



Thomas W. Davis

## Article

# Saint Paul on Cyprus: Archaeology and the Transformation of an Apostle

Thomas W. Davis<sup>1</sup>

The cool evening breeze provides a welcome respite from the warmth of the day. The two travelers look warily around the crowded atrium, unsure of what to do and where to be. All of the elite of the community are there, and the two latecomers are ill at ease. The official who has delivered the invitation has made it quite clear that their attendance is strongly requested. “We are but simple Jewish merchants,” protests the spokesman for the pair; “we do not dine with governors.” The Roman official is unperturbed. “The proconsul is an intelligent man and wishes to engage you in conversation. He enjoys having philosophical discussions after eating.” After a disquieting pause he adds flatly, “He expects your attendance.”

## The Pauline Comfort Zone

### Introduction

“The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down [from Antioch] to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus” (Acts 13:4);<sup>2</sup> so the Acts of the Apostles records the beginning of the most important missionary trip in

the history of the Christian church. The first missionary journey of the apostle Paul from Antioch to the island of Cyprus led to a revolutionary change in the Christian message. At Antioch, Paul of Tarsus had been within his comfort zone, a world that he knew intimately. It was a mercantile world, a Hellenistic world, and a Jewish Christian world. On Cyprus, specifically in Paphos, he was forced to enter a new reality outside his immediate experience: a political world, a patrician world, and a pagan Roman world. I believe this challenged his understanding of his calling, which changed profoundly the way he continued his missionary endeavors.

### The Comfort Zone

At the beginning of the Cyprus narrative Paul is in what I describe as his “comfort zone”—the urban world of the eastern Roman Empire. Paul is an urban man.<sup>3</sup> After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul spends fourteen years in Syria, Cilicia, and Arabia. After visiting Jerusalem at least once, he bases himself in Tarsus (Acts 11:25). He reflects an urban self-understanding when he tells the arresting Roman in Acts 22 that he is from “Tarsus in Cilicia,” no ordinary city. Paul has a typical Hellenized self-identity, which is city based. He has the urban pride of the Hellenistic world, where one’s city is more important than

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one's province or kingdom. He divides the world into city, wilderness, and sea in 2 Corinthians 11:26. Throughout his career Paul travels through the wilderness and on the sea, but makes his home in cities. The churches he plants are urban associations, and he illustrates his lessons with images of urban life.

Paul is a business man, by profession a *skenoipoios*, a tentmaker or, more generally, a leather worker. According to Acts 18, Paul works his trade while living in Corinth. In a speech recorded in Acts 20, Paul reminds the elders of the church in Ephesus of his business acumen: "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions" (Acts 20:34). In his own writings, Paul complains that it seems that only he and his colleague Barnabas have had to work for a living (1 Cor. 9:6)! Paul is in his comfort zone in the shop and the street market.

It is par excellence, for Paul, a Jewish world, or at least a Jewish-Christian world. His Jewish *ethnos* is a core element of his identity.<sup>4</sup> In 2 Corinthians he states what he calls "a little ... foolishness" (2 Cor. 11:1) in the defense of his mission, laying out his strong Jewish roots against challenges: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I" (11:22). In Galatians 1:14 Paul speaks of his zeal for "the traditions of my fathers." After his conversion he remains a synagogue attendee. He is among Greek "God-fearers" in Antioch and feels called to reach out and welcome them, but it is still a Jewish world he inhabits comfortably.

## Antioch

Antioch-on-the-Orontes, one of the great cities of the ancient world, becomes the "home church" for Paul for his first missionary journeys and is the heartland of the comfort zone for Paul. Located on the Orontes River near its mouth, Antioch was a nexus point for the trade routes from Mesopotamia and the north-south coastal road along the Mediterranean. One of Alexander's generals, Seleucus I, founded the city in 300 BC and named it after his father, Antiochus. Seleucus had a conscious policy of urbanization in upper Syria to create a counterweight to the ancient Mesopotamian cities; the result was the restoration of the Bronze and Iron Age patterns of urbanism.<sup>5</sup>

Warwick Ball suggests that the location was too strategic not to be occupied before the Macedonian foundation and that the evidence for previous settlements is obscured by the massive occupational debris beneath the modern city.<sup>6</sup> The Romans gained control over the city in 64 BC when they annexed the remains of the Seleucid kingdom.

The excavations in the 1930s revealed little about Roman Antioch, owing to the eleven meters of accumulated debris and the high water table of the Orontes River.<sup>7</sup> However, the basic layout of the city is known. The walls were pierced by at least four gates with five bridges across the Orontes River. The main street, crossing the city from the Aleppo Gate to the Daphne Gate, measured approximately two Roman miles in length with several strata of repaving. It was thirty-six meters wide, with colonnades on each side and probably roofing over the main carriageway. The main street was almost certainly the major market of the city, with the broad avenue lined with market stalls. *Tetrapyla* marked the major intersections, and a statue of Tiberius brooded over the main crossroads.<sup>8</sup> The slopes above the Orontes River held the wealthier private quarter, placed to catch the breeze and with better views.<sup>9</sup>

The Roman presence in Antioch was formal and official, reflecting the strategic importance of Antioch and Syria.<sup>10</sup> The Romans appointed governors who were politically reliable, and under the Principate, a procurator was paired with them and both resided at Antioch. Owing to the proximity of Parthia, the Roman army assigned to Syria was the largest in the east, with four legions and twenty thousand auxiliaries.<sup>11</sup> Because of the size of the army, the imperial governors had to be politically reliable, members of the aristocracy of the Principate. As part of his strategy of indirect rule, Augustus created a web of *clientalia* in the cities of the eastern empire. This helped thwart any possible tendencies to independence in the urbanized upper class.<sup>12</sup> These co-opted elites dominated the mercantile and social life of the city.

