

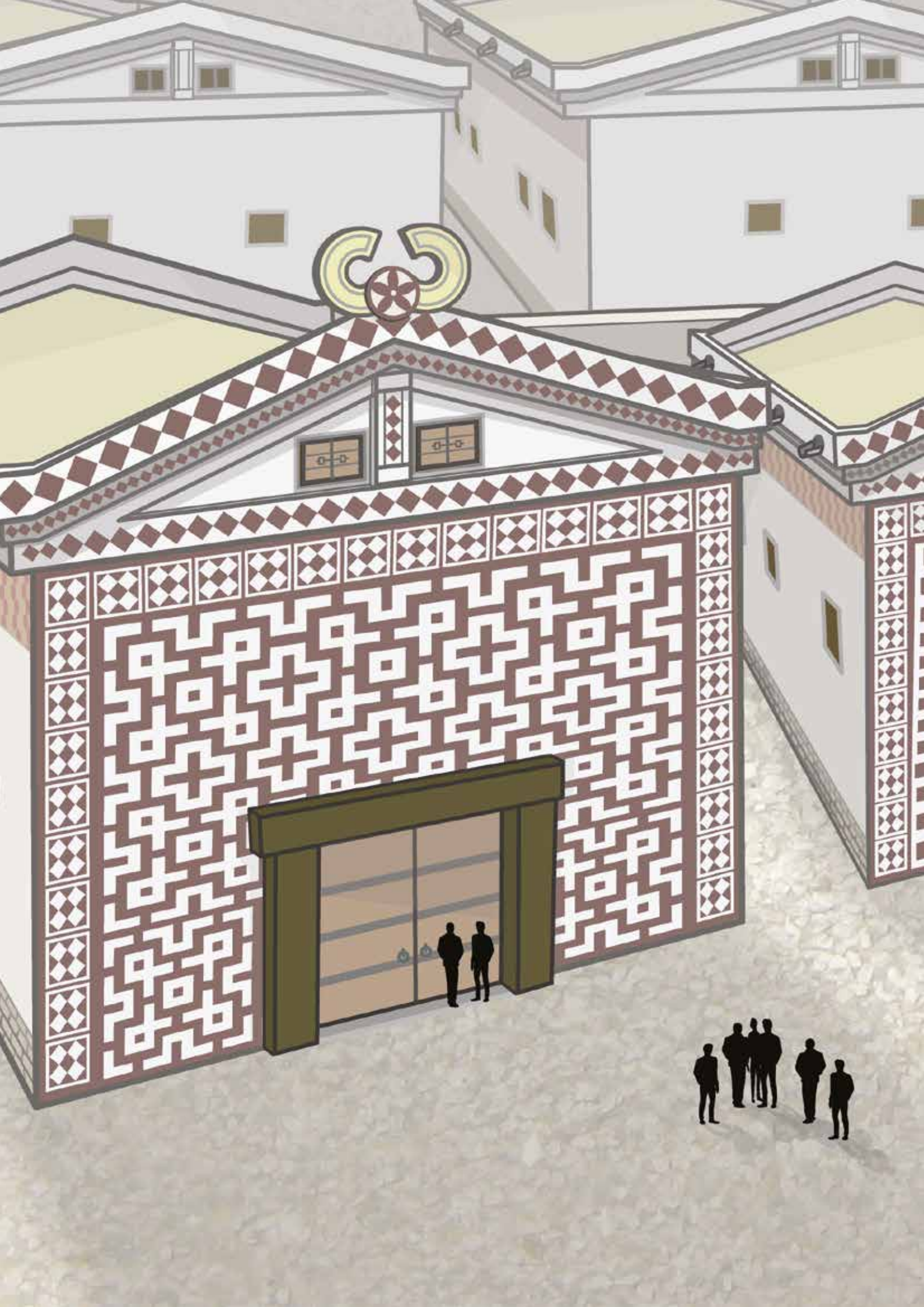
Excavating the Phrygian Capital of Gordion

Charles Brian ROSE

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Excavating the Phrygian Capital of Gordion*

