Dear Friends and Supporters,

Torrential rains throughout our first weeks at Sardis this year made it seem as if summer would never arrive. On the one hand, the landscape remains green and lush even now at the end of June. Exuberant purple hollyhocks still cover the slopes of the theater and stadium; they drift and gleam almost transparent as they catch the raking sunlight early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Tiny brilliant red poppies peek out among the hollyhocks, and shining white Queen Anne’s lace, a symphony of color and texture. Swirling stormy mists transformed the Acropolis into a scene from a Chinese landscape painting, the impossibly sheer peaks and precipitous buildings emerging from the eddying clouds and then vanishing. And the smell of the freshly wetted earth is delicious. On the other hand, the storms were so violent that they flooded roads, damaged olive orchards and grape vineyards, destroyed hard-earned crops, turned our trenches into sludgy ponds, and prevented us from working day after day. Every year we say the rains are unprecedented; and every year they exceed the last.

So we’re excited and relieved to be embarking on the construction of a protective shelter over the Lydian Fortification and adjacent features in sector MMS, which will provide much more security from rain and wind than the existing hodgepodge of roofs. This project, part of the “Touristic Enhancement Project” to protect and make accessible a series of ancient buildings here, is the culmination of many years of hard work by architects Troy Thompson (SmithGroup LLC), Nate Schlundt (Building Conservation Associates), and Phil Stinson (University of Kansas), conservators Michael Morris and Hiroko Kariya (private practice), engineers Teoman Yalçınkaya (Sardis Expedition Representative) and Taner Kurtuluş (Artabel, Izmir), and a host of others. A roof over the fortification was planned way back in the 1980s, and Troy and Phil, then architecture students, drew up a series of designs. But at the time, we couldn’t come up with a plan that would properly protect the mudbrick fortification. So in the end we built a smaller (but very successful) roof over the Roman and Lydian houses adjacent to the fortification, and intended to rebury the mudbrick wall itself. Years later, though, the team has solved the problems that stymied us. After completing and learning from the roof built over the Synagogue two years ago, and digging test sondages last summer (see the 2022 newsletter), we received permission from the Ministry of Culture, and are now beginning construction. The new construction is a twin of the...
sun shades as well as rain tarps. palace of the sixth and seventh centuries is deep into the remains of the Lydian thunderstorm blow in. At the top, Will to be rigged in an instant should a excavations on Field 49 is obscured by Fig. 5. Our view of Will and Burçin's Lycian palatial complex in the city center, we are beginning a new excava-

This year, will he reach the lesser-known periods of Lydian history, the Early Iron Age of the eighth century and earlier; or even the Bronze Age? But Will's trench was particularly hard-hit by the floods early in the season, despite all his efforts, and these deeper areas are still not dried out, making excavation difficult. Typically for Sardis, while Will is working in Hellenistic and Lydian remains of the first thousand years BC, just adjacent to him Burçin Güzel (Ege University) is excavating at the same elevations but much more recent history, uncovering Byzantine rooms and graves of the tenth century AD and later. Last year she found a very long-lived building, originally Roman but occupied for many centuries thereafter, filled with a couple dozen Byzantine burials. Burcin and her team are expertly excavating the graves. These buildings finally collapsed in an earthquake, which toppled the walls and buried the graves under a deep layer of rubble. The date of the earthquake is not quite settled, but it may be the same quake that destroyed Church E, the Lascarid church by the banks of the Pactolus River. We had thought that the area around the church and the modern village was the only part of the lower city occupied during the later Byzantine era; now we find occupation more widely spread and more substantial than the small village described by later travelers. Güzin Eren (Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations) is back among her beloved Lydian terraces on the steep slopes of Field 49, after a few years' absence while she finished her doctorate. Her goals this year are to uncover the connections between two major terrace walls, and to find deposits that could help date the massive Lydian boulder terrace wall that dominates the front of this hill. She argues persuasively that the wall was first built in the eighth century BC, roughly the time of Homer, and was reconstructed later in the sixth century. But to prove this she must find pockets of earth with pottery that can be shown to belong with the earlier phase of the wall, and those have proved elusive; the later Lydian builders were pretty thorough in their work. In addition, a later and even more monumental terrace wall was built in front of the boulder wall, and the junctions among all these walls lie buried under huge boulders that have slid down the hill from the uppermost wall. We have avoided this area in part because of the difficulty in moving these boulders safely; now the time has come, and Güzin is preparing both for the prac-
tical challenge of moving those colossal stones, and the stratigraphic challenge of identifying the deposits that will clarify the long history of Lydian terracing here. The sector below, Field 55, now enters its tenth year of excavation since we restarted work in 2013. This terrace was occupied by luxurious late Roman houses, built after the destruction of an early Roman sanctuary here dedicated to the cult of the Roman emperors. Liam Devlin and Arsen Nişan (Harvard University) are uncovering new rooms at the north part of a house, which are quite

