

The merchant of Hierapolis:

**Implications for the study of travel
and early Christianity**

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Τ[ίτο]ς
 Φλα]ούηος Ζευξις ἐργάτης
 πλ]εύσας ὑπὲρ Μαλέαν εἰς Ἰ-
 τα]λίαν πλόας ἐβδομήκοντα
 δύο κατεσκεύασεν τὸ μνημεῖ-
 ον εαυτῶ καὶ τοῖς τεκνοῖς Φλα-
 ούῳ Θεοδώρῳ καὶ Φλαοσίῳ
 Θευδα καὶ ᾧ ἂν ἐκεῖνοι
 συνχωρήσωσιν.
 (SIG³ 1229; IG 4.841(CIG 3920))

Titus
 Flavius Zeuxis, merchant
 having sailed off Cape Maleus to
 Italy on seventy-two voyages
 built this monument
 for himself and for his sons
 Flavius Theodoros and Flavius
 Theudas and for any others
 they may wish to grant permission.

The above epitaph is located on a tomb just outside the main gate of Hierapolis, an ancient city in modern Turkey located on a long plateau long known for its hot springs and frozen cascade of calcium oxide deposits. In addition to the hot springs, a cave to the south of the temple of Apollo drew tourists to the city; issuing toxic carbon dioxide gas, it was thought to be an entrance to the Underworld: “The *galli*, the eunuch-priests of the Magna Mater, were said to be the only living beings not to be asphyxiated by the carbon dioxide generated in the cave” (Bruce, “Hierapolis” 195). Worship of the Syrian goddess Atargatis was centred at Hierapolis, attracting still more tourists and pilgrims.

Not only was Hierapolis a cult and tourist centre, it was also a thriving commercial centre, particularly after the Flavian reconstruction of the city following an earthquake in 60 CE (D’Andria 99): “Hierapolis est donc sous l’empire romain une ville imposante, et sans nul doute une ville riche. Riche par l’afflux des pèlerins, mais aussi par le commerce” (Goossens 120). The city was known particularly for its textile products, and several inscriptions attest to the existence and importance of guilds of purple-dyers, carpet weavers and wool washers (IGRR 4.816, 818, 821, 822). Hierapolis had significant Jewish and Christian communities as early as 60 CE (Bruce, “Hierapolis” 195), which is mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Colossians (Col 4:12-13).¹ The huge necropolis of the city remains visible today and boasts some 1,200 tombs, three hundred with epitaphs (Bruce, “Hierapolis” 195).

¹ Col 4:12-13: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling for you in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of god. For I bear witness to him that he is working hard for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis.” Biblical translations are author’s own unless otherwise indicated.

As Goossens discusses, Hierapolis was a tourist destination, attracting “une foule de pèlerins: des Syriens, des Arabes, des gens de Mésopotamie, et même, si l’on croit notre auteur [Lucien], des Égyptiens, des Éthiopiens, des Médes, des Arméniens et des Babyloniens,” all eager to participate in the city cult and experience the healing hot springs (Goossens 129). Not only did people travel to Hierapolis, but members of the city traveled out into the world, particularly Titus Flavius Zeuxis. His status as merchant-traveller extraordinaire was so important to him that he chose to isolate this aspect of his life to represent his full identity on his tombstone, dismissing the general formulae and categories of farewells so often used in epitaphs (see McLean 267 – 78).² This inscription is of particular consequence when examined in the context of the mobility of Greco-Roman society as “a major factor in determining the spread and social character of early Christianity” (Malherbe 62). The epitaph of Titus Flavius Zeuxis has important implications for the study of travel and early Christianity in terms of the significance of travel in the Greco-Roman mind. An examination of the inscription in a first-century context, a balanced analysis of the significance of the inscription and a discussion of the place of travel in early Christianity focusing particular attention on the Book of Acts and Romans 15:19 demonstrate this point distinctly.

Dating the Inscription: Paleography and Onomastics

The epitaph of the merchant of Hierapolis can be dated to the first century CE, specifically to the Flavian period (69 – 96 CE). The tomb itself is located very close to the main gates of the city, affording it a position of special prominence. It is approximately 10 feet in height and 6 feet both in length and width.³ Raised on a small platform, the tomb is made up of large, rectangular stones of varying sizes, the largest being on the bottom, the smallest at the top. A thinner band runs around the tomb to form the top of the door frame, the door being quite short (one would have to really crouch to enter). The top of the tomb is decorated in a common floral motif.

The rectangular inscription is centred over the doorframe and is approximately 1 ½ feet long and just under 1 foot high. It has an incised margin

² For example, it was much more common to prohibit individuals other than one’s own children from being buried in the family tomb. See Roueché (ala2004 147): “[?The memorial belongs to ?Eu]arestus son of Acheus, in which my children [will be buried, but no-one] else [is allowed]; anyone who dares [to bury anyone in it, let him give] to the most sacred treasury a pound of pure bullion.”

³ These dimensions are, unfortunately, estimates only.

with a scroll decoration still visible outside the right margin. The margin is well preserved at the bottom right corner, and elsewhere is quite worn. The top left corner of the inscription is completely broken off, although the outline of the margin can still be seen on the plain grey stone beneath. The word ΤΙΤΟΣ is centred on the first line; the tau, omicron and sigma are easily visible, but the iota and second tau are much more difficult to discern, particularly in photographs. ΦΛΑ- is missing from the second line, ΠΛ- on the third and -ΤΑ- on the fourth. The letters are generally more worn on the left side, although the omicrons are generally worn throughout, particularly in ΦΛΑΟΥΙΩ on line seven.

