

Rogier E.M. van der Heijden

Empire and Imagination in Roman Sardis: The Wadi B Temple of the Imperial Cult as Mnemonic Cluster

Abstract: This chapter studies the entanglement of local imperial history and imperial worship in the Roman-period city of Sardis, modern-day Türkiye. In constructing its historical narrative and civic identity Sardis differentiated itself from surrounding cities, which mostly took Greek (mythological) figures and events for promotional strategies and the formation of collective memory. Sardis' strategies of identity formation and its uses of imperial and mythological pasts were responses to the competition that arose between the cities of the province of Asia in the context of the imperial framework of the Roman empire. Looking at archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence from the period, this chapter discusses to what extent a post-imperial Lydian memoryscape was constructed in the provincially-organised temple of the imperial cult at Sardis. I will argue that the sanctuary dedicated for the veneration of the emperors in the very centre of the city not only served as a focal point of imperial allegiance, but also of the juxtaposition of contemporary imperial power with civic, post-imperial history and memory.

Introduction: An Ancient Lydian City in the Roman Empire

Lydian Sardis was already an ancient city in the Roman period, having reached its geopolitical zenith under the rule of the Mermnad dynasty during the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. According to Greek and Roman writers, king Croesus was the wealthiest man of his time, thanks to the gold that flowed in the small river Pactolus from the Tmolus mountain range south of the city onto the Hermus plain north of the city.¹ Between the reigns of the illustrious kings Gyges and Croesus (the first and last kings of the Mermnad dynasty respectively), the

¹ Crawford H. Greenewalt, Jr., "Gold and Silver Refining at Sardis / Sardeis'te Altın ve Gümüş Arıtımı," in *Lidyalılar ve dünyaları / The Lydians and Their World*, ed. Nicholas D. Cahill (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), 134–41.

Lydians from Sardis conquered much of western Anatolia, establishing an emerging multi-ethnic empire that consisted of various Greek and Anatolian peoples.² Around 550 BCE, they encountered an even more powerful opponent in the east in the form of the Persians, who defeated the Lydians, sacked Sardis, and captured their king, Croesus.³ Sardis and Lydia would never be independent again, but would be ruled subsequently by the Persians, Alexander the Great and his successors, the Pergamene Kingdom, and the Romans.

Since the start of the modern excavation series in the 1950s it has become clear that cultural memory in (Roman) Sardis was heavily focused on the past belonging to the period of the Lydian empire. According to George Hanfmann, one of the earlier excavation directors at Sardis, archaic Sardiens suffered from a “regular Leontomania,” referring to the use and reuse of lion statues in the city, as the lion was the symbol of Lydian kingship and its association with the indigenous goddess Cybele.⁴ This preoccupation resurfaced during the Roman imperial period, when Sardis witnessed a significant increase in expressions of pride and remembrance of its Lydian past, prominently advertised on coins and in central public spaces. At the same time, the Persian and Hellenistic histories were largely forgotten.⁵ Such a development of supposedly increased attention for the local past was not odd for a city in the Roman period; in fact, this was a widespread phenomenon all across the eastern Mediterranean.

This chapter focuses on imperial cultural memory in one such public space, the first-century CE “Wadi B” temple of the imperial cult in the city centre of the city of Sardis. I will show that this sanctuary from the Roman imperial period combined not only Roman-period Sardis with the veneration of the emperor, but that it connected this with Sardis’ illustrious past, thereby creating an expectation

² Although the Lydian kingdom existed for multiple centuries, its “imperial” phase lasted less than a century. At the same time, its afterlife was long-lasting and carried meaning beyond the borders of the Lydian empire. For short-term empires, see Robert Rollinger, Julian Degen and Michael Gehler, “Approaching Short-Term Empires in World History, a First Attempt,” in *Short-Term Empires in World History*, ed. Robert Rollinger, Julian Degen, and Michael Gehler, Universal- und kulturhistorische Studien. Studies in Universal and Cultural History (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2022), 1–22.

³ Christopher H. Roosevelt, “Iron Age Western Anatolia: The Lydian Empire and Dynastic Lycia,” in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel T. Potts (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 896–913.

⁴ George M.A. Hanfmann, “The Sculpture of the Prehistoric, Lydian, and Persian Periods,” in *Sculpture from Sardis. The Finds through 1975*, ed. George M. A. Hanfmann and Nancy H. Ramage, Sardis Report 2 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 20–23.

⁵ For a typology of “forgetting” in opposition to “remembering” see Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Walstein Verlag, 2016).

of the present and envisioning the city's future.⁶ As the interaction with the region's past was an inherently communal affair, and because this was a past far removed from anyone's lived experience in the Roman imperial period, this chapter will rely on the concept of cultural memory as developed over the last three decades (see "Introduction," this volume).⁷ Furthermore, I will argue that the Wadi B temple formed visible, symbolic, and mnemonic connections with multiple features in the landscape surrounding the city, thereby tying the present of imperial worship to a past of imperial (and mythological) might.

To this end, I will first start the references to history and myth in the Wadi B sanctuary, as they were inscribed on statue bases of emperors and benefactors and sculpted into the architectural decoration of the temple. Second, I will turn to a 2016 chapter by archaeologist and historian Christina Williamson, in which she shows how the Attalid kings of Pergamum ideologically tied the acropolis on which they built their palace and main sanctuary to visible geographical elements in the surroundings of the city that were associated with myths; I will show that something similar can be seen in the Wadi B sanctuary at Sardis, from where the grave mounds of the Lydian kings and the mythological landscape of the Catacecaumene to the north and the east of Sardis were visible.⁸ Third, I will discuss how these memories were "activated" and reiterated in relation to the religious activity in the sanctuary. The final section will explore the temporal visions resulting from the concentration and activation of Sardinian memory in connection with its place in the imperial order, whether imagined or not, showing the entanglement of memories and histories. After all, the past is not just the past, but always perceived from the present with eyes on the present and the future.⁹

6 Gregor Feindt et al., "Entangled Memory," *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 29.

7 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Beck'sche Reihe 7 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992); Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999); Feindt et al., "Entangled Memory"; for a recent methodological discussion of memory and ritual in ancient Greek sanctuaries, summarizing past methodological advances, see Efrosyni Boutsikas, *The Cosmos in Ancient Greek Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 21–30.

