

On the Nature and Functions of the Macedonian Council of *Peliganes*

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THE *PELIGANES*, although sparsely attested in literary sources, have lately received attention in the scholarship because of the growing number of documentary sources that mention them. The most recent contribution is by Miltiades Hatzopoulos, who while discussing the civic organization of Macedonia writes: “The council (*boule*), the member of which bore the name of *peliganes* in the Old Kingdom, constituted, as everywhere in the Greek world, the permanent commission of the assembly.”¹ Another leading expert on ancient Macedonia, Nicholas G. L. Hammond, devoted his attention to the etymology of *peliganes* and was more ambiguous, stating simply: “One term for Councillors in a Macedonian town goes back to the time of Philip and probably much earlier: *πελιγῶνες*.”² Given Hatzopoulos’ stature in Macedonian studies, his statement will likely be accepted by most. But, contrary to his assertion, the nature of the *peliganes* deserves reconsideration in light of sources

¹ M. B. Hatzopoulos, *Ancient Macedonia* (Berlin 2020) 101. Hatzopoulos assimilates the *peliganes* to the ‘*boule*’ also in his earlier publications: *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings I* (Athens 1996) 323, 326; “Épigraphie et philologie: récentes découvertes épigraphiques et gloses macédoniennes d’Hésychius,” *CRAI* 142 (1998) 1196; “The Cities,” in R. J. Lane Fox (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Macedon* (Leiden 2011) 240–241. His position agrees with E. Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides* (Paris 1938) 157, who asserted that Seleukid colonies were organized on the pattern of Greek poleis.

² N. G. L. Hammond and G. T. Griffith, *A History of Macedonia II* (Oxford 1979) 648–649.

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broader than the evidence quoted by him. Such reconsideration is overdue because the *peliganes*, although attested largely within the Seleukid empire, have escaped the attention of most of the standard books on Seleukid institutions.³

The *peliganes* are directly mentioned in four documentary and three literary sources, one of which has been plausibly emended. The documentary evidence consists of:

1. A letter of Philip V to the city of Dion in Macedonia of ca. 180 BCE addressed: Εὐρυλόχῳ τῷ ἐπιστάτῃ καὶ τοῖς πελειγῶσι καὶ τοῖς / λοιποῖς πολίταις (“To Eurylochos the *epistates*, the *peleiganes*, and the rest of the citizens”).⁴
2. A decree of Laodikeia in Syria of 174 BCE adopted by the *peliganes*: δεδόχθαι τοῖς / πελιγῶσιν.⁵
3. A broken inscription from Seleukeia on the Eulaios (Susa) of the second century BCE, possibly containing a decree issued by the *peliganes*: [– – π]ελειγῶσι ΕΠ[– –].⁶
4. A Babylonian chronicle of 130 BCE names, in a much-damaged place, ^{lū}*pe-li-ga-na-a-n*[*u*] (plural in Akkadian), or *peliganes*, as a body bringing gifts to an official.⁷

The direct literary evidence:

5. Polybius, in his account of Molon’s rebellion, writes that

³ Bickerman, *Institutions*; L. Capdetrey, *Le pouvoir séleucide* (Rennes 2007). They are mentioned, however, by Domenico Musti, “Lo stato dei Seleucidi. Dinastia popoli città da Seleuco I ad Antioco III,” *SCO* 15 (1966) 123–124.

⁴ *SEG* XLVIII 785.2–4.

⁵ *IGLSyr* IV 1261.21–22. Discussion of the decision taken by the *peliganes*: Vojislav Sarakinski, “Peliganes: The State of the Question and Some Other Thoughts,” *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010) 40–42.

⁶ *SEG* LIX 1654, dated tentatively by the editors, Georges Rougemont, “Les inscriptions grecques d’Iran et d’Asie,” *JSAw* (2012) 24–27, and Pierre-Louis Gatier, “Des péliganes à Suse,” *ZPE* 184 (2013) 205–210, based on letter shapes.