When it comes to spacing, ΤΙΤΟΣ is nicely centred and even, but the rest of the inscription is fairly uneven. The cutter does not seem to have planned his space very well, and also seems to have made at least one spelling mistake which he then corrected: the iota in ΖΕΥΞΙΣ is really squished in between the xi and the final sigma. Lines 3-6 run into the right margin, and the last line runs into the bottom margin. The last three lines all slope downwards. Line height is slightly more even, though the letters appear to grow larger as they approach the right side. While there are some nice, even spots in the inscription (for example, ΤΟΜΝΗΜΕΙ in line 5), letter size is for the most part uneven. Although the cutter seems to run out of space in several locations and cannot keep his lines straight, he does insert three ivy leaves (lines 5, 6 and 8) for decoration; as they are spaced at odd intervals, seemingly mid-statement, they are definitely not for punctuation.

The dating of the inscription is of great consequence to the study of travel and early Christianity when viewed against the backdrop of the realities of commerce and travel during this period. An early date is suggested both by the paleography of the inscription and perhaps by the merchant's name. Kloppenborg Verbin's article "Dating Theodotos (*CIJ II 1404*)" is helpful when examining SIG³ 1229 as the letter forms suggest some commonalities, particularly the broken bar alphas and quadrilateral sigmas (266 – 68). However, the letters of the epitaph are rather irregular, suggesting perhaps an inexperienced cutter: individual letters take on different forms, particularly the omicrons (no two are the same shape) and the etas (some being wide, some quite narrow).

Paleography is not a precise science, and inscriptions cannot be dated precisely on the basis of letter forms, as Bradley McLean states in his seminal work on Greek epigraphy: "The dating of Hellenistic and Roman inscriptions according to allegedly key developments of particular letter forms is notoriously difficult and unreliable" (McLean 42; see also Kloppenborg Verbin 253). One

must be familiar with multiple inscriptions from the region and time period in question in order to properly analyze a single inscription, particularly one that is not self-dating (McLean 3; Kloppenborg Verbin 264 – 65). Unfortunately, no such set of dated inscriptions exists for Hierapolis as a control, and the possibility of variations among cutters (particularly between ‘official’ cutters of civic inscriptions and those for private dedications, as in this instance) and archaism further complicate matters.

However, important observations can be made regarding the paleography of the inscription based Roueché’s work on Aphrodisian inscriptions. The focus of her work is on 250 inscriptions, mainly formal, public inscriptions, which can be dated between 250 and 550 CE, the middle to late third century marking a turning point in epigraphic style and function. This essential change is described as “the abandonment of the tendency towards uniformity, which had so dominated the preceding centuries. For the early fourth until the sixth century, inscriptions are cut, sometimes quite carefully, on a set of widely differing principles” (Roueché xxii). Some characteristics of later, less formal scripts include the elongation of letters, more lunate forms and the disappearance of the classical forms of sigma and omega (Roueché xxii). While the inscription in question is a more private text (suggesting more flexibility in style), a comparison to several of the Aphrodisian inscriptions is helpful.

The merchant inscription, SIG³ 1229 most closely resembles inscriptions from Aphrodisias dating approximately between 253 – 260 CE. A number of letter forms are worth noting: there are no lunate forms, ligatures or monograms; most of the letters have serifs on the top; the alphas are mainly broken bar, with one straight bar in line five; the deltas do not exhibit the later tendency to accentuate the upper serif upwards (Roueché 332); the epsilons are square as opposed to lunate in form; the kappas have arms that do not reach the upper and lower extents of the upright; and the phi has an exaggerated upright with two separate semi-circles attached in the middle. The sigmas and omegas are perhaps most significant. The sigmas are quadrilateral, indicating an earlier date as the quadrilateral form was replaced by lunate and square forms from the early fourth century (Roueché 334; see ala2004 02, 08). The omegas exhibit the form standard throughout the Roman period, the cursive form prevailing from the fourth century (Roueché 334; see ala2004 01, 12). While letter forms alone are not enough to secure a date, based on the evidence from Aphrodisias it is very likely that the inscription in question can be dated to before 260 CE.

Perhaps a more secure basis for dating SIG³ 1229 is found in the merchant's name, Titus Flavius Zeuxis (Kloppenborg Verbin 259). The merchant has a *tria nomina*, a name consisting of a praenomen, nomen gentilicium and cognomen; the existence of the praenomen here could suggest an earlier date, as the praenomen fell into disuse in the late second century CE, except among the aristocracy (McLean 112).⁴ The dynastic nomen, Titus Flavius, could imply that the merchant was a freedman or a *peregrinus* (foreigner) granted Roman citizenship by a Flavian emperor (69 – 96 CE): “When a civilian Greek or any other foreigner became a Roman citizen, it was customary for him to take the praenomen and nomen of the current emperor, while retaining his former personal name as a cognomen” (McLean 123). The dynastic nomen would then be passed on to all members of the family (Flavius Theodoros and Flavius Theudas). McLean states that recipients of these grants of Roman citizenship could be “(1) veteran soldiers who acquired citizenship by serving as legionaries or auxiliaries, this fact often being explicitly stated; (2) freedmen of emperors, governors, or private *patroni*, and (3) citizens of the empire who received grants of citizenship under Caracalla” (McLean 115). While the merchant does not use the full name for a freedman (e.g. Titus Flavius l. Titi Zeuxis: Titus Flavius Zeuxis, freedman of Titus [Flavius]), it could be that he wishes to avoid calling attention to his former servile status and is drawing attention instead to his membership in the Flavian gens.⁵

