**The Christians and their *Politeuma* in Heaven:   
Philippians 3:20 and the Herakleopolis Papyri**

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‘But our citizenship is in heaven’

The New Revised Standard Version translation of Philippians 3:20 is typical of many[[1]](#footnote-1) and indicates why this is a classic starting point for discussion of Christian identity viewed in terms of citizenship. As we shall see, ‘citizenship’ is probably a mistaken translation of the key term, πολίτευμα (*politeuma*). However, the word *politeuma* undoubtedly is connected strongly with issues of identity and what we could call citizenship, so the text does speak to these matters. How *politeuma* ought best to be translated is a contentious issue, as is the question of why Paul chose to use this term (of which this is the only New Testament occurence). Two types of reason suggested by scholars for the word choice are that it is either a deliberate contrast with Roman citizenship in Philippi or a deliberate contrast with the Jewish community in Philippi. We will argue that the first of these suggestions is not quite correct and that the second is wrong. We will draw upon the so-called ‘Jewish politeuma’ papyri from Herakleopolis to help in these arguments and to explore the nature of Christian identity that is being proposed by Paul in Philippians.

3:18 πολλοὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦσιν οὓς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 19 ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια, ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν, οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες. 20 ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, 21 ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα. 4:1 Ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, ἀγαπητοί.

3:18 For many live—about whom I often used to tell you and now do so even with tears—as enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 people whose destiny is destruction, whose God is their stomach and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things. 20 For our *politeuma* is in heaven. From it we eagerly await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body, in accordance with the power that enables him also to subject all things to himself. 4:1 So, my beloved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved. (Phil. 3:18-4:1[[2]](#footnote-2))

At the climax of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he asserts that the *politeuma* of the Christians is in heaven. This is a puzzle. It would have made more obvious sense if Paul had said something like, ‘you are a *politeuma* of Christians in Philippi’, or maybe even, ‘you are a *politeuma* in Philippi of people who belong to heaven’. From usage in papyri, epigraphy and literary sources, we expect a *politeuma*, in this kind of context, to be something like a local administrative organisation, based in Philippi, in which the Christians exercise governance over themselves in accordance with Christian norms where these are not at odds with laws of Philippi (see below). If Paul had asserted this it would fit reasonably with usage of the term elsewhere, and rather nicely with the ethical context of Phil. 3:19-20, in which Paul wishes to contrast Christian behavioural norms with those of another group, presumably also in Philippi. However, Paul does not use *politeuma* in the sentence in the way we expect. Why is this?

Two long-standing scholarly views avoid this problem by translating *politeuma* in ways that directly fit with the *politeuma* not being in Philippi. One is the translation as ‘citizenship’. Another sees the term as meaning something like, ‘state/commonwealth’, a large-scale entity which governs its members. A more recent view, drawing on the papyri, is to take *politeuma* in the local sense described above and to see the term used as a contrast to a Jewish *politeuma* there. We will consider each of these three options in turn, then argue that the Herakleopolis papyri do not support the third of these readings but help us understand the probable dynamics of Phil. 3:19-21 in which *politeuma* is taken in a sense such as, ‘governing organisation’.

**1. *Politeuma* as ‘Citizenship’, in Contrast to Roman Citizenship**

Richard Cassidy writes,

Paul expresses his perspective in the following words: “But our citizenship (*politeuma*) is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20; author’s translation).  
 Before considering the implications of heavenly citizenship, it is well to recall the status of Philippi as a favored Roman colony, populated with Roman veterans. Philippi was indeed “a city of citizens” with its inhabitants possessing rights and privileges comparable to those enjoyed by citizens in Rome and Italy proper. Roman citizenship was highly coveted, and those living at Philippi participated in this high status. Their ancestors before them and they themselves had contributed to the expansion and the defense of the Roman empire. The citizenship they now enjoyed represented the highest status that those who ruled the empire could bestow. In its turn, this citizenship intensified the Philippians’ bonds with those who ruled the empire from Rome.  
 In order to underscore the reverberating character of Paul’s declamation, it is useful to supply italics and an exclamation point in the English translation. Paul’s words then read as follows: “But *our* citizenship is *in heaven*!”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Cassidy’s view rests on four points. He characterises the town in a certain way with regard to Roman citizenship. He effectively characterises the Christians as participating in that citizenship. He translates *politeuma* as ‘citizenship’. He sees Paul as choosing that term in order to contrast with Roman citizenship held by Philippians.

Cassidy is partly right in his characterisation of Philippi. He is right about the constitution of the town as a civic entity, but what he implies about the make-up of the population at the period when Paul is writing is very unlikely.

The site of the city of Philippi, in north-eastern Greece, was colonised three times. The first was a small mining colony in 360 bce. It was called Krenides (‘springs’) and was a mainland colony of the then powerful island of Thasos, just offshore nearby. The colony was established among various tribal groups that tend to be described by scholars as Thracian, because of their cultural affinity to the more enduring Thracian society to the east, roughly in what is now Bulgaria. The colony from Thasos was very short-lived as an independent entity. In 356 bce, Philip II, father of Alexander, was invited in before he would have taken over anyway. He established a Macedonian colony there, built walls and characteristically Greek institutions such as a theatre[[4]](#footnote-4), establishing the colony as a city, Philippi. In addition to a very lucrative mining industry, the city lay in what is, for Greece, an unusually large fertile plain, especially once drainage work had been carried out under Alexander and others, producing a substantial agricultural element in the economy of the city[[5]](#footnote-5).

Over the following few centuries, Philippi was a modest Hellenistic town, occasionally evidenced by sending of delegates to religious festivals elsewhere in Greece. It continued as this kind of place after the Romans gained control of the area in the second century bce[[6]](#footnote-6), including creation of the province of Macedonia in 146 bce. The *Via Egnatia*, the one Roman road that provided an almost entirely land-based route from Italy to the eastern Mediterranean, ran right through the city of Philippi. It was almost compelled to do this because the city occupies the small shelf of land between mountains which run on into Thrace, and what was still a very wide marsh. In his book on the Roman civil wars of the first century bce, Appian describes the town as ‘a way through … to Asia and to Europe like a gateway’ (*Civil Wars* IV, 105-6).

