

BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE: POSTCOLONIAL MISSION
IN ACTS 16: 8-10

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Although some observers in recent centuries have misunderstood Christianity as a European movement, first century observers could not have easily imagined this misconception. Instead, they viewed Palestine (and its larger province of Syria) and what we call Asia Minor as parts of Asia. Moreover, the one scene in which Acts could possibly describe the entrance of the gospel into Europe shows it originating from western Asia. The traditional division of continents has always been arbitrary (Greeks counted themselves as in Europe and distinguished themselves from "Asian" peoples to their east and later "Africa" to their south). Nevertheless, the division appeared significant to the many people in the Roman Empire who accepted Greek categories, and Greeks treated the Troad as the traditional entry point into Asia (the world to the west of the Greek homeland).

Although Luke does not explicitly use the language of Europe or Asia here, even a minimally culturally literate Greek audience would understand Troas' strategic role in these boundaries. This site further evoked both the legendary conflict between the Achaeans and Troy and the Persian conquests of Alexander, both of which Greeks conceptualized as "European" invasions of "Asia." By contrast, Rome detested "Asian" religions like Judaism. It is thus possible that Luke's original audience¹ would envision a reverse movement of an Asian faith into Europe in what we might today call "anticolonial" terms.² Although the Alexander allusion remains less than certain, for an audience in the Roman Empire the "Asian" geographic provenance of the gospel would be beyond dispute.

¹I envision his ideal audience as from somewhere in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean world, probably especially in the north or west Aegean region. If the audience is from the eastern Aegean, they would view themselves as part of "Asia."

²'scholars emphasizing "postcolonial readings" should find fertile soil for exploration in this passage.

1. Troas' Importance and Location

After a long journey from the interior of southern Asia Minor, Paul and his companions reached Alexandria Troas. Because Troas was not far from the coast, their "descent" to it in Acts 16:8 is aptly phrased.³ Although not yet certain of where to proceed, they probably entered Troas deliberately (16:8). It had a large artificial harbor that made it strategic for travel between the east and the west.⁴ This strategic location suggests that Paul and Silas may have hoped to sail from there; it was not likely a destination reached merely accidentally from their previous locations (16:6-8).⁵ That is, the missionaries probably did not intend Troas as their final destination.

Although Alexandria Troas in Paul's day was still overshadowed by the reputation of the nearby Troy (Ilium) of the legendary past, it was hardly forgettable on its own merit. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Alexandria Troas constituted the largest city in the Troad, the region of Troy.⁶ Most of the city remains unexcavated, but it is thought to cover over 1000 acres, its ancient walls once five miles around.⁷ The limited archaeological data support the closeness of Strabo's estimate for the walls, and some, estimating 100 persons per acre, have surmised 100,000 inhabitants. This estimate may well be too high, but clearly it was a significant city.⁸

³C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994-1998), 771.

⁴E.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 579.

⁵Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (ed. Conrad H. Gempf; WUNT 49; Tiibingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 112 (esp. 112-13 n. 29).

⁶Stephen Mitchell, "Archaeology in Asia Minor 1990-1998," *Archaeological Reports* 45 (1998-1999): 125-92 (here 138). On Troas, see further Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 331-335; E. M. Blaiklock, *Cities of the New Testament* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965), 35-38; Paul R. Trebilco, "Asia," 291-362 in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf; vol. 2 in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 357-59; more extensively, Peter Frisch, ed., *Die Inschriften von Ilium* (IGSK vol. 3; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1975). For other towns in the Troad, see Pliny *N.H.* 5.33.125-27.

⁷Fant and Reddish, *Sites*, 333.

⁸Colin J. Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," *TynBul* 26 (1975): 79-112 (here 87-88).

Although the city bore the name "Alexandria" after its founding in the fourth century BCE, the emperor Augustus officially titled it "Colonia Augusta Troas" or "Colonia Augusta Troadensium" (CZL 3.39),⁹ recalling the grandeur of its past. "Troas" was thus Alexandria Troas's preferred official title in this period.