Beneath the "superficial veneer" of Roman rule, Antioch was a multiethnic city.<sup>13</sup> Aramaic would have been the dominant language in the Syrian countryside, with the use of Greek widespread in the urban population. There was a substantial Jewish population in Antioch with its own archon.<sup>14</sup>

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Paul would have been able to blend in among his co-religionists. Seleucus I Nicator gave Jewish mercenaries the same rights as Greeks and Macedonians to settle in Antioch when it was founded. Jews lived in the southeastern quarter inside the walls of Tiberius but outside the early walls of Seleucus. Antioch's proximity to Palestine and its economic and political importance made it an attractive place of settlement for Jews. Local and ethnically related cults were important factors for maintaining personal identity in a minority situation in the ancient world, and the Roman Empire in particular witnessed this phenomenon. Synagogues fulfilled the same function for the Jewish Diaspora community. No direct archaeological evidence of a synagogue in Antioch has been recovered, but textual references document synagogues within the city and in the suburb of Daphne in the Roman period. According to one recent scholar, Antiochene Jewish life was "a rare historical example of Jews fully integrated into the life of a city while maintaining their own ancestral traditions."<sup>15</sup>

Antioch's prime mercantile location at a nexus of trade routes was an obvious advantage for Paul. The raw material for his tents would have been easily obtainable from the eastern steppe lands that have supported nomadic herders from the Neolithic period onward, and the passing trade caravans would have been a likely market for Paul's products. He probably rented a spot on one of the colonnaded markets in Antioch. Colonnaded streets were a dominant feature in eastern Roman urbanism. They functioned as market centers, replacing the typical western-style *agora*.<sup>16</sup>

From a base here, Paul could easily have traveled throughout Syria and along the Levantine coast, trading and making contacts. Antioch and Tarsus lay within the same market region being directly linked by road and by sea routes, so this was a familiar world for Paul. He had probably already established a network of clients while he was based in Tarsus, which could easily have included contacts in Antioch. The wealthy Jewish community would have provided a strong potential market for Paul, easily accessible given his shared cultural identity. The presence of a Roman army base in the city also provided another potential local market for Paul's leather goods and tents.

Seleucia was the main port for Antioch. The Roman port was artificially created north of the mouth of the Orontes because of the silting from the river; eventually this also silted up. Limited archaeological investigation in the late 1930s revealed the remains of a theater and some houses. Scattered remnants of the port installations were also identified.<sup>17</sup>

### The Cyprus Connection in the Antioch Church

In Acts 11 Luke recounts the scattering of the believers after the stoning of Stephen: "Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). Later, Luke records the names of five of the leaders of the church in Antioch, and the mention of Barnabas from Cyprus speaks to the continued influence and presence of Cypriot Christians. From the text, we must assume that the missionaries from Cyprus were Jews, like Barnabas, who is first mentioned in Acts 4. The Jerusalem church hears about this new church in Antioch (Luke shows the ability of people and news to travel easily), and shrewdly sends a Cypriot Jewish Christian, Barnabas, to find out what is happening. The relatively easy success of the missionaries in Antioch is a product of the shared cultural milieu between the Syrian city dwellers and the Cypriots. As a Cypriot, Barnabas would not be perceived as a threat by either the new converts or the missionaries and would be able more easily to gain their confidence.

Barnabas brings Paul of Tarsus to Antioch, where he will begin his publicly visible ministry. We do not know how long Paul was in Tarsus before Barnabas sought him out, but the Lukan chronology implies at least a decade. These are silent years with no mention of any ministry in either the Acts or Paul's letters, except a simple mention in Galatians 1:22, where Paul speaks of time spent in Syria and Cilicia. Of crucial importance is what is not said by either Luke or Paul: neither Luke in Acts nor Paul in his letters makes any mention of Gentile mission work that Paul might have undertaken during this period. His proselytizing appears to have been confined to the Jewish community of Damascus and possibly Arabia. If he did reach out to Gentiles in Arabia,

Cilicia, and Damascus, the results have gone unrecorded.

It is probably Barnabas who persuades the Antioch church that Cyprus should be the first “foreign” mission field for the fledgling congregation. Perhaps it is a way for the Antioch believers to partially repay the debt they owe to their spiritual midwives from Cyprus who have brought them into the new faith. It is also a safe choice, since some of the congregation probably has family ties and commercial links. Salamis, Barnabas’s home city, is only a day’s sail from the port of Antioch at Seleucia. “After all,” the church leadership may have reasoned, “if the people of Antioch responded to the gospel as presented by Cypriots, then the Cypriots should respond to a mission led by one of their own.”

## Paul on Cyprus: Out of the Comfort Zone

### The Cypriot Context

Cyprus is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, measuring approximately 225 kilometers east-west by 95 kilometers north-south. Located in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, approximately 70 kilometers south of Turkey and 120 kilometers west of Syria, Cyprus is enveloped by Asia Minor and the Levantine coast. Fernand Braudel’s concept of *la longue durée*, “a history in slow motion from which permanent values can be detected” is a valuable tool for envisioning the Cyprus Paul and Barnabas encountered.<sup>18</sup> These “permanent values” are critical to understanding the island’s cultural identity. Such permanent values include its island identity, its strategic location, and its abundant natural resources. Throughout its history, Cyprus’s island identity provided a protective shell around Cyprus’s cultural identity. As an island, Cyprus forced invasions and colonization attempts to be episodic in nature, resulting in a millennia-long process of cultural negotiation between indigenous populations and newcomers, which produced acculturation rather than annihilation. In his perceptive study of Cypriot prehistory, A. Bernard Knapp emphasizes the fluctuating degree of “openness or boundedness” on Cyprus.<sup>19</sup>

