

Cities of the New Testament: Alexandria Troas

This is the twelfth in a continuing *Ekklesia Then & Now* series on the cities of the New Testament. Previous installments have been Corinth (ET&N 23), Ephesus (28), Laodicea (33), Antioch (40), Rome (53), Alexandria (60), Lystra (64), Tarsus (68), Puteoli (74), Caesarea (82), and Athens (86). The purpose of the series is to examine the history, geography, religion, culture, and people of each city and to consider how they relate to us today. Additional installments of this series will discuss Colossae, Thessalonica, Philippi, Perga, Nicopolis, and Arimethea. Additional cities may be added.

Then

Paul's evangelistic efforts were not a haphazard series of wanderings. He was a master strategist, and his primary targets were the key cities in the Roman world - the trading and transportation centers that brought goods and people to and from Rome itself. Antioch was a jumping off point into the interior of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the major seaport in western Asia. Corinth, along with its dual seaports (Centrea and Lechaem) lay at the crossroads between East and West. So it should come as no surprise that Paul visited Troas no less than four times.



Map of the Troad

Location and History

The city, about 30 miles from the Dardanelles (Hellespont), the treacherous entry to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea beyond, was actually named Alexandria and often referred to as Alexandria Troas to distinguish it from the many other cities named Alexandria. With its protected artificial harbor and its position on the west coast of the Troad Peninsula, Alexandria Troas was an important port, with ships routinely ferrying trade goods between Asia and Macedonia. Although containing a population (~100,000) somewhat smaller than Ephesus, Corinth, Antioch and, of course, Rome, Troas fits the profile for a targeted Pauline city.

According to Robert Jewell (see Now section), Alexandria Troas was one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean world in terms of area, perhaps exceeded only by Rome. Scholars have estimated that the average population density of the larger cities of the Roman Empire approached 200 per acre - with Rome 300-400 per acre - but at just 100 per acre, Alexandria Troas may have offered its residents some of the more spacious living conditions in the Empire.



The harbor at Troas, now largely lost to sand dunes, its once-protective walls looted over the centuries

The Roman geographer Strabo reports that Alexandria Troas was originally founded (perhaps on the site of an earlier settlement) by Antigonus, one of Alexander the Great's most able and powerful generals. He named the city Antigonía Troas and forcibly populated it with people from seven other cities. When Antigonus was defeated and killed by rival generals at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 B.C., Lysimachus renamed the city Alexandria Troas. Julius Caesar made Troas a Roman colony in about 42 B.C. and, because of its strategic location, considered making it the capital of the empire. Caesar Augustus (63 B.C. - 14 A.D.) favored Troas for its loyalty to the empire and reestablished its colonial status in 12 B.C. Troas' artificial harbor, probably begun by inhabitants of Neandria (one of the seven cities evacuated by Antigonus), offered a protected haven from the prevailing northerly winds.

According to Jewell, "Troas served not only as a trading port, but also a nodal point of the Roman postal system, and its large number of public buildings, an extensive aqueduct, and inscriptions related to Roman veterans and Latin-speaking officials make clear that this was a crucial center of Roman administration" (*The Troas Project: Investigating Maritime and Land Routes to Clarify the Role of Alexandria Troas in Commerce and Religion*, 2005).

Paul in Alexandria Troas: First Visit (A.D. 50)

Paul's first visit to Troas was unplanned (at least by him). In about A.D. 49-50, Paul and Silas left Syrian Antioch on Paul's second missionary journey. After strengthening the new churches Paul and Barnabas had established in Lycaonia, Phrygia, and Galatia, and adding Timothy to the team, Paul apparently intended to proceed to Asia, his sights probably set on the large cities of Pergamum, Smyrna and particularly Ephesus, but God had other plans, and the group traveled through Mysia to Alexandria Troas (Acts 15:40-16:8). They were only there briefly when Paul

experienced the vision of the Macedonian man calling him to minister in Europe. Joined now by Luke (denoted by the sudden shift from "they" to "we" in the text), who presumably was a resident of Troas, the missionary team immediately booked passage across the Aegean to Neapolis (Acts 16:9-11). While he eagerly anticipated preaching the gospel in Europe, it is easy to imagine Paul at the rail gazing back at Troas as his ship sailed out of the harbor. He may well have turned to his companions and expressed his intention to return when the opportunity arose.



Reference map of Roman provinces in Asia Minor. Larger version available on website (www.ETandN.com).

