# THE ROMAN ROAD SYSTEM AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Acts 8:26; 20:1–3; 23:23–33; 28:13–16; Romans 15:19

*Mark Wilson*

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### KEY POINTS

- Roads were built initially to transport Roman legions to areas of conflict.

- The empire's expansion required governors to build roads for the provincial infrastructure.

- Milestones not only informed travelers but also served as imperial propaganda markers.

- Evangelistic activities from Jerusalem to Rome were facilitated along existing road networks.

- Apostolic journeys can be localized on major roads such as the *Via Appia* and the *Via Sebaste*.

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### CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS

The adage, "All roads lead to Rome," is reversed in this discussion. The construction of roads leading from Rome toward the eastern Mediterranean began in the third century BC. Around 20 BC Augustus placed a Golden Milestone (*Milliarium Aureum*) in the Forum to acknowledge that Rome was the hub of the empire's road system (Cassius Dio 54.8.4). However, the early church developed in the opposite direction—from Jerusalem to Rome—as seen in the book of Acts (1:8; 28:16). The established Roman road system will be connected to the spread of the gospel seen in the later New Testament.

Local roads were built initially to connect Rome with its surrounding cities.[1]

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1. The following general information on roads is drawn, passim, from Romolo Augusto Staccioli, *The Roads of the Romans* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2003).

Golden Milestone (*Milliarium Aureum*)

The building of consular roads brought an expansion of the road system throughout the Italian peninsula. The principal arterial roads followed the natural communication routes that had existed throughout history. The road system eventually extended throughout the provinces as the empire expanded. These roads developed for several reasons. They facilitated the movement of legions to established military bases along the empire's borders, especially during threats from enemies like the Parthians. Peripheral roads linked the military outposts on the outer boundary (*limes*) of provinces. Such roads were built by legionary troops and later maintained by local authorities through whose territory the road passed. They also allowed intercity and interprovincial communication and commerce. These roads likewise carried pilgrims to temples like Artemis' in Ephesus (Acts 19:24–26), to oracles like Apollo's in Claros and Didyma (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4.1), to healing centers like Asclepius' in Pergamum (Aelius Aristides, *Orations*

53.1–5), and to Jewish sacred feasts in Jerusalem like Pentecost (Acts 2:5–11).[2]

The construction of roads was celebrated by ancient authors. Plutarch observed that they were made in a straight line partly of quarried stone and partly with tightly rammed masses of earth (*Life of Caius Gracchus* 7.1–2). Bridges were built to cross depressions and riverbeds, thus allowing passage all year and providing raised roadbeds with a uniform height and an agreeable appearance. Roads were measured by Roman miles, and fixed stones were used to mark the distances. Strabo observed that, while the Greeks gave little attention to infrastructure, the Romans invested themselves in projects like paving roads and constructing aqueducts (*Geography* 5.3.8; 4.6.6). They paved roads, cut hills, and filled valleys, so that merchandise could be conveyed by carriage from the ports. Augustus was particularly concerned with building as many roads as he possibly could. Tacitus noted that an important reason for constructing solid roads and bridges over marshy areas was to convey heavy troops (*Annales* 4.73). Josephus confirms this aspect: behind the advance military guard came the road-makers who straightened out bends and leveled rough places so Vespasian's army would not experience exhaustion during difficult marches (*J.W.* 3.118).[3] Trajan's Column in Rome depicts several scenes (nos. 19, 23, 41, 56) showing the Roman military constructing roads and bridges during deployment.[4]

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2. For more on pilgrimage travel in antiquity, see Robert L. Cioffi, "Travel in the Ancient World," Oxford Handbooks Online (2016), 16–19; https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.110.

3. For other comments by ancient authors, see Cornelius van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2007), 11–15.

4. See pages XXX–XXX for images of the Cichorius plates for two more of these scenes..

Trajan's Column (Cichorius Plate) Scene 19 (center): Building a Bridge

### FEATURES OF ROMAN ROADS

The *cursus publicus* (postal service), inaugurated in the Republican era but reorganized by Augustus, employed young men to carry messages to and from the provinces. Later regular couriers on horseback (*tabellarii*), sometimes with fast carts, carried imperial communications (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 49.3). Every seven to ten miles (11–16 km) *mutationes* (horse-changing stations) were established. Riders could cover approximately fifty miles (80 km) a day. Regular travelers stopped at *mansiones*, usually located one day's journey apart. These provided all types of services and provisions for travelers including inns, restaurants, carpenters, blacksmiths, and veterinarians. A relief, now in Rome's Museum of National Civilizations, shows an innkeeper leaning out the window of his *mansio* and watching the arrival of two guests in a carriage.[5] The standard width of paved roads was fourteen Roman feet (13.5 ft; 4.1 m), but this could narrow to three and six-tenths feet (1.1 m) or expand to twenty-three feet (7 m) depending on terrain and location. Usually roads were curbed, then ridged to facilitate the runoff of water. Bridges and viaducts carried travelers across the many rivers and ravines that coursed through the mountains and countryside.[6] Some roads even featured sidewalks to allow pedestrian traffic.

