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## The Contacts of the Book of Acts with Roman Political Institutions

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of which the authors of the Bible partake and of which they tell us in such imperfect human words as they could command." We have two remarks to offer on this. First: According to this interpretation the sentence above: "Paul sometimes claims to speak the Word of the Lord, but at other times 'gives his opinion' quite tentatively really means: Paul sometimes claims to speak imperfect human words, but at other times speaks imperfect human words. Secondly: Professor Dodd's twelfth assertion absolutely ends the argument. He promised at the outset to let the Bible speak for itself, but now refuses to accept the plain statements of the Bible. He should have declared at the outset that, when the Bible claims infallible authority, it sets up a preposterous claim.

TH. ENGELDER.

## **The Contacts of the Book of Acts with Roman Political Institutions.**

When the Christian Church began to spread, its field of expansion was practically prepared in the territorial extent of the Roman Empire. Beginning at Jerusalem, the Church rapidly extended its borders beyond this city; it embraced all Palestine and the neighboring lands of Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt and soon had crossed into Macedonia and Achaia. Jerusalem did not remain the geographical center of the Christian Church very long; this city very soon found itself on the eastern extremity of church territory, just as it was situated near the eastern extremity of the Roman Empire. A map of church territory of the second century A. D. superimposed on a map of the Roman Empire would show that these two were rapidly becoming coextensive.

The Acts of the Apostles is a book of early Christian church history. It shows the Church in its beginnings at Jerusalem, traces its westward march into the central portion of the Roman Empire, and closes with the account of the Apostle Paul's going north on the Via Appia into the great city which ruled the world. The Church had started in a clannish provincial city and was now being planted in the center of world activity.

In this progress through a large part of the empire the missionaries of the Church would be expected to come into contact with various manifestations and institutions of this world-power. We would expect a great traveler like Paul to meet imperial officials, appear before Roman courts, and to use the rights of his Roman citizenship when the need arose. This is precisely what the Book



of Acts presents. A careful reading reveals a large number of contacts with, and allusions to, existing political institutions, which do not only throw some light upon the vicissitudes of the Church and its missionaries, but are also important in giving detailed information about some political arrangements of the Roman Empire. We shall consider the outstanding contacts approximately in the order in which they occur in the Acts.

In the fifth chapter of this book we meet with a political institution whose relation to the Roman Empire is noteworthy. The apostles Peter and John are preaching in Jerusalem, but are thereby arousing the opposition of the Jewish leaders. These men proceed to take action against the apostles, whom they consider religious innovators, and to bring them before the tribunal called the Sanhedrin. This is the same tribunal which had conducted the famous trial of Jesus. The question naturally arises, How could such a non-Roman court exist? What were its rights and its relation to Roman authority?

The Sanhedrin was, of course, not a Roman, but a Jewish court. It consisted of seventy leaders of the Jewish people, and its chairman was the high priest. At the time when Peter and John stood before this court, the Jews had lost their independence and were subjects of Rome. For when Pompey had conquered the East in 63 B. C., Judea had become a part of the Roman Empire; and although this territory had subsequently enjoyed the privilege of being a kingdom under Herod the Great (as *rex socius*) and his son Archelaus, yet Augustus had found reasons for deposing the latter in 6 A. D., and Judea had become a Roman province of the second rank. From this time onward the port of Caesarea was the seat of Roman administration in Judea; there a procurator guarded imperial interests, having at his command a number of soldiers. In addition thereto a garrison was kept at Jerusalem.<sup>1)</sup>

But in administering Judea, the Romans had carried out the usual policy of allowing existing institutions to continue in conquered territory to the extent that they did not conflict with Roman interests. Thus the Sanhedrin was allowed to function even under Roman rule. This court was strictly Jewish both in membership and in the law on which it based its actions; it did not purpose to judge according to Roman law. Its authority was recognized by all faithful Jews, whether they were in Jerusalem or elsewhere, but its jurisdiction did not extend to Gentiles. The court had both

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1) Mommsen, *Provinces of the Roman Empire*, II, 185—187.



civil and criminal jurisdiction in its Jewish sphere. It could order arrests; it had independent authority in police affairs; it could meet without special authorization from the procurator; it could punish; it could receive and settle appeals from lower Jewish courts which existed in various Jewish communities. In capital cases, however, this court did not have final jurisdiction. Though cases involving the death penalty might properly come before it, and though it might condemn to death, yet the execution of a criminal could not take place unless the procurator had sanctioned the step.<sup>2)</sup> For instance, we find the Sanhedrin condemning Christ to death, but the sentence was not carried out until the unwilling procurator Pilate had finally consented, when he delivered Him to be crucified. Thus a native court existing under Roman rule is one of the first political contacts made by the workers of the Church.

