

Aspects of Empire in Achaemenid Sardis

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Sardis in the Achaemenid empire

The Achaemenid Persian empire (c. 550–330 BC), founded by Cyrus II, centered on southwest Iran and lower Mesopotamia (fig. 1).¹ Under Darius I (521–486 BC) it reached its greatest extent, stretching from the Aegean sea to the Indus river, from Egypt to the modern central Asian Republics. Although there were subsequent fluctuations in territorial control, there were no major losses apart from Egypt (and that for less than sixty years). The empire encompassed within its boundaries people of many different backgrounds, speaking diverse languages, worshipping multiple deities, living in tremendously varied environments, and practicing widely differing social customs. The Achaemenid dynasty was to devise a method of hegemony that would allow these various peoples to function within the confines of the new imperial authority, to construct a system of empire flexible enough to provide for the needs of different peoples and ensure their ability to operate as part of the vast and complex system of the new Achaemenid empire.² This detailed study of Sardis, a regional capital in western Anatolia, within its imperial context helps us understand the ways in which the new Achaemenid administration worked with and within a pre-existing society to ensure the successful annexation of a region and its populace into the empire.³

Achaemenid administration was adapted to local needs and traditions, providing an effective system of government across the huge and varied empire.⁴ The royal capitals at the geographical heart of the empire, newly founded at Persepolis and Pasargadae and with new palaces built at the ancient cities of Babylon and Susa, were reflected and extended by regional capitals in the various administrative provinces, or satrapies, of the

1 Throughout this work, I use “Persian” to signify only “ethnic” Persians. “Achaemenid” refers not so much to a discrete family line of Persians as to the ideological umbrella created by the imperial hegemony. See Root (1979).

2 This was clearly a matter of concern to the empire-builder Darius I: see Hdt. 3.38 for his interest in the differing attitudes of disparate peoples in the empire, and in Darius’ own words, DB 1.17–20, 4.70, 4.88–92, DN_a esp. 15–47, DN_b (DB is Darius’ text at Bisitun; DN_a and DN_b are inscriptions on his tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis). Texts and translations of these documents may be found in Kent (1953) and Lecoq (1997); Lecoq rennumbers and reassigns some of the Old Persian inscriptions, updating Kent’s edition. For examples of multilingualism practiced in official proclamations, see, e.g., Tuplin (1987b).

3 A recent study exploring similar issues in a central region of the empire is Potts (1999:ch. 9). See also Hansman (1972).

4 For a synthetic discussion of Achaemenid manifestations throughout the empire, with particular reference to work done in the past five years, see Briant (1997a).

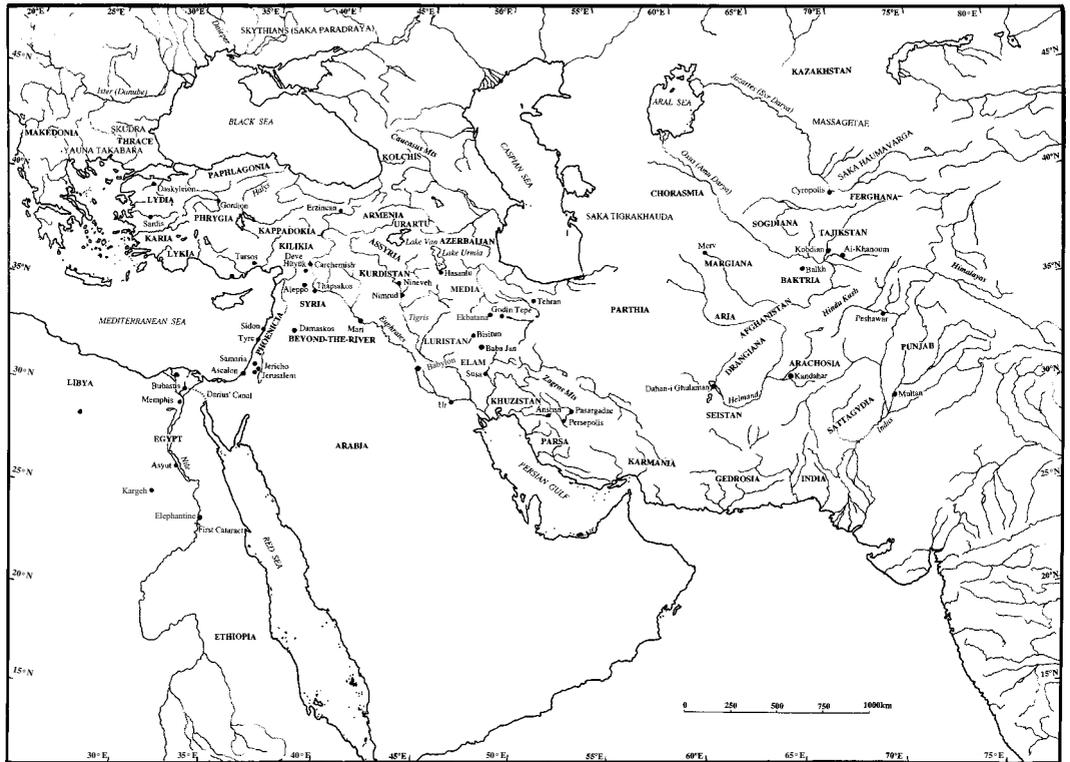


Fig. 1 The Achaemenid Persian empire.

empire.⁵ In many cases, the new rulers continued using old centers of control as administrative centers. These were generally strategically located for trade or warfare and already had in place administrative hierarchies or apparatuses appropriate for the area.⁶ The satrapal capitals functioned very much like the royal centers: provincial taxes, paid in kind and in precious metals, were collected and stored there before being redistributed to local garrisons and to others working for the government, or before being sent to the central imperial treasuries.⁷ The satraps, or governors, lived in elaborate residences, often in palaces taken over from previous rulers; when the great king traveled through his empire, he would be housed in satrapal palaces.⁸ The satraps kept archives of official correspondence as well as

5 See Kuhrt (1995a:690–701 and bibliography). For another empire faced with incorporating disparate regions during an expansionist phase, see, e.g., Gruen (1984a, 1984b). For an example of a regional capital and the complexities of “center-periphery” models, see Invernizzi (1996).

6 One well-documented example is the satrapy of Egypt: see Dandamaev and Lukonin (1989:103–104 and references); for a particular example of Egyptian practices maintained in the Achaemenid period, see Verger (1964).