His status as freedman is further suggested in a deeper study of his name. Kajanto suggests that rigid barriers between social classes were reflected in nomenclature, making the social distribution of personal names significant (Kajanto 519). The simple detail of the cognomen being Greek could be significant: “The fact that «Greek was the original language of slave trade» largely explains why «Greek cognomina had a servile taint»” (Kajanto 520).⁶ Statistically, the cognomina of the *ingenui* were primarily Latin: “The average is 80,8%. Even in Rome, where the Greek nomenclature was otherwise commoner

⁴ It can also be noted that his name does not include a patronym in the filiation formula of a nominative followed by a genitive (for example, Θεόδοτος Ουεπτηνου, “Theodotos son of Vettenu”), which generally indicates free birth. McLean notes however that this formula was not uniformly adopted in the Greek east, and its absence from a name does not necessarily indicate that the person occupied servile status (McLean 114).

⁵ Weaver notes that in the absence of other criteria for dating, separating the freedmen of Vespasian (69 – 79 CE), Titus (79 – 81 CE) and Domitian (81 – 96 CE; 89 L. Antonius Saturninus) is exceedingly difficult (Weaver, *Familia* 25).

⁶ Kajanto quotes M.L. Gordon, “The Nationality of Slaves under the Early Roman Empire,” *JRS* 14 (1924): 105.

than elsewhere, three fourths of the *ingenui* bore a Latin cognomen" (Kajanto 524). On the other hand, slaves from the Greek east bore non-Latin cognomina 80% of the time.⁷ Furthermore, the word Ζευξις means "yoking" or "manner of yoking (oxen)" (*LSJ* 754), calling to mind servile imagery. An undated inscription from Larisa does mention the manumission of a slave with the name Zeuxis, suggesting that it was in fact a servile name (*Deltion* II no. 5 p. 59).⁸ Given the meaning of Zeuxis and evidence for its use as a servile name together with the dynastic nomen, Zeuxis was most likely a freedman (perhaps an imperial freedman).

Trade

Evidence of the realities of trade in the first century further suggests that Zeuxis was a freedman of the Flavian *gens*. As Meeks points out, wealthy traders were "high in income, low in occupational prestige" (Meeks 73). Cicero calls traders and seafarers "poor men of humble birth" (*Against Verres* 2.5.167)⁹ and gives voice to the prevailing opinion of the landowning aristocracy that only agriculture is suitable for a gentleman:

Now the following is the gist of my understanding about trades and employments, those which free men can think of entering and those which are contemptible. First, those employments are condemned which arouse people's dislike, for example, collectors of harbour duties and money-lenders...Commerce should be considered vulgar if it is a rather small affair. If it is extensive and well-financed, importing many products from

⁷ Kajanto 527. It must be noted that "the ratio of non-Latin cognomina was considerable only in Rome. Elsewhere freedmen bore Latin cognomina almost as often as they did non-Latin" (Kajanto 527). This ratio would seem to destroy the theory of Greek cognomina as identifying slaves specifically. However, Kajanto asserts, "it should be borne in mind that... only the slaves coming from the East bore Greek cognomina, whereas the slaves obtained from Latin-speaking provinces for the most part bore Latin cognomina. The unequal geographical distribution of Latin and non-Latin cognomina in freedmen's nomenclature is thus attributable to the different provenance of slaves" (Kajanto 527). "For the most part" is perhaps significant here, as Treggiari asserts that the fact that Greek names predominate in inscriptions of freedmen "should not lead us to conclude necessarily that their bearers came from the Greek-speaking half of the Empire" (Treggiari 7-8).

⁸ The inscription could date anywhere from the fifth century BCE to the third century CE; see Reilly's collection of slave names from Greek manumission inscriptions from the Greek mainland and islands of the Aegean, *Slaves in Ancient Greece: Slaves from Greek Manumission Inscriptions* (Chicago: Aris Publishers Inc., 1978).

⁹ I am largely indebted to Meijer and Van Nijf's *Trade, Transport and Society in the Ancient World: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) for my translations of ancient authors.

all over the world and distributing them to many customers honestly, one should not criticize it severely. In fact, it even seems to deserve the highest respect if a merchant who has had his fill of trade, or I should say is satisfied with his profit, retires from the quayside to his farmhouse and estates, just as he sailed so many times from the sea to a harbour. Of all pursuits by which men gain their livelihood none is better than agriculture...
(*On Duties* I.150-2).

The only reputable merchant, to Cicero, is a retired one.

Many ancient writers further felt that the finding of a merchant who would distribute his products "to many customers honestly" would be a most difficult task. Commerce was often associated with greed and dishonesty, as the writer of Ecclesiasticus indicates:

How hard it is for a merchant to keep clear of wrong
or for a shopkeeper to be innocent of dishonesty!
Many have cheated for gain;
a money-grubber will always turn a blind eye.
As a peg is held fast in the joint between stones,
so dishonesty squeezes in between selling and buying.
(26:29 – 27:2).

Merchants and sailors were regarded as virtual criminals; in his description of the ideal state, Plato discusses the vices associated with harbours and the sea:

Had it to be on the coast, well furnished with harbours and ill off for many of its necessities, not productive at all, we should need a mighty protector and lawgivers who were more than men to prevent the development of much refined vice in consequence of such a situation... It is agreeable enough to have the sea at one's door in daily life; but, for all that, it is, in very truth, a 'briny' and bitter 'neighbour'. It fills a city with wholesale traffic and retail huckstering, breeds shifty and distrustful habits of soul, and so makes a society distrustful and unfriendly within itself as well as towards mankind at large.
(*Laws* IV.704b5-705b8).

