

Your Letters



“He feedeth among the lilies”

I am indebted to Brother Pete Mercer for drawing my attention to the connection between lilies and the saints in the Song of Solomon ([Feb. 2008, p. 487](#)). I had often wondered why the bridegroom should feed among the lilies (6:3). The Hebrew word for “feed” here, *raah*, is used of a shepherd keeping his sheep, and *Young’s Concordance* has another word *raah*, with the meaning of ‘keep company with’, giving a delightful play on words.

These beautiful, often tall and noble, flowers were depicted in Solomon’s Temple on the pillars and laver (or “sea”), surely hinting at the



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The white lily, *Lilium candidum*, the *shoshan* (Heb.) of the Old Testament, often referred to as the madonna lily.

saints that were to come. Ephemeral in this life as the grass of the field amongst which they bloom, they are nevertheless arrayed like Solomon in all his glory. Well might we take no thought for raiment, since God has given us the covering of Christ. And how comforting to know that Israel will finally “blossom as the lily” with a scent “as the wine of Lebanon”, as Hosea 14:5,7 (AV mg.) tells us!

May that day soon come when “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed [us], and shall lead [us] unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from [our] eyes” (Rev. 7:17).

Liz Robinson
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Paul’s epic journey to Rome

14. Journey’s end: Paul arrives in Rome

Tom Barling

After spending a few days with the believers at Puteoli, Paul and Luke proceeded by land to Rome, being met by two companies of believers from there. Together they travelled the final stage of his epic journey in what must have been a joyful end to their travels.

IN THE [PREVIOUS](#) article we concluded with Paul’s arrival at Puteoli. The town was not at this time the terminal port for the great corn ships; Claudius had constructed a harbour at Ostia, the well-preserved remains of which merit a visit.¹ However, passengers still disembarked at Puteoli and completed their journey on land. Though the details of the final part of the journey by sea point to an arrival at the port early in the year, the majority of the ships bringing corn from Egypt would understandably arrive later; apparently they could arrive in convoy in the safe

sailing period. Seneca (in his *Moral Essays*, note 77) has a vivid picture of these great vessels with their top sails aloft, providing a picturesque and captivating scene, and being greeted enthusiastically by the crowds.

Believers at Puteoli

Luke records a detail that appears remarkable: the local brethren besought Paul and Luke to spend some time with them, and Julius made this concession. They remained seven days with the

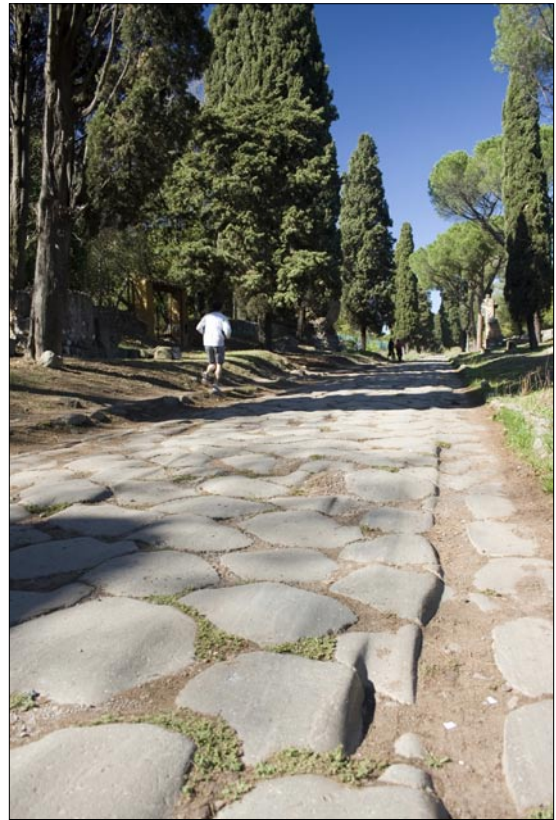
1. In his life of Claudius, Suetonius records the emperor’s work at Ostia, and also the measures he took to ensure a regular supply of grain for Rome. See *The Twelve Caesars*, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 195. This version is based by Michael Grant on a translation of *The Twelve Caesars* by Robert Graves.

local believers. The freedom allowed to Paul need not surprise us, for yet again we are reminded of the ruling made by Felix that the apostle's friends should have free access to him (Acts 24:23). More than once we have had occasion to comment on the relationship that had developed between Paul and the centurion, Julius. Possibly also, the centurion had matters that required his attention; the owners of the wrecked vessel might well have had an office in Puteoli and required as much information as possible about the circumstances of the loss of the vessel. Whatever the full explanation may be of the sojourn in Puteoli, it allowed Paul and Luke to make contact with the local disciples.

