

Item #53 (Archeological Tour, July 1976: Iraq, Iran, Turkey)

My pestering won out: Fr. Robert North, S.J., the organizer and guide of our 1975 “Caravan” to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria for the Pontifical Biblical Institute, decided to try his skill on two countries he had never been to, Iraq and Iran, and add on Turkey. Twenty-three men signed up. I was asked to be the second in command, as in the “caravan” to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (see Item #52). My main task, it turned out, was again to keep charge of our financial resources throughout the trip, but I was also briefly in charge in Iraq. During the academic year 1975-1976 I was in my first year of doctoral studies at the University of Oxford in Oxfordshire, England. The university was characteristically favorable to my use of the summer term to visit the countries indicated, and furnished at its own cost shots against possible infectious diseases to be found in the three countries. I was also profiting from my experience in 1975 and my notebook was much better prepared as was my note-taking on the spot.

Day 1: Tuesday, June 29: Bus to Rome airport (Fiumicino) from city at 2:40 p.m. Flight leaves for Baghdad at 7 p.m., arrives in Baghdad at 10:50 p.m. (11:50 p.m. Iraqi time). Bag of one participant falls off taxi on way to city from airport. Not to be found retracing route. The rest of us pitch in with offer of clothes. Night at Fatima Church.

Day 2: Wednesday, June 30: Rise 5:45 a.m. To Iraqi Museum for group. I go with Fr. North to Office of Antiquities. Then visit to Museum, 9:45-12:45. Museum excellent. We spend much time looking at displays. Lunch before going to Babylon under the guidance of a local tourist agency. Gate rebuilt in modern times out of yellow brick. Visit to ruins of Temple of Ninmah. Back to Baghdad for Mass at 9:00 p.m.

Day 3: Thursday, July 1: Rise at 4:45 a.m. On road in bus at 5:30 a.m. on way north to Mosul. Arrive before noon. Dominicans not at home. (North had planned to stay with them.) Vain search for a lodging for night. Lunch at Mosul. Visit to Nimrud (ample ruins with temples, obelisks, throne room), then Nineveh (brief view; I had seen some of plaques at

British Museum in London). On to Hatra. No Mass; no supper. Motel crowded because of presence of Iraqi government agency making documentary movie. I sleep in bus with some of the other men.

Day 4: Friday, July 2: At 1:30 a.m. Fr. North comes to bus where I am sleeping, finds me among the sleepers, wakens me, and informs me that I am now in charge of the men for the rest of the tour. It seems that when we left Rome he had had the impression that if he slept he would suffocate. The result was that he had not slept since we left Rome and wanted to return to Baghdad to catch a flight for Rome and treatment in a Catholic hospital. He insisted that I stay awake with him and keep him awake so that he could return to Baghdad early in the morning and fly back to Rome. I managed to stay awake and keep him awake, and at 6:00 we found a taxi and I sent him back to Baghdad with a Jesuit from his U.S. province. Our examination of Hatra went as scheduled. Date of foundation uncertain, but some ruins date back to middle of 16th century. In first century A.D. in hands of an Arab dynasty, when most of ruins date back to. Withstood two Roman sieges. We spend some time in Hatra. Then visit to Qasr (9th century B.C.) Then to other side of Tigris for visit to ruins of largest mosque in world. South to Samarra and lunch on fresh fish at local parish. On to Baghdad. Mass. Supper at restaurant. I have survived my first day as director.

Day 5: Saturday, July 3: Leave for Ur at 5:45. Arrive about 11:45 after stop in Nasariya for me to inquire about place for eating. Man at desk very pious Catholic. He asks if I have any holy cards. I find one with picture of Pope Paul VI. He kisses it, puts it with other holy cards on wall behind desk. (How to be a faithful Catholic in a Muslim area.) Mass in bus. Lunch in restaurant. On to Ur, possible Ur of Abraham. Inhabited from about 4000 B.C. Chief center for Sumer. Gradual decline under Persians. Practically extinct by 80 B.C., Ziggurat from 27th century. Guardian of Iraqi government on duty. Once he is

convinced that we have not come to spy on Iraqi air base a few kilometers away he becomes very communicative and explains the ziggurat to us. Dust and sand and millions of pottery sherds everywhere. I prowl around the ruins of temples for about an hour and then decide that the heat is too much. I go into our bus where the driver has the air conditioning going full speed. It feels cool after the heat outside. I look at the big thermometer. It reads 106 fahrenheit. Return to Baghdad. No supper.