Patricians clearly expressed contempt for merchants and sailors, and Meijer and van Nijf state that “the early Church was no more positive in this respect” (Meijer and van Nijf 15).

Merchants and businessmen were therefore not generally acceptable as city officials or councilors; an inscription from second-century Ephesus indicates that “a certain Lucius Erastus had to rely on the recommendation of the emperor Hadrian, who was also prepared to pay his entrance-fee for him, so that he could enter the council of Ephesus” (Meijer and van Nijf 72; *SIG*³ 838). There was even a law passed in the third century BCE stating that senators were prohibited from actively engaging in trade which, as Livy holds, was “considered beneath a senator’s dignity” (Livy, *Ad urbe condita* 21.63.3-4). The merchant of Hierapolis, it therefore seems, would not have been an individual in very good societal standing.

However, in practice things may have been different. Successful *negotiatores* (businessmen, the Latin equivalent of ἐργάτης) often had a higher social position, *mercatura* being less respectable: “The title ‘mercator’ is in fact generally avoided by traders in their funerary inscriptions, and it can be uncomplimentary in use by others” (Treggiari 89). The activities of a *negotiator* included finance, money-lending, ownership of agricultural land in the provinces and “other more profitable forms of trade” (Treggiari 102). The fact that Zeuxis mentions his occupation as an ἐργάτης first on his tombstone would suggest he was proud of his career, rather than trying to conceal something unsavory.¹⁰ Furthermore, freedmen had access to some of the “higher” pursuits of patricians, particularly imperial freedmen who, as such, were more socially mobile and had more economic advantages (Weaver, “Social Mobility” 129). As Kloppenborg points out, evidence shows that freedmen, municipal elites and others of modest social attainment could own vineyards, Cato referring to viticulture as, in his opinion, “the best type of farm” (*De agricultura* 1.7; see Kloppenborg 384 - 86).¹¹ Zeuxis may not have been as “vulgar” as initially assumed.

¹⁰ The merchant’s pride concerning his career could also account for his dropping of the freedman designation “l. Titi Zeuxis”: “A freedman ordering his tomb was usually more interested in his career after manumission” (Treggiari 4). While imperial freedmen were generally tempted to keep their association with the Imperial Familia as it gave them a certain social prestige, omission of the designation does occur (Weaver, *Familia* 81-83).

¹¹ While viticulture was viewed under the Republic as too risky an investment, the opinion began to change in the last first century CE. Kloppenborg writes that “In Italy of the Republic the prevailing patrician view was evidently that viticulture was either too risky or required too much

On the flip side, it was not uncommon for the elite to engage in trade and business. Meijer and van Nijf indicate that while traders were usually freedmen or slaves, those of lower status, patricians did engage in commerce: "...dependent freedmen and slaves may have acted as front-men, protecting the interests of the real, upper-class, investors" (Meijer and van Nijf 73). These aristocratic investors would try to go unnoticed; Treggiari states that "like the senatorial order, the more eminent *equites* resorted to some concealment about business ventures. They were engaged in *negotia* of one sort or another...hardly ever overtly in trade, though it is likely that they engaged in, for instance, the slave-trade, on the quiet" (Treggiari 88). Contrary to Cicero's ideal, these aristocrats moved not from the quays to their farmhouses, but from their farmhouses to the quays.

The Realities of Travel

While ancient authors may have frowned on the merchant of Hierapolis as a trader, several modern authors frown on him as a traveller, an attitude which is of great importance for the present study. This dismissive attitude towards the merchant's epitaph stems from the first-century context of the inscription and the relative ease of travel at this time. Augustus ushered in the *pax Romana*, close to two hundred years of peace across the Mediterranean, uniting it in "one world": "For the first – and last – time in history, the Mediterranean was politically as well as culturally one world" (Casson 121). Epictetus, a native of Hierapolis, wrote: "Caesar has obtained for us a profound peace. There are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies, but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west" (Epictetus 3.13.9). Augustus was hailed for clearing the Mediterranean of pirates, as Suetonius remembers in *Augustus* 98.2:

As he sailed through the Gulf of Puteoli, the passengers and crew of a recently arrived Alexandrian ship had put on white robes and garlands, burned incense, and wished him the greatest of good fortune – because, they said, they owed their lives to him and their liberty to sail the seas: in a word, their entire freedom and prosperity (Suetonius, *Augustus* 98.2).

capitalization, and hence was not a good investment for the wealthy who desired a risk-free income and little in the way of capital outlays" (Kloppenborg 385). Viticulture therefore attracted "various sub-aristocratic investors" (Kloppenborg 389). However, vineyards could yield huge profits, and viticulture began to be more positively viewed as more aristocrats sang its praises (see also Columella, *De re rustica* 3.3).

Travel by sea became more popular than land transport, which was much more expensive and difficult, particularly for transporting large quantities of goods (Casson 129 – 30). The Mediterranean therefore became “the Roman Empire’s internal lake” (Hopkins 765), with greater numbers of people traveling by sea for a greater variety of reasons than ever before and, indeed, for a great many centuries after:

The Mediterranean world of the first two centuries A.D., then was bigger than it had ever been before... The roads and sea ways were now thronged with traders in larger numbers than the Greek world had ever known, with armies, bureaucrats, couriers of the government post, and just plain tourists, from the few who traveled far and wide to see the great sights to the thousands who yearly left for nearby beaches or hills to escape the heat of the cities (Casson 127).