7 For taxes, see, e.g., Potts (1999:320 and references), Descat (1989), Koch (1989), Briant (1982).

8 Kuhrt (1995a:691).

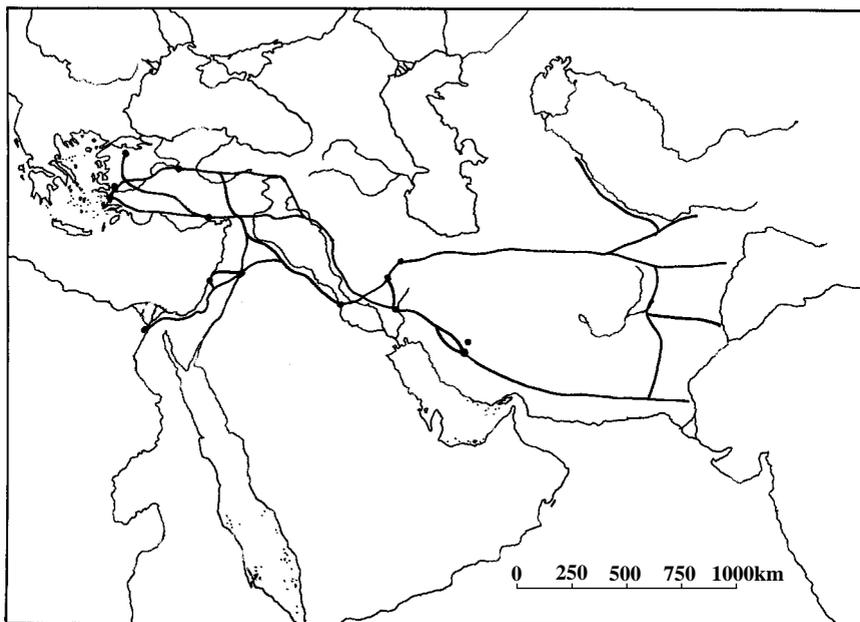


Fig. 2 The Achaemenid road system.

records of regional bureaucracy (petitions to the satrap, satrapal decrees, food disbursements to local workers engaged in state work or people traveling on account, etc.).⁹ The satrapal capitals were linked to the royal heartland in southwest Iran (Fars) and to each other by an extensive network of roads which supported rapid travel (fig. 2): way-stations were located at one-day intervals where messengers traveling on official business could obtain food, drink, and fresh horses.¹⁰ Travel was monitored, and strategic points on the roads were guarded by armed soldiers.

Achaemenid rulers were sympathetic to and supportive of local religious and social customs, often finding syncretic connections between various religions rather than imposing their own cults on unwilling indigenous peoples.¹¹ This official approach led to striking diversity in the different regions of the empire: Achaemenid-period society and systems varied widely across the empire to accommodate already-existing local structures.

⁹ For satrapal archives, see Briant (1986:434-437); a copy of a royal decree kept in various capitals is described in Ezra 5.17-6.2. For evidence that the satrapal capitals had a bureaucracy similar to that of Persepolis, see Helms (1982). For the bullae that demonstrate the existence of a satrapal archive in Daskyleion, seat of Hellespontine Phrygia, see Balkan (1959), Kaptan (1990). For the administration of the eastern regions of the empire, see Briant (1984).

¹⁰ Hdt. 5.52-54; 8.98.

¹¹ This was, of course, a feature of many empires, ancient and modern - a feature necessary to their longevity. For the ancient Mediterranean, see, e.g., Garnsey (1984). For specific examples in one region of the Achaemenid empire, see, e.g., Vogelsang (1987, 1992).

The duties of a satrap were very complex, and they depended to a certain extent on the region he or she was governing.¹²

Royal power rests upon the army, and the army upon money, and money upon agriculture, and agriculture upon just administration, and just administration upon the integrity of government officials, and the integrity of government officials upon the reliability of the vizier, and the pinnacle of all of these is the vigilance of the king in resisting his own inclinations, and his capability so to guide them that he rules them and they do not rule him.

The tenth-century Arab scholar, al-Masudi,¹³ here sums up a political-military viewpoint of the networks binding an empire and also points to some of the primary administrative obligations of the Achaemenid satrap.¹⁴ A satrap had to juggle the needs of those in his region with the needs of the Great King. He had to maintain a well-equipped, well-trained, loyal army to protect the land; he had to exact taxes and might need the army to assist in tax collection. Although the army might give him the power to obtain taxes from those who might otherwise be unwilling, it could only be persuasive where the ability to pay existed.¹⁵ The satrap therefore had to ensure the productivity of the land in order to be able to collect taxes: this required maintaining a sufficiently high level of satisfaction and capability among the people tending the land that they might husband it to good effect. Thus the satrap was chronically torn between needing to send the appropriate amount of tribute to the king now, and needing to ensure that the people under his hegemony would be capable of producing tribute again in the future.¹⁶ In western Anatolia, this task was made the more challenging by the close presence of the Greeks, who trampled the land in marauding armies or occasionally sought to incite insurrection among those under the hegemony of the satrap. At times, “integrity” and “just administration” must have been rather tricky qualities for the satrap to judge: how might

12 Mania, a governor of Hellespontine Phrygia, is probably the best-known example of a female administrator (*Xen., Hell.* 3.1.10ff.). See Kuhrt (1995a:697–698). Women might hold vast tracts of land in the center of the empire, without being themselves satraps: Darius I’s wife, Irtashduna (Artystone) is a good example. See Hallock (1969), Garrison and Root (2001, Introduction). For women in the Achaemenid empire, see Brosius (1996). For the sake of simplicity, and because as far as we know Sardis never had a female satrap, I will hereafter use the masculine gender in referring to satraps.

13 Al-Masudi ([1863] 1977:122).

14 See Petit (1990) for the administration of satrapies in the early Achaemenid period. For the late Achaemenid period, see Jacobs (1994). For Achaemenid systems of administration and taxation, see Tuplin (1987a). For non-satrapal financial transactions in the central regions of the empire, see, e.g., Stolper (1985, 1992), Cardascia (1951), Abraham (1995). Satraps no doubt also pursued their own personal ends which may or may not have benefited the king or the region.

15 Cf. the story of Themistokles and the Andrians, *Hdt.* 8.111.

16 Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1989) discusses the significance of the objects coming into the imperial treasuries.

he reconcile short-term and long-term goals, taking care at the same time to attend to his own safety?