This topography made it one of the likely points for the clash in 42 bce between, on the one hand, Cassius and Brutus, who, having killed Julius Caesar, had gone to the East and gathered a group of legions, and, on the other hand, Mark Antony and Octavian, arriving with their legions from Italy. Antony and Octavian were short of money. To cope with this problem they had agreed in 43 bce that they would reward their soldiers who retired at the end of the war by giving them land in new colonies in Italy. This land was to be expropriated more or less arbitrarily from eighteen of the wealthiest towns. After the battle of Philippi, they added that town to the list. Appian recounts the outrage that this colonisation process in Italy produced,

They came to Rome in crowds, young and old, women and children, to the forum and the temples, uttering lamentations, saying that they had done no wrong for which they, Italians, should be driven from their fields and their hearthstones, like people conquered in war.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The dispossession of Greeks at Philippi was probably even more merciless. A large block of the best farmland near the town was divided into rectangles and allocated to a few thousand retiring soldiers, displacing the Macedonian Greeks and Thracians who had previously held the land. The town became a Roman colony, with a Roman decuriate (governing council) entirely taking over political control from the Greeks. Moreover, unlike most Roman colonies in the East, very little re-Hellenisation happened in the subsequent two centuries.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As a Roman colony, citizenship of Philippi was Roman citizenship, with membership of a ‘tribe’ for voting in elections in Rome. As Adrian Sherwin-White argues, extremely few or none of the existing Greek population would be given Roman citizenship at the time of this type of colonisation. Similarly, between then and Paul’s letter in the middle of the first century ce, hardly any Greeks would have gained citizenship. The main route to that would have been through wealth and the holding of magistracies[[9]](#footnote-9). Unlike places such as Corinth, there is no evidence of Greek magistrates in Philippi at this period.

However, the population was probably still mainly Greek. The honorific inscriptions in the imperial cult temple in Philippi are in Latin, but the stone-masons’ marks on the joints of the pillars are Greek. Although the monumental centre of the colony is firmly Latin, there is more Greek further out. More broadly, although colonisation meant dispossession for many Greek farmers, colonisation was systemically an economic opportunity for Greeks, both locally and arriving from nearby provinces. After deep immersion in Philippian epigraphy, Peter Pilhofer concludes, *Gewiß waren die Römer zahlenmäßig nicht in der Mehrheit*, ‘certainly the Romans were not numerically in the majority’[[10]](#footnote-10).

Paul writes in Greek (as always) to a group led by ἐπίσκοποι (‘overseers’ traditionally translated as ‘bishops’) and διακόνοι (‘servants’, traditionally, ‘deacons’). The four Philippians named are Epaphroditus, Euodia and Syntyche—all Greek—and Clemens—one Roman. The narrative in Acts 16 about the group’s foundation involves, as converts, a ‘God-fearing’ Greek businesswoman from Asia, Lydia, and a gaolor, maybe something like a freed slave, and his family. Both these pieces of evidence fit the general pattern we would develop if asked to estimate the ethnic composition of a non-elite small group that mirrored the population of the town of Philippi: mainly Greek, but including a minority of Romans. The processes by which the Christian movement spread reinforce the likelihood of the preponderance of Greeks in the Christian group at Philippi. The conclusion must be that, very probably, the majority of Philippian Christians were Greek non-citizens, with a minority being Roman citizens[[11]](#footnote-11). Cassidy, like many other Philippians scholars, places both the town population and the composition of the church too substantially among the Roman citizens of Philippi.

The translation that Cassidy and most modern Bible versions adopt for *politeuma* is also unlikely. Most usage of *politeuma* is as a term for the activity or institutions of governance (see below). Conversely, use in the sense of ‘citizenship’ is very rare. One example of such use that many scholars cite is *IG* 9(2).517.6 (Larissa, Epist. Philipp. V), which talks about being ἀξίους τοῦ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν πολιτευμάτος (‘worthy of your *politeuma*’).

Peter Arzt-Grabner goes further than the argument from scarcity of usage of *politeuma* in this sense. He makes the case that, although the Herakleopolis papyri indicate that a member of a Jewish *politeuma* would be called a *politēs* (usually translated as ‘citizen’),[[12]](#footnote-12) the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (P.Lond. VI 1912) shows that it is not possible for *politeuma* to mean citizenship in the kind of rhetorical structure that scholars such as Cassidy imagine Paul to be using.

Der Claudius-Brief zeigt in diesem Kontext deutlich, dass ein Politeuma eben gerade nicht mit dem römischen Bürgerrecht gleichgezetzt werden kann.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Arzt-Grabner’s argument is that the letter of Claudius forbids the Jews of Alexandria from participating in activities, such as those in the gymnasium, which characterised citizens of the city. Arzt-Grabner infers that, since there was a *politeuma* of the Jews at Alexandria, being a member of that *politeuma* did not carry with a right of Alexandrian citizenship.[[14]](#footnote-14) Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer also expresses this type of idea. Drawing on the same material as Arzt-Grabner, Ostmeyer concludes that,

Die Politeuma-Papyri und der Claudius-Brief an die Alexandriner aus dem jahre 41 n. Chr. verdeutlichen, dass die Zugehörigkeit zu einem Politeuma in keiner Weise mit ein Vollbürgerschaft vergleichbar ist, es sich also nur um einen Status Zweiter Klasse handelte.[[15]](#footnote-15)

So, for Arzt-Grabner and Ostmeyer, although a member of a *politeuma* could be called a *politēs*, that was far inferior to being *politēs* of a *polis*, a city, so Paul could not be offering the former to the Philippians as something superior to the latter.

The difficulty with this argument is that it probably carries over too many characteristics of the Jewish *politeuma* of the papyri into the heavenly *politeuma* that Paul is proclaiming in Phil. 3:20. We will see below some characteristics that probably are carried across, but limitation of status compared to civic citizenship would surely not be. Apart from anything, the Christians’ *politeuma* is in heaven. Even if we granted Arzt-Grabner’s proposition that the Christians’ *politeuma* there is comparable to an ethnic organisation within a city, the city in question would be heaven, so the citizenship that Christian identity would be inferior to would be that of heaven. Since citizenship of heaven would, in Paul’s view, be far superior to Roman citizenship, the fact that, under Arzt-Grabner’s theory, Christian membership of a *politeuma* in heaven would be inferior to citizenship of heaven, would not thereby make such Christian membership inferior to Roman citizenship.

Arzt-Grabner’s direct argument against translating *politeuma* as ‘citizenship’ probably does not hold water. However, as we will see, there are characteristics of the *politeuma* idea in the papyri that may well surface in Phil. 3:19-21. These parallels are not decisive in themselves but they do suggest a meaning of *politeuma* rather closer to that of the papyri than to ‘citizenship’. They thus reinforce the less dramatic but fairly secure argument from the relative scarcity of usage of *politeuma* in the sense, ‘citizenship’. Cassidy, and others who follow the equivalent line, are unlikely to be correct.

