

THESSALONICA (PLACE) [VI, 523–27] [Gk *Thessalonikeus* Θεσσαλονικεύς, *Thessalonikē* Θεσσαλονίκη]. City mentioned in Acts 17:1–13; 1–2 Thessalonians; Phil 4:16; and 2 Tim 4:10. It was founded in 316 B.C.E. by Cassander, the son of Antipater, whom Alexander the Great had left in charge of Macedonia. It was named in honor of Cassander’s wife, Thessalonike, a stepsister of Alexander and the last surviving member of the ancient royal family of Macedonia. Built at the head of the Thermaikos Gulf below the Hortiades mountains, the city rose steeply above its harbor.

It is possible that Thessalonica was constructed on the site of an earlier settlement, Therme. Remains of foundations and fragments of an archaic temple (ca. 500 B.C.E.) have been found in the W part of the city, but it has not been possible to ascertain the deity in whose honor it was erected or the structure’s precise size and plan. A series of ancient Greek coins without a legend but bearing a Pegasus obverse type found at Thessalonica has been connected with Therme (Gaebler 1906). On the basis of the association, it has been suggested that Therme was a Corinthian foundation, colonized perhaps under Periander’s rule (ca. 600 B.C.E.).

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- A. Hellenistic Thessalonica
 - B. Early Roman Thessalonica
 - C. Later Roman and Early Christian Thessalonica
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A. Hellenistic Thessalonica

Aside from a number of tombs, some pottery, terra-cotta figurines, and smaller objects, surprisingly few Hellenistic remains have been discovered in Thessalonica. An inscription dated to 60 B.C.E. (*IT* [= Edson 1972] no. 7) found near the Roman forum makes mention of an agora. It is possible that this earlier Hellenistic agora was rebuilt later into the Roman forum, at least part of which has been excavated. Beneath the forum’s pavement were found varieties of Hellenistic pottery and a late Hellenistic “Atlas” now on display in the city’s Archaeological Museum.

Remains of a sanctuary of the Egyptian gods were discovered at Thessalonica. Unfortunately, the site could not be preserved. A scale model of one of the structures excavated, a small temple, is in storage at the Archaeological Museum. The temple, one of a complex of structures constituting the sanctuary of the Egyptian gods, consisted of a small anteroom which opened onto a larger hall. Directly opposite the opening of the anteroom, in the center of the far (N) wall was a niche, in front of which a stone bench was found. The walls were of simple Roman construction: rough stones and lime mortar alternating with successive horizontal bands of three layers of baked brick. Small irregular pieces of multicolored marble pavement decorated the floor in a simple geometric pattern.

Lying directly under the W portion of the anteroom and running some 4 m along its length to the E was an elongated vaulted room (1.6 by 4 m). Providing access to this crypt was a long tunnel-like corridor (1 by 10 m) which ran parallel to the W wall of the building above. Its outside opening terminated in a staircase beside the niche, though outside the temple proper. The corridor was connected to the crypt at the other end by an arched opening in the W extremity of the crypt’s N wall. The entrance to the corridor was found sealed at the top with marble slabs, a fortunate result of which was that the corridor and crypt were preserved in their original state.

In the middle of the crypt’s E wall there was a niche in which stood a small herm in archaizing style depicting a bearded Dionysos. The floor of the crypt, which was about 2.5 m below the floor level of the temple above, had no special covering. Unlike the corridor and the superstructure above, the crypt was constructed of

simple mortar without lime. To the N and E of the temple other structures were found, consisting of small rooms probably belonging to the sanctuary complex. A few meters to the NW, the end of a small rectangular building (5 m wide) was found. The masonry of the building's substructure has been described as Hellenistic, but its walls clearly are Roman, constructed in alternating bands of brick and green schist.

