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

(Concluded.)

The next contact with Roman political institutions is established in Macedonia, where the occasion of a riot and the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of the Apostle Paul bring out a number of remarks based on existing Roman statecraft. The event was briefly this: Paul and Silas came to a city called Philippi, in the Macedonian province. In the pursuit of their activity, Paul cast out an evil spirit, *πνεῦμα Πύθωνος*, from a girl. The owners of this girl, who had gained a considerable income from her mysterious power, find their source of gain cut off and at once proceed to be avenged upon the strangers, who were possessed of a power still more mysterious than hers. They take Paul and Silas, drag them before the city authorities, and charge them with teaching customs which Romans must not adopt. The authorities promptly take the strangers, divest them of their clothing, command them to be beaten with rods, place them into the innermost dungeon, and secure them by the stocks. In the following night an earthquake opens the door of the prison, and in the morning the authorities of the city sent the lictors, *ζαβδούχους*, to the warden with instructions to dismiss the two prisoners of the previous day. But Paul refuses to be dismissed in such a dishonorable manner; he reminds the authorities that he is a Roman citizen and that therefore it was unlawful to have him beaten with rods. Thoroughly frightened by the information that they had offended the Roman state in the mistreatment of one of its citizens, the city authorities come to Paul, politely escort him from the city and just as politely ask (*ἡρώτων*) him to depart.¹⁹ Surely a fine treatment of a prisoner! But—he was *civis Romanus*.

This whole incident moves against a background of Roman political institutions and political terms. In the first place, we have the explanation that Philippi was a *κολωνία*, a colony of the Roman Empire.²⁰ Colonies were numerous at that time. The founding of colonies was one of the means by which the Romans Romanized extra-Roman territory. In the times of the empire, colonization was often the means by which the soldiers of an army were rewarded. Philippi, as a colony, owed its existence to just such a rewarding of soldiers, which took place when Augustus had over-

19) Acts 16.

20) Acts 16, 12.

come the forces of Antony at Actium. Augustus then dispossessed some of the partisans of Antony in Italy to make room for his own veterans; these followers of Antony were then transferred to transmarine colonies, one of which was our Philippi. This city had, of course, existed long before, but it was now established as a colony and granted the privileges of a Roman colony.²¹⁾ What were these privileges? The colonies so constituted were to a large extent the Roman state in miniature. The magistrates were elected by the citizens; there was a colonial senate; these magistrates were permitted to have lictors while in their own territory. Philippi had the special privilege of the *ius Italicum*, which exempted its citizens from the rent ordinarily reserved for the Roman state in conquered territories.²²⁾

Another expression of political interest in the event at Philippi is the name given to the city magistrates, *στρατηγοί*. These city officials were pleased to call themselves pretors, but their real title was *duumviri iure dicundo*. These two men of a colony were the highest officials in the city and alone bore the title of magistrates. To become such magistrates, they were required to have held the questorship and the edileship before. In the performance of their office they had supreme judicial authority in their territory; they presided over elections, in the popular assemblies, and in the colonial senate; they carried out the decisions of the latter and thus were executive officials; they supervised the colonial treasury and arranged the census lists every five years.²³⁾ In conformity with their position they were granted the proper insignia. They wore the *toga praetexta* and were attended by two lictors bearing the fasces without the ax, the *ἑαβδούχοι*, whom the *στρατηγοί* sent to the prison-keeper.²⁴⁾ These *duumviri* were the men who had one day hurriedly ordered the beating of two despised Jews, but who on the very next day apologetically escorted these two men out of the city.

The matter concerning beating of the prisoners presents an interesting Roman principle. As early as 494 B. C. and again in 244 B. C. the *Lex Porcia* had protected every Roman citizen from the degrading punishment of being beaten with rods. The magistrate who violated this guarantee was subject to severe penalties.²⁵⁾

21) Marquardt-Mommsen, *Handbuch d. röm. Alt.*, IV, 118.

22) Hastings-Selbie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, s. v. Philippi.

23) Luebkers, *Reallexikon d. klass. Altertums*, s. v. colonia.

24) Acts 16, 35.

25) *Dion. Hal.*, 11, 725.

This accounts for the consternation of the *duumviri* upon learning that at least one of the insignificant Jews whom they had whipped could say, "*Civis Romanus sum.*" It was of this very expression that Cicero had said: "*Saepe multis in ultimis terris opem inter barbaros et salutem tulit.*" At another occasion, Paul had the satisfaction of seeing the remarkable prerogatives enjoyed by a Roman citizen.²⁶⁾ When the tribune at Jerusalem commanded Paul to be whipped, the claim of citizenship at once prevented the proceeding.

