandariya* in Arabic to Turkish fascinates me. As a foreigner, I realized how much identity shifts depending on one's geography, language, and cultural context.

My lifelong desire to travel, academic interests, and personal aspirations all lead me to pursue a deeper understanding of humanity. I'm drawn to what the past can reveal about our modern world—whether by something



Efsane and I at the Alanya Museum.



A view of the town of Gazipaşa from the top of Selinus, the archaeological site where Roman Emperor Trajan died.

waiting to be read, a new insight from someone I've met, something hidden in the dirt, or collecting dust in a museum. My time in Turkey reshaped the way I think about culture, communication, identity, and the meaning of global citizenship. I built lasting connections, practiced language learning skills, and gained practical experience in collaboration and archaeology. I can return to the classroom with stronger technical skills, a broader perspective, and a deeper sense of purpose.



The local mosque in Gazipaşa.

“Antiochia Cragum | Archaeological Research Project.” *Antiochiacragum.org*, 2024, antiochiacragum.org/. Accessed 17 Aug. 2025.

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