The movable finds at the Serapeum, including some 69 inscriptions, were transferred to Thessalonica's Archaeological Museum. Of special note are a dedicatory epigram of the 2d century B.C.E. by the otherwise unknown poet Damaios (*IT* no. 108), the head of a statue of Sarapis and one probably of Isis, a small Roman statue of Harpocrates and one of Aphrodite-Harmony, a small headless statue of a seated goddess of the known Isis-Cybele type, a small Hekataion, the upper part of a statue of an initiate or priest, and a relief dedicated to "Osiris initiate" (*Oseiridi mystei*) of the late Hellenistic period depicting an altar (in a space surrounded by a templelike structure) around which are three figures, one of whom is pouring a libation (*IT* no. 107). Also of interest is a letter of Philip V dated 187 B.C.E. in which he prohibited the use of the Serapeum's funds for extracultic purposes and declared specific penalties for contraventions of the regulation (*IT* no. 3). The inscription attests to the early importance and power of the cult.

An inscription mentioning the gymnasium administration of 96–95 B.C.E. (*IT* no. 4) and two later Roman inscriptions referring to ephebes (*IT* nos. 236 and 237) were found near the basilica of St. Demetrios. Byzantine literary sources indicate the existence of a stadium also in the vicinity of St. Demetrios. Although it is not certain that the Hellenistic gymnasium complex included a stadium, [Vol. 6, p. 524] such an arrangement would not have been unusual. The most likely site for the gymnasium and stadium would seem to be immediately S of St. Demetrios and just N of the Roman forum.

Stretches of the early Hellenistic city wall of Thessalonica have been incorporated into the medieval fortifications visible today. Rows of large blocks of well-worked stone characteristic of Hellenistic masonry occur especially in the N wall, while reused marble slabs and porous rocks (perhaps belonging originally to the Hellenistic wall and gates) are apparent elsewhere. The walls preserved today, which are thought to follow substantially the Roman and Hellenistic fortifications, date primarily from the 4th to 5th centuries C.E. and later. Their circuit was about 7 km, while their height extended from 8 to over 10 m.

B. Early Roman Thessalonica

The Macedonian kingdom under Perseus unsuccessfully defied Roman interests in the E Mediterranean. After a decisive defeat in 168 B.C.E., Perseus was seized while claiming asylum on Samothrace. Under the Roman division of Macedonia, Thessalonica was the capital of the second of four regions. When an independence movement was crushed 20 years later (148 B.C.E.), the Romans deported to Italy the entire surviving Macedonian aristocracy, including military and civil officials. Although its most important industries and much of its trade were curtailed sharply and despite its isolated and extremely vulnerable position, Macedonia hardly stagnated.

Thessalonica appears to have been in the forefront of the Macedonian recovery. In 146 B.C.E., it was made the capital of the reorganized province of Macedonia and enjoyed the commercial and civic privileges (including the right to mint its own coinage) accorded the seats of provincial governors. Its proximity to the Via Egnatia, the main artery linking Rome and the East, and the major N-S trade routes further facilitated security and commercial prosperity.

There is some indication of local unrest and magisterial abuses at Thessalonica during the mid–1st century

B.C.E. Late in 60 B.C.E., the Roman governor in Macedonia, C. Antonius Hybrida, returned to Rome on charges of misadministration (extortion) and *maiestas*. The proconsul was convicted and exiled.

Six months of Cicero's exile was spent in Thessalonica (May to November, 58 B.C.E.). In 18 letters written in Thessalonica, Cicero only twice refers to his environment: once to the *quaestorium* where he was lodged (residence of the province's financial officer; *Plan.* 99) and once to the Via Egnatia, where heavy traffic apparently made his own travel difficult (*Att.* 3.4). More instructive of Thessalonica's situation during the period is information gleaned from Cicero's speech (*Pis.*) on the alleged abuses of L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, governor of Macedonia from 57 to 55 B.C.E. Although some of the senator's charges may have involved complete fabrications and others probably reflected manipulation of information, there is little reason to doubt that during this period Thessalonica did not enjoy the Roman benefactions and attention to security it had realized in other times.

