

# The church of Philippi in the first six centuries of our era

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## Abstract

*From the commentaries on Paul's epistle to the Philippians, much can be gleaned about the circumstances of that period. But what happened in the time after the Philippians received Paul's letter? From the fourth to the sixth centuries, at least five churches were built. Were these churches necessary due to large numbers of churchgoers, or did one or more of these churches belong to heretical groups? This article attempts to provide a plausible overview of the development of the church in Philippi in the period following Paul's preaching there and the end of the sixth century. The famous studies by Collart and Lemerle cannot be ignored, but far more information than what those scholars had access to is now available to us. The recent works by Peter Pilhofer, in particular, are highly instructive. Using new evidence, we can now provide a more detailed history of this church's history than ever before.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With this article I would like to provide an outline of the history of the church of Philippi from the time when Paul preached the gospel there, up to and including the sixth century. Of course, such an outline must be fragmentary because much evidence is still lacking. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to gather the diverse data supplied by various documents, inscriptions and archaeological discoveries and to piece them together. Although the history of the church of Philippi is not necessarily a model for the history of the whole early church, we may assume that the history of this local church sheds some light on what was happening elsewhere.

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The beginning of this period can be marked by the apostle Paul's first visit, around the year 50 in the first century, and its end by the decline of the city from the end of the sixth century onward due to earthquakes and frequent raids by people living in the area to the north of Philippi (Lemerle 1945:113-118; Konstandakopoulou 1984:89, 111).<sup>2</sup> It is clear that, as a Roman colony, Philippi had some status in Macedonia. This status possibly influenced the development of its church. Therefore we will first have a look at its history.

Soon after taking Amphipolis in 356 BC, the Macedonian king Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, captured the village of Krenides. He fortified the village with walls and named it after himself: Philippi. At that time, the whole area up to the river Nestos was added to Macedonia. Philippi was situated about 40 miles to the east of Amphipolis and about 100 miles to the east of Thessaloniki. It lay close to the Pangaion mountains, where major goldmines were situated. From the outset, this city was inhabited mainly by Greeks and Macedonians and by a Thracian minority (Lemerle 1945:13).

In the second century BC tension arose between the Romans and the Macedonian kings. In the ensuing battle, the Macedonian army was defeated, and Macedonia came under Roman government in 167 BC. At the end of the second century BC, Philippi became an important stop on the Via Egnatia, the Roman road from Dyrrachium on the Adriatic Sea to Neapolis and further, to Byzantium.

Later, the decisive battle of the Roman civil war was fought on the plains near Philippi. The combat in 42 BC between Brutus and Cassius on the one hand, and Octavian and Antony on the other hand, marked the end of the Roman Republic (Dio Cassius 47.39-42). After this battle, many Roman veterans were settled in this strategically situated city. Philippi was turned into a Roman colony by Antony.<sup>3</sup> In 27 BC, Augustus named it after himself: *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis* (Plinius IV.42). As a Roman colony, the city was quite strongly Romanised (cf Acts 16:21). Philippi was allotted to the *tribus Voltinia*. Almost seventy inscriptions testify to Roman citizens' belonging to this *tribus* (Pilhofer 2000:880).<sup>4</sup> Sometimes another *tribus* is mentioned, for example, the *tribus Quirina* (Pilhofer 2000:386-388), but the number of

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<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that life stopped in Philippi around 600, but the city deteriorated in spite of some smaller reconstructions (see Bakirtzis 1989:696-698; 709-710).

<sup>3</sup> Other Roman colonies were, for example, Dion, Dyrrhachium and Pella (see Cabanes 2001:317).

<sup>4</sup> Cf the very different situation in Thessaloniki where also inscriptions related to a Roman *tribus* have been found, but not as numerous as in Philippi. Moreover, there is not an overrepresentation of just one *tribus* (cf Edson 1972:308). In Pilhofer's (2000) study only the inscriptions that have been published are taken into consideration. Ducrey counted 1359 inscriptions (see Pilhofer 1995:232).

inscriptions that mentions the *tribus Voltinia* outnumber other references by far.

The highest Roman authorities in a *colonia* were the “duumviri”. This word is most often rendered by στρατηγοί in Greek texts (Pilhofer 1995:195-197). The author of Acts shows his knowledge of the local situation when he uses this word in Acts 16:20. We even know the names of two “*duumvir*” who lived in the first century of the Christian era: Publius Cornelius Asper Atiarius Montanus and Varinius Macedo (Pilhofer 2000:1-2). By contrast, Thessaloniki was not a colony, but a *civitas libera* with a different way of administration. In Acts 17:6, the authorities in Thessaloniki were correctly mentioned as πολιτάρχαι (Brocke 2001:259-265).

The province of Macedonia was most often governed by a proconsul. During the reign of Tiberius and of Caligula, Macedonia was led by a governor (*legatus*) (see Dio Cassius 60.24.1; Strabo 17.3.25).<sup>5</sup> Around the year 300, Macedonia was made part of the diocese of Moesia. Soon after that, Macedonia itself became a diocese. Presumably, these changes in its form of government did not influence daily life in Philippi very much. What is more important is that Philippi fell into the Roman sphere of influence, while nearby Thracia became part of the eastern empire (Lemerle 1945:78).<sup>6</sup> Paul knew that Philippi was highly “Romanised”. In his epistle, he used words that must be interpreted against this Roman background.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the fourth century, Macedonia also became attached to the eastern part and Philippi would not be governed by Rome again (Lemerle 1945:80-84). It is not by chance that the boundaries between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches in that area roughly follow the borders between the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire.<sup>8</sup>

Philippi was a provincial town, much smaller than Thessaloniki. People met in the central square, the forum, and did their shopping in the shops around the forum. An amusing inscription is found close to a butcher’s shop – it mentions the game of hopscotch (Pilhofer 2000:263-4). The population of

<sup>5</sup> Two well-known governors were C Poppaeus Sabinus and P Memmius Regulus (cf Sarikakis 1977:47-54).

<sup>6</sup> “... la ligne de démarcation marque la limite extrême jusqu’où s’est exercée vers l’Est l’influence directe de la latinité.”

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the use of φυλή, πολίτευμα and πολιτεύομαι (cf Pilhofer 1995:122-139).

<sup>8</sup> For the efforts of the bishops of Rome to retain their influence in Macedonia, see Lemerle (1945:241-246).

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Philippi in the first century is estimated to have been about ten thousand,<sup>9</sup> while the population of Thessaloniki was between twenty and thirty thousand (Brocke 2001:72). More than a century ago, Beloch (1886:507) calculated a population of about fifty-four million people for the Roman Empire at the start of the first century.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, the population is generally assumed to be about sixty million (Stark 1996:6). Presumably, the population did not grow very fast in the following few centuries and from the third to the fifth centuries it is even thought that there were serious decreases in population (Charanis 1972:9). Consequently, by the end of the sixth century, the number of inhabitants in the region may have been about the same as in the first century. For Philippi, the situation would not have been very different. Perhaps the number of its inhabitants became even lower in the course of these centuries. After the reign of Domitian, Philippi did not usually strike coins any longer, which signals a loss of importance. The political role of Philippi was indeed rather modest. When it was an intermediate station on the Via Egnatia, Roman armies and even several Roman emperors passed through the town (Collart 1937:511-514), but at the beginning of the fourth century, as Rome became less influential and Milan became more important, people travelling from east to west and vice versa did not necessarily take the Via Egnatia, but often chose a northerly course through Sardica (today called Sofia). Consequently, Philippi was visited less than before by the authorities and their escorts and even by salesmen and other travellers (Lemerle 1945:71-72).

