

The people of Roman Ankara

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The British Institute has been located in Ankara for more than 60 years but, perhaps surprisingly, very few of its scholars and students have spent much time studying the city's own history. Before it became capital of the Turkish Republic, Ankara had been a significant provincial administrative and market centre, with a mixed Turkish, Armenian, Greek and Jewish population, as well as a small minority of Levantine merchants of European origin. It is very gratifying for an epigraphic scholar that all these categories of the population left their mark in the form of gravestones, inscribed in their respective languages, examples of which are in the collection of the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations, most of them in the Roman Baths (see photos below and right). Ankara's significant ethnic minorities have been largely forgotten. These substantial monuments provide an intriguing point of entry to an unwritten chapter of the city's history in the later Ottoman period. However, before the Turkish Republic, Ankara's great days go back to its foundation by the first Roman emperor Augustus, when it was the capital of the central Anatolian province of Galatia. It became and remained the most important city of the region throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods until the coming of the Turks in the 11th century.



A Jewish gravestone of ca 1900



A Karamanlı gravestone (Turkish in Greek script)

Roman Ankara is now beginning to receive some serious historical attention. Between 2003 and 2007 Professors Kutalmış Görkay and Musa Kadioğlu of Ankara University carried out a survey of the city's Roman remains and their findings have been published in a monograph (Görkay et al. 2011). Their work is based on a new survey, which has produced the first reliable map of the Roman city, study in museum and ministry archives, which contain reports of unpublished rescue excavations in the city mostly from the 1950s, reports on new work conducted by the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations and analysis of earlier publications of the main visible monuments: the Temple of Augustus, the Roman Baths, the Theatre, the so-called 'Column of Julian' and the section of main street that has been exposed in Ulus. The archaeological picture of the Roman city, whose remains have been obscured and often destroyed by continuous occupation since antiquity, nevertheless remains very patchy and incomplete, and to form an idea of what life in ancient Ankara was like it is essential to study the inscriptions. David French and I have this year completed the first volume of a corpus of all Ankara's Greek and Latin inscriptions, 315 texts from the first three centuries AD, research that has complemented the Ankara University archaeological project (Mitchell, French 2012). Squeezes from the project are now housed in the Institute and accessible on its website.



Making squeezes of inscriptions at Ankara

Inscriptions speak with a very direct voice from antiquity. Their unique and compelling importance derives from the fact that the information they contain, carved in a permanent lasting medium, comes down to us precisely in the form that was first written down by the person who conceived it. Nothing is distorted in the transmission, except by the deficiencies of our own understanding. Inscriptions thus combine the direct access to the distant past that comes from a contextualised archaeological discovery, with the characteristic of written utterances, that they make substantive propositions about antiquity. Accordingly they vitalise and send electric charges through research into all aspects of ancient scholarship: linguistic and literary, historical and cultural. They are not casual records, but also mark important moments or aspects of the lives of those who set them up. A selection of Ankara inscriptions therefore can give us a privileged glimpse into the lives of inhabitants of the Roman city.

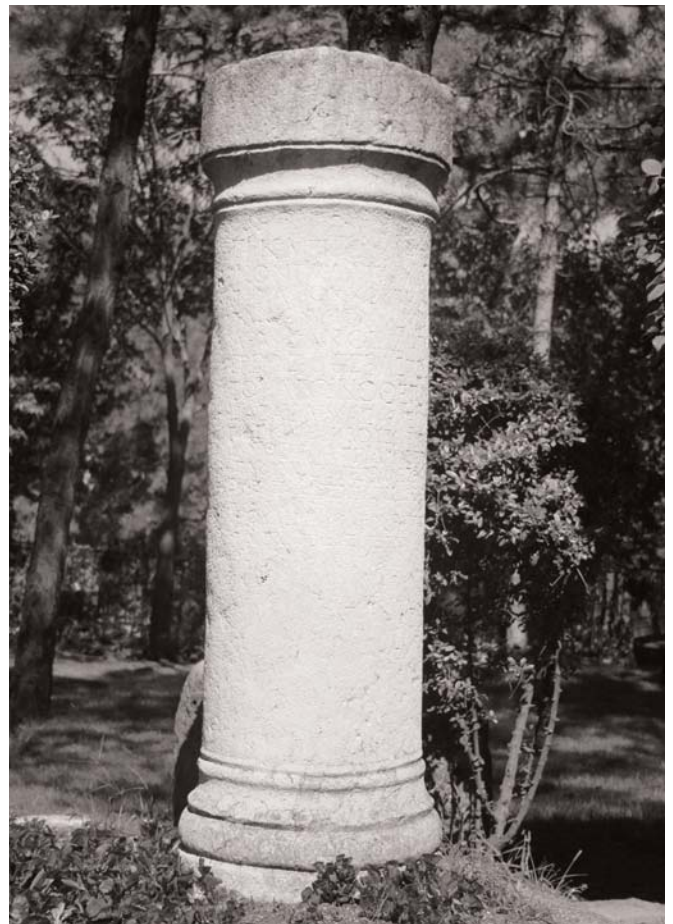
It is invidious to make choices among the texts, but we might begin with a slender columnar statue base (right) honouring a member of the local aristocracy, Tiberius Claudius Procillianus, son of Tiberius Claudius Bocchus.

