THE FORTY THOUSAND CITIZENS OF EPHEUS

In his sweeping critique of most of the methods used to estimate the populations of ancient cities, R. P. Duncan-Jones quotes the half-dozen surviving explicit ancient population figures, which in his view give a firmer base than the various methods of estimation, going back in many cases to Beloch’s classic work on ancient demography. Among them is a figure for Ephesus: “Ephesus had at least 40,000 male citizens, and thus a population probably no smaller than that of Pergamum, from the terms of a gift made in the second or early third century A.D.” As we shall see, Duncan-Jones’ description of the nature of the evidence is not exact, but he follows a long tradition in accepting the figure of 40,000. The source of the figure is the interpretation of an inscription published by Josef Keil in 1930, which was apparently first brought into the service of demography by T. R. S. Broughton in his work on Roman Asia Minor in Tenney Frank’s *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*. Broughton wrote as follows: “At Ephesus Aurelius Barenus entertained (besides the magistrates) 40,000 citizens (*Jahresh.,* XXVI [1930], beibl., 57f., late II), a figure which proves that


2. “Pergamum in the second century a.d. had a free adult population of about 80,000, and about 40,000 slaves, implying a total population of about 180,000 including children,” says Duncan-Jones (*Economy*, p. 261, n. 4), basing himself on Galen *De propriorum animi curialibet affectuum dignitione et curatione* 5.49 Kuhn. What Galen actually says is that Pergamum had 40,000 citizens and equal numbers of women and slaves; he does not indicate that the 40,000 citizens are all adults, but the tenor of the passage suggests it. Galen, it must be noted, gives the numbers while emphasizing how many of the passage suggests it. Galen, it must be noted, gives the numbers while emphasizing how many of the passage suggests it. It is, in fact, not clear that the 40,000 citizens are all adults, but the tenor of the passage suggests it.


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Beloch's estimate, based on a comparison of the area of Ephesus and Alexandria, that Ephesus had a population of about 225,000 (Bevölkerung, 230f.) is no exaggeration.4 After Broughton, David Magie adduced the same inscription in his massive work on Roman Asia Minor. Though offering little comment on the inscription, Magie referred to Broughton and the inscription for support of his statement that the cities of Pergamum, Smyrna, and Ephesus each had populations of at least 200,000.5

The inscription in question is mechanically republished in Die Inschriften von Ephesos (no. 951) with the following comment: "40,000 Bürger; vgl. Broughton bei T. Frank, An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome IV 814; Magie 585 und 1446 Anm. 50. Plinius, Ep. X 116–17. "Though, as we shall see, their citation of Pliny might have raised some doubts, the editors once more endorse the view that the inscription shows that Ephesus had 40,000 citizens. That is, however, not the case; all these eminent scholars have simply misread the Greek of the inscription. The text in question runs as follows:

ψηφίσατει βιουλής δ' (ήμου)
Αφρικανον φιλοσέβαστον
φιλότειμον νεοποιν
ἀνάγαντα ἡμερῶν ἐνδέκα
καὶ ῥοδὲξαμένων τὴν τε
κρατίσθην Ἐφεσίους βουλήν
καὶ πάντα τὰ συνέδρια καὶ
πολείταις ἀθλίους τεσσάρακοντα, μετέχοντα δὲ καὶ τοῦ
συνεδρίου τῶν νεοποιῶν
καὶ χρυσοφόρων, τὴν τιμήν
ἀναστήσαντος παρ' ἑαυτοῖς
Μ. ΦλαυουοῦΔαμετανοῦ φιλοσεβάστου
τοῦ διάρχου καὶ διάρχον
ἐκδίκου τῆς κρατίσθης
Ἐφεσίους βουλῆς

