

*Neokoroi*  
Greek Cities and Roman Emperors



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*Barbara Burrell*

CINCINNATI CLASSICAL STUDIES • BRILL

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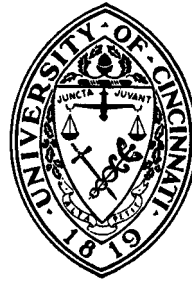
*NEOKOROI*  
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*NEOKOROI*  
GREEK CITIES AND  
ROMAN EMPERORS

BY

BARBARA BURRELL



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*In memory of*

*Florry and Harry Burrell*

*Bluma Trell*

*George Hanfmann*

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- Fig. 170. Tarsos coin type 5 a) *SNGParis* 1462. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.
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- Fig. 197. Neapolis coin type 1 a) *BMC* 138. Photo: copyright Trustees of the British Museum.

### Charts

The Emperors of Rome and Some Members of their Families  
Synoptic chart of Neokoroi Cities

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If this book is the body of my work on the neokoria, the skeleton was my dissertation for the Ph.D. in classical archaeology, *Neokoroi: Greek Cities of the Roman East* (Harvard 1980, unpublished). That contained lists of coins and inscriptions as well as a brief chronological analysis of each neokoros city, and still lives a sort of *samizdat* afterlife, in copies made by scholars for their own or their libraries' use. Despite its bulk, it never attempted to give a unified historical picture of the origins, development or even the meaning of the title, which is why I have chosen to leave it on the shelves of the archive where it belongs. The book you now hold is very different, as I hope anything would be if given the benefit of twenty years of new finds, reinterpretations, and the author's more mature understanding of the subject.

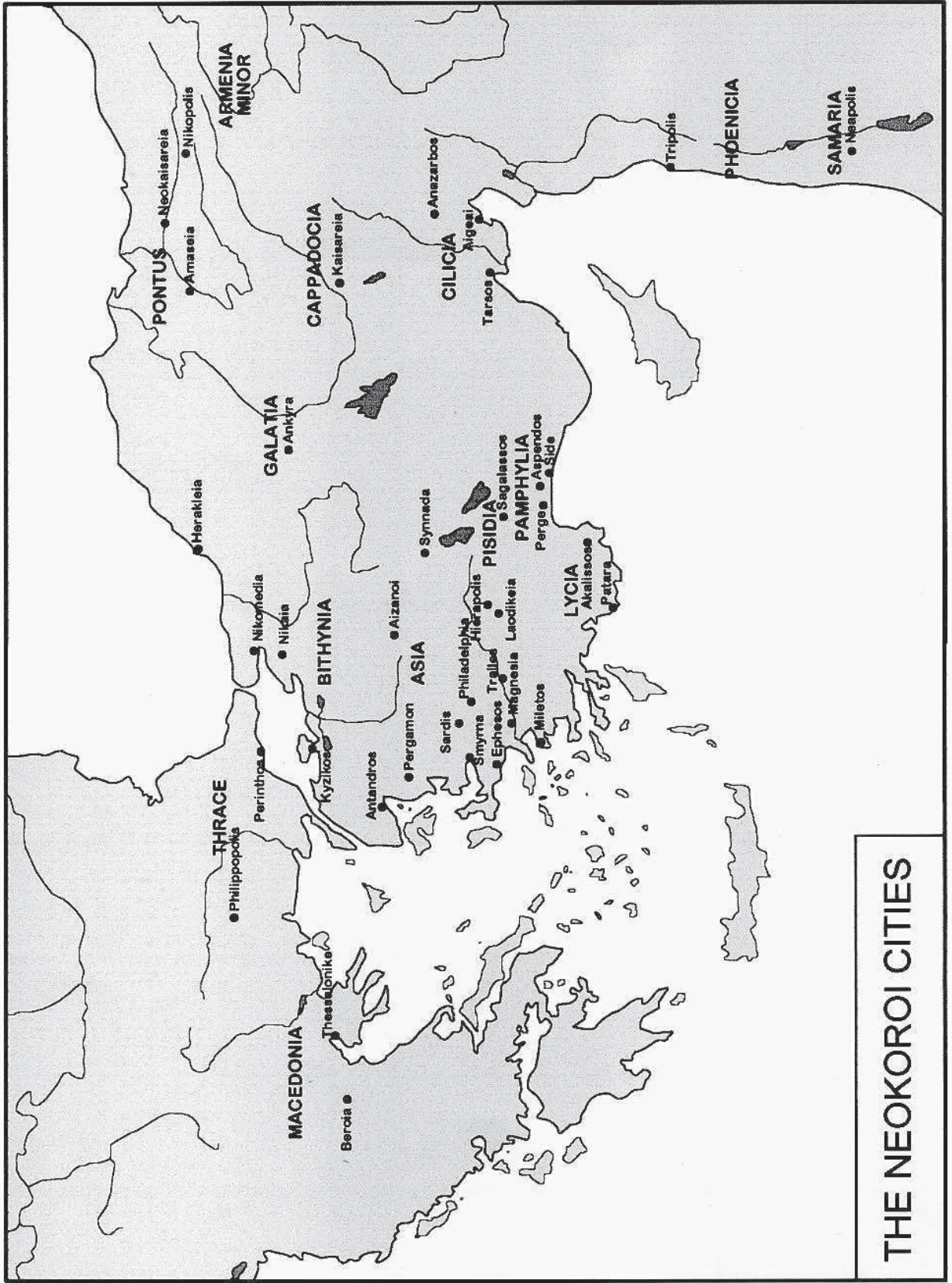
From the beginning, my intention has been to bring together the most diverse forms of evidence and to give each form its proper weight and interpretation. If my expertise has faltered, it is my own responsibility, as my advisors have been irreproachable. They include the late George Hanfmann, my principal advisor, as well as the late Emily Vermeule and David Mitten at Harvard University. I also received advice and support from the late Martin Price both at the American Numismatic Society and at the British Museum, from Holt Parker both at home and abroad, from Kent Rigsby again and again, and most of all from Brian Rose, *sine quo non*. The late Bluma Trell of New York University provided the initial inspiration; her interest and enthusiasm never flagged while she lived, and I doubt that they do even now. I have also benefited from the conversation and correspondence of Simon Price, Werner Eck, Kenneth Harl, Ann Johnston, Dietrich Klose, Michael Peachin, Glen Bowersock, and Thomas Howe, and from the gentle chiding of all the press' anonymous readers. I would like to thank Michiel Klein-Swornink and Gera van Bedaf for shepherding the book through the press, Shirley Werner for wearing out her erudite eye in its copyediting, and Susan Stites for the indices.