Frig Başkenti Gordion Kazıları

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Abstract

Located in central Türkiye, 100 km southwest of Ankara, the citadel mound of Gordion encompasses nine successive settlements spanning nearly four millennia, from ca. 2400 B.C. to the 14th century A.D. The city's period of greatest prosperity lay in the 9th and 8th centuries, and the site reached the height of its fame during the reign of Midas (ca. 740-696 B.C.), well known for his "golden touch." This article describes the recent fieldwork at the site, including the conservation of the East Citadel Gate, the Terrace Complex, and a large pebble mosaic, all of which date to the 9th c. B.C. The new excavations at the South Citadel Gate and in the center of the mound are also described, along with the most recent remote sensing results.

Key Words: Gordion, Phrygians, Tumuli, Conservation, Midas

Özet

Türkiye'nin merkezinde, Ankara'nın 100 km güneybatısında yer alan Gordion Höyük'ü, yaklaşık dört bin yılı kapsayan, dokuz ardışık yerleşim katmanından oluşmaktadır. MÖ 2400 ile MS 14. yüzyıla kadar kesintisiz yerleşim görülen kentte, en büyük refah dönemi MÖ 9. ve 8. yüzyıllarda gerçekleşmiş ve "dokunduğu herşey altın olan" tanınan Midas Dönemi'nde (yaklaşık MÖ 740-696) ününün zirvesine ulaşmıştı. Bu makalede, hepsi MÖ 9. yüzyıla tarihlenen Doğu Kale Kapısı, Teras Kompleksi ve büyük çakıl taşı taban mozaikinin koruma çalışmaları da dahil olmak üzere alandaki son çalışmalar ele alınmıştır. Güney Kale Kapısı'ndaki ve höyüğün merkezindeki yeni kazılarda ulaşılan ilk sonuçlar da makale kapsamında anlatılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gordion, Frigler, Tümülüs, Konservasyon, Midas

Introduction

Gordion is one of the most important sites of the ancient world in that it served as the political and cultural capital of the Phrygians (Fig. 1). The city was also known as the seat of the Phrygian king Midas during the late eighth century B.C., whose wealth earned him the title "ruler with the golden touch." With its monumental Phrygian architecture, an extensive destruction level dating to around 800 B.C., and more than 125 wealthy tombs belonging to the Phrygian elite, Gordion is the premier archaeological type-site for Phrygian civilization (Sentürk and Tüfekçi Sivas,

2007; Rose and Darbshire, 2011; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2017). As such, it is on a par with Athens, Rome, Pompeii, the Hittite capital at Hattusha, and Babylon in elucidating for us the material achievements of an ancient civilization. When Alexander the Great of Macedon began his world-altering campaign against the Persian Empire in 334 B.C., he came to Gordion in that first year and may have wintered there. His stay at Gordion also led to one of the most curious events in ancient history, the cutting of the Gordian knot.

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Rodney S. Young of the Penn Museum began excavations at Gordion in 1950 and concentrated on the eastern half of the citadel; there he uncovered evidence of nine successive settlements spanning a period of nearly 4,000 years, from ca. 2,500 B.C. to 1400 A.D. (Figs. 2, 3). Young also opened 30 burial tumuli, ranging in date from the 9th century B.C. into the Hellenistic period (late 4th–2nd century B.C.). These included the spectacular Tumulus MM that was built ca. 740 B.C., which contained the oldest standing wooden building in the world (Fig. 4). Excavations under the auspices of the Penn Museum have continued ever since, although we work closely with the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, which has contributed a great deal to the Gordion Project and its discoveries (Young et al, 1981; Simpson, 2010).

1. East Citadel Gate

The first monument that one sees when approaching the Citadel Mound is the monumental Early Phrygian Citadel Gate, whose stone walls still rise to a height of 10 m (Figs. 5, 6). This appears to have been the principal entrance into the citadel when it was initially constructed in the 9th century B.C., and despite damage by ancient armed conflict and earthquakes, it still remains the best-preserved Iron Age citadel gate in Asia Minor (Rose, 2017: p.148-154).

