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Archaeology and Paul's Campaign at Philippi

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ON THE journey to European Macedonia Paul's ship, Luke records, touched the Samothrace, an Aegean island. Here was the place where Demetrius Poliorcetes, "the taker of cities" in the fourth century B. C., set up the statue of the Winged Victory, which was discovered there in 1863, and has since adorned the Louvre in Paris as one of its most superb pieces. It may be that Paul saw this splendid monument of Greek art and religion. But if he did "it meant to him only another evidence of the triumphant idolatry he was working to overthrow."[1]

The 175-mile trip between Troas and Neapolis (modern Kavalla) on the Macedonian mainland, was made without incident and required two days, including the stopover at Samothrace, about midway across. At Neapolis, the port of Philippi and the terminus of the great Egnatian Road, Paul and his group landed. Situated on a promontory with the Aegean on two sides, its position was important as a connecting link by sea with Asia Minor and by land with Europe. The latter connection was made by the Egnatian Way, which ran through nearby Philippi and thence across Macedonia to Dyrrachium (Durazzo) opposite Brundisium in Italy (across the Adriatic), where the Appian Way connected with Rome. In Neapolis a typical motley array of races and languages, characteristic of port towns, reigned. This was to be expected in a town that was the first point of contact for traffic that flowed between two continents.

[1]Edgar Goodspeed, *Paul*, 1947, p. 73.

From Neapolis the ten-mile journey inland to Philippi was made. Sir William Ramsay has advanced the attractive hypothesis that Luke himself was a Philippian,[2] which, if true, would explain the emphasis laid on the importance of the city (Acts 16:12) and the vivid detail of the narrative of Acts 16:11-40.

1. *History and importance of Philippi.* The city took its name from Alexander's father, Philip II of Macedon, who was attracted there by the gold of nearby Mount Pangaeus, and transformed the ancient village of Krenides into a thriving fortress city. From this military base Alexander in 334 B. C. set out on his phenomenal career of world conquest.

In 42 B. C. on the surrounding plains along the Gangites River the battle took place between the murderers of Julius Caesar and his avengers. In commemoration of the hard-won victory there Octavius constituted the city a Roman colony, which made it "a miniature Rome in the Middle East."[3] The Roman colonies were small replicas in a sense of Rome itself. Usually three hundred Roman citizens emigrated to found such a colony as an advance guard of the mother city to hold in subjection the surrounding country. Military roads were constituted to bind together the various colonies with themselves and with the mother city.[4]

To be constituted a Roman colony was a reward and an honor. It was a token that a city possessed special importance and was esteemed by the Emperor, and was deemed worthy to be the residence of Roman citizen-soldiers, who constituted the military and social aristocracy of the provincial town where they lived.

It is interesting that Philippi alone is termed a colony by Luke (Acts 16:12),[5] possibly because of his residence there

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[2] *St. Paul The Traveller and Roman Citizen,* pp. 200f.

[3] M. S. and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Bible Dictionary,* p. 549. "From both coins and inscriptions it is well proved" that Philippi "was a Roman Colony," Camben M. Cobern, *The New Archaeological Discoveries,* p. 545.

[4] A. T. Robertson, *Luke The Historian in the Light of Research,* pp. 183-85; A. Souter, "Colony" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church.*

[5] Numerous other cities, however, are referred to by Luke that were colonies at the time, such as Troas (since 20 B. C.), Lystra (since 12 B. C.), Syracuse (since 21 B. C.), Puteoli (since 194 B. C.), Ptolemais (since before A. D. 47), Pisidian Antioch (since before 27 B. C.) and Corinth (since 27 B. C.)—total eight, including Philippi.

and natural interest and pride in the city.[6] This was natural, since the colonies held themselves above the other cities. At any rate, his "pride in the city, his familiarity with its geography, and his vivid first-person narrative (16:10-17), all show that Luke had some personal connection with Philippi."[7]

Moreover the city was granted the *jus italicum,* which gave it tax exemptions and numerous privileges. As a colony it was a free city, but other towns, which were not colonies, were frequently given the status of "free cities," as they were called, and had self-government within the Roman province where they were located. It was not Roman policy, however, to grant a provincial constitution and a free status to a community which did not possess a certain degree of culture and ability for autonomous government. In any case "the free cities and the colonies were points of power" and Paul went to them "as centres of influence."[8]

