

In Memory of the Mountain Gods:

Grave Stelai Featuring the Mount Argaios Cult from Cappadocia

Questions of urbanization and local identity are central to contemporary analyses of Anatolia's rich material record in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. In Cappadocia, however, these concepts are particularly challenging. Unlike neighboring regions, Cappadocia's landscape was not replete with city territories, and a perceptible cultural identity did not exist before the region's final king, Archelaus (Jones 1971; Mitchell 1993). During Archelaus' reign in the late 1st c. B.C.E. and early 1st c. C.E., the kingdom entered a period of stability. Cappadocia actively participated in dynastic networks, and Archelaus transformed the urban landscape.

Concurrent with this was the rise of an iconographic *koine* centered on the Mount Argaios cult, a focus of contemporary scholarship (Belis 2018; Durukan 2012; Hakman 2017; Kara 2016, 2017). Mount Argaios – whose worship has been traced to the 16th c. B.C.E. at the Yazılıkaya Temple north of Hattusa – features prominently on coins, gems, figurines, votive offerings, rock-cut tombs, and grave stelai dating to the high imperial era. This is a substantive shift from the Persian and Hellenistic periods, where the mountain's presence is almost entirely absent in the material record (Durukan 2012; Hakman 2017). Recent scholarship focuses on numismatic iconography, exploring which deities Cappadocia's inhabitants believed lived within the mountain. In the process, scholars have overlooked not only the stelai but also that most were found in the vicinity of Cappadocia Comana and Mazaca, cities that experienced a change in status under Archelaus (Jones 1971; Mitchell 1993). Mazaca was renamed Caesarea, and Cappadocia Comana was granted city rights. I argue this change in status and the re-emergence

of the cult in the material record are related and that the symbols of Argaios on stelai illustrate the importance of indigenous religion to constructions of civic and individual identities among the middling classes in Cappadocia.

The first part of this paper examines the iconography of a group of grave stelai from Caesarea and Cappadocia Comana previously associated with the cult of Argaios (Kara 2017); significant motifs include a triangular figure understood as an abstract representation of the mountain, as well as the lyre, phallus, thunderbolt, and crescent. In the second part of the paper, I examine evidence for the cult of Argaios on other stelai not previously associated with the cult. By undertaking analysis of this understudied cult through stelai, this paper contributes to broader discussions of identity in Roman provincial archaeology and frontier studies.

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