When the gate was seriously damaged by the earthquake of 1999, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism asked us to develop a program for emergency intervention in order to ensure that the building would not deteriorate any further. This project, expertly supervised by Elisa del Bono and Angelo Lanza, required us to remove the upper twelve courses of stones that sustained the greatest damage, row by row, and to reinsert them once they had been conserved. The 112 damaged blocks were consolidated with epoxy injections and the insertion of stainless-steel bars, while stainless-steel straps were installed to anchor the facing stones to the core of the wall.

The 2019 season witnessed the completion of this project, when all of the conserved stones were set back in place and covered by a “green cap” of shallow-rooted grass over a layer of geo-textile. This treatment prevents water from the entering the masonry and further damaging it, in that the roots will absorb the

water during the rainy season, but will not grow deep enough to penetrate the masonry.

2. Terrace Complex

The Early Phrygian citadel’s industrial quarter, or “Terrace Complex,” served as a center for food preparation and weaving activities on the Citadel Mound (Fig. 2). The complex in question consists of two parallel structures (the so-called “Terrace Building” and the “Clay Cut Building”), each of which would have been approximately 100 m long and positioned on either side of a 23 m wide court (DeVries, 1980: p.38-40; Sams, 1994: p.15-16; Burke, 2005). An accident at or near one of the building’s hearths probably caused a major fire ca. 800 B.C., judging by the pattern of the destruction, and the carbonized seeds discovered within the building suggest that the event occurred during the summer, when the winds would have quickly fanned the flames. The Terrace Building has been one of our primary projects in conservation since 1999 because the walls had been so badly damaged in that conflagration. The fire caused the walls to splay, and the stones are badly cracked in most cases. The walls of six of the eight rooms in the complex have now been conserved, and we will start on the remainder in the summer campaign of 2023.

3. Pebble Mosaic

One of the treasures of the Gordion Museum is the multi-colored pebble mosaic from one of the elite Early Phrygian buildings, Megaron 2 (Fig. 7). Dating to the second half of the 9th century B.C., it ranks as the oldest decorated stone mosaic ever discovered, which is why we have devoted several seasons to its conservation (Rose, 2017: p.157-160). New pebbles of white, red, and black have been collected in the nearby Porsuk valley from the same sources that had supplied the original pebbles. These were used to fill in the missing sections of the mosaic and render the design more intelligible to viewers. The replacement stones were painted with shellac which glows orange in ultraviolet light, thereby allowing restored areas to be easily distinguished from the original.

4. Area 1: The South Gate

Reconstructing the original appearance of the most imposing buildings on Gordion's citadel is not easy since none of them survives intact, nor do many of their foundations. Our best guide is provided by Gordion's two known citadel gates, the East Gate and the South Gate, which is why we have made their conservation such an important component of our fieldwork. The ongoing restoration of the citadel East Gate, on the eastern side of the mound, has already been described, but the South Gate is a new discovery, located on the southern side of the citadel (Figs. 2, 8, 9). The gate was built ca. 850 B.C., refurbished in the 8th and 6th centuries B.C., and then rebuilt again in the 4th century A.D., so it was in operation for over 1,200 years (Rose, 2017: p.160-171). The approach road was over 65 m in length, making it the longest known approach road of any citadel gate in Asia Minor, and the fortification wall on the road's northern side still rises to a height of nearly 4.4 m.

In general, the defensive walls lining the gate's approach road have survived relatively well during the last 3,000 years, but one stretch was so badly damaged that our excavators were forced to leave a large rectangle of earth in front of it so that the stones would be protected until the conservators had an opportunity to restore it. During the first week of the 2021 season we excavated this section of earth (measuring 6 x 4 m) and exposed the badly damaged wall behind it, where an earthquake had caused most of the facing stones to collapse. The core of the wall was still preserved to a height of nearly 3 m, and conservation began immediately after the excavation ended and was completed by the end of the season.

