

We would like to invite you to join us for the first Bilkent archaeology event of 2026, a lecture to be held in memory of our colleague Julian Bennett.

Reframing a City on the Roman Eastern Frontier: Recent Work at Zeugma

Prof. Kutalmış Gökay

Bilkent C block amphi, 17.30, Thursday 29/01/2026

Summary

Situated in south-eastern Turkey, Zeugma, literally "bridge" or "crossing" in ancient Greek, owes its name to its location at a major ancient crossing point on the Euphrates River. The city stood at the physical intersection of the principal east–west trade route and the north–south route following the river. The name Zeugma in fact refers to twin cities situated on opposing banks of the Euphrates. These were Hellenistic settlements founded around 300 BC by Seleucus I Nicator. The settlement on the western bank was named Seleucia after its founder, while that on the eastern bank was called Apamea, after his Persian/Bactrian wife Apama.

Following the annexation of the city into the Kingdom of Commagene by Pompey, Seleucia, frequently referred to simply as Zeugma, became one of the four most important cities of the kingdom. Subsequently, Zeugma emerged as a major eastern frontier city of the Roman Empire. During the first century AD, two Roman legions namely, Legio X Fretensis and Legio IV Scythica, were stationed there, greatly enhancing both the strategic importance and the cosmopolitan character of the city.

Because of its apologetically significant position, Zeugma constitutes an important research context for the study of hybridised local cultures formed through the interaction of Greco-Macedonian and Roman populations with indigenous groups. In addition to a substantial Semitic population, the city's inhabitants included Greco-Macedonian settlers introduced by Seleucus, merchants from various regions, and high-ranking Roman military personnel, whose numbers increased following the city's

incorporation into the Roman Empire. Roman citizens, legionaries, and civil servants also formed part of this diverse population.

As a result, Zeugma preserves archaeological remains that reflect the complex, sometimes ambiguous, yet highly diverse ethnic and cultural identities that coexisted within the city and gave rise to new cultural syntheses. The Zeugma Archaeological Project is a long-term research initiative conducted by Ankara University since 2005.

This talk will focus primarily on recent research concerning the main sanctuary at Belkıs Tepe, the military installations, domestic architecture, and the necropoleis of the ancient city.

Bio

Professor Kutalmış Gökay is a classical archaeologist specializing in Greek and Roman archaeology, with expertise in urbanism, material culture, and frontier studies in Asia Minor. He received his BA, MA, and PhD from Ankara University, where his doctoral research focused on Corinthian and Attic black-figure pottery imports into western Anatolia. He undertook further academic training at the University of Oxford and the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

Since 2005, Prof. Gökay has been conducting the Zeugma (Commagene) Excavations, a major archaeological project on the Roman eastern frontier. He has also worked at Aphrodisias, Arykanda, Alexandria Troas, Erythrai, and Ankyra, and held a long-term academic position at Ankara University. He has been affiliated with the University of Oxford as a Visiting Professor and research scholar at All Souls College, Christ Church, and Wolfson College, where he is currently a Member of the Middle Common Room.

A former Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, Prof. Gökay has also held research fellowships at Harvard University and the CNRS in Bordeaux. He is the founding President of the Turkish Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. His research focuses on cultural interaction, hybridity, and material culture in complex frontier societies.