### Ptolemaic Rule

Whenever dominance over the eastern Mediterranean was contested between rival powers, the control of Cyprus became a strategic necessity for the competing states. Following the death of Alexander the Great, Cyprus became a prize of war for the successor states, eventually coming under the full control of the Ptolemaic state of Egypt when the last local dynasts were suppressed. During the next two hundred years, the dynastic struggles of the Egyptian ruling house caused Cyprus to have periodic episodes of nearly independent rule under a claimant or exiled claimant to the Egyptian throne. The military ruled the island in the person of a high-ranking *stratēgos* and a mercenary garrison protected the island.<sup>20</sup>

Cyprus was an economic prize in the fourth century BC as well. The 2006 discovery of a mid-fourth-century-BC shipwreck off of the south coast at Mazatos underlines the maritime importance of the island, which had been first established archaeologically by the discovery of the Kyrenia ship in the late 1960s.<sup>21</sup> The Mazatos wreck appears to have carried mostly Aegean wine and may have been heading for one of the southern ports, such as Amathus or Kourion. The Kyrenia ship, which sank in the first quarter of the third century BC, likewise carried Aegean wine, but also Cypriot almonds, and was probably headed for the Syrian coast.

Nea Paphos (“Paphos” in common parlance in the first century), founded on the southwest coast at the end of the fourth century BC, became the Ptolemaic capital because of its naval advantages.<sup>22</sup> The remains of Roman Paphos mostly obscure the Ptolemaic city, with the exception of the necropolis called the “Tombs of the Kings” (actually of the societal elites of Paphos), a late fourth-century-BC pebble mosaic depicting Scylla, an appropriate theme for a naval-oriented city, and newly discovered frescoes from a third-century-BC house, which are evidence of the rich lifestyle of the elites of the province.<sup>23</sup> The new city was a product of imperial power, following the pattern established by Alexander. The establishment of Paphos was a direct challenge to the primacy of Salamis as the leading Cypriot city. Geography dictated the Ptolemaic choice. Salamis harbor was silting up and lay too close to the Syrian coast, whereas Paphos could be reached from Alexandria in a direct sail that avoided



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Seleucid territory. The establishment of Nea Paphos prevented the great pan-Cypriot sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite, located at Palaipaphos, approximately sixteen kilometers east of the newly established capital, from exercising its traditional political role in the region.<sup>24</sup>

Jody Gordon has applied postcolonial theory to the Ptolemaic and Roman empires on Cyprus.<sup>25</sup> His examination of the material expression of imperial ideology emphasizes the ruling powers' attempts to seduce Cyprus into becoming a compliant province, where the negotiation of cultural identity eventually produced a politically unified province masking internal complexity. By the first century BC, Ptolemaic rule was well established and Cyprus did not have an independent voice in the civil wars of the last century of the Roman Republic.

Rome first annexed Cyprus in 58 BC, joining it to Cilicia. Cicero was the most famous early governor of the joint province. However, Julius Caesar returned Cyprus to Ptolemaic rule in the person of his mistress, Cleopatra VII. This gift was confirmed in 36 BC by Mark Anthony. Cyprus returned to Roman rule after the battle of Actium in 31 BC.

Current excavations on Yeronisos Island, a small islet off the west coast of Cyprus, illuminate the last days of Ptolemaic rule under Cleopatra. On Yeronisos, Joan Breton Connelly has excavated the fragmentary remains of a late Hellenistic-style temple.<sup>26</sup> She hypothesizes that the temple was associated with boys' rites of passage, in light of the recovery of small limestone amulets normally depicted on "temple boy" sculptures from the Hellenistic world. She persuasively argues that the temple was dedicated to Cleopatra, the New Isis, and her son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion, the New Horus, marking his passage to adulthood. This would be in keeping with the Ptolemaic tradition of a royal cult, first established on Cyprus when Arsinoe Philadelphus, the wife of Ptolemy II, was deified on her death.

### Roman Rule

Augustus separated Cyprus from Egypt and made it a senatorial province, governed by a proconsul. By the beginning of the first century AD, Cyprus was already becoming a political backwater in the Roman Empire. The ancient sources are largely silent about

the island during the Roman period. In Mitford's words, "In 22 BC Cyprus entered upon more than three centuries of tranquil obscurity."<sup>27</sup> Inscriptions and coins together record only forty-eight proconsuls from 22 BC to AD 293, less than a sixth of the total. The proconsul served for only a one-year term; Mitford points out that this short period of office prevented corruption. In consequence, Cyprus probably was not seen as an attractive posting for a young Roman aristocrat who needed to line his pockets to advance his political career; we know of only six governors who went on to become consuls. Proconsuls had quaestors to assist them in public finance; the proconsul would normally have an advisory council and could summon locals for help. Cyprus was divided into four administrative districts.

Augustan coinage for Cyprus reflects a conscious attempt to integrate Cyprus into the empire. One Cypriot Roman coin uses a portrait bust of Augustus that echoes strongly back to the coinage of Julius Caesar.<sup>28</sup> This may have been a deliberate attempt to highlight Octavian's Caesarian heritage, designed to appeal to supporters of the defeated Ptolemaic monarchy. In the political hagiography of the Ptolemaic kingdom, Caesar was a "good Roman" who supported their queen and fathered their last king.