2. *Archaeology and Luke's reference to Philippi's importance.* Concerning this city Luke remarks that it was *protē tēs meridos,* i.e. "first in that part" of Macedonia (Acts 16:12), meaning thereby either the first in political importance and rank or first which the apostle reached. If Luke means the first in political importance and rank, a difficulty results which has led some scholars to impugn Luke's accuracy either on the ground of an obvious blunder or an overstatement dictated by his civic pride. But it is highly improbable that Luke would blunder through ignorance in a passage distinguished for its vivid detail and evidences of minute accuracy. Would it not be inconceivable to imagine he did not know that Thessalonica was the capital of the province, or if he referred to the easternmost of the four districts into which Macedonia had been divided by the Romans in 168 B. C., that he was unaware that Amphipolis was its capital and, at least,

[6]Robertson, *op. cit.,* p. 184.
[7]M. S. and J. Lane Miller, *ibid.*
[8]Robertson, *op. cit.,* p. 135. Luke mentions Athens, Tarsus, Ephesus, and Thessalonica, which are known to be in the class of "free cities."

this rival city would contest such a declaration?[9] The simple explanation is that Luke, being a native of Philippi, would understandably claim for his own city the precedence over the rival town of Amphipolis "which his own townsmen were doubtless claiming then, and which claim was acknowledged a little later universally."[10]

Furthermore, as far as its dignity as a Roman colony was concerned, its rich historical associations with the Empire, and particularly its strategic geographical location as the Aegean doorway to Europe and through the Egnatian and Appian Ways to Rome and the West, certainly Philippi from Luke's point of view had some claim to be "the first city in the district of Macedonia."[11]

But another difficulty has long encumbered Luke's enthusiastic description of Philippi (Acts 16:12) in his allegedly impossible use of the well-known Greek word *meris* in a geographical sense to mean a "region" or "district." Even F. J. A. Hort, the famous New Testament textual authority, was convinced that Luke blundered in this usage.[12] Hort was correct in so far as archaeological light at that time could elucidate this word.

However, archaeological evidence has appeared to show that Luke was more intimately acquainted with Macedonian geographical terms than present-day experts. Excavations in the papyri-rich sands of the Fayum in Egypt have demonstrated that the resident colonists there, many of whom had emigrated from Macedonia where Philippi was located, idiomatically employed this very word *meris* to denote the divisions of a district. Now all scholars own that the word was used correctly by Luke, and evidence is furnished by archae-

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[9]Some scholars suggest a corrupt text (and the codices vary, see R. J. Knowling, "Acts" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll, note on Acts 16:12). Scholars offer the following emendations: (a) for *prōtē tēs* read *prōtēs* "which belongs to the first region of Macedonia"; (b) delete *meridos* as a gloss and read "which is a city of Macedonia of first rank" (though not necessarily *the* first city); (c) for *meridos* read *Pieridos* and read with Hort "a chief city of Pierian Macedonia."

[10]Cobern, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

[11]Or did Luke use the adjective *first* in the sense of an honorary epithet, meaning merely "outstanding" or "noteworthy"? Cf. Giuseppe Ricciotti, *Paul The Apostle*, p. 297.

[12]See the Appendix to Westcott and Hort, *Greek Testament*, II, Appendix, p. 96; cf. D. G. Hogarth, *Authority and Archaeology*, p. 96.

ology to correct modern critics and once again to vindicate Luke.[13]

3. *The first converts in Europe.* At Philippi the Jewish element was so inconsequential that there was no building for a synagogue. On the Sabbath what Jews or Jewish proselytes there were (evidently only women) gathered in an "oratory" (*proseuchē*) in the open air near a stream, where water was supplied for legal and ceremonial ablutions. The "river" may well have been the Gangites which flows less than two miles west of the city, but on the other hand it may have been one of the numerous springs or wells from which the ancient well-watered village of Krenides ("Fountains") took its name.

The result of the meeting the first Sabbath was the conversion of a business woman named Lydia (i.e., "the woman from Lydia), a dealer in purple dye and a native of the city of Thyatira in the extreme southern part of Mysia on the frontier of Lydia, and often considered part of Lydia. For this reason Lydia's name was apparently more of a surname. Thyatira was a colony of Macedonians and a prosperous market for purple. The fact explains the woman's presence in Macedonia as well as her occupation.