One reason why the wall was so badly damaged is that Gordion's masons in the 9th century B.C. had placed rows of juniper logs between every three courses of stone, apparently to provide the wall with greater flexibility in the event of an earthquake. This measure works relatively well unless there is a war that results in the building catching fire, which is what happened when the Persians attacked Gordion ca. 540 B.C. This was a siege of unknown duration, but in the end, the Persians won. In the course of the conflict, however, the juniper logs caught fire and burned from end to end "within the wall", which weakened the stones around

them and caused their faces to shear off over time. We have therefore done our best to repair the damage caused by the Persians 2,500 years ago.

As part of our conservation program, the restored facing courses were anchored to the rubble core behind by steel straps, just as we did previously at the citadel's East Gate. Altogether, 43 newly stabilized stones were assembled in 12 wall courses, and the northern side of the approach road is once again defined by the same handsome limestone facing it once possessed (Figs. 8, 9). One can now perceive it more easily as the kind of monumental gate that the 9th century B.C. architects originally intended, through which Midas himself would have passed.

As in the case of the other Middle Phrygian buildings, the rubble packing behind the walls had been stabilized through the strategic placement of large juniper logs, which were still unusually well preserved. We discovered three such timbers measuring between 2.40 to 3.40 m, which demonstrates how enormous these binders actually were. The stratigraphic position of the logs indicates that they must have been cut ca. 2,800 years ago.

5. Area 1: The Mosaic Building

Above and to the northeast of the South Gate is the Mosaic Building, which had earlier been dated to the Late Phrygian period (5th–4th centuries B.C.) and interpreted as the office of Gordion's Persian governor (Voigt, 2013; p.219-220; Rose, 2017: p.161-163; Rose, 2021: p.50-51). The structure encompassed an area measuring 40 m by 18 m, and its multi-room plan resembles no other complex on the Citadel Mound: an enclosed vestibule with a decorated pebble mosaic floor opened onto a paved courtyard, which, in turn, led to another vestibule and "Throne Room," both of which were decorated with blue and white pebble mosaic floors featuring a network of meander designs (Fig. 10). At the southwest was a square room (the "South Room") framed by a colonnade of half columns on two sides, with the floors again decorated with the same type of mosaics.

Remote sensing in 2018 had revealed a large anomaly to the west of the complex that we thought could be connected to an adjacent fortification wall,

so we planned a large L-shaped trench around the colonnade. The results were sensational and enabled us to redate and reinterpret the complex. The closest parallels for the ceramics we uncovered came from buildings that had been destroyed in the Persian attack of ca. 540 B.C., so it quickly became clear that it had been constructed before the attack, not after it.

In light of the revised chronology, it seems highly likely that the Mosaic Building was constructed shortly after Gordion had become part of the Lydian kingdom, ca. 600 B.C., when there is evidence for renewed prosperity and reconstruction in the citadel, and that it served as the residence of Gordion's rulers during the early 6th century B.C. It had always seemed remarkable that a palace of the Phrygian kings had never been discovered at Gordion, and equally remarkable that no building on Gordion's citadel was as elaborately decorated as the Mosaic Building. Palaces in Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean were often situated at the edge of citadels, near one of the main gates, and in close proximity to the principal water source. All of these features apply to the Mosaic Building, which was adjacent to both the South Gate and the Sakarya River.

These conclusions need to be kept in mind as we examine the new discoveries from this area. Above a stone staircase we discovered approximately 1,100 kilograms of architectural terracottas that clearly had fallen from the roof when it caught fire during the Persian attack. This assemblage included pan and cover tiles, raking simas, pendent friezes decorated with red lozenges against a cream background, and antefixes with griffins. All of these types first appeared at Gordion in the first half of the 6th century, probably due to Lydian influence, and similar types of polychromatic tiles covered the other parts of the building as well.

In the trench to the north of the colonnade we made one of our most exciting discoveries of the season: sizable parts of an armor corselet fashioned of iron and bronze scales, dating to the 6th century B.C. The two pieces found thus far are almost certainly part of the same suit of armor, but further conservation is necessary before we can conclusively determine this. The bronze scales form a running meander very close to the motif in the Mosaic Building's mosaic floors. We should probably assume that the armor belonged to a Lydian defender of the city who would have worn it during the Persian attack, after which it was discarded.

