Hard Times? Philippopolis in the Fourth Century

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Abstract: This paper offers an overview of the historical evidence for Roman Philippopolis and a study of the literary and archaeological evidence for the city in the fourth century AD. The city fortifications were critically important during this period as they protected Philippopolis against Gothic raids and the predatory incursions of Roman armies engaged in civil wars. Although Philippopolis is not explicitly mentioned in Ammianus Marcellinus’ detailed account of the Gothic wars of AD 376 to 378, it was clearly affected by these circumstances, and the possibilities of urban development were limited, at least until the Gothic-Roman foedus of AD 382. New building of churches and private housing is attested in the later fourth and early fifth century. The city recovered from hard times in the fourth century, but comparisons with other cities of the Roman East, in particular Galatian Ancyra, show that it was unable to achieve the status of a major urban centre of Late Antiquity.

Key words: Thrace in the fourth century, Goths, Ammianus Marcellinus, church building, Constantine and Licinius, Theodosius I.

It is a privilege and a great pleasure to be invited to take part in a major symposium on Roman and Late Roman Thrace at Plovdiv. What sort of a fresh look can a visiting historical outsider bring to a gathering of scholars who have studied the evidence for years, and indeed been responsible for discovering much of it? The answer may indeed be very little, but the aim of this presentation is to give a sketch of the available information about Roman Philippopolis, which may provide helpful historical orientation to other outsiders, and to offer some observations about the city’s history during the upheavals and political turbulence of the fourth century AD.

The most explicit evocation of Roman Plovdiv comes from an unlikely source, the Greek essay-writer Lucian. Lucian’s Drapetai (‘The Runaway Slaves’) is a satirical diatribe against contemporary Cynic philosophers, in which Zeus comes to the rescue of Philosophy, whose reputation has been destroyed by those who claim to be philosophers but in fact are greedy charlatans. Zeus sends Heracles and Hermes to accompany Philosophy and punish these molesters. Their destination is not Greece, home of true philosophers, but Thrace, whose gold and silver mines are described as an irresistible attraction to impostors. They find their quarry in the guise of runaway slaves at Philippopolis, and the city is described in an ironical encomium by Lucian:

ΗΡΑΚΛΗΣ Ὅρατε, ὦ Ἑρμῆ καὶ Φιλοσοφία, δύο μὲν ὅρη μέγιστα καὶ κάλλιστα ὄρων ἀπάντων (Ἄιμός ἐστιν τὸ μεῖζον, ἡ καταντικρὺ δὲ Ῥοδόπη) πεδίον δὲ ὑπεπετταμένον πάμφορον, ἀπὸ τῶν προπόδων ἐκατέρων εὐθὺς ἀρξάμενον, καὶ τινὰς λόφους τρεῖς πάνυ καλοὶς ἀνεστηκότας, οὐκ ἀμόρφους
τὴν τραχύτητα, ὁποῖον ἀκροπόλεις πολλὰς τῆς ὑποκειμένης πόλεως, καὶ ἡ πόλις γὰρ ἡδή φαίνεται.

ΕΡΜΗΣ Νῆ Δί’, ὁ Ἡράκλεις, μεγίστη καὶ καλλίστη ἁπασῶν.

‘Herakles: You see those two greatest and most beautiful mountains (the big one is Haemus, and the one opposite is Rhodope) and the plain that spreads between them where everything grows, running to the very foot of each of them? These three absolutely splendid hill tops, quite comely in their ruggedness, how they stand out like multiple acropoleis above the city that lies beneath them; it’s already in view! Hermes: ‘By Hercules! It’s the greatest and finest city of all!’ (Luc., Fug. 25; see Sharankov / Cherneva-Tilkiyan 2002).

The three rugged crests formed the Trimontium (fig. 1). This was the third of the three names of Philippopolis recorded by the elder Pliny: Poneropolis antea, mox a conditore Philippopolis, nunc a situ Trimontium dicta, ‘previously Poneropolis, then called Philippopolis after its founder, and now known as Trimontium from its location’ (Plin. NH 4.11.41). The name Poneropolis, ‘city of troubles’, which was presumably coined as a joke, is first attested in Theopompus (Fr. 107) as early as the fourth century BC. By the time of the Emperor Vespasian, the Thracian / Greek city was presumably being called ‘Triple Mountain’ by Roman troops and their officers. Roman soldiers had given the same name to the British military fort of Newstead in the Scottish border country near Melrose (Ptol. Geogr. 2.3.6). The application of a descriptive Latin name to an old Greek city seems to be a unique phenomenon in the Greek East. The pervasive Roman influence at Philippopolis is also reflected by the fact that the city’s Greek epigraphy is supplemented by many Latin inscriptions, largely of military origin.

