CHAPTER SIXTEEN

NEAR EAST INVITED REVIEW:
KING MIDAS’ TUMULUS AT GORDION*


Long awaited, and after several missed deadlines (the last being December, 1981) the publication of the architecture and contents of the three largest and richest tumuli excavated by Rodney S. Young at Gordion has now appeared (July, 1982). It will be immediately noted here that the volume is one of the most important and significant publications of excavated material from a major Near Eastern site to have been published in years. The vast amount of material systematically presented in numerous photographs, plans and drawings, and in interpretative textual commentaries, revealed in a detailed manner never before attempted, will surely generate among students a renewed interest in the culture and history of the Phrygians. Young died (October 25, 1974) before he was able to organize for publication his manuscript with photographs, write the essays and conclusions he planned, and express all the ideas he kept in his fertile mind. A committee was therefore organized in 1975 by F. Rainey, then Director of the University Museum to collate the material in hand, to supply technical data and to contribute and solicit appropriate essays. The committee was also charged with organizing the topics and schedules for future publications of the 17 Gordion campaigns (1950–1973); this work is now in progress and soon (one cautiously hopes) we shall see a volume on the “lesser” tumuli (E.L. Kohler) as well as a detailed study of Phrygian pottery (G.K. Sams).

In this first volume the committee has accomplished the difficult task of gathering and organizing the scattered and unpaginated notes of Young,
printing them in the sequence he desired, and (so we are informed) leaving them intact and unchanged with proper concern to preserve his ideas and style. Aside from assembling the necessary photographs, plans, and drawings and adding appendices on technical subjects, some of the committee members, along with two invited scholars (GKS, JFMC), have written entries and essays on various subjects, including the final Conclusions chapter. Thus, the volume is the work of several scholars, indeed primarily of Young, but with important contributions by the others, all intimately familiar both with the excavations at Gordion and with the mind of its excavator.

Following the wishes of Young, the three tumuli (P, MM, W) are published in the order of their excavation, not in the chronological order perceived by the committee. Narration of the excavation problems and strategy, tomb description, and a catalogue of most of the contents of Tumulus P and MM are by Young, with further discussion of the pottery by GKS, the wood remains and bronze quadriga by ELK, the iron by JFMC, and the Egyptian Blue and paste by MJM. At the time of Young’s death he had completed a catalogue of the finds from Tumulus W, but not a description of the excavation of the tomb and its contents in situ. This latter work has now been accomplished by KDV, based on Young’s field notes and published writings; there is also a discussion of the pottery of W by GKS. A separate chapter (IV Commentary) includes discussion of selected groups of objects found in three tumuli, bull cauldrons (KDV), omphaloi (MJM), belts (ELK), pottery (CKS), wood (ELK), and bronzes by Young. A final chapter, Conclusions, is written by MJM. Analyses of wood, food, bronzes, and textiles from the three tumuli, as well as the latest C-14 dates and a discussion of Phrygian inscriptions are given in the appendices.

Given the situation that there is a total of six authors in the main body of the text, it would have been helpful to the reader if each non-Young entry had been identified by initials alongside the section heading, rather than with an asterisk matched at the bottom of the page with the author’s name. Because these entries are interspersed within Young’s in the Tumulus P and MM chapters, too often I discovered that I was unaware that a shift had occurred from one author to another (for example pages 219 to 233). In the appendices the names of the contributors are properly supplied at the heading, as are also the dates when their manuscripts were submitted (from 1959 to 1979). But dates are not supplied for the time of completion or submission either of Young’s or the committee’s contributions.

This multiplicity of contributors has also resulted in the inevitable situation that there is at times a lack of uniformity in discussions of the