We follow the apostle to another city, Thessalonica.²⁷⁾ Here the Jews again seek to take hold of him and his followers and, in so doing, bring the officials of a Roman city into the foreground. The expressions which here are politically interesting are *πολιτάρχαι*, and the political accusation raised by the Jews that these men (Paul and his followers) "act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."²⁸⁾ These factors appear in their proper light if we consider the peculiar political constitution of the city of Thessalonica. In the war of Augustus and Antony against Brutus and Cassius, the deciding battle of which was fought near by, Thessalonica had taken the part of Augustus. For this loyalty the city was rewarded by being constituted a free city, *urbs libera*. This status provided some very desirable and jealously guarded privileges. An *urbs libera* was entirely self-governing in all its internal affairs. Even the governor of the province to which the city belonged ordinarily had no right to interfere with its affairs; the provincial governor's financial officers did not enter the territory to collect taxes, but the imposts were sent to Rome in some other way; the local magistrates, the *πολιτάρχαι*, or city rulers, had the power of life and death over the citizens of the place, and no stationary garrison of Roman soldiers was quartered within its territory. It had an assembly, *δῆμος*, of jurisdiction in the city.²⁹⁾ Such privileges were highly prized, but could be lost by offending the emperor. The officials of a city that was *libera* would be very careful not to offend the ruler. This care regarding the pleasure of the emperor was undoubtedly the reason why the Jews chose the accusation that Paul was preaching the existence of another king, Jesus. To allow a group of such disloyalists to exist would be a grave charge against a *πολιτάρχης* and against an *urbs libera* and might lead to

26) Acts 22, 27.

28) Acts 17, 7.

27) Acts 17, 5—9.

29) Conybeare and Howson, *l. c.*, I, 333. 334.

the loss of free-city privileges. Hence the energetic action on the part of the city magistrates.

A little later Paul enters another Roman subdivision, the province of Achaia. This province had come into Roman possession in the conquest of 146 B. C.; Augustus gave it to the Senate, and it was then governed by a Pretorian with the title of proconsul, *ἀνθύπατος*. Tiberius had temporarily placed the province into the imperial class on account of the claim of undue taxation under senatorial control. Claudius, however, restored the province to the Senate, 44 A. D. When Paul reached Achaia, the province was under senatorial control, and Corinth was a city under provincial administration.³⁰⁾ It was this city which Paul and his companions now reached. After some time of activity in this great commercial city the hostile Jews furnished the occasion which brought the Apostle Paul into contact with Roman political institutions. The *ἀνθύπατος* of Achaia at this time was Gallio, a brother of the illustrious philosopher Seneca. It seems that the Jews watched for their opportunity to proceed against Paul very soon after Gallio had taken the office of proconsul. They dragged him before the proconsul with the accusation that he was teaching the people to worship God contrary to the law, *i. e.*, the Jewish law. Gallio promptly refused to meddle with the affair, since it evidently concerned a legal sphere that was outside of his jurisdiction.

This incident points to a political arrangement which was not unusual in the Roman Empire, namely, the granting of certain privileges to the Jews. By their peculiar religious principles the Jews often came into conflict with well-established Roman practises, such as worship of the emperor, sacrificing to show loyalty, and the use of the name of a Roman god in oaths. The Romans made compromises with the Jews to the extent that they permitted them to become autonomous in some spheres. Thus the Jews of Alexandria had their own senate and an *ἄρχων*, who administered many of their Jewish affairs according to Jewish law without interference from Roman authorities. Also in Palestine the Romans had made large concessions for the benefit of the Jews.³¹⁾

The event recorded in Acts 18 does not specifically say that the Jews enjoyed these privileges in Corinth, but the indications are that they did. Though they could easily have shown that Paul was not in agreement with their own law in the exercise of his

30) Pauly, Wissowa, Kroll, *l. c.*, s. v. *Achaia*.

31) Conybeare and Howson, *l. c.*, I, 418.

preaching, they seem to have tried to convert a transgression of their own national law into a charge of transgression of a Roman law. This is strongly indicated by Gallio's action and by the reference to the νόμος καθ' ἑμῶς.³²⁾ Gallio at once sees through the scheme of the Jews and promptly drives them out of the courtroom, since he will not meddle in a province of law which the Roman government had committed to the Jews. Thus we meet here one of the political concessions which the Romans were often willing to make in order to pacify a people without sacrificing the specific interests of the Roman Empire.