Ideology and imperialism

Even as Achaemenid bureaucracies were laid out and administrative networks put into effect, so too programs were established to support and promulgate the ideology of the empire. A legitimizing ideology is an important factor in uniting the inhabitants of a complex society, particularly at such a level as an empire.¹⁷ Such ideologies may be manifested verbally. Darius I, for instance, wrote a text legitimating his accession to the throne and had it inscribed in three languages around the sculpted relief making the same claim carved in the cliff face at Bisitun, along the main road leading from Mesopotamia to Ekbatana (modern Hamadan) (fig. 3). Then he had the text translated into various languages and disseminated, along with copies of the image, to locations through the empire¹⁸ – using the local languages was a strategy with profound symbolic as well as practical value.¹⁹

Ideology may also be manifested materially, through architecture, art, and luxury and everyday goods.²⁰ The composition of new imperial art forms and imperial texts in the Achaemenid empire often drew on pre-existing traditions: such references to time-honored and familiar patterns might provide ways to formulate a new ideology that legitimated the new regime in its position of power.²¹ This couching of new ideology in familiar local forms was important in nullifying the seeming remoteness of foreign conquerors: in the multicultural milieu of the Achaemenid empire, ideology had to be translated into the cultural discourses of the various populations

¹⁷ See, e.g., Claessen and Skalnik (1978:628), Kurtz (1981:182).

¹⁸ The copy from Babylon is the most striking, with its pictorial representation and local linguistic version publicly set up. Only an Aramaic version has been found in Egypt, which may therefore have been intended for Achaemenid chancery usage rather than public Demotic comprehension; its discovery among the Elephantine papyri shows the text was still being copied as late as the end of the fifth century. See Sayce (1906). A particularly interesting recent discussion of Darius' Bisitun text is Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1999). For local versions of the Bisitun monument, see Kuhrt (1995a:666–667). For the Babylonian version, see Seidl (1976), von Voigtlander (1978). For the Aramaic copy from Elephantine, see Greenfield and Porten (1982).

¹⁹ See Root (1991:4). ²⁰ See, e.g., DeMarrais et al. (1996). See also Marcus (1995).

²¹ See Root (1979:309 ff.) for the impact of a new ideological program composed of various venerable traditions. Kuhrt (1990) has demonstrated ways in which Cyrus chose elements of the iconographic and textual traditions of Mesopotamia. The Seleucid kings took similar advantage of ancient Babylonian traditions to root their control in this important territory: see Kuhrt (1996). One difficulty, naturally, is to discern those objects with specific ideological messages, and to distinguish between “top-down” ideological significance and “bottom-up.” See, e.g., Hays (1993). For a particularly thoughtful article exploring resistance to top-down ideology, see Brumfiel (1996).



Fig. 3 Darius' relief at Bisitun: imperial rhetoric in images.

participating in the system.²² And the expressions of ideology had to be flexible, adapting over time as well as place.

These ideological programs included the manipulation of artistic imagery to bear meaning within an imperial context, in ways sufficiently flexible to convey significance to local viewing audiences in widely disparate parts of the empire. Traditional local images were reworked to promote imperial ideologies in peripheral areas with different artistic customs than those of the Persian heartland. Official imperial iconography was translated into regional artistic syntaxes to make it intelligible to local viewing audiences. The adaptation of images had a self-reflexive function as well, for the appropriation and manipulation of local iconographies and styles signified the incorporation of these areas into the empire. By taking on and adapting traditional local imagery, the user might embed himself in an artistic framework that reinforced his own goals or sense of authority and power in those regions. Thus in the reworking of older imagery we see simultaneous streams of significance, spreading imperial ideology to distant parts of the empire, asserting power over those areas, and incorporating local imagery into official imperial art.

The impact of Achaemenid hegemony on local Anatolian practices may be seen in most aspects of the material record. Architectural influence generally seems to have concentrated on public buildings: administrative

²² Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990:265).

buildings and palaces, temples and parks, were all the focus of attention in the Achaemenid period.²³ Mortuary customs in many areas changed under Iranian influence. This trend was perhaps connected with the sort of new social identities suggested by the changing styles of particular goods with profound semiotic significance: clothing and jewelry, parade weapons and harness, personal seals, and table vessels. Although these changes may have been initiated by the elite – a polyethnic group comprising indigenous and foreign peoples – they eventually permeated all strata of society, so that even the standard ceramic tablewares used by non-elite people also came to reflect Achaemenid presence. The blending of influences from east and west with local customs produced vibrant new styles in artifacts and modes of life throughout Achaemenid Anatolia.

Achaemenid Anatolia

Anatolia in the Achaemenid period was divided into various satrapies, including at one time or another Armenia, Greater Phrygia (separated for administrative purposes into eastern and Hellespontine Phrygia), Lydia (called Sparda in Achaemenid texts),²⁴ Karia, Lykia, and Kilikia.²⁵ The borders of all the satrapies are rather unclear. The satrapy of Sparda, and its capital at the ancient city of Sardis, comprise the focus of this study.

The extent of Sparda is uncertain: before the Achaemenid empire, Lydia probably reached roughly from the Kaikos river in the north to the Maeander in the south, from just inland on the west (although certain Greek cities such as Ephesos and Miletos were under Lydian control or had treaties with the Lydians by the mid-sixth century BC) to somewhere around Güre in the east.²⁶ The Achaemenid province of Sparda saw some fluctuation in its

23 This concentration can only be called apparent, as it may be a reflection of excavated remains rather than actual practice in the Achaemenid period. The issue is complicated by at least two further elements: we might indeed not expect local non-palatial domestic architecture to change, to emulate Iranian structures of a different geographical and environmental context; additionally, as excavation of the Achaemenid period in Iran has itself focused on public buildings rather than non-elite domestic architecture, it is not yet clear that we would recognize an Iranian house (as distinct from a palace) even if it had been transported to Anatolia.

24 Imperial Achaemenid texts do not distinguish between Lydia and Sardis, calling the whole region by the name of its capital. Our word “Sardis” is a Hellenic transliteration of a Lydian word pronounced “Sfard-” or perhaps “Sward-.” The Achaemenid region “Sparda” is simply another transliteration of the city’s Lydian name. It was not common practice in the empire for an entire satrapy to be called by the name of its capital: Media and Ekbatana, for instance, are separately described in official texts. I do not understand the significance, if any, of the synecdoche used for the province of Sparda.

25 For the extent and nature of the Anatolian satrapies, see, e.g., Briant (1996:75–80 and references), Sekunda (1988, 1991), Petit (1990), Weiskopf (1982, 1989). I call the satrapies here by their Greek, rather than Persian, names; I will refer to the region of which Sardis was capital both as “Sparda” and as “Achaemenid Lydia.”