Despite political obscurity, Cyprus retained economic importance. Dimitrios Michaelides has emphasized the importance of Cyprus's economic role and the outsized contribution the island made to the Roman economy.<sup>29</sup> His survey of the economic role of Cyprus highlights the amount of perishable items Cyprus may have exported, evidence that has not survived in the archaeological record. The island continued to be a major source of copper; Augustus supplied King Herod with 150 talents in annual revenues from half of the mines and allowed the king to directly manage the other half.<sup>30</sup> There is no evidence of any imperial estates on Cyprus, but centuriation (laying out of agricultural field strips by imperial surveyors) near Salamis might indicate the reallocation of land confiscated from Ptolemaic elites.<sup>31</sup>

Urban life flourished in the Roman period on Cyprus. There is a great deal of archaeological and inscriptional evidence for extensive building in the first century AD in the Cypriot urban centers of Paphos, Salamis, Kourion, Amathus, and Soloi.

New temples, baths and aqueducts, public spaces, and markets were constructed. It is fair to say that Cyprus circa AD 50 was an urban world. Following the dictates of its island identity, the large urban centers of Cyprus lay on the coast. This coastal orientation was strengthened on Cyprus by the security situation under the *Pax Romana*, and would continue until the seventh century AD.

The Cypriot cities in the Roman period lacked the usual sense of strong local identity that most cities in the eastern empire evidenced. Cyprus did not have many urban dedications that exalted the city; for the most part, the inscriptions were dedicated to the imperial family on behalf of an individual, or the community, the *koinon kyprion*. A sign of the diminished role of urban identity is that in the reign of Claudius, the *koinon kyprion* was made responsible for minting the coins of Cyprus rather than individual cities.<sup>32</sup>

Religiously, Cyprus maintained its public attachment to the traditional male and female deities of Cyprus, with roots far back into prehistory. The Romans knew them as Aphrodite, Zeus, and Apollo. It is no surprise that the earliest segment of the Roman road system to be completed was the segment joining the temple of Apollo Hylates at Kourion with the temple of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos.<sup>33</sup> The Aphrodite sanctuary, founded in the Late Bronze Age, remained a major pilgrimage shrine under both Ptolemaic and Roman rule. The Romans continued the Ptolemaic policy of a ruler cult. As a Julian, Augustus was able to follow his adopted father, Julius Caesar, and claim descent from Venus, that is, Aphrodite. The great temple of Palaipaphos, with its claim to be the birthplace of the goddess, was an obvious candidate to become the “national” shrine of Roman Cyprus.

### Salamis

The site of Salamis has been excavated since the late nineteenth century, mainly by a major French mission, the British colonial authorities, and Dr. Vassos Karageorghis on behalf of the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus. The *coup d'état* against Cypriot President Makarios in July 1974 led to the invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus, including the site of Salamis, by the Turkish army.

Since that date, no internationally condoned archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the areas outside the direct control of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkish Republic archaeologists and Turkish Cypriot scholars have undertaken some excavation and survey work in the north of Cyprus, but these are not published internationally and have been condemned by UNESCO and the international community.

Salamis was excavated in the classical tradition of large-scale exposures with a focus on public space, the setting for the political and social elites of the ancient world. The primary aims of such excavations were chronology building to elucidate political history, and the recovery of works of art and ancient inscriptions. This reflected the desires of the Western (European and American) intelligentsia and the membership of the funding societies, including societal elites linked to the museum community.

Salamis was founded after the abandonment of the Bronze Age entrepôt of Enkomi around 1050 BC.<sup>34</sup> A powerful city-state in the Iron Age, Salamis was heavily involved in the Persian wars for control of the island. Blessed with a rich agricultural hinterland and a prime location along the shore facing the markets of Syria, Salamis was the dominant city politically, culturally, and economically before the time of Alexander.

Salamis was still in the comfort zone for Paul. First-century Salamis contained all the urban amenities characteristic of a successful and prosperous eastern Roman city. It had grown organically, rather than as a product of imperial fiat. Travelers entering the city from the harbor would pass through a major bath-gymnasium complex graced with fine statuary and elegant frescoes. Paul and Barnabas would then have encountered a magnificent theater with a seating capacity of fifteen thousand. Other excavated urban public spaces include the Hellenistic agora, still functioning in the Roman period, and the famous temple of Zeus Olympios, also founded in the Hellenistic period. The line of the classical/Hellenistic city wall, probably still functional in the Roman period, has been identified. Recent excavations by the University of Ankara have identified a major urban thoroughfare, lined with shops, reflecting the eastern Roman commercial pattern.<sup>35</sup>

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A population estimate based on the aqueduct capacity suggests a first-century population of around 120,000.<sup>36</sup> All of this would have been familiar and comfortable territory for Paul.

None of the excavation teams have yet focused on the domestic space of Salamis. We have no sense of the cityscape, how its visible amenities were linked, or what the arrangement of the neighborhoods was. Understandably, we lack any evidence of a synagogue, although Salamis had a very large Jewish population, who were encouraged to settle there under the Ptolemies. Acts 13:5 emphasizes the large Jewish population in the city when it reports that Paul and Barnabas proclaimed their message in the “Jewish synagogues” (plural). The late fourth-century basilica of St. Epiphanius, was built within a domestic quarter after a major earthquake in AD 342 severely damaged the city. In light of the placement of early Byzantine churches in urban neighborhoods in the Levantine mainland, one would normally argue that the neighborhood of the basilica of St. Epiphanius was likely to be Jewish and may have had a synagogue as a near neighbor.<sup>37</sup> However, the total destruction of the Cypriot Jewish community in the Diaspora revolt of AD 117 eliminates this line of research for understanding the Jewish neighborhoods of Salamis. Barnabas was a native of Salamis, and his purported tomb outside the city is now a major pilgrimage site on the island. Paul and Barnabas were almost certainly hosted by his family, but we cannot yet provide the proper domestic backdrop for this visit.