2. Troas' Association with Troy

When an ancient audience heard of Paul's stay in Troas, they would recall earlier Troy. Although they were often confused in antiquity, the Roman colony of Troas was distinct from the site of ancient Troy, still inhabited as the town of Ilium. Colin Hemer notes that Troas could never "escape the historic and civic prestige of Ilium" to the north, "which continued to hold the primacy in a religious league of confederate cities."¹⁰

Educated persons recognized that Ilium, not Alexandria Troas, was the site of Homer's tales (Pliny N.H. 5.33.315). Ilium itself was not small. Archaeologists have observed 47 blocks of Roman Ilium, most of them 360 Roman feet north-south by 180 Roman feet east-west. Nevertheless, the ties between the two "Troys" were significant; for example, over two centuries earlier (c. 216 BCE), Troas sent a relief force of 4000 that delivered Ilium from the attacking Gauls.¹¹

Despite its distance of ten or fifteen miles south-southwest from Homer's Troy,¹² the continuity between later Troas and its nearby, famous past endured in popular thought.¹³ This Roman colony held the name precisely to recall this past. In fact, Rome traced its founding to Trojans (especially in Virgil's *Aeneid*), and some cities in Phrygia claimed that

⁹Hemer, *Acts in History*, 179.

¹⁰Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," 94, also noting that in the first century it appears that Ilium freely produced coins, but Troas did not. The wealthier part of the late Roman city apparently faced the Dardanelles (Mitchell, "Archaeology," 138).

¹¹Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," 88 (citing Polybius 5.111.3-4).

¹²From the map in Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," 86 (plus a comment on 92), Ilium appears fewer than ten miles north of Alexandria Troas.

¹³With regard to continuity in Ilium itself: some supposed that the Palladium (Athena's image) might have remained in later Ilium, unless Diomedes and Odysseus actually succeeded in carrying it off (Appian *Hist. rom.* 12.8.53; despite the city's destruction!)

Phrygian heroes in the Trojan War had founded them.¹⁴ Troas would naturally evoke the same connection, especially for an audience outside the Troad. Some believed that the fallen heroes of the Trojan War still lived in the area of Troy.¹⁵

Greeks recognized Troy as the subject of their most famous and widely read epic, the *Iliad*,¹⁶ and allusions to the story pervaded Greek literature.¹⁷ Well over a millennium after the purported time of its fall, educated people at banquets might take turns reciting the final leaders of Troy (Athen. *Deipn.* 10.457F); those who thought of Troy in their own day typically associated it with its past suffering (Athen. *Deipn.* 8.351a).¹⁸ Linked with the famous past, both Alexandria Troas and Troy remained popular destinations for ancient tourism.¹⁹

Given the ancient Greek association of the Troad with the Greek point of entry into Asia, Greeks familiar with the *Iliad* (Greeks' most popular work) and the famous conquest of Asia by Alexander of Macedon (treated below) would view this as a strategic geographic point in the narrative.²⁰ But whereas the traditional Greek story line was a military invasion of Asia (under Alexander spreading Greek civilization),²¹ here messengers of what would be perceived as an Asian faith bring that faith to Europe.

3. The Troad, Europe and Asia

One nuance associated with Troy was that it guarded the Hellespont, since at least Homeric times the Greek boundary between Asia and Europe

¹⁴Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1:208.

¹⁵Especially emphasized in Philostratus *Hrk.* 2.11; 11.7; 18.1-2; but the local tradition of Hector's appearances appears in Maximus of Tyre 9.7.

¹⁶Philostratus *Hrk.* 25.13, complains that Homer departs from this stated subject after *Il.* 22. Homer's *actual* explicit theme in the *Iliad* is the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles (*Il.* 1.6-7) and how Achilles' stubborn anger led to many deaths (1.1-5).

¹⁷E.g., Lucian *Prof. P.S.* 20.

¹⁸In Dio Chrys. *Or.* 33.8, the actor apparently would have acted out Troy's fall, to the displeasure of his audience in Ilium; Troy was among the most prominent cities to fall in Lucian *Charon* 23.

