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The Book of Acts and Archaeology

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The Critical Issue

Since F.C. Baur proposed his thesis in the mid-nineteenth century and the corresponding rise of the infamous Tubingen school of radical higher critical thought of the New Testament, the book of Acts has fallen upon hard times concerning its value as a historical work. That is, Acts was no longer viewed by many as a theological-historical work composed in the latter part of the first century A.D., by Luke who was a friend, disciple, travelling companion of the apostle Paul, and an eye witness of much of what he wrote (from 16:11 onward).

According to Baur and his disciples, reasoning under the influence of Hegelian, evolutionary, and anti-supernaturalistic a priori presuppositions, Acts was seen as a product of a highly skillful and imaginatively creative writer of the latter part of the second century A.D. The author was an artful and captivating story teller who weaved together tales of intrigue and suspense into a theological tapestry. In other words, the author was not writing history but "theology."

This writer, whomever he might have been, was attempting to synthesis the Pauline (thesis) school of Christianity with the Petrine devotees (antithesis). Acts was the result of such an effort (synthesis). Thus, the work now known as Acts was not intended to be a historical account proper of the early church. Indeed, it is quite unhistorical in many accounts and details. Hence, we should not expect it to be a "history book" of earliest Christianity, as that was not the author's intention. Arising out of the speculations of the Tubingen school have come a multitude of radical higher critical views. Utilizing literary/source, form, and/or redaction criticism, these theories have proposed that a redactor or redactors composed the book of Acts out of numerous, more or less independent oral and/or written traditions or sources. From these traditions they patched together a theological quilt--the book of Acts.

With either of the above schemes, and with all the views between these two extremes, is the common thread of Acts not being historically reliable.⁽¹⁾ All these radical higher critical views have in common the notion that the book of Acts is a late second century work at best, and is unreliable, and therefore, untrustworthy as a historical source for the earliest years of the church, or for that matter most of the topics it touches upon.

Therefore, obviously Acts can not be relied on for accurate data of the formation and history of the early church, let alone does this second century literary piece correctly convey geographical, topographical, societal, political, religious, etc., data. It was not meant to. Its primary purpose was to fulfill a didactic function; that is, to express the religious experiences, feelings, world view, and struggles of Christians (primarily from the 2nd century), and *not* to portray the first century church's development and interaction with the world. As such it is "theological" literature, and not an attempt at history proper. Thus, we should

not be surprised at the many and often glaring historical inaccuracies of this book, since it was written at such a late date, and too far removed from the actual events, culture, and concerns of first century Christianity. It follows that Acts not only is not, but cannot, be read as reliable history, as for example, as one would read Herodotus, let alone Thucydides or Polybius.

Our Critical View and Method

To scrutinize these theories pertaining to the historicity of Acts and see if they fit the facts, we want to examine them in the light of archaeology. *Ergo*, we shall examine some of the archaeological data as it pertains to the book of Acts. Our primary sources will include literature from private and public correspondence, records, civil law codes and proclamations. Also, we shall consider epigraphical data, obtained from the study of diverse types of inscriptions, found on various kinds of objects, such as buildings, monuments, steles, etc., from the time around the period in question that relates directly or indirectly to our topic.

It logically follows that by comparing and contrasting the internal details (from within the book of Acts itself) with the information derived from external and independent sources (e.g., the archaeological sources listed above), we should be able to reasonably conclude if the book of Acts is historically reliable or not. To the point, if the radical higher critical views of Acts being basically unreliable and their framework for dating Acts in the latter part of the second century is correct, then the preponderance of evidence should bear this out with collaborating testimony from archaeology. On the other hand, if Acts is historically reliable, and thus probably having been written within the perimeters of the orthodox view, sometime in the latter part of the first century, the archaeological evidence should support this thesis. Either way our understanding can and should be expanded by the insights archaeology has to offer.

Furthermore, the appeal to the bar of archaeology not only should, but must be made given the radical higher critics preconceived ideas which disallow what the Scriptures state about themselves, that is, that the book of Acts was compiled from trustworthy sources where Luke was not present at a given event, or that he was a literal eyewitness to the rest of what he reports. The radical critics flatly deny these claims! Therefore, we shall appeal to the court of archaeology.

The orthodox viewpoint has nothing to fear and everything to gain from such an investigation. If Acts was written at an early date by Luke the physician, is reliable history, and not just in "religious" matters, then the witness of archaeology will affirm this verdict.

It is my contention that when the archaeological evidence is consulted, it clearly decides in the favor of the orthodox view of Acts, and that it is extremely reliable, not only on things theological, but "secular" history as well! In other words, although the book of Acts is not primarily concerned with history *qua* history, or in and of itself, it is nonetheless accurate when it comments upon historical events or issues that lay within its purview.

Accordingly, I will argue, and hope to show that because radical higher critical views of Acts cannot withstand the cross-examination of archaeology, these views are deserving of radical skepticism themselves. Yea, to be rejected and banished from the halls of higher learning in particular and the kingdom of academia and truth universally. The cold hard facts refute the speculations of the radical higher critics. In short, it's the classic case of a gang of brute facts beating up a nice theory.

