IMPERIALS: GREEK & ROMAN
CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL AND ETHNIC ORIGINS OF THE COLONISTS IN EARLY ROMAN CORINTH

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INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EARLY COLONISTS

After the Roman consul L. Mummius sacked Corinth in 146 BCE, the Romans founded a colony at the same location almost a century later (ca. 44 BCE).¹ The population which inhabited the colony in the first century or two of its existence has seldom been studied in its own right; far more often, scholars have treated the population as an appendage to studies of other aspects of Corinth. What follows is an attempt instead to focus on the population itself by bringing to bear a variety of evidence, both literary and epigraphic, much of which has previously been neglected, and to examine what conclusions concerning the population can reveal about the culture and society of early Roman Corinth.

Understanding of the colony’s population has varied over time, often depending upon what scholars have wished to find. Early excavators, for example, saw a clear division between the Greek and Roman phases of the city, thus simplifying the potentially overwhelming task of classifying and dating all of the site’s architecture and material remains. This distinction rendered the use of the terms ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ unproblematic in relation to the excavated finds and historical periods.² While occasional comments make clear that the early excavators

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¹ The precise date of the colony’s foundation is a matter of minor dispute. For a review of the evidence and opinions: Amandry 1988, 13.

² In this context, note that the relatively recent proliferation of studies on identity and, in particular, the study of Greek identity in Greece under Roman rule, has largely bypassed Corinth despite its wealth of evidence and its position as a focus of Greek-Roman interaction; Swain 1996, Goldhill 2001, and Ostenfeld 2002, although a notable exception is König 2001.