Life in the *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis* was dominated by agriculture (Pilhofer 1995:78), as the farmland around Philippi was very fertile. Besides the cultivation of corn, trade played an important role. As it stood at a junction of the highways, this town was highly suited to business. The nearby harbour of Neapolis also contributed to the prosperity of Philippi.

In the first century, several cults can be distinguished in Philippi, with its Greek-Macedonian population and Thracians and Romans.<sup>11</sup> I only mention some of these here: the Egyptian goddess Isis was worshipped; Thracian members of the population adhered to the cult of the Thracian Horseman; Dionysus was a well-known Greek god; and many Romans clung to the Roman god Silvanus. Of course, the Roman Emperor was venerated as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Pilhofer (1995:76) takes into account five to ten thousand inhabitants. Oakes (2001:45) made a slightly higher estimate: a population of ten thousand people for the city itself. Maybe the extension of the theatre to eight thousand seats in the second century is an argument in favour of a number of ten thousand inhabitants.

<sup>10</sup> His view was criticised by Lo Cascio (1994:23-40).

<sup>11</sup> See the list of "Cults attested at and near Philippi" in Abrahamsen (1995:16-18) (cf Pilhofer 1995:92-113; Bormann 1995:30-67).

From Acts 16:13, we may conclude that some Jews also lived in Philippi.<sup>12</sup> It was in this pluralist town that Paul preached the gospel for the first time in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

In commentaries on Paul's epistle to the Philippians, the later development of the church of Philippi is usually neglected. However, it is fascinating to look for an answer to the question of what happened to the church Paul founded there in the first few centuries afterwards. The famous studies by Paul Lemerle (1945) and Paul Collart (1937) may not be ignored in such research, but these sources are now somewhat dated. Undoubtedly the magnificent studies by Peter Pilhofer (1995, 2000) are the most recent and most thorough books about this community published thus far. In his studies, Pilhofer also paid attention to the development of the Philippian church. He wrote a chapter about Polycarpus and his contact with the church of Philippi (Pilhofer 1995:206-228) and he made some remarks about the third generation of the Philippian church (Pilhofer 1995:254-258). The study by Bormann (1995) has already been cited above. In addition to these studies, several other works have been published regarding Philippi and/or the Epistle to the Philippians. I would like mention here, in particular, the publications by Elliger (1987), Portefaix (1988) and Abrahamsen (1995).

## **2. THE FIRST FEW DECADES OF THE CHURCH OF PHILIPPI**

It is safe to say that the church of Philippi was the first church that Paul founded in Macedonia and even in Europe (see Phlp 4:15; 1 Th 2:2; Ac 16:11-12). Paul arrived in Philippi from Troas in Asia Minor. After leaving Troas by ship, he skirted Samothraki and landed in Neapolis, the harbour of Philippi at that time. In winter, when the winds were very strong, people made the whole journey by land, but in summer people heading westward usually travelled by sea. Later Ignatius made the same trip as a prisoner to be brought to Rome. It was via this highway that the gospel reached Macedonia.<sup>14</sup>

On his way from Neapolis to Philippi Paul, possibly passed the enormous stone monument of C Vibius Quartus that can be seen to this very

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<sup>12</sup> The recently found inscription that mentions a synagogue shows that in any case Jews lived in Philippi in the third or fourth century (see Koukouli-Chrysantaki 1998:28-35; Pilhofer 2000:389-390; Philo 281).

<sup>13</sup> Parts of the town as it was in the time of Paul can still be seen today, especially in the theatre, though the Romans enlarged it and adapted it to their own requirements. Other monuments were built in the second century and later.

<sup>14</sup> The gospel came in a comparable manner to Rome over the highway through Puteoli (Lampe 2003:10). I quote the English translation of Lampe (1989).

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day (Pilhofer 2000:63-65). Paul visited Philippi a few more times after his first stay there. If the travel report in Acts is reliable, he came to Philippi twice during the so-called third journey, before and after a stay in the south of Greece.<sup>15</sup> It is evident that his relationship with the small Christian community in Philippi was very close; see Philippians 4:14-16, where it becomes clear that this community supported him financially. In this text, it is said that the Philippians sent him help when he was in Thessaloniki. The church of Philippi may have been the only community to do so; see Philippians 4:15.<sup>16</sup> From 2 Corinthians 11:9, we may conclude that the Philippians also sent Paul help when he was in Corinth.<sup>17</sup>

Paul was very satisfied with the result of his preaching in Philippi (see Phlp 1:3-11).<sup>18</sup> Though we cannot exclude rhetorical exaggeration, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, the overall picture is very positive.<sup>19</sup> Paul had no reason to complain with regard to the belief of the Philippians. In Philippians 3, he reacts sharply to some people of Jewish origin who seem to have preached that Jewish rules must be obeyed.<sup>20</sup> The news about these preachers was distressing for Paul; nonetheless, he seemed to be convinced that the church of Philippi was on the right track.

The mention of overseers and deacons in Philippians 1:1 suggests that very soon the church consisted of more than just a few members. After all, we know the names of Epaphroditus (Phlp 2:25-30), of Euodia and Syntyche, both mentioned in Philippians 4:2, and of Clement (Phlp 4:3). In the latter verse, a fifth person is addressed, but not named (cf Verhoef 1998:209-219). Acts 16:14 speaks of Lydia, a dealer in purple fabric. Perhaps the gaoler should be mentioned here, as well as one of the members of the church (see Ac 16:33). It is possible that some of these seven people were among the overseers and deacons mentioned in 1:1, but it seems unlikely. We do not have any evidence for that and if it were the officials who (like Euodia and

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<sup>15</sup> Cf Acts 20:1-2.6. See also 1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:5.

<sup>16</sup> But see 2 Cor 11:8.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps 2 Corinthians was written in Philippi (cf Lemerle 1945:42-43; Thrall 1994:74-77).

<sup>18</sup> In this article I take for granted the authenticity and the integrity of the epistle to the Philippians. In my opinion it provides a realistic picture of the church of Philippi in the fifties of the first century. But Van Manen (1902:3626) denies this (for a critical review of Van Manen's work, see Verhoef 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Later on several authors exaggerated the number of Christians; see, for example, Irenaeus I.10.2; Tertullian III.2.1 argued that Christ "totum iam orbem euangelii sui fide cepit." But Origen, writing with regard to Matthew 24:9, refers to several nations when using the expression "plurimi nondum audierunt Evangelii verbum".

<sup>20</sup> Silva (1992:10) speaks about "an extreme form of Jewish Christianity".

Syntyche) caused problems, Paul would presumably have spoken in a different way. The plurals used in 1:1 suggest that at least two overseers and two deacons held these positions. So, altogether we count eleven people, including Lydia and the gaoler, both mentioned only in Acts. If these eleven persons all belonged to different families and if we calculate that 50% of their families,<sup>21</sup> consisting of a husband, a wife, two children and two slaves, belonged to the church, we can assume that the community to which Paul addressed his epistle consisted of about thirty-three members.<sup>22</sup> Of course, this number is by no means certain. Possibly a few more or slightly fewer people joined the church, but in any case we have a plausible hypothesis that can be defended on the basis of the information available.

