



FIRST NEWSLETTER FROM SARDIS, 2009

CONFIDENTIAL — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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This is a season of anniversaries — Greenie’s fiftieth (hard to imagine he has spent every summer at Sardis for fifty years!); the fiftieth anniversary of Ibrahim Akyar (“Ibrahim Çavuş”), the extraordinary foreman who has organized so much of the excavation at Sardis since the earliest days; the fiftieth anniversary of the expedition compound itself, and of some of its lofty pine trees, which bring such welcome shade on these hot days; Expedition agent Teoman Yalçinkaya’s fortieth anniversary — again, so much of Sardis has been built, renovated, or facilitated by him; my own thirtieth; camp manager Colin Wright’s fifteenth year of keeping the compound in tip-top shape. It is refreshing, therefore, to see so many new faces this summer.

Among the newcomers are two archaeologists, Güzin Eren, from Middle East Technical University in Ankara, and Randy Souza, from the University of California at Berkeley. Güzin continues last year’s excavations just by the modern road, where Saam Noonsuk (Cornell University) uncovered part of an earlier Lydian wall under the great Lydian fortification. Saam was able to uncover a short portion of the wall, and two pebbled floors that were used with it. Dating evidence was meager, however, since the pebble floors produced only scraps of pottery, none of it very closely datable, so the date of the wall remains uncertain. Güzin’s goal this year is to uncover more of this early fortification, and get more material to date it. This area, where the later wall has been largely destroyed by the road, is almost the only spot where the early structure is accessible, since the later Lydians, in the time of Alyattes, built their colossal, 65-foot-wide, 30-foot-high wall right on top of the earlier wall.

As usual, though, following the Lydian fortification was a bit like trying to pin down a wriggling snake: you catch it at one spot, but it turns this way and that, changing course and construction, almost seeming to anticipate each sondage, and struggling to get away. It would have been almost too easy if the wall had just continued straight. Instead, just beyond where Saam stopped digging last year, the wall turned a corner, and not even a proper corner, but a corner with a “wall” made of small stones without a proper built face (**Fig. 1**). We’re not quite sure what to make of this. The best solution we can think of right now is that the rough line of stones is the rear face of a retaining or terrace wall for some kind of earthwork (the earth retained by this wall, partly excavated in 2008, is visible in Fig. 1, just to the left of the workman). The stone wall and earthwork must be later additions to the fortification, in a major modification of its design. Similar changes in design, with the addition of earthworks retained by walls with one built and one

rough face, are found in the later fortification as well; and even though we don't quite understand their exact function, at least we can see such earthworks as a Lydian architectural tradition. But it also reminds us that we are seeing only a tiny part of a much larger structure. As so often, excavation at Sardis is like the story of the six blind men and the elephant: you make the best sense of what you encounter, using analogy where appropriate, but the whole beast is probably more complicated, and more unexpected, than we ever realize.

Randy Souza, by contrast, is in newer territory, on a hill called Field 49, located between the theater and "ByzFort." (ByzFort is short for "Byzantine Fortress," although the hill is neither Byzantine nor a fortress.) In the Lydian period, ByzFort was a monumental terrace enclosing a natural hill in gleaming white limestone blocks, almost 40 feet high, and more than 500 feet long. ByzFort has become our prototypical Lydian terrace, and its excavation in the 1980s and 1990s was one of the great achievements of those years. It is only more recently that we realized that in the Lydian period this was not a structure outside the walls — a sanctuary, for instance — but was at the heart of downtown Sardis. The Lydian terrace remained in use into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and must have been visible and known to Roman Sardians as a great monument of their own past.

ByzFort, however, is only one of a series of great terraces in the center of Lydian Sardis. The hill to its east, Field 49, was explored briefly in 1981 and 1982. Those excavations uncovered another colossal terrace wall along the north edge of the hill, made of polygonal blocks, more roughly worked and perhaps earlier than the limestone terrace at ByzFort.