### Paphos

The book of Acts records that Paul and Barnabas traveled “through the whole island” (Acts 13:6) until they arrived in Paphos. The Roman road system on Cyprus was not completed until sometime in the early fourth century AD, but some sections were already in place by the Pauline visit.<sup>38</sup> The first segment completed under Augustus linked the temple of Apollo at Kourion and the temple of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos.<sup>39</sup> This had a strategic value, linking the political capital with the prime religious sanctuary of the island. A Roman governor would want quick access to the temple leadership, and more importantly, to the treasury. Undoubtedly the Roman roads followed Ptolemaic and older tracks where

available. David Gill points out that Luke’s phraseology implies a land journey without using the more efficient coastal shipping.<sup>40</sup> We do not know how long the passage across Cyprus took Paul and Barnabas. A direct journey from Salamis to Paphos, stopping only at night, would have taken about seven days. Since the missionaries had already spent some time in Salamis speaking in a number of synagogues, it is more likely that they did not feel time constraints. If it was a more leisurely passage, then a two-wheel vehicle was the likeliest form of transport for two commercial travelers such as Paul and Barnabas.<sup>41</sup> This cart could carry their trade goods, that is, tents. We know Paul worked during his future mission journeys; there was no reason why Barnabas and Paul could not have teamed up here to do business as well since it appears they had the time.

They almost certainly passed along the southern coastal road as this was a major track linking the coastal cities and the best way by foot to Paphos. The fourth/fifth-century text entitled *Acts of Barnabas* records a journey of Mark and Barnabas that supposedly retraced the original route of Paul and Barnabas. In this text they pass along the coastal road, seeing both the temple of Apollo at Kourion and the temple of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos. Although the coastal road was present in the first century AD, the itinerary of the *Acts of Barnabas* reflects the mature Roman road system of Late Antiquity. This text is more likely a product of the campaign of the institutionalized Cypriot Church to gain autocephalous status.<sup>42</sup>

The Cypriot journey of the apostle ended at Paphos, the capital of the Roman province. The city had been severely damaged in an earthquake, leading Augustus to intervene and help repair the city. In gratitude, the city was renamed Sebaste. Later Claudius would name the city Sebaste Claudia Flavia.<sup>43</sup>

The site of Paphos has been investigated since the 1960s by the Cyprus Department of Antiquities and a number of foreign missions. The discovery of the first urban house with intact mosaics was the result of a chance discovery during construction activity in 1962.<sup>44</sup> Since then, it has become clear that magnificent floor mosaics were common among the elite houses of Paphos.



The Roman city Paul entered is hard to envision and its remains are almost completely obscured by the monumental public buildings and magnificent urban villas of the second and third centuries AD. The city was walled and was laid out on a grid system with well-defined commercial and residential quarters. It was graced with an excellent harbor, which gave a strong impetus to trade.<sup>45</sup> The main civic theater, recently uncovered near the Kourion gate, seated 8,500. The magnificent House of Theseus is considered to be the residence of the Roman governor.<sup>46</sup> It is the largest residence known from Roman Cyprus, measuring at 120 × 80 meters, with more than a hundred rooms. It is thought to date to the third century AD and continues to be occupied after a series of earthquakes in the fourth century severely damaged the city, leading to the provincial government being moved to Salamis. Fragmentary evidence of a previous structure on the site may be all that remains of the governor's residence at the time of the Pauline visit. It is certainly possible that Sergius Paulus occupied another residence, which has not been located.

## The Encounter: Out of the Comfort Zone

The main focus of the account in Acts of the Cyprus mission is the encounter in Paphos between Paul and the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus.<sup>47</sup> Luke sees this as a seminal event, changing Paul's name and, in essence, his ministry. Although the change of name has been subjected to extensive speculation in biblical scholarship,<sup>48</sup> the impact on the ministry of Paul has been almost ignored. There seemed to be no rationale for a change in Paul's thinking at this time. The image of a province unified by Augustan *Romanitas*, such as in Mitford's magisterial survey of Roman Cyprus, has provided the cultural backdrop for scholarly analysis of the Pauline encounter. This homogenization of Roman Cyprus has obscured any suggestion of a new environment or new pressures that might have produced a Cypriot impact on Pauline theology.

### A Cultural Divide

An examination of recent scholarship on Roman Cyprus suggests that the province was not as unified in the first century as previously thought. The elite

of Paphos appear to have embraced elements of a separate cultural identity from the rest of Cyprus. New studies indicate an east/west economic divide in Roman Cyprus between Paphos and the eastern two-thirds of the island. Anthi Kaldelis's doctoral study of Roman trade amphorae found on Cyprus indicates the complex interchange network Cyprus took part in.<sup>49</sup> Kaldelis's analysis shows that Amathus and Salamis traded heavily with Antioch, Cilicia, and the Levant, while Paphos looked strongly west with a high percentage of imports from Italy and Rome itself; this is particularly strong in the first century. The evidence presented by John Lund in his studies of Roman fine ware suggests a similar division.<sup>50</sup> The Paphos region was the production center for Cypriot Sigillata fine ware, while Eastern Sigillata ware produced in Syria dominate the fine ware sub-assemblages of Salamis and Amathus.

Roman coinage under the Julio-Claudians also hints at an east/west social/cultural divide that the first-century Romans were aware of. Under Augustus, the primary mint appears to have been in the provincial capital of Nea Paphos, and the coins seem to have been widely circulated. Gordon points out that the iconography and legends were presumably selected by Roman officials and mint officials and thus can be read to illustrate their goals for and attitude about Cyprus and Cypriots.<sup>51</sup> On this evidence, Rome was aware of a provincial divide between east and west. A series of coins produced under Augustus has two distinct reverse images: the temple of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos and the temple of Zeus at Salamis, built under imperial patronage of the Ptolemies.