⁷ *BCHP* 18 (BM 35189+46018+46216) B.3: R. J. van der Spek, “The Size and Significance of the Babylonian Temples under the Successors,” in P. Briant et al. (eds.), *La transition entre l’empire achéménide et les royaumes hellénistiques* (Paris 2006) 285 (text), 286 (translation), 288 (commentary).

once the rebellion had been quelled, Hermeias, a minister of Antiochos III, expelled “the so-called *adeiganes*” from Seleukeia: Ἐρμείας ... ἐφυγάδευε δὲ τοὺς καλουμένους Ἀδειγάνας (Polyb. 5.54.10). The last word, which is otherwise unattested, was convincingly emended to *πελιγάνας* by Pierre Roussel. This reading is now generally accepted.⁸

6. In the fragmentary portion of Book 7 of his *Geography* Strabo says: “Ὅτι κατὰ Θεσπρωτοὺς καὶ Μολοττοὺς τὰς γράϊας πελίας καὶ τοὺς γέροντας πελίου, καθάπερ καὶ παρὰ Μακεδόσι· πελιγόνας γοῦν καλοῦσιν ἐκεῖνοι τοὺς ἐν τιμαῖς καθὰ παρὰ Λάκωσι καὶ Μασσαλιώταις τοὺς γέροντας. “Among the Thesprotians and the Molossians old women are called ‘peliai’ and old men ‘pelioi,’ as is also the case among the Macedonians; at any rate, those people call their dignitaries ‘peligones’ (compare the ‘gerontes’ among the Laonians and the Massaliotes).”⁹

⁸ Pierre Roussel, “Décret des Péliganes de Laodicée-sur-Mer,” *Syria* 23 (1942/3) 31–32. Accepted: J. N. Kalléris, *Les anciens Macédoniens. Études linguistique et historique* I (Athens 1954) 243–244; Walbank, *HCP* I (Oxford 1957) 583; Musti, *SCO* 15 (1966) 123; G. M. Cohen, *The Seleucid Colonies* (Wiesbaden 1978) 80; R. A. Billows, *Kings and Colonists: Aspects of Macedonian Imperialism* (Leiden 1995) 181; van der Spek, in *La transition* 288; Sarakinski, *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010) 43; Gatier, *ΣΠΕ* 184 (2013) 206; G. M. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in the East from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India* (Berkeley 2013) 159–160; Omar Coloru, “Seleucid Settlements: Between Ethnic Identity and Mobility,” *Electrum* 20 (2013) 41–42; M. Mari, “Macedonian Cities under the Kings: Standardization or Variety? A View from Amphipolis,” in M. Kalaitzi et al. (eds.), *Βορειοελλαδικά: Tales from the Lands of the Ethne: Essays in Honour of Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos* (Athens 2018) 179–197, at 188; Hatzopoulos, *Ancient Macedonia* 102–103. Also in the Loeb edition of Polybius (2011), revised by F. W. Walbank and C. Habicht. The single dissenting voice is Nicholas G. L. Hammond’s (“The *Koïna* of Epirus and Macedonia,” *JCS* 16 [1991] 186), who does not, however, present any argument against the emendation.

⁹ Strab. 7a 1.2, transl. H. L. Jones. The fragments have been excerpted from the Vatican epitome. See Kalléris, *Les Anciens Macédoniens* 243 n.1, on the etymology of the words *πέλιος* and *πελιγάνες*.

7. Hesychius Π 1329: πελιγᾶνες · οἱ ἔνδοξοι · παρὰ δὲ Σύροις οἱ βουλευταί (“Peliganes: those who are held in esteem, *bouleutai* among Syrians”).

The slight difference in spelling of the name πελιγᾶνες/πελειγᾶνες/πελιγόνες is of no concern—all evidence pertains to the same body.¹⁰ Roussel already noticed that the institution of the *peliganes* is Macedonian, brought to the East in the process of founding colonies in the early Hellenistic age, when (contrary to the silent majority of scholarship) they received not Greek but Macedonian institutions.¹¹ Since, despite the steadily growing body of evidence, the *peliganes* are never attested in Greek cities, we are justified in considering them a Macedonian institution.¹² This is not to say that there was a universal, specific model of a Macedonian city. On the contrary, it is probable that Philip II and later kings respected local traditions.¹³ The inscription from Dion (no. 1), the earliest documentary evidence for the *peliganes*, attests to their Macedonian origin,¹⁴ while the Babylonian chronicle (no. 4) and the inscriptions from Laodikeia (no. 2) and Susa (no. 3) document the widespread presence of the *peliganes* in the Seleukid colonies in Syria and Mesopotamia, known also from literary sources (nos. 5 and 7). In other words, with every new piece of evidence the position advanced by Roussel is more and more certain. One needs to be very careful, however, when generalizing on the basis of the sparsely attested internal organization of Seleukid colonies in the East, since some of them surely enjoyed institutions patterned on Greek poleis, the best

