

Not the Tomb of Gyges*

Describing the approach toward Sardis in the spring of 1699, the British antiquary Edmund Chishull wrote: 'We continue our journey through a spacious and fertile plain, curiously beset on each side the road with [a] variety of round hillocks, which from their number, figure, and situation, in so level a campaign, appear plainly to be artificial'.¹ The tumuli or burial mounds so described by Chishull still dominate the Hermus river plain opposite Sardis. Their modern name is Bin Tepe, or 'Thousand Mounds'.

The tumuli of this vast cemetery seem to range in date from the seventh or sixth to the fourth centuries BC, and they vary in size from 10 to 350 m. in diameter.² Three, however, of these mounds are clearly larger than the others. Because of their unusual size, these three mounds have commonly been taken to predate the Persian capture of Sardis in the mid-sixth century BC.³ For the conquering Persians would not, it is argued, have allowed their Lydian subjects to raise such imposing monuments over their dead; it is then further argued that these three mounds, the largest tombs in Lydia, were probably the tombs of Lydian kings.

Two literary references have been adduced in support of this argument. First is Herodotus's description of the tomb of Alyattes.⁴ This is unequivocal; Herodotus describes the tomb explicitly as an earthen mound, and he specifies its size and location in precise terms. His description matches the easternmost of the three giant tumuli closely, and the identification of this tumulus has been rendered even more secure by the recovery of datable objects from a tomb-chamber deep inside the mound.⁵

The second reference is less clear. It is a fragment of a poem by Hipponax, which seems to describe landmarks along the road running from east to west through Lydia. Here I reproduce Degani's edition of the text, with a conservative translation by John Pedley.⁶

* This paper is based on research conducted under the auspices of the Sardis Expedition and its sponsors, Harvard and Cornell Universities; it is a pleasure to thank the expedition's director, C. H. Greenewalt, Jr., both for permission to work on this subject, and for his kind advice and encouragement. I am also grateful to W.J. Tatum and M.B. Wallace for many helpful comments and suggestions. The arguments offered here were first presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in December, 1991 (abstract in *AJA* xcvi [1992] 347-48); an abbreviated version of this paper will appear in *AASOR*, in the preliminary report on the campaign of 1991 at Sardis.

¹ E. Chishull, *Travels in Turkey and back to England* (London 1747) 14.

² G.M.A. Hanfmann, *Sardis from prehistoric to Roman times* (Cambridge, MA 1983) 53-58; B. McLauchlin, *Lydian graves and burial customs* (Diss., Berkeley 1985) 13-54; C. Ratté, *Lydian masonry and monumental architecture at Sardis* (Diss., Berkeley 1989) 7-15, 157-89.

³ See, e.g., W.J. Hamilton, *Researches in Asia Minor, Pontus, and Armenia* (London 1842) 146; Hanfmann (n. 2) 56. Strabo (xiii 4.7) says that this cemetery contains 'the tombs of the Lydian kings'.

⁴ Hdt. i 93.

⁵ J.F.M. von Olfers, *Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1858) 549-50; Hanfmann

†τέαρε[.....]δεύειε† τὴν ἐπὶ Σμύρνης
Ἰθὶ διὰ Λυδῶν παρὰ τὸν Ἀττάλεω τύμβον
καὶ σῆμα Γύγωω καὶ ἰμεγαστρῦ† στήλην
καὶ μνήμα Τωτος, Μυτάλιδι πάλμυδος,
πρὸς ἥλιον δύνοντα γαστέρα τρέψας.

... by the road to Smyrna;
go through Lydia past the mound of Attales,
the tomb of Gyges .. and the marker
and memorial of Tos ...
turning your belly to the setting sun.

