

# A Penn Adventure in Turkey

BY C. BRIAN ROSE

**IN THE SECOND WEEK** of March 2020, during Penn's Spring Break, my colleague Bridget Murnaghan and I took a group of 14 Penn graduate students to the site of Troy in northwest Turkey for an intensive week-long workshop. This trip was the centerpiece of a new team-taught graduate seminar that focuses on the interface between the site of Troy and Homer's *Iliad*, while situating them both within the context of current armed conflict in the Near East. Having co-directed excavations at Troy from 1988 to 2012, I was able to relive a part of my life to which I had devoted 25 years.

The site of Troy is located next to one of the easiest crossing points between continental Europe and Asia, and near the mouth of the Dardanelles, a strait linking the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea. As a result of this strategic location, the area around Troy has been politically contested throughout the last 3,000 years. Besides the many Trojan Wars of the 2nd millennium BCE, one could cite episodes of the Graeco-Persian Wars (early 5th c. BCE), the Fourth Crusade (1204 CE), and the Battle of Gallipoli (1915 CE), fought across the Dardanelles from Troy.

Because of this history, Troy has increasingly been pulled into discussions of recent armed conflicts. Books such as *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*,

both by Jonathan Shay, and *Ajax in Iraq*, by Ellen McLaughlin,

demonstrate that it is sometimes easier to understand modern wars by viewing them through the lens of antiquity. In facilitated programs designed by Theater of War Productions, ancient and modern combat trauma are interlinked, with



Students visit the Temple of Apollo Smintheus, who was known as the Lord of Mice. He was believed to have the power to protect his worshippers from plague, which is symbolized by mice. Notice the small lead mice on the steps behind the group.



Students delivered short lectures throughout the trip. The topic for this lecture was the Polyxena sarcophagus (on the left) in the Troy Museum.



Students prepare for the afternoon production of Ellen McLaughlin's *The Trojan Women* in the Odeion at Troy.



Dr. Peter Struck lectures on Aristotle at the Temple of Athena at Assos, with the island of Lesbos in the background.

Iraq and Afghan war veterans reading from Greek plays to highlight the timelessness of post-traumatic stress. Bridget and I hoped to incorporate all of these themes into the course.

After an orientation session in Istanbul, we drove along the Gallipoli peninsula to Troy, where the students reported on a series of Homeric topics at the site and in the museum over the course of several days. Also participating in the study tour were Dr. Peter Struck,

did Ellen accompany us on this trip, she also directed rehearsals of the play during the evenings of our first three days at Troy. The final performance was incredibly moving, especially considering that there were Syrian refugees not far from Troy who were attempting to cross to Lesbos, and thus the European Union.

None of these experiences would have been possible without the support of the Penn Museum, the Charles K. Williams II Foundation, the Sachs Program for Arts

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chair of Penn's Classical Studies Department, and his wife, Dr. Natalie Dohrmann, Associate Director of Penn's Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. During a side trip to Assos, 40 miles south of Troy, Peter reported on the life and work of the philosopher Aristotle, who had opened a philosophical school there.

A highlight of the trip was a performance by the entire class of the play *The Trojan Women* in the Odeion, or concert hall, of ancient Troy. This particular version of the play had been adapted by Ellen McLaughlin, whom I mentioned above as the author of *Ajax in Iraq*. Not only

Innovation, and Penn's Department of Classical Studies. As all of the students noted when it came time to depart, this was a journey that they would remember for the rest of their lives.

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