What kinds of people joined the small and young church of Philippi? We have already mentioned Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche and Clement. In Acts 16:14, Lydia, a dealer in purple fabric, is mentioned. The name Lydia points to the region of Lydia in Asia Minor.<sup>23</sup> The first three names are typically Greek. Clement is the only Roman name. From an estimated ten thousand inhabitants in Philippi, a significant number came from Rome, while another group originated from Thrace; the remaining people were Greek.<sup>24</sup> Although the number of names that we know about of the first Christians is very small, one would expect a more proportional representation of the different population groups. However, the inscriptions from the following few centuries also show that the Christian community in Philippi consisted mainly of Greek (and some Roman) people. Thus far, only two Latin inscriptions regarding Christians have been found (Pilhofer 1995:241-242; 2000:105-107). It is surprising that, so far, no Thracian name has been found in Philippi in connection with Christianity. Apparently, Christianity did not attract people of Thracian origin.<sup>25</sup> These people clung to their own religions; it was especially the cult of the Thracian Horseman that had many adherents.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For the problems concerning verses saying that someone is baptised with his/her house, see Sterck-Deguelde (2004:169-171).

<sup>22</sup> De Vos (1999:261): "about thirty members"; Oakes (2001:62): "50-100 members" (cf Tellbe 2001:224).

<sup>23</sup> One inscription mentions a purple dyer from Thyatira (see Lemerle 1945:28-29; Pilhofer 1995:177-182).

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to see inscriptions in Latin that are written in Greek characters as well as inscriptions in Greek partly written in Latin characters (cf Pilhofer 2000:50-57, 615-616).

<sup>25</sup> This applies to the cult of Silvanus as well. So far, no Thracian name has been found with regard to this cult (cf Pilhofer 1995:109).

<sup>26</sup> With respect to this cult, see Collart (1937:423-427) and Pilhofer (1995:93-100).

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As has been said above, in this area agriculture and trade were very important. The role of Lydia seems to fit well with these data. She was a businesswoman and presumably well-to-do (Sterck-Degueudre 2004:235-238). Although we cannot simply draw conclusions from inscriptions from later centuries, it is worth mentioning that in inscriptions related to Christian people, professions such as those of physician, architect, business minder and centurion have been mentioned.<sup>27</sup>

Another inscription indicates the border of a parcel of land owned by the church (Konstandakopoulou 1984:417; Pilhofer 2000:518). These inscriptions may indicate that in later times the church of Philippi owned property and that its members consisted of middle and upper class people. This could be in line with the circumstances of the church members in Paul's time.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, we should not be surprised that this church sent financial help to Paul more than once (cf Phlp 4:16 and 2 Cor 11:9). Paul's attitude was very different in other cities. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, for example, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he worked there for his living in order not to burden them.<sup>29</sup>

### **3. THE SECOND CENTURY**

The most instructive source with regard to the church of Philippi in the second century is Polycarpus' epistle to the Philippians.<sup>30</sup> Polycarpus was a bishop in Smyrna in the first decades of the second century. In one inscription, possibly from a cemetery, a certain Simon from Smyrna is mentioned (Pilhofer 2000:381-382). Such an inscription confirms that people travelled between these two cities.

We can deduce from Polycarpus' epistle that the bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, passed through Philippi on his journey to Rome, where he would be martyred (see Pol, *Phlp* 9:1). Ignatius himself had written to Polycarpus that he would leave Troas to be brought to Neapolis (Ign, *Pol* 8:1), the harbour for Philippi. The Philippians were deeply impressed with Ignatius. They asked Polycarpus to send them copies of the epistles by Ignatius in his possession (see Pol, *Phlp* 13:2). This means that the Philippians felt a close bond with Ignatius. They demanded that Polycarpus also arrange for them the mailing of

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<sup>27</sup> ἰατρός, οἰκόδομος, πραγματευτής and κεντυρίων respectively. The physician was a presbyter as well (see Pilhofer 2000:95-96).

<sup>28</sup> This does not contradict 2 Cor 8:2, as this does not concern material poverty (cf 2 Cor 8:9; see also Peterlin 1995:169-170).

<sup>29</sup> Cf Acts 18:3 for Paul's attitude in Corinth, and see 2 Cor 11:9.

<sup>30</sup> The authenticity of the epistle of Polycarpus and of the epistles of Ignatius is assumed.



an epistle to the church in Syria (Pol, *Phlp* 13:1). This suggests that it was a rather small community. Presumably this thirteenth chapter should be separated from the epistle and should be considered part of an earlier epistle by Polycarpus to the Philippians. In Pol, *Phlp* 13:2 Polycarpus enquired as to the circumstances of Ignatius. This is very striking, as elsewhere in this letter there is evidence that he knew about the martyrdom of Ignatius (see Pol, *Phlp* 9:1). This makes scholars hesitant about the integrity of this epistle.<sup>31</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this question in detail as the article focuses on information with regard to Philippi. However, as an aside, it seems very probable to me that we have two epistles by Polycarpus. If this is the case, then the first one, of which we have only Pol, *Phlp* 13, must have been written around the time when Ignatius was martyred, i.e. between 110 and 117 (Bauer & Paulsen 1985:4; Pilhofer 1995:210). In my opinion the second epistle should be dated two decades later.<sup>32</sup> This means that at two moments, in the second decade and in the fourth decade of the second century, Polycarpus had nothing to complain of in respect of the church of Philippi.

From Pol, *Phlp* 11:3; 14, we can deduce that Polycarpus had visited Philippi. He said about the root of their faith that it had been well known for a long time and that it was very fruitful.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, in 7:1 he warned against people who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. Some people argue that these words can be related to the point of view argued by Marcion. Another possibility is that Polycarpus borrowed general phrases against common heresies – cf 1 John 4:2-3 (Bauer & Paulsen 1985:120; Pilhofer 1995:219).

Elsewhere in his epistle, Polycarpus reminded the Philippians of some people from their midst who had died because of their belief (cf Pol, *Phlp* 1:1; 9:1). These words show that the group of believers constituted a clearly identifiable community and that they had in some way or other aroused the ire of the authorities. In any case, it is clear that the Christian community in Philippi did not live a hidden life. From the correspondence between Pliny, then the governor (*legatus*) in Bithynia and Pontus, and the emperor Trajan we know that at this time, at the beginning of the second century, being a Christian was punishable in itself, although Trajan in his answer told Pliny to stand off and not to persecute the Christians with too much fervour (Pliny

<sup>31</sup> For this discussion, see Pilhofer (1995:206-209), in which the integrity of Pol, *Phil* is contested (cf Bauer & Paulsen 1985:112, in which “die prinzipielle Offenheit dieser Frage” is upheld).

<sup>32</sup> Pilhofer (1995:212) postulates an even later date for Polycarpus’ second epistle to the Philippians.

<sup>33</sup> Pol, *Phlp* 1:2: ἐξ ἀρχαίων καταγγελλομένη χρόνων ... καὶ καρποφορεῖ.

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X.96-97).<sup>34</sup> In Pol, *Phlp* 12:3, Polycarpus asked the Philippians to pray for those who persecuted them, in spite of the problems they were confronted with. Polycarpus cautioned the Philippians to behave in the right way and to pray for the authorities. We may conclude that the relation between the Christians and the non-Christians was fairly complicated. If the Christians maintained a low profile, they did not usually experience many problems, but if they attracted too much attention, they could be sentenced to death.

