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## **I. The age of the Macedonian kingdom (316-168 B.C.)**

Thessaloniki was founded by Cassander, the son of the general Antipater, most probably in 316 B.C. The city was named after Cassander's wife.

Its founding was a political act from two standpoints: first, because it served Cassander's need to legitimize his position as master in Macedonia, given that the successor to the throne, Alexander IV, the minor child of Alexander the Great and the Persian Roxane, was still alive. Beyond the fact that the founding of the city was a royal act in and of itself, it simultaneously made Cassander appear to be continuing the building projects of Philip II, and consequently the successor of the royal house, of course in conjunction with the fact that he had married Philip's daughter Thessaloniki. Cassander's action was also political in that it promoted urban life in a region of the Macedonian state that required intensive urbanization, if it was to be administered effectively and developed economically. The absence of urban centers in the area around the Thermaic Gulf, where the new city was founded, is clear from the fact that inhabitants had to be moved to it from small cities and villages located in the Chalkidiki about 40 kilometers distant (the settlements "in Krousis").

Thessaloniki was founded through the method of synoecism. The populations of 26 small towns and villages were obliged to abandon their homes and settle in the new city. Ancient authors made reference to the names of Therme, the most important of the cities involved in the synoecism, as well as those of Apollonia, Chalastra, Gareskos, Aineia, and Kissos.

The mere number of these small cities and villages suffices to persuade us that the new city was an important one. Indeed, a comparison with other Greek cities founded in a comparable fashion shows that it was only in the case of Megalopolis in Arcadia that more settlements had undergone synoecism. Archaeological data showing that its fortified extent during the age of Cassander must have fluctuated between 45 and 90 hectares also support the view that the new city could be

characterized as “medium” or even “large” on the basis of views of city planning known in antiquity. This shows that Thessaloniki was the second-largest city in the kingdom after its capital, Pella, which had an extent of around 350 hectares. According to a recent theory, the course of its wall followed a route moving towards the East and North along the length of the Roman wall, towards the West along the length of D. Poliorcetes Street and towards the South along the length of Cassandrou and Philippou Streets, this point being however very disputable. The city was built according to the Hippodamian system, i.e., with streets that intersected at right angles to one another, while its population – by ancient standards – was considerable, if we are to judge from the characterization of “populous” given it by the Roman historian T. Livy.

As regards the area it controlled, i.e. its countryside, this included the area enclosed (from East to West) between Megalon Emvolon (Megalou Karabournou), Therme, the foot of Mt. Hortiatis, Asvestochori, and some as-yet undetermined point between the Gallikos (Echedoros) and Axios rivers.

From a political standpoint, Thessaloniki was organized from its founding along the model of Greek cities in southern Greece. Its body politic was divided into primary political-administrative units, *tribes* and *demes*, only some of whose names have been preserved. The preeminent political body was the assembly of adult male citizens, the *ekklesia* of the *demos*, which in common with the democratic cities of southern Greece took decisions about legislation, which were submitted for a vote by the city’s other important political organ, the *boule*. At the same time, we know of a number of elected officials with one-year terms whose duties may easily be understood merely by their titles: the eponymous priest, the treasurers, the gymnasiarchs, and the *agoranomoi*.

All these institutions, however, provided only the appearance of democratic rule. The central administration not only determined the city’s foreign relations, but also intervened in domestic affairs through royal officials, the *epistates*, who acted in accordance with written orders from the King. The extent of royal interventions in matters involving the city’s self-government is recorded in a representative fashion in a legislative regulation (*diagramma*) of Philip V (221-179 B.C.), preserved in an inscription dating to 187 B.C. The subject concerned the management of the finances of the Sarapieion (founded largely by foreign merchants), a wealthy local sanctuary the King had taken away from city authorities in order to transfer it to his *epistates*

and judges. As the text allows us to understand, the regulation was called forth by the attempt undertaken by the city (probably seeking to take advantage of the climate of isolationism Philip V was pursuing during this period) to appropriate a part of the sanctuary's wealth in order to buttress its finances.

