

1 | Phrygia: an anarchist history, 950 BC–AD 100

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Introduction

In *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, the anthropologist James C. Scott has offered an audacious series of hypotheses about the historical sociology of a vast stretch of upland South East Asia.¹ This region – called by Scott ‘Zomia’ – is a huge inland massif of some 2.5 million square kilometres, stretching from eastern China to north-eastern India, and including the highland districts of five other modern nation-states (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia). Today, the highlands of Zomia are inhabited by more than 100 million members of various minority peoples – the Kachin, the Wa, the Yao and others.

Scott makes three simple and provocative claims about this region. First, a geographical claim: that it is intrinsically more difficult for states to extend their power into mountainous inland regions than it is for them to control lowland and maritime zones. Changes in altitude, ruggedness of terrain, population dispersal and mixed cultivation all imposed direct and powerful geographical constraints on state building in the pre-modern world. Second, a historical claim: that this upland region has historically constituted a vast ‘shatter zone’, with a population made up of successive waves of refugees from the various lowland states that have surrounded it. Third, a sociological claim: that the existing societies of upland South East Asia have developed a set of social institutions specifically designed to prevent states developing in Zomia. As a result of their history as refugees from developing states, the peasants of Zomia have consciously fostered a radically egalitarian social structure, which both ‘thwarts incorporation by an outside state [and] also inhibits crystallization of any internal statelike structure’.² For example, the peoples of Zomia are (or have been until very recently) largely illiterate. In Scott’s account, this is not a state of pre-literacy, but *post-literacy*: many Zomian societies had possessed writing at some point in the past, but deliberately gave it up in order to avoid the kind of social stratification that develops as a result of the practice of writing.³

¹ Scott 2009. ² Scott 2009: 277. ³ Scott 2009: 220–37; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1973: 294–300.

Without doubt, all three hypotheses are open to empirical and theoretical criticism. The specific historical claim, that the inhabitants of this upland region are refugees from lowland states, is far from proven, and the geographical argument (that upland societies *necessarily* differ in character from lowland societies) runs dangerously close to geographical determinism.⁴ Several readers, too, have felt that Scott's interpretation of Zomian institutions, while romantically appealing, assumes exactly what needs to be proved on the crucial question of human agency. Even if we accept Scott's account of Zomian radical egalitarianism, there remains a 'world of difference between the recognition of the advantages of oral tradition and the giving up of script as a conscious collective choice'.⁵

Nonetheless, the usefulness of Scott's picture of 'anarchist' Zomia, I would suggest, lies not so much in its empirical accuracy, or even in its theoretical rigour, but in its analytic suggestiveness as an 'ideal type'. An ideal-typical model of a particular kind of society – in this case, a stateless, politically and economically fragmented upland society – may well not map all that closely onto observable reality. Indeed, as Weber puts it, 'The more sharply and clearly constructed the ideal types are – in other words, the more *unrealistic* they are in this sense – the better they perform their function, which is terminological and classificatory as well as heuristic'.⁶ A generation ago, historians of the ancient world were notoriously resistant to the use of simplifying sociological and economic models.⁷ This is no longer the case; over the last decade or so, several ancient historians and archaeologists, particularly in the United States, have made increasingly sophisticated attempts to model aspects of the ancient economy on modified neoclassical principles (the New Institutional Economics).⁸ However, this intellectual tradition, with its emphasis on state performance and individual and collective economic rationality, has proved most fertile in helping to analyse phases of rapid economic growth and increasing social complexity, such as the development of certain parts of the Roman Empire between 200 BC and AD 200.⁹ Its practitioners have shown less interest in those benighted parts of the ancient Mediterranean world which refused to develop a

⁴ Sadan 2010; Subrahmanyam 2010; Krasner 2011; Randeria 2011. On geographical determinism, see Harvey 2009: 202–13; Thonemann 2011a, esp. 17–19, 340–1.

⁵ Randeria 2011: 469. Cf. Subrahmanyam 2010 ('a strong whiff of functionalism hanging over the intellectual enterprise as a whole').