26 See Greenewalt (1992:247–249). For imperialism and Sparda, see Balcer (1984).

territory, but its northern and southern borders probably remained roughly where they had been before Achaemenid hegemony, perhaps incorporating the Kaikos and Maeander river valleys.²⁷ Its territory included the Aegean seaboard and perhaps took in modern Afyon in its eastern boundaries. Its capital was Sardis; its satraps were at times close members of the royal family, but we do not know the parentage of all the men sent to administer this important province.

The region to the north of Sparda, Hellespontine Phrygia, included much of the modern Troad and extended to the east to include “coastal Phrygia” and the inland areas at least as far as modern Bursa and possibly farther east along the road to Gordion.²⁸ The new-founded city of Daskyleion formed the seat of Hellespontine Phrygia; its satraps were members of the royal family.²⁹ The border between Hellespontine Phrygia and Sparda is uncertain, although the Mysian mountains were part of Hellespontine Phrygia.³⁰ To the south, Sparda was bordered by Karia; to the east, by Phrygia and Kappadokia.

The archaeology of Achaemenid Anatolia has in many published accounts seemed rather elusive. The evidence has been portrayed as scanty, widely scattered, and fragmentary.³¹ Authors have tended to downplay the importance of Achaemenid custom and culture by relegating it to a secondary position after mentioning the paucity of architectural remains that show Persian influence. Even those objects that were clearly affected by imperial artistic patterns are often by implication not Achaemenid creations, but simply off-shoots of earlier Near Eastern traditions. The Achaemenid Persians are thus by and large denied both artistic creativity and the ability to create an impact on local cultures in the empire. The very language used in describing that little impact authors have admitted often minimalizes its importance: a different rhetorical approach might bring out the profound impact of Achaemenid hegemony on public planning and urban design as well as on objects of personal semiotic significance such as jewelry, seal-stones, metal and glass tablewares, and textiles. A lack of Achaemenid effect on such aspects of material culture as the ceramic assemblage has generally been assumed – a proposition that until recently had scarcely been rigorously tested anywhere in the empire.³²

27 See Sekunda (1991:91) for an alternative opinion about the Maeander valley.

28 Sekunda (1988:176).

29 Thuc. 8.6. For archaeological evidence concerning the satrapal seat at Daskyleion, see Kaptan (1997).

30 The tribes inhabiting these hills revolted frequently: see Xen, *Hell.* 3.1.13, *Anab.* 1.6.7, 1.9.14, 11.5.13, 3.2.23; see Sekunda (1988:176) for the border.

31 For the “politics of meagreness” surrounding modern portrayals of Achaemenid presence throughout the empire, see Root (1991). For a work that collects scattered evidence to make a strong case for intercultural mingling and imperial impact in another period in Anatolia, see Mitchell (1993).

32 Notable exceptions to this generalization include D. Stronach (1978), Summers (1993), Henrickson (1993, 1994, 1998).

For some, the apparent lack of Persian impact in the west may be explained as the result of official Achaemenid tolerance of, and accommodation to, local customs.³³ Although this view may reflect a sympathetic attitude to the Persians' rule, often it bears explicit or implicit negative assumptions about their culture. It implies the Achaemenid Persians were so devoid of traditions, of culture, of art forms of their own, that they essentially had nothing to impose and therefore made virtue of necessity through an official policy of assimilation and appropriation in far-flung regions of the empire.

There are indeed difficulties in understanding the archaeological evidence and reconstructing the history of Anatolia in the Achaemenid period. Many objects apparently dating to the Achaemenid period first appeared to contemporary scholars on the art market, rather than stemming from controlled excavations, and information on their sources must be regarded as suspect. The practice of dating art on the basis of purely stylistic criteria in places other than that for which a stylistic sequence was developed has also contributed to an unproblematized picture of the Achaemenid empire. And ceramic sequences for the Achaemenid period are still poorly understood in many parts of Anatolia, especially in its eastern regions.³⁴ Finally, Achaemenid impact on the material record of western Anatolia has often been overlooked or downplayed in published reports.

Detecting the effects of empire

Studies of the Achaemenid empire have in the past fifteen years seen a shift in interest away from a narrow focus on the Great King and court life to encompass also the enormous population of the empire on whose daily efforts the governmental structure was based.³⁵ This shift has included a greater emphasis on archaeology, on Near Eastern textual resources, on Near Eastern art history. A concerted effort has been made to check and, when needed, correct the generalizations based on the Greek historiographic tradition that had previously determined the European outlook. How did the Achaemenid empire look when seen from the different perspectives of the various regions? How did the empire affect the existing traditions, the social and economic structures? Are there developments traceable in local situations which might be the result of interactions with the central state?³⁶

³³ See, e.g., Gray (1969).

³⁴ They are not that well understood yet in Fars, either. The sort of careful excavation done by D. Stronach at Pasargadae will help to clarify issues of Achaemenid ceramic sequencing as more sites are excavated.

³⁵ See, e.g., contributions to the *Achaemenid History* series. For a seminal discussion of some of the prejudices that have influenced the writing of Achaemenid history, see Said (1978). For a self-critical approach to writing history in the midst of such prejudice, see Prakash (1990).

³⁶ See Kuhrt and Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990).

In 1990, H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg outlined the difficulties that have been experienced in detecting Persian presence or impact, and proposed a new series of issues in developing a model of the Achaemenid empire. She pointed out that the search for the empire “has so far been mostly confined to phenomena that betray an Iranian influence, to artefacts of a typical or a hybrid Iranian provenience, to changes in the titulary and in the onomastica derived from the Iranian vocabulary... Iranian ‘traces’ are, however, not the only kind of evidence which can lead us to detect the impact of the Persian empire.”³⁷

Several factors are important to keep in mind. Ethnic “Persian” people were spread throughout the empire both in small numbers and in larger concentrations: the existing Persian aristocracy must have grown in number, with implications for social stratification, but in much of the empire they cannot have been numerous.³⁸ One of the most important factors is related to this: in many cases in the empire, the means of control would have passed through native individuals and offices. This will have affected the manner in which such control was expressed, tending to state it in ways familiar to both the intermediaries and the intended audience. It will have been many places, and not Sardis alone, that saw the growth of a polyethnic elite in the Achaemenid period. Such factors may limit the appearance of specifically and recognizably “Iranian” material in the archaeological record.

Other features of the archaeological record may equally point to a strong Achaemenid presence or impact, however. Increased control may cause an intensification of social stratification, a phenomenon which often does leave an impact on the archaeological record.³⁹ External domination might also trigger change in the size of a given site or in commercial relations.⁴⁰ All of these things, while not recognizably “Iranian,” may be due to the external control of the Achaemenid hegemony over an area.