In fact, the name Trimontium, applied to the settlement which spread around the outcrop of three hills south of the Hebros (Maritsa) river, was also a humorous soldiers’ exaggeration. The modest hills of Plovdiv were nothing compared to the mountain ranges that ran north and south of the city. The site commanded a river crossing on the main route through the Thracian lowlands from Byzantium and Hadrianopolis. Westwards this route continued to Serdica and to Naissus. Philippopolis / Trimontium was separated by substantial distances from its neighbours: it was 120 kilometres to Serdica / Sofia;
164 to Hadrianopolis / Edirne; and 440 km to Constantinople. The fifth-century historian Priscus in his famous account of an embassy to Attila the Hun, remarked that Serdica was thirteen days distant from Constantinople for a fast traveler (Prisc. Fr. 8.1). At this rate, the journey to Philippopolis would have taken ten days.

The extent of the city’s ancient territory in a juridical sense is not precisely known, but effectively and in economic terms Philippopolis was the organizational centre of the entire Thracian plain north of the Rhodope Mountains, whose foothills began little more than ten kilometres south of the city. It was somewhat further away from the Stara Zagora (ancient Beroea / Augusta Traiana) hills, which formed an interim barrier before the higher mountain chain of Haemimontus. The Lower Danube valley was on the north side of these mountains. It is clear from the topography that Philippopolis was much better connected to the East, to the Black Sea and Constantinople, than to the western and the central Balkan regions (fig. 2).

This territory was the economic heartland of the Thracian peoples, not only because it had fertile agricultural land and was accessible by a good east-west transit route, but because of the forests and mineral wealth, especially gold, which was obtained from the mountain areas. It is important to note that without the resources and protection offered by the mountains the fertile inland Thracian plain would have had no independent status, and simply served as an undifferentiated transit zone for the route that ran from central Europe to Asia Minor. Rhodope and Haemimontus provided the southern and northern boundaries of the fourth-century province of Thracia.

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1 Translated by R. C. Blockley.
The western boundary of Thracia was marked by the lower passes that separated Philippopolis / Plovdiv from Serdica / Sofia, the capital city of Dacia Mediterranea. This was also the boundary that divided the western from the eastern Roman Empire, a division that became permanent after Valentinian and Valens took power in AD 364. Philippopolis was on this frontier.

Like many cities of the Roman Empire, Philippopolis / Plovdiv had been a successful urban settlement for centuries before it earned a mention in historical annals. Characteristically almost every mention of Philippopolis by ancient authors refers to the city during wartime episodes, usually when it was under siege. Philip V in his struggle to maintain Macedonian independence from the Romans, seized Philippopolis and secured it with a temporary garrison force, which was subsequently expelled by the native Odrysians:

*Having arrived at the place called Philippopolis, he took possession of the city by an assault, after the inhabitants had fled to the mountain peaks. After this he raided the entire plain and having sacked some of the settlements, from which he took sureties, he retreated, leaving behind a garrison at Philippopolis.* (Plb. 23.8.5-6).

Under the Emperor Tiberius, another coalition of Thracian tribes, including the Odrysians, laid siege to Philippopolis, which had been occupied by the pro-Roman king Rhoemetalces.

In AD 250 the city was again besieged and fell to the forces of the Gothic King Kniva. Referring to this event at the end of the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus recalled reports, which he rightly regarded as seriously exaggerated, that over 100,000 of Philippopolis’ inhabitants had lost their lives.

\[\text{post clades acceptas inlatasque multas et saevas excisa est Philippopolis, centum hominum milibus – nisi fingunt annales – intra moenia iugulatis.}\]

‘After suffering disasters and many cruel calamities, Philippopolis was

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3 The implications of the division are worked out in full by Errington 2006.
4 For the early history of Philippopolis, see Hansen / Nielsen (eds.) 2004, s.v.
5 Zos. 1.24; Jord. Get. 18.101-103. See also the new Dexippus fragments and the bibliography cited below.
destroyed and a hundred thousand persons – if the records do not deceive – were butchered within its walls.’ (Amm. Marc. 31.5.17).