¹⁹Detlev Dormeyer and Florencio Galindo, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Ein Kommentar für die Praxis* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk. 2003), 245.

²⁰Believers in Troas itself might envision this less so, since their local experience would not be limited to their knowledge of ancient traditions.

²¹In reality, fusing Greek and Asian cultures.

(e.g., Varro 7.2.21).²² Greeks crossed via the Hellespont into "Asia" (e.g., Polyb. 4.46.1), as Persians did into "Europe" (Lysias Or. 2.28, §193). But whereas the Greeks invaded Asia in the eras of the *Iliad* and (from Macedonia) of Alexander,²³ now the gospel comes from Asia to Greece, Macedonia and the rest of Europe. Greek and Roman literature normally portray movements from Europe to Asia as more positive than the reverse; Jewish people, however, would think differently, as would those adopted into and committed to a Jewish movement.

Greeks and Romans viewed the legendary Trojan War as a clash between Europe and Asia.²⁴ Thus, for example, a Roman tragedy could have a Trojan lament the loss of "mighty Asia's" pillar.²⁵ For some, this war became a prototype of the continuing clash between Greek and eastern cultures.²⁶

In more recent history, Greek intellectuals similarly viewed Alexander's crossing the Hellespont as marking his entrance into Asia from Europe.²⁷ Thus the war between Alexander and Persia was between "Europe" and "Asia,"²⁸ and some alleged that Alexander struck his spear into the ground to claim Asia as his conquest (Ps-Callisth. Alex. 1.28). Thus Roman observers claimed that Alexander conquered Asia but never attempted to conquer

²²Between Macedonia and the part of the world including Syria (hence Judea), Phoenicia and Egypt in Pausanias Geog. 1.6.5. On western Turkey as the boundary for Asia, see e.g., Hilary Le Cornu with Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts* (Jerusalem: Nitivvah Bible Instruction Ministry, 2003), 78.

²³Although Demosthenes Philip. 3.31 complained that Macedonians were not only barbarians but even unfit as slaves, subsequent Hellenistic civilization treated both Macedonians and the "hellenized" ruling class in Asia as culturally Greek.

²⁴Virgil *Aen.* 7.224; Ovid *Am.* 2.12.18; Apollodorus *Epit.* 3.1; Maximus of Tyre 35.4; Menander Rhetor 2.13, 423.17-19; Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* 1.1. One could even depict the mythical flight of Jason and Medea from Colchis, from the generation preceding the Trojan War, as Europe opposing Asia (Valerius Flaccus 8.396).

²⁵Seneca *Troj.* 6-7.

²⁶From an ethnocentric Greek perspective (which classified the non-hellenized as "barbarians"), the Trojan War was a war of "Europe" against "barbarians" (Philost. *Hrk.* 31.2). This war became the prototype of any subsequent wars between Greeks and barbarians, particularly those across the Hellespont (Philost. *Hrk.* 23.12: cf. 23.16).

²⁷Polybius 3.6.4; Menander Rhetor 2.17, 444.4-5. Cf. Alexander's alleged critique of his father's ambition to cross Europe to Asia (Plutarch *Alex.* 9.5, complaining that he was too drunk even to move between couches).

²⁸Quintus Curtius 4.1.38.

Europe (including Italy; Livy 9.16.19), or noted that the Macedonian empire controlled large parts of Europe and most of Asia in its heyday (Livy 31.1.7).²⁹ Some Greeks viewed Alexander's invasion of "Asia" against the Persians as a deliberate reminiscence of Achilles' fight against Troy. Tradition insisted that Alexander himself (who viewed himself as a second Achilles) recalled this comparison, invoking the spirit of Achilles against the Persians.³⁰ "Alexandria" Troas bore Alexander's name (although Luke omits "Alexandria"), and tradition claimed that the city was founded in 334 BCE, i.e., during his lifetime.³¹

Greeks and Romans counted Persia as "Asia,"³² Persian attacks on Greece as Asian designs on Europe,³³ and their defeats after invading Greece as Europe's conquest of Asia.³⁴ Because Greeks and Romans often encountered Asian kingdoms in periods of the latter's weakness, Asia sometimes received the unfair caricature of cowardice as against Europe and Africa, which they claimed proved harder to subdue (Appian *Hist. rom.* pref. 9).³⁶ (Romans knew better than to believe the caricature when applying

²⁹Livy elsewhere couples Greece and Asia (37.53.7; 38.48.3; 38.51.3) and contrasts Asia (esp. Asia Minor) with Europe (esp. Greece; 34.58.2-3; 37.53.13; 37.54.20).