8 For the inherent relation between memory and space, see e.g. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies, Media and Cultural Memory/Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung* 8 (Berlin; New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

9 Feindt et al., "Entangled Memory," 40–41.

The Wadi B Temple of the Imperial Cult

Sardis was built against the slopes of a spur of the Tmolus (Boz Dağ) mountain range in modern-day western Türkiye. People had been living on the spurs of the Sardian acropolis since the Iron Age, where they transformed the spurs into terraces that cascaded down from the hill. In the archaic period, these terraces featured elite housing and large complexes that have been interpreted as the dwellings of the Lydian kings and the Lydian elite.¹⁰ The Wadi B temple, called after the ephemeral riverbed in this area, was built on one such terrace (Figure 1, no. 79).

The temple was discovered in the early 1980s, but only a small part of the complex was excavated at first.¹¹ On the basis of stylistic elements, the use of building materials and techniques, and the available knowledge of the history of Sardis, the temple has been dated to the second or third quarter of the first century CE.¹² The complex consisted of a broad open space of around 100 by 150 metres, a richly decorated temple on the south side of the plaza, and a porticus on the west, north, and east side of the terrace.¹³ The only archaeologically attested entrance was located on the north side; from the lower city, a monumental staircase led up to terrace, creating a vista between the staircase and the temple building itself. The temple's stylobate – the top of the platform on which the columns were placed – was 5.6 metres higher than the floor level of the plaza, commandeering the attention of the entire complex and giving the temple an increased monumentality within the already sizeable sanctuary. East of the sanctuary lay the possibly contemporary Theatre-Stadium complex (Figure 1, no. 25-26), only separated from the sanctuary terrace by a road leading from the lower to the upper city.¹⁴

The finding of an inscription belonging to the architrave of the temple mentioning the Senate in Rome (“σύνκ[λητ- (sic)”) has led to the interpretation of the

10 Nicholas D. Cahill, “The Lydian Palaces at Sardis in the Light of New Research,” *Türk Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Dergisi* 86, no. 2 (2023): 11–41.

11 Christopher Ratté, Thomas N. Howe, and Clive Foss, “An Early Pseudodipteral Temple at Sardis,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, no. 1 (1986): 45–68.

12 First argued by Ratté, Howe and Foss, “An Early Pseudodipteral Temple,” 59; this dating was confirmed and specified to the middle of the first century CE by recent excavations: Nicholas D. Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple of Roman Sardis: A Sanctuary from the First Century Through Late Antiquity,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 128 (2024): 397.

13 For a detailed archaeological map of Field 55, see Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 383, fig. 2.

14 Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 383–386.

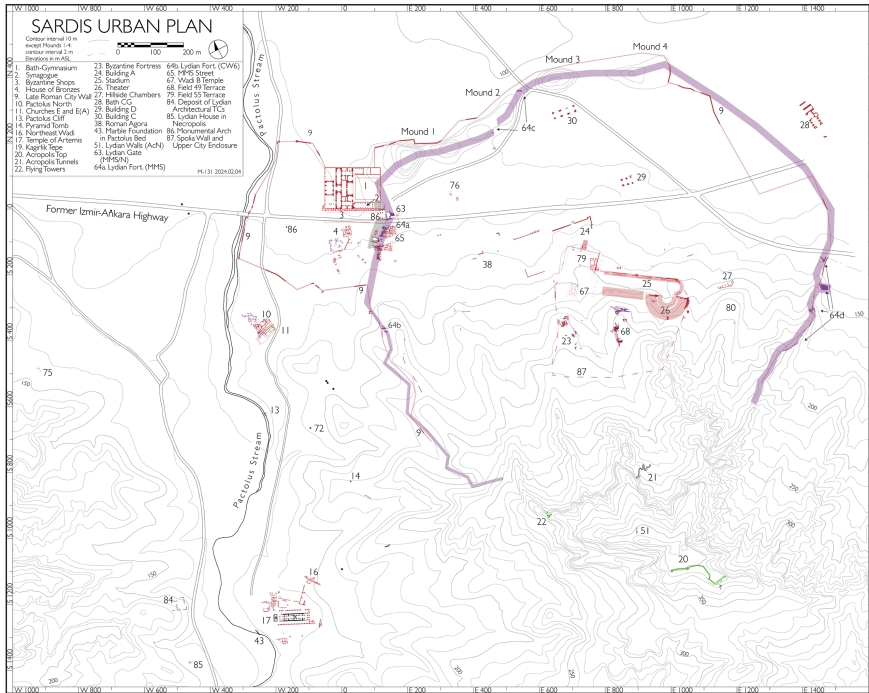


Figure 1: Archaeological map of Sardis. ©Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and Fellows of Harvard College.

sanctuary as a temple for the imperial cult.¹⁵ The sanctuary was in use until the second half of the fourth century CE, judging from the material found.¹⁶ Over the last 20 years, new excavations have been conducted, most importantly on the eastern side of the complex, where in late antiquity a villa was built from material that origi-

¹⁵ *I.Sardis* 2, 421; Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 392–393. It is important to note, however, that all the letters on this inscription were reconstructed from the holes into which the bronze letters of the inscription were fixed.

¹⁶ The original report stipulated that the temple was destroyed by natural circumstances halfway the second century CE, but this has been corrected by recent excavations and a reinterpretation of the coins found in this area in the 1980s: Ratté, Howe, and Foss, “An Early Pseudodipteral Temple,” 67; Jane DeRose Evans, *Coins from the Excavations at Sardis*, Sardis Monograph 13 (Cambridge MA: Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, 2018); Georg Petzl, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions, Part II: Finds from 1958 to 2017*, Sardis Monograph 14 (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2019), 63–67; Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 402–403.

nally belonged to the temple complex.¹⁷ Much of the excavated material comes from a context of reuse in and around the late antique villa; in particular, the so-called “spolia wall,” a monumental wall on the east side of the complex which possibly functioned as an “intraurban fortification,” contained a significant number of architectural material and honorific monuments with inscriptions.¹⁸ A relatively large part of the inscriptions was dedicated to priests of the imperial cult, and the appearance of the Roman Senate on the abovementioned architrave block makes it likely that a significant part of the epigraphic material found in this area belonged to the Wadi B temple that was dedicated to the imperial cult.