In recent years, ongoing archaeological work and a fresh approach to the historical documents have begun to give us a better understanding of the extent and importance of Achaemenid influence in Anatolia from c. 550 to c. 330 BC. The cultural impact of Achaemenid presence in some areas lasted well into the Hellenistic period; this important observation demonstrates the degree to which local cultures adopted Iranian customs and blended them with local habits, rather than merely taking on the appearance of foreign traits to curry favor with barbarian despots.

37 Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990:264).

38 Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990:267–268), drawing on Briant (1982); Briant (1988a). For ethnic Persian satraps in the time of Cyrus and Kambyses, see, e.g., Briant (1996:93).

39 Brown (1986:113 and references in n. 19).

40 Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990:272). See also the arguments in Bekker-Nielsen (1989) and Alcock (1993).

The city of Sardis in western Turkey, once capital of Lydia and satrapal capital for the region of the Achaemenid empire called Sparda, may serve as a case study for ways in which new discoveries combined with new approaches let us understand the manner in which Achaemenid presence affected local customs and social structures in one capital of the empire. Recent work at Sardis not only has made it possible to consider newly discovered material remains of the Achaemenid period in this city, but also may be used to inform the study of objects uncovered at the site earlier in the twentieth century. The picture is complex, with different sources of evidence illuminating different aspects of culture and society in Achaemenid-period Sardis.

Sardis as an Achaemenid capital

In the mid-sixth century BC, Croesus, king of Lydia, worried about the overthrow of his old ally Astyages the Mede by the young Persian, Cyrus, sent to Delphi to ask if he should cross the Halys river, the boundary between Lydia and Media, to invade the realm of the upstart king.⁴¹ “If Croesus crosses the river Halys, he will destroy a mighty empire,” intoned the oracle at Delphi; and so Croesus set out from Sardis with joyous confidence, only to learn it was his own empire that would fall. When the Persians conquered Lydia, they were faced with the problem of incorporating this large and wealthy province into the empire so that it might function as an integral part of the larger whole. Such a transition affected culture as well as commerce, people as well as politics.

Sardis affords a unique opportunity to examine the workings of the Achaemenid empire in the western provinces. The Lydian capital retained its administrative importance during the Achaemenid period, becoming the seat of Persian satraps. Literary sources mention military and political activities at the city. Archaeological excavation at the site has unearthed aspects of the material culture of the Achaemenid-period city that allow a completely different kind of look into life at Sardis. The artifacts excavated include not only architectural and ceramic remains, but also representational objects such as sealstones and sculpture. Thus at Sardis one may combine literary, archaeological, and art historical approaches and perspectives. These various forms of evidence are complementary: each one leaves considerable holes

⁴¹ The date is uncertain; see Cargill (1977). It is *probable* that the Lydian conquest precedes that of Babylonia, and so should date somewhere in the 540s, but we do not know this, and probability is based to a considerable extent on chronological impressions we gain from Herodotos. The standard date, 547 BC, is nothing more than a guess. The Delphic response to Croesus' question is preserved in later sources: Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.1407a; Cicero, *Poetica Fragmenta* 90.

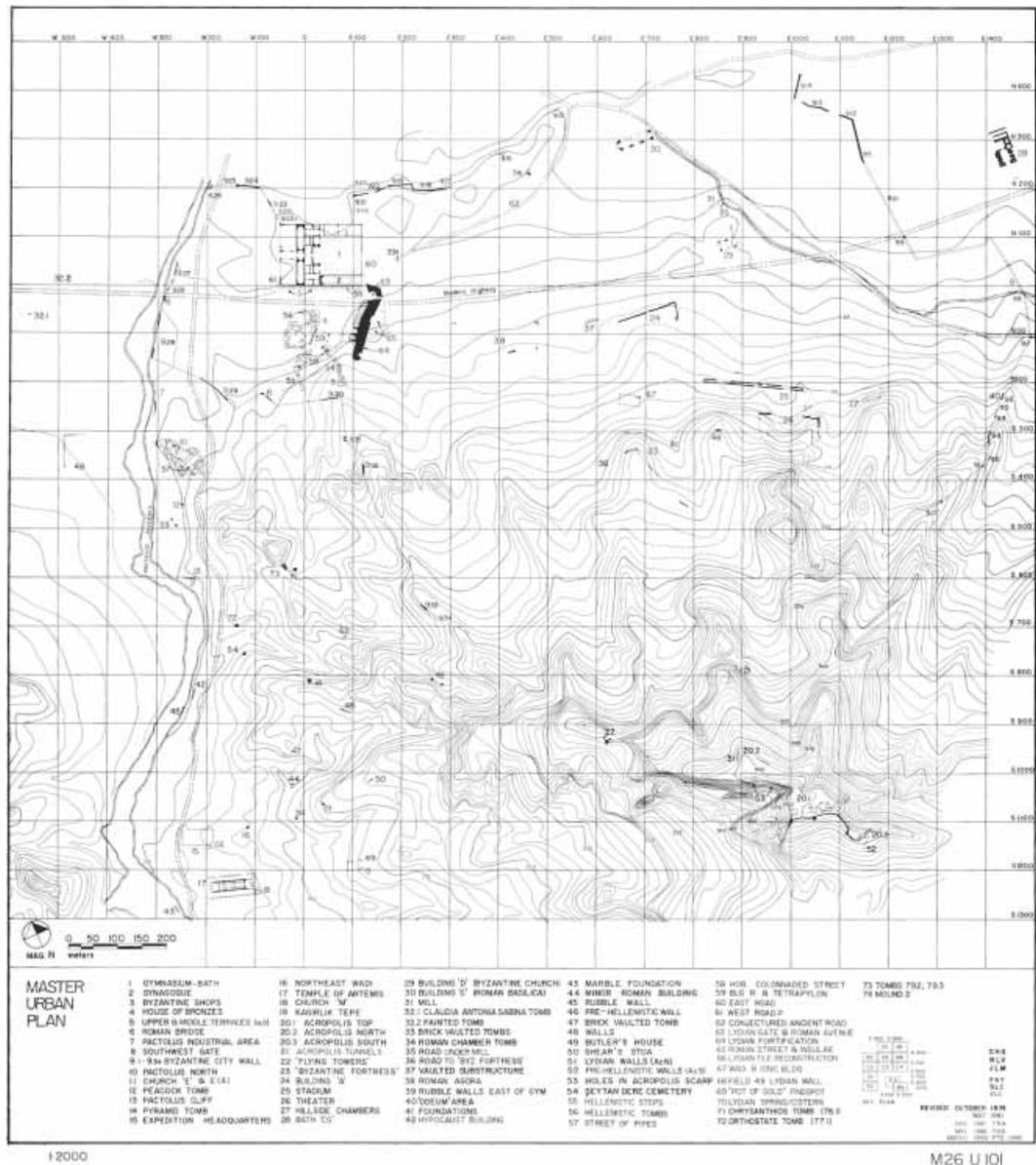


Fig. 4 Sardis:
master urban
plan.

in the picture it provides, but the holes are often in different areas and do not overlap entirely. From the fragments of information available from each type of evidence, we may piece together a pattern that approximates the original, like reconstructing an old kilim from rags and tatters that have survived under countless other carpets in a mosque.