Milestones called *milliaria* began to appear in the Republican period. The oldest known milestone was placed at Mile 53 of the *Via Appia* sometime between 255–253 BC. Caius Gracchus passed the *lex viaria* ("road law") in 123 BC and "measured off every road by miles … and planted stone pillars in the ground to mark the distances" (Plutarch, *Life of Caius Gracchus* 7.2). The Roman mile (RM) consisted of 1,000 paces (*millia passum*)

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5. https://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/DAE-10327264.

6. For the documentation and discussion of over five hundred bridges, see Colin O'Connor, *Roman Bridges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For pictures of and information on these bridges, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_bridges.

Ancient Roman Bridge in Aleppo, Syria

5 feet each equaling 5000 Roman feet. This was standardized by Agrippa in 29 BC with an approximate equivalent of 4,860 English feet (0.92 mi [1482 m]). The milestones identified the road builder or repairer, usually an emperor or governor, and indicated the direction and distance traveled or yet to be traveled, usually from its roadhead (*caput viae*). Outside of Italy these milestones assumed an additional function: "as an assertion—symbolized by the very massiveness of the road-markers—of Roman territorial possession in Asia Minor."[7] While French's comment may be limited to Asia Minor, his observation rings true empire-wide, for Roll asserts similarly about milestones in Judea that "their primary role was to propagandize the idea of Rome and its Empire."[8]

An extra-urban feature that developed outside Rome in the third century BC was the appearance of tombs outside the city gate. The names of local elites were announced on these sepulchral monuments. Exedrae and benches were provided for travelers, and sepulchral inscriptions appealed to them: "Hey, traveler, come here and rest a moment." This necropolis pattern was replicated in cities throughout the empire with a noteworthy example being Asian Hierapolis with over two thousand tombs and sarcophagi outside its city gates leading to Philadelphia and Laodicea.[9] Travelers also erected votive altars to enlist divine assistance for their journeys. One such altar is inscribed with *salvos ire*, wishing a safe outbound journey, and *salvos venire*, wishing a safe return. Another votive

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7. David H. French, *Milestones: Republican*, fascicle 3.1 of *Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor* (Ankara: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 2012), 8.

8. Israel Roll, "The Roman Road System in Judaea," *Jerusalem Cathedra* 3 (1983): 153.

9. Francesco D'Andria, *Hierapolis of Phrygia (Pamukkale): An Archaeological Guide* (Istanbul: Ege, 2003), 48–62, 205–9.

relief expresses similar wishes for a safe journey and shows two sets of feet, the ones on the right outbound and those on the left inbound.[10]

## ROMAN ROADS AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN

### ROADS IN ITALY

As the city of Rome expanded its territory southward into the Italian peninsula, one of the first roads to be built was the *Via Appia*. Named after its builder, the Roman censor Appius Claudius Caecus, the first section was constructed as a military road in 312 BC during the Second and Third Samnite Wars. Its initial phase covered 132 RM (122 mi. [196 km]) to Capua.[11] Throughout the next century the road was extended in stages until it reached Brundisium (modern Brindisi) in 191 BC, a distance of 365 RM (336 mi. [541 km]).[12] Ovid made this journey from Rome in ten days, averaging 36 RM a day (*Pontus* 4.5.8). Brundisium became "a strategic crossing point into Greece and a bridgehead for the conquest of the east."[13] Statius called the *Via Appia*: *Appia longarum... regina viarum* ("queen of long roads"; *Silvae* 2.2). Its construction and related infrastructure served as a model for subsequent road construction throughout the empire.

On his captivity journey Paul landed at Rome's port of Puteoli where he spent seven days. From Puteoli the *Via Campania* first passed through the rock-cut pass with stone walls revetted in a building technique called *opus reticulatum*. This *Montagna Spaccata* ("Broken Mountain") is still used for traffic today. At Capua the *Via Campania* connected with the *Via Appia*. Outside Tarracina (modern Terracina) a canal paralleled the road through the Pontine marshes, a nineteen-mile (30.6 km) section called the *Decennovium*. Travelers could take a "red-eye" through the night in a barge pulled by mules along its banks. Horace tells humorously that the arrangement did not always work out (*Satires* 1.5.9–23). Perhaps the centurion Julius was able to requisition a barge for official use to transport Paul along the *Decennovium* (Acts 27:1). Nevertheless, a messenger must have been



Votive Altar with Inscription *salvos ire*

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10. Daniela Velestino, *La Galleria Lapidaria dei Musei Capitolini* (Rome: De Luca, 2015), 70–71.

