This Hellenistic theater is located in the ancient port city of Miletus. The city founded more than 90 colonies before it was destroyed during the Persian Wars (499–478 BC). Its population rebounded during the Hellenistic era to remain one of the greatest cities of the ancient Mediterranean world.
Anatolia’s Riches

It’s only mid-morning, but the dank air has already dampened Professor Nicholas Rauh’s skin, his long-sleeve shirt and cargo pants now clinging to his tired limbs. Just an hour ago, he was sipping hot tea in a crowded shop, discussing the whereabouts of an ancient tomb while fans whirred overhead. Now, Rauh and his companions — an array of Purdue students sporting T-shirts and jeans — climb the steep hillside above a tiny Turkish village, mountain boots crunching on the jagged limestone. As the sun scorches their path, Rauh tightens the grip on his increasingly heavy backpack, breathing in the scent of distant sea air mixed with cedar.

And then they see it — a few footsteps away, a cluster of stone blocks forming a long-forgotten burial place. Pulling out a tape measure, a young man sporting an Indiana Jones hat approaches the site, climbing down to calculate its dimensions. As he repeats each measurement aloud, his female companion presses a stylus against her handheld computer screen, adding to their digital map of the land known as Rough Cilicia.

Truths waiting to be unearthed

Cilicia, the ancient name of a coastal region in southern Turkey, once belonged to the Hellenistic and later the Roman empires. Topographically, it’s divided into two areas. To the east, rivers meander through patchworks of oat and wheat fields, irrigating an expansive cereal industry. To the west is Rough Cilicia, so named because of its largely mountainous terrain. Anchored by the Mediterranean Sea, the Taurus Mountains jut 12,000 feet above the sand, their rocky outcroppings punctuated by tufts of new-growth cedars.

For classical researchers, the woodland remnants hold stories of a distant time waiting to be unearthed. Ancient texts speak of a vast forest that once existed here, where cedar, fir, juniper, and oak trees blanketed the hills above the coast, fueling a ship-building industry where rot-resistant cedar was king. Today, most of the remaining cedar trees are only 60 to 70 years old, with a few older growths of 500 to 600 years scattered on the barren landscape. But the primordial trees are gone forever, their last vestiges buried deep in the soil.
Examining walls, temples, pottery, and the earth itself, archaeologists hope to answer many questions: Did the population boom in this previously sparse area because of the trees? How much and when did the ancient Cilicians in the forests assimilate with the Greco-Roman residents surrounding them? And when a whole society is built around some primary resource, in this case trees, what happens when the resources are expended?

**Linking two lands**

Rauh began his quest a couple of decades ago, hundreds of miles from Turkey in Greece's Cyclades Islands. Hooked on classical antiquity as an undergraduate, he was especially intrigued by one of his professor's books on the economic history of Roman Anatolia, the ancient name for Turkey. Once in graduate school as a Fulbright student in Turkey, Rauh made his way to Delos, birthplace of Apollo. "Texts tell us that pirates came from Rough Cilicia in order to sell slaves to Roman traders there around 100 BC," says Rauh of the islet, where ruins of marble monuments loom over the waters.

Rauh wrote a book on the subject, and he was soon invited by Turkish authorities to investigate the region of the pirates firsthand. So he relocated his research base to Rough Cilicia, hoping to establish a link between the two lands. "The key lay in the pottery, which he suspected had been traded between the Roman inhabitants of Delos and the pirates anchored at the foot of the Tauros Mountains."

"If you look at an ancient site like Athens, the buildings tell you this is Athens," Rauh explains. "When you get away from urban centers to the secondary and tertiary sites..."

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**Ascending the cliffs**

Rauh is speaking now of the annual journeys he undertakes in Gazipaşa, Turkey, each July and August, accompanied by Purdue students and Turkish archaeologists such as Levent Vardar, who works for the ministry in Ankara. Rising before dawn each morning, the team piles into four-wheel-drive Jeeps outside the Baysal Hotel, whose balconies overlook the ruins of ancient Seleucia, where the Roman Emperor Trajan died in AD 117. As they make their way up the rocky coast, they pass towns once populated by pirates. A couple of hours later, the group disembarks. "Far up in the mountains, we meet local villagers, have tea with them, and say, 'We are archaeologists, and we're doing this.' Slowly they come out and say, 'There's a tomb this way, and there's an old Roman wall that way,'" says undergraduate Phillip Ramiez, an aspiring professor who...
Traditionally the most notable period in ancient Cilicia's history was that of the famed Cilician pirates, whose short-lived domination of Mediterranean sea-lanes wreaked havoc on Roman trade between 139 and 67 BC. But despite an abundant historical tradition, Purdue Professor Nicholas Rauh's early survey of the area accounted for few archaeological remains specifically identifiable with pirate settlements.

All of that changed in 2004 with the discovery of a small bronze ship's ornament in the form of the mythological winged horse Pegasus. The ornament, which has no known parallel, was discovered by a dive team directed by Professor Cheryl Ward of Florida State University.