The concurrent issuing of a "Salamis" coin may have been an attempt to acknowledge or recognize a religious divide in the province. The Palaipaphos temple image was meant to address the local elite in the Paphos area, while the statue of Zeus reverse was intended to appease Salaminians, thus placating both segments of the island.<sup>52</sup>

Paphos appears to be a particularly "Roman" district. Elsewhere in the eastern empire, depictions of temples housing the imperial cult are common on contemporary coin issues. On the basis of this, and the obvious "family" links of the Julians to Aphrodite, many scholars have suggested that the imperial



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ritual may have been somehow blended with the island's primary cult to Aphrodite.<sup>53</sup>

The east/west dichotomy is also hinted at by Parks in her discussion of the second use of the Aphrodite temple/Zeus Salaminos on coin issues by Drusus Minor.<sup>54</sup> Drusus, Tiberius's son, actually combined both images on one coin, further encouraging a unified province. Parks states that both images may have been used "to keep the people of each city happy." Barnabas seems to show evidence of the Cypriot cultural divide in his life as Luke depicts it in Acts. Barnabas, like Salamis itself, has an eastern orientation. He is at home in Jerusalem, Antioch, and eastern Cyprus, but when the story shifts to Paphos, Paul becomes the spokesman and leader. Luke portrays Paul as more open to the cultural challenge of the pagan Roman world than Barnabas, who appears out of his depth. This could also be evidence of a subtle anti-Roman bias in Barnabas, perhaps because he was from Salamis, the quintessential Hellenistic city of Cyprus. Fergus Millar notes the value of the New Testament writings for their insight into the negotiation of identity between subject and ruler in the Roman Empire, and Paul and Barnabas may epitomize this negotiation in a Cypriot context.<sup>55</sup>

### The Encounter

Paul and Barnabas are invited by the governor to discuss their beliefs in Acts 13:7. This is the first record of a conversation between Paul and a high Roman official, certainly not a comfortable moment at this point in the apostle's life. Although dating after the Pauline visit, the House of Theseus does provide us with an idea of how the Roman governors wanted to display themselves and how a visitor would have been forcibly reminded of Roman power and authority. The visitors' atrium was provided with benches and was dominated by a statue of a nude Venus armed with a bow. It has been suggested that this statue may also represent Roma, combining the main goddess of Cyprus with the titular goddess of the empire.<sup>56</sup>

It is most likely that Paul and Barnabas are invited to be part of the after-dinner "entertainment" at a banquet given by the governor. Philosophical readings and discussions would be a normal part of the evening at the home of an "intelligent man" — one

who was educated, spoke Greek, was interested in philosophical questions, and therefore was open to a new faith. The inclusion of the Jewish magician Bar-Jesus makes it almost a certainty that this was more of a social occasion than an official meeting held during office hours. The rival philosophers would be pitted against one another for the enjoyment of the dinner guests and, in the governor's case, out of an honest interest in the subject. If this is a correct interpretation of the setting for the conversation, then this is also the first time Paul has been invited to a pagan Gentile's house for dinner; another experience outside of his "comfort zone."

A recent study of Roman Cypriot magic texts from the site of Amathus makes clear that Luke's account of the contest between Bar-Jesus and Paul accurately reflects a Cypriot milieu.<sup>57</sup> Cypriot magic was often employed to prevent someone from speaking, and blindness could be used as a preventative measure in these cases; in the Acts account, Bar-Jesus is trying to prevent Paul from speaking to the governor about the faith; so in typical Lukan irony, the magician is struck down by the very weapon he was probably trying to use against Paul. After some discussion, Sergius Paulus "believes," but he is not baptized (Acts 13:12). It is likely that he has had a personal conversion, making Jesus his personal deity, while still maintaining the religious aspects of his public role as governor.

### The Impact on Paul

When Paul entered Paphos he crossed an economic, social, and political boundary that divided the province into an eastern-oriented zone and a western-oriented zone. It is now reasonable to propose that in Paphos, Paul left behind the economic, social, and religious comfort zone in which he had spent his entire Christian ministry. Therefore, when Paul met the governor, it is certainly possible that he was for the first time forced to confront new possibilities in his Christian mission. The positive results of his encounter with the governor, in contrast to the apparent failure of the synagogue mission within the Pauline comfort zone in Salamis, may provide the catalyst for a fundamental change in the Pauline ministry: Paul now embraces the truly pagan world as his mission field. In Pisidian Antioch he first goes to the synagogue, where he preaches his "classic" outreach

sermon to the Diaspora Jews. Luke records that when his sermon is challenged by some of the Jews, Paul responds, "We now turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

Paul's retelling of his conversion in the Acts accounts (Acts 22 and 26) makes his call to Gentile ministry to be contemporaneous with his conversion.<sup>58</sup> This is the central message of the vision Paul had in the temple during his first visit to Jerusalem. However, he may have been resisting this call until he saw the work of the Holy Spirit in Paphos. The first letter Paul writes to the churches he may have visited on this trip, Galatians, shows his embrace of the call and is a defense of his Gentile ministry. Paul in his own letters defines his own ministry as "Gentile" in aim from the very beginning. It is possible that Paul is indulging in a little hindsight here, reading his growing understanding of his true calling back into his original conversion and the beginnings of his ministry.

Luke consistently has Paul first reaching out to Jews, and only after he has been rejected does he reach out to Gentiles. In Luke's report of Paul's defense before Agrippa, he quotes the apostle: "First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea and to the Gentiles also" (Acts 26:20). Notice the separation of the dwellers in Damascus and Jerusalem from the Gentiles. The implication is that he has reached out to his fellow Jews as well as to Gentiles.