After Lydia and her household believed the gospel and were baptized, she insisted that the whole missionary party make her house their headquarters. It was undoubtedly a large dwelling, befitting a successful career woman, and commodious enough to entertain four guests in addition to her own household. It may be supposed that the front entrance led to an atrium, ornamented with flowers and shrubbery and open to the sky. Beyond this would be a peristyle court surrounded by sleeping apartments on the second floor, which were made accessible through a gallery that circled the court above the columns of the peristyle.[14]

As new converts were added to form the church in Philippi, Lydia's home became the first private house in Europe to serve as the meeting place of Christians. On the first day of

[13]Cobern, *op. cit.*, pp. 545-46; J. P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 320.

[14]Pansa's house in fashionable Pompeii, contemporary with Lydia's smaller dwelling, had this general plan, but contained no less than sixty rooms, though half of them facing the street were rented as stores and shops. Cf. E. J. Goodspeed, *Paul*, p. 75.

the week the church may be thought of as assembling in the atrium or peristyle of the house to sing psalms, read the Old Testament in Greek, pray, and hear an exposition by Paul, Silas, or Timothy. The private houses of wealthier members were to serve as places of Christian assembly for two centuries and more before Christians would have buildings of their own constructed solely for worship.

4. *The place of women in the church.* The beginning of the gospel movement in Europe auspiciously pointed to the different place women were to have in Christianity, especially in contrast to heathenism and Judaism. Woman's enslavement and debasement in numerous cults of Oriental paganism is notorious. In contrast, woman's liberation by Christianity is both characteristic and striking.

Even in reference to Judaism the change is striking. The low opinion of women in Judaism is reflected in Jewish liturgy, in which Israelite men fervently thanked God they were not born women. Women were excluded from participation in the synagogue service and could witness the service only from galleries or behind curtains. They were granted only an extremely restricted access to the temple, and suffered numerous severities under the Mosaic law and the pharisaical traditions growing out of it.

The church, on the other hand, from the beginning welcomed women, commended them, liberated them socially and spiritually, and granted them privileges of service and ministry they had never enjoyed before, although in matters of ruling and teaching in the house of God, they were never to usurp authority over a man, and thus introduce anarchy and confusion.[15]

5. *Christianity clashes with heathenism.* The gospel of divine grace had progressed well in Philippi, in fact, had been quite successful. One thing must have caused the missionaries to wonder—the lack of opposition and persecution. This could be partly explained by the absence of a synagogue in Philippi and experiences of virulent synagogue animosity as in Galatia. But the question still remained unanswered. How could Christianity thus advance against the strongholds of paganism and

[15]Cf. 1 Cor. 11:5, 13; 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 3:1.

remain unchallenged by the demonism which the apostle recognized from the Old Testament was the dynamic of idolatry (Deut. 32:7; Ps. 96:5; 106:37-38) and of heathen worship in general (1 Cor. 10:20-21)?

The answer was soon to come and was to mark the end of the missionaries' stay in Philippi. One day as the group was going to the place of prayer, they were accosted by a young woman "having a spirit of divination" who brought her promoters a tidy income by her predictions (Acts 16:16). The maid was a spiritistic medium who had actual powers of oracular utterance[16] and was under demonic influence and control. This is the reason she harassed the missionaries, the evil spirit energizing her subtly opposing and discrediting Paul's ministry by giving the appearance of commending it. With penetrating discernment, which was not to be imposed upon by satanic cunning, the apostle after patiently enduring the veiled attack for many days, and realizing the real enemy was not the girl but the evil spirit indwelling her, turned and addressed not the maid but "the spirit" (Acts 16:18), expelling the demon, as both Jesus and the apostles regularly did in their ministry of deliverance.

To represent this girl as a mere "hysteria type," of "none too strong mentality," whose "confused utterances were taken as coming from some supernatural power," as some critics assert,[17] is to betray ignorance of the essential fact of demonological phenomena, as well as rejection of the explicit statements of the historian.