Inscribed and Carved Cultural Memory

Imperial cult temples in this part of the Roman empire were usually organised and administered by a league of cities (κοινόν). The grants for temples of the imperial cult, however, were issued by the Senate and the emperor.¹⁹ One type of source material that stands out are the large number of honorific inscriptions with a set of titles with which the council and the people’s assembly described itself and the city. With the emperor as the symbolic and physical “lynchpin” of the system of benefaction and honouring in the entire Mediterranean, the erection of a statue of a benefactor with base and inscription in the sanctuary of the imperial cult tied the honoured individual to the emperor and the empire. It also tied the dedicating individual or institution, creating a relational triangle of empire and emperor, the benefactor, and the city through the council and assembly as dedicator.²⁰

One well-preserved statue base with dedicatory inscription belonged to a statue of Flavius Eugenator, who served as fiscal procurator in the administration of the province of Thrace. The inscription is telling for the advertisement of civic cultural memory and myth in Sardis and in Asia Minor. During the second and early third century CE, cities started to decorate the phrase “The council and the people of the

¹⁷ On the archaeology of Field 55 in late antiquity, see Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 403–417.

¹⁸ Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 404.

¹⁹ For the imperial cult in Asia Minor, see Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Barbara Burrell, *Neokoroi. Greek Cities and Roman Emperors*, Cincinatti Classical Series 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

²⁰ Anna Heller and Onno M. van Nijf, “Introduction: Civic Honours, from Classical to Roman Times,” in *The Politics of Honour in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire*, ed. Anna Heller and Onno M. van Nijf, Brill Studies in Greek and Roman Epigraphy 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 15.

. . .” with titles and adjectives that showed their history and uniqueness. In Sardis, an honorific inscription from this period would typically look as follows:

Φλ(άβιον) Εὐγενέ[τορα], τὸν
 κράτιστον [ἐπ]ίτρο-
 πον τῶν Σ[εβα]στῶ[ν],
 4 ἄνδρα εὐπ[ρεπ]ῆ(?) κα[ὶ]
^{vv} δικαιοῦτα[το]ν ^{vv}
 ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δ[ῆ]μος τῆ[ς]
 αὐτόχθονος [κ]αὶ πρω-
 8 τόχθονος καὶ ἱερᾶ[ς]
 [τ]ῶν θεῶν καὶ μητ[ρ]ο-
 πόλεως τῆς Ἀσίας κα[ὶ]
 Λυδίας ἀπάσης καὶ Ἑλ-
 12 λάδος κὲ δις νεωκό[ρου]
 τῶν Σεβαστῶν κατὰ
 [τ]ὰ δόγματα τῆς ἱερᾶ[ς]
 συν[κλή]του καὶ τὰς [κρί]-
 16 σεις τῶν αὐτοκρατ[ό]-
 ρων, [φ]ίλης κα[ὶ] συμ-
 μάχ[ου] Ὑ[ω]μα[ί]ων κα[ὶ]
 οἰκ[είας] τῶ[ν] κυ[ρί]ων
 20 ἡμῶ[ν] Σαρδιανῶ[ν]
^v μη[τροπόλε]ως ^v
vacat []

The Council and the People of the *metropolis* of the Sardians, *autochthonous* and *protochthonous* and sacred to the gods and *metropolis* of Asia and of all Lydia and of Hellas, and keeper of two Koinon temples of the Augusti by virtue of the decrees of the sacred Senate [and the decisions] of the [emperors - - - (honoured)] Fl(avius) Eugene[tor], *vir egregius*, *procurator Augustorum*, a decent(?) and very lawful man.²¹

This set of city titles can be divided up into two parts. The first part signified the city’s illustrious past and the second its supposedly special relationship with the

²¹ *I.Sardis* 2, 382–83. The inscription was published as two separate honorific inscriptions with the exact same text, but four of the six fragments of 383 (a, c, d, f) fit the cut marks of 382 exactly – fragment (e) joins fragment (d) and fragment (b) joins fragment (a); See Georg Petzl, “Addenda and Corrigenda to *I.Sardis* II”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (forthcoming 2024 or 2025); trans. author based on Petzl, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, 71; The Greek κράτιστος (literally “strongest,” “best,” “most excellent”) is a translation of the Latin *vir egregius* (“excellent man”) which grew into a title of honour for imperial officials in the second half of the second century CE: Meret Strothmann, “Vir Egregius,” in *Brill’s New Pauly: Antiquity Volumes*, ed. Hubert Canci, Helmut Schneider and Christine F. Salazar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), accessed 21 May 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e12205440.

Romans, thereby suggesting an intimate connection between Sardis and the Roman emperor. In what I call the “Lydian part,” Sardis highlighted selected episodes from its illustrious history; it was a *metropolis*, which literally means “mother city.” In the Roman period, the word *metropolis* could also point to a central position in a region or an important administrative function within its province, thereby not excluding possible ambiguities in its meaning.

The citizens of Sardis, too, chose to be not too precise with the use of the word in its inscriptions. Whereas *metropolis* of Asia signified its important administrative function in the province, “*metropolis* of Lydia” pointed to its role as most important city in the region of Lydia culturally, economically, and historically. Sardis was known throughout Antiquity as the capital city of the glorious Lydian empire, as we can tell from the many descriptions of different ancient authors.²² The third *metropolis* claim is an odd one and a bold one, in which Sardis claimed to be the mother city of Hellas, a term for the Greek mainland. The reference creates ambiguity on purpose, but most likely it referred to the myth of Pelops as prince of Lydia.²³ As such, Sardis attempted to claim its status as mother city, but used the *totum pro parte* Hellas to insinuate its superior antiquity to the cities of the Greek mainland. Simultaneously, it is possible that Sardis’ metropolitan statuses are references to their memberships of three leagues of cities with their own imperial cults, namely the abovementioned Asian *koinon*, the recently suggested (mostly Lydian) Koinon of the Thirteen Cities, and the Panhellenion, a league of cities with united in their Greek identity with its headquarters in Athens.²⁴

By using the words αὐτόχθων (“autochthonous”) and πρωτόχθων (“protochthonous”), Sardis tried to claim a superior antiquity over its rivals in the region.

22 For a collection of literary texts on Sardis and its history, see John G. Pedley, *Ancient Literary Sources on Sardis*, Sardis Monograph 2 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

23 Pind., *Ol.* 1.24; Paus. 5.1.6; Philostr., *Imag.* 1.17; 1.30; Nic. Dam., *FGrH* 90f10; Eur. Schol., *Or.* 5.01: “Τμώλου καὶ Πλουτοῦς υἱὸς ὁ Τάνταλος, Ταντάλου δὲ καὶ Εὐρυανάσσης Πέλοψ, Βροτέας, Νιόβη”: “Tantalos was the son of Tmolus and Ploutos; Pelops, Broteas and Niobe the children of Tantalos and Euryanassa.” Trans. author; Ath. 14.21 is more ambiguous about Pelops’ origin; Strab. 7.7, on the other hand, argued that Pelops was from neighbouring Phrygia; regardless of Pelops’ actual origins, a Sardian embassy referred to his Lydian identity already in a Senate meeting in 26 CE, when it plead its case for the grant to build a temple for the imperial cult to emperor Tiberius: Tac., *Ann.* 4.55. For Tiberius this was not convincing enough, as he decided to give the grant to Sardis’ rival Smyrna (modern-day İzmir).