Tiberius Claudius Procillianus, galatarch, son of the galatarch Tiberius Claudius Bocchus who had served as a military tribune, was seven times high-priest, twice Sebastophant, agonothetes, and carried out all his offices and duties and distributions to his native city, so that he surpassed all predecessors; 'New Hope' of his native city, the first tribe Marouragene, honoured its benefactor.

[Inscriptions of Ankara no. 83]

Procillianus' father's last name, Bocchus, is Celtic, and this is a family from the tribal Galatian aristocracy, which received Roman citizenship from the emperor Claudius. Bocchus, the father, served as an officer in one of the Roman legions based in Egypt before returning to become a civic grandee – he was seven times high priest of the imperial cult, more often than any other Galatian on record. Procillianus, in contrast, cultivated gentler arts. His name appears as the last of a list of 35 singers, who performed choral odes in honour of the emperor Hadrian at Pergamum in Asia around AD 129. Then in his early teens, he was evidently a talented choir-boy, picked to perform at this prestigious ceremonial, where he rubbed shoulders with other leading poets and performers of the age. In Ankara he receives honours as a 'galatarch', a leading figure in the imperial cult. However, while his father, who was certainly prodigiously wealthy, was honoured as having made gifts and donations to the city that surpassed those of any other benefactors, Procillianus was hailed more vaguely as 'the New Hope of his native city', an expression which suggests that more was expected of him than he was able to deliver in his career.

We can get a keen insight into the culture of Ankara's 'upper middle class', landed families that provided the backbone of the city council and fulfilled lower level public offices, from a gravestone that was visible in a wall beside the



Inscriptions of Ankara no. 83

13th century Arslan Hane mosque in 1972, but which has since been covered up or removed altogether. This, like many other funerary monuments from Ankara, was an altar-shaped base which has subsequently been trimmed to be reused as a building stone.

To the spirits of the departed. L. Marius Pudens for his own spouse, Aretê, who lived with him in a decent and comely manner; in recognition of her sensibility; he made the altar and the funerary urn on it with the grave for himself and for his spouse; the plot having been provided to them by Julius Valens and Antonia, his spouse, for the friendship they had shown to them, in honour.

[Inscriptions of Ankara no. 224]

Although this funerary text is in Greek, and the family was a local one, it shows the strong Roman influence which was evident in Ankara society by using a Greek translation of the Latin formula *Dis Manibus* to introduce the epitaph. The rest of the inscription is revelatory of the standards of morality expected among the landed but city-based gentry in the second century AD. The couple who set up the tomb had names that reflected their conduct. The husband's name was Pudens. The meaning of the name is associated with modesty, decency and a high sense of morality, especially sexual restraint. His wife's name, Aretê, simply translates into English as 'Virtue', and this is emphasised through the entire text, not only in the qualities for which she is praised, but also in the relationship that the couple enjoyed with their friends, Julius Valens and Antonia, who provided the tomb in recognition of the couple's love of goodness. The emphasis on moderation, decency, propriety and restraint is widespread in the commemoration of well-established families in the cities of the eastern provinces at this period. In this individual case we can see how these tendencies were perpetuated over the generations and across a segment of Ankara society. Initially two separate families chose the names Pudens and Aretê for their children. Pudens then commended his wife for the conduct of a life which had been led in a decent (*gnêsiôs*) and comely (*kosmiôs*) way, marked by sensibility and moderation (*sophrosyne*). The couple in turn had earned the devotion and generosity of their friends for their 'love of goodness' (*philokagathia*), and all these virtues and qualities were proclaimed publicly on their tombstone. This short text helps us to appreciate the massive social transformation between Galatian society of the first century BC, marked out by martial virtues, and the almost bourgeois Victorian morality that governed the lives of respectable citizens in the second century AD.

