

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN IN *RES PUBLICA COLONIA PHILIPPENSIIUM*: CONSTRUCTING CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE ROMAN COLONY OF PHILIPPI

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Abstract. In this article the construction of the identity of the members of the Christian community in Philippi is discussed. To achieve this goal, the archaeological evidence from the colony and Phil 1:12-28 and 3:4-16 are examined with the help of the social identity theory. The article is divided in three parts. In a first part the political and religious ambience in the colony is reconstructed. In the second part the text of Paul's letter to the Philippians is closely examined in order to locate indications of the way the members of the community understood their existence in the colony. Finally, in the last part the problem of the social and political profile of the members of the Philippian church is also addressed.

Keywords: Philippians, identity, Roman colony, Christology, ethics.

Introduction

In his 2004 study Jean-Claude Kaufmann compared the procedures of constructing identities in the ancient and the modern world. He concluded that in both cases this procedure moves around two significant poles. Identity is, namely, formed either through the integration of an individual in a social group (socialization) or through a conscious and subjective choice of features that are thought to provide meaning to the individual's social existence.¹ These elements are usually drawn from a shared reservoir of ideas, symbols, narratives, memories, and examples.² Kaufmann's model is admittedly rather abstract and schematic; it seems that in fact there is no "pure" procedure restricted to the one or the other pole and that identity formation is usually a combination of these two poles although not always in a balanced and equal way. Indeed, according to the insights of the so-called *Context Group*, identities in the Mediterranean societies of the 1st c. CE should be described as "dyadic", which means that identities are adopted and formed through the integration of individuals in social groups (e.g. family,

¹ J.-C. KAUFMANN, *L' invention de soi: Une théorie de l' identité*, Collin, Paris, 2004, 7-8.

² A.C. SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1986, 22-30.