The next contact with Roman political institutions is in the field of military practises. In the tenth chapter of Acts we find one of those significant events which took the Church out of its purely Jewish sphere and caused it to embrace also those of non-Jewish races. In Caesarea there was a man of the Roman army, Cornelius; evidently he was a convert to the Jewish faith, for he is described as a *φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν*.<sup>3)</sup> Moved by a vision, this man sends for the Apostle Peter in near-by Joppa and becomes a convert to Christianity. This Cornelius is identified as *ἀνὴρ τις ἐν Καισαρίᾳ . . . ἑκατοντάρχης ἐκ σπείρης τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς*.<sup>4)</sup> It is just at Caesarea that we should expect to find such a military official and a detachment of soldiers. For the Romans had made Caesarea the administrative center of the Judean province. There the procurator ordinarily resided, and the garrison would consequently be stationed in this city. *ἑκατοντάρχης* was the Greek equivalent for the Latin *centurio* and signified an officer placed over about one hundred men.<sup>5)</sup> This man Cornelius belonged to a *σπείρα*, *cohors*, evidently the troop stationed at Caesarea. A *cohors* consisted of about 600 men; in this case the men were very likely auxiliaries, since these auxiliary cohorts were often stationed in the procuratorial provinces as the sole garrison. The full name of this *cohors* was *Cohors II Italica civium Roma-*

2) Schuerer, *Jewish People in the Times of Jesus Christ*. 2d Div., I, 185—189.

3) Acts 10, 2.

4) Acts 10, 1.

5) Marquardt-Mommsen, *Handbuch d. roem. Altertuermer*, V, 455.



*norum Voluntariorum militaria*.<sup>6)</sup> The *cohors* is described as *καλουμένη Ἰταλική*. This expression again reflects a military practise of the Roman Empire.<sup>7)</sup> In times before the empire only Roman citizens served in the legions. Later the legions were recruited in the provinces, and only those soldiers were recruited in Italy who served in Rome. When military service began to be looked upon as an occupation, volunteers began to join the cohorts, since such service was easier than that in the regular legions.<sup>8)</sup> *Ἰταλικής*, then, tells us that the cohort stationed at Caesarea had been recruited from Italy and not from the province where it was stationed.

Here we may briefly indicate the other military arrangements which are met in the Book of Acts. When the Apostle Paul was sent to Rome as prisoner, he was committed to the care of a centurion named Julius, *σπειρης Σεβαστῆς*. The Latins called this cohort *Cohors I Augusta*. The practise of giving a particular name to a cohort was quite common, and this one had evidently been named after the first emperor, hence *Σεβαστῆς*.<sup>9)</sup> Other military terms found in Acts are: *χιλαρχος*, tribune of a Roman cohort; *σπραιῶται*, heavily armed foot-soldiers; *δεξιολάβοι*, javelin men, or slingers.

Passing on to Acts 12, we meet another political institution reflecting the policy of the Roman Empire. In this chapter, mention is made of a King Herod who appears as a persecutor of the Church. This Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great and is also known as Herod Agrippa I. The history of this man previous to his appointment as king had been closely interwoven with the fortunes of some Roman emperors. In 36 A. D. he had fled from his creditors in Alexandria and had taken up his abode in Rome, where Tiberius put him in prison. His star began to rise, however, when the profligate Caligula became emperor. Herod was now not only set free, but was even allowed to go back to Palestine as king. Caligula gave Herod the tetrarchy of Philip (Batanea, Trachonitis, and Auranitis) and the tetrarchy of Lysanias; the Senate voted pretorian honors on Herod. A little later Herod's dominions were enlarged still more; for when Claudius became emperor, 41 A. D., he not only confirmed the acts of Caligula concerning Herod, but even added Samaria and Judea to the dominions

6) Pauly, Wissowa, Kroll, *Realencyklopaedic*, s. v. *cohors*.

7) *Ibid.*

8) Marquardt-Mommsen, l. c., 467. 468.

9) Pauly, Wissowa, Kroll, *Realencyklopaedic*, s. v. *cohors*.



of this king, so that the kingdom of Herod Agrippa compared favorably with the kingdom of David and Solomon in extent.<sup>10)</sup> Claudius also conferred consular honors on him.

What relation did a king and a kingdom have to the Roman Empire? From the days of Tarquinius Superbus the Romans had become suspicious of royal power, and we can readily know that any "king" recognized by the Romans would not carry all the authority usually associated with this title. From the very manner in which Herod reached his throne it can be seen that he was dependent chiefly upon the good graces of the emperor. He who had made this king could just as simply unmake him. The relation of this king to the central government can be defined to some extent by a study of his activities as recorded by Josephus.<sup>11)</sup> Upon appointing Herod to his position, Claudius had sent letters to the governors and procurators of the province, urging them to treat this king with respect. Herod enjoyed a number of local privileges: he had the power of appointing or deposing a high priest at Jerusalem; he released the inhabitants of Jerusalem from taxes on their houses; when the people of Doris placed a statue of Caesar in a synagog, Agrippa accused them before Petronius, the governor of Syria, who issued an edict against the act.<sup>12)</sup> The Romans were not slow in showing such a king where his power ended. Thus when Herod repaired the walls at Jerusalem at public expense and built them wider and higher, Marcus, governor of Syria, informed Claudius, and Herod was forced to abandon the plan. Likewise, when a number of petty kings, including Herod, met at Tiberias, the same governor became suspicious concerning the purpose of this meeting and told these kings to go home. Such was the condition under which the Roman Empire tolerated a king. He was given a certain judicious amount of independence and a glorious title, but he was never free from the reins of the central government, which could undo him at any time.