The city's physiognomy and character during the era of the Macedonian kingdom was primarily determined by the fact that only a few decades after its founding, Thessaloniki had evolved into one of the most important – if not *the* most important – trading centers of the Macedonian kingdom. Contributing factors to this evolution were doubtless the nature of its port, which may be characterized as the most secure along the entire northern Aegean coast, and the unique geopolitical situation of the city, since it was located at the end of a radiating system of roads that permitted communication with all the important cities in Macedonia and its hinterland. But it would also be difficult to deny the major boost given it by the new conditions that prevailed in Macedonia and southern Greece after the ascension to the throne of the Antigonid dynasty, and in particular of Antigonus Gonatas (276-239). The Macedonians owed to this king the rebirth of their state, which following Cassander's death had known an extended period of political instability caused by civil conflict. The improvement of the political and economic role of Macedonia in southern Greece is also connected with Gonatas' rule. His naval victories in the central and southern Aegean at the expense of the Ptolemies in Egypt around the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. resulted in the Egyptians being supplanted in this part of the sea, which came under Macedonian control. This was an important development, since it was through the Aegean that the greater part of goods – chiefly, grain – were transported in the eastern Mediterranean. Under these new conditions, Gonatas and his successors took care on the one hand to form close commercial relations with the two major players that had a major influence on this trade, viz., the naval state of Rhodes and the independent island of Delos. On the other hand, they also took care to reorganize their own commerce on a new basis, with the transport of the production of basic products from Macedonia, viz., grains and timber for shipbuilding, by making Thessaloniki's harbor more important.

The role played by Thessalonian merchants in the economic life of the kingdom by virtue of their experience and – apparently – the relations they had developed in the harbor of Delos, is reflected in two decrees by which the Delians honored an equal number of Thessalonians for the services they had rendered to Delos. The first was a

corn-buyer (*sitones*) of King Demetrius II (239-229), the son of Antigonos Gonatas. The title means that the royal court had assigned him the responsibility for trading the grain exported from Macedonia to the island. The second man honored is not presented – at least in the related epigraphic testimony – as having held some official role. However, from the subject of the diplomatic correspondence between Delos and Thessaloniki that has come down to us, and which concerns the Delians' decision to honor him by erecting a portrait statue in Thessaloniki – an exceptional honor indeed – we may conclude that he was a wealthy businessman settled on the island who controlled commercial relations between Macedonia and the remainder of the Greek world.

That the city was considered a center of trade by the kings is indirectly confirmed by a study of Macedonian coinage from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. More specifically, Thessaloniki was one of the very few cities to which Philip V in 187 B.C. granted the right to issue its own coinage. According to all indications, this measure was aimed at providing a boost to local trade, and by extension to the economy of the kingdom itself, which had been shaken by the successive wars of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C.

Naturally, Thessaloniki's commercial character influenced areas of both its public and private life. New beliefs and ideas brought by its foreign residents are clearly traceable in the area of religion. One such indication is the case of worship of Egyptian deities, i.e., Isis, Sarapis, Osiris, and Anubis, which was promulgated in Greece through trade routes. The sanctuary for such worship in Thessaloniki, the Sarapieion, which was situated on Egnatia between Dioikitiriou Street and Vardaris Square, was built at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Archaeological and epigraphic finds prove that this was the largest center for the worship of Egyptian deities in Macedonia, and the second in all of Greece after that of Delos during the Hellenistic age.

However, it would be a mistake for such indications to lead us to overestimate the importance of the worship of foreign deities, and by extension, of foreigners, in the life of the city. The unbroken continuity and the importance given to the worship of divinities like Dionysus and Asclepius, from whom two of the tribes actually took their names, or even the exclusive use of Greek as the language of inscriptions, are only some of the indications of the Greek nature of the city's life during the period of the Macedonian kingdom.

## **II. The period of Roman rule (168 B.C.- 284 A.D.)**

In 148 B.C., when the Romans finally decided to establish the province of Macedonia, they made Thessaloniki its capital, acknowledging in this fashion the comparative advantages – chiefly, its size and especially its location by the sea – that it enjoyed vis-à-vis the other large cities of Macedonia. These same advantages had led them twenty years earlier, in 168 B.C., to proclaim it the capital of the second of the four administrative districts into which they had divided Macedonia following Perseus' defeat and the dissolution of the Macedonian kingdom. That district included the geographic region between the Strymon and Axios rivers. The question here is whether the incorporation of the city under Roman sovereignty influenced the physiognomy it had acquired during the period of the kingdom. For this reason, it is necessary for us to consider the historical course of around 450 years of Roman rule.

