

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ROMAN MILITARY PRESENCE AT GORDION, GALATIA

JULIAN BENNETT & ANDREW L. GOLDMAN

INTRODUCTION

The name of *Gordion* is best known in the non-specialist world for two details regarding its ancient history: it was the capital city of the semi-legendary King Midas, of the “Golden Touch”, who ruled *Phrygia* in the late 8th century BC; and it was here that Alexander the Great severed the “Gordion Knot” in 333 BC, causing the credulous among his supporters to believe he was destined to fulfil the prophecy of becoming ruler of Asia Minor. In the specialist world of Anatolian archaeology, on the other hand, *Gordion* is known as one of the key loci for our broader understanding of the Bronze and Iron Ages and the Hellenistic period in the region, and especially so with regard to the Phrygians, who dominated Central Anatolia in the 9/8th–6th centuries BC. Now, however, it can make a further claim to fame, as the location for the first Roman military site of early imperial date to be identified in all Anatolia through both architectural and artefactual evidence.

THE SITE

The multi-period archaeological complex that represents Iron Age and Hellenistic *Gordion* is located at the village of Yassihöyük, some 100 km west-south-west of Ankara (Voigt, 1997). Its main visible elements consist of a large flat-topped “höyük” or settlement mound, known in the relevant literature as the Citadel Mound (Fig. 1), along with some 100 *tumuli*, several of them of an exceptional size. These remains were first brought to academic attention in 1893 after being “rediscovered” during the building of the Berlin-Baghdad railway line, and were soon after identified as indicating the probable site of ancient *Gordion* (Körte, 1897), an identification generally accepted when the results of limited excavation on the Citadel Mound and of certain of the *tumuli* were published (Körte & Körte, 1904; cf. Sams, 2005). At the time, very little was known of *Gordion*, other than its claim to fame through its connections with King Midas and Alexander the Great. That aside, all that was known of the site was that in 189 BC, the *emporium* and *oppidum* of the Galatians at *Gordion* was captured by Manlius Vulso in his campaign against

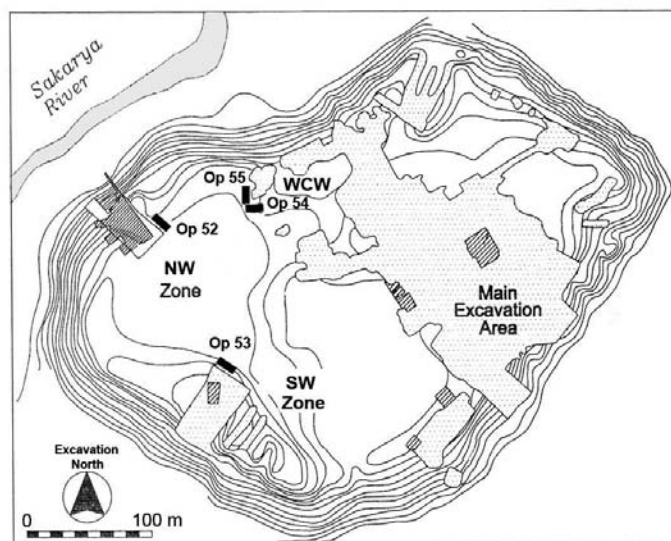


FIG. 1. The Citadel Mound at Gordion, showing the excavated areas discussed in the text

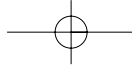
that tribe for their support of Antiochus III at the Battle of *Magnesia*¹, but by Augustan times the place had declined to little more than a village².

Exactly half-century passed before any further organised excavation took place at *Gordion*. The year 1950, however, saw the beginning of a programme of work that continued without a break until 1973 under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. This project had a specific objective, “to bring archaeological light to the Phrygians”, for at the time, virtually nothing was known of this Iron Age people (Sams, 2005: 12). Yet in the very first season of the excavation it became clear that the Roman period of occupation at *Gordion* was more intensive than might have been expected from Strabo’s report. For example, work in the NW Zone of the Citadel Mound revealed a colonnaded street or enclosure of early imperial date flanked by contemporary buildings, one of them a peristyle house, while a linear building of a broadly similar date was uncovered in the SW Zone (for the remains in the NW Zone, see Voigt *et alii*, 1997: fig. 21, and Goldman 2005: 60-61, with figs. 5-2, 5-3, 5-4).