In 1963, G.M.A. Hanfmann, founding director of the Sardis Expedition, suggested that if the name Attales in line 2 is emended to Alyattes, and if it is assumed, as in Pedley's translation, that both the στήλη or marker and the μνήμα or memorial of lines 3-4 were parts of a single monument, then it is possible to understand this poem as referring to the three great mounds opposite Sardis.⁷ If this reading is correct, then the central one of these mounds (PLATE VI (a)), which rises higher on the horizon than any other tumulus at Bin Tepe, is the tomb of the founder of the Mermnad dynasty and king of Lydia from the early to the mid-seventh century BC, the legendary Gyges.⁸

The modern name of this great mound is Karniyarik Tepe. It is roughly 220 m. wide, and 50 m. high on its south side. The tentative identification of the mound as the tomb of Gyges and the hope that its great size would have protected it from looters led Hanfmann to choose Karniyarik Tepe as the focus of the Sardis Expedition's work at Bin Tepe in the mid-1960's.⁹

In 1964, work began on a tunnel dug into the south side of the mound (FIG. 1). 65 m. from the edge of the mound, the excavators encountered a curving limestone wall consisting of two courses of squared blocks surmounted by a large crowning moulding or 'bolster' course (PLATE VI (b) and FIG. 2). This wall was eventually traced over a distance of about 100 m. in branch tunnels dug to the right and left of the main tunnel. As exposed, it describes about one-third of the circumference of a circle c. 90 m. in diameter and concentric with the outside of the tumulus. The wall is thus apparently the crepis or retaining wall of an earlier and smaller (but still substantial) tumulus, buried beneath the present mound. In addition to the tunnels dug along this crepis wall, the main tunnel was continued to the centre of the mound, but when work was abandoned in 1966, the tomb chamber or chambers had never been found. As Hanfmann put it, 'in the battle of man against mound, the mound won'.¹⁰

(n. 2) 56-57; C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* ccxlix (1983) 26-27.

⁶ Hipponax fr. 7 Degani; J. Pedley, *Sardis M2: Ancient literary sources on Sardis* (Cambridge, MA 1972) 77 no. 280.

⁷ G.M.A. Hanfmann, *BASOR* clxx (1963) 52-3 n. 56.

⁸ On the chronology of the Lydian kings, H. Kaletsch, *Historia* vii (1958) 1-47.

⁹ Hanfmann (n. 2) 57-8.

¹⁰ G.M.A. Hanfmann, *Letters from Sardis* (Cambridge, MA 1972) 155. A geophysical survey of the interior of the mound was begun in 1992; the preliminary results of this survey will be presented in *AASOR*, in the preliminary report on the campaign of 1992.