Zosimus in a passage which was derived from the contemporary Athenian historian Dexippus, mentioned that the Goths were allowed to take wealthy captives with them, doubtless so as to secure high ransoms⁷. Details of this siege and the fall of the city are now revealed by newly deciphered original fragments of Dexippus’ history (Davenport / Mallan 2013; Grusková / Martin 2014; Martin / Grusková 2014a; Martin / Gruskova 2014b; Grusková / Martin 2015; Mallan / Davenport 2015; Jones 2015).

In the fourth century the threat of external invasion was largely replaced by Roman civil wars, and the battles between rival emperors and usurpers had a repeated impact on the city. The account by the Anonymus Valesianus, written at the end of the fourth century, of Constantine’s first campaign against Licinius in AD 316/317 states that the emperors confronted each other from their marching stations in ‘Philippi’ (surely an error for Philippopolis) and Hadrianopolis respectively before they joined battle at the still unlocated Campus Ardiensis or Mardiensis. Under cover of night Licinius withdrew his forces to Beroea / Augusta Traiana, while Constantine advanced too hastily towards Byzantium. Constantine was obliged to make terms with Licinius when he realized that he was now cut off in the rear.

[Licinius] Valentem ducem limitis Caesarem fecit. Inde apud Hadrianopolis Thraciae civitatem per Valentem collecta ingenti multitudine, legatos ad Constantinum de pace misit apud Philippos constitutum. Quibus frustra remissis, iterum reparato bello, in campo Mardiensi ab utroque concurrurit et post dubium ac diuturnum proelium Licini partibus inclinatis profuit noctis auxilium. Licinius et Valens credentes Constantinum, quod et verum erat, ad persequendum longius ad Byzantium processurum, flexi in partem Beroeam concesserunt. Ita Constantinus vehementer in ulteriora festinans, deprehendit Licinium remansisse post tergum. Fatigatis bello et itinere militibus, missus deinde Mestrianus legatus pacem petiit, Licinio postulante et pollicente se imperata facto. Denuo, sicut ante, mandatum est Valens privatum fieret; quo facto pacem ab ambobus firmata est, ut Licinius Orientem, Asiam, Thraciam, Moesiam, minorem Scythiam possideret.

‘(Licinius) appointed Valens, the dux of the frontier area, to be Caesar. Then when a very large force had been assembled by Valens at the Thracian city of Hadrianopolis, he sent envoys to Constantine, who was based at Philippopolis, to discuss peace terms. When they returned with nothing achieved the war was resumed, and the two sides clashed at Ager Mardiensis, where, after an evenly matched battle that lasted all day, night came to the aid of the retreating forces of Licinius. Licinius and Valens, in the justified belief that Constantine would press on in pursuit further towards Byzantium, turned off the road and retreated towards Beroea. And so Constantine, while hastening on to distant destinations, realized that Licinius had remained in position behind him. As his soldiers were exhausted by the battle and the march, his envoy Mestrianus then sued for peace, conforming to Licinius’ demands and his own promise to fulfill the instructions. Eventually, as before, the order was given for Valens again to become a private citizen, and when this had happened peace was confirmed on both sides, so that Licinius took charge of Orients, Asia, Thrace, Moesia and Scythia Minor’. (Anon. Val. I.17-18).

The events of this civil war virtually repeated themselves in July AD 324, when Constantine defeated Licinius at Hadrianopolis, before delivering the coup de grace at the naval battle of Chalcedon two months later (Zos. 1.24). In the course of the fourth century

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⁶ The figure, as Ammiianus’ remark nisi fingunt annales shows, is not to be trusted.
⁷ Zos. 1.24: ‘For Gallus not only permitted them to return home with the plunder, but promised to pay them annually a sum of money, and allowed them to carry off all the noblest captives; most of whom had been taken at Philippopolis in Thrace.’ (transl. by Green and Chaplin).
Philippopolis lay on the marching route of Constantius, who led large forces from the East against the potential usurpers Vetranio in AD 350 and Magnentius in AD 351, and of Julian marching from the West against Constantius in AD 361.

In AD 365 the city sided with the revolt of Procopius against the new East Roman regime of Valens, but succumbed to the assault of the western general Equitius, who was despatched by Valentinian to support the beleaguered and vulnerable eastern emperor.

Inter quae tam trepida, speculationibus fidis Aequitius doctus conversam molem belli totius in Asiam, digressus per Succos Philippopolim clausam presidiis hostium, Eumolpiadam veterem reserare magna vi conabatur, urbem admodum opportunam et inpedituram valetudinius adpetitus, si pone relicta adiumenta Valenti laturus — nondum enim apud Nacoliam gesta conpererat — festinare ad Haemimontum cogeretur.