However, as we shall see, this does not shut down the question of whether Paul’s announcement of the location of the Christians’ *politeuma* has any relation to the Roman empire or its expression in the colony of Philippi.

**2. *Politeuma* as ‘State/Commonwealth’**

Peter O’Brien eschews the translation ‘citizenship’ but strongly links his alternative translation of *politeuma* to the Roman constitution of Philippi.

Most interpreters recognize that πολίτευμα has added significance in a letter sent to Philippi. This is not, however, because the rendering ‘colony’ fits. Rather, under the provisions of the Roman form of constitutional government conferred on the city by Octavian in 42 B.C., Philippi was ‘governed as if it was on Italian soil and its administration reflected that of Rome in almost every respect’. So, writing to Christians in a city proud of its relation to Rome, Paul tells the Philippians that they belong to a heavenly commonwealth, that is, their state and constitutive government is in heaven, and as its citizens they are to reflect its life (cf. also 1:27, where Paul uses the cognate verb πολιτεύομαι). [[16]](#footnote-16)

O’Brien’s translation of the word as ‘commonwealth’, which he then paraphrases as ‘state and constitutive government’, is drawn from Andrew Lincoln’s 1981 study, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*. Influenced by W. Ruppel’s 1927 study[[17]](#footnote-17), Lincoln constructs a line through the Hellenistic period, from Aristotle’s *Politica* (‘the government [πολίτευμα] is everywhere sovereign in the state [πόλεως], and the constitution [πολιτεία] is in fact the government [πολίτευμα]’)[[18]](#footnote-18) to Philo who speaks philosophically/theologically of those τῷ μεγίστῳ καὶ τελειοτάτῳ πολιτεύματι ἐγγραφέντες (‘having been enrolled in the greatest and most perfect *politeuma*’).[[19]](#footnote-19) Lincoln concludes that the best attested meaning in Hellenistic times is ‘state’ or ‘commonwealth’, with the nuance of ‘the state as a constitutive force regulating its citizens’.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Lincoln wrote prior to the publishing of the Herakleopolis papyri, although he was, of course, aware of related usage in Josephus (*Ant.* ΧΙΙ.2, 12, 108) and *Letter of Aristeias* (310). The general direction of his argument looks robust although, not unreasonably, he struggles to find suitable English words to use. ‘State’ is not a very good translation of *politeuma*. It evokes ideas of post-eighteenth century nation states. It also makes *politeuma* too close a synonym for *polis*.

‘Commonwealth’ is a more strategically useful translation mainly because readers will be less sure what it means, so the author can almost use it as if it was a neologism. The most common current usage is as the designation for the club of nations that was created in the aftermath of British imperial rule. It also finds use in titles of entities that are states or something approaching that. Prominent current examples are ‘The Commonwealth of Australia’ and ‘The Commonwealth of Virginia’. Again, current usage does give the term drawbacks as a translation for *politeuma*. The term also conveys, in its lexical formation, a sense, as a sharing of goods or, at least, of economic interests. This sounds positive. However, such an economic meaning is not clearly evidenced in the usage of *politeuma*.

Lukas Bormann also understands Phil. 3:20 as indicating a link to a governing entity, ‘Die philippische Gemeinde fühlt sich an einer anderen politischen Gemeinschaft angehörig (Phil 3,20).’[[21]](#footnote-21) Like O’Brien, he contrasts this with the city’s Roman identity, but Bormann sees this as more emphatic, marking a radical politicisation of Paul’s eschatology in comparison with 1 Thessalonians.[[22]](#footnote-22) Bormann is, in fact, at least as political as Cassidy, seeing 3:20-21 as indicating that the future lordship of Christ will, concretely, produce ‘die Bedeutungslosigkeit des römischen Bürgerrechts.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

As we have seen, Lincoln glosses *politeuma* as ‘the state as a constitutive force regulating its citizens’. If we remove the phrase, ‘the state as’, the gloss becomes more helpful. One further subtlety relates to the word, ‘citizens’. The papyri show that a member of a *politeuma* can be called a *politēs*. ‘Citizen’ may or may not be a good translation of that, depending on whether the context is of a city *politeuma* or of something such as an ethnic *politeuma*. The gloss would be more broadly applicable if we amended it to ‘a constitutive force regulating its members’. However, we will see from the papyri that even the term ‘members’ is not quite wide enough. In some of the Herakleopolis papyri the Jewish *politeuma* in that city is seen to regulate the lives of people from nearby villages who relate to the *politeuma* but who are not designated as members of it. We could widen the gloss to read something like, ‘a constitutive force regulating those who are within its ambit’. It would be useful to be able to derive a neat translation for *politeuma* from this and from further considerations arising from the papyri. We will offer a suggestion below. We will also return to the question of how this might relate to Roman characteristics of the Philippian context.

**3. *Politeuma* as Ethnic Community in a City**

Peter Arzt-Grabner argues that the term *politeuma* in Philippians has no relation to the Roman constitution of the town at all. He sees the term as instead stemming from its use to denominate certain Jewish diaspora social entities. He makes several key propositions.

In der Forschung herrscht weitgehend Konsens darüber, dass die Gegnerschaft des Paulus in Philippi jüdischen Ursprungs hat.

[Peter Pilhofer] sieht ... im irdischen Politeuma, das dem Politeuma der Christen in Himmeln als zu konstatierendes gegenübersteht, das Politeuma der Juden repräsentiert, dessen Attraktivität nach Pilhofer für Christen an sich auf der Hand liegt: „Es bietet eine *staatlich anerkannte Alternative zur römischen Daseinsform* ...“ [[24]](#footnote-24)...Dies mag grundsätzlich richtig sein.

Auch Textabschnitte der Paulusbriefe könnten indirekt darauf hinweisen, dass noch während der Zeit des apostels (jüdische) Politeumata in Philippi and Korinth, vielleicht auch in anderen Orten, existierten.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Arzt-Grabner takes his argument a long way. He not only sees Paul’s choice of the term *politeuma* as being as a deliberate contrast with a Jewish *politeuma* in Philippi. He goes so far as to see this as an indication of the existence of Jewish *politeuma* when we have no proven archaeological evidence of Jews in Philippi at anywhere near that period.

A first response to this is to say that *politeuma* is not a specifically Jewish term. The term is used in papyri, inscriptions and literature of organised communites of a particular ethnicity, miltary unit, or other group within a city. A clear example is that of the Cretans in Arsinoites according to P.Tebt. ll. 7-17.

