

PAUL'S 'FRIENDS' THE ASIARCHS (ACTS 19.31)

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Luke reports that, during the riot at Ephesus, some Asiarchs who were friends of Paul exhorted him not to address the mob. Commentators on Acts have sometimes wondered how the Paul of Acts, who had settled in Ephesus only recently, came to have friends from the elite of Asia. Part of the solution may be that cities typically welcomed and often honored popular speakers who adequately proved their skills on entering a city.¹ Luke's Paul certainly has status and fits the description of a popular teacher in Ephesus (Acts 19.10).² It also seems the case, however, that we have too frequently read Luke's claim here in terms of modern notions of friendship among social peers. Scholars have occasionally suggested, albeit to my knowledge only briefly, that Paul's Asiarch 'friends' were his patrons.³ I develop that suggestion somewhat more fully here.

1. See Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* (SNTSMS, 96; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 149-51 (focusing especially on 1 Cor. 2.3).

2. See more fully, Steven M. Baugh, 'Paul and Ephesus: The Apostle among his Contemporaries' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1990), pp. 119-30.

3. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 380; *idem*, 'Friendship', in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 380-88 (386); Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 595; cf. Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (BZNTW, 80; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 146.

Patrons as Friends

The Greek ideal of 'friendship' involved equality, but in practice 'friends' of lower station in this period functioned as clients of their superiors.⁴ Clients were often called 'friends' of their patrons, and less commonly patrons were also described as 'friends'.⁵ Members of the urban elite often entered 'friendships' as political alliances, expecting returns the measure of which was clearly defined by social custom.⁶ The most important return a social inferior could provide a patron was public gratitude; such 'free' publicity concerning the patron's generosity augmented the patron's local social standing, hence could also advance the patron's political ambitions.⁷

Urban Roman 'clients' in the strictest sense of the term spent much of the day with their patrons, a role that distinguished them from workers.⁸ Clearly Paul was not a 'client' in this strictest sense; Luke indicates that in Ephesus, as in Corinth (Acts 18.3), Paul worked with his own hands and supported others (20.34). Even in a less formal way, the historical Paul wished to avoid the appearance of being a dependent of the Corinthian church.⁹

4. For the egalitarian ideal of friendship, see Homer, *Il.* 18.81-82; Aristotle, *Eth. eud.* 7.9.1 1241b; but Aristotle defined 'equality' proportionately rather than quantitatively—*Eth. nic.* 8.7.2-3 1158b. See more fully, Keener, 'Friendship', pp. 380-82; *idem*, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), pp. 1008-1009.

5. For clients as friends, see, e.g., Martial, *Epig.* 3.36.1-3; *3 Macc.* 5.26; for patrons, e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 1; Valerius Maximus, *Deeds and Sayings* 7.8.7, 8; Philostratus, *Hrk.* 4.3; 10.2. See also 'friends of the king' and other political uses of friendship language in Keener, 'Friendship', pp. 380-81.

6. E.g., Cicero, *Verr.* 1.7.18; Plutarch, *Ages.* 23.6; *Pomp.* 70.4; *Statecraft* 13, *Mor.* 806F-809B; more fully, Keener, 'Friendship', p. 381; on mutual obligation, Alciphron, *Farmers* 12.3.15; *Fishermen* 7.1.7; Katherine G. Evans, 'Friendship in the Greek Documentary Papyri and Inscriptions: A Survey', in J.T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (SBLRBS, 34; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 181-202 (202).

7. See Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 148-49.

8. See, e.g., Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire*, pp. 151-52; Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 188-89.

9. Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT, 2.23; Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), *passim*, e.g., pp. 174-77, 227-32, 257; cf. Socrates in Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.26.