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## THE NEOKOROI CITIES

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## INTRODUCTION: METHODOLOGY

### i. *General Introduction*

This book tracks a singular phenomenon: that cities of Hellenic culture in some eastern provinces of the Roman empire (map p. xix) called themselves ‘neokoroi,’ usually translated ‘temple wardens,’ to signify that they possessed a provincial temple to the cult of the Roman emperor. Though the phenomenon is confined only to a certain place and time, a full pursuit of the circumstances and history of the neokoroi can, I believe, illumine many misunderstood issues regarding the imperial cult in the larger sense, as well as relations between the provincial cities and their Roman rulers, and among the cities themselves.

Any theoretical approach to such a study is pulled in different directions by polarities of generalization and particularization. One may tend to generalize because individuals of our species have certain tendencies in common, and these tendencies make human history repetitious. Moreover, the current prestige of the hard sciences privileges the search for general laws, as in physics, in the behavior of human beings. On the other hand, each human is formed by particular circumstances of the history that came before, and that human also contributes to the formation of a particular present and future. This study tends toward the particular, making the canonical bows toward Clifford Geertz’ technique of ‘thick description,’ where close observation of certain institutions can illumine an entire culture, and toward Marc Bloch and the *annalistes*, who showed the importance of scales of inquiry, and how such inquiry could be done despite the lack of precise sources and the inability to interrogate living informants.<sup>1</sup> This particular inquiry also traces developments over time, from the end of the

first century B.C.E. to the end of the third century C.E., a period for which sources exist but are varied and intermittent. Writing about it, then, is like surveying at night; there is a general darkness, though occasional moonlight allows some understanding of the terrain, and once in a while a fortunate flash of lightning illuminates some crucial detail fully.

The neokoroi were cities Greek in structure, though not necessarily in genealogy, and neokoros is a Greek title. The word originally designated an official whose basic responsibility was the care, upkeep or practical daily functioning of a sacred building, and whose duties could include the control of entry, safekeeping of valuable items, and the enactment of ritual or sacrifice; a more detailed discussion will follow below. In the first century C.E. we begin to find this role attributed to entire peoples or cities, and then more specifically to cities that maintained a provincial temple to the Roman emperor. This book will examine the title neokoros as it was applied to those cities, and what it meant to them politically, socially, and in practical terms.