Paul in Alexandria Troas: Second Visit (Early A.D. 56)

It would be about six years before Paul returned to Troas, this time intending an extended visit. After his second journey, which concluded with a brief stopover in Ephesus, where he left Aquila and Prisca, he spent only a brief time in Antioch before heading out again, again visiting the churches in Galatia and Phrygia en route to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-23; 19:1). Troas might have been calling him, but Ephesus was the larger, more important city. Paul spent at least two years in Ephesus lecturing

daily in the hall of Tyrannus, punctuating by his encounter with the seven sons of Sceva and the riot of the Silversmiths (Acts 19:8-41).

Sometime during this stay in Ephesus, he received a letter from the Corinthian church, probably delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:17-18), inquiring about various theological and practical questions. At about the same time, a delegation from the Corinth church arrived (1 Corinthians 1:11) with disturbing news of factions (1:12ff), tolerance of gross immorality (5:1ff), unseemly legal disputes (6:1ff) class distinctions during communal meals (11:17ff), and disorderly assemblies (14:1ff). His response, contained in 1 Corinthians, is probably the most significant Pauline letter after Romans. Along with deep theological exposition, he chastised them for the problems and responded to their questions. The co-writer, Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 1:1), probably delivered the letter and may have been the same Sosthenes who was beaten in Corinth after Achaia proconsul Gallio rejected the Jewish charges against Paul (Acts 18:12-17).

Some time later, Paul dispatched Timothy to see how things were going in Corinth, but the young evangelist apparently failed in his mission, perhaps because of a tendency to timidity (cf 2 Timothy 1:6-8). Timothy apparently returned with news that other preachers were stirring up the Corinthians, challenging Paul's authority. It seems that Paul went to Corinth during this time, but things didn't turn out very well, prompting Paul to refer to the trip as a "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1). Paul had planned to travel through Achaia and Macedonia, once again visiting Corinth at both the beginning and end of the trip (2 Corinthians 1:16), but he changed his mind. Instead, he decided to finally return to Troas, and sent Titus, a Gentile Christian in whom he had enormous confidence, to Corinth with instructions to join him in Troas after settling things down in Corinth. He dashes off an apparently-severe letter (perhaps contained in 2 Corinthians 10-12) that grieves the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:8).

Paul devotes just two sentences to his visit to Troas: "*When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia* (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Some commentators therefore suggest he was only there a few days, but Paul's words convey the sense of a longer visit (although not as long as he intended). "A door was opened," he reports, an expression he used about Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8-9) and Rome (Colossians 4:3). An "open door" implies that his preaching in Troas was producing fruit, and people were coming to Christ. The expression "*took leave of them*" (Greek, **apotassomai**) further implies that these new disciples desired Paul to stay.

I suspect Paul planned an extended stay in Troas, perhaps something approaching his eighteen months in Corinth and two years in Ephesus. This strategic Roman city could serve as yet another hub for Christian evangelism in the empire, just as Antioch, Philippi, Ephesus and Corinth did. We have no record of Paul preaching in villages, even though archaeologists believe that about seventy percent of the populace lived outside the urban areas. Paul's intent seems to have been to spend the time required to firmly establish churches in key cities, from which missionary teams could fan out to the surrounding towns and villages.

Titus' continued failure to show up in Troas deeply disturbed Paul. The expression, "*my spirit was not at rest*" (Greek, **ou echo anesis to pneuma**) suggests a continuous upheaval from which Paul could find no relief (**anesis**). Consequently, but undoubtedly with overwhelming regret, Paul bade farewell to the fledgling church, perhaps installing Carpus in a leadership position.

Paul again sailed across the Aegean to Neapolis and began the trek south on the good Roman roads that hugged the Macedonian coast. Somewhere along that route, he encountered Titus and learned the wonderful news that the church in Corinth had responded well, prompting another letter (2 Corinthians, but perhaps only chapters 1-9). There is considerable debate about the integrity of the Corinthians correspondence, and textual critics have theorized as many as six letters within First and Second Corinthians, but a discussion of the merits of such arguments is outside the scope of this issue.

This second visit to Troas reveals a defining characteristic of Paul: as carefully as he planned his evangelism, he never let his own agenda take priority over the people he served. Despite the fact that he deliberately went to Troas and directed Titus to join him there, implying a lengthy stay, he quickly changed those plans because of his deep concerns over the Christians in Corinth. Paul took his pastoral role every bit as seriously as his evangelistic and apostolic responsibilities. It is easy to view Paul as single-minded and somewhat harsh, but this incident shows that he lived the loving care he preached.

