

CHAPTER 52

THE SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL WORLD OF PHILADELPHIA

Rev 1:11; 3:7–13

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KEY POINTS

- Philadelphia was sixth of the seven churches of Revelation and the newest of the cities.
- The city was founded by the Attalid kingdom of Pergamum in the second century BC.
- It was situated on a major road with intercity and interregional connections.
- Earthquakes often damaged the city, which was then rebuilt with the help of Rome.
- The city was home to a Jewish community with a synagogue.

GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION

Philadelphia was located along the north-eastern slope of the Tmolus Mountains (Boz Dağları) in the southeastern part of Lydia.¹ The mound Gavurtepe, three

tenths of a mile (.5 km) east of modern Alaşehir, was the initial settlement site on the southwestern side of a broad valley some six miles (10 km) wide.² The Cogamus River, named by Pliny the Elder

1. See page XXX for a map of the Roman province of Asia that includes Philadelphia. For a map of the geography of ancient Lydia, see Christopher H. Roosevelt, *The Archaeology of Lydia, from Gyges to Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39 fig. 3.4. However, the city of Blaundos and territory eastward is usually situated in Phrygia.

2. Recep Meriç, *Hermus (Gediz) Valley in Western Turkey: Results of an Archaeological and Historical Survey* (Istanbul: Ege, 2018), 147. Gavurtepe was later used as a necropolis from the late Hellenistic period onward.



(*Natural History* 5.30), joined the Hermus River (modern Gediz) twenty-five miles (40 km) northwest of Philadelphia. Strabo confusingly places Philadelphia first in Phrygia and later in Mysia (*Geography* 12.8.18; 3.4.10). The site may perhaps correspond with that of the earlier Lydian city of Callatebus (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.31).³

Philadelphia commanded the road that led up the Cogamus, then crossed a watershed over two thousand feet (610 m) high before descending into the Meander Valley. There it joined the Southern Highway near Laodicea. In 480 BC Xerxes marched to Sardis along this route after stopping at Celanae/Apamea and Colossae (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.26, 30–32). In 399 BC Cyrus the Younger with his ten thousand marched this route in reverse departing from Sardis; he then crossed into the Meander Valley and past Colossae before reaching Apamea (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.2.5–6). Sardis (modern Sart) lay only thirty

miles (48 km) northwest of Philadelphia, while Tripolis on the Meander (modern Yenicekent) was the final city in Lydia some forty miles (64 km) to its southeast. The northwest gate of Tripolis was called the Philadelphia Gate, indicating its orientation to that city. Philadelphia lay along the imperial road constructed in 129 BC by the Roman governor Manius Aquillius that started in Pergamum, then at Laodicea merged with a branch coming from Ephesus. The final five of the seven churches listed in Revelation 1:11 are given in an order that tracks this route, which suggests the messenger delivering the Apocalypse would have used it (see map on page XXX). Aquillius' road eventually terminated at the Pamphylian port of Side.

A track left the Southern Highway at Apamea and ran northwest past the Phrygian city of Blaundos. Eckhard Schnabel has suggested that Paul descended from these "upper regions" before passing Philadelphia on his way

3. Alan H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 54, 92.

into the upper Cayster River valley before descending to Ephesus (Acts 19:1).⁴ This circuitous detour to Ephesus is unlikely for several reasons. First, traffic from Apamea, as mentioned, typically followed the Southern Highway as far as Laodicea. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, most likely followed the southern route when he passed through Philadelphia on his way to Smyrna around AD 110.⁵ Since the most direct route to the coast from Apamea passed through Laodicea and continued westward down the Meander Valley, it is likely that Paul took this route to Ephesus rather than through Philadelphia.⁶ The fourth-century Peutinger map depicts Philadelphia as a major way station situated at an important road junction.⁷

SETTLEMENT AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN ANTIQUITY

The city was the newest among the seven churches and was established by Attalus II king of Pergamum (reigned 159–138 BC) probably as a garrison town in reaction to the invasion of the Gauls in 168 BC. As the “most important of the Pergamene foundations,”⁸ its most common Greek ethnic designation (or demonym) was *philadelpheus* (φιλαδέλφεύς), occasionally

philadelphēnos (φιλαδέλφηνός); its Latin form was *Philadelphini*. The Macedonian shield on its civic coinage confirms that Philadelphia originated as a military colony with its first settlers probably coming from the nearby Macedonian colony of Kobedyte (Bebekli).⁹ Its civic territory (χώρα, *chōra*) was extensive, including many villages that extended southward to the Meander River at Tripolis and covered the Cogamis Valley as well. Barclay’s attempt to position the city as an “open door” for Greek culture and language to neighboring barbarous peoples ignores the hellenization of the region that had begun centuries earlier.¹⁰ The city’s name comes from a curious incident regarding Rome’s dealings with the Attalids. When Attalus II traveled to Rome in 167 BC, the Roman Senate attempted to turn him against his older brother Eumenes II (reigned 197–159 BC). Livy describes the outcome: “after disappointing the hopes of those who had supposed that he [Attalus II] would accuse his brother and seek a division of the kingdom, he left the senate-house” (45.20.3 LCL; see also Polybius 30:1–3). For remaining loyal, he earned the nickname “Philadelphus,” so Philadelphia reflects the love between the two brothers. In the

4. Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 2:1200.

5. William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 11.

6. This view is fully articulated in Mark Wilson, “The ‘Upper Regions’ and the Route of Paul’s Third Journey from Apamea to Ephesus,” *Scriptura* 117 (2018): 1–21.

7. An online version of the Peutinger map is available at <http://peutinger.atlantides.org/map-a/>.

8. David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1:124.

9. Getzel Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements in Europe, the Islands, and Asia Minor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 227.

10. William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 1:140.

Roman imperial period Philadelphia used the Actian calendar; like other Lydian cities, it reckoned civic dating from the battle of Actium in 31 BC.

In 129 BC, when the Senate voted to accept Attalus III's bequest of his kingdom to the Romans, Philadelphia became part of the province of Asia. Roman Asia was divided into thirteen administrative districts called *assizes* or *conventus*, and Philadelphia was located within that of its rival Sardis (Pliny, *Natural History* 5.111 [30]). An inscription found in Ephesus dating to the Flavian period similarly placed Philadelphia in the *assize* of Sardis.¹¹ In the second century AD Philadelphia finally became the principal city of a new *assize* (Aelius Aristides, *Orations* 50.96–98). Greek cities were typically divided into tribes, a division of the male citizenry called the *dēmos* (δῆμος).¹² That Philadelphia had seven tribes (unnamed) is known from a third-century AD inscription (CIG 3422).¹³ The seating arrangements of a city's tribes in a theater was sometimes inscribed on its rows such as at Hierapolis. The tribes gathered in the theater for meetings of

the assembly (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*; compare Acts 19:39). Perhaps the fourfold division of humanity often mentioned in Revelation—nation, language, tribe (φυλή, *phylē*), and people—reflects a Greek perspective of humanity's composition (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6).

Philadelphia's city wall had a rectangular plan with intermittent defensive towers. Though not well preserved, its masonry style dates it probably to the late third century AD (with later reconstructions).¹⁴ The summit of Philadelphia's acropolis (Toptepe) stands at 3135 feet (955 m) and loomed 200 feet (61 m) above the city. On its east side the *cavea* of the theater is visible; however, only the foundations of the stage building remain. A stadium that opened east toward the city was built into the northern end of the acropolis. In it games were held honoring Zeus Helios and Anaitis, a Persian goddess who was assimilated to Cybele and Artemis in Lydia.¹⁵ An alliance (δμόνοια, *homonoia*) coin of Domitian (reigned AD 81–96) shows the city goddesses of Ephesus and Philadelphia crowned and shaking hands. That of Ephesus holds a

11. Christian Habicht, "New Evidence on the Province of Asia," *Journal of Roman Studies* 65 (1975): 70, 75.

12. John K. Davies, "Phylai," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1178–79.

13. For an image and translation of the inscription, see "Honors by a Tribe of Wool-workers for Aurelius Hermippos (after 212 CE)" on the webpage *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/honors-by-a-tribe-of-wool-workers-for-aurelius-hermippos-after-212-ce/>.

14. For the probability that these walls replaced the Hellenistic walls as well as a further description, see Özcan Erdoğan, "The Remains from Late Antiquity and the East Roman Periods and Their Location within the Lydian City of Philadelphia: New Comments," *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* 5 (2015): 254–59.

15. Christian Marek, *In the Land of a Thousand Gods: A History of Asia Minor in the Ancient World*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 162, 516.