¹⁰ Roussel, *Syria* 23 (1942/3) 29; Kalléris, *Les Anciens Macédoniens* 244–245.

¹¹ Roussel, *Syria* 23 (1942/3) 28–30.

¹² Kalléris, *Les Anciens Macédoniens* 244–245; Walbank, *HCPI* 583. We need not join the modern debate on the degree to which the Macedonians were linguistically or culturally Greek. On the *peliganes* as an essentially Macedonian institution see Sarakinski, *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010) 31–46.

¹³ Mari, in *Βορειοελλαδικά* 179–197.

¹⁴ Hatzopoulos, *CRAI* 142 (1998) 1196, and *Ancient Macedonia* 103.

example being Antiochia in Persis.¹⁵

This leaves us with two issues: the permanence of the board of *peliganes* and its name, and the nature of this institution. All datable evidence is mid- to late-Hellenistic, with the exception of Hesychius, but he only transmits data excerpted from earlier sources ordinarily unknown to us.¹⁶ Although there is no evidence predating 220 BCE (no. 5), those who conjecture that the origin of the *peliganes* was in Argead Macedonia are almost certainly right.¹⁷ Without the assumption that the *peliganes* were installed in the Seleukid colonies after the Macedonian pre-Hellenistic pattern, it would have been nearly impossible to explain their proliferation in the East. Another Macedonian civic institution, the *epistates* or chief magistrate in cities of Old Macedonia, implemented in Macedonian colonies in the East, furnishes a ready parallel of the process of exporting pre-Hellenistic Macedonian institutions into Hellenistic kingdoms.¹⁸

A crucial question is the nature of the council of *peliganes*: was it, as Hatzopoulos claims, a regular Greek *boule* (“the permanent commission of the assembly”) under another name? Accepting Hatzopoulos’ stance would mean that the *peliganes* were selected by the appropriate assembly, preferably by lot, and that their primary function was probouleutic, i.e. pre-handling motions before they were submitted to the *demos*. These characteristics of

¹⁵ *OGIS* 233 = *I.Estrema Oriente* 252 attesting Greek-type legislative procedure with the *boule* and *ekklesia* expressly named. The same can be said of some cities in Hellenistic Macedonia, e.g. Thessalonike, where the *boule* and *demos* legislated (*IG XI.4* 1053), or Amphipolis. See Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions I* 140–145.

¹⁶ See Paul Bernard, “La glose sur les péliganes,” *CRAI* 142 (1998) 1208–1210, on possible sources of Hesychius’ entry *peliganes*, with no firm conclusion.

¹⁷ Roussel, *Syria* 23 (1942/3) 29–30; Hatzopoulos, in *Brill’s Companion* 241; Sarakinski, *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010) 38–39; R. J. Lane Fox, “Philip’s and Alexander’s Macedon,” in *Brill’s Companion* 378–379; Hatzopoulos, *Ancient Macedonia* 101, 103.

¹⁸ Mari, in *Βορειοελλαδικά* 183.

the *boule*, although best attested in Athens, are believed by modern scholarship to be the democratic norm in most cities of the early- to mid-Hellenistic age.¹⁹ Admittedly, selection by lot is directly attested in some poleis only, and a parallel probouleutic procedure with participation of *kosmoi* and other probouleutic boards, rather than of the council, is well known too; but it was the *demos*, not any other body, who legislated in Hellenistic Greek cities.²⁰ In the late-Hellenistic age the way *bouleutai* were appointed started to change, turning Imperial-age councils into bodies that replenished themselves through cooptation or were built through appointment of former magistrates by *timetai* ('censors'). *Bouleutai* were increasingly becoming a quasi-order of the socially prominent in the city, a phenomenon unheard of in the early Hellenistic age (the "aristocratization" of formerly democratic Greek cities of the Roman age, in the words