This cultural shock of Paphos also eliminates much of the perceived "tension" between Luke's record of Paul's practice of first seeking out a Jewish audience and Paul's self-proclaimed call to the Gentiles. It also may be a semantic difference between Luke and Paul. Luke may think of real "Gentile" ministry as outreach to untouched pagans. It is possible, however, that Paul's initial "Gentile" outreach was confined to the already acclimatized Gentiles (in religious terms), who have already been attracted to Judaism—the so-called "God-fearers" who would have been most easily encountered in the synagogue.<sup>59</sup> Paul may also be referring to Diaspora Jews who have shed their religious identity and have been Hellenized. A recent sociological study of the early church concludes that Diaspora Jews were the overwhelming majority of converts in the first centuries of the faith.<sup>60</sup> In this scenario,

Luke is accurate in that Paul first targeted the synagogue, and Paul is correct in that he specifically targeted the "Gentile" Hellenized secular Jews and the Greek converts to Judaism.

### Lukan Accuracy

Current archaeological evidence demonstrates that Luke's understanding of mid-first-century Cyprus is accurate and nuanced. The cultural shock Paul experienced in Paphos provides the unexplained justification for the change in Paul's theology. The east/west cultural divide that Paul encountered in Roman Cyprus was strongest in the first half of the first century, exactly when Luke places Paul on Cyprus. Archaeological evidence for the east/west cultural divide after the mid-first century lessens, particularly in the numismatic evidence. Following the reign of Claudius, Cypriot coinage minted on the island is labeled as the product of the *koinon Kyprion* and indicates that the elites of the Cypriot cities are presenting a unified message, acting in concert with Rome.

The vibrant mid-first-century Jewish community with strong ties to Judea depicted by Luke also is supported by the evidence of Cypriot coinage. Judean coins on Cyprus are "quite common" during the Julio-Claudian period, but almost disappear at the time of Vespasian.<sup>61</sup> By the early second century Judean imports completely disappear from the archaeological record and are replaced by Roman imperial coins minted in the west.<sup>62</sup> This is stark evidence of the complete destruction of the local Jewish community in the Diaspora revolt of AD 117. Although John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, in a recent study of Paul, recognize that Luke may include "correct details, accurate places and even travel sequences," they conclude negatively: "Luke's Acts were written in the 80s or 90s, several decades after Paul's time, and Luke gives him an overall interpretation from within his geographical situation, historical understanding and theological vision."<sup>63</sup> The picture of mid-first-century Cyprus derived from the archaeological data challenges this confident assertion and strongly improves the case for the book of Acts to be an accurate reflection of a mid-first-century milieu. When measured by the current state of archaeological understanding, Luke's account of Paul's Cyprus visit reflects a

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cultural geography that can be found only during the mid-first century.

This new understanding of mid-first-century Cyprus also provides a psychologically clear justification for Paul's radical theological vision of the Gentile ministry. When Paul returns to Antioch from his Cypriot mission, he has been transformed, the gospel message has been transformed, and as a result, the "followers of this Way" (Acts 22:4) will be transformed. "On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). The invitation to Jews to accept the Messiah of God has become an open door to the entire pagan world, and a Jewish messianic sect will become the Christian church. The crucible for all of these changes is Cyprus. ★

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Thomas W. Davis conducted extensive research on the archaeology of Cyprus during his tenure as director of the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute. He took up his position on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for the fall term of 2011. He is director of excavations at Kourion.

<sup>2</sup>Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New International Version, 1984 edition.

<sup>3</sup>Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977). Bruce remains my guide to all things Pauline.

<sup>5</sup>Henri Seyrig, "Séleucus I et la fondation de la monarchie syrienne," *Syria* 47 (1970): 290–311.

<sup>6</sup>Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 2001), 157.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Stillwell, ed., *Antioch-on-the-Orontes III: The Excavations of 1937–1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 7. The Antioch excavations were a classic example of colonialist treatment of archaeological heritage. The international consortium of museum and universities sponsoring the excavation removed half of the recovered mosaics (more than three hundred) to their respective museums.

<sup>8</sup>Ball, *Rome in the East*, 155.

<sup>9</sup>Christine Kondoleon, ed., *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup>Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>11</sup>Alan Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott, *The Augustan Empire*, 2nd ed., The Cambridge Ancient

History 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 714.

<sup>12</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 12.

<sup>13</sup>Ball, *Rome in the East*, 157.

<sup>14</sup>Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: Society of Biblical Literature, 1978), 1.

<sup>15</sup>Bernadette Brooten, "The Jews of Ancient Antioch," in Kondoleon, *Antioch*, 29–38.

<sup>16</sup>Ball, *Rome in the East*, 262.

<sup>17</sup>Stillwell, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes III*.

<sup>18</sup>Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 23.

<sup>19</sup>A. Bernard Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus: Identity, Insularity, and Connectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>20</sup>Veronica Tatton-Brown, "The Hellenistic Period," in *Footprints in Cyprus*, ed. David Hunt (London: Triglyph, 1990), 98–109.

<sup>21</sup>Michael Katzev, "The Kyrenia Shipwreck," *Expedition* 11, no. 2 (1969): 54–9; Stella Demesticha, "The 4th-Century-BC Mazatos Shipwreck, Cyprus: A Preliminary Report," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* (2010): 1–21. The final report on the excavation and conservation of the Kyrenia ship currently is being completed by Katzev's widow, Susan Katzev, and the architect of the excavation, Helena Wylde Swiny. I was privileged to be on board the University of Cyprus dive boat for a morning during the Mazatos-shipwreck 2010 field season.

<sup>22</sup>Danielle Parks, "The Roman Coinage of Cyprus," *The Numismatic Report* 34–35 (2003–2004): 1–316.

<sup>23</sup>Claire Balandier, personal communication 2010.