Day 6: Sunday, July 4: Leave 8:20 a.m. for Ctesiphon. View of Al-Hikma College on way, former Jesuit mission of the New England Province. Too successful, it was said, for local Muslims and so taken over by government. Ctesiphon founded by Parthians in 144 B.C. Attacked by Romans without success. Captured by Sassinians in 224 A.D. Sacked by Byzantine emperor Heraclius in 628 A.D. Destroyed by Arabs after 637 A.D. Remains of throne room. On to Aqar Quf. Ziggurat (restored) impressive. Picnic lunch. Back to convent. Mass at 6:30 p.m. On to Al-Shamra Restaurant. The Americans have pitched in to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the Fourth of July in a restaurant with table cloths and napkins. We are all seated when who should appear but Fr. North! "I'll take over" he said to an immensely relieved amateur director. He had returned to Baghdad, found that there was no flight to Rome, went to a Catholic hospital where the staff persuaded him he would not die if he slept, so sleep he did, for 36 hours. And he felt well enough to take over again. Celebration complete.

Day 7: Monday, July 5: Rise 4:00 a.m. To airport. Flight to Tehran at 6:00 instead of 7:00 as originally scheduled. We barely make flight and board from runway. Flight lasts 1 hour and 10 minutes. On arrival to Elizabeth Hotel. Afternoon free for group. Fr. North and I go to office of Near Eastern Tours where we are interviewed by a young woman in her twenties speaking French (Fr. North did not speak Farsi [Persian]) and sipping Pepsi-Cola. Fr. North had decided that his illness had

constrained him to depend on a travel agency rather than go-it-alone by ourselves at a lower price. Mass at 6:15 p.m.

Day 8: Tuesday, July 6: Rise at 6:00 a.m. Breakfast at Elizabeth Hotel. Walk to Tehran Museum. Visit from 9:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. An excellent museum, well worth the visit. But not quite as good as the museum in Baghdad. (Labels not as clear.) Back to Elizabeth Hotel. Lunch at hotel. Afternoon in lobby. Mass at 7:00 p.m.

Day 9: Wednesday, July 7: Rise 6:00 a.m. Mass at 7:00 a.m. Walk again to museum. Back to hotel for lunch. Afternoon in lobby. Flight to Isfahan 6:00 – 6:35 p.m. Supper at Sheherazade Restaurant. Night at Jahan Hotel. Fr. North called our stop in Isfahan just a “cost-free stop en route to Persepolis”. (Only later did I discover that Isfahan is the burial site of Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes, S.J., famous linguist, who labored many years in Vietnam.)

Day 10: Thursday, July 8: Rise 7:20. Breakfast. Beginning at 9:00 a.m. we did visit a few sites in the city: a polo field, the principal mosque (Masjid Shah). In the afternoon to Julfa (Armenian Museum and Cathedral). After 4:30 p.m. Mass at school run by Sisters of Charity (Roudabeh). Flight to Shiraz 10:30 – 11:10 p.m. Rest of night at Shiraz Inn.

Day 11: Friday, July 9:

Rise 6:30 a.m. Breakfast 7:00 a.m. Leave 7:30 a.m. for Persepolis. Explore there 9:15 – 11:15 a.m. Darius the Great (522-485 B.C. basically responsible for the huge settlement of Persepolis, though site may have been chosen by Cambyses II. Alexander the Great destroyed complex as livable in 330 B.C. Although many buildings unfinished complex is immensely impressive. We explore remains for two hours, from 9:15 to 11:15 a.m. (The Shah had a large number of brightly colored tents all neatly arranged in rows for some celebration of his. We

were told they were strictly off limits.) Then visit to Naqsh-e Rostam, rock cliff containing four tombs, that of Darius and three of his successors. Lunch nearby. On to Pasargadae (Pasargada?), established as capital of Persian Empire by Cyrus beginning around 546 B.C. Tomb of Cyrus. We drink water from a hose near tomb, i.e., amenities not available. We visit tombs. Back to Shiraz Inn for night.