During the civil wars of the 1st century B.C.E., Thessalonica seems to have pursued a policy of neutrality, though Pompey and his retinue resided there for a time in flight from Rome (49–48 B.C.E.). Many of Rome's senators and knights of the equestrian order joined Pompey at Thessalonica, and the city became effectively a "second Rome" with the consecration of a site for the authoritative convening of the Senate. Following the defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus, Thessalonica was caught again in the crossfire of competing Roman powers. The city seems originally to have been supportive of the "liberators" Brutus and Cassius, who had been instrumental in the assassination of Julius Caesar. At some point before the second battle of Philippi (42 B.C.E.), however, Thessalonica must have withdrawn her support, since Brutus is reported to have promised his soldiers the sack of the city if they were victorious. The victors at Philippi, Octavian (later titled Augustus) and Antony, received lavish honors from the city. So extreme was Thessalonica's attachment to Antony, the new Roman ruler in the East, that the city inaugurated a local era in his honor. That this later proved problematic with Octavian's defeat of Antony at Actium is demonstrated by the erasure of dates on inscriptions from the period (e.g., *IT* nos. 83 and 109).

A profusion of honors granted by Thessalonica marks Octavian's ascendancy as sole ruler of the Roman Empire and bearer of the title "Augustus." In the last third of the 1st century B.C.E., the laureate head of Julius Caesar with the legend *theos* occupies the obverse of a series of coins minted at the city, while the reverse presents the bare head of Octavian with the inscription *Thessalonikeon*. An inscription (*IT* no. 31) refers to a temple (*naos*) of "Caesar" probably dating from this interlude in the Roman city's history. Blocks from the archaic temple (of Therme?) with later Roman markings indicating directions for reconstruction were found in proximity to fragments of imperial statuary. It is possible that the early temple was made over to accommodate honors for the emperor. From this period also dates the establishment of a "priest and agonothete of the Emperor Augustus 'son of god'" and a priest of "Roma and Roman benefactors." A group of "Roman benefactors" received honors at Thessalonica from at least 95 B.C.E.

Among the fragments of imperial statuary recovered in the W part of the city N of the Serapeum was an almost complete statue of Augustus. He is depicted in a standing heroized representation with his right hand upraised. At least five precut pieces were used in the composition of the statue, suggesting that it may have been produced elsewhere and transported to Thessalonica for assembly. The statue has been dated to the reign of Gaius ("Caligula") or Claudius, and it is one of the few objects recovered at the city which can be dated with certainty to the period of Paul's visit. It is perhaps in the context of so effusive an outpouring of honors for Augustus that one should understand Paul's condemnation of those who promote "peace and security" (1 Thess 5:3—a Julio-Claudian program of *pax et securitas?*).

An institution apparently peculiar to Thessalonica was the office of “priest and agonothete of god Fulvus.” The Fulvus deified was the son of Marcus Aurelius who died at the age of four in 165 C.E. His divinization at Thessalonica may represent a case of local syncretism probably involving the Cabiros (a principal civic deity), perhaps Osiris, and [Vol. 6, p. 525] the devotional interests of the city’s “youths” and ephebes. The office is attested for the period 206-70 C.E. but must have originated shortly after the youth’s death (*IT* nos. 153–70 and 236). The priesthood was related intimately to other offices involving the “youths,” ephebes, and the gymnasium but was not synonymous with the ephebarchate or gymnasiarchate (*IT* nos. 236, 180, 195–96). Nor did the office supersede or displace that of the civic agonothete (*IT* nos. 163, 171, 178).