Fig. 5. Troy, Nate, Phil, Teoman, Umit Güngör (Ege University), and foreman Necmi Erdoğan watch as the cement truck pours the concrete foundations for the new roof. In the background, the sister roof over the Synagogue.

Fig. 4. Tractor and motorcycle traffic on the former İzmir-Ankara highway slows while the crane installs the columns for the new roof.

Fig. 6. Flooding in Will's trench undercut a monumental Hellenistic wall (built entirely from reused blocks from the Lydian palace), forcing conservators Kiernan Graves (Site & Studio Conservation, LLC), Carlin Gallupe (Queen's University, Ontario), and others to spend days stabilizing it with grout injections.

Fig. 7. Architect Zichen Liu (Harvard University) draws a collapsed brick wall in Burçin's trench, victim of the medieval earthquake that destroyed these buildings, leaving the bricks lying neatly stacked on their edges. The frieze and regular masonry would seem to belong to a building with some prestige, not just a squatter's hut.
different from the great marble court-
yard that has occupied us for a couple
years. They are now digging through
the debris of a terrible earthquake that
destroyed Sardis in the seventh century
AD, bringing an end to something like
a thousand years of urban living. Liam
in particular is finding his rooms filled
with collapsed masonry, which should inform us about the superstructure
of this building, and might also answer
questions about the nature of the seismic
event or events that destroyed this house
(and the rest of Sardis). Was this one
an earthquake, or more than one? The recent
and tragic events in Türkiye’s southeast
make these questions ever more relevant.
This house was apparently not occupied
at the time of the earthquake, as we
have encountered no artifacts or casual-
ties, but there are still many interesting
finds to be made. We also hope to learn
more about what this part of Sardis was
like after the earthquake, when most
occupation moved up to the Acropolis.
Frances Gallant Marqués’s (Cornell and
Harvard Universities) excavations here
in previous years uncovered a rich court-
yard with fallen columns, and showed that the survivors were salvaging marble
blocks to reuse elsewhere; but there are
areas of permanent occupation as well,
which will shed light, we hope, on a
very little-known period of history of
western Türkiye.
Nine years ago Gencay Öztürk (Ege
University) was tasked with uncovering
the Roman marble-paved colonnaded
avenue in front of the Synagogue, to
make the urban situation clearer to
visitors. But scattered on the pavement
he found fallen blocks belonging to what
turned out to be a three-bayed arch, the
largest monumental Roman arch in the
world. This year he returns to excavate
a last area of the arch to uncover any
more blocks that might inform us about
the upper part of this amazing building,
while John Signier (University of
Pennsylvania) studies the blocks as part
of the final publication.
It’s not every year that we get to open
a new excavation sector. This season we
turn our attention to an olive orchard
just across from the temple of Artemis,
in the so-called Necropolis. In 2010, a
rescue excavation retrieved a limestone
sarcophagus from this field, one of hun-
dreds or thousands of tombs scattered
through these hills. The sarcophagus
had been looted in antiquity; it probably
dates to the Persian or Hellenistic period.
But completely unexpectedly, we found
that the sarcophagus was surrounded by
a dense layer of Lydian pottery broken
on a floor, and a fieldstone wall, appar-
ently the remains of a Lydian house. The
pottery dates to the middle of the sixth
century BC, and this probably is another
example of the famous capture of Sardis
by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 547 BC,
the same destruction layer that Will has
been digging in the palace quarter. We
concluded that the house was abandoned
after the destruction, leaving many of its
contents still intact, and then this area of
Sardis was used as a cemetery, with the
sarcophagus and other burial goods dug into
the ruins of this house. We couldn’t dig
further in 2010, though, because the
land was privately owned, and so there it
has sat, patiently.
This is an extraordinary opportunity
to explore Lydian settlements. In other
sectors, these domestic destruction levels
have offered us unique insights into the
daily lives of the Lydians in the time
of Croesus, how they cooked, ate, and
drank, how they wove cloth, about trade
with other cultures. But Lydian levels
elsewhere are elusive and very deeply
buried under important Byzantine,
Roman, and Hellenistic buildings such
as those Will, Burçin, Güzin, and others
are dealing with.
After the field was purchased last
year, Eric Hensley (UW-Madison) found
Lydian walls buried under only a foot or
two of earth. But archaeology is often an
exercise in delayed gratification, and Eric
is practicing great restraint. It’s tempting
to dig down to expose all that wonderful
broken pottery, but he wants to dig one
whole room at once, so he is first locating
the walls of a room while exposing as
little as possible of the pottery and other
artifacts on the floor. So whenever he
uncovers a bit of pottery, he leaves it
buried, covers it with Tyvek to protect it,
and moves on. Frustrating, but later in
the season when we see this all at once,
it will be worth the wait (we hope!).
The new area offers the opportunity to explore
not just a room or two, but potentially
Fig. 10 (right). Arsen with a marble slab decorated with a cross, found shattered
in the doorway of the Roman house just as it was left after the earthquake in the
early seventh century. It looks like it should belong to a boulistra or some other
architectural feature of the house, but doesn’t fit anywhere nearby; perhaps it was
just stored here in this unoccupied house awaiting reuse.