The Philippians felt so much respect for Polycarpus that they consulted him about a problem that had arisen in their church with the presbyter Valens. It is evident from Polycarpus' reaction that, in his opinion, the Philippians had proceeded correctly. Valens, who appeared to be not wholly reliable, was the only blemish on the community's reputation (Pol, *Phlp* 11). He lost his office in church, but he was not excommunicated (cf Pol, *Phlp* 11:4). Regrettable though it is, presumably such an incident belongs to the usual process of "forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning".<sup>35</sup>

It is striking that the Philippians themselves apparently did not have a bishop. They asked Polycarpus, the bishop of Smyrna, for help with regard to Valens. In his answer Polycarpus did not mention a bishop either. Apart from his advice on how to act with Valens, he sent some instructions with regard to deacons (Pol, *Phlp* 5:2) and presbyters (Pol, *Phlp* 6:1).<sup>36</sup> There is no longer any sign of the overseers (ἐπίσκοποι) mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Philippians. The lack of a bishop in Philippi may be explained by the fact that this community was still rather small.

Later (c 200 CE), Tertullian mentioned the church of Philippi along with the churches of Corinth, Rome and Ephesus as paragons, where the real apostolic epistles were read (*De praescriptione haereticorum* 36:1-2). It is conspicuous that Thessaloniki was not mentioned by Tertullian in this regard.

To my knowledge, we have no information about the time between when Polycarpus wrote his epistles and when Tertullian published the book mentioned above.<sup>37</sup> But presumably it is not wide off the mark to assume that the church of Philippi grew steadily. The Christians there became an increasingly visible group of people, particularly because of their new religion

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Hadrian and Antoninus Pius acted in the same way (cf Eusebius IV.26.10).

<sup>35</sup> Ascough (2003:83) used these terms for groups going "through a number of stages of development."

<sup>36</sup> In 4:3 widows are mentioned. However, it is not clear whether an official function is meant here (cf 1 Tm 5:3-16).

<sup>37</sup> The legendary Acts of Paul could be mentioned here, but they are not very helpful. This document chronicles miracles that occurred in Philippi during Paul's stay there (Schneemelcher 1989:193-241, esp pp 230-234). The Acts of Andrew do not give reliable historical information either (see Prieur & Schneemelcher 1989:93-137, esp pp 110-111).

and their refusal to pray to other gods and to the Emperor. As in any young growing group, a struggle for power must have arisen. The problems with the presbyter Valens show that the right man was not always in the right place, but apparently this was just an unfortunate incident. Tertullian mentioned that Philippi was as an exemplary church, from which remark we may deduce that, generally speaking, not much had changed in the course of the second century.

Things were moving on and the Christian faith got more and more adherents in Philippi. From the fact that in the (younger) inscriptions related to Christians, so far no Thracian name has been found and only a few Roman names have been identified, we can deduce that in the second century too, most of the church members in Philippi were Greek. By the end of the second century, Christians were still a very small minority and did not yet play an important role. This is confirmed by the enormous number of building activities for the benefit of non-Christians in the second century. New temples were built for the Emperor and for the well-known deities. The theatre was expanded to seat about eight thousand people and it was adapted for Roman spectacles (Bormann 1995:24-25, 41; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1995:15-18).

Can we make an educated guess about the number of Christians in Philippi? As has been said above, we may assume that the number of inhabitants in the second century did not really differ much from that in the first century. The growth of the population of the Roman Empire, if any, was minimal in these centuries. Regarding the number of Christians, it is difficult to reach any certainty because of the lack of evidence. But we can try to create a plausible sketch of the development of the church of Philippi. We have information about this church in the fifties of the first century, in the time of Polycarpus, and in the fourth century. In 1996 Rodney Stark published a book in which he gave a very plausible reconstruction of the growth of the Christian church in the Roman Empire up to the year 350 CE. He proposed that "Christianity grew at the rate of *40 percent per decade*" (Stark 1996:6). Starting with the assumption that there were 1000 Christians in the year 40, he calculates the following results (Stark 1996:7):

- in the year 50            1.400
- in the year 100        7.530
- in the year 150        40.496
- in the year 200        217.795
- in the year 250        1.171.356
- in the year 300        6.299.832
- in the year 350        33.882.008.

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These numbers are very helpful as they give an explanation for the slow but steady growth of Christianity and the need for locations for meetings in the middle of the third century. The number of Christians at the beginning of the fourth century agrees with the generally accepted assumption that at that time about 10% of the population of the Roman Empire would be Christian. Moreover, the number of Christians in the year 350 (more than half of the population of the Empire) explains why the Empire should be governed by a Christian government at the time.

Although this calculation is plausible, it does not fit the development of the church in Philippi. Even if a number of 10 Christians in the year 50 is postulated, a growth rate of 40 per cent per decade would mean more than thirty thousand Christians in the year 300, which is much more than the total number of inhabitants. Consequently Stark's calculation for the whole Roman Empire cannot be used for just one city. This anomaly is caused by the fact that Christianity started in just a few cities and that only afterwards were other cities and the countryside reached. For the whole Roman Empire we can accept a steady growth, because low growth in a particular area would be compensated for by faster growth elsewhere. However, when one looks at just one town, there is probably more unevenness in such processes. In any case, much lower growth must be stated for a specific city than for the whole Roman Empire. If we cut the rate of growth to 20% per decade and we reckon with 33 members of the Christian church in Philippi in the year 60, we will have

- in the year 100      68
- in the year 200      424
- in the year 300      2623
- in the year 350      6528 church members.

This would mean that in the year 300, more than a quarter of the whole population of Philippi would be Christian. Such a result is certainly too high. By contrast, if we assume a growth percentage of 10% per decade, there would have been

- in the year 100      48
- in the year 200      125
- in the year 300      325
- in the year 350      523 church members.

Thus there would have been about 53 members in the year 110 and 58 in the year 120. This is presumably too low for a community writing to Polycarpus about the Ignatian correspondence. Also, a community of 325 members

seems too small to have been building a church at the start of the fourth century.

In between would be a growth percentage of 15% per decade, in which case we arrive at the following numbers:

- in the year 100      58,<sup>38</sup>
- in the year 200      233,
- in the year 300      945
- in the year 350      1900 church members.

It is evident that the growth of the church was not as regular as such numbers suggest. A faster growth at a certain moment would have been compensated for by a decline in another period. But, in general, these numbers seem to be acceptable.<sup>39</sup> We can understand quite well that a community of about 70 members would ask Polycarpus for copies of Ignatius' epistles in the second decade of the second century. Also, it is conceivable that a community of nearly 100 members might ask Polycarpus for advice in the difficult situation in respect of Valens in the thirties of the second century.<sup>40</sup> The situation described in Polycarpus' correspondence shows the situation of a church with more than just a few dozen members. For a much smaller community, the actions of this church are very improbable. We can also imagine that a community of nearly one thousand members wanted to build a church in Philippi after Constantine's promulgation of freedom of religion.