⁶ Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ch. 1.1 (transl. Runciman 1978: 23–5); cf. Finley 1985: 60–1.

⁷ Notable exceptions include, of course, Finley 1973 [1999]; Hopkins 1980 and 1995/6 [2002].

⁸ Morris 2004; Manning and Morris 2005; Scheidel, Morris and Saller 2007; Bresson 2007–8. The character of New Institutionalism is well described by Fine and Milonakis 2009: 78–87, 94–9.

⁹ E.g. Hitchner 2005; Bowman and Wilson 2009.

market economy or whose states inexplicably failed to ‘perform’ with sufficient dynamism and rationality.¹⁰

The chief argument of this chapter is that Scott’s account of the historical development of upland South East Asia – or, one might say, its principled *refusal* to develop – serves as a helpful simplifying model for understanding the culture and society of Roman Phrygia. Judged on the criteria of economic performance over time, levels of *per capita* consumption, and the freedom of factor and commodity markets, upland inner Anatolia looks like a classic example of a ‘failed society’.¹¹ Between the tenth and sixth centuries BC, as we shall see, inner Anatolia was home to a Phrygian state which achieved quite respectable levels of urbanism, production beyond subsistence, craft specialization and social complexity. Between the sixth and fourth centuries, this Iron Age state ceased to exist, leaving a post-literate, post-urban, highly fragmented, cellular agro-pastoral society across much of central Anatolia. Graeco-Macedonian colonial settlement in Phrygia during the third and second centuries BC did little to change this pattern. Even during the Roman Imperial period, when – for cultural, not economic reasons – a paper-thin façade of civic institutions and urbanization was erected in parts of inner Anatolia, Phrygian society remained largely decentralized and ‘underdeveloped’. In the face of this historical trajectory, we are faced with a choice: either to wring our hands in despair at the millennial failure of these stupid Anatolian peasants to follow the most basic rules of economic rationality, or to try to formulate an alternative way of understanding their curious long-term patterns of behaviour.¹²

‘Technical progress, economic growth, productivity, even efficiency have not been significant goals since the beginning of time. So long as an acceptable lifestyle could be maintained, however that was defined, other values held the stage.’¹³ Scott’s model of an ‘anarchist’ society – one which

¹⁰ In the chapters on Classical Greece in Scheidel, Morris and Saller 2007, the Greeks are repeatedly ticked off for their ‘failure’ to develop effective factor and commodity markets. ‘All three expedients [for procuring flexible labour in Classical Greece] had one crucial shortcoming . . . they could not provide a labour force which could be closely controlled or could be assembled at, or moved to, the loci of such production as was innovative in method or scale’ (Davies 2007: 354); ‘[T]he institutional context of democracy improved the conditions for market-oriented commodity consumption. But even in Athens . . . markets did not work without interference. The greatest problem was the variations in demand . . .’ (von Reden 2007: 405).

¹¹ For these criteria, see Scheidel, Morris and Saller 2007: 1–12.

¹² Manning and Morris 2005: 4, asserting ‘a commitment to assuming the basic rationality of economic actors and systems’. For an excellent example of the ‘hand-wringing’ school of Anatolian peasant history, see Kaplan 1992 (‘une agriculture bloquée par l’autarcie’).

¹³ Finley 1973 [1999]: 147.

consciously *walks away* from the state and its attendant socio-economic differentiation – is by no means a perfect fit for Roman Phrygia. But it does at least encourage us to take seriously the notion that, in post-Iron Age inner Anatolia, we might not be dealing with a ‘failed’ society, but with one that has, consciously or unconsciously, chosen its own destiny.