Fig. 11 (below). Our excavations and restorations are spread over an area of many
miles, through one of the most dramatic and enchanting landscapes in the world, now
more easily photographed with a tiny drone high above the birds’ flights.
a large area of Lydian occupation. The discovery of Lydian occupation here also underscores the difference between Sardis under kings Croesus and Alyattes, and the city in Hellenistic and Roman times. Evidence for Lydian habitation is found up and down the Pactolus valley. This came to an end, however, with the Persian conquest, when the city shrunk and former settlement areas such as this field were converted to cemeteries. In the Hellenistic era, the city center was reoccupied, but these peripheral areas remained abandoned. More on this in the next newsletter.

A final excavation area of this season is a tumulus tomb in the so-called royal necropolis at Bin Tepe (“A Thousand Mounds”). This cemetery, covering almost 30 square miles, is home to more than 120 Lydian tumuli or burial mounds, including one of the world’s largest, the tumulus of King Alyattes, the father of Croesus, a monster mound described by Herodotus as “the greatest structure ever built, apart from those of the Egyptians and Babylonians.”

These mounds often have stone burial chambers within them, and the Expedition has explored a number of them over the last 60 years. But since antiquity people have known that these burial mounds contain gold, and the smell of gold attracts tomb-robbers like maggots. So looters repeatedly dig into the mounds to locate the chambers; every one of the mounds we have investigated had already been plundered. Nonetheless, there’s a great deal to learn from them: the exquisite stone chambers are covered with Lydian masonry, revealing how the Lydians worked monumental stone blocks, and their technological and cultural connections with other architectural traditions. A number of tumuli have painted and sculpted burial couches (klina); and sherds and other finds left over by the looters hint at the date of the burials and at Lydian burial customs. These tombs have long and complicated lives: they were mostly built as family tombs to be used over many generations, sometimes with multiple chambers and burial couches. The burial chambers thus accumulated bodies and grave goods including eating and drinking vessels, jewelry, perfume flasks, and other materials the deceased might need in the afterlife.