This episode at Philippi was in reality a head-on collision of gospel light with pagan darkness, of the power of truth with error. It is valuable in illustrating the intimate connection between divination and demonism.[18] The maid is said to have possessed *pneuma Puthona*, that is, "a Pythian spirit." In Greek mythology Python was the name of the legendary dragon that haunted the region of Pytho at the foot of Mount

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[16]James M. Gray, *Spiritism and the Fallen Angels*, p. 97; Edward Langton, *Essentials of Demonology*, p. 177.

[17]Burton Scott Easton, "Python," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, IV, 2511.

[18]Cf. Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 4th ed., pp. 119-42; Auguste Bouche-Leclerq, *Histoire de la Divination dans l'Antiquite*, 4 vols., 1879-82.

Parnassus in Phocis. It was claimed to guard Delphi, the most renowned of all ancient oracular shrines, and to have been slain by Apollo. Pytho is accordingly the older name of Delphi. Consequently, "the Pythian spirit," as Hesychius defines it, meant a "divining demon" (*daimonion mantikon*).[19]

In course of time, the expression "Pythian spirit" came to be the generic title of the alleged source of the inspiration of diviners in general, including the slave girl, whom Satan employed as a tool at Philippi to oppose the progress of the gospel in Europe.

The spiritistic maid at Philippi is interesting too in illustrating the fact that "the vehicles of manifestation resembling possession in the ancient world are almost exclusively women. . . . Among the possessed prophetesses of historic times the most eminent is the Pythoness,"[20] The Delphic seeress was originally a maid from the surrounding countryside. She was reputed to be filled with the god Apollo himself and his spirit. The god, as was believed, entered into the physical body, and the priestess' soul, lossed from her body, apprehended the divine revelations. What she uttered was spoken through her by the god (demon).[21]

6. *Archaeology and the Philippian persecution.* When the promoters of the spiritistic medium (perhaps a group of pagan priests versed in occultism) saw that their dupe was exorcized and the means of their profit gone, lethargic paganism became aroused when its pocketbook was touched. As a result a violent persecution was precipitated. Those affected financially dragged the missionaries into the market place before the rulers, and during the hearing so great was the anger of the populace that all formalities of trial, witnesses, pleas, etc. were dispensed with and the missionaries punished and jailed.

Singularly prominent, as would be expected in a Roman colony, is the Roman element in the narrative. The market place or forum (Greek *agora*), where the rulers presided,

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[19]Hesychius of Alexandria, The Lexicographer, as quoted by J. A. Thayer, *Greek English Lexicon of the N. T.*, p. 557.

[20]T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession, Demoniacal and Other Among Primitive Races in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, p. 311; cf. his description of the Delphic Oracle, *ibid.*, pp. 311-31.

[21]E. Rhode, *Psyche, the Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks* (2nd ed. Freiburg, 1898), II, 60-61.

was in the center of the city. The general term "magistrates" (*archontes*) in verse 19, is exchanged for the specific title of *praetors (strategoi)* in verse 20 (cf. vv. 22, 35-36, 38). These officials are attended by lictors (*rhabdouchoi* vv. 35, 38) who carry the fasces or bundle of rods having among them an ax with blade projecting and which was born before Roman magistrates as a badge of their authority. With these rods the lictors ("scourgers") soundly beat Paul and Silas. Two lictors attended each praetor, protected him, and executed his orders.

The charge, craftily diverted from the real issue of money, was fabricated to concern the public order ("they are making a disturbance"), Anti-Semitism ("they are Jews"), and fidelity to Roman customs ("set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans").

The historical difficulty in the narrative concerns the title of *praetor* which Luke assigns to these Roman officials. The highest officials in a Roman colony, two in number, were styled *duoviri* or *duumviri.* That this title was in use at Philippi is proved by the inscriptions.[22] Why then did Luke use the term *praetor* here? Did he blunder or did he have reason to use the terminology he employs?

Archaeology again has shown that Luke did not blunder. Inscriptions reveal that the term *praetor* was employed as a "courtesy title" for the chief magistrate of a Roman colony. It was an office of great dignity (next below a consul) and showed respect for the *duumviri.*[23] Luke is accurate, as usual, moving on the plane of idiomatic educated conversation in such matters, and not on the plane of rigid technical conformity.[24]

7. *The Philippian jailing and Paul's citizenship.* Although Paul's imprisonment was divinely overruled for good in the conversion of the jailer and the extension of the gospel witness, his unjust condemnation without a fair trial, his brutal flogging and incarceration were violations of Roman law, which protected him as a Roman citizen. But objection has

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[22]Heuzey and Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine* 15, 127, Orelli No. 3746.