6. Area 4: The Center of the Citadel Mound

Area 4 lies slightly to the west of the center of the Citadel Mound, and directly to the west of the Phrygian industrial district, or "Terrace Complex" zone (Fig. 2). Excavation began here in 2015 in an attempt to clarify whether or not a central street existed in this area. In this case we were beginning our trench on the surface of the mound, and by the end of the 2018 season we had reached a level that was 12 m deep (Rose, 2017: p.138,171). In the course of the excavation, we encountered Seljuk occupation (13th–early 14th centuries A.D.) with nearly 50 storage pits, two levels of Early Roman date (ca. 60–120 A.D.), one of which featured a gold pendant, and several houses of Hellenistic date, spanning the late 4th and 3rd centuries B.C.

At the end of the 2017 season we had uncovered a sizeable pit that contained the debris from a large public building that had been built in the first half of the 6th century B.C. There was a concentration of broken architectural terracottas, including pan tiles, covers, ridge tiles, spouted eaves tiles, decorated fragments from raking or lateral simas, and pendant frieze plaques. Altogether, approximately 2,600 kilograms of architectural terracottas were uncovered (Fig. 11). The pottery discovered beneath the tiles indicates that the building in question was destroyed at the time of the Persian attack on the city ca. 540 B.C., and its demolished remains were subsequently dumped there. The one issue still to be addressed concerns the elaborate tiled roof, which surely did not come from a building adjacent to the pit where it was found. The most likely source of this elaborately tiled roof is Building U, one of the structures in the Terrace Building Zone immediately to the east of the pit (Fig. 2).

At a depth of over 12 m beneath the surface we discovered a stone buttress wall that was generally perpendicular to the monumental 8th century B.C. terrace wall 10 m to the east. It is noteworthy that there was no sign of a street or even a clear walking surface at the base of the buttress, although we can now say with confidence that the Middle Phrygian level in the center of the mound was nearly 10 m lower than the Middle Phrygian floor level in the Terrace Complex zone. Consequently, we are clearly dealing with a settlement composed of two high mounds with a low-lying area between them, all of which

were surrounded by fortification walls between the 9th and 4th centuries B.C.

7. Geophysical Investigations

Since 2007 we have devoted considerable attention to a reconstruction of Gordion's city plan during the Early, Middle, and Late Phrygian periods (9th–4th centuries B.C.). To accomplish this, we have made extensive use of remote sensing, which allows us to detect subsurface features such as walls and streets without the need of excavation (Rose, 2017: p.143-147). Although we employ a number of remote sensing techniques, two of them have been especially successful for us: magnetic prospection, which detects magnetic anomalies (such as mudbrick or stone) up to a depth of over 2 m, and electrical resistivity, which quantifies a buried object's resistance to electric currents and allows us to detect features as deep as 8 m. We have been able to determine that each of Gordion's two residential districts, the "Lower" and "Outer" Towns, was surrounded by a defensive ditch, 3.5 m in width, with a fortification wall on its interior (Fig. 12). The residential districts were approximately the same size, 44–45 hectares (109–111 acres), and therefore unusually large by comparison to the Citadel Mound itself, which was 13 hectares.

8. Gordion Cultural Heritage Educational Program and Efforts at Outreach

For the last three years, the Gordion Project has conducted a cultural heritage educational program under the supervision of Gordion's deputy director, Ayşe Gürsan-Salzman, in partnership with Halil Demirdelen of the Ethnographic Museum in Ankara. This is one of several outreach programs that we have organized during the last decade with a focus on the local community. The Gordion staff is in residence at the site for only 10–11 weeks each year. Therefore, we need to rely heavily on the local residents in the nearby town of Polatlı, as well as Yassihöyük village where Gordion is located, to protect the surviving ancient remains. Our intention is to educate the children of the region in ancient history and cultural heritage protection, and over the past ten years it has had a profound effect on

the local community's understanding of the importance of preserving the archaeological site. It has also enabled the excavation team to form partnerships with local educators, who now incorporate lessons on Phrygian history and archaeology into their classes.