The land of Phrygia: a sketch

Let us picture a traveller, not so many years ago, setting out from Constantinople for the high Anatolian plateau. Having taken ship to Nikomedeia (modern İzmit), she rides out east to the lower Sangarios (Sakarya) river, and thence upstream to Osmaneli (Byzantine Leukai), where she meets the road from Nikaia (modern İznik), six hours west of Leukai. From Leukai (102 metres above sea level), the road starts to climb sharply; the Sangarios swings away to the east, and our traveller continues on south up the Karasu gorge, past Vezirhan to Bilecik (520 metres). From Bilecik, a very steep road leads on up the defiles of the Karasu to Bozüyük (ancient Lamounia, 740 metres), while an easier route branches off south-east to Söğüd (650 metres).¹⁴ This zone marks a sharp ecological boundary: the olive does not grow south of Bilecik, and Söğüd is the last town where mulberry-cultivation and silk-production is possible. South of Söğüd, our traveller passes over the forested heights of the Boz Dağı, still covered with dwarf oak and fir, and descends into the great flat trough of Dorylaion (modern Eskişehir, 792 metres), her first taste of the grand Anatolian steppe. It is here, at the very rim of the plateau, that Phrygia begins.

The arid plain of Dorylaion, thinly watered by the Porsuk Çayı (the ancient river Tembris), is a different world from the fertile wooded valleys to the north and west. There are no trees, little shade, and for much of the last millennium the plain has been largely dedicated to stock rearing rather than agriculture.¹⁵ East and south-east of Dorylaion stretches the flat, bare landscape of the Upper Sangarios basin. The widely spaced towns of the Upper Sangarios – Amorion to the south, Nakoleia to the west, Pessinous and Germa to the east – controlled vast territories along the fringes of the central Anatolian steppe; an inscription dating to the 320s AD shows that

¹⁴ R. P. Lindner 2007: 35–56. On the ancient roads in this region, see also Magie 1950: II 800–2. For Vezirhan as a point of contact between Phrygian- and Greek-speakers in the fifth century BC, see further below, p. 16.

¹⁵ MAMA V xi–xxii; Foss 1996; R. P. Lindner 2007: 58–67; Thonemann 2011a: 162. Cf. Cic. *Flacc.* 41: *Dorylensis... qui arborem numquam vidisset.*

the small town of Orkistos, on an affluent of the Sangarios, formed part of the territory of Nakoleia, more than 50 km to the north-west.¹⁶ At the far east of this district, where the Sangarios makes its loop to the north, the mound of Yassihöyük marks the site of ancient Gordion, the capital of the Phrygian state of the early first millennium BC.¹⁷ The climate is severe throughout this region, with bitterly cold winters and pitiless summers: nowhere in upland Phrygia can the olive be cultivated without extreme difficulty, and the relative brevity of the growing season seems to have led the inhabitants of northern and eastern Phrygia to cultivate barley in preference to wheat, due to its faster growth and relative resistance to drought.¹⁸

Due south of Dorylaion rises the Türkmen Dağı mountain range, the ancient Mt Elataeis ('Fir-tree mountain', 1,826 metres).¹⁹ The ridge of the Türkmen Dağı separates the sombre plain of Dorylaion from a very different ecological zone: the so-called Phrygian Highlands, the region known in antiquity as the Arginousa ('Shining-White') after the extraordinary cones of white tufa that appear here and there in the pinewood uplands.²⁰ In the mid-first millennium BC, this remote, wooded district was home to a major Phrygian settlement (Midas City, at Yazılıkaya in the far east of the Highlands) and several important religious sites.²¹ However, Midas City was abandoned around the time of the Macedonian conquest of Asia, and no other significant urban centres seem to have developed in the region during the Hellenistic and Roman periods; the highlands were instead largely carved up into private and Imperial estates, administered from the town of Nakoleia, just east of the Highland region.

Continuing on south from the Highlands into central Phrygia, our traveller is funnelled down into the basin of the Akar Çay (the ancient river Kaystros), dominated by the great fortress of Afyon Karahisar (ancient and

¹⁶ Amorion: Katsari 2006; Lightfoot and Lightfoot 2007. Nakoleia: *MAMA V* xxv–xxxii; Drew-Bear 1978: 32–52. Pessinous: Devreker, Thoen and Vermeulen 2003; Claerhout and Devreker 2008; annual reports in *Anatolia Antiqua*. Germa: von Aulock 1968. Orkistos: *MAMA VII* 305; see further below, p. 36.