But there is no reason to doubt that Paul could have made use of public connections with prominent patrons in the less formal sense in which classicists and New Testament scholars commonly speak of patron-client ideology. The ideology was so pervasive in ancient Mediterranean society that most studies suggest that it impacted even rural areas.¹⁰ Certainly Paul appreciated publicity for the gospel in prominent places (Rom. 16.23; Phil. 1.13; 4.22), and Luke is eager to show the gospel's acceptance among other persons of high status (e.g. Acts 1.1; 13.1, 12; 17.12, 34; 18.8), as well as their respect for Paul's status (16.38-39; 21.39-40; 22.28-29).¹¹ Roman citizenship, not yet a widespread grant in the East, may have provided Paul an entrée with the Asiarchs, especially if some of them had received this particular status marker only recently as a result of their office.¹² Luke also occasionally uses 'friendship' language to describe reciprocal obligations, whether for members of the same class or different classes (Lk. 14.12; 16.9; 23.12).

If these Asiarchs were Paul's patrons, they presumably provided some public support for this new and prominent religious association or philosophic school, perhaps by contributing toward the school or guild hall where Paul and his partisans were meeting (19.9).¹³ Epigraphic evidence does indicate that some later Asiarchs, at least, supported education in Ephesus.¹⁴

10. Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 25, 40, 47; David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 77-82; David E. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 99-100. In New Testament studies, see, e.g., John H. Elliott, 'Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society. A Short Reading Guide,' *Forum* 3.4 (1987), pp. 39-48.

11. For indications in Paul's letters of his contacts with the elite, see especially David W.J. Gill, 'Acts and the Urban Élites', in D.W.J. Gill and C. Gempf (eds.), *The Book of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting* (The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 105-18.

12. Baugh, 'Paul and Ephesus,' pp. 155-56 (and cf. pp. 180-93).

13. Commentators sometimes suggest the possibility of a wealthy benefactor, e.g., James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 258; Witherington, *Acts*, p. 575.

14. See Baugh, 'Paul and Ephesus,' pp. 154-55, citing, e.g., *I.Eph.* 2065.

Honor for Sponsors of Religious Associations

A primary purpose for which patrons supported clients and provided benefactions for others was to garner political support for themselves; clients were supposed to publicly praise their patrons, propagating their honor.¹⁵ Scholars debate the exact function of the office of Asiarch, but however we define it most specifically, Asiarchs belonged to the political class for whom public honors counted heavily.¹⁶

But indiscriminate choices of friends could lead to complications and, in the end, more political harm than good. Because of the network of political alliances in urban Mediterranean society, 'befriending' another person's enemy could bring one into enmity relationship with the other person.¹⁷ For this reason, patrons would need to be careful not to take on clients who might prove to be political liabilities.

Paul's religious commitments would not necessarily disqualify him for consideration as an apparently safe prospective political investment. Sponsors of religious associations were common, and we know of Gentiles who became patrons of synagogues and consequently received honor from them.¹⁸ That Luke himself mentions one case (Lk. 7.5) indicates that he was familiar with the concept of a nonmember sponsoring a religious association. But while sponsors of pagan religious associations, like members, might often be pleased to belong to or at least support multiple religious associations, Judaism was monotheistic and forbade involvement in other religions. Did a Gentile sponsor for a monotheistic association risk public displeasure, even if he or she did not become a proselyte?¹⁹ In some locations this may have been the case, but in Asian

15. See, e.g., Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire*, p. 149; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, pp. 189-90; Marshall, *Enmity*, p. 32.

16. Cf. Lily Ross Taylor, 'The Asiarchs', in F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1922-1933), V, pp. 256-62 (256); Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: A. & C. Black, 1955), pp. 42-43; Baugh, 'Paul and Ephesus,' pp. 138-49, 163.

17. E.g., Lysias, *Or.* 9.10, 13, §115; cf. Aeschines, *Tim.* 193-95; Cicero, *Scaur.* 17.38. On urban enmity relationships in ancient literature, see Marshall, *Enmity*, pp. 35-69.

18. See, e.g., John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 48; I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 280.