It is a fact that at least in theory, Thessaloniki's rise to become the province's capital provided the prerequisites for its further economic development. The extent of the province – clearly greater than that of the Macedonian kingdom – resulted in the expansion of its natural hinterland, since towards the Northwest it stretched as far as the Adriatic, even including Epirus. Further, an important boost to the economic development of Thessaloniki could also have been provided by the construction of the Via Egnatia (from the very first decades of the province's establishment), which linked Dyrrhachium with the Black Sea and formed an extension of the Via Appia linking Brundisium with Rome. Thessaloniki was one of the most important way stations along the Via Egnatia, and the only large harbor in the Balkans on the Aegean. In 42 B.C., furthermore, Mark Antony proclaimed it a free city (*civitas libera*), i.e., he granted it the privileged status of tax exemption by virtue of the support it provided him and Octavian during their civil war with Brutus and Cassius.

However, these unquestionably positive presuppositions did not necessarily ensure a favorable economic outcome for the city, at least during the first period of Roman rule, particularly in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. During that period, exceptionally unstable economic conditions prevailed in Macedonia, since this frontier province of the Empire suffered continual incursions from the barbarian tribes of the Scordisci,

the Dardanians, and the Thracians. It is therefore entirely reasonable to assume that such conditions would have had negative consequences for the economy of the city, even if the very small number of inscriptions from this period attests to the presence of some isolated Italian merchants, who were using it as a seat for their economic activities with cities along the Northern Aegean coast. Indeed, if one is to believe the Roman politician Cicero, who lived in the city for some months in the year 57 B.C. as an exile, the destruction wrought by the Thracians on cities along the Via Egnatia between 68 and 56 B.C. paralyzed life in Thessaloniki to such an extent that its residents, in fear of similar attacks, abandoned it and took refuge on the acropolis for protection. This information, however, is unconfirmed by any other source. It was also natural for these unfavorable conditions to be made worse by the way in which the Roman administrators governed the province. Speaking of these same Thracian incursions, Cicero notes that Thessaloniki was one of the cities that suffered by reason of military requisitions, which were imposed by the provincial governor Calpurnius Piso by “force and fear” (*vi et metu*). It is not difficult for us to imagine what proportions this oppression would have assumed, and what it would have meant for beings both animate and inanimate, and for the province of Macedonia in general and the city of Thessaloniki in particular, that they found themselves in the vortex of civil wars between the generals of Rome. Thus in 49/8, the city was compelled to “offer hospitality” to the legions and exiled government of Pompey during his civil war with Caesar.

This negative picture was altered following the end of the civil wars. In 31 B.C. Augustus, sole ruler of the Empire, established a new status quo that brought the state a period of prolonged peace, the famed *pax romana*, which lasted until about the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Important administrative changes were noted in the Balkan peninsula in the first four decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., chief among which was the creation of Moesia and Thrace as neighboring provinces to Macedonia, accompanied by the shifting of the Empire’s frontier up to the Danube. This development had positive consequences for the economy of both the province and Thessaloniki, since it freed them from barbarian invasions. In contrast, we do not know whether, or to what extent, these positive consequences were mitigated by the lessened importance (and abandonment) of the Via Egnatia, and the creation of new roadways to serve trade in the Southern Balkans, e.g. the road linking Naisus (modern day Niš) with Byzantium via Serdica (modern Sofia) and Philippoupolis. From the limited information we have

at our disposal about the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., it emerges that Thessaloniki continued to serve as a port, while the number of its foreign inhabitants was by no means negligible during the same century (see below).

Within the province, the city encountered competition from other cities, the most important of which was Veroia (modern Veria). The latter's importance was increased when the Romans – perhaps as early as Augustus – made it the seat of the Macedonian *Koinon*, i.e. of a union of the province's cities, the activities of which were connected with worship of the emperor. Yearly celebrations lasting some days that were held in Veroia reached their peak with this worship and made it the center of the province, since all the members of the Macedonian aristocracy thronged there as representatives of their own cities to the *Koinon*, in addition to large numbers of simple Macedonians. Indeed, from the standpoint of hierarchy, for the Romans the title of “metropolis of Macedonia” and the prerogative of “*neokoros*” (“temple warden”, Gk. *νεώκορος*), i.e. of Veroia's being a city with a temple for provincial worship of the emperor, had made it more important than Thessaloniki. Thus, efforts by Thessalonians in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. to have Veroia stripped of these prerogatives were justified, though in the end they did not bear fruit.

