

"Tracing Sagalassos": an exhibition to benefit an ancient town...

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Equipped with an architectural background, Murat Germen captures the details that make the ancient city of Sagalassos, in Türkiye's Burdur province, in an exhibition featuring photos whose sales will fund archaeological excavations at the site. The show, "Tracing Sagalassos" is the work of academic, photographer and artist Murat Germen, currently on view at Bozlu Art Project.

Germen says he was informed of the existence of Sagalassos, an ancient town in Türkiye's Burdur province a while back, perhaps eight to ten years ago, thanks to a friend who knew about the excavations there.

Sagalassos is located amidst fountains and trees, near the lush Aglasun village. It is different from other ancient settlements in Anatolia, because it is a destination point. Germen says the town was not set up along a trade route, but is out of the way and needs to be reached after a trek.

"And when you reach Sagalassos, you cannot continue your journey from there. You have to go back the way you came from," he explains.

Murat Germen, Resilient No.1-9, 50cm x 50cm, 150 x 150cm, 3eds+1AP, Cprint+diasec, 2022. Germen adds that the town is different also because it is at a higher altitude than other ancient towns in Türkiye. Populated by Pisidians, a people who have trouble being obedient, according to the late Marc Waelkens, who had led excavations at Sagalassos for years, the town was well-protected against others that wanted to take over. "Thanks to its geography, and its residents," Germen says.

In the preliminary text to the exhibition, Germen quotes from Waelkens, a professor emeritus of archaeology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium: "The people of Sagalassos, who showed their stubbornness by resisting the Macedonian king, is one of the rare cities in Asia Minor that did not lose this reputation until the 6th century CE.

"Our knowledge of the Pisidians comes only from Latin and Greek sources. According to these sources, many Pisidians have served as mercenaries for the Great Persian Kings or their enemies since the early 5th century BCE. This was due to the failure of the Pisidians to be obedient, as it is often emphasised by Greek writers in the late 5th century and later."

Germen himself writes of the Pisidians and Sagalassos that "If this attitude is perceived as tenacity ?a questioning approach that I have adopted in my own life to this day ? I assume that the people of Sagalassos incorporated this character into the formation of their city ? While on the one hand, the people of Sagalassos were able to defend themselves from attacks better; on the other hand, after the city was abandoned entirely and the detrimental traces of time began to appear, it was able to remain better preserved as a ruined site."

Germen was part of the "For Sagalassos" exhibition in 2019, also at Bozlu Art Project, a show that aimed to raise funds for the excavation of the ancient town. Just like "For Sagalassos", "Tracing Sagalassos" also aims to raise funds for the excavation of the ancient town through the sale of Germen's detailed, exquisite photography.

He tells TRT World that he was at Sagalassos for three and a half days for the shoot in late June, after having visited the site and getting an idea of what he would portray earlier. He says that even though he brought with him a lot of heavy equipment, possibly weighing a hefty 25 kilograms, he ended up using just two lenses, a medium format digital camera with high resolution that produced crystal clear images, and a tripod ? as well as a drone for which he had received a permit to shoot with.

The resulting images offer the viewer a glimpse into what it would be like to visit the site and really focus on the details. He says there are a few headings he collected the images under:

Resilient, named after the classical forms that never go out of style and are always pleasing to the eye.

Beacon, for a vertical reference point in the middle of town, not unlike a bell tower in Europe or a minaret in Islamic geographies, showing the way to travellers seeking a landmark to make their way towards.

Safe, for an ancient town that rests upon nature ? "the mountains have its back," Germen points out, "the whole town is safe."

Then there is the series Footprint. Those drone photos "display the city planning within nature, how everything is interconnected, compact, and easily accessible."

"Tracing Sagalassos," Murat Germen's solo photography exhibition to benefit archaeological excavation projects of the ancient town, can be visited at Bozlu Art Project in Istanbul's Sisli district until August 27, 2022.