19. For proselytes with honor in the synagogues, see, e.g., *CIJ* 1.384, §523.

cities like Sardis, where the Jewish community was prominent and respected, a patron would profit from the synagogue community's recognition of his or her benefactions. In this case, members of the elite might be pleased to express generosity toward the synagogue, regardless of the degree of their personal religious sympathies toward Judaism. In return, Asian Jews could acknowledge the benefactions and praise the benefactors without expecting the patron's exclusive allegiance to their faith.

But no one in Ephesus with political ambition would have risked associating with someone known to oppose devotion to the city's patron goddess. Traditionally scholars associated Asiarchs with the office of ἀρχιερέυς for the imperial cult, but more recent studies have called this association into question.²⁰ Nevertheless, as holders of prominent public office the Asiarchs would certainly adhere to local and imperial civic religion themselves, and would be publicly devoted to the worship of the Ephesian Artemis. Ephesians honored the divine emperor near Artemis's temple;²¹ more importantly, their honors of Artemis (19.28, 34) are too well-known to require discussion here.

Patrons might help pay for a meeting hall, hence lending the credibility of their names to the fledgling movement. In return, however, they would expect honor: Paul's teaching was spreading widely through all of Asia (19.10), and they might appreciate the public recognition they could gain by supporting a popular and pious group. A complication would arise, however, if that group had or developed powerful enemies; in this case, association with it would prove more of a political liability than a benefit.

20. See, especially, R.A. Kearsley, in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri published in 1979* (North Ryde, New South Wales: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1987), §14, pp. 53-55; *idem*, 'The Asiarchs', pp. 363-76 in *Acts in Greco-Roman Setting*, p. 366; G.H.R. Horsley, 'The Inscriptions of Ephesus and the New Testament', *NovT* 34.2 (1992), pp. 105-68, esp. pp. 137-38.

21. See Peter Scherrer, 'The City of Ephesus from the Roman Period to Late Antiquity', in H. Koester (ed.), *Ephesus: Metropolis of Asia. An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), pp. 1-25 (5).

Paul's Obligations to Avoid Dishonoring Patrons

This situation may explain why Luke fails to provide a speech of Paul in Acts 19, as tempted as he must have been to do so. The Paul we know from Acts would not have missed an opportunity to preach, even in the most controversial of circumstances (14.14-18; especially 21.40–22.21); thus it is not surprising that Paul wishes to enter the theater. Concerned for his safety, the disciples restrain him (19.30; their intervention proves less successful in 21.12). At least in terms of Greek ideals for egalitarian friendships, concerns and sacrifices for a friend's safety were paramount.²²

But beyond any personal concern for Paul the Asiarchs might have shared with the disciples, they had solid political reasons to urge him not to enter the assembly: on the one hand, the current situation was bad but could be worse; apart from general monotheism, the object of the assembly's fury currently remained ambiguous to most of its members (19.32). On the other hand, an attempt at damage control could make the situation worse: if Paul spoke out, he greatly increased the risk of being assumed to have caused the disorder (cf. 19.33-34). This risk also threatened the reputation of Paul's supporters; too many people already knew that these Asiarchs were his 'friends'. Even court cases might involve their share of shouting, but at least they allowed for some debate and clarification (19.38-39); allowing such a large mob (the theater could seat some 20,000 people)²³ to associate Paul with defaming Artemis, however, would prove far more politically damaging to his friends. For the sake of the church's long-range stability in Ephesus, Paul might be wiser to avoid further risking his 'friends' dishonor even at the expense of neglecting a dramatic preaching opportunity.

22. See, e.g., Diodorus Siculus 10.4.4-6; Valerius Maximus, *Deeds and Sayings* 2.6.11; 4.7, *passim*; Musonius Rufus 7, p. 58.23 (Lutz); Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.7.3; Philostratus, *Hrk.* 51.12; Jn 15.13; for much fuller documentation, see Keener, 'Friendship', pp. 383-84. Occasionally this might be applied to patronal ideology (see deSilva, *Honor*, p. 136).

23. The usually-cited figures of 24,000-25,000 are more relevant to the early second century; see Peter Scherrer, 'Ephesus: History', in H. Cancik, H. Schneider, and C.F. Salazar (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), IV, pp. 1024-29 (1026).

