

THE NAME OF PAUL

By Colin J. Hemer

It is generally recognised that Paul, as a Roman citizen, must have possessed a full Roman name, in fact the *tria nomina* (three names). 'Paulus' was his *cognomen*, but his *praenomen* and *nomen* are quite unknown to us. When a provincial was enfranchised, as when a slave was freed, he automatically assumed the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his patron and transmitted it to his descendants. This is a valuable principle of epigraphic dating, for the mention of persons named 'Ti. Claudius' or 'T. Flavius' immediately sets a *terminus a quo* in the time of Claudius or of Vespasian.

According to Acts 22:28 Paul was born a Roman citizen. If his family bore the names of a Roman benefactor, the origin must be sought in a previous generation, presumably in the person of a famous Roman who had favoured Tarsus, and bestowed citizenship on some of its leading citizens. If we cannot explain Paul's citizenship in this way, we can only confess our total ignorance of the circumstances.¹

The three eminent Romans associated with the East and with Tarsus in particular in the preceding period were Pompey, Caesar and Antony, the two latter especially being linked favourably with Tarsus. There is then the possibility - we can say no more - that Paul might have been Cn. Pompeius Paulus, C. Julius Paulus or M. Antonius Paulus.

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1. See W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (London: Hodder, 1907) 205-214. It seems that Paul's forebears must have been Tarsian citizens of long standing, for such Jewish participation in a Greek city is hard to explain except as part of a Seleucid constitutional settlement incorporating a body of Jewish citizens (cf. Ramsay, *Cities* 169-186). It is probable that the hereditary origins of Paul's remarkable dual citizenship should in both aspects be sought in Tarsus, whereas the part played by that city in his own upbringing was much less than traditionally supposed. W. C. van Unnik (*Tarsus or*

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to an inscription from Naples which illustrates the question of Paul's name and identity at three separate points:

Dis manib./L. Antonius Leo, q./et Neon, Zoili f./natio. Cilix, mil. cl./ pr. Mis. 7 III Asclepio,/ vixit annos XXVII,/ militavit an. VIII, / C. Iulius Paulus heres cur. egit. (CIL 10.3377 = Dessau ILS 2839).

It may be helpful first to expand the abbreviations and then to translate the text.

Dis manib(us). L(ucius) Antonius Leo, q(ui) et Neon, Zoili f(ilius), natio(ne) Cilix, mil(es) cl(assis) pr(aetoriae) Mis(enensis) (centuria) (triere) Asclepio, vixit annos XXVII, militavit an(nos) VIII, (Gaius) Iulius Paulus heres cur(am) egit.

'To the spirits of the dead. L. Antonius Leo, also called Neon, son of Zoilus, by nation a Cilician, a soldier of the praetorian fleet at Misenum, from the century the trireme "Asclepius", lived 27 years, served 9 years. C. Julius Paulus his heir undertook the work [of his burial]'.¹

The young sailor Leo was a very different kind of person from Paul, and the initial invocation is enough to establish the text as conventionally pagan. It is interesting to note that in naval contexts of this type the man is classified as a 'soldier' and his ship as a military 'century'.

(1) Leo, like Paul, was a Cilician. A man was sometimes designated by his *natio* (ἔθνος) or *provincia* (ἐπαρχεία); thus, e.g., the similar sailor's epitaph preceding in ILS (2838): *natione Dalmat.* Cf. Acts 23: 34; also 8:9; 24:2, 10; 25:1; etc. This was essentially

Jerusalem. The City of Paul's Youth [Eng. tr. by G. Ogg][London: Epworth, 1962]) argues convincingly from Acts 22:3 and elsewhere that Paul received his family upbringing and early education, as well as his advanced training under Gamaliel, in Jerusalem. For a contrary view see, however, N. Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965) 83-85.

a statement about provincial origin, not about race or ethnic identity.²

(2) Leo, like Paul, had an alternative name, or *supernomen*. In this case a man from the Greek East had presumably received his Roman name upon enlisting, like the writer of a famous papyrus letter, Apion, who became Antóni(u)s Maximus, also at Misenum (G. A. Deissmann, *LAE* 179-183). A full study of alternative names in Latin has been undertaken by I. Kajanto, *Supernomina* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1966) but nothing comparable exists for the Greek instances, which are very abundant, and are social documents of considerable interest and varying function, often reflecting different linguistic and cultural identities of the same person.³ In a city