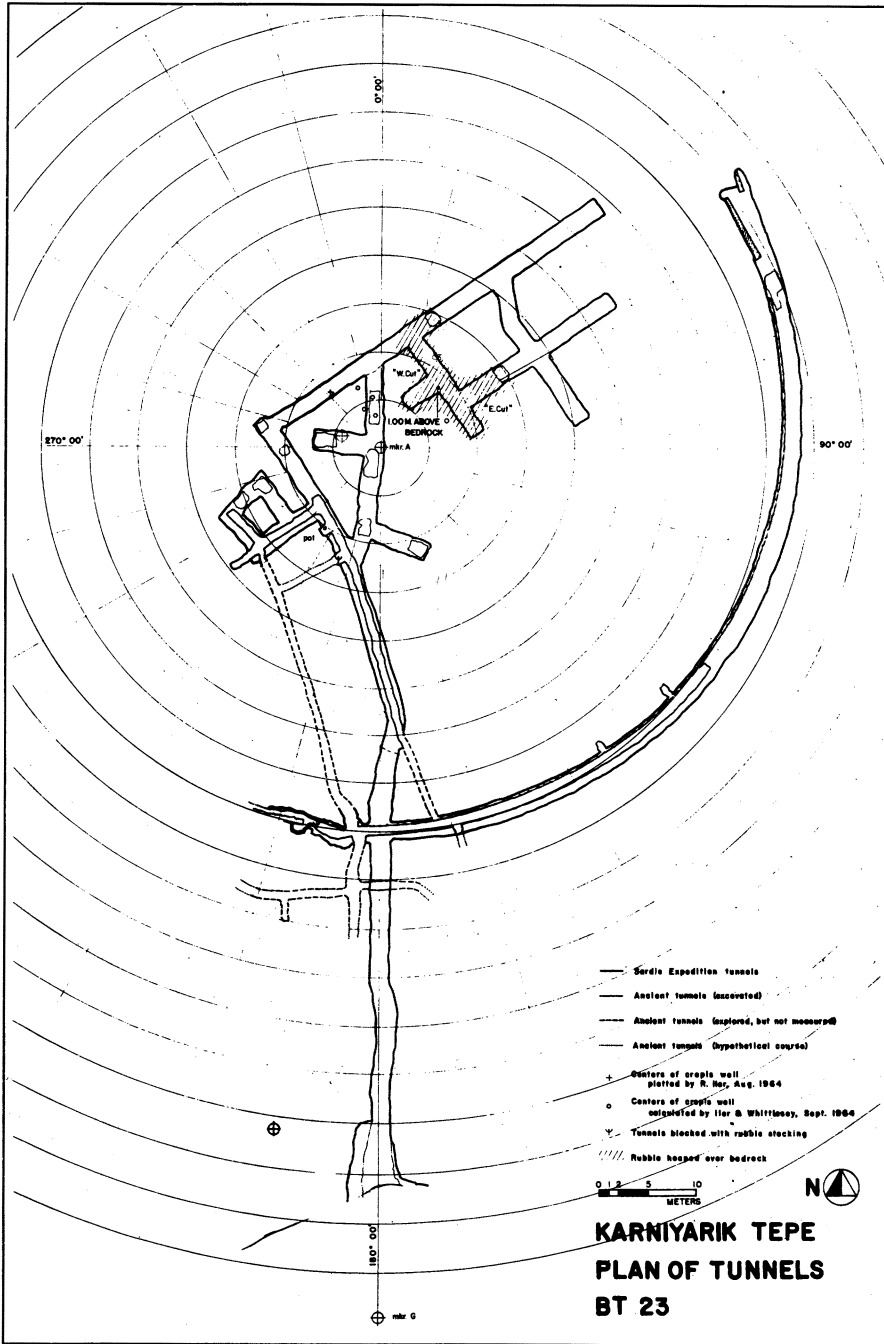


FIG. 1

In spite of this defeat, Hanfmann did find in the crepis wall buried beneath Karniyarik Tepe new evidence for the identification of the mound as the tomb of Gyges. This came in the form of a symbol or monogram inscribed in 25 places on the face of the wall: γ (FIG. 2). Hanfmann read this symbol, 'as a combination of two gammas and two upsilons, and thus as 'Gugu', the name of king Gyges in the Assyrian records'.¹¹ Now the crepis wall that bears these signs is unfinished, raising the possibility that the tomb to which it belongs was

also never completed. The appearance, moreover, of the wall is very fresh, as if the wall was buried immediately after it was built. Hanfmann tied these disparate threads of evidence together by suggesting, first, that the so-called Gugu signs inscribed on the face of the crepis of the original mound show that it was intended to be the tomb of Gyges, second, that work on this tumulus was

¹¹ G.M.A. Hanfmann, *BASOR* clxxvii (1965) 34. For the Assyrian records, see Pedley (n. 6) 81-2 nos. 292-93, 295.