On the basis of the archaeological record, the most important civic cults of the early Roman imperial period were those of “the gods” (for a time, the tutelary deities of the city), of the emperor, and of Roma and Roman benefactors. Official decrees of the city, made sometimes in concert with an official association of Romans (*Romaioi sympragmateumenoï*), were dated to the terms of individuals holding these offices. Also important in the city’s religious life in the 1st century C.E. was the cult of the Egyptian gods. An inscription (*IT* no. 255) records the divinely ordered diffusion of the cult from the sanctuary at Thessalonica to the Greek city of Opus. This is an indication, perhaps, of the “metropolitan” character of Thessalonica’s Egyptian cult establishment and presents an interesting parallel to the diffusion of early Christianity from the city to which Paul may refer in 1 Thess 1:8. The cult of the Egyptian gods appears to have absorbed elements of Dionysos worship at the city (*IT* no. 259). A small herm of Dionysos recovered in the central niche of the Serapeum’s subterranean crypt had a precisely worked hole for the apparent removal (and replacement?) of the statue’s genitalia. The ritual reconstitution of the dismembered Osiris is known to have been practiced generally in Egyptian cults (Arn. *Adv. Nat.* 7.5.19.9–13). It is possible that at Thessalonica in Macedonia, an area famous for its devotion to Dionysos, the object of reconstitution may have been Dionysos, with whom Osiris was identified under the umbrage of the Egyptian cult.

Found near the Serapeum were 1st-century-C.E. dedications to the “highest god” (*theos hypsistos*), one involving a vision on the part of the devotee (*IT* no. 67) and another indicating a cultic dining association (*IT* no. 68 and cp. 70). Devotion to Zeus “the highest” with the goddess Nemesis is also in evidence at the city, though in a slightly later period (*IT* no. 62, 2d or 3d century C.E.). Other divine objects of honor in early Roman Thessalonica include Herakles, the Dioskouri, a Hero for whom there is evidence of a temple, Apollo, and Aphrodite.

In the 2d and 3d centuries, Thessalonica’s principal civic deity was the Cabiros, who figures prominently in this period of the city’s numismatic record. According to legend, the Cabiros, a young prince, was murdered treacherously by his two brothers, who subsequently enshrined his remains at the foot of Mt. Olympos (Firm. *Mat. Err. prof. rel.* 11). Clement of Alexandria in the late 2d century C.E. identified the murderous brothers as those who had absconded to Tuscany with the chest in which Dionysos’ *virilia* were preserved, suggesting another possible link between Dionysos and an important Thessalonican religious figure. From the 2d or 3d century C.E., there is epigraphic evidence of a priesthood of the divine Alexander at Thessalonica (*IT* no. 278 and cp. 275 and 276). Iconographic materials also attest the presence of devotees of Cybele and Mithras, and from the same period an association of Asklepiasts is known (*IT* no. 480).

The remains of Roman Thessalonica’s forum complex now visible in the modern city date to the 2d century C.E., while the odeum to the E appears to have been built about a century later. The open area of the forum measured at least 65 m N-S by 100 m E-W. It was bounded by a portico on the S as well as the E. A Corinthian capital found at the site has been restored on a base in the outer colonnade. The E portico (running N-S) has a well-preserved mosaic

floor of geometric design. On parts of its edge are preserved three steps leading down over a drainage channel to the open paved area. Beneath the portico running E-W is a cryptoporticus consisting of two vaulted passageways constructed of extremely well-dressed blocks and finely hewn smaller pieces. In addition to large circular covered openings occurring in the apex of the vaults at regular intervals, there is an extensive series of smaller arched openings along the top of the sides of the passageway. The E extremity of the excavated passage ends abruptly before intersecting the N-S portico. To the S, the cryptoporticus would have opened onto a lower level of the forum which was multitiered in construction.

The odeum features a marble-paved orchestra which is slightly elliptic. At a level considerably above it are preserved seven rows of seats. The height of the first row of seats may indicate that the structure was used for shows involving animals. In its original state, the odeum extended some 26 rows of seats beyond the seven preserved rows. The proscenium has eleven niches, alternately semicircular and rectangular, constructed in brick, faced with marble and flanked by stairs leading to the proscenium proper. Before it were found two headless marble statues of muses, identifiable by their attributes as Thalia and Erato. The scaena is paved with mosaic at the level of the orchestra floor in meander and interlace designs. Monumental doorways lead from it to vaulted lobbies under the lower seats. From these the orchestra is entered. The lower part of one of the broad stairways leading to the diazoma (a gallery or lobby giving access to the theater seats) has also been excavated. A number of rooms were found beneath the seats and there are two larger rooms presumably opening onto the portico which were adjacent to the odeum proper.