Thus, my view is that the book of Acts is an extremely reliable historical source, contra the opinions of radical higher critics. In fact, this writer holds the book of Acts to not only be reliable, but the infallible and inerrant Word of God. However, due to constraints of space and scope I cannot address this issue in our present discussion.

To accomplish our task we shall examine the findings from archaeology in five major areas of study. We will compare and contrast what is stated in the book of Acts with what we presently know to actually be

the case in the areas of knowledge under discussion. This will be conducted in a thematic manner, and chronologically within each individual category according to the chapters in the book of Acts. These topics are (1) cultural milieus, (2) nautical concerns, (3) judicial knowledge, (4) geopolitical statements, and lastly (5) titles of governmental officials.

It needs to be noted that I make no pretensions at presenting an exhaustive study of the issue at hand. Unfortunately, we can only offer a brief treatment of each topic and must pass by a copious amount of pertinent information. Due to the dearth of available data we will only be surveying select examples from the pool of possible passages to establish our thesis. These shall have to suffice to illustrate and vindicate our point. (However, in addition to the bibliography, a large number of direct references have been cited throughout out the paper for further study.) Moreover, we will only be looking at archaeology and the book of Acts alone, not the gospel of Luke or any other sections of the New Testament.

Furthermore, we cannot deal with many of the problematic or disputed passages of Acts that are in question in light of archaeological findings. As yet most of these findings are ambiguous regarding the conclusions that should be drawn from them. In essence, the jury is still out, and rather than work from what we do not know, we will work with what we do know and can with reasonable confidence draw valid conclusions there from. On issues that we have inconclusive or no archaeological data, we will more than likely only reach inconclusive conclusions at best, and idle speculation at worst.

Our citing of the evidence that appears to support our thesis, and not treating that which does not, is not to selectively cite in order to "stack the deck" in our favor and only deal with what suits our views. This is not the case. Our approach is in accord with the "principle of charity," that teaches that in disputable matters, the benefit of the doubt is to be granted to the document in question, unless compelling and studied evidence warrants conclusions otherwise (Montgomery p. 29). In short, we are not to assume that the text is in error unless the evidence clearly merits such a view. And if a document proves truthful in every area that we are able to check its claims, then it is reasonable to grant that it is correct in areas or subjects which we are not able to directly verify.

This is especially true in our case when the text of Acts has been variously assumed to have erred, but has proven time and time again that it was not in err, but in fact, possessed correct and extremely precise data. Thus, if a writer such as Luke proves himself correct over and over again (as we shall see below), and conversely his critics prove wrong over and over again, we are justified in suspending judgment (assuming the writer is in error), and giving the benefit of the doubt to the normally trustworthy writer on moot points (see Bruce, AAGT, p. 17; Ramsay, BRD, p. 80).

Ironically, as we shall presently see, there has been so much information gathered from archaeology to confirm the accuracy and historicity of Acts, that the radical higher critic are the ones who ought to be doubted, not the text! The evidence decidedly does not warrant the historical berating Acts has received. In fact, it demands just the opposite! That is, the document is at least a reliable work of theological and historical literature.

The Cultural Milieus in the Book of Acts

If the book of Acts is historically reliable when it discuss various cultural settings and locations, archaeological findings that pertain to a given setting should verify the comments. Furthermore, if the book was written in the first (or second) century, then it should relate the facts and local color appropriate to that time period. We can reasonably discern both of these questions by noting the events, society norms, customs, beliefs, practices, vocations, institutions, buildings, nomenclature, topography, etc., which are mentioned in Acts. Hence, we now turn our attention to the *sitz em leben* of some of the communities reported in Acts.

First, we cite Acts 14:11-13, where Luke not only records simple events, but enlivens his narrative with the feel of Lystra, a small "back woods" and relatively insignificant town (see Ramsay, BRD, pp. 45-50,

CSP, pp. 407-418, SPT, pp. 114-119). Luke notes that the *native* populace of Lystra spoke their own language, Lycaonian, in this encounter, and not Greek as we might expect from a Greek city that became a Roman colony. This fact suggests that the worshippers in question were not Roman coloni, but the less educated natives. Pottery found from the first century period in the vicinity of Lystra contains a few fragments of Roman pottery, with the majority of the fragments being Hellenistic (Greek) (Thompson, LH, p. 11). It seems that the local populace was stratified into two basic levels: the educated Greek portion with corresponding Greek manners and language, and the uneducated natives who retained their own language. Additionally, we are told that these people worshipped gods they called Zeus and Hermes. An inscription located near Lystra from around 250 A.D. records a dedication to Zeus and Hermes, by men with Lycaonian names (ibid. p. 12). Thus, there is good reason to believe that Luke passed on to us not only correct facts regarding the native populace of an unimportant city at this time, but that he did it in a manner that also gives us a glimpse into the ambiance of the Lycaonian culture.