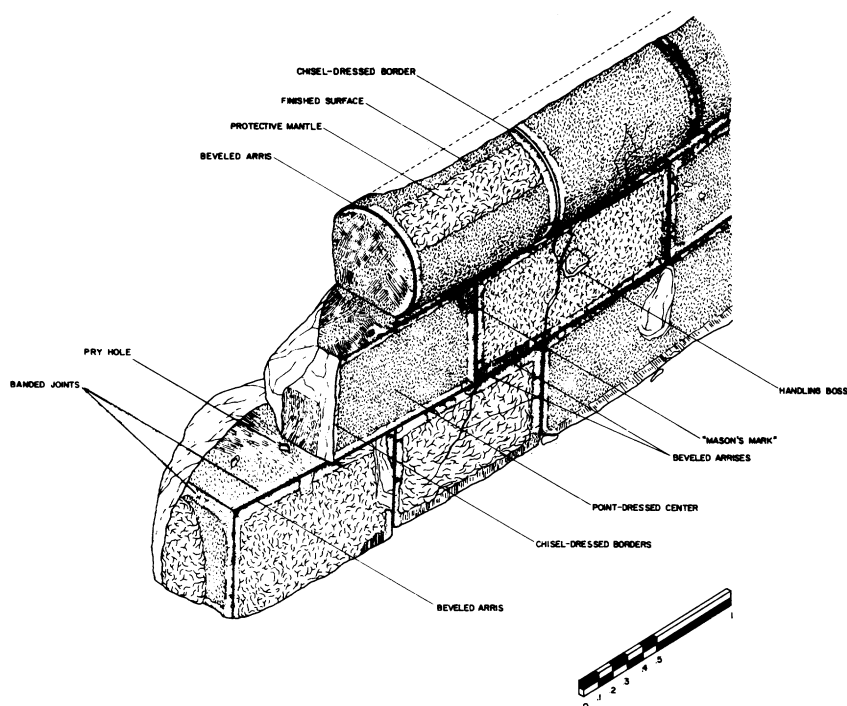


FIG. 2

begun during the king's lifetime, but not yet finished at the time of his death, and third, that the tomb was then enlarged by his successor, making it the landmark referred to by Hipponax.

The identification of Karniyarik Tepe as the tomb of Gyges is based largely on these two testimonia: the poem by Hipponax, and the monogram inscribed in the face of the early crepis wall. But Hanfmann's interpretations of both texts, while ingenious, are far from certain. In the fragment by Hipponax, for example, the emendation of Attales to Alyattes is problematic; Attales is attested as a Lydian name, borne by no less a figure than the brother of King Alyattes; thus the manuscript reading is not impossible, and may, as the *lectio difficilior*, be in fact preferable.¹² In addition, the $\sigma\tau\eta\lambda\eta$ and the $\mu\eta\eta\mu\alpha$ of lines 3-4 may well be separate monuments, especially, as Barbara McLauchlin has noted, if $\mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\sigma\tau\rho\upsilon$ is a personal name.¹³ Thus the first landmark mentioned is not necessarily the tomb of Alyattes, and the fragment may refer to four instead of three monuments; in either case, the correspondence with the triplet of great mounds at Bin Tepe breaks down. Finally, it is perhaps more likely *a priori* that the fragment refers to landmarks more widely spaced than the mounds of Bin Tepe. Both the $\sigma\tau\eta\lambda\eta$ of line 3 and the $\mu\eta\eta\mu\alpha$ of line 4, for example, have been identified with the rock-cut

relief in the Karabel pass near ancient Nymphaeum, about 25 miles from Sardis.¹⁴

The interpretation of the symbol inscribed in the face of the crepis wall is equally problematic. The name of King Gyges in Assyrian records is as Hanfmann noted indeed Gugu. But Assyrian records are the only places where that form of this name is attested, and as Neel Smith has shown, the native Lydian form, like the Greek, must have ended in a different vowel.¹⁵ According, moreover, to Roberto Gusmani, the combination of gamma and upsilon proposed by Hanfmann is epigraphically improbable;¹⁶ the symbol might be Greek, but as Smith has asked, why would Gyges 'adopt a ligature of Greek letters to write an Akkadian form of his thoroughly Lydian name'?¹⁷ I have wondered, as an alternative, whether the symbol might be read as two digammas, one right-side-up, the other up-side-down, and related to the 'WALWEL' inscriptions on early Lydian coins.¹⁸