¹⁷ See further below, pp. 9–10.

¹⁸ Robert, *OMS VII* 41–54 (olives and barley); on olives, see further Mitchell 2005b; Thonemann 2011a: 53–6. Archaeobotanical work at Gordion suggests that the cultivation ratio barley:wheat varied from 1:1 to 2:1 over the course of the first millennium BC: N. F. Miller 2010: 69, table 6.4; Marston 2012: 387–8.

¹⁹ Wrongly given as 'Elaphoeis' in the Barrington Atlas: for Elataeis, see Arist. *Hist. an.* 6.29 (578b), ed. Balme 2002; Plin. *HN* 8.225. The mountain was probably known as Suwara in the Hittite period: Forlanini 1996. For Roman-era villages on the north and west slopes of the Türkmen Dağı, Drew-Bear 1976: 251–2; Drew-Bear and Naour 1990: 1998–2001.

²⁰ Haspels 1971; Robert 1980: 266–99. ²¹ Berndt 2002; Berndt-Ersöz 2006.

mediaeval Akroinos).²² In the hills immediately to the north-east of Afyon, overlooking the valley of the Akar Çay, are the great marble quarries of Dokimeion, intensively exploited throughout the Roman Imperial period and beyond.²³ The plain of the Akar Çay is one of the great crossroads of central Anatolia; it was here that the battle of Ipsos was fought in the spring of 301 BC. From Afyon, one can continue on the main highway to the south-east, following the foothills of the Sultan Dağı mountains out along the southern fringe of the central Anatolian steppe. This is the region known as Phrygia Paroreios, with the small towns of Philomelion, Hadrianopolis, Toriaion and 'Burnt' Laodikeia perched on the edge of the treeless plateau.²⁴ Alternatively, one can turn south, to the ancient town of Synnada (modern Şuhut) in its circle of mountains, the administrative centre of eastern Phrygia in the Roman Imperial period.²⁵ Finally, the road from Afyon to the west leads down into the rich agricultural valleys of western Phrygia and the Lydian borderlands. The chief landmark of western Phrygia is the massive range of the Murat Dağ, the ancient Mt Dindymos (2,312 metres), whose fertile lower slopes are among the most favoured districts of inner Anatolia.²⁶ Many of the great perennial rivers of western Asia Minor rise on the flanks of Mt Dindymos: the Gediz Çay (the ancient river Hermos) rises on its western slopes, the Koca Çay (Rhyndakos) and Porsuk (Tembris) flow to the north, and the Banaz Çayı (Sindros), a major affluent of the Maeander, waters the plain to the south.

If we imagine our weary traveller looping anticlockwise around Mt Dindymos, she finds herself first in the valley of the Upper Tembris (Porsuk Çayı), north-east of the Murat Dağı, on the western edge of the Phrygian Highlands. There is little evidence for the history of the valley before the Roman Imperial period, when it was organized as a patchwork of senatorial and Imperial estates; just as in the Highlands, no real urban centres ever developed in this region. However, the prosperity of the village communities of the Upper Tembris in the Roman and Late Roman periods is vividly attested by the hundreds of richly decorated funerary and votive monuments surviving from the district.²⁷

²² Kaystros plain: Lochman 2003: 109–34. Akroinos: *TIB Phrygien* 177–8; Cheynet and Drew-Bear 2004. The neighbouring town of Prynnessos (Sülün) was more important in the Roman period: Brixhe and Drew-Bear 2010.

²³ Robert 1980: 221–56; Waelkens 1982a; Drew-Bear 1994; Christol and Drew-Bear 2005; Niewöhner, Chapter 10 below.

²⁴ Waelkens 1986: 254–69; Mitchell 1993: I 143–58; Thonemann 2008: 43–53. On the ecology of this region, see Wenzel 1937.

²⁵ Robert, *OMS VII* 41–70, 109–21; G. M. Cohen 1995: 322–5; Drew-Bear and Sacco 2006–7.