Second, the author of Acts tells us in 16:12-39 many specific details about this Roman colony, Philippi. For example, he informs us about the market place where the magistrates convened court, that there is a city gate by a river etc., (see Thompson, BA, p. 395). All these facts have been verified by archaeological, historical, and topographical studies (Thompson, LH, p. 14-15).

Third, Athens is mentioned in Acts 17:16-34. Our writer brings to our attention numerous details about the city in his narrative (see Ramsay, SPT, pp. 237-253). Paul was provoked by an inscription he read that was dedicated "to the unknown god." He debated moral questions with some Athenian philosophers in the market place before the Areopagus council. It has been established that metaphysical and ethical discussions were routinely carried on at the Athenian market place. The ancient court and most venerable of Athenian institutions, the Areopagus, held control over lectures. This important council named after the hill, Areopagus, meet in the days of Paul in the Royal Colonnade in the market place just as Luke states (see Ramsay, BRD, pp. 102-105; SPT, pp. 243-245; and Thompson, LH, pp. 16-18,).

Another particularly interesting tidbit is the disdainful Athenian retort in 17:18 by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of Paul being a "babbling" (*spermologos*). This is an authentic touch of characteristic Athenian social slang (Ramsay, SPT, pp. 241-243).

Athens was indeed a "very religious" city. We know that Athens had a large number of temples, and religious statues and images. Josephus and other early writers were similarly impressed, as Paul was, regarding the Athenian preoccupation with the gods (Bruce, CBA, p. 355). Still yet, we know that there were numerous inscriptions on alters in Athens dedicated to "to an unknown god." Pausanias, of the second century A.D., and Diogenes Laertes, from the third century, both mentioned such alters to these anonymous deities (ibid., p. 355; Yamauchi, p.116). Thompson informs us that "Philostratus in the early third century spoke of Athens `where even unknown divinities have alters erected to them'" (Thompson, BA, p. 399). The writer of Acts again accurately records cultural facts of a society.

Finally, on our list of cities, we will consider some of Luke's comments on the city and of Ephesus. In Acts 19:18-41 a host of significantly verifiable items are brought to our attention. (1) The city allegedly possessed a considerable number of inhabitant who practiced sorcery (2) A rather large trade existed in the city that derived its income from the manufacture and distribution of silver idols of the alleged goddess Artemis (Diana). (3) The alleged goddess had a temple in Ephesus. (4) There was some type of theater in the city.

The archaeological facts are such that all of the above observations by Luke have been confirmed (Thompson, LH, p. 19-23). Ephesus in ancient times was known for its sorcery and occultic practices, so much so that the phrase *Ephesia grammata* or "Ephesian scripts or writings" became a common term in the Greco-Roman world for magical texts (Bruce, CBA, p. 391-392; Unger, ANT, p.260). Some fairly early magical papyrus texts of this type are still extant today (see Deissmann, pp. 254, 302-305, 453, etc.). Many of these idols mentioned above have been found, as well as the remains of the temple (its dimensions were 160 feet by 340 feet). The remains of the theater have also been located. It was approximately 495 feet in diameter, and is estimated to have been able to seat 24,500 persons. Within

the theater was discovered an inscription describing numerous gold and silver images of Artemis, weighing from three to seven pounds each (Thompson, LH, p. 21).

These findings (especially when conjoined with further findings numerated below), reveal Luke's apparent eyewitness descriptions (either his own or that of Paul's) of the events and places cited above by his vivid portrayals of life and the social matrix of the communities Paul visited.

Acts not only is teeming with minute details of the "stuff of civilizations," but contains comments on external environmental factors which effected these communities as well. For instance, Luke takes note of a severe famine, during the rule of emperor Claudius, that plagued large parts of the Roman empire (Acts 11:27-30). The accuracy of this account was challenged by various scholars, who fancied this as an "imaginative" invention of Luke, because they were not aware of independent confirmation of it.

However, historical evidence, independent of Acts, has supplemented our previously famished diet of knowledge on this topic (see Ramsay, SPT, pp. 48-52, 68-69; and Bruce, CBA, p. 243, for further information on the time and extent of the famine[s]). Suetonius, the Roman historian who lived at the end of the first century and into the second, referred to austere conditions at the time of Claudius caused by "...a scarcity of provisions, occasioned by bad crops for several years" (as cited in Thompson, LH, p. 7). Dion Cassius, a statesman and writer, along with Tacitus, a Roman historian (55-120 A.D.), both refer to two famines in Rome in the first century (ibid. p. 7). Eusebius, the great Christian historian, and the Jewish historian, Josephus (37-95 A.D.), also mentions a severe famine in Asia Minor and Judea respectively in the first century (ibid. p. 7). Thus, we have independent and secular writers who attest to the fact of Luke's statement.

Acts not only demonstrates a throughout and extremely reliable account of the communities Paul interacted with, and environmental factors, but additionally, the role and importance of Roman citizenship in the first century.

During the first century A.D. Roman citizens were an especially privileged class of individuals throughout the Roman empire. They had special rights and privileges, such as unique legal rights and exemption from the taxes of local communities, etc., which non-Romans did not share (see Sherwin-White, RSRL, pp. 144-171).