¹⁴ The first to understand a reference to the Karabel relief was Th. Bergk (*Poetae Lyrici Graeci*⁴ ii [Leipzig 1882] 467); for discussion, see Masson (n. 12) and W.M. Ramsay, *Asiatic elements in Greek civilization* (New Haven 1929) 156-60. My thanks are due to C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., for drawing my attention to a more recent review of the evidence by W.K. Pritchett in his *Studies in ancient Greek topography* iv (Berkeley 1981) 267-81.

¹⁵ Smith (n. 12) 258-59 and 261-63 nn. 4-5.

¹⁶ R. Gusmani, 'Die neuen lydischen Funde seit 1964', *Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft und Kulturkunde* (Innsbruck 1968) 51; id., *Neue epichorische Schriftzeugnisse aus Sardis* (Cambridge, MA 1975) 69-70.

¹⁷ Smith (n. 12) 259.

¹⁸ In this case the monogram might well have the magical significance attributed to it by Gusmani (n. 16), especially if

¹² On Attales, Nic. Dam., *FGrH* 90 F 63. In addition to the commentaries of Degani and Pedley (n. 6) and of McLauchlin (n. 2), see especially D. Neel Smith, *Herodotus and the archaeology of Asia Minor* (Diss., Berkeley 1987) 258-59, and O. Masson, *Les fragments du poète Hipponax* (Paris 1962) 129-34.

¹³ McLauchlin (n. 2) 337 n. 54.

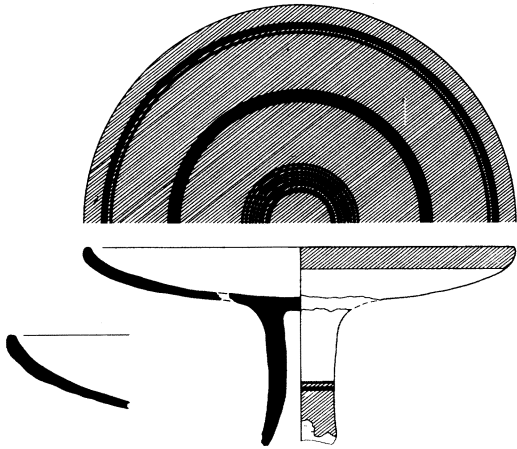


FIG. 3

At any rate, Hanfmann's readings of both texts are conjectural, as Hanfmann himself did not deny. His reconstruction of the building history of Karniyarik Tepe is equally uncertain. The argument that the mound is the tomb of a Lydian king is based on its size. Thus it does not apply to the original tumulus. And it is by no means necessary to assume, independent of the dubious literary and epigraphic testimonia, that the original tumulus and the enlarged mound were intended for the same person.

There is no other concrete evidence for the identification of the tomb; there is a lot, however, of independent evidence for its date. This comes in two forms, first, the masonry of the crepis wall buried beneath the present mound, second, pottery included in the fill of the tumulus itself. The masonry of the crepis wall demonstrates skilled and sophisticated craftsmanship (PLATE VI (b) and FIG. 2). The faces of the blocks are rusticated, with point-dressed central panels enclosed by smoothly chisel-drafted margins. Technical details visible upon closer examination include handling bosses, prymarks, a joining technique similar in some respects to anathyrosis, and very fine bevels or chamfers cut in both the horizontal and the vertical edges of the blocks. The vertical bevels are of particular interest, for most blocks are bevelled on only one side, and, according to a system first discerned in Greek architecture by A. Trevor Hodge, the bevels seem to record the order and direction in which the blocks were laid.¹⁹

The tradition of masonry construction represented by the Karniyarik Tepe crepis is also found in tumulus tomb chambers throughout Lydia, and in the public architecture of the city site of Sardis. The earliest datable example of this type of masonry in Lydian funerary architecture is the tomb of Alyattes, king from about 610 until his death in about 560 BC.²⁰ In Lydian civic architecture, this type of masonry is found in ter-

R.W. Wallace (*JHS* cviii [1988] 203-207) is correct in understanding 'WALWEL' as a form of the Lydian word meaning 'lion'.

