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Philippi: a very Roman city

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BRÉLAZ, C. 2018 *Philippes, colonie romaine d'Orient: recherches d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale*. Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 59. Pp. 399. ISBN 978-2-86958-299-6

In this volume, Brélaz brings together his extensive research on the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia. It is underpinned by the author's earlier publication of the Greek and Latin documents found in the city center or in its territory, many of which had remained unpublished.¹ His present work is a study of Philippi's political institutions and its social elite from the time of the colony's foundation in 42 BCE until the end of the 3rd c. or beginning of the 4th c. CE, when epigraphic material relating to the municipal administration gradually disappears as it is overtaken by the growing authority of the Christian church. More generally, Brélaz discusses Philippi not only in its regional situation, but also in the wider context of Greek-speaking colonies in the eastern empire. His aim is to provide an overall picture of Roman colonization in the East, which has not received the same attention as in the west. This is an impressive and very useful volume, which is divided into three main parts, with a conclusion and two appendices.

In *Le cadre formel et la constitution de la colonie*, Brélaz explores how the colony of Philippi was founded on the site of a Greek polis in 42 BCE by M. Antonius and refounded in 30 BCE by Octavian/Augustus as *colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensium*. He assumes that the organization of the new colony was on the same lines as those in the Lex Ursonensis. Given the Flavian date of the inscription, there has always been some doubt as to whether the regulations in the Lex Ursonensis applied to colonies in general, but Brélaz cites the supporting evidence including, most recently, fragments of the lex coloniae Ulpiae

¹ *CIPh* II.1. References to this volume are given throughout the book in heavy type.

Philippi

Traianae Ratiariae, dated in 106 CE. He offers no reason for the choice of the tribe Voltinia for the colony. It is not clear exactly when, but certainly by the time of Trajan, Philippi had also been given the *ius Italicum* with its attendant privileges.

Philippi's existence and prosperity depended largely on its military importance as a base on the *via Egnatia*, which runs from the Adriatic coast to Byzantium, and also on its proximity to the Danube *limes*, but it was also rural with a very large territory. Recently, Rizakis has shown that it extended further than previously recognized with the addition of a *praefectura* that stretched west of the urban center to east of Serres in the Strymon basin.² The territory was heavily fragmented, with *incolae* continuing to live in their existing communities. There is evidence of centuriation, but Brélaz refrains from estimating the number of veterans originally settled in the colony, and from overinterpreting the evidence to conclude that an original centuriation of 42 BCE was redrawn in 30 BCE. He compares such attempts specifically with the widely promoted theory that changes to centuriation in the northeast Peloponnese show that Corinth was a failing colony and was refounded under the Flavians, a conclusion that Brélaz dismisses as "far from certain."³ It is very likely that the military veterans arriving in Philippi in large numbers, particularly during the 1st c. CE, expected to receive land grants. This would then have led to the reorganization of some lots or the allocation of additional terrain. Unlike other cities in the East, the language in general use was Latin, not simply in the official context, well into the 3rd c. A contributory factor here must have been the constant renewal of the population of Philippi from Italy. It is probable, however, that in private some, perhaps most, of the long-established population would have spoken a form of Greek or a local dialect that would not have been part of the epigraphic record. Brélaz's lengthy discussion of linguistic usage and interactions is one of the most interesting aspects of this section.

In *Les institutions et les magistratures: aspects de la vie publique d'une colonie romaine d'Orient*, Brélaz describes the political, civic, and religious institutions of the city, which were established on familiar lines. He demonstrates his impressive command of the evidence in comparing Philippi with other Roman colonies in the East, including Corinth, which, founded in 44/43 BCE and originally dominated by those "of freedman stock," rapidly became a wealthy cosmopolitan center attracting influential Romans and well-connected Greeks, some of whom developed close contacts with Rome.⁴ In contrast, at Philippi, movement was in the opposite direction. The city provided recruits for the army as well as accommodating veterans. There was a flourishing Imperial cult and dedications on public buildings, but the elite of Philippi had few connections with the upper levels of Roman society or with members of the Imperial family. A small number did enter the equestrian order, but there is only one known senator (see below).