This education program has also enabled the excavation team to establish a strong connection with the local municipality or Belediye in Polatlı, which lies 18 km to the southeast of Gordion. The Polatlı cultural heritage department fully participates in Gordion's cultural heritage programs, and is publishing our new archaeological site guidebook in Turkish, which will be distributed without cost to the local residents. An annual festival in commemoration of Midas, Phrygia's most famous king, is being developed in tandem with Ankara's Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, and will take place at the site each June. The Polatlı municipality also sponsors a widely celebrated race at Gordion every August, the Gordion Half-Marathon, which draws a large number of visitors to both the archaeological site and the local museum.

One of the more successful outreach projects was an opera entitled "Midas' Ears" that premiered at the Gordion Museum in mid-September of 2021. This was written by Turkish composer Ferit Tüzün, and focuses on the legend wherein Midas, Gordion's most famous king, judged a musical contest between Apollo and the satyr Marsyas. After having chosen Marsyas as the winner, Apollo reportedly turned Midas' ears into those of a donkey as a sign of his foolishness. Nearly 1,100 guests attended the performance on the grounds of the Gordion Museum, which was directed by Murat Karahan and staged by the Turkish State Opera and Ballet. We express our thanks to all of them for their willingness to consider us as an appropriate venue, and we hope that such performances can become a regular annual event at Gordion. I close this article by thanking the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as well as the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. Without their assistance, none of these discoveries would have been possible.

Conclusion

Given the fact that fieldwork at Gordion has been ongoing for nearly seven decades, it may seem surprising that so much excavation and conservation

remain to be done, but the ancient settlement was enormous, encompassing over 100 hectares, and the majority of the monumental burial mounds that surrounded it remain to be explored. Consequently, as the project looks toward the next decade, there are several key initiatives that figure prominently in our agenda.

The first involves Gordion's city plan, for which we will use more remote sensing to determine the ancient road system; this should reveal the physical links among Gordion's administrative, industrial, and residential districts. Conservation is the most important and the most time-consuming of our current operations, and this is the case at most Old World sites that have been excavated for a long period of time. The conservation of the Terrace Building and the large megarons on the Citadel Mound will require at least another decade, as will the maintenance of the buildings uncovered during the new excavations.

Our most important task involves increased community outreach. The Gordion staff is in residence at the site for only two to three months each year, which means that we need to rely heavily on the local community to protect and promote the surviving ancient remains. This is the only way to ensure that our programs to preserve the past will survive well into the future.

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Appendix

Figure Captions



Fig. 1. Map of Anatolia with a reconstruction of the area under Phrygian control during the 8th century B.C. (Illustration by G. Darbyshire, A. Anderson, and G. Pizzorno; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)