(ἔτους) λϛ Φαμενὼθ   ̣  ̣  
[  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣ ι.] τῆς παρὰ Σώσου κ[αὶ] Α̣[ἰ]γ[ύπ]του τῶν δ̣  ̣[  ̣]  ̣[  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣]ν̣  
[- ca.9 - προ]χειρισθέντων ὑπὸ τ[ο]ῦ̣ πολιτε̣ύ̣ματ[ος τῶν Κρητῶν]  
10[γεγραμμένης] ἡμῖν ἐπιστολῆς ὑπὲρ τῶν τ̣[ῶι] Ἀ̣σ̣κ[ληπιάδηι ἀνηκόντων]  
[ἀντίγραφον ὑ]πόκειται [ὅ]πως εἰδῆι̣ς μετακείμεν̣ο̣ν̣ α̣ὐ[τὸ]ν̣   ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣[  ̣  ̣  ̣]  
[καὶ γένηται ἀ]κολούθως τοῖς προστεταγμένοις.  
[Σῶσος] καὶ Α̣[ἴ]γ̣υπτος Παγκρά̣τει χαίρειν. ἐπε[ὶ] προ̣[στέτα]κ̣ται διʼ ἡμῶν  
[τοὺς] κατοίκους ἱππεῖς ἐφο̣  ̣[  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣]τ̣ω̣ν̣[  ̣  ̣]α̣φ[- ca.17 -]  
15[ἐπ]έσταλκέ μοι Ἀπολλόδωρος [τῶ]ν πρώτ[ω]ν φίλων̣ [ὁ ἐ]πι[στ]ά̣της̣  
[καὶ] γραμματεὺς τῶν κατοίκων ἱππέων ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπικεχωρημένω[ν]  
τῶι πολιτεύματι τῶν Κρητῶν ἀνδρῶν

The 36th year, Phamenoth ..   
To N.N. Appended is a copy of the letter written to us by Sosos and Aigyptios,   
[?] appointed by the polity of the Cretans,   
relating to the affairs of Asklepiades,   
in order that you may know of his removal to the fifth hipparchy   
and that the instructions may be carried out.   
Sosos and Aigyptos to Pankrates, greeting. Since orders have been given through us   
that the catoecic cavalry should be [?]   
Apollodoros, one of the first friends and Epistates   
and scribe of the catoecic cavalry, has sent me from the 500 men   
who have been granted the polity of the Cretans.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Arzt-Grabner is, of course, aware of this type of papyrological evidence. The other argument that he effectively expresses for taking the *politeuma* of Phil. 3:20 as a comparison with a specifically Jewish one is his first assertion of there being a consensus that Paul’s opponents in Philippians are Jews. As a statement about the letter as a whole, this is overly broad. In Philippians 1, Paul mentions authorities who are imprisoning him and threatening death (1:12-13, 20-25), opponents in the vicinity of his imprisonment (1:15-17), and potentially frightening people who are opposing the Christians in Philippi and causing them suffering (1:28-30). The authorities, at least, are not Jewish, and there is far from being a consensus that the other two groups are Jews.[[27]](#footnote-27) Arzt-Grabner is on safer ground if his assertion is restricted to Philippians 3. Although there is, in fact, a plethora of alternative views about the nature of the opposition in this section of the letter (which some scholars see as a text originally separate from Philippians 1-2)[[28]](#footnote-28), most scholars do see the main opponents of Philippians 3 as (Christian or non-Christian) Jews.[[29]](#footnote-29) Paul derides them as ‘the mutilation’ (κατατομή), contrasts Christians as being ‘the circumcision’ (περιτομή, 3:2-3), and responds to these opponents by describing his surrender of the status that he had through Pharisaism (3:4-9). It is not quite so clear that the same opponents are in view in 3:18-19, ‘the enemies of the cross of Christ...whose god is their stomach and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things’. However, there are many scholars who would link these to the opponents of 3:2-3, drawing attention to possible allusions to food laws and circumcision in the expressions of 3:18-19.[[30]](#footnote-30) There is also significant scholarly support for the idea that Paul particularly sees the gentile Christians here as inclining to seek to join the local Jewish community in Philippi. Mikael Tellbe and others argue that the synagogue offers a stable way of living, worshiping the one God and not the emperor, with permission from the Roman authorities.[[31]](#footnote-31)

There are various problems with this scenario, both in itself and when taken as an explanation of Paul’s choice of the term, *politeuma*. One problem is the lack of evidence of a synagogue at Philippi prior to the fourth century ce.[[32]](#footnote-32) This is reinforced by Acts 16:13, in which Paul and his companions ‘went out of the gate to beside the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer (προσευχή) and, sitting down, we spoke to the women who had gathered there’. This does not sound like a functioning synagogue. The idea of gentile Christians being attracted to the synagogue as a potential place of safety for life as a Christian and, conversely, of Jews in the synagogue welcoming the idea of gentile Christians joining the synagogue with this in view, is also very unlikely. The general implausibility of the scenario is exacerbated by the repeated reports in the NT of hostility between synagogues and Paul and his movement. To all this must be added the lack of specificity of the term *politeuma* as a supposed signal for contrast with the local Jewish community.

This signal is made even weaker by the fact that the Philippian Christians’ *politeuma*, according to Paul, is not in Philippi. Again, Arzt-Grabner is well aware of this. Indeed, he sees this as a key point. He agrees with Pilhofer that there clearly could not be a Christian *politeuma* on the ground in Philippi, acknowledged by the city authorities.[[33]](#footnote-33) Arzt-Grabner goes on to say that,

Ein irdisches Politeuma der christlichen Gemeinde wäre für Paulus ... nicht erstrebenswert, weil es eben keine Vollbürgerschaft bedeuten würde...In einem überirdischen Politeuma hingegen sind die Unterschiede zwischen Bürgerrecht und Politeuma wohl als aufgehoben zu denken.[[34]](#footnote-34)

A problem with that argument is that, since Arzt-Grabner is presenting the *überirdisch* (‘celestial’) *politeuma* as having characteristics rather different from an earthly one, the comparison between the two becomes weaker. This makes it harder to argue that Paul chose this word for the heavenly one in order to evoke the earthly, Jewish *politeuma* in Philippi. We can take this point further. Paul’s idea of heaven is unlikely to have been one in which Christians, or anyone else, had the equivalent of an ethnic community group. It is therefore unlikely that the term *politeuma*, when heard in the phrase πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς (*politeuma* in heaven), would evoke for Paul’s readers the ethnic community sense of the term.

