

A set of sculptures belonging to the Scylla group has been unearthed at Laodikeia in Denizli, a city famous for its archaeological monuments in Türkiye's Western Anatolian Region. These extraordinary sculptures, reflecting the baroque style of the Hellenistic period, stand out with their well-preserved original paint and artistic style. The Laodikeia excavations are part of the "Legacy for the Future" project, initiated by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, to preserve Anatolia's archaeological heritage and pass it on to future generations.

Extraordinary Sculptures with Original Paint



Turkish archaeologists discovered the Scylla sculpture group during the restoration of the Western Theatre's stage building in Laodikeia, which is listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. The sculpture group includes the head and hand of the man-eating monster Scylla, the body of Odysseus, two upper-body sculptures of his companions who were attacked and killed by wild dogs around Scylla's waist, and the bow of Odysseus' ship.



The Scylla sculpture group was created in the early 2nd century BCE by sculptors Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes. The only other known copy of this sculpture group from the early Roman period (in the summer villa of Emperor Tiberius 14-37 CE) was discovered in front of a cave in Sperlonga, Italy, in 1957. Laodikeia's Scylla group, dating back to the period of Emperor Augustus (27 BCE - 14 CE), are the earliest known sculptures of their kind found to date. They are also the most original, with their intact paints, style, aesthetics, and artistic quality. For instance, the baroque craftsmanship of the Scylla head, the paint on the oar held by Scylla, and the realistic expression of pain on the face of the figure attacked by the ferocious Scylla dogs are exquisite and unparalleled in the world.



The sculpture group was likely displayed on the second floor of the stage building in the Western theatre in ancient times, which helped preserve its paint. Additionally, it is understood that on certain days of the year, a storyteller (Rhapsodos) would read from Homer's immortal work, the Odyssey, to the audience in the theatre while this sculpture group was displayed on stage. Some of the sculptures in the group remained intact, while others were broken and discarded into the fill beneath the backstage rooms due to the transition from paganism to Christianity.



Mythological Story of Scylla

Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are among the most important literary works of the ancient period. While the Iliad recounts the events of the Trojan War, the Odyssey follows the return of Odysseus, King of Ithaca, to his homeland after ten years. According to the epics, the Achaeans won the Trojan War thanks to Odysseus' wit and cunning, and his journey home was filled with many adventures. In the Odyssey, the encounter between Odysseus and the sea monster Scylla holds significant importance. Scylla is described as a sea monster with the upper body of a woman and the lower part surrounded by wild dogs, lying in ambush in the Strait of Messina (off the coast of Italy). As Odysseus' ship passes in front of the cave where this monster lies in wait, the dogs attack and devour six of Odysseus' companions (Stesios, Ormenios, Ankhimos, Ornytos, Sinopos, and Amphionomos).

Laodikeia: Denizli's Ancient Legacy



Laodikeia, located a few minutes north of modern Denizli, was founded by Seleucid King Antiochus II Theos and named after his wife, Queen Laodike. The city is a must-see destination, known for being one of the largest trade centers in history. Laodikeia also held great significance for the Christian world. The Laodikeian Church, one of the earliest surviving examples of the Seven Churches mentioned in the New Testament, established the city as a religious center at the metropolitan level in the early Eastern Roman period. Laodikeia also attracts attention today due to its proximity to Pamukkale. After visiting the ancient city, you can proceed to Pamukkale, where travertines that resemble a cloud field and the ancient city of Hierapolis can be seen in the same area. The Pamukkale Travertines and the Ancient City of Hierapolis, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are magnificent examples of natural and cultural heritage.

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