Comparatively little has been exposed of Achaemenid-period Sardis by excavation, a fact that has contributed to the paucity of previous studies of the topic.⁴² The site of the Achaemenid city lay mostly to the east of the areas that have been excavated (fig. 4); and deposits next to the Paktolos river that flows by the site may have been washed away by floods. A problem of identification has also been raised by the apparent continuity of local ceramic traditions. Until recently, ceramic sequences were so poorly understood that it has been difficult, at times, to distinguish ceramics of the Achaemenid period from those of the later Hellenistic period or, indeed, of the earlier Lydian kingdom. These sequences are now beginning to be much clearer, however, and Achaemenid-period deposits may at last begin to be distinguished from those of earlier and later times.⁴³ But a caveat remains: Sardis is a large city, and only a fraction of it has been excavated. Of that fraction, only a few areas have produced remains clearly dating to the time of the Achaemenid empire. It is my hope that continued work at the site and elsewhere will expand on and change the picture of Achaemenid-period Sardis presented in this study.

Approaching Sardis from the east

The approach to Sardis is usually described from the point of view of one coming from the west, from the Aegean sea. This is the way the ancient Greeks came to Sardis, from Smyrna or from Ephesus; it is the way many modern travelers also reach the site. Approached thus, the area around Sardis fits neatly into the inland Aegean climatic and geological systems. The broad fertile river valleys of Asia Minor, to be sure, contrast with the Greek mainland, but in general the climate and surroundings feel familiar, akin to the known world of those coming from the seacoast that lies to the west. This would not have been the case for those approaching from the east. The impact of the lush reaches of western Anatolia on a person who has just dropped down from the Anatolian plateau to the east must have been extraordinary. The following description of the approach to Sardis from the east seeks to embed Sardis within the Achaemenid empire.

Sardis is located some 2,400 km west of Susa and farther yet from Persepolis, a three-month journey for a person following the Royal Road by foot

42 Mierse (1983) summed up the evidence available in the 1970s; Greenewalt (1995b) compiled other evidence more recently.

43 Recent work by S.I. Rotroff on the Hellenistic pottery (forthcoming) has aided in solving this problem: I have benefited tremendously from discussions with her about Sardis' Hellenistic pottery. Discussion with C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., A. Ramage, and N.D. Cahill has helped me learn about pottery of the Lydian kingdom.

but quicker for one on horseback.⁴⁴ Along the way, the traveler would have passed 111 staging posts, perhaps akin to the Selçuk karavansarays, guarding a distance of 450 parasangs.⁴⁵ These way-stations made it possible for official travelers to move very quickly and for messages to be sent by a courier system that took messages rapidly across thousands of miles of plains and mountains. The road connected Sardis to Susa and thence to Persepolis and even India; it intersected with other roads that led to Palestine, to Egypt, to Media, to Baktria, and to Sogdiana. The road system and checkpoints it included thus provided an infrastructure that linked Sardis to the vast area of the Achaemenid empire so that it might remain in constant communication with even the most distant regions.

The road from Fars to Sparda first travels west through the foothills of the Zagros mountains and up the plains east of the Tigris, then through Kissia and Armenia, across the Euphrates, and finally through Kilikia and Kappadokia, turning west towards the Aegean to end at Sardis. Perhaps it branched at this point: most likely, one branch took a southern route, while another took a northerly path to cross the Halys river at a fortified point and pass into Phrygia.⁴⁶ The landscape through which it travels is highly varied and dramatic.

The traveler begins by skirting the Zagros mountains, moving northwest along the foothills. This part of Persia has beautiful and fertile areas where water is sufficient; modern Shiraz, near Persepolis, is famous for its wine and roses. The wind scuds across the plains, tossing the branches of pistachio and almond trees. As the traveler moves north, the silver heights of the Zagros ranges give way to the flat plains watered by the Diyala river, the Greater and Lesser Zab rivers and their tributaries; streams cascading from the mountains of Kurdistan water the plains so that they are carpeted with wildflowers in spring. Ferries are employed to take travelers across the rivers in their journey north.⁴⁷ They pass into Kissia and Armenia, where waves of grasses dance on the high plains.

44 The road between the capitals Persepolis and Susa is well documented. See discussion in Koch (1986, 1990). Most of our information on the routes linking the center of the empire with its western reaches comes from Herodotos' description of the imperial postal system, 5.52-53; 8.98. For a recent discussion of the Royal Road and its possible routes, see Graf (1994). For an alternative perspective that argues strongly for a southern route, see French (1998).

45 Hdt. 5.52-53. For the parasang, see Tuplin (1997:404-421). A Persian unit of measurement, the parasang was the equivalent of about thirty Greek stadia, according to Herodotos and Xenophon. Its exact length varied at different times and places; it was probably equivalent to three-and-a-half to four English miles.

46 This is the traditional view; against it, see French (1998) who argues (convincingly) that the road skirted the Halys, rather than crossing it, and that the bridges and channels Herodotos describes were merely displays of power on the part of the Achaemenids rather than necessary constructions.

