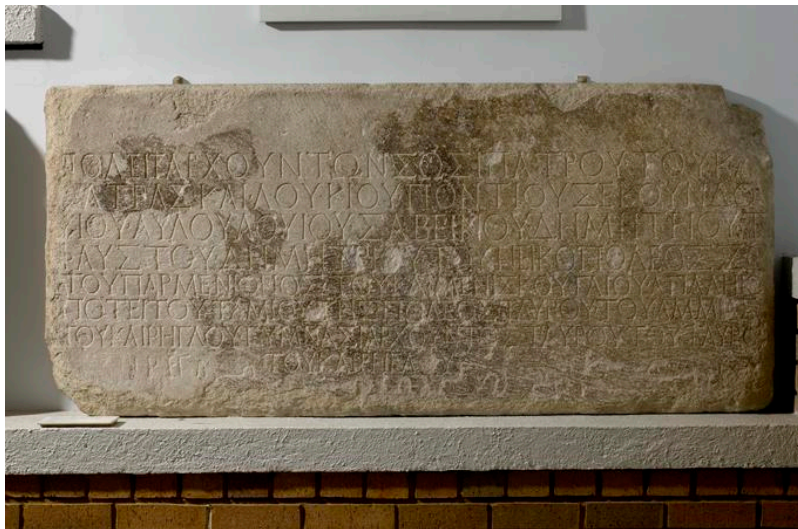


Background to Thessalonians

The church at Thessalonica began on Paul's second missionary journey probably in late 50 or early 51. Thessalonica was located in northern Greece in the region of Macedonia not too far south of Philippi. Thessalonica was founded about 315 B.C. by Cassander, a former general of Alexander the Great. In 167 B.C., the Romans divided Macedonia into four districts and Thessalonica was named the capital of the second district. Then in 142 B.C., Macedonia was made a Roman province and Thessalonica became the seat of provincial government. Finally, in 42 B.C., Thessalonica was given the status of a "free city" and ruled itself with officials called "politarchs" (once questioned but now confirmed by various inscriptions), which simply means city rulers.



The modern city of Thessaloniki, as it is now called, is the second largest city in Greece, an important port city that is home to 1 million people and still the capital of Macedonia.



"Politarchs" Inscription

Luke's use of the title "politarch" for the city authorities of Thessalonica in Acts 17:5 was once viewed by critics as inaccurate since the word was not known in Greek literature. But then this inscription was discovered on an arch in Thessalonica in 1835 (and now housed in the British Museum). The first word in the upper left is "poleitarchou" - politarchs - vindicating Luke's accuracy.

The fact that a large modern city is still located in Thessalonica limits the amount of archeological work that can be done. But here are two photos showing the ruins of the agora, or marketplace, for the Roman city with the modern city in the background.



Try to picture vendors with their wares and people bustling about as they shopped here



The theater in Thessalonica. You can see it in the middle of the picture above on the preceding page just before the modern apartments.

It appears that during the Roman era, the local authorities maintained loyalty to Rome by building a temple to Caesar where his kindnesses could be honored. A priesthood dedicated to the goddess *Roma* and to the emperor were set up, and coins were minted which honored Augustus and Julius Caesar as divine. This sustained Roman power and ensured further kindness from Rome. This background likely affected Paul's experience in the city, since he was preaching Jesus as king implicitly challenging Caesar's authority.

More resources:

-For an interesting news story showing what has been discovered while building the metro ... note the pictures of the beautiful mosaics: <https://greekreporter.com/2018/10/05/city-under-a-city-metro-reveals-thessalonikis-ancient-past-video/>

-For an overview of Paul's interaction with the city: <https://drivethruhistoryadventures.com/thessalonica-thessalonike/>