The impetus to return to this hill after 27 years came from an architectural survey, at the very end of last season, of walls exposed on the west slope of Field 49. The survey suggested that these walls were oriented similarly to the buildings of the lower Roman city. Phil Stinson (University of Kansas) and others have been interested in these alignments of walls and buildings, which offer hints of the underlying plan of Roman and Lydian Sardis. The varying alignments of buildings in different parts of the city suggest that Roman Sardis was not a strictly grid-planned city — no surprise, in such an ancient settlement, that there would be no overall plan — but that different regions might have adhered to different systems. One such system was carried through much of the unexcavated lower city — around buildings A, C, and D, which are still the most prominent unexcavated features in the "flatlands" below the theater and terraces. Last year's survey suggested, then, that this system was also carried up towards the Acropolis, onto ByzFort and perhaps part of Field 49 as well. In addition, a few weathered limestone blocks were visible in the side of the hill: could this be another Lydian terrace wall, like the one on ByzFort?

Curious to answer these questions, Randy set out to clear part of the hillside. He revealed a maze of walls: three parallel Roman foundation or terrace walls, a cross-wall stepping down the slope, more walls on the lower slope of the hill, and the corner of another building further down. Nor are any of these aligned with the walls of the lower city, as we had surmised. Last year, in the mess of brush-covered stones barely protruding from the topsoil, we had accidentally surveyed the faces of two different walls, and arrived at a mistaken alignment. Moral: measure twice, cut once, but then check it with excavation.

Randy followed up this shallow clearing by excavating a 5-meter-wide trench down the side of the

hill, to determine the stratigraphy of these various terraces (**Fig. 2**). This has already turned up a collection of fine artifacts: a once-beautiful vessel foot of mosaic glass, its brilliant colors dulled by corrosion, but the pattern of flowers still discernible under the microscope; fine pottery and lamps; a number of terracotta figurines. The most spectacular find so far is a very lovely bronze patera handle, still being cleaned but already revealing two dragon heads at the end, holding in their mouths a tiny round cup, silver wire inlaid at the center of the handle, and a pair of dolphins spouting water at the top of the handle (**Fig. 3**). This is one of the finest bronzes yet found at Sardis, and probably dates to the early Roman period, around the turn of the millennium, according to David Mitten (Harvard University). All these treasures come from a deep layer of earth, full of bits of brick, mortar, wall plaster, and other debris, with coins and pottery apparently dating to the first century AD. Could this be cleanup after the earthquake of AD 17, when Sardis was devastated by the great cataclysm? “Vast mountains, it is said, collapsed; what had been level ground seemed to be raised aloft, and fires blazed out amid the ruin” (Tacitus 2.47).

Tiziana D’Angelo (Harvard University) is continuing work in the theater of Sardis, removing a small area of poorly preserved mortared rubble bedding for the Roman theater seats and the deep Hellenistic fill beneath, to expose (we hope!) more of the Lydian house with its destruction level (**Fig. 4**). The date of the Hellenistic theater continues to perplex us. The pottery from the fill seems to date to sometime in the late third century BC, but does it date before the siege of Antiochus III, or after? In 215 BC, Antiochus used the theater at Sardis as a stage of operations for capturing the city from his uncle Achaeus. If the theater we’re excavating dates to before this date, it must have been brand new when Antiochus used it. If it is later, then who built or expanded this huge building, as big as the theater at Epidaurus? Was it Antiochus himself as part of his *synoikismos*, when he rebuilt the city after he had destroyed it the previous year, as he specifies in a letter to the Sardians? The problem is that earth fill of the theater contains very little pottery, and most of that is earlier sherds, probably imported with the fill from somewhere else. Only a few fragments are Hellenistic and might give a date for the theater. Tiziana’s careful excavation of the fill has recovered more fragments, probably dating to the late third or even early second century BC — but alas! she has also found gopher holes riddling the fill from top to bottom, and the pesky rodents could easily have moved a few sherds around in the fill; it is dangerous to date a whole theater by a couple tiny sherds. In addition, Tiziana just found a bronze coin of Sardian type, whose date has been quite uncertain. Her discovery of this coin in a reasonably good Hellenistic context, however, offers a more precise date for the coin than has been possible until now, says numismatist Jane Evans (Temple University); and it joins an interesting series of coins belonging to the period just before and after the famous siege of Antiochus, documenting the economic upheavals that accompanied the siege, destruction, and reconstruction of the city.