24 For the Koinon of the Thirteen Cities at Sardis, see Martin Hallmannsecker, “The Ionian Koinon and the Koinon of the 13 Cities at Sardis,” *Chiron* 50 (2020): 1–27; Christopher Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 117–18, has argued that the phrase “*metropolis* of Asia, Lydia and Hellas” must also have referred to the story that the first Lydian king was the son of Zeus and Earth (Gē), and suggests that the elaborate phrase could have been the result of a triumph over a rival.

Αὐτόχθων means “from the earth itself” or “indigenous,” and conveyed an almost strictly mythological (and thereby old and divine) association. Πρωτόχθων, on the other hand, meaning “first of the earth,” can be seen as both an extension and an augmentation of αὐτόχθων.

The “imperial part” of the title set shows Sardis’ loyalty to Rome and the emperors, and the privileges they had received from the Romans; first and foremost, it stated the grant of two official temples of the imperial cult, decided upon by the emperors and the Senate. As such, Sardis could boast being favourable with both the emperor and the highest “administrative” institution in the Roman empire. If that was not clear through this statement, Sardis made sure that readers would not be mistaken and specified that they were φιλή καὶ συμμάχος Ῥωμαίων, “friend and ally of the Romans,” implying also their supposed autonomous status, pretending that they voluntarily allied themselves with Rome.²⁵

In addition, in the late antique context of the spolia wall two fragments were found of a potentially long inscription on the city’s history, possibly inscribed on



Figure 2: Fragments of a larger inscription recording the early history of Sardis. ©Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and Fellows of Harvard College.

²⁵ See Petzl, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, 81, for a summary of suggested interpretations of the claim of being οἰκεῖος (“of the same household”) to the emperors.

a marble slab covering a wall within the Wadi B sanctuary.²⁶ Throughout the eastern Mediterranean several of such inscriptions have been found, either inscribed at central civic buildings or in important sanctuaries.²⁷ It is difficult to reconstruct the text and context of these inscriptions, given their fragmentary state, but some things can be deducted even from this. There is unfortunately no way to say until when this history of Sardis would have run, but the inclusion of its Lydian history is certain, with the first fragment reading as follows (Figure 2, left):

- - - -
]QΣH[
]Α Ηρακλε[-
 ν]εικᾷ Κόρο[ιβος
]ON ἀφ' οὔ ΑΙΙ[
]αδες – Δ[
]ΗΣ Σαδυάτ[(τ)-
] παῖδες Ι[
 οἱ τ]υγες ἡρξ[αν –
]ΕΚΑΔΟΥ[
]ΜΟΥΑΛ[
]ΝΟΑΡΑ[
]ΨΕΟΣ[
 - - - -

[- - -] Herakle[- - -] Koro[ibos] is victorious [- - -] since [- - -] Sadyat[(t)es - - -] children [- - -] ruled [- - -] the (aforementioned) Ard[ys (?) - - -].²⁸

The text seems to have contained a number of names, including Heracles, Sadyattes, and Ardys. Heracles played a prominent role in the early history of Sardis. According to the circulating myths, he married the Lydian princess Omphale when he was in Lydia. The prominence of this episode is visible on the obverse and reverse of this local coin from Sardis, minted at some point in the second century.²⁹ Second, he was the supposed founder of one of Sardis' royal dynasties, the

²⁶ The two fragments were both found in the “fills over marble collapse from the late antique Spolia Wall, F55 13.1 Locus 3”: Petzl, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, 175–76.

²⁷ Petzl, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, 175, has argued that the fragments belonged to a kind of chronicle; Peter Thonemann, on the other hand, has argued against the genre of a chronicle, preferring the identification of a “local history”, like Xanthus of Lydia's *Lydiaka*; Peter Thonemann, “A New “Lydian History” from Sardis,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 213 (2020): 81.

²⁸ *I.Sardis* 2, 577. Transl. Petzl.

²⁹ *RPC* III 2411 = *BMC Greek Coins Lydia* 79–80.

Heracleids. Pseudo-Apollodorus and Plutarch, for example, tell that Heracles married the Lydian princess Omphale and conceived a child with her.³⁰ Sadyattes and Ardys were kings of Lydia, but belonged to an even older dynasty.³¹

The second inscription, which is even more fragmentary, seems to mention an ancient king and members of a royal family (Figure 2, right):

- - - -
] βασιλε-!
ἀδελ[?]ΦΗΣΙ[
]ΗΝΑΙΔΕ[
ἀ]δελφός M[
]ΟΒΗΘΕΙ[
] . ΤΗΝ[
] . [
- - - -

[- - -] king? [- - -] sister(?) [- - -] brother [- - -].³²

The amount and quality of the temple's sculptural decoration corresponded with the size and significance of the sanctuary. Modillions depicting lions and bulls decorated the cornice, and the roof was laid with marble roof tiles, while the pediment is likely to have shown a sculpture with captions.³³ A Corinthian capital that likely belonged to the temple's peristasis included the depiction of four nude muscular male torsos and might also have featured bulls and lions. Three of the torsos show a lion skin draped over the shoulder and tied together on the chest, and the column capital thus likely depicted Heracles, who was not just a Pan-Hellenic hero and deity, but featured prominently in Sardian history, as we have seen above.³⁴ From

³⁰ Apollod., *Bibl.* 2.6.3; 2.7.8; Plut., *An seni* 4; Plut., *Quaest. Graec.* 45; other authors also allude to this, e.g. Ov., *Her.* 9.55; Stat., *Theb.* 10.646-649.

³¹ As Peter Thonemann has convincingly argued, the Sadyattes and Ardys mentioned in the fragment are not the kings with the same name from the Mermnad dynasty, but rather from a pre-Heracleid dynasty as told by Nicolaus of Damascus: Thonemann, "A New 'Lydian History'", 79–81. In the second fragment, which was carved by another stone mason, only the word ἀ]δελφός = brother can be reconstructed with certainty, but I would not be surprised if line 1 would have mentioned a βασιλεὺς = king, and line 2 may have contained the mentioning of an ἀδελ[?]ΦΗ = sister, analogous of the mentioning of the brother in line 4. It is therefore very well possible that this fragment records something about a royal family: *I.Sardis* 2, 578.