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2. This kind of formulation is characteristic of the Early Empire. Abundant evidence exists for the use of ethnics. Another text from the same series (*ILS* 2861), also of a sailor from the Misenum fleet buried at Naples, concerns another Cilician, named Q. Servilius Jason. Others in the series are 'by nation' Syrian or Bithynian, or again Nicaean or Alexandrian, from the names of their cities. The point touches on the vexed Galatian question. Many persons are designated 'Galatian' in the inscriptions in senses which probably correspond closely to different current senses of the term 'Galatia', and typically to the provincial sense when that was prominent. Most of the names of such persons are ostensibly Greek, sometimes with an indigenous Phrygian background, but rarely Celtic.
 3. While Romans always possessed a formal Roman name, not all who boasted the *tria nomina* were necessarily Romans. Kajanto (*Supernomina* 24) points out that while legionaries of non-Roman origin received citizenship on enrolment, until the end of the second century sailors remained *peregrini*. Antonius Maximus is a case in point: his receiving a Roman name did not make him a citizen. Leo, too, if he only received his Roman name on enlistment, was not thereby a citizen. He may of course have possessed actual citizenship on other grounds. For alternative names see also the large collection of examples in both Latin and Greek collected by M. Lambertz in *Glotta* 4 (1913) 78-143 and 5 (1914) 99-170, and G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* I (1981) No.55, 89-96.

like Termessus in Pisidia, where Greek and various Anatolian peoples seem to have mingled, examples are preserved in scores (*Tituli Asiae Minoris 3 passim*). Whereas Neon was evidently our sailor's original name, replaced by another designation in his Roman career, Paul was both Hebrew and Roman by birth, and operated under either name (Saul or Paul) according to context. It is a neat example of the 'undesigned coincidences' of Acts and Epistles that Paul's Hebrew name is known only from Acts, and his tribe (Benjamin) only from an acknowledged epistle (Phil. 3:5): he was named after the most famous member of his tribe.

(3) Leo's heir bears exactly the name which may possibly have been Paul's own. If he was Leo's near kinsman he may also have been a Cilician, and Tarsus was the capital and dominant city of Cilicia. The form of his name makes it probable that he or his ancestor was enfranchised by Caesar. The epigraphy of Tarsus is unusually sparse, and this precludes our verifying whether any considerable number of its citizens bore the names of the same Roman benefactor. They had a reputation for travelling abroad (Strabo 14.5.13 = 673), and it is very probable that there were Cilician families in Naples, as there was a large Tyrian community in neighbouring Puteoli (IG 14.830). Most of the Tarsian expatriates I have noted in the epigraphy, at Athens or elsewhere, bear Greek names in a Greek context.⁴ Nothing here, in the present state of our knowledge, can serve as more than an illustration of possibilities.

It is notable that no Roman mentioned in the New Testament is ever given his full Roman designation there. There are many instances of persons known by Roman *praenomina* (Gaius, Lucius, Titus) or by Roman *cognomina* (Aquila, Crispus, Justus, Rufus), but we cannot know that such were Romans unless their status is otherwise known or apparent (Agrippa, Felix, Festus, Gallio, all *cognomina*).⁵ Silvanus (Greek hypocoristic 'Silas') is

4. Thus the names on the tombstones of Tarsians at Athens (IG 2² 10415-10434) are all Greek without exception, though most are also of pre-Imperial date.

5. Among non-citizens the assumption of a Roman personal name was often prestigious, but the Roman pattern was often misunderstood, when, for instance a *praenomen* was misused as a *cognomen*. Greek inscriptions often render actual Roman *tria nomina* erroneously.

also a *cognomen*, of a Jewish Christian known, like Paul himself, to have been a Roman citizen. The simple use of the *nomen* is rare, virtually confined in the New Testament to the names of the centurions Cornelius and Julius, though sometimes combined with the *cognomen*, as in Pontius Pilatus, Sergius Paulus or Claudius Lysias. A. N. Sherwin-White points out that 'Cornelius' and 'Julius' reflect an older, Republican style of nomenclature, before the *cognomen* became universalized as a usual personal name, a style which persisted only in the army into the Julio-Claudian period. These were probably older men who preserved the earlier tradition at the date of the events of Acts.⁶

The name 'Paulus' itself was a common *cognomen*, occurring also in the variants Paullus, Polus and Pollus, and meaning 'small', whether in origin pejorative or affectionate.⁷ It may sometimes have been confused with an obsolete rare *praenomen*, usually spelt 'Paullus', which was occasionally revived as an archaizing fashion, as in the names of Paullus Aemilius Lepidus (*consul suffectus* in 34 B.C.) or Paullus Fabius Maximus (*consul* in 11 B.C., *proconsul* of Asia in 9 B.C.; *IGRR* 4.438, etc.).⁸ In Paul's case, as in that of enfranchised provincials generally, the *cognomen* will have been his ordinary personal name in the Gentile world, his formal designation by *praenomen*, *nomen*, father's *praenomen*, Roman tribe and *cognomen* being reserved for official documents and remaining unknown to us.

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6. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 160-161.
 7. See I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1965) 243-244. Many of the traditional, and indeed of the characteristically aristocratic, *cognomina* were pejorative in sense, though Kajanto suggests that the frequency of the feminine Paulla, Polla, etc. suggests that the affectionate sense, 'little boy', 'little girl', was frequently in mind in the choice.
 8. Kajanto, *Cognomina* 41 and n.