²⁶ Robert, *OMS VII* 206–13.

²⁷ Strubbe 1975: 230–6; Levick and Mitchell in *MAMA X*, xv–xlv; Mitchell 1993: I 158–9; Lochman 2003: 54–108; Thonemann, Chapter 6 below.

The historical development of the Upper Tembris valley could not differ more starkly from that of the plain immediately to the west, the modern Örencik ovası (c. 1,000 metres), north-west of Mt Dindymos. Although the natural resources of the Örencik ovası are poorer than the Porsuk Çayı basin, the small Hellenistic settlement at Aizanoi (modern Çavdarhisar) nonetheless developed into one of the few major urban centres of Phrygia in the early Roman Imperial period.²⁸ South of Aizanoi, the western and south-western foothills of Mt Dindymos formed the cultural border with Lydia to the west. The chief modern city in this area is Uşak (ancient Temenouthyrai) which sits on the far western rim of the Anatolian plateau.²⁹

The first towns of Phrygia proper lie just to the east of Uşak, in the rich Banaz ovası, the ancient plain of Doias. The north-eastern corner of this plain was occupied by the small town of Alioi, perched on a lower spur of Mt Dindymos, on the watershed separating the Banaz river basin from the Upper Tembris valley to the north.³⁰ But the greater part of the Banaz ovası was controlled by the most important town of central Phrygia in antiquity, Akmoneia (modern Ahat), at the far south-east of the plain.³¹ Akmoneia controlled a crucial bottleneck on the main west–east road through central Phrygia, running from Sardeis up the Hermos valley to Uşak, and skirting the south side of Mt Dindymos on its way eastwards to Afyon and the plateau.

Turning south from Akmoneia, our traveller skirts the western flank of a massive chain of mountains (the Çatma Dağı and Ak Dağ ranges), 90 km in length, separating the well-watered valleys of south-western Phrygia – the wealthiest and most extensively urbanized part of the region in antiquity – from the higher, drier plains to the north and east.³² Under the western edge of this mountain range lie the prosperous modern towns of Sivaslı (ancient Sebaste, on the lower Banaz Çayı), Çivril (not far from ancient Eumeneia, in the Upper Maeander valley) and Dinar (Apameia, at the source of the Maeander). The apple gardens and strawberry plots of Çivril and Sivaslı make a stark contrast with the bare, treeless plains of the Pentapolis (the modern Sandıklı ovası) and south-Phrygian Metropolis (Tatarlı), on the eastern side of the Ak Dağ.³³

At last, with pleasure and relief, our traveller reaches the far south-western corner of the Phrygian culture zone. This region, watered by two great

²⁸ Levick and Mitchell in *MAMA IX*, xvii–xxix; Rheidt 2010; see further below, pp. 23, 25–6.

²⁹ Drew-Bear 1979; Waelkens 1986: 143–4; Mitchell, Chapter 8 below.

³⁰ Plain of Doias: Robert, *OMS VII*, 214–9. Alioi: Drew-Bear 1980a; Weiss 1993.

³¹ Thonemann 2010. ³² Thonemann 2011a: 130–77.

³³ Pentapolis: Thonemann 2012. Metropolis: Robert 1980: 262–5.

perennial rivers, the Maeander and the Lykos, has little in common with the arid, steppe-like landscape of central, eastern and northern Phrygia. The two chief cities of the Lykos basin in the Roman Imperial period, Laodikeia (near modern Denizli) and Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale), were large, wealthy textile-producing urban centres, closely connected to the Aegean lowlands via the middle and lower Maeander valley.³⁴ Ecologically, the lower Lykos valley forms a transitional zone of exactly the same kind as the area of Bilecik and Söğüt to the north; like Bilecik, Denizli marks the inland limit of modern olive cultivation in western Turkey.