This relative ease of travel in the first century leads some modern authors such as Meeks to underestimate the importance of the epitaph from Hierapolis, stating that his situation was quite normal and not at all unique (see Meeks 17). This examination of the first century context of the inscription would therefore indicate that nothing very new is to be seen in the situation of Zeuxis.

The epitaph of the merchant of Hierapolis, however, needs to be viewed from a more balanced perspective on trade and travel in antiquity. The tendency of modern authors to overestimate the ease of travel in the first century in particular tends to diminish the significance of travel in the mind of the average Greco-Roman, demonstrated clearly in the merchant’s epitaph. Travel was seen as both a challenge and a significant triumph when completed successfully; the merchant was very proud of his accomplishments as a traveller, otherwise he would not have mentioned his seventy-two voyages on his tombstone. An analysis of the challenges of travel in the first century, positive attitudes towards travel and the use of travel as a form of government propaganda plainly illustrates this point.

While travel in the first century was free from piracy, a great many factors went into the single sailing of a ship. Sailing was largely seasonal, though not strictly limited to these seasons; a military handbook from the fourth century CE states that sailing was only safe between 27 May and 24 September, the seas being “closed” from 11 November to 10 March (Vegetius, *Epitome Rei Militaris* 4.39). The greatest danger in sea travel was, of course, storms and shipwreck. Winter storms were particularly frightening, and cloudy conditions in fall and

spring further complicated travel as sailors depended upon landmarks or the sun and stars to plot their course (Casson 15).

The merchant of Hierapolis, in his travels between Asia Minor and Rome, had to follow a particularly difficult route, one which made his seventy-two journeys quite an outstanding accomplishment. His starting point was inland, which Ramsay suggests is quite out of the ordinary: "It is strange that a merchant resident in an inland city should have taken so many voyages" (Ramsay, *Bishoprics* 107). His sea route took him past Cape Maleus on the edge of the Peloponnesus, a location he feels important enough to mention specifically in his epitaph. This cape, Strabo states, was notoriously challenging:

And just as in early times the Strait of Sicily was not easy to navigate, so also the high seas, and particularly the sea beyond Malea, were not, on account of contrary winds; and hence the proverb, 'But when you double Malea, forget your home.' At any rate, [Corinth] was a welcome alternative, for the merchants both from Italy and from Asia, to avoid the voyage to Malea and to land their cargoes here (*Strabo* 8.6.20).

Zeuxis doubled this cape successfully seventy-two times!¹²

Of further importance was how long travel actually took. The timing of voyages depended upon the prevailing winds. The Etesian winds, or summer trade winds, blew from the north to the east, making travel in one direction fairly easy, but in the other quite difficult: "Thus the voyage from Rome to Alexandria was apt to be a traveller's dream: with the prevailing wind on the stern, he could generally count on a quick and easy run of ten days to three weeks. But he paid the price on the return, which could take as much as two months or more" (Casson 151 – 52).

Another difficulty of travel related to the perceived will of the gods and omens. Casson points out that a ship never left on a fixed schedule:

First they had to await the arrival of a wind from the right quarter. Then there was the matter of omens... On many days of the year the religious

¹² If Titus Flavius Zeuxis was indeed a freedman, age is an even more important factor in the timing of his voyages, as the legal age for formal manumission was thirty. Weaver notes, however, that many slaves were manumitted before they reached this age (Weaver, *Familia* 98-99).

calendar forbade business of any sort, and this included the departure of ships. Then there were days, like our Friday the thirteenth, which were ill-omened, e.g. no Roman skipper would shove off from a port on 24 August, 5 October, or 8 November, and the end of the month as a whole was considered no time to be found on the water (Casson 155).

If the time was right to sail, the ship's authorities would sacrifice a sheep or a bull and examine its entrails for the proper omens (Casson 155). If the results were positive, "superstition still left a gamut of bad omens to be run: a sneeze as you went up the gangplank was bad (although if you had sneezed to the right during the sacrifice, that was good), a crow or a magpie sitting, croaking, in the rigging was bad..." (Casson 155). When the ship was underway, omens remained to be important: "So long as the weather was good, there was to be no cutting of hair or nails... Dancing was taboo" (Casson 156). When the ship arrived successfully at its destination, another sacrifice was made (Casson 157). Travel was therefore a most tricky business, and was not undertaken with the complete assurance and ease many authors suggest.

Despite these difficulties and contrary to the feelings expressed by such patricians as Cicero concerning the details of travel (trade, sailors, harbours, etc.), travel did occupy a positive place in the average Greco-Roman's mind. Notwithstanding complaints about the nasty characters sea trade brought to a city, the loss of harbour rights was a cause of great grief. The transit port of Rhodes profited greatly from the levying of harbour duties. When Rome created a free port in Delos in the second century BCE and therefore caused much financial loss to Rhodes, Rhodes sent a special envoy to Rome to complain:

But the greatest calamity inflicted on our town is this. The revenue we drew from our harbour has ceased owing to your having made Delos a free port, and deprived our people of that liberty by which our rights as regards our harbour and all the other rights of our city were properly guarded. It is not difficult to convince you of the truth of this. For while the harbour-dues in former times were formed for a million drachmas, they now fetch only a 150,000, so that your displeasure, men of Rome, has only too heavily visited the vital resources of the state.

(Polybius 30.31.10-12)

Not only were harbours economically important in the minds of city officials, but guilds of merchants and shipowners could hold significant power over the government: "The dependence of the state on the corporations of shipowners, for

the transport of supplies to Rome and the armies, gave the corporations a hold over the government" (Meijer and van Nijf 77). Travel and commerce could therefore hold a place of more prestige than otherwise suggested.

