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Die römische Kolonie von Butrint und die Romanisierung Griechenlands – Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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The site of the Roman colony of Buthrotum is in the territory of today's Albania. It was therefore barely accessible until the late eighties on account of the self-seclusion of Albania under its arch communist regime. After the events of 1997, few will be daring enough to venture into the chaos which has replaced the public authority in a large portion of this country.

B., who had visited in Buthrotum in 1989 and taken pictures, felt a thorough publication of its sculpture was needed now if only to recognise artefacts in the future which might have been stolen and sold in the general upheaval of 1997. But B. did not limit the scope of his book to this aim. He also tackles several general issues about the Roman presence in Greece. He is interested in the fate of the native populations which lived on the colony sites, in the methods used by the emperors to encourage Romanisation and in the rôle the colonies played therein. Therefore, he not only considers the example of Buthrotum, but also that of two other "colonies", Corinth and Nicopolis (p. 15). Of course, Nicopolis is not a colony (I shall come back to this point later in this review).

The first part of the book is entitled "Buthrotum: The systematic ousting of its Greek inhabitants?"¹ B. starts with an assessment of Hellenistic Buthrotum on the eve of the coming of Rome (pp. 18-46). Less than one page is devoted to the important inscriptions of Buthrotum, which gave us many insights into the administration of that town. Instead, B. devotes the rest of that chapter to a thorough and diligent discussion of some findings from Buthrotum (an altar, three more or less badly preserved statues and two stelai) which he identifies mostly for stylistic reasons as Hellenistic. This allows him to conclude that the Roman settlers came "to an old, since long urbanised town equipped with the financial and artistic means to participate fully in Hellenistic culture" (p. 46). But since epigraphy shows that Buthrotum had a normal Hellenistic constitution and that it even was center of a *koinon*, there should be no need to doubt that it was deeply rooted in Hellenistic culture. On the other hand, half a dozen in part badly damaged sculptures do not prove much about Buthrotum's means. The statistical sample is simply too small.

The next two chapters concern the early Roman colony (pp. 47-73). B. wants to know how the settlement took place, what modifications happened to the cultural and social structure of the city and if those changes can be connected chronologically and causally with the settlers' arrival (p. 47; I found the last question rather surprising because self-evident). Again, he does not give much space to the evidence many would probably find most important for this issue, i.e. coins and inscriptions.² And again, he discusses archaeological remains of Buthrotum at length, this time the

theatre and its sculptures. He succeeds in tracking down changes which occurred there.

B. continues by investigating the fate of the native population. For this, he mostly relies on Cicero's Buthrotum letters. The inhabitants of this city tried everything to prevent the foundation (No wonder — who wants his lands confiscated to the profit of a band of discharged soldiers? It is therefore strange that B. *a priori* even considers the possibility of a proper readiness of the natives to Romanise themselves.) Atticus, who had close links to Buthrotum, supported them, as did his intimate friend Cicero, whose committed but finally unsuccessful correspondence we still possess. One letter even seems to indicate that the Buthrotians ejected the settlers violently. B. claims that this military resistance of the Buthrotians to the colony foundation is absolutely singular. This statement is quite wrong, for two reasons. Firstly, we know of some cases when the native populations did offer violent resistance,³ and secondly, the Buthrotians did *not* fight the settlers: Cicero cites in that letter a mere rumor which later turned out to be wrong.⁴ Curiously enough, B. does not realise that. He continues by showing that the Greek city was totally superseded by the Roman colony (Roman officials with Roman names instead of Greek officials with Greek names; Roman building techniques). But when he finally devotes six lines to the fate of the Greek inhabitants (the subject of this chapter!) he just tells us there can be no certain statement and we cannot even rule out that they were all expelled. B. could have searched for parallels for the treatment of the natives at other Roman colonies, and he would have discovered that expulsion was not the worst fate the Romans could think of.⁵

The next chapter (pp. 74-87) is devoted to Corinth. Here certain ancient buildings were preserved and the coinage of the colony echoes motifs of the long since gone Greek city.⁶ B. explains this by the awareness of the settlers that they lived in a city with a long Greek tradition, and this awareness made them behave differently than the settlers in Buthrotum.