11. See the section on the *Via Appia* in Ray Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 1999), 13–21.

12. For details related to mileage along the *Via Appia*, see http://www.straderomane.it/en/strade/r0001/r0001_en.htm.

13. Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio, "Origins and Historic Events," in *The Appian Way: From Its Foundation to the Middle Ages*, ed. Ivana Della Portella (Los Angeles: Getty, 2004), 20.

**Roman Roads in Southern Italy**

- The Via Appia, developed by Appius Claudius Caecus around 312 B.C., helping Rome's connectivity with the East
- The Via Campania
- Decennovium (19 mile marshy subsection of the Via Appia)
- The Via Popilia
- The Via Latina
- The Via Tiburtina

sent from Puteoli to Rome because Roman believers met Paul first at the Forum of Appius (modern Borgo Faiti). This *mansio* at RM 43 was named after the censor who founded the road.[14] Horace also stopped at the Forum of Appius, observing it was "full of boatmen and crooked innkeepers" (*Satires* 1.5.3–4).[15] Other believers met Paul at RM 35 at Three Taverns (*Tres Tabernae*), another way station that provided food and refreshment. Both groups accompanied Paul on the *Via Appia* for the remainder of his journey into Rome (Acts 28:13–16).

### ROADS IN THE BALKANS

Around 146 BC the governor Gnaeus Egnatius began a road project across the Balkan Peninsula to link the Adriatic to his province of Macedonia on the Aegean Sea.[16] Before 56 BC the road had been extended through Thrace to Byzantium (Cicero, *On the Consular Provinces* 2.4).[17] Its length was 746 RM (696 mi. [1,120 km]). Travelers wishing to continue east from the port of Brundisium ferried across the Adriaticum (modern Adriatic) either to Dyrrachium or Apollonia (Strabo, *Geography* 7.7.4,8; he calls the former city by its Greek name Epidamnus). Branches of the *Via Egnatia* terminated at these Adriatic ports in the province of Illyricum. The remains of a *mutatio* are found at Ad Quintum (modern Bradashesh). Lychnidos (modern Ohrid) was the last major city in eastern

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14. Gijs Tol et al., "Minor Centres in the Pontine Plain: The Cases of Forum Appii and Ad Medias," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 82 (2014): 116–18.

15. *Horace's Satires and Epistles*, trans. Jacob Fuchs (New York: Norton, 1977).

16. For a beautifully illustrated volume on the *Via Egnatia* with excellent maps (albeit in Greek), see Giannes Lolos, *Εγνατία Ὁδός* (Athens: Olkos, 2009); for a practical guide for visiting the route today and its related archaeological sites, see Marietta van Attekum and Holger de Bruin, *Via Egnatia on Foot: A Journey into History* (Driebergen: Via Egnatia Foundation, 2014).

17. Constantine around AD 337 constructed the Milion in Constantinople to mark the eastern starting point of the *Via Egnatia*. The monument was modeled after Augustus' Golden Milestone in Rome.
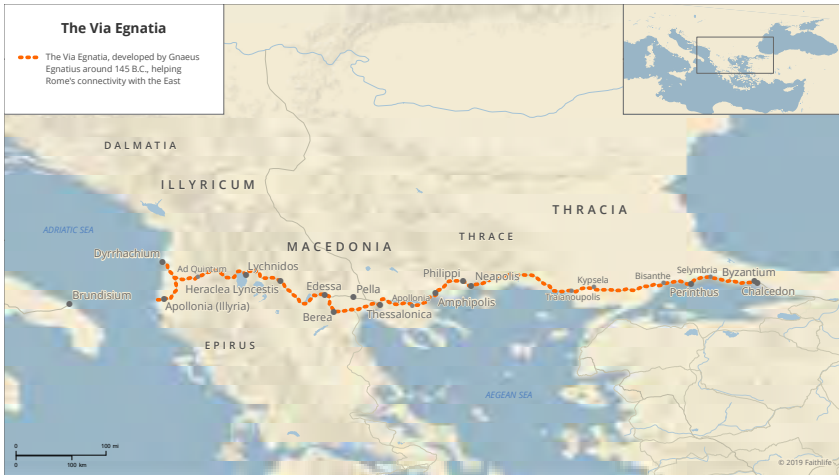
Illyricum. Heraclea Lyncestis (modern Bitola) was the first major Macedonian city, then Edessa where a branch ran south to Berea. After Pella came the provincial capital Thessalonica on the Aegean coast. Eastward the road ran through Apollonia, Amphipolis, Philippi, and back to the coast at Neapolis.