³² First published as *I.Sardis* 2, 578. New edition by author based on study in the summer of 2022. The partially visible letter in line 1, for example, can only be reconstructed as B.

³³ *I.Sardis* 2, 572.

³⁴ Cahill et al., "The First Koinon Temple," 394–397; Crawford H. Greenewalt Jr., "Sardis," *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı* 28 (2007): 745.

the frieze, finally, the finds are most fragmentary; the fragments suggest figures in static poses against a plain background, but the carvings are of high quality, according to the excavators. They identify a number of figures, among which they suggest an Attis, a Phrygian god of vegetation and husband to Cybele, the Anatolian mother goddess, whose cult was prominently present in Sardis throughout its history.³⁵ The style of the decorations is comparable with other architectural buildings in the province of Asia (modern western Anatolia) from the Julio-Claudian period, but the specific scenes and depictions thus seem to have been tailored to the local context.³⁶ All in all, the Wadi B sanctuary of the imperial cult seems to have placed specific emphasis on the distant past and mythology of Sardis as the royal seat of the emerging Lydian empire next to a focus on the Roman emperor.

Sanctuaries, Memory, and Landscapes

The Wadi B sanctuary at Sardis was located on a terrace overlooking the lower parts of the city to the north. As such, from the temple there is a view over the Hermus valley in which Sardis was located. From here, the multiple Lydian grave mounds dating back to the archaic period are easily visible and several other myths were said to have played in other areas in and around the valley. In a 2016 article, Christina Williamson shows how the Hellenistic kings of Pergamum anchored their rapidly growing city and kingdom to the mythological landscape around it through the creation of visual connections between sanctuaries in the city with burial mounds in the distance.³⁷ The focus of the article centres on the

³⁵ Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 397; in the Roman imperial period Cybele shows signs of syncretism with Artemis and Kore, but is also frequently depicted on her own: María-Paz de Hoz, “The Goddess of Sardis: Artemis, Demeter or Kore,” in *Between Tarhuntas and Zeus Polieus. Cultural Crossroads in the Temples and Cults of Graeco-Roman Anatolia*, ed. María-Paz de Hoz, Juan Pablo Sánchez Hernández and Carlos Molina Valero, *Colloquia Antiqua* 17 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 185–24; see also Sardian coins of Salonina from the mid-third century CE, which depict Cybele-Leto on the reverse sides: *GRPCL* 733, 734; for the cult of Cybele in the Lydian period, see Crawford H. Greenewalt Jr., “The Gods of Lydia / Lidya Tanrıları,” in *Lidyalılar ve Dünyaları / The Lydians and Their World*, ed. Nicholas D. Cahill (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2010), 233–46.

³⁶ Cahill et al., “The First Koinon Temple,” 398–399.

³⁷ Christina G. Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” in *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity. Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination*, ed. Jeremy McInerney and Ineke Sluiter, *Mnemosyne Supplements* 393 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 70–99; for the intricate relationships between myths and landscape, see e.g. Greta Hawes, ed., *Myths on the Map: The Storied Landscapes of Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

natural mound Kalerga Tepe, or Teuthrania as it was known in antiquity, which could be seen from the acropolis in Pergamon, but also from everywhere else in the landscape between Pergamon and the Aegean Sea in the west. Williamson convincingly shows how features in the landscape surrounding a city could serve and be activated as powerful *lieux de mémoire* in combination with public spaces in the city itself, allowing for the study of similar cases in which landscape, (civic) history, and urban elements are combined into a nexus of cultural memory.³⁸

In the article, Williamson makes a number of important theoretical observations taken from anthropological and geographical studies. First, from the work of anthropologist Eric Hirsch she takes the distinction between “foreground” and “background” spaces, where the foregrounded features “are well-known places that are mentally prominent due to their familiarity [and often] places of tradition”, and background spaces are “less known and unpredictable [. . .] ‘modern,’ with places of the future”, usually on a larger distance or even on the horizon.³⁹ Then, combining this with Waldo Tobler’s so-called First Law of Geography, she says that “things that *seem near* are more related than distant things. So foregrounded places can feel near without actually being near.”⁴⁰ Third, public spaces as “*lieux de mémoire* [. . .] are spatio-mnemonic linchpins, tying select events from the past to select physical locations in the present. At the same time, they are catalysts of communication, triggering thought and emotions that are shared. This is intrinsic to their power to evoke a sense of community and territory.”⁴¹

In another contribution from the same volume, Elizabeth Minchin argued for the continued relevance and significance of the burial mounds in the Troad region throughout history, not just in the Roman period, but also beyond, noting the significance for the Roman emperor Hadrian and the Ottoman *qayşar-i Rûm* Mehmet II alike.⁴² Here, the continuous engagement with the burial mounds which supposedly corresponded to the burial mounds made for the Greek heroes Achilles, Patroclus, Ajax and Protesilaus during the Trojan war, ensured also their

38 See also Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 Vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

39 Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” 91.

40 Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” 91; Waldo R. Tobler, “A Computer Movie Simulating Urban Growth in the Detroit Region,” *Economic Geography* 46 (1970): 234–40; see also Barbara Tversky, “Cognitive Maps, Cognitive Collages, and Spatial Mental Models,” in *Spatial Information Theory. A Theoretical Basis for GIS*, ed. Andrew U. Frank and Irene Campari (Berlin: Springer Verlag GmbH, 1993), 14–24.

41 Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” 92; Keith H. Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places. Landscape and Language among the Western Apache,” in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 56–57.

42 Elizabeth Minchin, “Heritage in the Landscape: The “Heroic Tumuli” in the Troad Region,” in *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity. Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination*, ed. Jeremy McInerney and Ineke Sluiter, *Mnemosyne Supplements* 393 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 264–69.

continued significance for these time periods. Key in this were the distinctive topography of the landscape filled with tumuli; “a ‘humanizing’ narrative that, first, links the viewer to the landscape, and, second, enhances his or her experience of the wider world”; the significance of the mounds beyond the community of the Greek and Roman Troad region; related to this, “attentive and engaged visitors”; regular and recurring ritual activity; and the transmission of cultural memories by tourist guides, informants and storytellers.⁴³

Landscape and the Wadi B Temple

A similar argument to Williamson’s and Minchin’s can be applied to Roman Sardis.⁴⁴ As religious complexes the imperial cult temples had a profound effect on the city and its inhabitants, affecting not only the image of a city but also the experience of the city and its history in relation to the empire. Onur Öztürk has shown that the Roman temples of the imperial cult in the province of Asia changed the form and experience of a city