Nicopolis is B.'s topic in the following part (pp. 88-108). This chapter is particularly awkward. B. sets off with a discussion whether Nicopolis was a *colonia*. B. cites one article of Saricakis which allegedly furnishes evidence that Nicopolis was. However, the content of this paper is quite the contrary: Saricakis rightly argues that Nicopolis was a Greek city and rather tries to explain how Tacitus came to call it *colonia* mistakenly.⁷ B. enumerates now himself the overwhelming evidence for the Greek status of Nicopolis against the thesis wrongly imputed to Saricakis (all public inscriptions from Nicopolis are in Greek, all known offices belong to the Greek type, all coin inscriptions are in Greek; add the well-known circumstances of its foundation, a large-scale synoecism of the whole region⁸). B. concludes: "Nicopolis was no Roman *colonia* in the normal sense. At any rate, there was no socially dominant group of western settlers" (p. 92).⁹ However, despite having collected the evidence for Nicopolis' real status, B. strangely continues to call Nicopolis a colony on numerous occasions, and even has a chapter heading "the buildings of the early colony".

Another part of the Nicopolis chapter is entitled "the question of the social and cultural processes".

Five of the six pages of this section are devoted to the diligent discussion of one single caryatid torso which is *per se* well-made, but not really helpful for answering the question raised by the chapter title. A last sub-heading is “Romanised Greeks in Nicopolis” but discusses rather whether the Greeks were forced to move to Nicopolis or they came voluntarily. I was not convinced by B.’s doubts against Hoepfner, who argued that there was some pressure.¹⁰

A last chapter is devoted to the spread of Italian-shaped theatres (with *pulpitum* and *scaenae frons*) in Greece (pp. 109-116). B. stresses that Buthrotum, Corinth and Nicopolis had such theatres from the start, but that other, proper Greek cities adapted their theatres only later. B. wants to establish a direct dependence, so as to show that the “colonies” (inverted commas because of Nicopolis) affected their environment culturally at least in this detail. Yet he cannot trace a direct influence of the “colonies” theatres beyond doubt: it was not neighbouring cities that adapted first their stages (the next known *pulpitum* is on Thera!), and there is no special stylistic feature the “Greek” *pulpitum* theatres would share with the “colony” stages but not with the Italian constructions. So it is just as possible that the *pulpitum* came directly from the west.

A catalogue of the sculptures from Buthrotum and some indices close the book.

A fair appreciation of B.’s work is not easy. In fact, many readers will feel rather disappointed after the perusal of his book. The title, “The Roman colony of Butrint and the Romanisation of Greece”, raises expectations that are not wholly satisfied by the contents. First of all, this is due to the annoying high number of factual blunders and internal inconsistencies.¹¹

But the main reason is probably that B.’s book is in the first place a kind of art catalogue framed by a story. Indeed, if we omit everything that belongs to the discussion of colonies, Romanisation etc., two thirds or more of that book can stand. And here, B. is really at home. His stylistical discussions are very detailed. Especially helpful is his lavish use of pictures. Whenever he compares Buthrotian (or other) findings with similar examples, he offers clear images to his reader’s profit. The press has done an excellent job. This beautiful hardback, printed on high-gloss paper and having nearly a hundred clear images, is amazingly reasonably priced. Since B.’s book offers an exhaustively commented publication of Buthrotum’s endangered sculpture, libraries will certainly need to acquire it. All my reservations and objections against B.’s historical conclusions do not in any way diminish my praise for his commendable rescue of Buthrotum’s remains from oblivion.

Notes

[1.](#) English translations of citations from B.’s book are all mine.

[2.](#) B. discusses an inscription mentioning a certain ...]f Graecinus who was IIvir of Buthrotum (pp. 57f). On the basis of coins struck by this person, the name can be completed to P. Pomponius [...]f Graecinus. But B. is surely wrong to propose that he might be a freedman of T. Pomponius Atticus, Cicero’s friend. It is true that there are indeed some very few freedmen who are decurions in Caesarean colonies up to Tiberius. But in that case, the inscription should read ...]l Graecinus (for libertus) and not ...]f Graecinus. Only a few years ago, two new inscriptions offered valuable

information on early imperial Buthrotum. They are dedications to the colony patrons Ahenobarbus (*the Ahenobarbus*) and Germanicus and they seem to indicate therefore that the settlers had close links to the imperial family. For reasons I do not quite understand, B. does give the bare references to the editions (p. 16 n. 38) but never makes use or even mentions the content of these inscriptions (it might have shed light on the several high-quality imperial portraits from Buthrotum). As the footnote with the editions is not in the relevant chapter and not really integrated in the list of B.'s inscriptions (p. 162), it seems that it was added at the very last moment.