On his second and third journeys Paul transshipped through Neapolis where he connected with the *Via Egnatia* (Acts 16:11; 20:1–3; 1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 1:16; 2:13; 7:5; Phil 4:15; 1 Tim 1:3). On the second journey Paul was forced to flee from Thessalonica down the coastal road that turned inland to Berea (Acts 17:10). From Berea some fellow believers took him back to the coast where he embarked either by ship perhaps from Pydna to Piraeus, the port of Athens, or he traveled overland through the rugged mountains of northern Achaia (Acts 17:14–15). When Paul preached in Illyricum, probably during the third journey, the *Via Egnatia* carried him westward to Dyrrachium (Rom 15:19).

Silas, the messenger for 1 Peter, traveled the *Via Appia* to Brundisium. He then ferried to Dyrrachium and traversed the *Via Egnatia* through Thrace to Byzantium. There he boarded a boat to Pontus, landing probably in Amisus, to begin his ambulatory visitation of churches in the provinces listed in 1 Peter 1:1.

### ROADS IN GREECE

Corinth, rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 46 BC, became the capital of the newly formed province of Achaia in 27 BC. There was little imperial interest in building or repairing roads here until the reign of Trajan, who installed the first milestones. Susan Alcock explains, "In part, this must be explained by the province's broken and dissected topography (encouraging marine transport), in part to its military unimportance."[18] For this reason Paul's arrival in Achaia from coastal Macedonia was probably through Piraeus, the port of Athens (Acts 17:14–15). Paul's journey to Corinth (Acts 18:1) fol-

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18. Susan E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121.

Corinth

lowed the Scironian road via Megara that entered the Peloponnese after crossing the Isthmus of Corinth. Hadrian later widened the road to two lanes so chariots could pass (Pausanias 1.44.6). Corinth was a major transportation hub for the province. Roads led to its northern port of Lechaion on the Gulf of Corinth and its eastern port on the Saronic Gulf—Cenchrae, a sailing point for Paul and home of Phoebe (Acts 18:18; Rom 16:1). A road network to the northwest connected it with the imperial colonies of Patrai and Nicopolis, where Paul later spent a winter (Titus 3:12). Paul's plan to pass through Achaia on his third journey (Acts 19:21; compare 20:1) suggests that he might have taken the overland route south from Berea via Larissa to Athens and Corinth.[19] An edict dating from Claudius regulated the demands of the *cursus publicus* around Tegea in the central Peloponnese (*ILS* 214). Paul's letters suggest multiple churches in Achaia,[20] so these would have developed along such established roads (1 Thess 1:7; 2 Cor 1:1; 11:10).

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19. *BAGRW*, maps 55, 58, 59 show few roads in Achaia. For maps of the first-century AD road network in Achaia see Alcock, *Graecia Capta*, 123; and Athanasios D. Rizakis, "Town and Country in Early Imperial Greece," *Pharos: Journal of the Netherlands Institute at Athens* 20 (2014): 242.

20. Jerry A. Pattengale, "Achaia," *ABD* 1:53 claims at least twenty churches by the start of Nero's reign in AD 54; however, the source of that number is unstated.

ROADS IN ASIA MINOR[21]

When Attalus III bequeathed his kingdom to the Romans in 133 BC and after the rebellion of Aristonicus was squelched four years later, the Roman Senate voted to receive Asia into the Roman Empire in 129 BC. The governor Manius Aquillius immediately began to expand the road system in the province. He utilized existing roads developed by the Attalids for military and commercial purposes. One road ran north from Ephesus through Smyrna and past Pergamum to Lampsacus on the Hellespont (Dardanelles; modern Çanakkale Boğazı). The measurement on a milestone found near Dikili indicates Ephesus as the *caput viae*. Paul connected with this road at Adramyttium on his second journey coming from Mysia. A spur near Skamandros took him west to the coastal port of Troas (Acts 16:8). Here Paul transshipped to the Macedonian port of Neapolis (Acts 16:11). Paul probably took this road when he left Ephesus after the riot, traveling again to Troas (Acts 20:1; 2 Cor 2:12). The messenger delivering Revelation to the seven churches traversed this road to visit Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum (Rev 1:11).

Manius Aquillius developed another road to link the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Branches began at Pergamum and Ephesus and merged at Laodicea before crossing the Taurus Mountains to pass through Perga before it terminated at Side.[22] The messenger delivering Revelation to the seven churches used the branch from Pergamum to visit Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev 1:11). In 6 BC Augustus improved the road segment from Perga to Lake Ascania for a section of his new *Via Sebaste* that then

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21. Monographs covering all Roman roads in Asia Minor—the lifetime work of David French—are available for free download at: https://biaa.ac.uk/publications/item/name/electronic-monographs.