³⁰Plutarch *Alex.* 15.4; Philostratus *Hrk.* 53.16. He allegedly took a sacred shield from the Trojan temple of Athena (Arrian *Alex.* 6.9.3).

³¹Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," 81; cf. Menander Rhetor 2.17, 444.8-9. The tradition has been questioned; cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 311; see also Pliny *N.H.* 5.33.124.

³²E.g., Aeschylus *Pers.* 73 (they ruled Asia; Greece, by contrast, is in Europe, *Pers.* 799); Aelius Aristides *Panath.* 13, 157D-158D.

³³Lysias *Or.* 2.21, §192; 2.28, §193; Cornelius Nepos 1 (Miltiades), 3.4; 17 (Agesilaus), 2.1; Philostratus *Hrk.* 28.11.

³⁴Thucydides 1.89.2 (Persians retreating from Europe); Valerius Maximus 6.9. ext. 2; Cornelius Nepos 2 (Themistocles), 5.3.

³⁵Yet even Xenophon, whose *Anabasis* demonstrated Persia's military weakness (providing the groundwork for Alexander's later invasion), respected Persia's glorious past (fictionalized in his *Cyr.*).

³⁶"Barbarian" Asia opposed Greece's greater glory (Valerius Maximus 4.6. ext. 3). The frequent exclusive prejudice for classical rather than ancient Near Eastern foundations for modern western civilization (e.g., Max Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* [trans. R. I. Frank; London: New Left Books, 1976]; see Guy Oakes, "On Max Weber's *Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*," *British Journal of Sociology* 28 [2, June 1977]: 242-43) follows too readily the classical Greek division of the world.

it to their dreaded Parthian rivals, however.)³⁷ Yet when Gauls crossed the Hellespont to invade the Troad, Alexandria Troas' inhabitants fought back (Polyb. 5.111.1-7), providing a good warning to Europe's "barbarians" not to invade "Asia" too eagerly (5.111.7).

Culturally, Asia Minor was increasingly Hellenized and Romanized; but symbolically, its heritage, epitomized especially by Troy and the wider ancient empire of Persia, could be treated differently. After the hellenistic cultural revival of the second century, those who wove legends reported the enduring hatred toward Troy of the Greek hero Achilles' ghost, still hovering near Troy (Philost. *V.A.* 4.11; *Hrk.* 56.6-10) and the continuing Greek perception that Troy was hostile territory (Philost. *Hrk.* 53.13).³⁸ Scholars have argued that the location of the Protesilaos cult on the Hellespont suited that hero's role of avenger of non-Greek incursions against Greeks, guarding Europe from barbarian Asia.³⁹

4. Between Asia and Europe?

Some doubt that we should overemphasize the division between Asia and "Europe" here, since the Greek language was dominant in both Macedonia and most of urban Asia Minor, and Philippi and Troas were both Roman colonies.⁴⁰ A stronger reason to doubt the distinction's relevance here is that Luke does not mention it; the context applies the title "Asia" only to the Roman province in the narrowest sense (16:6), and the title "Europe" appears nowhere in the New Testament.⁴¹

We should also keep in mind the serious danger of understanding these categories anachronistically. For example, Asia Minor and Greece belonged to the shared cultural sphere of the Hellenistic fusion of Greek and "Asian" civilizations; northern Europe, by contrast, was entirely outside the Hellenistic cultural sphere (though not unknown to them), like China or

³⁷See comment below.

³⁸Pliny N.H. 5.33.125 reported an earlier monument to Achilles near his tomb in the Troad: cf. Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* 4.11.