'In this state of high anxiety Equitius, who had been informed by reliable informers that the bulk of the war had entirely shifted to Asia, passed through the Succi pass and attempted with a large force to open the gates of Philippopolis, ancient Eumolpias, which was secured by enemy forces, a city which was very handily located and liable to obstruct his designs, if it lay in his rear while he was compelled to move rapidly to Haemimontus to bring relief to Valens (for he had not yet learnt what had happened at Nacolia).'

(Amm. Marc. 26.10.4).

The inhabitants suffered especially when they continued to be loyal to Procopius' short-lived successor Marcellus. After the final suppression of the revolt Procopius' severed head was paraded before them on its journey west to the court of Valentinian at Trier in Gaul.

Exstirpatis occasu ducis funeribus belli, saevitum est in multos acrius quam errata flagitaverant vel delicta, maximeque in Philippopolis defensores, qui urbem sequi posset non nisi capite viso Procopii, quod ad Gallias portabantur, aegerreme dediderunt.

'When the fatalities of the war had been uprooted by the death of the leader, a more vicious punishment was meted out against many of his followers than their errors or crimes demanded, and especially against the defenders of Philippopolis, who had had surrendered themselves and their city with extreme reluctance, and only when they were shown the head of Procopius as it was being transported to Gaul.' (Amm. Marc. 26.10.6).

The city was not expressly mentioned in the accounts of the Gothic incursions between AD 376, when the Tervingi and Greuthungi crossed the Danube en masse, and AD 378, when the Goths inflicted a devastating defeat on the Emperor Valens and Roman forces at Adrianopolis, but it cannot have been untouched by the upheavals of those years (see below). In AD 447 Attila's Huns are said to have sacked the city as they advanced to the walls of Constantinople (Prisc. Fr. 61*). The sources are almost completely silent about the direct and material effects of these barbarian threats and incursions against Philippopolis. There will have been casualties, and captives were taken with a view to future ransom*. Wealthy inhabitants were obviously targeted*. Many inhabitants no doubt fled for safety as best they could.

This can be inferred from Priscus’ description of the conditions his party encountered at Naissus in AD 449: ‘When we arrived at Naissus we found the city deserted, as though it had been sacked; only a few sick persons lay in the churches’ (Prisc. Fr. 8.2). Most of the population had fled or was in hiding, but the town’s fabric seems to have

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8 See Zos. 1.24 and the speech of Trajan Decius in AD 250, reported in the new Dexippus fragment (Dexipp. 194v; translated by C. P. Jones): ‘and when the army was collected to the number of about eighty thousand, his intention was to renew the war if he could, thinking that even if he had failed to bring help the honorable <course> was at least to set free the captive Thracians and to prevent them from crossing to the other side [of the Danube]’ ... ‘But since the vicissitudes of humans bring many calamities, as is the rule for mortals, it is perhaps the duty of prudent men to accept events and not to become disheartened, and not to be shaken by the failure in the plain and the capture of the Thracians (in case this has made any of you despondent) so as to become cowards.’

9 See Priscus’ famous account of his conversation with the Greek-speaking merchant captured by Attila’s Huns at Viminacium: ‘When he asked me why I wanted to know, I told him that his Hellenic speech had prompted my curiosity. Then he smiled and said that he was born a Greek and had gone as a merchant to Viminacium, on the Danube, where he had stayed a long time, and married a very rich wife. But the city fell prey to the barbarians, and he was stripped of his prosperity, and on account of his riches was allotted to Ongesius in the division of the spoil, as it was the custom among the Scythians for the chiefs to reserve for themselves the rich prisoners’. (Prisc. Fr. 8).
been intact. In 587 Philippopolis was besieged but not captured by the Avars. Cities in Thrace, as well as other parts of the Roman empire, which were defended by effective fortifications, could usually hold out against a barbarian attack, as may be judged by Ammianus’ well-known remark that the Alamanni in Gaul ‘avoid the actual towns as if they were tombs surrounded by hunters’ nets’ (Amm. Marc. 16.12.12). One of the main purposes of Trajan Decius’ letter to the people of Philippopolis, anticipating the catastrophe of AD 250, was to prevent them leaving the security of their defences to take on Kniva’s Gothic army: ‘he instead instructed them to hold fast by creating an atmosphere of fear, so that these men who were ill-equipped for war would not venture outside [the city] and make an attempt with inopportune enthusiasm, when his own relief force was close at hand’. The point that a city’s fortifications provided security for its inhabitants against the Gothic threat is taken up in the body of the letter itself (Dexipp. Fr. 26.2; 26.9-10). Julian is said to have ordered the repair of city fortifications throughout Thrace and on the Danube frontier.

