

SARDIS

in Playfair Display

“The Golden City of Firsts”

The Capital of Lydia, Birthplace
of Money, and the Home of
Croesus.

A Visual Story of the Ancient World's Wealthiest Capital.



The Legend of Infinite Wealth

The idiom "Rich as Croesus" (Turkish: "Karun kadar zengin") is not a myth—it is a historical legacy rooted in this soil. Croesus was the last Lydian king, and under his rule, Sardis became the wealthiest city in Anatolia.

Controlling the fertile Hermus (Gediz) Plain and the trade routes between the Aegean coast and the interior, the city's true power came from the ground itself.

A city where history was forged in gold.



Lydian Gold Artifacts, 6th Century BC.

The River That Flowed with Gold

Myth vs. Reality

The Myth: Legend claims King Midas washed his hands in the Pactolos River to rid himself of the “Golden Touch,” leaving the waters forever rich with gold.

The Geology: The reality was alluvial electrum (a natural gold-silver alloy) washing down from Mount Tmolos. The Lydians developed advanced techniques to refine this into pure gold, making them the regional superpower.



The Birthplace of Money

Lion: Symbol of Sun
and Royal Power



Bull: Symbol of
Fertility

Global Innovation: Before Sardis, commerce relied on barter. The Lydians invented the first state-guaranteed currency system, creating the economic model of the modern world.

The Bimetallic System: They were the first to mint separate coins of pure gold and pure silver to standardize value, moving away from variable electrum alloys.

Zero Point of the Royal Road



The 'Internet' of Antiquity: Sardis was the western terminus of this ancient superhighway. Originally built by Lydian King Gyges and expanded by Persian Emperor Darius I, this road facilitated trade, rapid military movement, and the flow of information across the known world.

The Gymnasium: A Center for Social Life



More Than a Gym:

In the Roman era, this massive Bath-Gymnasium complex was the heart of the city. It wasn't limited to athletes; it was a social hub where citizens gathered, bathed, and debated.

The Complex Layout:

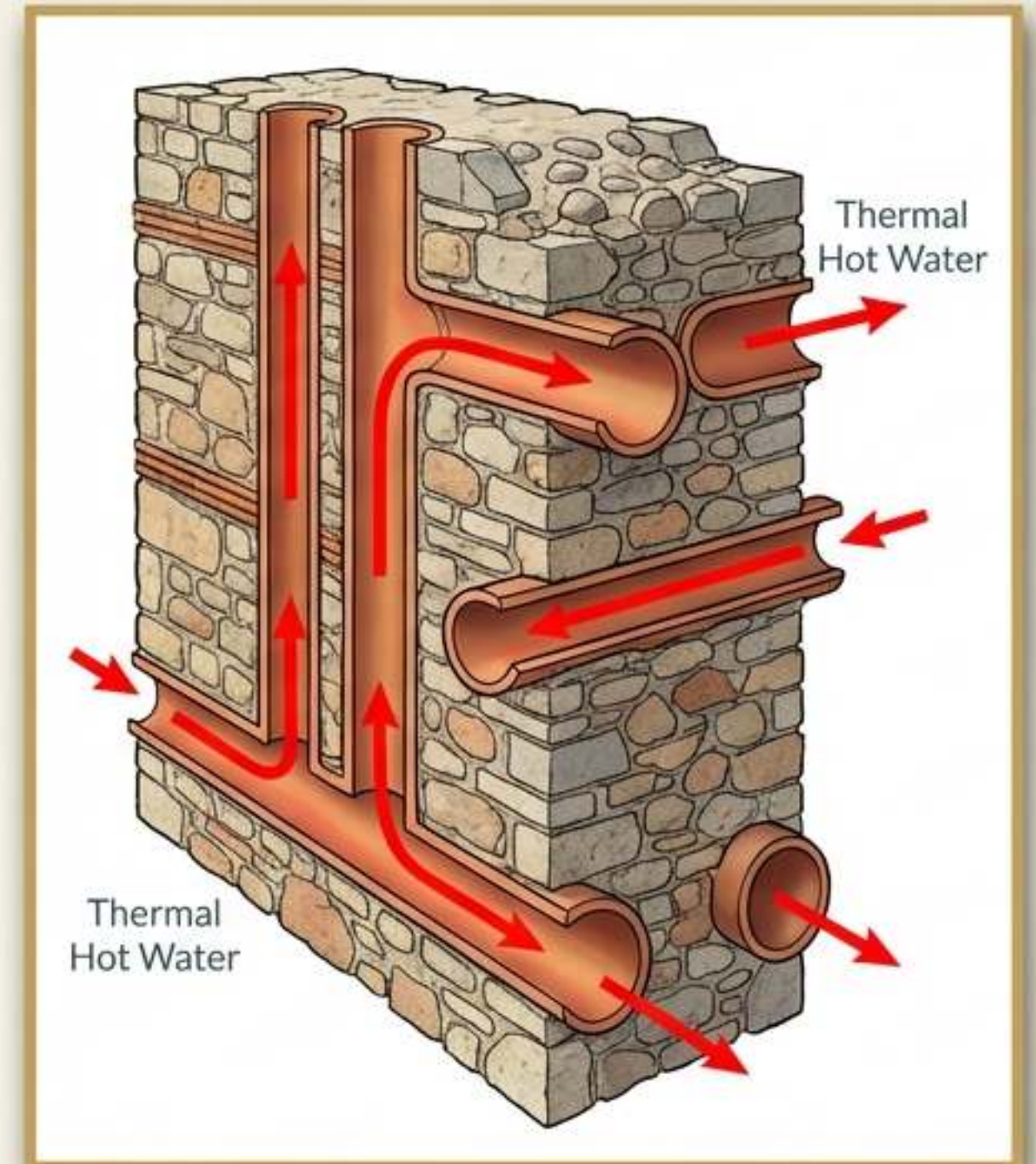
- The Bathhouse
- The Palaestra (Central Courtyard)
- The Sports Field