By this time Paul was undoubtedly well known to the local disciples. As far back as the day of Pentecost, among the converts made as the result of listening to Peter's testimony were "visitors from Rome" (2:10, RSV). The church at Puteoli may have had amongst its members a few who had embraced the gospel on that day of Pentecost. This is a mere surmise; it is much more probable that among the many Jews from Rome itself there would have been converts on that great day. They would not confine the good news to themselves, and it is possible that a group of believers had come into existence in Puteoli as a result of their preaching. Furthermore, it must surely be considered at least possible that, at the time with which we are now concerned, the letter to the Romans had become known at Puteoli.

It was some months since Paul had made any contact with others of the same faith, and that had been at Sidon soon after their departure from Caesarea (27:3). When contact had been established at Puteoli, it requires no imagination to understand the joy on both sides: that of Paul and Luke over finding fellow-believers who shared with them the hope of the gospel, and the rapt attention with which the disciples of Puteoli would listen to the recital of the voyage and the shipwreck at Malta.

The presence of Jews in Puteoli has for obvious reasons been much discussed. Josephus mentions the presence of Jews in this important port.² In view of the widespread diffusion of Jews at this time, of which there is ample evidence in Acts, it would not be surprising if there was a Jewish presence in Puteoli, and that some of these had embraced the Christian faith. In view of the fact that Paul and Luke spent six days in the port, Knowling raises the interesting possibility that they broke bread with the local believers, but this



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The Appian Way.

must be regarded as purely conjectural.³ Delighted to enjoy the apostle's company, the brothers at Puteoli would want to convey the news to fellow-disciples in Rome. Accordingly, a representative was despatched (or representatives) to convey to the disciples in the capital news of Paul's arrival amongst them and that he would soon be arriving in Rome itself.

Along the road to Rome

Finally, Julius and his party set out from Puteoli, after a while joining the great Via Appia, the prototype of Roman roads. The Romans were great civil engineers, and the enduring token of their prowess lies in the network of roads that they created. The roads had a military purpose, but also merchants and travellers with all kinds of interests were able to use them. Paul himself

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2. *Antiquities of the Jews* Book XVII, ch. 12.1 and *Wars of the Jews* Book II ch. 7.1 (Whiston's translation). Josephus uses Dicearchia, the Greek name of Puteoli.
 3. See R. J. Knowling, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2, London, 1900, p. 544, col. 2.

had travelled many miles along such highways in his preaching of the gospel, and to this fact the Book of Acts bears eloquent witness.

Now the apostle was concluding his epic journey to Rome, and the words of the Lord Jesus in 23:11 were soon to be marvellously fulfilled. The total distance from Puteoli to Rome was some 141 miles (there are slightly varying estimates). We do not know how soon the brothers in Puteoli sent those carrying news of Paul's arrival to the capital, but they obviously had to cover this distance before any report could reach Rome and there could be any response on the part of the Roman disciples. We can understand the joy of the believers in the capital when they realised that Paul was soon to be among them and fulfil his cherished desire of seeing them face to face (Rom. 1:9-11).

What must have particularly moved Paul was the way the believers in Rome responded to the news that he was on the way from Puteoli. They did not wait for him to arrive and then wel-

come him, but two different groups organised themselves and set out along the Via Appia. The arrangements to meet him must have been as rapid as the difficult circumstances permitted. Rome was a large city with a million inhabitants, and it would require some time for the news of Paul's forthcoming arrival to circulate. The group from Puteoli had travelled nearly 100 miles before they encountered the first company from Rome, at Appii Forum, some forty-three miles from the capital.

The emotion and joy experienced by Paul and Luke must have been great; they would be deeply touched by this demonstration of love. With what affection did the disciples embrace one another! One wonders what was the reaction of the Roman officer and his men to this display of brotherly affection, but perhaps by this time nothing about Paul could surprise them. Perhaps their wonder was further increased when another contingent met them at Three Taverns, about thirty-three miles from Rome. The effect of meeting up, not merely with one group, but two, was a deeply moving experience; to quote the NEB, "and when Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and took courage" (28:15).