Philadelphia Acropolis

scepter while the Philadelphian goddess holds a small statue of Artemis Anaitis.¹⁶ Architectural elements now resting atop the southern end of the acropolis once belonged to a temple of Zeus or Dionysus, but its foundation is now covered by a park.¹⁷

Philadelphia was situated in an earthquake region called the Catacecaumene (“burnt land”). Strabo states that because of the frequent seismic activity few people lived in Philadelphia but rather in the country as farmers (*Geography* 13.4.10). Grapes grew abundantly in the

volcanic soil, and vineyards dotted the countryside, even as today. Bunches of grapes appearing on civic coinage from the Claudian period testify to the soil’s fertility.¹⁸ In addition to agriculture, the city’s prosperity derived from wool workers, linen workers, cobblers, and dyers. It also was probably a center of textile production like its neighbors Hierapolis and Laodicea.¹⁹ Inscriptional evidence identifies guilds in the city associated with these trades.²⁰

In AD 17 a damaging earthquake struck twelve Lydian cities including

16. Barbara Burrell, “Iphigeneia in Philadelphia,” *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005): 241–42; fig. 11b. This interpretation differs from that identifying the goddesses as Tyche and the small statue as Artemis Ephesia.

17. Inci Turkoğlu, “Philadelphia in Lydia,” in *Proceedings of the International Congress on Cultural Heritage and Tourism, May 19–21, 2017*, ed. Necmi Uyanık et al. (Konya: Nobel Bilim, 2017), 550.

18. For an illustration, see the coin RPC S2-I-3039A on the Wildwinds.com page for “Roman Imperial Coins of Claudius,” http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/claudius/RPC_S2-I-3039A.jpg.

19. Peter Thonemann, *The Maeander Valley: A Historical Geography from Antiquity to Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 186–87. However, in note 40 he concedes that direct evidence of textile production “is not abundant.”

20. For further on these guilds, see Thonemann, *Maeander Valley*, 186 n. 40.

Philadelphia. The emperor Tiberius granted tax relief for five years and also gave ten million sesterces to rebuild the cities (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.47). Strabo's description of the city as abandoned because of earthquakes seems overstated. Otherwise, why would the emperor appropriate money to rebuild Philadelphia if it were largely deserted? Rome's mint in AD 22–23 issued a coin depicting Tiberius as a god wearing a laurel wreath to celebrate the restoration of these cities. In thanks, Philadelphia along with the other eleven cities erected a monument in AD 30 in Rome's Forum of Julius Caesar. A personification of Philadelphia was among those representing each city depicted on a base upon which a statue of Tiberius stood. Sardis and Magnesia ad Sipylum flanked the dedicatory inscription on its front with Philadelphia on the right side in the third position. This monument was apparently destroyed in the fire of AD 80. Fortunately, a copy with dedication was made by the Augustales of Puteoli, and this base is now displayed in the Naples National Archaeological Museum.²¹ Philadelphia received a new name twice: after AD 17 it was called "Philadelphia Neocaesarea" in gratitude to Tiberius, and later named "Flavia Philadelphia" after the wife of Vespasian (reigned 69–79) when the emperor gave financial assistance following another earthquake. Under



The personification of Philadelphia (at left) from the Tiberius statue base on display at the Naples Museum. The name Philadelphia can be easily read at the bottom left

Elagabalus it was given the right to call itself a metropolis.²²

RELIGIOUS SITUATION

The city's religious traditions are reflected on its coins. In the first century BC these featured Artemis, Zeus, Dionysus, and the Dioscuri. In the first century AD additional deities such as Hecate, Apollo Kitharoidos, Asclepius, Cybele, and Nike began to appear.²³ An inscription (SIG 3.985) dating around 100 BC mentions a shrine erected by Dionysius at the direction of the goddess Agdistis in a dream from Zeus. In it were cultic altars for at least ten gods and goddesses. Men and women, slave

21. Cornelius Vermeule, "The Basis from Puteoli: Cities of Asia Minor in Julio-Claudian Italy," in *Coins, Culture and History in the Ancient World: Numismatic and Other Studies in Honor of Bluma L. Trell*, ed. Lionel Casson and Martin Price (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 90–91.

22. Barbara Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek Cities and Roman Emperors* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 128.

23. Images of coins of Philadelphia can be viewed online at the Wildwinds.com page "Ancient Coinage of Lydia, Philadelphia (Philadelphia Neokaisareia)," <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/lydia/philadelphia/i.html>.

and free were required to take an oath to live within strict ethical guidelines in the context of their sacrificial offerings.²⁴ Inscriptions indicate that the city had a priest of Rome and Augustus as early as 27/26 BC, but no imperial cult temple was built until AD 214 when Caracalla visited the city and granted permission for Philadelphia to call itself *neōkoros* (νεωκόρος, “temple warden”; *IGR* 4.1619).²⁵

A Jewish community lived in Philadelphia. Two thousand families were settled in Lydia and Phrygia around 210 BC as military colonists (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.148–153). So the city’s Jewish population probably came from these settlers. No remains of a synagogue have been found, although a Greek inscription dating to the third century AD and found east of Philadelphia mentions a “synagogue of the Hebrews.” The legs of a funerary table found in Philadelphia for Judas and Hesychios display menorahs, lulav, and etrog on them.²⁶