Most telling regarding the role of travel in the Greco-Roman mindset is the work of Coulston in his article on transport and travel on the column of Trajan. Coulston points to the depiction of Roman armies on campaign against the Dacians as being unique in Roman propaganda art, a portrayal which had never appeared in such detail before and did not occur again after (Coulston 126). The scenes went beyond "mere campaign narrative" to focus on travel, the army crossing roads and building bridges with the permission of the local gods of forest and river:

In many respects the reliefs on Trajan's column are all about travel: travel of emperor and army to win victories, explore new regions, meet new peoples and to collect the royal gold which went to pay for the massive building complex within which the column stood... All was couched in the language of Roman 'historical' art for the urban audience.
(Coulston 126 – 27)

The portrayal of Roman victory over the Dacians on the column highlights transport and travel in such a way that travel is seen to belong to the civilized, sophisticated realm of the Romans, where the Dacians simply lurk in forests in disorderly mobs, awaiting their defeat.

Coulston suggests that the scenes on the column function as propaganda, highlighting the diplomatic and military achievement of the Roman armies who explore new worlds and bring barbarians to submit to the Roman name:

The technical skills and achievements of the Roman army as depicted on Trajan's column both made possible and advertised a victory of a singularly Roman kind. Aided occasionally by their own patron deities, the emperor and his army are victorious not only over the barbarian enemy and his fortresses, but also over the natural forces of rivers, forests and mountains, all with their potentially hostile *genii*... The conflict is not simply between Romans and Dacians, Trajan and Decebalus. It is also a contest between Romans and barbarians, *disciplina* and *peturbatio*, *labor* and *inertia*, imperial virtues and enemy perfidy, civilization and untamed nature, urbanization and wilderness. The depictions of transport and

travel on the column not only gave structure to the Dacian wars but also fully contributed to these actual and symbolic conflicts.
(Coulston 129 – 30)

Travel occupies a central place as it is through the orderly crossing of roads, building of bridges, clearing of forests and setting up of camps that the Romans achieve their superiority. Travel and transport are to be applauded and honoured, for it is through them, and the Roman mastery of them, that the Roman Empire is built. When viewed from this more balanced perspective therefore, it is clear that travel occupied a position of honour in the Greco-Roman mind. An analysis of the challenges of travel in the first century, positive attitudes towards travel and the use of travel as a form of government propaganda therefore situate the epitaph of the merchant of Hierapolis in its rightful place as an inscription of significance in the study of travel and early Christianity.

Significance for the Study of Early Christianity

The epitaph of Titus Flavius Zeuxis is highly significant for the study of travel and, particularly when viewed alongside Paul's attitudes towards travel in Romans and the Book of Acts, for the study of early Christianity. The focus of the present discussion is not on the trustworthiness of the travel accounts on Acts (see Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*), nor is it merely to catalogue the "notable Christians" who spent a great deal of their lives traveling (see Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* 371 – 72 for an impressive list of traveling Christians). Rather, it is to shed light on the position of travel in the Greco-Roman mind: for the merchant, Paul, the author of Luke-Acts and for the reader of the Christian texts. This goal will be accomplished through a brief discussion of the significance of commerce and travel in early Christian identity,¹³ the rhetorical role of travel in the Book of Acts and Paul's attitude toward travel, particularly in Romans 15:18-19.

¹³ I cannot hope to do justice to this topic in so short a space, as so many aspects of this topic deserve attention, particularly the importance of trade networks, voluntary associations and translocal links (see Ascough, "Translocal Relationships"). Mark Humphries' article "Trading gods in northern Italy" (see Works Cited) is significant in its examination of the role of trade networks in the diffusion of private religious cults in the Roman Empire. Meeks also discusses this topic in *The First Urban Christians*: "It is at least symbolically significant that the Isis sanctuary of Cenchrae...was nestled among warehouses on the south dock" (Meeks 18).

Zeuxis felt that his identity was best captured in the short statement “merchant, having sailed on seventy-two voyages beyond Cape Maleus towards Italy...” Many early Christians would have identified with both commerce and travel, Christian expansion being “closely associated with personal mobility, both physical and social” (Meeks 16). Travel played an important role in Christian identity: “Christians wrote; they read; and they traveled. Like soldiers, government officials, criminals and barbarians many Christians were on the move much of the time chiefly along the trade routes... Christians traveled, perhaps more than most of their contemporaries” (Grant 21 – 22). Many Christians would have traveled as a consequence of their professions, not solely for missionary activities; Paul’s fellow tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla are good examples, as is the purple-seller Lydia from Thyatira (see Acts 8.4; 16.14; 18.1 – 3; 1 Cor.16.19; Rom. 16.3). Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the mobility of early Christians is found in Rom. 16.1 – 16, where Paul lists twenty-nine people and households to whom he wishes to send greetings. Since Paul has never been to Rome and he evidently knew all these people, he must have met them when they traveled outside Rome.

The importance of travel to the identity of the early Christian is further attested in two epitaphs dating to the late second century or early third century CE. Horsley describes the first as an “epitaph for a much-travelled Christian missionary,” though he states that different interpretations are given for the epitaph’s content, including the possibility that he was solely a merchant, not a Christian missionary: “To be constantly at sea is what we should expect from a merchant, not from a philosopher/teacher” (Horsley 69). The epitaph, found in excavations in Lyon, reads:

If you desire to know what mortal lies here, this writing will not be silent, but will tell all. Euteknios is his surname, Julianos his name; Laodicea his city, Syria’s remarkable ornament. His father’s family was held in esteem, and his mother had a similar reputation. He was good and just, a man beloved by all. When he spoke to Kelts, persuasion flowed from his tongue. He went about among diverse nations, and knew many peoples; and he practiced a virtuous life among them. He gave himself continually to the waves and to the sea, carrying to the Kelts and to the land of the West all gifts which God instructed the bountiful East to bear. For this reason the threefold tribes of the Kelts loved the man.