Arriving at Rome

Paul's escort had thus been increased, and, as various commentators rightly recognise, the journey takes on more and more the aspect of a triumph, to celebrate not some military victory (as the Roman custom was) but God's grace so wonderfully and variously demonstrated in the experiences of this truly extraordinary man. Bruce comments on the Greek term employed to describe the meeting between Paul and Luke and the brothers from Rome, remarking that the word was "almost a technical term for the official welcome of a visiting dignitary by a deputation which went out from the city to greet and escort him for the last part of his journey". Bruce then refers to Matthew 25:6 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and also provides a reference to Cicero.⁴

When the apostle first came in sight of the imperial city, it would be with a deep sense of wonder. He was, after all, a freeborn citizen of Rome (Acts 22:28); but there was a higher form of citizenship for him, which eclipsed any earthly privilege (see Phil. 3:20,21). To revert to the concept of triumph, Paul's entry into the imperial



Picture: © iStockphoto.com/Shane Stezelberger

The remains of the Temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome. Paul's sea journey was completed in a ship sailing under this sign (Acts 28:11).

4. F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, Eerdmans, 1988, p. 502, note 35.

capital can be dated to about A.D. 60–61. A mere nine years later there was another and far more spectacular triumphal entry into Rome, celebrating the victory won by Titus, the future emperor, over the rebellious Jews. An arch remains to this day in the Forum Romanum, and on it can be seen a representation of the branched candlestick, formerly in the temple in Jerusalem, which now lay in ruins.

It was the false charge of taking a Gentile beyond the middle wall of separation that provoked a riot and led to the train of events that resulted in Paul's appeal to Caesar and his arrival in Rome. At the time of the apostle's entry into the capital, Rome seemed an invincible power, but its decline and overthrow are now distant events. However, the gospel proclaimed by Paul is still "the saving power of God for everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16, REB).

If we endeavour to determine the identity of the brothers who followed the Appian Way and served as an escort for Paul and Luke, we cannot arrive at any certain conclusion. Whoever they were, they clearly possessed a deep affection for the apostle. At the same time, the final salutations in Romans 16 may well be a guide. At the start of the letter, Paul sends his greetings to all the ecclesia (1:1-7), and at the conclusion of the letter, in final words of salutation, he writes, "Salute Prisca and Aquila my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus" (16:3, RV). Of the identity of the others to whom Paul sends his greetings little is known; it is sufficient for our present purpose that we regard them as possible, if not probable, members of the two escorting parties who accompanied Paul into Rome.

In a proposed [Epilogue](#) to this series we hope to take a final look at Paul's truly epic journey.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

Which Translation?—a correction

A READER has brought to my attention a misquotation of some words of B. F. Westcott quoted in Part 2 of the article "Is your Bible complete?", by Brother Richard Purkis, published in September 1996 (p. 361). This two-part article was subsequently reprinted in the book *Which Translation?*, published in 2000. The quotation, given on page 364 of the article and on page 22 of the book, quotes Westcott as saying in a letter, "I reject the word 'infallibility', of Holy Scripture, overwhelmingly". In fact, the book *Life and Letters of Westcott* by his son Arthur (MacMillan, London, 1903) shows that what Westcott said was, "at present I find the presumption in favour of the absolute truth—I reject the word infallibility—of Holy Scripture overwhelming". It would perhaps help if I went on to state briefly the background as to why this quotation was used.

It was Westcott who, along with F. J. A. Hort, was largely responsible for the Revised Version of the New Testament. This, along with many other modern translations, omits a number of verses that appear in the AV, relegating them to footnotes or excluding them altogether. This is because Westcott and Hort gave preference to two manuscripts of the New Testament that had only recently become available to scholars, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, and these omit these verses. Their preference is based

on the fact that these manuscripts are older than the ones used by the translators of the AV and are therefore, they said, more likely to reflect the original inspired writings.

Some scholars, however, opposed this use of these manuscripts, claiming that they were aberrant texts, and that the ones used by the AV translators were the right ones to use. A minority of scholars still holds this view, and the New King James Version (known as the Revised Authorised Version in its original form in the UK) follows the AV. A number of books have been written attacking the preference of the RV translators, especially Westcott and Hort, and seeking to expose them as having undesirable leanings in a number of directions. The quotation in question was taken from one such book, *Final Authority—A Christian's Guide to the King James Bible* by William P. Grady (Grady Publications, Indiana, 1993), though Grady quotes it correctly on page 230 of his book. (Brother Purkis says he unfortunately overlooked the words preceding his quote because the words he quoted were emphasised by Grady in bold.)

The question arises as to whether the two-part article in general misrepresents the views of Westcott and Hort. Brother Purkis has sent me copies of some pages of Grady's book, including the page from which the quotation was taken,