Another very important strand in Ankara society were the many military veterans who spent their retirement in the city after service in the Roman legions. Ankara occupied a key location on the Roman roads that led to the eastern frontier and must have been a very familiar stopping point for soldiers transferring from garrisons in the Balkans to the fortresses



Inscriptions of Ankara no. 164

and military stations along the Euphrates. Thus a Latin text (above) set up in honour of the retired centurion Marcus Iulius Rufus by the college of veterans that had settled at Ankara is a gratifying, but not surprising discovery:

For M(arcus) Iulius Rufus, son of Marcus, centurion of legio IV Scythica, second princeps of the first rank, awarded decorations by the deified Vespasian and the right of albata decursio (the cavalcade in white uniform) by the emperor Domitian; the college of army-veterans who reside at Ancyra in his honour.

[Inscriptions of Ankara no. 164]

The inscription has attracted attention from scholars interested in the military rank and military decorations that Julius Rufus received, but it also throws important light on the role of these retired non-commissioned officers in Ankara society. It is evident that they formed a distinctive Latin-speaking social group in the predominantly Greek city. They may have influenced families like those of Pudens and Aretê to adopt Latin formulae in their Greek inscriptions. Iulius Rufus, whose legion had been based on the Euphrates at Zeugma near modern Birecik, belonged to a generation of tough military pioneers who had served the Flavian emperors as they created permanent legionary garrisons in eastern Anatolia for the first time. His eminence is literally made clear by the size of his statue, which stood on a base that was originally 2.5m high, and must have towered almost 5m above pavement level.



Inscriptions of Ankara no. 235

Moreover, a fact that has not been noticed in previous publications, he also makes an appearance on another Ankara inscription, the inscribed statue base erected for a Roman governor of the province of Galatia, which can now be seen high up in one of the towers of Ankara Kale:

For Tiberius Iulius Candidus Marius Celsus, legatus Augusti pro praetore, [Marcus] Iulius Rufus centurion of legio IV Scythica.

[Inscriptions of Ankara no. 35]

Celsus, a Roman senator who was to hold the consulship twice, is known to have governed Galatia from AD 88–91 as legate of the emperor Domitian, from whom Iulius Rufus had received his most conspicuous decoration, ‘the cavalcade in white uniform’. This retired centurion is likely to have been the most prominent Ancyran of his generation.

Roman Ankara attracted non-military visitors from other cities of Asia Minor. A modest stele (above), gracefully decorated with leaves and a four-petalled flower in the pediment carries a short verse epitaph set up for a friend by his companion:

My name is Ariston, my country was Apamea, the fair, Kibotos; I lie here travelling together with my friend Hermes, who set up my tomb.

[Inscriptions of Ankara no. 235]

Ariston came from the Phrygian city of Apamea Kibotos, and Hermes composed this doggerel epigram, an attempt at dactylic verse, for his friend and fellow traveller. Such

amateur verse epitaphs were a notable feature of Phrygia’s funerary culture and are an indication both of the aspirations and of the cultural level of the region’s inhabitants. The simple adjective *kale*, ‘fair’, serves to evoke Apamea’s wealth and attractions, particularly in the context of an epitaph that commemorated one of its citizens who had died away from his home.

Apamea was an ancient and historic city, the centre of one of the Roman assize districts of Asia, but also, and more importantly, a great commercial emporium for the products of central Anatolia, including Cappadocia, which were then distributed south to Pamphylia and west to the Aegean coast. The city’s other name, Kibotos, means ‘chest’ or ‘packing-case’ and surely alludes to the goods that merchants brought to this great Anatolian emporium. It would be no surprise if business reasons had brought Ariston and Hermes to Ankara.

These examples by no means comprise a cross section of the inhabitants of the ancient city, but they amply demonstrate that Roman Ankara was a centre which brought together landed wealth, high culture, economic activity and imperial power. It was also home to a cosmopolitan polyglot community which may reasonably be compared with the equally fascinating mixed society of the later Ottoman period.

Bibliography

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