[t]hrough a series of platforms, walls and other architectural elements [. . .] During festivals and rituals the other senses (especially hearing and smell) came into play. Their sculptural decorations aimed to catch the gazes of the viewers and provided rich sensorial experiences. The history of each city, the associated cult and the new city titles formed the core of [a] set of [cultural] responses [. . .]. Promotion of the temples of divine rulers through inscriptions and coins further strengthened the perception of these projects as significant contributors of urban image.⁴⁵

Although these temples were obviously “Roman” or rather “imperial” in nature, at the same time they were placed in an inherently local tradition, for example by combining the sanctuary with a local patron deity or hero.⁴⁶ In Sardis, for example, another cult for the emperor was “inserted” into the already long-existing Temple of Artemis during the reign of emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE). In other words, through their function as provincially organised sanctuaries dedicated to

⁴³ Minchin, “Heritage in the Landscape,” 270–72; Minchin used for her analysis the work of Michael Schudson: Michael Schudson, “Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory,” in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. D.L. Schachter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346–64.

⁴⁴ This is denied by Minchin in the article discussed above: Minchin, “Heritage in the Landscape,” 272.

⁴⁵ Onur Öztürk, “Temples of Divine Rulers and Urban Transformation in Roman-Asia” (PhD Dissertation, Austin, TX, University of Texas at Austin, 2013), 238–39.

⁴⁶ Öztürk, “Temples of Divine Rulers,” 242.



Figure 3: Overview photo of Sardis, looking south towards the acropolis from no. 64c on the map of Figure 1 (photo and labels author).

the central figure and personification of the empire, the temples of the imperial cult tied their host cities to the structure of the empire. Their central function in civic life and their usually central or at least prominent location in the urban environment over time potentially caused the local populations to rethink or re-imagine their histories and relationship to their region and to the wider empire.

This can also be seen in the Wadi B imperial cult sanctuary at Sardis. As can be seen on the map and the photo (Figures 1 (no. 79) and 3), the sanctuary located on so-called sector Field 55 had a central location both horizontally and vertically, arguably the most prominent location in the city for a public space. Located right between the upper and lower parts of the city, in about the geographical centre of the urban area, the monumental sanctuary and terrace could not have gone unnoticed to the ancient visitor. Through its central location, it is possible that the sanctuary functioned as the central landmark in the city by which to navigate, thereby being an important reference point in daily life.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was surrounded by several other important public spaces. To the north and above was so-called Field 49 (Figure 1, no. 68), likely an affluent residential area on a terrace already built in the Lydian period. In fact, parts of the Lydian walls and

⁴⁷ For navigating the ancient city, see e.g. Diane Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Lydian building blocks would still have been visible in Roman times and they could be seen directly from the Wadi B sanctuary.⁴⁸ The road between Field 55 and the Theatre-Stadium complex formed a key artery connecting the two urban sections.⁴⁹ To the west might have been the Roman agora (Figure 1, no. 38), which has not been excavated yet, with any conclusive interpretation impossible at this moment. However, the visible remains of buildings suggest that this area was of



Figure 4: View over the Hermus plain towards the Bin Tepe ridge. The Tumulus of Alyattes (Kocamutaf Tepe) can be seen on the right. On the left is Karniyarık Tepe. Photo taken from the northern end of Field 49, above Field 55 (photo author).

a monumental and public nature. The Wadi B sanctuary thus occupied a central place within Sardis' urban landscape.

⁴⁸ This concerns the boulder wall on the eastern side of the terrace, the so-called "Field 49 South Lydian I terrace." See Güzin Eren, "Making Place for Thy Lydian Kings" (PhD Dissertation, Boston, CT, Boston University, 2022), 92–94, nn. 301, 308.

⁴⁹ Cahill et al., "The First Koinon Temple," 398, n. 54.



Figure 5: View of Bin Tepe from Karniyark Tepe, looking towards Sardis and the Tmolus.

©Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Beyond the urban area two significant landscape elements created visible and symbolic connections with the Wadi B sanctuary. Standing on the Wadi B terrace looking north, the height difference between the acropolis and the plain in front of it creates a mighty feeling. The best recognisable feature in the landscape in front of it is the ridge of Bin Tepe to the north of the city, just in front of the Gygaean Lake. The ridge is scattered with archaic tumulus graves, of which the three larger ones were probably tombs reserved for the Lydian kings, members of the royal family, and other members of the Lydian elite (Figure 4 and 5). In fact, the tumulus located most to the east has been identified as the tomb of the penultimate Lydian king Alyattes, the father of Croesus. The Bin Tepe tumuli fired imagination throughout antiquity, with the Greek poet Hipponax describing the mounds already in the late sixth century BCE, only a few decades after the conquest of Lydia: “. . . follow the road to Smyrna, go on through Lydia past the tomb of Attales, the barrow of Gyges and Sesostris’ stele, and the $\tau\mu\nu\eta\mu\alpha\tau'$ ὠτοστ, lord at Mutalis, turning your belly towards the setting sun.”⁵⁰ Herodotus expressed his awe a short century later, writing:

⁵⁰ Hipponax, *Hipponactis Testimonia et Fragmenta*, ed. Enzo Degani. 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1991), 30–32, no. 7; trans. Alexander Dale, “Hipponax fr. 42 IEG² = 7 Degani”, *Zeitschrift für Papy-*

The land of Lydia does not have many marvels to record, such as other lands do, except the gold dust brought down from the Tmolus. It presents however one work which is the greatest of all, apart from the works of the Egyptians and the Babylonians: There is there the grave of Alyattes, the father of Croesus, the base of which is made from great stones and the rest of it of mounded earth.⁵¹

Accounts such as these would have circulated still in the Roman imperial period, which makes it more than likely that the inhabitants of Roman Sardis would have known about the nature and identities of the tumuli of Bin Tepe. Furthermore, early Lydian remains on the top of one of the tumuli, Kocamutaf Tepe or the “Tomb of Alyattes,” were most likely renovated at some point in time, possibly during the Roman period.⁵² It is certain that during the late Hellenistic and the Roman imperial period, the locals’ interest in these monuments grew, as objects from this period have been found in and around the tumuli and newly established cultic activity is known for the area of the mounds and the Gygaean Lake.⁵³ These ancient man-made structures, which had become almost semi-natural features in the landscape, formed the backdrop of every activity on the terraces and spurs of the acropolis.⁵⁴ The tumuli cannot be missed standing on Field 55; the Tumulus of Alyattes, the largest on the Bin Tepe ridge, is almost 70 metres high and has a diameter of around 361 metres and a circumference of more than a kilometre.⁵⁵ The tumuli graves are located 11 to 12 kilometres from the Wadi B temple, which means that the details would disappear but the structure is still visible and recognisable.⁵⁶

The second, myth-laden landscape that the ancient observer could and would have seen from the Field 55 terrace is the Catacecaumene, an ancient volcanic landscape full of petrified lava flows on the other side of the Hermus plain, north-east of the city. According to the mythological traditions in the region, this was the area where Tylos and Masdnes went out to defeat a large serpentine or dragon-like monster that terrorised the population. In the fight Tylos was hit by

rologie und Epigraphik 187 (2013): 49; Hipponax identified Karnıyarak Tepe with the tomb of Gyges, but this has been proven wrong by Christopher Ratté: Christopher Ratté, “Not the Tomb of Gyges,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 114 (1994): 157–61.