As it was, the subsequent excavation seasons on the Citadel Mound at *Gordion* up to 1973 concentrated on the eastern half of the höyük, where there was much less post-Phrygian stratification to contend with. Even so, evidence for Roman period activity continued to be found and was duly recorded. In 1973, for example, excavations in the WCW area on the north of the Citadel Mound revealed several short lengths of Roman walling of imperial date, while the remains of three other Roman buildings and a hoard of 22 bronze coins, ending with 14 barely circulated local issues of Galba, was discovered in the nearby CC zone of the Main Excavation Trench. Moreover, work in the multi-period “Common Cemetery” on the south and south-eastern edge of modern Yassihöyük revealed over 50 graves of Roman date, a third with the remains of hob-nail boots (Goldman, 2001), while analysis of the many bronze *fibulae* that had been found on the Citadel Mound and in its vicinity prior to 1967 identified at least three of Roman date (Muscarella, 1967: 83-84, with pl. 19, 97-98, 100). One of these (n. 98) was a

¹ Liv. 38.18.11; cf. Polyb. 21, 37, 8.

² Strab. 12, 5, 3 (568).



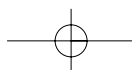
hinged bow brooch of indeterminate type, but a second (n. 97) was recognized as being an Aucissa derivative, a type of brooch well-known from Julio-Claudian contexts in the European provinces, although in this case it was erroneously dated to the 3rd century BC (Muscarella, 1967: 83). As for the third brooch (n. 100), described as “A cross-bow type fibula with turquoise and pink stone settings” (Muscarella, 1967: 84), this is in fact an example of an inset-enamelled “Snake’s head foot” bow brooch, a type common to *Raetia* in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries AD (cf. Riha, 1979: Type 5.15, n. 1281). However, although the discovery and identification of this material caused some questions to be raised at the time about the precise nature of the Roman *Gordion*, it was considered this was a matter whose resolution through excavation was best deferred until a future date.

RECONSTRUCTING ROMAN *GORDION*

A new phase of excavations began at *Gordion* in 1988, and in connection with this work a coherent and universal Yassihöyük Stratigraphic Sequence (YHSS) was prepared to allow a clearer understanding of the results produced by the earlier excavations within the entire *Gordion* complex (Voigt *et alii*, 1997: 2). This revealed that the Roman period of activity on the Citadel Mound, YHSS 2, was comprised of four main sub-phases, starting in the late Augustan or early Julio-Claudian period (Roman Phase 1), reaching a climax with Roman Phase 3 in the mid-late 1st–early 2nd century, after when occupation of the Mound either sharply declined or ceased entirely, except for a brief period of activity in the late 3rd to mid-4th century (cf. Goldman, 2005: 59–60 with 66). As it was, at the time the YHSS was being formulated, it had also been established that *Gordion* was most probably the location of the *Vindia* or *Vinda* listed as a *polis* of the Galatian *Tolistobogii* in Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, and as a *statio* in the Antonine Itinerary (Belke, 1984: 171; French, 1978: 294). Consequently the conditions were ripe for a complete re-evaluation of the Roman period of activity at *Gordion* using the artefactual and architectural evidence that was available from the 1950–1973 excavations at the site (Goldman, 2000).

This re-evaluation provided a number of surprises. Among them was the identification of several examples of high-quality Roman metalwork, including a pendant of “military type” found in a Roman grave in the Common Cemetery at Yassihöyük (Goldman, 2001: 21; for an identical specimen from *Dura Europos* see now James, 2004: fig. 43,307). A second was the identification of a range of ceramics associated with the Roman Phase 3 levels for which no exactly clearly distinct parallels could be found amongst the published material from other Roman sites in Anatolia. Finally, it was observed that certain of the Roman structures associated with these ceramics were built on a consistent north-south axis, an alignment quite unlike that found used in the earlier buildings on the Citadel Mound. This prompted the suggestion that a regularly-planned settlement had been established here sometime after the province of *Galatia* was created by Rome in 25–20 BC. On the basis of the evidence then available it was suggested that this settlement –whether or not it was *Vindia*– was perhaps created in association with the improvements the Flavian emperors made to the infrastructure of *Galatia* (Goldman, 2000: 395–396; Goldman, 2005: 63, 66), although the possibility that it was formed in the late Augustan or early Julio-Claudian period could not be entirely excluded.