**4. Relating to a *Politeuma* in Another Place**

We have argued that in Phil. 3:20 Paul does not present the Christians as having something equivalent to an ethnic community group located in the city of heaven. Although Lincoln’s terms, ‘state’ and ‘commonwealth’ look inappropriate as renderings of *politeuma*, his general tracing of the use of the term, as focusing on ideas of governing, looks correct for usage in Paul’s day. In Phil. 3:20, it is probably appropriate to translate *politeuma* as ‘governing institution’, or some similar expression.

Where does this leave the use of the ‘Jewish politeuma’ papyri in understanding of Phil. 3:20? If Paul is not presenting the Christians as being a quasi-ethnic group with a community-group-type foothold in a city called heaven, what relevance can the papyri have?

Even though *politeuma* was not a specifically Jewish term, much of Paul’s direct encounter with the term will have been in relation to one Jewish *politeuma* or another. Although the absence of papyri from the northern Mediterranean makes it hard to judge the extent of the replication there of institutions attested for Jewish communities in Egypt, it does look likely, as Arzt-Grabner is effectively arguing, that there were *politeuma-*type organisations of Jews in many parts of the Mediterranean world. Titles of *politeuma* officials in the papyri turn up elsewhere (although that is not very striking because they are leadership terms also in use in civic and other contexts) and the term *politeuma* was itself probably in wide use among such organisations.

Paul’s experience of the operation of Jewish *politeumata* was probably one of his most common experiences of the operations of a governing institution. Judging from the papyri, Jewish *politeumata* operated in ways that somewhat replicated modes of operation of city government, so experience of one will have carried over, to quite an extent, into expectations of the actions of the other. The ‘Jewish politeuma’ papyri offer useful evidence of the expectations that a Jew of Paul’s time would have had of the operations of a ‘governing institution’, a *politeuma*, whether it was that of a Jewish community group or a wider group such a city government: allowing for the fact that there would be differences such as over some use of specifically Jewish norms.

A factor that makes the ‘Jewish politeuma’ papyri particularly interesting in comparison to Phil. 3:20 is that the papyri include several examples of people relating to a *politeuma* that is in a place other than where they live. The Christians are in Philippi but their *politeuma* is in heaven. Jews from vilages around Herakleopolis appeal to the Jewish *politeuma* in the city. P.Polit. Iud. 6 is a particularly clear example.

P.Polit. Iud. 6.1-34 *recto* (Herakleopolis 134 bce)[[35]](#footnote-35)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| τοῖς̣ τὸ λϛ̣ (ἔτος) ἄρχουσι παρὰ Θεοδότ̣ο̣υ̣ τοῦ Θεοδότου Ἰουδαίου τ̣ο̣ῦ [συν]ε̣σταμένου ὑπὸ τῆ̣ς μητρὸς̣ [Β]ερενίκης. 5 ἐνέ[σ]τηκεν ἐμοί τε κα̣ὶ το[ῖ]ς ὀρφανοῖς ἐφʼ ὑμῶν κατάστασις πρὸς Τιμόθεον τῶν ἐ̣ξ̣ Ὀνν̣ῆ̣ περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸ παιδίον̣  ——  τ̣ὸ τελ̣ευτῆσ̣α̣ν̣ ἐ̣π̣ε̣ρ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣, ὁ̣ Τ̣ι̣μ̣ό̣θ̣εος   ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣εσ̣εν τὴ̣ν̣  ——  σ̣ύ̣γ̣κ̣ρισιν ὡς ἡμῶν κεκρ̣ιμένων̣ [ἐ]πὶ̣ τῶν ἐν τῇ κώμῃ πρε̣σβυτέρω̣ν̣ 15 π̣ε̣ρ̣ὶ̣ τούτων̣ καὶ̣ [τυ]χ̣[όν]τ̣ω̣ν τῆς̣ ὑπογραφῆς̣, τὸ̣ σ̣ύνολ̣ον οὔτε̣ κ̣ε̣κρι̣μένων οὔτε ε̣ἰ̣ς̣ ὑπο- γραφὴν ἑαυτοὺς δεδωκότων̣, Θ̣ε̣ο̣δώρου δὲ καὶ Στράτωνος 20 καὶ Ἰακούβιος τῶν τριῶν  τῶν γενηθέντων κριτῶν ἐπελθόντων πρὸς̣ τ̣ὴν δηλουμένην μου μητέρα κα[ὶ] ἐπερωτησάντων τινὰ 25 ἀπῴχοντο οὐδεμιᾶς ὑπο- γ̣ρ̣α̣φῆς γενομένης. διὸ ἀξιῶ, ἐὰν φαίνηται, συντ̣ά̣ξ̣α̣ι̣ ἀνακαλέσασθαι τούτους τε κα̣ὶ̣ τὸν Τιμόθεον καὶ ἐὰν̣ ᾖ 30 ταῦθʼ οὕτως ἔχοντα, προνοηθῆναι̣, ὡ̣ς̣ ἡμεῖς μὲν τευξόμεθα τοῦ δικαίου κ  ̣τ  ̣[  ̣]  ̣  ̣θ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣[  ̣]  ̣  ̣[ -ca.?- ] περὶ δὲ ἄλ̣λ̣ων διαλαβεῖν. | Den Archonten des 36. Jahres  von Theodotos, Sohn des Theodotos,  Jude der von seiner Mutter Berenike als  Bevollmächtigter eingesetzt worden ist.  Es hat vor Euch stattgefunden mir und  den Waisen eine Verhandlung  gegen Timotheos aus Onnes  wegen der Angelegenheiten, die das  παιδίον (Kind oder Sklave?) betreffen,  das bei [den Arbeiten] verstorben ist.  Timotheos [hinterτrieb?]  das Urteil  mit der Begründung, daß wir vor den  Dorfältesten bereits ein Urteil und eine  Subscriptio erlangt hätten. Wir haben  aber überhaupt kein Urteil erlangt, noch  haben sie sich der Mühe unterzogen,  eine Subscriptio zu schreiben.  Theodoros jedoch und Straton  und Iakubis, die zu dritt  als Richter eingesetzt worden waren  kamen zu  meiner bereits erwähnten Mutter,  stellten einige Fragen und  gingen wieder fort, ohne daß eine  Subscriptio erfolgte.  Deshalb bitte ich, wenn es  gerechtfertigt erscheint, anzuordnen,  diese und Timotheos vorzuladen, und,  wenn es sich so verhält,  Sorge zu tragen, daß wir  Gerechtigkeit erlangen,  [indem Timotheos – – –],  gegen die anderen jedoch eine [strenge (?)] Untersuchung durchzuführen. | To the *archons* of the 36th year,  from Theodotos, son of Theodotos,  a Jew, appointed as representative by his mother Berenike.  A hearing before you took place  for me and the orphans  against Timotheos from Onnes  on account of the matters relating to  the παιδίον (child or slave?)  who died [at work].  Timotheos [blocked?]  the judgement, on the grounds  that we had already received a  judgement and a written decision  from the village elders. However,  we have not attained a judgement at  all, nor have they taken the trouble  to provide a written decision.  Theodoros, Straton  and Iakoubis, the three who  had been appointed as judges,  came to  my above-mentioned mother,  put a few questions to her and  left again, without a written  decision ensuing.  Therefore I ask you, if it seems  justified, to issue an order, to  summons these and Timotheos and,  if such is the case,  to see to it that we  attain justice  [by– – –Timotheos],  against the others, however, carry out a [rigorous?] investigation. |