#### **4. FROM c 200-c 400**

We have very little information about the church of Philippi in the third century. At best, we can try to fill in the gap between what we know of the second century and the information we have regarding the fourth century. In any case, we know that a large majority worshipped Greek or Roman or other deities in the third century. Collart and Ducrey counted 187 sculptures at the Acropolis. Most of them can be seen there to this very day. These sculptures are linked to several cults. Ninety of them concern Diana, and only two of the sculptures are related to Christianity. The cult of Isis is also mentioned at the Acropolis

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<sup>38</sup> Compare the second century membership list of people joining the popular cult of Silvanus. It shows more than a hundred names (cf Pilhofer 2000:170-175).

<sup>39</sup> A number of 33 Christians in Philippi in the year 60 is plausible, but not certain. With 20 members, the number of believers would have been about 35 in the year 100, about 142 in the year 200 and about 573 in the year 300. If there were already 50 members in the year 60, these numbers are 87, 354 and 1431 respectively.

<sup>40</sup> A growth of 15% per decade would give 66 church members in the year 110, 76 in the year 120, 88 in the year 130 and 101 in the year 140.

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(Pilhofer 2000:189-190,583-584). These sculptures, except for the two Christian ones, date from the end of the second and the beginning of the third century (Collart & Ducrey 1975:257; Abrahamsen 1988:46). The Christian reliefs must be dated to a time when Christianity was dominant (Collart & Ducrey 1975:246). The large number of sculptures confirms the impression that relatively many Philippians worshipped Diana and other gods and that the Christians formed a small minority. Christianity still stayed in the background. Nevertheless, an increase in the number of Christians is probable.

Fourth century grave inscriptions mention the “holy church of the Philippians”. In one grave where a Christian was buried, coins were found that date from the time of Constantius II, i.e. 337-361 (Pilhofer 2000:96-97). In other inscriptions that have been dated to the fourth century, τὸ ἱερῶτάτο ταμείο is mentioned (cf Pilhofer 2000:73-74, 82-83).<sup>41</sup> Such inscriptions suggest that the Christian community must already have been a rather large group by the third century. According to our assumption, the number grew from about 233 in the year 200 to about 945 members by the year 300.

We have many more data for the fourth century. Archaeological discoveries have demonstrated that a church was built in Philippi at the start of the fourth century: the Basilica of Paul, a single-naved church that measured 25,3 by 9,9 metres on the inside (Pelekanidis 1980b:108; Pilhofer 1995:19). In 313 Constantine allowed the Christians to serve their own God.<sup>42</sup> The Basilica of Paul can be dated to around this time. It is interesting to see how an older hellenistic *heroon* was left intact and was incorporated in this basilica (Pelekanidis 1980b:107-110). In this way syncretistic elements must have crept in. We must also include the possibility that church members sometimes joined another religious movement as well.<sup>43</sup>

In the Basilica of Paul, an inscription has been found which tells us that Bishop Porphyrius made the mosaic on the floor.<sup>44</sup> Porphyrius was the first bishop of Philippi about whom we can be certain.<sup>45</sup> He resided there in the

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<sup>41</sup> Sometimes one of these inscriptions is dated in the third century (but see Lemerle 1945:94).

<sup>42</sup> Maybe Constantine visited Philippi because of his struggle against Licinius (see Collart 1937:518-519; Lemerle 1945:108-109). For an inscription that may refer to Constantine, see Pilhofer (2000:253-254).

<sup>43</sup> Some people venerated more than one deity, but we do not know of any Christian in Philippi who adhered to another religious group simultaneously (Pilhofer 1995:133-134).

<sup>44</sup> For this inscription, see Pilhofer (2000:337-338), Bakirtzis (1998:41-42).

<sup>45</sup> Apparently church fathers such as Chrysostomus and Theodoretus intended to provide a “complete” list of bishops and therefore they mentioned even Epaphroditus as a bishop of Philippi (cf Le Quien 1740:67). For the uncertainty with regard to Methodius of Olympus, see Lemerle (1945:270) and Williams (1992:680-684).

forties of the fourth century. He is known to have visited the synod of Sardica (342/343), now Sophia in Bulgaria (Mansi 1960:III, 38.42.48; Migne 10.642) and he joined the orthodox western bishops in their struggle against Arianism (Abrahamsen 1989:81-82). Seven other bishops from Macedonia had taken the same position, among them the bishops of Thessaloniki, of Beroea and of Dion (Feder 1916:132-139).

One might conclude that in Porphyrius' church orthodox opinions prevailed and that there was not much room for possible heresies (Abrahamsen 1988:54). On the other hand, some inscriptions from the middle of the fourth century state explicitly that the people mentioned in it had the right belief, ὀρθὴ πίστις, or that they belonged to the catholic church, καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία (Pilhofer 2000:94-97, 368-371). It has been argued that such words indicate that these people would have stated explicitly that they did not belong to the heretics, or more specifically to the Arians who might have been in Philippi as well as in other areas (Pelekanidis 1977b:73) (cf the discussion in Lemerle 1945:94-101). The presence of heresies cannot be excluded, of course, but the leadership of the orthodox Bishop Porphyrius seems to indicate that the church of Philippi contained mainly orthodox members. If this deduction is correct, then we can speak of a steady development of the church of Philippi up to the time of Porphyrius' leadership.

In this regard another tradition is worth mentioning. Theodorus Lector tells that Eustathius, bishop of Antioch, was banished by Constantine, probably in 327, because of his unremitting struggle against Arianism. Some said that he went to Philippi and that he died and was buried there; others speak of Thrace as the place of his banishment (Lemerle 1945:84; cf Lenain de Tillemont 1700:29). In any case, this tradition confirms that Philippi was known to be orthodox and willing to fight against Arianism.

After religious freedom was promulgated Christianity may have grown faster than before and more churches were built.<sup>46</sup> From 327 onwards, the christogram was even depicted on several coins. We have calculated that a growth of 15% per decade would have resulted in about 945 members in Philippi by the year 300, about 10% of the whole population. It has been proposed that 10% of the population of the whole Roman Empire could have been Christian by the beginning of the fourth century. Although the majority of this 10% is supposed to have lived in Asia Minor and in Syria (Brown 1996:24), a number of between 900 and 1000 church members seems to be very plausible for Philippi at the time. Shortly after this, many more people converted to Christianity. In his catalogue Pilhofer does not mention any inscription from the fourth century or thereafter that shows a connection with

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<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, for the population of the whole Roman Empire, serious losses in population are taken into account from the third to the fifth centuries (cf Charanis 1972:9).

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one of the deities venerated before. This evidence supports the proposition of rapid growth in the church in the fourth century.

After Theodosius passed the ban on non-Christian cults in the eighties of the fourth century, these cults could only continue as underground movements. People had to be Christian in order to participate in public life (Heussi 1960:93-94; MacMullen 1997:21-22). On the surface, life was Christianised from that time onwards. Nevertheless, we should not exaggerate the number of Christians. Before 300, Christianity developed steadily in spite of bans and even persecution. The laws issued by Theodosius at the end of the fourth century failed to eliminate pagan cults immediately.<sup>47</sup> It is striking to observe that no inscriptions related to Christianity (or Judaism) have been found that can be dated to before the year 300, and that from the time after 300 we do not have any inscription that refers to non-Christian cults<sup>48</sup>. This is symptomatic for the changes in religious life in the Roman Empire.