The final area of excavation is on the Acropolis. Will Bruce (University of Wisconsin-Madison) is continuing last year’s trench, located where a looter’s pit had produced so many interesting artifacts, including our first Lydian electrum coin. So far, he still has found no architecture, only earth fill, so we still don’t know where all the beautiful objects — terracotta rooftiles and revetments, imported pottery, and the Lydian electrum coin — were originally used. But on the 20th of June, he found another electrum coin, a third-stater like last year’s, and only the second such coin from more than 50 years of excavation

at Sardis. A week later, Will brought down a small, corroded, bluish object which he had immediately recognized as a coin, although nothing of the surface was visible; two incuse punches on the reverse, however, left telltale pits. Conservator Kent Severson (private practice, Boston) cleaned it expertly with a tiny scalpel, as he has cleaned the other Lydian silver coins in recent years, to reveal a lion and bull of croeseid type (**Fig. 5**). The discovery of these coins, which are fairly typical types of Lydian electrum and silver but have never been found at in excavation at Sardis before, is interesting in its own right, but also is raising all kinds of new questions about Lydian working in precious metals, and we hope to get some analyses done later in the summer to learn more about Lydian metallurgy and coinage.

The Synagogue, one of the highlights of Sardis since its excavation and restoration in the 1960s and 1970s, is again a focus of research and conservation. After many years' absence, David Mitten has returned to the Synagogue he himself excavated, to study the spolia in the building. The piers of the sanctuary are largely built from recycled pieces of other buildings, and a remarkable number of the most important sculptures and inscriptions from the Harvard-Cornell excavations at Sardis come from the Synagogue, either reused as building material in these piers (such as the inscription recording the letter of Antiochus III, mentioned above), or displayed as parts of its furniture. David and Aimée Scorziello (also Harvard University) are now studying the spolia still in place in the piers, identifying elements that might belong together in the same buildings (**Fig. 6**). Hot work, in the brilliant sun and blinding mosaics, but rewarding, and they have made substantial progress already.

Like most Roman buildings, the rubble walls of the Synagogue were faced with marble revetment. The revetment here was unusually lavish, however, with figural and geometric decoration in brilliant colored marble, and was built and rebuilt in many phases of use. In addition to his study of the date and the very latest phases of the Synagogue, Marcus Rautman (University of Missouri), with help from editor Kathy Kiefer (Sardis Office, Harvard University) and recorder Brianna Bricker (University of California, Santa Barbara), has been poring through the rich harvest of marble fragments from the building, collected in the 1960s by David Mitten and others and studied in the 1970s by Andy Seager (Ball State University, not at Sardis this year, however). Marcus has found treasure after treasure: more figural *opus sectile*; incised and champlévé relief slabs from wall decoration, including a wonderful scene depicting Daniel in the Lions' Den; and fragments belonging to a freestanding sculpted marble menorah, the second from the Synagogue and only the eighth from all of antiquity! He has also filled out Andy's collection of luxurious marble dining tables, and added more than 20 additional examples from across the site, giving us a clearer picture of luxurious Late Roman dining (**Fig. 7**). In all, this is one of the richest assemblages of such tables and interior marble furnishings in the Mediterranean, and offers further glimpses of the elite decor of this largest synagogue in the ancient world.