The World's First Thermal-Heated Shopping Mall



Retail Therapy: Lining the main marble road, these shops functioned like a **modern mall**, selling hardware, spices, paints, and fabrics.

Engineering Marvel: Excavations revealed Sardis was the first **known city to use geothermal energy for commercial heating**. Hot water from thermal springs was circulated through **clay pipes in the walls** to keep shoppers warm.



Cross-section of Shop Wall

The Giants of Artemis



Scale: The fourth largest Ionic temple in the world. Originally dedicated to Cybele and later Artemis, construction spanned centuries, starting under Croesus.

Survival: Devastated by a massive earthquake in 17 AD and later buried by landslides. These two columns stand as the survivors of a structure that once boasted over 45 massive pillars.

The 1911 Steam Crane



Industrial Archaeology:

Visitors to the temple are greeted by an unexpected artifact—a steam-powered crane from 1911.



The Logistics:

Early archaeologists laid a dedicated railway track from the Sart train station just to transport this 5-ton capacity machine. It remains on site today, a rusted monument to the heroic age of excavation.

A Testament to Tolerance: The Synagogue



A Place of Prominence:

Sardis houses the third-largest synagogue in the ancient world (3rd Century AD). Its location—directly next to the Gymnasium and the main road—signals the high status and wealth of the Jewish community.



Architectural Details:

The complex features a fountain for ritual washing and massive marble tables, likely used for reading Torah scrolls.