Following the Apostle Paul on his third great missionary journey, we find him in Ephesus, a city of the province of Asia. This was a senatorial province, governed by a proconsul. A riot was the occasion again that brought about a contact with a number of Roman officials. Paul had been active in Ephesus and by his preaching had turned people away from worshiping the great Diana of the Ephesians, whose marvelous temple at Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This activity of Paul was economically detrimental to those silversmiths of Ephesus who made money by selling little shrines dedicated to the great goddess. Headed by one of their guild, Demetrius, they started a riot in Ephesus which the officials had difficulty in quelling. In relating this occurrence, the writer of Acts mentions several officials and institutions which shed some light on political affairs. They are *Αἰδάρχαι*, a *γραμματεὺς*, and the *ἐννομὸς ἐκκλησία*.³³⁾

The Asiarch occupied a position which made him an important official in the government of Ephesus. "In the month of May, games and contests were held in Ephesus. To preside over these games, to provide the necessary expenses, and to see that due order was maintained, officers were appointed by election from the whole province. About the time of the vernal equinox each of the principal towns within the district called Asia chose one of its wealthiest citizens, and from the whole number thus returned ten were finally selected to discharge the duty of Asiarchs. — Of those who held the office of Presidents of the Games were men of high distinction and extensive influence. Receiving no emolument from their office, but being required rather to expend large sums for the amusement of the people and their own credit, they were necessarily persons of wealth. Men of consular rank were often willing to receive the appointment. When, robed in mantles of purple and crowned with

32) Acts 18, 15.

33) Acts 19.

garlands, they assumed the duty of regulating the great gymnastic contests and controlling the tumultuary crowd in the theater, they might literally be called 'Chiefs of Asia.'"³⁴) Some of these Asiarchs were friends of Paul, so they warned him not to show himself in the meeting of the assembly. Paul accepts the advice, but the meeting of the people is held and is conducted by an official called the *γραμματεὺς*, town clerk, who finally succeeded in curbing the riot. A *γραμματεὺς* was a person of considerable authority. He had the state papers and was keeper of the archives; he read what was of particular moment before the Senate and the assembly; he was present when money was deposited in the temple; when letters were sent to the people of Ephesus, they were officially addressed to him.³⁵) He was the very man to warn the Ephesians against any riotous act. In speaking to the people, the *γραμματεὺς* reminds them that Demetrius and his guild have a legal way of proceeding. They can make use of the proconsul,³⁶) or if they desire to do more, they can bring the matter before the *ἔννομος ἐκκλησία*.³⁷) This *ἐκκλησία* was the popular assembly of the people and could be convoked as a competent court.

After the completion of three great missionary journeys, Paul returned to the city of Jerusalem, the great city of his own nation. Here he was accused of having brought a Gentile into the Temple, an action which aroused the Jews so much that they tried to lynch Paul. The prompt action of the tribune Claudius Lysias saved him from the fury of the mob. Since a conspiracy among the Jews further threatened the prisoner, the official sent out a strong military guard, which took Paul to the governmental seat of the province, Caesarea. There a Roman procurator, Felix, held office, and it is here where the Apostle Paul stood trial, both before Felix and his successor Festus. This office of procurator and the trial conducted by its incumbents give us another contact with Roman political institutions.

The land of Judea had undergone some political changes since the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 A. D. Herod had ruled as king, but upon his mysterious death, Claudius failed to appoint another king over this territory, and Judea again became a part of the great Roman province of Syria, to be ruled by a procurator, *ἡγεμῶν*.³⁸) What was a procurator?

34) Conybeare and Howson, *l. c.*, II, 83. 84.

35) *Ibid.*, 80. 81.

37) Acts 19, 39.

36) Acts 19, 38.

38) Acts 23, 26.

Dio Cassius³⁹⁾ says this about procurators: "The procurators (a name that we give to the men who collect the public revenues and spend what is ordered) Augustus sends to all provinces alike, his own and the people's, and some of these officers belong to the knights, others to the freedmen. . . . The procurators get their very name, a dignified one, from the amount of money given into their charge. The following laws were laid down for all alike: . . . that they should not make up lists for service or levy money beyond the amount appointed, unless the Senate should so vote or the emperor so order; also that, when their successors should arrive, they were immediately to leave the province and not delay on their return, but to be back within three months." The procuratorship, then, was chiefly a fiscal office, found both in the senatorial and in the imperial provinces. In the imperial provinces, however, these procurators held a position somewhat different from that in the senatorial provinces. Here they were *procuratores Caesaris pro legato*, i. e., taking the place of an imperial *legatus* in a province; they were governors of outlying and comparatively unimportant districts, which were classed with the imperial provinces. These procurators were more or less under the control of a near-by imperial legate. Thus Judea was attached to Syria.⁴⁰⁾ These imperial procurators were appointees of the emperor and were always subject to recall; hence their term of office was never of fixed duration. That they also had some judicial power is evident from the court session which was held in the case of Paul.