Day 12: Saturday, July 10: Rise 6:30 a.m., breakfast 7:30 a.m. I walk through part of town with another tour member seeking Armenian church, mosques. Mass at 11:45 a.m. Leave for airport. Arrive Awaz 6:35 p.m. Short ride through town and back to Awaz Hotel. Spend night there. We are in southwestern Iran.

Day 13: Sunday, July 11: Rise 4:15. Leave 5:30. Visit to Tchoga Zanbil, Elaborate temple and tomb built around 1250 B.C., 28 meters square at base, nearly 50 meters high. Destroyed by Ashurbanipal around 640 B.C. We move north, at one point helping driver get out of ditch on dirt road. Sugar cane fields around us. To Susa, Site of pre-historic settlement from beginning of fourth millennium B.C. Long and elaborate history involving Ashurbanipal, Darius, Alexander the Great. Both Greeks and Persians. For a time a stronghold of Christianity. Eventually taken over by Islam. Mass, then lunch. Then a long ride through Luristan not far from border with Iraq. To Bisitun by last light. Supper between Bisitun and Hamadan. Night at Bouabi Motel.

Day 14: Monday, July 12: Rise 5:00 a.m. Leave 7:00 a.m. To mountains south of Hamadan. Inscriptions on cliff of Darius and Xerxes. Stop at tomb of Avicenna. On to "tombs" and synagogue of Mordechai and Esther. Mass in rose garden on edge of Hamadan. (Boy wonders what we are doing.) Cool weather for a change because of altitude. Motor trouble in bus between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. Fruit for lunch. Arrival at Rablavi at 6:30 p.m. Supper overlooking Caspian Sea.

Day 15: Tuesday, July 13: Rise 6:00 a.m. Leave Rablavi 7:45 a.m. Drive along Caspian Sea until 11:00 a.m. Then visit with American friends of one of group. They treat us with welcome refreshments. Pause for quick swim in Caspian. I am about to go in water when I see a horse with rider relieve itself in water. I have a change of mind. At 11:30 a.m. on to Chalus. Then south through Iburz Mountains to Tehran. Mountains higher and less labeled for travelers than the Rockies I knew near Denver in the 1950s. Arrival in Shahr Ray, suburb of Tehran. Probably visited by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. during his pursuit of Darius III. Rebuilt in 300 B.C. and called Europos. Captured by Parthians and used as Spring residence of Parthian kings. Occupied by Sassanians until Arab conquest in 637 A.D. Destroyed by Mongols 1220 A.D. Walls from 13th century. Mass in hotel.

Day 16: Wednesday, July 14: Rise 6:00 a.m. Mass in hotel 7:00 a.m. Morning in hotel. To airport 1:00 p.m. Flight to Istanbul 2 hours, 45 minutes. Arrive at hotel there 8:00 p.m., Turkish time. Supper in restaurant. Hotel Ipek Palas. Near obelisk.

Day 17: Thursday, July 15: Rise 6:00 a.m. Mass 6:45 a.m. Breakfast 7:30 a.m. To Hippodrome (where I turn around as I talk with members of our group and, to my consternation, find a bear staring at me from two feet away [trained bear for amusement; I was not amused, though bystanders were]). Blue Mosque, Hagia Sofia (fascinating visit; originally a giant Christian church; now a Muslim museum with a few Christian paintings still faintly visible). Near Hagia Sofia Sainte Irene, the Christian Church where the Divinity of the Holy Spirit was defined in the Council of 381; entrance and spiritual visit possible; now a storeroom impossible to enter). Visit to Archeological Museum, Ancient Near Eastern Museum. Overwhelming. Lunch 12:00 noon. 1:30 – 7:00 p.m. on Bosphorus. Trip up to Black Sea and back. Supper 7:30 p.m.