In this petition letter, Berenike and, on her behalf, Theodotos, probably from the village of Onnes, appeal to the leaders of the Jewish *politeuma* (not explicitly named here but the reference is clear from the collection as a whole) at Herakleopolis, to reopen a case. When the case was first heard by the leaders of the *politeuma* it was rejected on the grounds that Berenike had supposedly already received a written judgment on the matter from the village elders (πρεσβύτεροι). Theodotos argues that this had not actually happened. He and Berenike seek action by the leaders of the *politeuma* to provide redress for their situation.

A second example is P.Polit. Iud. 8. The body of this text begins[[36]](#footnote-36):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| τοῖς ἄρχουσι τὸ̣ λζ (ἔτος) τοῦ ἐν Ἡρακλέους 5 πόλει πολ̣ι̣τ̣ε̣ύ̣[μα]τ̣ο̣ς̣ τῶν Ἰουδαίων παρὰ Θεοδότου τοῦ Θεοδότου Ἰ̣ο̣υ̣δ̣α̣[ί]ο̣υ̣ τ̣ῶν ἐν τῶι Ὀξυρυγχίτηι σ̣τ̣ρ̣α̣  ̣  ̣[  ̣  ̣]  ̣ν̣των   ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣  ̣ι̣λ̣ε̣ι̣σ̣των ἐν κώμηι̣ Τ̣η̣ει τοῦ α̣ὐτοῦ νομοῦ. 10 τοῦ λγ (ἔτους) δανείσαντός μου Π̣λ̣ουσίαι Ἀπ̣ολλοδώρου Ἰουδαῖαι... | An die Archonten des Politeuma der Juden in Herakleopolis,  die im Jahr 37 im Amt sind,  von Theodotos, Sohn des Theodotos,  Jude, von denen, die im Oxyrhynchites  – – –,  im Dorf Teei (*sic?*) desseblen Gaues. Im 33. jahr gab ich ein Darlehen...  Plusia, der Tochter des Apollodoros, Jüdin... |
| To the *archons* of the 37th yearof the  *politeuma* of the Jews in the city of Herakleopolis, from Theodotos, son of Theodotos,  a Jew, of those who in Oxyrhynchites – – –, in the village of Teei (sic?) in the same district. In the year 33 I made a loan  to Plusia, daughter of Apollodoros, a Jewess... | |

There is then a discussion about the loan. The text ends:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ...ἀξιῶ ἐὰν φαίνηται συντάξαι γράψαι τοῖς ἐν̣ Τ̣ν̣η̣ε̣ὶ̣ Ἰουδαίοις ἐπαναγκάσαι αὐτοὺς τὰ̣ δ̣ί̣κα̣[ι]ά̣ μ̣οι ποιῆσαι ἢ ἐ̣ξαποστεῖλαι 35 αὐτοὺς ἐ̣φ’ ὑ̣μᾶς μετ̣ὰ̣ λει̣τ̣ο̣υ̣ργ̣ῶν, ἵνα τύχω τῶν δικαίων. [vac. ?] εὐτυχεῖτε. | Daher bitte ich, wenn es gerecht erscheint, zu veranlassen,  den Juden in Tneei (*sic?*) zu schreiben, sie mögen sie zwingen, mir Gerechtigkeit widerfahren zu lassen, oder sie unter  Begleitung von Amtsdienern zu Euch schikken, damit ich  Gerechtigkeit erlange. Lebt wohl! |
| ...on account of which I ask you, if it appears just, to give an order to write to the Jews in Tneei (sic?), to compel them to bring about justice for me, or that you will send to them, under leadership of the officials, so that I might  achieve justice. Be well! | |

Theodotos, a Jew from Oxyrhynchites, petitions the leaders of the Jewish *politeuma* at Herakleopolis in relation to a loan made by him to a Jew in the village of Teei/Tneei. The petition is built on the assumptions that the Jewish *politeuma* at Herakleopolis both has a role in relation to norms of life among Jews in Teei and is a source of remedies for problems that arise, remedies that may involve a delegation from the *politeuma* travelling to the village.

Our final example is P.Polit. Iud. 18.[[37]](#footnote-37) This rather damaged text is sent from Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ οἱ ἐμ Πεεμπασβύτει κριτα̣ὶ Στ̣[ ], ‘Alexander and the judges of Peempasbytis to St[ ]’. Thankfully the *verso* of the papyrus enables us to complete the address. The *verso* reads, Στράτωνι κ̣α̣ὶ̣ τοῖς  
ἐν Ἡρα̣κ̣λ̣έ̣ους̣ πό(λει) κριτα̣ῖ̣ς̣, ‘To Straton and the judges in the city of Herkleopolis’. What is going on is further clarified by a second hand that adds a line to the top of the papyrus, to the effect that this is going ἐπὶ τὸ πολίτευ(μα), ‘to the *politeuma*’. There is then a discussion of a case which is hard to follow on account of the damage. However, it is clear that the judges of the village of Peempasbytis see the judges of the *politeuma* at Herakleopolis as potentially exercising some sort of oversight of village decisions.

In all these cases, the *politeuma* in Herakleopolis is viewed as the effective governing institution for these people beyond the town itself. The effects of this are, first, that the *politeuma* regulates the actions of the people involved and, second, that the *politeuma* is seen as the source of redress for injuries suffered by the petitioners. The *politeuma* evoked in Phil. 3:20 also functions in both these ways. The *politeuma* in heaven regulates the actions of the people involved.

...whose God is their stomach and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things. For our *politeuma* is in heaven... (3:19-20)

The Christians’ behaviour contrasts with that of the earthly-minded because of the heavenly *politeuma*. Even though they are not living where the *politeuma* is located, it determines the Christians’ actions. The heavenly *politeuma* is also the source of redress for present difficulties.