[23]Hogarth, *op. cit.,* pp. 351-52. Ramsay, *St. Paul The Traveller,* p. 218. Cicero, *De lege agraria,* II, 34; Horace *Sat.* I, 5, 34; Orelli No. 3785.

[24]Cobern, *op. cit.,* pp. 546-47; Free, *op. cit.,* p. 321.

been raised that Paul did not take advantage of his citizenship to prevent his scourging. However, the mob apparently raised such an uproar that the apostle had no opportunity to defend himself.

The next morning, when the magistrates had been persuaded by someone (perhaps Lydia) that they had acted hastily and ill-advisedly and had sent word for Paul and Silas to be released, Paul had his opportunity: "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men that are Romans, and have cast us into prison and do they now cast us out privily? nay, verily, but let them come themselves and bring us out" (Acts 16:37).

Paul's insistence on this mark of consideration was not dictated by personal pique at his mistreatment, but for the sake of the cause he represented and the people to whom he ministered. An honorable discharge from custody was a debt he owed his converts and the future success of the work at Philippi required.

Paul's words had their desired effect, for the *strategoi* "feared when they heard that they were Romans" (v. 38). And rightly so! The *lex Valeria* of 509 B. C. had prohibited the striking of a Roman citizen without a previous popular decision. The *lex Porcia* of 248 B. C. had prohibited scourging a Roman citizen for any cause whatsoever. The magistrates had directly violated both these laws, and in addition condemned two Roman citizens (Silas was apparently a Roman citizen too) without a regular trial and defense, which procedure was emphatically contrary to Roman law. No wonder the magistrates were filled with alarm and came themselves to offer apology and release the prisoners.

This is a clear instance in which Paul made use of his prerogatives as a Roman citizen to carry on his ministry of evangelization, and which gave him such an advantage in his office as apostle to the Gentiles. "It was no doubt this citizenship . . . which inspired him with the great plan of utilizing the civilization of the Roman state to spread the gospel along the lines of communication."[25] But the apostle did not selfishly use this privilege. He employed it for the good of others and was

[25]Maclean, "Paul," in *One Volume Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible.*

willing to leave Philippi after his clash with the Roman authorities.

8. *Modern archaeological excavations of Philippi.* Today Felibedjik ("Little Philippi") marks the site of the many-acred ruins of the ancient Roman colony. The Ecole Francaise d'Athènes between 1914 and 1938 excavated Philippi, and the city is now much better known.[26]

The existing ruins of Philippi were found by French archaeologists to date for the most part to a period subsequent to Paul. These include the Roman baths, the theatre (rebuilt in the second century A. D. and Christian churches (much later). The forum has been brought to light, being rectangular in shape and measuring 300 feet by 150 feet. Five porticoes adorned it and it was surrounded by public buildings and temples. Here a rectangular podium with steps leading up to it was discovered. It evidently was a tribunal similar to that before which Paul and Silas suffered at the hands of the Roman authorities, and although dating from the second century when it was rebuilt, was not radically dissimilar to that of Paul's day.

One structure which is believed to date from Paul's period and even to be mentioned in the Acts account is the colonial archway to the west of the city. This archway may have designated the line of the pomerium within which foreign gods were not allowed. As the Via Egnatia left Philippi and headed west it ran beneath this arch and then traversed the Gangites, a mile or so from the city. It seems natural to deduce, therefore, that the "gate" mentioned in Acts 16:13 "was this very archway," and that the Jews met beyond it because it was required by law, and that the "river side" where Paul spoke to the assembled women was on the bank of the Gangites.[27]

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[26]Paul Collart, *Philippes ville de Macédoine depuis ses origines jusq' a la fin de l'époque romaine,* 2 vols., 1937. Cf. also *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 44 (1920) to 60 (1936). Cf. W. A. McDonald, "Archaeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands," *Bib. Archaeol.,* 3:2, May, 1940, pp. 20-22.

[27]Jack Finegan, *Light From The Ancient Past,* 1946, p. 271. Collart, *op. cit.,* pp. 319-22; 458-60.