It was presumably at the end of the fourth century that Paul's Basilica was rebuilt and transformed into the so-called Octagon. About fifty years later, another extension was constructed (see Pelekanidis 1980b:112-113). By then this church measured 33 by 29, 7 metres (Pelekanidis 1967:123). Meanwhile, another church was built, the so-called *Ecclesia extra Muros*, a few hundred metres to the east of the Neapolis gate. Pelekanidis (1977a:333-394, esp. 388-389, 1980b:117-121) argues that this church was built during the reign of Constantius II (337-361). This church was used especially for funerals. Its size (33 by 15,6 metres) (Pelekanidis 1977a:333) gives some indication of the increase in the number of Christians. Close to this church, an inscription was found naming the presbyters Faustinus and Donatus, who belonged to the Catholic and Apostolic Holy Church.

We can conclude with regard to the fourth century that the building activities are in line with the rapid growth of Christianity in Philippi. The number of Christians had become so large that Christianity had a decisive influence in the city.

## **5. FROM c 400-c 600**

In the fifth and the sixth centuries many churches were built in the Roman Empire. In this period three churches were built in Philippi.<sup>49</sup> The continual

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<sup>47</sup> According to Knibbe (1995:151), paganism survived in Ephesus into the fifth century.

<sup>48</sup> I consider only those inscriptions that can be dated. Edson (1972:310-311) collected many inscriptions in respect of Thessaloniki and the surrounding area. He lists 21 inscriptions that mention "Res Christianae et Iudaicae". Of these 21 inscriptions, three are dated before the year 300.

<sup>49</sup> The same phenomenon occurred in Thessaloniki. There the Basilica of St Demetrius, the Basilica Acheiropoietos and the Chapel of Hosios David were built (see Hodinott 1963:125, 155 and 174 respectively). Moreover, some buildings were transformed into churches.



raids by northern peoples on the Greek part of the Roman Empire had not yet prevented the people of Philippi from building new churches (Lemerle 1945:110-111). As mentioned above, the Octagon was built, and in this time the annexes north of the Octagon started to take shape (Bakirtzis 1990:149-157; Gounaris 1990:31). Perhaps the crosses at the acropolis of Philippi were erected in the fifth century in order to consecrate former pagan shrines (Lemerle 1945:85-86; cf Collart & Ducrey 1975:179-183, 246). In Philippi and in other cities the correspondence between Jesus and Abgar was written at the entrance of the city to safeguard the inhabitants against war and other disasters (Pilhofer 2000:128-131).

We know the name of Flavianus, bishop of Philippi. He is mentioned as one of the addressees of some epistles written by Pope Innocentius I (401-417) (Mansi 1960:III, 1048.1058-1063). Afterwards Pope Coelestinus wrote a letter against Nestorius and sent it to the bishops of Thessaloniki, Antiochia and Jerusalem and to Flavianus (Migne 50.465-466; *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 1.2; 1925-1926:21).<sup>50</sup> This is remarkable, as the other addressees had a much more prominent seat than the bishop of Philippi. Presumably the reason for mentioning Flavianus as an addressee in this papal epistle is that Flavianus had attracted much attention (Lenain de Tillemont 1709:XIV 758). Later on he would replace Rufus, bishop of Thessaloniki, at the 431 synod of Ephesus (Mansi 1960 IV: 1124,1212, V: 1363; *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 1.2; 1925-1926:27). We can see this as a sign of appreciation for his abilities.<sup>51</sup>

At this synod, where the doctrine of Nestorius would be discussed, Flavianus made his presence very much felt (Lenain de Tillemont 1709:396-397, 456, 758; Mansi 1960 IV, 1132, 1133, 1140). Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, had criticised the use of the term θεοτόκος for the Virgin Mary, but Cyrillus, patriarch of Alexandria, and many “orthodox” bishops in his wake condemned Nestorius’ point of view. Flavianus supported Cyrillus’ position. In the official meetings no solution was found. Emperor Theodosius wanted to pacify the different parties and asked both sides to send a delegation of eight persons in order to explain their points of view. Flavianus also participated in this mission (Lenain de Tillemont 1709:XIV, 470). However, even in the presence of the emperor the dispute between the two

<sup>50</sup> Flavianus is sometimes called an archbishop (see Lenain de Tillemont 1709:758; Le Quien 1740:68).

<sup>51</sup> At the synods of 449 and 451 the bishop of Thessaloniki was not replaced by Sozon, at the time bishop of Philippi, but by Quintillus, the bishop of Heraclea Lyncestis (see Mansi 1960 VI, 929; VII, 27; cf Konstandakopoulou 1984:199).

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theological schools, that of Cyrillus against that of Nestorius, could not be resolved. Nestorius was banished, but the theological struggle continued.

In the middle of the fifth century the church of Philippi was led by a man called Sozon. Sozon is known to have attended the notorious 449 synod of Ephesus and the synod of Chalcedon in 451 (Mansi 1960 VI, 503-505, 681-682, 903, 930, 951). At the synod of Ephesus, led by Dioscorus of Alexandria, Sozon argued that the monophysitic opinions of Eutyches, a monk of Constantinople, were in line with the orthodox opinions (Mansi 1960 VI, 847; *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2.3; 1935:181). However, two years later, at the synod of Chalcedon, he defended the orthodox opinions and approved of the condemnation of Dioscorus (Mansi 1960 VI, 1093; VII, 27; *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2.1; 1933:237). The monophysitic points of view were assessed as heretical. Perhaps it was in the time of Sozon's episcopate that the Octagon in Philippi was expanded. It is worth mentioning here that, according to one tradition, Sozon was the founder of the Kosfinitza monastery, which is situated high in the Pangaio mountains (Konstandakopoulou 1984:138-139).

The three churches built in these two centuries are referred to as Basilica A, Basilica B and Basilica Γ in the reference books, because their real names are not known. The large Basilica A was built shortly before the year 500 on a terrace of the Acropolis (Lemerle 1945:406; Pelekanidis 1980b:122).<sup>52</sup> It was 27, 6 metres wide and 55 metres long, including the narthex and apse. That is "scarcely smaller than St Demetrius and larger than 'Acheiropoietos'", two well-known churches in Thessaloniki (Hoddinott 1963:169). It was a splendidly and preciously decorated edifice. The somewhat smaller Basilica Γ, sometimes called the "basilica of the museum", was also built with precious materials. It was constructed only a little later than Basilica A, shortly after the year 500 (Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou 1988:410). Like Basilica A, it was a three-aisled basilica which could accommodate hundreds of people. It is striking that these two churches were built so close to each other. The distance between them was less than one hundred metres.

In the thirties of the sixth century, during the reign of Emperor Justinian, the energetic and ambitious bishop Demetrius was in charge in Philippi. We know that Demetrius was acquainted with the emperor (Mentzos 1989:195-205). In 533 Justinian sent him and bishop Hypatius of Ephesus to Pope John II in Rome. Demetrius and Hypatius asked the Pope to cooperate with Justinian in his attempt to restore the unity of the church. Justinian wanted to find a golden mean so that both orthodox believers and the heterodox monophysites would stay in the church (Migne 1936:1036; Murphy &

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<sup>52</sup> Hoddinott (1963:173) argues for an earlier date.

Sherwood 1990:80-81). The precious gifts Demetrius and Hypatius presented to the Pope (Mansi 1960 VIII, 792) may have helped to persuade him to further the emperor's purposes. John II repudiated the opinions defended by the rigid Cyrus and Eulogius and accepted Justinian's proposal (Migne 1936:1036; Le Quien 1740:69).