A couple winters ago, tomb-robbers bulldozed a row of tumuli, obliterating the mounds, and then dynamited their way into the chamber of one of them. This is a truly lovely structure, with three rooms built of elegant limestone masonry set deep within a mound about 150 feet in diameter. It is unusually complex, with an antechamber and two burial chambers, one equipped with one couch (klina), the other with a pair of couches. The looters scattered the bones from the funerary couches, broke holes in the walls, couches, and floor (just in case there was gold inside the solid bedrock—they’re not the brightest people…), and damaged the remaining grave goods. So we went in to clean up the mess and record the architecture.

Okan Emre Güney (Ege University) has excavated to reach the original door of the tomb, and has been clearing out the earth that fills the three chambers so they can be recorded by the architects. He has already found a few artifacts, such as alabaster vases for perfumed oil. But the looters have mixed everything up searching for gold, so the pottery, bones, and other material useless to treasure-seekers are now scattered through the earth. To recover everything that survives, Okan is bagging up all the dirt, about six tons so far, and sending tractor-loads back to the expedition camp, where it is carefully water-sieved to recover objects the size of a grain of rice. It’s a Herculean task, but has to be done; and has been unexpectedly rewarding. Okan has already found pottery dating from the sixth century BC into the Hellenistic period, documenting the early date and long use of the tumulus, as well as a few tiny bits of gilded bronze, hints of the wealth that the looters found in the tomb.

As always, the fieldwork is only the beginning of the story. Publications fill the days of many of our staff. Andy Seager (Ball State University), with the help of editors Kerri Sullivan (Harvard Art Museums) and Brianna Bricker (UW-Madison), is making a few last changes...
to the long-awaited final report on the Synagogue. Marcus Rautman (University of Missouri), Frances Gallart Marqués, Phil Stinson, Baha Yıldırım (Harvard Art Museums), Jane Evans (Temple University), Vanessa Rousseau (University of St. Thomas), and Liz DeRidder Raubolt (Grand Rapids Community College) are co-authoring a long article on the results of recent excavations at Field 55 and the Wadi B temple. Our story keeps changing as we learn more, but this is a good moment to summarize the last ten years’ work. Frances is also working on her own monograph on the figural terracottas from Sardis, while Will prepares one on the excavations in sector PN in the 1960s. Will is also a co-author of a forthcoming article on the Lydian silver coins he found (with parts of their owner) two summers ago, together with numismatist Jack Kroll (University of Texas) and conservators Jen Kim (Los Angeles Art Conservation), Brian Castriota (University College London), Emily Frank (NYU), Süheyla Şimşek (Ankara University), and İzel Güngör (Istanbul University), who spent so much of last summer cleaning the coins. And the camp is full of teaching and learning. Baha and others hold informal seminars for the students and staff, while we have occasional, more formal seminars for the whole team.

There will be much more to report in your second newsletter; this one, begun in June, is only coming to you in July, as it’s hard to keep up with the exciting work and discoveries every day. It fills us with pleasure, though, to see such progress in understanding our past, preserving and protecting it for others, and sharing it with the world. This is all due, as ever, to your unfailing support, for which we all remain most grateful.

Nick Cahill
Director, Sardis Expedition

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Past newsletters are available on our website https://sardisexpedition.org/en/news

We have a number of our Sardis publications available to interested supporters at a discount; if you are interested, please write to us at am_sardis@harvard.edu.

Fig. 20. In the Synagogue, the team of women continues the project begun last year to restore gaps in the mosaics with modern tesserae. With the help of the conservation team, they are now training a new cadre in the art of mosaic laying and restoration.