The essential truth that barbarian invaders were not equipped to besiege fortified cities was repeated at several points by Ammianus Marcellinus in his famous and frequently analyzed account of the devastation caused by the Tervingi and Greuthungi in Thrace between AD 376 and 378, even after their arrival in turn triggered a general uprising of disaffected Goths, who had previously been settled in Thrace.

In AD 376, according to Ammianus, Sueridas and Colias, two Gothic chieftains who had already been settled with their retinues near Hadrianopolis, resisted an abrupt Roman command to transfer from Thrace into Asia, and were simultaneously threatened by a large local force, including the weapon-manufacturers based in Hadrianopolis, after they had plundered the villa of the chief magistrate (Amm. Marc. 31.6.2-3). The Goths were reinforced by newly arrived Tervingi under Fritigern, who nevertheless persuaded them to abandon their futile assaults on Hadrianopolis: ‘he reminded them that he kept peace with walls and advised them to attack and devastate the rich and fruitful parts of the country, which were still without protectors and could be pillaged without any danger’ (Amm. Marc. 31.6.4). In the countryside they attracted many supporters: Goths who had been sold as slaves; destitute refugees from north of the Danube; fugitives from Thrace’s gold mines; and country-dwellers oppressed by the burden of Roman taxation, who were eager to show the marauders the grain-stores and hide-outs of city-dwellers (Amm. Marc. 31.6.5-6).

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10 Theoph. Simoc. 2.17.2-3: ‘At once he moved to Philippopolis, invested the city, and strove to take it. The town’s inhabitants fought back most skilfully and inflicted many injuries from their ramparts and battlements, so that the Chagan willingly abandoned the fight, respecting their inviolability on account of their courage’. (transl. by M. and M. Whitby).
11 The letter as reproduced by Dexippus is largely a rhetorical construct, according to Davenport / Mallan 2013.
12 Translated by Rolfe (Loeb edition).
13 See Errington 2006, 105-106 on Codex Theodosianus 10.19.5 (law of Valens, AD 370) and 10.19.7 (law of Valentinian, AD 373), which attempted to deal with the problem of fugitive workers from the Thracian gold mines who fled across the boundary between the eastern and western empires, from the dioceses of Thrace (Valens) to that of Illyricum (Valentinian). See also Amm. Marc. 26.8.14.
Ammianus noted that before the mass incursion of AD 376, at the
time of Julian's march against Constantius in AD 361, Goths had been
a kidnap target for Galatian slave-traders:

Quae cum ita divideret nihil segnius agi permittens, suadentibus proximis,
ut adgrederetur propinquos Gothos saepe fallaces et perfidos, hostes se quærerse
meliores aiebat; illis enim sufficere mercatores Galatas per quos ubique sine
discrimine venundantur.

While (Julian) was making these arrangements, allowing no slackness in
carrying them out, his closest advisors were urging him to attack the nearby
Goths, who were always tricky and treacherous, but he replied that he would
pursue worthier enemies; Galatian slave traders, who offered Goths for sale
everywhere regardless of their rank, could deal with them quite adequately.
(Amm. Marc. 22.7.8).

In AD 377 more Roman forces led by Valens’ generals Traianus
and Profuturus, reinforced by troops sent from Gaul under Ricomer,
attempted to pen the Goths in the recesses of the Haemus mountains
(Amm. Marc. 31.7.3-4). The Romans then engaged a large organized
Gothic army near Marcianopolis at the bloody and indecisive battle
of Ad Salices (Amm. Marc. 31.7.6-16). These encounters did not succeed
in containing the barbarians. Further Roman reinforcements, sent to
the region under Saturninus (Amm. Marc. 31.8.3), proved powerless
to stop the Goths spreading rapidly across the Thracian plain as far
as Mount Rhodope, taking many captives for ransom as they did so
(Amm. Marc. 31.8.5-7). The cities of Dibaltum (Colonia Flavia Pacis
Deultensium) and Beroea (Augusta Traiana) held firm (Amm. Marc.
31.8.9 – Dibaltum; 9.1 – Beroea). This was also doubtless true of
Philippopolis.

In AD 378 the pattern was repeated and led to the catastrophic de-
feat of a very large Roman force and the death of the Emperor Valens
at the battle of Hadrianopolis. The Goths reportedly occupied terri-

tory outside the cities of Beroea and Nicopolis, as well as taking positions
close to Hadrianopolis, but the cities themselves remained secure
(Amm. Marc. 31.11.2-3)14. Hadrianopolis held out without difficulty
after the battle, despite enormous efforts by the victorious Gothic army
(Amm. Marc. 31.15).