PHILADELPHIA IN LATER HISTORY

An early tradition suggests that Paul appointed his Jewish kinsman, Lucius (Rom 16:21), as bishop of Philadelphia. However, according to the Apostolic

Constitutions, the city’s first bishop, Demetrius, was appointed by John.²⁷ Ignatius visited the city around AD 110 and later wrote a letter from Troas to the church, whose leaders are unnamed (*Philadelphians* 1).²⁸ He warned them not to listen to anyone expounding Judaism (*Philadelphians* 6), suggesting the ongoing influence of the Jewish community. He also instructed them to appoint a deacon to join the embassies of other Asian churches to travel to Syrian Antioch and congratulate the church there for achieving peace and reconciliation (*Philadelphians* 10).

The travel network among churches established by Paul and the other apostles is shown to continue in the postapostolic period. Ammia and Quadratus were Christian prophets who ministered in Philadelphia during the reign of Hadrian (Eusebius, *Church History* 5.17). Eleven Christians from Philadelphia were martyred with Polycarp in Smyrna around AD 156 (*Martyrdom of Polcarp* 19.1). John Lydus (born AD 490) was a well-known Byzantine administrator from the city. Though nominally a Christian, he celebrated the city’s ties to pagan antiquity; by the fifth century “Philadelphia had earned special distinction for its temples

24. Stanley Stowers, “A Cult from Philadelphia: Oikos Religion or Cultic Association?” in *The Early Church in Its Context*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe, Frederick W. Norris, and James W. Thompson (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 287–301.

25. Burrell, *Neokoroi*, 126–29. For more on the pagan religious background, see Özcan Erdoğan, “On the History of Religions in Philadelphia in Lydia until the End of Late Antiquity,” *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* 4 (2014): 172–73.

26. Walter Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis: Band II, Kleinasien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 202–8 nos. 49–50; for photographs of the table legs, see p. 569, figs. 11–14.

27. O. F. A. Meinardus, “The Christian Remains of Seven Churches of the Apocalypse,” *BA* 37 (1974): 80.

28. The Philadelphians were so divided, according to Allen Brent, “that Ignatius could not name the bishop, presbyters, and deacons in this church.” (Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 40).



Church of Saint John

and festivals.”²⁹ Thus John proudly writes about his hometown: “The school of Proclus called Philadelphia ‘little Athens’ because of their enthusiasm for it” (*de Mensibus* 58). The Byzantine Church of Saint John dating to the sixth century provides the most visible remains in Alaşehir today with three piers of this large basilica still standing.³⁰ In 1390 Philadelphia was the last Byzantine outpost in Anatolia to fall by surrendering to Bayezid I. Numerous objects of Philadelphia including inscriptions and statues of various gods are found in the provincial archaeological museum at Manisa.³¹

SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL REALITIES OF THE PHILADELPHIA LETTER

Christianity likely came to Philadelphia in the latter half of the first century. Luke writes that Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the gospel during Paul’s time in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). John’s letter to the church in Philadelphia is rich in local imagery. The “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 3:9), as in Smyrna, seemingly refers to opposition from the local Jewish leadership. The victors in Philadelphia are promised that in God’s heavenly temple they would be columns (Rev 3:12).³² Columns of limestone, granite, or

29. Michael Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 30.

30. Erdoğan, “Remains from Late Antiquity,” 266–71.

31. For inscriptions see Hasan Malay, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in the Manisa Museum* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994), *passim*; for statues see Müntehe Dinç, “Manisa Müzesi’ndeki Hellnistik – Roma Dönemi Heykelleri,” in *Manisa Müzesi Heykeltraşlık Eserleri*, ed. Serra Durugönül (Mersin: Mersin University, 2015), 60–64, 66–67.

32. The Greek word *stylos* (στῦλος) is better translated “column” since in discussions of Greco-Roman architecture “pillar” is never used to describe the vertical supports of a temple.

marble were ubiquitous in ancient temples. Their style could be either monolithic or drum (round blocks), unfluted or fluted (grooved). By design, temples were often the most secure structure in a city, especially in earthquake-prone ones like Philadelphia. The promise of being a column suggests strength and stability. The promise of new Jerusalem (Rev 3:12) was interpreted literally by the Montanists, whose prophetic movement is believed by some to have started around Philadelphia in the late second century AD. However, this “Phrygian heresy” is better localized fifty-three miles (86 km) east of Philadelphia around their center at Pepouza. Nevertheless, Montanism had many followers in and around Philadelphia for centuries.³³

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33. William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 53.

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