¹⁹ A.T. Hodge, *AJA* lxix (1975) 333-47.

²⁰ See Kaletsch (n. 8) on the dates of the king's reign, and von Olfers, Hanfmann, and Greenewalt (n. 5) on his tomb.

race walls on the slopes of the acropolis of Sardis, as well as in the urban fortifications.²¹ The earliest securely datable example is a complex of walls that belonged to a bastion or tower flanking the Lydian city gate; fragments of Corinthian pottery found in a construction layer associated with one of these walls show that it was built after about 585 BC. Thus the datable Lydian parallels for the Karniyarik Tepe crepis all postdate the late seventh or early sixth century.

The same tradition of masonry construction is also familiar from Greek architecture. 'Rusticated' masonry exhibiting handling bosses, pry marks, anathyrosis, and—what are of particular interest—fine bevels or chamfers cut along the edges of the blocks occurs in Greece in both religious and defensive architecture of the Archaic and Classical periods. A famous example is the Archaic Artemision at Ephesus, the so-called Croesus-temple; other examples include the crepis of the Older Parthenon on the acropolis of Athens, as well as the north wall of the Athenian acropolis and the fortifications of Eleusis.²² As in Lydia, this set of construction techniques does not appear in Greece until the late seventh or early sixth century.²³ Independent of the question where these building methods originated, their appearance in Lydia is probably related to their roughly simultaneous development in Greece. This was after all the era when Lydia first gained lasting control over some of the Greek cities of western Asia Minor; both Alyattes and Croesus are also known to have sponsored building projects in Greek sanctuaries, including the temple of Artemis at Ephesus;²⁴ and Greek influence in another field of stone-working is obvious in Lydian sculpture.²⁵ This evidence suggests that the introduction and development of the building methods apparent in the Karniyarik Tepe crepis was a by-product of the growth of the Lydian kingdom, and of intensified relations with the Greek cities of the Aegean coast, during the reigns of Alyattes and Croesus, half a century after the death of Gyges.

The pottery found during the excavation of the Karniyarik Tepe tunnels, both in front of and behind the

²¹ Terrace walls near the top of the acropolis: G.M.A. Hanfmann (n. 2) 45-47. Terrace walls near the base of the acropolis: C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* suppl. xxv (1987) 72-84; Fortifications: C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* ccxlix (1983) 13-15; C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* suppl. xxv (1987) 31-33. On all these monuments, see also Ratté (n. 2) 18-24, 218-46.

²² Ephesus: the south cella wall, D.G. Hogarth, *Excavations at Ephesus. The archaic Artemisia* (London 1908) 256-58, pl. 11; cf. the central basis in the phase considered contemporary with the Croesus-temple, *ibid.*, 261-63; A. Bammer, *JÖAI* lviii Beiblatt (1988) 20-21. Older Parthenon, F.C. Penrose, *An investigation of the principles of Athenian architecture*² (London 1888) 18-20, pl. 9. Walls of the Athenian acropolis and Eleusis, W. Wrede, *Attische Mauern* (Athens 1933) pls. 23-33, 37-39; the vertical bevels on these walls have not to my knowledge been noted—at least in print—before now.

²³ J.J. Coulton, *Ancient Greek architects at work* (Ithaca 1977) 30-50.

²⁴ C. Ratté, 'Lydian contributions to Archaic East Greek architecture', in J. des Courtils and J.-C. Moretti ed. *Les grands ateliers d'architecture dans le monde égéen du VI^e siècle av. J.-C.* (Paris 1993) 1-12.

