A Conservation Management Plan for Preserving Gordion and Its Environs

BY AYŞE GÜRSAN-SALZMANN AND EVIN H. ERDER

IN 1950 a Penn Museum team under Rodney Young’s direction began excavations at the site of Gordion in central Turkey, the capital of the Phrygian kingdom and the power center of Midas, famous for his alleged golden touch. The early excavations focused primarily on the Iron Age remains (9th–7th centuries BCE), and yielded a wealth of material both on the Citadel and within the “Midas Mound,” now believed to be the burial place of Midas’ father. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Gordion excavations, and it is still one of the Museum’s most active projects.

Although Young’s discoveries were sensational, the ancient architecture he found is now in poor condition due primarily to two factors: post-excavation exposure to the natural elements, and regional rural development throughout the ancient landscape. What the site needed, but did not have, was a Conservation Management Plan that encompassed Gordion and its environs as well as the neighboring village of Yasshöyük. It was equally important to ensure that the village and municipal mayors subscribed to the plan, along with the Gordion excavation team, so that all of the area’s inhabitants would feel as if they were stakeholders in its success.

With this strategy in mind, we began the development of a five-year Conservation Management Plan for the Gordion region, conducted under a signed agreement with Ankara’s Middle East Technical University (METU) Faculty of Architecture, the Penn Museum, and Penn’s School of Design. Conservation Management Plans (hereafter CMP) are now legally required for all World Heritage Sites in Turkey (e.g. Mount Nemrut, Cappadocia, Hattusas, Hieropolis, etc.), and the formulation of such a plan to identify and manage the cultural landscape of Gordion is essential if the site is to achieve World Heritage designation in the future. Such a plan can only succeed if it is multi-disciplinary, involving archaeology, architecture, ethno-archaeology, conservation, archaeobotany, and the cooperation of local officials.
Conservation efforts on the Citadel Mound are being conducted under the direction of Frank Matero, Penn Professor of Architecture and Historic Preservation, who has focused on stabilizing the Early Phrygian Gate and the Terrace Buildings (9th century BCE). The on-going work involves conditions mapping and structural monitoring for one year, as well as the installation of “soft” vegetation caps for protection of exposed wall tops. Laser scanning of the monumental Gate has also been completed, and new, bilingual signage and viewing platforms are being designed and constructed by Professor Lindsay Falck, also from Penn Design, so that the citadel’s remains will be more accessible and comprehensible to visitors.

Especially important are the monumental burial mounds or tumuli (approximately 111) that surround the site. Intensive agriculture and herding, while an economic necessity, have severely eroded several of the tumuli, and the development of a strategy for their improved protection is essential. But organizing an effective system of protection is not a simple matter: our preliminary discussions with the municipal mayor and local planners have led us to believe that “buffer zones” have to be created around the tumuli to prevent agricultural activity from occurring over and around them. This will require negotiations between the villagers and the municipal and national administrators, ideally leading to the exchange of “tumulus land” for comparable agricultural land elsewhere.

Further discussions, now underway with local authorities at the municipality of the regional capital in Polath, will hopefully promote such an exchange and thereby prevent the tumuli’s rapid erosion. In the meantime, we have employed a simple protective method against erosion, developed by Dr. Naomi F. Miller of the Penn Museum, which involves growing local...
grasses on Tumulus MM. This works exceptionally well when combined with a drainage system and a fence to keep away the local sheep and Angora goats (which number around 1,000).

As the above discussion demonstrates, establishing a solid working relationship with the local community is essential to successful conservation, and this is one of the CMP’s highest priorities. As a result, an archaeological survey of the surrounding villages, especially Gordion’s neighbor Yassıhöyük, constitutes a major component of the CMP. The survey, under the co-directorship of the authors—Dr. Evin H. Erder (METU) and Dr. Ayse Gürsan-Salzmann (Penn Museum)—began in 2007–2008 with the establishment of a GIS database, which provides a preliminary geographic map of a 40 square km area that includes Gordion, surrounding tumuli, and the villages of Yassıhöyük, Çekirdeksiz, Beylikköprü, Kiranharmanı, Sazlılar, and others. Using the cumulative ethnographic and archaeological information as guidelines, in the next three-year period all historic, environmental, and cultural components in this area will be surveyed and mapped to facilitate their conservation and presentation to the Turkish public.

Our attention thus far has focused primarily on Yassıhöyük, a mid-size central Anatolian village of nearly 400 people, with 80 households. The economy is predominantly agro-pastoral, although the pastoral component has been diminishing in favor of farming during the last 40 years. The excavations at Gordion in the 1950s brought more than a hundred workers to the area, and some chose to settle in Yassıhöyük.

Some of the men and women involved in the excavations during the last 60 years have gained an understanding of its importance, but this is not the case for the majority of the inhabitants. In order to foster a shared sense of stewardship, we are developing educational programs in most of the surrounding village communities to increase local awareness of the region’s cultural heritage.

In addition, we have drafted a village map using GIS, and compiled an inventory of all traditional household units and their installations (sheepfolds, storage areas, outhouses, etc.). Verbal descriptions of house construction techniques were recorded and subsequently digitized, as was historic socio-economic information provided by the villagers. This inventory of local traditional architecture, as the first step toward the conservation of the region’s vernacular architecture, serves...
several purposes. If documented in a systematic way, these buildings provide clues to the history and development of the region, from the Ottoman period to the present, as well as local building traditions during most of the last century.

Other planned activities include teaching the villagers to become tour guides, using multi-media devices to present the site and the village at the local museum, printing colorful educational brochures, and setting up a women’s cooperative for the sale of local products and handicrafts. Yassihöyük villagers will play a pivotal role in all of these events, and the preservation of the ancient landscape will consequently be entwined with local economic development. Such a \textit{milieu}, in which the region’s inhabitants are closely connected to and partially dependent on their cultural heritage, will promote a powerful local stewardship that is both collaborative and sustainable.

\textbf{Acknowledgments}

Our deep appreciation goes to the villagers of Yassihöyük and the Mayor’s office in Polatlı. The Gordion Conservation Management Plan has been generously sponsored by the Turkish Science Foundation (TÜBİTAK, 2008), Charles K. Williams, the 1984 Foundation, the Morgan Family Foundation, the J. M. Kaplan Fund, and the University of Pennsylvania.

\textbf{For Further Reading}


To learn more about Gordion, see \textit{Expedition} 51-2, Summer 2009 (special issue on Gordion), or visit sites.museum.upenn.edu/gordion.