51 Hdt. 1.93. Trans. author.

52 Felipe Rojas, “Antiquarianism in Roman Sardis,” in *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alain Schnapp (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2014), 188–90.

53 Strab. 13.4.5-7; Christina Luke and Christopher H. Roosevelt, “Memory and Meaning in Bin Tepe, the Lydian Cemetery of the ‘Thousand Mounds,’” in *Tumulus as Sema. Space, Politics, Culture and Religion in the First Millennium BC*, ed. Oliver Henry and Ute Kelp, Topoi. Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 27 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 419–20.

54 Just as Kalerga Tepe for the Pergamenes: Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” 84.

55 Rojas, “Antiquarianism in Roman Sardis,” 186–87.

56 Williamson, “Mountain, Myth, and Territory,” 86 and n. 61.

the venom spewed by the dragon and died. However, Masdnes and Tylos' sister (or father, depending on the literary tradition) managed to lay their hands on a plant that brought Tylos back to life, and in the end, the dragon was defeated.⁵⁷

The Catacecaumene is located considerably further away from Sardis, at a distance of around 36 kilometres, in the so-called long-distance range, where individual elements tend to become unclear and integrate with the bluish background. The landscape would therefore only have been recognizable on days with clear weather conditions. The Catacecaumene is visible from Field 55 under these conditions, not blocked by other elements in the landscape. As such, all communal rituals and religious practices in the Wadi B sanctuary would also have been performed against the backdrop of the mythological volcanic landscape of the Catacecaumene.

The significance of the myth for the people of Roman Sardis is attested on three coin types from the third century CE which show different stages of the myth. The reverse side of one coin shows Masdnes fighting the dragon, which is teasingly showing the magic plant to Masdnes, with a club⁵⁸ (Figure 6). On another coin Tylos is seen



Figure 6: Reverse side of a Sardian civic coin from the reign of Gordian III (238-244 CE), showing Masdnes fighting the dragon of Catacecaumene (*RPC* VII.1 232.2). © BnF, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1309.

⁵⁷ Nonnus, *Dion.* 25.451–552.1; Plin., *HN* 25.5.14; Felipe Rojas, *The Pasts of Roman Anatolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 81–88.

⁵⁸ *RPC* VII.1 232.2.



Figure 7: Reverse side of a Sardinian civic coin from the reign of Severus Alexander (222–235 CE), showing Tylos holding club and extending his left hand to receive the plant from Masdnes, holding club and chlamys; at their feet lies the defeated dragon (*BMC Greek Coins* Lydia 179. © The Trustees of the British Museum, 1892,0507.156).



Figure 8: Reverse side of a Sardinian civic coin from the reign of Philippus Arabs (244–249 CE) showing Tylos, holding an indistinct object, standing in a biga drawn by two winged serpents riding over the lying earth goddess Gē, holding ears of corn (© BnF, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1313A).

receiving the plant from Masdnes with the defeated dragon at their feet (Figure 7).⁵⁹ On a third coin, finally, we see Tylos riding a chariot drawn by snakes with Gē, the personification of earth, depicted underneath lying down (Figure 8).⁶⁰ All three coin types were produced by the local mint of Sardis itself and form a unique design in the region, especially in a period in Roman history when dies were shared increasingly often between different local mints for the minting of civic coinage.⁶¹

The significance of the myth appears even more prominently through the fact that one of the administrative subdivisions of Sardis was named after Masdnes, who was also the legendary founder of Sardis' first royal dynasty.⁶² On one coin from the reign of Caracalla and Geta (209-211 CE) Tylos is even depicted as a Sardian hero, personifying the Sardian citizenry, holding a cult statue of the Sardian Kore facing Androclus for Ephesus.⁶³ The myth of Tylos and Masdnes thus not only accidentally played in sight of the city of Sardis, but was also closely tied to Sardis' ancient but glorious history for centuries. It therefore fitted well into the narrative of the city's history in the Roman period, too.

Activating Memory

As mentioned above, features in the landscape surrounding a city could serve as powerful *lieux de mémoire* in combination with public spaces in the city itself. However, the presence of commemorative monuments and monumental features in itself does not automatically signify actively felt meaning apart from the moment of erection. Rather, meaning has to be “activated” through use, connection, and association with practices, preferably institutionalised and recurring, in order to be ingrained in collective memory.

There is not much direct information from Sardis about the rituals and practices in the imperial cult sanctuary at the Wadi B terrace, other than one mention

⁵⁹ *BMC Greek Coins* Lydia 179.

⁶⁰ Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1313A, accessed 22 May 2024, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85550326>.

⁶¹ George Christopher Watson, “The Development and Spread of Die Sharing in the Roman Provincial Coinage of Asia Minor,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 125, no. 1 (2021): 123–42.

⁶² *Sardis VII* 1, 125; Louis Robert, *Études Anatoliennes: Recherches sur les Inscriptions Grecques de l'Asie Mineure* (Paris: Boccard, 1937), 135–39.