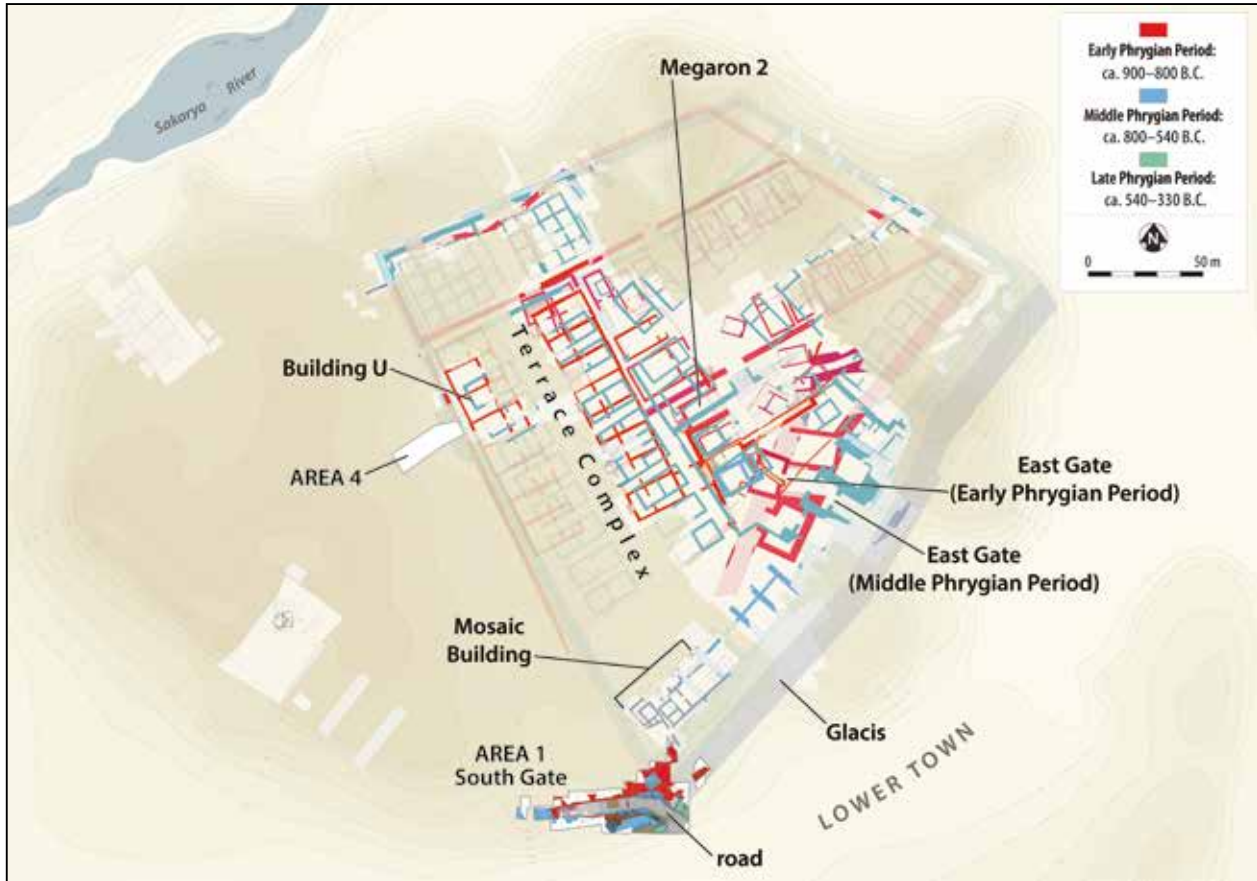


Fig. 2. Plan of the Citadel Mound at Gordion showing the Early, Middle, and Late Phrygian phases of habitation. The Sakarya River appears in its current position at upper left. (Illustration by G. Darbyshire, A. Anderson, and G. Pizzorno; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)