22. For the discussion of Republican roads in Asia Minor, see French, *Milestones: Republican*, 9–12.

Republican Milestone from Side
Erected by Governor Manius Aquillius

*viae*.[23] Paul's landfall on the first journey, probably at Magydus the seaport of Perga, brought him inland through a rock-cut pass with sidewalks, still in existence, to the connection with the *Via Sebaste*.[24]

On his third journey Paul walked along a sacred way that ran southward from Troas. A nine-arched bridge, still preserved, carried him across the Satnioeis River. From the Apollo temple at the Smintheum Paul continued to the port of Assos where he boarded a ship carrying his companions (Acts 20:13–14).[25]

Later in that journey Paul landed at Miletus and sent a messenger, probably Trophimus, to Ephesus to gather the church's elders. They exited through Ephesus' eastern Magnesian Gate and first traveled to its sister city, Magnesia ad Meandrum. From there a road situated between Mount Mycale and the Gulf of Latmus continued southwest past Priene. To cross the gulf near the mouth of the Meander River, a ferry was required to reach Miletus, where Paul addressed the elders (Acts 20:17–38).[26]

Peter's first letter was delivered by a messenger, probably Silas (Silvanus), to churches in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:1; 5:12). A comprehensive road system connected the capitals and other major cities in these provinces. A knowledge of this road network has allowed the

branched to the north and east through Pisidian Antioch and terminated at Lystra. An Augustan milestone, still standing in situ in the pass at Döşeme, numbers 139 RM to Pisidian Antioch, the road's *caput*

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23. G. H. R. Horsley and S. Mitchell, *The Inscriptions of Central Pisidia: Including Texts from Kremna, Ariassos, Keraia, Hyia, Panemoteichos, the Sanctuary of Apollo of the Perminoundeis, Sia, Kocaaliler, and the Döşeme Bŏgazi* (Bonn: Habelt, 2000), 168–69.

24. Mark Wilson, "Saint Paul in Pamphylia: Intention, Arrival, Departure," *Adalya* 19 (2016): 236–38.

25. Glen L. Thompson and Mark Wilson, "Paul's Walk to Assos: A Hodological Inquiry into Its Geography, Archaeology, and Purpose," in *Stones, Bones and the Sacred: Essays on Material Culture and Ancient Religion in Honor of Dennis E. Smith*, ed. Alan Cadwallader (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 278–83.

26. Mark Wilson, "The Ephesian Elders Come to Miletus: An Annaliste Reading of Acts 20:15–18a," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34 (2013): 3–6.

reconstruction of a viable itinerary for Silas, with accompanying insights into the demographics of these early Petrine churches.[27]

### ROADS IN CYPRUS

After the Ptolemies moved the capital to Paphos from Salamis in the late fourth century BC, a road system developed to link the ends of the island. It passed along the southern coast below the Troodos Mountains.[28] In 58 BC Cyprus was annexed to Rome but did not become its own province until 22 BC. Paphos continued as the Roman provincial capital, although Salamis served as one of the four district centers. After Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogues in Salamis, the latter's hometown (Acts 13:5), they along with John Mark traveled southwest through the cities of Kition, Amathus, and Kourion. They undoubtedly spoke in any synagogues existing in these cities. They then passed through Palai Paphos, home of the famous temple of Aphrodite. In Paphos they met the provincial governor Sergius Paulus whose *patria* (family) was from Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:7–12). The governor apparently offered an introduction to the leaders of the Roman colony there. This suggested to Paul that their evangelistic efforts should turn northward to Pamphylia and Galatia.[29] Presumably Barnabas and John Mark followed a similar itinerary across Cyprus when they

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27.  See "Peter's Christian Communities in Asia Minor" in this resource for a detailed discussion.

28.  For maps of Cyprus's road system during the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods, see Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, *The Roads of Ancient Cyprus* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2004), 102 fig. 12, 14 fig. 13, and 110 fig. 14.

29.  Stephen Mitchell, "Population and Land in Roman Galatia," *ANRW* 7.2:1073–74.

**Major Roads in Syria**

---- Arterial travel/trade routes through Syria,
     many of which were enhanced by the
     Romans

returned to the island on their second journey (Acts 15:39).[30]

