

Phrygia between the East and the West: an introduction

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Recent years have seen an increase in scholarly interests in the field of Phrygian studies, resulting in conferences such as “The Phrygian Lands Over Time: From Prehistory to the Middle of the 1st Millennium AD” at Anadolu University in Turkey in 2015, published as *Phrygia in Antiquity: From the Bronze Age to the Byzantine Period*,² and “The World of Phrygian Gordion” accompanying the exhibit “The Golden Age of King Midas” at Penn Museum in the US in 2016,³ not to mention several significant publications. Indeed, Peter Thoneman’s edited volume, *Roman Phrygia: Culture and Society*, illustrated the unique reality of central and western Anatolia during the post-Hellenistic periods;⁴ and Annick Payne’s recent contribution to the Oxford History of the Ancient Near East summarised the state of the field, providing not only an historical overview of the kingdom of Phrygia but also highlighting many recent advancements and outstanding questions.⁵ However, despite this proliferation of recent work on the subject, it has been more than 25 years since the conference “Frigi e Frigio” took place in Rome in 1995, and we thought that it was time for the Phrygians to return to Italy.

The conference “Phrygia between the East and the West,” held at the University of Pavia, Italy, on 7–9 April 2022, aimed to put recent research at the forefront and bridge scholarship from east and west, both in the sense of those sharing their work with presenters coming from across three continents, and also in the sense of bridging disciplinary, geographical, and chronological divides that often seem to fragment Phrygian studies. As organisers, we aimed to provide a venue where Classicists, archaeologists, Near Eastern historians, and those stuck in the middle could come together to reevaluate the Phrygian polity and culture once again, both in local and regional contexts, and from the origin of the group and its identity to its reception in later times.

In the last two decades, beginning with the first suggestions of redating the Gordion stratigraphy, several significant advances have been made towards our understanding of the Phrygian people, their polity, and the material cultural and textual remains that they and their neighbours

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² Tsetschlazde 2019.

³ Rose and Darbyshire 2016.

⁴ Thoneman 2013.

⁵ Payne 2023; see also several contributions to the edited volume by Jonathan Hall and James Osborne (2022) in the context of Iron Age Mediterranean interconnectivity, especially those of Susan Sherratt, John Papadopolous, and Ann Gunter, who examine the Phrygians in relation to other eastern Mediterranean peoples, especially Greeks and Phoenicians, but also other Anatolian groups, like the Lydians, and the Assyrians further east.

left behind.⁶ The site itself, located in west-central Anatolia, was home to a series of settlements from the late third millennium BCE to the 14th century CE; it was in the 12th century BCE, however, that Phrygians first arrived at Gordion, making it the centre of their polity over the course of the next several centuries. In the eighth century BCE, the Phrygian kingdom reached its zenith under the legendary King Midas, known to the contemporaneous Assyrians as Mita of Mushki.⁷ This kingdom existed as one of the major Iron Age political entities, alongside Urartu and Assyria, during the Middle Iron Age, and later fell under the control of the kingdom of Lydia and the Achaemenid empire. In fact, it has recently been argued based on a formal analysis of monumental Phrygian architecture and architectural representations in central Anatolia that many of the monuments traditionally assigned to the Middle Phrygian Period and the reign of Midas – especially the Midas Monument of Midas City – may actually date to the sixth century BCE, when the region was under Lydian control.⁸ Despite this possibility, it is well understood that the Phrygians themselves produced their own script and language, burial practices, standards of monumentality, and cultic institutions, though they may have been adopted and adapted by their successors in central and western Anatolia. Indeed, a recent study conducted by Lisa Kealhofer, Peter Grave, and Mary Voigt – the previous director of excavations at Gordion – revealed important changing group-identity dynamics and networks of interregional interaction from the Late Bronze Age to the end of the Late Phrygian period, primarily through a bottom-up, diachronic analysis of ceramic data from the site of Gordion itself.⁹ Since Gordion, its environs, and Phrygian cultural traits are the topic of several papers in this volume, I will leave any further details to later authors.