At the same time, Demetrius and Hypatius were involved in political intrigues. They had a secret consultation with Theodahad, nephew and rival of the Gothic queen, Amalasantha. With the help of Theodahad, Justinian wanted to gain more political influence in Italy.<sup>53</sup> Later, Theodahad seized power, but he did not give Justinian any influence in Italy.

In addition to his mission in Rome, Demetrius was also associated with some synods in Constantinople (Mentzos 1989:199-201). Justinian exerted influence on these meetings as he wanted unity in the church in order to reach unity in his empire.

Besides his activities in Rome and in Constantinople, Demetrius promoted several major projects in Philippi. In his time, there were a number of adaptations to the Octagon (Pelekanidis 1980b:114-116). The Basilica extra Muros was also renovated and enlarged (Pelekanidis 1977a:391-392; 1980b:117,120).

It was also presumably Demetrius who ordered second pulpits to be built in both the Octagon and Basilica Γ (Mentzos 1989:201-202). These two additional smaller pulpits were presumably meant for the bishop himself. The incumbent could only enter from the altar (see Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou 1983:198; Gounaris 1984:135). This innovation must have been introduced για ένα ισχυρό επίσκοπο που έβαλε τη σφραγίδα του σε δύο τουλάχιστον μνημεία των Φιλιππων, by a powerful bishop who left his stamp on at least two monuments in Philippi (Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou 1988:412). Gounaris suggested that the priest who initiated the building of these additional pulpits wanted to honour two different precepts regarding the position of the pulpit. In the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* it is said that the pulpit should be placed in the centre of the church<sup>54</sup> and in the *Testamentum Domini* that a place close to the altar is required (Gounaris 1984:136-137).<sup>55</sup> In Palestine and in Dalmatia the pulpit was mostly placed close to the altar (Orlandos 1952:543-544). Elsewhere, the pulpit was usually situated in the centre of the church. The

<sup>53</sup> For these accounts see Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, V.III.5-9, 13.29.

<sup>54</sup> In some churches two pulpits were built opposite to each other, one for reading the gospel and the other for reading the epistles (cf Kaufmann 1913:194). But this is a situation different from the phenomenon of the two pulpits in Basilica Γ and in the Octagon.

<sup>55</sup> For the text of the *Testamentum Domini*, see Kaufmann (1913:175-176).

phenomenon of *two* pulpits in both Basilica Γ and the Octagon is a very interesting liturgical phenomenon the discussion of which falls beyond the scope of this article.<sup>56</sup>

Shortly afterwards, about 550, the building of a new church, the Basilica B, was started (see Pelekanidis 1980b:124; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki & Bakirtzis 1995:43). Hoddinott (1963:192) argues for an earlier date: “towards the end of the first half of the sixth century”. It measured 56 metres in length, including the narthex, and 28.2 metres in width, including the aisles. It was to be bigger and “more complex and no less splendidly and excitingly conceived than its predecessor” (Hoddinott 1963:189).<sup>57</sup> However, before its completion, the dome collapsed. The Basilica would never be finished. Afterwards, the Byzantines built a small church within its ruins (Lemerle 1945:425). We do not know why the Basilica was never finished. The name of Bishop Demetrius did not appear after the year 536 anymore (Mentzos 1989:201). Did he die at the time? Mentzos (1989:204) suggests that after Demetrius’ departure (death?) the Philippians no longer had access to funding from the imperial treasury. Although this suggestion is attractive, the assumption is not at all certain, because Basilica B was built presumably more than ten years after 536. Some decades after the collapse of the dome of Basilica B the city began to decline because of earthquakes and because of incursions by the tribes living to the north (Lemerle 1945:113-118).

## **6. CHURCHES IN PHILIPPI**

According to some authors, the five churches in Philippi constitute “a remarkable phenomenon” (Abrahamsen 1995:172).<sup>58</sup> The discussion above has clearly shown that the Octagon and the Basilica extra Muros were in use simultaneously with Basilica A and with Basilica Γ around the year 500. In the middle of the fifth century, a new church was planned, but this new church, Basilica B, was never completed.<sup>59</sup> How many people were supposed to gather in these churches? Above, we concluded that at the start of the fourth

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<sup>56</sup> Mentzos (1989:202) argues that the phenomenon of two pulpits is found in Palestine and in the northern Adriatic area. Mentzos refers to Gounaris (1984:137), but Gounaris in fact says the opposite of what Mentzos claims Gounaris says.

<sup>57</sup> Even today we can see the rests of all the churches of Philippi, but the parts of the walls of Basilica B that remain are the most spectacular.

<sup>58</sup> Lazaridis (1997:47) argues regarding the churches excavated in Amphipolis that these churches “prompt the question why five brilliant early Christian monuments, which cannot be far apart chronologically from each other, were erected so close together here”.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps a sixth church was even built. Thus far, a study regarding this building has not been published (cf Abrahamsen 1995:160-161; Pilhofer 1995:26).

century, more than 900 Christians lived in Philippi. From that time on, the number of Christians may have grown quite rapidly. At a rate of 15% per decade, the number would have doubled in fifty years, in which case the church of Philippi may have had about 1900 members by the middle of the fourth century. At the end of the fourth century, most people were supposed to belong to the Christian church, due to the new laws issued by Emperor Theodosius. From then on it was advantageous to be a Christian. In spite of the privileged position of Christianity, some non-Christian groups probably continued on a modest scale. The privileged position of the Christians is underscored by the presence of five splendid and rather large churches. The Basilica of Paul was rebuilt and expanded into the well-known Octagon at the end of the fourth or at the beginning of the fifth century and it was expanded again about fifty years later. In the time of Justinian it was expanded again, and the Basilica extra Muros was rebuilt and enlarged as well (Pelekanidis 1980b:112-113,118-120; Hoddinott 1963:105). Basilica A and Basilica Γ were built around the year 500, while the Octagon was in use as well.

It is important to state that we do not know of any important theologian from Philippi. The names of a few bishops of Philippi are mentioned in the attendance lists of some synods, but apart from Demetrius and Flavianus, they did not hold a prominent place. The church of Philippi did not rank high. Does this really mean that the existence of five churches constitutes “a remarkable phenomenon”?

As was said above, the Basilica extra Muros had a particular function as a church for funerals (Pelekanidis 1977a:388-389; Pilhofer 1995:16). Therefore, we can leave this church aside. However, the role of the Octagon, the enlarged and renewed Basilica of Paul, must also be discussed. This church, the oldest in Philippi, was built in connection with an existing hellenistic sanctuary where an important hero was buried (cf Pelekanidis 1980b:107).<sup>60</sup> The older shrine was incorporated in the church. The manner in which it was constructed shows that the hellenistic shrine and the church were in use simultaneously (Bakirtzis 1995:43). According to Pelekanidis (1980b:110), the veneration of the hero was substituted by the veneration of the apostle Paul.<sup>61</sup> But Gounaris (1990:57) speaks in this regard about a martyr we do not know of. In some inscriptions the name “Paul” is specified with “presbyter” and/or with “physician” (Pilhofer 2000:95-96,98-100). This suggests the interpretation of an unspecified “Paul” as the apostle Paul. It

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<sup>60</sup> The name found on the sarcophagus, Εὐηφένης Ἐξηκέστου, might refer to the cult of the Cabirus (cf Pilhofer 1995:19).