For our *politeuma* is in heaven. From it we eagerly await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body (3:20-21)

The *politeuma* is elsewhere, but it is the source of the solution to the difficulties of the Christians’ present lowly life. A proper governing institution not only regulates but also carries out both positive and negative actions in relation to those under its control.

This also solves a grammatical conundrum in 3:20. The Greek reads, ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. Interpreters are generally surprised by the masculine or neuter singular expression, ἐξ οὗ. Lincoln is typical. He writes that ἐξ οὗ is a *constructio ad sensum*, referring to heaven (which is plural in the Greek here).[[38]](#footnote-38) However, this is an unnecessary complexity. As we have seen, a *politeuma* can send out agents on its behalf to set situations to rights among its dependent communities. Jesus Christ can be acting here as an agent of the heavenly *politeuma*. Since the actions of the heavenly *politeuma* would be viewed by Paul as actions of God, there would be nothing in this role of agent that differed from the role of Christ in other parts of the NT.

There is one way in which the terminology of 3:20 sits a little awkwardly with that of the Herakleopolispapyri. For Paul, the heavenly governing institution is ἡμῶν...τὸ πολίτευμα. The villagers who petition the *politeuma* at Herakleopolis consistently do not describe themselves as being ἐκ τοῦ πολιτεύμα̣τος, ‘of the *politeuma*’, whereas inhabitants of the city frequently do give themselves that designation.[[39]](#footnote-39) In practice, the villagers are clearly relating strongly to the *politeuma*, so they would presumably, in a general sense, view it as ‘their *politeuma*’. However, there appears to be a terminological distinction at work in the papyri between those living in town and country. One wonders if the distinction might relate to something like voting rights in the *politeuma*. If so, it would not be pertinent to Paul’s proposition.

**5. *Politeuma*, Empire and Citizenship**

We have concluded that Paul chose to use the term *politeuma* in Phil. 3:20 neither because it meant ‘citizenship’, in deliberate contrast to Roman citizenship, nor because it meant something like ‘ethnic community within a city’, in deliberate contrast to a Jewish *politeuma* in Philippi. We have argued instead for a translation as ‘governing institution’, with that governing institution both regulating behaviour and acting as a source of redress for difficulties. Where does this leave the broader issues of citizenship and of relationship to the Roman empire?

Although Paul did not use *politeuma* as a deliberate contrast to Roman citizenship, his statement about the Christians’ *politeuma* was, in principle, politically controversial.

ἡμῶν...τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει

...our governing institution is in heaven

The Christians’ governing institution is outside Philippi: in fact, outside the Roman empire. A Jewish *politeuma* in a Graeco-Roman city conducted its business under the constraints of that city’s laws and customs. The *politeuma* of a Graeco-Roman city itself, the city’s governing institution, operated under the laws and customs of the Roman empire. As Bormann argues,[[40]](#footnote-40) the Christians are being told that their governing institution is entirely out of the control of Philippi and the Roman empire, with, in principle, no subordination or allegiance to either.

Paul’s assertion then fits with the depiction of the all-conquering saviour Christ that follows.

ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

From it we eagerly await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body, in accordance with the power that enables him also to subject all things to himself. (3:20-21)

As I have argued elsewhere, this depiction of Christ maps onto the depiction of his ascent to universal authority in Phil. 2:9-11 and is a comparison with the Roman emperor as the saviour figure who comes from Rome (in the form of his legions) to rescue beleaguered colonists, as had happened at Philippi in recent memory.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The point of all this, in the letter, is seen in the rhetorical climax which follows immediately,

So, my beloved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord (οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ), beloved. (4:1)

This brings to a conclusion the line of exhortation and argument begun in 1:27-28:[[42]](#footnote-42)

Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὼν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων

Only, *politeuesthe* in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ so that, whether I come and see you or am apart from you, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling with one soul on behalf of the faith of the gospel, and not being panicked in any way by those who oppose you...

Faced with pressure in their life as Christians in Philippi, the recipients of Paul’s letter hear an exhortation to stand firm, since they have allegiance to a lord who far surpasses the Roman emperors in moral terms and in power, and they belong to institutions that are far beyond those of Rome, both in scope and in the sense that Rome cannot touch them. In view of this the Christians are instructed, ‘live (*politeuesthe*)in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ’. This term may carry the connotation of life lived in relation to the *politeuma* of 3:20. If it does, that further supports taking *politeuma* in broader terms of governing institutions rather than specifically those of an ethnic community in a city. *Politeuesthai* is a term more at home in the broader civic context.

What of the relationship between *politeuma* and citizenship? For anyone who had citizenship, that citizenship was linked with a *politeuma*, a governing institution, that of the city. For a person without citizenship, they might be a *politēs* of an ethnic *politeuma*. As Arzt-Grabner rightly argues, this was not of the same status as being a *politēs* of a city, let only a *politēs* of Rome itself. However, it did carry some rights, as we have seen, in the form of access to a type of legal process and the prospect of redress in various cases. This was a central characteristic of civic and Roman citizenship so, in this sense, the *politēs* of an ethnic *politeuma* was like a citizen. However, the scope of legal redress was curtailed because there were limits on what the ethnic *politeuma* could do. It was itself subject to the civic *politeuma*, to which the members of the ethnic group might have little access. In that sense, the *politēs* of an ethnic *politeuma* was not as privileged as a citizen.

For Paul, the Christians’ *politeuma* was in heaven. In tangible terms, that was no help at all in terms of citizenship. This *politeuma* was not even given limited recognition by the authorities in Philippi. In terms of the Christians’ perception of their own identity, if the heavenly *politeuma* was theirs, they presumably viewed themselves as some sort of *politēs* of heaven. Putting a value on that is a matter of belief. However, where a group shared such a belief, there could be tangible consequences. For instance, this heavenly citizenship could override divisions within the Christian community in terms of some being Roman citizens and some not. It could also legitimate appointment to office within the Christian community of types of people who might be excluded from such roles under the norms of Philippian society. It could also sustain, as Paul intended, a standing firm under pressure from the various forces that might be brought to bear on the Christian community in the context of Roman Philippi.