An interesting addition to the municipal offices is the *irenarchie*, which was held by four distinguished individuals.⁵ It was an occasional appointment, equivalent to the head of a police force, made when there was a need to maintain public order in the city, and

² Rizakis 2012.

³ Romano 2003.

⁴ Brélaz refers repeatedly to Corinth being the seat of the proconsul of Achaëa. This may be so, but there is still no indisputable, i.e., epigraphic evidence to confirm the identification.

⁵ The title *Irenarches Iani* appears at Corinth (Kent 1966, 195) but clearly refers to a priestly office.

especially in the countryside. These appointments should probably be dated at the beginning of the 2nd c., when there was unrest and a hostile Thracian tribe on the northern limit of Philippi's territory. There are frequent references to such appointments in the Greek cities of Asia Minor in the 2nd c. Brélaz notes that it was the only office of Greek origin in Philippi, which was organized on strictly Roman lines, and suggests that there may have been closer links between these cities and Philippi than previously recognized.

Another intriguing reference, this time to the city's financial problems during the reign of M. Aurelius and L. Verus, comes from Papirius Iustus in the *Digest*, who records the failure of a *curator rei publicae* to make necessary payments on behalf of the city. It brings to mind Pliny's correspondence with Trajan regarding financial problems in the cities of Asia Minor. In this case, the financial crisis was probably caused by the extravagant building program in the urban center, the remains of which can be still seen today.

In an appendix to this section, references to the colony and its institutions in the New Testament are discussed in the context of Paul's visit. It is a useful summary, but it seems out of place here. Paul certainly put Philippi on the map for later generations, but the church does not become significant, as Brélaz acknowledges, until the late 3rd c. Research at Corinth into membership of the church at the time of Paul's visit showed that the Pauline assembly was tiny: a few members may have had moderate disposable resources, but the majority were living at or below subsistence level, and the existence of the church scarcely impinged upon society as a whole.⁶ In recent years there has been renewed interest in the cities of Paul's ministration, and it will be interesting to see if there is a similar assessment of the size and social status of the Christian community at Philippi.

The third part, *La société des notables à Philippes* covers some of the same ground as the previous section. "Notables" is generously interpreted to include not only holders of public office, but also serving military officers, veterans, and wealthy freedmen. Particular attention is paid to the unusual presence of serving soldiers in public life. By the mid-2nd c. a few members of the old elite had entered the equestrian order at Rome, but only one senator is recorded. The family of C. Iulius Maximus Mucianus seems to have come from aristocratic Thracian stock and was given Roman citizenship by Augustus. He himself had been made a senator by A. Pius and subsequently moved to Philippi, where he acquired local citizenship, was enrolled in the Voltinia tribe, and entered the *ordo decurionum*.

In the concluding section, *La place de Philippes parmi les colonies romaines d'Orient et dans son contexte régional*, Brélaz recognizes two distinct career paths, one for the old elite and the other for social climbers, the upwardly mobile. He assesses Philippi's place in the region and concludes that it remained a comparatively small, essentially conservative city with a moderate degree of wealth. He ends with a plea for further quantitative analysis of inscriptions elsewhere to shed more light on the local communities and elites of cities planted by Rome in the Greek-speaking provinces. There are two appendices: a list of holders of public office and/or military status cross-referenced to a complete prosopographical list in *CIPh* II.1, 413–18; and *Addenda* and *Corrigenda* to *CIPh* II. 1.

In sum, this is a lengthy and learned book which highlights the extraordinary flexibility of the Roman practice of colonization. It is not a complete history of Philippi, but it will be

⁶ Friesen 2005

Palmyra revisited: 40 years of different ways of research

essential reading for those studying the city in all its aspects, and an invaluable resource for scholars exploring the complexities of Roman colonies in the Greek East.

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Palmyra revisited: 40 years of different ways of research

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From 1959, the Polish Archaeological Mission at Palmyra was the flagship of Palmyra research for more than 50 years, involving annual excavation in the field as well as publication activities, especially in the various series of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) of the University of Warsaw.¹ Other missions later also started

* The author notes that he is in scientific exchange and personal contact with both authors of the publications reviewed here, but these do not constitute a conflict of interest for the purposes of this book review.

¹ See the Palmyra project bibliography, Obłuski 2022.