In Acts 16:37-38 and other passages, Paul makes much of his Roman citizenship relative to certain rights this gave him. This and many other comments found in Acts harmonizes beautifully with what we know regarding these issues in the first century A.D. For example, we have a parallel case to Paul's in Acts 16, from Cicero's writings where he talks about one C. Servilius, who was beaten and abused by governmental officials. Cicero rhetorically asks "is there any legal reason why this should happen to any Roman citizen?" (as cited in Sherwin-White, RSRL, p. 172). The style and circumstances differ in the above two cases, but the tone, the alarm, the concern about how a Roman citizens should, or should not in these cases, be treated is the same.

However, there were major Roman societal and judicial changes pertaining to the rights of Roman citizenship that began early in the second century A.D. (ibid., pp. 68-70, 172-175, and 179-185). But, Acts evidences none of these substantial societal changes. It accurately mirrors the value and role of local governments and Roman citizenship from the first century, not those of the second or latter centuries (ibid., pp. 179-185). As Sherwin-White says, "Acts breathes the climate of the earlier phase" (ibid., p.173).

Therefore, the value and place of Roman citizenship in Acts properly represents the culture during the first century A.D., and conversely not according to its social evolution in the second.

Thus, to conclude this part of our discussion, we observe that the writer of Acts, based upon our discussion so far, not only is historically reliable, but he has far more to offer us. He accurately captures and vividly portrays intimate and precise information as he paints a picture for us, that is, a lifelike and

authentic first century mood and feel of the local-color and societal and religious practices, customs, and institutions of the locales it mentions. He demonstrates apparent eye witness experiences (his own or Paul's) that explain his keen and penetrating knowledge and insights of the places and events he writes about. In short, it has the ring of truth in describing the places Paul visited and historical events that occurred (see Ramsay, BRD, pp. 79-89; SPT. pp. 8-9). To sum up this section of our discussion we quote Sherwin-White and Ramsay respectively:

In Acts or in that part of Acts which is concerned with the adventures of Paul in Asia Minor and Greece, one is aware all the time of the Hellenistic and Roman setting. The historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct. One walks the streets and market-places, the theatres and assemblies of first-century Ephesus or Thessalonica, Corinth or Philippi, with the author of Acts. ...The feel and tone of city life is the same as in the descriptions of Strabo and Dio of Prusa...In all these ways Acts takes us on a conducted tour of the Greco-Roman world. The detail is so interwoven with the narrative of the mission as to be inseparable. (RSRL, pp.120, 121)

In Ephesus Paul taught 'in the school of Tyrannus'; in the city of Socrates he discussed moral questions in the market-place. How incongruous it would seem if the methods were transposed! But the narrative never makes a false step amid all the many details, as the scene changes from city to city; and that is the conclusive proof that it is a picture of real life. (SPT, p. 238)

Nautical Knowledge and Acts

The writer of Acts knowledge of the Greco-Roman cultural milieu in the first century is matched by understanding of nautical matters. Rackham says regarding Acts 27 that "the story is told with such a wealth of detail that in all classical literature there is no passage which gives us so much information about the working of an ancient ship" (as cited in Robertson, LH, p. 206). Luke has an appreciation for the sea and this comes through in the relevant passages (primarily in Acts 27:1-41). Again, we can undertake only a cursory survey of our topic. (For further study on this subject see Ramsay, SPT, pp. 331-339; Robertson, LH, pp. 206-216; and Smith's entire work, VSSP.)

Luke's recital of the type of ships used and some of their features, their courses charted, the winds they sailed under or were hindered by, storms encountered, the Islands named, sailing techniques, and much more squares with our knowledge of ancient and modern navigation, having been verified by external and independent evidence (Robertson, p.216). A few examples will have to suffice for our purposes.

Luke uses very precise terminology in discussing some of the details of their journeys. Smith and Ramsay list some specifics (see Robertson, p. 214; Ramsay, SPT, p. 328). For instance, "...They *sailed under [hyperleusamen]* the lee of Cyprus, keeping northwards with a westerly wind on the beam" (Acts 27:4); "here they *ran before a wind under [hypodramontes]* the lee of Claudia" (Acts 27:14). Likewise, in 27:14 we are told of a wind of typhonic force, the "northeaster" (*euraquilo*), which swept down from an island (Crete). At its height the Cretan mountains in question are over 7000 feet. It is the case even today that quite suddenly and unexpectedly near hurricane strength winds can flow down the mountains and create havoc for sailing vessels in the underlying waters (Ramsay, SPT, p. 327).

Robinson, sums up Luke's contribution and the value and accuracy of his sea-voyages when he stated: "it is to Luke that we owe the most vivid as well as the most accurate account of sea-voyaging that has come down to us from antiquity. Experts in navel science agree that it is without a parallel" (as cited in Robertson, LH, p. 207).

