

The City of Salamis

from “The Life and Epistles of St. Paul,” by Conybeare and Howson.

The coast of nearly every island of the Mediterranean has been minutely surveyed and described by British naval officers. The two islands which were most intimately connected with St. Paul’s voyages have been among the latest to receive this kind of illustration. The soundings of the coast of Crete are now proved to furnish a valuable commentary on the 27th chapter of Acts; and the chart of Cyprus should at least be consulted when we read the 13th chapter. From Cape St. Andreas, the northeastern point of the island, the coast trends rapidly to the west, till it reaches Cape Grego, the southeastern extremity. The modern town of Famagusta is nearer the latter point than the former, and the ancient Salamis was situated a short distance to the north of Famagusta. Near Cape St. Andrea are two or three small islands, anciently called The Keys. These, if they were seen at all, would soon be lost to view. Cape Grego is distinguished by a singular promontory of table land which is very familiar to the sailors of our merchantmen and ships of war; and there is little doubt that the woodcut given in one of their manuals of sailing directions represents that “very rough, lofty, table-shaped eminence” which Strabo mentions in his description of the coast, and which has been identified with the Idalium of the classical poets.

The ground lies low in the neighborhood of Salamis, and the town was situated on a bight of the coast to the north of the river Pedieus. This low land is the largest plain in Cyprus, and the Pedieus is the only true river in the island, the rest being merely winter torrents, flowing in the wet season from the two mountain ranges which intersect it from east to west. This plain probably represents the kingdom of Teucer, which is familiar to us in the early stories of legendary Greece. It stretches inwards between the two mountain ranges to the very heart of the country, where the modern Turkish capital, Nicosia, is situated. In the days of historical Greece, Salamis was the capital. Under the Roman Empire, if not the seat of the government, it was at least the

most important mercantile town. We have the best reasons for believing that the harbor was convenient and capacious. [¹] Thus we can form to ourselves some idea of the appearance of the place in the reign of Claudius. A large city by the seashore, a widespread plain with corn fields and orchards, and the blue distance of mountains beyond, composed the view on which the eyes of Barnabas and Saul rested when they came to anchor in the bay of Salamis.

The Jews, as we would have been prepared to expect, were numerous in Salamis. This fact is indicated to us in the sacred narrative; for we learn that this city has several synagogues, while other cities had often only one. [²] The Jews had doubtless been established here in considerable numbers in the active period which succeeded the death of Alexander. The unparalleled productiveness of Cyprus, and its trade in fruit, wine, flax, and honey would naturally attract them to the mercantile port. The farming of the copper mines by Augustus to Herod may probably have swelled their numbers. One of the most conspicuous passages in the history of Salamis was the insurrection of the Jews in the reign of Trajan, when a great part of the city was destroyed. [³] Its demolition was completed by an earthquake. It was rebuilt by a Christian emperor, from whom it received its medieval name of Constantia.

It appears that the proclamation of the Gospel was confined by Barnabas and Saul to the Jews and their synagogues. We have no information of the length of their stay or the success of their labors. Some stress seems to be laid on the fact that John Mark “was their minister.” Perhaps we are to infer from this that his hands baptized the Jews and proselytes who were convinced by the preaching of the Apostles.

From Salamis they traveled to Paphos at the other extremity of the island. The two towns were probably connected together by a well-traveled road. [⁴] It is indeed likely that even under the Empire the islands of the Greek part of the Mediterranean, as

Crete and Cyprus, were not so completely provided with lines of internal communication as those which were nearer the metropolis, and had been longer under Roman occupation, such as Corsica and Sardinia. But we cannot help believing that Roman roads were laid down in Cyprus and Crete, after the manner of the modern English roads in Corfu and the other Ionian islands, which islands, in their social and political conditions, present many points of resemblance to those which were under the Roman sway in the time of St. Paul. On the whole, there is little doubt that his journey from Salamis to Paphos, a distance from east to west or not more than a hundred miles, was accomplished in a short time and without difficulty.

Paphos was the residence of the Roman governor. The appearance of the place (if due allowance is

made for the differences of the 19th century and the 1st) may be compared with that of the town of Corfu in the present day, with its strong garrison of imperial soldiers in the midst of a Greek population, with its mixture of two languages, with its symbols of a strong and steady power side by side with frivolous amusements, and with something of the style of a court about the residence of its governor. All the occurrences which are mentioned at Paphos as taking place on the arrival of Barnabas and Saul are grouped so entirely round the governor's person that our attention must be turned for a time to the condition of Cyprus as a Roman province, and the position and character of Sergius Paulus.

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