C. Later Roman and Early Christian **Thessalonica**

The Arch of Galerius at Thessalonica commemorates Roman victories over the Persians in the last years of the First Tetrarchy (270–300 C.E.). The original arch included two triple archways, only one of which is preserved at the W. The height of the arch is about 21 m. It is built of brick, like the Galerian palace, octagon, and rotunda, which all belong to the same complex. The middle piers bear stone sculpture, divided into four registers. The sculpture is typical of late imperial times in crowding together many forms in a narrow space and representing objects out of scale with one another.

As the central figures of honor, the tetrarchs Maximianus, Constantius Chlorus, Diocletian, and Galerius probably were represented by four statues in the four niches to the left and right above the pillars of the central passageway. Approaching the arch from W to E, one is presented [Vol. 6, p. 526] with a series of scenes epitomizing the Roman victory in the East (specifically, the war in Armenia and the second or punitive campaign in Assyria). The traveler approaching from the E first would have passed through the SE arch complex (which has not survived) and then proceeded through the second arch.

Of particular interest on the SE facade of the arch is the central register in the SW pillar. Here Diocletian is shown joining Galerius in a *nuncupatio votorum* (a public declaration of vows) at an altar of Zeus and Heracles. Galerius is in military attire on the right while Diocletian, wearing a toga, stands to the left. They present a sacrifice in thanksgiving for the victory over the Persians. Between the two is the altar, toward which Galerius extends his right hand. The two visible sides of the altar are ornamented with sculptural representations of Zeus, with whom Diocletian was associated, and Heracles, with whom Galerius was connected. In back of the altar are two female figures labeled *Oikoumene*, the inhabited world, on the left and *Eirene*, peace, on the right. The relief's propagandistic message is that peace has been established in the world through the exertions of Galerius and Diocletian and their divine supporters Heracles and Zeus.

The surviving portion of the palace of Galerius, built as his official residence around 300 C.E., consists of a court about 22 m square, surrounded on the E, S, and W by rectangular rooms and beyond them, corridors paved with mosaics or marble. Beyond the wall forming the E boundary of the corridor are the remains of a bath complex. Opening beyond the SE wall of this complex is a large semicircular exedra. A little over 40 m due W and S of this position is an octagonal structure excavated in the early 1950s.

The so-called octagonal building had a central area opening onto seven large apses. The eighth wall, facing SW, contained the entrance. Although six of the apses are identical, the one opposite the entrance is appreciably larger. Each of the apses is somewhat larger than a semicircle, appearing rather more like a horseshoe in plan. From the head of one apse to that of its opposite is about 30 m. The structure was furnished with an extremely elaborate marble floor (including well-preserved *opus sectile* compositions on display in the Archaeological Museum). Found on the floor were four marble pilaster capitals, apparently wall revetments. On each of them the centerpiece is a deity in high relief, either draped or nude. Deities represented include Jupiter, Cabiros, Dioscuros, and Hygeia. In the larger NE apse there is a cross with equal arms, each consisting of a single brick enclosed within a circle of rayed bricks. On each side there appears a brick-composed lateral design representing a branch or plant of some kind. It has been suggested that these are later Christian insertions (i.e., the cross flanked by branches), perhaps depicting Constantine's vision of a cross on the sun with the injunction "by this conquer." It also is possible that the piece is an iconographic acclamation of the "victory of the cross" purportedly realized in Galerius' edict of toleration of Christians.

Associated with the Galerius palace complex is a marble arch found near the octagonal building and now on display in the Archaeological Museum. Two medallions enclose the central subjects of the arch. The tondo on the right contains a bust of Galerius with details finished in paint, while the one on the left contains the bust of a crowned woman, probably representing the *Tyche* or *Fortuna* of Thessalonica. Supporting the medallions are two figures in Persian costume, while holding either end of the wreath are smaller winged figures thought to be *erotes*.