Day 18: Friday, July 16: Up at 5:45 a.m. With Fr. North and six members of tour to visit if possible the site of the Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon (451) which defined the two natures with one person of Christ. It was part of my ambition to visit the sites of all the ecumenical councils (since fulfilled). The present site is called in Turkish Kadikoy and is on the east bank of the Bosphorus. Fr. North (who spoke Turkish) came to the port of Istanbul on the west bank of the Bosphorus with us and found a ferry which he said was headed for Kadikoy. He himself did not embark and left the seven of us who did to our fate. As the ferry got underway it was clear that it was not headed for Kadikoy. I speak no Turkish but I assumed that among the Turkish men standing on the deck with us some had been “guestworkers” in Germany so I raised my voice and asked in German if anyone among us spoke German. One man came to me and I presented my difficulty. We wanted to go to Kadikoy but the ferry was headed upstream. He calmly explained in German that there was no serious problem. We were headed for a port on the east bank of the Bosphorus about five kilometers upstream from Kadikoy. When the ferry we were on should touch port we should disembark and take a taxi for Kadikoy. I followed his advice and we soon found ourselves in Kadikoy. The exact spot where the council was held was the Church of St. Eufemia. I since learned it is now the site of a movie theater. But we were unable to say exactly where the council was held and so unable to do more than walk to a spot somewhat removed from the shore on a height from which we could see the countryside and Istanbul (Byzantium) and declare victory by purchasing rich Turkish pastries. We then found our way back to our hotel by 9:00 a.m. Our first excursion with the group was to the famous Topkapi, palace of the Sultan. Originally it was the acropolis of Constantinople. Then to the Ancient Near East Museum for a second visit. To Hippodrome for lunch at 12:30 p.m. Then on to Kariye Camii (Holy Savior in the Fields), a Church that perhaps dates before 413, when it was in the fields. It is the only church from the time of

Constantinople that seems to have preserved the original decorations. Brief view of Roman aqueduct. To Jesuit residence for Mass at 4:00 p.m. Then to the city bazaar (market) with two members of the group. Supper at 7:00 p.m. after a very full day.

Day 19: Saturday, July 17: Up at 6:00 a.m. Leave at 7:15 a.m. We are introduced to our Turkish driver who will accompany us for days and nights. Cross Bosphorus on one bridge possible. Go to Iznik, ancient Nicea, site of first ecumenical council in 325 in which the full divinity of Christ was defined. At the time it was the site of the emperor's summer palace on the eastern edge of a beautiful lake. We have Mass near the ruins of the ancient church in the town, with storks watching us, where the ecumenical council of 787 was held, that approved the veneration of images. We go outside of the town and can see the ruins of the emperor's palace where the council of 325 was held, emerging from the lake. The palace had been destroyed by an earthquake. On to Bursa (Blue Mosque). Lunch. On to Cannakkale, arriving at 7:50 p.m. Night at Troy Hotel. We are near the Aegean Sea.

Day 20: Sunday, July 18: Up at 6:00 a.m. Breakfast at 7:00 a.m. Then to ancient Troy. 9 superimposed cities. We look out on a plain from an elevation, just as I imagined from reading Homer and Virgil. A modern reconstruction of the Trojan horse stands nearby. Rather unconvincing (large, but not gigantic). Lunch at Edremit. On south to Bergama (Pergamum) one of the seven churches of the Apocalypse. Much to see in the afternoon. Mass in hotel in Bergama.

Day 21: Monday, July 19: Up at 4:00 a.m. Breakfast at 5:15 a.m. To some of the other cities of the Apocalypse: Thyataura (Turkish Akhisar). Famous for textiles in antiquity. Ruins of ancient city in center of modern town. Birth place of Lydia, a convert (and hostess!) of St. Paul in Philippi (Acts 16,14). Sardis (Sart). Peak of power under Croesus (560-546 B.C.) Principal center of Persian power in west. Captured by Romans.

Philadelphia (Alasehir). Founded by Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamum to be an “open door” for Greek culture. Destroyed by earthquake in 17 A.D. Rebuilt by emperor Tiberias and named Neo-Caesarea. We don’t visit for long. Eat lunch in bus as we travel. We skip scheduled stop at Gordium (Gordes) and after a long ride reach Hotel Roma at Ankara at 8:00 p.m.