47 See Graf (1994:179).

Here the ancient sources are ambivalent about the path of the road. Two major hypotheses exist for the route followed.⁴⁸ The “Southern Hypothesis” takes the traveler across the Euphrates at Zeugma, through the Kilikian gates, and across southern Kappadokia, skirting the mountains of Pisidia. The route then turns north through Laodikeia to end up at Sardis.⁴⁹ This was the route used by Cyrus the Younger in 401 BC, although it was at that time a remarkably difficult one to travel.⁵⁰ Moreover, Alexander of Makedon came through these same lands, possibly following the imperial road that transected them. A convincing argument has recently been made that the southern route was that of the official Royal Road in the Achaemenid empire.⁵¹

The “Northern Hypothesis” takes the traveler through Ankara. One of the three proposed northern routes takes the traveler north through Armenia to the mountains south of the Black Sea, and then west to Ankara via Erzincan and Sivas.⁵² An alternative route⁵³ would cross the Euphrates in the hills near the Keban dam and take the traveler through Malatya and highland Kayseri, past Pteria, probably crossing the red torrents of the Halys river near the spot where the modern Ankara–Sivas highway runs. A third proposal suggests that the road crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma. Here the Euphrates flows broad and muddy; travelers must have either swum or paid to be ferried over except in the height of summer.⁵⁴ Crossing the jagged Taurus mountains through the high and narrow Kilikian gates, they would descend into the Kappadokian plain. There the road would turn to the north, perhaps passing to the west of Hasan Dağ and avoiding the Great Salt Lake and the silica heat of the Konya plain, past Kayseri and along the green limestone and volcanic heights of Kappadokia. All three of these routes have pre- and post-Achaemenid versions; it is possible that the Royal Road offered travelers a choice between routes, depending on weather conditions or reports of bandits.⁵⁵

None of these hypotheses can be made to correspond directly to Herodotos’ description. His account has inherent difficulties, as the summarized total of stages and parasangs he gives is greater than his itemized list.⁵⁶ This

48 Part of the problem is Herodotos’ conflation of crossing the Halys river with passing the Kilikian gates. For the sources and ideas on which the various hypotheses are based, see Graf (1994:177–180). For possible predecessors to the road system of the Achaemenid period, see Birmingham (1961).

49 Ramsay (1920), Calder (1925).

50 For Cyrus’ route, Xen., *Anab.* 1.2; for difficulties, *idem* 1.2; 1.5; 5.1; 5.2. 51 French (1998).

52 Winfield (1977). Dillemann (1962) argues that the Royal Road crossed the Euphrates near Malatya and identifies a number of the stations in Armenia, taking the traveler through the eastern Taurus mountains and over the Kappadokian plain past Pteria.

53 See, e.g., Magie (1950:788–789). 54 See French (1981).

55 Caravans traveled under armed escort in the Achaemenid empire; see, e.g., Wiesehöfer (1982), Briant (1991).

56 Itemized: 81 stages and 313 parasangs; summarized: 111 stages and 450 parasangs. For this discrepancy and its implications, see Graf (1994:178), Tuplin (1997).

obvious contradiction serves as a warning for the credulity with which we should regard his every statement concerning the Royal Road. Probably, the main branch of the road, that used by the royal armies and royal couriers moving between Susa and Sardis, took the southern route, while another branch passed through Armenia and Kappadokia, crossing the Halys and passing by Ankara. Our putative traveler elects this northern route. At the city mound of Gordion, the Sangarios river flows cold and green past the site, watering the fields of grain between white and red outcrops of rock.⁵⁷ Blue rollers dart from their nests to forage, and hoopoes hop along the ground.

West of Gordion, the traveler passes through a high volcanic area. Tufa and pumice ridges are covered in tattered rags of sagebrush and fields of golden grain. For many miles after the ragged pink volcanic teeth of Sivrihisar, the road runs across ground essentially flat and barren. At last it struggles up and over a ridge and down into the area around Afyonkarahisar. Afyon shines lush in the dusty heat, the “black fortress” itself an old volcano neck surrounded by fields of poppies rimmed with silver poplars. After Afyon, the road winds over another mountain ridge, and the climate and surroundings become progressively more Mediterranean as the traveler approaches the Aegean sea.

First the scrub oaks begin, then the wild olive, and then the fig trees; the air grows more humid and the soil turns from white to red with rich iron oxides. Rivers cut deep into wild soft volcanic terrain. Burial tumuli dot the landscape on prominent ridges. After passing through a fierce area of broken lava and black volcanic cones at modern Küle, which the ancient Greeks called *katakekaumene*, or “the burned lands,”⁵⁸ the road finally drops over another ridge into Sardis’ valley, the valley of the Hermos river (modern Gediz), broad and flat and fertile.

Sardis is built to the north and up the flanks of an immense acropolis that dominates its landscape (fig. 5). This outcrop soars steep and red into the sky at the southern edge of the valley, just before the wooded hills that ascend the grey shoulders of the Tmolos mountains. To the west of the acropolis flows the Paktolos stream (modern Sart Çayı), which in ancient times ran rich with gold from the metal deposits in the hills. The watercourse divides the acropolis from the necropolis, another great red massif at the edge of the plain, its cliffs pockmarked with rock-cut tombs (fig. 6).

57 The accounts of Greek mercenaries, envoys, and other travelers suggest that Gordion was a station on at least one branch of the Royal Road. See, e.g., Xen., *Hell.* 1.4; Plutarch, *Them.* 30 and *Alk.* 37–39; *Hell. Oxy.* 11; Dio. Sic. 14.11. See also Graf (1994:177), Briant (1990). An east–west segment of paved road has been excavated running between Phrygian tumuli and was dated by the excavator to the late sixth century BC (Young 1963:348 and n. 6). This road surface probably dates to the Roman period (see Starr 1963:169, French 1980:704), but it might well follow the path of the earlier Royal Road.

58 Strabo 13.4.11/628.



Fig. 5 Sardis:
view of the
acropolis,
looking south.

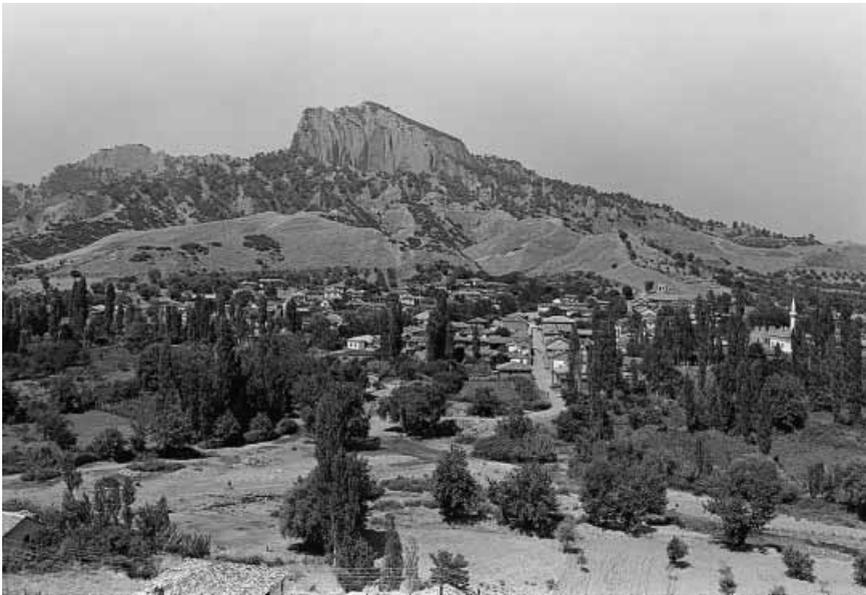


Fig. 6 Sardis:
view of the
necropolis,
looking west.