The excavations of Kerkenes Dağ, on the other hand, are unfortunately not represented in any of our papers; however, the work of Geoffrey and Françoise Summers, and now Scott Branting, and their teams has been incredibly important to Phrygian studies since the 1990s. The settlement, situated upon a natural mountaintop in central Anatolia and perhaps to be identified with ancient Pteria, was founded in the late seventh century and persisted only approximately 70 years until its fiery destruction in the mid-sixth century. The conflagration and subsequent abandonment of the site are believed to be the result of the conflict between Cyrus the Great of Persia and Croesus of Lydia, which is also evidenced at other major urban centres across Anatolia, including Gordion and Sardis.¹⁰ Recent archaeometric studies, in particular, have produced exciting insights into urban development and organisation in the sizeable Phrygian settlement,¹¹ and archaeobotanical research at both Kerkenes and Gordion has demonstrated intriguing agricultural strategies and their connection to Phrygian political economies.¹² Investigations of individual

⁶ Rose and Darbyshire 2011.

⁷ Rose 2021; also, this volume.

⁸ Summers 2023.

⁹ Kealhofer et al. 2022.

¹⁰ Summers and Summers 2013; Summers 2018; 2021; Branting et al. 2019.

¹¹ Branting 2004; Langis-Barsetti 2013; Osborne and Summers 2014. See also the forthcoming dissertation of Jessica Robkin at the University of Central Florida, with preliminary results presented at the 2021 and 2022 annual meetings of ASOR.

¹² Marston 2012; 2017; Marston and Branting 2016.

material classes, such as ivories and metals, have also produced exciting results pertaining to local production and craftspeople.¹³

Outside of the excavations of these two definitely Phrygian sites, major discoveries and reinterpretations of significant epigraphic evidence has also helped to further our understanding of Phrygians and the Phrygian polity in recent years. The tremendous work of Bartomeu Obrador-Cursach has dramatically improved our understanding of the Phrygian language in its historical context and provides an up-to-date lexicon and catalogue of all known Phrygian inscriptions.¹⁴ Brian Rose's recent investigation of titles found upon the inscribed monuments of Midas City have led him to suggest a Mycenaean origin for their understanding and function in Phrygian political messaging, perhaps connected with the transmission and recitations of Homeric narratives.¹⁵ While there remains debate over the precise dating and exact identity of the individuals involved, the discovery of the TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK I inscription in south-central Anatolia has also inspired new understandings of the central Anatolian political landscape, including a conflict between the local king and the "land Muska," the Luwian name for Phrygia.¹⁶ And finally, Lorenzo d'Alfonso's reassessment of the TOPADA inscription, specifically his identification of a group of Phrygians in the text, likewise suggests conflictual interregional interactions between south-central Anatolia and the Phrygians, whether during the eighth century, as previously interpreted,¹⁷ or during the tenth to early ninth century, as d'Alfonso suggests.¹⁸ These epigraphs, providing new and substantial historical data about otherwise poorly understood regional and chronological connections with Phrygia, are discussed in greater detail in several papers in the volume, and several interregional interactions between Phrygia and surrounding areas comprise one complete section.

There are five major themes under which our papers fall; however, as you will surely notice, many topics bridge multiple themes:

Our first section is concerned with political identities in Phrygia. We open with papers on the emergence and rise of a Phrygian polity and the formation of a Phrygian identity between the Aegean and Near Eastern worlds. Lorenzo d'Alfonso, through a survey of archaeological and epigraphic evidence, considers the Phrygian polity's shifting positionality between east and west as a reflection of a changing political identity around the eighth century, during which time Phrygia grounded itself in the west in opposition to the Assyrian empire (Chapter 1). Kate Morgan challenges the traditional narrative of an Early Iron Age Balkan migration, particularly as it pertains to Phrygian identity formation (Chapter 2). Specifically, she aims to demonstrate the distinctly local character of this process through a place-based approach to urban archaeological remains. Maya Vassileva, on the other hand, examines elements of Phrygian cultural identity that suggest a substantial western component, which, in combination with local and eastern influences, resulted in a Phrygian middle ground (Chapter 3). And Marco Santini provides an

¹³ Dusinger 2002; Lehner 2015.

¹⁴ Obrador-Cursach 2020.

¹⁵ Rose 2021; also, this volume.