Acts on Trial

Luke's portrayal of the legal system within the Roman empire in the first century, as already briefly cited, is as informed as the other areas we have already discussed. Thus, whether Paul is being confronted by

mobs and their demagogish rulers, the seething Sanhedrin, local Jewish tribunals, hauled before civil magistrates, the arrogant Areopagus council, proconsuls, prefects, later known as procurators (after A.D.44), such as Felix and Festus, or a vassal king like Agrippa, Luke's narratives coincide with what we know of the first century judicial processes. Charges and proceedings are written in contemporary and accurate language. Let's examine a few note worthy cases of Luke's accurate court reporting.

Acts 25:16 records the statement that "...it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had opportunity to defend himself against their charges." This remark by procurator Festus, written down by Luke, accords perfectly with Roman jurisprudence of the first century (see Sherwin-White, RSRL, p.48).

Or in 25:18 we read that the governor remarked "The accusers brought no charges against him which I could take cognizance." The Greek word rendered by "take cognizance" or "understand" (NIV "expected," KJV "supposed") has a technical meaning (Sherwin-White, TC, p. 101). The Greek phrase in question, *on ego hypenooun*, in its strongest sense means "suspect" (Sherwin-White, RSRL, p.50). In a legal context, it does not mean that Festus literally could not understand the issues, but that the issue brought before him to adjudicate was a religious issue, which fell out side the normal domain of the law. Therefore, it fits naturally, given the unusual charges brought against Paul, for Festus, to request King Agrippa's help as an assessor (legal advisor), a common practice of the day, in order to draft the formal charges against Paul to send along with him to Rome (see Sherwin-White, TC, pp. 100-101; and RSRL, p. 51). Furthermore, we are aware of other indictments against different parties parallel to the one in Acts leveled at Paul (Sherwin-White, p. 51). In short, the whole proceeding, as are the rest mentioned in Acts, accurately represents the legal procedures of the day in the first century A.D. (Sherwin-White, TC, p. 101).

Based upon his through studies of the legal accounts recorded in Acts, the renowned Roman and legal historian Sherwin-White pronounces his verdict on the case before us in the following statement: "The accounts of these trials in Acts is so technically correct that Roman historians since Mommsen have often judged them as the best illustration of Roman provincial jurisdiction in this particular period" (TC, p. 101). And in circumscribing our topic of the historicity of Acts from its presentation of judicial concerns he declared: "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming....any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken if for granted" (RSRL, p. 189). (For further study on this subject consult Ramsay, BRD, pp. 90-105; Robertson, LH, pp. 190-205; and Sherwin-White's TC, and RSRL.)

Acts on the Geopolitical Map

The writer of Acts excels in his geopolitical knowledge of the day in realms that Paul transversed, and later he and Paul visited together (Acts 16:6 onward) on their various missionary journeys. As we shall currently see Luke is no less precise in these details than in any other concern his book treats. (To help keep the many cities, regions, provinces, etc., straight in one's mind, consult the map on the following page.)

First, on our tour is Acts 13:49, where we are told regarding the Antiochian territory that "the word of the Lord spread through the whole region." We know from archaeological findings, an inscription, that Antioch, which was in the province of Galatia, was the center of a Roman region, Galatic Phrygia, during the time of Paul's visits and travels (Ramsay, SPT, p. 103; Thompson, BA, p. 393; LH,p. 10). Hence, Antioch was the center of the region called Phrygia (or the Phrygian Region) within the province of Galatia (Ramsay SPT, p. 102). Thus, it is a simple, but quite telling and accurate comment to note that the word spread through the region, of which Antioch was the chief military and civil center (Ramsay, SPT, pp. 102-105).

Second on our stop is Acts 14:6 and the "...cites of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about." The above was a special region, within the province of Galatia, composed of two cities and a tract of

cityless territory, from 37 to 72 A.D. only (see Ramsay, SPT, pp. 110-113). Although Iconium and Lystra were quite close to each other speaking merely geographically, and carried on commercial trade and social intercourse, they were nonetheless in different *political* regions, (but within the same province). Iconium belonged to the region of Phrygia Galatica, while Lystra belonged to the Lycaonia Galatica region (see Bruce, CBA, pp. 288-289; Ramsay, BRD, 39-63; Thompson, BA, p. 393). Numerous radical and moderate scholars have assumed that Acts 14:6 was just another case of Luke being wrong about the facts. But objective archaeological evidence once again has vindicated Acts, and not the armchair critics. Luke thus gives us not only correct, but a precise piece of geopolitical information.

Third, Luke further instructs us on geopolitical items in Acts 16:6-8. In Roman times Phrygia, a large area in Asia Minor, was divided. Part of it went to the Roman province of Asia, being titled Phrygia Asiana, while the other part of Phrygia went into the Roman province of Galatia (referred to above), and was called Phrygia Galatica (Thompson, LH, p.13). Sir William Ramsay found an inscription in 1911 that proved that Luke's geographical terminology of the passage under consideration was not only correct, but quite acutely at that (see Bruce, CBA, pp. 324-326; and Thompson, LH, p. 13).