³⁹Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), lix. Still, Philostratus also recognizes the continuing power of the hero Hector (*Hrk.* 19.3-7, esp. his help in 19.4 and vengeance in 19.5-7).

⁴⁰See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 486.

⁴¹Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," 99-100.

African Meroë. (In fact, northern Europe, such as Germany, was in a sense less in their sphere of valuable trade than India⁴² and China,⁴³ though less distant and affording more direct contact.)⁴⁴ Cultural spheres varied from one period to another, and cannot be identified with traditional continental divisions, which simply reflect 'ancient Greek geographic prejudices.'⁴⁵ The ancient Jewish population, central to the biblical story, by this period spanned both Roman and Parthian empires, thoroughly ignoring old Greek categories.

Having acknowledged these caveats, however, it remains the case that most Roman and urban eastern Mediterranean audiences would readily recognize the symbolic historic division between civilizations represented by the movement from Troas to Macedonia. Although the phrase "Asia" by itself in 16:6 does not imply "Europe" as a contrast,⁴⁶ I suspect that few members of Luke's audience, familiar with the most prominent stories of Greek culture, would fail to think of Asia and Europe when hearing of Troas and Macedonia in 16:8-9.

That Luke's culturally literate ideal audience would know such divisions is certain. Greeks divided the world into Asia (the civilizations to their east with which they had once fought bitter conflicts), Europe, and often (on the south of the Mediterranean sea) Africa; the distinction continued in later

⁴²For trade connections, see e.g., Pliny N.H. 8.4.7-8; 9.54.106-9; 12.8.17; 12.41.84; Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1971; London: G. Bell & Sons. 1954). 115-71; Hans-Joachim Drexhage, "India, trade with," 6:773-777 in *Brill's New Pauly*; Lionel Casson, *The Ancient Mariners: Seafarers and Sea Fighters of the Mediterranean in Ancient Times* (2nd ed.; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 199, 204-6; for religious and philosophic connections, e.g., Juvenal *Sat.* 6.585; Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* Bks. 2-3; for political connections, e.g., Suetonius *Aug.* 21.3. For a fuller treatment, see comment on Acts 1:8 in my forthcoming Acts commentary.

⁴³E.g., Pliny N.H. 12.1.2; 12.41.84; Casson, *Mariners.* 198, 205-6; Lin Ying, "Ruler of the Treasure Country: the Image of the Roman Empire in Chinese Society from the First to the Fourth Century AD," *Latomus* 63 (2,2004):327-39; Kevin Herbert, "The Silk Road: The Link between the Classical World and Ancient China," *Classical Bulletin* 73 (2, 1997): 119-24.

⁴⁴Traders with the Roman empire reached even Annam (today's Vietnam) by the late second century, and others "traded with Malaya and Java" (Casson, *Mariners*, 205).

⁴⁵For the danger of mixing apples and oranges by confusing cultural spheres with traditional Greek continental divisions, cf. Glenn J. Usry and Craig S. Keener, *Black Man's Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 41-44.

⁴⁶"Asia" in 16:6 is the Roman province, not Greater Asia.

literature.⁴⁷ Some Greeks even divided the world into just Europe and Asia, including Africa in Europe.⁴⁸ Because of the subjects addressed by most writers, the division between Europe and Asia proved the most essential one in most texts.⁴⁹ Some treated this distinction as if it were as pervasive as that between Greek and barbarian (e.g., Ps.-Dion. Hal. *Epid.* 3.268) or between heaven and earth (Varro 5.5.31). The distinction was geographic (purely in terms of historic perceptions), not cultural; thus Asia included the cities that were traditionally Athenian colonies in Asia Minor, though Greece was part of Europe.⁵⁰ There can thus be no question that audiences in the Roman Empire regarded Judea as part of Asia.