<sup>24</sup>Jolanta Mlynarczyk, *Nea Paphos III, Nea Paphos in the Hellenistic Period* (Warsaw: The Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 1990).

<sup>25</sup>Jody Gordon, "Why Empires Matter: A Postcolonial Archaeology of Cultural Identity in Hellenistic and Roman Cyprus" (paper presented at the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus, 2010). This forms part of his dissertation to be submitted to the Department of Classics of the University of Cincinnati.

<sup>26</sup>Joan Breton Connelly, "Twilight of the Ptolemies: Egyptian Presence on Late Hellenistic Yeronisos," in *Egypt and Cyprus in Antiquity*, ed. D. Michaelides, V. Kassianidou, and R. S. Merrillees (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 194–209.

<sup>27</sup>T. B. Mitford, "Roman Cyprus," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 2.7.2, 1285–1388, esp. 1295.

<sup>28</sup>Parks, "Roman Coinage of Cyprus"; Gordon, "Why Empires Matter," suggests the resemblance of the Augustus bust on the obverse of the coin to the iconography of Julius Caesar.

<sup>29</sup>Demetrios Michaelides, "The Economy of Cyprus during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," in *The Development of the Cypriot Economy from the Prehistoric Period to the Present Day*, ed. V. Karageorghis and D. Michaelides (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus, 1996), 139–52.

<sup>30</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.128.

<sup>31</sup>Mitford, "Roman Cyprus," 1296, n. 30.

<sup>32</sup>Parks, "Roman Coinage of Cyprus."



- <sup>33</sup>T. Bekker-Nielsen, *The Roads of Ancient Cyprus* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2004), 108.
- <sup>34</sup>Vassos Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus: Homeric, Hellenistic and Roman* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969).
- <sup>35</sup>This information is from personal visits to the site.
- <sup>36</sup>George F. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 42.
- <sup>37</sup>Eric Meyers, "Early Judaism and Christianity in the Light of Archaeology," *Biblical Archaeologist* 51, no. 2 (1988): 69–79.
- <sup>38</sup>Bekker-Nielsen, *Roads of Ancient Cyprus*.
- <sup>39</sup>T. B. Mitford, "Three Milestones of Western Cyprus," *American Journal of Archaeology* 70 (1966): 89–99.
- <sup>40</sup>David W. J. Gill, "Paul's Travels through Cyprus (Acts 13:4–12)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 219–28.
- <sup>41</sup>Bekker-Nielsen, *Roads of Ancient Cyprus*, 72–4.
- <sup>42</sup>Thomas W. Davis, "Earthquakes and the Crises of Faith: Social Transformation in Late Antique Cyprus," *Buried History* 46 (2010): 3–14.
- <sup>43</sup>Mitford, "Roman Cyprus," 1310.
- <sup>44</sup>Mlynarczyk, *Nea Paphos III*.
- <sup>45</sup>John R. Leonard and Robert L. Hohlfelder, "Paphos Harbor, Past and Present: The 1991–1992 Underwater Survey" (report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, 1993), 365–79.
- <sup>46</sup>This is not yet well published. The most accessible discussion is by W. A. Daszewski, *Guide to the Paphos Mosaics* (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus, 1988), 52–63.
- <sup>47</sup>The three possible inscriptions that may attest to his governorship are well summarized by Alanna Nobbs, "Cyprus," in *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting*, vol. 2, *The Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 279–90. The Roman Tiber inscription is the most likely.
- <sup>48</sup>This goes all the way back to Jerome and Augustine. A good summary of the discussion of Paul's name is by C. J. Hemer, "The Name of Paul," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 179–83.
- <sup>49</sup>Anthi Kaldelis, "Roman Amphorae from Cyprus: Integrating Trade and Exchange in the Mediterranean" (PhD thesis, University College London, 2008).
- <sup>50</sup>John Lund, "On the Circulation of Goods in Hellenistic and Early Roman Cyprus: The Ceramic Evidence," in *Panayia Ematousa II: Political, Cultural, Ethnic and Social Relations in Cyprus: Approaches to Regional Studies*, ed. L. Wreidt Sorensen and K. Winther Jacobsen (Athens: Danish Institute of Athens, 2006), 31–49.
- <sup>51</sup>Gordon, "Why Empires Matter."
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup>Mitford, "Roman Cyprus."
- <sup>54</sup>Parks, "Roman Coinage of Cyprus," 68.
- <sup>55</sup>Fergus Millar, *The Roman Empire and Its Neighbours*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1991), 81.
- <sup>56</sup>Gordon, "Why Empires Matter."
- <sup>57</sup>Andrew T. Wilburn, "Materia Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus and Spain" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005).
- <sup>58</sup>Bruce, *Paul*, 87.
- <sup>59</sup>Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 5, *Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).
- <sup>60</sup>Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).
- <sup>61</sup>Parks, "Roman Coinage of Cyprus," 142.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>63</sup>John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005). With unconscious irony they precede the sentence quoted above with the phrase "Put positively."

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## A Physics Challenge

Science is constantly moving. **Robert Mann**, professor of physics at the University of Waterloo and former president of both the Canadian Association of Physicists and the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation, has written an intriguing description of the latest developments in physics along with insights and challenges that they may raise for Christian faith. It can be read at [www.asa3.org](http://www.asa3.org) or [www.CSCA.ca](http://www.CSCA.ca).

This article is intended as an invitation. Readers are encouraged to take up one of the insights or challenges, or maybe a related one that was not mentioned, and draft an article that contributes to the conversation. These can be sent to Mann at [robertbmann@sympatico.ca](mailto:robertbmann@sympatico.ca). He will send the best essays on to peer review and then from those we will select some for publication in a physics theme issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. For full consideration for inclusion in the theme issue, electronic files should be received by Mann before December 31, 2012.