Understanding those cities’ governmental system is vital to understanding how neokoria (the state or institution of being neokoros) can be studied. Structurally the cities were Greek poleis, and their inscriptions document independent decisions made by a council (boule) and the body of adult male citizens (demos, sometimes meeting as an ekklesia), plus variously named magistrates.<sup>2</sup> The actualities behind this structure are more complex. Though legalities varied depending on the precise status of each city, the power to decide foreign, and increasingly internal, policy was vested in Roman hands, ultimately in the emperor himself. More immediately the provincial governor and various imperial officials were on the spot making decisions, adjudicating disputes, and seeing that taxes were paid. In this they generally had the cooperation of

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent history of recent interactions between theories of history and the social sciences, see McDonald 1996. I have been guided by the examples of Geertz 1973; Bloch 1973; and S. Price 1984b; the latter’s observations inform my work everywhere.

<sup>2</sup> Lewin 1995.

each city's own elite, who competed among themselves to take on offices and services, and often laid out their personal fortunes, in order to be preeminent among their fellow citizens, to stand in the esteem of the Romans, and to rise in power and status, sometimes to the ranks of Roman authority itself.<sup>3</sup>

A city's relationships with other cities could be conducted on good terms or in jealous rivalry, but only within the narrow confines that Rome allowed to each city's nominal autonomy. Attempts to go beyond those limits could be met by some reassertion of control by the imperial government, and the very presence of an overarching power beyond the city and the province assured that one party or the other in any dispute could appeal to that power, further eroding any independence that the cities tried to assert.

In discussing the neokoroi I have often found it necessary to refer to these cities as if they were people, who thought, weighed possibilities, and even had emotions like jealousy and pride. This is primarily an outgrowth of contemporary speeches and histories that exhorted, blamed, or categorized cities for such human traits; neokoros was after all a person's title applied to a city.<sup>4</sup> But it also masks a lack of specific knowledge of such matters as who initiated the quest for an imperial temple and when, whether there was debate on where to put it, down to who decided what order the columns should be. Generally, we know that the cities of the Roman empire were run on the lines of urban oligarchies, and that an elite often made decisions without much consultation of the rest of the city's male voting population, still less of nonvoters. They felt little need to inscribe their day-to-day accounts on stone for public reference, so we know little of the details of their operation, but much of magniloquent decrees and votes of thanks.

Provincial cities often banded together in an organization known in the East as a koinon.<sup>5</sup> Though the name translates as 'league' or 'commonality,' it was not a subset of official imperial administration, nor did its geographic lines have to correspond exactly to the borders of a Roman province. Instead a koinon was an organization of cities of similar

ethnic background and interests within a region, bound together by the practice of a particular cult. Under the Empire the central cult of most koina was that of a living human being, the emperor of Rome. By the end of the first century C.E., some (but not all) of the cities that had a temple for this provincial imperial cult were called neokoroi. It is worth noting that the very title denoted a caretaker, not an 'owner' of a temple: ownership, at least in the beginning, was in the hands of the koinon, which assigned its chief priests to preside over the temples in neokoroi cities, often an increasing number of temples as emperor succeeded emperor. Koina also represented the cities in other aspects of their relationship with Rome, e.g. embassies and legal proceedings.

Simon Price's seminal book, *Rituals and Power*, altered the landscape of inquiry concerning the worship of rulers in the Roman East. We have gone beyond former attitudes: the Judeo-Christian concern for what was believed rather than what was done, and its accompanying disdain for flatterers who would call a man a god; and beyond a simple faith in *Realpolitik*, which can only ask who profits, whether politically or economically. We have come to a more anthropological approach, which seeks to understand how the Hellenes handled their Roman world. Price, however, chose to be cautious, to privilege the balancing act between seeing the emperor as man or god in rituals private and public, great and small.

But in this study, which is at the level of the koinon and the province, we shall see less contradiction: the living emperor was addressed as a god, sometimes second only to the chief and patron gods of the cities in which he was worshipped. He had his own temple, which was referred to as his. His successors, perhaps his predecessors, and other members of his family, often including his consort, joined him in that temple; this was recognized by calling it a temple of the Augusti, or of the Greek equivalent, the Sebastoi. Thus the city where that temple was established could be called neokoros of the Augusti. Despite this fact, the individual emperor who was the prime object of cult was not forgotten: for example, what was at first called the temple of the Augusti in Flavian times at Ephesos was later referred to as that of the god Vespasian. What is more, where another god shared the temple, (s)he was often a personification or a placeholder, whose name could drop from common ref-

<sup>3</sup> Quass 1993.