Working in conjunction with Rauh's survey, Ward's divers found the Pegasus ornament in shallow waters at the previously unidentified harbor of Antiocchia ad Cragum. The city was founded by King Antiochus IV of Commagene in the mid-first century AD. Radiocarbon dating performed at Purdue's Prime Lab, however, dates a fragment of the artifact to approximately 125 BC, when pirates are alleged to have fortified the site.

"Combined with additional underwater finds, including transport amphorae (large jars) and a ship's anchor, the work of the survey now raises important questions about the occupation of this site by pirates a century prior to its foundation as a Roman-era city," says Rauh, whose book, *Merchants, Sailors, and Pirates in the Roman World* (Temple Press 2003), discusses the pirate question in greater detail. Pirate bands most likely were attracted to this coast by the availability of its pristine cedar forests, providing the initial impetus to a Cilician timbering industry.
accompanied Rauh on his 2006 and 2007 Turkish field studies. Armed with directions, the team heads out for the ancient sites, turning down invitations to stay and have a meal.

The locals — bronze-skinned farmers whose broad noses and prominent foreheads resemble some of the surviving reliefs that Rauh studies — are typical of the Turkish people, a hospitable sort who would invite even a suspected looter to dine with them while waiting for the police to arrive. But Rauh’s team reserves leisurely visits for mid-afternoon, when the stifling humidity and scorched rocks make it unbearable to work. Until then, the group marches forward. Above the tree lines, they study pollen-rich meadows and remnants of Roman lumberjack camps. Standing in basilicas, they map forgotten towns. And traversing fields for pottery sherds unearthed during modern-day plowing, they track the culture of an ancient mountain people.

For Ramirez, seeing these classical sites up close and personal is euphoric. “I’ve been to Egypt as well, but there’s tons of people, there’s tons of security, and they say, ‘Don’t take pictures of this.’ In Turkey, the country is overflowing with ancient sites. Only here can you go somewhere that’s very important or even moderately important and see impressive walls, inscriptions, and mosaics — you can just be there, touch it, and walk around it.”

From xenophobia to assimilation

Two thousand years ago, pastoral farmers reigned over the desirable cedar trees, clustered in these rocky canyons above the Mediterranean. Pirates who lived on the coast below — and who, historians believe, left wives and children behind when they set out to sea each year — would have needed to establish trading relationships with the mountain inhabitants.

In contrast to their urban counterparts — who likely assimilated to the mainstream cultures of the day, lest they be imprisoned or executed — residents of these rural villages probably didn’t encounter many Greek or Roman soldiers. In fact, Rauh says, “The natives who lived in the
mountains were xenophobic, but they didn't mind the pirates, who were outsiders themselves and weren't charging taxes.”

Fifty miles away in either direction, large city-states cropped up along this ancient coast, sporting the typical monumental architecture of Greco-Roman towns. But in these isolated villages, there are Roman baths but no theaters, hinting that villagers were selective about cultural adaptation. And instead of temples celebrating mythological heroes and gods, large temple-like tombs appear to revere ordinary people. These reliefs, along with primitive relics, indicate the residents practiced a prehistoric form of ancestor worship, unlike their more Romanized urban neighbors.

“When you take all these attributes together, we’ve come to the conclusion that these people stepped out of the Bronze Age, from a very primitive pastoral lifestyle, directly into the Roman era,” Rauh says. He believes that economics ultimately led to the villagers’ assimilation; as the lumber industry grew, boom towns cropped up, filling once-isolated areas with new communities. Once the wood was gone, he argues, the area was largely abandoned again.

**Lessons for today**

Thousands of miles away, back in Indiana, Rauh ponders what these hypotheses mean for civilization today. After centuries of violence, the Roman Empire enjoyed nearly 200 years of prosperity and peace, somehow finding ways to incorporate the various world views of its richly diverse population. Today, the United States is facing a similar challenge in a rapidly emerging global economy.

“Economically we’re becoming interdependent with people we don’t get along with, how do we deal with that?” he asks. “What happens when we run out of oil, are we going to go nuclear or use coal? Could the fighting over this engender the chaos that dismantles a very complex and logistically interdependent system? Could this example of this civilization at this time give us a model to think about? I suppose you can look at any other past culture, but what I’ve found as a classics teacher is that the experience of Greek-Roman society resonates with students; they see more relevant parallels than with any other culture.”

Angie Roberts is a freelance writer for Purdue Marketing Communications

The Halk Pazar (People’s Bazaar) in the medieval neighborhood of Ulus in Ankara, Turkey, is a block away from the world-renowned Museum of Anatolian Civilizations and just below the Roman acropolis of the ancient city of Ancyra.
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CLA alumnus Paul Huston (BA 2007, Philosophy; CLA Alumni Board Outstanding Senior 2007) sits atop Mount Nkoma in Malawi, Africa.