Phrygia 950–330 BC: society against the state

As indicated in the introduction above, the most striking and puzzling event in the history of Phrygia is the process of ‘de-statification’ that took place between 550 and 330 BC. From the ninth to the mid-sixth century BC, upland inner Anatolia was home to a complex, sophisticated society, possessing many of the characteristics of a state or proto-state.³⁵ Large ceremonial centres, palatial complexes and monumental cult-structures are known in several different parts of Phrygian-speaking western and central Turkey (Gordion, Midas City, Daskyleion, Kerkenes); the use of writing, both in monumental contexts and elsewhere, was widespread; a high degree of craft specialization can be inferred, and we have abundant evidence for powerful hereditary rulers (including, in the late eighth century, a certain ‘Midas’ or *Mita*) and an emergent urban and administrative elite. However, by 330 BC at the very latest, this embryonic state had disappeared almost without trace. As we shall see, the people of Phrygia in the last three centuries BC formed a post-literate, post-urban, largely non-stratified society. Monumental building works were all but unknown in Hellenistic Phrygia. Writing was reintroduced only very gradually; it reappears in public contexts in the first century BC, and becomes really widespread in inner Anatolia only in the course of the second or even third century AD, later than almost anywhere else in the Roman world. The aim of this section is first to describe, and then to try to explain the first part of this curious historical trajectory: why did Phrygia apparently experience such dramatic retrograde social evolution in the mid-first millennium BC?

³⁴ D’Andria and Silvestrelli 2000; Thonemann 2011a: 178–202. Laodikeia: des Gagniers 1969; Traversari 2000; Şimşek 2007. Hierapolis: D’Andria 2001.

³⁵ Overviews of Iron Age Phrygia: Fiedler 2003; Roller 2011.