It is surprising that Philippopolis is never specifically mentioned
in the narratives of the Gothic incursions and raids that led to the
battle of Hadrianopolis, but it must have been affected in broadly the
same way as the other cities of the Thracian plains. Even if the urban
centre escaped relatively untouched, the fear spread by the Goths over
a three-year period surely led its richer inhabitants to bring stores and
possessions into the city and to retreat there themselves to secure their
personal safety. The fact that the city, as capital of a Roman province,
was a location where tax revenues were stored, will surely have been a
particular incentive for the barbarians. The regional state treasury, first
attested by an inscription of AD 183/184, certainly existed at the time
of the Gothic wars, as a letter written by Basil of Caesarea around AD
373 refers in passing to a praepositus of the treasury at Philippopolis15.

The archaeological evidence for the impact of the Gothic ma-
rauding between AD 376 and 378 has recently been examined by Ivo
Topalilov, who suggests that two extra-mural sites, which seem to
have been pottery and granary kilns, show evidence for destruction
by fire in the late fourth century and may be linked to the Gothic raids

14 The city was secure even against the
Roman troops under the commander
Sebastianus, who was for a short time
suspected of treachery.
15 See AE 1950, 102 = 1979, 547 = 1978,
768 for the first mention of the aedes
thesaurorum, and Bas. Ep. 237.2.
However, this data is hard to evaluate. The reason for the fire destruction is of course hypothetical, and Gothic raids cannot explain fire damage of about the same period which is present in the atrium of a peristyle house and in parts of the Eastern Thermae (Topalilov 2014a, 228). The archaeological indications are open to other explanations and the dating evidence for these episodes is not precise enough to support a definite conclusion that they should be linked to the Gothic threats between AD 376 and 378.

Topalilov’s study nevertheless establishes the important point that Philippopolis continued to develop through Late Antiquity between the fourth and the sixth century. There is no sign of any drastic interruption of this development and it appears that the city was less affected by the Gothic wars of the late fourth century, and indeed by the ravages of Attila’s Huns during the AD 440s, than has often been supposed. Two major church foundations, the octagonal extra-mural martyrium (Bospachieva 2001), and the episcopal basilica (Кесякова 1989), with fine mosaics\textsuperscript{16}, are dated to the time of Theodosius I (fig. 3), and were linked with one another by a new or reconstructed colonnaded street that passed through the city fortifications at the East Gate (fig. 4)\textsuperscript{17}. This construction of monumental Christian buildings in the

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\textsuperscript{16} The mosaics of Philippopolis are now impressively and definitively published by Popova / Pillinger / Lirsch 2015; see also Bospachieva 2002; Topalilov 2015.

\textsuperscript{17} Topalilov 2014a, 228.
form of large churches and other sanctuaries at the end of the fourth century is fully in step with developments that are well documented elsewhere in the Eastern Roman Empire, notably in Asia Minor. A group of buildings that incorporate substantial store-rooms, as well as impressive peristyle houses with decorated mosaic floors have also been dated to the late fourth and early fifth century (Topalilov 2014a, 230; Bospachieva 2003; Topalilov / Ljubenova 2010). Urban occupation continued through the fifth and the first half of the sixth century under Justinian, perhaps until the last quarter of the sixth century (Topalilov 2014b).

This pattern of urban development matched that found in other major cities of Macedonia, Asia Minor and Greece. Despite its exposure to attacks and marauding by barbarian groups on the north-west frontier of the eastern Roman Empire, Philippopolis grew (modestly) in size (Topalilov 2014a, 223), retained its earlier Roman lay-out (Julian appears to have restored the wall circuit which had originally been completed around AD 172), introduced new public buildings, especially churches, and included more luxurious private housing in the late fourth and fifth than in the second century AD. There is little sign of building activity of any sort during the Tetrarchy or under Constantine. The location of later fourth and fifth century churches implies not only that financial resources were available for their construction, but also that the city felt sufficiently secure to build outside as well as inside its fortification wall. The immediate threat posed by the Goths in the crisis of AD 376-378 had passed. It appears likely that the much-discussed Roman-Gothic foedus of AD 382 established a genuine basis for harmonious co-existence between the Roman land-owners and the Gothic foederati through the rest of the fourth and into the fifth century (Mitchell 2015, 90-91). There is no record of aggravated trouble from the Goths for nearly a century. On the other hand, the structures close to the east wall contain very extensive provision for storage. Since AD 172 landowners and peasants had been able to rely on the security provided by Philippopolis’ fortifications, where they could hold out against a barbarian – or even a Roman siege. Building copious storage facilities for agricultural produce, especially grain, must have been a routine matter and helped to characterize the nature of the city itself. These archaeological remains of fourth century Philippopolis enable us to read a little more detail into the history of this century.