Romans, like Greeks, expressed both grudging respect for Asia (notably Parthia,⁵¹ but also some great civilizations beyond)⁵² and irrational xenophobia (such as Juvenal's oft-noted comparison of eastern "cults" like Judaism with the refuse of the Syrian river Orontes).⁵³ As one source points out, Romans expressed their own "Eurocentric chauvinism," as when Pliny the Elder calls Europe conqueror of the earth and "by far the loveliest portion of the earth" (N.H. 3.1.5).⁵⁴ Since they claimed descent from Troy, however, they owed some respect to their own "Asian" heritage.

⁴⁷E.g., Cicero *Rosc. Amer.* 31.103; Sallust *Jug.* 17.3; Pliny *N.H.* 3.1.3; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 4.49.

⁴⁸A view of some geographers noted in Sallust *Jug.* 17.3 (who treats Egypt as part of Asia, 17.4). The world's primary division in Philo Mos. 2.20 is Europe and Asia, although he writes from Alexandria. Some texts mention just the two, but perhaps because only these two are relevant to their point (e.g., Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 8.29). On the background and ancient understandings of the Europe/Asia distinction, cf. also Eckart Olshausen, "Europe/Europa," 5:206-210 in *Brill's New Pauly*, especially 209.

⁴⁹E.g., Aeschines *Ctes.* 250; Thucydides 2.97.6; Manetho *Aeg. frg.* 35.3; Livy 34.58.2-3; Appian *Hist. rom.* 11.9.56; 11.10.63; *Bell. civ.* 4.17.134; Menander Rhetor 2.10, 417.13-17 (on excellent governors in both. esp. 417.14).

⁵⁰E.g., Appian *Hist. rom.* 11.2.6. Asia Minor was only a small part of greater Asia, which included, e.g., Scythia (Ptolemy *Tetrab.* 2.3.60).

⁵¹See e.g., Pliny *N.H.* 6.29.112-6.31.141. Still, Parthians were called "barbarians" (e.g., Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 72.3; Josephus *Ant.* 14.343; *War* 1.264).

⁵²See comments on India and China above.

⁵³Juvenal *Sar.* 3.62.

⁵⁴LCL 2:5; see also Eric Herbert Warmington and Simon Hornblower, "Europe," 574 in *OCD*. Pliny viewed Europe as only a bit smaller than Asia and Africa combined in *N.H.* 6.38.210, and as roughly half the world in 3.1.5.

5. Asia's Gift to Europe

Luke cannot readily share the above-mentioned prejudices of some of his Greek and Roman contemporaries, because the faith he recounts would be viewed by his audience as Asian.⁵⁵ Whatever his own geographic location, the early Christian movement to which he belongs was numerically stronger in Asia than in Europe. Luke-Acts reports the story of Jesus in Asia; uses Septuagintal Greek; and otherwise would appear to Hellenistic historiographers as "Asian" historiography, just as Josephus did.⁵⁶

Acts thus in a sense narrates the beginning of what some could have viewed as an Asian movement's (spiritual) "conquest" in the reverse direction. Jews were considered Asian; the gospel coming from Asia to Europe reversed the Greek invasions of Troy and, more recently Alexander's invasion of Persia.⁵⁷ But Asia's gift of the gospel to Europe was better in this case than Hellenization or Roman conquest—though many traditional Greeks and Romans would demur. Rome had made peace with Hellenization but a writer there could, as we have noted compare eastern "cults" to Syrian refuse pouring into the Tiber (Juvenal *Sat.* 3.62). At the same time, those who lashed out against "eastern" customs in Rome often did so precisely in reaction against other Romans who embraced such customs.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Of course the salvation-historical issue was specifically Jewish (a gift to all Gentiles, Rom 15:27); my point is only that by traditional Greek categories known and used by Luke's audience, Judea belonged to Asia.

⁵⁶See David L. Balch, "METABOLH POLITIWN—Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," 139-88 in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; SBLSymS 20; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 152-53, 186. It was not without reason that, in the heyday of historians wrongly calling mystery cults "oriental," Harvard classicist Arthur Darby Nock pointed out that Christianity was more "Oriental" in character than the mysteries ("The Vocabulary of the New Testament," *JBL* 52 [1933]: 131-39, here 136).