Fourth, Luke speaks of Philippi in Acts 16:12 being a Roman *colony* and the *leading* or first city of its *region* or part. These three points have been proven to be correct. Philippi was a Roman colony, founded by Roman veterans (Yamauchi, SS, p. 115) Also, the title of "first" or "leading" was used by some to describe Philippi (see Sherwin-White, RSRL, pp. 93-96). While it is true that scholars debate exactly what this title ("first") meant, the fact remains that it was nevertheless used for Philippi (see Bruce, CBA, p. 330; Thompson, BA, p.395) Lastly, papyri from Egypt have been discovered that substantiate Luke's usage of the Greek word *meris* to mean region (Yamauchi, SS, p. 115). Apparently colonists from Macedonia used this word as an idiom. Through these and other details, once again, Acts demonstrates its historicity and firsthand knowledge of a city and germane geopolitical factors by sharing with us insightful comments, such as local idioms and the title that the Philippians liked to proudly appropriate for their community, that give us not only a reliable, but a larger than life profile of Philippi. (For further study on Philippi see Ramsay, SPT, pp. 201-226; and Unger, pp. 218-219.)

The bottom line of the above discussion of geopolitical accounts of Acts is that they were not only correct, but uncannily precise. In each of the above cases and more that could be cited, Acts was believed to be in error and hence disputed. However, archaeological evidence has again and again confirmed its accuracy. The radical critics, on the other hand have been disproved time and time again. Acts has been acquitted by objective testimony and evidence of the serious charges of errors in the geopolitical sphere and conversely has shown itself to be an extremely trustworthy document on the geopolitical landscape of the first century communities it mentions. (For further study on this topic in general, see Ramsay's CSP and SPT.)

Judging a Book by its Titles

Acts affords us with yet another opportunity to measure its historical reliability by external and independent sources. By cross-checking the wide variety of titles employed for various religious and governmental officials in it with archaeological data from the corresponding time period, Acts historical worth can be discerned. (For a brief explanation of the major types of rulers within the Roman empire from A.D. 14 onward, see Sherwin-White, TC, p. 98-102.) You may not be able to accurately judge a book by its cover, but in our case we can certainly judge Acts by its titles.

Acts 13:7 mentions one Sergius Paulus, the *proconsul* (or the Greek *anthupatos*, that translates the Latin *proconsul*) of the island of Cyprus, who was ruling from the seat of the provincial government in Paphos at the time of Paul's visit. This passage has been greatly contested since it was believed that this area during the time of Paul was not governed by a *proconsul*, but by an imperial *legate*. Thus, Acts was thought to be in error. What are the facts?

Cyprus, to which Paphos belonged, became a Senatorial province in 22 B.C. Therefore, from that date onward it was, at least throughout the time of the apostle Paul, governed by a proconsul. Thus, up until 22 B.C. it had been an Imperial province, and was ruled by a imperial *legate* (Robertson, LH, p. 182). But, at the time of Paul's visit it was a senatorial province and was governed by a *proconsul*. In fact, an inscription has been found at Soloi (in Cyprus) that states "in the Proconsulship of Paulus" (see Ramsay SPT, pp. 74-76). It is not my contention that this is necessarily the very Sergius Paulus of Acts 13, but merely that archaeological findings have confirmed that Luke used the correct title for the governor in Cyprus during the time of Paul's missionary activity in this area (Thompson, LH, p.8). (For further study on this issue see Ramsay, BRD, pp. 150-172; and Thompson, BA, pp. 390-392.)

Recounting Paul's arrest and imprisonment at Philippi in Acts 16:20-39, Luke calls the legal officials magistrates (Greek *strategois* or the Latin *praetors*), and their officers, sergeants (the Greek is *rabdouchoi*, and the Latin is *lictors*). Since, as noted earlier, Philippi was a Roman colony, its magistrates were called "*duumvirs*," not *praetors*, which was a more dignified title. Again it seemed that Luke was incorrect. However, we know, of at least one parallel case from the Roman colony of Capua, where the "*duumvirs*" were, or at least preferred to be, called *praetors* (Thompson, BA, p. 396; LH, p.14). Cicero writes: "Although they are called *duumvirs* in the other colonies, these men wish to be called *praetors*." Therefore, it is possible, indeed highly probable given Luke's usual precise and seemingly firsthand information, that the Philippian magistrates did not use their official titles, but opted for the more respectable one (see Bruce, CBA, p. 335; Unger, ANT, p. 223).

Moving along we arrive at Thessalonica, and Paul's run in with its authorities (Acts 17:6-9). Here, Luke calls the city officials *politarchoi*. Since this title is not found in any extant classical literature, it should come as no surprise that it was assumed that Acts had erred again. However, Acts is correct (Sherwin-White, RSRL, p. 96-97). Inscriptions have been discovered, from Macedonian towns, including Thessalonica, that verify Luke's usage of this unusual term (see Bruce, ACNT, p.325). For example, the Roman road entered the city by a Roman arch called the Vardar Gate. On this arch is an inscription: "In the time of Politarchs...." The inscription is dated from 30 B.C. to 143 A.D. (Thompson, LH, p. 15).