However, the city’s history in the fourth century, at least until the reign of Theodosius I from AD 379 to 395, is very shadowy. It was barely mentioned in the historical annals during this period. The first occasion was in AD 343, when the eastern bishops who had been summoned to the Council of Serdica to resolve the dogmatic and political disputes that divided the Church, refused to convene with their western counterparts and assembled separately at Philippopolis, where they issued a statement condemning the term homoousios. In so doing they had withdrawn across the frontier that divided the western provinces of the empire, ruled by Constans, to those of the East, under Constantius. A generation later the city served as a destination of exile for the Arian bishop, Eustathios of Sebaste, another mark of its relative obscurity (Bas. Ep. 237). Compared with other cities along the empire’s main east-west axis: Ancyra (see below), Nicomedia, which

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18 Mitchell 1993, vol. 2, 68. There is very little evidence for large churches being built in Asia Minor and Syria before ca. AD 350.

19 For an invaluable survey of church building in Philippopolis and Thrace generally, see Topalilov 2016b.

20 Socr. Hist. Eccl. 2.20: ‘But as Protogenes, bishop of Serdica, and Hosius, bishop of Cordova, a city in Spain, would by no means permit them to be absent, the Eastern bishops immediately withdrew, and returning to Philippopolis in Thrace, held a separate council, wherein they openly anathematized the term homoousios; and having introduced the Anomoian opinion into their epistles, they sent them in all directions.’ (transl. by Ph. Schaff and H. Wace).
became Diocletian and Galerius’s capital, Constantinople itself, which rapidly developed into the capital of the eastern Christian empire, and even Serdica, which was briefly considered as a potential capital city by Constantine during his struggles with Licinius, Philippopolis was not considered to be a major power centre.

A notable gap in the record is the almost complete absence of significant public inscriptions in Late Antiquity. The only relevant fourth-century text is the inscription recently identified by Nikolay Sharankov relating to the reconstruction of the stage building of the theatre at Philippopolis by a provincial governor ca. AD 305\(^2\). This work occurred during the period when the Tetrarchic re-organisation of the provinces in the Thracian diocese was under way, and Philippopolis received particular attention when it was confirmed as the capital of Thracia. The theatre was probably not only the city’s most important public building, but also provided the setting for major ceremonial and official business at this period (fig. 5). The situation may be fruitfully compared with the nearly contemporary reconstruction of the theatre at Pisidian Antioch in the governorship of Valerius Diogenes between AD 310 and 313, when that city became the administrative centre of the new province of Pisidia\(^2\). However, subsequently not a single emperor or imperial official of the fourth and fifth centuries is commemorated by a public inscription at Philippopolis, until the epigraphic silence was broken, remarkably, by the four-line Latin epigram that identified a statue of Leo’s general (and later usurper) Basiliscus in AD 471, an inscription that may have been set up after Philippopolis was relieved from the threat posed by the forces of the Gothic warlord Theoderic Strabo\(^2\).

How should we interpret or explain this epigraphic silence? A standard approach to the history of the fourth century is to see this as a period of revival after the crises and catastrophes of the third century. Diocletian and his colleagues in the tetrarchy, Constantine and Licinius, Constantine as sole ruler and his sons who split the empire are collectively judged by history to have restored the Roman empire to something like its former levels of peace and internal security. This may be a correct overall assessment of the fifty-year period during which Roman order was imposed on the empire, but the innovations and developments of this period were above all focused on the central institutions of the state: administrative structures, especially the creation of new smaller provinces and the system of dioeceses; new and more systematic approaches to taxation based on the poll and land tax, which may have led to fairer, as well as more efficient taxation; military reforms to the army, and a restructuring of other aspects of state administration. However, none of this had direct consequences for the development of provincial communities. By comparison with the previous hundred years there was very little public building in the cities of the empire in the period from AD 250-350. There is no decisive evidence from Philippopolis to suggest that the city was an exception to this general pattern. This even applies to religious structures. The rapid spread of Christianity under Constantine was not immediately reflected in church building. With some notable exceptions in major eastern centres, which relied on imperial patronage or the hosting of major church councils, very few new churches can be dated to the first half of the fourth century AD, and most middle-order cities had to

\(^{21}\) Sharankov 2014; see also p. 73 and pp. 105-106 in this volume.