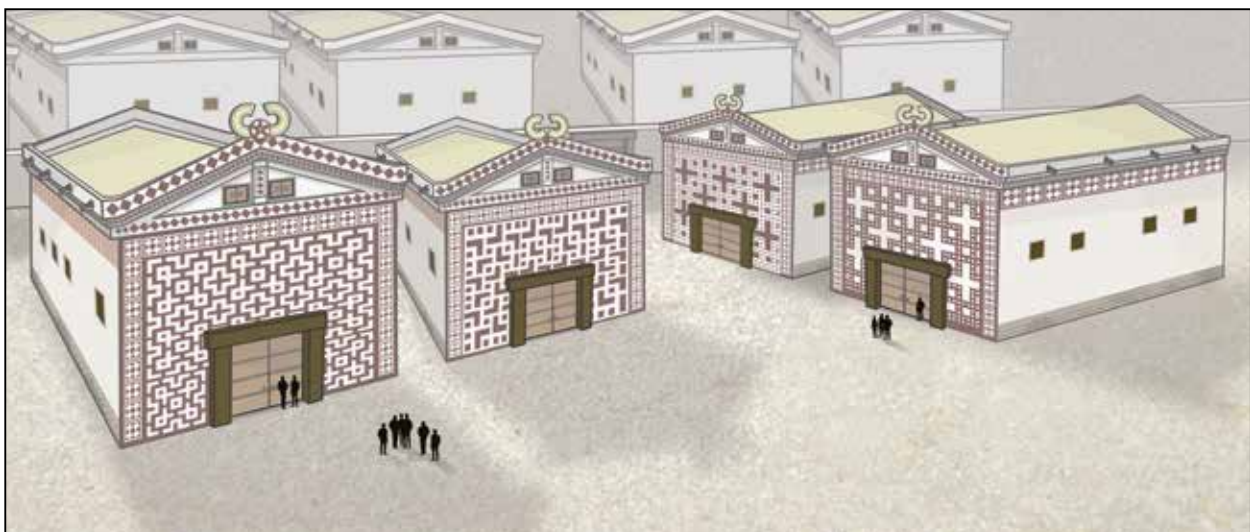


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the Middle Phrygian citadel's Inner Court in the 8th century B.C., by Gareth Darbyshire and Ardeth Anderson. (Illustration: courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 4. Günce Öğgüden preparing to scan the interior of the Tumulus MM tomb chamber. (Photo by Michael Barngrover; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 5. The restored East Citadel Gate (9th century B.C.), at the end of the 2019 season, looking northwest. (Photo by Braden Cordivari; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 6. East Citadel Gate: north face of the South Bastion following the installation of the soft-cap. (Photo by Brian Rose; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)

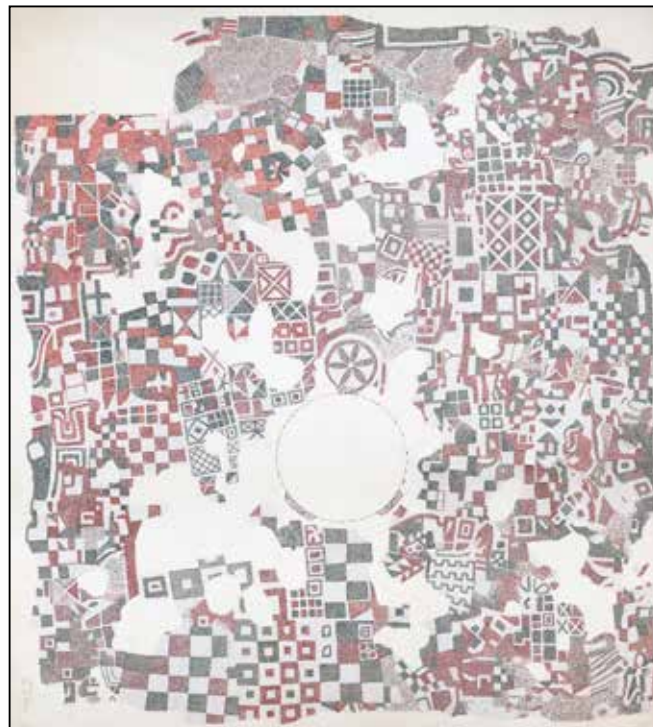


Fig. 7. Watercolor reconstruction of the Early Phrygian pebble mosaic from the main room of Megaron 2. (Painting by J. S. Last; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 8. Aerial view of the of the South Citadel Gate in Area 1, looking north. EP = Early Phrygian, MP = Middle Phrygian, LR = Late Roman. (Photo by Emily McGowan; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 9. The newly conserved north wall of the South Gate (9th century B.C.). The arrows indicate vertical offsets in the wall. A glacis, or stepped terrace wall, is in the foreground. (Photo by Brian Rose; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 10. The pebble mosaic floor in the Mosaic Building as uncovered by Rodney Young in 1952, looking northwest. (Photo: courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 11. Cataloguing the architectural terracottas from Area 4. (Photo by Gebhard Bieg; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)



Fig. 12. The fortifications of Gordion detected through remote sensing. The new results in the Outer Town appear at left. (Plan by GGH; courtesy Penn Museum, Gordion Project Archives.)