²⁵ G.M.A. Hanfmann and N.H. Ramage, *Sardis R2: sculpture from Sardis* (Cambridge, MA 1978) 14-18.

early crepis wall, is consistent with a date between the end of the seventh century and the middle of the sixth. The richest source of pottery discovered during the excavations of the mid-1960's was a layer of ashy earth running over the crepis wall. This layer yielded an assemblage of several partially restorable objects—pottery vessels and a lamp—which may be dated by comparison with Greek pottery and lamps, and with similar objects found in stratified contexts at the city site of Sardis, especially the mid-sixth century Persian destruction layer; both indices point to the late seventh or early to mid-sixth century BC.²⁶

Now the pottery from this ashy layer dates only the enlargement of the tumulus; it does not date the construction of the crepis wall, unless Hanfmann's suggestion that the former followed hard upon the latter was correct. In fact, Hanfmann's suggestion, which was based on the fine condition of the crepis wall, and which incidentally contradicts the mid-seventh century date proposed by Hanfmann himself, is supported by new evidence: a stemmed dish found in the summer of 1991 in the stone packing piled up behind the crepis wall (FIG. 3). As with the objects from the ashy layer, comparison between this dish and similar objects from independently dated layers, including the Persian destruction layer mentioned above, indicates a late seventh or early to mid-sixth century date.²⁷

Thus the archaeological evidence—the architecture and the finds—suggests that both the original and the enlarged tumulus should be dated roughly fifty to one hundred years later than the death of Gyges, that is, to the reigns of Alyattes or Croesus. It is not impossible that Karniyarik Tepe was a cenotaph or memorial for Gyges, raised up by his descendants, but it is more likely that the so-called Gugu sign is simply someone or something else's symbol, and if a personal monogram, more likely that of one of the masons who built the tomb than of the tomb's intended occupant.²⁸

²⁶ Pottery from Karniyarik Tepe, Hanfmann (n. 2) 57-58; id., *BASOR* clxxxii (1966) 27 fig. 23; for the Greek parallels (mostly east Greek), see in general C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., *Ritual dinners in early historic Sardis* (Berkeley 1978) 11-17; the lamp is similar to R.H. Howland, *Agora IV. Greek lamps and their survivals* (Princeton 1958) Type 12A. In addition to the ceramic evidence, a radiocarbon date of 610 plus or minus 90 BC was obtained from charcoal included in the same ashy layer (radiocarbon dating by M. Tamers of Beta Analytic Inc.). Pottery from the Persian destruction layer, C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* suppl. xxv (1987) 25-31, fig. 12; *ibid.*, 62-70, fig. 12; C.H. Greenewalt, Jr., et al., *BASOR* suppl. xxvi (1990) 143-55. The date of the Persian destruction layer is established by the historical circumstances, and by two Attic black-figure cups included in the layer (N.H. Ramage, *AJA* xc (1989) 419-24). The simply decorated local Lydian pottery vessels found both in the Persian destruction layer and at Karniyarik Tepe are less independently diagnostic; vessels of these types do not seem to occur in deposits postdating the mid-sixth century, but similar vessels are found in layers which may be as early as the late seventh century—thus the wide range of dates adopted here.

²⁷ Sardis inv. no. P91.9/9857. Diam. 0.230 m., p.H. 0.085 m. Pinkish-red micaceous fabric; decoration in black glaze (shown on the drawing as solid black) on red slip (shown on the drawing as hatched). Cf. the comparanda already noted (n. 26).

²⁸ Whatever its significance, this sign does seem to be associated with specific masons or teams of masons, for it does not occur indiscriminately on the wall, but only in certain areas

The question of the identification of a sixth-century Karniyarik Tepe is a tantalizing one, but it must be remembered that the intended occupant of the original tumulus and the actual occupant of the enlarged tumulus were not necessarily the same, and that the arguments for identifying the enlarged tumulus as a kingly tomb do not necessarily apply to the smaller mound encircled by the crepis wall. Nevertheless, the tomb in both its phases must have been made for a person of prominence, and it may not have been inappropriate for a prince or princess of the royal house.