Either way, a Roman military tombstone found in 1996 while ploughing a field north of the Citadel Mound seemed to confirm that *Gordion* might have been a place of some note in the late 1st and early 2nd century. The soldier commemorated, Tritus, had died while serving with the



cohors VII c. R. Breucorum equitata, and was memorialised by one Mersua, *vexillarius* in the same unit (Goldman, 1997: 47). Subsequent research established that the *cohors VII Breucorum* was *in praesidia* in *Moesia Superior* until at least AD 100, and that it formed a part of the auxiliary garrison of *Pannonia Inferior* from AD 143 until at least the 3rd century (Goldman, 1997: 49). Therefore, the unit's presence at *Gordion* could best be explained by it having been there in connection with Trajan's Parthian War, either to supervise passage on the nearby Pessinus-Ancyra route; or to oversee the collection of supplies for provisioning those units passing through *Ancyra* on their way to the eastern frontier (Goldman, 1997: 49-51). In fact the proposition that the *cohors VII Breucorum* was in *Anatolia* for Trajan's Parthian War has since been effectively validated by an unpublished and incomplete diploma for *Moesia Inferior* for 115, which reports that a *cohors VII*, most probably the *VII Breucorum*, was absent from that province in that year as it was "*translatis in expedit[i]one*" (pers. comm.: P. A. Holder; cf. also Eck & Pangerl, 2005: *passim*).

Soon after the discovery of this tombstone, it was noted by one of us that a class of locally-made redwares found mainly in the Roman Phase 3 levels at *Gordion* included a number of items that were broadly similar in form and the use of a red or reddish fabric to the "Legionary Wares" associated with Julio-Claudian and Flavian military contexts in the European provinces of the Roman Empire. The relevant *Gordion* examples included a beaker decorated with barbotine "knobs" (cf. Goldman, 2005: fig. 5-5a), while other more bulbous version of the same basic form, but with a rough-cast surface decoration, were seen to be closely similar to continental fine wares found at such Neronian sites as Usk (e. g., Greene, 1979: fig. 8, 20, 1). It was subsequently shown that a number of the other redware forms at *Gordion* could also be paralleled amongst the ceramic material found at Roman military sites in the European provinces. Such was the case, for example, with a range of open vessels with applied features in the form of lengths of pie-crust rim and "bulls-horn" imitation spouts, which bear a marked morphological similarity by form, "decoration" and the use of a reddish fabric to material found at several Julio-Claudian and Flavian sites in central Europe (e. g., *Carnuntum*: cf. Gassner & Jilek, 1997: fig. 5, 15). Moreover, these same Roman Phase 3 levels at *Gordion* also produced red-slipped vertical-rim dishes with footprint-type maker's stamps (cf. Goldman, 2005: fig. 5-6), forms that can be broadly paralleled among the products of the Arretine and South-Gaulish terra sigillata potteries of the Julio-Claudian period, while other examples of the same basic ware have been provisionally classed as Flavian "Eastern Sigillata B" or "C", with some perhaps from Cyprus or the Levant (Goldman, 2005: 62).

THE 2004 AND 2005 EXCAVATIONS

The growing wealth of evidence for intensive early imperial Roman activity at *Gordion* associated with artefacts that had a strong European aspect naturally increased speculation on the character of the site at that time. Consequently, for reasons that have been fully explained elsewhere (Sams & Goldman, 2006: 43-49), it was agreed that four small trenches should be excavated in 2004 and 2005 in the immediate vicinity of those structures and contexts that were associated with this material (Fig. 1). This work has resulted in the finding of *in situ* artefactual and structural evidence showing that at least one part of the Citadel Mound was used on a "permanent" basis by the Roman army from the second half of the 1st and into the early 2nd century.

The more conclusive evidence for this activity came from Operations 54 and 55, which were located next to that part of the WCW area that had produced structural evidence of Roman date. These two excavated areas revealed a rectangular north-south building some 9 m wide but of an

