

Paul's epic journey to Rome

8. Heading for Phoenix

Tom Barling

Against Paul's advice, the ship on which he was travelling to Rome sets out on the next stage of its journey, intending to tie up for the winter at Phoenix, only to be thwarted by the sudden rise of a wind of hurricane intensity.

IT WOULD BE with no little sense of relief that the ship's company would greet the centurion's decision, after due consultation, to depart for the safer anchorage at Phoenix. The stay at Fair Havens had certainly not been without considerable advantages; the previous leg of the journey, with its slow progress, had been frustrating, we recall, and the amenities offered by the nearby town of Lasea would have been much appreciated. But the sailing season was now much advanced, and the time to tie up for the winter was not far away, so, despite the possible perils of the late season, the weather conditions gave every encouragement for them to leave.

At Fair Havens they had already proceeded a good distance along the southern coast of Crete, and Phoenix was a mere thirty-eight miles away westwards. But what were the advantages offered by the harbour which for the moment we call Phoenix? Whilst the precise location and advantages of the port for wintering are not directly relevant to a record of Paul's journey, for the ship bearing him did not actually call there, the subject of Phoenix does merit our attention; for, although the issues are rather complex, there is evidence once more to demonstrate Luke's reliability.

The harbour at Phoenix

The reliability of Luke's account emerges to some degree in what George Brown, a clerical relative of James Smith, already referred to in our previous article ([Jul. 2007, p. 243](#)), reports. On a yacht called *Ursula*, belonging to a Mr Tennent, Brown and his party coasted along the southern shores of Crete. Brown's intention was to visit Phoenix and Fair Havens in that order, as the vessel was sailing from west to east. He possessed a precious guide in Smith's book, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St Paul*, to which we are constantly making reference in this series, and which hereafter we shall refer to simply as *The Voyage*. The first edi-

tion appeared in 1848, and the *Ursula* was coasting in 1856.

Brown's account, published in Appendix 1 of the 1884 edition of Smith's book, has considerable interest for our present purposes. First, when

they arrived at the harbour identified by Smith as Phoenix, Brown had a conversation with a Turkish official (Crete was then in the hands of the Turks), who told Brown that Lutro (that is, Phoenix) "is the only secure harbour in all winds on the south coast of Crete".¹ This important fact was evidently familiar to those who advocated moving on to Phoenix. Brown also makes this interesting observation: "Looking east from the Harbour of Lutro, the grand pyramid Mount Ida was in full view forty miles off".² This was the breeding ground of the powerful wind which was to bring such disaster to Paul's ship.

But there is a problem. At Phoenix there are two bays, separated by a strip of land. This is admirably illustrated in the [photograph](#) overleaf, fairly recently taken from a point dominating the area.³ Although the interpretation of the end of Acts 27:12, "lieth toward the south west and north west", presents problems, it has been generally recognised that the physical character of the area today does not tally with Luke's description. Was he then in error, or were the advocates of moving to Phoenix in error? The problem remained unresolved until an all-important article by R. M. Ogilvie was published. In this he makes the illuminating remark, "Before a seismic upheaval of the sixth century A.D., which raised the level here [at Phoenix] by tilting the island from west to east, this bay had two inlets, one facing southwest and one northwest, exactly as Luke says".⁴

1. See p. 261, and the maps accompanying this article, redrawn from the book.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
3. Kindly provided by Brother Paul Harris of Louth.
4. See F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (revised), Eerdmans, 1998, p. 483. He is drawing on an article by R. M. Ogilvie. But Ogilvie does not state, as Bruce does, "exactly as Luke says". For the Ogilvie article see "Phoenix", *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series 9 (1958), pp. 308-14.



The modern harbour of Lutro, site of the ancient harbour of Phoenix, which would have provided a safe haven for Paul's ship if it had been able to reach it.

Picture: Paul Harris

If this appears an unexpected vindication of Luke's faithful record, there is a further interesting aspect to this matter. In *Hasting's Bible Dictionary* Sir W. M. Ramsay has written a long article on Phoenix. After affirming, "The identification of Loutro as the harbour called Phoenix in Acts 27:12 seems to be beyond dispute", he later adds, "But the identification is encumbered with one serious difficulty", and then he mentions the familiar problem of the precise orientation of the harbour. In his endeavour to resolve the problem, he mentions the desirability of entertaining the possibility that "the coast-line has been modified during eighteen centuries",⁵ an anticipation of the very solution proposed by Ogilvie. All coastlines can indeed be altered in the course of time, and this is especially true in the case of the Mediterranean.

The gale bows up

To return to the consideration of Acts 27, as we have already discovered, the weather conditions were genial, but, alas, they can also prove beguiling and treacherous. The travellers made Cape Matala without incident, thus covering three or more miles. The wind, although not a following one, was not "contrary", and by hugging the coast they came safely to the Cape.