<sup>4</sup> For anthropomorphic cities, Lendon 1997, 31, 73-89.

<sup>5</sup> The basic work is still Deininger 1965.

erence, as the name of the goddess Rome slipped away from mentions of the temples of Augustus at Pergamon and Ankyra, and Tiberius and Trajan could stand alone in depictions of their temples at Smyrna and Pergamon, with no sign of their cult partners Livia and the Senate or Zeus *Philios*. The reverse is never true: the provincial temples initially dedicated to Rome and Augustus are never called simply temples of Rome.

Looking at the neokoroi is important in itself, but doubly important in the light it sheds upon what modern scholarship calls ‘the imperial cult.’ Under that rubric have been lumped all aspects of the worship of emperors, living and dead, in East and West, by Romans and non-Romans of all sorts, organized by province, by city, and down to individuals. Often the practice, and even the vocabulary, of one of the above differs widely from that of another. Despite a common thread of Hellenic speech and culture, a Sebasteion built by decree of the Athenians may well have been different, and served different functions, from one built by Ephesians, Alexandrians, Aphrodisians, or Palmyrenes. Towns and individuals may have set up altars or statues to the emperor without even bothering to seek permission of a governor, much less the nod of authorities at Rome.

In narrowing our focus to the neokoroi, however, we study a less mixed phenomenon, composed of events that are internally comparable, though subject to development over time. Honors proposed for an emperor passed through the sieve of each koinon and reached some sort of consensus among its cities small and large, rich and poor, cosmopolitan and isolated. Even after this was achieved, the conduct of the provincial imperial cult was too large in scope, too important to the image of the Roman authorities at which it was aimed, to pass unexamined by them. What few sources we have emphasize ceremonious deliberation by the Roman Senate and careful consideration by the ultimate recipient, the emperor. Thus applications for provincial imperial temples, and subsequent neokoriai, were subject to review on at least three levels: emanating from a city that offered a home for the cult, they had to also be acceptable to the other cities of the province as grouped in their koinon, to the emperor, and to the Senate. This is as close to a homogeneous group of events as the modern term ‘imperial cult’ covers. In fact, a study of the neokoroi can serve as a laboratory to examine this dialogue among cities, koi-

non, Roman emperor, and Senate, and how they arrived at results satisfactory to, or at least accepted by, all.

As will be seen, there were mechanisms that encouraged the establishment and the spread of neokoria. Rivalries among cities in the same koinon might make each one strive to be neokoros, or if disappointed at first, to become the next one. At the same time, province-to-province comparisons could be made when provincial embassies met one another. This was frequently the case at a succession, for example, where ambassadors from all over the Empire brought an initial tribute of crown gold and declared their first honors to a new emperor. But it was well into Tiberius’ reign that his acceptance of Asia’s offer of a temple to his cult prompted the province of Hispania Ulterior to offer him another one. He refused, not necessarily because he was a difficult man to please, though Tacitus portrays him as such, but because he could make that refusal a symbol of his modesty before the Senate.<sup>6</sup> This refusal would have then informed other aspirant provinces how not to approach this particular emperor, and the dialogue could go on.

Still, only certain koina of the Greek-speaking East are known to have named their cities neokoroi.<sup>7</sup> It is possible that this circle of organizations was influenced by events in the koinon of Asia, where the earliest uses of ‘neokoros’ as a city title are known. In other areas, most notably mainland Greece, no neokoroi have yet been found. But it is vital to note that our pools of evidence only represent a fraction of what once existed, and may yet be increased: a previously unknown inscription or coin could add new names and historical circumstances to our knowledge of the neokoroi at any time.

## ii. *The Word ‘Neokoros’*

Before going further, it is essential to examine the word ‘neokoros,’ both etymologically and in the context in which it was adopted as a title for cities. The 1888 thesis of Buechner assembled the ancient sources, though it must be supplemented by recent discoveries.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 4.37-38; Charlesworth 1939, discussed below.

<sup>7</sup> See also Lendon 1997, 160-172.

<sup>8</sup> Buechner 1888, 2-21.



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