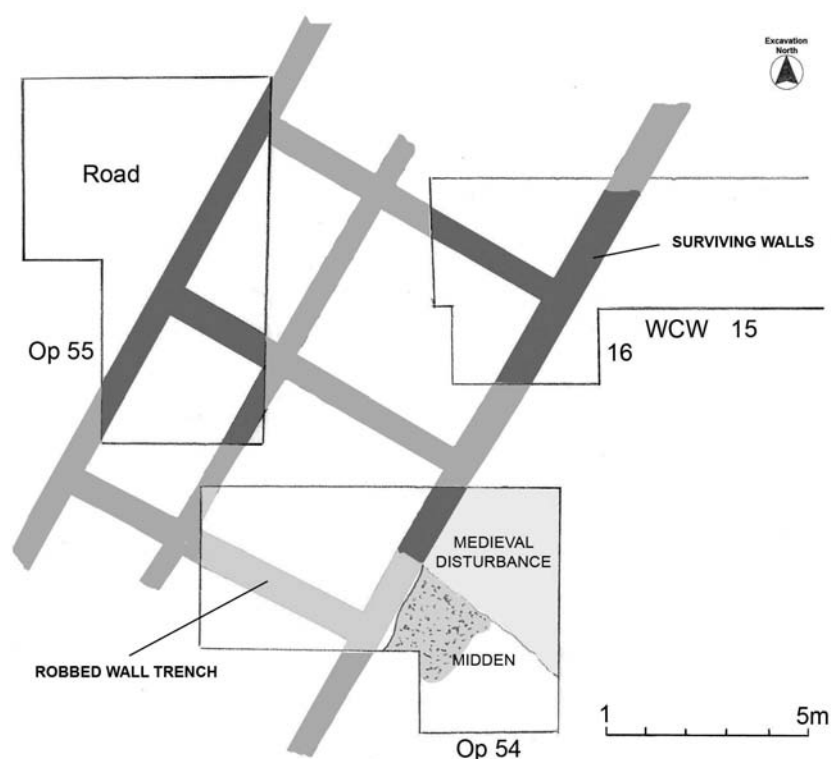


FIG. 2. Detailed plan of the Gordion Operations 54 and 55, together with WCW-16, showing the surviving remains of the Roman building interpreted as a barrack block

unknown length, which fronted a road surface on the west side (Fig. 2). This building, which had clay-bonded stone foundations and a probable mud-brick superstructure, contained at least three contiguous rooms on its north-south axis, the more complete central one being divided by a cross-wall to create a western space of 2,5 x 4 m, and a larger eastern one at 4,5 x 4 m. Moreover, re-analysis of the records for the 1973 work in the adjacent WCW-16 sector, directly northeast of Operations 54 and 55, suggested that this had located the rear part of the room north of the central room, allowing its plan to be restored as being of an identical size. As such, the plan and dimensions of these rooms are appropriate for adjacent *contubernia* in a regular Roman military barrack block, with the *arma* to the west and the *papilio* to the east. Indeed, their internal areas, at 28 sq. m., and relative proportions of 1: 1.8, directly conform to those typical of legionary and auxiliary *contubernia* of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (e. g., Davison, 1989: 37-39 [legionary] and 97-102 [auxiliary]).

The possibility that these rooms represented contiguous *contubernia* in a barrack block was greatly strengthened by the artefactual material indirectly and directly associated with them. For example, among the material from post-Roman contexts here, such as rob-trenches and pits of medieval date, there were a variety of copper alloy artefacts of Roman military type, including three harness pendants. Two of these were of Bishop Type 2, with a teardrop shape and palmette terminal, the one with a suspension loop the other with a suspension hole, and both can be paralleled at a number of early imperial military sites throughout the Roman Empire (cf. Bishop, 1998: 96). The third pendant, however, was a Bishop Type 3 derivative, in which the peltate-

shaped plate with kidney-shaped perforations that constitutes the main type (Bishop, 1988: 148) becomes the lower part of a more complex piece, with a rectangular or ovoid face-plate bearing an applied circular plaque, and which in our case can be closely paralleled at *Siscia* and other sites in the Danubian region (cf. Radman-Livaja, 2004: 111 with tab. 66,480). In addition, these layers also produced a single copper alloy scale with twin vertical piercings on all four sides, showing that it came from a section of semi-rigid scale armour, a class of armour that is now believed to have possibly been introduced in the late Hadrianic or early Antonine period (pers. comm. M. C. Bishop; cf. also McCarthy *et alii*, 2001: 508).

Those artefacts found in securely stratified deposits directly associated with the building in Operations 54 and 55 provided more conclusive evidence for its identification as a Roman army barrack block. For example, a midden deposit located to the south (i. e., to the “rear”) of the central room in Operation 54 produced several individual examples and some linked groups of iron rings from ring-mail armour as well as individual examples of copper alloy and iron scale from scale armours. It also included a broken copper alloy bow brooch of Aucissa derivative type and an iron bow brooch with two pins, both of which can be broadly dated to the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. That aside, the pottery from this midden was consistently of *Gordion* Roman Phase 3 types, i.e., redwares and red-slipped wares of the late 1st–early 2nd century AD, while the deposit also contained examples of glassware that can best be paralleled amongst material from the destruction levels at *Pompeii* (pers. comm., J. Duncan Jones). However, the most decisive evidence for the military nature of this building came from the front part of the north room in Operation 55, the room that would have been the *arma* if this was indeed a *contubernium*, for this space produced two substantial lengths of flexible iron scale armour, the scales being joined with copper alloy staples, and both lengths having textile impressions on their rear faces.