Meanwhile, conservator Kent Severson has taken on the difficult task of lifting and resetting mosaic panels that had become detached and buckled in a particularly cold winter freeze a couple years ago (**Fig. 8**). I had worried that lifting these panels would reveal unsuspected and extensive damage to their beddings, but Teoman Yalçinkaya's sound construction of the 1970s has stood up very well, and they are in good condition. Nevertheless, we are considering building a light, protective roof over the Synagogue, which will shelter the building and mosaics from further weathering and thermal expansion,

and will also make the Synagogue — which can be a blinding inferno in the heat of the summer — a more comfortable and inviting place for visitors.

Roofing is a theme of this season, as architects Robert Horner (freelance architect, Seattle), Nathaniel Schlundt (Ball State University), Nitsan Yomtov (freelance architect, Seattle), and Phil Stinson, and conservators Michael Morris (Metropolitan Museum) and Kent Severson ponder the complicated problems of designing a roof over the Lydian mudbrick fortification. For almost 30 years this has been protected by a cleverly designed but very temporary roof built by the foreman, Ibrahim Akyar. It's time for a change, but the interlocking goals of protecting the mudbrick wall, displaying and explaining it to visitors, and creating an architecturally pleasing structure, have posed challenges for almost two decades. In a series of afternoons in the trench or the architects' basement, these talented architects and conservators have resolved many of these problems, and I think we are well on our way towards a solution.

We have long wanted to put up a series of informative signs for visitors to the site. In the spare moments between their many other duties, Nate Schlundt and Brianna Bricker, both blessed with great creativity and sense of design, have so far drawn up seven of the 28 planned signs. Their design is a balance between simple legibility and informative detail, with drawings and photographs illustrating the text. We hope to have these installed by the end of the season.

Conservators Gülseren Dikilitaş (private practice, Istanbul), Briana Feston, Julia Sybalsky (both Institute of Fine Arts, New York University), and Tiffin Thompson (University of Pennsylvania) have been working on the wall paintings of the Roman houses at MMS. With endless problems of ground moisture and deterioration, the conservation of these paintings has challenged generations of conservators, but Gülseren brings a fresh point of view and many new ideas, and the team has made progress (**Fig. 9**). Back at camp, Vanessa Rousseau (University of Wisconsin-Madison) is going through boxes of fallen fresco fragments from these and other Roman houses, and finding some remarkable patterns and joins: a great series of lozenges and crosses, which artist Cathy Alexander (freelance, Cambridge) has been working into gorgeous watercolor reconstructions (**Fig. 10**).

Vanessa's and other scholars' work has been aided enormously in the past four years by the efforts of Elizabeth Gombosi (Sardis Office, Harvard University), and the Depot Move team: Sheila Nightingale (City University of New York), and newcomers Alexia Margaritis (Cornell University), Annie Austin (Harvard University) and Ferhat Can (Middle East Technical University). They are cleaning, re-bagging, checking the inventory and computer records, reorganizing, and generally bringing the last half-century's finds into good order, making it much easier to locate and less filthy to work with the myriad finds we have stored here. They are now making a full-court press to transfer all the objects out of the old depot, so it can be renovated over the winter, and are making enormous strides, sometimes going through a year's worth of objects in a few days.

Other research at the camp proceeds apace. Inscriptions from the past fifty years of excavation are being organized for study and publication by Georg Petzl (Cologne University) (**Fig. 11**). Frances Gallart-Marqués (Cornell University) continues her study of figural terracottas, whose number grows almost daily as Tiziana and Randy unearth more fragments of Hellenistic and early Roman figurines, and