(Horsley 68: Lyon, III/IV century, *ed. pr* J. Pouilloux, *JSav* (1975) 58-75 [ph., 59])¹⁴

Julianos seems to be as proud of his status as traveller as Zeuxis. The second epitaph is clearly Christian and belongs to Abercius of Hierapolis: “the holy shepherd...sent me to Rome to make articulate the kingdom.. and I saw the plain of Syria and passed through all the cities, having crossed the Euphrates. Everywhere I had as companions Paul [lacuna]...” (Harland 26). Harland states that this epitaph “demonstrates that travels continued to be an important aspect of identity among some Christian leaders” (Harland 26).¹⁵ Travel clearly played an important role in early Christian identity.

Travel seems to have played a somewhat different role for Paul as expressed in the Book of Acts. Rapske, in his examination of Acts against the backdrop of aspects of travel in the ancient world, describes Paul as a “professional traveller,” contrasting him with “ordinary travellers” who would only travel during the customary seasons:

The varied privations and rigours would then be associated with traveling in the ‘doubtful’ or ‘closed’ seasons and lead to the conclusion that the

¹⁴ The Greek text, reproduced from Horsley 68, is as follows:

<p><i>Col.1</i> εἰ γινῶναι ποθέεις ὅστις βροτὸς ἐνθάδε κείται, οὐδὲν σειρήσει τάδε γράμματα. πάντα δὲ λέξει· Εὐτέκνιος ἐπικλήν, Ἰουλιανὸς τοῦνομα τῷδε, Λαοδίκια πατρίς, Συρίας περιβλεπτον ἄγαλμα· 5 ἐντιμος πατρόθεν, μήτηρ·δ' ἔχε δόξαν ὁμοίην, χρηστὸς καὶ δίκαιος, πᾶσιν πεφιλημένος ἀνὴρ, οὐ Κελτοῖς λαλέοντος ἀπὸ γλώσσης ῥέε πειθῶ· ποικίλα μὲν περιήλθεν ἔθνη, πολλοὺς δέ <τε> δήμους ἔγνω καὶ ψυχῆς ἀρετὴν ἤσκησεν ἐ<ν> αὐτοῖς· 10 κύμασιν καὶ πελάγει συνεχῶς ἐπέδωκεν ἑαυτόν, δῶρα τὰ πάντα φέρων εἰς Κελτοὺς καὶ Δύσεως γῆν [ὄ]σα θεὸς προσέταξε φέρειν χθόνα πάνφορον Ἡοῦς· [τοῦνε]κα τὸν φιλέ[ε]σκε βροτὸν τριπλὰ φύλα τὰ Κελτῶν.</p>	<p><i>Col.2</i> ἤλασεν εἰς ΒΑΘ 15 ἀντὶ τρόπων Α. τῷ πάντων ΚΡ ἐν δόξῃ ΚΑΤΕ ὑεὶ ΠΑΝΜΑΚ καὶ πᾶσιν ΤΟ 20 τοῦνεκα ΤΟ υἱὸς Η.ΕΚ ΑΙΤΗΤΟΣΙ ψυχῆς ΤΕ δοίη ΤΕΘ</p>
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The stele, found in excavations at the Church of Saint-Just in Lyon (IV-XV), consists of two lines of text, each of thirteen lines, and is broken on the right side. Dimensions: .74m high, .55m deep, 1.47-1.29m wide. Published: J-F. Reynard (47-56); A. Audin (56-58); M. Guarducci, *MEFR* 88 (1976) 843-52; C.P. Jones, *AJP* 99 (1978) 336-53; *SEG* 1214; *BE* 799; (1977) 599 *bis*; (1979) 663. The text is dated differently by various authors, from post 180 (Guarducci 852) to II²/III *init.* (Pouilloux 60, 61) and III/IV (Jones 349-50). See Horsley 68-69.

¹⁵ Some Christian leaders viewed travel negatively, for example Ambrose in *De Elia* 70 – 1: “God did not make the sea to be sailed over, but for the sake of the beauty of the element...”

apostle, with an unmistakable call to bear witness extensively throughout the Mediterranean and to suffer frequently and variously for the Name, is to be numbered among the intrepid professionals rather than the fair-weather traffic (Rapske 6).

It is unclear if Paul saw himself in this light however, as travel seems to play a rhetorical role in his mission across the Mediterranean. In 2 Cor. 11.25 – 26 he places travel in the context of his sufferings as an apostle: “Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters...”¹⁶ Travel is not the central fact; it is Paul’s role as apostle and consequent suffering that he highlights.

Travel is integral to the plot of the Book of Acts; it plays a much different role for the author of Luke-Acts than it does for Paul as expressed through his letters. It is clear that travel is central to the book right from the very beginning, with the “mission statement” expressed in Acts 1.8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹⁷ The author is almost obsessive about the sea, able to discuss winds, harbours, ship parts, steering method and the complexities of shipping traffic (Alexander 36; see especially Acts 20.13 – 16; 21.1 – 3; 27.1 – 2, 4 – 8, 13 – 19; 28.11 – 13). The book is located mid-way through the *pax Romana* of Augustus; as Rapske notes, it would “be difficult to imagine a period in antiquity better suited to the realization of the prophetic affirmation of Acts 1:8” (Rapske 2 – 3).