¹⁶ Goedegebuure et al. 2020; Hawkins and Weeden 2021; Adiego 2021.

¹⁷ Hawkins 2000, pp. 451–452, with further references therein.

¹⁸ d'Alfonso 2019.

examination of local Anatolian and Assyrian evidence for the organisation of Phrygian political power, determining that the form of the polity shifted between a centralised and decentralised state (Chapter 4). Lastly, Dylan Winchell examines archaeological evidence from the site of Gordion and the adjacent Northeast Ridge through a model of fragility, suggesting that periods of construction and destruction can be viewed as products of the fragile, yet coercive, power relations between Phrygian elites and non-elites at the site (Chapter 5).

In the second section, the Phrygian polity itself is examined by several authors, who investigate an array of lifeways and technologies characteristic to Phrygian communities. Brian Rose begins by providing a comprehensive survey of recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries from Gordion and Midas City, along with their various interpretations, and contextualises the evidence within the wider region. He aims to demonstrate a connection between cult and politics in expressions of Phrygian kingship during the reign of the eighth-century king Midas (Chapter 6). Evidence from Phrygian-period Gordion is central to several other papers in this section as well, each of which investigates particular classes of materials as proxies for Phrygian lifeways and for group identities reflected in these social practices. Giacomo Casucci considers foodways – specifically cooking practices – situating them in a regional context and evaluating them as a reflection of cultural identity (Chapter 7). Braden Cordivari, on the other hand, evaluates the practice of tumulus construction at the site of Gordion, stressing the connection to local elite identity maintenance, while challenging the notion of a Thracian-derived ethnicity (Chapter 8). Alessio Mantovan examines the diffusion of Phrygian Graywares into southern Cappadocia with evidence from the recent excavations at Kınık Höyük-Niğde, where imported table wares represent a significant part of the eighth-to-sixth-century elite ceramic assemblage (Chapter 9). Enrico Regazzoni challenges the “Phrygian-ness” of metal utensils, interpreted as serving ladles, discovered in Phrygian burial contexts; through these objects, he explores the role of the Phrygian polity – or lack thereof – in transmitting materials and practices associated with elite consumption to the east and west (Chapter 10). Based on the New Chronology of Phrygian Gordion, Katrin Euler-Sasseville challenges the traditionally understood developmental trajectory of terracotta roof tiles, suggesting that the Phrygian examples pre-date those from the Greek mainland and were, in fact, the inspiration for the later practices around the Aegean (Chapter 11).

Our third section features papers that evaluate exchange and interaction between the Phrygian highlands and the lands to the east, south, and west. To begin with, we turn our attention to the interface between Phrygia and Urartu, with two papers discussing the relations between the two Iron Age kingdoms. First, Mehmet Işıklı, Oğuz Aras, Ayşegül Akin Aras, and Mehmet Ali Özdemir provide a survey of the recent results from excavations at the Urartian city of Ayanis, aiming to provide an Urartian perspective on regional interactions in central Anatolia (Chapter 12). Annarita Bonfanti, Roberto Dan, and Andrea Cesaretti compare material traces of the relationship between Phrygia and Urartu, highlighting certain shared ceramic wares, metal objects, and stone artefacts and architecture (Chapter 13). Next, Adonice-Ackad Baaklini and Margaux Spruyt turn their attention towards potential interactions with Mesopotamia and investigate a range of evidence for practices of commensality, especially elite feasting and banqueting, as opportunities for displays of power in the Phrygian context, aiming to situate the polity and its practices within wider Near Eastern traditions (Chapter 14). Lâtife Summerer and Julia Koch, on the other hand, examine interactions with the north, providing an evaluation of material and

epigraphic connections between Phrygia and the Black Sea region, suggesting that it served as a middle ground for Phrygians and Greek colonists (Chapter 15). Finally, Winfried Held examines a Middle Phrygian-period limestone temple model from late eighth to mid-seventh century Daskyleion in comparison with actual temple architecture in western Anatolia, suggesting cultural relations throughout the region along the Aegean Sea (Chapter 16).

