

The foundation and planning of early Roman Corinth

Mary E. Hoskins Walbank

Introduction

For long there was an implicit assumption by scholars that *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis* was not a conventional Roman colony, but rather a re-foundation and continuation of the Greek city destroyed a hundred years earlier. Today most scholars accept that Corinth was a traditional Roman colony. Drawing upon my dissertation (1986) which re-assessed the material evidence in combination with the literary evidence in an attempt to define both the nature of the original Roman foundation and the way in which it developed,¹ this article provides an analysis of activity during the formative period of the foundation and very early years, before the Augustan peace took hold. This is a necessary prerequisite to understanding the later development of Roman Corinth.²

Corinth before 44 B.C.

The foundation has to be seen against the background of the Greek city and its destruction in 146 B.C. With the victory of Mummius the city of Corinth ceased to exist. Most scholars, on the basis of the literary evidence, have thought that the city was totally destroyed, razed to the ground as Strabo and Diodorus say,³ but this impression of total devastation derives largely from the rhetorical and poetic contexts of works often written well after the event. Damage to buildings in the city centre (fig. 1) was selective: the North Stoa, which had served as an arsenal, was demolished with great ferocity; a columned hall west of the South Stoa, which may have been a government building associated with the levying of taxes, was also demolished.⁴ On the other hand, the Archaic Temple escaped destruction, although the roof was badly damaged.⁵ The structure of the splendid South Stoa was left virtually intact, and the water supply of Peirene remained in working order.⁶

Another curious aspect of the sack is the way in which the inscriptions, particularly those of a public nature, were treated. Their condition, I suggest, indicates that they were deliberately smashed into tiny fragments and scattered.⁷ The destruction of Corinth by senatorial decree was quite distinct from the initial seizure and plundering. The accounts of Florus and Zonaras make this clear, and Florus also says that it was destroyed *tuba praecinente*, which certainly

1 *The nature and development of Roman Corinth from 44 BC to the end of the Antonine period* (The Open University 1986) which is to be published in expanded form in the *Corinth Excavations* series. Cf. also my "Pausanias, Octavia and Temple E at Corinth," *BSA* 84 (1989) 361-94.

2 The Roman period from 228 B.C. to A.D. 267 is covered in a useful survey article by J. Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I," *ANRW* 7.1 (1979) 438-548. Much important material is contained in Wiseman's topographical survey of the Corinthia, *The land of the ancient Corinthians* (Göteborg 1978) [=LAC]. The Corinthia has been examined as part of the Doxiades Institute's research project on ancient Greek cities (N. Faraklas and M. Sakellariou, *Corinthia-Cleonea* [Athens 1971]). Major excavations have been published in final publications by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and current excavations are reported annually in *Hesperia*. Aspects of Roman Corinth have been treated in articles or conference proceedings, including T. E. Gregory (ed.), *The Corinthia in the Roman period* (JRA 88, 1994).

3 Strabo 8.6.23; Diod.Sic. 32.4.5, and 27.1.

4 R. L. Scranton, *Corinth* I.3 (1951) 177; C. K. Williams, *Hesperia* 46 (1977) 55-58.

5 H. S. Robinson, *Hesperia* 45 (1976) 236-37, and pers. comm. He now thinks that only the large timbers of the roof were removed by the Romans, and used for rebuilding the fleet or some similar purpose.

6 South Stoa: O. Broneer, *Corinth* I.4 (1954) 100; Peirene: B. H. Hill, *Corinth* I.6 (1965) 64.

7 For their publication see B. D. Meritt, *Corinth* VIII.I (1931) nos. 1-9, 11, 23-61, and J. H. Kent, *Corinth* VIII.3 (1966) nos. 1-49.