### ROADS IN SYRIA

Antioch on the Orontes served as the capital of the Seleucid Empire (281 BC), then Pompey made it the capital of the new Roman province of Syria in 64 BC. The city sat at the apex of an important road system in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. In the first century AD the Euphrates River (modern Fırat) was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, and ongoing problems with the Parthians required the Romans to base at least two legions in Antioch to secure that border.[31] A road led approximately 125 miles (201 km) northeast to the major ford at Zeugma/Apamea. Another road ran south connecting Antioch with the major coastal cities of Roman Syria: Laodicea ad Mare (modern Latakia), Tripolis (modern Tripoli), Berytus (modern Beirut), Sidon (modern Saida), and Tyre (modern Sour). The road then entered Judea passing through Ptolemais (modern Acre) to Caesarea Maritima.[32] The road led inland from the coast through Antipatris and Lydda before ascending to Jerusalem. Cities along this route were conveniently located a day's journey apart, thus providing

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30. For the hypothesis that Alexandria was the original destination of the first journey, see Thomas W. Davis and Mark Wilson, "The Destination of Paul's First Journey: Asia Minor or North Africa?" *Pharos Journal of Theology* 97 (2016): 1–14.

31. During Trajan's reign that increased to four legions and an equal number of auxiliary troops totaling around forty thousand; see Michael Maas, "People and Identity in Roman Antioch," in *Antioch The Lost Ancient City*, ed. Christine Kondoleon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

32. A section of this road, 164 feet long (50 m), was found north of Acco near Shave Ziyyon; see http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=22789&mag_id=122.

Roman Roads in Arabia
The Via Nova Traiana, developed by Trajan around 111 A.D., improving connectivity through Arabia

travelers convenient facilities for room and board. [33] Journeys between Antioch and Jerusalem are mentioned numerous times: by Agabus and his fellow prophets (Acts 11:27–28); by Paul and Barnabas for famine relief (Acts 11:29–30; Gal 2:2), by Paul and Barnabas for the apostolic council (Acts 15:3–4, 30),[34] by Paul for the second journey return (Acts 18:22); by the so-called Judaizers (Acts 15:1; Gal 2:12); and by Peter (Gal 2:11).[35]

Northwest of Antioch a road led through the Syrian Gates (modern Belen Geçidi) to descend to the Mediterranean coast, then north through Alexandria ad Issum before passing the Syrian/Cilician Gates into Cilicia. Cilicia's three main cities were Mopsuestia (modern Misis), Adana, and Tarsus. All were situated on major rivers: respectively the Pyramus (modern Ceyhan), Sarus (modern Seyhan), and Cydnus (modern Berdan). Roman bridges spanning the rivers still remain in these Cilician cities.[36] When Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch, this was the route that he used (Acts 11:25–26). The letter drafted by the Jerusalem council presumes this itinerary:

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33. Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2003), 128–29. Butcher provides a map of a similar journey made by Theophanes and his retinue around AD 317–323 that took eighteen days from Antioch to Raphia, south of Gaza (p. 132 fig. 43).

34. A diversion from Ptolemais through Samaria is mentioned here, probably to connect with Samaritan believers in Sebaste and Shechem (Acts 8:5, 14; 9:31).

35. An alternate inland route via Damascus was also possible; see Barry Beitzel, *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 254, 255 map 108.

36. O'Connor, *Roman Bridges*, 127.

Antioch, Syria, Cilicia (Acts 15:23). On his second and third journeys Paul traveled this route before traversing the Cilician Gates north of Tarsus into the heartland of Asia Minor (Acts 15:41–16:1; 18:23).

### ROADS IN ARABIA

After Paul's conversion on the road outside of Damascus (Acts 9:3–8), he traveled to Arabia (Gal 1:17). In the first century AD Arabia was the land of the Nabateans, the descendants of Ishmael, and of the Idumeans who had converted to Judaism under John Hyrcanus I in the late second century BC.[37] The road from Damascus led southeast through Soada (modern As Suwayda) and Bostra (modern Busra). There the road turned southwest to Philadelphia (modern Amman). It then turned south to run east of the Dead Sea all the way to Petra, the capital of the kingdom. Much of this route was later incorporated into the *Via Nova Traiana* built from AD 111–114 between Bostra and the Red Sea port Aela (modern Elath/Aqaba). The reference to Sinai in Arabia (Gal 4:25) has suggested to Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer that Paul might have extended his journey southeast into the northern Hejaz to Hegra/Hagra (modern Mada'in Saleh). A Jewish community lived in Hegra in the first century AD,[38] and a Jewish tradition localized the holy mountain Sinai nearby.[39] Caravans plied these trade routes carrying frankincense and other precious spices from southern Arabia to Rome (Pliny, *Natural History* 12.32.63–65).