⁶³ *GRPCL* 546; María-Paz de Hoz has suggested that Tylos is also depicted on another Severan-period Sardian coin in the manner of Triptolemos (*BMC Greek Coins* Lydia 152): De Hoz, “The Goddess of Sardis,” 94.

of annual sacrifices to the emperors, which could cost up to multiple thousand *denarii*.⁶⁴ This was a considerable amount of money, considering that the annual donation by the city to the cult of Mēn Askenos at Sardis in 188 CE “for the sacrifices and libations for the god and for the victory and eternal permanence of the Emperor and for plentiful harvest” only cost 600 *denarii*.⁶⁵ Other studies on similar temple complexes in western Asia Minor, such as the one by Onur Öztürk, show that temples of the imperial cult had a significant impact on the urban experience of the local population, that they were typically embedded within local traditions and stories, and that the meaning and significance of these traditions and stories were respectively enhanced and activated by the rituals performed in them, because of the communal nature and sensory stimulation of these rituals.⁶⁶ Due to the similarities between the Wadi B sanctuary and the other imperial cult temples in Western Anatolia, Öztürk’s conclusions may be transferred to the situation in Sardis. The significant amount of money dedicated to the annual sacrifices to the emperor indicates a rather lavish recurring ritual that would have stayed in the minds of the civic population. Through the annual reiteration of the communal rituals its presence in civic memory would have been reiterated as well and thus ingrained into civic life and into the idea of what it meant to be a citizen of Sardis in the Roman period.⁶⁷

Similarly, the presence of inscriptions advertising Sardis’ imperial history, mythology, and their relevance for contemporary Sardians activated this memory, too. Their erection in a central public space meant that they were read by the sanctuary’s visitors during festivals and rituals, but also on other days. The depiction of episodes and symbols from the Lydian past and the myth of Tylos and Masdnes on locally minted coins enhanced the anchoring of the messages in and in connection to the Wadi B temple also in other areas and contexts in Sardis.⁶⁸

64 *ISardis* 2, 348, ll. 12-16: “Υπὲρ ἧς Μένανδρος ὁ πατὴρ ἀνέθηκεν εἰς θυσίας / τῶν Σεβαστῶν καὶ κρατῆ/[ρα τ]ῇ βουλῇ κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν / [δ]ηνάρια ἐξακισχίλια.” Trans. Petzl: “Her father Menandros dedicated on her behalf for yearly offerings/sacrifices of the Augusti and for a bowl (*symposion*) for the Council 6,000 *denarii*”; *ISardis* 2, 331, mentions a festival on behalf of the emperors (*Augusti*) celebrated in the village of the Tagenoi (possibly near modern-day Ahmetli) for which an altar was erected to Caligula (r. 37-41 CE).

65 *ISardis* 2, 321. Trans. Petzl.

66 See also Beate Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

67 To denote the active engagement with recurring rituals, this has been called “repetition with revision,” also signifying the inherent moldability of rituals and (collective) memory: Thompson-Drewal in Boutsikas, *The Cosmos in Ancient Greek Experience*, 25.

68 For “anchoring,” see Ineke Sluiter, “Anchoring Innovation: A Classical Research Agenda,” *European Review* 25, no. 1 (2016): 20–38.

Conclusion: Empire and Imagination in Roman Sardis

The Sardians in the Roman imperial period constructed temporal horizons on four levels. In the past, Sardis had been a mighty city under the Lydian kings, of which the memory was anchored in the landscape surrounding the city. Second, in the less distant past, they had proven their loyalty and worth to the Romans, which led in the contemporary present to the presumed favourable position of the city in the eyes of the Romans – or so the Sardians claimed – and the bestowal of important grants and privileges by the imperial authorities. Together this would lead, so the Sardians hoped, to more privileges and a higher status in the region, compared to the other cities with which they competed.

From its onset the Wadi B sanctuary was meant to connect local (imperial) history and mythology with the worshipping of the emperor. The epigraphic and numismatic sources discussed in this contribution show that the Sardians continued to tie their own history and mythology to the Roman empire in the second and third century CE. The references in the inscriptions in the sanctuary and on the coinage of the city connected, activated, and enhanced the associations between the temple, the city, and the civic past.

As such, we can come up with the following conclusions. Already due to its location, the Wadi B temple of the imperial cult formed an important space in the city of Sardis, centrally located and spatially connected to important public spaces and buildings. Due to its function as a space in which the city venerated the emperor, the sanctuary served as a locus for expressions of history and civic identity. The inscriptions featuring Sardis' titles implied Sardis' proposed and aspired identity and status in the province of Asia and in the Roman empire. Although relatively inconspicuous on their own, together they would have activated the memory of the Lydian past in the setting of the imperial cult by being read repeatedly and on many of the inscriptions. An explicit connection to the Lydian past was made by the probably extensive inscription recording Sardis' early history. The most conspicuous remains of this past could be seen directly from the temple up close in the form of the Lydian walls of Field 49 south of and above the temple, and in the distance in the form of the archaic mounds of Bin Tepe north and below the temple. The connection between Sardis, the Lydian past, and the landscape of the Catacecaumene northeast of the city may have been less obvious due to its distance to the city, but was made explicit in the third century CE through its depiction on locally minted coins.

All together, these markers highlighted Sardis' glorious history in a public space dedicated to the veneration of the most important men of the empire, the

emperors of Rome. This brought together the reality of empire with the imagination of imperial history, suggesting a temporal transfer of past glory and power to the city of the Roman period. These claims were not only marks of adherence to the civic culture and practices in the province of Asia, but also served a political goal, namely the quest for privileges resulting from the claim of transfer of historical power, status, and prestige. This was only possible through a temporal identification between Roman Sardis and Lydian Sardis. In other words, Roman Sardis was not just the successor of old Lydian Sardis, but essentially the same city, only in another time period. Through the constant reiteration of the temporal identification in a spatial manner, that is, the spatial and visual connections with the Lydian royal tombs at Bin Tepe and the pre-foundation myths of the Catacecaumene, which were then “activated” in the sanctuary when rituals were performed in proximity of the statues and inscriptions and possibly involving them as well, Roman Sardis was identified with Lydian Sardis of the Archaic period. Its implication? Sardis was not only a city with a rich past, but through its illustrious history was entitled to such status in the world of the Roman empire as well.

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations of ancient sources are according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th edition, or the list of abbreviations provided by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) (https://www.dainst.org/fileadmin/Media/Website/02_Forschung/Publikationen/Publizieren_am_DAI/Liste_abzukuender_Titel.pdf, accessed 18 May 2024), apart from the following:

<i>GRPCL</i>	Kurth, Dane. <i>Greek and Roman Provincial Coins: Lydia. Vol. 4: The Bronze Coinage of Lydia: Sardes – Tripolis</i> . Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2020.
<i>I.Sardis</i> 2	Petzl, Georg. <i>Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions, Part II: Finds from 1958 to 2017</i> . Sardis Monograph 14. Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2019.
<i>Sardis</i> VII 1	Buckler, William H., and David M. Robinson. <i>Sardis VII: Greek and Latin Inscriptions, Part 1</i> . Publications of the American Society for the Excavation of Sardis VII. Leiden: Brill, 1932.

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