

## 4. SERGIUS PAULUS INSCRIPTION\*

On the apostle Paul's first missionary journey, around A.D. XX, he comes to know the Roman proconsul who lived on Cyprus. Luke writes, "6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord." (Acts 13:4-12 NAS95)

In the Roman Empire Roman provinces were divided under two different categories, those needing Roman troops and those that did not. The former were directly under the emperor and the latter were governed by the Senate and ruled by proconsuls. Cyprus, when Paul visited, was under the administration of a proconsul (ἀνθύπατος in Greek) from 22 B.C. until the time of the emperor Hadrian.<sup>1</sup>

The proconsul is identified by Luke as an intelligent man and also one who was interested in the content of the message that Paul preached. The apostle, the record shows, had a confrontation with a magician by the name of Elymas and upon bringing a judgment on him from God because of his activity, the proconsul embraced the Gospel. The text indicates, however, that it was not only the miracle that brought him to Jesus, but also the teaching of the Lord.

Is there evidence for this proconsul that Luke mentions? There appears to be three inscriptions that refer to him, two in Cyprus and one in Rome.<sup>2</sup> The two in Cyprus were discovered by General Louis di Cesnola, a veteran of the American War between the States, and written in Greek.<sup>3</sup> One of these inscriptions was discovered in 1877 at the northern coast of Cyprus, at Soli.<sup>4</sup> It mentions Paulus (nomen, name of clan) but does not have the praenomen (forename, personal name chosen by parents) or cognomen (third name, branch of clan) of the proconsul, so whether it refers to the Sergius Paulus in Acts is uncertain. The inscription reads,

Apollonius to his father ... consecrated this enclosure and monument according to his family's wishes ... having filled the offices of clerk of the market, prefect, town-clerk, high priest, and having been in charge as manager of the records office. Erected on the 25th of the month Demarchesusius in the 13th year (of the reign of Claudius - 54 A.D.). He

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Williams, *New International Biblical Commentary: Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 227-28. See discussion by Philip and David Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), 733-734.

<sup>2</sup> David Williams mentions additional inscriptions that might relate to the family of Sergius Paulus:

In addition, W. Ramsay and J. G. C. Anderson discovered in 1912 an inscription near Pisidian Antioch that mentions a "Lucius Sergius Paullus, the younger son of Lucius." In 1913 Ramsay discovered the woman's name Sergia Paulla on an inscription in the same region. These discoveries played an important part in his theory that the family of Sergius Paulus were Christians (see *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915], pp. 150-72).

David J. Williams, *New International Biblical Commentary: Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 227-28.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Chisholm, *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol 7 (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1910), 700; Louis Palma di Cesnola, Find a Grave, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=4011> (last visited November 9, 2011). See Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, 734.

also altered the senate by means of assessors during the time of the proconsul Paulus.<sup>5</sup> The inscription does demonstrate that the family of Pauli was on the island of Cyprus.<sup>6</sup>

The second Greek inscription is one found in Kythraia in northern Cyprus that references Quintus Sergius Paulus in the time of Claudius,<sup>7</sup> which is the proper time period for the event given by Luke. Of the three inscriptions, this is probably is the best evidence in Fitzmyer perspective,

He may be known from a fragmentary dedicatory Greek inscription from Kithraia in northern Cyprus (*IGRR* 3.935 = *SEG* 20.302 [*SEG Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*]), presently housed in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, which on line 10 may preserve part of his name: *Kointou Serg[iou ...]*, after mentioning Claudius Casesar Augustus in the preceding line. Unfortunately the restoration is not certain, and the restored name is contested.<sup>8</sup>

The third inscription is written in Latin, and discovered in Rome, reading Lucius Sergius Paullus (Latin spelling of name in contrast to Paulus for the Greek), was discovered in Rome.<sup>9</sup> It served as a boundary stone erected by emperor Cludius Caesar, and discovered in 1887. Witherington considers this inscription the most helpful because “we have a clear reference to one Lucius Sergius Paulus, who was one of the curators of the Tiber River under Claudius. There is nothing in this inscription that would rule out the possibility that this Sergius Paulus was either at an earlier or a later date a proconsul on Cyprus, and in fact various classics scholars have been more ready than some NT scholars to identify the man mentioned in Acts 13 with the one in the Latin inscription.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> T. B. Mitford, *Annual of British School at Athens* 42 (1947), 201-06, quoted from Sergius Paulus, [www.biblehistory.net](http://www.biblehistory.net) (last visited November 11, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles : A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 399-400. See his discussion of Ramsay’s discoveries in former Asia Minor (modern Turkey), in the region of Pisidian Antioch.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.pleaseconvinceme.com/index/The New Testament Is Verified Archeologically](http://www.pleaseconvinceme.com/index/The_New_Testament_Is_Verified_Archeologically) (last visited November 11, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 501-02.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 501-02.

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