From Acts 18:12 we read of Gallio, *proconsul* of Achaia, who Paul appeared before on spurious charges. It was believed that Luke was mistaken in referring to Gallio as a *proconsul*, since it was believed that Achaia at this time was governed by a *procurator*, not a *proconsul*. But, the literary and archaeological evidence supports Acts, not its critics. Achaia was governed by a *proconsul* from the time of 27 B.C. to 15 A.D. However, in 15 A.D. it reverted back to being under the control of the emperor; thus, it was governed by a *procurator* during this time period. Nonetheless, from 44 A.D. onwards it came again under the control of the Roman Senate, and thus was governed by a *proconsul* (see Ramsay, SPT, p. 258; Robertson, LH, p. 182; and Thompson, LH, p. 19).

Furthermore, the Gallio in question was the brother of the great Stoic philosopher, Seneca, who mentions that his brother "Gallio caught fever in Achaia" (Bruce, CBA, pp. 373-374; Thompson, LH, p. 19). Additionally, a Delphian inscription states a proclamation of emperor Claudius that Gallio became *proconsul* of Achaia in July, 51 A.D. (Bruce, ACNT, p. 324; CBA, p. 374; Thompson, BA, p. 401; LH, p. 19). This is remarkable confirmation of Luke's accuracy in Acts 18:12., of not only stating the proper title of the governor, but the name of the actual person himself.

Next we want to examine Acts 19:31, 35, and 38. In these verses Luke mentions the "chief men," or "officials (*asiarchon*), who were friends of Paul, the "town clerk" (*grammateus*), and Ephesus being the "temple keeper" or "guardian" (*neokoros*) of the temple of Artemis. All of these titles and offices have been verified by archaeological finds, namely, inscriptions, as having been used in Ephesus in the time frame that Paul journeyed to the city (see Bruce, CBA, pp.400-402; NTDR, pp. 83-84; Sherwin-White, RSRL, pp. 85-91; Thompson, BA, p. 408; LH, p. 24-25).

In Acts 25:26 Festus is said to have applied the title of lord (*kyrios*) to the emperor. This was supposed to have been a blunder by Luke in attributing these words to Festus, since this title was not used for the emperor. Deissmann cites sources (pp. 351-354) that show that in fact the term was at times used for the

Roman emperors in Paul's days (and some before Paul's time), even giving several parallel cases. One is where a Boeotian town referred to Nero as "lord of the whole world" (p. 354). This and other evidence for the usage of the term moved Deissmann to write:

The fact that a New Testament writer well acquainted with this period makes Festus the Procurator speak of Nero simply as 'the lord' now acquires its full significance in this connexion. The insignificant detail, questioned by various commentators, who, seated at their writing-tables in Tübingen or Berlin, vainly imagined that they knew the period better than St. Luke, now appears thoroughly credible. (p. 354.)

Lastly, we cite Acts 28:7. Luke calls the head official on the island of Malta, the "chief" or "first" (*protos*) official. This title is vouched for by both Greek and Latin inscriptions as the proper title for the Roman governor of Malta during this time period (Bruce, CBA, p. 523; Thompson, LH, p. 25).

Perhaps Luke's accuracy in correctly naming religious and governmental officials can be better appreciated by citing two observations of Bruce:

The student of Roman history is aware of the bewildering variety in the titles held by these men, and he cannot fail to be struck by the confident accuracy with which Luke uses them. (ACNT, p. 325)

A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords his critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy. Luke takes this risk, and stands the test admirably. One of the most remarkable tokens of his accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned in his pages. This was by no means such an easy feat in his days as it is in ours, when it is so simple to consult convenient books of reference. The accuracy of Luke's use of the various titles in the Roman Empire has been compared to the ease and confident way in which an Oxford man in ordinary conversation will refer to the Heads of Oxford colleges by their proper titles--the *Provost* of Oriel, the *Master* of Balliol, the *Rector* of Exeter, the *President* of Magdalen, and so on...But Luke had a further difficulty in that the titles sometimes did not remain the same for any great length of time; a province might pass from senatorial government to administration by a district representative of the emperor, and would then be governed no longer by a proconsul but by an imperial legate... (NTDR, p. 82).

Thus, to conclude this segment of our discussion and to bring into clearer relief the significance of Luke's lucid and apparent eyewitness insights, it should be plain to see that Luke demonstrates in Acts a remarkable familiarity and accuracy in his appropriation of titles for various officials. (For further study consult Bruce, NTDR, pp. 82-83; and Robertson, LH, p. 179-189.

Acts and History

Despite all the facts, all the details, attesting to the historical reliability and trustworthiness of Acts that we have seen in our survey, radical and moderate higher critics could (and some do) suggest two possibilities for this phenomena. First, the author(s) who wrote Acts late in the second century A.D. was not only a truly great writer and story teller who "breathed the breath of life" into his creation, but no doubt, was a world traveller (or the collective group of redactors were), and thus had access to the precise facts communicated to us relating to first century life via Acts.