3. A well-known counterexample is the colony of Eporedia which was founded on the territory of the Salassians. This tribe continued to harass the settlers until it was finally wiped out (Strabo 4.6.7). One could cite Camulodunum as well. This colony was founded on the site of a British tribe's sacked capital. One reason for the out-break of the Boudiccan revolt was this very settlement and its settlers' outrageous behaviour (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.31).

4. Cicero twice mentions the rumour that the Buthrotians ejected and slew the Roman settlers, *Att.* 15. 29 (6th July) and again *Att.* 16. 4 (10th July); Cicero stresses both times that he has only hearsay evidence and complains about his lack of reliable information. But on the 11th July, he receives two letters and writes that "here I learned something totally different about the Buthrotians [i.e., they got rid of the settlers; but this was wrong and thus] like many other things, we also must suffer that [the foundation of the colony — it should be remembered that Cicero tried everything to prevent it]" (*Att.* 16. 2). B. cites these letters (p. 68, n. 189f), it is true, but has not appreciated them properly.

5. The Salassians (cf. my n. 3) were all killed or sold before a second colony, Augusta Praetoria, was founded on their land. *If* the Buthrotians had really offered military resistance to Rome (as B. believes), this would have probably happened to them as well.

6. To B., "this case seems to be singular in the local coinage of the Greek East." (p. 124). This claim is wrong. P. Weiss notes similar phenomena for Alexandria Troas and Parion (B. cites this article p. 87 n. 280, but later apparently forgets about it), and one could think of other cases. Antioch in Pisidia, for instance, put the god Mên with crescent on its coins before the establishment of the colony as it did later.

7. Th. Ch. Saricakis, "Nicopolis d'Épire était-elle une colonie romaine ou une ville grecque?", *Balkan Studies* 11 (1970), pp. 91-95. The Tacitus passage in question is *Annals* 5.10.3. Saricakis seeks reasons for Tacitus' confusion. He might be right, but I would like to point to Tacitus' usage of the word *colonia*. Tacitus mentions a *splendidissima colonia* in Raetia, a province devoid not only of colonies but even of municipia (*Germania* 41.1) and the same Tacitus says that during the Boudicca's rebellion, the colonies (plural) were set on fire though we know there was only Camulodunum at that time (*Agricola* 5.2). Thus Tacitus regularly uses the word *colonia* in a non-technical sense.

8. Strabo 7.7.6; Cassius Dio 51.1.3. Pausanias 7.18.8. Nicopolis belongs therefore to the tradition of

large-scale Hellenistic synoecism foundations, like Thessalonica, Cassandreia, Demetrias or Lysimacheia.

[9](#). Incidentally, whether a city has a group of dominant western settlers is no criterion for being a colony or not. Being a *colonia* means holding a legal status, and this status can be given to indigenous cities receiving *no* settlers at all.

[10](#). Hoepfner has shown that some of the old settlements whose inhabitants were transferred to Nicopolis had suffered destruction at their temples and ramparts. Furthermore, he adduced two passages from Pausanias which seemed to him to imply pressure (5.23.3 and 7.18.8f). B. argues that the verbs Pausanias uses do not necessarily mean violence and cites Liddell-Scott s. v. as proof. I agree for ἐπάγεσθαι, which indeed can be neutral, but not for ἰρημᾶω. Quoting a dictionary is no sound approach. He should have checked the occurrences of this verb in Pausanias, who uses it quite regularly for the sacking and destruction of towns (just a list for the first four books of Pausanias: 1.20.7, 1.25.4, 2.2.2, 3.23.5, 4.27.10, 4.35.7). Furthermore, Cassius Dio 51.1.3 explicitly says that one group of natives was assembled together, while the other was driven out of their homes. This proves beyond doubt that there *was* some violence in founding Nicopolis, as it is shown by Hoepfner's findings. We can assume that many people happily moved to the newly built city while others left their homes only reluctantly, and it was they who had their ramparts and temples destroyed.

[11](#). In fact, there are some hints that the final redaction was done in an undue hurry: B.'s (correct) conclusion that Nicopolis was not a colony does not match his continuing to call it exactly that; and cf. my notes 2 and 6.