\(^{22}\) Christol / Drew-Bear 1999, 39-71; with further observations by Christol 2013 and 2014.

\(^{23}\) AE 1937, 98 = 1941, 138 = 1948, 43 = 1950, 83; Beševliev 1964, 206; Hic est, quem cernis, equitum / pedetumque magister, / consul, patricius imperiiq(ue) / parens, / ipse triumphator (r)ediit nunc / victor ab оrbe. / Gloria Romanis tu, Basiliscse, / tuis. ‘The man you can see is magister equitum and magister peditum, consul, patrician, father of the empire and himself celebrator of triumphs; he has returned victorious from the world. You, Basiliscus, are a glory to your Romans’.
wait until the time of Theodosius I before churches were built for large congregations. In other words, the picture of urban recession, which is seen in the middle and second half of the third century, continued at least up to the middle of the fourth century. This overall picture of stagnation helps to provide an explanation for the Emperor Julian's short-lived attempts to return power to the cities, allowing them to raise their own taxes, and aiming to create a new balance between cities and imperial authorities (Mitchell 2015, 82).

The cities of Thrace, Philippopolis, Augusta Traiana, Hadrianopolis and Marcianopolis, appear to have stood out as islands of relative security in a turbulent region in the fourth century, engulfed by war or the threat of war both from barbarian invaders and settlers, and from rival Roman imperial armies. By contrast, provincial centres in Asia Minor along the major east-west road axis, including Nicomedia and Ancyra, as well as Thessalonica, a major but not easily accessible neighbor of Philippopolis to the south, achieved the status of imperial residences. It is hazardous to make direct comparisons in assessing the historical standing of ancient cities, because the conditions for the preservation of evidence vary unpredictably according to local circumstances, but a direct comparison between Philippopolis and Ancyra indicates that Ancyra could profit from the security of its location in a way that was impossible for Philippopolis. Ancyra, capital city of the province of Galatia, was about the same distance from Constantinople as Philippopolis but maintained a higher fourth-century profile than its Thracian counterpart. The city's inscriptions during this period include five imperial bases: three for Constantine, all erected at the moment that he took sole power in the East, November AD 324; one for Julian, set up when he spent two weeks in the city on his way to Syrian Antioch in June AD 362; and one marking an act of Christian devotion on behalf of the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius around AD 400. There is also a verse epitaph for a provincial governor of Galatia (I. Ankara 2, # 362). Fourth century inscriptions in general are rare at Ancyra, as they are at Philippopolis. The corpus includes only fifteen gravestones dating to the period AD 300-450, compared to about ten times that number in the century from AD 450-550, although these include a verse epitaph for a provincial governor (I. Ankara 2, # 350-364). In the first half of the fifth century texts from Ancyra explicitly document a substantial new secular building programme (I. Ankara 24  For a recent survey of the meagre evidence for early fourth century church-building in Anatolia, see Niewöhner 2016, 295-308.

25  See Mitchell / French, forthcoming (= I. Ankara 2), # 329-331 (Constantine), 332 (Julian), 333 (Arcadius and Honorius).
The letters of Libanius demonstrate that Ancyra was an important educational centre from the AD 350s to the 380s, and other literary and juridical sources show that Ancyra served for short periods as an imperial residence. Julian spent two weeks in the city in AD 362 en route for Antioch and the Persian expedition; his successor Jovian was inaugurated as consul in the city in January 364; Valens used Ancyra as a headquarters during his war with the usurper Procopius, and his third son was born in the city in January 366; Arcadius used Ancyra as a summer residence in several years between AD 397 and 405. Philippopolis, by contrast, was beset by chronic insecurity which hindered its development as a major provincial centre of Late Antiquity. ‘Hard times’, a term which can be applied to many civic histories in the age of Diocletian and Constantine, continued later in the fourth century in the Thracian cities than they did in the protected interior of Asia Minor. Many recent archaeological discoveries in Plovdiv clearly underline the city’s resilience through Late Antiquity until the later sixth century, and Philippopolis serves as an excellent demonstration of the survival capacity of fortified Roman cities even during hard times. However, the recurring and abiding threat from Goths, Huns and later Avars set clear limits to civic development.

26 For the documentation see Foss 1977, 31-87 and I. Ankara 2, chapter 1.

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