

BOOK REVIEW

Glen L. Thompson and Mark Wilson. *In This Way We Came to Rome: With Paul on the Appian Way*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024. Xxi + 248 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9781683597247. \$32.99.

From an era when roads led to Rome, *In This Way We Came to Rome* treks its most popular course, the Appian Way. This fascinating work conducts readers along the most likely 141-mile path that the Apostle Paul travelled across ancient Italy. Glen Thompson is professor emeritus of New Testament and historical theology at Asia Lutheran Seminary, while Mark Wilson is founder and director of the Asia Minor Research Center. Together they offer the most sophisticated research on the best calculated path traversed by Paul. While the historicity of the journey has not been questioned, its historicity is veiled by the passing of time and limited scholarly attention.

Three reference points in the narrative of Acts anchor the apostle's route: Puteoli, the Forum of Appius, and the Three Taverns (28.13-16). These expand here to deliver a historical, geographical and hodological understanding of the Appian Way as it leads from Puteoli into Rome. Each chapter profiles a different consecutive segment of the road, representing each single day of Paul's travel. This segmented approach makes comprehension of the whole more manageable. While some scholars hypothesize Paul's journey took ten days, Thompson and Wilson calculate a likely seven-day journey (p. 27). Their precise and historically based calculations provide a credible case for this time frame. Additionally, this work profiles Paul's early voyage from Caesarea and his later time in Rome to frame his Appian Way experience in a contextual *inclusio*.

Instrumental to the task of Thompson and Wilson is the necessary judgment about the location of the ancient road. For much of its length, the highway has depreciated into oblivion (Puteoli), been replaced by farm lands (Sinuessa), or been overlaid by a modern construction (Aricia). Research leads to traces of the road, that in turn lead to their plot of the road, segment by segment. One example illustrates the character of their field and pub-

lished work. Outside Formiae, conjecture that the road moved between a massif and the marshes proved to match a route with discernable Roman era bridges and viaducts. Two surviving milestones further support the route, but their location only 0.7 Roman miles apart means “both cannot be in situ” (p. 87). Returning to an accurate marker forty miles earlier, the authors deduce a past relocation of the stones and continue their task beyond Formiae to the medieval city of Itri. This weigh station lacks any ancient reference, requiring the Roman drainage system to form the authors’ eventual ‘hypothetical reconstruction’ of the highway station (p. 89). Their personal labor to walk the entire path from Puteoli to Rome in the course of research is unprecedented and unmatched.

Two great qualities mark the benefit of this book. First, the high detail of research offered here reflects the extensive efforts of the authors to discover traces of the ancient road and its monuments while plotting its course with GPS coordinates. Images, charts, maps and precise coordinates accompany their description. Resting spots (*stationes*, *mansiones*), tombs and major landmarks are faithfully referenced. Distances consistently come in Roman miles, kilometers and miles. The authors report the surviving, visible paving in each sectional map that accompanies a narrative description. As a result, this work is the first English treatment of the consular road from Puteoli to Capua and the best English treatment of the Appian Way. Any reader willing to track with the detailed narrative will encounter a remarkable synthesis of ancient, medieval and modern sources to uncover this forgotten route. Cicero, Livy, Josephus and the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* are among the most frequently cited ancient sources. Modern archeologists like Lorenzo Quilici and Lawrence Richardson influence the research.

Secondly, intermittent reflections are imagined for the travelling apostle to provide a Pauline-centered focus on the Appian Way. The authors declare, ‘We wanted readers to travel the road and see it through Paul’s eyes’ (p. xvii). For example, since some of the tombs along the Via Celle portion date from the mid-first century BCE, the authors realize, ‘Paul passed many of them as he left Puteoli’ (p. 36). His theology of death in his letter to Romans (7.24; 8.39) intersects with the constant landscape of tombs ‘as he approached that same city to be put on trial for capital crimes’ (pp. 154-55). The centurion Julius (Acts 27.1) offers an historical name for the authors to hypothesize the journey from a Roman and more personal perspective. They even postulate the irony of a greater Christian history, such as when the party stopped at the *statio ad Septimum* where a tenth-century church was later

built, remarking that Paul rested at a location ‘which would someday become a place of worship’ (p. 46). Thompson and Wilson meaningfully integrate and maintain this apostolic perspective unto their closing statement: ‘Just as all roads were said to lead to Rome, so from there his message now spreads along those same roads “to the ends of the earth”’ (p. 188). While the first benefit offers objective research on the Appian Way, the second benefit subjectively contextualizes this study in Paul’s own experience. Intermittent and balanced, an element of faith accompanies this analytical journey.

The high caliber research and specific focus on one essential New Testament topic makes this book one of a kind. New Testament, patristic and ancient scholars will appreciate the recovery of the Appian Way and the historical details around Paul’s time in Rome. Several examples here demonstrate additional insightfulness of the work. Archeologists have discovered over 150 oak stump piles and submerged concrete at Minturnae to reveal the location of the first-century-BCE road and the remnants of the wooden bridge that took Paul across the Liris River. An early second-century graffiti found at Puteoli displays a woman crucified after having been scourged. The Roman church *San Paolo alla Regola* has a strong possibility of being near Paul’s residence in Rome because of the combined location of the Jewish community and the military offices. Excavations at Tres Tibernae have been underway since 1993, a crossroads area with edifices like modest small shops (*tabernae*) that reflects its name. Coincidentally, Cicero wrote his friend Atticus from here, thanking him for the good news (*euangelia*) a century before the great evangelist Paul encountered fellow Christians here.

While invaluable for those working in biblical or ancient studies, the book’s specialized and narrow focus will limit the audience. Its heavy content comes with stylistic elements that may frustrate many readers. Curiously, the citations are in APA style; researchers conditioned to viewing the scholarship alongside the text must traverse twenty-eight pages of a bibliography for the referenced source. Abbreviations abound; VA quickly imprints for *Via Appia*, but VCC (*Via Campana Consolaris*), MP (milestone), RM (Roman mile) and others take time to develop reading fluency. URLs are sometimes offered in footnotes without context or amplification. While the authors encountered ‘the constant decision about what to include given the constraints’ (p. xvi), this brevity becomes unbalanced when a peculiar claim is posed but unexplored, such as Paul returning to Asia after a release

from Rome. St. Sebastian Catacomb is profiled, but Appian Way neighbor St. Callixtus is surprisingly omitted.

However, such elements are eclipsed by the impressive research presented here. No other book plots Paul's Italian walk with more precision and importance than *In This Way*. For those who have trekked the Appian Way immediately out of the city—a favorite experience for many Christian travelers—the memorable but elusive landmarks finally receive identification. Most of all, the enigma of Paul's journey across Italy finds lucidity here, while fostering a sense of wonder around the advance of the gospel when all roads led to Rome.

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