¹⁹ The literature is vast, to cite only: P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford 1972) 1–16, 52–81; R. A. De Laix, *Probouleusis at Athens* (Berkeley 1973); M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1991) 247–250; J. Creed, "Aristotle and Democracy," in A. Loizou et al. (eds.), *Polis and Politics: Essays in Greek Moral and Political Philosophy* (Aldershot 1990) 23–34; P. J. Rhodes, *The Decrees of the Greek States* (Oxford 1997) 11–15, 475–491; V. Gabrielsen, *The Naval Aristocracy of Hellenistic Rhodes* (Aarhus 1997) 26–28; P. Hamon, "À propos de l'institution du Conseil dans les cités grecques de l'époque hellénistique," *REG* 114 (2001) XVIII–XIX; V. Grieb, *Hellenistische Demokratie. Politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Grossen* (Stuttgart 2008) 45–47, 157–160, 213–217, 289–292; C. Mann, in C. Mann et al. (eds.), "Gleichheiten und Ungleichheiten in der hellenistischen Polis: Überlegungen zum Stand der Forschung," in *"Demokratie" im Hellenismus. Von der Herrschaft des Volkes zur Herrschaft der Honoratioren?* (Mainz 2012) 14–19; R. Fabiani, "Dedochthai tei boulei kai toi demoi: protagoniste e prassi della procedura deliberativa a Iasos," in *"Demokratie" im Hellenismus* 119–122, 160–165; H.-U. Wiemer, "Hellenistic Cities: The End of Greek Democracy?" in H. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Greek Government* (Chichester 2013) 56–59; E. Kosmetatou, "Tyche's Force: Lottery and Chance in Greek Government," in *A Companion to Ancient Greek Government* 235–251; K. Nawotka, *Boule and Demos in Miletus and its Pontic Colonies* (Wiesbaden 2014) 93–125, 139–141.

²⁰ Hamon, *REG* 114 (2001) XVII–XVIII; Nawotka, *Boule and Demos* 98–109.

of Patrice Hamon and Hans-Ulrich Wiemer).²¹ This transformation, important as it was and worthy of mention, is of limited relevance here since all the documentary evidence of the *peliganes* is mid-Hellenistic and thus much earlier than the transformation of *bouleutai* into a quasi-order. *Peliganes* need to be juxtaposed with mid-Hellenistic *boulai*—in most Greek cities, bodies emanating from the *demoi*.

There is nothing in our evidence on how the *peliganes* were appointed. We may only guess that these councils were introduced by royal fiat into Seleukid colonies either when they were founded or when they were reorganized. This would involve direct or indirect royal agency in appointing the first group of notables to serve as the *peliganes* in a city.²² But this leaves open how their ranks were later replenished. Selection by the assembly (either by lot or by vote) is only one option, cooptation or appointment by a royal official being also possible. There is nothing in our sources to prove that the *peliganes* were selected by the assembly, let alone that they were a permanent commission of the assembly as Hatzopoulos holds. As a matter of fact, Babylon is the only city in which both the *peliganes* and the assembly are simultaneously attested (third quarter of the second century BCE). In Babylon the only function which can be assigned to the assembly of citizens (*pulitê/pulitānu* in Akkadian, the

²¹ F. Quaß, *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens* (Stuttgart 1993) 382–394; Hamon, *REG* 114 (2001) XIX–XXI, “Le Conseil et la participation des citoyens: les mutations de la basse époque hellénistique,” in P. Frölich et al. (eds.), *Citoyenneté et participation à la basse époque hellénistique* (Geneva 2005) 121–144, and “Élites dirigeantes et processus d’aristocratisation à l’époque hellénistique,” in H.-L. Fernoux et al. (eds.), *Aristocratie antique: Modèles et exemplarité sociale* (Dijon 2007) 79–100; Wiemer, in *A Companion to Ancient Greek Government* 64–67; A. Zuiderhoek, *The Ancient City* (Cambridge 2017) 80–82. The institutional evolution of councils does not contradict the general rule that in Greek cities leadership was always the stage on which the elite played the leading role: C. Habicht, “Ist ein ‘Honoratiorenregime’ das Kennzeichen der Stadt im späteren Hellenismus?” in M. Wörle et al., *Stadt und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus* (Munich 1995) 87–92.