The Hermos river valley is a rich agricultural plain, sown in modern times with grapes for sultana raisins, with such fruits as melons, peaches, cherries, and apples, and with market vegetables like eggplants, tomatoes, and peppers, as well as with tobacco; the hills flanking it are sown with wheat and

Fig. 7 View of Bin Tepe – east-central and eastern part of Bin Tepe from Kır Mutaf Tepe with Karniyarık Tepe on upper left.



barley, with olive trees scattered.⁵⁹ It makes a green and gold patchwork of fields, with poplars shining in the sun and dark green cypresses jutting into the sky like somber paintbrushes. Across the valley, often lost in the haze, is Bin Tepe (Turkish for “thousand hills”), a great ancient cemetery with scores of burial tumuli on low ridges next to the expanse of the Gygaean lake (fig. 7). Bin Tepe seems imposing and oddly magical, both when viewed from the city of Sardis and perhaps even more so when seen from amongst its own hills. In the spring, it is a carpet of wildflowers and green grain; by summer it is golden and parched brown under the blazing sun. Rimming Bin Tepe to the north, the Gygaean lake is in turn walled in on its north side by the silver hills that frame the valley.

Important for the development of Sardis was its location. Sardis lies inland, a three-day walk from Ephesos (fig. 8). The city is built near the junction of two important routes: the east–west route following the Hermos valley, and a north–south route that runs either through the Karabel pass towards Ephesos or over the saddle of Mount Tmolos towards Hypaipa to the south, and through a valley and pass via Akhisar towards Bursa to the north.⁶⁰ Sardis overlooks the east–west route and the Tmolos route; it may have been a base for people patrolling the Karabel route. The city may have

⁵⁹ The crop percentages of the region in 1963–1964 were (excluding cotton, tobacco, and market fruits and vegetables): 45.5 percent wheat, 32.6 percent barley, 21 percent grapes, 0.9 percent olives. Ancient ratios may have included more olives. See Hanfmann (1983:5).

⁶⁰ For the southern routes, see Greenewalt (1995b:125 n. 2).



Fig. 8
Achaemenid
western Anatolia.

served simultaneously as sentinel, toll-gate, and market-place for traders following these paths. It may therefore have controlled a great deal of the traffic moving between coast and inland, between the tremendous reaches of the Achaemenid empire to north, south, and east and the important ports of Ephesos and Miletos to the south as well as Smyrna and Phokaia to the west.

To sum up: for the person approaching Sardis from the east, the rich fertility of the valley would have been extraordinary after crossing the high Anatolian plateau. If the person had come all the way from Fars, the lushness of Lydia would have contrasted with the windswept scrub of their home even at the same time that the local flora might have recalled the sparer but beautiful flowers and trees of Iran.⁶¹ Sardis itself, heralded by burial

⁶¹ The beauty of the landscape is seen in recent accounts; so the archaeologist E.E. Herzfeld, traveling from Pasargadae to Persepolis in November of 1923, rhapsodizes (Herzfeld Archive, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, N-84, p. 11): "The morning was splendid despite the frost: the area glittered like millions of stars, on everything lay a collar of long, light crystals. Even after the fabulous last sunset, the moonlight on the grave of Cyrus was wonderful. The entire day marvelous: the narrow Pulvar valley,

tumuli along the road, rising massy and red-cliffed from the edge of the plain, surrounded by a system of immense fortifications and teeming with human activity, completely dominated the area around it. The rich agricultural wealth of the Hermos valley was added to by the gold washed down from the Tmolos mountain range by the Paktolos river. The cultural comingling that this study explores attests to the number of people coming from widely differing areas and cultural systems to meet at this Achaemenid capital, exchanging ideas and developing new cultural practices to accommodate or even foster the demands of the polyethnic society growing at Sardis.

Geographical background

Geology

The area around Sardis belongs to the “Aegean coastlands” part of the Alpine orogenic system, a series of east–west fractures producing a sequence of east–west mountain ranges with grabens between that have filled with nutrient-rich alluvial and colluvial deposits. These are the valleys of the Hermos (Gediz), Kaÿster (Küçük Menderes), and Maeander (Büyük Menderes) rivers. The area is still highly seismically active: over 350 earthquakes have been recorded since the eleventh century CE.⁶² The Tmolos range, reaching an altitude of 2,159 m and forming the southern border of the Hermos valley, is part of the Maeander massif, one of Turkey’s three oldest; on its northern side it comprises a series of marble limestones c. 1,000–2,000 m thick, with a front of biotite and non-dolomitic marble, while the southern side is mostly much older uplifted gneiss.⁶³ The northern foothills of the Tmolos range are sedimentary rocks of the Neogene: sandstone, limestone, and conglomerate, most of which are relatively poorly cemented and erode easily to sandy loams high in mineral nutrients. The acropolis massif of Sardis itself, c. 320 m high, is composed entirely of crumbling Tertiary conglomerate, of schist and gneiss pebbles loosely cemented with lime, that is highly

first a wild crevasse with cliffs of dolomitic limestone, broadens slowly, with the foliage becoming ever thicker. In the river meadows bulrushes, oleander, and almond trees. Even the cliffs slowly become grown over, like karst, and show that this area could indeed be forested and was perhaps much more thickly wooded in ancient times. The fall colors: the trees orange-yellow to carmine-red, the sky light turquoise, the mountains violet, blue, red, yellow. Splendid. I wished I could send something of the beauty of these days home.”

I am indebted to the Smithsonian Institution for a postdoctoral fellowship in the spring of 2000, and to A.C. Gunter and C. Hennessey for their help during my tenure at the Freer and Sackler Galleries.

⁶² Ilhan (1971).

⁶³ For the geology of the area around Sardis, see Brinkmann (1971:171), van der Kaaden (1971:201), Hanfmann (1983:3), Hanfmann and Waldbaum (1975:78), Kamilli (1978), Olson (1970, 1971, 1977).