### ROADS IN JUDEA

During the Hellenistic period a group of Greek cities were built in the Galilee region, later known as the Decapolis (Mark 5:20; 7:31). A series of roads were constructed to connect these cities and their adjoining regions. However, any specifics about their nature or alignment are unknown. Many of the earlier roads, according to Roll, "were gradually converted by the Romans into built and engineered imperial highways."[40] These roads facilitated intra- and interregional commerce and communication in Judea. However, the earliest documented roads come from the time of the Jewish revolt in AD 66. The first Roman milestone dates to AD 69 when Traianus, the father of the emperor Trajan, was commander and overseer of road construction from Caesarea to Scythopolis.[41]

37.  For a discussion of these sites in modern Syria and Jordan, see Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 2:1033–45.

38.  Jane Taylor, *Petra and the Lost kingdom of the Nabateans* (London: Tauris, 2001), 163.

39.  Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 113–16,

40.  Israel Roll, "Between Damascus and Megiddo and Megiddo: Roads and Transportation in Antiquity across the Northeastern Approaches to the Holy Land," in *Man near a Roman Arch: Studies Presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir*, ed. Leah Di Segni et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 11.

41.  Benjamin Isaac observes that when Judea was a subunit of Syria administered by equestrian officials the roads were not marked by milestones. He continues, "This process was initiated only when senatorial commanders were in charge of Judaea as a separate province. It may be noted that these Flavian milestone-inscriptions are the only ones that mention the names of military commanders or governors in Judaea" ("Roman Roads, Physical Remains, Organization and Development," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 34 [2015]: 41)

From the Hasmonean period two routes ran westward from Jerusalem toward the coast and merged at Lydda before continuing to Joppa. The northern route ran through Lower Beit Horon and Modiʿin while the southern route passed Emmaus (Luke 24:13). After Pompey conquered Palestine in 63 BC, his representative Gabinius reorganized the political structure by dividing it into five administrative districts. Jerusalem was one of the district centers along with Gadara, Amathus, Jericho, and Sepphoris (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.170). The Lower Beit Horon–Modiʿin route became more settled and thus began to carry increased traffic.[42] Peter probably traveled on the northern route to Lydda and Joppa (Acts 9:32–38). Later he took the coastal road to Caesarea when Cornelius' messengers came to Joppa to fetch him (Acts 10:5–9, 22–24). Philip as well as Peter and John traveled north on the central ridge road to Samaria (Acts 8:5, 14). Philip later took the road through the hill country past Beth Guvrin[43] to meet the Ethiopian eunuch who was traveling along the desert road near Gaza (Acts 8:26).[44]

Saul, later Paul, traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the disciples there (Acts 9:1–3). There were several ways he could reach Scythopolis, a transportation node in the southern Galilee. He could travel northward through Samaria.[45] Or he could descend along the Wadi Qilt (Heb. *Nahal Prat*) to

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42. Andrea M. Berlin, "Jewish Life before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36 (2005): 422–23.

43. Seventeen milestones dating to the late Roman period have been discovered along this route. Five are now displayed at the KKL-JNF Archaeological Garden: http://www.kkl-jnf.org/about-kkl-jnf/green-israel-news/december-2016/roman-milestones-givat-yeshayahu/.

44. The eunuch's mode of transport is usually translated "chariot" (ἅρμα, *harma*), but this is unlikely. It was more probably a richly ornamented single-axle carriage called a *carpentum* used by officials and the elite.

45. Beitzel, *New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, 255 map 108; compare 249 map 105.

Jericho (compare Luke 10:33), then proceed either through the Transjordanian highlands[46] or follow the west bank of the Jordan River.[47] From Scythopolis the road ran north to the Sea of Galilee where it forked. The road on the lake's eastern side steered northeastward from above Hippus through Gaulanitis toward Damascus (Rainey-Notley). The road on the lake's western side passed through Tiberius and Capernaum, then continued northward into the Jordan River valley. A fork at Hazor turned northeastward again through Gaulanitis to Damascus (Beitzel).[48] A third possible route continued northward along the Jordan to connect with the Herodian road mentioned by Josephus (*J.W.* 3.10.7). This route ran eastward from Tyre past Caesarea Philippi through Trachonitis to Damascus (*BAGRW*). Archaeological realia from these routes include numerous late Roman milestones found near Scythopolis and a well-preserved Roman bridge at Caesarea Philippi.[49]

After being taken into custody in Jerusalem at the end of his third journey, Paul was secretly taken to Caesarea (sixty-eight miles [109 km]) under the protective command of two centurions commanding two hundred soldiers, seventy cavalrymen, and two hundred spearmen. Paul was provided a horse to ride (Acts 23:23–24). At Antipatris the foot soldiers were allowed to return to Jerusalem, while the cavalry escorted Paul the remainder of the trip (twenty-six miles [42 km]; Acts 23:31–33). That such an auxiliary cohort could travel at night suggests that they were marching on a built and engineered road between Jerusalem and Caesarea, the provincial capital and residence of the governor Felix. Acts thus provides important textual evidence for an imperial road in Judea before the Jewish revolt.[50]

### ROADS AND TRAVEL

Travel by sea was the preferred option because of speed, ease, and cost. However, the Mediterranean was closed during the winter and unpredictable in the late fall and early spring. Travel at this time was dangerous, as Paul well knew (2 Cor 11:25; see also Acts 27:9–12). Even when sea-lanes were open, winds could be fickle, and travelers were subject to the availability of a ship sailing in the right

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46.  Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *Carta's New Century Handbook and Atlas of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2007), 241 with map.