⁵⁷It was also more successful than the failed Persian invasion under Xerxes. It was not, of course, a military invasion, but a sort of cultural infiltration, an approach more successful in the past (Hellenistic culture, though maintaining Greek as its dominant element, involved significant cultural fusion).

⁵⁸Regarding Judaism, see John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 1983), 55-56; Zvi Yavetz, "Judeophobia in Classical Antiquity: A Different Approach," *JJS* 44 (1, 1993): 1-22. Many in the Greco-Roman world were attracted to what they regarded as the exotic and esoteric lore of the east or Egypt (e.g., Valerius Maximus 8.7. ext. 2-3; Lucian *Cock* 18; *Phil. Sale* 3; Iamblichus *V.P.* 3.14; 4.19).

That Paul and Silas voyage in 16:10-12 from Troas to Macedonia reinforces the possibility that some of Luke's audience might hear a contrast with Alexander, the Macedonian who invaded "Asia" at Troy (see comment above). Of course, people sailed from Troas to Macedonia and the reverse on a regular basis (e.g., Acts 20:5-6), but in view of continental boundaries that most envisioned, this juncture in Luke's narrative is significant. Luke's first volume is framed by scenes in Jerusalem's temple (Lk 1:5-22; 24:52-53), but his second volume is driven by the movement from Jerusalem (Acts 1—7) to Rome (28:16-31). The voyage from the Roman colony of Troas to Macedonia would bring them to the Via Egnatia, a Roman road that constituted a major link between Italy and Asia Minor in the Roman period.⁵⁹ Many scholars believe that by starting on the Via Egnatia, Paul was already signaling his interest in Rome,⁶⁰ though conflict in Thessalonica may turn him southward.

Moreover, from Luke's salvation-historical perspective, the gospel's spread was even more significant for history than Alexander's conquests and cultural fusion. Passing from Troas to Macedonia here is thus no mere customary voyage. Given the movement of the narrative as a whole and (the epic dimension of that movement), this transition might evoke Alexander in reverse. It probably evokes at least the traditional divide between continents, showing that this "Asian" faith can reach all cultures. If one resists all of these conclusions by pointing out that Luke does not explicitly mention this division, one might infer that Luke does not regard continental divisions as significant. At the very least, however, it is certain that many Gentiles who heard Acts would have heard the narrative's movement the way they understood other movements from Asia (whether the "cult" of Cybele or Judaism), as that of an Asian faith establishing itself in Europe.

6. Conclusion

A first-century audience in the Roman Empire would recognize in Acts 16:8-10 the call of Asian believers to spread Jesus' message in Europe. Luke's larger narrative includes all three continents, noting the initial foray of the gospel into Africa (Acts 8:26-40, recounting the first Gentile Christian) and later into Europe, toward the heart of the Roman Empire.

⁵⁹Nigel G. L. Hammond, "The Western Part of the Via Egnatia," *JRS* 64 (1974): 185-94; cf. Ludwig Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire* (4 vols.; trans. L. A. Magnus et al.; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1907-1913), 1:284.

⁶⁰E.g., Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (trans. Paul L. Hammer; New York: Harper & Row; London: SCM, 1969), 15.

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Luke's audience would not await a signal of the gospel's movement to Asia, however, because his original audience recognized the place of its beginnings (that dominate all of Luke's first and a substantial part of his second volumes) as being in "Asia."

Not all of my suggestions in this article are of equal weight. That Luke's audience understood Jesus' movement and the apostolic mission as beginning in Asia is certain. That Luke envisioned the movement from Troas to Macedonia as a transition from Asia to Europe I regard as very likely, though because he is not more explicit, I can be less certain how much he makes of this. Finally, I believe it possible and even fairly likely that much of Luke's audience could hear a reversal of Alexander's Macedonian invasion of Asia in this narrative. Because Luke does not evoke that history more clearly (in contrast to his often explicit biblical allusions), it is uncertain to what degree Luke himself intended such an allusion. Nevertheless, ancient narratives evoked such history frequently enough to suggest the plausibility of this final point and to invite further exploration from some scholars interested in the question.