Unfortunately, it was only at the very end of the 2005 season that the Roman Phase 3 levels began to appear in the two other areas excavated in 2004–2005, Operations 52 in the NW Zone and 53 in the SW Zone. Nonetheless, post-Roman pits and rob-trenches in both produced pottery and glassware similar to that found in the Roman Phase 3 levels in Operations 54 and 55, as well as metal artefacts of a military character, including a second example of a copper alloy scale from a semi-rigid armour. It is thus quite possible that the early Roman buildings identified during the earlier work in the vicinity of these areas were related to the Roman army. Certainly, the peristyle house in the NW Zone would not be out of place in such a context, and it might not be entirely coincidental that the linear building flanking the other side of colonnaded street or courtyard here has a width comparable to that usual in a barrack block. Moreover, it might also be noted that a brooch found in 1997 during excavation in this general area (Voigt *et alii*, 1997: fig. 32 g) seems to be an example of “Hülsenscharnier” type, a form of brooch most commonly found in *Raetia* and the adjacent provinces in late 1st and early 2nd century contexts (cf. Riha, 1979: Taf. 39.78, Type 5.12.2). That aside, one of the Roman Phase 3 buildings found in the SW Zone in 1950, and whose eastern continuation was revealed at the end of the 2005 season in our Operation 53, can likewise be restored as possibly being another barrack block. Such is suggested by its 8 m width and the existence of three cross-walls whose spacing allows the possibility that it had originally contained two other cross-walls defining five rooms with internal dimensions of about 4,5 x 6,5 m, figures entirely appropriate for Roman military *contubernia*.

CONCLUSIONS

A full analysis of the 2004 and 2005 excavations at *Gordion* is still in progress, as is the work on evaluating the Roman period structures revealed in earlier years in the NW and SW Zones. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the building remains found in 2004–2005 in Operations 54 and 55 belonged to a Roman army barrack block, in which case *Gordion* thus becomes the first site in the whole of Turkey to produce an example of what is a standard building form exclusive to regular Roman army units of the early imperial period. As such, the evidence that the Citadel Mound at *Gordion* had once been provided with at least one purpose-built structure designed for use by members of a regular Roman army unit provides a valuable corollary to the general belief that in Anatolia, these men were normally billeted on the civilian community (cf. Bennett, 2007: forthcoming), although we cannot as yet answer the question of whether or not the Citadel Mound was occupied by an entire unit or part of one.

That aside, the evidence of the ceramics and glassware indicates that this building was in use from possibly as early as the late Julio-Claudian and certainly from the early Flavian period until the reign of Trajan. Moreover, the nature of the military equipment found in association with it points to its inhabitants having been members of an auxiliary unit, perhaps with a mounted element, to judge from the size of some of the iron scales, comparable to those believed to be used in horse-armour: in which case the knowledge that the *cohors VII Breucorum* was an equitate unit is perhaps directly relevant. However, the ceramics and glassware suggest that the *Gordion* barrack block was in use at an earlier period, while the ceramics also point to a link with the Northern and Central European provinces. That being so a comment of Tacitus might be relevant here³, namely that in AD 57, a legion and “its auxiliary cavalry and infantry” were transferred from “*Germania*” to Anatolia in connection with the preparations for Corbulo’s first Armenian campaign (cf. Dušanić, 1978: 470-475, but note Speidel, 1998: 165-167; 175-176; Speidel, 2000: 329-331). There again, it needs to be observed that just as with Roman military metalwork, the specific style of these ceramics need not represent anything more than a form of “type-fossil”, representing elements of a fairly well-defined range of ceramic types, in this case the “Legionary Wares”, that are to be found across the entire Northern and Central European parts of Rome’s empire. Moreover, while the closest parallels to certain of our *Gordion* Roman Phase 3 ceramics can be dated to the mid- or late Julio-Claudian period, this need not exclude the possibility that the military occupation of the site should really be dated to the Flavian period, and was somehow connected with the improvements that were then being made to the infrastructure of *Galatia* (Goldman, 2005: 63 & 66).