The presentation of Galerius with the *Tyche* of Thessalonica is an instance of a pattern of protector god or hero and city goddess which recurs in Thessalonica's religious history. At an early stage in legends surrounding the martyr St. Demetrios, regarded as the protector of the city, he was connected with the Lady Eutaxia ("good order") and in later legend and art, he was associated closely with the Virgin. Before St. Demetrios superseded him, the Cabiros had been the city's protector and was depicted in its coinage on the obverse with *Tyche* on the reverse. It appears from this arch that Galerius also may have assumed this role for a brief period in Thessalonica's history.

Springing from a kantharos at each end of the vault (soffit) of the arch is a complex vine with twin interlacing shoots bearing thick bunches of grapes and leaves. These rise on either side to a central medallion containing a bust of Dionysos wearing a heavy wreath. An almost identical design appears in the mosaic decoration of a soffit between the columns of the nave in the Basilica of the Holy Virgin (*Acheiropoietos*) in Thessalonica. From a kantharos flanked by two birds rises a twin vine, rich with bunches of grapes and leaves. Instead of the central medallion containing a bust of Dionysos, a four-armed Latin cross appears in a blue circular field. Excavations in the NE portion of the church have revealed a succession of mosaic-covered floors dating to the imperial period.

Immediately E of the Galerian palace are the remains of a bath complex which has been related to the hippodrome. According to the original plan, a colonnaded avenue led from the palace and hippodrome to the triumphal arch, then on to the rotunda. The rotunda originally may have been intended as a mausoleum. Though it dwarfs Diocletian's mausoleum at Spoleto, it closely resembles it in plan. The massive size of the Galerian structure is

demonstrated by the dimensions: the wall is 6.3 m thick, supporting a dome about 24.5 m in diameter. Inside are eight vaulted openings in the wall, each decorated with a different mosaic design. The original entrance was from the S, where an elaborate approach flanked by stoas extended N from the arch of Galerius. With the conversion of the building for use as a Christian church about 400 C.E., the entrance was changed to the W, a nave was built to the E, an exterior corridor around the structure was built, and on the interior, the dome was decorated with mosaics, featuring portraits of saints and architectural constructions. The building was adapted for Moslem worship about 1590, and a minaret was added to the precinct.

Other important early Christian monuments at Thessalonica in addition to the Church of the Virgin (*Acheiropoietos*) and the Rotunda (*Hagios Georgios*) include the chapel of *Hosios David* and the Basilica of St. Demetrios. *Hosios David*, located in the central N portion of the modern city just below the acropolis, contains an apse mosaic of Christ *Pantocrator* from the 5th century C.E. The restored mosaic is remarkable not only for its stunning presentation of a young, unbearded Christ but also for its depiction of [Vol. 6, p. 527] scenes drawn from Ezekiel and perhaps Revelation. Preserved at the Basilica of St. Demetrios, just NE of the Roman forum, are a number of early Christian mosaics and architectural elements and a crypt complex adapted from an earlier martyrion for the saint.

A Samaritan-Greek bilingual inscription (*IT* 789) has been recovered at Thessalonica. The inscription consists of three elements: two lines in Samaritan characters (line 1, “Blessed be our Lord forever” and line 15, “Blessed be his name forever”); a biblical text, the benediction of the priests from Num 6:22–27 (lines 2–14) in a Greek translation that differs from the LXX, more closely approximating the Hebrew of the MT and the Sam. Pent.; and the dedication by one Siricius (lines 15–18), the donor, who along with his wife and children had the plaque set up. Siricius expressed good wishes to the city of Neapolis (Samaritan Nablus?) and its friends (lines 18–20). The inscription, which bears no date, has been placed in the Byzantine period (ca. 4th–6th centuries C.E.). It may provide evidence for a Samaritan diaspora community at Thessalonica.

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