In contrast to the picture it presented in the first century after Christ, the city's historical course from about the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and thereafter was an impressive one. Truly the “most populous” and “wealthiest” city in Macedonia, and thanks apparently to the abilities of its inhabitants, primarily the local aristocracy, it managed always to be favored by new developments. The city gradually surpassed the rather narrow limits of the capital of one of the Roman Empire's smallest provinces, and developed into a megalopolis of the Greek East. The first step in this course was joining the newly founded Delphic Amphictyony; the second was its participation in the Attic Panhellenion, a broader political formation in which Greek cities of the eastern region of the Empire took part. The city's apogee in the Antonine (138-193) and Severan (193-235) ages is reflected in its extensive building activity, attested by the excavation data. This was the age in which the greater part of the image we have today of the public portions of the Roman city was created. Its most important project, the agora complex in Dikastiriou Square, which was the political and administrative center of the city with characteristic buildings such as the *cryptoporticus*, the Odeum, and the “Stoa of the Idols” (the famed *Incantadas*).

The city's importance was reinforced in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., as raids by the Parthians on the Empire's eastern frontier contributed to the revival of the military importance of the Via Egnatia. Roman legions passed through the city on their way to Asia Minor. During the turbulent years of the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., and despite the general decline experienced by the greater part of the Empire due to political instability and barbarian incursions, the city successfully met two successive sieges by the Goths, in 254 and 268 A.D., thanks to its repaired walls. In recognition of these successes, and of the inhabitants' loyalty to them, the military emperors ruling the Roman state in that era granted Thessaloniki a number of other privileges in addition to the honorary title of "colonia." These are the well-known privileges of the "*metropolis*" and "temple warden / *neokoros*", by which Thessaloniki finally became the equal of Veroia from the standpoint of hierarchy. These concessions, however, were not simple diplomatic actions to flatter the vanity of the city's residents. Far more, they constituted acknowledgement of a reality, viz., the position Thessaloniki had begun to acquire in the eastern portion of the Empire from as early as the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. The continual decline in the number of cities in both Macedonia and the Balkan provinces must have contributed to this, particularly in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., a fact that reinforced Thessaloniki's importance as an urban center and the largest trade and transport harbor in the peninsula, with which the city of Veroia certainly could not be compared. In this sense, it is not at all strange that in 298/299 A.D. Caesar Maximianus Galerius, who ruled the eastern half of the Empire together with Diocletian, chose Thessaloniki as the seat of his part of the state, and then proceeded to build his well-known, imposing palace.

During the approximately 450 years of Roman rule, it was natural for at least some aspects of life in the city of Thessaloniki to change. However, this does not mean that whatever changes occurred were the consequence of systematic interventions on the part of the Roman state. On the contrary, and in accordance with their longstanding tactic, Roman power did not bring about changes in e.g. Thessaloniki's political organization, as the Romans respected the existing institutions of self-rule that dated from the period of the Kingdom, with their possible introduction of only one new office, that of the *politarches* (civil magistrates). But the ever greater undermining of the role of the *demos* in favor of those of the *boule* (council) and *archontes* (magistrates), attested by our sources, has practically no



relation to Roman interventions, and is more closely connected to social developments.

On the other hand, what did change rapidly in relation to the era of the kingdom was the demographic face of the city. As an important road junction and large transport harbor for an enormous aristocracy, Thessaloniki evolved through its history into a cosmopolitan center. Its inscriptions, most of which date to the Imperial period, leave no doubt that the city took in a larger number of foreigners than any other in Macedonia.

The cosmopolitan character of Thessaloniki is first of all underscored by a number of isolated cases of persons from other cities and regions in the Empire who visited, lived, or died in it. Roman soldiers and administrative employees on the staff of successive provincial governors, as well as the imperial procurator who managed the Empire's wealth in the province, people from Edessa and Cassandria in neighboring regions, from Dasaretis and Heraclea Lyncestis in Upper Macedonia, Pautaliotes from modern-day Bulgaria, Corinthians, Lacedaemonians, and Cretans from southern Greece made up but a part of this colorful human canvas. There was an impressive presence of foreigners hailing from cities and regions in Asia Minor such as Nicaea and Nikomedia (Bithynia), Amastris (the Pontus), Thyateira (Caria), Attaleia (Pamphylia), and Korykos (Cilicia), to name but a few examples. Most of these people must have been sailors and merchants, but it seems they were in constant contact with the city, to judge from the fact that they formed a *thiasos* of those from Asia Minor, i.e., an association under the protection of Dionysus. We know of similar *thiasoi* from other areas in the Balkans where we encounter traders from Asia Minor.

There was a small number of Thracians among the ethnic groups that composed the city's population. Their presence may be traced through the study of their names in city inscriptions, which are composed in Greek.