<sup>61</sup> See the comparison of the veneration of heroes with that of Christian martyrs in the 79th epistle of Julian (Bidez 1924:86).

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seems very probable that the bishop of Philippi would name his church after the apostle who founded the church there. In any case, the older cult was partly taken over by the Christian cult. Gounaris (1990:57) speaks of a varnish (ἐπικάλυψη) laid on top of the old cult.<sup>62</sup> At the end of the fourth century this basilica was transformed into an octagonal sanctuary. This octagonal shape is known from several mausoleums and was sometimes also used by Christians in honour of their martyrs (Grabar 1946:141-152; Heussi 1960:112). That suggests that this church did have a very special function and that besides its function as a place for the congregation to meet, it was particularly in use as a place of pilgrimage.<sup>63</sup> Christians brought their offerings in a room next to the tomb and they were blessed by holy water flowing from a marble cistern (Gounaris 1990:53; Bakirtzis 1995:45-46).<sup>64</sup>

About the year 500 Basilica Α and Basilica Γ were built for the believers to hold their services, and by then the Octagon was visited by people to commemorate their hero/martyr. Some decades later, the Philippians started to build a new church, the so-called Basilica Β. This means that at the beginning of the sixth century, around the year 500, apart from the Octagon and the Basilica extra Muros, two quite large churches were in use for the services in a relatively small city like Philippi. Peter Brown has calculated that the number of square metres indicates the number of people a church could accommodate (Brown 1996:24). If his calculations are correct, nearly 3000 people could be accommodated in these basilicas, apart from the space that was provided by the lofts. However, it is highly questionable whether these numbers are relevant.

In my opinion, the reason for building these churches was not just the number of churchgoers.<sup>65</sup> Did the people that wanted to build a church really calculate how much room was needed for the community or for a part of it? I do not think so. Is it possible that competing groups had their own churches? Of course, it cannot be excluded that different groups within the church wanted to have their own basilica for worshipping, but we do not have any

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<sup>62</sup> It was not unusual that elements from an older cult were absorbed into the Christian religion. Elements of the Cabirus cult were taken over in the cult of the Christian martyr Demetrius (cf Edson 1985:936; Bakirtzis 1995a:58-59; see also Pelekanidis 1980a:153-154).

<sup>63</sup> Pelekanidis (1980b:116) argues that the Octagon with the surrounding buildings served as sanctuary *par excellence* for the whole region.

<sup>64</sup> For comparable rituals, see Lassus (1947:161-167).

<sup>65</sup> Lemerle (1945:106) argues in respect of Basilic Α and Basilic Β: "Il n'y a pas de proportion entre ces édifices considérables, et la population que pouvait avoir, au V<sup>e</sup> ou au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, cette ville de Philippes."

evidence for that in Philippi. It is possible that expressions such as ὀρθὴ πίστις, right belief, and καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία, catholic church, on some gravestones suggest that heresies were present in Philippi,<sup>66</sup> but we do not know this with any certainty. In any case, we do not have any information about groups in Philippi who wanted to have their own churches in order to meet their theological needs. This point may not really help us solve the matter of the several churches in Philippi.

The phenomenon of rather large churches, even in a provincial town, is not specifically related to Philippi. But the information we have regarding the churches of Philippi is very poor. We know much more about churches in other cities, and perhaps this information can help us clarify the phenomenon of several churches in Philippi. A very important study in this regard is the one by Peter Lampe (2003). In his book, Lampe makes it clear that in Rome several churches were financed by private persons in order to give more room for the congregations that previously met in houses (Lampe 2003:360-365; cf also Harnack 1906:68-69; Brandenburg 1989:422-423). These houses must have been rather large and consequently their owners must have been wealthy people. Some churches were named after their donors (cf Rom 16:10-16 where several “house churches” are mentioned). Another reason for building a church could be a spectacular recovery from an illness. This may have been the reason why a man called Leontius built the enormous Basilica of Saint Demetrius in Thessaloniki at the beginning of the fifth century (Sotiriou & Sotiriou 1952:9; Hoddinott 1963:125; cf Spieser 1984:167, 214). Sometimes the government also paid for the building of new churches (Heussi 1960:111). In the case of Philippi, we do not have such helpful information. But it seems very plausible to me that the question regarding several rather big churches could be answered in this way, at least partly.

Another aspect is that the building of churches may be compared with the building of temples. Classical temples were not built for assemblies but in honour of a deity. The size of the temple was proportional to the deity's importance. The temple was seen as his/her residence and only the priests were allowed to enter, for example, to make sacrifices (Lanczkowski 1985:673). In such a case the number and the size of the temples is not in proportion to the number of worshippers. Some non-christian authors thought Christian churches should be considered temples. At the end of the third century, Porphyrius even spoke about imitation (Harnack 1916:93). This aspect may have played a role in plans to build a church. But unlike Greek temples, the churches were certainly meant as places where people could gather (cf Eusebius X.5.9). The noun βασιλική (Latin: *basilica*) suggests that

<sup>66</sup> For the meaning of καθολικός, “implying orthodoxy”, see Lampe (1991:690).

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such a building was used for people to meet. Strabo (5.3.8) mentions temples and basilicas, making evident in this way that these two kinds of buildings should be distinguished (of course this predates Christian churches). Vitruvius explains that basilicas had to be built in a special way in order to make them comfortable for people to meet there (Vitruvius V.1.4). It is clear from these phrases that basilicas were built as places to meet. On the other hand the phrase οἶκος θεοῦ, house of God, was also used to refer to houses of worship (Eusebius IX.10.10; Homer 12.4). Another word often used to refer to churches was ἐκκλησία. Originally this word referred to the meeting of the citizens of a city. In the same way it was used for the meeting of Christians and afterwards for the building where they met.

From the beginning of the fourth century it became more usual to incorporate altars in churches to meet the demand for sacrificing. In general, we can conclude that the churches of that time must be seen to have been more in line with synagogues than with the temple of Jerusalem or Greek temples. Nevertheless, we must accept the possibility that sometimes very large churches were built with precious materials in honour or praise of God. The number of churchgoers did not determine the size of the churches.

With regard to the churches of Philippi we may conclude that the phenomenon of five churches is not as striking as is sometimes suggested. Splendid churches were built as houses of God where people could meet. Private persons may have contributed money for these buildings and the authorities probably also paid for them in part.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The history of the Christian community of Philippi is a history of a gradual development from a small group of about thirty adherents in the sixties of the first century to perhaps nearly one thousand believers at the beginning of the fourth century. Later, the whole population of the Roman Empire was supposed to be Christian. We do not know of any really shocking events in the early history of the community in Philippi. Valens' regrettable deed in the beginning of the second century was apparently an isolated incident. The positive judgements by Polycarpus and Tertullian confirm the steady and successful growth of this church. The bishops we know of represented orthodox mainstream Christian opinions. This does not mean that we cannot find some syncretistic elements in Philippi. The intact incorporation of the older *heroon* in the Basilica of Paul demonstrates that older pagan aspects were incorporated into the Christian cult. But such a form of syncretism was not exceptional.



Flavianus and Demetrius were the most conspicuous bishops of Philippi that we know about. Demetrius combined the political aims of Justinian with his own ecclesiastical aims and he promoted immense activity in building projects in Philippi. Later, from the end of the sixth century, Philippi increasingly suffered from earthquakes and raids by Slav peoples, and its renown began to fade.

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