²² I owe this suggestion to an anonymous reader for *GRBS*.

language of the source) was to gather in the theatre to listen to royal pronouncements, never to discuss anything, elect anybody, or vote on anything.²³ No link between the assembly and the *peliganes* can be established in the light of our evidence.

The probouleutic activity is never attested for the *peliganes*. Moreover, there are two pieces of evidence, one certain (no. 2) and one probable (no. 4), for the *peliganes* legislating, i.e. performing duties in Greek states reserved for the *demoi*.²⁴ In the address of the letter of Philip V (no. 1) the *peliganes* are named in the position of prominence, as almost always was the *demoi*, or the *boule* and the *demoi*, in addresses of letters of Hellenistic kings to Greek cities. A typical instance is the letter of Seleukos I to Miletos: βασιλεὺς Σέλευκος Μιλησίων τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τῶι δημῶι χαίρειν (*Didyma* 493).²⁵ By appearing in the address of a royal letter, the *peliganes* are treated as the supreme body of a polis (Dion). Polybios' evidence (no. 5) is telling too: Hermeias punished the *peliganes* of Seleukeia on the Tigris because their city sided with Molon. This is understandable only if the leadership in Seleukeia was vested in the *peliganes*.²⁶ The early- to mid-Hellenistic *boule*, usually selected by lot and thus representing a cross-section of the active part of society, was not the board of

²³ AD III 30, no. -161, obv. 25'; III 134, no. -140A, rev. 6'; III 230, no. -132 D₂ rev. 15'; III 264, no. -124 A, obv. 7'; III 278, no. -124 B, rev. 17'; III 326, no. -118 A, rev. 19'; III 454, no. -87 C, rev. 30'. R. J. Van der Spek, "The Theatre of Babylon in Cuneiform," in W. H. van Soldt et al. (eds.), *Veenhof Anniversary Volume: Studies Presented to Klaas R. Veenhof* (Leiden 2002) 448–455.

²⁴ Luca Mazzini, "Seleucia on the Tigris, Doom of Babylon?" *IncidAntico* 19 (2021) 172–173, admits that the *peliganes* legislated, but he unnecessarily equates them with *boule* in this respect. See Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 82–87, on decrees of the Athenian *boule* on non-procedural matters—a rare phenomenon of oligarchic nature. It is well attested, however, in Hellenistic Macedonia: Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* I 139–148. The *peliganes*, as we know them, legislated in matters of substance, not of procedure.

²⁵ Other examples: Welles, *Royal Corres.* 2, 4, 6, 7, 14, 15, 17, 22, 23, 25, 31–35, 38, 41, 43, 48, 62, 64, 66, 72.

²⁶ Sarakinski, *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010) 42–43.

municipal leaders: the leadership of a polis rested with elected magistrates, *strategoï* or the like.²⁷

For the *peliganes* as *bouleutai* we are left with the entry in Hesychius' lexicon (no. 7). Although Hesychius is not to be neglected as purveyor of an earlier tradition, because his lexicon is not a documentary source no technical terminology can be expected. The most obvious way of reading Hesychius is that he (or his source) was referring to the *peliganes* in (presumably) Seleukid Syria as the members of a council (a *boule*), not necessarily of the *boule* selected by lot or elected by the people to perform probouleutic duties in a city. In the light of our evidence, the *peliganes* were the principal body of the Hellenistic Macedonian city, responsible for legislating and other leadership activities, overshadowing the *demos*, if it ever convened.