47.  See *BAGRW*, map 69.

48.  Israel Roll, "Between Damascus and Megiddo," 10 map 4 does not show this as an option in the Roman period.

49.  For a list of these milestones see http://milestones.kinneret.ac.il/en/info-about-milestones/inscriptions-on-milestones/; for the bridge see John Francis Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias the Lost City of Pan* (London: Tauris, 2004), 52, also illustration 45.

50.  Under Elagablus (AD 219/220) the Romans did major construction work on the northern route from Jerusalem to Antipatris through Gopha. However, the road south from Antipatris to Lydda/Diospolis continued to be maintained as well; see Israel Roll, "Roman Milestones in the Vicinity of Aphek-Antipatris," in *Aphek-Antipatris I: Excavation of Areas A and B, the 1972 to 1976 Seasons*, ed. Moshe Kochavi, Pirhiyah Beck, and Esther Yadin (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2000), 41–44, 40 fig. 4.1 for a map.

direction.[51] The book of Acts and the New Testament letters depict a combination of land and sea travel for the journeys of Paul and for Silas' delivery of Peter's first letter. Even Revelation was carried from the island of Patmos before delivery could begin from Ephesus to the other seven churches.

For his land journeys Paul primarily walked (for example, πεζεύω, *pezeuō*; Acts 20:13). Perhaps pack animals were used occasionally. However, fodder and water would be a constant need, and predators like lions were an ever-present danger in the mountains. Personal necessities such as food, clothing, and water would be carried in something resembling a modern backpack. A goat-hair sheet could also provide basic shelter from inclement weather when a *mansio* or synagogue hostel was not available.[52] Paul eloquently described the challenges of travel:

> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits … in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea…. I have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Cor. 11:26–27 NIV)

Regarding bandits, Paul traveled on the desolate borders of Bithynia and Mysia during his second journey (Acts 16:7–8). A bandit-overlord named Cleon preyed here in the late first century BC (Strabo, *Geography* 12.8.8–9). In this same region Paul likely encountered some of Cleon's successors.

## CONCLUSION

Travel was ubiquitous in the Roman Empire. The itinerary of Herod the Great in 14 BC demonstrates this: from Caesarea he sailed to Rhodes, Cos, Chios, Lesbos, Byzantium, landing at Sinope. From Pontus he traveled overland through Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, and Phrygia arriving in Ephesus and then sailing back to Samos (Josephus, *Ant.* 16.17–23). The epitaph of Flavius Zeuxis, a merchant from Hierapolis, declares that on seventy-two occasions he made the dangerous passage around Cape Malea at the tip of the Peloponnesus below Corinth.[53] Zeuxis thus made thirty-six roundtrips to Rome during his lifetime from the Lycus valley, a distance by land and sea of 2310 miles (3718 km).[54] Eckhard Schnabel estimates that Paul traveled approximately 15,000 miles (25,000 km) during his journeys, of which about 8700 miles (14,000 km) were by land.[55] While this figure may appear large to modern travelers, it is significantly less than the sum of Zeuxis'

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51. William M. Ramsay, "Roads and Travel (in NT)," in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 5:376–83. Cicero (*Atticus* 5.8.1) was delayed for twelve days in Brundisium waiting for passage on a ship.

52. For these and other factors related to ancient travel, see Mark Wilson, "Paul's Journeys in 3D: The Apostle as Ideal Ancient Traveller," *Journal of Early Christian History* 8 (2018): 13–17.

53. Tullia Ritti, *An Epigraphic Guide to Hierapolis (Pamukkale)* (Istanbul: Ege, 2006), 67–70.

54. This figure was calculated on Orbis from nearby Laodicea ad Lycum: http://orbis.stanford.edu/.

55. Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 122.

travels: 83,160 miles (133,848 km). As Laurence observes,

> The need to travel would seem to be part of the experience of the Roman Empire…. There is evidence in some form for travel or the need to undertake journeys on the part of individuals from all parts of the empire.[56]

Thus the apostles traveling along Roman roads to preach the gospel would be viewed as part of a larger empire-wide movement.

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56.  Ray Laurence, "Afterword: Travel and Empire," in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, ed. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence (London: Routledge, 2001), 169.

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