Only a few contacts with Roman political institutions remain to be considered. When Paul had obtained a hearing before Felix and his case could not be decided at once, he was retained in custody for some time. This keeping is described in the words: Διαταξάμενος τῷ ἑκατοντάρχῃ, τηρεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ἔχειν τε ἀνεσιν καὶ μηδὲνα κολύειν τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν αὐτῷ.⁴¹⁾ This indicates one of three types of imprisonment practised by the Romans. There was a *custodia publica*, the most severe type, when the prisoner was confined in a public jail and possibly placed in a position of torture. Paul being placed in the stocks at Philippi is an example of this kind of imprisonment.⁴²⁾ A second mode employed was the *custodia libera*. In this case the accused party was committed to the care of a magistrate or a senator, who became respon-

39) *History of Rome*, LIII, 15.

40) Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, s. v. *procurator*.

41) Acts 24, 23.

42) Acts 16, 24.

sible for the prisoner's appearance at trial. This method resembled our practise of releasing on bond. A third type was the *custodia militaris*. The accused person was given over to the care of a soldier, who was responsible for the prisoner on pain of death. It was the practise to chain the prisoner's right hand to the soldier's left, so that the prisoner was secure in spite of the comparative amount of liberty he enjoyed. It was this last type of custody in which we find Paul.⁴³⁾

When Paul stood before Festus, this judge was about to commit his prisoner to the hand of his enemies in Jerusalem, when the apostle suddenly demanded: *Καίσαρα ἐπικαλοῦμαι*.⁴⁴⁾ I appeal to Caesar. This shows the exercise of a privilege granted to Roman citizens who were on trial. For the provincials indeed, the judgment of the procurator or the proconsul was final. Not so in the case of the Roman citizen; he could appeal from a provincial court to the imperial court at Rome, and thereby a matter was removed from the jurisdiction of the local court. During the times of the republic it had been the tribune who with his right of *intercessio* could protect the individual; the emperors acquired tribunician powers, and thereby they became the ones to whom appeals were made. When such an appeal had been made in a provincial court, the governor was required to send the prisoner to Rome under guarantee of safe-conduct and to transfer an account of the trial, all its acts and documents, the depositions of witnesses on both sides, and the governor's own judgment of the case to the court at Rome.⁴⁵⁾

Thus Paul was sent away from Caesarea in custody. After a stormy voyage, which kept him on the way from about October to March, he proceeded along the Via Appia to Rome. There he came into contact with another Roman institution, the last one of the Book of Acts. When he came to Rome, the tribune Julius, who had brought him from Caesarea, delivered his prisoner to the *στρατοπεδάρχης*, the pretorian prefect. It was this man's duty to keep in custody those prisoners who were to be tried before the emperor. Since the household troops of the emperor were quartered in a *pretorium* attached to the palace on the Palatine Hill, it is very likely that Paul now saw with his own eyes that great Forum which in a measure was the focal point of that mysterious political power he had so often met in his journeys.

43) Conybeare and Howson, *l. c.*, II, 288.

44) Acts 25, 11.

45) Conybeare and Howson, *ibid.*

Thus did the Roman system of government meet the traveler and missionary of the first century A. D. Everywhere that great governmental power is evident. The Book of Acts, therefore, gives us a cross-section of certain phases of Roman political institutions and shows this power in daily operation. One other factor impresses itself upon one who studies these political contacts; it is the un-failing accuracy with which Luke designates the various political officials. His nomenclature of these offices is perfect — a fact which confirms the inspired character of his book.

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Sermon Study for the First Sunday in Lent.

HEB. 4, 14—16.

(Eisenach Epistolary Lessons.)

V. 14: "Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." The author speaks of a great High Priest. The office of priest and high priest was instituted by God Himself in the Old Testament. Ex. 28, 1—3; Heb. 5, 4. Priests were to be mediators between God and men, Heb. 2, 17; 5, 1; cf. Ex. 18, 19; to maintain and, if necessary, to reestablish the covenant relations between God and His people. For this purpose they were to offer up sacrifices, Heb. 5, 1, in order to "make atonement," Lev. 1, 4, 5; 5, 6, 10, etc.; 16, 6.