Bin Tepeler: The Thousand Hills



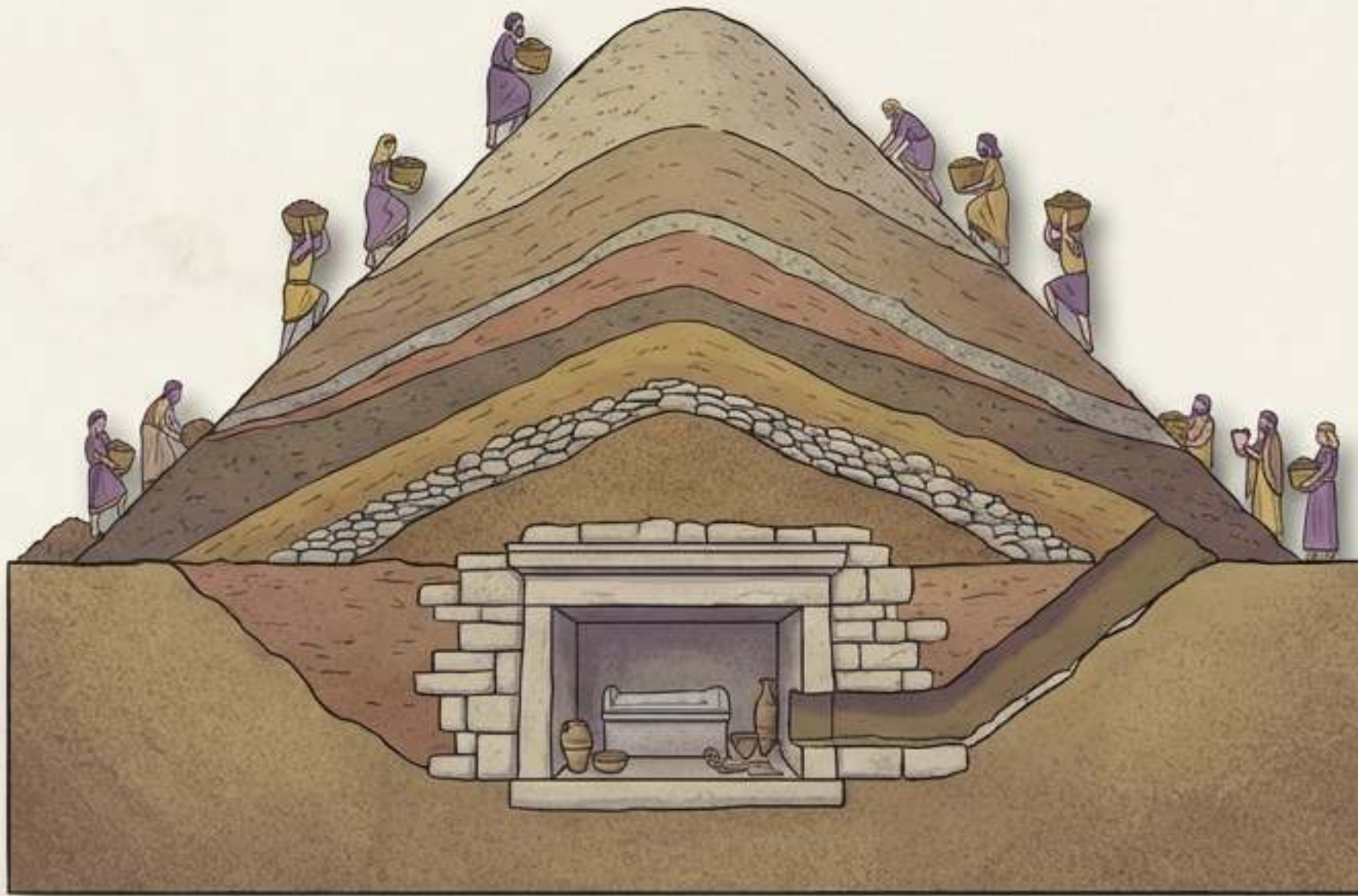
The Necropolis:

Located 5km north of the city, this is the largest tumulus field in the world, containing approximately 119 visible burial mounds.

Royal Tombs:

The largest mound belongs to King Alyattes. Its footprint rivals the Pyramids of Giza, serving as the final resting place for the Lydian nobility.

Folklore: “May Your Soil Be Plentiful”