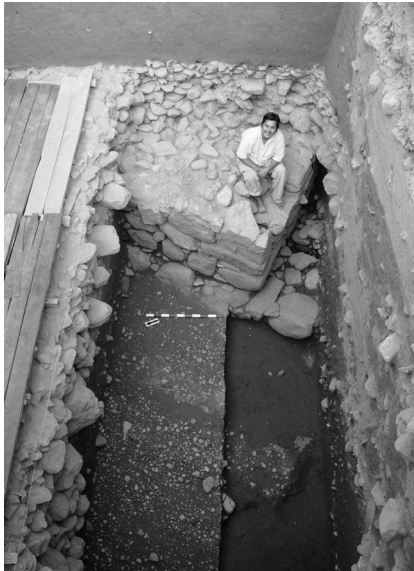
as Marcus and the Depot Move team unearth fragments saved in previous years. Jane Evans is moving her way back through the decades of coins, and making many important discoveries and observations, such as her work on the Hellenistic issues around the time of Antiochus III. Andrew Ramage (Cornell University) has just arrived to work on his publication of the House of Bronzes/Lydian Trench. And Greenie (University of California, Berkeley) has been taking on a series of research projects, from his beloved Lydian pottery, to researching the Byzantine and Islamic pottery of Sardis, to articles on Lydian history and culture, pottery, food, perfumes and unguents.

These latter are in preparation for the exhibition of Lydian art and archaeology at the museum of the Yapı Kredi Bank in Istanbul, which runs from January 19 to April 19, 2010, as part of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture program. The exhibition will consist mostly of objects of the Lydian and Persian periods from the Manisa, Istanbul, Uşak, Izmir, and Ephesus museums. In the lab, Jennifer Kim (Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences), Astrid van Giffen (Strauss Conservation Center, Harvard University) and the other conservators are restoring some of the finest Lydian objects from past years. Restored in the 1960s and later, many of these need infills, painting, or simply to be taken apart, cleaned, and re-restored (**Fig. 12**). They are looking gorgeous, however, and will join many old Sardian favorites from past newsletters, as well as Lydian objects from the Butler expedition of 1910-1914, and from contemporary cities such as Ephesus, Gordion, and Miletus. These have never been seen together before, and this exhibition will be an unprecedented opportunity to appreciate the diversity and quality of Lydian art and culture. A catalog is being prepared, but I hope you can plan a trip to Istanbul for next spring to see some of these wonderful objects in person, and the site that produced them.

Elizabeth Gombosi will be retiring this year as Associate Director and head of the Sardis Office in Cambridge. Elizabeth first came to Sardis as photographer in 1968, and between 1968 and 1977 took many of the expedition's finest pictures. Since 1999 the Expedition has been blessed by her extraordinary commitment and professionalism, wonderful ideas, dependable common sense, and constant cheer and humor. We are of course sorry to see her leave the Sardis Office, but delighted that she promises to continue her involvement with the Expedition, and rejoice that she will have time now to do so many things she has wanted to do. Congratulations, Elizabeth, and all our best wishes!

It is due to the generosity and good will of all of you supporters that we are here, able to take on and enjoy this work. During these days of economic hardship and retrenchment, all of us are particularly aware of and grateful for your support, and that you have made these researches and discoveries possible. As always, deep and heartfelt thanks!

Nick Cahill



2008

2009



Fig. 1. The early Lydian fortification under the colossal mudbrick wall, in 2008 and 2009. Last year, the situation was complicated enough, as the early wall turned a corner (behind Saam, in the left-hand picture), while the foundation below continues straight (to the right in the picture). This year, as you can see, the wall unpredictably turns a sharp left exactly at the edge of last year's excavation. The foundation continues on to the right (to the right of Güzin, invisible in this picture; one stone has been robbed out, confusing the situation even more). In all these pictures, photographer Ricky Taylor (Harvard University) is invisible behind the lens, but greatly appreciated!



Fig. 2. Excavation on the slope of the hill at Field 49. Last year the long Roman walls were just visible at the surface, and survey suggested that they were aligned with walls in the lower city. A trench up the slope this year proved this wrong, but revealed a whole series of walls retaining the hillside, the result of centuries of urban development. How early does this development begin here?