Accepting the stereotype that Jews disrespected hence could rob temples (19.37), the crowds shouted down the Jewish speaker (19.33-34) who was probably trying to dissociate the Jewish community from Paul's preaching against idols (cf. 14.15; 17.29-30; 1 Thess. 1.9). Their wish to dissociate themselves from Paul is understandable even within Luke's narrative world; after all, Paul had earlier divided their synagogue and left with most of the converts (Acts 19.8-9). It is therefore not surprising that Asian Jews later accuse Paul of stirring unrest (cf. 21.27-28; 24.5), though in Luke's irony it is Paul's success at propagating Jewish monotheism that lies beneath this charge (19.26-27)!

The riot in Ephesus rendered Paul a political liability and may help explain, as commentators frequently suggest, why he dare not enter the city later when he wishes to meet with the elders there. (Luke could politely omit this motive in 20.16, just as he omits mention of the cause of the Jewish expulsion from Rome in 18.2, which may have involved debates over Jesus' identity.)²⁴ After this point his former 'friends' might at the least prove more cautious in their association with him. This would become all the more the case if any court action (cf. 19.38) went against him.²⁵ To be sure, ancient ideals of friendship involved trust in and loyalty to one's friends, which included rejecting false accusations about them and maintaining fidelity in the face of hardship.²⁶ In the traditional ideal, an aristocrat could not in good conscience engage in legal proceedings against a friend and justice demanded that patronal bonds, like those of kinship, be preserved.²⁷ But in the world of urban

24. So many scholars understand Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4 (e.g. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* [SJLA, 20; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976], p. 211; Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960], pp. 24-26); though the matter has long been debated (cf., e.g., Stephen Benko, 'The Edict of Claudius of A.D. 49 and the Instigator Chrestus', *TZ* 25 [1969], pp. 406-418).

25. On avoiding those convicted of crimes, see, e.g., Theophrastus, *Char.* 29.2. Those never convicted could more easily appeal to a burden of proof in their favor (Isaeus, *Estate of Aristarchus* 1; Lysias, *Or.* 5.2-3, §§102-103; 7.24-29, §§110-11; 16.12, §146; Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 30.64).

26. See, e.g., Sir. 6.7-16; 12.8; Valerius Maximus, *Deeds and Sayings* 3.8. ext. 5-6; Musonius Rufus 9, p. 68.13-15 (Lutz); much more fully, Keener, 'Friendship', pp. 382-83. For 'trust' in patronal friendships, see Marshall, *Enmity*, pp. 21-24.

27. Cicero, *Handbook of Electioneering* 45; *Rhet. Her.* 3.3.4.

aristocratic politics, neither friendships nor enmities were necessarily permanent.²⁸

If Paul's preaching was as popular in Ephesus as Luke claims, Luke does not strain the plausibility of his narrative by allowing Paul some patrons from among the political elite. This portrayal fits Luke's tendency to report the responses of the social elite, especially when they were favorable. Luke was also well aware, however, that Paul advanced his gospel only in the face of considerable conflict. Paul's agenda to convert polytheists to monotheism brought him into conflict with forces which could challenge the nominal support of his elite allies. Although Paul's undisputed letters do not name specific patrons in Ephesus, he mentions that he had a notable 'open door' for ministry, and that there were many adversaries (1 Cor. 16.8-9). The turn of events narrated so dramatically in Acts 19 suggests that Luke knew that the adversaries (which Luke portrays as mostly rabble) won out in the short run. Yet Luke's optimism about the success of the mission, despite opposition (Acts 9.31; 19.20; 28.30-31), provides the context for individual details of his narrative. For Luke, Paul's contacts among prominent members of the Asian elite provides a foretaste of the gospel's ultimate success even among those who, like his own patron (Lk. 1.1), might risk the greatest loss of status.

28. See, e.g., Marshall, *Enmity*, pp. 42-43.