CHAPTER THREE

THE LOCAL MAGISTRATES AND ELITE OF ROMAN CORINTH

Benjamin W. Millis*

Introduction

Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis, founded ca. 44 BCE on the site of the ancient Greek city of Corinth, may well have begun on a rather small scale, but it expanded quickly over the waning years of the 1st century BCE. By the middle of the Julio-Claudian period, Corinth was a bustling merchant city and seaport, as well as, presumably, the thriving capital of the province of Achaia. The city’s burgeoning population was composed of a number of disparate groups, and the opportunities available in Corinth would have attracted people from a variety of economic and social backgrounds throughout the wider region, particularly from the Greek East. As has long been recognized, literary and epigraphic evidence shows clearly that freedmen were a major element within this mix of settlers, and recent scholarship has argued that freedmen were not just a dominant group, but the predominant group, at least among the colony’s elite.3

* As always, I owe a debt of gratitude to Sara Strack for careful reading of an earlier draft and helpful comments. Mouritsen 2011 contains much that is generally relevant to many of the men discussed below, and I regret that it appeared too late for me to make systematic use of it.

1 The number of original colonists is normally estimated to have been ca. 3,000, largely on the basis of that figure being given for Carthage at Appian Pun. 136; for example, Engels 1990, 22; Stansbury 1990, 125, 145 n. 98; and Brunt 1971, 259–61 for a discussion of the size of various colonies.

2 The evidence that Corinth was the provincial capital is not quite conclusive, although the identification is generally accepted: Wiseman 1979, 501–2 with n. 244, Stansbury 1990, 166–69.

3 For analysis of the evidence and for earlier bibliography (of which the most important is Spawforth 1996), see Millis 2010a. I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to two problems in that paper (see also below, 41). Adams (2003), although not adducing evidence from Corinth, discusses in detail much that is directly relevant, especially for the picture I attempted to draw of how the Roman Corinthians mediated between the sometimes conflicting claims of the two societies and languages and reference to this important work should have been made throughout. Despite Adams’s major contribution, however, a thorough collection and analysis of the use in Greek of Latin terms, with all their orthographical and morphological variants, remains to be done. Second, my collection of the
The status of freedmen and the opportunities afforded to them at Corinth is perhaps best illustrated by the case of Cn. Babbius Philinus. Babbius, clearly recognizable as a freedman by his Greek cognomen and his lack of filiation, was a Corinthian notable and prominent benefactor from the early Julio-Claudian period. He held a range of civic magistracies and priesthoods; those attested are aedile, duovir and pontifex maximus. The source of his wealth is unknown but presumably came from commerce. He is perhaps best known among modern scholars for his crucial role in the architectural development of the west end of the Forum, where he donated the Fountain of Poseidon and the so-called Babbius Monument, although these may not have been his only major benefactions to the city. Williams offers a convenient thumbnail sketch of his career in terms of his architectural benefactions.

[The Fountain of Poseidon] seems ... to be more the type of monument that fits within the cursus honorum of a man at the time when he is serving as aedile of the city. The circular aedicule [i.e. the Babbius Monument] ... may have been ordered from Athens and imported to Corinth from Athens already carved. An expense of this sort might imply the gift of a man who has arrived at the peak of his career.

Finally, West notes that “the name of Cn. Babbius Philinus appears more frequently than any other in Corinthian inscriptions,” although this verdict may not be entirely correct since some of the inscriptions probably do not refer to Babbius himself but to one of his descendants.

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4 This universally accepted observation was first made by West in *Corinth* VIII.2, no. 132.
5 The evidence for Babbius is collected at *RP* I COR 111 (for other Babbii, many probably related, see *RP* I COR 106–10, 112; cf. 659–60); Spawforth 1996, 169. Stansbury (1990, 254–58) provides a narrative account of Babbius’ career.
6 *Corinth* VIII.2, no. 132; *Corinth* VIII.3, no. 155.
7 Thus *Corinth* VIII.3, 100 (on no. 232), for example.
8 Williams 1989, 162 n. 14.
9 *Corinth* VIII.2, 5 (on no. 2).