1. E.g., the English Standard Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All translations are by author unless stated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Richard J. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 194-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A point that some scholars appear to lose track of is that the dimensions of the area within the walls, and the size of the theatre (until an extension in 2nd century ce), were established by Philip II, rather than by the Romans. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (SNTSMS 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 2007), 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Oakes, *Philippians*, 20-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Appian, *Civil Wars* V, 12, tr. H. White (LCL Vol IV; London: Heinemann, 1913). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. BarbaraLevick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 161-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 352; PeterGarnsey, *Social Status & Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Peter Pilhofer, *Philippi* I: *Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas* (WUNT 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Oakes, *Philippians*, 59-70. There is some debate over whether this is contradicted by Paul’s addressing them by the term φιλιππήσιος (4:15), a Latin loan word. However, Paul’s general broad use of geographic terminology makes this a weak argument. It would also prove too much because it would mean that all the audience were citizens of Philippi and Rome, which would certainly not be the case. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung des Judentums’, 146, citing P.Polit. Iud. 1.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ‘The letter of Claudius shows clearly in this context, that a *politeuma* precisely cannot be equated with Roman citizenship’. Peter Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung des Judentums in neutestamentlicher Zeit anhand der Politeuma-Papyri und anderer Texte’, in J.Herzer, ed., *Papyrologie und Exegese: Die Auslegung des neuen Testaments im Licht der Papyri* (WUNT 2:241; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 127-58, here 151, my translation. Arzt-Grabner is arguing against the first of two possibilities that Peter Pilhofer offers for translation of *politeuma* in Phil. 3:20. In particular, Pilhofer argues that Paul intended *politeuma* as a comparison with the citizenship held by a member of a Roman voting tribe, specifically the *tribus Voltinia*, to which the original colonists of Philippi and their descendants belonged. For Pilhofer, this comparison meant that Paul united the Christians of various cities together under a common *politeuma*, in the same way that belonging to the tribe Voltinia united the Philippian Roman citizens with those of several other colonies such as Aquae Sextiae and Nemausus (*Philippi* I, 130-31). Pilhofer’s suggestion is much more specific than a comparison with Roman citizenship and is hard to sustain. Even if *politeuma* in a particular text did mean ‘citizenship’, it would be very unlikely that a point of comparison would be membership with a Roman voting tribe. The meanings of *politeuma* revolve around governance. Even if it sometimes means citizenship, that looks likely to relate to belonging to an entity that governs the group of members. This was not the case for Roman voting tribes. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung des Judentums’, 145-46, citing P.Lond. VI 1912. 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ‘The Politeuma Papyri and the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians in the year 41 ce show that belonging to a politeuma is in no way comparable to a full citizenship: it is thus only a matter of a second class status.’ Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer, ‘Politeuma im Neuen Testament und die Politeuma-Papyri von Herakleopolis’, in Herzer, *Papyri und Exegese*, 163, my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 443, 459-61, here 461. Quotation is from A.T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul’s Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology* (SNTSMS 43; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. W. Ruppel, ‘Politeuma. Bedeutungsgeschichte eines staatsrechtlichen Terminus’, *Philologus* 82 (1927), 268-312, 433-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Aristotle, *Politica* III.6.1278b, translation per Lincoln, *Paradise*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Philo, *De opif. mundi* 143; cf. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. ‘The Philippian church thinks of itself as belonging to another political community’. Lukas Bormann, *Philippi: Stadt und Christengemeinde zur Zeit des Paulus* (NovTSup 78; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 223, my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ‘The meaninglessness of the Roman citizenship.’ Ibid., 219, my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Peter Pilhofer, *Philippi I* (WUNT 87; Mohr Siebeck 1995), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. ‘In the scholarship there is a substantial consensus that Paul’s opposition in Philippi has a Jewish origin .... [Pilhofer - as the second of the two alternatives that he offers for 3:20] sees ... in the earthly politeuma, that stands over against the Christians’ politeuma for that to be stated as being in heaven, representation of the politeuma of the Jews, the attractiveness of which for Christians, according to Pilhofer, is obvious: “It serves as an *officially recognised alternative to the Roman mode of existence*...” ... This seems to be absolutely right ... Also, texts from the letters of Paul can indirectly indicate that, even in the time of the apostle, (Jewish) politeumata existed in Philippi, Corinth and, perhaps, also in other places.’ Peter Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung des Judentums in neutestamentlicher Zeit anhand der Politeuma-Papyri und anderer Texte’, in J.Herzer, ed., *Papyrologie und Exegese: Die Auslegung des neuen Testaments im Licht der Papyri* (WUNT 2:241; Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 127-58, here 151, 152, 155, my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. P.Tebt. 1.32. 7-17 (Arsinoites 145 BCE) APIS translation, per Papyri.info, 3/9/14. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See, for instance, discussion in Oakes, *Philippians*, 84-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For instance, Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See discussion in Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (Word Biblical Commentary 43; Thomas Nelson, 2004), l-lvii. For a recent contrary view that they are cynics (Paul calls them ‘dogs’, κύνες, in 3:2), see Mark D. Nanos, ‘Out-Howling the Cynics: Reconceptualizing the Concerns of Paul's Audience from his Polemics in Philippians 3’, in *The People Beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal (Early Christianity and Its Literature; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 183-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For instance, Martin and Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Mikael Tellbe, *Paul Between Synagogue and State* (Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament series 34; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 210-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Oakes, *Philippians*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung’, 152, citing Pilhofer, *Philippi I*,132-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ‘An earthly politeuma of the Christian community would, for Paul, ... not have been worthwhile, because it precisely would not have signified full citizenship ... In a celestial politeuma, on the other hand, the differences between citizen rights and politeuma are to be thought of as being as good as nullified.’ Arzt-Grabner, ‘Die Stellung’, 152, my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. P.Polit. Iud. 6.1-34 *recto* (Herakleopolis 134 BCE). per Papyri.info, 3/9/14; German translation J.M.S. Cowey and K. Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis [144/3 - 133/2 v.Chr.] [P.Polit.Iud.]* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001), 80-84; English translation by the author, after Cowey and Maresch. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. P.Polit. Iud. 8.4–11, 32–36, *recto* (Herakleopolis 133 BCE. per Papyri.info, 3/9/14; German translation J.M.S. Cowey and K. Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis*, 93-102; English translation by the author, after Cowey and Maresch. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. P.Polit. Iud. 18 *recto* (Peempasbytis [Herakleopolites] 142 bce). per Papyri.info, 3/9/14; German translation J.M.S. Cowey and K. Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis*, 137-45; English translation by the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 102; Martin, *Philippians*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. E.g., P.Polit. Iud. 1.4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Bormann, *Philippi*, 218-24. Bormann places this in the context specifically of conflict between Paul/his communities and the Philippian authorities (218). The nature of the Philippians’ conflict appears to me to be broader and less defined than this. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Oakes, *Philippians*, 138-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The *inclusio* (framing repetition) between 1:27 and 4:1 is an argument in favour of seeing Philippians as a single composition rather than a composite one. The link between the depictions of Christ in 2:9-11 and 3:20-21 is a further such argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)