Keil did not translate the inscription, but he characterized it as "ein schönes neues Zeugnis für die Munifizenz, mit der reiche Bürger in ehrenamtlichen Stellung Feste und Festmahlere für eine riesige Teilnehmerzahl ausrichteten."6 It may be that Keil's "riesige" led Broughton to understand χιλίους τεσσάρακοντα as "40,000," but perhaps Keil may simply have thought that entertaining 1,040 citizens meant dealing with a gigantic number. For that, of course, is what the phrase must mean. The passage of Pliny cited by the editors of Die Inschriften von Ephesos is worth quoting in this regard (Epist. 10. 116):

qui viri rem togam sumunt vel nuptias faciunt vel inuent magistratum vel opus publicum dedicant, solent totam bulen atque etiam e plebe non exiguum numerum vocare

binosque denarios vel singulos dare. quod an celebrandum et quatenus putes, rogo scribas. ipse enim, sicut arbitror, praesertim ex sollemnibus causis, concedendum ius istud invitationes, ita vereor ne ii qui mille homines, interdum etiam plures vacant, modum excedere et in speciem diurnam incidere videantur.

Trajan’s reply (10. 117) praises Pliny’s interest in moderation. The parallel to the Ephesian inscription is very close: in both cases the entire βουλή (plus all the συνεδρία in Baranus’ case) and over a thousand citizens have been invited. Even after one has taken proper account of the fact that Pliny is dealing with cities of more modest means and dimensions than Ephesus, his judgment about moderation is applicable to the latter: for Baranus to invite 1,040 citizens in addition to the council and συνεδρία was a great deal, on the edge of propriety (even over eleven days, or perhaps nights, as άνάμνησις suggests). For him to have entertained 40,000 is surely out of the question.

In any event, χίλιοις τεσσαράκοντα cannot mean 40,000. For one thing, χίλιος is an adjective modifying πολείτας, not a substantive that could be modified by τεσσαράκοντα. For another, Greek has standard and well-attested ways of expressing the idea of 40,000. The normal one is τετρακισίμοιροι, formed as is normal for numerals of 2,000 and greater by a numerical adverb modifying the adjective. It is overwhelmingly common; a search of the Theaurus Linguae Graecae 7 shows nineteen occurrences of forms of τετρακισίμοιροι in Diodorus alone, another seven in Josephus, five in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, seven in Appian, and so on. A second, less common method uses the substantive μύρια modified by a numerical adjective. Diodorus, it seems, uses this form mostly when needing to express numbers greater than 90,000 (ten myriads, e.g., in 2. 17. 2), but it can (and occasionally does) occur with smaller figures (e.g., five myriads in 5. 25. 1). 8 A third means is comparatively rare, the use of χιλιάδες with numbers greater than nine: there is one example in Diodorus (21. 6. 2 ἐκ τῶν χιλιάδες). It is a usage relatively popular in the Septuagint (τεσσαράκοντα χιλιάδες in Num. 1:21; over 240 examples of χιλιάδα— in the Septuagint), but unknown to documentary usage until it appears in papyri of the Arab period.

In a phrase ordered like χίλιοις τεσσαράκοντα, on the other hand, the elements are uniformly to be taken as a descending series: first are given the thousands, then the hundreds, then the tens, then the ones (the ascending series also occurs—e.g., Hdt. 1. 32. 3 ἡμέρας διηκόσια καὶ πεντακισίμια καὶ διηκόσια—in which case the καὶ is mandatory, as it is not in the descending series). It is unnecessary to give numerous examples of this phenomenon, but one illuminating case from 2 Esdras (i.e., Ezra and Nehemiah) seems worth quoting. In the middle of the list of those who returned from the Babylonian captivity, along with numbers written in the manner described above (e.g., 2:35 τριστριάδοιτε ἐξεκάστων τριάκοντα, 2:38 χιλιοί διακόσιοι τεσσαράκοντα ἐπτὰ) we find (2:37, 17:40) χίλιοι πεντήκοντα δύο. So far as we know, no one has ever suggested that the sons of Immer were 52,000 in number, particularly since the total given for the entire people is 42,360 plus slaves (2:64).

7. Using the invaluable experimental CD-ROM on an Ibycus computer.
8. Cf. the passage of Galen quoted in n. 2 above for his use of τετρακισίμιος side by side with διήκοσια μύρια.
How many citizens Ephesus had in the late second century, or at any other period, we do not know; but Baranus' inscription is no evidence for a figure of 40,000.9

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