The last direct attestation to the nature of the *peliganes* is Strabo's statement (no. 6) juxtaposing the Macedonian *peliganes* with *gerontes*, i.e. members of the *gerousia* in Sparta. The issue of the old age implied by Strabo's etymology should not be read literally, since he does not say that there was an age limit for the *peliganes*, only that their name was derived from the word *pelioi* ("old men"). One should bear in mind that the Greek word γέροντες designated both "old men" and "Elders, Chiefs." In the political sense the second designation was prevalent, at least in the pre-Roman age.²⁸ That said, one has to admit that there is in fact no reason to exclude the possibility that there was an age limit for *peliganes*; the current state of the evidence does not allow for a firm conclusion in this matter. The designation "Elders, Chiefs" is nevertheless applicable to the *peliganes*, whose prominent position in a polis, if not specifically their attested responsibilities, were comparable with those of the *gerousia* in Sparta—the Council of Elders and high court superior to

²⁷ Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 4–6; Hansen, *Athenian Democracy* 268–247.

²⁸ LSJ s.v. γέρον; Denis van Berchem, "La g rouisie d' ph se," *MusHelv* 37 (1980) 25–40, at 34; Rhodes, *Decrees* 460.

Sparta's assembly.²⁹ *Gerousiai* profusely attested in the Imperial age, in both Athens and Asia Minor, should be left out of consideration on account of their being venerable associations, not organs of the state *sensu stricto*: they could initiate legislation and influence it, but the decision rested with the regular legislative bodies, the *boule* and the *demos*.³⁰

Perhaps two more items can be brought into consideration, although neither mentions the *peliganes* by name. In his description of Surena's triumph after the victory over Crassus Plutarch says that the Parthian general gathered the *gerousia* of the Seleukeians to deride the Romans who carried in their baggage the licentious *Milesiaka* (*Crass.* 32.4). Plutarch uses the word *gerousia* in a restricted way, always referring either to the bodies which indeed carried this name, like the *gerousia* in Sparta³¹ or Syracuse (*Marc.* 23.2), or to the ruling council of Rome, the Senate.³² If this is read in the context of other evidence (nos. 5 and 6), it is reasonable to infer that what Plutarch called the *gerousia* of the Seleukeians was in fact the Council of Elders known from Polybius as the *peliganes*.³³ This was either Plutarch's metonymy, used for clarity's sake (*gerousia* was more common by far than

²⁹ On the elevated position of the Spartan *gerousia* in the classical and early-Hellenistic age see P. Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London 1987) 121–125; E. G. Millender, “Kingship: The History, Power, and Prerogatives of the Spartans ‘Divine’ Dyarchy,” in A. Powell (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta II* (Chichester 2018) 460–461. The somewhat diminished position of the Spartan *gerousia* of the Imperial age (P. Cartledge and A. Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities* [London 1989] 143–149) need not concern us here as it falls beyond the chronological limit of this paper.

³⁰ J. H. Oliver, *The Sacred Gerousia* (Baltimore 1941) 21–38; van Berchem, *MusHelv* 37 (1980) 25–40; Rhodes, *Decrees* 538–539; E. Bauer, *Gerousien in den Poleis Kleinasiens in hellenistischer Zeit und der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Munich 2014) 345–348; K. Martin, *Demos, Boule, Gerousia: Personifikationen städtischer Institutionen auf kaiserzeitlichen Münzen aus Kleinasien I* (Bonn 2013) 141–142.

³¹ Plut. *Lyc.* 6.1, *Pyrrh.* 27.4, *Ages.* 4.4.

³² Plut. *Caes.* 28.7, 29.7, 33.6, 67.1; *Fab.* 18.5; *Rom.* 13.3, 27.3; *An seni* 789E.

³³ Roussel, *Syria* 23 (1942/3) 29.

peliganes) or to reflect the fact that the ruling council of Seleukeia no longer bore the name *peliganes*. The same may apply to Tacitus' account of the internal strife in the Arsakid state, in which he likens the council of Seleukeia to the Senate, not only in numbers (300 members each) but also in respect to obvious Roman senatorial qualities which decided the membership: means and wisdom.³⁴

Putting all this evidence together, one may surmise that in Seleukeia (and probably some other Macedonian cities including the Seleukid colonies) legislative power and leadership was originally vested in the *peliganes*, a council descriptively referred to as *gerousia* or *senatus*. This was not the council (*boule*) acting as a committee of a largely unattested *demos* but a council of notables, in a way similar to the Roman Senate of the early Imperial age.³⁵

