

The Roman-period cemeteries at Gordion in Galatia

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Study of mortuary practices in the Roman East has advanced slowly, particularly with respect to the study of burial patterns among the non-élite and in non-urban environments. In Turkey, investigation generally focuses on urban necropoleis, funerary architecture and associated inscriptions located at sites on or near the coasts,¹ where urban cemeteries are relatively accessible with plentiful surviving above-ground material. Within the rural interior, however, there has been little systematic investigation of cemeteries associated with Roman-period settlements.² Salvage needs often control the agenda as teams despatched from local museums or universities operate under tight deadlines and with insufficient funding, limited manpower, and a shortage of facilities for post-excavation analysis or off-site research. Consequently, many of the field reports have been only preliminary in nature, offering an uneven recording of finds and providing few accurate plans and drawings.³ From 1990, the state of affairs improved considerably with the appearance of *Müze Kurtarma Kazıları Semineri* (MKKS), the proceedings of an annual conference on museum-sponsored rescue projects which is a vital resource for students interested in funerary archaeology and particularly Roman-period burials.⁴ Yet the small sample-size of burials typically unearthed by salvage projects, and the general absence of concurrent work at adjacent settlements, rarely allow one to discern funerary patterns within the actual cemetery in question, let alone at a regional level. Synthetic studies and conference volumes of the type now being produced for western provinces are not yet available for Roman Anatolia.⁵ Likewise, theoretical interpretative frameworks⁶ have not yet been applied to funerary archaeology in Roman Turkey or the eastern provinces in general.

This article is a modest attempt to heighten awareness of the potential of burial archaeology at sites in central Turkey. It focuses on the three Roman-period cemeteries excavated at Gordion (mod. Yassihöyük), which lies c.95 km southwest of Ankara on the banks of the Sakarya (*Sangarius*) river. Following a general overview of those necropoleis, it will consider the contents and significance of the burials from the Common Cemetery, a complex burial ground with many components. An examination of Gordion's cemeteries is a useful exercise for a variety of reasons. First, significant portions of two cemeteries have been unearthed, each producing a sample of over 50 burials (more than is usually produced by salvage work) which offer a greater statistical probability of identifying patterns of burial practice. Second, in central Anatolia rural settlements and their cemeteries are almost entirely unexplored. The Roman-period rural settlement here is of modest size (c.3 ha) and at some distance from Galatia's few urban centers. Third, recent fieldwork at Gordion has increasingly focused upon the site's later phases, including its Roman-period settlement,⁷ as a result of which we can for once try to re-

- 1 See Spanu 2001, 175-77 for a comprehensive list of studies focused on the funerary monuments of Asia Minor. A notable exception to the focus on monumental tombs is the work carried out on the so-called Acropolis at Pessinus: Devreker, Thoen and Vermeulen 2003.
- 2 My use of 'Roman-period' rather than 'Roman' for descriptive purposes intends to recognize the complex ethnic diversity of Galatia, since a majority of its population is unlikely to have possessed Roman citizenship or to have been of Italic descent. On Galatia's ethnography see Mitchell 1992, 170-76.
- 3 E.g., Türktüzün 1990 (10 graves of the 2nd-4th c. A.D. from near Kütayha); Günel, Yurttagül and Yağcı 1992 (12 graves of the 1st c. A.D. at Çayırhan, east of Ankara); Demirci, Türkan and Salman 1999 (18 burials of the 2nd-3rd c. A.D. at *Philamelium* in Phrygia); Kiper 2000 (a disturbed necropolis of Late Roman and Byzantine date near Çankırı).
- 4 At the time of writing the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism has begun to place its most recent annual volumes online, available in PDF format: www.kultur.gov.tr/TR/ and see its listing of e-books (= e-kitap).
- 5 E.g., Struck 1993; Marchegay, Le Dinahet and Salles 1998; Pierce, Millett and Struck 2001.
- 6 As was recommended by Jones 1993, 247 f.
- 7 Sams and Voigt 1995, 374-76; 1996, 435-37; 1997, 481-82; 1998, 683; 2003, 140; Sams and Goldman 2006, 43-49; also Voigt *et al.* 1997, 13 ff.