Paul in Alexandria Troas: Third Visit (Later A.D. 56)

Returning from Greece and Macedonia later than same year, Paul once again stopped in Troas, where his interrupted seminal efforts had produced a new church. Luke reports that Paul and his substantial entourage of Bereans, Thessalonians, Derbians, and Asians remained one week (Acts 20:2-6) and, on the evening before they left, being a Sunday (to us, this would be Saturday evening since days were considered to begin at sunset), the church gathered in a third-story room, where they listened to Paul preach the gospel. As Paul continued for hours - until midnight, Luke tells us - the room became increasingly stuffy and filled with the smoke from many oil lamps. *"And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead"* (Acts 20:9).

Paul rushed down the stairs to the boy's side and one can imagine the confusion and anger that gripped the Troas Christians, but Paul calmly picked up Eutychus and announced, *"Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him"* (20:10b). The congregation proceeded to share the Lord's Supper. The next day, while most of Paul's companions went by sea, he traveled overland to Assos. Perhaps he had planted the gospel there en route from Ephesus to Troas earlier that year and now sought to see if a church remained.

While this visit to Troas was again brief, it must have left a deep impression on the Troas church. Their initial response to Eutychus' death was replaced by *"not a little comfort"* (Greek, **parakaleo**, literally *to call near*, and often translated *to encourage*), and surely the incident was related over and over in the city. God had used Paul as an instrument to demonstrate His power and in so doing also validated Paul's message through the "signs of a true apostle" (cf 2 Corinthians 2:12).

Paul in Alexandria Troas: Fourth Visit (A.D. 65)

About nine years later, it is likely that Paul paid a final visit to Troas. *Acts* ends with Paul's two-year house confinement in Rome (Acts 28:16-31), but the pastoral letters (1-2 Timothy, Titus) reveal that wasn't the end of his story. Paul was apparently cleared on charges in about 63 and allowed to leave Rome. Paul would have wasted little time resuming his evangelistic travels. During his extended stay in Ephesus

(53-55), Paul had written his magnificent letter to the church in Rome. In it, he revealed his intended travels after delivering the contribution from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church:

"I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you" (Romans 15:24-28).

In about the year 98, Clement, overseer of the church in Rome and perhaps an associate of Paul, wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, hoping to persuade some rebellious young members to show proper respect for their elders. The letter includes some comments about Paul: "After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west..." (1 Clement 5). Information about Paul's intended journeys would be known to the Roman church, and to a Roman, the "extreme limit of the west" could only mean the Iberian Peninsula. Additional evidence that Paul fulfilled his intention of visiting Spain comes from the apocryphal Acts of Peter, which describes Paul's departure from Rome to Spain. Paul's itinerary is a matter of speculation, and I won't go into more depth here, saving the discussion for the Titus issue of the *ET&N* Co-workers series early next year.

What is relevant now is that Paul's post-Roman confinement travels included some time in Alexandria Troas. In his final letter (2 Timothy), Paul asks his young assistant to "*come to me soon*" (4:9), instructing him to *bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments*" (4:13). There seem to be two possibilities here.

1. Nero had decided to make Paul, whom he must have viewed as the primary leaders of the Christians, a scapegoat for the great fire of Rome in 64, and put out the word to provincial officials to arrest him and transport him to Rome for execution. Everywhere he went, Paul drew attention through his bold preaching and apostolic works, so he probably wouldn't be in a city long before officials would know of his presence. Paul was probably residing with Carpus and, if he was seized in Troas, would have been extradited abruptly, giving him no time to retrieve his personal possessions.
2. Paul headed for Ephesus after his visit and in the blistering summer heat of western Turkey, it was not practical to carry a heavy load. He intended to return to Troas after a tour of Asia and therefore left his books and prized parchments (probably Old Testament texts) with a trusted friend.

Whether one of these or some other scenario is accurate, it was the last time Paul visited Troas. He was convicted of whatever trumped-up charges Nero levied and beheaded as a Roman citizen, ending arguably the second most remarkable life in history.

The Troas Project

Luke's account of the early church in the book of *Acts* is simultaneously revered among faithful Christians and reviled by critics. Some claim the details in the work prove its accuracy and maintain its historicity. Others claim a plethora of errors and inconsistencies, particularly with Pauline letters, and dismiss Luke as nothing more than a Christian propagandist. This is not the place to present or dispute these views. I find no inconsistencies between Luke's and Paul's writings that cannot be explained by the fact that neither was attempting an exhaustive treatment of their subjects. In many cases, it is impossible to authoritatively verify the descriptions of people and events in the New Testament. Belief is not a suspension of reason, but it is ultimately a matter of faith.



The Troas Project seeks to replicate the travels of Paul as described by Luke.