Fig. 3. Early Roman bronze patera (libation bowl) handle from Field 49, in the hand of conservator Julia Sybalsky, who is expertly cleaning it. Two dragons hold a tiny circular cup at the end, while dolphins spouting waves once enclosed the now-missing bowl. Silver inlay in the center and traces of gilding adorned the exquisite piece.

Fig. 4. In the theater, Tiziana D'Angelo oversees the removal of poorly preserved remains of the rubble foundations of the Roman seats. These were laid into steps cut into the Hellenistic earth fill below. Are these steps a Roman creation to stabilize the mortared rubble, or might they be the impression left by the removal of the Hellenistic seats (of which not a trace remains)?





a)



b)



d)



e)



c)



f)

Fig. 5. After last year's discovery of a Lydian electrum coin on the Acropolis, the first from excavations at Sardis, we could hardly hope to find another—but Will Bruce did find one (a trite, or third-stater, with a lion head with “hairy nose wart”), and then followed that up with a croeseid silver stater as well, with a lion and bull facing one another. a) Uğur Terzioğlu, Representative of the Ministry of Culture, with the electrum coin just as found (Will Bruce in the background, his smile unfortunately not captured); b) silver stater as discovered, barely recognizable; c) Kent Severson cleaning the silver stater found a week later; d) half the coin cleaned, showing the depth of corrosion—the lion on the left revealed; e) silver stater, completely cleaned, showing lion on left facing a bull on the right; f) this year's harvest of Lydian coins (so far!). Both coins show only two simple punches on the reverse.



Fig. 6. David Mitten and Aimée Scorziello studying the spolia built into piers of the Synagogue. The reuse of these already-ancient blocks, inscriptions, and sculptures is one of the most intriguing aspects of the Synagogue, and its piers have produced some of the most important artifacts from the Harvard-Cornell excavations, such as the Cybele Monument, and the “Synagogue Inscription” in an unknown Anatolian language. Their article in last year’s publication, *Love for Lydia*, discusses many of these objects.

Fig. 7. Marcus Rautman with one of the marble tables from the Synagogue he has studied and inventoried, developing Andy Seager’s earlier work, and documenting the luxurious dining habits of the Late Roman Jews of Sardis. The tables come in all different shapes: round, square or C-shaped, some with cutouts around the edges — “cup holders” as Marcus describes them, but here after work, someone is trying them out with an Efes Pilsen bottle.



Fig. 8. In the Synagogue Main Hall, Kent Severson and Jennifer Kim repair mosaics which had become separated and displaced by frost heave. Kent temporarily removed the broken panels and repairs, then consolidated the remaining panels, and replaced the old panels and filled losses. This is the beginning of a larger program to conserve and develop this important monument of Sardis.



Fig. 9. The Roman wall paintings in MMS have been a source of frustration, with constant problems of salt efflorescence and deterioration. Gülseren Dikilitaş brings her long experience and ideas to this project.



Fig. 10. Cathy Alexander painting a watercolor restoration of wall paintings from Roman houses in MMS. In her study of Roman wall painting at Sardis Vanessa Rousseau, with Cathy's expert help, has found new joins among the boxes of fallen fragments in the depot, and worked out the decorative scheme in these interesting Late Roman rooms.

Fig. 11. In his seminar on epigraphy, Georg Petzl teaches Aimeé Scorziello how to make a paper squeeze of a Greek inscription. From left to right: David Mitten; Tiziana D'Angelo; Greenie; Will Bruce; Uğur Terzioğlu; Teoman Yalçinkaya; Ferhat Can.





Fig. 12. A Bird Bowl excavated in 1965, scheduled for display at the Vedat Nedim Tör Museum in Istanbul next January. It desperately needed restoration, including the creation of new handles (both of which were missing), and new infills; conservator Astrid van Giffen expertly restored it to like-new condition. Below, conservators Jennifer Kim (played here by Tiffin Thompson after Jen's departure), Briana Feston, Julia Sybalsky, and Astrid van Giffen with some of the objects they restored for the exhibit.