Another ethnic group, the Jews, must have been more numerous. The earliest beginnings of their history cannot be determined with precision, but when the Apostle Paul visited Thessaloniki in 50 A.D. to preach Christianity, the Jewish community had a synagogue and members who had both social prestige and power, sufficient that they were able to persuade local rulers to intervene in favor of their case. The life of this community continued without interruption until the early Byzantine period. Indeed it is not impossible that, in the wake of the major destructions of metropolitan

Judaism in Palestine in 70 and 130 A.D., the number of synagogues actually increased. Despite the sparse testimony at our disposal, we are justified in concluding that the community's members, although they sought (up to a point) to adapt to the Greek environment, still did not fail to stress those elements that underscored their "particular" identity.

The most important foreign community in the city may unreservedly be characterized as that of the Italians, which developed to the point that it became the largest in Macedonia. The first settlements of Italians in Thessaloniki date to the final years of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., but their number began to increase significantly in the following century. This late date in relation to the conquest of Macedonia shows that at least some families must have come to the city directly from Italy, as well as from other centers in Greece or Asia Minor that went into economic and commercial decline by virtue of disastrous conditions during the late Republican age. In any event, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. there were so many Italians in Thessaloniki that they formed a body, an association of Roman citizens, through which they probably protected their common economic interests. Their main point in common, due to their varied origins and history, was their privileged position as Roman citizens. An organization of this type did not mean, however, that they constituted, or even wished to constitute, a group with a sense of a separate identity. Cultural relations between the Roman and Greek worlds, and their political unification after Augustus established dominion, offered no grounds for such behavior. Furthermore, their commerce with the Greek environment and – in some cases – their previous lengthy sojourn in Greek cities assisted their adaptation to Greece, as is in any case demonstrated by their generalized use of the Greek language. The inscriptions clearly demonstrate that permanent Italian settlers had no particular difficulties in being included in the city's social life, participating with local residents in religious and professional associations, or holding public offices. Indeed some, bolstered by their prestige and the economic power they held by reason of their profitable banking and commercial occupations, intermarried with powerful local families, chiefly those that had Roman political rights (*civitas romana*), with the result that they were absorbed into an indissoluble unity, strengthening the existing local aristocracy.

But Greeks, who made up the city's largest single population, played the leading role in the life of the city. As in other cases, so too in the case of Thessaloniki the sources allow us to follow the activities and fortunes of only the upper class in a

satisfactory fashion. Despite internal distinctions, its members had a uniform model of behavior, that of “beneficence”: this was a system of ethical commitments and legal obligations already developed from the Hellenistic Age, and generalized throughout the Empire, which led local aristocracies to undertake at their own expense the most important part of city functions. In other words, they were the ones who contributed to its rebuilding and beautification, the organization of costly games or its representation in international organizations, to name just a few examples.

It is frequently said, and written, that the local aristocracies of the cities of the East had been Romanized and lost their sense of Greekness. Such claims are normally based on the (correct) observation that the members of these aristocracies sought to become Roman citizens, as indeed happened. It should however be noted that for these aristocracies, possession of the rights of a Roman citizen constituted a necessary presupposition if they wished to overcome the narrow framework of their city-state and adapt to the new political conditions afforded them by the Empire. This also held true in the case of a number of these individuals, certainly the most important, who were desirous of rising in the state aristocracy, i.e., who aspired to assume important positions in the administration of the Empire. It is certainly worth pointing out that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. quite a number of Thessalonians did in fact become senators and *equites*. This adaptation, however, did not mean that the Thessalonians who had become Roman citizens had lost their historical and by extension, their Greek, identity.

In support of this claim, one need only recall the flattering references by the writer Lucian (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) concerning the intellectual performance of the audience he encountered in the city and which “is filled with orators and authors and quite well-known sophists, so much so that there is a fear lest my work seem less important here (i.e. in Thessaloniki) than (it seemed) in Olympia” (*Herod.* 8). One might also make mention of the famous mosaic floors depicting the encounter of Dionysus with the sleeping Ariadne, or the rape of Ganymede, found in private residences of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., and which demonstrate both knowledge of, and familiarity with, Greek mythology. But the collective consciousness of the Thessalonians is demonstrated far more clearly by their successful efforts to include their city in the Attic Panhellenion (see above); it suffices merely to evaluate correctly two details connected with this event: a) the Panhellenion had its seat in Athens, and b) for a city to become a member, it had to provide precise proofs of its Greek origins.

With this cosmopolitan profile, and with its inhabitants simultaneously living in the present while honoring their past, Thessaloniki entered the great new era in its history, the Byzantine age.

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