The matter of what date or period we should assign to the primary phase of military activity at *Gordion* apart, the question of why a garrison should have been located here needs to be addressed. Those familiar with the work of Malcolm Todd will immediately see the broad parallels between the re-use of this Anatolian site by the Roman army in the mid-late 1st–2nd centuries AD and the re-use of certain British *oppida* and hill forts in south and south-west *Britannia* by the Roman army during the Julio-Claudian invasion and consolidation of those parts of the province (Todd, 1985). In the case of *Gordion*, however, we are not dealing with an invasion/occupation period site, but one that belongs to a period that post-dates the creation of the province of *Galatia* in 25/20 BC. In which case we should seek an alternative explanation for the presence of a Roman military unit here from the mid 1st century AD onwards.

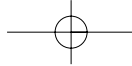
³ Tac. *Ann.* 13, 35 with 15, 6.

The most likely one is that the site functioned as a central stores depot for the Roman army in *Galatia* (and beyond?). After all, *Gordion/Vindia* lies at the centre of what was in Roman times a landscape devoted to agriculture, a part of the area to the west known as the *Chora Considiana* having been imperially-owned from at least the time of Hadrian (Mitchell, 1993: 153, n. 95). As it is, the original owners of this land were condemned for *lese majeste* by Tiberius⁴: thus it is highly probable that the estate was in fact appropriated during that emperor's reign, and not under Hadrian, as has been implied (Mitchell, 1993: 157). It could be, then, that at least parts of the area around *Gordion* were already imperially owned in the mid 50's when Nero decided on his Armenian campaign. In which case, it could be that a garrison was initially assigned to *Gordion* as part of the general logistical build-up required for supplying the four legions and their associated auxiliaries that were assembled by Corbulo for this enterprise (cf. Bennett, 2007b: forthcoming). On the other hand, it could well have been that the creation of the province of *Galatia* and *Cappadocia* in AD 72/73, and the installation of a larger garrison in the region (Bennett, 2002: 304), that brought about a situation in which *Gordion* started to be used for this purpose. After all, this double province is somewhat unusual in that many of the milestones found here report extensive roadworks in the years 80–82 in which the routes involved were now being paved –*vias stravit*– for the first time (e. g., French, 1981: 32A; cf. Mitchell, 1993: 124–126): in other words, they record an organised programme of works in which paved roads replaced earlier tracks.

That aside, whatever date we should assign to the first use of *Gordion* by the Roman military –Neronian or Flavian– it is quite probable that the re-naming of the place as “*Vindia*” belongs to this period of re-occupation. Such might be inferred from the fact that the name is likely to be derived from the Celtic **Uindo*, for “white”, “fair”, or “bright”, and which survives in Old and Modern English as “Winter”, meaning “the bright time”, with direct reference to the brightness of the snow in that season (cf. Rivet & Smith, 1979: 500; Goldman, 2000: 44–45). More to the point, the word is found used as a place-name element throughout the European provinces, with examples in *Pannonia*, *Raetia* and Gaul, although it is most commonly found in *Britannia*, where there are six examples, three of them associated with Roman forts. Thus we might envisage a scenario in which the toponym “*Vindia*” was imposed on *Gordion* by a newly arrived Roman garrison of European origin, with reference to the gleaming “bright” or “white” appearance of the scarp edge that marks the east side of the Yassihöyük basin. Certainly, an origin for the name this way makes better sense than the currently accepted belief, that the arrival of the Galatians in the 3rd century BC prompted the name change (Mitchell, 1993: 50), especially as Strabo still knew *Gordion* as *Gordion* in Augustan times: thus its re-naming as *Vindia* logically belongs to a later period.

Such aside, if a garrison was established at *Vindia* to oversee the collection of supplies from the surrounding areas for the garrison of *Galatia-Cappadocia*, then we might assume that it was maintained here for precisely the same reason after the process of formalizing the Euphrates frontier was completed under the Flavians. In which case we might surmise that the existing (?equitate) garrison was replaced domino-style by the *cohors VII Breucorum equitata* from *Moesia* when Trajan gave the order to move troops forward for his invasion of *Parthia*. In other words, once its former garrison was posted east, the *VII Breucorum* now assumed the responsibility for supervising logistical matters at *Vindia* and in the immediate area. Indeed, it is quite probable

⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 3, 37, 5, 8, and 6, 18.



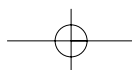
that the *VII Breucorum* remained at *Vindia* until the autumn of 117, when Hadrian passed through Ankara on his way from the east to the Danubian frontier, taking with him many of those units that had been transferred from the west for Trajan's Parthian War. After all, what better time for formally abandoning a military site that had by now substantially less relevance than before, allowing the re-location of its garrison in *Pannonia Inferior*, where the same cohort is attested in 143?

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