Day 22: Tuesday, July 20: Up at 5:30 a.m. Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. On the way. Quick view of Roman baths, then column of Julian the Apostate (stork on top), from 3rd century A.D., temple with inscription of Augustus, originally from second century B.C., then rededicated to Emperor Augustus 6 A.D. To Hittite Museum in Ankara for brief visit. Lunch on way to Hattusa (Bogazkoy), about 90 miles due east of Ankara. (I eat tainted custard, become ill, but continue with group.) Visit Hittite ruins. (Hittites important for copies of treaties they have left; Hittite had become an important language for Near Eastern specialists of Old Testament background.) Huge complex. Visit Yazilikaya, an outdoor shrine with many reliefs. Then to Alaca Huyuk (“mound”). Sphinx gate. (Women washing sheep fleece ten yards from entrance to ruins.) We return to Ankara. I go to Fr. North with the problem of my sickness. He says I can stay in the hotel in Ankara after the group leaves and then try to find us in southeast Turkey, or go with the group. The only realistic choice is to stay with the group.

Day 23: Wednesday, July 21: Up at 6:00 a.m. Sick. Vain attempt of group to visit massive Greek temple that was the shrine to Ataturk in Ankara. To Kultepe (Kanes in Turkish) Fortified city at height of power between 1900 and 1600 B.C. City of merchants. Tablets of Akkadian language found near ruins after decades of searching. To nearby Caesaria of Cappadocia (Kayseri). To nearby Goreme for view of landscape (mountain 12,000 feet high), Caesaria made capital of Cappadocia by Emperor Tiberius. Later became bishopric of St. Basil the Great in 4th century. We arrive at a church at Goreme at 5:35 p.m., five minutes after closing time. To hotel.

Day 24: Thursday, July 22: Up at 5:45 a.m. I feel much better. Leave at 7:30 a.m. See churches at Goreme (Keranlik Kilise [“Dark” Church], frescoes of Ascension, Nativity, Magi Church of St. Barbara). Lunch at Potavi. Through Cilician Gates, pass of about 1,000 meters altitude in Mersin Province. We arrive at St. Paul’s birthplace, Tarsus, city on or near sea. Great antiquity. Made capital of Cilicia by Pompey in 67 B.C. We see fountain that dates to Paul’s times, stretch of Roman road about 20 feet from surface of city discovered when an underground garage was being built. We walk through town. Remains of arches, columns that Paul may have seen. Great experience. Had Hellenistic baths and Roman theater. Seat of Stoic philosophic school. Site of bishopric. More important than I had thought apart from St. Paul. Night at Cilian Palace Hotel.

Day 25: Friday, July 23: Up at 5:15 a.m. Breakfast of lentil soup (local specialty). Leave hotel at 7:00 a.m. Pause at bridge outside Tarsus. Reflection on importance of place for Christianity. Pass Mopsuestia, home of Theodore (died 428), leading Monophysite theologian, castle of Toprak Kale (built of black basalt). On to Karatepe (the “Black Hill”), originally a small fort and summer residence of petty king from the Cilician plain. Interesting ruins. Lunch at Kadisbi. To Iskenderun (Alexandretta in antiquity, founded by Alexander the Great but preserves little of the past). On the way we pass Issus, a flat piece of landscape where Alexander the Great defeated Darius in 333 B.C. Then on to Antioch, where the disciples of Jesus were first called “Christians” (Acts 11,26). On to Hotel Cinar, 8 miles south of Antioch, because there was no place in the Kent Hotel in the city.

Day 26: Saturday, July 24: Up at 5:15. Breakfast at second hotel. Visit to “St. Peter’s Cave”, where tradition has first Christians gathering in prayer because not welcome in synagogues. Antioch of early Christian times invisible because buried under ruins of earthquake that caused side of nearby

mountain to obliterate town that now lies under town built over it. On to Alalah (Acana), flourished from founding in 3rd millennium B.C. to around 1240 B.C. 18 main levels of occupation. Mixed population was predominantly Hurrian. Destroyed by "Peoples of the Sea". On to Gaziantep. Large, flourishing town with history of being bone of contention between Byzantines and Muslims. Battle between Franks (Crusaders) and Turks (Muslims) 1150. Archeology museum with Hittite remains. Remains of Seljuk fortress. Lunch in restaurant. On to Carcamish. We go to Turkish army fort on end of bridge going across Euphrates River. Our host is a lieutenant in the Turkish army who is in charge of the fort and who speaks excellent English. We walk across bridge which at its beginning is only a yard or two from Syria. On way back inside Turkish fort a member of the tour wanders off clearly marked path. Lieutenant remarks calmly but loudly, "I wouldn't go in that area for it is heavily mined". Rapid reaction by member of tour. Back to Gaziantep. Supper in restaurant. Night in hotel.