Finally, let us consider the permanence of the *peliganes*. With the concentration of evidence in the mid- to late-Hellenistic age and no source being later than Strabo, the question arises whether this is an artifact of transmission or else the name *peliganes* went out of use at some point. In Seleukeia on the Tigris, for example, sometime between the late-first century BCE and the early-first century CE the council almost certainly acquired the name *boule*, as attested by bronze coins bearing the inscription BOYAH at Seleukid-era dates corresponding to 13/4, 14/5, 15/6, 40/1, 42/3, 43/4, 44/5 CE.³⁶ One has to agree with

³⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 6.42.1, *trecenti opibus aut sapientia delecti ut senatus, sua populo vis.* A. J. Woodman, *The Annals of Tacitus. Books 5 and 6* (Cambridge 2017) 260; Leonardo Gregoratti, "The Importance of the Mint of Seleucia on the Tigris for Arsacid History: Artabanus and Greek Parthian Cities," *Mesopotamia* 47 (2012) 132.

³⁵ In a way this usage of the words *boule* and *gerontes/gerousia* reflects what *Iliad* 2.54 says of Agamemnon when he was about to convene the leaders of the Achaians: βουλήν δὲ πρῶτον μεγαθύμων ἵζε γερόντων.

³⁶ R. H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris* (Ann Arbor 1935) no. 134 (22 pieces), and G. Le Rider, *Séleucie du Tigre: les monnaies séleucides et parthes*

Georges Le Rider who identifies the seated figure on the obverse of these coins holding a staff, a symbol of power, as a personification of the council of Seleukeia.³⁷ To Katharina Martin the iconography of the *boule* on these coins resembles the portraiture of Hellenistic queens and it alludes to the position of power exercised by the council.³⁸ It seems, therefore, that only the name changed, not the supreme position of the council within the government of Seleukeia.

A reflection of this is perhaps found in the *Acts of Mār Mārī*, a hagiographic text composed in the sixth century and recording events best dated to the second. It reads: “Now there were three assemblies in Seleukeia, one for the elders, one for the young people, and one for the children, for this is how they organized their assemblies.”³⁹ The editor of the text, Amir Harrak, claims that the assembly of the elders was the assembly of all free citizens of Seleukeia, after the pattern of the Akkadian assemblies *puḫru ša šībūti*.⁴⁰ This has been met with disbelief, since under no plausible scenario could the knowledge of an Akkadian judicial organ have made it into the *Acts of Mār Mārī*.⁴¹ Even if Harrak is right on linguistic grounds in his claim that the terminology in the *Acts* is derived from the Akkadian *puḫru ša šībūti*, his explanation of the “council of elders” as the assembly of Seleukeia unconvincingly leaves two other assemblies unexplained. In Babylonia the *puḫru ša šībūti* was a council of elders

(Florence 1998) nos. 351, 536–538 (4 pieces). The inscription: McDowell 71. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements* 160, and Le Rider, *Séleucie* 24, read the inscription as BOYAH(Σ). The first reading is standard in coin inscriptions: Martin, *Demos* II passim.

³⁷ Le Rider, *Séleucie* 23–25, 58; Gregoratti, *Mesopotamia* 47 (2012) 133; Martin, *Demos* I 110.

³⁸ Martin, *Demos* I 113.

³⁹ Amir Harrak, *The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle* (Atlanta 2005) 19.

⁴⁰ Harrak, *The Acts* 43–45 nn.105–106.

⁴¹ Joseph P. Amar, review of Harrak’s *Acts* in *JNES* 70 (2011) 166–167.

representing the body of citizens (*mār banî*).⁴² Thus it paralleled the *gerousia/peliganes* known from classical sources rather than the popular assembly (*demos*), otherwise unattested in Seleukeia. More likely the organizational model described in the *Acts of Mār Mārī* is reminiscent of the tripartite structure of the post-Hellenistic city, with *neoi* (ephebes), adult citizens, and elders (*gerousia/peliganes*).⁴³ Characteristically, in the *Acts* the apostle in his Christianizing mission turns to the elders, apparently the active part of the society of Seleukeia. Thus the *Acts of Mār Mārī* may inadvertently reflect an arrangement according to which the power was vested in the council.