Because of the extraordinary detail at some points in *Acts*, however, it is possible to test certain facts. The specifics in parts of Luke (e.g., 16:11) are striking since most chronological periods in Scripture are ambiguous. Right now, there is just such a project undergoing that seeks, among other things, to confirm or deny the accuracy of some of the sea voyages Luke describes. Robert Jewell, Guest Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg and leader of The Troas Project, comments, "A significant test of the authenticity of

the sailing data in the Book of Acts would be to follow the routes and schedules at the appropriate times of year, with appropriate wind conditions, in a coastal vessel rigged according to ancient standards. If the times allotted to each segment of these journeys prove impossible to achieve, the plausibility of the hypothesis that the 'we-source' (the first-person sections of *Acts*) originated as a contemporaneous travel journal beginning with Paul's arrival in Troas would be disconfirmed. If the segments prove possible to replicate, this would confirm the plausibility of the travel details and tend to support the premise of a travel journal by a companion of Paul's journeys" (*The Troas Project: Investigating Maritime and Land Routes to Clarify the Role of Alexandria Troas in Commerce and Religion*, 2005).

As outcomes of the project and to secure financing, Jewell promises at least two educational films, one of which "will deal with the crucial role of Troas at the point where traditional scholarship inferred that Paul and Luke first met, with Luke subsequently making a travel diary of their journeys together." Of course, even if the project confirms the plausibility of the travel diary thesis, as Jewell appears to believe, it probably won't have any affect on the cynics. Plausibility does not prove actuality. On the other hand, disproof of the travel details probably won't have much affect on Christians either, although it will fuel anti-Christian fires. You can check out the website of The Troas Project at troasproject.org, although right now there's not a lot of content. I look forward to hearing more about the project and eventually viewing the films.

The Eutychus incident

It's unfortunate that the Eutychus incident is sometimes used as the source for jokes. In one United Church of Christ bulletin, he is described as "the patron saint of those who sleep during the sermon." On a blog (not accessible), one person wrote,

"that's what happens when a preacher drones on too long..." Numerous online sermons include the preacher's hope that his listeners won't suffer the fate of Eutychus. Harmful treatments of Scripture? Probably not. Frivolous? Absolutely. There is no suggestion in the passage that Eutychus fell asleep from boredom. Paul's session with the Troas church simply went on so long that Eutychus became exhausted and since he was foolish enough to be sitting in an open window, he fell.

There is an apparent maxim in the modern church that assemblies should last no longer than 60-90 minutes and sermons no more than twenty. A friend of mine thinks that if a preacher can't make his point in five minutes, it's not worth making. I suppose these time restrictions are a reflection of our busy world. Paul could not know if he would ever see the Troas church again, and he had spent very little time with the Christians there, so he was undoubtedly trying to pack as much deep spiritual truth into what little time he had. He can therefore be forgiven for going a little long. What would you give for a transcript of that evening in Troas?

As admittedly foolish as Eutychus may have been for sitting in the window, he also deserves to be praised for his commitment. How many youth - or adults for that matter - would sit all night in a stuffy room listening to a preacher? For those who focus on Eutychus' fall from the window, the meaning of his name, *fortunate*, may seem ironic; but when one considers what he learned that night, it is all together fitting.

People vs. plans

Leaving Troas to find Titus must have been excruciatingly difficult for Paul. For a lesser man, it would have been easy to write off the Corinthians who seemed so fickle and so lacking in understanding. Paul had his plans for spreading the gospel to as much as the Roman world as possible, and the establishment of new churches in key cities was crucial. Yet, he laid aside his personal plans because of his deep concern for a troublesome and troubled group of people.

On a smaller scale, I have experienced the kind of dilemma Paul face. In our church, I teach regularly and for each lesson, I usually prepare extensively (some might say excessively), looking at the target text or topic from as many angles as possible. I prepare a detailed outline, I devise questions designed to motivate and challenge people to think. I often print up a class handout. Sometimes in a class, someone will apologetically ask a question, saying he or she doesn't want to get us off track since I probably have a certain amount of material I want to cover. When that happens, I always quote a professor I had years ago, who taught me that the goal of teaching is not to *cover* materials, but to *uncover* it with the class. What I may want to teach is not nearly as important as what the class members need to learn, and that is often impossible to anticipate.

On a few special occasions, I have begun classes, only to be interrupted by an immediate, sometimes unrelated issue that a class member is facing. Those of us who teach or preach need always to remember that the specific lesson we planned can wait for another week when a brother or sister is hurting or has some new revelation to share. The classes where this has occurred - when I have been sufficiently sensitive to recognize it - have been the best classes I've ever been part of, and the lesson that class learned those days was undoubtedly far more spiritually significant than what I had planned. Jesus was, of course, the best example of this kind of sensitive teaching, and we can all hope to emulate his example.



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, respond so we can all share in the discussion!

NEXT ISSUE: Neos and Kainos (Dec 26)

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