Day 27: Sunday, July 25: Rise at 4:45 a.m. Breakfast in hotel at 5:30 a.m. Leave at 6:00 a.m. to begin trip back to Istanbul. From Gaziantep to Konya by way of Mirsin. Lunch at Mirsin. Mirsin modern port west of Tarsus. Has history dating back to sixth millennium B.C. Inland beginning at Silifke. Crusaders' castle. Skip visit to Catal Huyuk, city of possibly 10,000 inhabitants flourishing 6700-5700 B.C. Konya on Anatolian plain. Known as Iconium in antiquity. (See Acts 14,1-6 for the account of how Paul and his companion, Barnabas, were mistreated there.) Archeological museum. Monastery of dancing dervishes. Mass in Konya at 7:00 p.m. Night in hotel.

Day 28: Monday, July 26: Rise 5:45 a.m. Breakfast in hotel at 6:30 a.m. Leave 7:00 a.m. To Antioch in Pisidia (modern Yalvac) by way of Beysehir. Antioch in Pisidia was the scene of famous speeches by St. Paul (Acts 13,13-52) made in a synagogue the foundation of which is probably the one visible under the ruins of a Byzantine church. In his second speech

Paul says he will turn to the Gentiles, which, of course, he did. It was raining most of the time we were at Yalvac so we missed seeing this site, but a later trip to Turkey made it possible for me. Very moving experience to hear someone read Paul's account of turning to the Gentiles and realize that I am one of them. The city was a Christian fortress during the Crusades. Next brief stop, Egridir, next to steep mountain. Through Isparta. Lunch at Bucak. On to Antalya (see Attalia, the name for the town in Acts 14,25) on the Mediterranean Sea at 4:15 p.m. Mass in hotel at 7:00 p.m. Walk to port with another member of tour after supper. The whole area between Yalvac and Antalya figures in ending of the first missionary journey of Paul so rich in events (see Acts 14,21-25) but there is not much of the modern landscape that is a reminder of it.

Day 29: Tuesday, July 27: Rise at 5:30 a.m. Breakfast in hotel at 6:15, Leave 7:00 a.m. glimpse of Hadrian's massive gate as we leave Antalkya. North to Belkis (Aspendos in ancient times; small settlement; battle of Eurymedon in 468 B.C.; Roman theater constructed under Antoninus Pius). Brief stop at Perge, ancient town with canal down main street. Lunch at Burdur. About 12 miles away a tell with a series of pre-historic civilizations dating from about 7,000 B.,C. To modern Dinar near road to Horan. We are in a rural area near site of ancient Colossi, recipients of Paul's Letter to the Colossians. We descend from the bus and find ourselves near a farmhouse where a group of men are watching some Olympic games. Fr. North manages to single out the relevant owner and asks if our group can go through one of his fields to the unexcavated hill that marks the site of Colossi. With a bit of financial remuneration he agrees and we walk daintily through a field of peppers to a small hill surrounded by deep wadis. Underneath the surface of the hill littered with pottery sherds lies what remains of the settlement that merited a letter from St. Paul. I say a few prayers and then, with the other men, return to the bus. To Denizli for supper at restaurant and lodging at hotel.

Day 30: Wednesday, July 28: Up at 5:30 a.m. Breakfast at 6:15 a.m. To Laodicea. One of seven churches of the Apocalypse (Apocalypse 3,14-22). Reprimanded for being lukewarm. Founded by Antiochus II in 250 B.C. Named for wife. Ruled by kings of Pergamum after 190 B.C., by Romans after 153 B.C. Large Jewish population. Ruins of town wall, 2 theaters, stadium, acropolis. Excavated by Laval University in Quebec. On to Hierapolis (Pamukkale), about six miles from Laodicea. Petrifying springs (7,200 cubic meters of deposit left annually). Captured by Romans in 133 B.C. Population mainly Romans and Jews. Ruins of large Christian Church. Site of martyrdom of Apostle Philip? On to Izmir (Smyrna), One of the seven churches of the Apocalypse (Apocalypse 2,8-12). Large. Visit acropolis, agora. Lunch here. After lunch I take a walk around the area with one of the group. Somewhere where we walked must have been the site of martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna. At 7:00 we have Mass in our hotel.