Or, second, Acts was simply the result of a well educated redactor (or redactors) who possessed a wide breath of knowledge, and performed a "cut and paste job" with the best oral and written traditions extant (form criticism), creating a literary master piece of church history and dogma.

However, even if we were to grant for the sake of argument either of these scenarios as being true, nonetheless, neither of them refutes the rock solid accuracy and historicity of the book of Acts. At worst even if he (they) only used early traditions, they were sound traditions; therefore, he presented us with

first rate historical reporting. Either scenario cannot explain away the plain facts. The information contained therein is reliable, and were possible, has been verified by external and objective evidence.

As plausible, consistent, and complete as these theories of Acts origin might seem (see Ramsay, SPT, p. 7-8), when Ockham's razor is applied to them, they are cut into pieces. They are possible but not probable. Indeed, they are extremely unlikely! To the point, why should we postulate elaborate and complex theories to account for the accuracy of Acts, when there is a much simpler explanation, and one that is in accord with history what the text itself states. Namely, Acts was written by Luke sometime in the first century. Those events to which he was not an eyewitness, he obtained reliable reports from those who themselves were (see e.g., Luke 1:1-3; Acts 1:1). Thus, since as we have seen, Acts is a trustworthy source, why should we "fly in the face" of the evidence and postulate complex theories to explain this accuracy? Why propose a redactor or redactors in the late second century with this incredible and trustworthy knowledge, and such vivid accounts, and the claim to have been an eyewitness to many of the events described, and then at the same time propose that he (they) lied about being an eyewitness. This is go directly against what an otherwise trustworthy text states. This maneuvering is not only unnecessary, but wrong in view of the facts. The critical surgical edge of Ockham's razor needs to be applied to the myopic vision of our higher critical patient to remove their improbable speculations and restore clear sight to see the facts correctly.

It is my belief that radical or moderate higher critical views of the book of Acts can only continue to be held by their adherents being ignorant of, or simply ignoring, the overwhelming archaeological, historical, and literary data that argues for the accuracy and early date of the writing of Acts.⁽²⁾ As such these views not only ignore the historical and literary evidence for Acts, but are pre-archaeological in orientation. That is, they derive from antiquated ideologies of Hegelian religio-evolutionarism, and an anti-supernaturalistic world view, and not from archaeological investigation. They were formed before the development of modern archaeology, hence, are pre-archaeological. The modern theories have no such excuse, but simply survive because of sheer ignorance or blatant rejection of objective evidence for the sake of subjective speculations. Thus, higher critical view were and are built as W.F. Albright stated "*in der Luft*" (p. 29 ["in the air"]) on the dreams of arm chair theologians, and not the careful evaluations of archeological and literary informed historical-theological thinkers (see Gasque, SWRA, pp. 28, 61-63). Such fanciful dreaming needs to be brought back to the ground by facts, cold hard archaeological facts.

In conclusion I submit that it has been reasonably demonstrated that the book of Acts is a reliable and trustworthy, indeed is quite a reliable and trustworthy, historical document. Therefore, grounded on the facts, the conclusions of moderate and radical higher critics are to be rejected because they are incorrect. Worse yet, they are touted as being the conclusions of learned, critical, and informed scholars, when in actuality their opinions are quite uninformed, uncritical, and naive. Thus, they are not to be accepted.

Acts should be respected and regarded as a first-rate work of history in the matters it speaks about, both theological and historical. It has been confirmed over and over again by independent and objective findings. To end our discussion we will appropriately let Sir William Ramsay have the last word:

The present writer takes the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness...You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's. and they will stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment, provided always that the critic knows the subject and does not go beyond the limits of science and of justice...

...Acts may be quoted as a trustworthy historical authority...Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history; and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at great length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purposes. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians. (BRD, pp. 81, 89, 222.)

Endnotes

1. For a fuller treatment of the history, development, and general tenets of radical higher critical views, see Gasque (HVBC) pp. 68-88, and Yamauchi (SS) pp. 92-98. For discussions from a "moderate" higher critical viewpoint on the book of Acts in particular, and excellent criticisms of radical higher critical views and methodologies in general, see Hengel's works. For rousing and insightful criticisms of radical higher criticism consult Ramsay, SPT, pp. 1-28; LP, pp. 3-68; BRD, pp. 79-89; and Gasque, SWRA, pp. 61-65.

2. There is a large amount of relevant data from literary and historical considerations to support the view that Acts was written by Luke, the doctor, friend, disciple, and later travelling companion of the apostle Paul, and that Acts was written at a rather early date--probably before 67 A.D.--that we cannot address here due to space limitations. Nonetheless, these factors can and should be taken into consideration (in addition to the archaeological data, and more that is available besides what is presented in this paper), in deciding the issue at hand. Therefore, the reader is recommended to consult: Bruce, CBA, pp. 22-23; AAGT, pp. 1-18; Ramsey, POS, pp. 191-200, 301-321; SPT, pp. 383-390; Robertson, LH, pp. 1-15, 30-41; Sherwin-White, RSRL, pp. 69-70, 172-185; and Thompson, LH, p. 28.

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