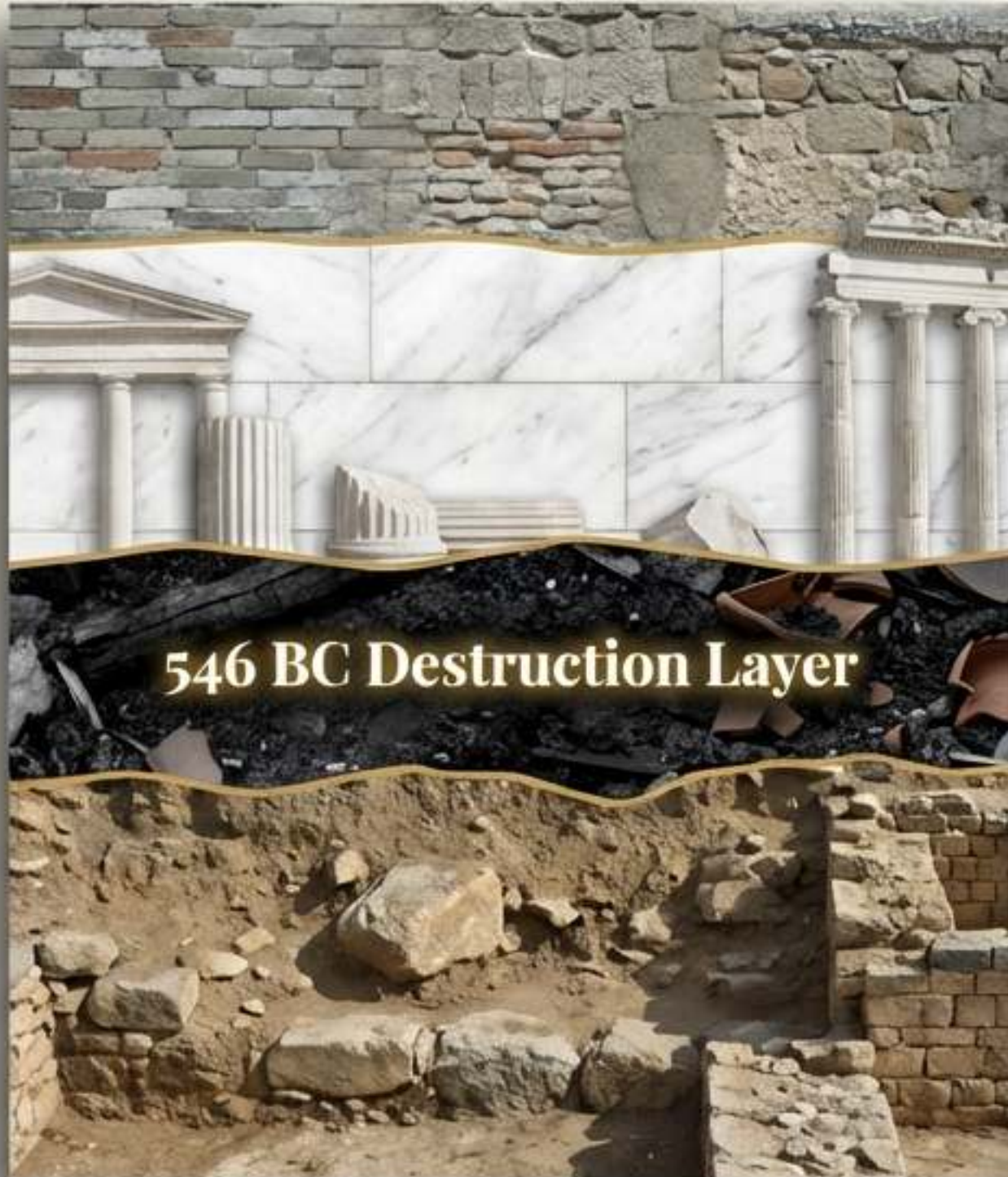
The Idiom:

The common Turkish funeral wish “Toprağı bol olsun” (May their soil be plentiful) is believed to originate from these Lydian burial customs.

The Meaning:

The height of a tumulus depended on how much soil the people brought to pile upon the grave. A larger mound signified a ruler who was deeply loved and respected by the populace.

A Layer Cake of Civilizations



Byzantine (Shops, Church)

Roman
(Gymnasium, Theater)

546 BC Destruction Layer

Lydian/Iron Age
(Fortifications)

The Destruction Layer:

A distinct layer of ash and debris marks the sack of the city by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 546 BC, ending the Lydian Empire.

Visiting a World Heritage Treasure



UNESCO Status:

Inscribed on the World Heritage List (2025).

Location:

Sart, Salihli district, Manisa.
82km from Izmir on the Ankara highway.

Museums:

Ruins are on-site. Gold artifacts and mosaics are displayed in the **Manisa Ethnography Museum** and the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (New York).

The Enduring Legacy of Sardis



"The city of gold, where the King's Road begins and history runs deep."

Sardis is more than ruins; it is the laboratory where the economic engine of the modern world was invented. From the first coin to geothermal heating, the innovations of this "Golden City" still echo in our daily lives.

Don't just read about the Golden City—walk the Marble Road.