Day 31: Thursday, July 29: Up at 5:30. Breakfast at 6:30. Leave hotel at 7:00. We go to Ephesus. Immensely impressive. At one time a large port on the Aegean Sea. But earthquakes changed the coastline, moving it several miles west. The “ruins” (everything is in surprisingly good shape) have been excavated by Austrian archeologists for decades. Most impressive is the House of the Virgin in the hills, about six miles by road from the edge of the ruins and thus outside Ephesus. Since our visit in 1976 I have become more aware of the fact that this was in all probability the site where St. John took the mother of Jesus until her assumption (celebrated locally by Christians and Muslims we were told). The site in the hill was staffed by U.S. priests and nuns. The site of the Council of Ephesus (431) that defined that Mary was indeed the Mother of God was two former narrow warehouses linked together end to end to form one building so that the council fathers could convene. Very moving for me to add this site to my list of sites of ecumenical councils that I have visited (since

1976 completed). Also immensely moving was the large theater, which seemed to be in the condition in which it was built. We entered it with Acts 19,28-41 in mind. We had Mass and lunch at Ephesus, certainly one of the high points of our entire trip. Then south to Didyma, oracle of Ionian immigrants that rivaled Delphi. Destroyed by Darius in 499 B.C. Restored by Alexander. Vast temple begun but not finished. We looked on Miletus from the hillside where Didyma was located, mindful of the moving experience of Paul and the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20,15-38). Group departs for Greece with Fr. North for more travel. While we are still together our Turkish bus driver takes his leave of the group (he will still drive those not going to Greece back to Ismir and Istanbul) he thanks us for the experience of seeing so much of his country with us and says he is impressed by how we were exclusively concerned with our goal of visiting archeological sites and sites concerning our faith. We have supper at hotel in Izmir.

Day 32: Friday, July 30: Rise at 5:30 a.m. Breakfast at 6:15 a.m. As we wait for bus to bring those who did not break off for Greece two or three porters notice my baseball cap. It is from White House, the Jesuit retreat house on the banks of the Mississippi just south of St. Louis, Missouri. They notice a couple of small crosses on the cap. By Turkish law it was illegal to wear such religious insignia. Apparently they have never seen such a symbol. Technically speaking they could have confiscated the cap and perhaps accused me of a misdemeanor. Instead they waved me along with a laugh. Instructive. We leave Ismir at 7:50 a.m. We go to Istanbul by way of Edremit, Ganakkale, ferry, Genibolu, Tekirdagu. Rain. We view walls of Constantinople on entry. Mass at 8:30 p.m. in Hotel Sippri. Supper in restaurant.

Day 33: Saturday, July 31: Up at 6:15 a.m. Mass in hotel at 7:00 p.m. Breakfast 7:30 a.m. in hotel. Off to airport as we await our flights. I am in charge to see that no one wanders too far away. Those of us headed for Rome go aboard. We reach

Fiumicino with no difficulty. To Rome by light rail. To Biblical Institute by bus 64, Home on Feast of St. Ignatius! My pestering has borne some fruit!

Some Reflections on the Tour of Iraq, Iran and Turkey:

Some there are who would say that spending one's time as we did in July of 1976 was a waste of time. I disagree though I do not wish to argue over the matter. Back in the days when I was studying English, Latin and Greek classical literature (1947-1949) in my "Juniorate" at St. Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant, Missouri, I took a course on Thucydides based on the original Greek text. For whatever reason I still do not understand the persons in the text before me came alive. They were real people, not just names! They lived in circumstances vastly different from mine, but still in the same world. I had become a part of what I was reading. I was in the text looking out. That is what happened when I visited ancient sites. I became a part of what I was seeing. This for me is the test of great literature or of history well written or of ruins well understood: do I become a part of what I read or of what I see. Can I realize that I am with the people whom I am reading about, in the same world, with the same challenges, with the same tests. If so, my time was well spent. Looking back I can say that my time was well spent as I visited with like-minded friends Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey as I realized I was a part of the same world that I saw.