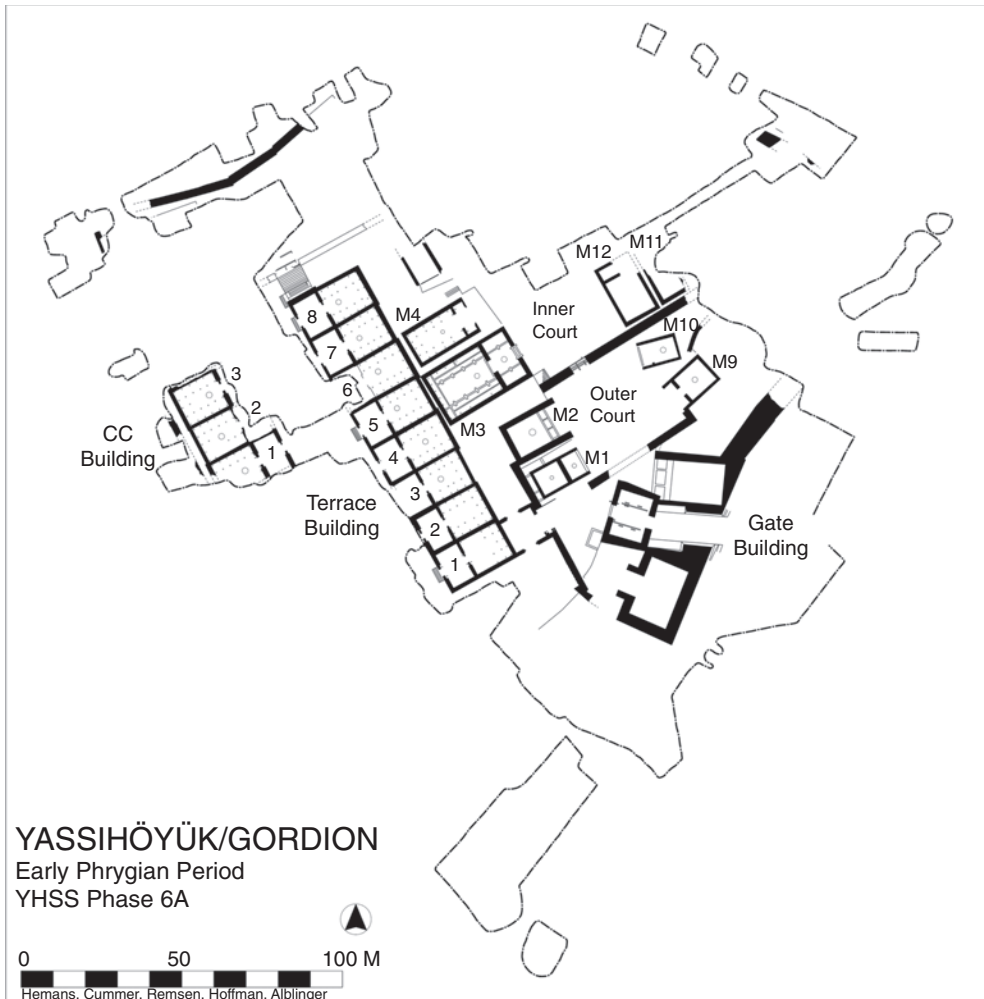


Figure 1.1. Gordion, site plan (Early Phrygian period). Courtesy of the Gordion Archive, University of Pennsylvania Museum.

The earliest archaeological evidence for the emergence of social complexity in Phrygia comes from the well-excavated site of Gordion in north-eastern Phrygia. Over the course of the tenth and ninth centuries BC, the Phrygian settlement at Gordion saw a series of massive building projects on the site's central Citadel Mound (Fig. 1.1).³⁶ The eastern side of the mound was given over to two spacious open courtyards, each of which was flanked by a number of enormous halls ('Megarons'), probably used both as reception

³⁶ Voigt and Henrickson 2000; Dusingberre 2005: 8–10.

chambers and cult rooms. The courts were accessed from the lower town by a massive ramped citadel gate. Immediately west of this large palace complex stood two long buildings (105 metres in length), facing one another across a broad street; each building was subdivided into eight smaller units, each consisting of a stepped entrance leading to a small anteroom, with a larger hall behind.³⁷ These sixteen units, housing some 300 workers in total, served as a single vast workshop-complex for food storage and preparation, and for large-scale production of textiles. The workshops were equipped with at least 125 looms – making this by far the largest attested weaving operation in the eastern Mediterranean – and food-preparation facilities (ovens, grain bins etc.) sufficient for feeding thousands of people.³⁸ The existence of this extraordinary mass-production unit, juxtaposed with the lavish palatial complex to the east, suggests that Early Phrygian Gordion (c. 950–800 BC) already enjoyed a sharply differentiated social structure, combined with a very high degree of centralization of production and distribution.

At the beginning of the Middle Phrygian period (c. 800–540 BC) – which saw Phrygian cultural influence reaching its greatest extent in central and western Anatolia – the monumental structures on the eastern part of the Citadel Mound were destroyed by an extensive fire. The palace complex and associated workshops were swiftly rebuilt in a form similar to their previous Early Phrygian incarnation; on the far side of a broad paved avenue, on the western peak of the Citadel Mound, a further group of lavish high-status residences now appears, suggesting the emergence of a new, secondary elite group at Gordion.³⁹ Similar palatial structures also begin to appear at other, widely-spaced Phrygian sites in Anatolia during this period. At Daskyleion, a Phrygian settlement on the south shore of the Propontis, a large palatial complex was built in the mid-eighth century BC.⁴⁰ The huge walled city at Kerkenes Dağ, in the far east of the Phrygian zone of influence, and apparently first occupied in the late seventh century BC, was dominated by another huge palace unit, accessed through a monumental entrance with fine sculptural decoration.⁴¹

Further indices of stratified political organization can be seen in the last years of the Middle Phrygian period. In the Phrygian Highlands between Eskişehir and Afyon, the first half of the sixth century BC saw the

³⁷ Only the east building has been completely excavated; the west building has at least four units, and probably mirrored its counterpart.

³⁸ Burke 2005; Burke 2010: 124–50. ³⁹ Voigt and Young 1999: 197–220; Voigt 2007.

⁴⁰ Bakır-Akbaşoğlu 1997.

⁴¹ Summers 2007; Draycott and Summers 2008; Kealhofer et al. 2010.