They were now within what must have appeared easy reach of Phoenix, some thirty-four miles away. However, the situation was soon to deteriorate. First, we note that at this point the orientation of the coastline changes dramatically ([see map opposite](#)); it now runs almost due

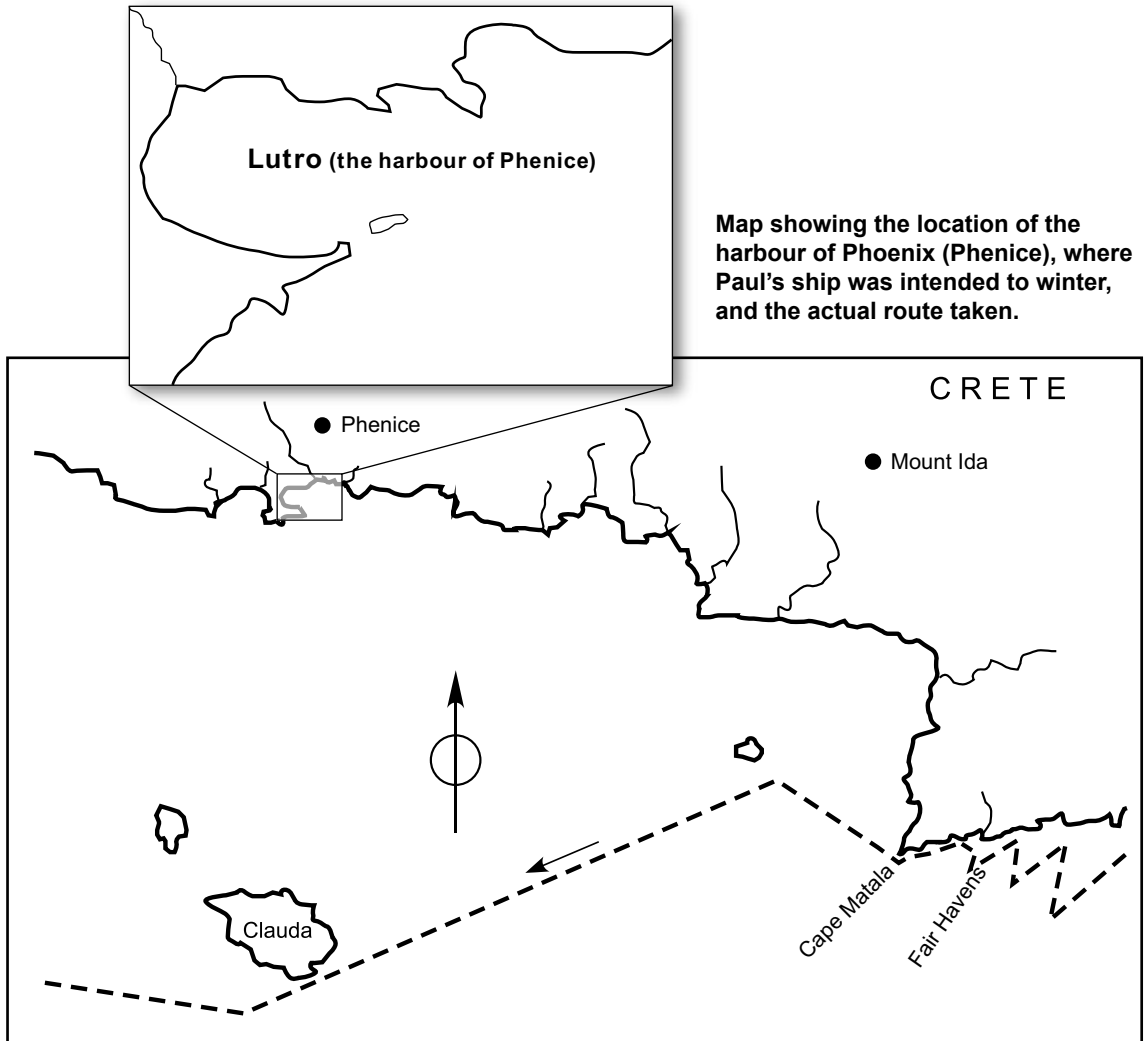
north. Presumably the same south wind was still blowing; there is certainly nothing to indicate the contrary.

Smith demonstrates this by an illustration he provides, and remarks, "as the bearing of the course is WNW, the south wind was as favourable as could be desired, being two points abaft the beam".⁶ Here again we have a demonstration of a point already made, and which is fundamental to an understanding of Luke's record. These sailing vessels could not sail against the wind; and the wind that now blew up was no ordinary wind; it was, as Luke vividly recalls, "tempestuous" (literally 'typhonic', from the Greek *tuphōnikos*, the origin of 'typhoon'). This single term serves to convey the irresistible force of the wind. As mentioned above, it swooped down from Mount Ida, a lofty mountain 8,058 feet (2,456 metres) high.

This wind was none other than "Euraquilo" (RV), commonly called Euroclydon (AV). The etymology of this word been the subject of much discussion, but there seems to be a consensus that the word is hybrid, being compounded of two elements, one Greek and meaning 'east wind', and the other Latin meaning 'north wind'. Does this hybrid term indicate that crews spoke either Greek or Latin (a possibility we cannot dismiss)? Almost certainly, there would be Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon in the crew, and they would most probably speak Greek, as would crew

5. Vol. 3, p. 863.

6. See p. 98; his illustration faces p. 97.



members coming from Greece itself. The Romans may have provided some elements, despite the general Roman dislike of the sea, and they would speak Latin. But we must not forget that the Letter to the Romans was written by Paul in Greek, and Greek was very widely spoken at this time in the Empire.

About the wind, Bruce asserts that "Today in Mediterranean lands it is known as 'the grigal' or 'gregale'".⁷ Apparently it can be experienced also at Malta, where there, too, it can blow with typhonic force. On the ill-fated passage from Fair Havens, as they made for Phoenix and were making good progress towards their goal, the wind descended suddenly upon them, not long after they had rounded Cape Matala. We are now considering verse 14, which is translated thus in

the RV: "But after no long time there beat down from it a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo". But to what does "from it" refer? Lumby in his commentary fully endorses the RV translation and rightly makes the observation that the pronoun can only refer to Crete, mentioned in the previous verse.⁸

We shall discover abundant evidence, as we further follow Luke's account, of the terrifying power of "Euroclydon".

(To be continued)

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 485.

8. J. R. Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge University Press, 1894, p. 438.