The only other example of the probable disappearance of the *peliganes* from the municipal government is Laodikeia. An imperial-age inscription shows the *boule* and *demos* as decision-making bodies of the city, replacing the *peliganes* in this capacity.⁴⁴ In contrast to Seleukeia on the Tigris, no source attests the circumstances of this shift in constitution—a shift in substance, not in the name alone. We can neither be sure when exactly the *peliganes* disappeared from Seleukid colonies, nor whether this happened due to decisions of central governments or through the internal evolution of the cities once governed by the *peliganes*. The disappearance of the board of *peliganes* might be placed in the context of transformations associated with the transition from the late-Seleukid to Arsakid and Roman rule.⁴⁵

⁴² Muhammad A. Dandamaev, “Babylonian Popular Assemblies in the First Millennium B.C.,” *BCSMS* 30 (1995) 23–29; J. Oelsner, B. Wells, and C. Wunsch, “NeoBabylonian Period,” in R. Westbrook (ed.), *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden 2003) 919.

⁴³ Franz Cumont, “Notes sur un passage des Actes de S. Mari,” *Revue de l’instruction publique en Belgique* 36 (1893) 373–378; Mazzini, *IncidAntico* 19 (2021) 172–173.

⁴⁴ *IGLSyr* IV 1257; cf. 1302 from Balanaea.

⁴⁵ Cf. the transition of leadership in Babylon from *šatammu* and the council of Esagila to *epistates* which happened at the turn from the Seleukids to the Arsakids: P. Clancier, “The Polis of Babylon: An Historiographical Ap-

In Seleukeia on the Tigris, and perhaps in some other Macedonian cities of the Parthian empire, the clearly anachronistic name of *peliganes* was dropped, but the principle of local government by a council of notables, now called *boule*, was retained. In Roman Syria the government of the *peliganes* gave way to the most common constitutional arrangements, with the *boule* and *demos* in charge of legislation.

The growing number of documentary testimonies, Greek and Akkadian, speaks to the Macedonian pre-Hellenistic origin of the *peliganes* and to the wide implementation of this body in Seleukid colonies organized on the Macedonian pattern. In his book on Seleukid colonization, Getzel Cohen remarked in a brief paragraph concerned with the *peliganes*: “At Laodiceia, at least, it is clear that they formed a council of some sort. But whether they were actually constituted as a *boule* or a *gerousia* is unclear.”⁴⁶ The dichotomy presumed by this sentence is unnecessary. The *peliganes* were not the *boule*—in Greek cities, a council selected from the *demos* to perform mostly probouleutic functions. The *peliganes* were the council (in Greek, a *boule*) of notables or Elders (in Greek, a *gerousia*) governing Macedonian cities and legislating, much as the *boule* and *demos* did in Hellenistic Greek cities. Proliferation of the *peliganes* in Macedonia and Seleukid colonies in the East and the role they played seem to bespeak the coexistence of the constitutional norm of (many/most) Hellenistic Greek cities, ruled by *boule* and *demos*, with the practice in Macedonian cities of rule by councils of notables. The dearth of documentary evidence from Macedonia prevents us from saying whether the rule of the city by the *peliganes* was the norm (unlikely) or just one Macedonian tradition which happened to be transmitted to Seleukid colonies. The evolution of the council of *peliganes* in the late-Hellenistic age and later is

proach,” in B. Chrubasik et al. (eds.), *Hellenism and the Local Communities of the Eastern Mediterranean: 400 BCE–250 CE* (Oxford 2017) 75–80.

⁴⁶ Cohen, *Seleucid Colonies* 80. On the *peliganes* as *gerousia* also Mari, in *Βορειοελλαδικά* 188, but without stating any rationale.

bifurcated: in some Seleukid colonies in the Parthian empire the name *peliganes* was no longer used but the municipal government of the council of notables survived until the second century CE, whereas the Seleukid colonies in Roman Syria dropped the name *peliganes* and adopted a system resembling the constitutional norm of Greek cities in the East, in which the *boule* and *demos* legislated.⁴⁷

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