The next contact with Roman political institutions takes us into another province of the Roman Empire, the island of Cyprus. This island had become a part of the Roman Empire in the great period of eastward expansions during the first century B. C. M. Cato had taken Cyprus from Ptolemean control in 58 B. C., whereupon it became part of the province of Cilicia, on the mainland of Asia Minor. After the Battle of Actium, 31 B. C., by which

10) H. Stuart Jones, *Jrl. of Roman Studies*, XVI, 23.

11) Josephus, *Antiquitates*, XIX, chaps. 7. 8.

12) *Ibid.*, chap. 5.



Augustus gained control over Antony and his followers and thus prepared the way for the empire, Augustus divided the provinces between the Senate and himself and made Cyprus one of his own imperial provinces. In 23 B. C. this province was given over to the Senate, and at the time when Paul was active on the island, it was still under senatorial control.<sup>13)</sup>

To get a clear view of the powers of various provincial officials, we must keep in mind the essential differences between *senatorial* and *imperial* provinces. This distinction was first made by Augustus, who divided the provinces into these two classes by giving some to the Senate for administration and keeping others for himself. The general distinction between these two classes was this: Those provinces which had been completely pacified and were resigned to Roman control, thus no longer requiring the presence of a large military force, were given over to the Senate. Those provinces, however, which were still turbulent and in which trouble might be expected in the collection of revenues or in the exercise of Roman law, thus requiring the presence of a large military force, were kept under the control of the emperor. This essential difference entailed other points of distinction, which are described as follows by Dio Cassius: <sup>14)</sup> "Augustus ordained that the rulers of senatorial provinces should be annual magistrates, elected by lot. . . . They were to be sent out by the assembly of the Senate as a body, with no sword at their side, nor should they wear the military garb. The name proconsul was to belong not only to the two ex-consuls, but also to the rest who had served as praetors or at least held the rank of ex-praetors. Both classes were to employ as many lictors as were usual in the capital. . . . The heads of the imperial provinces, on the other hand, were to be chosen by himself [Augustus] and by his agents, and they were to be named propraetors, even if they were from the ranks of the ex-consuls. . . . He caused the class of his own choosing to employ the title of propraetor and to hold office for as much longer than a year as should please him, to wear the military costume, and to have a sword with which they were empowered to punish soldiers." Some of the important points regarding the governorship in a senatorial province were the following: "This governor, called proconsul, ἀνθύπατος, is appointed to his province by lot. He has the insignia of a consul, such as lictors with fasces, but he is destitute of military power, and his office expires at the

13) Marquardt-Mommsen, *l. c.*, IV, 390. 391.

14) *History of Rome*, LXX, 13.



end of a year. The imperial governor, however, is a *propraetor*, *ἀντιστράτηγος*, or, as he was more often called, a *legatus*, *πρεσβευτής*, of the emperor. He goes out from Italy with all the pomp of a military commander, and he does not return until the emperor recalls him." 15) His great dependence on the emperor is evident at once. In fact, the object of Augustus in effecting this provincial arrangement was to have a corps of officials in command of all the military forces who were immediately dependent upon him in their office.

It was a senatorial province, then, which Paul entered when he came to Cyprus ca. 47 A. D., for the title of the governor is *ἀνδράνατος*. The incumbent of this office at this time was Sergius Paulus, who very likely had previously held the office of *Curator Riparum et Alvei Tiberis* and was possibly of pretorian rank.<sup>16)</sup> This man called Paul and his companions before him. But an antagonist appeared in the form of the sorcerer Elymas; he was blinded, and Sergius Paulus believed, "marveling at the teaching of the Lord." 17) It was not an ordinary convert whom the apostle had gained; for this man in his official position as Roman proconsul could have six lictors, had a small number of soldiers at his command, exercised the imperium over all his provincials, presided in tribunals, judged the claims of the usurer and the tax-gatherer, and was attended by a host of secretaries, notaries, heralds, physicians, and augurs.<sup>18)</sup> (To be concluded.)

Seward, Nebr.

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## Sermon Study on Phil. 1, 27—2, 4.

(Eisenach Epistolary Lesson for Septuagesima.)

A thorough study of this text, the Eisenach Epistle-lesson for Septuagesima, will confirm the impression received by a casual reading of the words that their import is an exhortation of the Apostle Paul to the congregation at Philippi to remain steadfast in the faith of the Gospel and united in spirit, in spite of all hindrances that might come from without or within. It will be found quite convenient to group the various items found in the text under any theme which expresses the above thought.

The apostle, in writing this present chapter of his letter to the

15) Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, I, 143.

16) Pauly, Wissowa, Kroll, *Realencyklopaedie*, s. v. *Sergius*.

17) Acts 13, 12.

18) Merivale, *History of the Romans*, III, 407—409.