Our fourth section shifts focus to papers that seek to understand the use of monuments, scripts, and images in Phrygia and surrounding regions. Two papers consider the role of landscape monuments: James Osborne and Michele Massa examine peak sanctuaries and sacred mountains, alongside supporting archaeological data from the region between the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, evaluating the region of south-central Anatolia as a cultural interface between Phrygia and the Syro-Anatolian region (Chapter 17); Tamas Kisbali, on the other hand, analyses rock-cut monuments between the Phrygian highlands and the Aegean coast, both in their natural and built environments and in later textual accounts, suggesting that they served as monumental intersections of royal and divine power (Chapter 18). The transmission of certain avian imagery, specifically depicting birds of prey, is evaluated by Martina Derada in association with central Anatolian religion. She highlights the prominent connection of the symbol with Phrygian Matar and its distribution through the region, and contextualises recent discoveries from southern Cappadocia, which may reflect a legacy of Phrygian traditions (Chapter 19). The complex script environment of Iron Age Anatolia is central to several papers. Petra Goedegebuure, on the one hand, provides a thorough palaeographic and philological evaluation of the recently discovered TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK 1 inscription in order to reassert a late-ninth-to-eighth-century date for the inscription, and to suggest a Phrygian identity for (or component of) the Muška named in the text (Chapter 20). Ryan Schnell, on the other hand, examines the use of script as an identity marker, considering the juxtaposition of hieroglyphic and alphabetic systems in central Anatolia (Chapter 21). And lastly, Nino Luraghi considers the early development of Greek and Phrygian writing systems, placing them in the context of a process of script adoption and adaptation for use with different languages, with support from more distant processual comparanda from Iran and Sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 22).

Our fifth and final section is concerned with memory and reception in the Graeco-Roman world, as well as connections between Phrygia and the west and post-Phrygian Asia Minor more broadly. Antonis Kotsonas challenges the historicity of the traditional narrative of an Early Iron Age Balkan migration, employing a philological approach to illustrate the political motivations behind the construction of such narratives in the ancient Greek historical context, particularly considering the choices of the Macedonian rulers in western Anatolia (Chapter 23). Alberto Gandini then brings the concept of memory to the forefront, aiming to analyse the shifting geography of Phrygian memoryscapes in Graeco-Roman times, and to understand the political and cultural motivations behind diachronic variations in local memories of a Phrygian past (Chapter 24). The transmission and development of the cult of Meter is examined in western Anatolian, Greek, and Roman cultic contexts. Felix Pirson and Güler Ateş assess the development of the cult in the micro-region of Pergamon, as well as evidence for the cult's impact on the landscape and environment (Chapter 25). Following the cult to the west, Francesco Sorbello examines the cult of Meter Theon in Classical and Hellenistic Athens, paying specific attention to its political function and its reflection of Attic and Ionian identity with marked Anatolian

influences (Chapter 26). Bridgette Keslinke, on the other hand, considers the connection between commensality and the adoption and assimilation of Kybele into the Roman cultic context (Chapter 27). To conclude, two authors examine individual western Anatolian settlements in their Phrygian context. Paolo Maranzana provides an archaeological assessment of the site of Pessinus from the Late Bronze Age through the Roman Period, aiming to compare the site's history with the Classical narratives of a Phrygian foundation, and determining that, while the pre-Classical site may have been under the territorial control of Phrygia, Pessinus itself was not properly founded until the Achaemenid period (Chapter 28). And lastly, Grazie Semeraro provides new archaeological evidence from the Iron Age cemetery immediately to the north of Hierapolis-Pamukkale, allowing a greater understanding of the early history of the site and suggesting a Phrygian presence in the region (Chapter 29).

The sum of this volume aims to provide a reference work of recent research for all those engaged in Phrygian studies. While the collection of articles is certainly not comprehensive, we aimed to include scholars working on all aspects of history, archaeology, and philology related to Phrygia and its people, and hope that any gaps in our coverage will be understood as unfortunate happenstance and not intentional exclusion. We are incredibly pleased with the works produced by our contributing authors, and hope that you find their scholarship as rich and inspiring as we do. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow co-editors, the editorial staff of *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, all of our contributing authors, and of course all of you interested in the intriguing field of Phrygia and its culture.

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