

Remaining Roman in death at Corinth? A debate with K. W. Slane

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Many of the Roman-period tombs and graves around Corinth have been found by chance, and only recently are investigations of mortuary practices, including the article discussed here,¹ starting to appear.² Slane's premise is that the élite of Roman Corinth retained strong ties with central Italy for 150 or more years after the foundation of the colony in 44/43 B.C., and that the funerary evidence extends the earlier evidence chronologically and probably socially (455). She begins:

I single out two of the several types of chamber tombs, both of which are known in multiple examples at Corinth, and consider their probable connections with central Italy and the light they shed on commemorative rituals.

Implicit throughout is her belief that Corinth remained essentially "Roman" in general, and not simply in its funerary practices. Others would argue that by the early 2nd c. Corinth had become an integral part of a Graeco-Roman world in which patronage, intermarriage, manumission and economic cooperation all contributed to a mixed social identity.

The title of Slane's article raises an important initial question: what does "Roman" mean? The last decade has seen (not least in the pages of this journal) many discussions of the terms "Romanization", "being Roman" or, as here, "remaining Roman",³ but Slane does not define what she means by "remaining Roman" in a Corinthian context. A more nuanced approach would be to think in terms of different political, social and cultural identities that are interwoven and evolve over time. While this, too, has its pitfalls,⁴ Roman Corinth, with its complex heritage and subsequent history, is best explored along these lines. It is legitimate to view personal identity through the lens of burial forms, but this is only one aspect of a larger picture. Scenarios might include an upwardly mobile Corinthian resident deciding to follow "Roman" custom outwardly through the construction of a prominently-situated chamber tomb of a certain plan, yet demonstrating his or her personal "otherness" in its decoration or in the burial practices held at the graveside.

The topography at Corinth entailed that, while there were burial grounds along the roads to west and east, the main suburban cemeteries were to the north. The main routes from the coast ran across the plain before ascending the cliffs and continuing across the upper plateau. Early reports record that the roads were lined with elaborate family tombs,

1 K. W. Slane, "Remaining Roman in death at an eastern colony," *JRA* 25 (2012) 442-55.

2 Cf. J. L. Rife *et al.*, "Life and death at a port in Roman Greece. The Kenchreai Cemetery Project, 2002-2006," *Hesperia* 76 (2007) 143-81; *id.*, *Isthmia IX. The Roman and Byzantine graves and human remains* (Princeton, NJ 2012), with review at *JRA* 26 (2013) 827-38; M. E. H. Walbank, "Unquiet graves: burial practices of the Roman Corinthians," in D. N. Schowalter and S. J. Friesen (edd.), *Urban religion in Roman Corinth* (*HarvThSt* 53, 2005) 249-80.

3 The latest, and rather different, contribution to the debate is A. J. S. Spawforth's (*Greece and the Augustan revolution* [Cambridge 2012] especially 26-33) "Romanity", shorthand for the cultural impact of Greek culture on the Roman and the subsequent dialogue between the two élites. This is interesting from the standpoint of Roman Corinth.

4 Cf. D. J. Mattingly, "Cultural crossovers: global and local identities in the classical world," in S. Hales and T. Hodos (edd.), *Material culture and social identities in the ancient world* (Cambridge 2010) 283-95.