And despite the title of this paper, I would like to offer, *exempli gratia*, a positive suggestion. Apart from archaeology, most of what we know about Archaic Lydia we know from Herodotus. The centrepiece in many ways of Herodotus's treatment of Lydian history is his imaginary account of the meeting between Croesus, who claimed to be the happiest of mortals, and Solon, who refused to admit that Croesus or any other living man might be considered truly happy, only fortunate.²⁹ Soon after this meeting, according to Herodotus, 'a dreadful vengeance ... came upon Croesus, to punish him ... for considering himself the happiest of men'.³⁰ His son and heir apparent Atys was killed in a hunting accident.³¹

As a whole, this story is clearly fictional, but it may nevertheless be based on a kernel of truth—the death of a Lydian prince.³² Herodotus says only that upon the death of Atys, Croesus buried his son 'as was natural (ὡς οἰκὸς ἦν)'.³³ It is left to us to imagine what Croesus would have considered natural, and I only note that it would only be consistent with what we know of Croesus for him to have commandeered a tumulus already under construction and made of it as his son's tomb one of the largest mounds at Bin Tepe, and that this identification would be equally consistent with the architectural and archaeological evidence for the date and building history of Karniyarik Tepe.³⁴ It is, therefore, possibly the tomb of a Lydian royal; it is surely not the tomb of Gyges.

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attributable, on the evidence of the bevets cut in the edges of the blocks, to specific working teams. See Ratté (n. 2) 77-82.

²⁹ Hdt. i 30-32.

³⁰ Hdt. i 34, trans. Rawlinson.

³¹ Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* vii 2.20, presumably based on the Herodotean story.

³² See, e.g., D. Asheri ed. *Erodoto. Le Storie I* (Milan 1988) 287-88.

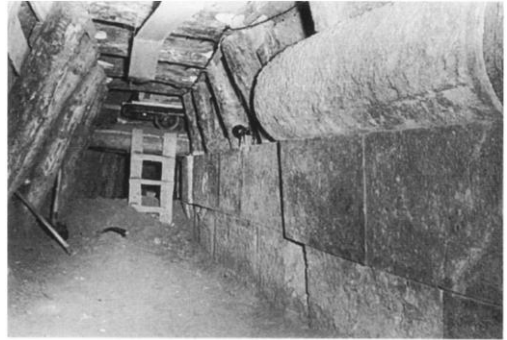
³³ Hdt. i 45. On the phrase, ὡς οἰκὸς ἦν, see J.E. Powell, *A lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge 1938) s.v. οἰκα (*contra* LSJ s.v. οἰκα, who would take ὡς οἰκὸς ἦν to mean 'it is likely' and Rawlinson, who translates 'with such honours as fitted the occasion'; cf. R.A. McNeal ed. *Herodotus, Book I* [Lanham, MD 1986] 126).

³⁴ This is nor the first attempt to 'identify' the tomb of Atys; the words μνήμα τῶτος in line 4 of Hipponax *fr.* 7 (Degani) were emended by Schneidewin to μνήμα τ' Ἄττος and by Bergk to μνήματ' Ἄττος; see Degani ad loc. and Masson (n. 12) 133. Either reading if correct would likely preclude the suggestion proposed here, but as we have seen the difficulties of this text are grave.

NOT THE TOMB OF GYGES



(a) Karniyarık Tepe. General view looking north.



(b) Karniyarık Tepe. View of crepis wall.



*EPOIESEN, EGRAPSEN,
AND THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE VASE TRADE*

(c) Krater by the Komaris Painter.



PALAMEDES SEEKS REVENGE

(d) Attic black-figure neck amphora,
British Museum B 240.