Rapske, in his work “Acts, Travel and Shipwreck,” goes on to examine the author’s intention in relating the shipwreck in particular at such length, concluding that the author is concerned with a Jewish-Christian sense of “retributive logic”: “Luke’s burden is to demonstrate to his readers by an accurate account that Paul and the troubled manner of his witness from place to place, far from indicating personal disqualification and censure of his message, actually constitute the beginnings of the fulfillment of the mandate of Acts 1:8” (Rapske 46). Rapske states that Luke’s narrative works to confirm Paul as

¹⁶ Note also 2 Cor 10:14: “For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you, for we were the first to come all the way to you with the Gospel of Christ.”

¹⁷ All biblical citations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version.

messenger and his message, linking the shipwreck account to Luke 21:12 – 19 (“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you...”).

Rapske’s theory, however, sidelines the importance of travel in itself in the Book of Acts and in the mind of Paul, ignoring its significance for the Greco-Roman reader. Alexander sheds much more light on this integral aspect of the narrative in his comparison of voyaging in the Book of Acts and in Greek romance: “The popularity of this kind of voyage narrative among the Greeks must reflect the importance of the sea, and especially of the coastal voyage, in the Greek perception of the world” (Alexander 33). Alexander discusses specifically “the mental maps which the narrative presupposes; and the significance of the sea as a mode of travel” (Alexander 18). He writes:

Acts foregrounds an aspect of Paul’s travels which Paul himself prefers to ignore, or at least (except in the notoriously rhetorical passage 2 Cor.11) to downplay. Moreover Luke has carefully prepared the ground in such a way that Paul (and his party) are the only characters who travel by sea in the whole two-volume narrative: Galilee for Luke is a ‘lake’ (λιμνη), not the sea (θαλασσα or πελαγος), so that, in Vernon Robbins’s words, ‘Only Paul and his associates face the challenge, adventure, and destiny of voyaging across the sea’ (Alexander 33).

Not only does Paul face the adventure of sea travel, he is presented as being completely at home on the sea, dominating the crew during the shipwreck (Acts 27.21 – 26). As the gospel moves from a Jerusalem-centred map to a map centred on the Mediterranean, what was previously Greco-Roman territory becomes Christian territory, in a similar way as what was Dacian territory becomes Roman as depicted on Trajan’s column. As Alexander states, “The narrator is implicitly laying claim to a cultural territory which many readers, both Greek and Judaeo-Christian, would perceive as inherently ‘Greek’” (Alexander 37).

Alexander’s notion of mental maps becomes much clearer in an examination of Romans 15:18-19, in which Paul in his own words lays claim to the map of the Mediterranean with reference to the spread of the gospel: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round (κύκλω) as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:18-19). Κύκλω has the meaning of “in a circle” or “round about” (see *LSJ* 1007), implying that the east forms a circle with Jerusalem and the Roman

province of Illyricum as the eastern and western sides (Rome and Spain belonging to a second Mediterranean 'circle'). While travel here is not explicit, it is implicit in the passage, as it was trade and travel which allowed for this perception of a Mediterranean circle: "The apostle is not thinking of individual churches but...of peoples and lands... The eastern part of the empire is defined by Jerusalem on the one hand as the salvation-historical center of the world and the starting point of the gospel, and by the end of the Via Aegnatia on the other hand" (Käsemann 395 – note the specific reference to the important travel route of the Via Aegnatia).

Paul in Romans 15:18-19 is reminding the Roman community of the validity of his missionary commission and his preaching to the Gentiles specifically "not where Christ has already been named" (Rom 15:20), but in regions which had not yet heard the Christian message. Travel therefore also allowed for the idea of the claiming this territory for the gospel. As Käsemann writes, "It is of the essence of the gospel that it is not just proclaimed but that it fashions an earthly sphere of validity for the lordship of Christ" (Käsemann 394). Travel becomes central to the Christian expression of identity in Acts as Paul sails the sea, bringing the good news "to the ends of the earth."

Conclusion

As an examination of the epitaph of Titus Flavius Zeuxis in a first-century context, a balanced analysis of the significance of the inscription and a discussion of the place of travel in early Christianity focusing particular attention on the Book of Acts and Romans 15:18-19 clearly demonstrates, the merchant's seventy-two voyages beyond the treacherous Cape Maleus towards Italy have important implications for the study of travel and early Christianity. Meeks notes that the "common route" the merchant would have taken on his way from Hierapolis to Laodicea and on to the port of Ephesus was itself important in the spread of early Christianity:

Across Asia Minor the "common route" (*koine hodos*) ran from Ephesus past Tralles, up the Maeander valley to Laodicea, to Apameia, Antioch by Pisidia, Philomelium, across Lycaonia to Iconium, down by Laranda and the Cilician Gates to Tarsus, then either to Antioch in Syria or across to Zeugma on the Euphrates. Here, in reverse order, is a virtual catalog of the course of expansion of the Pauline groups from Antioch to the Aegean (Meeks 17).

The merchant's location of his identity in his role as merchant and extraordinary traveller resonates through the narratives of Paul and his associates, and highlights the important position travel, particularly sea travel, held in the Greco-Roman world. "Titus Flavius Zeuxis, merchant, having sailed on seventy-two voyages beyond Cape Maleus towards Italy, built a monument for himself and for his sons Flavius Theodoros and Flavius Theudas..."

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